

The Ostrogothic Military

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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 foci for sometimes fierce recent debate. This chapter is organized according to three main chronological phases: the period of the conquest, Theoderic's reign as king of Italy, and finally the Gothic War. This permits both the examination of change and the analysis of issues specific to each sub-period. Although the Ostrogothic Italian kingdom endured for only three generations, 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.

The Army of the Conquest: Theoderic's Goths—An Army or A People?

Theoderic's forces in 489 developed from several Gothic groupings. Principally, they originated in Theoderic's own armed following and in that of his namesake, Theoderic Strabo ('the Squinter').¹ Neither group can be considered as 'the Gothic people', although later sources from within the Italian kingdom and outside attempted to create that image. The fact that as well as the Toulouse 'Visigoths' two Balkan Gothic groups existed gives the lie to such a supposition. Moreover, these were not only two such groups, but 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. Attila's polyglot subjects possessed several levels of ethnicity beneath a unifying Hunnic identity. In a justly famous story, the east Roman ambassador Priscus met a Greek in

¹ Well described in Heather, *Goths and Romans*, pp. 227–308.

Attila's camp,² but this 'Greek' also regarded himself as a Hun. Famously, most known Huns bear Gothic names, not least Attila and his brother Bleda, and the material culture associated with the Hunnic kingdom emerges from local Roman and 'barbarian' traditions. After Attila's death, 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 kingdom's wreckage.³ For some, even a solid historical existence can be questioned. Only three named Skiri are known: Odovacer, his father, and his brother.⁴ It is difficult to decide whether Skirian identity ought to be considered 'ethnic' or familial. Nonetheless, a successful kin group's identity might attract enough adherents for it to operate in uncontroversially 'ethnic' fashion. After all, historians are accustomed to describing post-imperial Gaul, its people, and its culture between the late 5th and 8th centuries using a familial identity originating precisely in Odovacer's generation: Merovingian. The families of the two Theoderics apparently 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 'reappearing' tribe with a long pedigree seems questionable.

Whether the Goths formed 'a people on the move' as in traditional *Völkerwanderung* interpretations or as in more recent works were simply an army has recently been debated.⁵ Extreme interpretations are unsatisfying, not least because 'army' and 'people' are trickier terms to define than might be assumed. Consequently, between the 'polar' readings, conclusions are difficult to pigeonhole as either 'army' or 'people'. Nevertheless, the issue is of consid-

2 Priscus, frag. 11.2 (Blockley), pp. 266–75.

3 Fehr/von Rummel, *Völkerwanderung*, pp. 75–80; Heather, *Goths*, pp. 240–51; id., *Goths*, pp. 124–9; Pohl, *Völkerwanderung*, pp. 118–25; Thompson, *Huns*, pp. 167–76; Wolfram *Goths*, pp. 258–68; id., *Roman Empire*, pp. 139–43.

4 Goffart, *Barbarian Tides*, pp. 203–5.

5 The debate has focused on Alaric's Goths more than on the Ostrogoths but the same issues apply. For a clear defence of the "people on the move" see Heather, *Goths*, 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"; Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, pp. 189–94; Kulikowski, "Nation Versus Army".

erable relevance. Gothic factions (like, presumably, the others) are described having women and children in tow,⁶ which has been taken as proving that they were a migrating 'people'.⁷ This does not necessarily follow. Roman armies took women and children with them too, as did most armies until well into the 20th century.⁸ This note of caution, however, does not authorize us to disallow the view of the Goths as 'a people on the move'. A 'factional' interpretation permits an intermediate course, envisaging a social group including women and children, but with young male warriors serving more established leaders forming the most important element.⁹

After many years of campaigning, in and out of East Roman service, three consequences can readily be imagined. One is the knitting of warrior bands into established quasi-permanent bodies, living together year-round, practising weapon use, and regularly fighting alongside one another. These would acquire most of the attributes of regular military units and the whole organization those of a permanent army. Indeed the Ostrogoths largely functioned as an army during the 470s and 480s. The second consequence, however, will have been the acquisition of wives, children, and undoubtedly 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 made the Goths, even if originating 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 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 situation's dynamics are thought through, even a narrowly military reading of the Goths' origins and structure (like this one) must ultimately imagine the force that arrived in Italy as something more socially variegated.

6 Malchus, frag. 20, ed. Blockley; Ennodius, *Pan.* 26–7.

7 Heather has repeatedly expressed this opinion, most sophisticatedly in *Goths and Romans*, and *Goths*.

8 Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, pp. 190–1; *Codex Theodosianus* (cited hereafter as *CTh*) 7.1.3.

