VISIONS OF COMMUNITY IN THE POST-ROMAN WORLD
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Visions of Community in the Post-Roman World
The West, Byzantium and the Islamic World, 300–1100

Edited by

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## Abbreviations

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<td>AASS</td>
<td>Acta Sanctorum</td>
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<td>BHG</td>
<td>Bibliotheca hagiographica graeca, ed. François Halkin, Subsidia Hagiographica, 8a (3rd edn, 3 vols, Brussels, 1957; repr. 1986)</td>
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<tr>
<td>CC CM</td>
<td>Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis</td>
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<td>CC SG</td>
<td>Corpus Christianorum, series Graeca</td>
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<tr>
<td>CC SL</td>
<td>Corpus Christianorum, series Latina</td>
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<td>CSCO</td>
<td>Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium</td>
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<td>CSEL</td>
<td>Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticonum Latinorum</td>
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<td>CSHB</td>
<td>Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae</td>
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<td>Deutsches Archiv</td>
<td>Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters</td>
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<td>MGH</td>
<td>Monumenta Germaniae Historica (Hanover-Berlin, 1824– )</td>
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<td>AA</td>
<td>Auctores antiquissimi</td>
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<td>DD</td>
<td>Diplomata</td>
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<td>EE</td>
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<td>LL</td>
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<td>SS</td>
<td>Scriptores</td>
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<td>Neues Archiv</td>
<td>Neues Archiv der Gesellschaft für ältere deutsche Geschichtskunde</td>
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<td>PG</td>
<td>Patrologia Graeca, see PL.</td>
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<td>PO</td>
<td>Patrologia Orientalis</td>
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<td>RE</td>
<td>Realencyklopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaften</td>
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Introduction
Ethnicity, Religion and Empire
Walter Pohl

Traditional religions are often community-based and community-oriented, from civic cults and divine origins of lineages and peoples to the flexible forms of cultural adaptation in classical religion. With the emergence of universal religions, the relationship between cult and community, religious and political identity became much more complex. A proselytizing religion tends to transcend other forms of community through defining membership by conversion.¹ But on the other hand, it often attaches itself to definite political realms which it legitimates and helps to integrate. This may create a rather dynamic and sometimes paradoxical relationship between religious identity and particular communities. With the emergence of the Christian Roman Empire in the fourth and the Islamic Caliphate in the seventh century, it might seem for a while that empire was the adequate form of political organization for a universal religion.² But the equation between empire and religion remained ephemeral, and the religious dynamic invariably outgrew its imperial framework. In Western Europe, Christian kingdoms predominantly named after peoples developed. We have become so accustomed to seeing the world as a world of nations that we have taken for granted that Europe should have developed that way, as an aggregate of independent peoples. Ethnicity, however, played a very different role in the many other political cultures that preceded and surrounded medieval Europe, and more comparative research is necessary to understand these differences.³

This volume, therefore, raises the question of how ethnic identities, civic and regional communities, religious beliefs and political allegiances interacted in shaping different social worlds. It takes a comparative look at visions and practices of community and at the role of identity and difference in the three post-classical political cultures: the Latin West, Byzantium and the Islamic world, roughly between the fifth and the eleventh centuries. For this period,

¹ Werner Gephart and Hans Waldenfels (eds), Religion und Identität (Frankfurt, 1999).
such questions have never been raised from a comparative point of view. This is all the more surprising as the differences in the development of modern nations between Europe and the Middle East have often been noticed. It is commonplace to say that there was little sense of national community on which states such as Iraq, Lebanon, Syria or Jordan could be established after the fall of the Ottoman Empire. Even the Turkish nation was a controversial issue; for instance, the poet who wrote the text that was used for the Turkish national anthem, Mehmet Akif, was in fact a bitter critic of nationalism and went into exile when the Turkish republic was proclaimed.  

Obviously, ethnicity and nationality played a different role in Islamic history than they did in the West. The present volume is intended to raise new questions about the early stages of these differing developments.

Comparison between the West and the Islamic world, sometimes also taking the Byzantine commonwealth into account, has become a hot topic in recent years. But in many respects we are still at the beginning. Ambitious attempts to write a comparative history of the post-Roman Mediterranean seem to show that it is too early for synthesis. Research in all fields involved could profit enormously from critical comparison. This could also lead to a better awareness of the way in which traditional paradigms, master-narratives and methodological choices still influence our perceptions of the period. For instance, the recently renewed controversies about the ‘Fall of Rome’ or the ‘Transformation of the Roman World’ have once again tended to concentrate on the Western Empire, and on the ‘barbarian’ kingdoms that were founded on its territory. But Rome fell in at least four different ways: the Western transition from empire to kingdoms in the course of the fifth century, the Slavic rupture in the Balkans, the Islamic conquest of the East in the seventh century and the gradual Byzantine transformation of eastern Rome. Differences and similarities

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in these processes can shed additional light on the reasons why the Roman Empire lost its hegemony in the Mediterranean; and they help to understand how different ‘visions of community’ developed in these regions.

In the Latin West, the Roman Empire was replaced by a plurality of Christian kingdoms with ethnic appellations: the Franks, the Anglo-Saxons, the Lombards and others. The political landscape of Latin Europe around 1000 CE was already dominated by France, England, Scotland, Hungary, Poland, Bohemia, Croatia, Norway, Denmark, and Sweden. The Byzantine Empire still comprised a considerable number of different ethnic, regional and even religious identities, as Ralph-Johannes Lilie shows in Chapter 17. It had recovered lost territory in the east and the Balkans, and pushed Bulgaria westward into modern Serbia and Macedonia. Still, more or less orthodox states developed on its peripheries, for instance the Rūs in Kiev, and ethnicity played a role in most of them. In the Islamic world, ethnic affiliations (in the broad sense) existed on several levels, but political power rested mostly on Islamic and dynastic foundations. At the end of the period under consideration here, the power of the caliphs of Baghdad had faded away, and regional dynasties had established themselves, the Umayyads in al-Andalus, the Fatimids in Egypt, the Buyids in Iran, the Hamdanids in northern Syria and others, some of them supported by Ismaili or other Shiite religious movements. Thus, the imperial heritage of the Roman Mediterranean gave way to distinct political cultures. Realms with ethnic appellations covered large parts of Europe, whereas imperial and dynastic polities resting on strong religious foundations continued to dominate the Eastern Mediterranean. Or were these differences not as fundamental as they appear? The answer depends, not least, on our concept of ethnicity.

The role of ethnicity in early medieval Europe, especially in the migration period, was quite thoroughly studied in the last quarter of the twentieth century, not least in Vienna. Research on ethnogenesis has shown how complex was the process of ethnic aggregation and the formation of distinct peoples in the early Middle Ages. Herwig Wolfram’s contribution, Chapter 6 in this volume,
represents this line of research by showing ‘how many peoples are in a people’. This approach can surely be of use to scholars studying other parts of the world. Although ‘ethnogenesis’ is still at the centre of polemic, research has moved on. As national origins have lost much of their political appeal, origin myths do not require the same amount of scholarly attention (or sometimes, fury, as Chris Wickham notices in his Conclusion).\footnote{Herwig Wolfram, ‘Origo gentis (Goten)’, in Realelexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde, 2. Aufl., 22 (2003): 178–83; Herwig Wolfram, ‘Auf der Suche nach den Ursprüngen’, in Walter Pohl (ed.), Die Suche nach den Ursprüngen. Von der Bedeutung des frühen Mittelalters, Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters, 8 (Vienna, 2004), pp. 11–22.} Rather, scholarly interest has turned to ongoing ethnic processes that continually transform the composition of ethnic groups, and to the role ethnicity plays in their strategies of identification and distinction. The centuries after the dissolution of the Western Roman Empire saw the emergence of new peoples and of states that were named after them: the kingdoms of the Vandals, Goths, Burgundians, Franks, Lombards, Angles and Saxons. Most of them did not survive in the long run. But ethnic polities, however mixed their populations really were, continued to play an important role in the political landscape. This underlying phenomenon was at the heart of the Wittgenstein Prize project conducted in Vienna between 2005 and 2010.\footnote{For results of the project, see Walter Pohl and Gerda Heydemann (eds), Strategies of Identification – Ethnicity and Religion in Early Medieval Europe, Cultural Encounters in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, 13 (Turnhout, 2012, forthcoming).}

The post-imperial centuries in the West established a new discourse of ethnicity, and models of legitimate rule in the name of a people.

The resources of ethnic identification and distinction created in the early centuries of the Middle Ages remained available throughout European history. Even many early medieval peoples who failed, such as the Vandals, Huns, Goths or Burgundians, accumulated such prestige that others attempted to partake in it by identifying with peoples who had long disappeared: several medieval states adopted the name of the Burgundians, up to the Grand Dukes of the fifteenth century; Hungary appropriated the Huns as ancestors; early modern Sweden the Goths and Vandals (who represent two of the Three Crowns of the Swedish coat of arms); and some Slavic dynasties traced their origins back to the
However, the military exploits of a heroic age would hardly have been enough to establish the political role of ethnicity. It is easy to observe that all successful ethnic states were or soon became Christian. This was partly due to the valuable infrastructure offered by the Church, and to the support of the bishops. But there is more to it, and this is a neglected element in the study of European ‘visions of community’: Christianity also provided a world view that made the gentes essential actors in the history of salvation. Thus, the baptism of the Frankish king Clovis around 500 CE came to be regarded as the true foundational act of the French state, and its 1500th anniversary was celebrated with pomp and furious debates in 1996. Much more than Islam, Christianity could be understood to support the particularity and importance of ethnically defined groups. Therefore, most medieval rulers’ titles contain a double legitimation: Gratia Dei rex Francorum, rex Angliae or similar. The long-term success of ethnic states, which paved the way for the eventual development of European nations, would not have been possible without the Christian discourse of ethnicity.

Therefore, this volume is not simply entitled ‘Ethnicity in East and West’ or similar. Two key questions that have emerged from recent research on the role of ethnicity in the post-Roman West are both more general and more specific. First, in what way did supra-regional kingdoms come to be distinguished by ethnic labels? And second, what was the role of Christianity in encouraging the political use of ethnic identities? These two questions point strongly towards comparison with Christian Byzantium and with the Islamic world. What is the role of particular identities within the universal vision proposed by the two religions? And what are the realities on the ground created by the sometimes conflicting, but more often aggregated religious, ethnic and other social identities? Which


\[15\] See below.


‘visions of community’ inspired political action and legitimated rulership in the three post-classical political cultures?

Comparison between different regions, cultures or periods is an expanding but methodologically sensible field. Sociological models tend to offer sweeping blueprints for comparison, but they often sit poorly with the complexity of historical evidence. Are our categories for historical analysis – such as state, empire, tribe, religion, ethnicity, culture – flexible enough to sustain systematic comparison? Socio-cultural anthropology recently has gone through a revival of methodological and conceptual attention for cross-cultural comparison. One of the problems is that comparison tends to reify the cultures that are being compared, and the boundaries between them. In the case of this book, the common past and the intense communication between the regions under scrutiny do not allow them to be marked off against each other in any wholesale way. In spite of all difficulties, we are even being encouraged to ‘compare the incomparable’ across academic boundaries. As we go along, more methodological reflection will be needed to assess the results of cross-disciplinary encounters such as the one presented in this volume.

Most importantly for our topic, we have to reflect on the categories of identity and ethnicity. Theoretical questions of ethnicity and of its uses are raised in several contributions to this volume, among them the essays by two social anthropologists working on Asia (Andre Gingrich, Guntram Hazod, Chapters 1 and 2 respectively), by Bas ter Haar Romeny (Chapter 11), and in Chris Wickham’s Conclusion; I would like to add a few observations here. What is ethnicity? It is probably safe to say that the barbarian peoples of the West were ethnic groups. It is already more problematic in the case of the umbrella terms.


23 Marcel Detienne, Comparing the Incomparable (Stanford, 2008).

'Arab' clearly represented a self-designation in the early Middle Ages, but it may not always have been understood in an ethnic sense; when and how it was used in the Middle Ages needs more detailed investigation.25 ‘Germanic’ was hardly used for self-identification in antiquity, although modern scholarship has long maintained that, and was not used for contemporary ascription between ca. 400 and 750.26 ‘Roman’ is even more difficult to assess. A number of recent studies have discussed its significance in antiquity;27 similar assessments are lacking for the early Middle Ages, when ‘Roman’ had several different meanings. Classical Roman-ness was maintained with considerable efforts; if Evagrius presents the late sixth-century bishop Gregory of Theopolis as addressing a Byzantine army as ‘Men, Romans in action and in appellation’, this refers to a performative identity following an ancient classical tradition.28 ‘Roman’ might be also used for the inhabitants of the city of Rome or for the Latin-speaking population of the western kingdoms or, of course, for the Rhomaioi, the mostly Greek-speaking citizens of the empire. In some contexts, it might acquire a more or less ethnic note; since Late Antiquity, the ‘Romans’ could be seen as one gens among others. The identity of the eastern Romans was even more contradictory: they were the descendants of the ancient ‘Hellenes’, a term that was hardly used for self-identification since it had come to be understood as a synonym for ‘pagans’; speakers of Latin and other languages called them ‘Greeks’, whereas they might be designated ‘Ionians’ (al-yūnāniyīn) by Arabs and later by the Turks.29 We call

25 See Chapter 4 by Jan Retsö in this volume; and the rather different view from Robert Hoyland, Arabia and the Arabs: From the Bronze Age to the Coming of Islam (London, New York, 2001), pp. 229–47. I would like to thank Patricia Crone, Princeton, for advice on this point.


29 See Clemens Gantner, ‘The Label “Greeks” in the papal diplomatic Repertoire in the eighth century’, in Walter Pohl and Gerda Heydemann (eds), Strategies of Identification – Ethnicity and Religion in Early Medieval Europe, Cultural Encounters in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, 13 (Turnhout, 2012, forthcoming). See also Chapters 22 and 23 by Clemens Gantner and Daniel König, respectively, in this volume. Nowadays, the Turkish name for Greece is still ‘Yunanistan’.
them ‘Byzantines’, a term used only for the inhabitants of Constantinople in the period. Iranian identity may seem more straightforward, but, as Richard Payne reminds us in Chapter 12, in the Sasanian realm the Iranian identity of the ēr was constituted ‘by ethics and sacred history, not race’. Ērānšahr was essentially an elite concept, perhaps not too different in that respect from the Arab/Islamic Empire that followed. After the Islamic Conquest, an Iranian political identity was only promoted by the Mongolian dynasty of the Ilkhanids in the 14th century.

Several other social identities could contain more or less salient ethnic elements, for instance the Prophet’s kin, the civic identities of the inhabitants of Tours, Naples or Damascus, the local identities at Karka and Arbela,30 or the provincial identities of Egypt or Aquitaine. And what about the allegiances of the people (ahl) of Syria and the people of Iraq in the Umayyad period31 or the ‘micro-Christendoms’32 in Egypt and Syria under Byzantine and then Muslim rule? The Jewish communities in the West were variously seen as religious or ethnic groups, or, as Wolfram Drews puts it in Chapter 21, a gens defined by religious books. And what kind of communities were the populus Christianus and the Muslim umma altogether?33 Visions of community were manifold in our period, and ethnicity could play rather different roles in them.

Chris Wickham, in his Conclusion, points out that rather than asking ‘is this a real ethnic identity or not?’, the question should be what elements of ethnic identity a social group stresses, and how it does so. What we get in the sources are traces of the use of ethnicity as a defining element of a group, or rather, of a number of distinctive groups (as Andre Gingrich stresses in Chapter 1, ethnic groups never come alone, for ethnicity is a relational category). This means that the incidence (or ‘salience’) of ethnicity can vary considerably under different circumstances, even in the same social field. We will not always be able to reconstruct the relative importance of ethnicity in a given social landscape. But where we have sources voicing visions and perceptions of community, or accounts that help to trace the agency of groups, we can get quite good clues about the role of ethnic identifications.

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30 See Chapter 12 by Richard Payne in this volume.
Sociological models and ‘ideal types’ may surely be useful to ease comparison (as Chris Wickham underlines in his Conclusion). But the historian’s task also is to historicize our categories. The point is not only that ethnicity and religion have occupied different places in the social fabric in the regions under comparison here. The problem is that their very significance may have varied, according to circumstances. ‘Religion’ involved a rather different set of social practices and discourses in classical Rome, in medieval Christendom, in the early Islamic world and, of course, in the modern age. Less obviously, but critically, the concept and discourse of ethnicity also depend on its historical setting. For instance, ethnicity in an age of national states is almost inescapably caught up with the identity politics of minority groups and post-colonial societies; in most cases, national and ethnic identities are seen as opposites that make it hard to describe the ‘Ethnic Origins of Nations’ in these terms. For medieval historians, therefore, ‘ethnicity’ becomes more productive if we go beyond the ideal type and employ it as a matrix in which to accommodate historical change. Thus, the term can help to register both the changing meanings and variety of phenomena that we can class as ‘ethnic’, and the relative salience of ethnic bonds in a given historical context.

The theory of identity and ethnicity cannot be discussed here at length. The usual features that constitute the ‘ideal type’ – common origin, language, territory, a common history, a sense of solidarity, customs and law, costume and habitus, symbolic objects – in short, culture – are valuable as a checklist. But hardly ever do all of them apply to a given ethnic group. What we can use is an ‘à la carte’ selection of some of these distinctive features that serve as symbolic markers of ethnic identity. In each case, some other criteria do not apply. Goths always lived in more than one territory (and also regarded different countries as their ancestral homeland – Scandinavia, Scythia, the Vistula region and even Britain). Franks, Goths, Lombards and Bulgarians over time changed their language without changing their identity. The same applied to religion, costume and many customs in the early medieval kingdoms. The Franks had at least two different law codes, Salian and Ripuarian law, with no recognizable ethnic division at their bases. Not all Lombard men had long beards, not all Frankish warriors used the battle axe that Isidore calls francisca – the examples are many. And, regrettably, origin myths, origines gentium, are not attested for all early medieval peoples.

Moreover, most of these criteria are also valid for many of the groups listed above, for the identity of cities and territories, of religious sects and military units, of political communities and dynastic retinues. Only one element seems to be specific to ethnicity: whatever distinctive features serve as ‘boundary markers’, they are perceived as expressions of an innermost self, an ingrained common nature. Most social identities have a decisive point of reference outside the group: the city, the land, the state, the army, the ruler, a religious creed. Symbolic strategies of identification attach themselves to these figures that represent the common denominator, the defining feature of the community. In ethnicity, by contrast, the principle of distinction and the symbolic essence of the community are thought to lie in the human group itself. Its symbolism builds on kinship, blood, origin and fate. To put it bluntly: ethnic groups are secondary social groupings (that is, not created by any personal bond) that are believed to be primary (that is, constituted through kinship). It is obvious that this heightened sense of community can hardly bear the weight of promise that it implies. Therefore, ethnicity hardly ever occurs in its pure form; it has to attach itself to other, more tangible forms of community – a homeland, state, army or religion.

One methodological consequence is that ethnicity can rarely be studied on its own. All historical identities and communities are aggregates of several forms of identification that overlap to different degrees, and that are subject to change. The modern nation has established more systematic and stable composites of ethnic, territorial, political and sometimes also religious identities (but has not achieved an even near-complete overlap either). Different allegiances may, of course, clash. All these identities and their conjunctions have to be produced and negotiated through serial identifications. Individuals (or small groups) identify themselves with a group; the (in-)group represents itself in common symbols and rituals or political acts; and the out-group perceives and acknowledges the existence and characteristics of this group. These three levels of identification (we could add modern scholarship as a fourth level) are essential for ethnic (and other social) identities; and they require relatively regular communication to function. Our historical sources are traces of this communication; therefore, they usually do not simply reflect identities that are ‘out there’, they are part of the process of their creation.

In the study of ethnicity, recent scholarship on the Islamic and Western worlds seems to have taken different trajectories: Whereas ‘tribe’ is a key concept in Islamic studies, much debated but hardly dispensable, it has largely been

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abandoned for the gentes in the West. In the 1960s, Reinhard Wenskus still spoke of ‘Stammbildung’, the formation of tribes, but like the term ‘Stamm’ itself, this label was soon more or less abandoned in German-speaking scholarship. Uses in English are more varied (sometimes, gens is still anachronistically being translated as ‘nation’ or ‘race’); but it makes most sense to regard Goths or Franks as ‘peoples’. This is in part due to the ideological overtones of the term ‘tribe’, which has often been used to suggest a notion of primitivity, an archaic stage of human society. Alternatively, ‘tribe’ may also evoke a sense of teleology, derived from the tribes of Israel. In German historiography, the German people had long been seen as constituted through its tribes – Saxons, Franks, Suebians, Bavarians and others. This model allowed historians to establish the continuity between the ancient and the modern Germans, and to bridge a gap in the early Middle Ages in which neither Germani nor die Deutschen had been used as a collective term. The scholarly use of ‘germanische Stämme’, Germanic tribes, is therefore best avoided. But of course, there is hardly a modern term denoting ethnicity that is without overtones. Many social anthropologists avoid the concept of tribe for a different reason, because they regard it as a colonial category, through which Europeans in Africa or the Americas have classified native populations. But, as Andre Gingrich shows in Chapter 1, in many parts of Asia tribal structures can hardly have been invented by outside observers.

Tribal systems may thus exist in some societies and not in others, and their significance may vary. Tribes, according to Patricia Crone’s definition, are societies ‘which create all or most of their social roles by ascribing social importance to biological characteristics, in other words, societies ordered with reference to kinship, sex and age’. This goes beyond the notion of common descent that is a defining feature of ethnicity. An ethnic group may very well regard itself as united by ties of blood without specifying who is related to whom in what way. Tribal systems tend to be constructed much more thoroughly according to genealogical principles, in which families, clans, lineages, subtribes, tribes and groups of tribes are related to each other in a complicated web of kinship. This also determines solidarities in cases of conflict: at least ideally, you have to support the closer relative against the more distant one. Tribal organization thus provides a simple and efficient logic to channel and escalate conflict by following patterns of kinship and gradually involving additional groups, regardless of their interest in what the original cause of the dispute may

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38 Wenskus, Stammbildung und Verfassung.
39 See also Godelier, ‘À propos des concepts de tribu’.
40 Crone, ‘The tribe and the state’, pp. 72f.
have been. This logic of dispute is usually defined as blood feud, but may need a more complex explanation.\footnote{Many early medieval conflicts have been labelled too easily as blood feuds: see Ian Wood, ‘The bloodfeud of the Franks: a historiographical legend’, \textit{Early Medieval Europe}, 14 (2006): 489–504.}

Thus, perhaps the concept of tribe may help to understand some differences in the role of ethnicity in Europe and in the Islamic world. The sources seem to convey a rather different image of the shape and size of the respective groups in the East and in the West. The rich ethnic terminology in Arabic reflects a whole hierarchy of tribal affiliations, \textit{ṭabaqāt}, from the people of the Arabs, within which there was an opposition between the inclusive tribal groupings of Yaman and Qais, to single tribes, subtribes and clans.\footnote{Eva Orthmann, \textit{Stamm und Macht. Die arabischen Stämme im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert der Hiğra} (Wiesbaden, 2002), pp. 256–66.} Even though in the texts these terms are not always used according to their exact level of significance, the tribal language is available. Quite to the contrary, the Latin word ‘\textit{gens}’, even more than the Greek \textit{ethnos}, can cover the whole range from a family to the Franks or even, in Late Antiquity, the Romans; it is interesting to see that \textit{gens} was also taken over into Arabic as a loanword (\textit{jins}, pl. \textit{ajnās}).\footnote{See Chapter 9 by Michael Morony in this volume.} Other semantic options (such as \textit{tribus}, \textit{genus}) are rarely used to distinguish between different levels of affiliation. Arabic sources contain ample material on tribal genealogies (for instance in the work of Ibn al-Kalbī), and the early caliphs seem to have encouraged their written distribution.

In the West, the closest we get to these are the genealogies of the Anglo-Saxon royal families and, of course, the early Irish sources. But they came from a world of small- to medium-sized kingdoms in constant competition with each other, quite unlike the large-scale kingdoms of Goths, Franks or Lombards on the continent. There, we have a small number of genealogies of different dynasties, a long one (seventeen generations) for the Gothic Amals and a very brief one (four generations) for the Merovingian king Clovis,\footnote{Wolfram, ‘Auf der Suche nach den Ursprüngen’.} but they could not serve to relate the families among each other or with overarching tribal units. Nor do substantial subdivisions among barbarian peoples become visible in our sources. Scholars have hypothesized a dual structure among the Franks on the basis of the two distinctive law codes, the Lex Salica and the Lex Ribuaria. But apart from the fact that the name of the law book is not Lex Saliorum as would be normal if Saliens was an ethnonym, in none of the bloody civil wars in the Merovingian kingdoms did Saliens and Ripuarians as such ever clash.\footnote{Matthias Springer, ‘Gab es ein Volk der Salier?’, in Dieter Geuenich, Wolfgang Haubrichs and Jörg Jarnut (eds), \textit{Nomen et gens. Zur historischen Aussagekraft frühmittelalterlicher Personennamen}, Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde, Ergänzungsband, 16 (Berlin, New York, 1997), pp. 58–83.} Very occasionally, we
get casual information that gentes regarded themselves as related (for instance the Goths and the Gepids, or the Saxons of Britain and the continental Saxons). There is also a brief genealogy, the so-called ‘Frankish table of nations’, which derives some of the major peoples of the sixth century from three ancestors whose names resemble the three Germanic ancestors already mentioned in Tacitus. Remarkably, the Romans are listed here as relatives of the Franks. Many early medieval authors also attempted to attach contemporary peoples to the genealogy of the sons of Noah. But none of this resembles the elaborate and ever-changing Arab tribal genealogies.

Arabic literature presents and often idealizes the archaic world of the Bedouin tribes, with their severe logic of tribal obligations. Ibn Khaldūn, in his fourteenth-century introduction to his History, the so-called Muqaddimah, even offers a complex theory of tribal groupings. According to him, true group feelings only result from blood relations. At the same time, he is aware that most pedigrees are imaginary, because in reality most groups of people are mixed. Only in the desert, where no one else would have desired to live, have lineages been kept pure, which accounts for their superiority. Ibn Khaldūn knew that tribal affiliations were constantly modified to fit the expectations of the present. But although the tribal system had been fragmented by the dispersed settlement in the conquered countries, it could still serve as a frame of reference to mobilize support or express dissent. Such a tribal logic can be traced in some of the internal conflicts in the early Islamic period, where support could be mobilized along traditional genealogical lines.

It is striking that a similar tribal logic is virtually absent in conflict narratives and other sources about the gentes in the West. We know a lot about the conflicts between and within these kingdoms, and there is little trace of tribal motivation in the narratives. As many conflicts arose between members of the same ethnic group (many of whom served in Roman armies) as between different tribes. A number of violent struggles are also attested between members of the same family, for instance the Merovingian dynasty. Characteristically, Gregory of Tours pictures King Clovis as a cynic who uses the language of kinship just to kill off all the potential rivals in his family:

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50 Orthmann, Stamm und Macht.
And having killed many other kings and his nearest relatives, of whom he was jealous lest they take the kingdom from him, he extended his rule over all the Gauls. However he gathered his people together at one time, it is said, and spoke of the kinsmen whom he had himself destroyed. ‘Woe to me, who have remained as a stranger among foreigners, and have none of my kinsmen to give me aid if adversity comes.’ But he said this not because of grief at their death but by way of a ruse, if perchance he should be able to find someone still to kill.\textsuperscript{51}

The language of kinship solidarity is used here, but only to underline that the creation of the Frankish kingdom took the opposite direction. Thus, a clear pattern of ‘tribal’ allegiances and enmities could hardly form. Stable tribal systems often prevent the rise of supra-regional powers because the most powerful tribes soon have to face opposition from a broad alliance of those threatened by their expansion.\textsuperscript{52} If such a system existed among the northern barbarians in the earlier imperial age, it had obviously collapsed in the early migration period. Post-Roman Europe can hardly be called a tribal society.

Another interesting point of comparison is the relationship of ethnic and military identities. In Late Antiquity, barbarian armies on Roman territory seem to have relied increasingly on their ethnic identities as an element of cohesion in a potentially hostile environment; it has sometimes been asked whether the Goths were ‘nation or army’, but this need not necessarily be seen as an alternative.\textsuperscript{53} The armies of Alaric I or of Theoderic the Ostrogoth essentially stayed together even in times of crisis, whereas the armies following Roman usurpers or generals disbanded after defeat. Procopius, in his account of the Gothic war in the mid-sixth century, has King Totila voice this observation. In his speech before the battle at the Busta Gallorum, Totila denies the coherence, and the Roman-ness, of the Byzantine army:

\begin{quote}
The vast number of the enemy is worthy only to be despised, seeing that they present a collection of men from the greatest possible number of nations (ex \textit{ethnōn xyneilegmenōn hoti malista pleistōn}). For an alliance which is patched together from many sources gives no firm assurance of either loyalty (\textit{pistis})\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{52} The foundation of the Tibetan Empire under the dynasty of the Pargyel seems to be an example to the contrary: see Chapter 2 by Guntram Hazod in this volume.

or power (dynamis), but being split up in origin (schizomenē tois genesi), it is naturally divided likewise in purpose.\textsuperscript{54}

Roman identity, according to what may well be Procopius’ own critique, had stopped inspiring a sense of solidarity in Roman armies, who were mostly composed of barbarian mercenaries. Gradually, the Western empire was replaced by the kingdoms of the Goths, Vandals, Burgundians and Franks. Stefan Esders has shown that the Roman military oath became fundamental for the oaths of allegiance in the post-imperial kingdoms, not only within the barbarian army, but between the king and his subjects in general.\textsuperscript{55}

It is interesting to compare these examples of military-ethnic identity with those of the early Islamic armies, analysed in this volume by John Haldon and Hugh Kennedy (Chapter 18). While Abbasid armies, from the ninth century onwards, consisted of different ethnic groups (first and foremost, Turks), in earlier periods the regional identities of the armies were stressed.\textsuperscript{56} Here, ethnicity rather seems to have been regarded as a potentially centrifugal factor. A telling example is the conflict between the Syrian and the Iraqi army in the Umayyad period, in which regional-military identities undercut older tribal loyalties within the overarching framework of an ethno-religious identity (Arab/Islamic). In the speeches before the battle of Siffin in 657, as rendered by al-Ṭabarī, ‘the appeal is to regional identities, the people of Syria (ahl al-shām) against the people of Iraq (ahl al-‘irāq)’. The leader of the Iraqi army, Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, even deliberately pitted the tribal units in his army against their counterparts on the Syrian side. This example also demonstrates the importance of economic interests in strategies of identification; membership in these armies entailed financial privileges, albeit to different degrees, and the revenues came from the region. The tribes, on the other hand, had been dispersed, so that tribal allegiances in the new settlement areas had only naked identity to recommend them. The Islamic conquerors had based their rule on the previously existent regions, such as Iran, Syria, Egypt and Ifriqiya. Still, as Hugh Kennedy stresses, these identifications regarded only the Arab Muslim as part of the population and, in practice, the military. Thus, they never consistently became demarcations.


\textsuperscript{55} See Chapter 19 by Stefan Esders in this volume, with further bibliography; and Stefan Esders, \textit{Sacramentum fidelitatis: Treueid, Militärwesen und Formierung mittelalterlicher Staatlichkeit} (forthcoming).

\textsuperscript{56} Kennedy, \textit{The Armies of the Caliphs}, pp. 118f.; see also Chapter 9 by Michael Morony in this volume.
for independent Islamic states; ‘regional identities and loyalties could acquire social and cultural, but rarely political importance,’ as Bernard Lewis remarks.57

Territorial identities, which seem to be common to all three political cultures, hardly offered sufficient basis for stable large-scale polities. As John Haldon and Hugh Kennedy argue in Chapter 18, around the same time as in the Umayyad Caliphate, regional-military identities developed in the Byzantine sphere of power in the themata, if on a smaller scale. None of them, however, became the basis of a relatively stable autonomous polity, not even in the remote exarchate of Ravenna. The Isaurians of the fifth century remained an isolated case of an ethno-military identity that developed within the Byzantine system, and it was more ephemeral than often thought, as Mischa Meier argues in Chapter 16. In the West, none of the Roman provinces was directly transformed into a post-imperial regnum. That does not mean that they did not have potential for identification. Many provinces had in fact been established on the basis of ethnic identities or even kingdoms, and they retained an ethnic potential throughout the Roman period, as Fritz Mitthoff shows in Chapter 3. And even though the Visigothic kingdom coincided more or less with Hispania and the Frankish kingdom with Gaul, the ethnic designation prevailed. Even after the kingdom of the Lombards in Italy had been subdued by Charlemagne in 774, its identification as regnum Italiae was slow to appear; quite to the contrary, Charlemagne was the first ruler to issue royal diplomas using the title rex Langobardorum, instead of Flavius rex as the Lombard kings did.58 Britannia was a special case, as Catherine McKenna shows in Chapter 8. Even though large parts of the island came to be ruled by Anglo-Saxon invaders and in time were known as England, the British population in Wales continued to identify with Britain at large, rather than with their Welsh homeland, well into the high Middle Ages; Welsh regional identity remained weak.

‘Visions of community’ certainly became attached to empires both in the Christian and in the Islamic sphere. The Christian ‘Rhetoric of Empire’ in the late Roman Empire is a striking example.59 This conjunction of Christian ideas and imperial ideology was so successful that it dominated the Byzantine Empire to the end, and inspired the grandiose if often dysfunctional construction of the renewed Roman Empire of the Carolingians and the Ottonians in the West. This model did not identify religious authority with political power, but only brought them in close conjunction. This created a tension that made itself felt throughout the history of the Latin West, most dramatically in the Investiture Controversy between the emperor and the pope in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Attempts to bridge the distance between the empire and the ecclesia,

for instance in the Carolingian Empire in the first decades of the ninth century, regularly created expectations that a ruler could hardly fulfil, at least in the long run. In the West, as in Byzantium, an (if only notionally religiously homogeneous community had both secular and ecclesiastical leaders, both of whom derived their authority from God. The Islamic Caliphate, on the other hand, was conceived as a combination of worldly power and religious authority, but made no attempt to enforce religious unity throughout its realm. It seems that this followed the Sasanian model rather than a late Roman one. Michael Morony, in Chapter 9, argues that there was a fundamental difference in the development of legal systems in the Latin West and in the Islamic world in the early Middle Ages: in both, territorial law gave way to the personality of the law; but in the West, the legal distinction was ethnic (Frankish, Lombard, Bavarian, Burgundian law), whereas in the East, it was religious.

It is interesting to compare the complex tension between universal religion and universal empire in Christian and Islamic empires with an example from the Buddhist world. In Chapter 2, Guntram Hazod argues that the development of a Tibetan empire in the seventh century CE was due to the common interest of clan groups in establishing control over the Silk Road, whereas the adoption of Buddhism, a religion not yet shared by all, caused its decline. Still, Buddhism later inspired a sense of Tibetan unity in spite of political diversity. As in many cases of ethnic identification, an outside denomination came to stick here, as the name ‘Tibet’ seems to be derived from the Arab ‘tubbut’, which designated one of its tribal components. Whether Christianity was in fact an element that reinforced (at least temporarily) Roman rule after Constantine had endorsed it,

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60 Mayke de Jong, The Penitential State: Authority and Atonement in the Age of Louis the Pious, 814–840 (Cambridge, 2009); Mayke de Jong, ‘Ecclesia and the early medieval polity’, in Stuart Airlie, Helmut Reimitz and Walter Pohl (eds), Staat im frühen Mittelalter, Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters, 11 (Vienna, 2006), pp. 113–32; and see the contributions by Steffen Patzold and Stefan Esders in this volume (Chapters 20 and 19 respectively).

61 See Chapter 17 by Ralph-Johannes Lilie in this volume for the role of Muslims and heretics in Byzantium.

62 The personality of the law in fact took a while to develop in the post-Roman kingdoms in the West; while the distinction between Roman and ‘barbarian’ (Burgundian, Visigothic) law was already established in the fifth and sixth centuries, the full variety of different ‘ethnic’ law codes within the Frankish realm was only established as an option in the Carolingian Empire, in the late eighth and ninth century. See Brigitte Pohl-Resl, ‘Legal practice and ethnic identity in Lombard Italy’, in Walter Pohl and Helmut Reimitz (eds), Strategies of Distinction: The Construction of Ethnic Communities, 300–800, The Transformation of the Roman World, 2 (Leiden, New York, Cologne, 1998), pp. 205–19; cf. Patrick Wormald, The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the 12th Century 1: Legislation and its Limits (Oxford, 1999).
or whether it contributed to eroding it (as Edward Gibbon believed in the late eighteenth century), is still a matter of controversial discussion.\textsuperscript{63}

The relevance of religious identities for the political system, and their relationship with ethnicity, is perhaps the most interesting field of comparison. Initially, both the Christian \textit{populus} and the Islamic \textit{umma} had been recruited individually and from people of different ethnic or tribal origin. Conversion really meant turning from an old identity to a radically new one. Paul’s epistle to the Colossians (3: 11) emphatically states that among the Christians ‘there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all and in all’. It is a community that embraces all those who want to join. Peter (1 Pet. 2: 9–10) told the early Christians: ‘But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of His own … You once were not a people, but now you are God’s people.’\textsuperscript{64} In Late Antiquity, things became complicated because for a time it would seem that Christendom was almost co-extensive with the Roman Empire, at least in the West. Augustine and other Christian intellectuals had to try hard to steer clear of too close an identification with the Christian Empire. Yet, imperial and Christian identities remained closely linked in Byzantium.

But eventually, the barbarian peoples were also baptized. The Gospel of Matthew ends with Christ’s exhortation to the eleven pupils: ‘\textit{Euntes ergo docete omnes gentes}’ (Mt 28: 19). Consequently, the approach to their conversion tended to focus on peoples. When the Frankish king Clovis was baptized around 500 ce, thousands of Franks were also converted.\textsuperscript{65} Soon, Peter’s phrase that I have just quoted, ‘You are a chosen people’, was used to flatter converted peoples, Franks,Angles or the Irish.\textsuperscript{66} The pressure for collective conversion was especially strong in the Carolingian Empire, for instance in the Saxon mission. To become a subject of the Franks meant becoming Christian, there was no way past that. But more

\textsuperscript{63} Edward Gibbon, \textit{The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire} (London, 1779–88); cf. Rosamond McKitterick and R. Quinault (eds), \textit{Edward Gibbon and Empire} (Cambridge, 1997); for an interesting recent argument (mothers stop teaching Roman civic values to their children and promote Christian spiritual values instead), see Kate Cooper, ‘Gender and the fall of Rome’, in P. Rousseau, \textit{Blackwell’s Companion to Late Antiquity} (Oxford, 2009), pp. 187–200.

\textsuperscript{64} 1 Peter 2: 9–10: \textit{Vos autem genus electum, regale sacerdotium, gens sancta, populus acquisitionis … qui aliquando non populus, nunc autem populus Dei.}

\textsuperscript{65} Gregory of Tours, \textit{Histories} II,31 speaks of 3,000 of Clovis’ army who were baptized with him; Fredegar, \textit{Chronicae} 3,21 has ‘ethnicized’ this into 6,000 Franks. See Helmut Reimitz’ forthcoming study on the history of Frankish identity and the rise of western ethnicity in the early Middle Ages.

\textsuperscript{66} This will be argued in a forthcoming article by Walter Pohl and Gerda Heydemann.
Introduction

often, Christianization went parallel to the establishment or the reinforcement of an independent state, as in the case of Bohemia, Poland, Hungary or Bulgaria.  

Islamic conversion took a different course. Al-Ṭabarī repeatedly quotes Islamic conquerors giving the defeated three options: ‘You may enter our religion, in which case you will enjoy what we enjoy, and you will bear the obligations we bear’; alternatively, they could pay the poll-tax or continue their resistance. This is, of course, well known. It must have had an effect on the identities of conquered peoples whose communities gradually eroded through conversion to Islam. On the other hand, it obviously strengthened the sense of community of those who resisted. In the Carolingian period, on the contrary, the converted also had to pay tithes, which may help to explain why revolt often followed conversion, from the Saxons in the eighth to the Bulgarians in the ninth and the Hungarians and Poles in the eleventh century.

Ethnic and religious identities could interact in different ways when they became politically salient. Three contributions in this volume offer important new perspectives on Frankish community-building between religious, ethnic and political identities. In Chapter 7 Helmut Reimitz gives a careful reassessment of the many meanings of Frankishness in Merovingian historiography. Whereas Gregory of Tours, in the sixth century, linked the fortunes of the Frankish realm to the sacred topography of Gallic saints and to the moral authority of its bishops, both the seventh-century Fredegar Chronicle and the eighth-century Liber Historiae Francorum established Frankish identity as the key to successful rulership. Frankishness could mean different things, but it had become a principal resource for political identification. Stefan Esders traces the development of the oath of allegiance and its Carolingian uses in Chapter 19. Already in the formulary of Marculf, the oath had to be given by Franks, Romans and all other subjects; this inclusive character was reinforced by the

69 See Chapter 11 by Bas ter Haar Romeny in this volume.
Carolingians. ‘By exacting general oaths of fidelity, the Frankish kings developed political identity within their kingdom largely along three lines: the legitimacy of the ruling dynasty,72 Christianity and religious orthodoxy, and the creation of new political identities.’73 Fides and devotio, late-Roman terms for military and political loyalty, were at the same time key words for Christian faith. Gens and ecclesia, as Steffen Patzold argues in Chapter 20, present alternative, but inseparable ways of framing the inclusive community of the regnum.74 The ethnic ‘vision of community’ was mainly propagated in narrative sources, while ecclesiastical unity was primarily a topic of normative and exhortative texts. Whereas there could only be one Church, the regnum, and consequently also the gens Francorum, could be divided. Both, however, ultimately depended on good counsel and on consent. The Carolingian elites went to great lengths to exploit the integrative potential of all available strategies of identification. Frankishness was a driving force in the phase of expansion, which by its very success transcended its ethnic matrix. Still, in the long run, while the Franks took over the late Latin language of their subjects, these began to adhere to the identity of their rulers, to become ‘the French’.

In the early Islamic period, Arab and Islamic identities tended to converge, so that non-Arab converts enjoyed lower status and prestige. But this amalgam of Arabic and Islamic identities could also create problems. When Khālid b. al-Walīd conquered the former Lakhmīd fortresses around al-Hirah, he was said (according to al-Ṭabarī based on al-Sari) to have discussed with the inhabitants whether they were Arabs, until he was convinced by their language that they were.75 It did make a difference, but Islam was certainly more important. ‘May you perish,’ Khālid said to the Arabs of al-Hirah who refused to convert. ‘Disbelief is a desert that makes one lose its way. It is the foolish (one) among the Arabs who follows it.’

Some of the differences between East and West may be explained by the course of events. The post-Roman kingdoms in the West were formed by ethnically identified armies, most of them with their families and following, who had already spent at least a generation on Roman territory. They converted to the Christian religion of the Romans, and distinguished themselves from the provincial Roman majority over whom they ruled by their ethnic affiliation. The Islamic conquerors, on the other hand, may have been proud of their Arab identity, but what provided the stimulus for expansion and the main

72 Matthias Becher, Eid und Herrschaft. Untersuchungen zum Herrschaftsethos Karls des Großen (Sigmaringen, 1993), pp. 120–27.
74 See also de Jong, ‘Ecclesia and the early medieval polity’.
cohesive factor of their realm was Islam; at least initially, it distinguished them from conquered populations. Much more than western barbarians, they came as invaders who seized power in a spectacular series of victories over both neighbouring empires. The result, therefore, was a unified Islamic realm in which political power transcended the tribal structure at its foundation. It is hardly conceivable that Iraq could have become a kingdom of the tribe of Bakr, al-Jazira a kingdom of the Qais or Egypt a kingdom of the ‘Akk. On the other hand, it is difficult even to imagine that Bishop Wulfila, the ‘apostle of the Goths’ in the fourth century, could have become a prophet and forged a tribal coalition so powerful that these ‘Wulfilites’ would have extended their power over much of the Roman Empire as the Muslims did, while Gothic identity receded to the power struggles between informal networks in the army of the prophet Wulfila.

But at a second glance, things are not so easy, and this volume offers differentiation rather than a coherent picture of distinctions between the West, Byzantium and the Islamic world. It is not that ethnicity did not matter in the East and was all-pervasive in the West. Both worlds were dominated by strong religious identities that were supposed to have precedence over any ethnic ties. God was not the God of one people alone; everyone was called to follow him. Political power was believed to be derived from God through Christ or Muhammad. Within that frame, ethnic loyalties might play important political roles. But even when Turks, Persians and Kurds began to rule over Islamic lands, they hardly did so in the name of their ethnic communities. And Islam did not encourage them to do so in the same way as Christianity did in the West.

The tremendous success of the Islamic conquests may have been due to setting the inherent rivalries of tribal societies on a course of expansion, and to linking their ambitions to a powerful overarching religious and political framework. What room did this system leave for shaping particular concerns and identities? How flexible was it in dealing with religious and ethnic differences and in accommodating them within an empire ruled by the ‘commander of the faithful’? But the Islamic expansion came to a halt; within more closely circumscribed limits, the Byzantines resisted. How did Byzantium adapt to the crisis of Roman-ness, and how did it deal with alternative identifications asserting themselves on its peripheries? The orthodox Oikoumene remained centred on the empire, but ethnically denominated states rose in its periphery, Bulgars, Serbs and others. Even more than in the West, it seems that these states went through a very difficult process of identity formation. The neighbouring empire(s) created tensions that were not easy to withstand, both in the case of Bulgaria, which repeatedly succumbed to Byzantine influence, and in the case of Armenia, which became very fragmented politically under the competing influences of Byzantium and the caliphate.76 What was the place of ethnic

76 See Chapter 13 by Lynn Jones in this volume; and cf. Chapter 15 by George Hatke (Ethiopia and its confused narratives of Christianization).
polities within the universal horizon of the Christian church, and how did that differ between East and West?

In the last resort, all three post-Roman political cultures succeeded in establishing a certain sense of community that united them, regardless of their many internal conflicts. This global identity relied, not least, on the image of the foreigner, the religious and ethnic ‘Other’, the Saracen or the infidel. ‘Visions of community’ often entail visions of otherness, as a number of contributions in this volume show. Some of these perceptions could be surprisingly wholesale, as in the case of the label ‘majūs’ used for the Vikings in al-Andalus, which was ultimately derived from the Persian ‘magi’ and their Zoroastrian religion. The classification of human groups, such as the Saracens, was determined by a few key texts, and surprisingly, the coming of Islam did not alter the picture decisively.

But even the worst negative stereotypes (boiling unborn babies in the womb and then eating them, and similar horrors) were not used exclusively for ‘apocalyptic’ enemies; they could also serve to denounce supposed pagan practices in Christian towns. For a while between the seventh and eleventh centuries, dog-headed and other monstrous races were not necessarily considered to be distant creatures, but they could be thought to populate neighbouring areas of missionary activity in the Baltic region.

Stereotypes allowed for a wholesale defamation of others on a rhetorical level, while in a pragmatic way, people of different origin could be accepted or even integrated. ‘Border mentalities’ could be very different from the clean distinctions offered in some of the surviving texts. This may be considered as another instance of the difference between lived experience and theories of identification that our texts offer. On the other hand, texts were not simply derived from realities on the ground, or intended to mask them with a good dose of rhetoric, they could also contribute to shaping them. Both lived experience and erudite ‘visions of community’ relied on current discourse, and both were driven by similar internal tensions. Christian ‘visions of identity’, for instance, had to allow for conversion, for a change of identities, and if handled in a realistic way, this required a space for otherness. On the other hand, the very drive to conversion could also serve to increase the pressure to transform diversity to unity. This is one element of early medieval identities that has come to play a very unpleasant role in the world of today: both ethnic/national and religious visions of community can be used for strategies of exclusion, repression and forced unification. Some of these mechanisms go back to the period under study in this volume. Research on ethnicity in the early Middle Ages acquires an important function here. Neither the West nor the Islamic world have ever

77 See Chapter 24 by Ann Christys in this volume.
78 See Chapter 28 by John Tolan in this volume.
79 See Chapter 26 by Wolfram Brandes in this volume.
80 See Chapter 29 by Ian Wood in this volume.
81 For the Byzantine world, see Chapters 27 and 17 by Alexander Beihammer and Ralph-Johannes Lilie, respectively, in this volume.
been monolithic blocs or consistent cultures that inescapably had to clash. If we uncover the complex mechanisms in which their identities were formed, we may be able to contribute to a better understanding of the delicate balances that have nourished their respective ‘visions of community.’

A full bibliography of the volume can be found at: www.ashgate.com/visions-of-community-bibliography.pdf
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Part I
What Difference Does Ethnicity Make?
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Tribe and State:
Social Anthropological Approaches
Chapter 1
Envisioning Medieval Communities in Asia: Remarks on Ethnicity, Tribalism and Faith

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This chapter is written from the perspective of historical anthropology, and as a conceptual contribution to the debates that feature in this volume and at the symposium that preceded it. In particular, it follows the work of my colleagues Johann Heiss and Guntram Hazod (see Chapter 2 in this volume), with whom I have had the opportunity to share many years of collaborative research. The following remarks on ethnicity, tribalism and faith draw upon the medieval contexts of southwestern Arabia and of Tibetan-speaking Central Asia. My primary concern here is to outline and to elaborate some of the conceptual tools that historical anthropology has to offer for historical analyses of such contexts. Before that, some methodological considerations are offered to outline the background and orientations.

INTRODUCTORY METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The desire to conceptually and methodologically bridge the gaps between medieval history and historical anthropology follows a pragmatic as well as a theoretical rationale. The pragmatic dimension is informed by joint efforts invested by Walter Pohl, Guntram Hazod, Johann Heiss, myself and several other researchers to set up a large research network in both local Viennese and international academic contexts, and to elaborate and submit a corresponding grant proposal to that purpose to the Austrian Science Fund. The grant proposal and research network in fact resulted from this volume and the preceding conference, and consequently bore the same title, ‘Visions of Community’. In these pragmatic contexts, historians of Asian and European medieval periods cooperate with historical anthropologists with some expertise in the relevant periods in southwestern Arabia and Tibet. It is this particular pragmatic setting of trans- and interdisciplinary research within a specified set of contextualized research problems that defined the need to also review and elaborate those conceptual tools that historical anthropology has to offer for this type of academic work.

On a theoretical level, this task can be accomplished neither as swiftly nor as straightforwardly as one might expect. Initially, anthropology’s own record
of historical theorizing and conceptualizing requires cautious, retrospective consideration. That requirement is primarily due to two structural reasons that are rooted in historical anthropology’s own development. The first of these is linked to what I call an uneven distribution of workloads within anthropology. The shifting trends of socio-cultural anthropology constitute the second structural reason, which directly intersects with the first and may be referred to as the changing fashions of ‘hot topics’ inside socio-cultural anthropology.

The uneven distribution of workloads inside socio-cultural anthropology has resulted from the necessities of regional specialization. Those anthropologists who specialize in areas with deep and fairly continuous historical records obviously have to engage with those records as soon as their own interests shift to historical topics. By contrast, anthropologists who specialize in areas where such fairly continuous historical records are not available are unable to do so, for better or for worse. One consequence of this uneven distribution of challenges within anthropology was often a more pronounced regional engagement by anthropologists who had to face the challenge of densely available historical sources. As a result, regionally engaged anthropologists were reluctant to move beyond the specificities and peculiarities of regional expertise on occasion to engage in comparative and broader conceptual reasoning as well. By and large, broader comparative and theoretical input into socio-cultural anthropology has steadily emerged from the works of scholars less preoccupied with the burden of local and regional historical records.

The changing fashions of socio-cultural anthropology to an extent are related to that uneven distribution of workloads. Today, historically well-informed anthropologists often tend to interact with their partners in regional expertise from other disciplines, such as archaeologists, linguists, physical anthropologists or, indeed, historians. They have often managed to overcome their previous marginalization as representatives of auxiliary disciplines, for which many had to live through challenges similar to those experienced by professional women in business careers: in order to be recognized as an equal partner, you have to be better than the others – or, rephrased for the present academic context: in order not to be marginalized into an auxiliary position, you have to be a good anthropologist and a respected expert in historical matters as well. On the one hand, regionally focused research agendas leave less time and energy for wider conceptual and theoretical elaborations outside one’s own field of historical and regional expertise. This has contributed to the narrowing of audiences and interests among other anthropological sub-communities working in other fields: if by a certain necessity and logic, the results of regionally and

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1 In this text, the term ‘anthropology’ designates neither physical nor biological anthropology, nor the other two among the ‘four fields’ of anthropology that today dominate American academic traditions, namely linguistic and archaeological anthropology. In short, anthropology here is used as shorthand for socio-cultural anthropology in its common European and Asian academic meaning.
historically highly specialized anthropological analyses are less and less often communicated in comprehensible terms to the anthropological communities at large, then the latter will tend less often to take notice of those results.

On the other hand, this is just one among two main reasons why during the quarter of a century between, say, the mid-1980s and 2010, the changing fashions of ‘hot topics’ inside socio-cultural anthropology included less often than before the insights of historical anthropology. The second factor resulting in the same effect has to do with socio-cultural anthropology’s larger development throughout the twentieth century. Ever since the 1980s, this field has gone though a whole series of critical self-examinations. Some of them cumulatively built upon each other while others did not, and all of them today seem to be feeding into the beginnings of a transnational and global era in anthropology.2 From the perspective of today’s anthropology, coping with globalization and its challenges and dangers certainly is the central task of the years to come. Out of that perspective, it is evident and self-understood that historical anthropology per se seems to be a research realm of merely secondary significance – and moreover, the existing legacies of historical anthropology convey a reputation of being hopelessly old-fashioned and out of touch. Historical anthropologists today are thus struggling more often than not with skeptical attitudes toward their research agenda.

Such skeptical reactions are indeed justified to the degree that historical anthropology’s record does in fact include a plethora of formerly hegemonic, outdated paradigms and models. Still, these outdated and formerly hegemonic models continue to define what commonly is understood as historical anthropology inside socio-cultural anthropology at large, and beyond it. Evolutionism, diffusionism, ethnohistory and certain elements in structuralism, functionalism and Marxism have all contributed to the promotion of definitions not only of historical anthropology, but also of anthropology at large. To a great extent, socio-cultural anthropology until the 1970s or so shared such outdated paradigms with historical anthropology.3 By contrast, socio-cultural anthropology since the 1970s has generally ignored historical anthropology.

So, what comes next? Historical anthropology’s relative insignificance within its own discipline during the last quarter of a century has had both negative and positive consequences. The negative side is that this subfield has diminished not merely in significance, but also in size and human resources. On the positive side, it has entered into its own phases of reorientation. On a theoretical level, to a remarkable extent it has absorbed the results of the critical self-examination that has characterized the field at large. Simultaneously, it has moved ahead on

3 Fredrik Barth, Andre Gingrich, Robert Parkin and Sydel Silverman, One Discipline, Four Ways: British, German, French and American Anthropology – The Halle Lectures (Chicago, 2005).
an empirical level in fast and pioneering ways: For some areas, such as southern Arabia or Tibet, the subjects of the present chapter, the histories of whole periods in the medieval and modern eras have in fact been written neither by philologists nor by historians but by socio-cultural anthropologists, among them Paul Dresch,4 Johann Heiss5 and Guntram Hazod (with Sørensen).6

As a result, historical anthropology today is a small subfield in anthropology which nevertheless has fully established its expertise and reputation in its respective regional specializations. In turn, this lean and active presence provides a solid basis for an academic future in which transnational and global issues will continue to occupy a central position inside and outside anthropology, while the continuing relevance of postcolonial studies is preparing the way for a renewal of historical interest inside socio-cultural anthropology.

Historical anthropology thus is entering new grounds while such comparative and wider conceptual tools are re-assessed and tried out across regional, ‘national’ and disciplinary boundaries, as in the present volume. If this is done with a focus on established anthropological concepts such as ethnicity, tribalism and faith, then this meets precisely the challenges historical anthropology has to face now.

ETHNICITY THEN AND NOW

Not unlike older debates on tribes and tribalism, some anthropologists working with a short historical perspective continue to argue that ethnicity was basically a product of colonialism. Within certain limits, this may in fact depend on the choice of definition. If primary emphasis is placed upon administrative classifications from above, then colonialism certainly aggravated and defined or redefined many forms of ethnic labeling for its own purposes of domination and practices of ‘divide and rule’.

Apart from the fact that certain regions of Asia or Europe never underwent sustained periods of direct European colonial rule (for example parts of China, Tibet, Iran, Asia Minor and parts of the Arab peninsula), the argument is flawed for a more important reason. It is in fact outrageously Eurocentric to claim that only Europeans were capable of understanding that other major groups had different religions, languages and cultures, and that only Europeans were

capable of identifying and naming other groups according to these criteria. There is sufficient textual evidence available from pre-modern Chinese, Indian or Arabic sources to testify to the contrary.

Today’s standard definitions of ethnicity are derived from the principal anthropological authors, such as Fredrik Barth,7 Thomas Hylland Eriksen8 and Marcus Banks.9 They term ethnicity a ‘thin’ concept, which is always shaped by, and largely depends on, other factors such as class, gender, power, religion and so forth. Still, the standard working definition for the contemporary era seems to have stood the test of time. It conceives, first of all, ethnicity as a relational term, that is, analogous to other relational terms such as marriage, alliance, conflict and so on that always imply two or more sets of persons or groups. Already in a grammatical sense, it would thus be inappropriate to speak, for instance, about ‘having ethnicity’ as if one were referring to one’s hair color, body part or disease.

In this sense, the thin and relational anthropological conception of ethnicity refers to two or more groups of humans who tend to conceive major cultural differences between them as relevant in time. Whenever the social construction of these cultural differences gains continuing and defining relevance for group identification, we speak of ethnic groups. Ethnicity thus is the primary concept while ethnic group is the derived and dependent concept. Three important qualities come along with this working definition: first, ethnic boundaries can always be crossed by persons or groups; second, ethnic boundaries themselves may again and again change over time; and third, ethnicity includes important elements of culture but is not identical to culture.

Out of these main ingredients of our working definition it becomes clear that ethnic identity is never the only form of identity, but may or may not turn out to be one important among several dimensions, or registers, of identity,10 such as age group, profession, gender, status group, religion, tribal affiliation, regional belonging and so on. Ethnic identity thus in fact contains ‘situational’, ‘performative’ and ‘constructivist’ elements. We may find ourselves in situations in which it is highly important for us to emphasize that we are Swedish-speaking citizens of Finland; there may be other situations in which it is more important to present ourselves as supporters of, say, the Finnish Green party or as Helsinki university professors and so forth. In addition, we may run into situations in which for one reason or another it may be advisable to conceal that we are Swedish-speaking Finns, and so we might try to behave as if we were Danes.

We might, however, run into problems if we tried to ‘perform’ and ‘construct’ ourselves to the outside as if we were Japanese. The situational and performative dimensions have their weight, but they also have their limits. These limits also have to do with our minimal definitional ingredients. Because ethnicity is a relational concept, ethnic identity depends not merely on self-ascription, but also on recognition and allocation of meaning by others. If I move in a crowd of racists who are aware that I am Afro-American or Jewish, then I may try as hard as I can to behave as if my ethnic background were unimportant to me, but I still might not be able to escape the possible racist realities of such an encounter. The only important factor in such an extreme case is what matters for them about me. In less extreme cases, recognition and allocation of meaning by others are not the only factors that matter, but always interact together with self-ascription. Ethnicity may always serve as one among several registers of personal or group identity, but only to the extent that this is accepted by others.

If we now try to translate socio-cultural anthropology’s standard understanding of ethnicity to the medieval periods of southwestern Arabia and Tibet, then it soon becomes evident that the term may usefully be applied, albeit with some qualifications. In medieval Tibet the majority of the population spoke Tibetan in various regional dialects, and most of them followed one or the other prevailing versions of Buddhism. Yet there also were Muslim professional groups of low status, Indian pilgrims, Chinese merchants, Mongol diplomats and so forth. In southwestern Arabia, the majority of the population spoke local varieties of Yemeni Arabic dialects, and they mostly followed two main and a few minor versions of Islam. Yet there were also Indian merchants, Jewish craftsmen, Persian intellectuals and African low-status groups, among others.

It is not so difficult to envision how the main ingredients of our working definition for ethnicity might in fact have operated inside the daily lives amid the relations between (linguistic and religious) majorities and minorities of those contexts. In terms of everyday face-to-face interactions, ethnic labeling would never be explicitly mentioned out of politeness and tact. Explicitly referencing or addressing it in spoken language could initiate conflict, and would always be part of ongoing conflicts. Ethnicity thus would play a tacit, non-verbal role in peaceful interactions, but it would always be present in the mind because of its visual and audible manifestations: different clothing and dress were normal, and at times even prescribed for many religious and linguistic minorities, sometimes emphasizing a privilege and sometimes a subordinate position. The name by which a minority member was known and addressed would have

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added up to these main markers of ethnic difference in personal interactions. Different prayer times and eating habits would serve as additional markers in some instances, and even if many minority members seem to have spoken the respective majority language fluently, an accent here or there, or simply hearing that ‘they’ also were capable of speaking other languages among themselves would further contribute to identifying ethnic difference. Because these visual and acoustic markers of ethnic difference were much more explicit in those days than they are now, differences themselves did not have to be explicitly addressed verbatim.

At present, it is thus less difficult to see how ethnicity might best be envisioned for Central and West Asian medieval periods in daily face-to-face encounters between majority and minority members. It was a latent, non-verbal marker relatively pervasive in daily interactions. The ‘situational’ options, therefore, were quite narrow, and certainly much more limited than they are today. Perhaps it was possible for a Persian resident of Sanaa in the twelfth century to travel in the disguise of a Yemeni Arabic merchant, if he spoke very good Arabic – but still it would have been much more unusual than it is today for, say, Serbian restaurant owners in Vienna to pose as Italian pizza experts. And while a Jewish woman in Sanaa or a Buddhist woman in Lhasa would have been able to cover herself completely and disguise herself as a Muslim woman of the fourteenth century, Muslim male residents of Lhasa or male Jewish residents of Sanaa might have found it virtually impossible to disguise themselves as a male member of the majority population. Assimilation occurred, but did not totally extinguish status differences. One might convert to majority religions, one could immigrate from outside, but the name of origin usually remained, and continued to remind others and oneself for some generations about a somewhat different ethnic background.

While it is thus possible to operate with a slightly modified standard concept of ethnicity for minority/majority relations, relations inside the majority pose more complex problems. I shall discuss them in the context of tribalism and faith. But I remind readers that those fields also will contain fluid transitions to ethnicity inside the majority populations.

TRIBES THEN AND NOW

The dimension of ethnicity is more easily comparable between Tibetan-speaking Central Asia and southwestern Arabia than is the dimension of tribalism. When Johann Heiss and I began our southwest Arabian field work experience in the early 1980s, demographic estimations held that some 75 per cent of the Yemen’s population and some 80 per cent of southwestern Saudi Arabia’s population lived outside larger and smaller cities. We thus may safely conclude that for the medieval period, the rural population of southwestern Arabia amounted to not less than that proportion, but was quite smaller in absolute numbers.
From existing sources we know that among that overall rural population, the majority of residents in the northern highlands (Asir and northern Yemen) and in adjoining steppe zones to the east were regarded, and regarded themselves, as tribal; the same applied to smaller pockets in the southern mountains to the north of Aden.\textsuperscript{13} By contrast, between the ninth and the twelfth centuries, the inhabitants of the large coastal plains along the Red Sea and Indian Ocean were still labeled as tribal, but in fact seem to have gone through a long process of de-tribalization.\textsuperscript{14}

Today, only smaller tribal groups live in the hilly parts of these coastal plains. In short, we may conclude for southwestern Arabia during medieval times that about half of the rural population lived in social groups designated by the Arabic generic term for tribe, each of them having a collective tribal proper name. The majority of these tribes were mountain peasants, while to the east and along the coasts smaller tribal groups were semi-nomadic and nomadic.

In Tibetan language, there are generic terms for ‘tribe’, but they appear primarily to refer to nomads both today and in the past, as historical texts indicate. While the size of the Tibetan plateau is much larger than southwestern Arabia, the population level was always far lower, as was, by consequence, population density. This, in turn, indicates that ‘horizontal’ nomadic groups covered larger areas there, and their proportion of the overall population was larger. The settled population primarily lived in or near the few pockets of agricultural land, in hierarchical interaction with monasteries and principalities. In short, Tibetan tribes on the plateau were usually nomads with their own leadership, subsisting on grazing in vast and scarcely populated areas at the periphery of the main settlements and trading routes. In the Himalaya and other mountain zones, the situation was not entirely different: yet there much smaller groups of ‘vertical’ nomadism and transhumance must have interacted more frequently with larger groups of mountain peasants.

From this initial, sketchy overview it already becomes apparent that a well-known battle cry of anthropologists of Africa and South America is quite misleading and invalid for these regions of Asia: tribes and tribalism were not an ‘invention’ of colonialism, nor were they in these Asian cases primarily a product of European imaginations seeking to project biblical myths upon exotic territories. Historians and historical anthropologists have to be aware that the notion of tribe was often used for colonial purposes as much as for racist and supremacist ideas about backwardness and primitive conditions of humanity. This is certainly true for large parts of Africa, Australia, some parts of the Americas, portions of southeastern Europe and also for parts of southeastern and southern Asia. Together with indigenous initiatives, many anthropologists


\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
working in these particular regions have therefore actually dropped any notion of tribe whatsoever from their academic and public terminology. The current solution is to speak of ethnic groups instead, which may work in some cases but not in most: Some large ethnic groups of more than 1 or 2 million people still continue to comprise sub-units with collective proper names, which suspiciously resemble what formerly was called a tribe.¹⁵

While we duly respect the necessity to criticize colonialist and primitivist mindsets where they effectively play a role, southwestern Arabia and Tibet are different examples. They represent cases in which there actually was a pre-colonial, indigenous record of conceptualizing those very units with such local generic terms that translate into ‘tribe’. So historical anthropologists working in these two areas find themselves in an interesting situation: While the majority of anthropologists working elsewhere in the world, most notably in Africa and in the Americas, prefer to use the more fashionable term ‘ethnic groups’ for almost any socio-cultural group subordinate to or intersecting with nationhood, historical anthropologists in southwestern Arabia and Tibet use the term ‘ethnic group’ much more selectively and carefully in the more classical and standard sense. ‘Ethnic group/ethnicity’, however, never appears as a generic indigenous term, but exclusively in specific ethnonyms. By contrast, anthropologists working outside the worlds of Islam and Buddhism have remained extremely reluctant to employ the term ‘tribe’ (although it often exists in many local languages as a generic term), whereas anthropologists working in the core Muslim and Buddhist regions happily continue to use the term ‘tribe’, which always corresponds to a generic local equivalent.

This sharp dissonance within anthropology concerning the uses and abuses of the term ‘tribe’ not only has to do with its proven pre- and non-colonial existence in the Muslim and Buddhist realm, as opposed to its proven colonial abuse elsewhere (and the frequent absence of any indigenous, pre-colonial records in that regard). In addition, similar disputes are concerned with different sets of meanings attributed to the same term. Indeed, in many parts of Africa, Australia or the Americas, ‘tribe’ (or the equivalent term) is invariably associated with timeless stagnation, backwardness, primitive conditions and similarly negative deficiencies. By contrast, ‘tribe’ in most parts of the Muslim world, and in the central Asian parts of the Buddhist realm (Himalaya, Tibet, Mongolia) refers to entirely different qualities: It is associated with freedom, independence, self-determination, autonomy and so on. In turn, this in all likelihood is related to the long enduring legacies of medieval and early modern indigenous states in these regions, and to historical records at the service of those states, as well as to local folk traditions that may have opposed state records on various important matters but obviously not on this one: ‘Tribes’ in these contexts indeed were also defined by their relative autonomy from the state, which nevertheless always

¹⁵ Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism*. 
allowed them to regularly interact in diverse ways with the state.\textsuperscript{16} This major commonality between tribes in southwestern Arabia and in Tibet now allows us to return to some of the significant differences between them with regard to medieval times.

I have already pointed out the larger nomadic (Yak, horse, sheep, goat) portion among Tibetan tribes, as opposed to a much smaller nomadic element (camel, sheep, goat) in southwestern Arabia. It seems that not unlike other central Asian nomads, the tribes of Tibet were often characterized by a more militaristic and hierarchical social organization. By contrast, the tribes of southern Arabia observed a relatively clear-cut hierarchy along gender lines, but inside these gender realms, their social organization was more egalitarian. This corresponds to widely differing kinship systems prevailing in each of these two regions. Tibetan kinship systems have stronger bilateral elements and display less accentuated avoidance and hierarchy between male and female, whereas much stronger hierarchy prevails inside the gendered halves of society according to distinctions of seniority. In Arabia’s most common forms of kinship, the bilateral elements are much weaker, while the patrilineal components are stronger in southern Arabia and especially elaborate in northern Arabia. It would be a misunderstanding, however, to assume that tribes in southwestern Arabia or in Tibet were primarily large, extended forms of kinship and genealogy, even if local ideologies attempted to present them as such. In fact, local kinship ideologies are an impressive force of socio-political cohesion integrating anybody who comes in from the outside and is accepted, while forgetting everybody who leaves or who is expelled. In this sense, ‘tribes’ for these regions can be loosely defined as territorial-political units with changing degrees of self-determination, ruled by strong ideologies of kinship and genealogy, and always co-existing with nearby states and clergy. A tribal member thus always has a home territory, an armed group to which he or she belongs, and whose collective proper name is often also part of his or her personal name. Except for a few persons in their tribal leadership, most of these tribes do not read or write in the periods that concern us here. By consequence, they do not actively speak, and perhaps do not even easily understand, the standard scriptural languages that do exist in their region and time, but are reserved for the elite.

The reason why even in these western and central Asian contexts, distinctions between tribe and ethnic group may be regarded as fluent begins at this point. Since these tribes have home territories where many if not most of their members live most of the time, tribal dialects and tribal manners may acquire very heterogeneous features. A scholar from Sanaa who visits a tribal area near Asir, or a monk from Shigatse visiting a tribal area in Amdo, may require weeks if not months to be able to follow the local dialect and understand some of the major local rites and manners. Some might question whether this

is not also some kind of ethnic difference? The same medieval scholar might be much more familiar and, in fact, at ease with a Muslim butcher in his Shigatse neighborhood, or with a Jewish craftsman in his Sanaa market: They are acquainted with each other and master the same local language. At the very least, it has to be emphasized that ethnic differences need not necessarily imply social distance, whereas tribal adherence and tribalism may very well include forms of vast social distance. And one may go so far as to argue that sometimes ethnic diversity may include a comfortable neighborhood and social proximity (and sometimes not), while tribal adherence almost certainly would include not only a sense of belonging to one particular home group, but also a potential to confront, and to challenge, other tribes.\(^{17}\)

**FAITH HERE AND THERE**

In terms of social history, this last section leads us to the mosque and the temple, to the madrasa and the monastery. In line with ‘visions’ of community as the topic of this volume, however, I prefer to discuss here not the institutions and their members, but the ideas that are taught and distributed from there, and the languages in which these ideas are conveyed.

At the end of the preceding section it was noted that literacy was confined to a small upper stratum of rural and urban elite members, most of them male. Historical anthropologists like Ernest Gellner have outlined that writing and reading connected the local elites across wide distances. In turn, writing and reading eventually led to the standardization of written and spoken language among those elites, which granted them privileged and exclusive forms of access to practical and spiritual knowledge, and endowed them with the aura of control over sacred texts.\(^{18}\) To a certain extent, this went along with control over written commercial records, the mastering of legal texts when it came to corresponding law cases and, last but not least, with elite hegemonies in the writing of history. In all these important dimensions, faith to a certain extent rested and depended on a culture of scripturalism that was controlled by the literate elites in both regions during the periods under scrutiny here.

On this general but essential scale of similarity, two additional features of comparability should be emphasized. First, the versions of Islam and Buddhism that are relevant here did not possess an absolute institutional centre: In so far as the caliphate still existed, it had no practical relevance for southern Arabia any longer, while those forms of Buddhism prevailing at the time in the Tibetan-speaking areas were highly diverse and relatively volatile forms of spiritual leadership. Nothing existed that could compare to the Bishop of Rome’s role for

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Christianity in high medieval Europe. Theological hierarchies and elites existed in both cases, deeply embedded in the wider culture of scripturalism, but the degree of their centralization was relatively modest. Second, another important difference to that majority of European countries in which the common people did not understand Latin was a certain degree of proximity between liturgical language and popular dialect – at least to the extent that in linguistic terms, they were closely related to each other. The common people of northern Yemen may not have been able to write and read, but at least most of them would be able to follow their Imam when he read the Qur’an, and even more so when he preached to them and prayed with them. The Lamas, monks and nuns from the nearby monastery who performed a ritual before visitors and spectators attending from various villages in the vicinity were at least understood, in spite of the scriptural Tibetan they spoke.

To my mind, these factors should be emphasized because they must have worked in the same general directions. It does make a difference if the sacred is represented by one and only one ultimate authority, or by several of them who may change and adapt their opinion somewhat more easily. In addition, it does make a difference if you can follow what the religious expert in front of you is reading out, or if you don’t because he reads it in a language that you do not understand – be it Latin in medieval London or Arabic in medieval Herat or Isfahan. What follows from this is first, that an elite culture of scripturalism existed in both cases but second, in matters of faith it was more closely intertwined with popular piety, and less distinctively set apart from it. This leads to one among two hypotheses on faith with which I wish to conclude this chapter. The hypothesis claims that in the cases of medieval Tibet and southwestern Arabia, weak forms of theological centralization and close forms of correspondence between liturgical and popular language set the stage for a dense and intimate intertwining between scriptural and popular traditions of faith. On that basis, we may now in the end turn our attention very briefly to the main differences of theological content, as outlined in the respective scriptural traditions.

Buddhism is a scriptural tradition in which many gods, spirits, demons and other beings are subordinate to higher non-theist principles. Humans are a humble part of this world, which contains sanctity in many locations. The respective Buddhist tradition celebrates its past victories over folk religions, but allows them to live on as long as they respect the superiority of Buddhist principles. In this sense, local and house deities, ancestral spirits and elements of local shamanism may co-exist with the superior Buddhist rituals and beliefs. The scriptural elite prefer and practice one rather than the other, but accommodate folk practices as well; the common people use both in hierarchical order since they seemingly do not contradict each other: Humans are a humble part of the cycle of life, the world is a Cosmos permeated by sanctity.

Islam’s scriptural traditions postulate one Creator who is sacred himself, while creation as the outcome of his activities is not sacred: Creation is not at all
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identical with cosmos, these are two different visions of humanity, and thus of community.¹⁹ Humans are not humble, but the crown of creation: Some invisible creatures such as demons are their equals while others like angels are superior to them. The rest of non-human creation is subordinate to humanity, and hierarchically ranked in itself. Some living beings are on top, such as birds, who foreshadow paradise, others are below them, such as animals with their different qualities between being edible and impure. The scriptural elite may to an extent accommodate folk beliefs. These may transform certain elements of the holy texts (such as references to demons) into something else, and combine them with the maintenance of pre-Islamic belief elements (such as sacred springs or holy parks). Yet, by and large, Islam co-exists uneasily with folk beliefs, with a tendency – sometimes latent, sometimes explicit – to seek their disappearance.²⁰

In a nutshell, one vision encourages a sacred cosmos with humble humans in it; the other vision encourages a profane world in which humans are the crown of creation. On that basis, my second hypothesis argues that these are alternative visions for humanity’s communities: The humble co-inhabitant of a sacred cosmos is more explicitly encouraged to seek harmony in the inner self and with his or her socio-ecological environment; the self-reliant crown of creation is more explicitly encouraged to confront obstacles in order to transform a non-sacred world in order to succeed.

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Chapter 2

Tribal Mobility and Religious Fixation: Remarks on Territorial Transformation and Identity in Imperial and Early Post-Imperial Tibet

Guntram Hazod

At the start of the seventh century CE, there was a political upheaval in the southern agrarian zone of the Tibetan Highlands that was to have a lasting impact. A union of rival clans under the leadership of a local dynasty, the Pugyel ('Princes of Pu' (spu rgyal)), led to the formation of a united kingdom. The Pugyel and their allies represented the new political unit as a holy order whose maintenance was guaranteed by the sovereign, henceforth entitled the tsänpo (btsan po), 'powerful one' (i.e. emperor). An effective military organization permitted the kingdom, striving for outward expansion, rapidly to emerge as a leading power in Central Asia. In the eighth century the empire came to extend beyond the Himalayas in the south, as far as Yunnan and Sichuan in the south-east and east, and into present-day north Pakistan in the west, and controlled the city states on the Silk Road in the north. Tang China, the powerful neighbour in the east, was repeatedly put in its place by Tufan, as Tibet (T. Bö (Bod); below, n. 9) was known in the Chinese sources. In the mid-ninth century the empire disintegrated almost as fast as it had emerged. But its after-effects were enormous and in many respects formative for the following epochs. The post-imperial era is the history of the extension and establishment of Buddhism (Lamaism) in the Highlands, which in its discourses created the vision of a common Tibetan history and led to the flowering of Buddhist universalism, the seeds of which had been sown in the period of the tsänpo. The development of the religion took place within a tribal order, represented by the patrilineal clans, which survived the break-up of the empire and established a new polity in union with Buddhism. These two developments of the foundation of the empire and the Lamaist expansion transformed the ethnic, religious and social identities within this area in favour of new concepts of integration and community-

1 Tibetan names and terms in brackets represent their transliterated form in accordance with the Wylie System. Abbreviations used in this article: T. = Tibetan, S. = Sanskrit, Ch. = Chinese.
building. They found their expression not least in a specific political geography of the imperial (seventh–ninth century) and hegemonial (twelfth–seventeenth century) periods which I will outline in the following with regard to the decisive mechanisms of integration and the associated territorial transformations.

THE BUILDING OF THE EMPIRE

The core zones of the Highlands were the agrarian areas of Central Tibet, on either side of the Tsangpo River (Brahmaputra) (Figure 2.1). From the third and fourth centuries, a number of local polities (in the sources described as ‘petty kingdoms’, gyetren (rgyal phran)) developed here. These were stratified, clan-based societies headed by ruling lineages (i.e. lineages of ‘lords’ and ‘ministers’, je, lön (rje, blon)). In the tradition, the bearers of the lineages were described as the ‘people of inner Tibet’ (bod nang gi mi’u) and as descendents of (four) proto-clans that were supposed to go back to a common ancestry – a fabrication of later, nationalistically coloured accounts of history, because the names of these ‘proto-clans’ are rather to be identified as ethnonyms referring to people of different origins (various Turkic groups and groups linguistically belonging to the Tibeto-Burmese family of languages). The postulation of a

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2 The ‘Tibetans’ do not appear in the classical (post-imperial) account of Tibetan anthropogenesis and socio-genesis: see Tsering Gyalo, Guntram Hazod and Per Kjeld Sørensen, Civilization at the Foot of Mount Sham-po: The Royal House of lHa-Bug-pa-can and the History of g.Ya’-bzang. Historical Texts from the Monastery of g.Ya’-bzang in Yar-stod (Central Tibet), Beiträge zur Kultur- und Geistesgeschichte Asiens, 36, Denkschriften der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse, 290 (Vienna, 2000), pp. 55f. The ‘four great clans’ (rüchen shi (rus chen bzhi)) were associated with Minyag (Tangut), the Sumpa (Ch. Supi) and Azha (Ch. Tuyuhun) (both of Turkic tongues) and with the population of Zhangzhung (Zhang–zhung). The last mentioned relates to the prehistoric Zhangzhung power in present-day west Tibet, which was conquered by the Tibetans in the seventh century. In this account the Zhangzhung people are linked with the rū (clan, lit. ‘bone’) called Ma (rma), a term for ‘man’ and an ethnonym that in this classification probably also includes the originally Tibeto-Burmese population of the Highlands usually associated with the name Mön (Mon). ‘Tibet’ derives from the Arabic ‘Tubbat’, which denoted the Tuyuhun, one of the components of this ethnic construct of ‘Tibet’. Matthew T. Kapstein, The Tibetans, The Peoples of Asia (Oxford, 2006), p. 29, summarizes the question of Tibetan origin: ‘The peoples of the Tibetan plateau became Tibetan primarily owing to cultural developments during the past two millennia, rather than to common genetic origins.’ This cultural assimilation process, which was a process of ethnization, was forced and concretized by the development of the empire and led, among other things, to a Tibetan lingua franca. There are numerous Indo-Germanic elements in it, which go back to early contacts with Indo-Scythian groups in the northeast of the Highlands (ibid., pp. 18f.); see also Christopher I. Beckwith, Empires of the Silk Road: A History of Central Eurasia from the Bronze Age to the Present (Princeton, 2009), p. 375.
common origin is not entirely unjustified, however, because it indicates a reality under which the core areas of the Highlands had already developed a cultural homogeneity in the centuries before the foundation of the empire. The ‘petty kingdoms’ are here the result of this early Tibetan identity.  

The patrilineal clan as the primary structural principle of this segmentary pre-state order was connected with a particular territory, and ancestrally linked to a territorial divinity, which each represented the celestial unity of the individual settlement areas. The territory of the Pugyel was Yarlung, with the snow mountain called Yarlha Shampo as the territorial god (lha). Like the other gyetren, it was affinally linked with several units, such as those described as ‘ancient relatives at the four borders’ (nanyen thashi rab (gna’ gnyen mtha’ bzhi)), four local dynasties that bordered Yarlung, each of which formed its own gyetren. Furthermore, the sources speak of the ‘six clans of paternal subjects’ (yabang rüdrug (yab ‘bangs rus drug)), clans of the lön (‘minister’) category (see above), which were allied to the Pugyel. It appears they also formed something like a ritual unit, where in the course of a joint hunt (the hunt for the wild Yak) the Pugyel regularly had to prove his sacred power. The clans of these gyetren units were transregional, that is, apart from their own territory they had branch settlements in various areas. Thus a clan in one unit could represent the ruling lineage (je (rje)) and elsewhere serve as a lön lineage. The link to the home territory here remained an important identity criterion. It also explains the mutual demarcation of the gyetren, which not only faced one another as bride-giver and bride-taker but also waged wars against each other. The sources finally make it clear that the alliance formations were apparently relatively open and had no lasting foundation. The lön lineages could leave the alliance at any time, as is made clear in the description of the rival of Yarlung, the house of Ngāpo (Ngas–po). Several clans left the alliance of the Lord of Ngāpo, who is described as unloved, and joined the Yarlung lord, entitled ‘Son of the Gods’ (lha sā (lha sras)), and indeed linked to the suggestion to destroy the territory of their


5 Gyalbo, Hazod and Sørensen, *Civilization at the Foot of Mount Sham-po*, p. 220.
former chief. The successful crusade against the rival, with his territory in the area of the Lhasa valley, was the actual start of the foundation of the empire.\(^6\)

The alliance of the Pugyel and his heroic fellow combatants was of a new quality, as the records in the early chronicles, with their panegyrics to the Yarlung house, show. The mythical charter, which legitimized the figure of a god king, now addressed as lha tsänpo (‘divine mighty one’), was essentially the principle of higher descent, according to which the mythical progenitor of the Pugyel line was described as the distant progenitor of all lines. ‘Yarlha Shampo (the territorial god (lha) of Yarlung) is the highest lha’, it says in the Old Tibetan Chronicles,\(^7\) which are full of (landscape) metaphors of the height and extent of the Yarlung dynasty (see also below). We see the ideology of the god king thus based on a structural principle that was anchored in the tribal order, that is, it resulted from the tradition, which also made possible the spontaneous agreement of all segments in this order. Several of the originally rival groups voluntarily joined the new alliance, others were incorporated by violence.

What we call the development into an ‘early state’ in Tibet actually appears to be the consequence of the foundation of a pragmatic alliance of regional powers that pursued a common aim: to realize a larger political and economic project, namely to participate more strongly in the markets on the Silk Road or to control them. We know that the transition from a segmented, regional order to an early state is usually conditioned by a range of different factors – ecological, economic and demographic. In Tibet, according to the descriptions in the Old Tibetan Annals and other sources, the striving for the markets of the Silk Road was in any case a decisive impulse. Here it is important to know that the Highlands were surrounded by superior neighbours – above all China (the time of the Sui dynasty, 581–617 CE, and later of the Tang dynasty, 618–907), the city states in the Tarim Basin (Kashgar, Khotan, Kucha, Yarkand and others) and India in the south (Figure 2.1). And the trade and transit routes had passed over the Highlands for centuries. Thus the old ‘petty kingdoms’ had long been involved in exchange on the peripheries of these routes, and with the foundation of the empire they were only bringing themselves into this transit network as a new power factor – presumably also in order not to be taken in by more powerful opponents.\(^8\)

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6 Brandon Dotson and Guntram Hazod, The Old Tibetan Annals: An Annotated Translation of Tibet’s First History, Veröffentlichungen zur Sozialanthropologie, 12 (Vienna, 2009), pp. 16ff.
7 Jacques Bacot, Frederick William Thomas and Gustave Charles Touissaint, Documents de Touen-houang relatifs a l’histoire du Tibet (Paris 1940–46), pp. 81 (l. 25) and 86.
8 Beckwith, Empires of the Silk Road, p. 127, notes that the more exact motivations behind the appearance of the Tibetan Empire have not yet been identified. He himself, however, mentions ‘the strong interest in trade’ in this connection (p. 127, n. 51), and in fact the descriptions in the Old Tibetan Annals or the indications in later chronicles (such as the early establishment of trade routes summarized as the ‘eight profits’ (khe brgyad)
Figure 2.1 Tibet in the late eighth, early ninth century
The foundation of the empire was followed within a few decades by an effective reorganization of the country, where – probably drawing partly on earlier Turkic models – the division of the core area into ‘horns’ (ru) each subdivided into ‘civil districts’ (yülde (yul sde)) and ‘military thousand districts’ (gö tongde (rgod stong sde)) served as the basis for the civil and military administration (i.e. taxation and the calling up of the regiments). The transregional clans allied with the emperor, who remained in their lands, were entrusted with the ministerial tasks of the administration and the leadership of the military units. In the eighth century Tibet developed into a leading military power in the Central Asian area, whose outer boundaries finally included the important stages of the Silk Road and were secured by a range of garrisons.

The opening up of the markets went hand in hand with an intensification of the cultural contacts and the taking over of cultural elements – in the field of medicine, astrology, geomancy, architecture and above all religion (i.e. Buddhism). Linked to religion was the creation of a writing system (in the first half of the seventh century, developed on the pattern of north Indian writing) – worldwide a characteristic institution in the formation phase of the state, which in Tibet initially served for the announcement of the declarations of the tsänpo (including the writing of the ‘texts of laws’). One took what one needed – resulting in a pragmatic syncretism in various cultural areas. These new introductions were in principle all related to the ruling house and its cult. This is true in particular for Buddhism (according to tradition introduced from Nepal and China), which initially was only intended for the court and included the foundation of temples as a symbolic element of order, before it was declared the state religion in the eighth century after the foundation of the first monastery (Samye, 779 CE). Apart from the enormous impetus to cultural achievements that Buddhism triggered in the eighth century, its introduction also sowed the seeds of the empire’s collapse. It was not a military defeat that led to the dissolution of the throne, but a general withdrawal of the aristocratic clans from the alliance with the ruler, as the Buddhist religious king moved to the centre of a new religion and cult no longer shared by all.

under the administration of particular clans: see Dotson, ‘Administration’, pp. 228f.) underline the economic motives for this foundation act, which to a certain extent from the start had the plan of (profitable) conquests inscribed on its standard.

9 These military and civil districts largely lay in the area of present-day Central Tibet (Figure 2.1), which was described as Bö (Bod). It became a synonym for ‘Tibet’ (and ‘Great Tibet’, Bod-chen). This Bö region, for its part, formed one of the five administrative zones that were established farther outwards in the course of the expansion of the empire. In the ninth century, nine garrisons (trom (khrom)) formed the spatial conclusion of the empire (Dotson and Hazod, Old Tibetan Annals, pp. 37f.; Hazod, ‘Imperial Central Tibet’).

10 See above, n. 8.

11 Dotson and Hazod, Old Tibetan Annals, p. 85; Kapstein, Tibetans, p. 57.
THE ‘MOBILE CENTRE’

We recognize the contract between the holy throne of the emperor and the peripheral clans, which was regularly renewed by a holy oath, as the actual core of the empire and state formation. Here the king swore ‘by his head’ to guarantee his devoted vassals particular privileges; essentially, this was the recognition of their territories and in some cases also the guarantee of relative autonomy, which permitted some major lines to continue their own pre-imperial structures of a local dynasty.12 From this it is also clear that alongside the idea of the centre, a political regionalism continued to exist. With a view to the internal consolidation of power, we now find a significant political geography, which likewise reflects this configuration of the old ‘clanscape’ networking in the central Tibetan core zones. The decisive proof is provided by the *Old Tibetan Annals*.13 This bureaucratic register records the imperial gathering called by the great ministers twice a year, as well as the location of the winter and summer residences of the court, which like that of the council (dünsa; ‘dun sa) constantly alternated. We see here the geography of a ‘mobile centre’, where the constant moving of the court and the assembly signified the suitable strategy for state integration. An identification of this network of place names, which we are only gradually recording today, leads to the conclusion that with the places it is a question of the old home territories of lineages which, as it were, acted as hosts to the emperor and the council.14 This fact appears extremely significant to us, as we find here a structural element of a tribally organized early state formation, under which the ‘centre’ (court and government) does not have a fixed location but is in movement, a movement that runs from the centre to the periphery (it is the emperor who goes into the lands of his allies in order to renew the oath). It forms an essential difference to the later development of the bureaucratic state, which has a fixed centre of government (a ‘capital’) and is centripetal, with a movement from the outside to the centre. We would like to note that this geography of the ‘mobile centre’ is still hardly acknowledged in anthropological theory. Rather, in the classics on the theory of the ‘early state’15 we still find the false picture according to which state formation in agrarian cultures always goes together with the creation of a governing centre fixed to a particular location. In the secondary literature on Tibet, too, we still find the widespread image according to which Lhasa was the capital of the empire. In reality, it is only mentioned once or twice in the *Annals* and the authors here are misled by the idealized descriptions in the post-imperial chronicles, where Lhasa is described as the seat of the first Buddhist king (Songtsän Gampo, d. 649 CE), who founded

12 Hazod, ‘Imperial Central Tibet’, p. 192.
13 Dotson and Hazod, *Old Tibetan Annals*.
14 Hazod, ‘Imperial Central Tibet’, p. 224.
the famous Jokhang in Lhasa (see below). Only in the seventeenth century, when the Dalai Lama and the newly founded government moved in there, did Lhasa become a capital in the classical sense (with the seat of the government and the aristocratic establishment, a market and trading centre, and so on).

The heir-producing lineages had a particularly important place within the circle of lineages allied to the tsänpo. They provided the ‘maternal uncle minister’ (shanglön (zhang blon)), the highest position within the clan aristocracy and the government. The shanglön were the product of a centripetal marriage order according to which the shang lines appear as bride-givers to the court, alternating in a cycle of five generations, which placed the holy throne in the middle of a continual alliance of relationship. The bride-giver side was traditionally more highly placed, so that the emperor was surrounded by a powerful ring of maternal lines (i.e. lines of the queen mother and the shang, maternal uncle), which was likewise characterized by solidarity as well as by a control function in relation to the throne. It appears as if these mechanisms of an ‘avuncular order’ also operated within the structures of the mobile centre, according to which the geographically alternating visits of the court were occasionally tied to the conclusion of marriage alliances. In the Tibetan context with the patrilocal residence rule, the bride-taking side always comes to the paternal household of the bride to collect her. These principles of postnuptial residence formation contain a political dimension. They are related to the principles of the formation of a governing seat, the model for which we find in the king myth; this is the tale of the mythical progenitor of the royal line, who came down to earth from heaven in order to become the ruler of the land and of the people, and who was received in Yarlung by a local group, the paternal subjects (see above). He comes as a fertilizing rain to the (female) earth, and furnished with magical weapons and the attributes of a demiurge. This foundational narrative reveals the essential contours of the Tibetan ‘great man’ theory, according to which the formation of a local power is always preceded by the ‘invitation’ of the ruler or king by a local group. We find these mechanisms repeatedly in the post-

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20 Charles Ramble, ‘Sacral kings and divine sovereigns: principles of Tibetan monarchy in theory and practice’, in David Sneath (ed.), *States of Mind: Power, Place and...*
imperial period, when on the basis of invitations Buddhist masters founded religiously dominated hegemonies in the old clanscapes. Thus the movements of the tsänpo, who in spring and winter each year appeared with his camp as a guest of a different district, are to be seen in the narrower context of a tribal order. Together with the parallel seasonal movements of the assembly (also positioned in the clanscapes), we recognize an overarching mobile centre that was closely connected to the old regional principles.

THE DEMONESS-TIBET DESIGN

With Buddhism, a vision of geopolitical order emerges in Tibet that infiltrates the old territorial identities and to a certain extent was also to reverse them. For the period before the arrival of the new religion the Buddhist discourse classified the ‘Snowland’ (Gangsjong, i.e. Tibet) as an uncivilized, barbaric satellite that eked out its existence on the outer periphery of the world and the value system emanating from the Buddhist motherland of India. The land was under the rule of bloodthirsty demonesses (the rakshasi (T.: sin (srin)) of Indian cosmology), whose inhabitants were compared to the primitive groups of the Himalayas who were categorized as ‘non-human beings’ (mimayin). This necessitated the appearance of a cult hero who liberated the land; this is the bodhisattva and Lord of Compassion Avalokiteshvara, the spiritual son of the Buddha Amitabha, who in the form of a monkey cohabited with a sin demoness, created human beings and pushed civilization forward. This relates to the above-mentioned Tibetan anthropogenesis, to which the socio-genetic structure of the ethnic groupings of the Highlands as the people of ‘inner Tibet’ is linked. Significantly, the narration is located in the home territory of the Pugyel, in Yarlung, which is precisely to be seen in relation to the developments originating from here as a first place of origin of Tibetan identity. The Lhasa valley is considered to be the centre of the barbarian Snowland, which after the foundation of the Jokhang temple by the tsänpo Songtsän Gampo in the seventh century acquired a key position in the Buddhist history of the country. Until the foundation of Samye (Tibet’s first monastery in the 770s) the presence of the new religion restricted itself to a symbolic representation in the form of temple foundations and their specific Mahayanistic inventory, in which the tsänpo now appeared in the idealization of a ‘king of religion’ (S. dharmaraja, T. chögyel (chos rgyal)) and world ruler (S. cakravartin). Songtsän Gampo was considered the first of the three leading chögyel


See Gyalbo, Hazod and Sørensen, Civilization at the Foot of Mount Sham-po, pp. 15f., and below, in the section on “The “Galactic Polity””.

See above, n. 2.

of the imperial period (the other two relate to tsānpō of the eighth and ninth century), in whose vitas (written in the early post-imperial period) we find the essential narratives and authoritative programmes for the Buddhization of the country. These narratives emerged in the milieu of the highly ritualized proto-nationalist movements of the eleventh century, the springtime of the Buddhist Renaissance (phyi dar) – with the revitalization of the old imperial temples linked with the period of the first chögyel. The outline of Tibetan anthropogenesis is one of these reflexive narratives. It has an internal relationship with the similarly widespread account that portrays the spectacular picture of a demoness lying on her back stretched out over the Highlands, on whose limbs (shoulders, elbows, hips, knees, feet) the first temples ascribed to the founder king Songtsān Gampo were positioned (Figure 2.2). This figure is an image of barbarian Tibet and the uncultivated soil, whereas the temples on the demoness symbolize the taming and religious fixing of the body, an image that was synchronized with the processes of the expansion of the empire. The temples are described in a concentric arrangement of twelve ‘holding down and boundary-taming temples’ of the empire.\(^{24}\) The Lhasa Temple is positioned at the heart, and thereby signifies its special position as the exemplary centre, from which the empire extended and the Buddhist civilization of the barbarian Highlands started.

Tibet historians such as Rolf Stein and Michael Aris\(^{25}\) saw in the concentric layout of the imperial temples – according to a current version they are more precisely called the ‘[four] temples for holding down the [four] horns and [respectively four] for taming the outer and further outlying border areas’ (Runön-thadül-yangdül temples) – an imitation of similar models of imperial China. ‘The conquering and civilising function of the first [Tibetan] king, once he was established at the centre, was performed in accordance with Chinese ideas; in square concentric zones, each boxed in by the next and extending farther and farther from the centre.’\(^{26}\) This refers to the five subjugation zones (Ch. fu) of the empire, as they are described in the book Yu Kung (probably fifth century BCE) with the royal domains at the centre, and followed by several pacified zones, out to the uncultured barbarians.\(^{27}\) This presumed pattern – an assumption that disregards possible indigenous patterns\(^{28}\) – confines itself to outward appearances; in its ideal disposition the Runön-thadül-yangdül followed the structure of the mandala cosmology. The Lhasa Jokhang is called the ‘tree of life’ of the whole of Tibet, a visualization of the exemplary centre as it is laid out in Indian Mount Meru cosmology and is symbolically represented in the central

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\(^{24}\) For a detailed discussion of this tradition, see Sørensen and Hazod, *Thundering Falcon*, pp. 171–215.


\(^{26}\) Stein, *Civilization*, p. 39.

\(^{27}\) Aris, *Bhutan*, p. 18.

\(^{28}\) Sørensen and Hazod, *Thundering Falcon*, pp. 179–81.
Figure 2.2  *The geography of the Tibet demoness*, 78 x 165 cm, painting on paper, replica of eighteenth-century original, Tibet Museum, Lhasa. After Sørensen and Hazod, *Thundering Falcon*, p. 208
pillar of the temple. The Lhasa sache (sa dpyad), a term customary in the post-imperial period for the complex geomantic classification of the Lhasa valley, describes a mandala pattern marked in the landscape which is topographically demarcated by four mountains. They are considered to be ‘supports’ of the central temple and the zone they mark is in principle a topographical extension of the foundation of the temple drawn in the form of a mandala. The same mechanism also applies to the outer pacification zones, so that the Runön-thadül-yangdül arrangement is to be read as the spatial transference of the holy district around Lhasa. It represents a ‘boundary model’ onto which both territorial expansion as well as an internal vertical (political and social order) can be transferred.

The programme underlying the temple scheme is taming and civilizing (dülba (dul ba)). Within this order it creates new boundaries of identities, which are essentially based on ethical principles and are defined by the relative proximity to the Dharma (the religious law). The barbarian zone, which is at the same time an integral part of this system, lies outside this order. According to the logic of the dülba the barbarian on the periphery has an inner relationship to butchers or other groups who as professional exterminators of living beings rank at the lowest step of the social hierarchy. In a spatially concentric transference this model of civilization conceals a certain boundlessness, because the barbarian zone can always theoretically be driven further outwards and correspondingly repeatedly be positioned in relation to the inner space. In fact, there are varying traditions of the Runön-thadül-yangdül pattern that go beyond the group of twelve temples and include further boundary temples along the zones of the expansion of the empire. As a product of the post-dynastic discourse, the written and figurative forms of the demoness-Tibet design include several elements from later epochs, but the beginnings of this temple classification seem to go back at least to the eighth century. It represents a first testimony of the religious fixing of territorial transformations that followed the empire-building – for its part a consequence of the transformation of an originally tribal local power.

A central narrative element in the demoness temple account is the fixing of the ground. It is linked to an older (indigenous) foundation myth, which is related to the apocalyptic narrative of the ‘great water’, which is widespread in the Highlands and Himalayas. The banishment of the threatening flood (embodied in a demoness) by a demiurge using a magic staff (or another vertical instrument pointing downwards) permits the settlement of the group in the affected area. In the Buddhist accounts the demiurge usually is represented by the figure of Padmasambhava, the ‘precious (tantric) master’ (Guru Rinpoche), who is supposed to have acted at the court of the tsänpo in the second half of the eighth century and who prototypically dominates the whole taming story of the Highlands in its later (Vajrayanistic) form. The essential contours of the

29 Ibid., p. 175.
31 Gyalbo, Hazod and Sørensen, Civilization at the Foot of Mount Sham-po, pp. 61–5.
foundation myth have already been addressed in the old narrative of the origin and arrival of the mythical progenitor of the royal line, which underlines that the original demiurge is to be identified with the group itself, or the first clan of a settlement area. In this sense, the great demoness, whose body (the earth) lies on the (seething) primal waters, forms an extension and re-dimensioning of regional characteristics. One of the political allegories in the Old Tibetan Chronicles that illustrates the size of the Yarlung house and the extent of the empire is the drawing of a symmetrical area, ‘Tibet with four enemies on the four borders’, over which the ‘water of Yarmo’ (i.e. the Yarlung River) extends. Tibet, as it were, is the Yarlung on a large scale, in the same way as the god of this land towers over all tribal units (see above). The further development of this basic design in the form of a mandalic fixing of ‘holding down’ temples also includes the idea of a new form of centralism, which is more static. One finds this realized in the developments of post-imperial Tibet.

THE ‘GALACTIC POLITY’

In the eleventh century, through intensive contacts with Indian masters, a second wave of the spread of Buddhism took place and led to the foundation of schools of orders and of monasteries. The coexistence of equal-ranking monastic rules established on the same ideological principles, which were each based on a union of religious and secular (ancestral) lineages, determined the political landscape of Tibet up until the seventeenth century. The secular lines refer to local rules in the old clan territories whose representatives served as donors and patrons to the monastic seats. Usually the leadership of the religious and secular thrones hailed from the same ancestral lineage. The territory of these hegemonic circles was transregional and consisted of a centre (the

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34 In Central Tibet many of the new local rules founded themselves on collateral descendents of the Pugyel line, which in the period of the ‘fragmentation of Tibet’ (Bö sibu (Bod Sil-bu) after the collapse of the empire (ninth–tenth century) scattered over the Highlands. The (Buddhist) Guge kingdom in West Tibet (tenth–seventeenth century), which was founded by direct descendents of the royal line together with old lön lineages, saw itself as a shifting of the power areas (ngari (mnga’ ris)) of the Pugyel into the west (Tö (stod); hence the name Tö Ngari for West Tibet). This ngari transfer and continuation also holds in principle for the smaller centres in Central Tibet (Gyalbo, Hazod and Sørensen, Civilization at the Foot of Mount Sham-po, pp. 177–97).
Visions of Community in the Post-Roman World

mother monastery) and several patchwork branch settlements scattered over the country. The mandala formed the decisive basic model. The application of this symmetrical, holistic model combines cosmological, individual and socio-political dimensions with topographic features. The Tibetans call it *kyilkhor* (*dkyil 'khor*), ‘centre and periphery’, which in the context of the taming and civilization of the country from one starting point, the seat of the religious founding master, was transferred into the landscape as a ‘Buddha field’ (or field of civilization). Often these foundation acts were combined with rituals of territorial ‘sealing’ where the master defined the claimed area as a protection zone for all living beings and placed it under the charge of the (converted) local gods.35 The central temple, in which the mandala-structured transcendental divine world of the Buddhist pantheon was present, formed the ideal centre of these local powers. Its holiness was equally present in the religious throne of the founder, who passed on the spiritual mastery of the opening and realization of the Buddha field within his teacher–pupil line. As the all-embracing spiritual teacher, the master illuminated the secular throne of the founder lines, and often the religious hegemons of medieval Tibet saw themselves as incarnations of the *chögyel* of the imperial period.36

In pioneering studies on the pre-colonial Buddhist states in South East Asia, the anthropologist Stanley Tambiah described the nature of the mandala-based polities. The ‘galactic polity’, as he calls it, ‘stands for the arrangement of a centre and its surrounding satellites and is employed in multiple contexts to describe ... the structure of a pantheon of gods; the deployment spatially of a capital region and its provinces; the arrangement socially of a ruler, princes, nobles and their respective retinues; and the devolution of graduated power on a scale of decreasing autonomous’.37 Typical of this arrangement is its reduplication, through which the individual satellites for their part represent duplicates of an exemplary mandala. This allows the political flexibility of the galactic polity, in which theoretically one satellite unit can assume the position of the centre. In the history of post-imperial Tibet, we do in fact have several such changes, where one monastic rule is once positioned peripherally, and at another time shifts to the centre of a supra-regional hegemonial power.38 The political landscape indicates here a significant interweaving of centralism and

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36 See, for example, Gyalbo, Hazod and Sørensen, *Civilization at the Foot of Mount Sham-po*, pp. 66f.


regionalism and appears to be a specific feature of pre-modern state structures that goes far beyond Buddhist Asia.39

With a view of early Buddhist Central Tibet, we have to recognize the principle of equality of the individual circles as a basic precondition of the galactic policy. In Buddhism there is no charter that envisages a value scale of higher or lower mandalas, just as there is no higher-ranking order. (This is also true of the position of the Dalai Lama, who is not the God King of all Tibetans, but in principle just the leader of a particular order.) Nevertheless, in Tibet in the above-mentioned Lhasa Temple we find a historically developed ideal centre, which through its specific history of a heart temple of the empire and starting point of Tibetan proto-nationalism dominated all others.

The demoness temple account forms a significant part of the legacy bequeathed to the leaders who sought to realize a theocratic state in the seventeenth century: the Dalai Lamas understood themselves as the legitimate heirs both of the ‘glorious emperors’ and of the later religious hegemons. The Dalai Lama state occupied the ‘Lhasa mandala’ and established a bureaucratic apparatus, which led to major social changes and to a significant break with the past: the old lineages, the old bond of clan and territory that had marked the polity of the mobile centre and, to a certain extent, the ‘galactic polity’ of the pre-Dalai Lama era disappeared.40 Even if they repeatedly exhibited decentralist tendencies in their history, in the former je and lön lines we can discern the decisive factors for the development of an all-embracing centralism and a ‘greater Tibet’, whose ethnic reconstruction as a Tibetan identity was fixed through the Buddhist discourse.


40 The disappearance of the old clan names and clan identities, however, only relates to Central Tibet, to a certain extent the heartland of the demoness, while in particular marginal zones of the Tibetan cultural area the ancestral lineage is still present in various forms today. Occasionally in the local accounts there is an artificial link with the heartland, for example by the genealogical origin of the group being traced back to prestigious areas (Yarlung, Samye) or to one of the great Central Tibetan lineages. See, for example, Gyalbo, Hazod and Sørensen, Civilization at the Foot of Mount Sham-po, p. 206.
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Identity and Difference in the Roman World
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Chapter 3

Zur Neustiftung von Identität unter imperialer Herrschaft: Die Provinzen des Römischen Reiches als ethnische Entitäten¹

Fritz Mitthof


Gewiß handelt es sich hierbei um zwei bedeutende Entwicklungslinien, doch ist damit längst noch kein vollständiges und adäquates Bild gewonnen. Zum einen war der ethnisch-kulturelle Anpassungsprozeß, den wir Romanisierung nennen, weder eine lineare Entwicklung noch von universeller Wirkung. Anfänglich zielte die römische Integrationspolitik bekanntlich nur auf


Zum anderen beruht die eingangs geschilderte Sichtweise auf einem höchst statischen Bild der inneren Zustände des Imperiums. Sie vernachlässigt die Weiterentwicklung traditioneller Kulturkreise unter römischer Herrschaft ebenso wie die massiven Migrationsbewegungen im Reich. Vor allem aber bleibt bei einem solchen Ansatz verborgen, daß innerhalb des Imperiums eine ethnisch-kulturelle Dynamik wirksam war, die zur Genese neuer Identitäten auf Reichsboden führte. Ethnizität stellte in der Kaiserzeit ein überaus komplexes und vielschichtiges Phänomen dar, wie anhand der drei folgenden Beispiele illustriert sei:


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sind also iranische, römische und palmyrenische Bildelemente eng miteinander verbunden.


Die Entwicklung der lokalen bzw. gruppenbezogenen ethnisch-kulturellen Identitäten im Römischen Reich und ihr Verhältnis zur Identität als Reichsbürger, der communis patria, ist bislang nur wenig erforscht. Dabei fehlt es nicht an aussagekräftigem Quellenmaterial: Neben Bildwerken und literarischen Nachrichten solcher Art, wie sie bereits angeführt wurden, sind

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5 Tacitus, Historiae, 4, 28: actae utrobique praedae, infestius in Ubiis, quod gens Germanicae originis eiurata patria Agrippinenses vocarentur.

Im vorliegenden Beitrag sei ein Aspekt der Thematik herausgegriffen, der meines Erachtens bislang nicht angemessen bewertet worden ist. Es geht um die Frage nach der Bedeutung der Provinzen als ethnische Entitäten. Zwar ist die Möglichkeit, daß die Provinzen nicht nur politisch-administrativen Charakter besaßen, sondern auch als Ansatzpunkt für Identitätsstiftung gedient haben könnten, in der Forschung durchaus bereits erwogen worden; stets ist man aber zu dem Schluß gelangt, daß andere Bezugsgrößen für die lokale Identität der Reichsbevölkerung von größerer Bedeutung waren. Man hat hierbei vor allem an die Städte gedacht, aber auch an historische Regionen und Großlandschaften; hingegen wurde eine entsprechende Rolle der Provinzen abgestritten.


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substantielle Veränderung der traditionellen ethnisch-kulturellen Komposition bewirkte.


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\(^7\) Cicero, *In Verrem*, 2, 2, 7.


Ein ganz ähnliches Programm wie die Münzprägung zeigen die Reliefs aus dem Hadrians-Tempel auf dem Marsfeld.9 Leider fehlen die zugehörigen Beschriftungen, so daß sich die Darstellungen nur aufgrund des Vergleichs mit den Münzbildern und damit allenfalls unter Vorbehalt identifizieren lassen. Für derartige Statuengruppen als bildliche Repräsentation des römischen Herrschaftsbereiches gab es Vorbilder aus der Zeit des Augustus. Dieser hatte nämlich nach dem Zeugnis des Servius eine Porticus mit dem Namen *Ad nationes* errichten lassen, in der *simulacra omnium gentium* aufgestellt gewesen seien.10 Zwar hat sich von dieser Porticus und ihrer Ausstattung nichts erhalten, doch gibt es vergleichbare Relieffunde aus einer Kaiserkultstätte der julisch-claudischen Zeit im kleinasiatischen Aphrodisias, die vermutlich eine Nachahmung ihres Bildprogramms darstellen.11

Für unsere Zwecke ist ein Vergleich der dargestellten Völkerschaften, hier als *ethne* bezeichnet, mit dem Bildprogramm Hadrians von Interesse. Zur Zeit des Augustus standen große wie kleine Völkerschaften inner- und außerhalb des Reiches im Vordergrund, so zum Beispiel die Pirusten im Gebiet des heutigen Kosovo und sogar die völlig unbedeutenden Trumplini aus den Alpen; bei Hadrian werden dagegen beinahe ausschließlich die Provinzen des Reiches dargestellt. Unter Augustus wurde dem Betrachter also ein Panoptikum von Völkerschaften geboten, die entweder als Jagdtrophäen oder aber als künftige Beute eines – im Sinne Vergils – rasch expandierenden *imperium sine fine* gelten konnten, unter Hadrian dagegen der klar definierte, in Provinzen gegliederte Herrschaftsraum eines Weltreiches, das an seine Wachstumsgrenzen gelangt war. In diesem Zusammenhang sei daran erinnert, daß Hadrian bei seinem Herrschaftsantritt

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einen Teil der Eroberungen seines Vorgängers Trajan zur Disposition stellte und als erster Herrscher Roms Provinzen räumte.


13 Appian, Rhomaika, Proömium: Τὴν Ῥωμαικὴν ἱστορίαν ἀρχόμεος συγγράφειν, ἀναγκαῖον ἡγησάμην προτάξαι τοὺς ὅρους ὅσων ἔθνων ἄρχουσι Ῥωμαίοι ... νομίζας δὲ ἄν τινα καὶ ἄλλον οὕτως ἐθελήσαι μαθεῖν τὰ Ῥωμαίων, συγγράφῳ κατ᾽ ἔθνος ἐκαστὸν.
Das Wort *ethnos* konnte also in nach-hadrianischer Zeit ganz allgemein für „Provinz“ stehen. Wie verhält es sich aber mit seinem lateinischen Pendant *natio*? Zur Beantwortung dieser Frage stehen hunderte kaiserzeitliche Grabsteine zur Verfügung, die Herkunftsangaben der Verstorbenen unter Nennung ihrer *natio* enthalten. Anhand dieses Materials läßt sich der Übergang von der traditionellen Verwendungsweise im ethnischen Sinne zu einem neuen, auf die Provinzen bezogenen pseudo-ethnischen Gebrauch im Laufe des 2. Jh. ausmachen:


2. Ein etwas anderes Bild ergibt sich bei Betrachtung der Grabsteine von kaiserlichen Gardereitern, die in Rom stationiert waren. In diesem Milieu überwiegen zwar ebenfalls die Herkunftsbezeichnungen nach Provinzen, doch findet sich auch ein gewisser Anteil an Namen germanischer und keltischer Stämme (d.h. der *natio*-Begriff wird hier teilweise noch in seiner traditionellen Form gebraucht).

3. Die meiste Beachtung verdienen im vorliegenden Zusammenhang die *natio*-Angaben auf Grabsteinen der Prätorianer aus dem Donau- und Balkanraum, die seit der Machtergreifung des Septimius Severus vornehmlich hier rekrutiert wurden. In diesem Milieu finden sich ausschließlich *natio*-Angaben, die von Provinznamen abgeleitet sind, gefolgt zumeist vom Namen der *civitas* und eventuell auch des Dorfes.14 Daß tatsächlich Provinzen gemeint sind, beweisen Fälle, in denen nicht das Ethnikon, sondern der Provinzname auftaucht;15 und daß *natio* in diesem Kontext kein ethnisches Substrat meint, sondern die Herkunftsprovinz, erhellt am deutlichsten aus dem folgenden Beispiel: Die Stadt Serdica,

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14 So z.B. in *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* (im Folgenden *CIL*), Bd. 6, 3184: D(is) M(anibus) P(ublius) Aelio Surioni tur(ma) Ulpi Frontonis natione Pannonius domo Flavia Sirmio. vix(it) ann(os) XXXVII, mil(itavit) an(nos) XX. faciendum curaverunt hered(es) Vale(n)s et Candidus; – *CIL*, Bd. 6, 2736: D(is) M(anibus) s(acrum) Aur(eli) Mucconi mi(litis) c(o)h(ortis) X praetoriae (centuria) Gaiani qui vi(xit) ann(os) XXXVI. digno merenti marito Gratilla fecit virginia sua natione M(o)es(i)acus civis Meletinus vico Perepro b(ene) m(erenti) f(ecit).

15 So etwa die Provinz Moesia superior in *CIL*, Bd. 6, 2730: D(is) M(anibus) Antonius Paterio mil(es) coh(ortis) X pr(aetoriae) (centuria) Artemonis. vix(it) an(nos) XXXV, mil(itavit) an(nos) XI, nat(ione) Mysia superiore reg(ione) Ratiarese vico C[nisco]. Aurelia Vener[i]a co(ni)iux co(niugi karissimo (h)eres b(ene) m(erenti) f(ecit).

Da diese Art der *natio*-Angabe besonders in Inschriften von Soldaten fassen ist, scheint es plausibel, den Ursprung der Ausdrucksweise im Militärjargon zu suchen. Vermutlich bezeichneten sich die verstorbenen Soldaten auf den Grabsteinen nämlich genau in derselben Form, in der sie auch in den Mannschaftslisten der Truppenverwaltung geführt wurden. Zur Untermauerung dieser These sei auf einen lateinischen Papyrus aus dem 2. Jh. verwiesen, der der Forschung bislang wegen des *natio*-Begriffs Deutungsprobleme bereitet hat.18 Es handelt sich laut Überschrift um ein Verzeichnis, das nach Konsuln, also chronologisch, ferner nach *nationes* und schließlich nach einem weiteren, nicht mehr erhaltenen Kriterium gegliedert war: *Milites diligent per consules et nationes et [...]. Die Erstherausgeber dachten an eine Art von Triumphalfasten; in der Neuedition hingegen wird das Fragment zu recht als Aktenstück der Militärverwaltung interpretiert. Erkennbar sind im erhaltenen Textausschnitt außer den Konsulatsangaben mehrere Provinz- und Städtenamen sowie Ziffern am Ende jedes Eintrags. In der Neuedition wurde in der Überschrift das Wort *provincias* ergänzt, doch ergibt sich bei einer solchen Rekonstruktion das Problem, wo dann die *nationes* genannt waren. Da wir jetzt wissen, daß *natio* in einem solchen Kontext für die Herkunftsprovinz eines Soldaten stehen kann, läßt sich der Begriff mühelos auf die Provinznamen beziehen, die im Text

16 CIL, Bd. 6, 2742: D(is) M(anibus) Diogenes Gaius mil(es) coh(ortis) X pr(aetoriae) (centuria) Uranide vix(it) an(nos) XL mil(itavit) an(nos) XIII nat(ione) T(h)rax civitate Serdica. Aur(elius) (H) erodes mil(es) coh(ortis) VII pr(aetoriae) (centuria) Dubitati frater b(ene) m(erenti) f(ecit); – CIL, Bd. 10, 1754 = Inscriptiones Italicae, I, 1, 145 = Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae (im Folgenden *ILS*), 2043: D(is) M(anibus) Aur(elius) Abitus mil(es) coh(ortis) X pr(aetoriae) (centuria) Dubitati frater b(ene) m(erenti) f(ecit).

17 CIL, Bd. 6, 2605 = ILS, 2041: D(is) M(anibus) Aur(elio) Victorino mil(itii) coh(ortis) VI pr(aetoriae) natione Dacisca regione Serdic(a). vixit an(nos) XXX mil(itii) in legione an(nos) VI in pr(aetorio) an(nos) IIII. fecit memoria Valerius Augustus mil(es) coh(ortis) VI pr(aetoriae) fratri bene merenti f(ecit).

18 Chartae Latinae Antiquiores, Bd. 10, 422, 1 (datiert nach 121).
vorkommen. In der Überschrift ist daher wohl als drittes Element ein Begriff zu ergänzen, der sich auf die Ortsangaben bezog, etwa civitates.


Freilich soll damit nicht behauptet werden, daß die Provinzen zu irgendeinem Zeitpunkt alle anderen Formen lokaler bzw. regionaler Identität ersetzt hätten. Selbstverständlich spielten auch die Städte in dieser Hinsicht weiterhin eine zentrale Funktion, besonders die großen Metropolen des griechischen Ostens, ebenso wie historisch gewachsene Großlandschaften einen wichtigen Bezugspunkt bildeten. Gerade letztere gewannen in der Spätantike sogar erheblich an Bedeutung. Zum einen liegt dies sicherlich daran, daß die verschiedenen Sprachzonen des Imperiums für die ethnisch-kulturelle Identität

19 Codex Theodosianus (im Folgenden C.Th.), 11, 1, 33 (Isidoro pr.pr. Illyr. d. 10 Oct. 424 Const.): Id ab unaquaque provincia censuimus expetendum, quod ab isdem nuper esse promissum tua sublimitas indicavit. Ut vero nullus de cetero ad possessiones eorum, quod maxime reformidant, inspector accedat, Macedonum reliqui exemplum secuti mediae quantitatis, ut obtulisse noscuntur, tributa suscipiant. Sed Achivi, qui protestati sunt etc.

20 Historia Augusta (im Folgenden HA), Septimius Severus, 19, 9: ... sed Afrum quiddam usque ad senectutem sonans.
21 Ibid., 15, 7: cum soror sua Leptitana ad eum venisset vix Latine loquens, ac de illa multum imperator erubesceret ... redire mulierem in patriam praecepit.
22 HA, Maximini duo, 2, 5: hic adulescens et semibarbarus et vix adhuc Latinae linguae, prope Thraecica imperatorem publice petit ...
23 Digesten, 32, 1, 11: Fideicommissa quocumque sermone relinqui possunt, non solum Latina et Graeca, sed etiam Punica vel Gallicana vel alterius gentis.
24 Augustinus, Epistula 17, 2, ed. Alois Goldbacher, CSEL 34,1 (Wien, 1895), pp. 41f.: neque enim usque adeo te ipsum oblivisci potuisses, ut homo Afer scribens Afris, cum simus utrique in Africa consituti, Punica nomina exagitanda existimares.
25 Hieronymus, Commentarius in Epistulam ad Galatos, 2, 3, PL 26, col. 382: Galatas excepto sermone Graeco, quo omnis Oriens loquitur, propriam linguam eandem paene habere quam Treviros.

ac Pannonicis parentibus vecordior ...; – Aurelius Victor, Epitome de Caesaribus, 42, 17: Qua de causa ne quid apud Gallos natura praeципites novaretur ...
The present chapter will discuss two terms that appear in literary sources for the people(s) living south and south-east of Palestine who established and upheld a political entity for several centuries before the Roman annexation of 106 CE: Arabs and Nabataeans. These two terms, as an examination of the evidence will demonstrate, represent two different sectors of the society of the Arabo-Nabataean kingdom, a dichotomy that endured into the early Islamic period. Neither adjective, moreover, reflects ethnicity in the modern sense of the word.

Ancient sources often identify the Nabataeans as Arabs, a tendency that has been taken to confirm their ethnicity: the Nabataeans, some argue, were simply Arabs. This has generated a discussion concerning the origin of these 'Arabs'. But what is an Arab? Anyone aware of the ethnic and political situation in the modern Middle East knows that the appellation 'Arab' is very problematic. Despite the ideologically inspired claims of many modern Arab nationalists, followed by a large number of scholars, there are no objective criteria with which to define the adjective 'Arab' today. The word has been in use for almost three millennia designating quite different groups of people. When treating ethnicity in antiquity one should beware of applying modern, nebulous notions of nationality and ethnicity to distant periods of history. These concepts have largely been developed in Western Europe during the last two hundred years and their relevance to ancient historians remains questionable.
If one admits that the label ‘Arabs’ is neither self-evident nor uncontroversial, the term ‘Nabataean’ poses a similar quandary. But regardless of the varied meanings of these two terms in ancient sources, the identification of Nabataeans with Arabs is not without an evidentiary basis. The principal literary sources for the history of the Nabataeans – Diodorus Siculus’ *Bibliotheca*, Strabo’s *Geography* and Flavius Josephus’ two works on the history of the Jews – appear at first glance explicitly to identify them as Arabs. Josephus uses the term árabes and nabataïoi seemingly indiscriminately when describing the kingdom south-east of Palestine with its capital in Petra. When Diodorus presents his digest of the earlier account of Hieronymus of Cardia, recounting events in the same region at the end of the fourth century BCE, he refers to the local people involved as ‘the árabes called nabataïoi’, a phrase found in other passages of his work as well as in Strabo.

Remarkably, however, the term ‘Arab’ does not occur in the inscriptions of the ‘Nabataeans’ themselves. The kings in Petra are always called ‘King of NBT’ in the funerary inscriptions as well as on their coins. A closer scrutiny of the available literary evidence shows that the identification of Nabataeans as Arabs is hardly certain. There are passages in Strabo that can be interpreted as distinguishing between Arabs and Nabataeans. Thus Strabo says in one passage that the distance from the Gulf of Suez to Babylon is 5,600 stadia ‘towards Petra/the rock of the nabataïoi … through the adjacent arábia ethnē as well as nabataïoi and khaulotaïoi’. As far as Diodorus is concerned, the entire passage describing the events around 312 BC probably did not originally mention Nabataeans but only Arabs. The word nabataïoi alternating with árabes should be replaced by ‘nomads’ according to some manuscripts of Diodorus. In Josephus’ works the word nabataïoi occurs in *Antiquities* (together with árabes) in passages concerning events down to the Roman conquest in 63–62 BCE. An isolated occurrence of nabataïoi appears in the report about the operations of the Roman general Gabinius against Petra in 55 BCE, interestingly enough both in *Antiquities* and in *War*. Thereafter the term disappears, and we hear only of árabes.

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7 Diodorus, 19,94,1 = *Quellen*, p. 439; 2,48,1 = *Quellen*, p. 431; Strabo, 16,4,18 = *Quellen*, p. 602; see also Appian, *History: Mithradates*, 16,106 = *Quellen*, p. 420.
8 See the material collected in *Quellen*, pp. 107–410.
9 Strabo, 16,4,2 = *Quellen*, p. 601. The translation of the passage in *Quellen* as well as in the Loeb edition of Strabo includes Nabataeans and Khalaotaeans in the larger concept of arðbia ethnē. But te kai can, and should, rather be read ‘as well as’, not ‘and’. The translations are steered by the concept of Nabataeans being Arabs.
10 Diodorus, 19,94,1–100,3 = *Quellen*, pp. 439–53.
11 See the discussion in Retsö, *Arabs*, pp. 287ff.
12 Josephus, *Antiquities*, 14,103 = *Quellen*, p. 484; Josephus, *War*, 1,178 = *Quellen*, p. 543. It is the only occurrence of nabataïoi in the latter apart from the Nabataïos in 5,474, which Josephus understood as a proper name.
Josephus’ use of both Arabs and Nabataeans is, however, not as indiscriminate as has been assumed. The occurrence of the term Nabataeans reflects the sources he used, some of which spoke of Nabataeans, not Arabs. Josephus himself may not have paid much attention to the difference; his sources, however, which he copied faithfully, distinguished clearly between the two. When describing the campaign of Judas Maccabaeus in Transjordan in 163 BCE, for instance, there is a distinction in Josephus’ text between the friendly Nabataeans and the Arabs fighting against Judas. This reflects Josephus’ source, 1 Maccabees, which made the same distinction. Another example in Antiquities is the report of how Jonathan Maccabaeus sought refuge in Transjordan among the nabataioi árabes. Here Josephus’ source, 1 Maccabees, referred only to nabataioi. Josephus further reported that Jonathan fought against nabaténoi in Arabia. In 1 Maccabees, however, the war was waged against the árabes zabdénioi, a people in southern Syria. In these two passages we can observe how Josephus identified Nabataeans as Arabs, even though his sources distinguished between them. The use of the term Nabataeans in connection with the Roman conquest of Palestine in 63 BCE has been shown to reflect the sources used by Josephus, ultimately the report by Theophilus of Mytilene which reached Josephus via Strabo’s lost History.

The interpretation of Josephus’ evidence thus has to take his sources into account. It is well known that for the history of Herod the Great he mainly used the work of Herod’s court historian, Nicolaus of Damascus, which he followed rather closely. The isolated occurrence of the term in the passage on Gabinius similarly derived from Nicolaus’ work on Herod the Great. Nicolaus in his turn had had access to an autobiography of Herod. Now most of the occurrences of ‘Arabs’ in Josephus, in the section dealing with the time of Herod the Great, can be shown to originate from this autobiography. It then becomes evident that Herod had a lot to say about the Arabs in the Negev, whom he must have known quite well. In fact they were his close relatives since his mother was from ‘Arabia’. This means that this part of Josephus’ work probably is a first rate source, originating from an author with close acquaintance with ethnic and political conditions in the area. One might even argue that, contrary to what is often said, we have in the section on the time of Herod in Josephus the only

14 Josephus, Antiquities, 12.334–6 = Quellen, p. 467.
15 1 Maccabees 5: 24–8.
16 Josephus, Antiquities, 13,10–11 = Quellen, p. 468.
17 1 Maccabees 9: 35 = Quellen, p. 592.
18 Josephus, Antiquities, 13,179.
20 Retsö, Arabs, pp. 367f.
21 Ibid., p. 367.
22 Ibid., pp. 373–5.
pre-Islamic source dealing with ‘Arabs’ originating from an ‘Arab’, that is, Herod himself.

From the report on the Arabs from the time of Herod in Josephus’ works, the Arabs appear as separate from the people in Petra in present-day southern Jordan and probably belonged to the Negev area on the western side of the Arabah. Since Josephus mentioned Nabataeans in connection with the Roman military operations around Petra in the 60s and 50s BCE, the term obviously recurred in his sources dealing with these events. The conclusion, then, is that the Nabataeans belonged to the area around Petra and, according to the reports from the Maccabaean time, further north in Transjordan, while the Arabs inhabited the Negev and some parts of Syria.

Arabs and Nabataeans can thus hardly be identified with one another in antiquity. They were obviously separate entities, as the ancient sources unanimously attest. The question then arises: what kind of entities? It is fairly certain that the language spoken in large parts of the ‘Nabataean’ kingdom was related to what we would call Arabic. But speaking a form of Arabic does not say much about ethnicity. Arabic is and has always been a large and multifarious linguistic group. The reasons for the application of the label ‘Arabic’ to all these various South Semitic dialects are more political than linguistic. Ancient reports describe an Arabic language, but the linguistic characteristics of this language or, rather, languages are not ascertainable.

In the literary sources mentioned above there is a recurring expression: ‘the Arabs called Nabataeans’. Greek and Latin sources frequently represented Arabs as consisting of many ethné. But the combination of Nabataeans and Arabs may be of special significance. According to Diodorus, among the signs carried in Pompey’s triumph in Rome in 61 BCE was one naming ‘king Arethas of nabataïoi, king of árabes’, a report that likely reflects contemporary political realities. There might thus have been a special relationship between Arabs and Nabataeans, which, however, had nothing to do with ethnicity in modern terms.

In early Islamic times nabat was clearly a socio-political term designating the farming communities in Syria and Iraq. There are statements in Arabic sources indicating that one could become Arab or Nabataean; it was possible to switch identity. Thus a saying attributed to Ayyūb b. al-Qirriyya (d. 703 CE)

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24 Diodorus, 40,4,1 = Quellen, p. 453; cf. Plutarch, Pompey, 45,2 = Quellen, p. 585.

proclaimed: ‘The people of Oman are Arabs who have become Nabataeans, the people of Bahrayn are Nabataeans who have become Arabs.’ Another ascribed to the second caliph ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb stated: ‘Make yourselves Ma’add [i.e. genuine Arabs] and do not make yourselves Nabataeans.’

The identity between the Nabataeans of antiquity and the ‘anbāṭ of the Islamic period has often been denied. The ancient Nabataeans have been seen as an ‘ethnic’ group, whereas the Islamic Nabataeans are typically thought to have constituted a social stratum in the early Islamic state. But if the ancient term Nabataean does not stand for an ethnicity in the modern sense, the pre-Islamic Nabataeans need not have been different from their Islamic counterparts.

How then are we to conceptualize the relationship between Arabs and Nabataeans in antiquity and what are the consequences for our understanding of ‘ethnicity’ in ancient history? The inscription carried in Pompey’s triumph indicates a link between the two appellations. In Josephus we find specific reference to a commander of the Arabs in charge of an Arab force. King Malkhos, to whom Herod fled in 40 BCE from the Parthian invasion, is reported to have held ḥē arabarkhía, the rule of the Arabs. The ‘Arabarchy’ is mentioned also in other contexts such as in Ptolemaic Egypt and in Seleucid Syria, where it clearly designated some kind of police force and/or border guards. The kings known from the coins as ‘kings of the NBṬ’ are in Josephus consistently called ‘king of the árabes’. The king may even have been called ho áraps, ‘the Arab’. The Poseidippus fragment, dated to the third century BCE, offers additional testimony, with its reference to a nabataῖος and the title arábōn hippomákhōn basileús, ‘king of the Arab horse-fighters’. Rather than attesting to the identification of the Nabataeans with the Arabs, these titles require a distinction between them.

The Nabataean king is also the king of Arab warriors.

If we liberate ourselves from the decidedly modern idea that all designations of human collectives in ancient sources must indicate a ‘people’ or refer to ‘ethnicity’, our understanding of political and social structures in ancient (perhaps even modern!) times may progress. Maurice Sartre’s formulation should be kept in mind: ‘Notre définition des Arabes est prioritairement culturelle.’

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28 Josephus, Antiquities, 16,284; 16,288 = Quellen, pp. 515, 516.

29 Josephus, Antiquities, 15,167 = Quellen, p. 506.

30 Retsö, Arabs, pp. 409–12.

31 Ibid., p. 373.

32 For the text, see Quellen, pp. 586f.


If by ‘culturelle’ is meant ‘culture’ constituting ethnicity or even nationality in the modern sense we are on a dangerous track. It is highly doubtful whether these concepts are relevant for unpacking the meanings of ‘ethnic’ and ‘national’ designations in pre-modern societies. As far as the term ‘Arab’ is concerned, the variation of its many meanings over the course of a documented history of nearly three millennia are worthy of emphasis. The term was in flux in both the ancient and early Islamic periods. It has been claimed that ancient attestations of the term lack reliability, because they derive from foreign, that is, non-‘Arab’, writers disinterested in ethnic terminology. Such an approach ignores the diverse ways in which ancient authors interacted with ethnic, cultural and political realities. As we have seen, we might even have a comprehensive narrative source originating from at least a ‘semi-Arab’. One cannot classify all literary sources as desktop products whose relations to realities cannot be defined and therefore are more or less without value.

An example of the relationship between internal and foreign sources comes from the early Islamic period. In the contemporary sources from the seventh and eighth centuries CE, written by Christians and Jews, the Muslim conquerors were never called Arabs. When the traditional biblical term Ishmaelites or the general designation Saracens were not employed, we find the term mōagarītai in Greek and mhagraye in Syriac. Both obviously reflect the Arabic muhājirūn. This term had already appeared in the Qur’an as a designation of the core group of the Islamic movement. The term ‘Arabs’ for the Muslims appeared in the foreign sources only during the first half of the eighth century. We possess very few contemporary sources in Arabic for the first Islamic century; from the evidence of those we have, and even more from those compiled from the second half of the eighth century onwards, we clearly discern the limited use of the term ‘Arab’, mostly by groups at the margins of the Islamic movement. It was probably entirely absent from ancient Arabic poetry. Judging from Arabic sources, the Arabization of the Muslim community was a phenomenon that commenced after the Second Civil War (680–93). It was during the latter half of the Umayyad period that the Muslim tribes began to label themselves ‘Arabs’. We thus have an agreement between domestic and foreign testimonies. The foreigners were not so uninformed after all.

It seems reasonable to pay close attention to Josephus’ use of the terms ‘Arab’ and ‘Nabataean’, as he provided a source of primary importance for the history of the Arabo-Nabataean kingdom. Herod the Great described Arabs located in the Negev who were his close relatives. These Arabs were closely connected with the Nabataeans on the other side of the Arabah valley and even ruled over them. We should imagine a political entity consisting of a majority of peasants and nomads in which the former were dominant and were called Nabataeans. The military power was entrusted to a caste of professional warriors called ‘Arabs’.

35 Retsö, ‘Concept of ethnicity’.
36 Retsö, Arabs, pp. 96–9.
with a special loyalty to the king. Even some of the kings might have belonged to this group since they could be called ‘the Arab’. The kings were thus kings of Arabs and Nabataeans.

The modern concepts of ‘peoples’ and ‘ethnicity’ thus turn out to be irrelevant for the understanding of the structure of the Arabo-Nabataean kingdom. Instead we find a political entity organized in a distinctive manner. To the outer world it was the ‘Arabness’ of this kingdom that made a lasting impression. When the Romans annexed the kingdom in 106 CE they named it *Provincia Arabia*, and the term Nabataea disappeared. It is interesting to notice, however, that in a couple of documents from the sixth century CE, the people of the province were called *arabes*, even *tón árábōn éthnos*.\(^{37}\) The transformation of an administrative unit to some kind of ethnic entity is found also in other regions in Late Antiquity even if we should beware of seeing these éthnē as ‘peoples’ in the modern sense. Such labels were constantly in flux.

\(^{37}\) The Pella inscription from 521 and *Codex Iustinianus, Novella* 102, see Retsō, *Arabs*, p. 524, nn. 92 and 97.
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In May 655, Emperor Constans II’s regime in Constantinople accused the ambitious Chalcedonian monk and former imperial secretary Maximus Confessor of responsibility for the loss of the important province of Egypt to the Arabs. Maximus had lived in the province of Africa since ca. 630. It was there that he – according to the accusation – had persuaded the commander Petrus not to send Numidian troops to the aid of an endangered Egypt. Maximus was convicted and exiled to Thrace.  

The punishment may have been a form of revenge, having been instigated by the Monothelete Constans II because Maximus had taken part in a Lateran synod in 653, in which Monotheletism was denounced. What interests us here is the historical argument for the accusation of high treason: the loss of Egypt to the Arab general ‘Amr b. al-‘Ās. The argument stressed the military reasons for this catastrophe. ‘Amr, having come from Palestine, invaded Egypt in December 639, captured the frontier stronghold of Pelusium in January 640 and then defeated a Byzantine military force at Heliopolis (Ayn Shams) in July of the same year. In April 641, the fortress of Babylon (Old Cairo) fell, the key position to the route to Alexandria as well as into the Nile valley, and by the end of September 641 the Arabs had entered Alexandria. Two months later the Byzantines signed an agreement of capitulation and within a year the last Byzantine troops evacuated Egypt.

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This is not the place for a detailed discussion of the complex course of the conquest, which other scholars have analysed brilliantly. This chapter will be concerned with only one aspect of the events, often cited by modern historians as a primary (or even sole) reason for ‘Amr’s rapid success: the role of Egyptian dogmatic dissent from the orthodoxy of the Byzantine government. Had Monophysite (and prior to this Arian and Melitian) Egypt, thanks to its centuries-old divergence from the Chalcedonian and from 624 Monothelete orthodoxies of the imperial administration, found a separate religious identity? Had a religiously defined identity emerged which competed with Roman political identity and facilitated, or even encouraged, Egypt’s departure from the Byzantine Empire in 642? Did there exist a sense of ‘We are Monophysite Egyptians’ – and did such loyalties supersede the feeling ‘We are Rhomaioi’, paving the way for resistance to the empire? Was there a direct causal link between Monophysitism and imperial disloyalty: did Egyptians reason, ‘Since we are Monophysite Egyptians, we no longer want to be Romans’?

The accusations against Maximus Confessor, namely that he was responsible for the loss of Egypt, were not coincidental. As the Byzantines were preoccupied with the prevention of a further advance of the Arabs into North Africa and Asia Minor in the late 640s and 650s, they were becoming aware that the recapture of Egypt was impossible. A scapegoat was sought for the misfortune. The Greek-Christian literature of the subsequent decades was full of lamentations...
and explanations for the disaster. Egypt *did* matter for the government in Constantinople, though no emperor since Diocletian had personally travelled to the country. Its tax revenues probably accounted for 30 per cent of the overall output of the Prefecture of the East. The grain deliveries from Egypt were significant for the provision of the capital city. The military occupation of the country, even in the fifth and sixth centuries (as previously in the early Principate), amounted to between 22,000 and 30,000 men, a very high number for a province that had not seen any serious threat since a short-term Palmyrenian occupation three and a half centuries ago in 269–73. Only in the early seventh century did Egypt face warfare: in 610 during the usurpation of the two Heraclii against Phocas, and when the Persians overran the country in 617–29. It seems unlikely that the Byzantines diminished their troops after the reconquest. Thus, in 640 the number of Byzantine soldiers in Egypt was possibly twice as high as the approximately 15,000 Arabs whom ‘Amr had under his command.

One of the reasons cited by modern historians for the rapid, seemingly straightforward conquest of Egypt by the Arabs is sectarian strife. Above all, the literary sources foreground the rivalry between Cyrus, the Monothelete

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12 Initially, ‘Amr’s expedition army seems to have had not more than 3,500 to 4,000 men; reinforcements under the command of Zubayr b. al-‘Awām were sent in autumn 640, numbering probably 12,000 men: Hugh Kennedy, *The Armies of the Caliphs* (London, 2001), pp. 11–20 and 62–9; also Kennedy, *Great Arab Conquest*, pp. 147 and 150.
patriarch (from 631/2 to 640 and again from September 641) and praeefectus Augustalis (governor) dispatched from Constantinople, and Benjamin, the Monophysite patriarch (626–55), along with some disagreements between the patriarchs and various military commanders. The Coptic martyrologies describe a full-scale persecution enforced by Cyrus, but these reports may reflect, on the one hand, prejudices and preoccupations of much later (ninth- and tenth-century) recensions and, on the other, reminiscences of the state of affairs that had pertained twenty years earlier. As the Persians had threatened Alexandria in 617, discord between the Patriarch John the Almsgiver (610–19) and the general Nicetas, a cousin of the emperor Heraclius, had similarly weakened the Byzantine defence. Cyrus, however, had annually paid large sums of gold solidi to the Arabs since 637 in order to prevent them from invading Egypt, and in 640 Heraclius summoned him to Constantinople. At any rate, these disagreements primarily concerned Alexandria and the question of whether one should defend the fortified city against a siege or surrender without a struggle.

A second theatre of events was, in contrast, the Egyptian hinterland, the chora. An allegation here is that the Monophysite fellahin had – as previously with the Persian assault – not participated in the defence against the aggressor or made any visible attempt to overthrow the conquerors again. They had, according to the narrative sources, even welcomed the conquerors as new masters (either openly or tacitly). Religious sectarianism is cited as the main reason for the collaborative sentiment of the Egyptian population. After all, unlike in Gaza or Syria, no Christian martyrs are recorded from the time of the Muslim capture of Egypt. Sometimes the theological dispute was interpreted as just the late antique manifestation of a long ‘national Egyptian’ opposition.

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16 For example, Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam (see below, n. 26): see Kennedy, Great Arab Conquest, pp. 142–6, 148f. and 167f. Butler, Arab Conquest, pp. 439–46, though stressing the Chalcedonian oppressive policy against the Coptic Church strictly excluded the possibility that Copts collaborated with the Muslims (or the Persians) against the Christian government.

17 Jan van Ginkel, ‘The perception and presentation of the Arab conquest in Syriac historiography: how did the changing social position of the Syriac orthodox community influence the account of their historiographers?’, in Emmanouela Grypeou, Mark Swanson and David Thomas (eds), The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam (Leiden, Boston, 2006), pp. 171–84.
against Roman and Byzantine rule. But the 'national' theory finds no support in
the sources, and scholars with a papyrological background doubt the relevance
of religious dissent for the conquest. Of course the Arab conquest cannot be
(solely) explained by Egyptian–Monophysite collaboration. In any case, it would
be only one of many aspects and reasons. The question is whether such an anti-
Byzantine tendency existed in the chora at all – and whether it was necessarily
motivated by a specific religious identity. Or does it simply reflect a Byzantine ex
post facto explanatory legend, blaming the Egyptian population for the defeat of
the Byzantine army?

The question encounters a complicated source situation: the only
contemporary chronicle from the eyewitness John, Monophysite bishop of
Nikiou, has only been preserved in the flawed Ethiopian translation of the
Coptic original. In the existing form, there are numerous passages where the
chronology and prosopography are confused and confusing. The Byzantine

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18 Arguments against any nationalist thesis are formulated by Ewa Wipszycka,
‘Le nationalisme a-t-il existé dans l’Égypte byzantine?’, Journal of Juristic Papyrology,
22 (1992): 83–128 (repr. in Ewa Wipszycka, Études sur le christianisme dans l’Égypte
Against a strong nationalistic element in Melitian monasticism – argued by Griggs,
Early Egyptian Christianity, pp. 122, 125–6 (on the Miltian schism) and pp. 210–11, 213–15 (on the
national background of Arianism) – see Hans Hauben, ‘Le catalogue métilien rééexaminé’,
in Maurice Geerard (ed.), Opes Atticae. Miscellanea philologica et historica Raymondo Bogaert et
19 The most important contribution is Arietta Papaconstantinou, ‘Historiography,
hagiography, and the making of the Coptic ‘Church of the Martyrs’ in early Islamic
Egypt’, Dumbarton Oaks Papers, 60 (2005): 65–86. Furthermore, cf., for example, Gascou,
‘L’Égypte byzantine’, p. 435: ‘Obnubilée par les conflits religieux, l’historiographie de
l’Égypte byzantine a longtemps tendu à opposer le pays à l’Empire. Elle s’est attachée à
détecter la montée d’un sentiment national antibyzantin, voire d’un séparatisme, fondé
sur le rejet de la langue et de la culture grecques et du système politique impérial. On a
mêmesoutenu que les Égyptiens auraient accueilli avec faveur les conquérants arabo-
musulmans. À juger d’après des manuels, encyclopédies ou synthèses récents, ces vues
paraissent indéracinable.’
20 For an overview, see Hugh Kennedy, ‘Egypt as a province in the Islamic Caliphate’,
in Carl F. Petry (ed.), Cambridge History of Egypt, vol. 1: Islamic Egypt, 640–1571 (Cambridge,
(London, 1916). Nikiou is situated on the western margins of the Nile Delta on the route of
the Arabs from Babylon to Alexandria. On background and tendencies of John’s chronicle,
see J.-M. Carrié, ‘Jean de Nikiou et sa Chronique: Une écriture ‘égyptienne’ de l’histoire?’,
in Nicolas Grimal and Michel Baud (eds), Événement, récit, histoire officielle: L’écriture
de l’histoire dans les monarchies antiques (Paris, 2003), pp. 155–72; Howard-Johnston,
Witnesses to a World Crisis, pp. 181–9 and Hoyland, Seeing Islam, pp. 152–6.
chroniclers Nicephorus (+ 829)\textsuperscript{22} and Theophanes Confessor (+ 817)\textsuperscript{23} report about these events rather peripherally and do not draw on Egyptian sources but instead on authors like Theophilus of Edessa (+ 785), who wrote in northern Syria or Constantinople. Furthermore, we have Coptic martyrologies, all of uncertain date and questionable reliability.\textsuperscript{24} Largely eschatological or hortative in scope, they place the sufferings of the Coptic Church and martyrs under Cyrus’ persecution at the centre of their stories, according to hagiographical patterns and topoi.\textsuperscript{25} On the other hand, the Arabian historiographers yield valuable information but are similarly problematic. Even the earliest of them wrote one and a half centuries after the event. The comparatively early compiler Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam (ca 805–871),\textsuperscript{26} although he expressed an Egyptian narrative tradition like that of ‘Abd Allāh b. Lahi’a (ca 715–790),\textsuperscript{27} represented ninth-century perceptions rather than those of contemporaries to the conquest. He and other later Arabic works reflect more likely what was opportune and important in the late ninth and tenth centuries, when the Abbasids’ more onerous exactions had replaced the Umayyads’ more ‘tolerant’ policies towards the Christians. All Coptic and Arab narrative sources have the tendency to project later conditions back onto the time of the conquest, often stressing the collaborative role of the Copts in order to de-escalate contemporary conflicts. More generally, all source materials are prone to simplify events and to reduce narratives down to the actions of single individuals.\textsuperscript{28}


\textsuperscript{25} The underlying messages are analysed by Theofried Baumeister, \textit{Martyr invictus: Der Märtyrer als Sinnbild der Erlösung in der Legende und im Kult der frühen koptischen Kirche} (Münster, 1972) and Papaconstantinou, ‘Historiography’, pp. 73–81.


\textsuperscript{28} Fred M. Donner, \textit{Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing} (Princeton, 1998); Howard-Johnston, \textit{Witnesses to a World Crisis}, pp. 179–91 on
the study of religious and collective sentiments in the Egyptian chora.\textsuperscript{29} What is of immediate importance is the way in which both late Arab and contemporary Byzantine sources described Coptic collaboration. They distinguished merely between \textit{Rum} (Romans) and Copts. Byzantine authors did not even mention non-Christian communities, like the Jews, as collaborators.\textsuperscript{30}

Alongside these historiographic sources documentary papyri provide a second, independent source of information. Editors have, however, until now largely neglected the seventh and eighth centuries: the roughly 2,500 edited texts represent but a tiny fraction of the tens of thousands of papyri from the period that still await their decipherment.\textsuperscript{31} Only a handful of papyri originate from Alexandria in contrast to the roughly one million documents found in the chora.\textsuperscript{32} Automatically, therefore, the papyrological evidence changes our perspective. The material itself requires the separate examination of Alexandria and the chora, which ancient perception of the geographical circumstances and methodical reflections also suggest. Alexandria was of course the stronghold of orthodoxy as well as of Arianism and Monophysitism.\textsuperscript{33} Every discussion at the patriarch’s front door was surely more pronounced than elsewhere in Egypt;\textsuperscript{34} in the city every action and reaction, because of the mobilization of the

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\textsuperscript{29} On the problems involved, see Roger S. Bagnall, ‘Models and evidence in the study of religion in late Roman Egypt’, in Johannes Hahn, Stephen Emmel and Ulrich Gotter (eds), \textit{From Temple to Church: Destruction and Renewal of Local Cultic Topography in Late Antiquity}, Religions in the Graeco-Roman World, 163 (Leiden, Boston, 2008), pp. 23–41.


\textsuperscript{31} Wolfgang Habermann, ‘Zur Verteilung der papyrologischen Zeugnisse’, \textit{Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik}, 122 (1998): 144–60, esp. the diagram on p. 147. This survey is based on the Greek papyri; for the total number given above the Coptic and Arabic texts should also be taken into account.


\textsuperscript{34} Ewa Wipszycka, ‘Les gens du patriarche alexandrin’, in Jean-Yves Empereur and Christian Décobert (eds), \textit{Alexandrie médiévale 3}, Études alexandrines, 16 (Cairo, 2008), pp. 89–113.
masses, was far more radical than in the chora, which had a completely different
dynamic, and each theological issue was a matter of ecclesiastical and political
power as well.\textsuperscript{35} Despite all its theological controversies, it was Alexandria that
resisted the Arabian siege most fervently and for the longest period of time.\textsuperscript{36}
The commercial and political ties between Alexandria and Constantinople were
closely interwoven – and Alexandria was, possibly more so than the rest of Egypt,
interested in continuing to play a leading role in the Mediterranean world.

Leaving Alexandria aside, which is well studied and can hardly offer any
surprises, our attention should be directed to the chora. How did the religious-
denominational situation – and attitudes towards the empire – appear in
Middle and Upper Egypt? As collective moods, mentalities and sentiments do
not emerge suddenly, we have to study these developments in the \textit{longue durée}.
Extending the time frame also enlarges the papyrological evidence significantly.
Papyri communicate a differentiated and generally representative illustration
of fourth- and sixth-century Egypt in particular.\textsuperscript{37} Unlike the literary sources,
which in most cases concern the bishop’s seat of Alexandria and the Delta
towns, the papyri offer information about the cities of Middle and Upper Egypt.\textsuperscript{38}
Greek and Coptic papyri have familiarized us with over 300 bishops by name
from Byzantine Egypt and with the highly active monastic communities.\textsuperscript{39}
It is only in rare cases, however, that the documentary evidence reveals the
religious persuasion to which the bishop belonged. Even the term \textit{katholike
ekklesia} is known in the language of the papyri only as the designation for
the ‘main church’ of a settlement, without any indication of its Chalcedonian

\textsuperscript{35} Christopher Haas, \textit{Alexandria in Late Antiquity: Topography and Social Conflict}
Group Dynamics in Late Antique Pagan and Christian Communities}, Transformation of the
Classical Heritage, 46 (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 2010), esp. chs 6–8 on 'defining the
Alexandrian bishop'.