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

Italian Background

The loss of direct imperial control over Africa in the 420s and 430s produced crucial changes in Italian politics.¹⁰ The seaborne threat from Carthage forced significant forces to be stationed throughout Italy, rather than (as hitherto) just in the north. A key element of 5th-century politics was the increasingly hostile separation of Italian and Gallic aristocracies. However, whereas the 4th-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 ensure its control of the centre of politics and patronage. The Italian army became decisive in peninsular politics, as Ricimer's long period of dominance makes clear. Although unable to establish itself over the factions based upon the Goths of Toulouse and the 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 transalpine Alamanni.

Recruitment remained problematic, however. Lacking effective fiscal control beyond Provence and the Narbonnaise or Tarraconensis, any Italian emperor's income was greatly reduced. The peninsula became a political hothouse 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 problematic. Therefore, taxation paid 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*.¹¹

Nonetheless, crucial dynamics operated. Roman troops' remuneration had always involved land. Late Roman forces, as noted, lived and sometimes moved accompanied by wives and children. Recruits got older, married, and settled down. Hereditary military service¹² 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

10 See Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, pp. 257–83 for Italian political history, and 328–38 for social and economic conditions, with references; Humphries, "Italy, AD 425–605".

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

12 *CTh* 7.1.5, 7.1.8.

men born and raised in Italy, even if serving in units with 'barbarian' titles: second-generation 'Italo-barbarians'.

This discussion casts the confrontation between Odovacer and Theoderic somewhat differently from the clash of 'barbarian' armies sometimes imagined. Both sides originated in a specific 5th-century imperial context. Their similarities doubtless explain the drawn-out, long-indecisive nature of the struggle and the common changing of sides.¹³ Nonetheless, Theoderic's troops' military experience and long practice operating as units were probably crucial to their eventual victory.¹⁴

Hospitalitas

Crucial to understanding the military's place in Gothic Italy is what has been dubbed, perhaps misleadingly, 'the *Hospitalitas* debate'.¹⁵ 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.¹⁶ Procopius' *Wars* allege that the 'barbarians' appropriated a third of the land of Italy, and Cassiodorus' *Variae* allude to Gothic 'thirds' or 'shares'. Italy was long understood as having been divided according to that billeting law, with one-third going to the Goths. This idea fit then-dominant paradigms, seeing the 5th 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 than the relevant clauses of the Burgundian Code.

13 *Anonymus Valesianus, pars posterior*, 10.50–56, ed. Rolfe; Cassiodorus, *Chronicle* 1320–31, ed. Mommsen; *Consularia Italica* (a collection of annalistic texts grouped by Theodor Mommsen under this title, which is highly misleading but convenient for citation) 639–49; Ennodius, *Life of Epiphanius*, 109–19. Heather, *Goths*, pp. 219–20; Wolfram *Goths*, pp. 281–4.

14 An army of Gallic 'Visigoths' decisively broke Odovacer's siege of Theoderic in Pavia (*Anonymus 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 5th-century tradition, with Alaric II following his uncle Theoderic II's example.

15 Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, pp. 422–47; for summary of the debate to ca. 2005 and references. Goffart, *Barbarian Tides*, pp. 119–86.

16 *CTh* 7.8.5 (dated 398).

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.

The Roman law of *hospitalitas* had, Goffart showed, concerned the temporary provision of shelter, not salary, provisioning, or settlement. Procopius' testimony was politically motivated, the *Wars* legitimizing Justinian's 'reconquest' of Italy. Procopius might have distorted evidence to paint Theoderic in a bad light. His reference to a third of the land might only be hyperbole, with no relationship to the *tertia* referred to elsewhere. Goffart turned instead to Ennodius' and Cassiodorus' contemporary statements that the Goths had been settled without Roman landowners feeling any loss.¹⁷ 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 *millennarius*.¹⁸ The former had previously been read as a levy of one-third of the revenue from land, paid by landowners whose estates had not been partitioned to house a Goth. Alongside actual expropriation, this would have represented a serious burden on the Italian aristocracy, making Ennodius' and Cassiodorus' rhetorical statements extremely insensitive. The aristocracy clearly retained its 5th-century prosperity under the Ostrogoths—difficult to envisage if their revenues had been so drastically reduced. Goffart suggested that the *illatio* was a third of the usual tax revenues, diverted to pay Gothic salaries. The 'third' (*tertia*) referred to this.¹⁹

A *millenarius*²⁰ had been assumed to be a *chiliarch* (a commander of 1000 men). The term can mean this but Goffart pointed out that a *millena* was also a notional Roman tax assessment unit still used in Ostrogothic Italy.²¹ In specific numbers and perhaps drawn from particular fiscal assets, these were set aside for designated purposes. For Goffart, a *millenarius* was a Goth paid

17 Ennodius, *Epist.* 9.26; Cassiodorus, *Variae* 2.16.

18 Goffart, *Barbarians and Romans*, pp. 73–80. The *loci classici* are *Variae* 1.14 and 2.16–17.

19 Bjornlie, elsewhere this volume, for the straightforward fiscal connotations of the *illatio tertiarum*. Relating the *tertia* to the fiscal payment schedule simplifies the situation further.