\textsuperscript{36} Bojana Mojsov, \textit{Alexandria Lost: From the Advent of Christianity to the Arab Conquest}

\textsuperscript{37} Roger S. Bagnall, \textit{Egypt in Late Antiquity} (Princeton, 1993), pp. 4–13; Bagnall,

\textsuperscript{38} On the structure of Christian institutions in the chora, see Ewa Wipszycka,
‘Le istituzioni ecclesiastiche in Egitto dalla fine del III all’inizio dell’VIII secolo’, in Alberto
Camplani (ed.), \textit{L’Egitto cristiano. Aspetti e problemi in età tardo-antica}, Studia Ephemeridis
Augustinianum, 56 (Rome, 1997), pp. 219–71; Ewa Wipszycka, ‘Fonctionnement de
l’église égyptienne aux IVe–VIIe siècles (sur quelques aspects)’, in Christian Décobert
(ed.), \textit{Itinéraires d’Égypte. Mélanges offerts au père Maurice Martin S.J.,}, Bibliothèque d’étude,
107 (Cairo, 1992), pp. 115–45 (repr. in Ewa Wipszycka, \textit{Études sur le christianisme},

\textsuperscript{39} Klaas A. Worp, ‘A checklist of bishops in Byzantine Egypt’, \textit{Zeitschrift für Papyrologie
und Epigraphik}, 100 (1994): 283–318. On monks and monasteries, see, for example, the
recent study of Ewa Wipszycka, \textit{Moines et communautés monastiques en Égypte (IVe–VIIe
(i.e. orthodox) denomination. One can only suspect denominationally divided townships, at most, in the rare instances when the papyri attest to more than one bishop in a metropolis at the same time. Even then, however, our Fasti of the bishops are insufficiently consistent and the dating of the texts insufficiently secure to support arguments for competing bishops.

An exceptionally good example where the evidence of papyri, supplemented with information from a literary source, the Libellus precum Marcelli et Faustini, could be developed into a narrative is provided by Oxyrhynchus in the second half of the fourth century. A certain Theodorus, the orthodox bishop there from 347–83/4, seems to have had a Melitian rival in Dionysius in the 350s. Between 357 and 361, as Athanasius was in exile and the Arian George of Cappadocia presided over the Alexandrian Church, Theodorus also converted to Arianism. Thereupon the orthodox Christians from Oxyrhynchus made Heracleidas their bishop. But by 371, Theodorus was once again described as orthodox bishop of Oxyrhynchus; in the interim (Athanasius was also again in Alexandria) he had apparently returned from Arianism to the Orthodox Church. We then promptly hear of a certain opposing Melitian bishop named Apollonius who was most probably the son of the aforementioned Melitian bishop Dionysius from the 350s. At present this is the most instructive example of how one should imagine the sectarian loyalties in Egypt in the fourth century (and later). Even bishops converted rather easily, it seems, from one confession to another. Unlike the seat of the patriarch of Alexandria, the bishop’s seat of Oxyrhynchus was not a pawn of political interests – and at all events, the alternating appointments here do not seem to have caused bloody turmoil.

Generally speaking, one should not envision the religious situation in Byzantine Egypt as too strongly polarized between the orthodox and the heretics. In addition to the Arians, who were, incidentally, only very rarely, if at all, discernible in the chora, the Melitians were named; their schism did

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not originate dogmatically, but had evolved over issues of the *lapsi* under the persecutions. Although they had been widespread in the chora,

we do not often hear about them in the papyri. Next to the famous documents in P.Lond. VI 1913–22, which shed light on the schism,

the file on the abbot and holy man Nepheros, who presided over the monastery ‘Hathor’ in the borderland of Heracleopolis and Cynopolis, emerged from Melitian milieu.

The approximately forty-five papyrus letters and documents report on the daily dealings of the community of monks likewise dating from the decades of the 330s and 340s. Highly revealing Melitian texts come from considerably later, from the beginning of the sixth century, in P.Dub. 32–4.

In the August 511 settlement (P.Dub. 34), a certain Eulogios appears still as a ‘Melitian monk’. Serving as witnesses to the legal transactions are two ‘most reverent Melitian priests of the holy catholic church in the monastery of Labla’ together with two ‘most reverent orthodox priests in the monastery of Labla’.

However, in a guarantee from September 512 (P.Dub. 32), the same Eulogios described himself as ‘once a Melitian monk but now orthodox’

and finally in July 513 (P.Dub. 33) as ‘orthodox monk of the

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45 Heracleopolites/Cynopolites, ca. 330–40. On the whole dossier, see Hans Hauben, ‘Aurélios Pageus, alias Apa Paièous, et le monastère Méliéti d’Hathor’, *Ancient Society*, 32 (2002): 337–52 with further bibliography on p. 337, n. 2. While most of the documents deal with the internal affairs of the Melitian community, the letter P.Lond. VI 1914 (May 335?) reports the mistreatment of Melitian brethren in Alexandria. For the historical context, see the commentary of the editor, Harold I. Bell, *Greek Papyri in the British Museum (P.Lond.)*, vol. 6 (London, 1924), pp. 38–45.

46 For P.Nepheros, see the introduction by Bärbel Kramer and John C. Shelton, *Das Archiv des Nepheros und verwandte Texte* (Mainz, 1987), pp. 11–21, and the comments of Hauben, ‘Aurélios Pageus’. The letters and administrative texts give the impression of a peaceful monastic community. Noteworthy is also the distinctively heathen name of the monastery.


48 P.Dub. 34 = Friedrich Preisigke (ed.), *Sammelbuch griechischer Urkunden aus Aegypten*, vol. 1 (Strassburg and Berlin, 1913–15), 5174 (Arsinoiton Polis, 7th Sept. 512) l. 2:
monastery of Mikrou Psyon’ in order to sell his monk’s cell in Labla in Arsinoites to two Melitian monks.\footnote{P.Dub. 33 = Preisigke (ed.), Sammelbuch, 1, 5175 (Arsinoiton Polis, 9th July 513) l. 2: Εὐλόγιος ὀρθόδοξος μοναστηρίου Μικροῦ Ψυῶν.} A transition could occur so unspectacularly in the chora and even in clerical circles transactions between religious sects could be conducted in a similarly unproblematic way.

Numerous apocryphal writings, especially those of Nag Hammadi found in the immediate vicinity of a Pachomian monastery, also demonstrate just how variegated Christian belief and literature in late antique Egypt was.\footnote{See Marvin Meyer and Elaine H. Pagels, ‘Introduction’, in Marvin Meyer, The Nag Hammadi Scriptures: The Revised and Updated Translation of Sacred Gnostic Texts (New York, 2007), pp. 1–3, and the survey of sources in Birger A. Pearson, Gnosticism and Christianity in Roman and Coptic Egypt (New York, London, 2003), pp. 40–81.} Written in the first half of the fourth century in Diospolis Parva in Upper Egypt, they contain texts of Gnostic orientation and the uncanonical Gospel of Thomas in Sahidic Coptic. Alongside Christians of an orthodox persuasion, there existed other diverse religious communities about whose size, activity and development, from the period extending from the fourth to the seventh century, we know precious little. The Manichaeans were at least sufficiently vigorous in the fourth and fifth centuries to attract the polemics of Church fathers and orthodox law-makers as a latent threat to the right faith. The most important surviving work of this influential religion, the so-called Cologne Mani-Codex, originated in Egypt in the fifth century.\footnote{Mani Codex: Ludwig Koenen and Cornelia Römer, Der Kölner Mani-Codex. Über das Werden seines Leibes. Kritische Edition aufgrund der von A. Heinrichs und L. Koenen besorgten Erstedition, Papyrologica Coloniensia, 14 (Opladen, 1988). More texts can be found in Iain M.F. Gardner and Samuel N.-Ch. Lieu, ‘From Narmouthis (Medinet Madi) to Kellis (Ismant el-Kharab): Manichaean documents from Roman Egypt’, Journal of Roman Studies, 86 (1996): 146–69, and Iain Gardner and Samuel N.-Ch. Lieu (eds), Manichaean Texts from the Roman Empire (Cambridge, 2004), esp. pp. 119–25, nos 27–31: ‘Manichaeans and Christian ascetics in Egypt’. See also Jean-Daniel Dubois, ‘L’implantation des manichéens en Égypte. Avec résumés en français et en anglais’, in Nicole Belayche and Simon C. Mimouni (eds), Les communautés religieuses dans le monde gréco-romain. Essais de définition, Bibliothèque de l’École des Hautes Études, Sciences religieuses, 117 (Turnhout, 2003), pp. 279–306.} The Jewish community was not as prominent as in the Hellenistic period; it was, however, still active.\footnote{On the Jewish community, see Haas, Alexandria in Late Antiquity, pp. 91–127, and Roberta Mazza, ‘Documenti dall’Egitto relativi agli Ebrei (sec. V–VII)’, Annuario di Studi Ebraici, 17 (2000): 383–94.}

Also not to be underestimated is Egyptian polytheism, particularly at the subliminal level of lay piety as well as in the literary-philosophical ‘Hellenism’ of
Visions of Community in the Post-Roman World

Late Antiquity. Schenute from Atripe (385–465), the eloquent and pugnacious founder and abbot of the White Monastery near Panopolis, preached consistently against pagans. Against pagans and supposed crypto-pagans, such as Flavius Gessios (a former praeses Thebaidis after all), Schenute took active steps. Hellenistic learning and literature, which in the fifth and sixth centuries were strongly suspected of polytheist sympathies, flourished in Egypt: Claudian (370–404), Cyrus (ca. 400–460), Pamprepius (+ 484) and Nonnus (5th century) all came from here. Panopolis seems to have been a stronghold of classical heritage and late paganism, and was the native city of the last three of the aforementioned authors. By 600, the remaining pagans had presumably joined the church, but at least in the urban centres of Middle and Upper Egypt Hellenism (and crypto-paganism) was still alive.

In short, the religious ‘landscape’ was exceptionally varied and complex. The boundaries between religious persuasion and denomination appear to have been fluid. A simple polarization between orthodox and Arians, Melitians or, from 451, Monophysites finds no support in the documentary sources from the chora in either the fourth or the sixth century. Particularly instructive is the lack of any indication of the sectarian affiliation of the best documented personality of


55 Stephen Emmel, ‘Shenoute of Atripe and the Christian destruction of temples in Egypt: rhetoric and reality’, in Johannes Hahn, Stephen Emmel and Ulrich Gotter (eds), From Temple to Church: Destruction and Renewal of Local Cultic Topography in Late Antiquity, Religions in the Graeco-Roman World, 163 (Leiden, Boston, 2008), pp. 161–201, esp. 166–81. A careful analysis of the relevant text (Schenute’s Let Our Eyes) reveals, however, that the pagan belief of Gessios was much more stressed by Schenute than it was by Gessios himself.


Political Identity versus Religious Distinction?

Byzantine Egypt, Dioscorus of Aphrodite. In over 400 legal documents, petitions and poetic writings from this notary and poet of the age of Justinian, not a single sentence or reference can be found which would point to either Monophysite or Chalcedonian loyalties. Nevertheless, this man from Upper Egypt, whose mother tongue was probably Coptic, was not afraid to travel to Constantinople on two occasions in order personally to convey the case of his besieged village to Empress Theodora and Emperor Justinian. On both occasions he sought – and received – help from the central government against local potentates.

One may argue that the papyri generally are a poor source for historical events, conflicts and trends. However, although few papyri and inscriptions from the Egyptian chora refer to religious tensions, many describe social and economic conflicts, particularly in the fifth and sixth centuries. Papyrological sources allow the historian to trace the plight of the curial class and the gradual expansion of large-scale land holdings at the expense of the free farming community. The texts from the Dioscorus archive recount the struggle of the village of Aphrodite against the local potentate for the authority of autopract tax rights and against despotism and harassment. The regional rulers,
however, were neither foreigners nor representatives of the (Chalcedonian) Constantinopolitan regime, but rather the local (monophysite) class of large landholders, who, by the middle of the sixth century, had also managed to fill the local and regional offices of the public administration almost exclusively from their own ranks. If the grim image of corrupt despotism in the form of large landholders and the reliability of all of Dioscoros’ complaints have been convincingly challenged, the economic and social conflicts of Byzantine Egypt remain evident. However, religious affiliations are entirely absent from these conflicts, not to mention supposed ‘ethno-national’ concerns.

To return to our central question: do there exist in the – not very numerous – documentary papyri from the time of the Persian and Arab conquest any references suggestive of friction between the Byzantine administration and the local population, whether motivated by religious or other factors? The answer is clear: no. Generally speaking, historical events do not figure prominently in documentary papyri. The Persian conquest, for example, is only discernible in the dating formulae of the papyri, which at this point abandoned the name of the emperor in favour of a different standard form for the invocations. But until now, no record from the regime or the military has arisen that mentions any defensive measures, let alone problems in the implementation of such measures. The more than ten years of Sasanian rule over Egypt are only evident in a handful of texts – most prominently in a small dossier mentioning a certain ‘Saralaneozan’, a Persian office holder, perhaps the governor of all Egypt.

The situation for papyrological sources pertaining to the Arab conquest is only slightly better. The end of Byzantine rule over Egypt has been visible to us until now in the papyri only through the discontinuation of the use of the dating with the emperor’s regnal years. The discovery of an extensive papyrus archive dating from the years immediately following the conquest hopefully will shed more light on the circumstances shortly before and directly following the Arab


65 As Zuckerman, Du village à l’Empire, esp. in his résumé on pp. 213–19, has lately emphasized.


subjugation. But, tellingly, religious questions also played no role in these texts. All in all one has the impression that the official writings are marked less by eager obedience, collaboration or even joy over the new rulers and more by fear and uncertainty as to how the new lords will act and react.

However, apart from their lack of evidence for historical events, the number of edited papyri is, especially for the seventh and eighth centuries, still marginal and the genre of source material (private contracts, receipts, bookkeeping and so forth) limited, so that there is little information regarding internal and external political conflicts. In such a situation, how much weight should be given to the argument that there is evidence neither for religious tensions between the orthodox representatives of the state and the Monophysite population, nor for the Egyptian population’s welcoming of Arabian domination? Silence, however, is rarely accidental in the papyrological evidence, and it is very probably indeed significant that religious tensions and conflicts of loyalty are not recorded, while other conflicts, specifically the economic ones, do appear in the papyri.

For making a control test, the relevant question is: who should have been the orthodox representatives of the state against whom the people’s displeasure arose? The tax officials? The soldiers? The officials in the governor’s offices? The governors themselves? Was it those who came from outside, the strangers sent from Constantinople, who would have been regarded as the orthodox enemies?

The situation is clear with the tax officials. Whether liturgically obligated functionaries or agents of the large landholders, the tax collectors were at all times ‘little people’ from the local citizenry who themselves hardly differed in social terms from the taxpayers. The case is equally clear with the military. The soldiers of the troops stationed in Egypt were, since the late first century AD predominantly and since the fourth century almost exclusively, recruited locally. The papyri present a clear picture in this case: the soldiers were deeply rooted in

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68 Many dozens of letters of correspondence between the high officials Senuthius and Athanasius reveal the hectic activity of the tax authority around the year 643 – and also the new, distinctly harsher tone of the Arabian administration establishing itself: Federico Morelli, L’archivio di Senouthios anystes e testi connessi. Lettere e documenti per la costruzione di una capitale, Corpus Papyrorum Raineri, 30 (Berlin, New York, 2010).

69 Bagnall, ‘Models and evidence’, p. 34: ‘One thing that does need emphasis, however, is that the silence of the record needs to be taken as seriously as the presence. One often hears or reads that it is simply a matter of the chance of survival that we do or do not have evidence of something. This is untrue. The patterns of preservation of evidence are not simply a matter of randomness. On the contrary, they reflect deep patterns: in choices about what to record in writing; in ancient treatment of papyrus documents, both in retention and in disposal.’

70 We may ignore the argument that the Monophysite Egyptians were generally unwilling to pay orthodox Constantinople. The payment of taxes was always unpopular, under the Romans as much as under the Ptolemies or the Pharaohs.
Visions of Community in the Post-Roman World

the local society and were an important economic part of the same. Around 600
the names of more than one hundred attested soldiers in Syene again suggest,
more distinctly than earlier, a strong Egyptian element. Soldiers with origins
outside of Egypt can only be detected in connection with the campaigns against
the Blemmyans (mid 6th century), and scattered among the officers were men
of foreign extraction. The problem the Byzantine army had in Egypt was
definitely not that it was a foreign entity in the country, but rather the reverse:
that it was too deeply rooted in the region.

The same holds true for the officials who rendered their services in the
governor’s offices and likewise belonged to the militia. Also with this group the
papyri indicate the local family background and community network of the
officials. They also lend themselves poorly to being the enemy, unless their
ascent into the privileged civil service inspired the envy of their peers. But
what about the governors themselves? Were not they, at least, the orthodox
representatives of the state, sent out in order to extract the last cent from
the province? The regime had, in fact, fought long in order to defend this last
position of an external government representative against the pretenders from
regional networks. But in the end, the central administration also lost this battle
for direct influence in the province. Emperor Justin II granted, in Novella 149
(from the year 569), that in the future the nomination of the governor shall be
made by the bishops, landlords and cities of the respective province. From this
point in time, at the latest, the local aristocracy divided the governor’s posts
among themselves. At the most, Constantinople still appointed the praefectus

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71 James G. Keenan, ‘Soldiers and civilians in Byzantine Hermopolis’, in Adam Bülow-
Jacobsen (ed.), Proceedings of the 20th International Congress of Papyrologists, Copenhagen, 23–29
72 One circumspect analysis of the Pathermuthis archive is provided by James G.
Keenan, ‘Evidence for the Byzantine army in the Syene Papyri’, Bulletin of the American
73 Jean Gascou, ‘Militaires étrangers en Égypte byzantine’, Bulletin de l’Institut français
74 Prominent examples are Flavius Abinnaeus in the mid-fourth century: Harold I.
Bell, Victor Martin, Eric G. Turner, Denis van Berchem (eds), The Abinnaeus Archive: Papers of
a Roman Officer in the Reign of Constantius II (Oxford, 1962), pp. 6–12 (P.Abinn.), and Timothy
D. Barnes, ‘The career of Abinnaeus’, Phoenix, 39 (1985): 368–74; and Flavius Taurinus,
his son and grandson in the fifth century: Günter Poethke, Griechische Papyrusurkunden
spätrömischer und byzantinischer Zeit aus Hermopolis Magna, Berlin: Griechische Urkunden,
76 See Peter E. Pieler, ‘Erwägungen zur Novelle Justin II. über die “Wahl” der
Augustalis, who had the rank of a diocesan vicarius, but even here Egyptian office holders are also attested\(^7\) and candidates like Cyrus were exceptional.

By the second half of the sixth century – and in all probability even earlier – almost all official representatives of the empire were thus recruited from Egypt. They were foreign in neither a political nor religious-sectarian sense, for Egyptian aristocrats tended, like most Egyptians, to be Monophysites. Two illustrations should suffice: one of the few distinguished families to have achieved advancement into the highest, palatine offices of the empire was the so-called Apion dynasty. As Apion I made his career as comes sacrarum largitionum under Anastasius, the sources noted that he was still a Monophysite, but late in his life he changed to the Chalcedonic denomination at the instigation of Justinian and Theodora.\(^7\) A distant relative, Fl. Strategius patricius, arranged the reunification of the Monophysite church of Alexandria and of Antioch roughly one century later around the year 615.\(^7\) Even the most noble Egyptians and careerists were Monophysites.

To sum up: from the testimony of the papyri the conditions for the supposed polarization, ‘Orthodox empire versus Monophysite province’, are completely lacking. The representatives of the empire were dogmatically indistinguishable from the population. Dioscorus of Aphrodite may once again be regarded as a typical example: his opponents were the local great landowners, Monophysites like himself; he nevertheless maintained a high opinion of the (Chacedonian) emperor, his court in Constantinople and the governor in Antioopolis; and he requested and obtained protection and assistance from imperial authorities.\(^8\)

All this disagrees with the hypothesis that dogmatic differences facilitated the conquest of Egypt. We will have to seek other, multi-causal explanations. One aspect could be the high tax burden and the hope that the Arabs might be less exacting. This, however, assumes that extensive Arabian propaganda existed,

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aimed at this particular purpose. There is no indication of such propaganda in Greek, Coptic or Arabic sources. After all, the military argument – as formulated in the accusation against Maximus Confessor – still carries the most weight in explaining the rapid success of the Arab invasion. From the reign of Justinian, the land on the Nile was divided into no less than seven provinces and every province must have been under the control of a governor. Four of them had the rank of a dux et Augustalis by, at the latest, the recapture following the Sasanian interlude.\(^1\) This means that there were four military commanders in Egypt and it is improbable that a high command (for instance of the dux et Augustalis in Alexandria) persisted. The consequences were rivalries and conflicts between Byzantine commanders for rank and authority, as John from Nikiou (despite his ambiguities) accurately related. Moreover, there were tensions between generals ready to fight and the patriarch preferring to surrender. Hence there was no coordinated defence: the Arabian army always confronted but a tiny fraction of the Byzantine force. ‘Amr b. al-‘Ās’ 15,000 Arab warriors never encountered 30,000 Byzantine soldiers, but only a quarter of them at most. That was decisive, and such logistical problems gave plausibility to the accusation against Maximus: additional troops from Africa would have strengthened the Byzantine forces significantly and would have put them in a position to meet the Arab forces on equal terms.

The papyri place a question mark over the argument that sectarian differences played a decisive role in the Arab conquest of Egypt or had any significant impact on the daily life of the chora at all. Neither local separatism nor resistance to empire find any support in the contemporary documentary sources. A certain Egyptian and Monophysite identity did not lead to a desire for political separation. In Byzantine Egypt there was no sharp distinction between Rhomaioi and Egyptians, as the Coptic martyrologies and Arab historians of much later centuries claimed. The polarization between Chalcedonian Rhomaioi and Monophysite Copts suggested by these narratives did not describe the historic reality of the mid-seventh century but rather projected much later conditions back onto the time of the conquest. Narratives of Coptic disloyalty, tellingly absent from contemporary Byzantine sources, belong to ninth- and tenth-century historiography, when in the substantially different political situation of the Abbasid Caliphate Arabic and Coptic historiographers sought to emphasize the support of the Egyptian populace and the Monophysite patriarch for the Arab conquerors. Religious conflicts and sectarian strife had neither alienated Egypt from the empire nor undermined the political identity of the Rhomaioi along the Nile on the eve of the Arab conquest.

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\(^1\) Aegyptus I and II under a dux et Augustalis in Alexandria, Augustamnica I and II under a dux et Augustalis in Pelusium, Arcadia, which had a dux et Augustalis in Oxyrhynchos after the Sassanians (see Rosario Pintaudi, Ruzena Dostálková and Ladislav Vidman (eds), Papyri Graecae Wessely Pragenses, vol. 1, Pap.Flor. 16 (P.Prág I) (Florence, 1988), 64; (Ars., 636), and the Thebais inferior and superior under a dux et Augustalis in Antioopolis; see Palme, ‘The imperial presence’, pp. 245–9 and Figure 12.1 on p. 246.
Ethnic Identities in the Early Medieval West
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The purpose of this chapter is merely to underline the well-known fact that in reality there has never been anything like a uniform people or nation. Even the Icelanders’ gene pool proves the point. But there is (1) a problem of terminology. Dealing with ancient and medieval gentes means studying ‘peoples in progress’. Up to early modern times the Latin natio was only a subdivision of a gens.¹ But since the eighteenth century, especially since the French and American revolutions, the nation has become a social group organized by means of a constitution. The nation has come to stand for freedom and democracy, shared historical rights based on mostly fictitious traditions, but also on real equality and unity (e pluribus unum), emancipation and progress for a distinct body of citizens, whose origins (at least in theory) do not matter, who live in a given territory and who speak the same language. Since the concept of nation was the enlightened and secularized offspring of Christian universalism it borrowed its parent’s zeal to convince and convert the world. National languages tend to be aggressive against competitors; only the language of the majority counts and it is imposed on all citizens as the only politically viable means of communication. Therefore, the terms ‘people’ or ‘nation’ are misleading and basically do not suit our purpose. On the other hand, we are forced to choose between keeping silent and trying to make ourselves understood. Consequently, we must use certain words and concepts even if they do not do justice to the evidence of the past. To worsen matters, words such as natio or gens etymologically stand for begetting and bearing, and thus refer to communities of genetic-biological descent. The concept of the modern nation has never completely lost its archaic biological-genetic undertones and can easily devolve into notions of nationalism, chauvinism and racism. It is, however, against such etymologies and modern misapplications that the ancient and medieval texts, not least the tribal sagas, followed the Old Testament and equated people, gens, with army, exercitus.² Ulfilas’ Gothic Bible employed laigaion, legion, and harjis, army, in the

¹ See, for example, Cassiodorus, Expositio psalmorum, ed. Marcus Adriaen, CC SL, 97, 98 (Turnhout, 1958), II, v. 8 (97) and XCV, v. 7 (98).
same context. In the middle of the fourth century both the Roman armies and the barbarian war-bands were polyethnic and open to all kinds of warriors. The same was true of the Roman legion. In the Notitia dignitatum of around 400 CE a great many military units bore the names of barbarian peoples. Several names of Alaman tribes, for instance, were only recorded as military units of the Roman army. Friedrich von Schiller still spoke of Völker, ‘peoples’, when he referred to the imperial army of the Thirty Years War (1618–48) in his Wallenstein’s Lager (Wallenstein’s Camp). In sum, the sources attest to the polyethnicity of the peoples against the etymologies of their terminology.

(2) Some examples will prove the point. In the kingdom north of the Black Sea, which was ruled by Ermanaric during most of the fourth century, there were – apart from Ostrogoths – several Finnish ethnic groups, early Slavs and Antes, Heruli and Rosomoni, Alans, Sarmatians, Aesti and other Balts. At the same time the ‘land of the Goths’, Gútthiuda, north of the Lower Danube, comprised Tervingi (known to us as the Visigoths), Taifali, Bastarni, minorities from Asia Minor, former Roman provincials, romanized Daco-Carpian groups, Iranians and different Sarmatian groups. In accordance with its traditional make-up, as well as with the pattern of the Roman army of which the Visigoths were a part, the army that settled in Southern Gaul in 418 had the following composition: Visigoths, two groups of Ostrogoths, Alans, Bessi from Thrace, Galindi from the Baltic Sea, Varni, Heruli, Saxons and members of the Sarmatian, Taifalian and Suevian colonies as listed in the aforementioned Notitia dignitatum. The Italian kingdom of Theodoric the Great was no less polyethnic. All kinds of Goths, Rugians, Scirians, Vandals, Alans, Herulians, Sarmatians, Iranians and Taifali, Turcinglians, Gepids, Suevi and Alamanni marched in his army. The commander of Avignon in 508 was called Vandil, a saio, a royal envoy, bore the Alan name Candac, another the Iranian name Tutizar, a Milanese tribune the Celtic name Bacauda. Then there were Romans serving in Theodoric’s army who were either ‘Goths at heart’ or former Roman subjects, like the Breoni in the Tyrolean mountains. Geiseric’s Vandal army, which crossed the Strait of Gibraltar in 429, consisted of two different Vandal peoples, the Hasdings and the Silings, of Alans,
Goths and Suevi, and mustered a considerable number of Berbers as allies after being settled in Africa. To be sure, Geiseric did not command all the Vandals, nor did Theodoric rule over all the Goths even between 511 and 526 when he was also King of the Visigoths, nor did Attila – even at the height of his power – manage to unite all the Huns under his overlordship. And the same holds true of any other people; Gepids and perhaps even Longobards stayed behind when Alboin led the Longobard army into Italy in Spring 568. On the other hand his Longobard gens-exercitus also consisted of Herulians, Gepids, Suevi, Romans from Pannonia and Noricum alongside peoples from inside Germania such as Thuringians and, not to be forgotten, Saxons. And the Franks and Anglo-Saxons? Let us spare ourselves the enumeration of all the peoples who sailed with Hengist and Horsa to Britain, or who lived in the Gaul and Germany of Clovis and his Merovingian and Carolingian successors and ‘were obedient to the Franks’, as one of Louis the Pious’ biographers put it.

(3) It is beyond doubt that the formation of a tribal society was not a matter of blood and common descent. But what mechanism kept a polyethnic people together, or rather made it a people? After a while there were – at least at first glance – only Goths in Spain and southern France, only Longobards in Italy and only Vandals in Africa. In theory the gentes differed from each other according to several criteria, among which lingua, language, was usually listed last. In fact, when the Longobards ceased speaking their Germanic language it had no bearing on their identity. The same holds true of the Western Franks

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12 Wolfram, Empire, pp. 285f.
14 Wolfram, Goths, pp. 231ff., 290ff.
17 Regino of Prüm, Chronicon, ed. Friedrich Kurze, MGH SS rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum separatim editi [50] (Hanover, 1890), p. XX.
when they became Romanized, not to mention the ‘Scythians’, a name applied to all peoples who sat on horseback, used composite bows, were fierce pagans and came from what is now the rim of Eastern Europe. They were simply ‘glued together’ so that from the beginning they were a polyethnic medley and spoke a variety of languages side by side.\textsuperscript{19} Obviously, the concept of language generally is no reliable category of distinction.\textsuperscript{20} Only Christian cult-languages such as Bible Gothic and Old Church Slavonic had a meaningful effect on the making of peoples and nations.

(4) There was no common pagan religion in the pre-Christian era. Beginning with Caesar and Tacitus, observers of Germanic paganism conceived of a distinctive pantheism.\textsuperscript{21} Even within the same people, different groups and subdivisions, men and women, worshipped different gods and goddesses and performed different cults and rites. Instead, the conversion of the Gothic peoples to Christianity, or rather to its homoœan-Arian denomination, brought about an enormous change and considerably furthered tribal unity. The same was true, or even more so, of the Frankish conversion to Catholicism, since it also closed the gap between the creed of the Roman majority and the Frankish peoples. In contrast, in 381, the year before the first treaty between the Visigoths on Roman soil and the Emperor Theodosius was concluded, the second ecumenical council of Constantinople solemnly condemned Arianism. But the second canon of the council decreed that the ‘churches of God among the barbarian peoples … are to be governed in the manner that already existed among their forefathers’ – and that is where the matter rested. In this way a space was created within which barbarian Arianism or rather homoœanism could survive and even spread. The standardizing force of Ulfila’s translation of the Bible, the religious zeal of the new converts which even reached what is now Austria and southern Germany, and the support of the Roman crypto-Arians in the settlement areas of the Goths and Vandals, all favoured the maintenance of Arianism. As a Gothic faith, it served as a means of preserving and creating ethnic identity, even though, or precisely because, their Roman environment became more and more radically Catholic.\textsuperscript{22} Procopius of Caesarea explained that once upon a time there was only one people which had now been split up into what he called the Gothic peoples, primarily the Visigoths, the Ostrogoths, the Vandals, Gepids and Alans, but also the Burgundians, Herulians, Scirians and Rugians. They all spoke the same Gothic language and adhered to the same Gothic laws and the same Gothic (homoœan)

\textsuperscript{19} Wolfram, Empire, pp. 132f.

\textsuperscript{20} Herwig Wolfram, ‘Sprache und Identität im Frühmittelalter mit Grenzüberschreitungen’, in Walter Pohl and Bernhard Zeller, Sprache und Identität (Vienna, forthcoming).


\textsuperscript{22} Wolfram, Goths, p. 85. Wolfram, Gotische Studien, p. 262.
faith. But we ought to add the observation that although they were no longer one and the same people, they easily admitted and integrated splinters or even whole groups of peoples from one another, albeit with varying intensity. Each individual could hold several passports, so to speak.

(5) This was possible because ethnic identity was situational, as Patrick Geary rightly pointed out long ago. Depending on opportunity and circumstances, the same person could profess a Hunnic or Gepid or Gothic identity. Or a Roman lady with a Longobard name could sell property with the consent of her husband, who bore a Roman name, according to Longobard law, which conferred more advantage than Roman law. Or an Avar might keep his identity as long as he stayed pagan, used a composite bow, sat in the saddle and acted as lord, irrespective of the language he spoke, be it Turkish, Slavic, Germanic, a Romance language or some other unknown vernacular. In contrast, one Christian Avar lost his identity, which was embodied by the khagan, as Walter Pohl has shown. In order to survive legally, socially and economically, the same Avar changed his ethnicity to become a Bavarian, Slav or Roman.

(6) Obviously, ethnic identity was deeply rooted both in religion and in keeping up one’s own legal and socio-economic status. After the downfall of the Visigothic Spanish kingdom in 711, Saracen garrisons appeared all over southern France. After the Frankish king Pepin I had recognized and guaranteed the Gothic law, the same southern French towns suddenly housed Gothic garrisons. Ever since the Roman Empire had spread over the Old World, foreigners, barbarians of all kinds, had settled on Roman soil voluntarily as well as by force. The majority of these newcomers were integrated into the lower strata of Roman society primarily by losing their ethnic identity. This mechanism had already ceased to work by the eve of the battle of Adrianople in August 378, and became entirely outdated when the barbarian kingdoms

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23 Procopius, De bello Vandalico, I (III), 2, 2ff., trans. Dewing; Wolfram, Goths, pp. 19ff.
27 Pohl, Awaren, p. 325.
29 Wolfram, Goths, pp. 125f.
were installed within the Roman borders. Now it was the Roman land-owning upper class into which the newcomers had to be integrated while maintaining their ethnic identity. This process – whatever the techniques of accommodation were – did little harm to the Roman landowners in the Gothic and Burgundian kingdoms.\textsuperscript{30} In contrast, the settlement of the Vandals, Longobards and Anglo-Saxons\textsuperscript{31} could affect the Roman upper class to the extent that they lost their property, together with the \textit{ius libertatis Romanae}.\textsuperscript{32} But in every kingdom the barbarian elites fought each other for a bigger share of the cake. In the treaty of 442 Ravenna not only formally recognized Geiseric’s kingdom of the Vandals and Alans, but also handed over to him the richest African provinces. There the king obtained both the imperial \textit{fiscus} and the Roman landowners’ property. But a considerable group of Vandal noblemen who, it seems, were to have benefited economically from this treaty must have been bypassed. In 442 they revolted, and the king cruelly quashed the rebellion. The Vandals lost more people than they would have done in an open battle, a contemporary noted.\textsuperscript{33}

Both the abandonment of Longobard kingship in 574 and its re-establishment in 584 were related to economic matters, not least the expenses of the Romans. But in 584, when the Longobards elected Authari, the dukes provided the new king with half of their property.\textsuperscript{34} In Theodoric’s Italian kingdom people such as Theodahad, who was to become the last Amal King of the Ostrogoths, did not shrink from cheating their fellow tribesmen out of their property, thereby exposing them to slavery. But if a man who faced such a threat could prove before the king or his envoys, \textit{saiones}, that ‘he had marched in the Gothic army’, nobody would dare deprive him of his property and his legal and socio-economic status. This meant, in Cassiodorus’ words, that the given warrior enjoyed the ‘freedom of the Goths’, and at the same time that all the different ethnic groups who were part of the Gothic army also shared in the Gothic identity called \textit{libertas Gothorum}.\textsuperscript{35} This ‘freedom’ was obviously modelled after the \textit{ius libertatis Romanae} and was guaranteed and secured by Theodoric the Great, a king who could rely on a centralized administrative agency, including both a
well-functioning Roman bureaucracy and a well-organized chain of military command. Consequently, although Theodoric was thrice elected King of Goths, after having been recognized by the emperor in 498 he did not remain a *rex Gothorum*. Instead he declared himself a supratribal, Roman-style *Flavius rex*, thus setting an example not only for the Visigothic kings in Spain but also for his Italian successors, including the Longobards. In 584 Authari was elected king ‘on the joint resolution’ of his fellow dukes and those qualified to make political decisions. ‘Because of the honor of the office’ he was given the name of Flavius, ‘which henceforth all Longobard kings carried with great good fortune’. Evidently the assembly of the Longobard army wanted to furnish their new king and his successors with a political statement that would win him recognition from barbarians and Romans alike. But Ostrogothic Ravenna also fell back on the common practice that derived its origins from the Roman military oath. After Theodoric’s death, agents sent from Ravenna placed all subjects, Romans as well as the Gothic army, under oath to the new king. And yet there is the peculiar statement by Procopius that in the Gothic army there existed a people called the Rugians who had no intermarriage with the Goths. The Rugians confessed the Gothic faith, as we learn from the *Vita Severini*. They had followed Theodoric to Italy and were settled in Venetia where they enjoyed the *libertas Gothorum*. In Spring 541 their chieftain even managed to become the Gothic king, if only for five months. But the same Rugians kept away from the Goths and did not mingle with the name-givers of the army in which they served and of the kingdom whose king they provided.

In truth, it is hard to find comparative evidence. The Saxons who left Longobard Italy were denied, or even deprived, of their ‘rights’, and this was exactly what did not happen to the Rugians. With the Iuthungi we might come closer to the point. When they appear for the first time in 270, they vigorously deny that they are ‘half-breeds’ and not ‘pure and genuine’. Perhaps this statement can be understood in view of the popular etymology that explained the Alamanni as a hodgepodge of peoples by misrepresenting ‘al-men = full men’ as ‘al-men = all men’. Be that as it may, the Iuthungi originally clearly

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40 Wolfram, *Goths*, pp. 278ff., 301 and 352f.
41 Paulus Diaconus, *Historia Langobardorum*, III, 6, ed. Waitz and Bethmann, p. 95.
distinguished themselves from the Alamanni but nevertheless became part of the Alamannic tribal confederation in the fourth century. It is true that even then the luthungi were the only Alemanni who brought with them an ancient name. But the Gothic name was certainly at least equal to that of the Rugians. Barbarian history was a tale of the ‘deeds of brave men’, and the more generations it comprised the better. In this respect the Amal Goths were in the lead in the world of the peoples.

(7) So what? I do not have a conclusive answer, save that it was precisely the diversity and variety of this world of the peoples that could not be ignored for centuries to come. Procopius noted that all the peoples of the Vandal army, including the non-Germanic Alan, became Vandals in Spain. But rex Vandalorum et Alanorum is still attested as title of the Vandal kings shortly before 534. Those who codified the Longobard laws from 643 could not conceive of a Flavius rex but only of a tribal king as law-giver who addressed his Longobards and the other Italian barbarians as the excellentissimus rex gentis Langobardorum. Charlemagne followed his father as rex Francorum, as king of the Franks and their many peoples. But from June 774 to Christmas Day 800 he turned into a king of the Franks and Longobards and patrician of the Romans. Although a contemporary noted that the gens Langobardorum had lost Italy in 774, Charlemagne stayed rex Francorum et Langobardorum even as emperor until his death in January 814. Thus once again many peoples remained in a people, and an e pluribus unum was not really conceivable before the shaping of the constitutional national state. In present-day democratic Italy, for example, seventeen ethnic and linguistic groups live alongside the majority, but they are all Italian citizens with equal rights.
Though for a long time Christianity (very much with a capital C) and Ethnicity have been seen as separate conceptions that excluded each other in Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages, recent studies have brought the interaction of the two discourses more strongly into view. In some recent articles and papers Walter Pohl has pointed out the importance of the intellectual and spiritual potential of late antique and early medieval Christianities for the formation of ethnic identity as one of the key resources of political integration in the medieval West.2 Such a comparison of Christian and ethnic discourses might also be interesting on a methodological level, where the study of ethnicity can learn from historicizing Christian discourses in the late and post-Roman West. Here I am particularly thinking of Peter Brown’s work, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, where he studies the history of Western Christendom as the formation of just one christendom among many possible forms and traditions of Christian belief in the post-Roman Mediterranean.3 As different as they were, however, the various christendoms and micro-christendoms were all linked through the idea of belonging to the wider world of a universal Christianity. Ideas of a universal Christianity, in turn, could have been as different as the christendoms whose representatives and spokesmen sought to legitimize their particular forms and traditions as

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1 I would like to thank Peter Brown, Gerda Heydemann, Jamie Kreiner, Walter Pohl, Herwig Wolfram and Ian Wood for reading earlier versions of this chapter and for their as ever extremely helpful suggestions.


embodiments of a larger Christian whole. Consequently, the implementation and legitimation of particular Christian forms of beliefs depended on broader conceptualizations of a universal Christianity to which they were linked. I would suggest thinking about late antique and early medieval ethnic identities in a similar way, as attempts to represent local realities as manifestations of grander collectivities. Thus, we need not study only the changing and varying history of an ethnic identity, but also the changing history of ethnicity as the cultural and social conception of the world to which an ethnic identification was connected.

In order to explore ethnic identities and ethnicity as conspicuous historical processes and the dynamic relationship of ethnic identities and ethnicity, it is also important to explore their interaction with other forms of social identity. As Walter Pohl has recently pointed out in a fundamental article on new perspectives for research on early medieval ethnicity, the interplays with other forms of social identities, such as Christian, civic, regional or military, have to be studied as a crucial factor in the specific formation of ethnic identities and ethnicity:

Most identities have a decisive point of reference outside the group, the city, the land, the state, the army. Symbolic strategies of identification attach themselves to these figures that seem to represent the common denominator, the essence of the community. In ethnicity, however, the principle of distinction and the symbolical essence of the community is thought to lie in the human group itself. Its symbolism builds on kinship, blood, origin and fate. Distinctive features are perceived as expressions of an innermost self, an ingrained common nature. The mystique is in the people itself, not in any foundational object. Therefore ethnic bonds are mostly regarded as resistant to loss of homeland and political organisation or to the change of language, religion, culture or even ethnronym. It is a very powerful construction of community, but also a precarious one, because the evanescent mystique of the ethnic community has to be made evident in everyday life. It seldom survives in its pure form, rather it has to attach itself to other, more tangible forms of community – a common homeland, state or religion.

In this respect, studying the analogies between the rise of Western Christendom and the establishment of ethnicity as one of the key resources for political
integration in the post-Roman West can offer more than mere methodological suggestions. The two discourses were in fact closely related to each other. Studying them both as open-ended historical processes enables us to see why. Both discourses and their respective strategies of identification shared – if for different reasons – the precarious mystique of evanescence and imperfection. Whereas ethnic identity depended strongly on the matrix of a common past, which had constantly to be accommodated to changing social and political circumstances, Christian communities looked to a no less uncertain eschatological future. Thus the respective strategies of identification, which made Christian and ethnic communities evident in everyday life, tend to overlap with and to build on other macro-social mappings, not least with each other. Their precarious nature might be one of the reasons why interactions between the two discourses seem to have been particularly important for specifically Western formations of Christendom and ethnicity. As some recent case studies, which have been explored in the course of a larger project on ‘Ethnic Identities in the Early Middle Ages’ in Vienna, demonstrate, ethnic and Christian strategies of identification constantly built on or reacted to each other: relations between them range from direct competition in attempts to establish the one against the other as the main organizing principle of the world, to complementing each other in efforts to reconfigure the remaining resources of the Roman world.

The Frankish world of the early Middle Ages plays a special role in the investigation of these processes. Through its political success and the expansion of Frankish rule over half of Europe under the Carolingians, the Frankish world provided the medieval West with fundamental political, religious and social structures. This is particularly true for the changing meaning of ethnicity in the post-Roman world. This process proceeded through the numerous negotiations

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8 For this project on ‘Ethnic identities in the Early Middle Ages’, funded by the Wittgenstein prize, which was awarded to Walter Pohl in 2004, see Walter Pohl’s introduction to this volume.

9 See the contributions in the forthcoming volumes edited by Pohl and Heydemann, Strategies of Identification, and in particular Gerda Heydemann’s contribution to this volume on ethnicity in Cassiodorus’ Expositio Psalmorum, with further references to the literature on Christianity and ethnicity in the late Roman world.
and conflicts over the role and meaning of Frankish identity, through which Merovingian and Carolingian scribes and scholars continuously invested Frankish identity with new meaning and social prestige, and thus contributed to the long-lasting success of the Frankish name. Together with the striking political success of the Franks, the discourse of Frankish identity served to filter and transmit post-Roman ethnic experiences and experiments.\textsuperscript{10} Just as the christendoms in the post-Roman world developed their own ideas of a larger Christian world, which they sought to embody, articulations of Frankish identity also shaped the ‘larger whole’ of a tapestry of ethno-political units. They were connected to what we might call – in echoing the title The Rise of Western Christendom – the rise of Western Ethnicity.

The interplay and interaction of Christian and ethnic discourse in this process can be traced especially well in the historiographical texts written and revised in the Frankish kingdoms. As we shall see, their authors built different, and often competing, visions of community into their respective histories. But the medium of history also obliged their authors to embed their visions of community in a larger historical whole, where the relationship of ethnic identities to other social categories had to be taken into account. The clearest example for this also happens to be the oldest: the Histories of Gregory of Tours, the spectacular beginning of Merovingian historiography. In this text, the bishop of Tours, writing at the end of the sixth century, fashioned a radical Christian vision for the integration of the still young Merovingian regnum.\textsuperscript{11} In his Histories, Gregory put together a colourful collage of highly varied studies of Merovingian society, for the most part set during the period of Gregory’s own life.\textsuperscript{12} They were written

\textsuperscript{10} For a comprehensive investigation of this process, see Helmut Reimitz, \textit{Writing for the Future: History, Historiography and Identity in the Early Medieval Frankish world} (forthcoming).


\textsuperscript{12} Ian N. Wood, \textit{Gregory of Tours} (Bangor, 1994), pp. 2–4; Martin Heinzelmann, \textit{Gregor von Tours (538–594) ‘Zehn Bücher Geschichte’: Historiographie und Gesellschaftskonzept}
as Ten Books of Histories, presenting case histories in shorter or longer episodes and chapters, meant to analyse the perspectives and opportunities made available to Merovingian society, should its members seriously direct themselves towards a Christian vision of community. In Gregory’s Histories, a common future does not automatically proceed from a common past, but from a continual decision in favour of the Christian morality outlined by Gregory in his narratives. Nobody was free of flaws, not even King Gunthram, whom Gregory compared to a sacerdos domini; nobody was altogether lost, not even King Chilperic, the Herod and Nero of Gregory’s time; everyone made mistakes, including Gregory himself. Gregory developed a historical drama that amounted to a continual redefinition of identity. The decisive criterion for his Christian vision of community was not a one-off decision, but the continual striving towards the morals and values of the Christendom which he defined in his Histories.


15 Gregory of Tours, Historiae, VII, 47, ed. Krusch and Levison, pp. 366–8; where Gregory thought that the famous feud of the citizens of Tours Sichar and Chramnesind had been solved: Et sic altercatio terminum fecit. But the conflict went on, as Gregory himself tells us later in Historiae, IX, 19, ed. Krusch and Levison, pp. 432–4.

16 For Gregory’s spirituality see Brown, Rise of Western Christendom, pp. 154–65; on the eschatological perspective of the Histories, see Martin Heinzelmans, Gregory of Tours: History and Society in the Sixth Century, trans. C. Caroll (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 153–72; for an excellent study on the role of books and writing in this continual striving towards Christian morals in Gregory of Tours’ works, see Conrad Leyser, ‘Divine power flowed from this book: ascetic language and episcopal authority in Gregory of Tours’ Life of the Fathers’, in Kathleen Mitchell and Ian N. Wood (eds), The World of Gregory of Tours, Cultures, Beliefs and Traditions. Medieval and Early Modern Peoples (Leiden, Boston, Cologne, 2002),
Gregory’s effort and energy in establishing a Christian vision of community in his *Histories* has been thoroughly studied in some recent works. Yet relatively little attention has been paid to the effort and energy that Gregory devoted against alternative visions of community in his *Histories*. This is particularly true for the Frankish vision of community. As I have argued elsewhere at greater length, he actively prevented Frankish identity from unfolding in his *Histories* and from becoming a resource of integration for the Merovingian kingdom. As historical players, the Franks only appear after Gregory had developed the spiritual and social topography of Gaul through telling the history of the Christianization of its provinces. This Christian topography provided the framework for the establishment of Frankish rulers in the former Roman provinces of Gaul. But at the same time he carefully avoids giving the Franks a common history grounded in an ancient and mythical past. In a long and lengthy discussion on the impossibility of finding reliable sources for the history of the first Frankish kings, Gregory shows that only after their crossing of the Rhine, on Roman soil in Gaul, did the Franks first have kings; only then can they be located in time and space. For the earlier period there are only isolated and discordant reports, and the history of the Franks during that time must remain unclear and uncertain.

At the same time, Gregory denies the Franks any access to Christian resources of salvation before their contact with Gregory’s Christianity and the Church of Gaul. In the chapter immediately following the lengthy discussion of the impossibility of writing a Frankish history before their arrival in Gaul, he also discusses their paganism. Nearly every paragraph in this chapter is introduced by a lament that the Franks had no prophets and teachers like the people of Israel and could not receive God’s words like the chosen people had through Moses, Habakuk or David. As there is no ancient past of the Franks as a defined community, there is also no Christian providence in the history of the Franks.

After Gregory finally let the Franks have kings on former Roman territory, their kingdoms are only part of a world of kingdoms (one of which Gregory identified as that of the *rex Romanorum* Syagrius), which were as volatile as they were vulnerable. Such regna could vanish swiftly, as did that of Syagrius, or even more dramatically, like that of the Arian Vandals, whose sad history and

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17 See above, n. 12.
18 Reimitz, ‘Cultural brokers of a common past’.
19 Gregory of Tours, *Historiae*, II, 9, ed. Krusch and Levison, pp. 52–8, the chapter which is by far the longest in the second book starts with the sentence: *De Francorum vero regibus, quis fuerit primus, a multis ignoratur*.
dramatic end is summed up in two chapters in which Gregory places unusual stress on the ethnic denominator of the *regnum Wandalorum*. For the future of a *regnum Francorum*, the turning point is the decision of their king Clovis to convert to Catholicism, a decision that Gregory portrays in a careful construction as the key factor in the king’s military and political success. Other Frankish *regna*, in contrast, vanish. It is actually the newly christianized Clovis himself who kills the other Frankish kings, some of them close relatives, as Gregory states, in order to bring them under his rule. The *Histories* clearly demonstrate that it was not the mutual bonds created by Frankish identity, but the conversion to the correct form of Christian belief that secured the providential mission of the *regnum* ruled by the kings of the Franks. This is also made explicit by Gregory after the death of Clovis. In summing up Clovis’ victories and successes Gregory states that while the enemies of the king had lost their *regna*, *patriae*, *populi* and, what is even worse, their souls, Clovis the confessor extended his *regnum* per *totas Gallias* and his life to an eternal existence in the *regnum Dei*. On Clovis’ way to salvation, however, the Franks drop away as a sharply definable group in the *regnum*.

Whereas Franks appear as collectives in Gregory’s narrative when he describes the establishment of their kingdoms, he avoids ascribing agency to the Franks after the conversion of Clovis. Already in the account of Clovis’ baptism Gregory avoids addressing the *populus* that was baptized with the king as Franks, mentioning only 3,000 *de exercitu suo*. It is noteworthy that Gregory does not once use the ethnic denominator to describe Clovis’ rule. When at war, Clovis does not lead the Franks, but his own *exercitus*, with whom he fights and defeats above all Arian kings. *Franci* hardly appear at all, and even where they do appear, they are not under the rule of Clovis. The traitors who turned their king Ragnachar over to Clovis are described as *Franci*. The king is put to death, but Clovis betrays the king’s Frankish betrayers in turn. In the following books the name of the Franks does not appear very often. It is never used to describe the agency of a group with a particular position within the *regnum*. From the end of the second book onwards the Franks become more and more integrated in the social texture of Gaul as one social group among many.

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26 The chapter following the baptism reports a war against the Burgundian kings subsequently followed by the war against the Visigothic kingdom: Gregory of Tours, *Historiae*, II, 32 and 37, ed. Krusch and Levison, pp. 78–81, 85–8.
28 Martin Heinzelmann, ‘Die Franken und die fränkische Geschichte in der Perspektive der Historiographie Gregors von Tours’, in Anton Scharer and Georg
Gregory of Tours is famous for his idiosyncrasies, but these idiosyncrasies were well entrenched in the society for which he wrote. As a number of studies have shown, Gregory, as bishop of Tours, was tightly interwoven in the politics of the Frankish regna which he described and shaped in his Histories. Our only source for Gregory’s deep involvement in Merovingian politics is actually his own text. From the beginning of the fifth book, he is not only reporting the events as the author of the narrative, but presents himself as the bishop of the prestigious church of Tours and one of the most influential figures of the kingdom. We may therefore assume that his literary Spielräume – his room/s for manoeuvre as an author – were related to his political and social experience. This might also have been true for the Spielräume that were available for the coexistence of different social identities in the Merovingian kingdoms. A Merovingian king whose position was equidistant from all social and ethnic groups appears to have already conformed to the expectations of the Gaulish elites at the time of Clovis’ baptism at the beginning of the sixth century. Bishop Remigius of Reims, along with Bishop Avitus of Vienne in the Burgundian kingdom, wrote letters to the newly baptized King Clovis expressing their hope that the king as caput populorum and princeps gentium would show equal justice towards all the different individuals and groups of the kingdom.

But this may indeed have been the policy followed by the early Merovingian kings. On the surviving seal ring of Clovis’ father Childeric, who ruled as the regular and welcome Roman commander of the province of Belgica Secunda, the intitulatio rex appears without the ethnic denominator Francorum. The title
of the oldest Frankish law code – *lex Salica* – could also be evidence that they avoided identifying a Frankish or ethnic tradition too strongly with the *regnum*.\(^{35}\) As Stefan Esders has shown, this was also the position affirmed by the general oath of loyalty that was supposed to be sworn by the entire free population, and often expressly by the different ethnic groups within a single administrative district, among them the Franks.\(^{36}\) Thus it looks as if the *regnum*, as the focal point for the integration of the diverse groups *per totas Gallias*, was carefully and deliberately left ill-defined by the early Frankish kings themselves. Gregory at least considered it still possible at the end of the sixth century to use it as a cover for his rather radical vision of a Christian community. In his *Histories*, the *regnum* provided the political framework for a Christian society whose constant moral exercise and efforts, for which the bishops as well as the kings were held responsible, were the decisive factor for its providence.

Gregory did not only use the social *Spielräume* available to him in the Merovingian *regnum* in writing his *Histories*. With their great success in the following centuries he also helped to maintain these *Spielräume*. Soon after Gregory’s death, the *Histories* became the reference work for the history of Gaul under Frankish rule. No alternative history from the sixth century has come down to us, and all subsequent writers of Frankish history had to work either with or against his historiographical legacy. As Martin Heinzelmann and Pascal Bourgain have pointed out, there are few other historiographical works that have a transmission ‘so varied in shape and form, so fragmented and yet with so many early copies extant’.\(^{37}\)

From the Merovingian period alone, six copies


survive from around 700 and the first half of the eighth century, an unusually high number for this period.

These survivals, however, are mostly witnesses not to the original, but to an early revision of Gregory’s text. Though at the end of his text Gregory had threatened all who omitted or rewrote passages from his work with horrible fates, involving the Devil himself and ‘the second coming of ... Christ and the Day of Judgement’, this was exactly how subsequent generations treated his Histories. Soon after the death of the bishop of Tours, Merovingian compilers produced a shortened, six-book version of Gregory’s Ten Books of History. It includes only the first six books of Gregory’s Decem libri and these, in turn, lack several chapters. The genesis of the six-book version of Gregory’s Histories has often been explained in terms of a conscious effort to erase or reduce the clerical or ecclesiastical content of the work, in order to rewrite it for an audience who wanted to read a history of the Franks and their kings. If this was the case, this audience must have been rather disappointed. Though it was far from how Gregory wanted his Histories to be transmitted, the Merovingian compilers nevertheless continued his project of historiographical experimentation within the outline he himself had defined. At no point in these manuscripts are the Franks or their kings given a firmer place in their regnum and their history than Gregory had allowed for. And while the numerous abridgements remove a large number of episodes pertaining to the spiritual and ecclesiastical history of southern Gaul in particular, the position of the Franks and their kings in the preserved chapters is no more clearly focused than in Gregory’s original version.

Thus the aim of the Merovingian compilers does not seem to be to provide a stronger focus on the history of the Franks or their kings, but to reconfigure Gregory’s stories in order to adapt them to the changed socio-political settings of the seventh century. So they had to cut the stories off from their roots in the distinctive spiritual and social networks of southern Gaul, which Gregory had used to legitimize his position as bishop, author and prophet in his narrative. But the Merovingian compilers did not want to abandon Gregory’s vision of


community. It was the will to preserve the vision of community that Gregory had formulated (if from a distinctive Southern Gallic perspective that was no longer relevant to their times), not the intention to undermine it, that motivated (and possibly legitimized) the revision by the Merovingian compilers. 41

The amount of work involved in actually combining Gregory’s narrative with a Frankish vision of community is best shown by the two other historiographical texts that survive from the Merovingian period: the Chronicle of Fredegar, dating, in its oldest surviving version, from the 660s, 42 and the Liber historiae Francorum, compiled in the 720s. 43 Both texts built upon the authority of Gregory and his Histories, which they expressly cited as their source. 44 But in order to use Gregory’s text for their very different versions of Frankish history, they were forced to revise it fundamentally.

The Chronicle of Fredegar contradicted Gregory directly to counter his claim that nothing could be said on the earlier history of the Franks. In their (sometimes word for word) excerpts from Gregory, the chroniclers provided the Franks with a mythological past that defined them – like the Romans – as the descendants of Trojan heroes. 45 Little wonder that our oldest extant written narrative of a common fate and destiny for the Franks’ origins was transmitted


42 Fredegar, Chronicae cum continuationibus, ed. Bruno Krusch, MGH SS rerum Merovingicarum, 2 (Hanover, 1888), pp. 1–193; for the date of the oldest extant redaction, see Roger Collins, Die Fredegar-Chroniken, MGH Studien und Texte, 44 (Hanover, 2007), and Ian N. Wood, ‘Fredegar’s Fables’, in Anton Scharer and Georg Scheibelreiter (eds), Historiographie im frühen Mittelalter, Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung, 32 (Vienna, Munich, 1994), pp. 359–66 (for a date in the early 660s).


44 Fredegar, Chronicae, III, ed. Krusch, p. 89 with note a: liber quartus, quod est scarpsum de cronica Gregorii episcopi Toronaci. Liber historiae Francorum, ed. Krusch, p. 241, with notes a and c; see below, n. 56. In both cases, however, the authors used the Merovingian six-book version.

in a chronicle written from an outright anti-royal perspective. In contrast to
the continuous history of the Franks from when they left Troy, the continuity of
the Merovingian royal family is repeatedly and seriously called into question.46
On their long path through history from Troy to the Rhine, the Franks even lost
their kings, but they were still able to preserve their identity and freedom.47 From
the continuous history of the Franks in the past, the Chronicle also develops their
role in stabilizing the regnum in the Merovingian present. Even in the fourth
book of the Chronicle, the so-called ‘independent’ part of the narrative, the
Merovingian kings can only guarantee the continuity and success of the regnum
with the help of the Franks. When disputes between the Merovingian kings
endanger stability and peace in the regnum, it is repeatedly a iudicum Francorum,
an assembly of noble Franks, which has to find a solution in order to avoid a
military confrontation.48

As I have argued elsewhere at greater length, in the seventh century it took
more than the insertion and alteration of stories to combine Gregory’s Histories
with a Frankish vision of community. The stories also had to be united with a vision
of the world in which the identity of a gens Francorum made sense and could be
presented as superior to other ethnic identities as well as to other forms of social

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46 Ian N. Wood, ‘Deconstructing the Merovingian family’, in Richard Corradini,
Maximilian Diesenberger and Helmut Reimitz (eds), The Construction of Communities in
the Early Middle Ages: Texts, Resources, Artefacts, The Transformation of the Roman World,
12 (Leiden, New York, 2003), pp. 149–71; Maximilian Diesenberger and Helmut Reimitz,
‘Zwischen Vergangenheit und Zukunft. Momente des Königtums in der merowingischen
Historiographie’, in Franz-Reiner Erkens (ed.), Das frühmittelalterliche Königtum,
Reallexikon für germanische Altertumskunde, Ergänzungsbände, 49 (Berlin, New York,

47 Fredegar, Chronicae, II, 6, ed. Krusch, p. 46; the story contrasts many accounts,
where the continuity of a people is linked to kingship, see, for instance, Gregory of
Tours, who mentions that the Alemans after their king had been killed in the battle
against Clovis, immediately submitted to Clovis (Historiae II, 30, ed. Krusch, p. 76). For
early kingship(s) in the Roman and barbarian worlds, see Stefanie Dick, Der Mythos vom
‘germanischen’ Königtums. Studien zur Herrschaftsorganisation bei den germanischsprachigen
Barbaren, Reallexikon für germanische Altertumskunde, Ergänzungsbände, 60 (Berlin, New
York, 2008), and Wolfram, Gotische Studien, pp. 15–65; see also Karl Ferdinand Werner,
‘Volk, Nation, III–V’, in Otto Brunner, Werner Conze and Reinhard Koselleck (eds),
Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache Deutschlands,
vol. 7 (Stuttgart, 1992), pp. 195f.; Reinhard Wenskus, Stammesbildung und Verfassung. Das
Werden der frühmittelalterlichen Gentes (Stuttgart, 1977), pp. 12f., 47ff., 66ff., with further
references.

48 Fredegar, Chronicae, IV, 37, 40 and 53, ed. Krusch, pp. 138, 140 and 146.
identity. Therefore, it was necessary to embed both the excerpts from Gregory and the new historical accounts in a fresh narrative structure. Whereas Gregory explicitly positioned himself in relation to the *Ecclesiastical History* of Eusebius, the *Chronicle of Fredegar* used another model of Christian historiography, the Christian world chronicle. This model also derived from Eusebius, but survived above all in the form of translations and continuations in the Latin West. With this 'world chronicle', Eusebius and later his translator and continuator for the Latin West Jerome established the model of a multi-focus history laid out in parallel columns, *fila*, dealing with several *regna* simultaneously. The Eusebius/Jerome chronicle inspired numerous continuations in the late antique and early medieval West, which are called Christian 'universal chronicles' in modern handbooks. And indeed these chronicles combine the history of the Old Testament with the history of the *regna* and peoples of the world, their rise and fall and, in the centuries after Christ, their dissolution and completion in the Christian-Roman Empire.

In post-Roman times, the model could easily accommodate ethnic diversity, too. Thus the compilers of the *Chronicle of Fredegar* reworked the text of the Eusebius/Jerome chronicle just as they rewrote Gregory’s. They integrated new histories of *regna gentium* such as those of the Franks, Burgundians, Saxons and Persians, and continued them throughout the whole compilation until the end of the *Chronicle*. Through omissions, additions and textual changes, the Franks and other ethnic groups figure as the most important composite elements of the *regnum*. With the particular profile of the Franks in this history, the agency assumed by, and attributed to, the Franks, they became the main factor for the integration of the Merovingian *regnum*, and – with their continuous history

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49 For a more detailed comparison and discussion of the Fredegar chronicle with Gregory of Tours’ *Histories*, see Reimitz, ‘Cultural brokers of a common past’.


visions of community in the post-roman world

reaching back as far as that of the Romans and linked to the biblical past – its stability and providence.52

Within the context of this careful integration of the Franks into a larger historiographical world of gentes, the compilers combined their ethnic vision for the Frankish kingdoms with Gregory’s vision of Christendom. The story of Clovis’ conversion is briefly retold, summing up the main elements of Gregory’s narrative: the nearly lost battle against the Alemanni, Clovis’ promise to convert if God would help him, and finally the baptism of Clovis by the bishop of Reims, Remigius. Here, however, the compilers also expanded their short summary. They added some sentences that not only doubled the number of Clovis’ followers given by Gregory to 6,000, but also added that these men were Franks.53 And they ended their account of the baptism with an additional anecdote: during the baptism, after Remigius had read the story of the passion of Christ, Clovis became so upset that he even interrupted the ceremony to comment: ‘If I had been present with my Franks – cum Francis meis – I would have taken revenge.’54 The chroniclers close the chapter with the statement that these words clearly proved him to be a real Christian. But they might just as well have intended to present Clovis as a real Frank.

The Chronicle of Fredegar, which in its oldest extant redaction was compiled in the eastern parts of the Frankish realm, was not the only conception of Frankish history in the Merovingian kingdoms to build upon Gregory’s text. In the West a much more sharply defined idea of Frankishness had been articulated, in which the ‘real’ Franks were seen as the elites in the centres of the western Frankish kingdom.55 In the first decades of the eighth century this conception of the Franks was given a historiographical account which seems to have been directed against both older visions – the broader and more open definition of the Chronicle of Fredegar and the anti-ethnic vision of Gregory of Tours. In the Liber historiae Francorum, Gregory’s claim is contradicted no less clearly than in the Chronicle of Fredegar. This text, which is presented as Gregory of Tours’ own work in a number

52 See Reimitz, ‘Cultural brokers of a common past’. For the question of agency in definitions of ethnicity and ethnic identity, see Pohl, ‘Strategies of identification’.
of quite early manuscripts, begins with a sentence that made it absolutely clear that the question about the origins of the Franks and their kings should not be left open: *Principium regum Francorum eorumque origine vel gentium illarum ac gesta proferamus.* With that sentence the text introduces an alternative version of the Frankish descent from the heroes of Troy to the *Chronicle of Fredegar*, which is set just before another réécriture of Gregory of Tours’ *Histories*. The self-confidence with which the *Liber historiae Francorum* contradicted Gregory’s historiographical authority, and his claims about the early Franks, is typical of this text. As briefly mentioned, its author had very clear notions as to who should count as the definitive Franks of his contemporaries: the elites of the western kingdom between the Seine and Oise.

From the beginning until the very end of the text, these Franks, together with their kings, are the main agents of history. This is particularly obvious in the réécriture of Gregory’s stories about Clovis in the *Liber historiae Francorum*. Whereas Gregory had avoided associating Clovis’ agency with that of the Franks throughout his narrative, the compilers of the *Liber historiae Francorum* weaved them carefully into the verbatim quotations from Gregory. Gregory describes Clovis’ rise as a series of victories over other peoples, but in the *Liber*, the victories are won by the Franks together with their king. Thus the battle during which Clovis swore to convert to Christianity was a conflict between Franks and Alemanns. When the *Liber* deals with Clovis’ baptism it uses many direct citations from Gregory, for example for both Clovis is the new Constantine. But the *Liber* left out the sentence where Gregory compares the cleansing of baptism to the washing away of leprosy. Instead, as in the *Chronicle of Fredegar* before it, the name of the Franks was added to the end of the story. But the author of the *Liber* does not only double the number of the baptized people as the compilers

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56 For example, Vaticanus Palat. 966 (ca. 800): *Incipit liber sancti Gregorii Turonensis episcopi gesta regum Francorum*; Vaticanus Ottob. 663 (ca. 800): *Incipit liber sancti Gorii (!) Toroni episcopi gesta regum Francorum*; Vaticanus Reg. lat. 713 (ca. 800): *Incipit liber hystoriae Francorum a Gregorio Turonensis urbis episcope edita*; cf. *Liber historiae Francorum*, ed. Krusch, p. 241 with notes a and c (the manuscripts are the manuscripts B2a2-B2a1, A3b in the classification of Krusch).


58 See n. 55 above.


of the Fredegar chronicle did; in the Liber it is the whole people of the Franks – cunctus populus Francorum – who were baptized along with Clovis.62

This newly constructed, shared Christian future of the Franks and their kings is continued in the narrative of the next chapter. Clovis, cum multo exercitu Francorum, immediately turns against the Arian brother-kings of the Burgundians, Gundobad and Godegisel.63 Gregory of Tours also recorded a campaign against the Burgundians. His version, however, is different. According to Gregory, Clovis allies himself with one of the Burgundian kings, Godegisel, against the latter’s brother Gundobad, because Godegisel had promised Clovis tribute and territory. The embarrassing alliance with the Arian king comes to nothing in Gregory’s version, which, considering the anti-Arian stance of the bishop of Tours, is hardly surprising.64 In the Liber historiae Francorum, by contrast, the story of the united campaign of the Franks and their glorious king against the Burgundians comes to a happy ending and Clovis returns home with a great deal of treasure.65

Clearly, both texts, the Chronicle of Fredegar as well as the Liber historiae Francorum, turned Gregory’s vision for the Merovingian regnum around. But instead of writing an entirely new history, they also built on it in several respects. Though their authors fundamentally revised the text of Gregory in their réécritures, they also explicitly referred to him as the author of the text.66 It seems that they did not want to disregard the spiritual and historiographical authority of Gregory’s Histories.67 Through the authority associated with them, Gregory’s stories provided a valuable resource: their providential elements

63 The Liber historiae Francorum clearly builds here on the religious contrasts of Franks and Burgundians that go back to Gregory of Tours. For the much more complex religious situation in the regna, see Ian N. Wood, ‘The Latin culture of Gundobad and Sigismund’, in Dietrich Hägermann, Wolfgang Haubrichs and Jörg Jarnut (eds), Akkulturation (Berlin, 2004), pp. 367–80, and his forthcoming ‘Arians, Catholics and Vouillé’, which will be published in a collection on Vouillé edited by Ralph Mathisen and Danuta Shanzer.
64 Gregory of Tours, Historiae, II, 32–3, ed. Krusch and Levison, pp. 79–81; Edward James, ‘Gregory of Tours and ‘Arianism’’, in Andrew Cain and Noel Lenski (eds), The Power of Religion in Late Antiquity (Farnham, Burlington, 2009), pp. 327–38.
65 Liber historiae Francorum, 16, ed. Krusch, p. 266: Chlodoveus vero, ablatis thesauris cum preda maxima reversus est victor; the reworking of the text, which was made about ten years after the older version of the Liber in the late 730s adds cum Francorum exercitu.
66 See above, nn. 44 and 56.
67 Nearly all titles in the manuscripts of the third book of the Chronicle of Fredegar with Gregory’s epitome and the Liber historiae Francorum mention Gregory as bishop of Tours; the revised version of the Liber, written in the late 730s, even characterizes him as sanctus Gregorius; Fredegar, Chronicae, III, ed. Krusch, p. 89; Liber historiae Francorum, ed. Krusch, p. 241. The spiritual authority of Gregory’s Histories was still acknowledged in the eleventh century by Fulbert of Chartres: see Karl Ferdinand Werner, ‘Gott, Herrscher und Historiograph. Der Geschichtsschreiber als Interpret des Wirkens Gottes in der Welt und Ratgeber der Könige (4.–12. Jahrhundert)’, in Ernst-Dieter Hehl (ed.), Deus qui mutat
merged into the visions of Frankish identity and ethnicity of the *Chronicle of Fredegar* and the *Liber historiae Francorum*.

By analysing the differences between the two texts, we can also detect another reason for the appeal of Gregory’s *Histories* for later historians. Precisely because Gregory did not bind his radical Christian vision to the history of a particular social group, but devised it as a vision for the integration of all the different social groups and groupings in a Christian *regnum*, his *Histories* could easily be incorporated into different concepts of Frankish identity. Gregory thus handed down to future generations of historiographers – and even those who wanted to write a Frankish history – the very flexibility he had been able to use for the articulation of his own vision of community.

In the formation, reformation and transmission of Gregory’s text, these *Spielräume* were not only constantly defined and redefined, but also preserved. This pertains not only to texts merging Gregory’s vision into a history of the Franks, but also to the transmission of the *Histories* (or parts of them) as he had actually written them. Particularly when investigating the interplays of Christian and ethnic visions of community in the Frankish world, we should not forget that interest was never lost in the text Gregory had actually written. The manuscript transmission clearly shows that the Merovingian six-book version must have been extremely popular at the time when the *Chronicle of Fredegar* and the *Liber historiae Francorum* were written. Two complete, two near-complete and one fragmentary copy survive from this period. Two of these were supplemented with the missing Books 7–10 during the eighth century. The unusually high number of Merovingian copies of this version provides an insight into the competition between Gregory’s vision of community and the new visions articulated by the *Chronicle of Fredegar* and the *Liber historiae Francorum* during the seventh and eighth centuries.

This process continued into the Carolingian period as documented by the transmission of the *Histories*, which saw the text completely revised afresh. The oldest of these Carolingian versions is a manuscript from Lorsch, written in the first decades of the ninth century. The manuscript appears to have been the project of several scribes, and was in many places corrected by a proof reader after they had finished their work. They had access to the Merovingian tempora. *Menschen und Institutionen im Wandel des Mittelalters, Festschrift für Alfons Becker* (Sigmaringen, 1987), pp. 1–31, at 28f.


69 The manuscript has been published on the homepage of the University Library of the Ruprechts Karl Universität Heidelberg, at http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/cpl864. See Bernhard Bischoff, *Die Abtei Lorsch im Spiegel ihrer Handschriften* (Lorsch, 1989), pp. 31f.; description of the manuscript, p. 32; Heinzelmann and Bourgain, ‘*L’œuvre de
six-book version as well as to a longer, presumably complete edition of the History. The Lorsch compilers did not prefer one over the other version, but used both to construct a new selection of stories from Gregory’s work. They took their material from all ten books, but divided the selected chapters into only nine books. As the tenth book of Gregory’s History they added the fourth book of the Chronicle of Fredegar. This new tenth book also included the first 24 chapters of the Continuations of Fredegar, added by Carolingian scribes to legitimate the Carolingian rise to power. Thus the historical narrative ended in 741, the year of the death of the Carolingian prince Charles Martel and the start of the rule of his son Pippin, soon to become the first Carolingian king of the Franks.

At first glance, the combination of these texts seems odd. With the fourth book of the Chronicle of Fredegar the compilers turned to a narrative that portrays the Franks as the leading ethnic community among several others, and the focal point of the stability and future of the regnum Francorum. This fits well with the Carolingian Continuations which were added to the text. In the fourth book of Chronicle of Fredegar, the Carolingian ancestors Pippin and Arnulf are described as two eminently prominent representatives of these Franks. In a similar vein, the Continuations present their successor Charles Martel and the Franks as a successful community. In a remarkably monotonous piece of rhetoric, they describe, in a series of short, successive chapters, the triumphal history of the Carolingian princeps Charles Martel. Together with all the Franks, he succeeded in reconquering territories and peoples that had been lost by lazy Merovingian kings, and in re-establishing the unity of the Frankish kingdom. However, as the broader historiographical framework for this success story, the Lorsch compilers did not choose the first three books of the Chronicle of Fredegar, with their ethnic rendering of the world and the mythical past of the Franks. Instead, they carefully integrated this success story into their selection of Gregory’s vision.


70 Rosamond McKitterick, History and Memory in the Carolingian World (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 133–55.