20 Goffart, *Romans and Barbarians*, pp. 80–8. Cassiodorus, *Variae* 5.27, ed. Mommsen is key.

21 See Cassiodorus, *Variae* 2.37, ed. Mommsen.

with a *millena* of tax revenue.²² 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.²³

Goffart's simple reading has considerable advantages. No longer need one 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.²⁴ Most seriously, Goffart's thesis as originally formulated required readers to understand *terra* as meaning "fiscal revenue from the land", which, critics argued, was rather forced. In response, Goffart pointed out that even in straightforward-looking modern legal documents, 'land' implies a web of relations and obligations. This excluded the 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*, accounting for many other relationships frequently ignored by anti-Goffartian critiques.

Most problematically for Goffart's critics, the traditional view was rooted in the appearance of tripartite divisions in the Roman *hospitalitas* law and in some texts discussing 'barbarian' settlement. Goffart decisively showed that the Theodosian Code's *hospitalitas* had no bearing on the issues confronted in 5th- and 6th-century texts describing 'barbarian' *tertia* and the rest. Therefore, even if one finds Goffart's argument unconvincing, a return to old-style 'expropriationist' theses, based ultimately on that *hospitalitas* law, is impossible.

Even in its most recent formulation, Goffart's interpretation is not unproblematic.²⁵ 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 landowning 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

22 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.

23 Goffart *Romans and Barbarians*, pp. 89–100.

24 Principal critiques include: Barnish, "Land, taxation and barbarian settlement"; Cesa, "Hospitalitas o altre 'techniques of accommodation?"; Halsall, "Technique of Barbarian Settlement"; Wood, "Ethnicity and ethnogenesis". Goffart has responded vigorously in *Barbarian Tides*, "Technique of Barbarian Settlement", and "Administrative Methods".

25 Pace Goffart, "Administrative Methods".

'barbarian' landownership. Furthermore, we need not suppose that all the land of Italy was encompassed in the discussion of 'thirds'. The only text to say so is Procopius' *Wars*. If, like Goffart, one rejects that testimony, one must logically reject it all, not pick and choose details from it. The most one may say is that Procopius' mention of a 'third' might have been motivated by the legal arrangements employed. The documents need not imply a universal, peninsula-wide arrangement, but only that those relationships applied to those lands or resources necessary for the Gothic army's payment. Indeed one need assume only that those relationships applied to the lands or resources necessary to pay those Goths who were paid in that way. There is no implication that all Goths were remunerated entirely in the fashion discussed in the handful of relevant documents in the *Variae*. Goffart's critics 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.

Goffart's reading of the *illatio*, *tertia*, *sortes* and *millenarii* seems reasonable. Late imperial Roman precedents existed for his system, having apparently been used to pay elite field armies such as in a general sense the Goths were.²⁶ A Gothic warrior would be paid by a draft on taxation,²⁷ which he collected from designated taxpayers and, as Gothic status apparently equated more or less with service in the army, this relationship would be inheritable. Most of this situation's 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 Romans earmarked to pay him his salary.

The Goffart thesis' limitation is its insistence that one system entirely sufficed in all cases, in Ostrogothic Italy and elsewhere.²⁸ 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.²⁹ 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, like the emperors,

²⁶ *CTh* 7,4,20, 22.

²⁷ That such a system for payment was employed in Ostrogothic Italy is suggested by *Edictum Theoderici* (cited hereafter as *ET*) 126 and especially 144.

²⁸ See Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations* for discussion of the problems with this assumption.

²⁹ García Gallo, "Notas sobre el reparto de terras"; Wolfram, *Goths*, p. 224.

Theoderic rewarded some of his followers from these resources. Grants of fiscal land on emphyteutic leases are reasonably well attested as a form of imperial patronage.³⁰ Theoderic had other—entirely traditional—resources within the *sacrae largitiones* and *res privata*. Confiscating enemies' property was normal after a civil war.³¹ It is reasonable to see Odovacer's senior supporters being expropriated, their land used to reward some of Theoderic's followers.³² Contemporary sources mention massacres of Odovacer's men.³³ They had probably been paid according to a system like that proposed by Goffart but they had also lived 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. 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 taxpayers) existed.³⁴ The late Roman state had rewarded retiring veterans with land.³⁵ 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. This, however, is also irrelevant to discussions of *sortes* or *tertia*, which relate to tax revenue. Some dynamics within the Gothic army are important. 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. They would not normally draw an annual salary nor periodic donatives in return for military service.³⁶ 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*. He has a son serving in the army

30 Jones, *Later Roman Empire*, pp. 417–20.

31 Cassiodorus, *Variae* 4.32, ed. Mommsen 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* 112–13.

32 Cassiodorus, *Variae* 1.18, ed. Mommsen refers more easily to the distribution of expropriated land (and abuses of that situation) when Theoderic conquered Italy than to illegitimate claims on tax revenue.