It is still possible today to observe the care the compilers took to assemble their text. At some points, where the scribes had too hastily followed their exemplar of the Merovingian six-book version, they had obviously missed out chapters from Gregory’s, which the editors of this Carolingian version wanted to include in the text. The codicological autopsy clearly shows that some folios were added later.73 Most notably, in the second book, the Carolingian compilers originally skipped (like their Merovingian predecessors) the story of the flight of Bishop Quintianus to the Merovingian kingdom. Quintianus was bishop of Rodez (d. ca. 525), which at that time was under the rule of the Arian king of the Visigoths. When he was accused of wanting to bring his bishopric under the rule of Clovis and the Franks, he fled to Clermont, Gregory of Tours’ home city, where he later even became bishop.74 Though it was originally not included in the selection, the editors of the historiographical workshop in Lorsch later decided to include it in their version of Gregory, and inserted it into the compendium on a separate folium.75 The addition reflects the general tendency of the compendium very well. The story fits well with the emphasis on the Franks, an emphasis also evident through the addition of the Chronicle of Fredegar and its Continuations to Gregory’s work in the manuscript. But the story also underlines the fact that it was the Christendom of Gaul that formed the basis for founding and expanding mutual loyalties in the regnum Francorum. And just like the interest in the story of Quintianus, the selection of chapters from Gregory by the Lorsch compilers demonstrates a strong interest in the histories of the saints of southern Gaul, many of whom, like the one about Quintianus, fell victim to the abridgements of the Merovingian six-book version.76

The interests exemplified by the re-addition of the Quintianus episode make good sense when we take into account the context of the manuscript’s production. The monastery of Lorsch had from its beginnings close ties to the bishopric of Metz. The monastery, founded in 764, was from the start placed under the jurisdiction of Metz, in the person of bishop Chrodegang, who also became its first abbot and sent monks from his own foundation, Gorze, to the new monastery.77 As Bernhard Bischoff has shown there must also have been close contacts and lively exchange between the two libraries and scriptoria.78 This was particularly true for the time when towards the end of the eighth century, the Metz community sought to establish shared origins of the bishops of

73 See Heidelberg, Pal. lat. 864, fos. 8, 9 and 14.
74 Gregory of Tours, Historiae, II, 36, ed. Krusch and Levison, pp. 84f.
75 Heidelberg, Pal. lat. 864, fol. 23a v.
77 Matthew Innes, State and Society in the Early Middle Ages: The Middle Rhine Valley 400–1000 (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 51–9; for Metz, Lorsch and the Carolingians, see Barbara Rosenwein, Negotiating Space: Power, Restraint and Privileges of Immunity in Early Medieval Europe (Manchester, 1999), pp. 112–18.
78 Bischoff, Die Abtei Lorsch, pp. 36f., 61.
Metz with the family of the Carolingian rulers. A key figure in this genealogical construction was Bishop Arnulf of Metz, who was explicitly named in the fourth book of the *Chronicle of Fredegar* as a member of the *iudicium Francorum* that mediated in the conflict between the Frankish kings Chlothar II and Dagobert I. In the same text, Arnulf also appeared as one of the most important members of the group supporting Chlothar II against his Merovingian rivals (above all the powerful Queen Brunhild) to take over the rule of all of the kingdoms in 613. At the end of the eighth century at the latest, the Carolingians cultivated the memory of Arnulf as one of their ancestors. In a text most likely written in Metz in the 780s, the lineage shared by Arnulf and his Carolingian descendants is described with the phrase *ex nobilissimo fortissimoque Francorum stemmate*. Not much later, yet another genealogy written at Metz labels Arnulf’s ancestry as *ex genere senatorum*. This is precisely the phrase frequently used in Gregory’s work for members of the episcopal and civic elites in southern Gaul, not least for members of his own family. As Otto Gerhard Oexle has shown, this genealogical text not only borrowed Gregory’s phrase, but relied heavily on stories taken from his *Histories*. Furthermore the later genealogy skipped the reference to a common origin from Troy with a genealogy of Arnulf in which Aquitanian saints figured prominently as the ancestors of the Carolingians and the bishops of Metz. Oexle also observed that particular interest in the genealogical construction and its underlying history is documented during the episcopacy of

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79 *Fredegar, Chronicae*, IV, 53, ed. Krusch, p. 146; for the *iudicum Francorum* in the Fredegar chronicle, see above, p. 120.


85 Pauli Warnefridi liber de episcopis Mettensibus, ed. Pertz, p. 264.
Bishop Drogo (822–55/56), the son of Charlemagne and half brother of Emperor Louis the Pious.86

Yet the construction of the genealogy and the intensified interest in Gregory’s spiritual topography of Gaul both at Metz and at Lorsch went far beyond linking a single Aquitanian genealogy of the bishops of Metz to the Frankish genealogy of the Carolingians. It also connected the providential mission of Gregory’s Christendom to the framework of the Carolingian Empire after 800. This involved not only the suggestion, but the moral demand that the future was to be safeguarded through continual care for this Christendom. As with Gregory, this is based upon the admonition that it is the duty of the rulers to maintain and strengthen the religio.87 But in contrast to Gregory, through the continuation of his vision with the text of the Chronicle of Fredegar and its Carolingian continuations, the political frame in which this moral demand is to be achieved is ultimately defined as the regnum Francorum.88

Even so, the historical narrative of the Lorsch compendium was conceived as a historia ecclesiastica, which is also clear from an alteration to the manuscript at the start of the text. The title of the first book originally ran incipit liber primus historiarum, but was changed by a contemporary hand to liber primus historiae ecclesiasticae.89 By contrast, the second oldest surviving Carolingian version of Gregory’s Histories already describes the text as the Gesta Francorum.90 This manuscript was written around the middle of the ninth century in the monastery of St Hubert in the Ardennes.91 Like the Lorsch manuscript, it contains a selection from the ten books of Gregory, to which the fourth book of the Chronicle of Fredegar up to chapter 24 has been added. It is not a copy of the Lorsch manuscript, but an equally careful and independent selection.92 Whereas the Lorsch compilers were especially interested in episodes from the region of Clermont, these were largely ignored by the St Hubert scribes. Instead, some of the chapters on the

87 Gregory of Tours, Historiae, X, 16, ed. Krusch and Levison, p. 505.
88 For the electric relationship of Christianity, the gens Francorum and the Frankish Empire in the time of the production of the compendium of Lorsch, see Mayke de Jong, The Penitential State Authority and Atonement in the Age of Louis the Pious, 814–840 (Cambridge, 2009).
89 Heidelberg, Pal. lat. 864, fol. 2r.
92 For a comprehensive comparison of the two versions in the manuscript of Heidelberg and Namur, see my forthcoming Writing for the Future.
prestigious bishopric of Tours were included, which had in turn been passed over in Lorsch. It also seems that the effort to present Gregory’s church history as *Gesta Francorum*, as suggested by the title, had an influence on the specific compilation of the text in the manuscript. Thus, for example, the story of the baptism of Clovis breaks off after the sentence *Procedit novus Constantinus* and continues only in the middle of the next chapter with the campaign of Clovis against the Burgundians. The effect of this omission was certainly similar to the réécriture of Gregory’s narrative in the *Liber historiae Francorum*: the war against the Burgundians was presented as the logical consequence of the king’s recent conversion to Nicean Christianity. At the same time, the compilers of St Hubert – again like the *Liber historiae Francorum* – suppressed Gregory’s comments that Clovis had, through his baptism, been washed clean of the leprosy and dirt of paganism. The editors of Gregory in St Hubert also chose to suppress this aspect of the Frankish past at another place: the chapter in which Gregory wrote extensively about the pagan past of the Franks was similarly cut.

The specific selection made for the manuscript from St Hubert served as a model for the editors of yet another Carolingian version. It is a large historiographical compendium that is extant in a tenth-century copy written in St Bertin, but seems to have been originally composed at the end of the ninth century in Rheims. Without doubt, it is the most spectacular example of the rearrangement of Gregory’s *Histories*. In this case, chapters were not only omitted as a whole, but continually substituted with passages from the *Liber historiae Francorum*. For instance, in place of the chapter regarding the paganism of the Franks, the Frankish origin myth from the *Liber historiae Francorum* was substituted.

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95 St Omer, Bibliothèque municipale 697+706, a codex that is today preserved in two parts, of which the first part (cod. 697) contains Eutrop, *Historia Romana*; Marcellinus Comes, *Chronicon*; *Notitia Galliarum*, while the second part contains Gregory of Tours, *Historiae*; Fredegar IV, *cum continuationibus* c. 24; *Annales regni Francorum*; *Annales Bertiniani*. The extant manuscript was written in St Bertin at the end of the tenth century, but is a copy of a historiographical export from Rheims. For a longer discussion of the layers of the extant manuscript, see my forthcoming *Writing for the Future*; for a good description, see the edition of the *Annales Bertiniani*, *Annales de Saint-Bertin*, ed. Felix Grat, Jeanne Vieillard and Suzanne Clémencet (Paris, 1964), pp. xxii–xxxviii; see also the discussion of the manuscript tradition in the English translation of the *Annales Bertiniani* by Janet L. Nelson (trans.), *The Annals of St Bertin* (Manchester, 1991), pp. 15f.

96 St Omer, Bibliothèque municipale 706, fols 21ra–23vb.
As can be seen in the edition of the narrative of Clovis’ baptism in the manuscript in the Appendix to this chapter, this key moment of the history of the Frankish regnum was similarly rearranged, again relying on excerpts from the *Liber historiae Francorum*. As in the compendium from St Hubert, Gregory’s characterization of Clovis’ pagan prehistory was deliberately excluded. In its place, we find the passage from the *Liber*, stating that the whole people of the Franks – *cunctus populus Francorum* – were baptized. The rest of the chapter is missing, as in the manuscript from St Hubert, but the Burgundian wars are again told with help from the *Liber historiae Francorum*. Here, however, as in the manuscript from St Hubert, Clovis’ alliance with the Arian Burgundian king Godegisel is not mentioned; instead, the *novus Constantinus* Clovis fights, from the start, against the two Arian kings. The passage gives a good impression of the finesses with which the compilers chose and arranged the texts of the compendium. Many other examples could be added to demonstrate that the editors handled the spiritual and ecclesiastical resources of identity as carefully as they had integrated the Frankish origin myth.

For a better understanding of these efforts, a brief look at the manuscript context can help. The reworking of Gregory’s *Histories* is part of a large historiographical compendium that tells the history of the Romans from the founding of their city – *ab urbe condita* – all the way up to the history of the Carolingian Empire until the end of the ninth century. The compendium originally ended with the *Annales Bertiniani* of Hincmar of Rheims, which continued the *Royal Frankish Annals*. The Annals’ narrative starts in 741, resuming the story after the end of the Gregory–Fredegar compendium with the death of Charles Martel and the succession of his son Pippin. Friedrich Kurze, the editor of the *Royal Frankish Annals* suggested more than hundred years ago that none other than Hincmar himself may have been responsible for the formation of the compendium, and in fact there is some evidence in favour of this hypothesis. At any rate, the texts at the beginning of the manuscript structurally match the annalistic narratives from 741 to 882 very well. Included at the beginning are Eutropius’ *Breviarum ab urbe condita* and the *Chronicon Marcellini*, a chronicle arranged year by year, which corresponded to, as well as contrasted with, the Anno Domini scheme of the Carolingian annals. The choice of these two authors for the depiction of Roman history was certainly no coincidence. With the mirroring of the annalistic form the compilation conveys the continuation of Roman tradition as well as its renewal in the Christian kingdom and empire of the Franks. In between these is placed the compiler’s adaptation of Gregory’s


*Histories*, introduced by a catalogue of the dioceses of Gaul – a version of the *notitia Galliarum*. Thus, the central role of the Frankish church in bringing about the *translatio imperii* to the North is underlined. At the same time, however, the primacy of the bishop of Rheims in the Frankish-Christian *imperium* and his decisive role in the Christianization of the Franks and their *regnum* is highlighted by this specific version of the text. Certainly, the compendium from Rheims represents the most radical rearrangement of Gregory’s *Histories* we know of. The historical drama that unfolded in it, however, was still developed within the outlines defined by Gregory. The narrative of the *Histories* evolves into a church history, but was further transformed into a *Historia ecclesistica regni*, or even *imperii, Francorum*.

The wider historiographical context within which Gregory’s text is presented in the Rheims compendium allows us to observe with greater clarity than in the other examples the contribution of Frankish identity to a Christian vision of community in the Carolingian Empire. With the expansion of Carolingian rule over half of Europe, the particular christendom that had been developing in the Frankish realm since the sixth century was forced, much more intensely than before, to assert itself against other forms and traditions of Christian belief. 98 Just as in the Frankish kingdom, other christendoms in the former Roman provinces had developed their identity as parts and representatives of a universal Christianity. Yet, through their application in different local, regional and geopolitical contexts, they had devised different forms, traditions and interpretations of Christian belief. From the end of the eighth century onwards, the question of the compatibility and convergence of these christendoms led to intensified theological disputes in the Carolingian Empire. These discussions in turn led to what may have been a sharper definition of the contours of Western Christendom than had been available in previous centuries.99 In the process, the role of Frankish identity seems to have become increasingly important. The Rheims compendium appropriated the providential mission of the *regnum (Francorum)* from Gregory’s vision and used it to express and preserve a Christian identity. In this respect, it built upon the general pattern of the social partitioning of the world into peoples in order to assert the primacy of this Christendom from the illustrious history of the Franks.

The interaction of Christian and Frankish visions of history in the Carolingian transmission of Gregory’s *Histories* also helps us to make some observations on the early medieval history of Frankish identity. Some time ago, Walter Goffart characterized the early medieval transmission of Gregory’s *Histories* as a process ‘from *Historiae* to *Historia Francorum* and back again’.100 But, as we have seen, the reinterpretation of Gregory’s *Histories* as a *History of the Franks* required a fundamental revision. The Merovingian and Carolingian compilers of the

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100 Goffart, ‘From *Historiae* to *Historia Francorum* and back again’.
two versions (the Merovingian six-book version and the Carolingian version) developed their histories within the outline defined by Gregory. While they, of course, also had other objectives, they held on to Gregory’s episcopal positioning with the church and its representatives as the decisive moral authority. However severely they shortened the text, these versions still transmit a fair number of case histories that showed how worldly rulers ignored the theological and spiritual authority of the representatives of God’s Church at their peril. In order to preserve the value of these stories for the social negotiations of the present, they were continually adapted to new political and social circumstances. What we can observe through these adaptations is that in the new circumstances of the seventh, eighth and ninth centuries, the ethnic labelling of the text became ever more important.

With the increasing salience of the name of the Franks in the Carolingian transmission of the Histories we might also be able to better understand the success of Frankish identity. Although it was not the main objective of the compilers to put together a ‘Frankish history’, they contributed to a process in which Frankish identities were continually invested with new meaning and social prestige, and thus to its success. Consequently we can observe, in the Carolingian transmission of the Histories possibly more clearly than in other texts, how this process was shaped not only by the competition between different conceptions of Frankish identity, but also by its interplays with other forms of social identity. The rewritings of Gregory’s church history constitute a particularly rich body of evidence for how the compilers of his text in the Frankish world brought into focus two discrete yet complementary concepts – Christendom and ethnic identity – which were to have a long and influential future throughout the European Middle Ages.

APPENDIX: CLOVIS’ BAPTISM AND THE BURGUNDIAN WAR IN ST OMER, BIBL. MUNIC. 706, FOLS 28RA–28VA

Gregory, Historiae, II, 31, ed. Krusch, p. 77, line 8

Procedit novus Constantinus ad baptismum abnegatis diaboli pompis. deleturus leprae veteris morbum sordentesque maculas gestas antiquitus recenti latice deleturus. Cui ingresso ad baptisterium sanctus Dei sic infit ait ei ore facundo; Mitis depone colla, Sicamber; adora quod incendisti, incende quod adorasti’. Erat autem sanctus Remegius vir sapientissimus *(fol. 28rb) rethoricus et praeclarus in virtutibus.

Omission of the Alliance with the Burgundian King

Tunc Gundobadus et Godegisilus fratres regnum circa Rhodanum aut Ararem eum Massiliensem provintiam retinebant. Cumque se invicem inpugnarent, auditas Godigisilus Chlodovechi regis victurias misit ad eum legationem occulte, dicens: ... At ille dolum fratres, quem non suspecabatur, advertens, terga dedit fugamque inuit, Rhodanitidesque ripas percurrens, Avinionem urbem ingreditur.

Insert from the Gregory Epitome of the Liber historiae Francorum, c. 16, ed. Krusch, p. 264 on the Burgundian War of Clovis

Habebat tamen secum virum inlustrem Aredium, ... Tunc missa legatione ad Gundobadum, ut ei per singulos annos tributa imposita reddire debeat, iubet. At ille et de praesenti solvit et deinceps solviturum se esse promittit.[33.] Post hęc ergo resumptis viribus, iam despiciens regi Chlodoueo tributa promissa solvere, contra Godegiselum fratrem suum exercitum movet eumque apud Uiennam civitatem inclusum obsedit. ...
This page has been left blank intentionally
The Welsh people came into being in a crucible of defeat and diminishment. Their country was demarcated, for practical purposes, by Anglo-Saxon incomers who, in the aftermath of the Roman withdrawal from Britain at the beginning of the fifth century, gradually emerged as the dominant political and cultural force throughout most of the island. The western British peninsula that is the land of Wales was first defined in the eighth century by the construction of an earthwork under the aegis of King Offa of the English kingdom of Mercia. Offa’s Dyke, comprising a ditch and an earthen wall that together appear to have measured some 27 metres in width and 8 metres from the bottom of the ditch to the top of the wall, was a defensive bulwark intended to contain the wild Britons to the west, or at the very least to afford a position from which they might be kept under surveillance. More significantly, however, for the formation of the island’s peoples, it became as well the notional boundary between Wales and England. Perhaps the oldest name for the territory as a whole is *Wealas*, an Old English word for the land and its people that in origin means ‘foreigners’.

It is by no means certain that construction of the Dyke was ever completed; indeed, it is not clear how long it was meant to be. What matters to the story of the invention of Wales is that the Dyke came to exist in the imagination of English and Welsh alike as stretching from the estuary of the river Dee in the north to that of the river Wye in the south, and thus effectively from the Irish Sea to the Bristol Channel. About 100 years after the Mercians embarked on the project, the Welsh monk Asser wrote in his life of King Alfred of Wessex that *fuit in Mercia moderno tempore quidam strenuus atque universis circa se regibus et regionibus finitimis formidolosus rex, nomine Offa, qui vallum magnum inter Britanniam atque Merciam de mari usque ad mare fieri imperavit*.¹ The eastern boundary of Wales in any legal sense would shift with the political fortunes of Welsh princes and Norman Marcher lords well into the late Middle Ages, but Offa’s Dyke had

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¹ Asser, *Life of King Alfred*, ed. William Henry Stevenson (Oxford, 1904), p. 12. ‘There was in Mercia in fairly recent time a certain vigorous king called Offa, who terrified all the neighbouring kings and provinces around him, and who had a great dyke built between ‘Britannia’ (Wales) and Mercia from sea to sea.’
by the late ninth century acquired symbolic potency as the marker of ethnic and geographical difference between England and Wales.  

By that time, all of the Celtic-speaking British kingdoms to the east of Offa’s Dyke had fallen to one or another of the English kingdoms, and the island of Britain south of Hadrian’s Wall and east of the Dyke were well on their way to cultural and linguistic Englishness. Wales came into being as a geographical entity because it was, along with Cornwall and Brittany, the last refuge of a British population clinging to its political and cultural autonomy. It was an artificial construct, and one that represented the reduced circumstances of shabby gentility. And it was, moreover, a country defined and denominated by the invaders who had deprived the Britons of the political power that they had held elsewhere in the island.

Asser, as we have seen, described Offa’s Dyke as a fortification separating Mercia from Britannia, not England from Wales. In Offa’s day, and indeed in Asser’s own, it was only natural to think of Anglo-Saxon kings and their power in terms of the individual kingdoms that would only begin to form a single kingdom of England under the suzerainty of Alfred and his successors – especially his grandson Athelstan – in Wessex. What is perhaps more surprising to a reader unfamiliar with medieval Welsh traditions is the use of the term \textit{Britannia} to designate what is, quite clearly in this context, Wales. Asser employs a kind of inverted synecdoche, in which he describes the part by naming the whole, rather than vice-versa. He invokes the idea of the traditional unity of the Island of Britain, an idea that retained cultural authority in Wales right down to the end of the Middle Ages and beyond; and he identifies the island with its dispossessed rulers and their people, the Britons.

Asser’s account of the construction of Offa’s Dyke is emblematic of medieval Welsh thought about Wales. A tenacious attachment to the notional unity of Britain simultaneously displaces, defers and disguises the emergence of a specifically Welsh identity. Yet the political and geographical reality, from the eighth century, is that British Britain exists in memory and aspiration only, while Wales is the actuality struggling to emerge. It was not only the lore of 
\textit{Ynys Prydein} (the Island of Britain), though, that complicated the development of an ethnic sense of ‘Welshness’, but the political traditions of the Celtic-speaking

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British people and the geography of Wales itself. It is to these topics that I turn first.

A glance at a topographical map of Wales is enough to show that it consists of mountainous terrain, deeply incised by narrow valleys, and a narrow strip of coastal plain cut into rather small pieces by the mouths of rivers large and small. Physically, the land of Wales lends itself to political unity no more readily than do other mountainous peninsulas. The groups that came to hold sway in Wales in the post-Roman, pre-Norman period – the fifth through eleventh centuries and on to the end of the thirteenth – occupied their separate and various lands. There were places where the frontiers of such territories permitted aggression and annexation of one small kingdom by a neighbor, but for the most part political fragmentation was the most natural expression of the topography.

Moreover, the Welsh, like their British forebears, were people who identified with their tribal groups rather than with any larger gens; they seem to have postulated no common ancestor, although we catch a glimpse in some tenth-century genealogies of an ancestor deity called Beli Mawr to whom several Welsh dynasties laid claim. It is possible that in an earlier era, all or some of the British dynasties attached themselves to Beli, and thereby to one another, but we see no trace of that. British tribes had no political experience and no history to encourage them to see themselves, as a people, in a broader context, and the topography of Wales offered no encouragement in that direction.

In the first and second centuries, Ptolemy and Tacitus named nearly thirty distinct British tribal groups. The principal groups in what is now Wales were at that time the Deceangli, the Ordovici, the Demetae and the Silures. Five or six hundred years later, when Wales began to emerge as Wales, most of these names had disappeared. The names of kingdoms had replaced those of population groups, and the dynasties of these kingdoms generally have origin stories specific to themselves, for example Gwynedd – the important northern Welsh kingdom that occupies the space that Ptolemy associated with the Deceangli and the Ordovices. At one point in the fifth or early sixth century we have a Welshman identified on a memorial stone from Cardiganshire as ORDOVS, an Ordovican.4 But a stone of about the same period, from a bit further north, marks the grave of a man identified as civis Venedotiae, a citizen of Gwynedd.5 More than a name has changed.

The origin legend of the kingdom of Gwynedd in North Wales describes a warrior hero by the name of Cunedda, who is said to have migrated in the fifth century from the one time British kingdom of Gododdin, the territory of the

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Votadini around Edinburgh, to north Wales. There he founded the kingdom of Gwynedd. Other legends provide him with sons who are the eponymous founders of other Welsh kingdoms, as Ceretic of Ceredigion. An interesting feature of the legend, as it finds its way into the Old Welsh genealogies, the Historia Brittonum and early poetry, is that Cunedda is said to have established his kingdom by expelling the Irish who had settled in the lands from which he carved it. And perhaps he did. But what is particularly interesting about the legends of Cunedda and his sons, which do more than any other story to construct a coherent history for Wales, is that there were in fact Irishmen in Wales, Irishmen who had arrived in the fourth and fifth centuries and settled permanently. There is no real evidence of the Irish colonists, whose presence is quite literally written in stone in the ogham inscriptions on many of the early medieval memorial stones found in Wales, having been expelled. They were, as far as we can tell, absorbed into the new Welsh kingdoms. The legend of the expulsion of the Irish from Gwynedd describes one of the ways in which a new people – the Gwyndodydd – came into being and defined themselves as sharing a common descent. It simply erases the foreignness of the Irish colonists and their descendants by asserting that the foreign was expelled, as it erases the difference between the British incomers from northern Britain and the tribal groups already established in north Wales. When I said that the Welsh had no origin story, then, I meant that the Welsh as the Welsh – a single people – had no such story, or none that is visible to us. It was the dynasties that emerged from tribal population groups during the upheavals of the migration period that produced those myths, and those dynasties, as they sought to resituate themselves in the western peninsula, had not even begun to imagine that peninsula – Wales – as a geographical unit, nor its inhabitants as a single people. Unitary identity was a concept associated rather with Britannia, Ynys Prydein – the island of Great Britain and its population before the adventus Saxorum.

British lore seems to have assumed that the Britons were the indigenous people of the island. Although the origin story that presents the British as eponymous descendants of a grandson of Aeneas called Brutus survives in the ninth-century Historia Brittonum, it seems not to have found its way into vernacular tradition, and next surfaces only in Geoffrey of Monmouth’s twelfth-century Historia Regum Britanniae. As far as we know then, the Welsh neither had nor generated as part of a political enterprise any mythos of common origin, whether of themselves as Welsh or of themselves as British.

As a physical entity, then, Wales had no cultural existence before the construction of Offa’s Dyke, and even after that frontier had come into being the very idea, let alone the actuality, of a politically unified Wales was a long
way off.\footnote{There was occasional movement in the direction of a politically unified Wales during the later Middle Ages, most notably under the princes of the northern Welsh kingdom of Gwynedd in the mid-thirteenth century. The hegemony that Llywelyn ap Gruffudd managed to extend over other princes and kingdoms won him acknowledgment by the English king Henry III as ’Prince of Wales’ in 1267, but this implicit recognition of Wales as a political nation, albeit not a sovereign one, was short-lived, as Edward I effected the conquest of Wales in its entirety in 1282. It was common in the first half of the twentieth century to envision Wales as having been on the threshold of political nationhood when Edward descended upon it, the Hammer of Wales no less than he was the Hammer of the Scots. But the fact is that neither Llywelyn’s subjection of the other Welsh princes, nor those achieved for brief periods of time by earlier rulers, emerged from a shared sense of political coherence.} Culturally, however, there were several markers of identity available to the people of Wales, that emergent amalgamation of old British tribal groups, British incomers from the northern part of the island and elsewhere in Britain, and established immigrant populations of Irish and perhaps people of other origins as well. There was more than one way in which they might have chosen, at a critical historical moment, to distinguish themselves from the Saeson, the English who had defined for them their new and constrained homeland.

One of these was Romanitas, the Roman heritage that Wales shared with the rest of Britain south of Hadrian’s Wall. Welsh lands had been in the first four centuries of the Common Era by no means central to the Roman province of Britannia, but there was nonetheless a real Roman presence in Wales. During the Roman occupation of Britain, the fort of Venta Silurum at Caerwent in southeastern Wales had the status of civitas, and substantial towns developed as well around the forts at Caerleon, Segontium and Caersws.

Roman occupation left its traces in the Welsh landscape as it did elsewhere in Britain, and a number of those Roman remains found their way into legend well into the Middle Ages. The survival of Romanitas in Wales is apparent, for one thing, in the survival of Latin inscriptions. To cite just one example, there is the aforementioned fifth- or sixth-century stone from the edge of Snowdonia, marking the burial place of one Cantiori, who is described as civis Venedotiae, a citizen of Gwynedd, and a consobrinus Magli magistrati, a cousin of the magistrate Maglus.

Roman pride is manifest too in a much deteriorated inscription on a much later, ninth-century stone, Eliseg’s Pillar, which traces the royal line of the Welsh kingdom of Powys back to Magnus Maximus, the usurper who in 383 is said to have led most of the Roman military forces in Britain away with him in his successful challenge to the authority of the Emperor Gratian.\footnote{See Early Welsh Genealogical Tracts, ed. Bartrum, pp. 1–3 and 123f. for the text of the inscription on Eliseg’s Pillar. For the most recent discussions and additional bibliography, see Nancy Edwards, ’Rethinking the Pillar of Eliseg’, Antiquaries Journal, 29 (2009): 143–77, and Owain Wyn Jones, ’Hereditas Pouoisi: the Pillar of Eliseg and the history of early Powys’, Welsh History Review, 24 (2009): 41–80.} While Gildas in the
mid-sixth century, and the historians of Britain who followed him throughout the Middle Ages, excoriated Maximus for leaving the island defenseless against barbarians, the Welsh of Powys and Dyfed had moved at least as early as the ninth century to incorporate him into the genealogies of their kings. And by the twelfth or thirteenth century, Magnus Maximus, or Macsen Wledig as he had come to be known to the Welsh, was the protagonist of a romantic tale in which his love for a British princess in the most remotely northwesterly corner of Wales motivated his conquest of Britain. According to this story, Magnus Maximus was subsequently able to recapture the imperial throne that was rightfully his with the aid of the princess’s brothers and the troops they led. This medieval text is a jovial rewriting of the Roman conquest of Britain, the usurpation of Maximus and, for good measure, the foundation of Brittany. Unfortunately, we have no way of knowing how old the tradition of Macsen as a benevolent Britannophile of an emperor was when Breuddwyd Macsen Wledig (The Dream of Macsen Wledig) was written, most likely, as has been noted, in the twelfth century. There would seem to be no doubt, however, that the survival and transmutation of his story indicate a recurrent pride among the Welsh in their Roman past. So too do the genealogical traditions that attached him to the head of the dynasty of Powys, traditions at least as old as Eliseg’s Pillar. Several tenth-century Welsh genealogies also attest to an ongoing pride in the Roman heritage, linking for example the dynasty of Dyfed, a southern Welsh kingdom whose name preserves that of the tribe of the Demetae, with ‘Maxim guletic’.

There is other evidence, though, that the pride in Romanitas felt in Wales had faded perceptibly by the seventh century – which is to say, before there was a Wales. Patrick Sims-Williams showed in his 2001 O’Donnell Lecture that on the early medieval inscribed stones found in Welsh territory, there is a ratio of 23 percent Latin names to 77 percent Celtic British names on stones of the fifth and sixth centuries, whereas the ratio falls to 6 percent Latin to 82 percent Celtic British from the seventh century on, with the remaining 12 percent of names derived from the Bible. This onomastic shift was perhaps accompanied by a change in literary fashion as well. British writers like Pelagius in the fourth century, Patrick in the fifth and Gildas, who may well have received at least part of his education in the territory that would one day be Wales, in the sixth, all write erudite, if sometimes eccentric, Latin. But after Gildas, Latin seems to fall silent among the Celtic British. Aldhelm, Bede and Alcuin flourish among the English at home and abroad; Columbanus, Adomnán and John Scotus Eriugena among the Irish. Yet we hear nothing in Latin from the Welsh until King Alfred commissions Asser to compose his vita at the close of the ninth century. It is significant, of course, that Alfred should have turned to Wales, to a monastery as

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10 Genealogies reproduced in Early Welsh Genealogical Tracts, ed. Bartrum, pp. 9f.
11 Sims-Williams, ‘The five languages of Wales’.
Inventing Wales

far from the heart of his kingdom as was St. Davids, to recruit a court scholar. But what it signifies is not the survival of the Roman tradition of literary education in west Wales into the ninth century, but rather the extraordinary Latinity of the monastic culture that grew up on the shores of the North Atlantic waterways in the sixth, seventh and eighth centuries, and that in some places survived the Viking raids of the ninth.

The British were comfortable with their Roman heritage, but it did not serve as the banner under which the Welsh would gather to define themselves in opposition to the barbarians to whom they were left vulnerable by the Roman withdrawal, the people who would create the England that would make Wales. After the withdrawal of the imperial legions at the beginning of the fifth century, the Celtic-speaking people of Britain south of Hadrian’s Wall maintained insofar as they were able some semblance of Roman ways. In particular, there is evidence for the survival at least for a while of the Roman system of education. And the Roman practice of memorial stones was sustained, with Roman-style letter forms employed in Latin inscriptions. Later in the Middle Ages – in the ninth and tenth centuries and beyond – certain dynasties in Wales would even attach themselves to the memory of the usurper Magnus Maximus, and a narrative appeared in the twelfth or thirteenth century that celebrated simultaneously Magnus Maximus and Wales. But the cult of Magnus Maximus seems not to have been more than an anomalous thread in the fabric of Welsh culture; it is no gauge of an identification with the Roman past as a primary tool of ethnogenesis or of self-distinction from the English on the other side of Offa’s Dyke.

One reason for the ineffectiveness of Romanitas in the formation of an identity encompassing all of the people of Wales may have been the fact that the Roman presence seems to have been strongest in the southern part of the territory. It was the central and southern Welsh dynasties of Powys and Dyfed that attached themselves to Magnus Maximus, while the dynasties of Gwynedd and the other northern kingdoms traced their lineage back to Cunedda, who was as we have seen a legendary warrior who came to Wales from the north of Britain during the period of the Anglo-Saxon incursion. Self-conscious Romanitas may have been a southern affectation, an effective means of identifying dynasties with lands inscribed with the Roman past but less meaningful in the more mountainous north.

That said, it should be noted that in the legendary story of Magnus Maximus told in the aforementioned twelfth-century, The Dream of Macsen Wledig, it is to Arfon, in the far northwest of Wales, that the emperor journeys to seek his bride Elen. And it is this northern Welsh princess who demands of him that he build ‘three major forts’ (teir prif gaer, lines 227–8) for her ‘in three locations of her choice in the Island of Britain’ (e tri lle a dewisseei en enys Brydein, line 228) and that ‘the prime fort be built for her in Arfon’ (e dewissaud wneithur e gaer uchaf en Arvon idi, line 229), that is, in the north. This fort in Arfon is the Roman fort of Segontium, whose remains are visible to this day. ‘And after that the other two forts were built for her, namely Caerllion and Caefyrddin’ (Odena e gwnaethpwyt
idi e dwy gaer ereill, nyt amgen Caer Llion a Chaer Verdin, lines 232–3), southeastern and southwestern Roman forts respectively of which there are also surviving traces. One aspect of the rehabilitation of the usurper Maximus, then, was the eventual adoption of this figure by litterateurs, at least, if not by rulers, in the north.

Christianity might have served as an alternative, related rallying point for a nascent Welsh identity. The Celtic-speaking Britons were to at least some degree Christian as well as Roman, but they had no conversion narrative, any more than they had an origin narrative. Christianity had simply spread gradually in Britain during the last Roman century, the fourth. Three British bishops attended the Council of Arles in 314, so it would seem that the Christian church in Britain was well established by then. And it was non-Christian Picts, Irish and Saxons whose pressure on Roman Britain increased in the second half of the fourth century and overwhelmed it after the Roman withdrawal.

By the beginning of the ninth century, by which time the English and the Irish were themselves thoroughly and famously Christianized, there were glimmers of a retrospective effort to construct the opposition of the British to the fifth-century invaders as that of a Christian people to a pagan threat. The *Historia Brittonum* tells us that Arthur won twelve victories against the Saxons, of which the eighth was a battle fought near Caer Gwynion, ‘where Arthur bore the image of Holy Mary, mother of God, upon his shoulders, and through the power of our Lord Jesus Christ and Holy Mary, put the Saxons to flight’.

But we hear nothing of this sort from Gildas in the sixth century. Gildas reports that the Britons received the Christian faith during the reign of Tiberius and produced martyrs during the Diocletian persecutions, but that during the time of the barbarian incursions they had so fallen away from proper moral observance that the English conquest could appropriately be construed as an act of divine punishment comparable to the Babylonian captivity of Israel.

Indeed, we don’t know how thoroughly Christianity had pervaded Britain during the Roman period or to what extent it was eroded during the fifth century. We do have reason, though, to believe that it was from Britain, and perhaps specifically from southwest Wales, where the Irish had established colonies as early as the fifth century, that Christianity first found its way into Ireland. So there is good reason to believe that there were at least some pockets of genuine Christian zeal in fifth-century Wales. The later Middle Ages would look back to the sixth century as the Age of the Saints, the time when Saint David had flourished, and that is another oblique indication of Christianity having had a visible presence in early Wales. Indeed, Gildas himself would be said to have been educated in Wales at the school of Saint Illtud. But nowhere in early Welsh

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12 Nennius, *British History*, c. 56, ed. Morris, pp. 35, 76; there was probably an error in reading the Welsh original ysgwyd (shield) as ysgwydd (shoulder).

13 In the first Vita, composed in the ninth century by a Breton monk of Rhuys: see *Two Lives of Gildas by a monk of Rhuys and Caradoc of Llancarfan*, ed. Hugh Williams,
tradition, outside the *Historia Brittonum*, do the Welsh celebrate themselves or their British forebears as the first Christians in Britain.

If neither Wales itself as a country geographically conceived, nor the Roman or the Christian identities that set the Britons of the western peninsula apart from those who threatened them in the early Middle Ages, then what were the markers of identity by which the Welsh defined themselves? I would point to two: first, the island of Britain, a homeland unrelinquished on the symbolic level right up to the Edwardian conquest of the late thirteenth century; second, and most important, the vernacular language – Cymraeg – a language that united those who shared a country while resisting identification of that shared country with any particular set of limits.

Vernacular Welsh tradition has, as far back as we can trace it, employed the triad as a conventional device for cataloguing bardic lore and narrative tradition of various kinds. At its simplest, the triad is no more than a set of three names, as in this triad of the ‘three generous ones’:

**Tri hael Enys Brydein: Nud Hael mab Senyllt, Mordaf Hael mab Seruan Rhyderch Hael mab Tudwal Tutclyt.**

The three generous ones of the Island of Britain: Nudd the Generous, son of Senyllt, Mordaf the Generous son of Serwan, Rhydderch the Generous son of Tudwal Tudglyd.14

Other triads are more plentiful storehouses of narrative tradition, such as this one:

**Tri Matkud Ynys Prydein: Penn Bendigeituran uab Llyr a guduwyt yn y Gwynuryn yn Llundein, a’e wyneb ar Ffreinc. A hyt tra uu yn yr ansawd y dodet yno, ny doei Ormes Saesson byth y’r Ynyshonn; Yr eil Matkud: Y Dreigeu yn Ninas Emreis, a gudyawd Llud uab Beli; A’r trydyd, Esgyrn Gwertheuyr Uendigeit ym prif pyrth yr Ynys honn. A hyt tra vydynt yn y kud hwnnw, ny doei Ormes o Saesson byth y’r Ynys honn.**

The three Fortunate Concealments of the Island of Britain: the Head of Bendigeidfran son of Llyr which was concealed in the White Hill in London with its face toward France. And as long as it was in the position in which it was put there, no Saxon Oppression would ever come to this Island; the second Fortunate Concealment, the Dragons in Dinas Emrys which Lludd son of Beli concealed; And the third: the bones of Gwerthefyr the Blessed in the Chief

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Ports of this Island. And as long as they remained in that concealment no Saxon Oppression could ever come to this Island.\footnote{Ibid., 37R, pp. 94–102.}

The point to be made here is that the great majority of the triads fall into the category of Trioedd Ynys Prydein, ‘Triads of the Island of Britain’, because they take Britain as a whole for their purview. There are no ‘Triads of Wales’, and many if not most of the stories alluded to in the triads are set outside of Wales, elsewhere in Britain.\footnote{It has been argued that what is meant by Ynys Prydein, the Island of Britain, is in fact the Roman province of Britannia, that it excludes from its imaginary world the world of the Picts and Scots north of the Antonine Wall, if not Hadrian’s Wall. It is an interesting point, bearing as it does on the effect that the Roman occupation had on the formation of the British people as distinct from the Picts, but as I am focusing on the emergence of a Welsh identity, I do not want to pursue it here.}

As a compendium, Trioedd Ynys Prydein can be dated no earlier than the twelfth century, and indeed our earliest manuscript sources for the compendium of triads date from the thirteenth.\footnote{Trioedd Ynys Prydein, ed. Bromwich, pp. lxxxvii–xcix.} It is generally accepted by scholars, however, that the lore they embody is traditional, and that it had been circulating orally and most likely in smaller written collections, for centuries. We may take it that the compilation of the triads represents a self-conscious twelfth- and thirteenth-century interest among the Welsh learned classes in amassing, recording and preserving native traditions, but Trioedd Ynys Prydein does not represent literary innovation.\footnote{The Norman period, especially the century leading up to and the century following the conquest of Wales by Edward I in 1282, saw the production of a substantial number of manuscript anthologies of narrative prose, bardic poetry and other native material as well as of the triads.}

Another cultural arena in which ‘Britain’ remained throughout the Middle Ages an emotionally potent point of reference was bardic poetry in praise of the rulers of the Welsh kingdoms. These poems are full of local detail – the names of places where battles have been fought and where courts are held. But they rarely mention by name their patrons’ kingdoms – Gwynedd, Deheubarth, Powys – and they almost never mention ‘Wales’. A recurrent trope is that the prince is ruler of his people – the Gwyndodydd of Gwynedd, or the men of the South – and priodor Prydein, the proper ruler, or even the proprietor, of Britain. The notional ‘Britain’ is both elastic and aspirational. Britain is in the mind of the audience – it might be the entire island, it might be the province of Britannia, it might extend no further than Offa’s Dyke, encompassing only the territories that the Britons control. In other words, sometimes ‘Britain’ may refer to ‘Wales’, but this is never expounded or implied in any way. ‘Britain’ is a toponym of undefined reference. On a political level, it may refer to what was, what is or what will be.
Here, for instance, is Gwalchmai ap Meilyr, praising Owain of Gwynedd, who died in 1170:

Arddwyreaf hael o hil Rodri,
arddwyad gorwlad, gwerlin deithi,
Teithïawg Prydain, twyth afrdwyth Owain,
Tëyrnain ni grain, ni grawn rëi.

I exalt a generous man of Rhodri’s lineage,
Guardian of the borderland, ruler by right,
The rightful lord of Britain, Owain of steadfast steeliness
Lord of lords who grasps not, who hoards no spoils.19

This cultural habit of balancing the purely local site against the amorphous whole land of the imagination finds expression as well in the term that defines the people of Wales. They are the Cymry, plural of Cymro, the people who share a country and a language. Before the development of Pictish into a distinct language and the establishment of English dominance in much of the island, the British vernacular was spoken throughout Britain, as the survival of names like ‘Cumberland’ shows. Like ‘Britannia’ and its vernacular equivalent, Prydein, Cymry is a term that had at first considerable elasticity of reference; on one level it referred to all Celtic-speaking British people, and on another it denoted the Celtic-speaking inhabitants of Wales and the country they inhabited.20 While ‘Britannia’ and Prydein would retain their ambiguity of reference, however, at least in poetic contexts, Cymry would eventually emerge as the unequivocal native name for Wales – the land west of Offa’s Dyke – and its people. It became the term by which the people known to the English as Wealas, with the fundamental sense of ‘aliens’ identified themselves and their territory. In Modern Welsh, there is a distinction between the ethnonym Cymry, the people of Wales, and Cymru, the land of Wales. We encounter only one form, however, in the medieval language, and that is the form with -y, the term that designates people rather than space, and defines them in relation to one another and to their language. The poet and translator Tony Conran wrote aptly that

If we turn to Irish classical poetry, we find it full of kennings, or conventional phrases that stand for Ireland. Ireland is always present in her poetry, as a

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physical entity, a land made one by ties of history and legend. But in Welsh
poetry, there is very little sense of Wales as a geographical whole before the
twelfth century. Wales, to use an etymological metaphor, is a back-formation
from the Welsh. It is the people, the Cymry, who are important: their country
is essentially the Island of Britain as a whole, and the fact that they occupy
only that fraction of it called Wales is no more than an unfortunate historical
accident.21

Several aspects of Welsh culture begin to fall into place here, pointing to the
centrality of language as a marker of identity: the movement away from Roman
toward Celtic names documented in the inscribed stones of the seventh and
subsequent centuries; the fact that despite nearly four hundred years of Roman
occupation, the British did not become speakers of a Romance language, as did
the Gauls, and the Franks too, eventually. It may even be that the importance
of language as the signifier of nationality, as the boundaries of British Britain
shifted and contracted over the course of the fifth through eighth centuries,
accounts for the relative paucity of writing in Latin to have survived from Wales
between Gildas and Nennius.

There is a tradition of very early writing in the Welsh vernacular, even a case
to be made for the survival of poetry in Welsh that goes back to the period of
struggle for control of northern Britain. These are the poems to Urien of Rheged
attributed to the poet Taliesin, mentioned in the Historia Brittonum as one of
the poets who flourished among the Britons around 600, and the elegies of Y
Gododdin, attributed to another of the poets mentioned in the Historia Brittonum,
Aneirin. The stanzas of Y Gododdin celebrate and lament warriors of the Votadini
defeated in battle against the English. The authenticity of these poems in the
form in which they have been preserved is much contested, but it is absolutely
incontrovertible that there was from very early on in the history of Wales a
tradition of there having been early poems that survived and came to Wales
along with the Men of the North who migrated there to found the dynasties
of Gwynedd, Powys, Ceredigion and Meirionydd. This poetry is a talisman that
serves many of the purposes of an origin myth.

It is in poetry, too – language at its densest and most highly charged – that
we can best observe the development of the term Cymry as a marker of Welsh
national identity and of its application to the land of Wales as well as its people.
In a poem in praise of Cadwallon of Gwynedd, who fought against Edwin of
Northumbria in the mid-seventh century, Cadwallon is described as the ’lord of
Britain’ (muner Prydain) whose shield protects the ’cheeks of the Welsh’ (grudd
Cymry).22 The encomiastic epithet muner Prydain participates fully in the ongoing

(Harmondsworth, 1967), pp. 43f.
22 R. Geraint Gruffydd, ’Canu Cadwallon ap Cadfan’, in Rachel Bromwich and Robert
Brinley Jones (eds), Astudiaethau ar yr Hengerdd: Studies in Old Welsh Poetry (Cardiff, 1978),
identification of the Welsh, on the symbolic level, with the island of Great Britain in its entirety. The phrase *grudd Cymry*, however, is more ambivalent. If we understand *Cymry* as referencing people, the image is one of a lord whose power shields the faces of his people from harm. And the geographical distribution of those people is indeterminate; they might be anywhere in *Prydain*. However, we might instead read *grudd Cymry* as an early instance of the usage of *Cymry* to denote the land of Wales. The image in that case is one of a lord whose power defends the slopes of Wales.

The deliberate ambiguity of the term *Cymry* remains in productive play in a tenth-century poem, *Armes Prydein*, ‘Prophecy of Britain’, a poem that affords further insight into the ways in which the art of poetry, profoundly valued in Welsh culture, mediated the emergence of a vocabulary of national identity by means of its figurative and polyvalent usages. ‘*Armes Prydein*’ dates from the reign of Athelstan (924–39) in the increasingly powerful English kingdom of Wessex. Athelstan, we are told by William of Malmesbury, imposed upon the Welsh princes the collective obligation of a heavy tribute. The Welsh poem is a response to Athelstan’s demands. It imagines a mustering of Scots, Vikings and *Cymry* to resist his taxes and to drive the English out of Britain.

At certain points in this poem, the *Cymry* are quite clearly the Welsh of Wales:

> Gwnahawnt goruoled gwedy gwehyn,
> a chymot Kymary a gwyr Dulyn,
> Gwydyl Iwerdon Mon a Phrydyn,
> Cornyw a Chludwys eu kynnws genhyn.
> Atporyon uyd Brython, pan dyorfyn
> ...
> Gwyr Gogled yg kynted yn eu kylchyn. (lines 8–12, 15)

They will celebrate after the difficulties,
and there will be an alliance between the *Cymry* and the men of Dublin,
the Irish of Ireland, Anglesey and Pictland,
the men of Cornwall and Strathclyde – they will all be welcomed by us.
The Britons will be remnants when they are victorious.

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The Cymry of this passage are Welshmen, distinct from, albeit allied with, other British peoples – the men of Cornwall and Strathclyde and the heroic men of the North. Collectively, they will achieve the re-emergence of the Brython, the Britons. The Cymry are but one constituent of that people, but it is they who are being asked to, and who will refuse to, pay tribute: eu tretheu dychynnullyn/ yg ketoed Kymry nat oed a telhyn, ‘they will try to collect their taxes, that no one in the Welsh treasuries would ever pay’ (lines 21–2).

This seems to be the case as well in several later passages describing the anticipated battle: the Welsh are explicitly the leaders of the great alliance. Thus, Kymry kynyrcheit kyfun dullyn, ‘The followers of the Cymry move united into battle’ (line 61), and Kymry gyneircheit eneit dichwant, ‘The followers of the Cymry are not concerned for their lives’ (line 77).

Elsewhere in the poem, however, the distinction of Cymry from Brython appears to collapse, as the poet prophesies that

Gwrthottit Trindawt dyrnawt a bwyller,
y dilein gwlat Vrython, a Saesson yn anhed.
Poet kynyt eu reges yn alltuded
no mynet Kymry yn diffroed. (lines 41–4)

The Trinity shall refuse the blow which is being planned,
to devastate the land of the Britons, and English in occupation.
Sooner may they retreat into exile
than that the Cymry should be landless.25

Britons and Cymry seem to be the same people here, and it is unclear whether they are the Welsh or all the Celtic-speaking people of Britain. In the account of the imagined battle that will drive the English from Britain, when the Cymry give battle to the Saesson, Cymry sometimes again seems to refer to all the forces of the coalition, as it does in line 54, Kymry a Saesson kyferuydyn, ‘The Cymry and the English will meet’, and in lines 141–2, Ymgetwynt Gymry, pan ymwelant/nyt ahont allmyn or nen y safant, ‘The Cymry will insure, when they look each other in the eye/that the foreigners will not go from the spot where they stand.’ Nevertheless, the combined forces are not always described as Cymry: sometimes they are still

24 I quote from Isaac’s translation, here and throughout, although in some cases I make slightly different English lexical choices in rendering the Welsh.
25 This translation is my own.
Brython, or Britons, as in line 90, *Saesson rac Brython gwæ a genyn*, ‘The English sing a song of woe before the Brython’,\(^{26}\) as they were in line 12, quoted above.

In still other passages, *Cymry* is ambiguous. We cannot tell whether *Rydrychafwynt Kymry, kat a wnaant* ‘The Cymry will arise, they will do battle’ (line 82) or *Dygorfu Kymry trwy kyfergyr*, ‘Cymry ever triumphed through assault’ (line 125) refers to the Brittonic alliance or to its Welsh leaders on this occasion.\(^{27}\)

Indeed, the very question of precise reference here is an over-literal twenty-first-century reader’s question. For the poet and his tenth-century audience, I would suggest, *Cymry* could, and did, mean simultaneously both ‘Britons’ in general and the people of Wales.

Once the English have been defeated, the *Cymry* will rejoice, having been released from the burden of tribute. These are quite specifically actual Welshmen of Wales, the people of the southern kingdoms of Dyfed and Glywysing:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Gwyn eu byt wy, Kymry, pan adrodynt,} \\
\text{‘Ryn gwarawt y trindawt o’r trallawt gynt!} \\
\text{Na chrynet Dyfet na Glywyssyg.’ (lines 97–9)}
\end{align*}
\]

Happy the Cymry when they report
‘The Trinity has delivered us from former tribulation!
Neither Dyfed nor Glywysyng need tremble.’

The political map of Britain changed dramatically during the course of the early Middle Ages. For the first four centuries of the Common Era a Roman province comprising some dozen tribal groups, it became over the course of the next four centuries a crazy quilt of small kingdoms whose rulers might or might not have emerged from the underlying tribal populations. Some of these kingdoms were British, some English and some Irish. In the eighth century, the political map clarified and simplified: English-speaking kingdoms south of the Antonine Wall and east of the line that would be marked by Offa’s Dyke; the Irish/Pictish kingdom of Scotland north of the Wall; and Welsh kingdoms east of the Dyke. Defined by the English as a nation of Wealas, aliens, the people of these kingdoms also thought of themselves as a people – a people who shared a language that had once been spoken throughout *Ynys Prydein*, the Island of Britain.

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\(^{26}\) I quote Isaac’s translation of the line, but it is worth noting that the tense structure of Welsh elides the distinction between the visionary present and the imagined future, in that one tense signifies both present and future. Rachel Bromwich translates ‘The Saxons will sing their lamentation before the Britons’ (emphasis added).

\(^{27}\) Although lines 127–8, which follow closely on this ambiguous use of *Kymry*, employ the term in a manner that appears clearly to denote the Welsh, as the leaders of the coalition, while at the same time echoing line 125 in a poetic construction called *cymeriad*: *Dygorfu Kymry y peri kat, a llwyth lliaws gwlat a gymnullant*, ‘The Cymry ever triumphed by giving battle, and they will muster the peoples of many countries.’
The concepts of Britain and of the Cymry complemented one another, and the elasticity of both terms helped the people of Wales negotiate the difficult passage of the migration period and to elide differences among older tribal populations, aristocratic warrior refugees from the Old North and ‘barbarous’ Irish immigrants. Gradually, all of the people of Wales came to identify themselves with the western peninsula and Cymry, the people who share territory and language, became one with Cymru, the land, as the seventh-century poem in praise of Cadwallon suggests.

In the peroration of ‘Armes Prydein’, the poet imagines an island from which the English have been driven, o Vynaw hyt Lydaw ... o Dyuet hyd Danet ... o Wawl hyd Weryt, ‘from Mynaw to Brittany ... from Dyfed to Thanet ... from the Wall to the Forth’ (lines 172–4). He promises that eil Kymro llawen llafar a uyd, ‘a latter day Cymro will be glad and garrulous’ (line 185), and that Kymry gwenerawl hyt Vrawt goruyd, ‘the venerable Welsh will be victorious forever’ (line 192). The reference of the term Cymry expands and contracts, serving memory, reality and hope simultaneously. It is this elasticity of language that makes possible the recurrent conviction among the Welsh that for the island of Britain and the nation of the Cymry, to quote T.S. Eliot, ‘Time present and time past/ Are both perhaps present in time future,/ And time future contained in time past’, and that ‘What might have been and what has been/Point to one end, which is always present.’

In his 1985 book When Was Wales? A History of the Welsh, Gwyn A. Williams, late professor of history at York and Cardiff universities and self-styled ‘People’s Remembrancer’ of the Welsh, wrote that ‘A country called Wales exists only because the Welsh invented it. The Welsh exist only because they invented themselves’, and in his concluding pages that ‘Wales is an artefact which the Welsh produce’. They have been inventing and producing themselves since the Romans left Britain and the English arrived.

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28 From the opening lines of ‘Burnt Norton’, the first of his Four Quartets.
Early Islamic Identities
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In his famous essay *On the Qualities of the Turks (Fī Manāqib al-Turk)* al-Jāḥiz reported how the Turkish prince al-Fatḥ b. Ḵaqān responded to a categorization of different groups in the Abbasid army. At an assembly of the rank and file of the caliphal army, the descendents of Abbasid propagandists, the important elders of the Shiʿa, the mature sons of officials and men known for their obedience and religious sincerity that was held at Baghdād during the caliphate of al-Muʿṭaṣim (833–42), someone in the audience at the edge of the crowd had spoken up declaring that the army of the caliphate was divided into five different groups: Khurāsānīs, Turks, Arabs, *mawālī* and ‘Sons’. But al-Fatḥ praised and thanked God for uniting such dissimilar kinds of people (*ajnās*) in obedience. He confronted the speaker who had compartmentalized these groups, separated their genealogies and distinguished their categories (*ajnās*), accusing the speaker of desiring division and taking sides while he, al-Fatḥ, wanted concord (*ulfa*) and to minimize differences. He denied any lack of conformity or separation in genealogy and declared that Khurāsānīs and Turks were brothers because they shared the region of the East, and that they were all Khurāsānīs, even if they differed in some specific characteristics and external appearances. The difference between the Turk and the Khurāsānī was unlike the difference between the Arab and the non-Arab (*al-ʿajami*), or that between the Byzantine (*ar-Rūmī*) and the Slav (*al-Ṣaqlabī*), or between the Zanjī and the Abyssinian (*al-Ḥabashi*). It was more like the difference between different kinds of Arabs, between Makkans and Madīnans, the desert dweller (*badawī*) and the townsman (*ḥaḍarī*), or the plainsman and the mountaineer. Even if these differed in some aspects of their language, appearance, character and temperament they were all pure Arabs. God had assigned their appearance, form, disposition and language to them. If one asked how their sons could all be Arab given the differences

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1. The Banawī were the descendents of the Khurāsānī soldiers who had gone west at the time of the Abbasid revolution and settled in Baghdād. They were often called the Sons of the Dynasty (*Abnā al-dawla*). See Hugh Kennedy, *The Armies of the Caliphs: Military and Society in the Early Islamic State* (London, New York, 2001), pp. 81, 93, 96.

2. *Ajnās* is the plural of *jins*, which is a loanword in Arabic from the Latin *gens* with roughly the same range of meanings.
among their fathers, al-Fath would say that since the Arabs are a unity, they are equal in language, character, ambition, pride, protection, temperament and natural disposition. The Arabs are cast from a single mold. In the same way Khurāsānīs and Turks were two parts of the same people distinguished only by their different ways of life. The larger group to which someone belonged was determined by one’s living conditions and the nonmaterial circumstances that determined them. In the case of the caliphal army, the Khurāsānī, the banawī, the mawlā and the Arab became a single category.3

Although these categories are not all necessarily ethnic according to our usage, we might say that for those that were al-Fath was using a definition of ethnicity that was based more on environment than on anything else. After all, al-Fath was himself a Turk who had assimilated to Arab/Islamic culture, and al-Jāḥiẓ was probably of black African descent. This merely underlines the fact that historically Islamic societies have been pluralistic in a number of different ways and that assimilated outsiders are more likely to privilege their new identity. Just about the only place that ethnicity was ever institutionalized was in the army, where there was a pattern of ethnic units from at least the ninth century.4 This was partly because of the specialization of different ethnic groups as infantry or cavalry,5 partly because their ethnic identity gave such units solidarity and improved their morale, and partly a tool to divide and rule: the ruler could use them against each other if necessary. In any case, there is no evidence that ethnicity formed the basis for states.

Ethnicity did, however, serve as a category for group identity and particularly for stereotypes that people had of each other. In the context of the shu’ūbiyya ‘Arabs, Persians, and other participants insult one another’s customs and pretensions with a vigor that would warm the heart of any modern ethnic nationalist.6 But most shu’ūbīs were not political, nor was the Iranian self-identity expressed politically.7 Nevertheless, the main criteria for ethnicity in

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7 Ibid., pp. 162, 181–2.
the Arabic sources were geography, politics, language and religion. By the late tenth century many of the rulers from one end of the Islamic world to the other were non-Arabs, but they were not ethnically the same as the people they ruled. Following the collapse of the caliphate in al-Andalus in the eleventh century, some of the successor ta’ifa states were ruled by Berbers, such as the Banū Zirī of Granada, or by Slavs, such as Mujāhid of Denia, although their subjects were neither Berbers nor Slavs. The point of Ibn García’s eleventh-century letter was to argue that non-Arabs were at least equal, if not superior, to Arabs and to legitimize non-Arab Muslim rulers, such as his master, the Slavic ruler of Denia. It was not to legitimize the rule of an ethnic group.

But ethnicity was not the only category. There were other categories based on regional identities (such as the Khurāsānīs), tribal identities, one’s place of origin, occupation or religion. These categories sometimes overlapped in a number of different ways. However, one of the defining differences between Classical Antiquity and the post-Antique world was the long-term trend through Late Antiquity for religion to become the primary basis for a person’s identity. This was paralleled by the emergence of confessional groups that grew into religious communities and was probably because of them. Religious communities formed the basic organizing structures of the multi-ethnic, multi-religious societies of the Islamic period.

One of the bases for such a community was a system of law that applied only to its members. These legal systems were personal rather than territorial. During Late Antiquity personality of law can be found in the tribal sunna of pre-Islamic Arabs and later in the law codes of the Germanic groups, but the basis was shifting from ethnicity to religion. From the fifth century onward the Visigoths, Ostrogoths, Burgundians, Ripuarian and Salian Franks, Lombards and Anglo-Saxons enshrined their unwritten customs in law codes. Although the Breviary of Alaric (ca. 506) was no longer used in Visigothic Hispania after Visigothic law became territorial with the law code of Recceswinth in 654, the Breviary did remain in use in Aquitaine and the Rhône Valley under Frankish rule. The Franks respected personality of law for themselves and their subject peoples. For centuries after the Franks conquered the Burgundians in 534, Frankish subjects of Burgundian descent claimed the right to be judged by Burgundian

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11 Drew, Salian Franks, pp. 22–3.
law. Lombard law remained in force in the Carolingian Kingdom of Italy after Charlemagne conquered the Lombards in 775. It continued to be applied from the eighth to the twelfth century, and was gradually displaced by the revival of Roman law in the eleventh century. The law of the Ripuarian Franks states that ‘Whenever anyone in the district of Ripuaria is called into court – whether he be Frank, Burgundian, or Alamannian – let him answer according to the law of his nation.’ Although Ripuarian law was territorial in the sense that it applied in the district of Ripuaria, at least Burgundians and Alamanni who happened to be there could be judged according to their own law. Thus, when Regino of Prüm (ca. 850–915) said that peoples differed according to their origin, custom, language and law that was based on contemporary circumstances but was not necessarily a new idea. Nevertheless, the tendency to explain the emergence of personality of law in the early Middle Ages by relating it primarily to Germanic tribalism in western Europe is seriously undermined by developments in Sasanian Iraq during Late Antiquity where personality of law developed on a religious basis, in a non-tribal society, and before Islam.

From the late Sasanian to the early Islamic period one can see a general trend from territoriality to personality of law and from a human to a divine source for valid law. The evidence for this consists of an emerging pattern of separate systems of religious law for the members of different religious groups – Jews, Christians and Mazdean Zoroastrians – that covered ritual, personal behavior and matters of personal status such as marriage, divorce and inheritance. A Rabbinic Jewish community emerged among the Jews of Babylonia with the development of the Talmud from the third century CE onward by rabbis who based their authority on the claim to knowledge of an oral tradition that went back to Moses. The Talmud covered the details of everyday life, and during the fourth and fifth centuries rabbis served as local judges, market inspectors and

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12 Ibid., p. 24.
13 Drew, Lombard Laws, pp. 21–2; Drew, Salian Franks, p. 27.
17 Mazdean Zoroastrianism is the dualist form, Ohrmazd vs. Ahriman, that survives today. During Late Antiquity it was one of three existing forms of Zoroastrianism.
tax collectors in Sasanian Babylonia. The legal competence of the rabbis did not extend to criminal justice; that was reserved to the Sasanian monarchy.

Christians, for their part, developed a system of canon law from the fifth century CE onward for the administration of the Church of the East in Sasanian territory. Legislative authority came from the Holy Spirit who was identified as the source of law. By the late sixth century canon law was being extended to include the lay members of Christian communities in matters of property, marriage and inheritance. The local judges were Christian priests. Both Jews and Christians incorporated the Sasanian law of property into their own religious law.

Sasanian royal law was territorial as was late Roman law. It consisted of royal decrees collected in a book of laws called the Dādestān Nāmag. This does not survive, but a late Sasanian digest called the Māḏīgān ī Hazār Dādestān that contains the opinions of fifth- and sixth-century jurists and royal decrees (the last one from 616) does survive. Its contents cover legal procedure and documents, the status of wives and slaves, marriage, divorce, adoption, inheritance, property rights and settlements, the guardianship of trusts, the endowment of fire temples, sales, gifts, loans and debts, and penalties for personal injury, adultery, robbery and theft. Much of this is based on Mazdaean ethical principles and religious requirements, just as the law of the later Roman Empire was based on Christian principles. It was intended for Mazdaean Iranians, and it was administered by mowbeds, whose jurisdictions were territorial and who rendered decisions in accordance with royal decrees. The application of this law by mowbeds as local judges spread a Mazdaean way of life among Iranians similar to the activity of rabbis among the Jews. The difference was that, because the mowbeds belonged to the politically dominant group and were backed by the state, they were able to enforce conformity and membership among the Mazdaean population. On the other hand, they depended on secular officials to enforce their decisions. In this respect they were similar to Christian bishops in the Late Roman Empire, where there was a trend toward ecclesiastical courts during Late Antiquity.

The Muslim conquest broke the relationship between the mowbeds and the state in former Sasanian territory, but a similar relationship was created between Muslim qāḍīs and Muslim rulers.

Although Sasanian royal law was territorial, wherever Mazdaeans were part of mixed populations with Jews and Christians, Sasanian law functioned as personal law for them. This would have been the case particularly in Sasanian
Iraq, where Mazdaean Iranians were a ruling minority in the population, so Sasanian law served to distinguish them from Jews and Christians in matters of personal status.

Personality of law based on religion only increased and spread under the Muslims, who had their own religious law that did not apply to non-Muslims. The latter were expected to have their own. In former Sasanian territory Mazdeans, Jews and Christians continued to preserve, develop and adapt their own legal systems for their own needs, mainly in matters of personal status. Among the Jews the *geonim*, who headed the rabbinic academies at Sura and Pumbaditha in Babylonia/Iraq, not only continued to discuss legal matters but also now began to export their legal system via responsa to Jewish communities outside of Iraq, mainly in the formerly Roman parts of the Mediterranean world. This began toward the end of the seventh century, about the same time as the legal responsa of Ḥenanisho’, Catholicos of the Church of the East (686–99), that deal with the freeing of slaves, marriage, the legal capacity of minors, guardianship, pledges, legitimate succession, wills and bequests, and judicial procedure. In the eighth century Isho’bokht of Fars produced a six-volume codification of law (*Composition on the Laws*) for the Christians of the Church of the East that covered jurisprudence, marriage, inheritance and contracts. Church councils continued to produce canons through the seventh and eighth century until 790 CE. In addition, the pattern of religious communities that had been established by the late Sasanian period now spread beyond former Sasanian territory into former Roman territory that had been conquered by the Muslims. The various Christian Churches in what had been the eastern part of the Roman Empire developed their own system of personal law based on forms of the Syro-Roman Law Code that included marriage, divorce, dowries, inheritance, degrees of consanguinity, debts and loans, selling and buying, contracts and partnerships, and pledges and oaths. Personality of law based on a religious identity became normative, but it was never absolute. Criminal and business law came under Islamic law from the beginning, and in cases between different non-Muslim minorities the Muslim judge applied Muslim law. By the tenth century most of the eastern


22 Edelby, ‘Legislative autonomy’, p. 52.


26 Maged S.A. Mikhail, ‘Legislative and communal autonomy of Coptic Christians during the first three centuries of Islamic rule’ (forthcoming), p. 18; Rose, ‘Personal status
Churches were imitating Muslim law with regard to inheritance, consanguinity and business contracts.27

The Coptic Church in Egypt is something of an exception. There is no evidence for judicial or communal autonomy for the first three centuries of Muslim rule, when they had no law code of their own or even nomocanons. They made their first legal compilations in the tenth century and only adopted a form of the Syro-Roman Law Code in the eleventh century.28 One of the reasons for this lag may be that the sixth to the ninth century saw a sharp decline in litigation in Egypt with disputes being settled by arbitration instead. Lawsuits became prevalent again in the ninth and tenth centuries.29 During the same period sale contracts among Coptic Christians, which were written in Coptic, continued the pre-Islamic form of sale until contracts began to be written in Arabic at the end of the eighth century. By the ninth century Christian marriage contracts written in Arabic in Egypt were according to Islamic law.30 In the early Abbasid period Christians and Jews in Egypt increasingly applied to Muslim courts because the qāḍī’s judgment was backed by the government unlike the judgment of the bishop. 31 Already we are told that in the mid-eighth century Khayr b. Nu‘aym, a late Umawī qāḍī in Egypt (739–45), after he had judged Muslims inside the masjid would sit at the door of the masjid and judge the cases of Christians and Jews. According to al-Kindī, he would accept the testimony of a ‘Christian against a Christian, a Jew against a Jew’, and in each case he asked the people of their religion about acceptable concepts of justice (adala).32

This sounds remarkably similar to the report in the Chronicle of 754 that Khayr’s contemporary, the governor of al-Andalus from 737 to 742, ‘Uqba b. al-Ḥajjāj al-Ṣalūlī ‘condemned no one except by the justice of his own law’ (iustitia legis propriae). Collins takes this to mean that ‘Uqba employed personality of law and applied the Visigothic law code, the Forum Iudicum, to his Christian subjects thereby encouraging them to have a separate group identity.33 Apart from the fact that this text does not actually say that, it does imply that law was personal and that there was more than one kind of law. Nor does this text say whether or not Jews were still covered by Visigothic law or had their own law laws’, p. 163.

30 Edelby, ‘Legislative autonomy’, p. 52; Mikhail, ‘Coptic Christians’, p. 16.
31 Ibid., p. 19.
at that point. However, the change in the situation of the Jewish population of the Iberian peninsula from the Visigothic to the Islamic period is one of the best ways to understand the difference between the Germanic and Islamic parts of the post-Roman Mediterranean world.

Visigothic law had begun in the fifth century as personal law that distinguished Visigoths from Hispano-Romans. By the middle of the seventh century Visigothic law had become territorial; the same body of law applied to Hispano-Romans and Visigoths alike in the Visigothic kingdom, including Jews. By the late seventh century the primacy of the metropolitan bishops of Toledo within the Visigothic kingdom had also been achieved, so that the canon law of the Church was equally territorial. The Visigothic monarchy recognized the legislative authority of the Councils of Toledo, while the Church gave up its autonomy in the selection of bishops to the crown. Thus the anti-Jewish legislation of the 690s, that made it impossible for Jews to be merchants, and enslaved and confiscated the property of unbaptized Jews, was not in the Visigothic law code but in the canons of the Councils of Toledo of 693 and 694.

These canons singled out Jews based on their religious identity and based on the assumption that the Church could legislate with regard to them.

The Muslim conquest in 711 changed matters completely. Christians in al-Andalus continued to be governed by the Visigothic law code, that reverted to personal law again, but now for Christians instead of for Visigoths. It also survived as the law code of Leon, but in al-Andalus Christians could no longer legislate with regard to Jews. The Jews were now in a position to develop their own legal life, which they did by applying to the Geonim of Babylonia/Iraq who sent them responsa. This did coincide with the beginning of the activity of the Geonim to export Talmudic Judaism from Iraq via their responsa. Talmudic scholarship in al-Andalus and its Babylonian orientation is said to have begun with the arrival of Natronai bar Habibae, an unsuccessful aspirant to the exilarchate, who left Babylonia after 773 and wrote down the Talmud from memory after he arrived in Iberia. It was mainly during the ninth and tenth centuries that the Jews of al-Andalus consulted several Geonim of Sura from R. Zadoc (823) to R. Naḥshon

35 Collins, Arab Conquest of Spain, p. 9.
36 Ibid., pp. 135–6.
37 Drew, Salian Franks, p. 23.
Religious Communities in the Early Islamic World

(874–82), and several Geonim of Pumbedita from R. Paltoi (842–58) to R. Cohen-Zedek (923–35). R. Natronai of Sura sent responsa to the community at Lucena, and R. Paltoi, the Gaon of Pumbedita, sent the entire Talmud together with its interpretation to al-Andalus. By the middle of the tenth century, when R. Moses and his son R. Enoch were the heads of a large school in Córdoba, the Jews of al-Andalus were becoming independent of the Babylonian Geonim, and fewer responsa were being sent. By the late tenth and early eleventh century the ideal of the legal autonomy of the Jewish community is reflected in the way the rabbis disparaged the competence of the Muslim courts because the rabbis claimed that those courts accepted unreliable documents and witnesses.

Beginning slightly earlier, around 800 CE, there was a parallel spread of the Muslim Mālikī system of law (madhhab) via the transportation from North Africa to al-Andalus of the Muwaṭṭa’ of Anas ibn Mālik (d. 795) in Madīna by the latter’s students. Among the first to do so were Ziyād b. Ābd al-Raḥmān al-Lakhmī, called Shabṭūn (d. 809 or 815) and his student Yahyā b. Yahyā al-Laythī (d. 847). Baqī b. Makhḥad (d. 889), who was in the east from 833 to 867, brought eastern legal and historical works back to al-Andalus with him and transmitted the Muwaṭṭa’ of Mālik according to the eastern reading. Muḥammad b. Waḍḍāḥ (d. 900), who returned to al-Andalus from collecting ḥadīth in the east in 859, transmitted Yahyā b. Yahyā’s version of Mālik’s Muwaṭṭa’ and spread the Mudawwana of the North African Mālikī scholar Ṣaḥnūn (d. 854) in al-Andalus.

There are two general conclusions that may be drawn with regard to the nature of such religious communities. One is that there were practical limits to legal autonomy in a tendency to incorporate elements of the hegemonic legal system, either Sasanian or Islamic, into communal law. The second is that the difference between the Germanic and Islamic parts of the post-Roman world is that the pluralistic societies in Islamic territory were organized into religious communities and that personality of law was based on religion instead of ethnicity.

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41 Chejne, Muslim Spain, pp. 18–19.
44 Ibid., p. 80.
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Diverse issues of identity and contested visions of community characterized social relations in North Africa at the time of the Muslim conquest in the seventh century. Seventh-century identities were often multiple and complex, whether Christian, Muslim or something else. Religion constituted one component, but was itself insufficient to define groups. Rather, what was important were the subgroups of a sometimes splintered religious community. Other sources of identity were provincial, ethnic, military and familial affiliations, which in turn often included extended families and clans. A striking case is that of Kusayla (Kasīla) the autochthonous Roman commander of the forces who trapped and annihilated the bold Muslim commander ‘Uqba b. Nāfi’ and his forces in 683. Such identities were multiple, but could nevertheless underpin loyalty to the empire.

Neither fixed bipolarities nor dichotomies existed. Historians should not expect to find such straightforward situations. Seventh-century identities were in a constant state of motion. The term ‘shifting’ is thus appropriate for capturing aspects of seventh-century identities and visions of community, which in some cases were very contested. The instability of identity compounds the challenges for modern historians who seek to investigate conditions and trends in that poorly documented era.

Part of the explanation lay in broader unstable conditions that affected many: warfare, persecutions, compulsory exile and voluntary asylum all contributed to population displacements and considerable human suffering from the earliest years of the seventh century to its end, from Mesopotamia to the western extremities of the Mediterranean. Individuals and groups accompanied or fled from armies, others were deported or simply took advantage of opportunities for profit that presented themselves. Yet some managed to survive through luck.

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1 I dedicate my paper to the memory of Yves Modéran, who tragically died on 1 July 2010. He was invited to but unable to participate in this international conference. I thank Professors Pohl and Haldon and the other distinguished organizers of this conference for the invitation and the opportunity to participate.

or adaptation. These fluctuations resulted in many more becoming aware of the otherness of those whom they had seldom previously encountered. Such events contributed to efforts to draw boundaries, but also created contexts for the emergence of greater familiarity. There was also substantial social change, not merely fluctuating fortunes. The societies of the 680s and 690s were not identical with their counterparts during the first or second decades of the seventh century.

Not everything had become parochial and localized. People still managed to cross physical and psychological boundaries and borders and even managed to travel great distances in the seventh century. Ecclesiastics, officials, merchants and others continued to employ the familiar older Roman routes. Despite fragmentation, the shattered remains of former imperial polities provided resources for movement and communication.

Some individuals managed to cling to several identities and loyalties and some moved easily between them, although in doing so they risked severe opprobrium and physical harm and retribution for alleged treachery. There were abrupt withdrawals, flights and defections. But governments and ecclesiastical leaders sought at times to draw clear boundaries for religious, political and personal loyalties. The sources are replete with examples of boundary violations and accusations of perceived betrayals and conspiracies. Loyalties frequently became blurred and confused. Individuals and groups sometimes found ambiguity and blurred boundaries useful. Conditions remained unsettled as a result of this for a considerable time. Some actors saw no contradiction or inherent conflict in their conduct and actions, while others evidently did. People interpreted their present predicaments in terms of recent experiences and memories of rapid changes and drew upon familiar frameworks to comprehend them.