33 Moorhead, *Theoderic*, pp. 26–7.

34 Jones, *Later Roman Empire*, pp. 812–23 is the classic basic account.

35 *CTh* 7.8.1.

36 See Cassiodorus, *Variae* 5.36, ed. Mommsen.

who collects his salary from designated taxpayers; in Goffart's terms he is a *millenarius*. When the old Goth dies, the son inherits his land.³⁷ 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—held tax-free in return for military service—and they, too, have two sources of sustenance. Note that in this hypothetical reconstruction no Roman landlord has been expropriated. Goffart's interpretation of the standard means of furnishing a soldier's salary remains entirely intact and no revision is required of his reading of the *illatio*, *tertiae*, or *millena/millenarii*.

Crucially, however, this system contained the seeds of change. Within a generation, Gothic soldiers drew their salary not just from taxation: land with attached military obligations has come into the equation. This situation resembles that visible slightly later in 6th-century Merovingian Gaul.³⁸ The growing connection between Gothic troops and landed communities reflects the dynamic suggested above, 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 taxpayer and tax collector. They nevertheless remained an essentially military body. This allows us to retain Goffart's interpretation and avoid having to explain away references to Gothic landownership or, alternatively, see them as compelling the rejection of Goffart's thesis.

Goffart pointed out another dynamic: the temptation to transfer the right to collect a salary from a designated fiscal asset into the latter's outright ownership. This would completely change the relationships involved, rendering the taxpayer the Goth's tenant. Some documents apparently represent

37 An uncle's illegal retention and management of the paternal inheritance of an adolescent Goth of sufficient age to perform military service is discussed in *Variarum* 1.38. This text could relate at least as easily to an inherited draft on fiscal revenue as to landed property.

38 Halsall, *Warfare and Society*, pp. 46–50 and refs.

investigations of or attempts to prevent such abuses.³⁹ During weak, especially minority, government these can easily be imagined. 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 acquisition of landed properties by Goths. Unlike land granted as remuneration for service, they would be liable for the *capitatio* and other relevant fiscal obligations. Goths might, however, want to extend tax exemption to all their lands.⁴⁰ This would be a source of conflict.⁴¹ 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.

The Army in the Governance of the Ostrogothic Kingdom

After his victory, 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 with communication and the exercise of power posed by Italy's difficult physical geography.⁴² 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 regional 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.⁴³ Theoderic seems instead to have imaginatively employed patronage and propaganda.⁴⁴ The army was seemingly assembled regularly in the principal royal centres: Pavia, Milan, and Ravenna. Here, Theoderic paid donatives (supplementary cash payments), rewarded those who

39 Cassiodorus, *Variae*, 8.28, ed. Mommsen.

40 Such a desire may lie behind the situations described in Cassiodorus, *Variae* 1.26 and 4.14, ed. Mommsen.

41 For a Gallic analogy, see Halsall, *Warfare and Society*, pp. 46–7.

42 For Theoderic's concern with effective and rapid communications, see Cassiodorus, *Variae* 1.29, 2.19, 4.47, 5.5, etc., ed. Mommsen

43 *Burgundian Code* (54.1) suggests something similar being practised in that smaller realm.

44 Well analysed by Heather, "Theoderic, King of the Goths", pp. 152–65.

had done well, and punished those who had not.⁴⁵ This enabled the continuous distribution and redistribution of royal patronage, not only the circulation of offices but also 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 with lower-born rivals for royal favour.

The assembled army was subject to manifestations of royal ideology aurally in speeches and panegyrics and visually in the pictorial and epigraphic decoration of buildings.⁴⁶ The Senegallia Medallion demonstrates that some of the largesse distributed carried Theoderican propaganda.⁴⁷ As Cassiodorus' writings show, these ideological productions stressed the army's role as a pillar of *civilitas* and consequently its responsibility to maintain harmonious relations with Roman civilians.⁴⁸ They also stressed Theoderic's claim (by the latter half of the reign) to represent an ancient, uniquely royal dynasty.⁴⁹ Royal association or authorization trumped all other claims to legitimate authority but competition for this entailed subscription to Theoderic's propaganda and ideology.⁵⁰ This process undermined pre-existing 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 as a state-controlled coercive force, in spite of increasingly complex and deeper-seated social ties.