To turn from broader preliminary remarks to more specific ones about seventh-century North Africa, here are seven points.

Multiple and fluctuating loyalties are evident in the Erotapokriseis of St. Anastasius the Sinaite, which John Haldon has elucidated and Joseph Munitiz has published. At the end of the seventh century, Anastasius, a monk at the monastery of St. Catherine’s on Sinai, compiled a series of answers to the questions Christians posed to the monks. The writings of Anastasius Sinaites reveal the proliferation of mixed loyalties and mixed historical world views as well as the efforts of a monastic writer to interpret seventh-century developments retrospectively within a strict frame of reference. However, Anastasius was a unique figure, a representative of a monastery that attempted to refashion Christian identities in response to the transformations of the

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seventh century. Not all Christians could turn to a monastery for answers to the many questions the traumatic events of the period raised. Anastasius uses the term Ἄραβες. Monasticism on Mt. Sinai provided a matrix for his writings.

Seventh-century North Africa significantly lacked any monastic authors comparable to Anastasius the Sinaite, and the absence of monastic constructors of identity may have facilitated the disappearance of Christian communities. The Romano-Africans of North Africa lost their identity almost completely. This was not a rapid process. Although Latin monasticism once thrived in North Africa, it failed to survive, in contrast to the Christian monasteries in Egypt, Palestine and the Levant. The failure of monasticism in North Africa to produce an Anastasius the Sinaite in the second half of the seventh century or to maintain an institution with prestige even remotely comparable to that of Sinai is noteworthy and may help to illuminate contrasting histories and fortune. Christian monasteries depended on local support, such as the tribes of the Sinai, which apparently dissipated in North Africa.

The seventh century was marked by an awareness of the unravelling and fragmentation of the empire, especially in the East. Consciousness of ripping and laceration is evident in the text of the *Doctrina Jacobi* from the 630s. In such situations, personal loyalty came more frequently into question as both governmental authorities and communal loyalties lost their persuasive power. Seventh-century Byzantine and Romano-African defeats at the hands of the Muslims were blamed on the treachery, cowardice, weakness and avarice of others, especially individuals with alternative ethnic or religious allegiances. Alleged transgressions created opportunities for polemicists and politicians to engage in scapegoating and accusations of military treason. Such scapegoats included General Vahan, whose alleged betrayal of the Byzantines at the battle of the Yarmūk Mikael Nichanian has reevaluated; Patriarch Cyrus of Alexandria and Maximus the Confessor for purportedly losing Egypt to the Muslims; Maximus the Confessor for the loss of North Africa; Pope Martin I for unauthorized and supposedly deleterious contacts with Muslims; and finally Moors or *Mauri* for breaking ranks and fleeing during the North Africans’ critical

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7 Mikael Nichanian, ‘Le maître des milices d’Orient, Vahan, de la bataille de Yarmouk (636) au complot d’Athalaric (637)’, in Barlow Der Mugrdechian (ed.), *Between Paris and Fresno: Armenian Studies in Honor of Dickran Kouymjian* (Costa Mesa, Calif., 2008), pp. 321–37. The Baanes at Yarmūk was magister militum per Orientem and in fact was Vahan Khorkhoruni, from a very important Armenian clan.
resistance to Muslims in 647 at or near Sbeitla in former Byzacena, which I have discussed and reconstructed elsewhere.\footnote{8} Fred Donner has developed persuasive theories of an initial seventh-century period of loose, fluid and overlapping relationships between the earliest Muslim believers and some local Christian communities, especially in Syria.\footnote{9} Although it is beyond his purview, some of his remarks are apt for the North African situation. The hypothesized early era of unfixed religious boundaries may help to illuminate an otherwise puzzling episode. Byzantine authorities’ accusations against Pope Martin I, however preposterous, may in fact reflect the still fluid and flexible stance of some Christian leaders toward the newly emergent power, and efforts to reach some sort of accommodation with the new regime.\footnote{10} Byzantine authorities may even have accused Pope Martin I in 653 of collaboration with Muslims;\footnote{11} ‘because he [Martin] alone overthrew, ruined, and destroyed the entire west’.\footnote{12} He fiercely denied such charges: ‘At no time did I send letters to the Saracens nor, as some say, a statement [tomus] as to what they should believe; neither did I ever dispatch money, except only to those servants of God traveling to that place for the sake of alms, and the little which we supplied them was certainly not conveyed to the Saracens.’\footnote{13}

One can only speculate what supposedly may have been in a lost tomos from Pope Martin concerning what ‘Saracens’ should believe.\footnote{14} The nature and significance of this mysterious tomos is extremely controversial. If the

\footnote{8} Walter E. Kaegi, Muslim Expansion and Byzantine Collapse in North Africa (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 116–44.

\footnote{9} Fred M. Donner, Muhammad and the Believers (Cambridge, Mass., 2010), pp. 109–16.


\footnote{12} Anastasius Bibliothecarius, Collectanea, PL 129 (Paris, 1879), cols 553–690, at 593: ‘quod solus subvertit et perdidit universum Occidentem, et delebit’.


\footnote{14} Other popes such as Gregory I, Gregory II and Nicholas I did attempt to lay out acceptable and unacceptable practices, beliefs and customs among various ethnic groups. Although Martin I may have attempted to regulate relations between Christians
document existed at all, the *tomus* may represent a trace of a papal effort to communicate with Muslims in an era in which proto-Muslim beliefs and practices were assumed to be in flux and therefore malleable. But it is unclear whether Martin’s alleged relations with ‘Saracens’ involved those in the Levant or those in North Africa or both. The explanation may be more complex. Martin I allegedly engaged in contact of some kind with Muslims and more specifically also engaged in some sort of alleged financial transactions with them. He may in fact have sought to communicate with Christian clergy in areas under emerging Muslim control and also to provide financial aid to such local clerics and to assist (or ransom) Christians in desperate conditions in areas under Muslim control. Even though those initiatives – the real facts remain unclear – were intended to support Christians, strictly speaking they could have involved payments to or negotiations with Muslim authorities. Suspicions concerning these activities aroused imperial fury. Martin I was unable to convince his imperial accusers to drop their case against him and died in exile in Chersonese Crimea on 16 September 655.15

Regardless of the accuracy of the accusations, the case of Martin I reveals a political climate in which the boundaries between Christians and Muslims were uncertain and in which religious identities did not automatically determine political loyalties. The unambiguously Christian Pope could find himself the target of accusations of collaboration with Muslims. In the East, studies of Christians and Muslims sharing places of worship in the Levant and, even more striking, sharing political authority in Cyprus after 649 and at Arabissus, in the border zone between Muslim-occupied North Syria and Byzantine Anatolia, have demonstrated the endurance of cultural and political ambiguities well beyond the initial conquests.16 In light of Martin I’s political travails, such fluidity was


likely to have characterized relations between Christians and Muslims in the
Western Mediterranean in the middle of the seventh century no less than in the
East.

NORTH AFRICAN CONTEXTS OF IDENTITY

North Africa presented its conquerors, both Byzantine and Muslim, with
peculiar challenges to their identities. The early Muslims found themselves in
an environment that was almost entirely unknown, and prior to the conquests
Byzantine military officials from the East similarly operated in unfamiliar
territory. Through similar processes, Muslim and Byzantine military leaders
formed perceptions and framed experiences of a North African context to which
neither one was native. There was an asymmetrical development that worked in
favor of the Muslims. Byzantine commanders trained in the East applied their
experiences to North African situations, while Muslim military experience grew
exponentially in North Africa through the flow of capable Muslim commanders
from western Asia into North Africa and vice versa. Once the Muslims had
conquered the Byzantine East, these processes worked in favor of the Muslims
to the disadvantage of Byzantine military leaders marooned in a North Africa
disconnected from the core provinces of the empire.

Where the transfer of military officials from the East to North Africa had
fostered a Byzantine vision of North Africa as a component of a broader, imperial
community, their isolation from the East eroded such ties. A comparable process
of reinforcement, by contrast, honed Muslim leadership in North Africa. The
Heraclian family, which dominated Byzantium throughout the seventh century,
had its roots in, and derived its strength from, transfers between eastern and
North African tours of duty, together with the social networks and knowledge
they acquired through experiences with personnel, terrain and subjects in two
different regions of stressful borders and warfare. These were fundamental
components of the Byzantine strategic culture that existed on the eve of
and during the initial years of Muslim military operations in North Africa.\(^\text{17}\)
Mid-seventh-century decision-makers in Constantinople probably continued
to think about policies and selections of key personnel for Africa in the light
of time-honored habits and patterns of actions. However, those processes of
transferring the latest military innovations and adapting the latest lessons from
the eastern frontier (in Syria and upper Mesopotamia) to North Africa were
coming to an end for the Byzantines in North Africa.

By the early 640s, the foes on Byzantium’s eastern frontier, the Muslims, had
extended their reach to North Africa. Soon they were shifting some of their key
Muslim commanders, namely ‘Abd Allāh b. Sa’d b. Abī Sarḥ, Ruwayfi’ b. Thābit,

\(^\text{17}\) On imperial strategy, see Edward Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine
‘Abd Allāh b. Zubayr, Buṣr b. Abī Arṭāṭ, ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān and Fadāla b. ‘Ubayd, from the Levant and Egypt to North Africa. They developed extensive experience and motivation in fighting the Byzantines in the East and Egypt and applying the latest Muslim tactical innovations and diplomatic skills from those newly-won territories and frontiers to surmounting Byzantine resistance in North Africa. These Muslim commanders strove for victories, but probably also for the enhancement of their reputation and wealth. Later Muslim traditions rather inconsistently awarded fame to commanders who competed for the glories of conquest. Although historical recollections of these events and competing Muslim personalities are mixed, there are indications that a sensitivity to the North African environment contributed to Muslim successes. Significantly, Caliph ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān, unlike his Byzantine imperial rivals, had hands-on direct military campaign experience in North Africa. His later military decisions with respect to North Africa were well informed, resulting in part from his personal experiences there and not merely from reports and hearsay.

The processes through which imperial leaders and officials arrived at strategic decisions were complex and often opaque for modern investigators. But shifting patterns of experience and identification played a major role. Major Byzantine military appointments and strategy in North Africa had followed a pattern since the commencement of the Byzantine reconquest of North Africa in the 530s. Emperors often selected commanders of proven military leadership from the corps of officers who were available in the East, namely those who had developed experience against Persia in the tough proving grounds of the military zone of north Syria and upper Mesopotamia. Each brought with him to North Africa the latest experience, tactics and military wisdom from military campaigns against the Persians. This was a point of pride. According to Procopius, experience in fighting the Persians was an asset to Byzantine military effectiveness in sixth-century North Africa, and presumably that assumption persisted in the seventh century. Some of the challenges of terrain, water resources, logistics, fortifications and weather in both theaters were comparable although not identical. Reinforcing this stream of appointees with experience in upper Mesopotamia were significant numbers of officers and soldiers from Armenia, some of whom had also served in the Upper Mesopotamian frontier zone. This legacy continued from Justinian I through the reign of Heraclius.

However, by the 640s and 650s there no longer remained an untapped pool of talented and successful Byzantine commanders for the imperial government to transfer from north Syria, upper Mesopotamia or southeastern Anatolia to North Africa. With the collapse of that older but familiar imperial adversary, the Sasanian Empire, the Byzantine Empire had lost its traditional training and

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18 Procopius, Wars, 3, 11, 9.
testing grounds in upper Mesopotamia to the Muslims. The Byzantine Empire’s leadership was still desperately searching for ideas and formulae for victory against the Muslims. There probably continued to be an exchange of information about effective methods and tactics between the empire’s receding eastern frontier and North Africa and Numidia, but such efforts remain undocumented.

For North Africa, the supply of effective and successful Byzantine military talent from the East had disappeared and previous progressive patterns for military careers and advancement, which secured the absorption, dissemination and distribution of military wisdom, broke down in the unprecedented empire-wide military crisis of the middle of the seventh century. This was a time of profound confusion. Military commanders in North Africa cannot have found much encouraging inspiration from the Byzantine army’s record in the East between 630 and 647 or in 665.

The ethnic composition of the seventh-century Byzantine or Roman army in North Africa is thinly documented, but it was not homogeneous. Military ranks included Greeks and Armenians from the East as well as descendants of Roman veterans who had intermarried with local populations. Armenians held many prominent posts in the Byzantine armies throughout the empire, including Palestine and Syria, during the Heraclian dynasty, and had been prominent in North Africa since the Byzantine reconquests in the 550s. Some can be identified. Noteworthy is an important Byzantine military commander in North African Numidia, John dux of Tigisis, who left an inscription at his chapel in Timgad in 641 or 643 identifying himself as an Armenian.21 Some, like the future Emperor Heraclius, intermarried with African elites.

The Heraclian dynastic policy of appointing Armenians to prominent posts in North Africa continued at least into the middle of the seventh century; the example of Narseh at Tripoli stands out in the late seventh century.22 The imperial government also continued to exile undesirable or dangerous Armenians to North Africa and to nearby islands in the Mediterranean. So the Byzantine presence in Africa had a strong Armenian stamp, not only a Roman or Greek one. Historians


may wonder how Armenian commanders in North Africa reacted to the news that Muslims were overrunning much of their Armenian homeland at the end of the 630s and beginning of the 640s, but the sources are silent. Armenians in North Africa cannot have received such news with equanimity. It may have stiffened the determination of some to continue to fight in North Africa, while others may have sought to return to the East to help defend their homelands and villages or to assist their families. Local populations probably increased in the ranks of Byzantine forces in North Africa with the passage of time. How the Latin-speaking elites and the local populations of North Africa responded to the Armenian presence in their midst is unknown. How well Armenian military officers adjusted to conditions in North Africa and Numida is equally unclear. The *Strategikon* of Maurice (ca. 600 ce) reveals that some Byzantines advised awareness of ethnic differences within their military forces and to beware of possibly treacherous or volatile loyalties.²³

Byzantine adversities in the East generated no new military insights or strategies with which the North African commanders could respond to the Muslim conquests. By the late 640s, Byzantine commanders who had served in northern Mesopotamia or northern Syria had been familiar only with catastrophic defeats such as Yarmūk and repeated, devastating withdrawals. They found no effective ways for waging elastic mobile warfare or for combating Muslim raiders except taking advantage of whatever fortified towns and rough terrain and mountain passes were available. The experiences and perspectives of Byzantine commanders or officials who had participated in the defense of Egypt likewise offered neither encouragement nor military innovations. In time the Byzantines would develop effective strategies to contain the Muslims in Anatolia, but that process of adaptation was a slow one. Military officers with that kind of effective experience were not, it seems, transferred to North Africa to apply the innovations the Byzantines were developing in Anatolia. The time, nevertheless, had come to stop trading land for time. Byzantine forces needed to regroup and to revise their approach in North Africa. North Africa could not be abandoned without decisive combat, which was fast approaching in the mid-seventh century.

If the transfer of military leaders served to strengthen the position of North Africa within the empire, the difficulty with which the Byzantines transferred soldiers suggests local troops’ allegiance to the empire had significant limitations. The well-known efforts of Maximus the Confessor to undermine imperial loyalties on theological grounds appear to have intersected with identities of province and military unit. Although their actions are poorly documented, local Numidian elites and soldiers may have had a motive other than the principled objections of Maximus the Confessor to refuse to leave Numidia for Egypt to

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²³ Maurikios, *Strategikon*, 8,2,17; 8,2,80.
fight the Arabs in 633.\textsuperscript{24} Local elites and soldiers may have been reluctant to depart their homelands for unfamiliar and risky localities, and, perhaps even more importantly, they may have feared leaving Numidia, Zeugitana (former Africa Proconsularis) and Byzacena vulnerable to various tribal raids during an absence of indefinite duration on campaign in Egypt or elsewhere in the East. Their refusal to move was in itself an assertion of de facto autonomy and a readiness to risk imperial wrath for the sake of local interests and priorities. They identified with a Numidian locality. They possibly feared permanent transfer far away from what they regarded as their homes and familiar countryside. It was no straightforward matter for the imperial government to retaliate against stubborn soldiers at a time of great vulnerability. The sixth-century historian Procopius reported that Byzantine troops already in the reign of Justinian disliked transfers between the North African and eastern fronts.\textsuperscript{25} Soldiers’ opposition to transfers was longstanding and independent from religious issues. Previous rivalries between Byzantine commanders in Numidia and Byzacena had resulted in Byzantine military reverses at the hands of local tribes in 545;\textsuperscript{26} Numidain troops had experienced and participated in a great deal of dissension within Byzantine ranks in North Africa. Theirs was the perspective and identity of a locality or military unit, rather than an empire.

The early Muslims frequently sought to co-opt such locally oriented populations, as they sought to control a volatile region. Accounts of the conquest in Arabic became tangled and garbled in transmission and accordingly have befuddled and misled many subsequent historians whether Islamicists or Byzantinists. One narrative reveals the responses of Byzantines, or Romano-Africans, to the arrival of the Muslims. It is a complicated story of internal North African tensions and of the flight of North African Latin leaders to Mu’āwiya. A confused textual transmission has reinforced the opacity of events in which loyalties and identities appear to have been decidedly mixed.

The eminent historian al-Ṭabarī and the well-informed, early fourteenth-century geographer Ibn ‘Idhārī, as well as other Muslim writers, provide a description of an important sequence of events in North Africa that dated to the very end of the 640s, very soon after the Muslim victory at Sbeitla in 647 and the resulting harsh terms of tribute the Muslim commander ‘Abd Allāh b. Sa’d b. Abī Sarḥ reportedly imposed on North African taxpayers. The narrative of al-Wāqidī as transmitted initially by al-Ṭabarī described a complicated pattern of collaboration, boundary-crossing and cooptation. These actions are in part comprehensible only in the context of Constantinople’s increasing dependence


\textsuperscript{25} Procopius, Wars, 3,10,5.

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 4,25,1–28; 4,27,5–38; 4,28,1–35.
on North African resources and negative local responses to such imperial policies. Imperial pressure also helps to explain how these conflicting passions generated internal strife that, in combination with sectarian Christian polemics and ecclesiastical grievances and interests, contributed to hindering the development of a cohesive North African resistance to the Muslims. The original account of al-Wāqidī that al-Ṭabarī transmits is straightforward concerning the – unidentified – Emperor Constans II’s effort to secure the same large payment of gold from the North Africans that they had paid to the Muslim leader Ibn Abī Sarh. It is this simpler version that eventually, by the fourteenth century, turned into the more elaborate and garbled accounts of the geographer Ibn ‘Idhārī and the compiler al-Nuwayrī. In the words of al-Ṭabarī, who drew on the important – now lost – history of al-Wāqidī (late eighth and early ninth century Ce):

The Byzantine emperor [Constans II] dispatched a legate [rasūlan, in al-Ṭabarī, I: 2818, AH 23 or 27], ordering him to take [from the inhabitants of Ifrīqiya] 300 qintārs [of gold], just as ‘Abdallāh b. Sa’d had done. So he gathered the leading men (ru’asā’) of Ifrīqiya and said, ‘The Emperor has commanded me to take from you 300 qintārs of gold, the same amount that ‘Abdallāh b. Sa’d has taken from you.’ They answered, ‘We have no money to give. As for what we once possessed, we have used it to ransom ourselves. As to the Emperor, he is indeed our lord, so let him take the portion of our wealth that used to be lawfully his, on the same terms as we formerly paid him every year.’ When [the legate] heard this he ordered them to be imprisoned. They sent [for help] to a certain group among their associates (aṣḥābihim); they came against [the legate] and broke open the prison, so that the detainees escaped.27

This simplified story seems to have become the core of future elaborations. Thus Ibn ‘Idhārī repeats this account, with embellishments:

When Heraclius [Constans II] learned what terms the people of Africa have made with ‘Abd Allāh b. Sa’d b. Abī Sarḥ he sent to Africa a patrician named Awlīma and he ordered him to take three hundred qintars of gold just as Ibn Abī Sarḥ took it. And he took up residence in Carthage. And they told him that, ‘All of the wealth that we had we ransomed up to the Arabs. As for the Emperor, he is our lord, he would punish us again!’ And their leader in this matter was a man named Ḥubāḥiba. And they drove out Awlīma the newcomer. And they reached the conclusion to accept al-Aṭaryūn [tribune?]. And Ḥubāḥiba went to Syria and reached [Caliph] Mu‘āwiya. He described to him the situation in Africa and asked that he send an army of Arabs with him. And Mu‘āwiya sent with him Ibn Ḫudayj with a supporting army. That was in the year 45. And Ibn

Hudayj proceeded until he reached Africa ... And the emperor of Rome sent a patrician named Nikephoros [Nikfur] advancing and it was said with 30,000.28

This story is plausible, although the underlying Graeco-Roman names Ḥubāḥiba, al-Awlīma and al-Atāryūn, who may have been a tribune, are uncertain and of dubious historicity. The Liber Pontificalis corroborates the existence of fiscally motivated dissent among North African landowners toward the Byzantine authorities and their tax policies.29 Ibn Khaldūn similarly described local North African dissatisfaction with the perceived excesses of Byzantine taxes.30 The result was local rebellion, the forcible reimposition of order and the flight of the disgruntled to gain Muslim assistance. North Africa became increasingly difficult to incorporate into Byzantine imperial structures, although Ḥubāḥiba reportedly died in Alexandria, Egypt and did not participate in the ensuing campaign.

Muslim sources thus reported the arrival of a leading Byzantine official, a court fiscal official who was chased away by disgruntled local North African taxpayers.31 For al-Ṭabarī, local North African leaders were unwilling and unable to pay another round of duplicate taxes to Byzantine authorities sent by Emperor Constans II.32 The tradition became muddled in transmission, and attempts to identify the protagonists with known Byzantine officials have proved fruitless.33 It is unlikely that Ḥubāḥiba was a garbled Arabic rendering of Ioannes cubicularius,

31 Ibn al-Athīr, Kāmil, ed. Tornberg, vol. 3, p. 91-2. Ibn ‘Idhārī, Bayān, ed. Colin and Levi-Provençal, p. 17. ‘Awlīma’ may refer to a Greek title but the Greek or Latin title, if any, is unclear. Only Ibn ‘Idhārī and Ibn Nuwayrī mention Awlīma. The omission of Awlīma in the narratives of Ibn Khaldūn and Ibn al-Athīr may be significant. Perhaps they were suspicious about the tradition or perhaps they drew on different traditions. The Wāqidī/Ṭabarī variant version does not contain any reference to the rebel North African leader going to Muslim-controlled Syria for aid.
32 al-Ṭabarī, Ta’rīkh, I, 2818, ed. de Goeje.
33 One Muslim historical tradition transforms multiple but unnamed local North African notables into one person mistakenly named ‘Ḥubāḥiba’, whom later copyists even turned into a Jennaha that some nineteenth-century scholars erroneously believed was Gennadius. The name Ḥubāḥiba has no independent confirmation in other known sources. For a different view, see Tahar Mansouri, ‘Les frontières entre Byzance et l’Islam’, in Mustapha Khanoussi, Paola Ruggeri and Cinzia Vismara (eds), L’Africa Romana. Ai confini dell’impero: contatti, scambi, conflitti. Atti del XV convegno di studio, Tozeur, 11–15 dicembre 2002 (Rome, 2004), pp. 782–6.
who might have been also magister militum of Byzacena. Nevertheless, accounts of North African collaboration give an impression of mid-seventh-century developments. Emperor Constans II may have reacted negatively to reports that North African elites had made peace arrangements with Muslims, especially since such treaties will have deprived his government of revenues. Moreover, he may have attempted to levy a greater sum of taxes, whether equivalent to the sum the Muslim commander ‘Abd Allāh b. Sa’d b. Abī Sarḥ had imposed on Romano-African elites or not. It is also possible that local inhabitants responsible for the expulsion of the exarch from Carthage chose a new one (without waiting for the initiative or approval from Constantinople), whom the same locals then deposed before placing an alternative official in his stead. Local elites were undertaking comparable actions in contemporary Byzantine Italy, especially at or near Ravenna. These fractious tendencies could have indirectly reduced incentives for local resistance to the Muslims and thereby facilitated Muslim successes in North Africa as they allegedly did further east. The departure of the above-mentioned deposed and disgruntled official for Damascus would have been entirely consistent with Mu’āwiya’s policies and efforts in the East. Such a response is unlikely to have been exceptional. The various recensions of the story appear to reflect contemporary circumstances and correlate well with Constantinople’s hostile responses to local fiscal agreements with Muslims in northern Syria and in Egypt, such as Patriarch Cyrus’ abortive agreement to purchase peace from the Muslims in Egypt.

A different outcome might have occurred in North Africa in the initial decades after 647, at the start of Muslim raids. Historiographical accounts, including later Qayrawānī traditions, have obliterated most traces of what once was an ambiguous and potentially fluid situation with various options. One can conceive of an intermediate status for North Africa between Islam and Byzantium. In such a scenario, North Africa’s inhabitants would have paid some substantial kind of tribute to the Muslims, as was the case in the years that immediately followed the Muslim victory over Gregory at or near Sbeitla. However, such a liminal status could also have enabled the North Africans to remain subjects, in some sense, of the Byzantine emperor, a status that implied the traditional

34 John Robert Martindale and Arnold Hugh Martin Jones (eds), The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire (3 vols, London, 1971–92), vol. 3, Ioannes 130, p. 687; George Zacos, Byzantine Lead Seals (2 vols, Basel, Bern, 1972–84), vol. 1, no. 2885. Or it may derive from some confused rendering of ʾaṣḥābihim, leaders or notables from the tradition that is recounted by al-Ṭabarī, Taʾrīkh, I, 2818, ed. de Goeje. The name may be a copyist’s error for the vague term ʾaṣḥābihim in the al-Wāqīḍī al-Ṭabarī tradition.


fiscal, political and military obligations to the Byzantine Empire. Mu‘āwiya permitted or experimented with such joint arrangements at precisely the same time for the island of Cyprus in 649 and 653.\textsuperscript{37} The details of arrangements in mid-and-late seventh-century Cyprus remain unclear to modern historians. They hardly operated smoothly. A situation similar to the Cypriote scenario is not directly attested in North Africa, although Mu‘āwiya may have tolerated such accommodations in the initial decades of Muslim operations west of Tripoli. Such a situation would have been transitory. The varying ways in which, and stages through which, Muslims established control over Roman regions, whether Cyprus, Egypt or North Africa, remain urgently in need of further research.\textsuperscript{38}

The future belonged not to Roman commanders, such as Kusayla, who doggedly resisted the early Muslims, but rather to local elites and tribes who responded positively to Muslim overtures and, ultimately, to Islam itself, through the initiatives of Muslim commanders such as Mu‘āwiya ibn Hudayj and Ḥassān b. al- Nu‘mān.\textsuperscript{39} Despite initial divisions and rivalries, the Muslims consolidated their power in North Africa far more successfully than did their Byzantine predecessors. The leadership of Muslims in North Africa was far from cohesive and depended much on the personal authority of individual commanders who had established familial or personal bonds with ‘Uthmān or governors of Egypt such as ‘Amr b. al-‘Āṣ.\textsuperscript{40} Later historical traditions enumerated their frequently destructive disagreements and rivalries. But divisions between Muslims proved less injurious to the fortunes of the Muslims than did divisions among the local inhabitants of North Africa. The Muslims proved better able to adapt to conditions in North Africa than did the Byzantines, even though they failed themselves to create a single cohesive North African Muslim identity in the seventh century or later. Byzantine resistance to local autonomy stifled


the formation of a united local front against the Muslims. Many centuries later, Ibn Khaldūn ascribed the slowness of the Muslim conquest to the numerous, complex and difficult tribal and familial loyalties of the local inhabitants, chief among which, in Ibn Khaldūn’s account, were the Barbar, the Berbers.41 The Muslims would, in time, impress their own identity onto North Africa far more effectively than the Byzantines, however imperfectly.

Most medieval Muslim historians were not Maghribi. Rather, they wrote from the perspective of Baghdad or Cairo, usually with little or no direct familiarity with North Africa; ‘Abbāsid and post-‘Abbāsid frames of reference thus complicate the interpretation of Arabic historiography for seventh-century history. But Muslim traditions also reflect the partisan perspectives of Zubayrid and Marwānid constituencies and their antagonisms and respective claims in the late seventh and eighth centuries, as well as the claims of various later Qayrawānī families. The Muslim conquest of North Africa was more complex and more violent despite the eventual decisiveness and success of Muslim leaders’ delicate negotiations with autochthonous populations and towns. This was ultimately a dynamic process, which grew exponentially from initially modest raids and profited from Byzantine and autochthonous mistakes and vulnerabilities. The Byzantines and North African autochthonous populations for their part never maximized their potential for combining to devise any viable armed resistance. Several layers of problems impeded the creation of any effective defense.

Muslim historiographical and geographical texts’ representations of a North African elite that cooperated only irregularly with the Byzantine authorities reveal a period during which political loyalties were in flux and unpredictable. Such a view of the seventh-century supports arguments for the fluidity of early Islam and the openness of Muslims to including Christians within a polity of believers. These opportunities for inclusion narrowed from the end of the 660s, after the death of Constans II and after the new string of decisive Muslim North African victories at Cululis, Gighis and Hadrumetum (Sousse), and especially after the triumph of ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān over his caliphal rival Ibn al-Zubayr in 692. By the late seventh century, the early Muslims had gathered sufficient momentum to assert direct control of regions such as North Africa and Cyprus, where political loyalties had remained ambiguous. Unlike Cyprus, North Africa was not an island, and its conquest brought contiguous territories of far greater dimensions and geographical conditions – the entire Maghrib – into the Muslim purview. Muslims adapted to North African environments with remarkable alacrity, with the result that much of the ambiguity and fluidity of the seventh century vanished in what were increasingly recognizably Muslim North African societies.

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Christian Identities in the Middle East
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Chapter 11
Ethnicity, Ethnogenesis and the Identity of Syriac Orthodox Christians
Bas ter Haar Romeny

The work of the Vienna School has concentrated mainly on the formation of peoples in the northern part of the Roman Empire. However, during the period in which Goths, Vandals and Avars become visible in written sources, we also see communities with more or less ethnic features emerging in the east. Interestingly, these groups were linked with positions taken in the Christological debates of the fifth century. Christians living in the realm of Rome’s mightiest enemy, the Persians, adopted Dyophysitism, the idea that Christ’s humanity and divinity constituted two distinct natures. Up until today they form the Syriac-speaking Church of the East (formerly known as the Nestorian Church). Within the Roman Empire, but close to the eastern border, we find the Armenians, the West Syrians, the Copts, and further south the Nubians and Ethiopians. These all adopted Miaphysitism: the idea that in the person of Christ, divinity and humanity were united in one nature.

Seeing the results of the schisms of the fifth century, historians have often stated that they were brought about by national or ethnic rather than purely religious movements. The classic statement of this idea is Sir Ernest Woodward’s 1916 study *Christianity and Nationalism in the Later Roman Empire*. At first sight, it seems improbable that the detailed theological discussions on Christology could explain the development of separate communities. It is tempting to think of the resurgence of older, non-religious, ethnic features. However, this idea was refuted for the West Syrians (also called Syriac Orthodox and, in earlier studies, Jacobites), the Donatists and even for the Copts by A.H.M. Jones in his 1959 article ‘Were ancient heresies national or social movements in disguise?’ His answer was a clear no. He demonstrated that the factions cannot be equated with ethnic communities, or their confrontations with ethnic conflicts. Yet the idea is so attractive, that even a modern sociologist such as Anthony Smith, who recognizes the importance of religion, still speaks of a reassertion of ethnic symbols and ties under the guise of new forms and their contents. Monotheism

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broke the rule of the Old World that a religious and an ethnic community always coincide, but the rise of various sects brought back the old situation in a new form, aided, he appears to suggest, by the ‘remoteness’ of these communities and the use of a different ‘peripheral’ language.³

It seemed to me that there was room to study this problem again, the more so since the social sciences had given us new tools and more precise definitions of such core terms as ethnicity, nation and identity. In 2002 I obtained a large grant from the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO), allowing me to start an interdisciplinary research project into the identity formation of the Syriac Orthodox community. Their historiography, exegesis and material culture have been used as sources. We tried to describe the process of identity construction among the Syriac Orthodox, starting from the fourth century, when no distinct group was visible, up to the thirteenth century, when the group had most of the features of an ethnic community.⁴ Questions dealt with included the following: How did they define themselves and how did they differentiate their own culture from that of others? How did they connect with the past before 451? What exactly was the role of religion in this? Did additional factors play a role, such as other elements of culture, or feelings of enmity towards the Byzantines? It is important to note that the linguistic and cultural pattern in the area was very complex.⁵ Syriac Christian culture was heir to at least three cultures: Aramaic or Mesopotamian, Graeco-Roman and Jewish.⁶ An Arabic element may also have played a role. This raises the question of how the Syriac Orthodox wove a new culture of their own out of these threads, and how they related to other Miaphysites, to the East Syrian Dyophysites, the Chalcedonians and later also to Islam, and the Church of Rome.

In this chapter I present some of our main results, relating them in particular to the ideas on the formation of peoples (‘ethnogenesis’) as expressed by the Vienna School. I start with a discussion of these, which shows that they correspond well to developments in the social sciences. The significance for our study of the Syriac Orthodox is that the Vienna approach stresses the importance of the diachronic perspective and that it has been developed specifically to explain events taking place in more or less the same period.

⁴ As an extension to the project the transformation of this identity in the diaspora of today has also been considered. The Syriac Orthodox Christian refugees in the Netherlands, Sweden and Germany intensely debate their identity and some even have nationalist aspirations.
ETHNOGENESIS THEORY AND THE SOCIAL SCIENTIFIC DISCOURSE ON ETHNICITY

After the Second World War, both among social scientists and historians a debate was initiated over terms such as nationalism and ethnicity. Until then, national and ethnic identities, which were not clearly distinguished, were often seen as categories that existed in a real and objective sense. One’s ethnicity was considered something one inherited from one’s parents; it was an immutable personal identity. Peoples were seen as constant factors in history, and they were described in biological terms. From this, it was only a small step to racial and even racist views, as Nazi ideology had shown. However, while studying the Germanic tribes that invaded the Roman Empire in Late Antiquity, Reinhard Wenskus, a historian from Göttingen, recognized that these were not stable communities based on common descent, but were continually subdividing, merging, changing their composition and incorporating some groups while losing others. Still, Wenskus and his followers in the Vienna School maintained that there was some level of continuity that needed to be explained. Thus the Huns consisted of several groups, but they nevertheless identified with each other and had a myth of common origin. Wenskus suggested that a Traditionskern, a core group of families, guarded and handed on mythical traditions regarding their origin. Circumstances permitting, others associated with this core group, and thus within a relatively short time a large ethnic group would emerge that identified itself on the basis of the myths and memories of the ‘kernel of tradition’.

A number of scholars have criticized the approach of Wenskus and its further development in the Vienna School. In 1995 two articles appeared that each in its own way distanced itself from them. The first was written by Charles R. Bowlus,8 the second by Walter Goffart.9 The former is still quite positive about Wenskus, who ‘liberated’ traditional sources ‘from the nationalist paradigms of the nineteenth century’, but ‘has not been entrapped by fashionable conceptual schemes’ when borrowing from the social sciences. In Bowlus’s presentation it is Herwig Wolfram who is supposed to have developed a fixed ethnogenesis model which he tried to apply to all Germanic tribes. Rather than giving a full argumentation, Bowlus tries to win us over by voicing his discontent with the term ethnogenesis, which he mistakenly considers a bastardization as the Greek word ethnos would have been combined ‘with the Latin genesis’.10 He goes on to suggest that Wolfram tried to influence scholars by organizing a number of conferences, and notes with some satisfaction that many scholars there neither

7 Reinhard Wenskus, Stammbildung und Verfassung: Das Werden der frühmittelalterliche Gentes (Cologne, 1961).
10 Bowlus, ‘Ethnogenesis models’, p. 150.
used the term ethnogenesis nor applied ‘Wolfram’s version of the Wenskus model’. This should have made Bowlus realize that the Vienna School was perhaps less homogeneous than was useful for his polemic. In order further to discredit Wolfram, he associates his conferences by implication with a Slovak nationalist assembly, held in Bratislava in 1984.

In an article in a 2002 collection of papers by critics of the Vienna School, Bowlus even presents what looks like a conspiracy theory, suggesting that Wolfram was able to spread what has now become the ‘ethnogenesis construct’ or ‘paradigm’ because he was the director of an important institute and because he, in contrast to Wenskus, found an able translator into English as well as an eloquent English-speaking ‘defender’ (Patrick Geary).\(^{11}\) Here it also becomes clear what the real issue is, according to Bowlus. On the basis of a discussion of the Bavarians and Moravians, he concludes that there is a ‘mismatch between theory and evidence’: ‘the ethnogenesis construct ... is a paradigm that may be suited for modern social scientists, who crunch massive amounts of data in their computers ... It is not a methodology for scholars who probe opaque and musty manuscripts.’\(^{12}\) In other words, Bowlus creates opposition between social scientists and those working on the sources, and presents ethnogenesis theory as a Procrustean bed. In my opinion, this image of opposition is false and the ethnogenesis models are not intended as a fixed mould; he conjures up an imaginary enemy.

Walter Goffart, in the meantime, is a more serious critic, but to some extent even he is tilting at windmills. In his 1995 article, he explains that Wenskus and his follower Herwig Wolfram are part of the movement of the \textit{Neue Verfassungsgeschichte} of the 1950s, which is actually ‘rooted in the 1930s’.\(^{13}\) Interestingly, the name Wolfram is mentioned only twice, in a footnote.\(^{14}\) The main text does not mention him, whereas it does quote extensively from his works, and is in fact fully directed against him. He is simply presented as one of the ‘believers’ or ‘the most recent commentator’.\(^{15}\) Goffart’s main point is that one cannot heal the \textit{germanische Altertumskunde} – the study of Germanic Antiquity – by surgically removing the racist element as if this was just a recent blemish of limited size caused by Nazism. In fact, he says, what one needs is a full-scale rethinking. The racist element is not just something that was added by the Nazis, but was inherent in the way Germanic Antiquity has been studied for centuries. In Goffart’s view the \textit{germanische Altertumskunde} was connected with a

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\(^{12}\) Ibid., p. 256.

\(^{13}\) Goffart, ‘Two notes’, p. 10.

\(^{14}\) Ibid., p. 9, n. 2.

\(^{15}\) Ibid., pp. 13, 27.
large body of anti-Enlightenment thought and nationalism long before the Nazis came and took from it whatever they could use.

Though Goffart is not mistaken in his analysis, he underestimates the importance of the step Wenskus made: saying farewells to the biological interpretation of ethnicity and accepting that peoples are social constructs is nothing short of a paradigm shift. It is obvious that in many other respects Wenskus remained a representative of his time and environment, but then one has to recognize that his followers in the Vienna School have moved on. One cannot identify its modern representatives such as Walter Pohl with the Neue Verfassungsgeschichte, and even Wolfram has contributed much to the refutation of, for instance, Otto Höfler’s idea that the Germans in and of themselves had a staatsbildende Kraft, which is central to the Neue Verfassungsgeschichte. In short, Goffart is aiming his guns at a position that has long been abandoned. Wenskus’s followers, in particular Walter Pohl and Patrick Geary, have already dealt with many of the issues raised by him. Now they do concede to the Romans the central role in the formation of the Germanic peoples, for instance, and ideas of the Traditionskern have also developed.

Goffart’s second point concerns the use of Latin sources for supposed oral traditions of myths of origin. He argues that these texts should be seen in the context of late Roman historiography and ‘Mediterranean story-telling’, and does not believe that these could reflect a reliable chain of memory reaching...
back over many generations. In his contribution to the 2002 volume, he gives additional reasons.

First, supported by anecdotal evidence, he claims that ‘memory rarely carries back more than three generations’. In a recent article, Wolf Liebeschuetz points to counterevidence from the *Iliad* and from Maori traditions. One could also refer to anthropological evidence on, for instance, the West African *Epic of Sunjata*. With regard to Goffart’s complaint about the imperfect nature of memory mechanisms Liebeschuetz adds that it is the nature of memories that are handed down that they undergo transformations. Still they create ethnic identity and, I would add, the transformations are part of the ‘maintenance’ of the identity: identities need to be continually renegotiated. The West African evidence is particularly clear about this: stories about the forefathers are adapted to match the circumstances of the moment.

Second, Goffart makes plain that he is interested in what he calls ‘normal history’. What people present as their distant past, he claims, is not history, but ‘invented tradition’: it is based on a deliberate choice, dictated by the needs of the day. Here he assumes that Wolfram is taking indications on the *Urheimat* of a people and events in their distant past for the hard facts that he is looking for himself. In fact, his position and that of Wolfram are less far apart than it seems. The latter makes clear that he does not take the content of myths and legends at face value. Thus when dealing with Scandinavian history he readily concedes that Snorri Sturluson’s account of the orders King Olaf the Saint gave before the battle of Stiklestad (1030) is highly improbable. Still, Wolfram says, ‘one must investigate the traditional motifs available to the author and accepted or even expected by his audience. In sum, it is the language of myth that is in question here, and its impact on the collective consciousness of peoples and their elites.’ In other words: there is no disagreement on the fact that traditions are invented. The question is whether we should speak about inventions from scratch or inventions that use motifs and mythical elements that may have found their way to the Latin authors after a long chain of oral transmission. In my opinion Goffart too hastily discards the latter option. Though the use of Latin sources

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for the origin myths of the tribes is not without problems, there is no other way. Traditions are invented, but hardly ever from scratch.

Whereas Goffart’s approach, if followed consistently, reduces the sources to pure fiction, most other critics of the Vienna School show a different tendency. We have already seen that Bowlus considers theoreticians to be in opposition to those working with the sources. Alexander Murray and Michael Kulikowski in the 2002 volume do the same, while expressly stating that they wish to take at face value what the sources say about groups and identities. Murray states that the sources clearly testify to ‘the banal, unambiguous, and conventional – ethnic association was something one was born into: a person was a Frank, a Roman, or a Burgundian by birth’.

Though he concedes that ethnic denominators may change ‘over substantial periods of time’, he seems to be content with this observation (at least within a synchronic context), and he criticizes Patrick Geary’s attempts to get behind the sources and explain contradictions. According to Murray ‘The sources do not comply with the method.’ Kulikowski agrees with him on this point, and says that we cannot find out what ‘barbarian collectivities were really like’. In his view we can only ‘put aside preconceived conceptual frameworks’ and study the activity that the sources record.

He suggests we should ‘take the evidence on its own terms’, which means in his view that we should neither accept nor try to give a substitution for the definition given by the sources of groups as communities of descent. What we should do is to study the behaviour of the groups.

Unfortunately, things are not so simple. We cannot just give up the analysis of what the sources say and limit ourselves to enumerating events. I will try to explain why, referring to modern social scientific theories on identity and ethnicity. My main point is that if we take the sources at face value, we are making the choice of a certain theory without realizing this. The option that Kulikowski, Murray and Bowlus suggest is therefore in my view rather problematic. What they do not realize is that a discourse mentioning ethnic associations by definition presents these as primordial attachments, that is, attachments that are thought to stem from the assumed ‘givens’ of social

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25 Referring to Geary, ‘Ethnic identity as a situational construct’.


27 Kulikowski, ‘Nation versus army’, p. 83.

28 Thus already Pohl, ‘Ethnicity, theory, and tradition’, p. 239.

existence: kin connection, religion, language and social practices. These
building blocks of one’s identity would seem to flow from a natural or spiritual
affinity, and they would seem to be immutable, existing as it were in and by
themselves. Now the ‘primordialist’ view accepts the way they are presented
and considers them indeed ‘given’: one is born with a certain identity, and
any change is unlikely. The ‘instrumentalist’ or ‘constructionist’ approach, on
the other hand, realizes that elements of identity are not static entities, but
social constructs. Attachments are not given, but defined in social interaction.
Language, religion and culture are not overpowering, coercively binding agents
in and of themselves, as the primordialists would have it. They are the product
of actions and identifications. Even the idea of kin connection is often based on
no more than a myth of common origin. Communal identities thus reside in our
perception and ideas, and, as Benedict Anderson stressed, ethnic communities
are imagined communities.

One might ask why the sources present the elements that build our identity
as primordial and fixed, if in fact they can be the recent outcome of a social
process. In my view this has to do with the fact that elements of identity need

to be reified in order to be communicated in a convincing way. The suggestion
that ‘it is so and has always been so’ implies ‘it should always remain so’, thus
connecting identity with a sense of security and belonging – which is the main
commodity offered by any community. The (subconscious, natural) act of
reification gives culture and identity their power to determine further social
interaction and even socio-economic processes.

The primordialist point of view is still widely held and defended, as is clear
from the popularity of Huntington’s book The Clash of Civilizations. This author
defends the idea that ethnic conflicts such as that in the Balkans are fought along
the ‘fault lines’ of the age-old civilizations of the Orthodox, Islam and the West.
Huntington was criticized, however, for not recognizing that fifty years of official
secularism and economic modernization had eroded the hold of organized
religion. All sides in the conflict used religious symbols, but these symbols were
often empty, linked to a shallow and unauthentic religious conviction. Religion
had become a minor difference among Yugoslavians, but it had been defined as
a major one by those leaders who wanted to exploit the fear connected with the
collapse of the overarching state. In other words, Huntington is following the

30 Clifford Geertz, ‘The integrative revolution: primordial sentiments and civil
politics in the new states’, in Clifford Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays
31 Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of
32 Samuel P. Huntington, The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order
(New York, 1996).
33 See, among others, Michael Ignatieff, The Warrior’s Honor: Ethnic War and the
rhetoric of the leaders and is describing the end result of a process rather than the process itself.

To return to the critics of the Vienna School, when Kulikowski, Murray and Bowlus give up attempts to find out what is behind the statements in the sources, they are in fact opting for the primordialist model. Like Huntington they run the risk of accepting the rhetoric of the authors, describing their position in a process of identity formation rather than the process itself. My point of view is that, though the reification of the features of one’s identity cannot be termed ‘wrong’ in any sense, it is the task of the scholar to look further than the end result. In my research project on the Syriac Orthodox we have therefore followed the critics of the primordialist approach, and accordingly paid close attention to the social process of identity formation.

Now Kulikowski, for instance, might answer that one would wish to get behind the sources, but that this is simply not possible. His suggestion seems to be that those who wish to do so in fact accept ‘preconceived conceptual frameworks’. This is not necessarily true, however. Of course a theory can be taken for granted and the data be made to fit it, but that is just bad scholarship and not what most of those criticized by him – members of the Vienna School and others – are doing. Instead, they are using a standard method of research: they are formulating a hypothesis by applying a theoretical model to the specific conditions that are known. Subsequently they test whether the hypothesis can indeed explain the facts. In describing social processes it is often possible to develop more than one hypothesis, even on the basis of the same theory. The question then asked is which of these can best explain all the known facts, that is, which of these is valid while introducing the fewest new assumptions. In other words, good social history does not make the facts fit the theory, but uses theory to give an explanation of the facts. Here there is an awareness of the theoretical assumptions and a constant readiness to discard a hypothesis or even a theory when new facts disprove them.

The theory-free approach advocated by Kulikowski, Murray and Bowlus sounds attractive, but it has two big problems. First, as I have argued, it appears that they are unwittingly following the primordialist approach to identity. The second issue follows from this. Not only are they not free of theory, their unawareness also means that they have assumptions that they are not putting to the test and discarding if necessary. Thus they do not realize that the hypotheses based on primordialism lack explanatory power especially where ethnic change is at stake, as in the case of migrations, major political developments or the appearance of new communities. It is not surprising that the classic statement against the primordialist position, Barth’s *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries,*34 was indeed written with people in mind who change their ethnic identity.35 As these

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are the circumstances in which we find the Goths, the Huns and for that matter the Syriac Orthodox, it is clear that the alternative proposed by Kulikowski, Murray and Bowlus is no real option.

At the same time I concede that the classic constructionist position as formulated by Barth is also not without its problems. It does not account sufficiently for ethnic durability and the persistence of elements of older social structure and culture. In defining ethnic groups as units of ascription and self-ascription, as Barth does, and in focusing on the boundary that defines the group, instead of on ‘the cultural stuff that it encloses’, it may seem that ‘anything goes’, as though ethnic identity was not related to the shared cultural characteristics initially possessed by the members of a group. Theoretically it is perhaps possible to invent a completely new identity, but in practice this is rather exceptional, to say the least. Usually there is at least some continuity with the past.\(^{36}\) It is now recognized that myths, memories and symbols have a very important function in unifying a group and ensuring its continuity. Their content now receives more attention from social scientists and historians, as a result of the lead of John Armstrong\(^ {37} \) and Anthony Smith.\(^ {38} \) We might say that some elements of an identity can be very old, whereas others can be brand new. It is important to see which threads continue as they are, which are broken off and which are dyed a different colour. It is within a narrative that these symbols are given their significance: a discourse that serves to define the differences between an individual and the other members of the group as minor, and the differences between this individual and outsiders as major. This narrative is the context within which and by which the various elements of religion and culture are interpreted and preserved, or discarded. This happens in a way that is designed to answer the needs of the moment and usually also in response to other groups and their actions and identifications: the narrative is determined by the situation.

The analysis of ethnic discourse is one of our main tasks, and this is where the approach of Armstrong and Smith and that of the Vienna School come together. They tally very well with each other. They share a diachronic perspective in the reconstruction of ethnic processes, as they see ethnic identity not as primordial or fixed, but as a social construct that is not stable but open to change. They also share an interest in myths and memories as these play an important role in ethnic processes and how they are perceived. Both distinguish between elements

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\(^ {37} \) John A. Armstrong, *Nations before Nationalism* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1982).

of identity that have certain durability and others that may be more short-term. Specific features of the Vienna concept of ethnogenesis as developed in the study of the creation of the Germanic tribes after the fall of the Western Roman Empire are its stress on the political context of much of the ethnic discourse, as well as the idea of the Traditionskern. In Wenskus’s thought this was a core group of families, guarding and handing on mythical traditions regarding their origin. Pohl warns us, however, that one should not think of self-assured elites ‘in secure possession of ancient truths’. In his view the idea of a kernel entails a sense of solidity and immutability that could be misleading, as one ought rather to think of a ‘loose set of groups and networks more or less involved in “ethnic practices”’. They constantly had to renegotiate their identity in a field of overlapping systems of identification. Their ethnic discourse was often patchy and ambiguous – and it had to be so, as clear definitions might exclude some of the people they wanted to integrate.

In our study of the Syriac Orthodox we decided to follow the constructionist approach with the modifications of Armstrong and Smith, which, as I have just argued, shares its main assumptions with the theory of the Vienna School as propounded by scholars such as Walter Pohl and Patrick Geary. As a research group we also decided to test the hypothesis of the Traditionskern. We considered this a useful model because for some of the communities studied by the Vienna School it does have considerable explanatory power, even if there are no hard data to prove the existence of groups of families functioning as ‘kernels of tradition’.

Before we can turn to our main hypothesis and the results of our research, we should discuss one more issue, however. One of the strongest contributions to the 2002 volume of critics of the Vienna School is, in my opinion, that of the editor Andrew Gillett. His main issue is the question of whether ethnicity was indeed a central and motivating political force. On the basis of the evidence of royal titles, he argues that in fact it was not. Already in an earlier publication Pohl partly agrees with him: for the elite ‘ethnicity was an opportunity to reinforce loyalties and facilitate integration’, but ‘their concerns and outlook … were far from being purely ethnic’. As he explains, one should understand that in Late Antiquity the need for ethnic identification was growing as a result

of feelings of insecurity. This means that we should reckon with the possibility that other forms of identity and other ways of expressing attachments can also be found, and might actually be more important at a particular moment than ethnic identity. This tallies well with the warning expressed by the social anthropologist Willem Hofstee.\(^4^4\) It is crucial, he argued, that the circumstances in which terms such as community, people, identity, nation and ethnicity are used are studied first. These analytical categories should remain unbounded categories, as universal fixed definitions would make us overlook important differences between societies. The circumstances under which these terms are used in the sources should help us clarify why they are used and with what meaning.

Exactly in order to circumvent the problems mentioned by Gillett and Hofstee, we chose not to use a closed definition of ethnicity, but instead used the widely accepted list of features of an ethnic community given by Hutchinson and Smith.\(^4^5\) According to them, an ethnic community has a proper name expressing the identity of the community, a myth of common ancestry, shared historical memories, a link with a territory, elements of common culture and a sense of solidarity. This list of features provided us with a matrix that is helpful for describing the various layers of identity within a developing community at one given moment in time. It made it possible to map the degree of ethnic awareness within the community. It was not our intention simply ‘to tick boxes’: we have indeed studied the expression of the various features within their context, and we found that the appearance of a feature can usually not be described in a binary ‘yes or no’ fashion.\(^4^5\) Still we registered a clear development in the way these features appeared in the sources, and we are not overstating matters if we say that in the case of the Syriac Orthodox a self-perceived group identity gradually took an ethnic form.

THE SYRIAC ORTHODOX AND THEIR IDENTITY

For a number of reasons, I think that the case of the Syriac Orthodox is important to the debate. In the first place, it is a clear case of a new community that gradually formed itself. In the second place, we can follow this group over a long period of time. Our data extend from its very beginnings, in which a choice different from the mainstream in a religious debate was the only distinguishing feature, until it became a full-fledged ethnic community. In addition to the formation of identity, we should therefore speak of the maintenance and renewal of identity: the Syriac Orthodox were successful in adapting their identity to new


situations. The process of maintenance and renewal, through sifting, selecting and summarizing earlier material while adding new elements and giving new meanings – one could speak of renegotiation – is the key factor in explaining the durability of an identity, and one that deserves much more attention. In the case of the Syriac Orthodox, historiography, biblical interpretation and art were very important tools in this process.

We found that the historiography and to some extent also the biblical interpretation of the Syriac Orthodox tradition show a gradual ethnicization of their self-perceived group identity. To what extent the presence of the various features of Hutchinson and Smith need to be present in order to be able to say that a group is indeed an ethnic community is open to debate. In any case, even in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the limited political aspirations of the Syriac Orthodox did not entail the idea that community should be sovereign in its own homeland, and thus we certainly cannot speak of a nation. This was clearly not an option for the Syriac Orthodox (or the Syriac speakers of the Middle East as a whole). However, the Syriac Orthodox did ‘invent’ a tradition of their own, a history back to the time of Noah (and even further to Adam), based on whatever source material was available, not just the Bible. Therefore their identity was not just religiously motivated – although that element was always dominant – but also included the cultural traditions of pagan empires such as those of the Assyrians and the Aramean kingdoms. As is the case with other examples of ethnogenesis, this core of traditions was not a given, but something that crystallized out of the available stories and customs and only slowly came into existence. It was not unchangeable, but was continuously reinterpreted, added to and detracted from. However, the Syriac Orthodox were by the twelfth century aware of having such a core. If one wanted to find a *Traditionskern* as well, one should perhaps not think of a group of families, but of the clergy.

Roughly speaking, five main periods with distinct interests were discerned in our research. We defined an early period, from 451 up to the middle of the seventh century. This period was primarily concerned with the validation of Syrian Christianity as the legitimate continuation of the ‘official’, apostolic Church. The later period (650–1300) can be divided into two parts. The first section, from the mid-seventh up to and including the tenth century, was a period of re-orientation, necessitated by political developments and the contacts with Islam. It showed efforts to establish a tradition, and to determine who the Syrians really were and where they came from. The last section then, from the eleventh up to and including the thirteenth century, was a period of further compilation and codification. Authors contributed much to the formation of a West Syrian identity as they strove to integrate the spectrum of earlier understandings. In addition to these three periods, we also examined the period before the split, and the developments in our own times.

Our main hypothesis was that the choice made in religious matters was the starting point for the new group, but that there were a number of factors that contributed to its development: the position of the clergy and an autonomous
Visions of Community in the Post-Roman World

centrifugal force in the Byzantine Empire, for which religious difference became the focus and symbol. Through a process of selection and resignification, gradually other features from the complex cultural background of the Syrian Christians were added: language, for example – one of the most easily recognizable, and therefore strongest, features of identity – became very important, but only after some time. On the western side of the Byzantine–Persian border, the use of Syriac seemed to gravitate towards the Miaphysites. As soon as the use of Syriac became recognized as a symbol of the religious association that was in the process of becoming a community, it offered the possibility of establishing a link to a more distant, and more glorious, pre-Christian past: did not the Bible say that the Babylonians and Assyrians spoke Aramaic, that is, Syriac? So they were Syrians, too. We should not think of ancient fault lines here, but of a social process of identity construction. It was the choice of the Miaphysite doctrine as the focal point for a number of new and existing, partly competing, partly complementary loyalties, under the pressure of the Chalcedonians and later the contact with Islam, which accorded the Syriac Orthodox, as well as some other Christian communities, a special social and juridical status.

Basically we think that this hypothesis still explains the development very well, and is corroborated by the sources we studied. We have a number of modifications and adjustments, however. The main ones are as follows:

a. Even more than before we started, we tend to see the seventh century as the time when the Syriac Orthodox developed from a religious association to a community that gradually acquired the sense of being an ethnic community. Though certain developments had already started earlier, the beginning of Islamic rule was a turning point.

b. The art-historical evidence points to the fact that identity is never exclusive and simple. Whereas our written sources indicate clear borders between the Syriac Orthodox and other communities, it appeared that the local style in the wall paintings of Syria and Lebanon was not exclusive to the Syriac Orthodox, and that Muslim and Christian art in the Mosul area could not be distinguished on the basis of style or even iconography.

c. The combination of art-historical and written evidence suggests to us that the higher clergy were the carriers (and inventors) of the tradition and acted much in the same way as the Traditionskern in the ethnogenesis theory.

We may now look at some of the issues in more detail, working from the first centuries to later medieval times. Here we focus on the issue of the carriers of the tradition.  

46 For a fuller version of the second part of this chapter, see Bas ter Haar Romeny with Naures Atto, Jan J. van Ginkel, Mat Immerzeel and Bas Snelders, ‘The formation of a communal identity among West Syrian Christians: results and conclusions of the Leiden
THE DEVELOPMENTS IN MORE DETAIL

With regard to the origin of the Syriac Orthodox as an ethnic group we hypothesized that the choice made in religious matters was their starting point. The reason for this was that the Syriac-speaking Miaphysites had never known political independence, as had the Armenians, nor did they exhibit any of the six features associated with ethnic communities listed by Hutchinson and Smith.

Syriac-speaking Miaphysites had no proper name expressing the identity of the community. When Tatian describes himself in the second century as someone who ‘philosophizes in the manner of the barbarians, born in the land of the Assyrians, educated first on your principles, secondly in what I now profess’ (Oratio ad Graecos 42), we would agree with Fergus Millar that the barbarian philosophy must be Christianity, and that the word ‘Assyrians’ refers simply to the inhabitants of the province of Syria. Syriac-speaking Miaphysites could not claim a myth of common ancestry or shared historical memories exclusively for themselves; nor were the elements of common culture exclusive to them: they shared the Syriac language with some Chalcedonians and with the East Syrian Dyophysites, and their Miaphysite beliefs with Copts, Ethiopians, Armenians and Greek-speaking Miaphysites. In the fifth century, at any rate, their network and sense of solidarity were not exclusive either. Even in the early sixth century, Miaphysites still cherished the hope of being reunited with those who professed the official religion of the Byzantine Empire.

The only feature of an ethnic community that to some extent may have been present is the link to a certain territory. But as this is an isolated feature, the indications we have point more to a sense of loyalty to the region than to anything else. I am referring to the way Ephrem seems to stress the role of his own region in his Genesis commentary, identifying the cities where Nimrod was king with Edessa, Nisibis, Ctesiphon, Adiabene, Hatra and Resh’aina. His positive view of Nimrod, the legendary king of this area, is conspicuous.

Though it is known that there must have been people who knew the cuneiform script and the Akkadian language up to at least the first century CE, we have not found any indication of a Traditionskern that passed on Assyrian or Babylonian traditions to the later Syriac Orthodox. On the contrary, in the twelfth century Michael the Syrian himself explicitly states that in order to become good Christians, his community gave up all pagan knowledge. It is through Greek sources, he says, that one can regain a connection with the

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pre-Christian past.\textsuperscript{50} This would seem to be a clear description of a tradition being reinvented.

It should be stressed that the term ‘reinvented’ does not entail a value judgement: even modern nation states such as Belgium and the Netherlands have invented their past. After all, apart from a geographical one, no connection can be demonstrated between the tribe of the Belgians whom Julius Caesar described as the bravest fighters of all and the present state of Belgium, nor can one contend that the present Dutch had anything to do with the megalithic tombs in the province of Drenthe. Yet they do appear in the ‘canon of history’ sent by the Ministry of Education to all primary schools. One can say, however, that Syriac-speaking Christians were living in an area where the Assyrian Empire once held sway. The empire disappeared into the mists of history, but its inhabitants may have continued to live there, mingling with the people they overcame and that overcame them. If outsiders were to deny the Syriac Orthodox the right to identify themselves with the Assyrians, they would be using double standards. Moreover, one should not forget that the question of ‘who the Syriac Orthodox really are’ – which is behind such a denial – can only be posed if one defines ethnic communities in essentialist or even biological terms.

Within today’s community in the diaspora a discussion is going on about the question of whether the Syriac Orthodox should identify themselves with the Assyrians or the Arameans. In terms of a Traditionskern, it might be more obvious to think of the families in Edessa that became Christian and decided to use their dialect of Aramaic as a liturgical language. Their Aramaic was a dialect that already had a literary tradition and, as one of the offshoots of Reichsaramäisch, a respectable pedigree. Yet it does not mean that they defined themselves as Arameans. The situation in the Edessa of the first centuries would seem to have been more complicated: there are clear Arab influences, among other things, in the names of its kings, whereas other sources speak of the town as Armenian rather than Aramaic. As lingua franca in the first millennium BCE, Aramaic had actually been adopted by various people. The use of the language on the coins of the Edessan state can be seen as a statement of independence from the Romans and Parthians, and was in that sense an identity marker. However, it did not point to an allegiance to the ancient kingdoms of Aram.

The possible role of the Edessan families as Traditionskern for the Syriac Orthodox is further limited by the fact that many of the Miaphyses in the area to the west of the Euphrates were actually expressing themselves in Greek, at least when they wanted to write something down – it is possible that some of them used Aramaic as a spoken language, but it is uncertain whether this was

Eastern Aramaic or Western. Their use of the Eastern Aramaic dialect we now call Syriac was a development of later centuries. As a *Traditionskern* hands down traditions that can, if circumstances allow, become the tradition of a much larger group, this in itself is not a problem, but it would perhaps suggest a more central role for Edessa in these later developments than is borne out by the sources. This possible *Traditionskern* would also be atypical in the sense that it passed on a language rather than a myth of origin. Finally, it would not explain the split between East and West Syrians.

It was in the sixth century that the first outlines of a communal identity appeared. Syriac- and Greek-speaking Miaphysites in the area of present-day Syria, Lebanon and south-eastern Turkey had begun to define themselves as being in opposition to the Chalcedonians, and came to be defined as such by others. Jacob Baradaeus (d. ca. 578) laid the foundations of a separate Miaphysite ecclesiastical hierarchy, which was not officially linked to the Coptic or Armenian Miaphysite churches. Those who had been persecuted by the Byzantines assumed the role of martyrs, and were remembered as such. These memories formed the basis of a historical conscience. The religious position of the new hierarchy was also further developed. In general it can be said that centrifugal forces in the Roman Empire were greatly assisted by the position of the clergy. Imperial officials were constantly recycled, while bishops could build up a local power base. Together with the monks – from whose ranks the Miaphysite bishops were chosen – they formed a continuous presence in their area. Monasteries began to dominate cultural and intellectual developments, controlling the communication channels for the diffusion of the myths and symbols that shaped the community. Bishops also extended their authority to secular areas.\(^51\) Though all this suggests that the mechanisms of group formation were in place in this period, the level of group identification seems not to have taken the form of an ethnic awareness as yet. In biblical interpretation of the period we see, however, that not just the present emperor is criticized, but also the very institution.\(^52\) This can be interpreted as a first expression of the wish to be independent.

It is as if history were revived and tradition reinvented in the following period, after the advent of Islam. There was a sense of continuity, but not all the lines of the earlier periods were actually followed. The contact between Muslims and Syriac Orthodox Christians already necessitated further delineation of the position of the latter. Moreover, the arrival of Islamic rule cut off the Miaphysites in the area of present-day Syria, Lebanon and south-eastern Turkey from the Byzantine Empire, and confronted them with the fact that they were on their

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own: they were no longer part of the Byzantine Empire and the empire would not become Miaphysite. What may have appeared a fluid situation before had now become crystallized. The Syriac language started to play a role as a distinguishing feature: Miaphysites in the area distanced themselves from Greek. This reflects the fact that they also distanced themselves from the Byzantine Empire, while they started to identify with some of the pre-Christian peoples of the area. At least in the early ninth century, the different elements were connected and formed a system. Though all six features of an ethnic community were present (name, myth of common origin, shared historical memories, shared elements of culture (religion, language), links with a geographic area and a sense of solidarity), it is clear that the religious aspect remained central.

With regard to the carriers of the tradition we can say that the rise of Islam did not fundamentally change the position of the higher clergy, but their powers in worldly matters were now officially confirmed: from the middle of the eighth century, the caliphs had given the patriarchs a charter to this effect. They acted as the leaders of their community and their monasteries were the centres where the tradition was kept and developed. A family aspect may have played a role as well: at least about the East Syrians we know that important families put their stakes on different options, sending some of their sons to the clergy and making others study medicine and become important and powerful doctors at the Abbasid court. There is no doubt that such families played an important role in the reinvention of the tradition.

The next period, often dubbed that of the ‘Syriac Renaissance’, started only after a period of at least a century in which the production of literature in Syriac by the West Syrians almost came to a standstill. The enormous output of Yahyā ibn ‘Adī in tenth-century Baghdad shows that the Syriac Orthodox were still active, but he wrote in Arabic. It seems that political and military developments, including the Byzantine military achievements against the Muslims in the twelfth century and the Crusades, favoured a new start for Syriac literature in the area of present-day Turkey, if only because of the stimulus of cultural contacts. The historiographical and exegetical works of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries may be seen to summarize the tradition once more, and show evidence of further ‘cultivating’ and ‘pruning’.

The work of Michael the Syrian is witness to a growing interest in the pre-Christian past. Language as an identity marker was extremely important to him, as we have seen: whoever spoke Aramaic was one of his forefathers, he suggests. It is important to note the background to Michael’s argument: what he wanted to do was to prove that the Syrians would be able to govern themselves. As a patriarch Michael had considerable power, not just in ecclesiastical affairs but

also in civil matters. He had to deal, however, with the aspirations of the Byzantine emperor Manuel I Komnenos, who wanted to reunite and restore the Roman Empire. Manuel was already talking to the Armenians, who were troublesome to Michael anyway, as they were a strong power in Southern Turkey. Therefore he and his friend Dionysius bar Salibi were relatively negative about the Armenians, who in terms of doctrine should have been their allies, and relatively positive about the Chalcedonian Franks (the Crusaders), with whom Michael sought to enter into an alliance against Manuel. It is conspicuous that Michael’s enemies within the Syriac Orthodox Church did want to give in to the Byzantines: the borders between the communities became a function of power politics and alliance-making. The fact that political alliances became more important than doctrinal matters may point to the fact that the stress on the religious aspect of the Syriac Orthodox identity became slightly less pronounced. It is in this period that we can really speak of an ethnic discourse, and this ethnic discourse was a function of the political aspirations of the higher clergy.

It was our study of the art of this period that made us realize that the written sources, which present clear demarcations between the communities, do not tell the whole story. The wall paintings in the area of present-day Syria and Lebanon clearly show intensive contact between Byzantine Orthodox, Maronites and Syriac Orthodox, whereas there are also Crusader and Muslim influences. And neither the style nor the iconography of the art of Mosul suggests that Christians and Muslims had different artistic traditions. Much of the art must have been made in the same workshops. We do see evidence of local schools, however. This makes us conclude that the reality of everyday life in the small towns of the Middle East necessitated contacts between the various communities to a much higher level than the keepers of the tradition, the clergy, may have wanted. Personal identity is always based on a combination of different loyalties, which may be contradictory. Even though at this time loyalty to the Syriac Orthodox Church was accompanied by a sense of common descent, it was not the only identity people had.

CONCLUSIONS

Though one can argue about certain details, I think my collaborators and I have been able to make it plausible that the choice made in the Christological discussions of the fifth century was the starting point for the development of the new group which we now call the Syriac Orthodox. They developed from a religious association to an ethnic community in the period before 1300.

55 See Bas Snelders, Identity and Christian-Muslim Interaction: Medieval Art of the Syrian Orthodox from the Mosul Area, Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta (Leuven, 2010).
There are no ethnic fault lines reappearing, and there are no indications of the continuous existence of an early Mesopotamian community that could be seen as the forerunner of the Syriac Orthodox community.56 There are several indications that the position of the higher clergy was indeed central to the social process of identity construction and the continuous existence of the group, for which the religious difference was the focus and symbol.57 It is also in the writings of the clergy that we see other features from the complex cultural background of the Syrian Christians gaining importance and gradually becoming markers of what, at the end of the twelfth century, can be called an ethnic identity. Language, in particular, became very important as an indicator of identity and a tool for forging a link with the pre-Christian past. Though sixth-century biblical interpretation had already shown criticism of the institution of the emperor and imperial ideology,58 the point of no return in the development from religious association to ethnic community was the early Islamic period. The arrival of Islam made the split between the Miaphysites and the Byzantine Empire definitive, and concluding developments that had indeed started earlier, Muslim rulers accorded the Syriac Orthodox a special social and juridical status.

The model of the Traditionskern helped us to clarify the role of the higher clergy, even if we have to concede immediately that it is not exactly the type of kernel that Wenskus had in mind. But the higher clergy had a central role in defining the community and its boundaries, making use of earlier traditions, the Bible, as well as material from other sources. It is in their discourse that the need for an ethnic identification first comes up, and in line with the model we found that their ethnic discourse was indeed determined by their immediate context and political interests. At the same time we agree with Pohl that the way they formulated their identity was often patchy and ambiguous. Identity is also never exclusive and simple, and it has to be constantly renegotiated. The Arabic-speaking Syriac Orthodox of Takrit and Mosul may have had other ideas about their identity than Michael the Syrian in Melitene, and our own art-historical evidence has shown that the reality of everyday life in the villages did not allow the strict maintenance of boundaries between the communities. People were also loyal to their city or village, and were in constant contact with members of other groups. It was in this field of overlapping systems of identification that the


58 See above, n. 52.
higher clergy tried to keep their flock together by pointing to a common history and even to a common descent.

In a new project we are now comparing what we found for the Syriac Orthodox with a number of Coptic and Byzantine Orthodox sources. The situation of the Copts seems different at first sight. As Egypt is geographically more clearly demarcated than the area where the Syriac Orthodox live, it seems natural to assume as a result of this a certain continuity between the history of Pharaonic Egypt and the Coptic community. It appeared to us, however, that there was no Egyptian sense of ethnicity that opposed Copts to Greeks or Byzantines before the Arab conquest. In this period one cannot even speak of Copts as a separate social or religious group. Egypt was inhabited by Christians who used either Greek or Coptic. They were divided over Christological issues, but not according to linguistic lines. And again, they did not make their religious choice because they were Copts or Egyptians. Other times brought with them other issues, however. Thus in later medieval times it became important to portray the Miaphysite Copts as a social and ethnic group that was the natural ally of the Muslims. The history of the first century of Islamic rule over Egypt was rewritten in this light. In the twentieth century it became popular to stress the truly Egyptian nature of the Coptic community. Thus ‘Pharaonism’ stressed the glorious past of Pharaonic times and its continuity. For the Copts, too, the higher clergy has always played a large role in the maintenance of the group’s identity, and it does so even today. From time to time there was strong internal competition for power, however: in the very beginning the desert fathers could claim extensive popularity; much later strong monasteries were a force any patriarch had to reckon with.

Members of the Byzantine Orthodox Church in the Middle East, on the other hand, would not seem to have developed into an ethnic community at an early stage. As the name Melkites indicates, they were the followers of the Emperor. However, in addition to his religious policy, a number of important monasteries also played an important role in the development of their communal identity. It was only at a much later stage that they associated with an ethnic community as well: that of the Arabs. This step was made possible by their adoption of the Arabic language in the first centuries after the arrival of Islamic rule. They even contributed, together with the members of some of the other Churches, to the

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59 See for this point also Jacques van der Vliet, ‘The Copts: “Modern Sons of the Pharaohs”?’, in Bas ter Haar Romeny (ed.), Religious Origins of Nations? The Christian Communities of the Middle East (Leiden, 2010), pp. 279–90, with further references. A monograph on the subject is being prepared by Dr Samuel Moawad, who collaborated in the new project.

development of Arab nationalism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The well-known dictum ‘Every person who speaks Arabic is an Arab’ enabled an inclusivist nationalist discourse, which was meant to transcend religious differences and to give Christians a place as allies of the Muslims in the Middle East.\textsuperscript{61}

\textsuperscript{61} The research on which this chapter is based is subsidized by the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO).
Chapter 12

Avoiding Ethnicity: Uses of the Ancient Past in Late Sasanian Northern Mesopotamia

Richard Payne

Around the year 600 CE, a hagiographer in the city of Karka d-Beit Slok (modern Kirkuk) prefaced his history of the city’s martyrs and bishops with an account of its foundation at the hands of Assyrian, Seleucid and Achaemenid kings.¹ Karka, according to the hagiographer, had played a central role in the political travails of these kingdoms, and the corresponding patronage of their respective kings had rendered the city ‘Karka the Great’, the dominant political center of the Northern Mesopotamian province of Beit Garmai. Within three decades of the History of Karka’s composition, a hagiographer in, or near, the city of Arbela, approximately 90 kilometers north of Karka, similarly invoked ancient kings in the course of a hagiographical narrative. The History of Mar Qardagh presented the saint as a descendant of Nimrod and the Assyrian king Sennacherib, the potency of whose lineage Mar Qardagh demonstrated with his mastery of hunting, archery and polo.² And just as the ancient kings had magnified Karka, its counterpart became ‘Arbela of the Assyrians’. These hagiographers enlisted physical vestiges of the pasts they evoked to underpin their historical claims. Detritus of ancient kingdoms frequently interrupted the Northern Mesopotamian landscape and constituted a highly malleable cultural resource. A group of monks, for instance, took up residence in the Neo-Assyrian relief of Sennacherib at Khinnis, perhaps to demonstrate their subjugation of


the supernatural powers inhering in the ruins of ancient kings.³ The History of Karka and the History of Mar Qardagh similarly harnessed the power of a ruinous landscape – the tell, walls and civic monuments of Karka and a fortress on the outskirts of Arbela – spatially to support their narrative claims on behalf of the antique grandeur of their cities and their noble inhabitants, an application of the ancient past to the representation of Christian community with significant implications for discussions of social identity in the late Sasanian Empire, ca. 502–636 ce.