None of this meant uniformly harmonious relations between army and local society—such had hardly existed under the empire. The *Variae* mention conflicts and complaints arising from the army's behaviour.⁵¹ Gothic troops, Cassiodorus repeatedly enjoined, should not molest, harass, or steal from provincials;⁵² the provincials of the Cottian Alps were compensated for depredations committed as the army passed through the region en route to Gaul

45 Cassiodorus, *Variae* 5.27, ed. Mommsen: *bonos enim laus malos querula comitatur*. See also *Variae* 4.14, 5.26–27, 5.36.

46 Heather, "Theoderic, King of the Goths", pp. 162–3. Some settings for Theoderican ritual are analysed by Wharton, *Refiguring the Post-Classical City*, pp. 105–47; 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.

47 Arnold, "Theoderic's Invincible Mustache".

48 Cassiodorus, *Variae* 2.8, 3.16, 3.24, 3.38, 5.26, ed. Mommsen.

49 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.

50 *ET* 43–44 and 46 undermine the use of patronage to influence legal cases.

51 Most clearly perhaps in Cassiodorus, *Variae* 4.36, ed. Mommsen.

52 Cassiodorus, *Variae* 3.38, 4.13, 4.36, 5.10–11, 5.13, 5.26, 6.22, 7.4, ed. Mommsen.

in 508.⁵³ 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. Several times Cassiodorus had to order the rapid and effective payment of *annonae*.⁵⁴

Organization

The *Variae*, a rich source for the army's place within Theoderic's realm, provide no a priori evidence that much had changed at all from the late imperial situation, beyond the army's Gothic composition. Gothic, like late Roman, soldiers were subject to their own jurisdiction. 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.⁵⁵ Whether this referred to a particular hairstyle or simply to serving soldiers' typically hirsute appearance (cf. the French *poilu*) is unclear. The heavy *chlamys* (a type of cloak) continued to signify military authority.⁵⁶ A possible role in male socialization will be discussed later but the late Roman army had long espoused real or invented 'barbarian' characteristics. Its jargon incorporated Germanic terms and the *capillati*'s long hair might also have manifested 'barbarian chic'.⁵⁷ The army had been a bastion of the Arian creed in late imperial Italy.⁵⁸ Overall, it was well suited to maintaining the signifiers of Gothic identity, including the use (at least for specialized technical terms) of Gothic speech.

53 Cassiodorus, *Variae* 2.8, ed. Mommsen.

54 Cassiodorus, *Variae* 2.5, 3.41, ed. Mommsen.

55 Cassiodorus, *Variae* 4.49, though Gothicness is not specifically mentioned. Amory, *People and Identity*, pp. 344–6; Wolfram, *Goths*, p. 103; Arnold, *Theoderic and the Roman Imperial Restoration*, pp. 113–15.

56 Cassiodorus, *Variae* 6.15. cf. *CTh* 14.10.1. The military identification of the donor/s of *Variae* 1.26 is 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 by assuming mention of the cloak refers to military status.

57 Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, pp. 101–10.

58 Amory, *People and Identity*, pp. 236–76. Robert Markus rebuked the suggestion in a review of Amory's book, *Journal of Theological Studies* 49 (1998), pp. 414–7.

Military organization is unclear. Theoderic supposedly disbanded the Roman guard regiments as useless ceremonial units.⁵⁹ However, although the rank of *comes domesticorum vacans* was certainly honorific, the evidence does not suggest the guards were disbanded.⁶⁰ The *Variae* refer to *domestici* and *scholares*.⁶¹ Royal bodyguards are mentioned, albeit with Atticising Greek terms (*hypaspistai*, *doryphoroi*), in accounts of the Gothic War. The reference to the horse and foot guards as *domestici patres equitum et peditum*, which perplexed Hodgkin,⁶² may hint at an important structuring element in the Gothic army, to which I will return.

The late Roman army had been organized into a field army (*comitatenses*) and frontier troops (*limitanei* or *ripenses*). Whether this division persisted in Gothic Italy is unknown.⁶³ There were certainly frontier garrisons; Theoderic referred to their role in keeping out ‘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 Raetia makes clear that *militēs* are simply enough soldiers in the *exercitus*, contrasting them with *Romani* and *provinciales*.⁶⁴ Nonetheless, 5th-century Roman aristocrats—including Cassiodorus’ great-grandfather—had raised and commanded local defence forces⁶⁵ 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.⁶⁶ Amory’s “rational choice” interpretation was forcefully criticized

59 Jones, *Later Roman Empire*, p. 256; Moorhead, *Theoderic*, p. 254. Halsall, *Warfare and Society*, p. 45 and n. 24.

60 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.