Accounts of the glorious exploits of ancient kings and their noble descendants embedded in a redolent landscape often furnished the materials out of which communal, and especially ethnic, identities were crafted in late antiquity. As the Northern Mesopotamian hagiographers evoked their ancient past, Middle Persian and Armenian narratives elaborated histories of ancient kings and nobles affixed to a palpable landscape that were very much concerned to articulate Iranian and Armenian ethnicities.⁴ What is striking about the History of Karka and the History of Mar Qardagh in an empire where ethnic claims played so prominent a role is the absence of ethnic argumentation. Neither the kings nor the saints bore ethnic adjectives or sustained ethnic claims. The terms Assyrian (‘aturya) and Assyria (‘atur) designated geographical and historical, not ethnic, entities in late antiquity.⁵ Although historians frequently classify the population of Northern Mesopotamia into discrete Aramean and Iranian groups, those individuals who did not espouse an Iranian ethnicity do not appear to have shared a similarly cohesive epithet.⁶ In early Islamic sources, the Aramaic-speaking population of Iraq identified themselves either solely with their village or with reference to myths of ancient Iranian kings or Nimrod, who as we shall

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Avoiding Ethnicity

see was frequently incorporated into Iranian mythical history in Mesopotamia. Christians, at least, equated the adjective ‘Aramean’ with pagan. If outsiders attributed to Mesopotamians a collective peoplehood, they did so in the most unflattering of terms: as the late fifth-century Armenian historian Łazar P’arpec ‘i reported, the king of kings Peroz claimed, ‘The most worthless men and the least significant troops in my empire are Syrians.’ The inhabitants of Northern Mesopotamia thus avoided ethnic argumentation. But this absence of ethnicity did not entail a lack of interest in antiquity. The present intervention seeks to elucidate the ways in which the active appropriation of the past enabled Northern Mesopotamian Christians, whose participation in Iranianness was problematic if not impossible, to skirt the issue of ethnicity and to articulate their social status in terms of their cities and noble lineages, both of which were magnified by their saints. In an empire where power is usually thought to have resided with Iranians and Zoroastrians, the hagiographers’ application of the past will reveal a shifting, negotiable spectrum of identities mobilized in the pursuit of prestige and privilege in late Sasanian society.

Hagiographical evocations of the ancient past have principally been interpreted as signposts of continuity, ethnic or cultural, with the Neo-Assyrian kingdom. From the late nineteenth century, some of Iraq’s Christian communities have based their political claims on the notion of an Assyrian peoplehood biologically descended from the Assyrians of Nineveh and Assur, which has distorted discussions of identity in late antique Northern Mesopotamia in ways familiar from the historiography of the early medieval West. Whether criticizing or endorsing such claims of Assyrian descent, scholarly attention has focused on the appearance of the Assyrian past in late antique texts, especially the History of Mar Qardagh, and ignored Seleucid and Persian kings, as well as the ambiguous figure of Nimrod. Primordialist accounts of Assyrian – not to mention Iranian – ethnicity, which presume biological continuity from antiquity to modernity,
remain prominent. \(^{11}\) Recent studies of the Assyrian past have, however, expressly eschewed such arguments in favor of cultural continuity. The settlement of Neo-Assyrian sites, such as Assur, into the third century CE is argued to have preserved memories of the Assyrian kingdom. \(^{12}\) Joel Walker has shown that the shrine of Mar Qardagh stood upon what had been a Neo-Assyrian temple and explained the History of Mar Qardagh’s evocation of Sennacherib as a product of a continuous, folkloric memory of the Assyrians. \(^{13}\) There were, indeed, important continuities between the ancient Mesopotamian and Sasanian periods in terms of settlement, literary culture and religion. \(^{14}\) However, arguments for cultural continuity underestimate the ability of literary specialists to reinvent an imagined landscape on the basis of available textual resources. \(^{15}\) Adam Becker has persuasively criticized the argument for folkloristic, oral memories and argued that the Assyrian past in the East Syrian literature of the sixth and seventh centuries derived entirely from the Bible. \(^{16}\) But in addition to the scriptures, the authors of the History of Karka and the History of Mar Qardagh depended upon the Chronicle of Eusebius, the great late antique archive of ancient history. A cleric in the city of Karka undertook the translation of this compilation of classical Greek historiographers from Greek into Syriac at the end of the sixth century. \(^{17}\) The Chronicle thus entered Karka’s episcopal library just as the History of Karka was

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produced, and the selection of the *Chronicle* itself – a work concerned exclusively with ancient history – speaks eloquently of the interest in the pre-Christian past evinced both in contemporary hagiography and in the location of saints’ shrines. The ancient past did not impose itself upon Northern Mesopotamian hagiographers. Rather, they actively invented narratives of ancient history and applied them to their local landscapes.

This invention of the past took place in a society undergoing far-reaching transformations. During the reigns of Khusro I (531–79), Hormizd IV (579–90) and Khosro II (590–628), the Sasanian Empire reached the height of its power in political, economic and cultural terms. The Sasanians expanded, if sometimes ephemerally, on three frontiers simultaneously. They successfully resisted the rise of the Turks along the eastern frontier, deftly maneuvered among the fiercely independent Armenian and Georgian aristocrats of the Caucasus, and repeatedly subdued Rome in the west. From the client courts of al-Hira in Arabia or Mtskheta in Iberia to the city-states of Sogdia, Iranian culture, including Iranian historiography, provided the language of prestige and power. The fiscal and military reforms of Khusro I that resulted in the dizzying revenues of the late Sasanian fisc and undergirded the resurgence of the Iranian Empire engendered a new elite of imperial administrators, alongside the high nobles whose predominance remained unchallenged. Northern Mesopotamian Christians were prominent among these new office-holders, not least the family of Yazdin from Karka d-Beit Slok, the best known of late Sasanian fiscal officials. The hagiographical sources describe the Christian landowning elites of late Sasanian Northern Mesopotamia, increasingly implicated in the imperial administration, as *bar ḥere*, ‘free men’, a term corresponding with Middle Persian āzādān, a class of


sub-nobility beneath the wuzurgān, ‘great nobles’.\textsuperscript{21} The early Sasanian kings had settled ethnically Iranian great nobles in the principal cities of the region, and they continued to occupy the highest imperial offices in Northern Mesopotamia into the seventh century.\textsuperscript{22} The empire was thus dependent upon a Northern Mesopotamian elite marked by profound cultural diversity: a high nobility articulated its status in ethnic terms and in its allegiance to Zoroastrianism, while a middling level of nobility articulated its status in more localized terms and in its allegiance to Christianity. Narratives of the ancient past endeavored to address some of the cultural disparities between Iranian and non-Iranian elites, who collaborated more closely than ever before to advance the cause of empire in the late Sasanian period.

The History of Karka and the History of Mar Qardagh participated in a broader invention of the past taking place throughout the late Sasanian Empire. In the course of the sixth and early seventh centuries, the Sasanian court and Zoroastrian religious professionals devised and developed the Book of Kings (Xwadāy-nāmag), a conflation of the mythical histories of the Pishdadian and Kayanian of the Avesta with that of the Sasanian dynasty.\textsuperscript{23} Although Avestan royal traditions were of relevance to the Sasanians throughout the dynasty’s history, the Kayanians came to occupy a more central place in imperial ideology from the fifth century onward.\textsuperscript{24} And it was only in the sixth century that a systematic royal narrative began to emerge from the newly confident Sasanian kings, a history of and for the empire that expressed its ambitions to dominate the world. If the Assyrians have monopolized scholarly interest in late Sasanian Christian representations of the past, the History of Karka set an Iranian king, Darius III, alongside Sargon and Sennacherib. The presence of an Iranian king as a civic patron, a role characteristic of the protagonists of the Book of Kings, suggests links between East Syrian Christian hagiography and Sasanian historiography, which was no less interested in embedding its narratives within provincial landscapes. The Sasanians frequently enlisted the ancient monuments and natural features of the provinces to support their ideological claims. Sasanian topophilia is most

\textsuperscript{21} Iris Colditz, Zur Sozialterminologie der iranischen Manichäer: Eine semantische Analyse im Vergleich zu den nichtmanichäischen iranischen Quellen (Wiesbaden, 2000), offers the most developed analysis of these terms to date.

\textsuperscript{22} Morony, Iraq after the Muslim Conquest, pp. 181–2.


evident in Fars, where from the third century onward the manipulation and imitation of Achaemenid monumental architecture has contributed to the controversy over whether the Sasanians were aware of the Achaemenids. They recognized the Achaemenids as Kayanians, that is, as the last dynasts of the royal house narrated in the Avesta. As this was a mythical history, its genealogies and chronologies were imprecise and incomplete, with the result that of the Achaemenids only the name of Darius and his homonymous successors was retained in the tradition. The Sasanians accordingly appropriated Achaemenid antiquities freely as evidence of the Pishdadian and Kayanian empires to which they succeeded. Both the hagiographers of Northern Mesopotamia and the architects of the Book of Kings engaged in fundamentally similar pursuits, reinterpreting physical landmarks on the basis of the narratives at their disposal. Without the Avesta – still transmitted orally – and a well-developed Zoroastrian mythology of the ancient kings, the Sasanians would not have viewed the ruins of Fars as Pishdadian or Kayanian. Without the Bible and the Chronicle of Eusebius, the inhabitants of Northern Mesopotamia would not have viewed their tells or walls as Assyrian.

Yet the relationship between these two simultaneous inventions of the ancient past goes much deeper than mere methodological parallels. The Iranian history of the Book of Kings served to express not merely Sasanian legitimacy, but the very unity of the empire by placing its provinces, cities and natural landscapes within the accounts of kings, or rather by embedding narratives of the ancient kings within provincial landscapes, to create an empire suffused with stories underpinning imperial authority. It was thus not only in Fars that the Sasanians sought spatially to articulate their dominance by locating ancient monuments and natural features within their own past. To take an example from the region in which the Syriac hagiographies were produced, Ibn al-Balkhī has preserved an account to which the Pishdadian king Tahmasb created the Greater and Lesser Zab rivers in Northern Mesopotamia near the cities of Arbela and Karka, the source of the region’s prosperity and fertility. The Cities of Iran, a compilation of civic histories redacted in the Abbasid period on the basis of Sasanian materials, endowed the empire’s principal cities with Kayanian and Sasanian histories, as

well as Seleucid ones. Indeed, together with the establishment of fertility, for example through canal building, the foundation of cities was one of the tasks an Iranian king was expected to have undertaken. The Book of Kings produced at the Sasanian court offered provincial histories that celebrated local distinctiveness even as they interwove these accounts into an overarching narrative of imperial domination. The rivers, mountains, ruins and civic monuments of the provinces were mobilized to express imperial unity with local colors.

The creation of the Book of Kings has most often been connected with a discourse of ethnic exclusiveness, rather than with the relationship between the empire and its provinces. Thus Theodor Nöldeke, Artur Christensen and Ehsan Yarshater influentially referred to the work as an ‘Iranian national history’, an appellation whose presupposition of an early twentieth-century primordialist conception of ethnicity is patent. While the historicization of Iranian ethnicity remains well beyond the scope of the present chapter, a few remarks on the limitations of our knowledge concerning ideas of Iranianness are in order. Zoroastrian religious professionals developed and promoted the ethno-religious concept of the ēr, the conventional translation of which as ‘Iranian’ obscures its highly religious valence. A bundle of religious virtues that distinguished members of the Good Religion constituted the ērīh practiced by the ēr. The empire was known as ērānšahr, ‘the territory of the ēr’, which evoked the distinguished and distinguishing sacred history of the Iranian kingdoms that had ruled ērānwēz, the central, dominant region of the world, from the primordial origins of humanity. Ethics and sacred history, not race, constituted the ethnicity of the ēr. Both because of the seductive correspondence between Achaemenid ārya, Sasanian ēr and New Persian īrānī, and the importance of ‘the idea of Iran’ – ērānšahr – in imperial ideology, historians have tended to privilege the ethno-religious discourse of ēr/ānēr (non-Iranian) as the primary taxonomy employed by the dynasty and imperial administration, which would have placed firm limits on the ability of non-Zoroastrians to collaborate in the Iranian project. The language of ērīh was central to the self-conception and self-representation of Iranian nobles, as is evident from its deployment in

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29 Cities of Iran, ed. and trans. Josef Markwart, A Catalogue of the Provincial Capitals of Érānshahr (Pahlavi Text, Version, and Commentary) (Rome, 1931), pp. 8–23. For a new translation, see Touraj Daryaee, Šahrastanihā ērānšahr: A Middle Persian Text on Late Antique Geography, Epic, and History (Costa Mesa, Calif., 2002). Markwart’s commentary, however, remains indispensable.

30 Theodor Nöldeke, Das iranische Nationalepos (Strasbourg, 1896); Artur Christensen, Les Kayanides (Copenhagen, 1931).


private inscriptions. Nevertheless, a lack of ērīh prevented neither Christians nor Jews from pursuing or acquiring power in Sasanian society. If the discourse of ērīh was doubtless dominant among the high nobility, we need to explore the alternative taxonomies through which the less exalted, non-Zoroastrian elites of the late antique Iranian world defined their positions. Histories produced at both provincial and imperial levels suggest that the categories of locality and nobility were at least as important determinants of status as ethnicity and religion.

In an empire highly fragmented both economically and culturally, locality will have been the principal means of distinguishing between individuals. Local identities pervade the sources for Sasanian society, whether Zoroastrian, Christian or Jewish. Depending on the region and the specific social context, persons could represent themselves as inhabitants of a district or a province, of a village or a city. And these localities often offered stories of which one could boast, as a collection of Zoroastrian tales of the wonders of the region of Sistan reveals. The Cities of Iran attests both to the importance of historical narratives to civic belonging and to Sasanian attempts to regulate civic histories. If non-Zoroastrians could not partake of ērīh, they could claim membership within their respective localities, depending on how such local identities were constituted. A further distinction cut across religious and ethno-religious boundaries: nobility. In the late antique Iranian world, claims of social status were articulated genealogically, and nobility was inherited from one’s father and one’s father’s fathers. Claims of noble lineage were thus made on the basis of traditions derived from a reassuringly distant past – the highest grades of nobility claimed descent from the Parthian kings, the Sasanians claimed descent from the mythical Pishdadian and Kayanian kings, and the Christian elites of Northern Mesopotamia, as we shall see, claimed descent from the aristocracies of Assyrian, Achaemenid and Seleucid kings. Scholars have been more attentive
to the claims of the high nobility to Parthian lineage, but the lower nobility placed a similar emphasis on the antiquity of their blood and the ontological chasm between themselves and non-nobles. It is in light of the often interrelated categories of locality and nobility, rather than categories of ethno-religious difference, that we can apprehend the significance of the appropriation of the ancient past in Northern Mesopotamian hagiography for Christians endeavoring to define as lofty a place as possible for themselves within the Sasanian Empire.

In Northern Mesopotamia, narratives of urban foundation served to express the distinctions and relations between cities and towns in a region where the imperial administration does not appear to have imposed a clear, enduring hierarchy of settlement. A principal concern of late Sasanian accounts of antiquity was the establishment of connections between particular kings and particular cities. If the Book of Kings and the Cities of Iran recorded imperial transcripts of urban foundation legends, the Syriac hagiographies provide an otherwise unparalleled provincial perspective. The History of Karka claimed the patronage of royals whose outsized reputations ensured the recognition of the entire Near East: Sargon the descendent of Sennacherib and Nimrod, Darius and Seleucus Nikator. It fused Assyrian, Achaemenid and Seleucid accounts of foundation to place itself within the histories of three different glorious kingdoms, whose pasts served different functions. Despite its name, ‘Karka of the House of Seleucus’, the work insisted on the Assyrian king Sargon’s initial foundation of the city. But if Sargon first laid its foundations, the kings Darius and Seleucus endowed the settlement with the attributes constitutive of Karka as a city. Sargon, Darius and Seleucus each provided Karka with the monuments – walls, fortresses, streets, markets and inscriptions – and the noble families – descendents of nobles from Assyria and Fars – that adorned the city. The History of Karka’s efforts to conflate these varied pasts offers an apposite frame through which to interpret discourses of urban foundation operative elsewhere in Northern Mesopotamia. While narratives of the Assyrian and Iranian past otherwise appear unconcerned with one another, the History of Karka argued that these alternative histories were complementary assets of ‘Karka the Great’.

The construction of an Assyrian civic history entailed the assimilation of Nimrod to an Assyrian genealogy. In late antiquity, Nimrod was the traditional founder of cities in Northern Mesopotamia. Genesis 10 described the amorphous king as a founder of cities, and Syriac exegetical tradition elaborated on this report to identify Nimrod’s biblical foundations with Edessa, Nisibis, Ctesiphon,

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Avoiding Ethnicity

Arbela, Hatra and Reshaina. The list was, however, a matter of dispute. The sixth-century Cave of Treasures pointedly excluded Arbela from the list of foundations; its suppression of Arbela is a trace of a debate in late Sasanian Mesopotamia concerning which cities could claim Nimrod as their founder. The History of Karka and the History of Mar Qardagh responded to doubts about their cities’ associations with Nimrod by identifying Nimrod with Ninus, the son of Belos, the founder of the Assyrian dynasty in the Chronicle of Eusebius. In the late seventh century, the Chronicle of Khuzistan reveals the culmination of the process by which Nimrod was reinvented as an Assyrian king. Here it was Ninus, son of Belos, not Nimrod who built the cities enumerated in Genesis 10, so completely was Nimrod subsumed into the Eusebian Assyrian genealogy. This was an approach adopted, or even engineered by, the authors of the History of Mar Qardagh and the History of Karka. In the History of Karka, Sargon is a descendent of both Belos and Nimrod, while in the History of Mar Qardagh Arbela, the city of the saint descended from both Sennacherib and Nimrod, became a ‘city of the Assyrians’. These narratives did not merely place their cities within the list of Nimrod’s foundations from which some had excluded them, but also redefined Nimrod as but one of the Assyrian kings that had graced their cities.

If the Assyrian past permitted Karka and Arbela to map themselves onto a Northern Mesopotamian pattern of civic histories, Seleucus Nikator and Darius ranked Karka among the Greek and Iranian foundations of the Near East. With the patronage of Seleucus Nikator, Karka expressly positioned itself alongside Seleucia-Ctesiphon and Antioch – the greatest cities of the Fertile Crescent were foundations of the Seleucid monarch. It is the inclusion of Darius, however, that most forcefully signaled a convergence between imperial and provincial narratives. The Cities of Iran omitted Karka from its list of cities, a reminder that the city was less grand than its hagiographer’s aspirations, but did provide distinctly Iranian histories for the cities of Northern Mesopotamia quite at odds with those appearing in Syriac texts. A mythical Iranian hero, Warāzag ī
Neither Nimrod nor Seleucus was the founder of Edessa, but rather Narseh the Parthian. An otherwise unknown Sasanian dynast, Peroz son of Shahpur, established Nineveh (Mosul). Given this tendency to overlay local histories with Iranian ones, the presence of Darius III in the History of Karka suggests that the high nobles of the imperial administration within the city promoted Darius, as a Kayanian, as the founder of Karka. The History of Karka harmonized these narratives, which may otherwise have been in competition with one another. By insisting on the importance of Sargon, Seleucus Nikator and Darius the work interwove the alternative histories of the city’s foundation into a single, comprehensive account that incorporated both local and imperial perspectives.

In addition to melding alternative visions of civic community, the juxtaposition of ancient pasts supported Karka’s claim to dominate the province of Beit Garmai (MP Garmegān). We have hitherto referred to Karka as a ‘city’. In the absence of archaeological excavations, it is uncertain whether Karka’s role in the regional economy substantiated its claim of civic status. The city emerged in the late Sasanian period as the principal administrative center of Beit Garmai, and high nobles, dahigāns and a marzbān are known to have resided within its confines. Nevertheless, the fiscal administration of the province was shared with Adiabene, which may indicate a degree of ambiguity regarding the city’s position.

The settlements of Hirbet Glal to the northeast and Shahrgard to the southwest both rivaled Karka for political dominance in the province; it was only in the late fifth century that the metropolitanate was transferred from Shahrgard to Karka. The History of Karka was to be recited at the festival of the city’s martyrs, which the bishops of Hirbet Glal and Shahrgard were constrained to attend. To communicate the city’s preeminence on this occasion, the hagiographer enumerated the monuments supporting Karka’s claim to constitute a city. The kings were reported to have established structures still visible at the end of the sixth century. Sargon established two buildings within the city, a temple that continued to attract worshippers in the sixth century and a ‘house of the kingdom of Sargon’ (beit d-malkuta d-sargon), as well as a ‘small

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45 Cities of Iran, ed. and trans. Markwart, p. 13.
46 Ibid.
47 Ibid., p. 16.
49 Morony, ‘Continuity and change in the administrative geography’, p. 10.
wall’ (shura za’ura) and a ‘fortress’ (hesna) on its outskirts.51 Darius expanded the fortifications and also contributed to the cityscape with the construction of certain houses and a fire temple (beit nura).52 It was Seleucus Nikator, however, who had done the most to adorn Karka with the defining features of a city. He provided Karka with a robust wall with sixty-five towers and two city gates. An inscription, a testimony of antiquity, embellished one of the gates. In addition to a royal palace with an observation tower (beit dawqe), he had squares (platawata) built.53 The hagiographer mobilized the visible attributes of Karka as a city, from its streets to its towers, as evidence of its civic status.

The kings, moreover, entrusted the power of the city to noble men. Sargon provided Karka with its first nobles, endowed the city with the surrounding territory as its hinterland and subjected the inhabitants of the city’s territory as ‘slaves’ (abde).54 Karka’s civic identity was fundamentally aristocratic, and the division between city and hinterland mirrored the chasm between noble and slave. In its efforts to enmesh city and nobility, the History of Karka innovated a particular interpretation of the ‘Karkaye’, the inhabitants of Karka, as a novel form of elite representation. Sasanian elites most often identified with their rural estates rather than cities.55 The nobles of Karka possessed such rural properties in the hinterland, even if they associated themselves with specific quarters of the city.56 The designation of the inhabitants of the hinterland as slaves may well reflect the attitude of these landowning aristocrats toward the agriculturally productive population on their estates; Jairus Banaji has recently argued that a state of semi-servility characterized the landless peasants of Northern Mesopotamia.57 While elites retained their rural estates and dependencies, there are strong indications that the sixth-century fiscal reforms heightened the importance of the city to elite careers. Hence the above-mentioned high nobles resident in Karka. While omitting the Zoroastrian high nobles from its narrative, the History of Karka identified the Christian nobles of the middling class of nobility – the bar ḥere – with Karka’s past and landscape and provided accounts of the origin of their families, no less ancient than those of the Parthians and Sasanians.

Twelve noble families had been implanted in Karka by ancient kings and, according to the History of Karka’s pretensions, continued to adorn the city at the end of the sixth century. When Sargon built Karka, he transferred ‘a great

52 Ibid., p. 510.
53 Ibid., p. 511.
54 Ibid., p. 509.
family from the land of the Assyrians from among the notables of the kingdom, one known by the name of Burzin’ as well as another unnamed ‘great lineage’ (tuhma raba). The remainder of Karka’s aristocrats originated in Istakhr. Darius ‘brought five families from the land of Istakhr’ whose names are written in the archives of the kingdom of Persia’. Seleucus, for his part, installed further notables from the famous city of Fars: ‘he brought five notable families from Istakhr … and gave them arable property (‘ar‘ata) and vineyards in the land’. The authority of these great families was, moreover, mapped onto the layout of Karka. Seleucus divided the city into twelve districts, each named after one of the twelve aristocratic families settled by himself and his royal predecessors. The reference to nobles from Istakhr is striking. In their seals, Sasanian officials sometimes defined themselves as pahlav (from Parthia) or pārsīg (from Fars), terms that may combine affiliations of region and lineage. Nobles claiming an origin in Istakhr, a symbolic center of Fars, appear not only in late Sasanian Karka, but also in the Northern Mesopotamian cities of Nisibis and Lashom. Origination from Istakhr was likely a basis for claims of pārsīg status, and the Syriac sources thus attest both to the importance of such distinctions in the province and to Christians claiming an origin in Fars. Yet the hagiographer was content to promote the nobility of the city’s various aristocratic families without applying ethnic terminology that may have privileged those whose roots lay in Istakhr rather than Assyria. Indeed the descendents of the nobles settled by Darius validated their noble status with records preserved in a royal archive, where the Sasanians preserved the names and genealogies of the empire’s greatest clans. In the absence of such official documentation, elites aspiring to the nobility necessary for high status and advancement in the imperial administration were dependent on narrative authentication of their claims, which the History of Karka provided.

The History of Mar Qardagh’s invocation of Nimrod and Sennacherib, possibly influenced by the History of Karka’s claims, supported a similar redefinition of the relationship between city, nobility and Christianity. If its contribution to Arbela’s social imaginary was more limited in scope, the narrative was concerned to define Arbela as the dominant center of a region where structures of imperial powers were quite diffuse. Once appointed marzbān, Mar Qardagh returned

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59 Ibid., p. 510.
60 Ibid., p. 511.
61 Ibid.
‘to his home in the city of Arbela of the Assyrians’ and constructed a fortress on its outskirts, from which he ruled from the Diyala river to Nisibis, a combination of three provinces each with a separate marzbān in the late Sasanian period that is suggestive of Arbela’s aspirations to serve as a predominant center of Northern Mesopotamia. The nearby settlement of Hazza, probably more important than Arbela for the imperial administration, was, by contrast, merely ‘a village in the lands of the Assyrians’ (qrita d-‘atra d-‘aturaye). Mar Qardagh’s nobility, however, constituted a more sustained object of interest for the hagiographer. Joel Walker has revealed the extent to which the author was conversant with Iranian court culture and sought to legitimate the aristocratic language of manly valiance in Christian terms. In light of the History of Karka’s evidence for late Sasanian Christian elites claiming noble descent from Assyrian and Iranian kingdoms, Mar Qardagh’s precisely defined lineage indicates that some of Arbela’s Christian nobles considered themselves, like the saint from among their ranks, to be ‘from a great clan from the stock of the kingdom of the Assyrians’, that is, descendants of Sennacherib and Nimrod, via Gušnōy, an unambiguously Iranian name. The Nimrod-Gušnōy-Qardagh genealogy further points to an effort to develop a version of the ancient past accommodating of the Iranian high nobles and their strategies of ethnic argumentation. Although assimilated to an Assyrian royal genealogy by the hagiographer, Nimrod was most often considered an Iranian in the late antique Near East and was valorized as such by the Iranian inhabitants of Northern Mesopotamia. In addition to occupying a prominent place in local discourses of civic foundation, Nimrod was a source of ancient prestige recognized by the high nobles. By fusing Nimrod and Sennacherib, the hagiographer represented the city’s nobles in terms of an ancient past that could earn the recognition of the high nobility. The History of Mar Qardagh promoted the preeminence of both the city of Arbela and its nobles

as the consequence of a past whose gloriousness could be ascertained by all the diverse elites of the region, even as it advanced an uncompromising Christian militancy toward Zoroastrianism.69

The mobilization of antiquity in late Sasanian Northern Mesopotamia served to promote identities civic and aristocratic within the representation of Christian community to which references to ancient kings were subordinate. As hagiographers in the service of saints’ cults that realized Christian communities at particular times and places, the writers of the History of Karka and the History of Mar Qardagh provided narratives that would foster Christian cohesion in the quotidian spaces of town and hinterland. Their concern, above all, was to remind their auditors of belonging to the ‘people of the Christians’ and to define the terms of such membership. In so doing, they imbricated membership in the Christian people with membership in civic and aristocratic communities that depended on histories other than those of martyrs and bishops. Indeed, by drawing on literary sources and landscapes to reinvent the past, the hagiographers communicated claims to civic and noble status in novel ways to equip Christian elites with narrative arguments with which to position themselves in late Sasanian society. In their pursuit of recognition by the high nobility, Northern Mesopotamian elites argued in terms of the antiquity of their cities and noble lineages. The uses of the ancient past are thus suggestive of the ways in which non-Iranian provincial elites could respond to the ethnically exclusive discourse of ērīh: with silence, and a shift of emphasis toward alternative manifestations of power rooted in the past. The Northern Mesopotamian hagiographers developed not a fusion of ethnicity and religion, but rather one of city, nobility and religion. Ethnic, ethno-religious and religious boundaries could be invoked to impede collaboration between Iranians and non-Iranians in the late Sasanian imperial project. But imperial elites of all stripes could share affinities of locality and nobility. By sanctioning and promoting such identities within their representations of Christian community, hagiographers contributed to the integration of Christian elites into imperial structures, a leitmotiv of late Sasanian social history. Nevertheless, it was as an attribute of a particular micro-Christendom that the ancient, especially Assyrian, past retained its forceful symbolism in Northern Mesopotamia, long after it had lost its salience in Sasanian political culture.70 As we attempt to account for the emergence and perdurance of particular religious and ethnic communal


70 See, for example, the invocation of Sennacherib in the twelfth- or thirteenth-century History of Mar Behnam, ed. Bedjan, Acta martyrum et sanctorum, vol. 2, pp. 397–441, with Helen Younansardaroud, ‘Die Legende von Mar Behnäm’, in Martin Tamcke (ed.),
identities in the late antique Near East, the complex interaction, or imbrication, of such identities with the solidarities of locality, social status, region and office-holding, among others, would repay our attention.

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Chapter 13

Truth and Lies, Ceremonial and Art: Issues of Nationality in Medieval Armenia

Lynn Jones

What is commonly referred to in modern scholarship as the medieval Kingdom of Armenia, a united kingdom lasting from the late ninth to the early twelfth century, is a chimera. While the myth of a ‘Golden Age of Armenia’ is a modern construct, like most myths it is based in fact. There was a united kingdom of Armenia; it lasted twenty-three years, from the 885 investiture of Ashot I Bagratuni to that of his grandson, Gagik Artsruni, in 908.\(^1\) Political unity could not be maintained after 908 due to a series of civil wars that resulted in a loose coalition of principalities – in the tenth century there were three coeval ‘Kings of Armenia’ ruling in different ‘kingdoms’:\(^2\) If there was – outside of these twenty-three years – no politically identifiable medieval ‘Kingdom of Armenia’ how did the ruling classes identify and distinguish themselves and their power? How did any one family of rulers distinguish themselves from the proliferation of competing Armenian princes and kings? I will focus on the manifestation of the medieval Armenian interpolitical context in royal ceremonial and art.

In the ninth century the most important families were the Bagratuni, with lands in the north, and the Artsrunik’ in the south (Figure 13.1).\(^3\) Regional loyalties dominated and Armenian unity was largely conceptual – reflecting adherence to a common language and Christian confession rather than the preeminence of any single political entity. The majority of the ruling families in Armenia branched from the main Bagratuni line; those who declared independence changed their name to reflect their lands, such as the Tarōnites and Siunikians.\(^4\)

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\(^2\) The three were Ashot II Bagratuni, his cousin Ashot, known as Ashot the anti-king, and Gagik Artsruni, king of Armenia and Vaspurakan. See Jones, *Between Islam and Byzantium*, pp. 26–7.

\(^3\) The Bagratuni lands stretched between the northern city of Kars and Lake Sevan, to the east, and south to the northern shores of Lake Van. The Artsrunik’ lands were located to the south and east of Lake Van.

\(^4\) The founder of the Georgian royal Bagrationi family was descended from the Armenian ruling Bagratuni family. The supremacy of the Armenian branch was, of
Figure 13.1 Map of Armenia. Source: Jones, *Between Islam and Byzantium*, Fig. 1.1
The Artsrunik’; although originally not related to the ruling Bagratunis, had, by the Middle Ages intermarried with that family to the extent that the most powerful of the Artsrunik’ kings, Gagik Artsruni, was the grandson of the first Bagratuni king of Armenia.\(^5\)

All considered called themselves Armenian, all spoke the Armenian language and all professed Armenian Orthodox faith. Given this fundamental cultural unity one might expect the history of Armenia from the ninth to the eleventh centuries to have been one of harmonious cooperation, with the varied principalities acknowledging and benefiting from Bagratuni rulership. This was not the case. Conflict rather than cooperation characterized the history of a period in which the foundations of unified rule were fragmentary and unstable.

Wedged between lands contested by the Byzantine Empire and the Abbasid Caliphate, Armenia was a vassal state of the Abbasid Caliphate, with taxes collected by a resident governor, or ostikan.\(^6\) Yet it was not these greater powers that prevented and then destroyed political unity but rather an unending series of internecine conflicts. These conflicts, I argue, shaped both ceremonial and royal Armenian art. While the visual expression of Armenian rulership did borrow from both the empire and caliphate it was not slavishly copied but was...


adapted to reflect the allegiances, and champion the status, of the competing Armenian ruling families. When viewed from an Armenian perspective, with knowledge of the history of the period, royal art and ceremonial can be seen to reflect the successive division of the country into competing factions.

The Bagratuni successfully maintained their dynasty, ruling what they termed the kingdom of Armenia from 884 to 1045 and calling themselves kings of Armenia. This was at best a willful denial of political realities. By the end of the tenth century various branches of the Bagratuni family had broken away from the suzerainty of the so-called King of Armenia and claimed independent kingship in Siunik’, Tarōn, Tao Klardjeti and Vaspurakan.7

Contemporary texts make clear that one of the most important expressions of Bagratuni royal status was the ceremonial bestowal or confirmation of legitimate power. Textual descriptions of ceremonies accorded to and by Bagratuni kings reveal much about the medieval Armenian concept of rulership. The ceremonies also provide important comparanda for other expressions of royal power, such as portraits, of which there are few surviving examples.

I have demonstrated elsewhere that the textual accounts of the investitures of the first three Bagratuni kings of Armenia clearly document a dual investiture with Abbasid and Armenian ceremonies.8 The investitures featured different participants, occurred in different settings and followed different procedures. First, the ostikan ceremonially presented the new king with a crown, luxurious robes and other sumptuous gifts on a military practice field in the presence of the assembled Armenian and Abbasid armies. The king was then invested a second time in a ceremony performed by the head of the Armenian Church, the katholikos, in the major church of the current Bagratuni capital.9 The katholikos anointed the king, placed a crown on his head and sometimes also invested him with royal robes.

This double investiture confirmed and displayed different aspects of Bagratuni kingship. The caliphal gift of a crown and robes acknowledged the

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7 See above, n. 4.
8 Jones, Between Islam and Byzantium, pp. 13–30, with bibliography.
9 The Bagratuni capital was peripatetic until 961, when it was established at Ani. The precise location of Ashot I’s Armenian investiture is not specified, but is believed to have been at Bagaran, the current Bagratuni capital. See Maksoudian’s comments in Draskhanakerttsi’, History of Armenia, trans. Maksoudian, p. 274, n. 6; Ter-Ghewondyan, Arab Emirates, trans. Garsoñan, p. 59. For Smbat I, the katholikos clearly states that the Armenian investiture took place in a church – but does not identify it; Draskhanakerttsi’, History of Armenia, trans. Maksoudian, p. 132. The thirteenth-century historian Vardan notes that Smbat was invested in the church he had built at Erazgawork’, but his account is confused, as he goes on to note that Smbat built this church ‘after receiving royal status’: Robert W. Thomson, ‘The historical compilation of Vardan Arewelci’, Dumbarton Oaks Papers, 43 (1989): 125–226, at 187. No location is specified for Ashot II’s investiture in 918; see Draskhanakerttsi’, History of Armenia, trans. Maksoudian, p. 205.
source of royal power and also served to rank the king within the Abbasid sphere of influence. The subsequent investment of a crown by the katholikos in a religious ceremony validated the recipient’s pious worthiness to rule as a Christian king. The investiture ceremonial can therefore be seen as the symbolic unification, in the person of the Bagratuni king of Armenia, of the seemingly disparate aspects of Bagratuni rule: Armenian vassalage to the caliphate and Armenian Orthodox faith.

While other, competing members of the Armenian hereditary nobility were raised to royal status by the ostikan only the Bagratuni kings of Armenia were invested by the katholikos. This restriction ensured that the pious validation accorded by the investiture was only attainable by, and associated with, Bagratuni kings. From the ninth to the eleventh century the most powerful symbol of Bagratuni rulership was their investiture by the katholikos, by which the king’s unique pious worthiness was validated and displayed. This Armenian ceremonial remained a paradigm that could not be copied and for which there existed no substitute.

When we turn to Bagratuni royal art we are faced with a paucity of comparanda, but what does remain, I suggest, confirms the evidence of the double investiture ceremony: Bagratuni rulership was characterized by an emphasis on piety. The church of the Holy Saviour in Sanahin dates to the mid-tenth century and features portraits of two of the sons of Ashot III Bagratuni, king of Armenia (Figure 13.2). The images are carved in low relief and set in a niche beneath the gable on the east façade.

The figures of the princes, identified by inscription as Gurgēn to the left and Smbat to the right, are symmetrically arranged and hold between them a model of the church. They are the same height and exhibit the same posture, with heads turned frontally toward the viewer and bodies shown in profile. The faces are carved with identical, simply delineated features. They wear identical tunics with voluminous sleeves. The figures also wear identical, three-peaked headdresses with pendants and long flaps, or lappets, framing their faces. Lappets were a characteristic feature of the crowns worn by the Armenian Arsacid kings, as demonstrated by coins of the period. The pendants are prependoulia, an element of Byzantine regalia restricted to members of the imperial family, and their presence here has been ascribed to the influence of Byzantine imperial imagery. In this view, they are misunderstood elements of a more powerful culture used to boost the importance of minor princes.

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10 Jones, From Islam to Byzantium, pp. 21–2.
11 In modern-day northern Armenia. For the construction of the medieval monastery, see Stephen of Tarōn, History, trans. Macler, pp. lix–lx, 30.
However, if we look not to Byzantium but to artistic traditions within the Caucasus we find that the Bagratuni portraits are not the only royal images that include *prependoulia* – nor are they the earliest. *Prependoulia* are also found in a Georgian royal portrait dated to 963–66. The south façade of the cathedral at Osk’ Vank displays the sculpted images of another pair of princely brothers, Davit III and Bagrat Bagrationi, rulers of Tayk’ and members of the Georgian branch of the Bagratuni family (Figure 13.3). They are depicted wearing an impressive assemblage of Byzantine regalia, including *chlamydes*, tunics and crowns. Anthony Eastmond has demonstrated that the Byzantine elements neither reflected current imperial fashion nor accurately represented the brothers’ status in Byzantine eyes.\(^\text{14}\)

The Georgian portraits provide evidence that elements of Byzantine regalia, including *prependoulia*, were recognized and valued for the symbolic power they conveyed. The headdresses at Sanahin with their Byzantine and Arsacid elements are, I suggest, a similar assemblage of generally recognized royal symbols.

While the headdresses of Smbat and Gurgēn have drawn the bulk of scholarly attention, I suggest that it is most important that, as a whole, the portraits at Sanahin convey an overwhelming impression of fraternal unity and equality – they are identical in size, form and dress. This is extraordinary in an age when a primary function of art is the visual expression of hierarchical distinctions of rank. This similarity of the sculptures has too frequently been dismissed in scholarship as the result of the limits of provincial talent – again, a view that does not reflect the internal Armenian political context or consider that the message conveyed by the sculptures was intended for a specific Armenian audience.

The historical context offers an obvious reason for the particular way in which Smbat and Gurgēn are represented. They had a third, younger brother, Gagik, who had attempted to usurp the throne from his ailing father and was subsequently exiled from the Bagratuni court. The absence of Gagik’s portrait at Sanahin reveals the depiction of Gurgēn and Smbat to be a visual presentation of dynastic unity in response to challenges to the order of royal succession.

Supporting evidence for this interpretation is found at the church of the Holy Sign at Haghbat (Figure 13.4). It too features portraits of Gurgēn and Smbat, and again, Gagik is not represented. As at Sanahin, the sculpted images of the two

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brothers are placed high on the east façade within the confines of a rectangular niche beneath the gable. Their figures are again symmetrically arranged within the niche, and they again hold between them a model of their church. However, at Haghbat the brothers’ relative rank is given clear visual expression, confirming historical accounts that date the portraits to 977, when Smbat succeeded his father as king of Armenia.18

Figure 13.4  Gurgēn and Smbat Bagratuni, east façade, Church of the Holy Sign, Haghbat. Source: Jones, Between Islam and Byzantium, Fig. 3.3

Smbat’s royal status – and his superior rank vis-à-vis his younger brother – is most immediately apparent in his costume. He wears an elaborate woven turban while Gurgēn wears a cap-like helmet.19 While the figures are similarly clothed in undecorated mantles worn over plain tunics and high riding boots strapped at the ankle, Smbat’s dress is more elaborate. The sleeves of his mantle are tightly gathered into smooth wide cuffs and his boots feature two straps. In contrast, Gurgēn’s sleeves terminate in small loose folds, and his boots have one strap. The severity of both brothers’ dress is relieved only by the voluminous

19 Gurgēn’s helmet, while unique in surviving Armenian imagery, bears comparison to late Sasanian helmets, known as spangenhelm. See St. John Simpson, ‘From Tekrit to the Jaghhagh: Sasanian sites, settlement patterns and material culture in Northern Mesopotamia’, in Karin Bartl and Stefan R. Hauser (eds), Continuity and Change in Northern Mesopotamia from the Hellenistic to the Early Islamic Period (London, 1996), pp. 87–127, esp. 97, illustrated plate 2 a/b.
material of their tunic sleeves, which project beyond the cuffs of their mantles and hang down from their extended arms. Even this detail serves to express their relative rank. Smbat’s sleeves are large and hang straight down, while Gurgēn’s are smaller and bend backward toward his body, seemingly reacting to, and accepting, Smbat’s royal status.\textsuperscript{20}

Figure 13.5  Gagik I Bagratuni, Church of St. Gregory the Illuminator, Ani (lost). Source: Jones, *Between Islam and Byzantium*, Fig. 3.4

When Smbat died in 989/90 his exiled brother was recalled and installed as Gagik I, Bagratuni king of Armenia – although his kingdom was now reduced to Ani and the surrounding lands. After attaining royal status Gagik founded the church of St. Gregory the Illuminator at Ani. While conducting excavations

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\item Smbat’s tunic sleeves thus seemingly emulate the static nature for which the Byzantine emperor was celebrated, and which is a characteristic of imperial portraiture. For a discussion, with bibliography, of taxis and ataxia, see Henry Maguire, ‘Images of the court’, in Helen Evans and William Wixom (eds), *The Glory of Byzantium: Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era, 843–1261*, Exhibition Catalogue (New York, 1997), pp. 183–91, esp. 185–7. I know of no parallel use of this wonderfully sophisticated device in Georgian royal imagery.
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in Ani in 1906, Nicolas Marr unearthed in the rubble of the church a life-sized sculpture depicting Gagik holding a model of his church on his outstretched arms (Figure 13.5). The portrait, which vanished during the First World War, was the only known example of medieval Armenian sculpture in the round. According to Marr the statue measured 2.26 meters in height and was originally placed in a niche on the church’s north wall.

The king’s royal status was prominently conveyed by a white turban of immense proportions. He wore an undecorated red mantle over a white tunic, and a necklace bearing a large cross rested on his breast. The tunic’s sleeves projected beyond those of the mantle and terminated in great swags of fabric, analogous to (but larger than) those worn by his brothers at Haghbat.

While the evidence is both quantitatively and chronologically limited, the portraits of Haghbat and Ani suggest a standard representation of Bagratuni royal status which features the presentation of church models, turbans as indicators of royal rank and mantles worn over tunics distinguished by pendant sleeves. It is only the last of these features that is apparently unique to Bagratuni portraits. Representations of donors with church models appear in Armenia as early as the sixth century, and their reoccurrence throughout the medieval period confirms that they were an established element in the Armenian representation of aristocratic and royal piety. Contemporary Georgian portraits invariably depict donors with church models and thus attest to a wider, shared tradition of representation. Turbans, while more restricted in their

21 A fragment of the upper torso of the statue was recently discovered in a field and is now in the regional museum in Erzurum. I have, thus far, been unable to view it.
23 The sleeves have formal counterparts only in the depictions of sleeve-dancers of the Islamic courts. However, the latter are always shown unfurled and extended over the hands rather than gathered at the wrists as in the Armenian portraits. I thank Scott Redford for this observation. Baggy sleeves are part of the royal costume on the Spanish-Umayyad Pyxis of al-Mughira, dated to 968, but their form does not duplicate those found in the Bagratuni images. See Jerrilynn Dodds (ed.), Al-Andalus: The Art of Islamic Spain (New York, 1992), pp. 193–7. Gagik I’s distinctive spit curl, which curves on his cheek, is also found in Abbasid, Fatimid and Hispano-Umayyad paintings. For examples, see Richard Ettinghausen and Oleg Grabar, The Art and Architecture of Islam 650–1250 (New Haven, Conn., 1994), figs 107, 143–4, 189, 191. This must reflect the general transmission of style from the Islamic courts to the Armenian; it may also reflect the Armenian use of Islamic, or Islamic-trained, artists.
24 In his portrait on the west façade of his palace church (built 915–21) Gagik Artsruni proffers a prominent model of his church to the figure of Christ. For this image and for the development of the Artsruni visual expression of kingship, see Jones, Between Islam and Byzantium, pp. 53–97.
25 For parallel examples of the use of this iconography in Georgian portraiture, see Eastmond, Royal Imagery.
chronological occurrence, indicate status in contemporary Armenian, Georgian and Byzantine art. The turbans worn by the Bagratuni kings at Haghbat and Ani should not, therefore, be read as foreign elements but rather reflect the thorough assimilation of Islamic modes of dress into the Armenian aristocracy.26

Perhaps as important are the elements that are not found in the surviving portraits of Bagratuni kings: there are no foreign robes or crowns. While it is possible that the robes worn by the figures at Haghbat were originally embellished with painted decoration, and that they therefore may have imitated either Islamic or Byzantine embroidered textiles, it should be noted that the dress is not Byzantine or Islamic in form. They are not depicted in chlamydes or other imperial regalia, as is found in the Georgian royal imagery at Osk’ Vank. Indeed, a comparison of the sculptures at Haghbat and Sanahin suggest that what was acceptable for Bagratuni princely imagery was not acceptable for the representation of Bagratuni kings. Once Smbat attained royal status his portrait no longer features any elements derived from foreign regalia.

The royal Bagratuni portraits of the second half of the tenth century thus visually stress the specifically Armenian nature of Bagratuni kingship, prominently displaying the rulers’ piety and eschewing any foreign emblems of power. This interpretation correlates with the ideology of kingship expressed in the investitures of the first three Bagratuni kings, where the recognition of temporal power symbolized in the Abbasid ceremony was secondary to the pious symbolism conveyed through the investiture performed by the katholikos.

As we have seen, Bagratuni rule over a unified Armenia was brief, ending in 908 with the investiture of Gagik Artsruni by the ostikan, granting him the title ‘king of Armenia and Vaspurakan’. It is clear from the contemporary descriptions that Gagik was invested in an Abbasid ceremonial that paralleled those accorded to the Bagratuni kings of Armenia. Yet, however splendid, Gagik’s investiture was set apart from Bagratuni investitures by its lack of religious symbolism. Gagik was invested as King of Armenia and Vaspurakan three or possibly four more times by the ostikan, but was never invested by the katholikos. Until his death he was the most powerful of the Armenian kings, but he could not compete with the pious legitimacy enjoyed by the Bagratuni kings of Armenia, conferred upon them in a uniquely Armenian investiture ceremony.

Is Gagik’s seemingly inferior status vis-à-vis the Bagratuni dynasty addressed in his royal portraits? There are two surviving images and one description of a lost portrait. All are, or were originally, found at his palace and palace church on the island of Aght’amar, in Lake Van, now eastern Turkey (Figure 13.6).

26 For a discussion of the parallel contemporary and later use of such ‘Islamic’ dress in Byzantium, see Cyril Mango, ‘Discontinuity with the classical past in Byzantium’, in Margaret Mullet and Roger Scott (eds), Byzantium and the Classical Tradition (Birmingham, 1981) pp. 48–57, esp. 51–2.
The palace no longer exists, but according to a contemporary text multiple depictions of Gagik were prominently featured amongst the visual splendors. He was shown seated on gilt thrones, flanked by princely attendants, lines of musicians, ‘women dancing in an admirable manner’, men engaged in swordplay and wrestling matches, and by lions and other wild beasts and birds.\(^{27}\)

There are no similar surviving representations of Armenian kings, nor are there any descriptions of lost Armenian royal imagery that parallel this description. There are also no parallels with contemporary Byzantine imperial art. The description of Gagik’s palace portraits does evoke the iconography of the Islamic cycle of princely entertainments, which features an enthroned king flanked by attendants and animals traditionally associated with royalty, and frequently includes musicians, dancers and contests of strength.\(^{28}\) Examples


\(^{28}\) For examples of this iconography, see Thomas Arnold and Adolf Grohmann, *Denkmäler islamischer Buchkunst* (Leipzig, 1929), p. 10; Janine Sourdel-Thomine and Bertold Spuler (eds), *Kunst des Islam*, Propyläen Kunstgeschichte, 4 (Berlin, 1973) p. 267, figs 204c,
roughly contemporary with Aght’amar survive from the Abbasid capitals of Samarra and Baghdad and from the court of the Spanish Umayyad caliph.29

Further evidence of this suggested emulation of Islamic iconography is found on the exterior of the Church of the Holy Cross, which is all that remains of the tenth-century city of Aght’amar.30 The east façade features a portrait of a ruler, and while various identities have been proposed for this figure I suggest that it can only represent Gagik Artsruni – the presentation of this ruler corresponds to the textual descriptions of Gagik’s palace portraits31 (Figure 13.7).

Figure 13.7  East façade, Church of the Holy Cross, Aght’amar, Lake Van. Source: Jones, Between Islam and Byzantium, Fig. 4.24


29  For Islamic minor arts, see above note 28; for palaces, see Ernst Herzfeld, Die Ausgrabungen von Samarra, vol. 3 (Berlin, 1927), p. 38, fig. 23. For Hispano-Umayyad examples and bibliography, see Dodds, Al-Andalus, pp. 41–7.

30  Two subsidiary chapels were added to the northeast of the church sometime after the early fourteenth century, and the southern bell tower and the western chapel were added in the eighteenth or early nineteenth century. For discussion of these later additions, see Sirapie Der Nersessian, Aght’amar: The Church of the Holy Cross (Cambridge, 1965) pp. 9–10. The island of Aght’amar is now an open-air museum administered by the Turkish government.

Gagik, then, is shown haloed and crowned, sitting cross-legged on a cushioned platform throne, wearing a loose, undecorated tunic belted over trousers (Figure 13.8). He reaches with his left hand to pluck from a cluster of grapes and raises a glass with his right hand. He is flanked by two attendants in princely dress and by a lion and eagle. A comparison of this portrait with a medallion issued by the reigning Abbasid caliph, al-Moqtadir, reveals the extent of Islamic influence on Gagik’s portrait (Figure 13.9).
Figure 13.10  West façade, Gagik Artsruni presenting a model of his church to Christ, Church of the Holy Cross, Aght’amar, Lake Van. Source: Jones, *Between Islam and Byzantium*, Fig. 4.3

Figure 13.11  Detail, Gagik Artsruni, Church of the Holy Cross, Aght’amar, Lake Van. Source: Jones, *Between Islam and Byzantium*, Fig. 4.7
The west façade of the Church of the Holy Cross features a second portrait of Gagik, carved at a monumental scale (Figures 13.10, 13.11). Here he is haloed and wears a jeweled crown and a richly embroidered mantle over a tunic and trousers. He holds in his outstretched hand a model of the church that he proffers to the figure of Christ. On one level Gagik’s image is a straightforward representation of his piety as donor. However, I suggest that this image served primarily to convey the source, and therefore the legitimate nature, of Gagik’s power. The particular form of Gagik’s mantle and crown does not occur elsewhere in surviving art, and the mantle’s decorative motif of small, plump birds with short, thick beaks is not repeated elsewhere in the church’s extensive sculptural program. This led Sirarpie Der Nersessian to suggest that the sculpture represents specific Islamic regalia presented to Gagik by the caliph or the ostikan. Certainly this is possible; the contemporary histories document that before construction on the church was completed Gagik received at least three crowns and many embroidered robes from Islamic authorities. Yet regardless of whether Gagik’s crown and robe represent specific Islamic regalia, the sculpture does show him wearing identifiably Islamic costume and thus displays the source of his authority and asserts his legitimacy.

Why did Gagik Artsruni turn to Islam for an iconography of power? If we accept that there was already in existence an established method of visually characterizing Armenian rulership in the form of Bagratuni ceremonial and royal imagery, why then did Gagik Artsruni not emulate the Bagratuni model? I suggest that, simply put, Gagik could not compete with the Bagratuni kings of Armenia on the issue of piety. Gagik’s father and grandfather converted to the Muslim faith while captive in Samarra, and his elder brother died an excommunicant. Gagik was himself the decisive factor in the capture and resultant murder of his uncle, the Bagratuni king Smbat I – he allied his military with that of the ostikan, and at the head of the combined armies successfully captured the Bagratuni capital of Duin. Smbat was taken prisoner by the ostikan, and was eventually tortured and killed. His decapitated body was nailed to a cross and displayed on the walls of the city.

The martyr’s death of King Smbat, the subsequent miracles connected with his body and his canonization as a holy martyr all granted the Bagratids a spiritual prestige par excellence. This was underscored by their use of the Armenian investiture which was, quite literally, the crowning expression of

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32 The image is over two and a half meters high.
35 An awareness of this model has been suggested above, provided by the figures of Old Testament kings carved on the exterior of the Church of the Holy Cross, each of which wears a turban as a symbol of royal status.
Bagratuni piety. It has been demonstrated that the primary symbolism of the Bagratuni investiture ceremonial was one of pious rulership.

What Gagik Artsruni did possess, and what the Bagratids lacked, was secure temporal power. When faced with a need for a visual expression of his power, Gagik was conceivably presented with two options: model his imagery on that of the Bagratuni kings or assemble a new expression of rulership. Unable to compete with the Bagratids on the issue of piety alone, and denied the dual investiture, I suggest that he sought to give visual expression to his strongest royal qualification, his temporal power, and that he found in Islam appropriate expressions of this power. Equally important, such royal presentations would be unchallenged by any similar expression of Bagratuni rulership.

The example of medieval Armenia warns us of the dangers of interpreting material culture from the perspective of an outsider. Medieval Armenia was not, in the view of those who lived there, the periphery. It was rather the intersection of multiple cultures and artistic traditions, a kaleidoscope of internal and international alliances. It is true that the visual expressions forged to convey Armenian rulership reflect the influences of surrounding cultures. But they were adopted, and adapted, to address the specific needs of the competing ruling families in what is generally and inaccurately termed the Kingdom of Armenia.
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Chapter 14

Roman Identity in a Border Region:
Evagrius and the Defence of the
Roman Empire

Hartmut Leppin

Nestorius, the exiled bishop of Constantinople, was an unlucky man. It was bad enough to have been banished to the far end of Egypt, but it was still worse to be caught by barbarians, as was Nestorius’ fate. The Blemmyes, however, who had captured Nestorius, were fast to learn that an exiled heretic was not exactly a good catch. They released him, apparently without any compensation. Nestorius returned to Egypt only to face another challenge: he had to make clear to Emperor Theodosius II why he had been absent and why he did not want to return to his former place of exile, the Kharga Oasis. So he wrote several letters to the emperor in order to explain what he had suffered and that he had not willingly abandoned his place of exile.

Some 150 years later, while quoting these letters at length and interpreting the occurrences in his own way, the ecclesiastical historian Evagrius Scholasticus underlined spitefully that what had happened to Nestorius was the rightful punishment for his heresy, which is the main message of this episode. Yet, the episode also exhibits a recurrent theme in Evagrius’ works: the frontiers of the empire are not safe, the Roman government is failing to control them tightly; Romans could easily become the subjects of other powers, with whom they had to find an arrangement, even though they had to explain their apparently disloyal behaviour. Such things also occurred in Syria, where Evagrius lived and composed his church history.

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1 Various versions of this chapter have been read in Vienna, Oxford and Hawarden. I am grateful to the respective audiences for their contributions. My special thanks also go to Anthony Kaldellis and Wolfram Brandes for generous help, and to David Toalster for improving my English.

Evagrius’ biographical details (PLRE III A 452–3) derive from his own work. He was born in 535/6 in Epiphaneia, a small city in the valley of the Orontes. As a boy he had to endure the Persian invasion of 540. This disaster must have been a vivid memory in his youth. Nevertheless, his family was able to afford an extensive education for him. He studied law in Constantinople for four years and became a scholasticus. Having returned to Syria he pursued his legal career and became attached to the service of Bishop Gregory of Antioch, who, as we shall see, was the main hero of his narrative, which was composed at the end of the sixth century after Gregory’s death. Evagrius was a public figure in Antioch and even well known at court. For his literary achievements he was endowed with honorary offices by the emperors Tiberius (as an honorary quaestor) and Maurice (as an honorary praetorian prefect). He enjoyed a very impressive career.

Clearly Evagrius wrote from a Roman point of view and supported the Roman cause. The genre of church history, however, unlike secular historiography, is characterized by a tension between the Christian and Roman claims of universality. Thus, Evagrius did not write imperial history, Reichsgeschichte. Although most Christians lived within Roman borders, Christianity was not restricted to the empire. As a consequence, Evagrius regularly addressed the fate of Christians outside the empire. It was, in his eyes, even imaginable for Persian rulers to become Christians or to have sympathy for Christian practices. He mentioned that Chosroes I was said to have been baptized on his deathbed and that Chosroes II made dedications to St Sergius, including a cross. On the other hand, Evagrius’ interest in the Roman Empire was uneven, a tendency equally evident in other church historians. Syria was the focus of his attention, whereas


4 Evagrius, Historia ecclesiastica, 4,26.

5 Evagrius, Historia ecclesiastica, 6,24.

6 Evagrius, Historia ecclesiastica, 4,28, ed. Bidez and Parmentier, p. 177; for parallels, see Allen, Evagrius, p. 189.

other parts of the empire were mentioned only occasionally, with the exception of Constantinople as the political centre.\(^8\)

Still, Evagrius was a peculiar ecclesiastical historian. When compared with previous writers such as Socrates, Sozomen and Theodoret, Evagrius exhibited many more elements of classical historiography. He listed Ephorus, Theopompus, Appian and Polybius as well as several other classical historiographers among his predecessors\(^9\) and quoted Procopius at length.\(^10\) His focus was mostly on events of religious importance, even when employing Procopius’ works, but he also concerned himself with problems of taxation\(^11\) and sometimes even with military history. Even so, his ecclesiastical history was intended to show how true Christians managed to preserve their orthodoxy against any heretical interference. But there was also a subtext, namely how to defend the Roman borders and Roman identity in a world where it seemed threatened.\(^12\)

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\(^9\) Evagrius, \textit{Historia ecclesiastica}, 5,24; see Allen, \textit{Evagrius}, pp. 237–9 for the list which is incomplete and perhaps goes back to Eustathius of Epiphaneia.

\(^10\) This seems to be obvious: A. Tricca, ‘Evagrio e la sua fonte più importante Procopio’, \textit{Roma e l’Oriente}, 9 (1915): 102–11, 185–201, 283–302 and 10 (1915): 51–62, 129–45, who doubts whether Evagrius had a full version of Procopius’ text at his disposition when he wrote his church history, could not prove his case; see Anthony Kaldellis, \textit{Hellenism in Byzantium: The Transformation of Greek Identity and the Reception of Classical Tradition} (Cambridge, 2007), p. 137. Kaldellis explains this by the need to grasp reality adequately (‘We see here how the Greek tradition stepped in to bridge the gap when reality could no longer be described in purely Christian terms’). Perhaps another factor is that classical tradition was not as dangerous as it had been previously.

\(^11\) Hartmut Leppin, ‘Evagrius Scholasticus oder: Kirchengeschichte und Reichstreue’, \textit{Mediterraneo antico}, 6 (2003): 141–53. Evagrius knows, however, that Rome in contrast to barbarian rule guarantees a certain order in tax-paying (\textit{Historia ecclesiastica}, 6,5); for Rome as a power of order, see, for example, Procopios, \textit{Bella} 8,30,6.

\(^12\) For Roman identity in this time, see, for example, Geoffrey Greatrex, ‘Roman identity in the sixth century’, in Geoffrey Greatrex and Stephen Mitchell (eds), \textit{Ethnicity and Culture in Late Antiquity} (London, 2000), pp. 267–92. He underlines that ‘Christianity, and more specifically Chalcedonian orthodoxy, was thus in the process of becoming one of the most important aspects of Roman identity in the sixth century’ (p. 277). I propose a minimalist definition of identity, which is inspired by systemic approaches to societies: identity is a form of self-description of groups based on a distinction that is regarded as important; the main point is the difference, not the essence: ‘Alle Identität konstruiert sich über Negationen’ (Niklas Luhmann, ‘Sinn als Grundbegriff der Soziologie’, in Jürgen Habermas and Niklas Luhmann (eds), \textit{Theorie der Gesellschaft oder Sozialtechnologie – Was leistet die Systemforschung?} (Frankfurt am Main, 1971), pp. 25–100, at 60).
This subtext will be the main subject of this chapter. I seek to argue that Evagrius, perhaps unwillingly, shows that the secular representatives of the Roman order were failing, whereas good bishops (in his case an exemplary bishop, his patron Gregory) were able to keep Roman identity alive. In so doing, it is important to consider that church historiography, as ancient historiography in general, was simultaneously descriptive and normative. Often passages that seem to be descriptive in character are normative in their meaning: any event of the past can easily become a historical example. Models positive and negative are offered to the reader in every narrative.

The defence of the Roman borders was obviously first of all the task of the Roman emperors. Unfortunately, emperors, as described by Evagrius, were often distant and of dubious trustworthiness. In the tradition of Roman historiography Evagrius provided a portrait of every Roman emperor. There are exemplary basileis such as Marcian (450–57) and Tiberius II (578–82), there are more mediocre rulers as, for example, Justinian (527–65), and there are totally incompetent claimants to the purple such as Zeno (474–91), whose rule was depicted as a continuation of barbarian raids with different methods. What the invaders left to the Romans was robbed by the emperor himself in a barbarous way, as Evagrius affirmed. Moreover, Zeno was devoid of self-control. Characteristically, his reign was accompanied by barbarian invasions; Evagrius explicitly names the Scenites and the Huns.

Another incompetent emperor was Justin II (565–78). When the Persians prepared an invasion of Syria in 573, Bishop Gregory informed him of the impending incursion, but the emperor dismissed the warnings. In the eyes of Evagrius, the incompetence of the Roman emperors brought disastrous consequences. When he mentioned a military disaster incurred by the future emperor Tiberius (578–82) under Justin (565–78) he highlighted the role of divine providence in overcoming imperial ineptitude:

He [Tiberius] came close to capture since the soldiers did not even endure the sight of the barbarians, but for the fact that divine power miraculously preserved him and guarded him for the Roman rule, which, together with

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13 See Michael Whitby, ‘Evagrius on emperors and patriarchs’, in Michael Whitby (ed.), The Propaganda of Power: The Role of Panegyric in Late Antiquity (Leiden, 1998), pp. 321–44; at p. 329 he observes overlaps between his portraits of emperors and his assessment of bishops such as Anastasius and Gregory: pp. 329–31 for Gregory; pp. 331–2 for Anastasius (‘In contrast to Gregory, Anastasius was clearly very particular about access to his presence and resembled Maurice in preserving a balance between being available for important matters and distanced from trivia’, p. 332).


Although divine providence cares for Tiberius and the state, Evagrius could imagine the collapse of the Roman Empire, simply because of the incompetence of its rulers. Roman emperors alone were inadequate guarantors of the Roman order. This does not mean that Evagrius was an enemy of the imperial order. But there was a necessity to compensate for the eventuality of a disastrously incompetent ruler. This could be the task of the empress, but also of high officials and other persons whom we will discuss later on.

There is not much to be said on high officials in Evagrius. The governors of Syria and the comites Orientis are rarely mentioned and do not seem to be important in the eyes of Evagrius. If compared, for example, to Libanius’ first oration, his so-called autobiography, written also in Antioch two centuries before, the difference becomes clear. Whereas in Libanius the most important representatives of the Roman order were the governors, the good ones who supported him and the bad ones who failed to see his genius, these functionaries

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16 Evagrius, Historia ecclesiastica, 5,11: ὃς καὶ μικροῦ ἑάλω, τῶν στρατιωτῶν μηδὲ τὴν θέαν τῶν βαρβάρων ὑπενεγκάντων, εἰ μὴ θεία πρόνοια παραλόγοις τούτοις διέσωσε καὶ εἰς τὴν Ῥωμαίων βασιλείαν ἐφύλαξε, κινδυνεύσασαν τοῖς Ἰουστίνου παραλόγοις ἐγχειρήμασι σὺν καὶ τῷ ὅλῳ πολιτεύματι διαρρυῆσαι, καὶ βαρβάροις τῆς τοσαύτης ἀρχῆς ἐκστῆναι; all translations follow Michael Whitby.

17 Cf., for example, for similar ideas Priskos, Fragment, 11,2, ed. Roger C. Blockley, The Fragmentary Classicising Historians of the Later Roman Empire: Eunapius, Olympiodorus, Priscus, and Malchus (2 vols, Liverpool, 1981–83), l,624–36 = number 8, ed. Fritz Bornmann, Prisci Panitae Fragmenta (Florence, 1979), p. 56,6–20 = Priscus, Excerpta et Fragmenta, Exc. 8,144–6, ed. Pia Carolla, Bibliotheca scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana (Berlin, 2008), pp. 41f.; Scriptores Historiae Augustae, Triginta Tyranni, 5,7. Evagrius’ general outlook is usually interpreted as optimistic, see Walter Emil Kaegi, Byzantium and the Decline of Rome (Princeton, 1969), pp. 217–23, on the base of 3,41, which is a topical refutation of pagan arguments; Caires, ‘Evagrius’, p. 31; Glenn F. Chesnut, The First Christian Histories: Eusebius, Socrates, Sozomen, Theodoret, and Evagrius (Macon, 1986), pp. 224–30; Ivan V. Krivouchine, ‘Le révolte près de Moncarton vue par Évagre, Théophylacte Simocatta et Théophane’, Byzantion, 63 (1993): 154–72, at 159f.; Krivouchine highlights the positive interpretation of Maurice’s reign by Evagrius. It is, however, always difficult to obtain a clear picture of an author’s idea about history if he is dealing with the monarch in power; besides, Evagrius shows the dangers that can even befall his hero Gregory who is accused of participating in pagan offerings (Evagrius, Historia ecclesiastica, 5,18; 6,7; see Ilse Rochow, ‘Die Heidenprozesse unter den Kaisern Tiberios II., Konstantinos und Maurikios’, in Helga Köpstein and Friedhelm Winkelmann (eds), Studien zum 7. Jahrhundert in Byzanz. Probleme der Herausbildung des Feudalismus (Berlin, 1976), pp. 120–30; Allen, Evagrius, pp. 230–32). This is connected to Evagrius’ concept of Tyche, which is capable of endangering everything; see Chesnut, Christian Histories, pp. 216–23.

18 Evagrius, Historia ecclesiastica, 5,12.
were shadowy figures in Evagrius apart from the comes Orientis Asterius (PLRE III A 139) who was in conflict with Gregory.\(^{19}\)

Much more important were military leaders. Evagrius provided several examples of competent generals. Belisarius, in particular, occupied a prominent position in the time of Justinian. Evagrius mentioned his (more or less) successful campaigns in the East and in Italy, as well as the victory against the Vandals.\(^{20}\)

Moreover, precisely under the reign of the ineffectual Justin II excellent commanders came into view, as, for example, the commander Justinian who triumphed in the battle of Melitene in 575/6 against Chosroes I. Justinian and his army even spent the winter in Persian territory, ‘in great prosperity and glory’.\(^{21}\)

However, Maurice, the future emperor equally praised by Evagrius, superseded Justinian during the reign of Tiberius.\(^{22}\)

Another noteworthy commander of the sixth century was Marcian (PLRE IIIB 821–3). He laid siege to Nisibis, although insufficiently supplied with troops.\(^{23}\)

Nevertheless, the emperor urged him to capture the town and, in the end, despite the warnings of Gregory of Antioch, replaced him with a certain Acacius (PLRE III A 9–10) without informing the rank and file. As a consequence, officers simply departed, and the Roman army began to disband.\(^{24}\)

So, while praising several army commanders, Evagrius also highlighted their limitations. They depended on the goodwill of the emperor. And at this point, other members of the elite, the bishops, entered the picture. They gained prominence in the time of the Persian invasion of Syria in 540–43. This was obviously not merely a literary device, but reflected historical reality as the Roman army was poorly prepared for the Persian attacks and in many cases bishops contributed to Roman defence, through diplomacy and through the performance of what were perceived to be miracles.\(^{25}\)

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\(^{19}\) Evagrius, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 6,7. This passage makes plain that Asterius was more popular in Antioch than the bishop. In *Historia ecclesiastica*, 6,8 Evagrius is proud to tell his readers that Asterius died during the earthquake of 588, whereas the bishop survived miraculously. For other *comites*, see 4,4 (Irenaeus arrests Severus); 4,6 (Ephraem becoming bishop of Antioch); see 1,18 for three high officials who are mentioned because of their building activity. For Libanius’ first oration see Hartmut Leppin, ‘The Late Empire’, in Gabriel Marasco (ed.), *Political Autobiographies and Memoirs in Antiquity* (Leiden, 2011), pp. 417–53, esp. 420–450.


\(^{22}\) Evagrius, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 5,19.

\(^{23}\) Evagrius, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 5,8.


But Evagrius imbued the narrative with his own ecclesiastical perspective, as emerges from a comparison with Procopius’ *Wars* with which he, of course, was familiar. Procopius may have been ironic in several chapters, but he reflected at least superficially official or semi-official positions. Evagrius after some general remarks concentrated (without, however, criticizing the emperor explicitly) on those towns protected by God or by saints – and not by the imperial army or by Justinian’s providence. In important details he departed from Procopius.

This aspect becomes patent in the divergent interpretations of the protection of Sergioupolis-Resafa which had been left intact by the Persians. Procopius reported in the *Wars* that the Persian army had to retreat because of a lack of water, and in the *Buildings* he underlined that the town was protected by the walls which had been built by Justinian. The statement is not substantiated by archaeological research, as Gunnar Brands has proposed that the fortifications date to the age of Anastasius around the year 500, the particularities of which the audiences of neither Procopius nor Evagrius were likely to have been aware. Evagrius, by contrast, narrated that the town had made an agreement with Chosroes, which included the payment of a heavy ransom to Chosroes. But when the Persian king learned of the silver-covered coffin of Saint Sergius still within its walls he wanted to attack the town. At this moment thousands of shields appeared on the walls and deterred the Persian army. There is no word about logistical problems or imperial providence, the rescue of the town was ascribed only to God and to Saint Sergius. Even if Evagrius did not know the *Buildings*, he explicitly deviated from Procopius’ interpretation of the salvation of Sergioupolis, highlighting the influence of Christian people and objects.

In the case of Antioch, Evagrius also underlined the role of the bishops as the real saviours of towns. Procopius had narrated Chosroes’ discovery of enormous riches in a church which he then brought to Persia after setting fire to Antioch. In the end he was convinced by Antiochene ambassadors to spare the edifice that had yielded the riches. Evagrius, however, stated that Bishop Ephraem rescued the church and its precincts because he had amassed the enormous

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28 Procopios, *De Aedificiis* 2,9,3–9.


31 Procopios, *Bella* 2,9,14–18.
dedications as a kind of ransom. The secular representatives of the town went unmentioned. Apamea, the second most important town of Syria, provided a similar case of narrative deviation. Bishop Thomas had striven to fend off the Persians by his own means, namely through the demonstration of a fragment of the Holy Cross to the population, which was followed by a great mass of fire. Procopius offered a similar account. Yet, whereas Evagrius confined himself to underlining the final salvation of the town, Procopius told his readership that the town had to open the city gates to the king and his escort and was forced to pay ransom even if it was not plundered and the population did not have to endure deportation. The story here is much more complete and much more nuanced than in the church history.

While repeatedly referring to Procopius, Evagrius never ventured to criticize him openly. Yet he corrected him implicitly and fundamentally. Procopius portrayed a Persian king who was driven by his wishes and ambition and an extremely feeble Roman organization. Evagrius also depicted a disastrous war, but signs of divine mercy accompanied the disasters. In the end, after leaving Sergioupolis, Chosroes was full of respect for the Christian God who convinced him to depart from the Roman Empire. Thus we have a sort of Christian mission by default. The failure of the Roman institutions was indisputable, and the power of the Christian God readily apparent.

Highlighting divine intervention in the defence of towns was nothing new in ancient historiography. Unsurprisingly, in the ecclesiastical history of Theodoret, who like Evagrius wrote in Syria, we find the case of a bishop miraculously defending his town: James of Nisibis, who under the reign of Constantius II deterred the Persians, an episode also mentioned by Philostorgius. Theodoret reported explicitly that the Persian army was not driven away by the soldiers, but by God coming to aid the Romans. But the miraculous salvation of towns has gained in importance in Evagrius, a tendency that corresponds with the

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36 In the case of Edessa both concur in the suggestion that the town was rescued thanks to the well-known Christian prophecy that Edessa would never fall to the enemy (Procopios, *Bella* 2,12,7–30; Evagrius, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 4,27, ed. Bidez and Parmentier, p. 174).
39 Philostorgios, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 3,23 and Appendix 8.3; see Bidez’ testimonia for further sources.
weakening of Roman defence in Syria, made much more patent in Evagrius than in Procopius.

One aspect that seems to be emblematic for Evagrius’ view of the role of a bishop was, as far as I can see, completely new in the tradition of church history: an episode that dates to 588/9 and took place near Monocarton. The Roman troops had driven away their new commander Priscus who had spoken superciliously and announced imperial measures perceived as disadvantageous by the soldiers. According to Evagrius they had gone so far as to plunder their commander’s tent, in the manner of barbarians,41 and to acclaim a new emperor, Germanus, against his own will.42 As no general was able to calm the troops, the emperor Maurice tried by various means to bring them back to order, and ultimately had to seek the assistance of Gregory of Antioch.

Who was Gregory of Antioch, whom I have frequently mentioned so far?43 He was first of all the principal hero of Evagrius’ church history, virtually embodying the ideal of a bishop. The reader of Evagrius was confronted with Gregory for the first time even before his accession to the episcopal throne and in a characteristic context: discussing Symeon the Stylite, Evagrius mentioned that he himself had seen the saint’s head when under the reign of Maurice, Gregory prepared to send the relic to the magister utriusque militiae Philippicus in order to protect the eastern army.44 Gregory’s loyalty and importance for the defence of the empire was thus self-evident in this passage.