61 Cassiodorus, *Variae* 1.10, 7.3, ed. Mommsen.

62 Cassiodorus, *Variae*, 1.10, ed. Mommsen; Hodgkin *Letters of Cassiodorus*, p. 150, n. 2.

63 Wolfram, *Goths*, pp. 316–7, referring to *Variae* 1.11 claims that the *militēs* commanded by Servatus, *dux* of Raetia, “cannot have been Goths”. Heather, “*Gens and Regnum*”, p. 118, n. 89, mis-cites the source and alleges that Servatus is “said to have led *limitanei* (i.e. inferior quality troops)”. Cassiodorus, *Variae* 1.11 mentions neither *limitanei* nor Romans.

64 Cassiodorus, *Variae* 7.4, ed. Mommsen.

65 Cassiodorus, *Variae* 1.4, ed. Mommsen.

66 Amory, *People and Identity*, especially pp. 149–94.

by Peter Heather, who contended that the Goths were a people whose ethnic identity was grounded in a class of freemen.⁶⁷ Amory's hypothesis of entirely fluid ethnicity is too extreme, but Heather's primordialism is overly crude.

At the heart of the controversy is both sides' failure to appreciate two points.⁶⁸ Ethnic change does not imply a straight exchange of one monolithic identity for another. Ethnicity is multi-layered; change involved not the wholesale replacement of one's entire ethnic identity but adding a level to it. Different levels of ethnicity can be situationally reordered. An identity can become that according to which one normally acts and is categorized, 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 someone or, better, a family might change from self-identifying primarily as Roman to self-identifying primarily 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, instability, and especially the outbreak of the Gothic War (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. One index is the attestation of individuals with Gothic and Roman names. Adding a name was hardly uncommon in Late Antiquity, especially when associated with a change of status. Gregory of Tours appended the name Gregorius when he entered the priesthood; his maternal great-uncle Gundulf doubtless took that Germanic name upon entering the service of the kings of Austrasia.⁶⁹ 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 learn Gothic.⁷⁰ Significantly, this 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 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,

67 Heather, "*Gens and Regnum*"; Heather, "Merely an Ideology?"

68 Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, pp. 35–62, 332–6. See also Swain, this volume.

69 Gregory of Tours, *Histories* 6.11.

70 Cassiodorus, *Variae* 8.21, ed. Mommsen. Full fluency in Gothic seems less necessarily implicit in Cassiodorus' statement than a competent command of army-Gothic argot.

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 results similar to those observable in Gregory of Tours' writings.

The life cycle was possibly important. The *Variae* state that adolescent Goths came of age when they were liable to serve in the army,⁷¹ plausibly at fifteen. Cassiodorus mentions the training of *iuvenes*, apparently archers (*sagittarii*), and a mobilization 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.⁷² Comparison with other post-imperial situations permits the suggestion that upon coming of age a Goth learnt his trade 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.⁷³ Merovingian *comites* had followings of *pueri*; the *domestici* in attendance on Theoderic's officials ought possibly to be seen the same way.⁷⁴ Clearly they were paid by the fisc. At some point *domestici* 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, thereafter being called out only for specific campaigns but training their own households. This system appears superficially 'primitivizing', 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. 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.⁷⁵ 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 ensuring his cities' proper fortification.

71 Cassiodorus, *Variae* 1.38, ed. Mommsen.

72 Mommsen read the text as *domestici partis equitum et peditum*. This appears 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.

73 Cassiodorus, *Variae* 4.2, ed. Mommsen.

74 Cassiodorus, *Variae* 5.14, 9.13, ed. Mommsen.

75 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.⁷⁶ Zones of Gothic settlement have been extrapolated from the distribution of particular types of metalwork, usually found in inhumations (Figure 8.1). This straightforward interpretation cannot stand. The origins of most of this (largely feminine) material does not necessarily authorize its designation as 'Ostrogothic'.⁷⁷ 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 who was descended from one such. Finally, this material is found in very small quantities. If the costume associated with these objects was Gothic, not all Goths were buried in this fashion. The rite cannot therefore simply reflect Gothic settlement. The context of such isolated finds is consequently crucial. Most items were deliberately and publicly deposited with the dead. Although, as Figure 8.1 shows, about fifty Italian and Dalmatian sites contain such burials, there are usually only one or two such graves on each cemetery. Some are from urban cemeteries, frequently associated with churches, notably at major centres like Rome, Ravenna, Aquileia, and Milan.

If these artefacts were associated with Gothic holders of political and military power, their display in 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 had apparently not generally manifested their ethnicity like this. That the Goths did so must somehow illustrate the impact of imperial collapse and Gothic conquest upon Italian social relationships. Furnished inhumation was a public display.⁷⁸ 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),⁷⁹ it might have comprised local landowners and lesser people.