When Gregory was ordained bishop of Theopolis (Antioch) in 571, the ecclesiastical historian praised him lavishly and interestingly. The beginning of this chapter was telling: ‘His fame was wide-spread, to speak poetically.’45

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41 Evagrius, Historia ecclesiastica, 6.4.
42 Evagrius, Historia ecclesiastica, 6.5. PLRE III A 529f.
45 Evagrius, Historia ecclesiastica, 5.6, ed. Bidez and Parmentier, p. 201: Ο’ κλέος εὐρύ, κατὰ τὴν ποίησιν; see Allen, Evagrius, pp. 217f., for other characterizations of Gregory who seems to have been regarded as a peace-loving figure, even by Miaphysite sources (see Michael Syrus, 10.3, ed. Jean-Baptiste Chabot, Chronique de Michel le Syrien, Patriarche Jacobite d’Antiche (1166–1199). Éditée pour la première fois et traduite en français I–V (Paris, 1899–1924), p. 292). Nevertheless, Evagrius’ description of Gregory seems to have an apologetic connotation as Gregory was accused of pagan sympathies as well as of incestuous practices and had to be defended by Evagrius himself (Historia ecclesiastica, 5.18; 6.7). In addition, his predecessor (and successor) Anastasius had been deposed by Justinus because of his resistance to the emperor’s avarice. Thus, the circumstances of Gregory’s accession were bleak.
Evagrius consciously avails himself of a Homeric formula, κλέος εὐρός, which he had used only once before in order to praise another bishop, St Isidore of Pelusium who was by no means a political bishop like Gregory but was among the heralds of God’s word with whom an ecclesiastical historian should be dealing. This formula placed Gregory in the classical tradition, which also remained the cultural tradition of the Roman Empire. In the last sentence of his eulogy on Gregory, Evagrius included another quotation, citing Gregory of Nazianzus’ praise of the monastic life, in ascribing τὸ αὐστηρὸν αἰδοῖ σύγκρατον (or. 6.2), ‘austerity mingled with modesty’, to Gregory of Antioch: the quotation of an authoritative Christian author marked the end of a chapter that had begun with a phrase from Homer. In the course of the chapter Evagrius, while underlining the γνώμη of Gregory, namely his capacity to perceive quickly what was necessary and his ability to devise counsels, reminded those readers fluent in the paideia of the heroes in Thucydides, especially Themistocles. This bishop was the embodiment of both the classical tradition and Christian values.

Among the plethora of virtues and achievements that distinguished Gregory were his campaigns for the Roman cause on many occasions: his career began at the monastery of Mount Sinai, which he was compelled to lead on the order of Emperor Justin II. This was a very risky job indeed when he had to defend this place: ‘He encountered very great dangers, since he endured a siege by the Scenite barbarians; but when he had nevertheless succeeded in bringing the greatest peace to the said place, he was called from there to the archbishopric.’

From the beginning he was a representative of the Roman order and a valuable fighter against barbarians. Later, as a bishop, he supported the soldiers marching through his see in their material needs.

Evagrius made plain that Gregory with all his loyalty towards the Roman cause was not an instrument of political power: ‘He was most unsusceptible to yielding or cowering before power.’ The word used here, δυναστεία, means power in general, but also has the more concrete meaning of misuse of power. Thus, the reader is taken back to the tradition of bishops such as Ambrose and John Chrysostom resisting worldly power, when improperly wielded. The bishop was to be loyal to the Roman Empire in general, but not obedient to the individual Roman emperors in every regard – in contrast to the military commanders who

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46 Usually referring to Odysseus, see Homer, Odyssea, 1,344, 4,726, 4,816, cf. 19,333.
47 Evagrius, Historia ecclesiastica, 1,15.
48 Kaldellis, Hellenism.
50 Evagrius, Historia ecclesiastica, 5,11.
were completely dependent on imperial commands, as in the case of the officer Marcian who was arbitrarily deposed by imperial order and was bound to obey unlike a bishop who could resist.

Finally, Gregory was even renowned beyond the borders of the Roman Empire: ‘In dealing with everything without delay, as necessity summoned and opportunity complied, he astounded not only the Roman emperors but also the Persian king.’ This international fame he has in common with Themistocles who had been famous among both Greeks and barbarians according to Thucydides.

In the course of his narrative, Evagrius mentions Gregory on several occasions, always highlighting his virtue even if under attack. In a long passage that comprises several chapters of the sixth book the description of Gregory’s greatness reached its climax in the course of Evagrius’ depiction of the Roman army in mutiny. The soldiers did not fare too poorly, and even defeated the Persians under Germanus, the leader of their own choice, lending an even greater urgency to their claims. After several abortive attempts by high functionaries to calm the troops, the task was handed over to Gregory. The officers were assembled in Litarba, not too far away from Antioch, and the bishop, although suffering heavily from gout and confined to his couch, addressed the army in a speech that is among the most polished passages in Evagrius’ work and is

52 Evagrius, Historia ecclesiastica, 5,6, ed. Bidez and Parmentier, p. 202: Κατέπληξε δὲ οὐ μόνον τοὺς Ῥωμαίους βασιλέας, ἅπασι χρώμενος ὡς ἥ τε χρεία καλοίη καὶ καιρὸς ὑπείκοι σὺ ὅστερον, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοὺς Περσῶν, ὡς ἐκαστα προσφόρως δηλώσω; see also Evagrius, Historia ecclesiastica, 6,18 referring to Khusro II.

53 Thucydidès, 138,1–2.

54 For the historical reconstruction, see Michael Whitby, The Emperor Maurice and his Historian: Theophylact Simocatta on Persian and Balkan Warfare (Oxford, 1988), pp. 286–9, who also hints at the deficiency in Evagrius’ account.

55 Gregory’s speech is also in Nikephoros Kallistos, Historia Ecclesiastica, 18,16. Theophylaktos Simokates, Historia Ecclesiastica, 3,5,10 mentions the speech without quoting it; see Michael Syrus, ed. Chabot, p. 359 and probably also Agapius of Menbidj (Mabbug), ed. Alexander Alexandrovich Vasiliev, PO VII,4,180, who presumably derived their information from Theophilus of Edessa. See Caires, ‘Evagrius’, pp. 43–6 for the rhetoric of Gregory’s speech; at 44 for an allusion to Thucydides, 1,120,1 in the last part of the speech. See L. Michael Whitby, ‘Theophanes’ chronicle as source for the reigns of Justin II., Tiberius and Maurice (A.D. 565–602)’, Byzantion, 53 (1983): 312–45, at 327, for Theophanes’ account of Monocarton. Evagrius deviates in many regards from Theophylact, whose account is probably more reliable.

56 Evagrius does not mention the unsuccessful attempts of the bishops of Constantine and Edessa to calm down a rebellious army mentioned by Theophylaktus Simokates (Historia ecclesiastica, 3,2,2–9); see 2,3,8–9 for a bishop praying with the faithful during a battle in order to ensure victory; 3,6,17 for a Roman commander consulting a bishop before starting his campaign.
certainly from his pen. Gregory eventually managed to conciliate the men. Here, the reader encounters a very important and well-known motif of Roman historiography: commanders, able to assert themselves against soldiers in a mood of revolt and to effect their reconciliation, were among the most famous military heroes. Scipio Africanus Maior, Caesar and Germanicus were well-noted examples. Now, however, a bishop assumed this role, addressing the soldiers as he had to, as Romans, but with an unusual qualification: ὦ ἄνδρες Ρωμαίοι τὴν προσηγορίαν καὶ τὰ πράγματα, ‘Men, Romans in appellation and in action’.

Romanness, as it is understood here, was a matter of performance. The label ‘Roman’ was very flexible at this time, because it could include people of different ethnic origins and most of the soldiers at this time were anything but Roman by origin. Evagrius seems even to be proud of a Roman army assembled by Emperor Tiberius II (578–82), consisting of ‘the best men both from beyond the Alps in the vicinity of the Rhine, and those on this side of the Alps, the Massagetae and other Scythian nations, and those near Paeonia, and Mysians, Illyrians and Isaurians, that he established squadrons of excellent horsemen almost 150,000 in number’. This multi-ethnic army was so successful as to drive the Persians out of the Roman Empire. Such an attitude towards the Roman army was completely different from the stance of, for example, Synesius, who

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57 Evagrius, Historia ecclesiastica, 6,12; see Allen, Evagrius, pp. 254f. Clavis Patrum Graecorum gives it as 7388, but the arrangement of the context made by Evagrius testifies to his authorship.
59 Cassius Dio 42,53–5; Suetonius, Divus Iulius, 70.
60 Tacitus, Annales 1,41–4.
61 According to the (unreliable) account of Theodoret, Constantius II exhorted all his soldiers to be baptized explaining this by the insecurity in war (Historia ecclesiastica, 3,7).
62 Evagrius, Historia ecclesiastica, 6,12, ed. Bidez and Parmentier, p. 231; the soldiers are called Ρωμαίοι repeatedly in this speech.
63 See Greatrex, ‘Roman identity’. To address soldiers as Romans was not uncommon, of course, see, for example, Theophylaktos Simokates, Historia ecclesiastica, 3,13,1; Agathias, Historiae, 2,12,6.
64 καὶ τοσοῦτον ἄγείρει στρατὸν ἄνδρων ἡρώων, ἐκ τε τῶν ὑπὲρ τὰς Ἄλπεις ἐθνῶν τὰ ἀμφὶ τῶν Ῥήνων ἀριστινήν στρατολογήσας τὰ τὸ ἐντός τῶν Ἀλπεων, Μασσαγετῶν τε καὶ ἕτερων Σκυθικῶν γενῶν, καὶ τὰ περὶ Παιονίαν, καὶ Μυσούς, καὶ Ἰλλυρίους, καὶ Ἰσαύρους, ὡς σύνεγγυς πεντήκοντα καὶ ἐκατόν χιλιάδων ἱλας ἢπειρῶν ἁρίστων ἐγκαταστήσασθαι (Evagrius, Historia ecclesiastica, 5,14, ed. Bidez and Parmentier, pp. 209f.).
ca. 400 had severely criticized the barbarization of the Roman army⁶⁵ and who was otherwise extolled by Evagrius.⁶⁶

Nevertheless, all those soldiers were regarded as true Romans by Gregory and were expected to behave as Romans – no matter what their origins. Romans displayed courage, like these soldiers, who had been victorious against the Persians, had indeed done. And even if they were annoyed by their generals, they were loyal to the πολίτευμα, to the political order of Rome – interestingly Evagrius’ Gregory did not mention the emperor in this sentence, but only in the following phrase when he explains the emperor’s offer to the soldiers. He exhorted the soldiers to give in, calling them Romans once more, again underlining that they have to be worthy of the title ‘Roman’ not only in regard to courage, but also in regard to obedience, which was a new facet of Gregory’s speech. In so doing, they could prove themselves as true heirs of the Romans. Gregory even went back to republican history and to Manlius Torquatus (cos. 347, 344 and 340 BCE), who was barely mentioned in late antique Greek literature,⁶⁷ to illustrate this idea. This legendary consul had his own son executed after a military victory, since he had, however heroically, acted against the explicit orders of his father.⁶⁸ The Roman soldiers had been successful, too, but without the orders of Roman commanders or the emperor for that matter. There seems to be a threat in this notorious example. The soldiers addressed by Gregory could rightfully be punished despite their valour. Finally Gregory defined the role of the priesthood in this conflict as ‘mediating between empire and army’. The soldiers should avoid Christians fighting against Christians – obviously the speaker assumed that Romans were generally Christians.⁶⁹

After the speech which, as every reader of Evagrius will expect, changed the minds of all the soldiers, he exhorted them through his authority as a priest to accept Philippicus as their commander although they had sworn not to accept

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⁶⁶ Evagrius, Historia ecclesiastica, 1,15.

⁶⁷ As far as I can see, he is mentioned in Paianius’ translation of Eutropius’ Breviarium (2,5), but only for his successful single combat against a Gallic warrior which earned him the surname of Torquatus. Some officers may have known some Latin, but whether this included the knowledge of this episode it is difficult to say.

⁶⁸ The episode seems to have been well known in the West. See Augustinus, De civitate Dei 5.18; Orosius 3,9; Claudianus, Panegyricus de quarto consulatu Honorii Augusti (C. 8) 403.

him, and he administered Holy Communion to them. Among the readership of Evagrius (which probably did include many soldiers) it was obviously by no means regarded as strange that the bishop appealed to Roman traditions that had emerged from a pagan context, but concurred with Christian values. The priesthood even received a clear function within the state: as the mediator between imperial rulership and army.

Gregory of Antioch was the bishop of his town and an individual wholly loyal to the empire, supporting the eastern troops spiritually as well as logistically and praising Romanness. The Church was indispensable to his particular vision of political order. He adopted the roles of an Athenian politician, a Roman general and a Christian bishop, thus embodying the Byzantine convergence of classical Graeco-Roman and Christian traditions. But, what is more, Gregory was in some regards more Roman than the army or even the emperor himself. And this is where the problems begin: the bishop upheld Roman identity in a zone under pressure from Persia in a more effective way than secular authorities.

There are two more speeches of bishops to soldiers that are dated more or less contemporaneously to the end of the sixth century. They are part of the History of Theophylact Simokates, who ascribed them to Bishop Domitianus of Melitene. Theophylact wrote a generation after Evagrius, ca. 630, during the reign of Heraclius. He portrayed the reign of Maurice positively as the Sassanians seemed to have been definitely defeated at the time of his writing.

The content and the setting of his speech, which occurred early in 591, were completely different from those of Gregory’s harangue. Domitianus spoke in a triumphant tone after Rome had regained Martyropolis from Persia. It was a sermon delivered during a festival for the city’s martyrs. The text was replete with biblical allusions, and even explained the betrayal of several Roman soldiers in terms of theology. The bishop lavishly praised the piety of the Roman emperor

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70 In Evagrius, Historia ecclesiastica, 6,14, ed. Bidez and Parmentier, p. 232. Gregory persuades soldiers to return to the siege of Martyropolis at Maurice’s request. However, they fail due to their lack of siege engines.


73 See Whitby, Emperor Maurice, pp. 39f.

74 Theophylaktos Simokates, Historia ecclesiastica, 4,16,1–26. For this speech, see Frendo, ‘History and panegyric’, p. 152 (‘In style Theophylact blends his own bombastic version of secular oratory with a proliferation of biblical allusions and turns of phrase in such a way as to depart from his usual practice and for that matter from the traditional practice of Greek historiography, which was to write up all speeches in the author’s own style’); Walter E. Kaegi, Heraclius: Emperor of Byzantium (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 182f.
as the guarantor of success, but there was no hint of the classical tradition so prominent in Gregory’s oration. In contrast, the soldiers, who were assembled as a Christian community, were not addressed as Romans. Although both speeches were followed by a celebration of the Holy Communion, the fundamental difference was obvious. Where Gregory played the role of a Roman commander, Domitianus exclusively fulfilled the basic functions of a bishop.75

For his second, much more concise speech Domitianus acted so to speak as a military chaplain of the Roman army.76 He assembled Roman soldiers and commanders who were starting a campaign in order to restore Chosroes II. The first paragraphs extolled the glory the soldiers could achieve through a victory in enemy territory. They were exhorted to despise death. Interestingly Domitianus did not remind them of eternal life, but argued from the brevity of life. In regard to the topoi utilized, this speech was an anticipated funeral oration.

The second part interpreted Chosroes as a king of Babylonia having been forced to take flight, that is, as a reflection of Nebuchadnezzar.77 In addition, the bishop underlined the illegitimacy of Chosroes’ rival Bahram. The end was marked by a short prayer: ‘May you have as guide of your campaign the Chief General of the Host of the Lord, the only-begotten Son of God, the God before the ages who grants you conclusions more auspicious than your hopes.’78 Although the first part has a very traditionalistic air, it was devoid of classical content.

It has been argued that in his History Theophylact sought to enhance the glory of Domitianus at the cost of Gregory.79 If this should be the case (and I am not wholly convinced of this idea), Domitianus could be an example of how a bishop should act and speak, namely ἱεροπρεπῶς, ‘in a manner befitting a priest’.80 Interestingly Theophylact, without engaging in malice, downplayed Gregory’s speech when he did mention it.81 Evagrius, on the other hand, made

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75 Theophylact has a Roman general speak like Themistocles (Historia ecclesiastica, 6,8,1).
78 ἔστω δὲ προπομπὸς ὑμῖν τῆς ἐκτάξεως ἀρχιστράτηγος κυρίου δυνάμεως, ὁ μονογενὴς παῖς τοῦ θεοῦ, ὁ πρὸ τῶν αἰώνων θεός, τὰς ἀποπερατώσεις αἰσιωτέρας τῶν ἐλπίδων ὑμῖν παρεχόμενος (Theophylaktos Simokates, Historia ecclesiastica, 5,4,15).
80 Theophylaktos Simokates, Historia ecclesiastica, 4,15,17.
81 Theophylaktos Simokates, Historia ecclesiastica, 3,5,11. According to Theophylact (and in contrast to Evagrius), the troops had already been reconciled with the emperor.
some positive remarks on Domitianus and mentioned his role in dealing with Chosroes, but did not even allude to his speeches.82

Evagrius was aware that not every bishop was so fortunate as to live under Roman rule. An interesting case was Paul, the bishop of the Persian town of Nisibis,83 who ‘was annoyed at Persian insolence towards Christians’ (δυσχεραίνων τὴν Περσῶν παροινίαν τὴν εἰς Χριστιανοὺς γιγνομένην) and wanted his town, which had been lost after Julian’s (361–63) disastrous campaign against the Persians, to be subject to the Romans again.84 Thus, Paul informed Gregory about a Persian attack in accordance with the idea of a connection between the Christian bishop and the Roman cause. Characteristically, here too Gregory was regarded as the representative of the Roman order by his fellow bishop and as the main contact within the empire.

Yet political circumstances could also reverse the situation and bring a Roman bishop under Persian rule. Should he become a hero of resistance? Obviously not, as Evagrius seems to say: when Apamea was captured by the Persians in 540, Chosroes used his unexpected success to stage himself as a Roman emperor, perhaps intending to make Justinian a subject of ridicule. He provided circus games in the town as Roman emperors used to do. Contrary to the custom enjoining clergymen to abstain from public games, Bishop Thomas, according to Evagrius a man ‘most able in word and action’ (ἀνδρὸς λόγῳ τε καὶ ἔργῳ δυνατωτάτου), joined the king at this occasion, ‘attending on and placating Chosroes in every way’ (παντοίως Χοσρόην θεραπεύων τε καὶ ἡμερούμενος).85 The ecclesiastical historian defined the behaviour of the bishop as wise, σοφῶς. Thus, he seems to have expected loyalty towards every ruler. Resistance until death was not what a wise bishop should offer. Bishops do not only exist as agents of the Roman Empire, but by their own right. Although loyalty to the Roman order is an undeniable quality of bishops in the eyes of Evagrius, Christian universality made it possible for Christians to survive under foreign rulers, being loyal and frank at the same time. Christianity and bishops could survive even if the defence of the Roman Empire should fail. This may give the

(3,4,4), Gregory’s only task is to make them accept Philippicus who is confronted with the defection of Martyropolis immediately afterwards, which he is then unable to prevent; see Krivouchine, ‘Le révolte’, pp. 161–7, for Theophylact’s account.

82 Evagrius, Historia ecclesiastica, 6,18.
84 Evagrius, Historia ecclesiastica, 5,9, ed. Bidez and Parmentier, p. 205; see above, pp. 244 and 246.
impression that Evagrius was unconcerned whether his sovereign was a Roman or a Persian. This is certainly not true. There is no doubt that Bishop Thomas was unambiguously loyal towards the Roman Empire. Evagrius made him snub the Persian king when Chosroes asked whether the bishop wished to see him in Apamea: ‘And he is said to have stated truthfully that he had not the slightest pleasure in seeing Chosroes in his own city.’ Chosroes dutifully admired Thomas for his frankness.⁸⁶

In conclusion, the church historian Evagrius was a loyal Roman subject, well versed in classical literature and a devout Christian. The defence of the Roman border against the Persians was a matter close to his heart. But he was not willing to rely completely on Roman institutions. He knew that many emperors were not up to their task, that many commanders were incompetent and that the competent ones were in danger of being superseded by their rivals because they in turn were dependent on the emperors. Thus, the bishop became a powerful, reliable figure who could appeal to Roman and classical values which were seen to be in accordance with Christian values. He was important for the defence of the Roman Empire, but he could also cope with other rulers.

In contrast with contemporary bishops in Gaul, who acted as the heads of their towns, Gregory did not exercise Bischofsherrschaft, the rule of the bishop.⁸⁷ He was not the Stadtherr, the ruler of the city, did not collect taxes and was not constrained by the interests of his town.⁸⁸ He did not act as the representative


⁸⁸ Gregory even flees when the Persians attack Antioch in 573 – taking the riches of his church with him (Evagrius, Historia ecclesiastica, 5,9). This may have enforced the need for apology in Evagrius’ work.
of his town, nor did he defend its walls. He was always a figure who acted in support of the functionaries and military leaders. He stepped in when the political organization ceased to function. He was not only the defender of his town, but a representative of the Roman order in general. Nevertheless, the bishop could survive obediently under foreign rulers, a conclusion Evagrius may not have drawn explicitly, but which was implicit in his account.

This was a vision of political unity of enormous consequence: Roman identity could be detached from the political organization of the empire without becoming merely a religious identity. The guarantor of the Roman Empire – in contrast to what panegyrics used to tell their audiences – was not the emperor, but the bishop and the army when commanded and exhorted by the right people. The Roman Empire was based on Christianity – but the Christian organization for its part did not depend on the Roman Empire. Thus, a bishop could contribute to the defence of the Roman Empire, but he would not be carried away by its downfall.

But there is perhaps another line of tradition to consider: are those bishops who exhort the army, who define the Roman army as a Christian community, predecessors of those who call for a holy war? Is this a first step towards a direction that became plain in Heraclius’ wars against the Sassanians with the destruction of holy fires? Neither Gregory nor Domitianus disparaged the enemies in religious terms, but the new role of the bishop in the exhortation of the Roman army might have contributed to the interpretation of war as a religious event.

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89 He could have dispensed justice as a kind of supervisor of the governors, see Justinian, Nov. 86 (539) and 123 (546).

90 In contrast to his contemporaries Socrates and Sozomen, the ecclesiastical historian Theodoret of Cyrrhus shows a certain distance towards the Roman Empire (see Hartmut Leppin, Von Constantin dem Großen zu Theodosius II.: Das christliche Kaisertum bei den Kirchenhistorikern Socrates, Sozomenus und Theodoret, Hypomnemata, 110 (Göttingen, 1996), pp. 268f.). The proximity of the Persian border possibly contributed to a certain anxiety in this respect.

Chapter 15
Holy Land and Sacred History:
A View from Early Ethiopia

George Hatke

Ethiopia is unique among sub-Saharan African countries in many ways, not least of which in that it possesses a written history stretching back two and a half millennia. Yet, while historical memory in other ancient and medieval societies has been the subject of several studies,1 that of Ethiopia has yet to receive sufficient scholarly attention. It will be argued in this chapter that perceptions of the past had a profound impact on the late antique Ethiopian kingdom of Aksum,2 particularly in the context of that kingdom’s invasions of South Arabia3 in the early sixth century, and that Christianity helped shape these perceptions, thus giving the Aksumites a sense of divine mission which they sought to realize by Christianizing South Arabia. When the kingdom of Aksum first began to attract the attention of Graeco-Roman authors in the first century,4 the Horn of Africa had already witnessed centuries of contact with the Arabian Peninsula, the diffusion of Semitic speech into Ethiopia being one of its most significant results. Ge’ez, the Semitic lingua franca of Aksum and still the liturgical language of the Ethiopian Church, is a product of early population movements from Arabia to Africa. Though the rise of the Aksumite state5 represents a political development

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2 Both the kingdom and its capital city, located in the Tigray province of northern Ethiopia, are known as Aksum. On the history of the Aksumite kingdom, see Stuart Munro-Hay, Aksum: An African Civilisation of Late Antiquity (Edinburgh, 1991).

3 ‘South Arabia’ in this context is shorthand for the region occupied by the ancient kingdoms of Saba’, Qatabān, Ma’īn, Ḥadramawt and Ḥimyar, corresponding roughly to present-day Yemen and including parts of southwestern Saudi Arabia and western Oman.

4 All dates cited in this paper are of the Common Era (ce) except where otherwise noted.

5 Though it is not until the turn of the Common Era that the kingdom of Aksum makes its first appearance in foreign sources, excavations on the hill of Bēta Gīyōrgīs near the modern town of Aksum indicate the rise of a polity as far back as the fourth
that occurred quite independently of Arabian influence, Aksum was destined to play a pivotal role in the history of South Arabia.

The history of Aksumite military intervention in South Arabia can be divided into two periods based on epigraphic and literary sources. The first period begins ca. 200 and lasts for roughly seventy years. This period is marked by intense warfare between the rival states of South Arabia, in the course of which the kingdom of Ḥimyar emerged victorious and annexed the territories of its defeated enemies, including that of the ancient kingdom of Saba', better known to the west as Sheba. Aksum's relations with the Sabaeans and Ḥimyarites in the third century were complex, the Ethiopians allying themselves with one or other of the two sides at different points depending on the political climate of the time. In the end, though, Ḥimyarite expansion cost the Aksumites their foothold in South Arabia and established Ḥimyar as the sole power-holder in South Arabia, a status it retained down to the sixth century. After the third century there follows a long hiatus in which Aksum, though still in diplomatic touch with Ḥimyar, did not maintain a military presence in South Arabia. This did not, however, prevent such rulers of Aksum as Ousanas (ca. 310–30) and ‘Ēzānā (ca. 330–70) from upholding the fiction of Aksumite domination of South Arabia by styling themselves kings of Saba’ and Ḥimyar in their inscriptions, a claim they sought


For an in-depth study of the political history of this period, see Muḥammad Bāfaqīh, L’unification du Yémén antique: la lutte entre Saba’, Ḥimyar et le Ḥaḍamawt, du Ier au IIIème siècle de l’ère chrétienne (Paris, 1990). The chronology of South Arabian history from the third century on is based on the premise that the Ḥimyarite Era, according to which South Arabian inscriptions were dated until the mid-sixth century, began in 110 BCE. The arguments for this date, now almost universally accepted by scholars, are outlined in Joëlle Beaucamp, Françoise Briquel-Chatonnet and Christian Robin, ‘La persécution des chrétiens de Nagrān et la chronologie ḥimyarite’, ARAM Periodical, 11 (1999–2000): 15–83.

to bolster by imitating the South Arabian musnad script in these inscriptions.\textsuperscript{10} Yet the development during the fourth century that would ultimately have the greatest impact on the history of both South Arabia and Ethiopia was not political propaganda but rather ‘Ēzānā’s conversion to Christianity ca. 347–49,\textsuperscript{11} as a result of which Ethiopia’s destiny was set as a Christian power with a belief in a divinely mandated manifest destiny.

The full significance of Aksumite Christianity would not, however, be felt in South Arabia until the second period of Aksumite military intervention there. This period was ushered in by King Kālēb of Aksum (ca. 510–40), who reinitiated Aksumite warfare with South Arabia in 518 by invading the country and establishing a local Christian, Ma’dīkarib Ya’fur (ca. 518–23) as ruler over the Ḥimyarites. In response, a Jewish Ḥimyarite named Yūsuf ‘As’ar Yath’ar (ca. 522–25)\textsuperscript{12} organized a resistance movement and proclaimed himself king. Though the Ethiopian community at the Ḥimyarite capital of Ẓafār was one of the first targets of his aggression, the indigenous Ḥimyarite Christians at the town of Najrān in the north suffered a particularly harsh fate, their town being subjected to a full-fledged siege, after which they were put to the sword by Yūsuf’s army in the autumn of 523.\textsuperscript{13} With the use of foreign merchant ships, Kālēb launched another invasion of South Arabia in 525, defeating Yūsuf and putting an end to his regime. Following the precedent he had established during his first invasion of Ḥimyar seven years earlier, Kālēb appointed a Ḥimyarite nobleman and recent convert to Christianity named Sumūyafa’ ‘Ashwa’ as a client ruler to represent Aksumite interests. Again, as before, there was an uprising against Kālēb’s client, though this time the leader of the revolt was a general of the Aksumite army named ’Abrehā, who had stayed on in Ḥimyar and then, sometime after 531, established himself as a monarch in his own right. In this way South Arabia remained under the rule of an autonomous Ethiopian dynasty until 570, when it fell to the Sasanians of Persia.\textsuperscript{14}


\textsuperscript{12} Often referred to in the older secondary literature as Dhū Nuwās, the name by which he is known in Arabic sources.


\textsuperscript{14} For the political and cultural history of Ethiopian rule in South Arabia, with an emphasis on the South Arabian sources, see Iwona Gajda, Le royaume de Ḥimyar à l’époque monothéiste: L’histoire de l’Arabie du Sud ancienne de la fin du IV\textsuperscript{e} siècle chrétienne jusqu’à l’avènement de l’islam (Paris, 2009), pp. 102ff.
A reference in the *Christian Topography*, a sixth-century text attributed to a Nestorian Christian merchant commonly known as Cosmas Indicopleustes, provides evidence that Kālēb sought validation from the historical record for his campaign against Ḥimyar. The *Christian Topography*, which seeks to prove that the earth was flat and shaped like the Tabernacle of Moses described in the book of Exodus, survives in three copies, one of ninth-century date and the other two dating to the eleventh century. The real value of the text, however, lies not in Cosmas’ cosmological theories but in the geographical and ethnographical details he provides as tangents to his main thesis. What is apparent from the few autobiographical details he gives is that he was a trader, and it was in that capacity that he traveled to Ethiopia. It was, however, as a result of his proficiency in Greek that Cosmas’ skills were in demand there. Writing of his visit to the Aksumite trading center of Adulis in 518, located near the coast of present-day Eritrea, Cosmas says that the Aksumite king Ellatzaas (= 'Ella 'Aṣbeḥā) was at that time about to go to war against the Ḥimyarites of neighboring South Arabia when he wrote to the governor of Adulis, asking him to have copies made of some old inscriptions from the city. The governor, in turn, delegated the task of copying these texts to Cosmas and another merchant named Mēnas, and the two foreigners duly made two copies, one of which they gave to the governor while Cosmas kept the other.

From a Ge’ez inscription at Aksum (RIE 191) we know that Kālēb and 'Ella 'Aṣbeḥā were one and the same, and if later Ethiopian tradition can be trusted as a guide in this matter it is likely that Kālēb is 'Ella 'Aṣbeḥā’s secondary, baptismal name. As for the texts copied by Cosmas and Mēnas, one was an inscription of Ptolemy III (246–222 BCE), the other an inscription of a third-century Aksumite king whose name has not been preserved, but who claims to have conquered much of Arabia’s Red Sea coastline. These two inscriptions are designated by scholars as *Monumentum Adulitanum I* and *II* respectively. By citing written

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15 The work itself seems to have been published anonymously, for the author says of himself only that he is ‘a Christian’, without giving his name.
19 On this date, see Beaucamp et al. ‘La persécution’, p. 60.
evidence of earlier Aksumite conquests in Arabia, Ḍālēb would have been able to justify his campaign as not only a war to avenge the Christians killed by Yūsuf but also and more importantly as a war to reclaim Aksum’s lost Arabian empire. Ḍālēb may have been a staunch Christian but, far from rejecting Aksum’s pre-Christian past as a dark age whose memory had to be repressed, he drew on key themes from this history to present the war against Ḥimyar as an act of restoring territory to Aksum that was hers by ancestral right. Ḍālēb’s interest in having the old Aksumite inscription *Monumentum Adulitanum II* (= RIE 277) copied before setting out to fight the Ḥimyarites can thus be understood as a reading of history to justify a military action. That Ḍālēb’s own inscription from Aksum (RIE 191) copies the style of *musnad* script employed in inscriptions of the fourth-century kings Ousanas and ‘Ēzānā gives further credence to the thesis of a politically motivated antiquarianism on the part of Ḍālēb.

But at whom did Ḍālēb direct his propaganda of restorative warfare, based on his tendentious reading of *Monumentum Adulitanum II*? To be sure, such a text would have carried little weight in Ḥimyar. Since an Ethiopian – and presumably Aksumite – ruler named Zoskales is known to have been ‘well versed in reading and writing Greek’ as far back as the first century,23 it can be assumed that the more cosmopolitan members of the Aksumite elite would have been able to read the Greek text of *Monumentum Adulitanum II*, together with whatever copies of it Ḍālēb might have disseminated. On the other hand, visiting envoys and merchants from the Roman Empire would also have seen such public inscriptions as *Monumentum Adulitanum II* when arriving at Adulis, and it may well have been at this latter group that Ḍālēb directed his propaganda campaign. His intention in having the text copied and disseminated could have been to send a message to the Romans that Aksum was still the unrivalled power of the southern Red Sea, just as it had been back in the third century when *Monumentum Adulitanum II* was erected, and that any war waged in South Arabia by Ethiopian troops would result in the establishment of Aksumite, not Roman, control over the region. The Romans had already attempted to conquer South Arabia in 26/25 bce24 and though Ḍālēb was encouraged by Justin I (518–27) to invade Ḥimyar, his desire to limit direct military involvement of a third party can well be appreciated in retrospect when one considers that a later Ḥimyarite appeal to the Sasanians for help against the Ethiopians would ultimately result in the Sasanians’ annexation of South Arabia.25 Ḍālēb’s desire to keep Roman political influence out of the


southern Red Sea can also be understood in light of a somewhat later reference by John of Epiphania to the Sasanian conquest of South Arabia. After returning from a diplomatic mission to the Sasanian Empire in the 590s, John of Epiphania produced a history of the Roman war with the Persians from 570 on, in which he states that the Ḥimyarites were subjects of the Romans whom the Persians had attempted to stir up in revolt. A seasoned diplomat who had learned firsthand about eastern politics from none other than the Sasanian emperor Khusro II (590–628) himself, John of Epiphania is unlikely to have inserted so blatant a political fiction as the claim that Ḥimyar was subject to Rome without some pressing ideological need to do so.

In fact, South Arabia had long occupied an important place in Rome’s self-image as a universal empire, and it is in this context that we must view John of Epiphania’s claim that the Himyarites were vassals of Rome. That the Roman expedition of 26/25 BCE had failed as a military venture in no way dashed Roman hopes of establishing a future empire extending all the way to the Bab al-Mandab. In the Aeneid, Virgil makes an allusion to Augustus’ victory at Actium in 31 BCE, saying that when Augustus’ patron deity Apollo aimed his bow at Rome’s enemies, ‘all the Egyptians, Indians, Arabians, and Sabaeans, terrified at this sight, turned in flight’. The adoption of Christianity as the state religion of the Roman Empire by Constantine I (306–37) infused this discourse of empire with a new sense of entitlement as the Roman emperor assumed the role of protector of the world’s Christians. Already in Constantine’s reign, accounts of imagined conquests were produced by publicists to support claims that their emperor was destined to rule the world and, in so doing, forge a universal Christian empire. Thus Constantine’s biographer, the bishop Eusebius of Caesarea (d. ca. 339), describes the emperor as campaigning from Britain to India and as far south as Ethiopia, ‘illuminating with beams of light of true religion the ends of the whole inhabited earth’. Another author of Constantine’s reign, Publilius Optatianus Porfyrius, includes both Arabians and Ethiopians among the peoples of the world who came to pay homage to Constantine as the sole ruler and conqueror of the east. While scholars have been quick to seize upon such material as evidence of a conceptual Christian commonwealth in Late Antiquity, it should not be forgotten that there were many rulers within this so-called commonwealth who,

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30 Ibid.
despite their close and often cordial relations with Rome, sought to carve out their own, autonomous territories in which they could create a microcosm of a spiritual empire. Kālēb may have sought to achieve just this by adding South Arabia to his kingdom, and by justifying his actions as a war that restored to Aksum what had once been and, he hoped, would always remain Aksumite territory.

But if Kālēb used an Aksumite inscription in Greek from Adulis as a document justifying his invasion of Ḥimyar as a re-conquest of lost territory, Ge’ez sources suggest that he presented his Himyarite campaign rather differently to his subjects. To Ethiopians, re-gaining control of South Arabia as part of their historical inheritance would undoubtedly have been an attractive prospect, but to persuade his subjects to risk their lives for this venture Kālēb sought recourse from the divine. The evidence survives in a fragment of a Ge’ez inscription from Mārib (RIE 195:II), believed to have been erected by Kālēb following his victory over King Yūsuf of Ḥimyar. This inscription quotes extensively from the Bible, and even at one point alludes to the ‘glory of David’ (kǝbra Dāwīt), the context of which is not clear due to the lacunae in the text. Particularly suggestive is the fourth line of text in the fragment, in which one can make out the words ‘I give you th[is…]’ (ǝhūbakāhā la-yǝ’ǝ[tī…]). Müller reconstructs this passage as ǝhūbakāhā la-yǝ’ǝtī mǝdr tǝtwārasā, ‘I give you this land that you might inherit it’, and identifies it with the Ge’ez version of Genesis 15:7, in which God tells Abraham that He has brought him from Ur ‘that I might give you this land to inherit’ (kama ǝhabakāhā la-ya’ǝtī mǝdr tǝtwārasā). According to the fifteenth chapter of Genesis, the land in question is said to stretch from the Nile to the Euphrates, an area the Old Testament regards as the realm of the united kingdom of Israel.

Since Müller’s reconstruction is hypothetical, one must take care not to give this passage undue weight as evidence for an Aksumite doctrine of manifest destiny cloaked in biblical allusions. On the other hand, the Book of the Ḥimyarites,

32 The inscription refers at one point to the defeat and killing of a Ḥimyarite king, and since Yūsuf is the only ruler of Ḥimyar who met his end at the hands of the Ethiopians, we can assume that, though his name is missing in what survives of RIE 195:II-I, Kālēb erected the inscription.
a sixth-century Syriac account of Yūsuﬁ’s massacre of the Christians of Najrān, attributes this very idea of inheriting the Jewish Ḥimyarites’ land to Kālēb. In Chapter 43 of this text we are told that, following the Aksumites’ victory over Yūsuﬁ’s army, Kālēb addressed his troops, saying, ‘Behold! The Lord has bequeathed to us the land of our enemies.’ Later on in his speech, the king repeats this theme of the destruction of God’s enemies and the inheritance of their land by recounting cases in which God helped the prophets of the past, reminding his troops that ‘He destroyed the nations before Joshua son of Nun, and caused him to inherit their land.’ Though Kālēb’s speech must be classified with the more anecdotal material of the Book of the Ḥimyarites, it nevertheless illustrates an image which Near Eastern Christians had of the Aksumite king as the inheritor of Ḥimyarite land by virtue of divine favor. Since the Aksumites are known from other Syriac sources to have carried on correspondence with the Christians of the Syriac-speaking world during Kālēb’s reign, the opportunity for foreign Christians to learn of Kālēb’s political ideology vis-à-vis South Arabia would easily have presented itself. The Aksumites may well have seen themselves as the new children of Israel who would inherit the ‘Promised Land’ of South Arabia, the Ḥimyarite Jews being dismissed as upstarts. Similar aspirations to be the ‘New Israel’ have been noted by scholars in Christian societies from Britain to Armenia during Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages, particularly in societies still undergoing Christianization. In the Ethiopian case, casting the Aksumite conquest of Ḥimyar as a replay of the Israelite conquest of Canaan may have been Kālēb’s way of laying claim to Ḥimyar as part of his God-given inheritance, while at the same time denying the Ḥimyarite Jews any rights to their land. Thus, if Kālēb had relied on Monumentum Adulitanum II as a historical basis to the Aksumite claim to South Arabia, the Bible would seem to have provided religious support.

36 Ibid., p. 47b (Syriac text) = p. cxxxvi (English translation).
37 Ibid., p. 48b (Syriac text) = p. cxxxvii (English translation).
After defeating the Jewish Ḥimyarites in battle in 525 and killing their king Yūsuf, Kālēb undertook a second campaign, one of Christianizing South Arabia. The Book of the Ḥimyarites lays particular emphasis on this period, and recounts in some detail the Aksumite king’s tour of Ḥimyar in the company of priests, as a result of which those Christians who had been forcibly converted to Judaism were absolved of their apostasy and were brought back within the Christian fold.

He allowed them to go as they pleased and commanded that they gather the rest of all those who had recanted while he was passing through the cities of the land and did all that was in his soul ...; and [he did so] moreover in order that he might see and question them if they had remained repentant, and he then commanded the priests who were with him to give absolution to them and forgive them [their] infidelity to God.\(^42\)

But the program of (re-)Christianizing South Arabia involved not just mass conversions but the construction of churches throughout the land as well.

Now after the king and the troops which were with him had been in the land of the Ḥimyarites for about seven months and had done there all that he had desired, and had built many churches in that land and appointed priests in them from among those who were with him, and had also appointed a king and imposed tribute on that land, and had left behind Ethiopian notables to protect the king from enemies and also [to protect] those churches which he had built, he led away with him a large group of captives from among the erring Ḥimyarites and fifty princes of royal lineage.\(^43\)

By restoring churches destroyed by Yūsuf’s troops and founding new ones, Kālēb sought not only to reaffirm Christianity after its repression by the Jewish Ḥimyarites but to symbolically Christianize the landscape itself by establishing visual symbols of the Christian faith in the form of churches. That such visual symbols were meant to replace traces of the old Ḥimyarite regime is stated even more explicitly in the Martyrium Arethae, a sixth-century Greek account of the martyrdom of the Najrānī Christians. According to this text, Kālēb, after killing Yūsuf, went straight to Ẓafār, where he put the people of the royal palace to death, and then on the grounds of the palace itself he built a church over the following seven days with his own hands.\(^44\) Though one may with good reason doubt that Kālēb himself built the church in such a short time, it is easy to see that the choice of location for the church was motivated by political as well

\(^{42}\) Book of the Ḥimyarites, p. 53b (Syriac text, translation mine).

\(^{43}\) Ibid., p. 56a (Syriac text, translation mine).

as religious interests, for by building on the palace grounds at Ẓafār the very center of the Jewish king’s power was reclaimed for Christianity. Once his church was complete, Kālēb sent messages to Justin and the archbishop of Alexandria, informing them of his conquest.45 The archbishop promptly appointed a bishop for the Ḥimyarites, who upon arriving at Ẓafār consecrated the new church, baptized the locals and appointed priests and deacons ‘in every place’.46

The program of church construction initiated by Kālēb after his victory over King Yūsuf was continued by 'Abrehā. According to Procopius 'Abrehā had been a slave of a Roman merchant in Adulis and was among those Ethiopians stationed in South Arabia by Kālēb.47 He later revolted against Kālēb, who sent two expeditions to South Arabia to overthrow the upstart, and only after Kālēb’s death did 'Abrehā agree to pay tribute to Aksum.48 This payment of tribute, however, probably represents no more than an attempt on 'Abrehā’s part to buy de facto autonomy from Aksum, for he not only received foreign ambassadors as an independent ruler but also styled himself ‘King of Saba’ and Dhū-Raydān and Ḥaḍramawt and Yamanat and their Arabs of Ṭawd and the Tihāma’. In his promotion of Christianity in South Arabia, however, 'Abrehā was following a precedent set by Kālēb, and in that respect his reign is marked by a certain continuity with the past. Thus we are told in famous inscription from the dam at Mārib (CIH 541) that, during his repair of the dam, he ‘marched into the city of Mārib and consecrated the church of Mārib while a priest was there, who was of the monastery(?)’.49 'Abrehā’s most famous construction, however, was the cathedral which he built in Ṣan‘ā’, then the Ethiopian administrative center in South Arabia. As this structure is not mentioned in CIH 541, it would appear to have been built after March 549, when the inscription was carved.50 Though descriptions by medieval Muslim authors51 are likely exaggerated, the cathedral seems to have remained intact and perhaps even in use by local Christians as

45 Ibid., XXXVIII, 4–5, p. 281 (Greek text) = p. 280 (French translation).
46 Ibid., XXXVIII, 8–10, p. 283 (Greek text) = p. 282 (French translation).
48 Ibid.
50 Beaucamp et al., ‘La persecution’, p. 79.
a place of worship as late as the eighth century, when it was destroyed by the ‘Abbāsids,52 making it probable that the Muslim reports are based at least in part on direct observations, or on information obtained by travelers who had seen the cathedral. The site that popular tradition associates with ‘Abreĥā’s cathedral is located 175 meters from the wall of the citadel of Šan‘ā’ and is still called al-Qalīs, the name given to the structure by medieval Muslim authors, which in turn was derived from the Sabaic word for cathedral (QLYSn).53

Though it is obvious that this program of church construction was an Ethiopian response to Yūsuf’s imposition of Judaism on the Christian inhabitants of South Arabia, the Ethiopians’ church building campaign can also be viewed as a symbolic Christianization of the South Arabian landscape itself. That later generations of Ethiopian Christians conceived of it as such is suggested by a passage in the final chapter of the Kebra Nagaśt (‘Glory of the Kings’), a fourteenth-century work that in places seems to draw on seventh-century apocalyptic texts.54 The final chapter of the book recalls how Kālēb and Justin I met in Jerusalem, where they devised a plan to destroy the Jews of Ḥimyar, vowing that ‘they will ravage their country, build churches there, and slaughter the kings of the Jews’.55 It was this campaign against the Jews, together with the construction of churches throughout the land, which the Kebra Nagaśt claims would help establish the ‘Kingdom of Christ’, projected to last until the coming of the False Messiah.56 Though such a late text as the Kebra Nagaśt cannot be regarded as a reliable witness to Aksumite history – particularly when Kālēb and Justin never met personally, much less in Jerusalem – the very fact that its final chapter emphasizes church construction as part and parcel of territorial

53 Itself derived from the Greek ἐκκλησία (Beeston, ‘Foreign loanwords’, p. 43).
54 There is little evidence that the Kebra Nagaśt dates as far back as the sixth century and, while it may rely on older material derived from foreign sources, the overall structure leaves us in no doubt that the Ge’ez text insofar as it is preserved is of fourteenth- or even fifteenth-century date (Stuart Munro-Hay, ‘A sixth-century Kebra Nagast?’, Annales d’Éthiopie, 17 (2000): 43–58). On the other hand, a number of the apocalyptic topoi in the Kebra Nagaśt bear a striking similarity to references to Ethiopia in apocalyptic texts in Syriac and Coptic, some of them dating back to the seventh century. On this point, see Francisco Javier Martinez, ‘The King of Rūm and the King of Ethiopia in medieval apocalyptic texts from Egypt’, in Włodzimierz Godlewski (ed.), Coptic Studies: Acts of the Third International Conference of Coptic Studies: Warsaw, 20–25 August, 1984 (Warsaw, 1990), pp. 247–66; Glen Warren Bowersock, ‘Helena’s bridle and the chariot of Ethiopia’, in Gregg Gardner and Kevin L. Osterloh (eds), Antiquity in Antiquity: Jewish and Christian Pasts in the Greco–Roman World (Tübingen, 2008), pp. 383–93.
56 Ibid.
conquest illustrates the powerful effect that Ethiopian rule in South Arabia had on the medieval Ethiopia's self-perception as a Christian nation.

If Kālēb and 'Abrehā sought to create a new holy land in South Arabia by founding churches as visual symbols of Christianity's triumph over Judaism, they would have been in good company as far as the sixth-century Roman world is concerned. In Palestine and Roman Arabia over 350 churches have been found, most of them built during the sixth century.\textsuperscript{57} Given that Christian tradition, particularly after the fourth century, recast this region as a specifically Christian 'Holy Land',\textsuperscript{58} the Romans' program of church construction there had a special significance as an expression of Christianity's triumph over Judaism.\textsuperscript{59} There is a striking similarity between the Romans' program of Christianizing space and Ethiopian efforts to achieve the same in South Arabia through the construction of churches. That the construction program initiated by Kālēb and continued by 'Abrehā was in fact directly linked with that of the Romans is suggested by later Arabic sources. According to al-Ṭabarī (d. 923), 'Abrehā had written to the Roman emperor – who at that time would have been Justinian I (527–65) – asking for help in building his cathedral at Ṣan‘ā’, in response to which craftsmen, mosaics and marble were sent.\textsuperscript{60} One might be tempted initially to dismiss al-Ṭabarī's report as a topos like the stories of Roman or Coptic craftsmen helping to repair the Ka’ba,\textsuperscript{61} or of the decoration of the Ka’ba with marble and mosaic-work by the Umayyad caliph al-Walīd (I) b. ‘Abd al-Mālik (705–15).\textsuperscript{62} However, archaeological evidence for the Romans’ shipment of building materials to the southern Red Sea survives in the form of marble fragments associated with the remains of Aksumite churches at Adulis. These fragments have been verified by isotopic analysis as having come from the Proconnesian marble quarries on the island of Marmara – the same quarries, indeed, that provided much of the marble for the church of Hagia Sophia.\textsuperscript{63} That artisans from the Roman Empire may have trained or assisted Ethiopian craftsmen with the decoration of the churches at Adulis is quite possible given that some of the motifs attested on marble fragments found at that site, such as a six-pointed star and a cross


\textsuperscript{58} Haim Lapin, \textit{Economy, Geography, and Provincial History in Later Roman Palestine} (Tübingen, 2001), p. 125.

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., p. 191.

\textsuperscript{60} Al-Ṭabarī, \textit{Tārīkh}, ed. de Goeje, I, p. 935.

\textsuperscript{61} Al-Azraqī in Ferdinand Wüstenfeld, \textit{Akhbār Makka al-Musharrafā, Die Chroniken der Stadt Mekka} (Beirut, 1964), vol. 1, pp. 104–5.


framed by a wreath, are closely paralleled in late Roman art from Palestine. The argument can be made, then, that the construction of churches in both the Levant and South Arabia represents not simply parallel but interrelated efforts by the Romans and Aksumites to Christianize the late antique landscape, thus making it holy.

But while we have abundant archaeological remains of the churches built by the Romans in what was fast becoming the Christian ‘Holy Land’, we are less fortunate in the case of the churches built by the Ethiopians in South Arabia. In this latter case, scattered architectural fragments are the only material traces with which later literary references can be substantiated. Among these architectural fragments we may note a number of columns from the Great Mosque at Ṣan‘ā’, some of which once bore crosses and were likely taken from ‘Abrehā’s cathedral. Similar material from Žafār, including architectural elements decorated with vine-scroll motifs, may derive from the church restored by Kālēb following his victory over Yūsuf in 525. Apart from these meager remains nothing is known of the layout and decoration of the churches built under the Ethiopian regime in South Arabia, apart from descriptions of the Ṣan‘ā’ cathedral by medieval Muslim authors. Based on the information provided by al-Azraqī, it would appear that ‘Abrehā’s cathedral at Ṣan‘ā’ was a three-aisled cruciform structure with a dome. This layout has been compared to that of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, which has a domed octagonal chapel 16 meters in diameter at the end of a five-aisled nave 26 meters wide, a feature which is in turn similar to the domed church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem.

Such a layout is likely to have been a conscious choice on the part of ‘Abrehā. A number of early churches in Ethiopia are known to follow the layout of churches in Palestine and are associated in popular tradition with stories from the life of

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Christ. The cathedral of Our Lady Mary of Zion at Aksum, for example, closely follows the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem in both its proportions and its five-aisle plan. It is significant, then, that the legend about this cathedral preserved in a later Ge’ez text entitled Maṣḥāfa ‘Aksūm (‘The Book of Aksum’) incorporates Jerusalemite motifs. The foundation of the sanctuary called ‘Our Mother of Zion, the Guardian of Aksum’ is said in this text to predate the coming of Christianity, the first structure being built at a place called Mazber, where we are told the tomb of the Ethiopians’ eponymous ancestor Ethiops Son of Kush was located. The second structure, built by the legendary Queen of Sheba (known as Mākedā in Ethiopian tradition), is reputed to have been founded in the land of ‘Āsbā’Asfā. The text continues:

And the third [structure] is that which ‘Abrehā and ‘Aṣbeḥā built where the sanctuary of Gabaza ‘Aksūm stands. Its foundation took place through miracles and power, for there had previously been a large lake there. Now the righteous kings ‘Abrehā and ‘Aṣbeḥā went up and prayed on a high mountain called the Footprint of Our Lord (Mǝkyāda ‘Ĕgzi’ǝna) that there might be revealed to them the place where they were to build the Gabaza as the abode of His Name. And Our Lord came down and stood in their presence, and he gathered up some earth and deposited it in the place where it now lies, and [dry] land was made. And upon it there shone a pillar of light, and they built the sanctuary there, where it now stands.

Through this legend Ethiopian tradition makes a direct association between the two Ethiopian kings whose careers were so intimately linked with South Arabia: Kālēb/Ella ‘Aṣbeḥā and ‘Abrehā. It does so in the context of grafting a bit of Palestine onto Ethiopia. Thus the mountain in Aksum from which the two kings were shown by God where the city’s cathedral was to be built is named the Footprint of Our Lord after the spot on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem from which Christ was believed to have ascended to heaven. That similar legends

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70 Ibid., p. 228.
71 Though the Maṣḥāfa ‘Aksūm in its final form dates back to the last part of the seventeenth century, it incorporates earlier material, as it shares part of the manuscript tradition of the Kebra Nagaśt and its first section, from which the passage cited in the present study is taken, may date from the fifteenth century (Gianfranco Lusini, ‘Aksum: Māṣḥafā Aksum’, in Siegbert Uhlig (ed.), Encyclopaedia Aethiopica (Wiesbaden, 2003), vol. 1, pp. 185–6).
73 Ibid. (lines 6–14).
were invented by the Ethiopians to imbue their churches in South Arabia with a special holiness is suggested by a legend of the foundation of 'Abrehā's cathedral at Ṣan‘ā’, preserved by the eleventh-century author Ishāq b. Yahyā al-Ṣan‘ānī. Writing of the site of 'Abrehā’s cathedral, al-Ṣan‘ānī notes that ‘it has been said that Jesus son of Mary entered Ṣan‘ā’ and prayed on this spot; thus the Christians have constructed this church on his traces and the traces of the place where he prayed’.75

Due caution is, of course, in order when evaluating such traditions. Given that a Christian community existed at Ṣan‘ā’ at least until the ninth century, when a bishop of Ṣan‘ā’ is mentioned by Thomas of Marga,76 the legend of Jesus’ visit to Ṣan‘ā’ could conceivably have developed long after the period of Ethiopian rule. However, based on the earliest construction phases of the cathedral of Our Lady Mary of Zion at Aksum, it is quite likely that the Ethiopian tradition of modeling churches on those of Palestine dates back as far as the sixth century. As we have seen, the cathedral at Aksum follows the layout and proportions of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. As for the date of its construction, an important clue is provided by a reference in Kālēb’s inscription from Aksum (RIE 191) to the construction of a church called Gabaz, an epithet which closely parallels that of the cathedral of Our Lady Mary of Zion, Gabaza ‘Aksūm (‘the Guardian of Aksum’). In his inscription Kālēb states that he built a church upon his return from his first campaign against Ḥimyar in 518, saying: ‘the Gabaz I built and sanctified by the Power of God’.77 The stepped podium on which the cathedral of Our Lady Mary of Zion was erected is typically Aksumite in construction,78 indicating an early date for the cathedral’s foundation, while evidence for a connection with Kālēb is provided by a brief inscription from the cathedral which reads ‘This stone is the entryway of Lāzēn’ (za-‘bīn gabgab za-Lāzēn).79 This Lāzēn is the name of the clan to which Kālēb belonged, hence the reference to the king as ‘the man of Lāzēn’ (B’S LZN = bǝ’sē Lāzēn) in his inscription from Aksum.80 It is quite likely, then, that the use of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher as a prototype can be attributed to the very Aksumite king who not only helped restore Christianity in South Arabia following a period of persecution by the Jewish Ḥimyarite king Yūsuf but also set about making it a truly Christian country through the construction of churches.

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77 Bernard et al., Recueil des inscriptions, p. 273.
80 Bernard et al., Recueil des inscriptions, p. 272.
If Kālēb was already building churches in Ethiopia after the pattern of Roman churches in Palestine, it is likely that he would have done the same in South Arabia, and that 'Abrehā followed suit. That 'Abrehā did indeed follow contemporary trends in Ethiopian – and by extension Roman – church construction is suggested by a comparison of the proportions of his cathedral at Ṣan‘ā’ with that of the cathedral of Our Lady Mary of Zion at Aksum. The length of the latter structure is 125 ell, each ell being a little less than half a meter. According to al-Azraqī the total length of the nave and īwān of the Ṣan‘ā’ cathedral is 120 dhirā’, by which he presumably means the ‘Abbāsid dhirā’ of 48.25 centimeters, effectively the same measure as the Aksumite ell. The two cathedrals were also of similar height, that at Aksum being 32 ell while that at Ṣan‘ā’ was 33.5 dhirā’. Only in the width of their respective naves did the structures differ in dimensions, the nave of the cathedral at Aksum being 47 ell wide, while that of the Ṣan‘ā’ cathedral was 40 dhirā’ wide. From the similarity in their size and proportions it may be the case that the two cathedrals – Kālēb’s at Aksum and ‘Abrehā’s at Ṣan‘ā’ – belong to the same Ethiopian tradition of building churches modeled on those built by the Romans in the Holy Land.

Though the reports of ‘Abrehā’s revolt against Aksum and his establishment of an autonomous state in South Arabia have led many scholars to assume that South Arabia and Ethiopia parted ways with the advent of his rule, the fact that he continued Kālēb’s program of church construction suggests greater continuity between the reigns of the two kings. We must not, of course, exclude the possibility of competition between ‘Abrehā and Kālēb as both tried to outdo his rival in the construction of churches. Nevertheless their similarity in vision may explain why medieval Ethiopian tradition chose to reconcile the two rivals by identifying them as the twin rulers ‘Abrehā and ‘Aṣbeḥā who reigned simultaneously in Aksum and established Christianity as Ethiopia’s state religion. The theme of two brothers being jointly responsible for qualitative changes within society is widespread in the oral traditions of southern Ethiopia, and undoubtedly belongs to a very old archetype in Ethiopian culture. All the same, the fact that two sixth-century rulers are associated with the introduction of Christianity, while the fourth-century convert ‘Ēzānā is completely overlooked, illustrates the importance of the events of the sixth century – and particularly Ethiopian rule in South Arabia – in the historical consciousness of Ethiopia. It is thus significant that ‘Abrehā, though he ruled only in South Arabia, was

81 A vaulted space walled on three sides.
83 Ibid.
transformed by medieval Ethiopian tradition into a full-fledged king of Aksum by becoming the brother of Kālēb/'ella-'Asbeḥā. Throughout the Middle Ages traditions of Kālēb’s victory over the Ḥimyarites continued to act as a point of reference for Ethiopian rulers in their campaigns against non-Christian enemies. As a case in point, Kālēb is mentioned in the sixteenth-century Acts of Marḥa Kerestōs in the context of a campaign led by Ba’eda Māryām (1468–78), who is said to have dealt with the pagans (‘aramīyān) of the Ethiopian Highlands ‘like King Kālēb dealt with those who killed the people of Najrān’.87 Seen from this perspective, Aksum’s intervention in sixth-century South Arabia was not a peripheral incident but was vital to the development of Ethiopia’s identity as a Christian nation. It was this fact that established not ‘Ēzānā but Kālēb in later tradition as the true founder of Ethiopian Christianity.

In conclusion, the reign of Kālēb (ca. 510–40) can be seen as a turning point both in the history of Ethiopian Christianity and in the development of Aksum’s self-image as a kingdom with age-old – and better yet, documented – credentials to rule South Arabia. It has been argued that Kālēb had an interest in his kingdom’s past as an instrument of political propaganda, whether it took the form of having copies made of old records of Aksumite conquests in Arabia or copying the script used by his predecessors in their inscriptions. But while written documentation of Aksum’s claim to Arabia may have been regarded by Kālēb as sufficient for convincing his Roman co-religionists of his credentials as the king to whom all were to defer in South Arabian affairs, the war against Ḥimyar needed religious legitimation for it to be an effective rallying point for Kālēb’s Christian subjects.88 Since the Christianization of northern Ethiopia probably remained unfinished business in the early sixth century, Kālēb may have presented his triumph over the Jewish Ḥimyarites as proof of the Christian God’s granting of victory to the true believers, by means of which converts might be gained. The construction of churches in South Arabia was his way of demonstrating this same point to the Ḥimyarites by giving them highly visible symbols of Christianity’s firm implantation in South Arabia, a policy continued by ’Abrehā. That churches in both Ethiopia and South Arabia were built following Roman models in Palestine suggests that Kālēb and ’Abrehā saw Christianization as a step towards the creation of new holy lands. History and holiness were thus integral to the creation and maintenance of political communities in the southern Red Sea region in Late Antiquity.

87 Acts de Marha Krestos, ed. Stanislas Kur (Louvain, 1972), p. 64 (Ge’ez text, translation mine).
88 On the parallel phenomenon of sacred history being created for political ends in the context of the Sasanian conquest of South Arabia in 570, see Zeev Rubin, ‘Islamic traditions on the Sāsānian conquest of the Ḥimyarite realm’, Der Islam, 84, 2 (2007): 185–99.
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Chapter 16

Anastasios und die ‚Geschichte‘ der Isaurier

Mischa Meier

In den Jahren um 500 n. Chr. verfasste der aus dem oberägyptischen Koptos stammende Dichter Christodoros eine *Ekphrasis der Statuen im öffentlichen Gymnasium des so genannten Zeuxippos*, die sich, von wohl geringen Kürzungen abgesehen, in der *Anthologia Graeca* erhalten hat. Unter den 80 dort beschriebenen Standbildern befand sich auch eine Darstellung des römischen Feldherrn Pompeius (v. 398–406); sie sollte möglicherweise mit einem Bild Caesars korrespondieren (v. 92–6), denn der Dichter scheint durchaus auf gegenseitige Bezüge unter den von ihm behandelten Statuen geachtet zu haben. In jedem Fall aber repräsentieren ausschließlich Caesar und Pompeius innerhalb des von Christodoros versammelten, ansonsten recht ausgewogen angeordneten Ensembles aus mythischen und historischen Personen den...
Typus des römischen Politikers, wie denn überhaupt mit Vergil, Apuleius, Caesar und Pompeius nur vier Römer vertreten sind. Was der Dichter mit dieser idiosynkratischen, die tatsächliche Statuenabfolge in den Zeuxipposthermen wohl kaum exakt abbildenden Auswahl bezweckt hat, konnte in der Forschung bislang noch nicht geklärt werden und soll auch im Folgenden nicht mein Thema sein. Ausgangspunkt meiner Überlegungen ist die Beschreibung der Pompeius-Statue, die mit gutem Grund wiederholt die Aufmerksamkeit der Interpreten auf sich gezogen hat. Denn einzig an dieser Stelle erwähnt Christodoros ausdrücklich Kaiser Anastasios (491–518), unter dessen Herrschaft er seine 
_Ekphrasis_ verfasste, und bringt diesen überdies mit dem großen Pompeius in Zusammenhang. Die Passage diente denn auch bereits vor mehr als drei Jahrzehnten Alan Cameron als eine zentrale Belegstelle für seine mittlerweile nicht mehr angefochtene These, dass Anastasios’ Vater den Namen Pompeios trug. Aber sie ermöglicht noch weitere aufschlussreiche Erkenntnisse:


2 Vgl. Stupperich, pp. 216, 228f.


4 _Anthologia Graeca_, 2,398–406:

Καὶ πρόμος εὐκαμάτων Πομπήιος Αὐσονιήων, θείδρον ἱσαυροφόνων κειμήλιον ἠγορεάων, στειβομένας ὑπὸ ποσσὶν Ἰσαυρίδας εἶχε μαχαίρας σημαίνων, ὅτι δοῦλον ὑπὸ ζυγόν αὐχένα Ταύρου εἴρυσεν ἀρρήκτω πεπεδημένον ἄμματι Νίκης· κεῖνος ἀνήρ, ὃς πᾶσιν ἔδειξεν ἐμὸς σκηπτούχος ἄμφοτερου ἑλεσθένητος, χειροκίνητος ἰσαυρίδος ἔθνεα γαίης. Ἄναστασίοιο γενέθλην, τοῦτο δὲ πᾶσιν ἔδειξεν ἐμὸς σκηπτούχος ἄμμων δημώσας σακέεσσον ἰσαυρίδος ἔθνεα γαίης.

Kommentar zum Text: Tissoni, pp. 250–53.
Pompeius hat demzufolge einst die Isaurier niedergerungen und unter römische Herrschaft gezwungen; möglicherweise stellte die Statue dies mittels des calcatio-Motivs dar (der Fuß des siegreichen Feldherrn ist in den Nacken des unter ihm liegenden besiegten Gegners gestemmt). Für das Gebiet der Isaurier – die Grenzen Isauriens wechselten bekanntlich in der Antike und lassen sich nicht eindeutig festlegen,⁵ zudem sollte zwischen der Provinz und der weiteren Region unterschieden werden⁶ – steht sinnbildlich das Tauros-Gebirge im Süden Kleinasiens. Eindeutig ist, dass Christodoros auf Pompeius’ Erfolge gegen die so genannten kilikischen Piraten anspielt (67 v. Chr.), die im 1. Jahrhundert v. Chr. immer wieder das Mittelmeer unsicher machten und ihre Rückzugsgebiete in den schwer zugänglichen Regionen Kilikiens fanden, dessen exakte Grenzen ebenfalls in der Antike wechselten und das nicht erst von Christodoros mit Isaurien gleichgesetzt werden konnte.⁷ Im Folgenden jedoch


nimmt die Passage eine bemerkenswerte Wendung: Mit dem Hinweis darauf, dass Pompeius der Stammvater der Familie des Anastasios sei, wird geschickt der Bogen in die Gegenwart des Dichters gespannt und der aktuelle Herrscher rückt ins Zentrum der Darstellung: Er indes hat nicht nur (wie Pompeius) die Isaurier 

In ganz ähnlicher Weise, jedoch noch deutlicher enkomiastisch übersteigt, wird der Isaurierkrieg des Anastasios auch im Panegyricus des Priskian von Kaisareia8 in eine historische Tiefendimension hineingedrückt. Einmal

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mehr wird dabei das Pompeius-Exempel herangezogen und mit Nachdruck auf die Abstammung des Kaisers vom hochberühmten römischen Feldherrn verwiesen,9 und einmal mehr gebietet es die panegyrische Überbietungstopik, Anastasios von seinem angeblichen Vorfahren abzusetzen: Pompeius, der sogar direkt angeredet wird, solle vor Anastasios zurückstehen (cede nepoti). Denn er habe seinerzeit im Tauros die Isaurier (die hier als genus bezeichnet werden) unbezwungen (indomitum) gelassen (eine Abweichung gegenüber Christodoros, der Pompeius ja immerhin einen militärischen Erfolg zugesteht); erst Anastasios habe sie besiegen können: *Hic domuit penitus conuellens semina belli* (v. 18). Die Verankerung der Isaurier in der Geschichte reicht bei Priskian allerdings noch tiefer als bei seinem ägyptischen Dichter-Kollegen, indem weitere exempla angeführt werden, darunter sogar ein mythisches: Nicht solle sich Griechenland des Bellerophon rühmen, weil er die Solymer besiegt habe (letztere wurden in der Antike mitunter synonym für Isaurier benannt);10 denn diese hätten sich später ja erneut erhoben. Erst Anastasios habe sie derartig niedergehen, dass sie danach nicht mehr hätten Widerstand leisten können (post haec ne possint esse rebelles).11 Und auch Servilius, dem man mit Recht den Beinamen Isauricus verliehen habe, verblasse gegenüber den Großtaten des Anastasios.12 Einzig dem Kaiser, so Priskians Fazit, sei es also gelungen, mit der *sclerata gens* (v. 57), den

mit all seinen bekannten methodischen Schwächen, so dass die Datierungsfrage letztlich weiterhin offen bleiben muss.

9 Vgl. Priscianus, *De laude Anastasii*, 10–15:

*Nec mirum tales ex tanta stirpe creatos*

*Pompeii, proprio quem culmine Roma locauit;*

*Cuius quis meritos ualeat numerare triumphos,*

*Quos uidit Titan linquens repetensque profundum,*

*Quos medio ueniens steterat miratus Olympo?*

*Sed tamen egregio, Pompei, cede nepoti.*


tyranni (v. 50) – d.h. mit Feinden der römischen Herrschaft – in einem einzigen Krieg (uno marte, v. 50) fertig zu werden.


15 So die Vermutung von Baumgarten, De Christodoro, p. 60; zustimmend Tissoni, pp. 30f.; 35f.


\(^{19}\) Kandidos, fr. 1,1–10, ed. Roger Blockley.


Joch er sich aber dereinst befreien werde,\textsuperscript{22} hinreichend Anknüpfungspunkte für die Isaurier des 5. Jahrhunderts geboten. In der antiken Literatur findet sich die vermeintliche Abkunft der Isaurier von Esau jedenfalls sonst nur noch bei Johannes von Antiocheia (frühes 7. Jh.), der an dieser Stelle aber wohl auf Kandidos rekurriert und daher keinen selbständigen Zeugen ausmacht.\textsuperscript{23} Immerhin belegt das Kandidos-Exzerpt, dass unter Anastasios zumindest einige Isaurier durchaus darum bemüht waren, als Gruppe eine Verortung in der christlichen Weltgeschichte zu erfahren und somit als integraler Bestandteil des antiken Kosmos zu erscheinen. Solcherlei Bestrebungen waren in der Spätantike zunächst einmal nicht außergewöhnlich. Wir kennen ähnliches auch von verschiedenen germanischen \textit{gentes}.\textsuperscript{24}

Einmal mehr wird jedenfalls deutlich: Unter Anastasios erscheinen die Isaurier als eigenständige Gruppe, werden in offiziösen Dokumenten sogar als Reichsfeinde mit eigener ‚Geschichte’ gekennzeichnet; letztere hatte sich aber offenbar noch nicht in Gestalt einer kohärenten Meistererzählung stabilisiert, sondern spiegelt sich in verschiedenen, ganz unterschiedlichen Varianten – ein erstes Indiz dafür, dass der Diskurs über die ‚Geschichte’ der Isaurier damals noch nicht sonderlich alt gewesen sein dürfte.\textsuperscript{25} Aus diesem Befund resultiert zwangsläufig die Frage, wann die ‚Geschichte’ der Isaurier zu einem Thema wurde – und aus welchem Grund. Da die Herstellung eines Bewusstseins einer eigenen ‚Geschichte’ einen wesentlichen Schritt im Prozess der Ausbildung kollektiver Identitäten einzelner Gruppen definiert,\textsuperscript{26} handelt es sich bei dieser Frage keineswegs um eine Marginalie, denn sie leitet direkt in die aktuellen Debatten über den Gruppencharakter und die Identität (im Sinne von Fremd- und Selbstwahrnehmung) der Isaurier im 5./6. Jahrhundert über;\textsuperscript{27} ihre Bearbeitung könnte daher möglicherweise einige bisher noch nicht hinreichend untersuchte


\textsuperscript{25} Vgl. Elton, ‚Isaurians’, p. 298: „[...] the sudden focus on the Isaurians, like Candidus’ treatment of their origins, contrasts with their previous obscurity“.


\textsuperscript{27} Zu diesen Diskussionen vgl. etwa Shaw; Lenski, ‘Assimilation and revolt’; Elton, ‚Isaurians’ und Hugh Elton, ‚Illus and the imperial aristocracy under Zeno’, \textit{Byzantion}, 70 (2000): 393–407; Feld, \textit{Barbarische Bürger}. 
Aspekte innerhalb dieses übergreifenden Diskussionszusammenhangs erschließen.

Grundsätzlich waren die Isaurier in der Spätantike recht negativ konnotiert – und dies, obwohl sie sich offenbar während des frühen und hohen Prinzipats (bis etwa Mitte des 3. Jahrhunderts) recht erfolgreich in das Gesamtgefüge des Römischen Reiches einzubinden verstanden hatten.28 Man war sich zwar der Tatsache bewusst, dass sie zur Bevölkerung des Imperium Romanum gehörten, doch galten sie dennoch weiterhin als wilde Halbbarbaren, die in weitgehend unzugänglichen Bergregionen ihr eigenes Dasein führten und allenfalls durch wiederholte Raubzüge und notorisches Banditentum die Aufmerksamkeit auf sich lenkten.29 Tatsächlich ist es denn auch in der Spätantike mehrfach zu Zusammenstößen der römischen Bevölkerung und Administration mit isaurischen Gruppen, ja zu regelrechten Aufständen von Isauriern, gekommen.30 Um die Mitte des 4. Jahrhunderts musste zur Kontrolle der unruhigen isaurischen Rückzugsgebiete ein eigenständiger Militärbezirk unter einem comes et praeses Isauriae eingerichtet werden.31 Andererseits sind aber auch isaurische Einheiten im römischen Heer seit dem 4. Jahrhundert nahezu durchgehend belegt, wobei allerdings die Benennung eines Truppenkörpers nach Isauriern nicht zwangsläufig bedeuten musste, dass die entsprechenden Einheiten auch

28 Letzteres legen jedenfalls die Indizien nahe, die Lenski zusammengetragen hat, siehe Lenski, 'Assimilation and revolt', pp. 431–9; ähnlich auch Feld, Barbarische Bürger, pp. 200ff.


Die weit verbreitete, auch in der Spätantike fassbare Geringschätzung der Isaurier als halbbarbarische Banditen einerseits sowie die Präsenz vordergründig homogen wirkender isaurischer Einheiten im römischen Heer andererseits haben die ältere Forschung zu der Ansicht geleitet, dass es sich bei den Isauriern um eine eigenständige, in einem nahezu abgeschlossenen geographischen Raum angesiedelte, weitgehend kompakte ethnische Einheit gehandelt hat. Prominente Mitglieder dieses Verbands, so hat 1893 Ernest W. Brooks in einem auch heute noch viel zitierten Aufsatz gefolgert, seien dann mit ihren Gefolgsleuten um die Mitte des 5. Jahrhunderts ganz gezielt nach Konstantinopel eingeladen worden, um dort ein Gegengewicht gegen die einflussreichen germanisch-alanischen Militärs um Aspar und seinen Sohn Ardabur zu schaffen, die man sich ebenfalls als ethnisch weitgehend einheitliche, am Kaiserhof ihre Sonderinteressen verfolgende Gruppe vorstellte. 36 Obwohl die unter dem Zeichen des sich zunehmend ausdifferenzierenden Ethnogeneseparadigmas stehende Forschung die Vorstellung germanischer (bzw. alanischer) Verbände, die als kompakte ethnische Einheiten im Oströmischen Reich, zumal in Konstantinopel, agiert haben sollen, längst als modernes Konstrukt entlarvt hat, haben sich entsprechende Assoziationen mit Blick auf die Isaurier noch lange halten können. 37 Demgegenüber wurde allerdings in einigen jüngeren

32 Vgl. etwa Notitia Dignitatum, 5,66, 7,56, 29,7–8, ed. Otto Seeck (Berlin, 1876); HA, Probus, 16; Ammianus Marcellinus, 14,2,14 (mit David Woods, siehe Woods, pp. 110f.);
Corpus Inscriptionum Graecorum, 4,9207 und 4,9230; Elton, ^Illus*, pp. 394ff. (weitere
Belege); Feld, Barbarische Bürger, pp. 208ff.

33 Elton, *Illus*, pp. 395, vgl. 397; Bernhard Palme, *Theodosiaci Isauri in Alexandria*, in
James M.S. Cowey und Bärbel Kramer (eds), Paramone. Editionen und Aufsätze von Mitgliedern
und verwandte Gebiete: Beihet, [Neue Folge], 16 (München, Leipzig, 2004), pp. 157–73;
Haarer, p. 27, mit Anm. 86.

34 Procopius Caesariensis, Bellum Gothicum, 1,5,2–3. Wenig später stießen weitere
3000 Isaurier als Verstärkung hinzu, vgl. Procopius Caesariensis, BG, 2,5,1.

and revolt*, p. 426.