The deaths of all members of certain kindreds could be marked by such displays. Families employing the ritual demonstrated the basis of their pre-eminence: their association with the Gothic holders of political and military

76 E.g. Moorhead, *Theoderic*, pp. 68–9.

77 von Rummel, *Habitus Barbarus*, pp. 323–37.

78 Halsall, *Cemeteries and Society*, passim.

79 Bierbrauer, "Archeologia degli Ostrogoti", pp. 194–202.

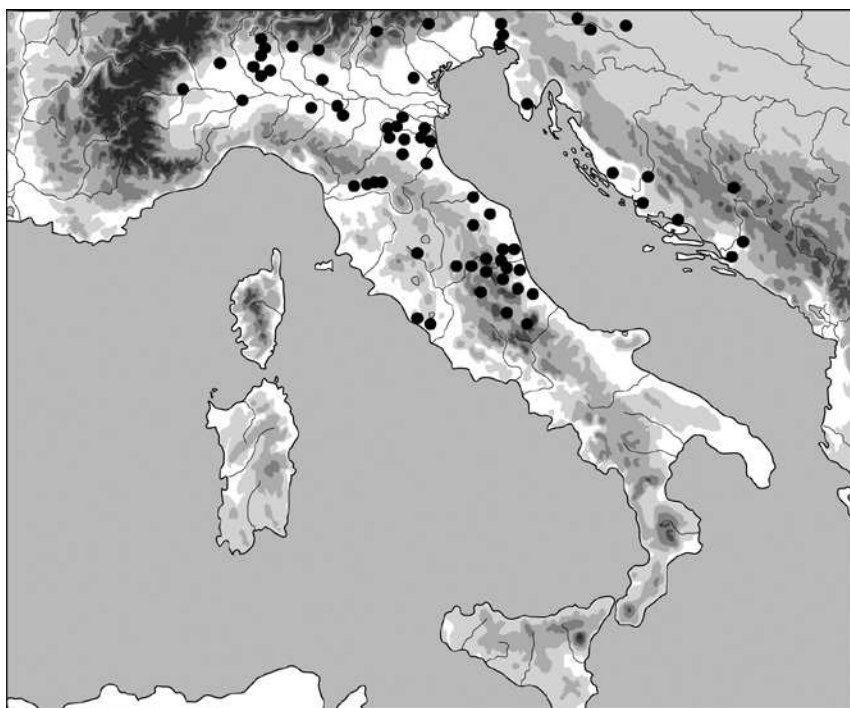


FIGURE 8.1 *Map of supposed Ostrogothic burial sites in Italy and Dalmatia.*
MAP BY GUY HALSALL

power. This could be linked with competition for royal patronage within local communities and among the political elite. We must also, however, conclude that people adopting this costume in public ritual were not necessarily (and possibly were unlikely to have been) Danubian incomers. Nonetheless, these burials' fairly limited number show that while a death produced stress the 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 where such stress and competition were most common. These surely included areas where Gothic newcomers dwelt, but the artefacts' distribution need have 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. The objects which seemingly manifested a connection with

Theoderic's government were feminine as often as masculine, suggesting a gendering of power and further supporting 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 how Theoderic's soldiers were equipped. 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. 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.⁸⁰ Theoderic's Ostrogothic army was clearly highly organized and efficient. Its Gallic, Spanish, and Balkan campaigns were well organized, well led, and usually victorious. Success breeds success, warriors continued to join Theoderic, and the repeated experience of victory made Gothic troops battle-hardened and confident.

The Gothic War

Accounts of the Gothic kingdom's cataclysmic downfall 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 Europe⁸¹—it cannot be taken as straightforward description, even though Procopius witnessed some events himself. *The Wars* are enmeshed in traditional classical ethnographic stereotyping and Procopius strove to make his account read like the great examples of the historical genre: Thucydides and Polybius.⁸² Hence the appearance of *doryphoroi* and *hypaspistai* in Roman

80 Bierbrauer, *Invillino-Ibligo*.

81 Halsall, *Warfare and Society*, pp. 1–6, 177–80.

82 Cameron, *Procopius*; Kaldellis, *Procopius of Caesarea*.

and Gothic armies.⁸³ Procopius' writing—at least initially—was imbued with Justinianic ideology about the rightness of the reconquest. His accounts of the Gothic forces, especially at the siege of Rome, must therefore be handled with caution. Procopius mocked '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.⁸⁴ Some descriptions are surely hyperbolic. Procopius' account of Gothic *oplitōi* must surely be heavily ironic.⁸⁵ Although an apt description of an armoured spearman with a large round shield, the term's cultural baggage—the Attic hoplite, civilized 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 Theodahad⁸⁶ or Witigis, bumbling would-be *poliorcetes*—as from disillusionment with Justinianic policy.⁸⁷

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.⁸⁸ That the Gothic army, as Cassiodorus makes clear, was a well-organized, 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,⁸⁹ also brought the two sides closer together. Indeed, given the predominance of troops recruited from beyond the frontier in the imperial army, the 'Goths' may have been considerably more 'Roman' than the forces opposing them. This irony seems to

83 These terms appear in accounts of classical Greek hoplite warfare and, in the case of the *hypaspistai*, in Polybius' description of Alexandrian Macedonian warfare.

84 Procopius, *Wars*, 5.18.42, resolved at *Wars*, 5.27.25–8, ed. Dewing.

85 Halsall, "Funny Foreigners", pp. 111–12.

86 Vitelio, *Theodahad*, argues from verbal usages in Cassiodorus' writings that Theodahad was indeed influenced by Platonic philosophy.

87 Halsall, "Funny Foreigners", pp. 112–13.

88 Halsall, *Warfare and Society*, pp. 180–8.

89 E.g. Thompson, *Romans and Barbarians*.

be heavily played upon in Procopius' account. The similarities between the armies certainly facilitated the changing of sides. Soldiers in the opposing forces could be barely distinguishable from each other.⁹⁰

The Gothic army's dismal showing in the earliest phase of the war probably attests to the previous decade's political stresses and lack of active campaigning. Most of the experienced Gothic troops were located outside Italy, in the Balkans (where they scored some important early successes against the invading Romans), in Provence, and in Spain, where they were probably involved in sometimes successful campaigning against the Franks.⁹¹ Their opponents, by contrast, were battle-hardened and confident veterans used to victory (even if frequently more by luck than judgement) under Belisarius. The dynamics of the earlier Theoderican period were reversed. They would turn back again during Totila's 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 suggest. 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 order that his men 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.⁹²

The wars' effects on the Italian peninsula are well known.⁹³ 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 more on the basis of political allegiance than biological descent. Most of the rank and file of the 520s would 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 *domestici patres*, will have had any clear memory of life outside the seemingly stable confines of Romano-Gothic Italy. It would be

90 Pohl, "Telling the Difference".

91 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.

92 18th- and 19th-century commanders similarly ordered troops to attack with unloaded muskets when an advance was to be pressed briskly with "cold steel".

93 Brown, *Gentlemen and Officers*, pp. 1–60, is classic.

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,⁹⁴ sometimes not. Byzantine deserters joined them during the wars, doubtless also adding a Gothic identity. Those returning to the East Romans abandoned it again. None of this implies "incomplete assimilation"⁹⁵ 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. Roman deserters became in some ways Goths, although these troops' non-Italian and frequently indeed non-imperial origin continued to mark them out. Given the Italian upbringing of most Goths, it was easier for them to become Roman.

The dynamics stressed throughout this chapter permit a more subtle reading of the Goths' ultimate downfall than that recently championed.⁹⁶ 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, have been presented as sufficient proof of this. This conclusion, however, does not emerge from the evidence. The revival of the discredited Germanist notion of a class of *Königsfreie* need not detain us.⁹⁷ 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.⁹⁸ Gothic military communities were embedded within peninsular society and politics. Their edges doubtless hardened during the wars and it is unsurprising that serving Goths' families should have been more at risk than in the peaceful conditions

94 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 should not assume that they were any more 'a people' than late imperial regiments of *Franci*, *Alamanni* or *Parthi*, similarly redeployed with wives, children, and camp followers.

95 We should note the conservative political connotations of phrases like "incomplete assimilation".

96 Heather, *Goths*, pp. 321–6.

97 Staab, "A reconsideration".

98 Representing as a surprising and defining feature of Gothic society the suggestion that the Gothic rank and file did not blithely follow their officers and social betters' instructions is again politically revealing.

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 have no necessary bearing on the nature of the Italian Goths. The destruction of its field army at Adrianople (378) 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 sufficient breathing space to rebuild a substantial force of the same standard.⁹⁹ Troops can be replaced in numbers but not necessarily in quality and Procopius underlines how 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 Teia in the cataclysmic battle of *Mons Lactarius* were doubtless the best Gothic warriors. Others died in the disastrous naval defeat of *Sena Gallica* in the Adriatic.¹⁰⁰ That these defeats effectively ended Gothic resistance is 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 history¹⁰¹ is easily encompassed within the dynamics discussed here, 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 Teia's deaths, sixty-odd years later, they had—unsurprisingly—changed in many ways. Their primarily military character had, however, endured throughout. A kingdom created by the sword had perished by it.

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99 Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, pp. 199–200, 243.

100 Procopius, *Wars* 8.29–32 (*Busta Gallorum*); 8.35 (*Mons Lactarius*); 8.23 (naval defeat), ed. Dewing.

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