36 Brooks.

37 Vgl. etwa Minor, pp. 124ff.; Hild und Hellenkemper, Bd. 1, p. 40; Burgess, p. 875;
Haarer, pp. 11 („a counter-balance against German dominance“), 15ff.; Feld, Barbarische
Bürger; zuletzt Alexander Demandt, Die Spätantike. Römische Geschichte von Diocletian bis


38 Burgess.
insbesondere Zenons, verdanken sich nirgendwo in erkennbarer Weise einem signifikanten Bekenntnis zur isaurischen Herkunft. Elton folgert daraus, dass auch die in der oströmischen Führungsschicht der 2. Hälfte des 5. Jahrhunderts agierenden Isaurier zunächst einmal als ambitionierte Individuen anzusehen seien, die ihre jeweils eigenen Interessen verfolgten, dafür temporäre Bündnisse mit anderen Mitgliedern der Aristokratie eingingen und ihre isaurische Herkunft demgegenüber als eher nachrangig betrachteten, insofern diese nur eine ihrer unterschiedlichen Identitäten repräsentierte. Illus etwa war, so Elton, zwar Isaurier, „but he had other identities too, as Roman general, Chalcedonian Christian, patron of philosophers, enemy and then ally of Verina, none of which could be excluded from one another“. 44


Anastasios und die 'Geschichte' der Isaurier


Es geht mir in diesem Vortrag allerdings nicht darum, das komplexe Problem des umstrittenen Gruppencharakters der Isaurier insgesamt zu lösen, sondern – wie gesagt – nur um einen Teilaspekt dieses Diskussionszusammenhangs, nämlich den Zeitpunkt und Kontext des Aufkommens eines Diskurses über die


48 Feld, Barbarische Bürger, p. 235; ähnlich ibid., p. 240: „die dramatische Rivalität der beiden ethnischen Gruppen“; 246f.

49 Feld, Barbarische Bürger, p. 238, Anm. 8.

50 Feld, Barbarische Bürger, p. 277.


Mit Blick auf das Aufkommen einer isaurischen ‚Geschichte‘ möchte ich der Thronbesteigung und Herrschaft Zenons allerdings deutlich weniger Gewicht zumessen. Zwar mangelt es uns für Zenon an vergleichbarem panegyrischem Material, wie für die Herrschaft des Anastasios vorliegt,\(^ {54}\) doch sind trotz allem einige Schlussfolgerungen möglich. Das auf einem Wiener Papyrus erhaltene

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\(^{53}\) Elton, ‚Isaurians‘, pp. 298 (Thronbesteigung Zenons), 299–301.

anonyme Fragment eines Panegyricus auf einen namentlich nicht genannten Kaiser konnte schon vor längerer Zeit von Ronald C. McCail als Enkomion auf Zenon identifiziert werden.\textsuperscript{55} Etwaige Anspielungen auf dessen isaurische Provenienz finden sich in dem – allerdings nur teilweise erhaltenen – Textstück bezeichnenderweise nicht, möglicherweise auch deshalb, weil diese Herkunft letztlich doch nicht allseitige Akzeptanz hervorrief und daher, um Peinlichkeiten zu vermeiden, übergangen wurde; so hatte es im Übrigen auch das Handbuch Menander Rhetors für vergleichbare Fälle vorgesehen.\textsuperscript{56} In der weiteren, fast ausschließlich Zenon-feindlichen Überlieferung wird hingegen durchaus (wenngleich nicht allzu häufig) auf seine isaurische Abkunft eingegangen, aber entsprechende Auslassungen enthalten keinerlei Hinweise auf eine ,Geschichte‘ der Isaurier – abgesehen von den üblichen Topoi, wonach es sich bei ihnen schon immer um verabscheuungswürdige Banditen und Barbaren gehandelt habe.\textsuperscript{57} Weder Zenons Gegner noch er selbst bzw. seine Anhänger scheinen also im öffentlichen Ringen um die Akzeptanz des umstrittenen Kaisers von der ,Geschichte‘ Gebrauch gemacht zu haben. Für seine Widersacher war dies auch gar nicht erforderlich, denn die isaurische Herkunft des Kaisers bot bereits für sich genommen hinreichend Potential für negative Assoziationen und musste nicht noch zusätzlich um eine historische Dimension bereichert werden. Aber auch Zenon selbst dürfte kaum Interesse daran gehabt haben, eine ,Geschichte‘ der Isaurier zu entwerfen. Denn jeder Versuch, den Isauriern ein eigenständiges, historisch fundiertes Profil zu verleihen, hätte sie den ,Römern‘ noch weiter entfremdet; es musste also gerade umgekehrt im Bemühren Zenons liegen, die Isaurier als integralen Bestandteil der römischen Bevölkerung erscheinen zu lassen. Dazu standen ihm prinzipiell zwei Möglichkeiten offen: Er konnte zum einen offensiv versuchen, die isaurische ,Geschichte‘ im antiken Kosmos zu verankern – etwa so wie wir es bei Kandidos kennengelernt haben. Oder er versuchte sich von vornherein nicht an Experimenten mit der Geschichte und beließ alles beim alten. Ich vermute, dass Zenon die letztnamen Alternative gewählt hat, weil er im Falle einer Eigeninitiative unweigerlich erheblichen Widerspruch provoziert und eine Debatte ausgelöst hätte, die zu kontrollieren


ihm ausgesprochen schwer gefallen wäre. Es scheint also, dass die Diskussion über die 'Geschichte' der Isaurier kein Produkt der Zeit Zenons gewesen ist: Seine Gegner benötigten das historische Argument schlichtweg nicht; Zenon selbst und seine Anhänger hingegen taten im eigenen Interesse gut daran, es gar nicht erst zu bemühen.

Unter Anastasios gestaltete sich die Situation anders. Auch dieser Kaiser sah sich zu Beginn seiner Herrschaft erheblichen Schwierigkeiten gegenüber: Seine religiöse Haltung galt als zweifelhaft, was ihm verbreitetes Misstrauen und insbesondere von Anbeginn die Feindschaft des Patriarchen von Konstantinopel Euphemios einbrachte; trotz seiner raschen Eheschließung mit Zenons Witwe Ariadne war seine Position als dynastiefremder, zudem bereits betagter (ca. 60 Jahre alter) ehemaliger Hofbeamter (silentiarios) alles andere als gefestigt; mit Longinos, dem Bruder Zenons, stand durchaus ein Kandidat aus der Familie des Vorgängers bereit, der als zweimaliger Konsul (486 und 490) und ehemaliger (?) magister militum praesentalis über gute Kontakte in die Führungselite verfügte (was in den Quellen auch ausdrücklich vermerkt wird) und der überdies wohl auch entsprechende Ambitionen auf den Thron besaß. Dementsprechend unsicher war zunächst die Position des Kaisers, und er wird sich rasch seiner wesentlichen Kapitalien besonnen haben; diese beruhten u. a. auf der Tatsache, dass er kein Isaurier war. Angesichts dieser Ausgangslage und vor dem Hintergrund einer Situation, die durch eine markante Opposition zwischen Anhängern und Gegnern der Isaurier in der Führungsschicht Konstantinopels sowie die keineswegs von vornherein aussichtslosen Hoffnungen des Isauriers Longinos auf den Thron gekennzeichnet war, schien es nunmehr geraten, selbst die Initiative zu ergreifen.

Der genaue Hergang der Ereignisse, die bald nach dem Herrschaftsantritt des Anastasios zum Krieg mit den Isauriern führten, ist nicht mehr exakt


61 Euagrios, HE 3,29; Theoph. a. m. 5983, ed. de Boor, vol. 1, p. 136,1–3; Haarer, p. 21.
rekonstruierbar, da die Quellen sich widersprechen.62 Offenbar versuchte sich der neue Kaiser aber zunächst an einer eher vorsichtig-tastenden Politik, entschied sich dann jedoch schon bald für ein drastisches Vorgehen; die konkreten Anlässe dafür sind schwer zu ermitteln: Von einem angeblichen Aufstand in Isaurien wird berichtet,63 verschiedene gegen die Isaurier gerichtete Maßnahmen des Anastasios sollen Auseinandersetzungen provoziert haben,64 und schließlich wurde auch ein Aufstand im Hippodrom von Konstantinopel, der als Inszenierung der Isaurier galt, als Auslöser der Feindseligkeiten ins Gespräch gebracht.65 Wahrscheinlich standen die Verbannung des Longinos nach Ägypten sowie die Exilierung mehrere weiterer isaurischer Größen am Beginn der Unruhen, doch Sicherheit ist darüber nicht mehr zu gewinnen.66 Jedenfalls spitze sich die Situation rasch zu, so dass umgehend gehandelt werden musste. Trotz der anfänglichen Erfolge der beiden mit der Kriegführung beauftragten römischen Feldherrn Johannes Kyrtos und Johannes Skytha (Sieg beim phrygischen Kotyaion [h. Kütahya] über das Heer der Aufständischen) zog sich der Krieg letztlich in ermüdernder Länge bis zum Jahr 498 hin67 – dann aber konnte ein umso eindrücklicher Erfolg vermeldet werden, und dieser hatte sich nach allem, was unsere Zeugnisse verraten, auch eingestellt.

Anastasios hat offenbar sämtliche ihm zur Verfügung stehenden Möglichkeiten genutzt, um den Krieg gegen die Isaurier als gewaltiges Großereignis und Vernichtungsfeldzug gegen einen auswärtigen Gegner zu stilisieren, der die Römer durch die Geschichte hin immer wieder vor erhebliche Probleme gestellt hatte und nun endlich wirksam niedergerungen werden konnte. Bezeichnenderweise wird der Konflikt denn auch vom Zeitgenossen


65 Marcellinus Comes, Chronicon, ad ann. 491,2, ed. Mommsen, p. 94; Johannes Antiochenus, fr., 308, ed. Roberto, p. 528–32.

66 Zu den Einzelheiten siehe Meier, Anastasios I., pp. 75ff., bes. 79ff.

67 Haarer, pp. 22–8; Feld, Barbarische Bürger, pp. 332–5; Meier, Anastasios I., p. 82.
Marcellinus Comes ganz konkret als *bellum Isauricum* eingeführt und damit von den unmittelbar darauf erwähnten *bella civilia* gegen den Kaiser in Konstantinopel abgesetzt, eine Sprachregelung, die Prokop später aufgreift.\(^{68}\) Die Tatsache, dass es sich bei den prominenten, namentlich bekannten Häuptern seiner Widersacher nunmehr tatsächlich ausschließlich um Isaurier handelte,\(^{69}\) spielte Anastasios bei seinem Vorhaben möglicherweise in die Hände. Die eingangs besprochenen Auszüge aus der Panegyrik stellen jedenfalls einen Teil seiner Strategie dar, die sich indes auch in anderer Weise manifestiert: So wurden etwa die Anführer der Gegenseite, Longinos von Kardala sowie zwei Größen namens Athenodoros, nach ihrer Gefangennahme 497 nach Konstantinopel verbracht und zum Gegenstand groß angelegter Inszenierungen: Nach ihrer öffentlichen Enthauptung wurden ihre Köpfe auf Lanzen gespießt, in Schandparaden durch die Stadt geführt und schließlich in Sykai (Galata) ausgestellt. Die von Anastasios bezweckte Aufheizung der Stimmung gegen die Isaurier, gleichzeitig wohl ein probates Mittel zur Festigung seiner eigenen Position, zeigte Wirkung. Der Kirchenhistoriker Euagrios (spätes 6. Jh.) sah in der Inszenierung einen „süß en Anblick für die Byzantiner, in Vergeltung für das Übel, das sie durch Zenon und die Isaurier erlitten hatten“.\(^{70}\) Der etwas später, im Jahr 498, niedergerungene Longinos von Selinous wurde in Ketten durch Konstantinopel gezogen, was selbst der Anastasios gegenüber ausgesprochen feindselig eingestellte zeitgenössische Chronist Marcellinus Comes anerkennend als *ingens spectaculum* wertete.\(^{71}\) Die isaurischen Burgen wurden zerstört, überlebende Isaurier ( möglicherweise auch die Zivilbevölkerung) nach Thrakien deportiert.\(^{72}\) Damals wohl entstanden die *Isaurika* in 6 Büchern des Christodoros, und in diesem Kontext wird man auch seine Beschreibung der Statuen in den Zeuxippos-Thermen anzusiedeln haben.\(^{73}\) Die siegreichen Feldherrn wurden mit Konsulaten in den Jahren 498 (Johannes


\(^{71}\) Marcellinus Comes, *Chronicon*, ad ann. 498,2, ed. Mommsen, p. 95.


der Skythe) und 499 (Johannes Kyrtos) belohnt, was insofern bemerkenswert ist, als der Kaiser Konsulate ansonsten vorwiegend an seine Verwandten vergab.\textsuperscript{74} Die Einsparungen der Zahlungen an die Isaurier nutzte Anastasios für ein großmütiges Steuergeschenk an die Reichsbevölkerung.\textsuperscript{75}

All dies fügt sich zu einem schlüssigen Panorama zusammen: Anastasios sah seine Stellung zu Beginn seiner Herrschaft offenbar selbst als ausgesprochen labil und dementsprechend gefährdet – und dies mit gutem Grund. In dieser Situation dürfte ihm der sich rasch zuspitzende, möglicherweise durch gezielte anti-isaurische Maßnahmen noch beförderte Konflikt mit den Isauriern nicht ungelegen gekommen sein, denn er bot nicht nur die Möglichkeit, die Isaurierpartei um seinen Konkurrenten Longinos auszuschalten, sondern erlaubte es überdies, die Vorbehalte, die man insbesondere in Konstantinopel gegenüber den Isauriern hegte, zu instrumentalisieren und dabei Polarisierungen zu erzeugen, die klar die Fronten zwischen Gut und Böse definierten;\textsuperscript{76} selbst die Absetzung des unzuverlässigen Patriarchen Euphemios ließ sich in diesem Kontext über den Vorwurf hochverräterischer Konspiration mit isaurischen Größen bequem betreiben.\textsuperscript{77} In dem Maße, in dem die Isaurier nunmehr als auswärtige Reichsfeinde und Tyrannen, ja als Gegner Roms durch die Geschichte hindurch erschienen, konnte der Kaiser sich selbst als siegreicher Imperator, der dem Reich Frieden und Wohlstand sowie Befreiung vom Joch der Tyrannen verschaffte, feiern lassen. Was nicht einmal dem großen Pompeius vergönnt gewesen war, das hatte sein ‚Nachfahre’ Anastasios vollbracht. Diese Strategie implizierte natürlich zugleich auch eine erhebliche Distanzierung von seinem Vorgänger, dem Isaurier Zenon (sie spiegelte sich vor allem in der Versteigerung von dessen Kaisergewändern)\textsuperscript{78} – und das zeitigte Konsequenzen: Wer fortan überhaupt noch etwas Positives über diesen Kaiser sagen wollte, dürfte das Isaurier-Thema jetzt in keinem Fall mehr berühren. Dies, und nicht ein mögliches Desinteresse an der Ethnizität der Isaurier,\textsuperscript{79} dürfte der Grund dafür gewesen sein, dass sich der Verfasser eines sowohl Anastasios als auch insbesondere Zenon

\textsuperscript{74} Roger S. Bagnall, Alan Cameron, S.R. Schwartz and K.A. Worp, Consuls of the Later Roman Empire (Atlanta, 1987), pp. 531 and 533.

\textsuperscript{75} Johannes Malalas, Chronographia, ed. Thurn, p. 321,41–2.

\textsuperscript{76} Vgl. ähnlich Haarer, pp. 11f.

\textsuperscript{77} Anastasios benutzte offenbar geschickt eine ahnungslose Indiskretion des Patriarchen, um diesen der Kollaboration mit den Isauriern bezichtigen zu können. Zu den Einzelheiten und den Quellenbelegen siehe Feld, Barbarische Bürger, p. 335; Meier, Anastasios I., pp. 87–90.


Zur Stellung von ethnischen und religiösen Minderheiten in Byzanz: Armenier, Muslime und Paulikianer

Ralph-Johannes Lilie


1. ARMENIER


1 Im Rahmen eines kurzen Aufsatzes können auch diese drei Beispiele nicht vollständig dokumentiert werden. Es werden daher nur die jeweils benutzten Quellen genannt und dazu eine Auswahl aus der Sekundärliteratur angeführt, mit deren Hilfe der Leser die Forschungsdiskussion nachvollziehen kann.


Trotzdem kann man nicht sagen, daß die Armenier in Byzanz nun ausgesprochen beliebt gewesen wären. Zumindest zeitweilig war eher das Gegenteil der Fall. So bescheinigte man einer Quelle aus der zweiten Hälfte des 8. Jahrhunderts zufolge in Byzanz den Armeniern beispielsweise, daß sie unzuverlässig, treulos und ganz allgemein charakterlos seien, und verbot deshalb

ihre Ansiedlung im Reich. Allerdings war war dieses Verbot schon wenig später wieder vergessen.


Es ist einsichtig, daß die Byzantiner unter solchen Umständen die Verhältnisse in Armenien nicht ignorieren konnten. Diese Verhältnisse waren alles andere als stabil. Einmal bekriegten die Armenier sich, wie schon gesagt, häufig untereinander, aber sie fanden nur selten, wenn überhaupt, eine gemeinsame Linie gegen ihre auswärtigen Nachbarn, denen sie jedoch im Ernstfall allein kaum gewachsen waren. Das hatte zur Folge, daß die armenischen Mächte eigentlich eine ständige Schaukelpolitik zwischen Byzanz auf der einen und den Persern und nach diesen den Arabern auf der anderen Seite betrieben, ja betreiben mußten, um ihren Reichen wenigstens eine halbwegs unabhängige Existenz zu sichern. Genau das aber trug den Armeniern naturgemäß den Ruf von Unzuverlässigkeit ein.


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Zum Zeitpunkt seiner Desertion zu den Arabern 782 hatte Tačat bereits 22 Jahre als Themenstrategos in Byzanz gedient. Nimmt man an, daß er nicht sofort den Rang eines Strategos innegehabt hat, dürfte er wohl während der fünfziger Jahre nach Byzanz gekommen sein. Laut dem armenischen Historiker Łewond soll er sich besonders auf den Bulgarienfeldzügen Kaiser Konstantins V. ausgezeichnet haben, so daß er schließlich in den sechziger Jahren zum Kommandanten eines Themas aufsteigen konnte, wobei allerdings nicht klar ist, ob er die ganze Zeit hindurch ausschließlich das Bukellarion oder auch andere Themen kommandiert hat.5

Der Fall des Tačat zeigt deutlich die Problematik: Wir sehen hier einen armenischen Adligen, der praktisch seine ganze Karriere in Byzanz absolviert hatte, aber selbst nach über 20 Jahren relativ problemlos bereit war, nach Armenien wieder zurückzukehren, sofern man ihm nur genug anbot – was die Araber dadurch taten, daß sie ihm de facto eine Herrschaft im arabisch dominierten Teil Armeniens offerierten.

Tačat war kein Einzelfall! Es gibt viele Berichte über Armenier, die nach Byzanz kamen, dort für eine Weile blieben und dann wieder nach Armenien zurückkehrten. Die byzantinischen Kaiser förderten das auch aktiv: Armenier wurden als Söldner angeworben, häufig kamen sie auch, wenn sie Probleme in der Heimat hatten, meist in Zusammenhang mit Auseinandersetzungen innerhalb der armenischen Fürstentümer. Byzanz bot ihnen gerne Exil an, schickte sie zuweilen aber auch bewußt in ihre Heimat zurück, um dort die griechischen Interessen zu vertreten. Manchmal wurden ihnen Truppen mitgegeben, manchmal Geld. Byzantinische Ehrentitel wurden freiebig verteilt, und die Araber verhielten sich ähnlich. Insofern ist es kein Wunder, wenn die Armenier versuchten, die beiden benachbarten Großreiche gegeneinander auszuspielen. Grundsätzlich wird man ihnen sicher eine größere Sympathie für die Byzantiner unterstellen können, schon weil beide Christen waren, aber auch und vor allem


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wegen seiner Bildung schon den Beinamen σοφός, ‘der Weise’. Auch hier ließen die Beispiele sich vermehren, sagen aber nicht unbedingt viel aus.

Wir wissen also immer noch nichts darüber, wie Armenier in Byzanz gelebt haben. Das liegt daran, daß die literarischen Quellen sich dafür nicht interessieren, und dokumentarische Quellen, also Akten, Urkunden und dergleichen, gibt es für den mittelbyzantinischen Zeitraum allenfalls in einigen Klosterarchiven, die aber ihrerseits nur wenig Aufschluß über weltliche Angelegenheiten bieten.


Unterdrückt waren diese Armenier sicher nicht, was sich schon daraus erklärt, daß auch armenische Truppen in Unteritalien stationiert waren. Viele byzantinische Feldherren und Gouverneure in Unteritalien hatten zumindest einen armenischen Hintergrund, wenn Sie nicht sogar selbst Armenier waren.

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11 Ibid., p. 10,60, Nr. 4.

12 So z. B. Symbatikios, der 891/92 als Feldherr in Untertialien kommandierte; zu ihm cf. Gerard Dédéyan, 'Le stratège Symbatikios et la colonisation Arménienne dans la théme de Longobardie', in Ravenna da capitale imperiale a capitale esarcale, Atti del

Wie gesagt, das ist nur ein kleiner Einblick, den man wahrscheinlich nicht verallgemeinern kann. Trotzdem wird man den Befund auch auf die Verhältnisse im byzantinischen Kernland übertragen können.


2. MUSLIME

Anders steht es mit den Muslimen, deren Stellung sich von der der Armenier schon aus religiösen Gründen wesentlich unterschied. Während zwischen


In ähnlicher Weise schloß 988 der fatimidische Kalif al-'Azīz billāh einen Vertrag mit Kaiser Basileios II., in dem der Kaiser sich u. a. verpflichtete, in den Moscheen von Konstantinopel das Freitagsgebet im Namen von al-'Azīz verkünden zu lassen. Es muß also mehrere Moscheen in Konstantinopel gegeben haben, die zweifellos den muslimischen Händlern und Kriegsgefangenen, aber auch Söldnern als Gebetsstätten dienten.15

Aber es war nicht nur auf solche Art erzwungene Toleranz, die die Einstellung der Byzantiner gegenüber den Muslimen prägte. Die Quellen sagen zwar nicht viel aus, aber es scheint für Muslime prinzipiell nicht unmöglich gewesen zu sein, auch im byzantinischen Staatsdienst außerhalb der Armee Karriere zu machen.

Ein Beispiel hierfür bietet der Fall des Χασὲ υἱὸς τοῦ Ἰούβη, wie er in den griechischen Quellen genannt wird, also des Chase, des Sohnes des Ioube, was wahrscheinlich eine griechische Entsprechung des arabischen Namens al-Ḥasan b. Ayyūb sein dürfte. Dieser Chase war arabischer Herkunft. Die Namensform legt nahe, daß Chase entweder selbst oder zusammen mit seinem Vater nach Byzanz gekommen ist. Sein jüngerer Bruder hieß Niketas. Wahrscheinlich deutet die Beibehaltung seines arabischen Namens auch darauf hin, daß Chase es, im Gegensatz zu Niketas, ablehnte, zum Christentum überzutreten. In einer Quelle wird klar erklärt, daß er von sarazenischer Abkunft gewesen und auch später in seinem ganzen Gehabe und in seinem Glaube ein Sarazene geblieben sei: Ὁ γὰρ Χασὲ ἐκεῖνος, ὁ ἐκ Σαρακηνῶν τῷ γένει ὁρμώμενος, Σαρακηνὸς δὲ τῷ ὄντι τῇ γνώμῃ καὶ τῷ τρόπῳ καὶ τῇ λατρείᾳ διατελῶν.16

Chase war ein Vertrauter des Kaisers Alexandros (912–13), den er – was bei einem überzeugten Sarazen natürlich unvermeidlich sein mußte – negativ beeinflußt haben soll. Er führte den Titel eines Protospatharios und hatte ein höheres Amt in der Provinz Hellas inne. Den Quellen zufolge war er bei den Einwohnern außerordentlich unbeliebt. Schließlich hätten sie seine Verschwendungssucht und seine unersättliche Gier nicht länger ertragen und ihn daher im Altarraum der Kirche des Parthenon in Athen gesteinigt.17


Lassen wir die Invektiven gegen den Sarazen Chases einmal beiseite, ergibt sich, daß hier ein Muslim ein Staatsamt innehatte, obwohl er nicht zum Christentum übergetreten war. Solche Übertritte gab es sicher häufiger, obwohl sie in den Quellen nur selten thematisiert werden. In der schon genannten ‘Prospopraphie der mittelbyzantinischen Zeit’ kennen wir gerade vier. Umgekehrt sind es immerhin zehn, darunter sogar ein Priester, der nach seinem Übertritt ein bekannter und erfolgreicher arabischer Befehlshaber wurde.18


Von grundsätzlichen Verfolgungen von Muslimen in Byzanz ist in den Quellen, wie schon gesagt, eigentlich nichts zu finden.

Nicht viel anders verhält es sich mit den lateinischen Christen in byzantinischen Diensten. Relevant wird dieses Problem allerdings erst ab dem 11. Jahrhundert, als Lateiner in größeren Zahlen nach Byzanz kamen und sich dort auch für längere Zeit oder sogar permanent niederließen, sei es als Söldner, als Exulanten oder auch als Kaufleute, die in ihren eigenen Quartieren lebten. In diesen Quartieren hatten sie eigene Kirchen, die mit der byzantinischen Kirchenorganisation nichts zu tun hatten, sondern ihren Heimatkirchen und damit letztendlich dem Papst in Rom unterstanden. Zu Problemen scheint das nicht geführt zu haben, obwohl Rom und Konstantinopel seit 1054 ja durch ein Schisma getrennt waren. Die ökonomischen Interessen überwogen in diesem Fall allem Anschein nach die religiösen Unterschiede.21

19 Ibid., pp. 249,40–250,42.
20 Leonis Diaconi Caloënsis Historiae Libri Decem et Liber de Velitatione Bellica Nicephori Augusti, 9,6, ed. Charles Benoît Hase (Bonn, 1828), pp. 149,2–12; 8, pp. 152,19 – 153,8; Skylitzes, Synopsis historiarum, ed. Thurn, pp. 249,40 – 250,42; 304,91 – 305,7; 308,97–9.

3. PAULIKIANER


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der Paulikianer, und die Mitglieder der Sekt wurden getötet, in die Sklaverei geführt oder konnten vielleicht auch fliehen. In jedem Fall war es mit der Sekt dam damit vorbei. – Denken wir, denn tatsächlich war das durchaus nicht der Fall.


Tatsächlich wurden – im Gegensatz zu dem von den Quellen erweckten Eindruck – nicht einmal die Wohnsitze der Paulikianer völlig zerstört, denn ein Jahrhundert später forderte der Patriarch Theodoros II. von Antiocheia den Kaiser Johannes I. Tzimiskes auf, endlich diese Brutstätte von Häretekern zu vernichten. Ganz offensichtlich hatten viele paulikianischen Siedlungen also überlebt. Tzimiskes, der aus anderen Gründen dieses Verlangen nicht ablehnen konnte, siedelte die Paulikianer aus Kleinasien nach Thrakien um, wo sie um die Stadt Philippopolis neuen Lebensraum fanden. Auch dort wurden sie keineswegs unterdrückt, sondern scheinen im Gegenteil Stadt und Region in den folgenden Jahren mehr oder weniger kontrolliert zu haben, denn noch einmal ein Jahrhundert später sah Kaiser Alexios I. Komnenos sich genötigt, Philippopolis zu besetzen und die Häreter endgültig auszuschalten. Aber der Grund war

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auch hier kein religiöser, sondern auf der Seite des Kaisers hatte eine Abteilung von Paulikianern aus Philippopolis in Stärke von 2.800 Mann gestanden, die 1081 nach einer byzantinischen Niederlage gegen die Normannen desertiert waren. Erst das veranlaßte den Kaiser zu einem schärferen Vorgehen, bei dem angeblich neben den Männern jetzt auch Frauen und Kinder gefangengenommen wurden. Man ließ ihnen die Wahl, sich taufen zu lassen oder in die Gefangenschaft zu gehen.28


Fassen wir also zusammen: Für eine eigene ethnische Diskrimination gibt es in Byzanz keine Anzeichen. Wenn sie trotzdem erfolgte, dann eigentlich immer nur zusammen mit der religiösen, wie etwa im Fall der Juden, die in der Tat immer wieder größere oder kleinere Verfolgungen erdulden mußten. Trat ein Jude dann allerdings zum Christentum über, so hörte die Diskriminierung im allgemeinen auf, und spätestens seine Kinder wurden normale Mitglieder der byzantinischen Gesellschaft und verschwinden damit zumeist auch aus unserem Blickfeld.29

Diskriminierung von Minderheiten erfolgten eigentlich nur auf zwei Gebieten, dem kulturellen und dem religiösen, wobei ersteres in der Regel nicht vom Kaiser ausging, sondern von der byzantinischen Gesellschaft selbst, will sagen: von der relativ kleinen Bildungsschicht, die eifersüchtig über ihre zumindest kulturelle Vorrangstellung wachte. Das ist ein eigenes Thema, das hier nicht diskutiert werden kann.30 Auf religiösem Gebiet hatte der Kaiser dagegen tätig zu werden. Im allgemeinen vertrat er dabei die Interessen der byzantinischen Kirche, die durch ihn ihre Rechte und Interessen im Reich durchsetzte. Aber auch hier kann man nicht von einer unnachsichtigen Verfolgung Andersgläubiger sprechen, eher von einem allgemeinen Pragmatismus: Wenn die Andersgläubigen, seien sie nun Heiden, Muslime oder Häretiker, sich einigermaßen zurückhielten und die öffentliche Ordnung nicht zu offen störten, wurden sie zwar nicht offiziell toleriert, aber eigentlich auch nicht offen verfolgt, sondern man scheint sie weitgehend in Ruhe gelassen zu haben, wobei einzelne Ausnahmen nicht gegen diese grundsätzliche Haltung sprechen. Besonders galt diese Zurückhaltung natürlich dann, wenn die Andersgläubigen von Wichtigkeit für den Kaiser waren, was in der Regel bei den fremdländischen Söldnern der Fall war, aber auch dann, wenn es sich zum Beispiel um wichtige Spezialisten in Industrie und Gewerbe handelte. Ähnliches war auch dann der Fall, wenn hinter diesen Minderheiten starke auswärtige Mächte standen, die ihrerseits mit Repressalien drohen konnten.


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The term ‘community’ has been promiscuously employed in both common sense and technical language. In an essay published in 1933, the sociologist Louis Wirth noted that the word ‘community’ ‘has been used with an abandon reminiscent of poetic licence’.1 That the term ‘identity’ is equally multidimensional, suggesting different things according to the questions asked of it, hardly needs to be pointed out.2 ‘Identity’ can be used to refer to a whole range of social-institutional roles and self-perceptions, many of which can overlap or even contradict one another at different levels of social experience and practice. All members of all societies necessarily belong to more than one such group of mutually recognized ‘identity-sets’, but they do not all belong to the same sets. Thus the identity of an individual as male or female carries with it a reservoir of ways of behaving in both public and private, and according to the specific context in which other persons of one or the other group are encountered. The situation is further modified and complicated when the individuals in question also act out some of their other social and institutional roles, such as ‘parent’, ‘soldier’, priest’, for example.3 Even social and economic status directly affect patterns of behaviour and the ways in which one’s identity is given expression – a poor man behaves differently before a rich or powerful man than before


3 The best introduction to this approach to the question of social roles, identities and the institutionalization of social practices according to context and self-image is Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, _The Social Construction of Reality_ (Harmondsworth, 1967), and Alfred Schütz, _Der sinnhafte Aufbau der sozialen Welt_ (Vienna, 1960).
his peers, and vice versa. The expression of social and cultural (including, of course, moral-ethical) values is modified according to the context, in order that the individual can give expression to his or her understanding of ‘self’, and present the desired version felt to be most appropriate (or necessary, if ulterior motives are present) to the situation. At the same time, social interaction also embodies sets of power relations, so that not all individuals or groups are able to present the identity they would (or think they would) prefer in every situation (for example feelings of inferiority or superiority affect such situations very markedly). Thus different sets of identities, based on appropriate patterns of socially determined and culturally normative behaviour, have different values according to the context in which they function. This is especially important if we are not to oversimplify identities and notions of community. A hierarchy of interests, in which now one aspect, now another, comes to the fore, seems to inform most human social interaction. Observable social praxis is often the result of clashes and contradictions generated by a specific context in which an individual or group of people have to adopt a particular identity for that particular context. It is by analysing situations like this that the historian can try to see how such contradictions evolve, how they present themselves and are ‘understood’, and how they are resolved, an approach that offers some insight into the structure of causal relationships leading to historical change.

In looking at patterns of communal identity, in consequence, it is important to try to locate the context perceived by those who express a particular identity, either for themselves or for others, in order to understand how identity was established, in what context and for what purposes (which may, of course, remain entirely implicit in the minds of those concerned) it is being used. It can be important to distinguish, for example, whether particular identities are adopted in a context of instrumentality or one of solidarity: does an individual adopt a particular identity in order to achieve a local, personal objective to do with the immediate conditions of their own individual existence or do they adopt a particular identity in order to be classed as members of a wider group, sharing common ritual and institutional observances, modes of dress, public behaviour and so on? The two are not mutually exclusive. Under what conditions, for example, does a person describe themselves merely as a Christian, and under what conditions would he or she refer to themselves as an orthodox Christian? When do subjects of the East Roman emperors describe themselves by their city or district of origin, rather than by other criteria? These are all questions about the

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4 Indeed, such degrees of differentness are also embodied in law: see, for example, Evelyne Patlagean, *Pauvreté économique et pauvreté sociale à Byzance*, Civilisations et sociétés, 48 (Paris, 1977), pp. 25–7.

conscious identities adopted, or professed, by those referred to in the sources. And we need also to be aware of which identities were imposed from outside a group in order to describe it to other outsiders and which were adopted as a means of self-demarcation in the wider social world. From our own point of view as historians of these social formations, it is equally possible – indeed, necessary – to apply or generate identities from our own standpoint as observers, in order to try to explain certain phenomena, identities that may never have been, and in some contexts could never have been, explicitly recognized by those to whom we apply them, but which serve useful heuristic or analytical purpose (such as ‘lower classes’ or ‘social elite’ or ‘imperial bureaucracy’ and so on).

Leaving to one side for the moment the sort of narrowly circumscribed social-functional identities referred to already (male, parent, relative and so on), there seem to be several major categories or types of ‘communal’ identity that occur in Byzantine sources during the period with which we are concerned. Broadly speaking, these are covered by five main headings: religion; race and language; region (which usually overlaps with the previous group); public function (for example soldier, priest); and, depending on context and culture, perceived social origin and solidarities. Identities from one set often overlap, in respect of the values attributed to them, with identities from another – for example Isaurian = highlander = barbarian = good soldier = not very Hellenized and so forth. Identities are always potentially conflicted – where do the boundaries lie between ‘us’ and ‘them’ or ‘the other’, and under what circumstances are such difference-markers or boundaries invoked or evoked? There are plenty of examples of attributed characteristics that suggest a specific communal identity in respect of city or region of origin, for example, and which are represented through the assumption or evocation of ‘different from’ or alterity. Interpretations of culturally differentiating social praxis linked to concepts of ethnic identity owe a great deal to the work of Fredrik Barth, who stressed precisely the issue of

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7 Sex and gender are perhaps the most fundamental distinctions, of course, but they remain for the most part implicit in cultural discourse, especially in the contexts with which we will deal in this chapter.
boundary-forming actions in constituting identities and solidarities.\(^8\) One need only read the *Life* of Theodore of Sykeon, for the late sixth and early seventh century, or that of Theophanes the Confessor (or indeed the introductory section of any saint’s *Life* of the sixth to tenth century) to realize that the terms *patris* (homeland/place of origin), especially in respect of town or village, and *genos* (Cappadocian, Paphlagonian and so on) carried implicit assumptions about identity, whether imposed or adopted.\(^9\) In many cases, specific characteristics are associated with particular groups. For the writer of the *Miracles of Artemios*, written down during the 660s in Constantinople, it is a well-known fact that Alexandrians speak Greek with a comic accent.\(^10\) An Egyptian watchman prays for help to the saint, invoking in particular the fact that Artemios was the *doux kai Augoustalios* in his own home town, suggesting thereby that a feeling of common identity would be taken for granted in such a case.\(^11\) Silicians are quick to anger,\(^12\) young men are impetuous.\(^13\) Similarly, in the *Questions and Answers* of

\(^8\) See the essays in Fredrik Barth (ed.), *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (Boston, 1969).

\(^9\) *Vie de Théodore de Sykéon*, ed. André Festugière, *Subsidia Hagiographica*, 48 (2 vols, Brussels, 1970) (cf. BHG\(^3\) 1748); Methodios, *Vita S. Theophanis Confessoris*, ed. Vasilij Latysev, ‘Methodii Patriarchae Constantinopolitanitii Vita S. Theophanis Confessoris’, *Zapiski Russ. Akademii Nauk*, 8th ser., 13 (1918): 4 (BHG\(^3\) 17872). See also *Theophanis Chronographia*, ed. Carl de Boor (2 vols, Leipzig, 1883–85), vol. 1, pp. 3–12, 13–27, for alternative versions. It is, of course, also a *topos* of such hagiographies to begin with place of birth and, often, regional or ethnic identity. But this merely emphasizes the point made here. Ethnic or racial identity has been the subject of much recent debate, particularly with reference to the early medieval West and the ethnogenesis (or origins) of a range of ‘peoples’ (or groups) and the ways in which a range of markers such as dress, language, religion and so forth, as well as literary and oral tradition, were manipulated, exploited or evoked to generate functional distinctions relevant to specific political as well as cultural moments. See, for example, the essays in Helmut Reimitz and Walter Pohl (eds), *Strategies of Distinction: The Construction of Ethnic Communities*, 300–800, The Transformation of the Roman World, 2 (Leiden, 1998); Richard Corradini, Rob Meens, Christina Pössel and Philip Shaw (eds), *Texts and Identities in the Early Middle Ages* (Vienna, 2006); Walter Pohl (ed.), *Die Suche nach den Ursprüngen. Von der Bedeutung des frühen Mittelalters*, Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters, 8 (Vienna, 2004); Walter Pohl and Maximilian Diesenberger (eds), *Integration und Herrschaft. Ethnische Identitäten und soziale Organisation im Frühmittelalter* (Vienna, 2002).


\(^12\) *Miracles*, 26, ed. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, p. 37,15–17; Nesbitt and Crysafulli, p. 149.

Anastasios of Sinai, Cypriots are regarded as particularly hardy because of the climate of their homeland; and in a qualitatively different mode of ‘identity’, the poor are irresponsibly prolific (like the Bedouin of the desert) and so on.\(^{14}\) In a tenth-century strategical manual, Armenians are represented as notoriously untrustworthy and irresponsible, unless commanded by ‘Byzantine’ (which does not mean Greek in the ethnic or even linguistic sense) officers.\(^{15}\) These examples are important, for while they are not all concerned with ‘community’ or ‘communal identity’ in the usual sense, they show that, according to who reads or listens to such material, one identity usually carries with it a host of other possible identities, which may or may not be realized by the context in which it is employed, and which may or may not all be known or understood by the different groups hearing or using the identity-term in question.\(^{16}\) They also suggest that the caricature-like accounts of various barbarian peoples, as represented, for example, in the descriptions of western Germanic peoples or the Persians, in texts such as the *Strategikon* of Maurice (late sixth century), implied common and recognizable ‘identities’ used to differentiate, in these examples, Roman from non-Roman or – as in the examples from the *Miracles of Artemios* – metropolitan from provincial.\(^{17}\) Such examples, especially where Roman and

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\(^{14}\) Anastasii Sinaitae Quaestiones et Responsiones, ed. Marcel Richard and Joseph Munitiz, CC SG, 59 (Turnhout, 2006), qu. 26, 2; 4; qu. 28, 16; qu. 81, 3.


\(^{16}\) For work that deals with different aspects of the ‘Byzantine identity’, see Gill Page, *Being Byzantine: Greek Identity before the Ottomans* (Cambridge, 2008), esp. pp. 7–10, 11–21; and from a very different perspective and set of research questions, the important collective volume Arietta Papaconstantinou and Alice-Mary Talbot (eds), *Becoming Byzantine: Children and Childhood in Byzantium* (Washington DC, 2009).

non-Roman are to be distinguished, litter the pages of a wide range of texts from the late Roman through the whole of the Byzantine period. The history of the term Hellene is illustrative.\(^\text{18}\) Equally, some of the ‘identities’ imposed upon or carried by certain individuals or groups represent a ‘common sense’ which may cross cultural boundaries, both in the historical period in question, as well as across many generations: the often negative views of members of the ‘older’ generation on young men, for example, an anthropological commonplace in modern industrial societies, but no less obvious in the writings of Procopius of Caesarea and others about the young members of the Blue and Green ‘factions’ in the cities of the eastern Roman Empire in the sixth and early seventh centuries; or the ways in which familial associations and relationships were constructed into both actual networks of social power as well as symbols of a particular identity.\(^\text{19}\)

Roman in contrast to non-Roman is one of the most obvious ‘communal’ identities found in texts of the sixth to eighth century. Re-affirming boundaries, between the Orthodox, identified with the Chosen People, and the non-Orthodox ‘outside’ world (whether geographically or spiritually), played a particularly central role; and although this was by no means a novel aspect of Christian thinking, it was the context of seventh-century change that gave it an added dimension.\(^\text{20}\) This is perhaps most apparent outside the territories remaining to

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the empire after about 640, where the political authority of the Roman emperor was no longer relevant, but where different communities existed in a new, and potentially threatening, political context. Chalcedonian fears about both Islam and, more particularly, non-Chalcedonian, especially Monophysite, Christians are very obvious in the writings of Anastasius of Sinai, for example. Issues of purity, boundary-drawing and differentiating orthodox from unorthodox or heretical practice are paramount in many of the Questions and Answers, as well as in the diēgēmata or narrationes attributed to this prolific writer, organizer and traveller. The seventh century saw the evolution of a particularly pronounced desire to establish what counted as Roman/Orthodox and what not, to fix metaphorical (and physical) boundaries between two worlds. It is apparent in anti-Jewish polemic, which becomes particularly strident at this period, as well as in hagiographical writings, where Christian mores and behaviour, expressed especially through the faith in the miraculous powers of saints and their relics or icons, are compared with those of doubters, heretics and barbarians. It is equally apparent in imperial propaganda, both in respect of internal challenges to the authority of emperors, as well as in differentiating the God-protected


21 See John F. Haldon, ‘The works of Anastasius of Sinai: a key source for the history of seventh-century east Mediterranean society and belief’, in Averil Cameron and Lawrence Conrad (eds), The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East I: Problems in the Literary Source Material (Princeton, 1992), pp. 107–47. To what extent the ideas presented in the literary sources reflected accurately the beliefs and attitudes of the mass of the population is very difficult to judge. Given the fact, however, that these notions were presented in a range of sources – miracle literature, apocalyptic, homiletic and so forth – which would have been read out to congregations and audiences throughout the Christian world, I see no reason to doubt that the great majority of the Christian population of the various regions of the empire would have been broadly familiar with the main ideas they contain. We would argue that they were not just Constantinopolitan, but had a much wider currency (although there may well have been local inflections of different elements of this ‘bundle’ of ideological elements, about which we know nothing at all).


The reasons for this insistence can be most readily found in the beleaguered situation of the seventh-century East Roman state. But longer-term shifts in the perceptions of members of East Roman society at the end of the sixth and beginning of the seventh century also played a crucial role. Attitudes to the relationship between emperor and Christian subjects, as well as to the ways to obtain divine counsel, had been changing from the middle of the sixth century especially, and these changes now worked themselves out through the transformations generated by the wars and social-economic dislocation of the seventh century. The emphasis in both the expression of ordinary people’s feelings about their religion and the way the emperors felt they could best present themselves as fulfilling their God-given mission are revised. The impoverishment of the central government and the consequent increase in fiscal pressure on the tax-paying population, partly the long-term results of Justinian’s wars of reconquest, as well as intermittent social and religious conflict within the empire, all played a role in this. The peasant population of the empire suffered at the hands of an oppressive bureaucracy and from heavy taxation, as well as from banditry and the warfare of the later sixth century. This is not to argue that there was necessarily a direct link between alterations or continuities in day-to-day perceptions and practice, on the one hand, and the events or contexts in which they are inscribed, on the other. But through efforts to understand how the world works and how it is changing, the narratives of social existence,


25 This is clearly expressed in Justin II’s novel of 566 rescinding tax arrears (Jus Graecoromanum, ed. I. and P. Zepos (8 vols, Athens, 1931/Aalen, 1962), vol. 1, Coll. I, Nov. i) and in that of Tiberius II, issued in 575, cancelling a year’s tax demands (spread over a four-year period) (Jus Graecoromanum, ed. I. and P. Zepos, vol. 1, Coll. I, Nov. xi). The impoverishment of the agricultural producers throughout the empire is the main reason given for these imperial acts of generosity.

mediated through language, are altered and eventually transformed. What the written sources give us is a description of social practice and beliefs as particular observers see them. It is from the analysis of these assumptions, where they can be grasped, that historians can attempt to locate contemporary ideas about the way human and divine agencies affect the world, and hence focus on the underlying causes of changes in patterns of belief and behaviour.27

The evidence for the changes in the way people appear to have responded to imperial authority and the ecclesiastical establishment, whether in writing or in ‘political’ action, seems to hint at such shifts in attitudes. An increasing emphasis on symbolic referents such as particular saints, heavenly intercessors and their accompaniments, relics in particular,28 as well as worries about the role played by those who practised a more informal spiritual authority, hermits and holy men, spiritual leaders and members of the monastic community, all represent important elements in this picture. These features were not entirely new. But the evolving situation of the later sixth century, following the visible contraction of the empire under Justinian’s successors, gave them a heightened significance.29 The imperial establishment itself was caught up in these shifts in the last thirty years of the sixth century, perhaps in an effort to re-orientate the divergent trends within late Roman culture around the symbolism of the imperial state and the Christ-loving emperors at Constantinople. Ceremonial, as well as attitudes to religious and foreign policy, would suggest as much.30

Questions of community and identity played just as fundamental a role in the newly evolving Islamic polity, too. For Arabs the terms ‘Arab’ and ‘Muslim’, for example, were by no means taken as synonymous, although in the Byzantine and Christian sources they are generally used in this way.31 But within the new

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27 For some comments on narrative construction and the ways in which texts provide indicators of perceived realities, see John F. Haldon, ‘Ideology and social change in the seventh century: military discontent as a barometer’, Klío, 68 (1986): 139–90, esp. 145–54, with literature.


31 See the useful survey of Elizabeth Mary Jeffreys, ‘The image of the Arabs in Byzantine literature’, in The 17th International Byzantine Congress, Major Papers (New York,
Islamic world there were not only long-standing distinctions between settled and nomadic, urban and rural groups, between community and confessional identities and solidarities, just as in the formerly East Roman world. New distinctions became significant as the new political formation evolved, as new patterns of power relations took form and generated new solidarities and oppositions. New patterns of communal identity and new types of vested interest identity were generated, so that, while in many cases the older structure of social fissions and solidarities continued in existence, it was overlaid by a different vocabulary and semantics which helped people situate themselves in their world, informed their beliefs and perceptions, and guided their actions in their dealings with their fellows. One of the most obvious terms of inclusion or exclusion in the Islamic sources is the notion of tribal identity, but this brings with it a host of problems in respect of what it meant for those who used it (or read or heard about it) and what we understand by it. In Syria substantial Arab settlements existed near a number of cities, and there existed long before the Muslim conquest a considerable population of seasonal Arab pastoralists and transhumants, closely related by dint of both language and tribal connections, real or imagined, to both the Bedouin and settled populations of the Arabian peninsula. Their regular presence in their summer camps meant that they were well integrated into the rural and urban economic networks of Syria through trading and other forms of exchange relationships. In many districts the Arab element was as numerous as the native Aramaean population, and there is good evidence of an influx of Arabs into ‘Roman’ regions of southern Syria and Transjordan in the later sixth and early seventh century, accompanied also by a process of sedentarization. Large numbers of these ‘Syrian’ Arabs adopted Islam or were assimilated into the military effort of the new Arab Islamic power in the opening phases of the conquests, although many of them remained strongly attached to their (Monophysite) Christianity as well as to traditional forms of religious belief. This made the picture of ‘tribal’ identities in Syria, and also


in Iraq, especially complicated, since pre-conquest and post-conquest groups claimed particular ‘tribal’ allegiances that were often full of contradictions to the outside observer, but informed much of their sense of self-identity, their political life and their political and ideological affiliations. The issue is made more complex since the term ‘tribe’, now generally abandoned by anthropologists, can mean so many different things and is, perhaps, more misleading than it is helpful.33

What we would like to look at in the following are particular cases of communal identity, not in the sense of a geographically located community, nor indeed of a religious community, nor again in the sense of ‘tribal’ or familial connections (which, indeed, cut through such identities), but in the sense of a community identified by common practices, vested interests, social position and, often, shared ideological perspectives. To a certain extent, this definition is embraced also by Ferdinand Tönnies’ notion of Gemeinschaft, as opposed to Gesellschaft (later taken up by Max Weber, of course), representing a more intimate set of relationships than the latter term.34

But since the topic of ‘society’ has been raised, we might, before proceeding further, add also a cautionary word on the use of this term, which may often mislead.35 The concept as well as the term ‘society’ or ‘social system’ is problematic from several points of view, chiefly because it can suggest that a particular set of social relations is bounded or somehow entirely distinct from, separated from, the other social systems around it.36 But this can only rarely be the case, since even if there are, for example, religious-ideological boundaries, the people of different creeds on either side will inevitably have certain things in common, such as agrarian practices and domestic economic organization, at least in situations where climate and seasonal factors are common to both. Byzantine peasants in the Balkans were hardly very different in these respects

33 For discussion, see most recently Richard Tapper, ‘Anthropologists, historians, and tribespeople on tribe and state formation in the Middle East’, in Philip S. Khoury and Joseph Kostiner (eds), Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East (Berkeley, Los Angeles, 1990), pp. 48–73, and Maurice Godelier, ‘The concept of the “tribe”: a crisis involving merely a concept or the empirical foundations of anthropology itself?’, in Maurice Godelier, Perspectives in Marxist Anthropology, trans. Robert Brain (Cambridge, 1973), pp. 70–96 (both very critical of the arguments and definitional criteria put forward by, among many others, Morton Herbert Fried, The Notion of Tribe (Menlo Park, Calif., 1975) and Marshall Sahlins, Tribesmen (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1968)).


36 For an eloquent statement of why this cannot be the case, with an alternative approach, see Michael Mann, The Sources of social Power, vol. 1: A History of Power from the Beginnings to A.D. 1760 (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 1–33.
from their Bulgar and Slav neighbours, nor can Byzantine peasants in southern or eastern Asia Minor have differed greatly in the seasonal practices that dominated their agrarian existences from similar communities on the other side of the political divide. Yet at a different level there were real and obvious differences – in habits of worship, in language and perhaps dress, the vocabulary and expression, and the instrumental value attributed to different positions within a set of kinship relations and so forth. In other words, there are multiple, layered overlaps crossing over the political, religious or linguistic divisions we commonly identify as marking the boundaries of a given society, and we need to bear this in mind, especially when discussing, for example, such topics as the changing impact of religion on marriage, on local and customary legal practice, the seasonal patterns of social and economic life, and so forth. Such overlaps can play a role in perceptions, too – the well-known commonalities represented in the epic of Digenis Akrites between the Roman and Arab frontier lords, for example, in respect of notions of honour and social status, set them apart from the more urbane and court-oriented worlds of Constantinople or Aleppo or Damascus or Baghdad. 37

What we refer to as ‘Byzantine society’ or ‘Islamic society’ (an even grosser over-simplification, given the range of geographical and cultural variations across the Islamic world), therefore, must necessarily be understood in the widest sense, as elements within a number of social systems that overlapped and intersected at various points, not just in terms of physical space – around the edges, so to speak – but also in terms of social practice, household organization and so forth. Eastern Roman or Byzantine society grew up out of the late Roman world just as did the societies around it, in particular the social worlds of Italy and the Balkans and the Near and Middle East, and in consequence, while sharing certain characteristics, they diverged in many others. They perceived themselves as very different yet at the same time functioned in many respects in much the same way, for the relationship between human beings and their physical environment represented a constant, determining the patterns and seasonality of life from bottom to top.

A community of interest generates just as structured an identity, or set of identities, as any other type of community, after all. 38 Depending on the prevailing conditions, it can arise at a regional level (‘provincial’ identity – perhaps including also ethnic/linguistic solidarities), in a given centre of


population (urban or village identity), as an affirmation of shared status or group identity (participation in a specific activity or membership of a particular association – Blues, Greens) and so on; in other words, a combination of spatial and behavioural identities may be operating. The group we wish to introduce here, which was extremely large, was distinguished not only by its juridical status, but also by its organizational capacities and, frequently, by its clothing and appearance. It was a group that had existed as long as the Roman state, although its fortunes changed considerably over time, and even from region to region. Its members did not necessarily share the same language, although there was a specific linguistic register common to all. It was also distinguished from the rest of society by virtue of the fact that it occasionally posed a serious threat to the normal existence of other subjects of the emperors. We are speaking, of course, of soldiers, although it will become very clear that the sorts of identities present in the late Roman world in this respect did not exist in the Islamic context, where a whole range of factors militated against such a perception.

Let us begin by presenting some evidence for the way in which soldiers in the late Roman world of the sixth and seventh centuries can be said to possess a ‘communal’ identity, in the sense of an identity of interest as described above. The first point to emphasize is that from the time of the Republic, soldiers had enjoyed a particular legal status, inscribed in Roman law, modified and altered during the first century and a half of the Principate. A central element in this was the existence of a specific military peculium, which meant the right of disposal of property gained through their state service or through inheritance freely, without reference to the lex Falcidia, according to which property had to be apportioned among specific groups of relatives before its dispersal elsewhere. They enjoyed a range of fiscal privileges also, which set them apart from the civil population of the empire, notably freedom for their families from extraordinary state impositions and corvées.39

A second point is that soldiers were to a degree independent of other social
loyalties, serving the state in a more or less unmediated way in a purely military
hierarchy of power. They acted together to their common advantage, both at
a highly localised level (local mutinies, for example) and on a more general
basis (supporting a coup d’état, for example, or opposing orders which were felt
adversely to affect their interests, such as the Danube forces in 601 and 602). In
the context of the sixth century or the later fifth century, soldiers’ opposition
to the state authorities were generally connected with questions of service –
late pay, bad supplies, inadequate compensation for hardship, over-zealous
officers, and so on. The military unrest which is described in the sources for
this time cannot be connected with any sort of ideological interest, except in
the very narrowest sense. There does not appear to be any marked desire to
intervene in imperial or provincial politics, except to obtain better conditions.
Soldiers’ grievances were connected to their immediate economic situation and
conditions, and this also lent to them a specific common identity.40

Soldiers were also picked out by being ‘constitutionally’ inscribed in the
formal structures of the expression of imperial power – their traditional role in
respect of imperial accessions, along with the senate and people, was generally
recognized and, although it cannot be proved, may well have been invoked at
times of crisis by their leaders. Although this role was weakened during the
later fifth and sixth centuries, it retained its legitimacy, as the events during
the days preceding the accession of Justin I would suggest, for example.41

see Brian Campbell, The Emperor and the Roman Army, 31 B.C –A.D. 235 (Oxford, 1984),
pp. 210–36; Peter Garnsey, Social Status and Legal Privilege in the Roman Empire (Oxford, 1970),
pp. 245ff.; Ramsay MacMullen, Soldier and Civilian in the Roman Empire (Cambridge, Mass.,
(1958): 152–234. Soldiers’ property derived, by whatever means, through their military
service was defined as idioktêton: see Ecloga. Das Gesetzbuch Leons III. und Konstaninos’ V.,
ed. Ludwig Burgmann, Forschungen zur byzantinischen Rechtsgeschichte, X (Frankfurt
am Main, 1983), xvi, 1; peculium castrense was differentiated in classical Roman law from
property derived through inheritance or other income not connected with military
service. For the changes introduced during the eighth century, see John Haldon, ‘Military
service, military lands, and the status of soldiers: current problems and interpretations’,

40 Such conclusions are supported by Kaegi’s analysis of military unrest in the
fifth and sixth centuries: Walter Kaegi, Byzantine Military Unrest 471–843: An Interpretation
(Amsterdam, 1981). Kaegi stresses the combination of maladministration, irregular pay
and bad treatment at the hands of corrupt or incompetent officers that prevailed: see esp.
pp. 64–153. See also Jones, Later Roman Empire, vol. 2, pp. 677ff., 1035–7, and comments in
Haldon, ‘ideology and social change’, pp. 141f.

41 See, in particular, Hans-Georg Beck, Senat und Volk von Konstantinopel. Probleme der
byzantinischen Verfassungsgeschichte, Sitzungsber. d. Bayer. Akad. d. Wiss., phil.-hist. KI.,
1966,6 (Munich, 1966) (repr. in Hans-Georg Beck, Ideen und Realitäten in Byzanz (London,
1972), XII), pp. 4–12, and Otto Treitinger, Die oströmische Kaiser- und Reichsidee nach ihrer
Just as importantly for their sense of self-definition as a group, soldiers were regarded as a specific element in the make-up of society. In the late ninth or early tenth century, the emperor Leo VI notes that they are one of the pillars of the Roman polity, along with the tillers of the soil. Unlike peasants, however, soldiers were united by common organizational imperatives, behavioural code and specialized technical language of command. The ordinary, non-military population often found themselves in conflict with the interests of the soldiers, especially where the supplying and quartering of troops was concerned.


42 See Leo VI, Taktika, IV, 1, ed. George T. Dennis, The Taktika of Leo VI: Text, Translation and Commentary (Washington DC, 2010), pp. 46f.


44 See especially the commands given in the late sixth-century Strategikon of Ps.-Maurice, at iii, 3–5, for example, which were only gradually transformed into Greek from Latin.

45 Both the military treatises and state legislation regularly urge commanders at all levels to maintain order among their soldiers, especially where they are in contact with civil populations. Compare Strategikon of Ps.-Maurice, i, 9 (on marching through Roman territory) with the strict regulations set out in Justinian, Nov. cxxx, 1–5 (a. 545) (Iustiniani Novellae, in Corpus iuris Civilis, iii, ed. Rudolf Schöll and Wilhelm Kroll (Berlin, 1928)) on the supplying of soldiers on Roman territory. In 503–505, for example, Joshua the Stylite describes the unpopularity of the large force assembled around Edessa, which constituted...
They had been guaranteed a specific place in the Christian order of things since at least the fourth century, and they were in any case the visible representatives – whether en masse or individually – of the existence of the Roman state.\(^{46}\) That this was a taken-for-granted of civil–military relations is evident in an Egyptian document of the late 630s or early 640s, in which a prayer for the success of the soldiers fighting the Arabs is preserved.\(^{47}\) They were the ‘fellow-soldiers’ of the emperors themselves, who referred to them symbolically in the ninth and tenth centuries as ‘their sons-in-law’ and saw themselves as their spiritual father.\(^{48}\)

During the later seventh century, soldiers and their leaders become more actively and more vocally involved in imperial politics, illustrated in particular by their involvement in a whole series of military-backed or -inspired rebellions and coups d’état. Grievances over conditions of service, pay, supplies, officers’ treatment of the men and so on, no longer appear in the sources as the chief grounds for mutinies or rebellions.\(^{49}\) In contrast to the sixth century, soldiers were now involved in debates on fundamental issues about the nature of their state, and the activities or abilities or orthodoxy of particular rulers, issues that reflect very clearly the sorts of questions and problems confronting society at large.\(^{50}\)

One of the most significant features in the explanation for this change was an evolution in the relationship between the state and the armies. The evidence suggests that, as the field armies were withdrawn into Asia Minor, into the

\(^{46}\) See Haldon, ‘Ideology and social change’, pp. 155–8 for sources and further literature; and for soldiers in the everyday life of Roman society, see MacMullen, Soldier and Civilian, pp. 49f., 65f., 157ff. Cf. the references in certain seventh- or eighth-century hagiographical works in which soldiers appear, invariably described by their rank or station, which signalled them out as distinct from ‘civil’ society. See, for example, the late seventh-century Miracula S. Therapontis, in Ludwig Deubner, De Incubatione capita quattuor (Leipzig, 1900), pp. 120–34 (BHG 1798) §16 (a dekarch); §19 (an Armenian soldier).


\(^{49}\) The evidence is discussed at length in Haldon, ‘Ideology and social change’, pp. 178ff.; see also Haldon, Byzantium in the Seventh Century, pp. 355–75.

regions that were henceforth to support them (and that came to be referred to also as *themata*), so they became increasingly ideologically distanced from the centre as they became more and more highly localized. Central authority over recruitment or conscription of soldiers may have been loosened. A centrally held system of registers was maintained, and we must presume that regular returns were made to the centre about the status of the armies in each district (the only evidence for how this worked comes from the later eighth and early ninth century, however). But as a consequence of greatly increased localization of the individual units making up each army, soldiers became more closely integrated into local society, a point that becomes apparent from any discussion of the way the middle Byzantine thematic administration operated. Soldiers recruited from particular localities served in the same units (as far as later evidence can suggest), tending thus to share similar loyalties and a similar ‘common sense’ of how their world worked. It should be emphasized, perhaps, that the existence of units over a long period of time in a given locality or town was, in itself, nothing new, and produced also in the fifth and sixth centuries strong local identities and ties between the soldiers of such units and their locality. Marriage into families from the locality, possession or purchase of land, acquisition of other forms of property or jobs were all quite typical for the lives of many soldiers in Egypt, Syria and Italy, from which regions the evidence is clearest, during the sixth and into the seventh century. But I would argue that a real qualitative difference was made in respect of the effects of these local loyalties and identities by the very different political and social-economic context – first, in respect of the fact that this development was relatively new for Asia Minor which, until the seventh century, had only rarely seen permanently based troops widely distributed across its provinces; second, and possibly much more importantly, in respect of the fate of urban centres in the same period.

The change in the position held by towns in the later seventh-century Byzantine world was of fundamental importance for the role soldiers were to play at this time. The transformation in the role of towns as the essential cultural, administrative and ideological bridge between province and centre, a shift in their function that begins already in the fifth century and becomes very clear by the end of the sixth century, meant that the state began to re-locate its fiscal operations in the village community. The effects of the economic and social

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51 For the evidence for this localization, see Haldon, ‘Military service, military lands and the status of soldiers’, p. 45 and n.111.


dislocation brought about by the warfare of the period after 640 (but including also the disruptive effects of the Persian campaigns in Asia Minor in the period from 610 to 626) dramatically hastened this process, resulting in an increasing localization in non-luxury exchange and market relations, as the ceramic evidence – limited and incomplete though it is – at least appears to suggest. It can hardly be coincidence that the decline in the independent political activities of Blue and Green factions in the cities of the East (as far as we know about their activities outside Constantinople at all), an urban phenomenon and the most obvious focus of popular views throughout the fifth and sixth centuries, parallels both the decline in the functional importance of cities in East Roman culture and government, and the increasingly vocal appearance of soldiers in politics. It is reasonable to interpret this higher profile in the activities of provincial soldiers as a concomitant of these developments. We can further postulate that the army appears in the sources in this light because it now came to constitute the most effective medium through which large numbers of people regularly came together, and where, we can legitimately assume, views and fears and anxieties could be expressed or formed in a public context. In consequence the army, in effect, replaces the urban populace of the empire as the voice of the provinces. To what extent local military units accurately reflected the concerns of the local civilian population remains unknown, although it is highly likely that some overlap of interests and concerns existed.

Byzantinistische Arbeiten, 56 (Berlin, 1989), for a detailed analysis of the textual and archaeological evidence concerning cities; also Helen Saradi-Mendelovici, ‘The demise of the ancient city and the emergence of the mediaeval city in the eastern Roman Empire’, Échos du Monde Classique/Classical Views, 32, n.s. 7 (1988): 365–401. Whatever the arguments for the continued importance of towns in terms of a local social role (which is hardly to be doubted) or as centres of commercial and market exchange (which depends upon the size, situation and pre-history of the town in question) at the end of the sixth and beginning of the seventh century, the evidence for the transfer by the state of its fiscal operations from towns to villages during the course of the seventh century is unequivocal. For an argument for the continued centrality of urban centres at the end of the sixth century, see Mark Whittow, ‘Ruling the late Roman and early Byzantine city: a continuous history’, Past and Present, 129 (Nov. 1990): 3–29, who illustrates the continuity of urban life and points to the nature of the change in the mode of investment in cities.


It is these factors that establish the context within which the activities of soldiers in the later seventh and early eighth century are to be interpreted and made sense of. What we see is, we would suggest, the reflection among soldiers from the provinces of the views and perceptions of ‘ordinary’ people, in a context of a rapidly changing world, which was often difficult to comprehend in the terms of the traditional sets of values of East Roman cultural norms and expectations. This gives soldiers a double importance in late seventh- and early eighth-century Byzantine society, first in terms of views expressed by them that may also have reflected those held by the rural and urban provincial population (although the question of the degree to which ordinary soldiers’ views coincided with those of their leaders is important here), and, second, in terms of relations between Constantinople and the provinces.

The interest of soldiers and their leaders in imperial affairs and in the way the empire was being governed – or misgoverned – during the second half of the seventh and first quarter of the eighth century is evident in their involvement in the series of rebellions and coups between the years 695 and 726 in particular. But it is also evident in a number of interesting cases before then. In 654, for example, soldiers and their representatives approached the exiled Maximus Confessor in Thrace to question him on slanders he was reported to have uttered against the Virgin. In 681 the soldiers of the Anatolikon thema assembled at Chrysoupolis demanded that Constantine IV should rule jointly with his two brothers, on the grounds that, since they believed in the Holy Trinity, so this should be reflected in a triumvirate of co-emperors. Their action is surely a demonstration of the fact that provincial soldiers were conscious enough of matters that seemed to them to be relevant to their own situation and to that of the empire as a whole to make their views known. Their views cannot have been too different from the provincial population, for they were by this time recruited entirely from the districts in which they were based, and probably well integrated

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57 *Maximi confessoris Gesta in primo eius exsilio*, PG 90 (Paris, 1865), cols 135–72 (BHG 1233), see 168C–169B.

into the provincial populations among whom they lived. The importance of the armies as a possible alternative power base must in any case have been apparent, as the recognition accorded them in official pronouncements might suggest – Constantine IV acknowledges their role in his sacra to the patriarch George, prior to the opening of the Sixth Ecumenical Council in Constantinople in 680. Even more obviously, Justinian II was clearly attempting to integrate the imperial armies into his scheme of authority when he listed them in his iussio of 687 as being present at his ratification of the Sixth Council, perhaps a reaction to earlier experiences. What is especially significant about this list, however, is the fact that the representatives of the thematic armies are the only representatives of the provinces – apart from them, the remaining persons listed are either officers of the imperial central administration, the parade-ground regiments of imperial guardsmen or Constantinopolitan groups such as the collegia of the City (which will have included Blues and Greens). This is a striking indication of the central role attributed to soldiers by the emperor at this time, no doubt a reflection of the importance they were perceived to hold in the structure of power relations within the state. And the soldiers themselves cannot have remained unaware of this. Not only were soldiers picked out by their juridical and probably (in many cases) also economically better-off condition from the mass of the rural population; it was they who, along with their officers, were involved in facing and repelling the incessant raids and attacks of the Arabs. They were the front line of the Orthodox world and, although there is only the faintest reflection of this in the written sources, they must have occupied a central position in the popular mind (as the prayer to which reference has already been made testifies).

To what extent soldiers based in different parts of the empire felt more or less alienated from the capital and the imperial government is very hard to discern. It is possible that the provincial troops that were allowed by the garrison to enter Constantinople in 698 with the newly proclaimed Tiberios Apsimar, and who then plundered the City, were giving vent to some hostility or resentment of the imperial capital, its inhabitants and their privileged position, just as the victorious Constantine V purportedly permitted his provincial soldiers to pillage...
parts of the City in 743. But many interpretations of these passages are possible. From later evidence, it is clear that a distinctively provincial culture did evolve, and that a mutual suspicion and, on occasion, antipathy between capital and more distant provinces did exist. The strict central control exercised over distant military commanders through centrally appointed fiscal and administrative officers described by Leo VI in his *Tactica* at the beginning of the tenth century may even at that time have been more theoretical than real. But it is clear that the emperors did attempt to rotate the higher military provincial commands on a fairly regular basis, in order to avoid too close an identity between local population, local army units and commanding officers. The evidence from the literary and sigillographic material for the later seventh and eighth centuries suggests that this was the usual pattern; the exceptions are represented by those generals who were especially trusted friends and associates of particular emperors, and who are particularly picked out by some of the literary sources (officers such as Artavasdos, the son-in-law of Leo III, for example, or the generals Michael Lachenodrakon and Lagkinos under Constantine V, to name but three). While this applied to the highest-ranking officials, however, it almost certainly applied less rigorously to the middle- and lower-ranking officers, who – like the peasant soldiers they commanded – came to be rooted in local society and identify with local interests.

Kaegi’s analysis of military unrest in the later part of the seventh, and the eighth and ninth centuries shows that local loyalties played an important part in at least some of the internecine strife that affected the provincial armies at this time. And although there was always a substantial element of permanent, standing troops in each theme, based at key strong-points or at the thematic commander’s headquarters, who may have been drawn from other regions

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62 Theophanes, *Chronographia*, p. 420,25 (trans. Mango and Scott, p. 581). In both these passages, it is *exotikoi archontes*, that is, provincial officers (presumably with their soldiers) who are responsible. But these have nothing to do with ‘half-barbarian provincial nobles’ (Paul Speck, *Artabasdos, der rechtgläubige Vorkämpfer der göttlichen Lehren*, Poikila Byzantina, 2 (Bonn, 1981), p. 310, n. 98) or foreign soldiers in the forces of Constantine V (Ralph-Johannes Lilie, *Die byzantinische Reaktion auf die Ausbreitung der Araber*, Miscellanea Byzantina Monacensia, 22 (Munich, 1976), p. 320).

63 Leo, *Taktika*, esp. iv. 33, ed. Dennis, pp. 56f.


65 A group of middle-ranking officers and landowners of provincial origins can be distinguished in the sources for the later eighth and ninth centuries: see Haldon, *Byzantine Praetorians*, pp. 331ff. and notes.


of the empire, this localization of interests seems to have played an important role in provincial affairs and relations between both commanders and their contingents, as well as the provinces and the capital. Already in the late 630s there is evidence to suggest that Heraclius began to establish a clearly delineated frontier zone, with specific military structures concentrated at key points – the passes into Asia Minor through the Taurus and Anti-Taurus mountains, for example.\(^{68}\) It is again very likely that this also promoted the generation of strong local identities tied to the districts from which many of the soldiers will have come and which they had to defend. There are other, somewhat different examples of local-regional identities generated by military units also, especially in the context of state policy, which could also contribute to the creation of new identities. The case of the Mardaites of the Lebanon, who as a local, highly motivated force, with a clear sense of identity and solidarity (both objective and subjective), plagued the Islamic forces and civil authorities in the region during the 670s and 680s, is illustrative.\(^{69}\) Similarly, the so-called Gotthograikoi seem to reflect another example of an identity based in military activity as well as ethnic differentness. Although originally an elite corps recruited from Germanic sources (probably in Italy and the Balkans) by Tiberius II, transferred to Bithynia probably only after the middle of the seventh century on a permanent basis, they seem already by the early eighth to have evolved a strong sense of communal identity, and a reputation to go with it.\(^{70}\) Likewise, the various groups of Slav prisoners transferred by Constans II and Justinian II to Asia Minor, from whom soldiers were also recruited, generated their own, geographically localized cultural identity.\(^{71}\) But these are not, strictly speaking, examples resulting from


\(^{69}\) Lilie, *Die byzantinische Reaktion*, pp. 105–8, notes that the Mardaites were probably not as effective as later Byzantine stories about them, followed by more recent historiography, would have it. But they provide nevertheless a relevant example of communal identity and solidarity in a military context. For a full account, see Hans Ditten, *Ethnische Verschiebungen zwischen der Balkanhalbinsel und Kleinasien vom Ende des 6. bis zur zweiten Hälfte des 9. Jahrhunderts*, Berliner Byzantinistische Arbeiten, 59 (Berlin, 1993), pp. 138–58.


an identity generated by a specifically military institutional status, reflecting rather cultural, ethnic and linguistic difference, partly in an alien context.

The highly dispersed nature of the Byzantine defensive forces is reflected in the much later treatise on guerrilla strategy written during the reign of Nicephorus II (963–69), but there is little doubt – from the accounts of the warfare of this period preserved in the synoptic Chronographia of the monk Theophanes – that such a dispersal had occurred well before the end of the seventh century. But there is such a dearth of empirical data from the literary record for the nature of the relations between the provinces and the capital during the seventh and eighth centuries that it is difficult to say anything about attitudes or identities. The conflicts between different themata and between the latter and the central government described by Kaegi suggest that strongly held views about the status of thematic forces, or about central attitudes to particular armies and their commanders, certainly existed. But except in the most general sense it is impossible to say in what those views consisted. The sources regularly refer to the themata or armies as unitary blocs which act as such, which joined together with, or opposed, other thema divisions according to the political conjuncture, and which clearly possessed an identity based on the regions of their recruitment, their unit traditions and – possibly – also certain local cultural or linguistic characteristics. Mentions of ‘the men of the Armeniakon’ (or Opsikion, or Anatolikon and so on) illustrate the nature of these identities and solidarities, at least as far as the soldiers themselves were concerned. In accounts of the various military coups and rebellions of the later seventh and early eighth century certain units are picked out by the commentators as especially troublesome, such as the so-called Gothograikoi of the Opsikion thema, probably descendants of Gothic and Lombard mercenary forces of the later sixth century established in Bithynia. Indeed, the Opsikion thema itself appears to have played a central role in imperial politics throughout the second half of the seventh and the first half of the eighth century, partly because of its geographical position (in north-west Asia Minor, covering the approaches to Constantinople) and the


fact that its commander was based in both Nicaea and Constantinople; partly because it supplied the garrison soldiers for the imperial capital at this time. It was this very visible identity, and the very real threat it posed to the emperors in Constantinople, that encouraged Constantine V (who had suffered particularly during the rebellion of Artavasdos in 741–42, when he had been abandoned by the Opsikion forces) eventually to set up his own elite units in the capital, the tagmata, as a counter-weight. But its identity as a distinct regional and military entity was no stronger than that of the other ‘thematic’ or regional armies, as is well illustrated by the changing fortunes of the Italian forces under the Exarch, based at Ravenna, between the 640s and 650s (when the Italian forces carried out imperial orders with little opposition) to the 680s and 690s (when they refused to support imperial emissaries against the Pope). Regional identities certainly also played a role in emperors’ views of the reliability of different armies. Constantine V seems to have recruited his first tagmatic soldiers from the eastern regions of the empire, perhaps a reflection of their political loyalties at the time, deliberately distancing them from soldiers nearer the capital. Later emperors, from Eirene on, followed a similar policy – Eirene herself promoted a field unit from a different region to be her own bodyguard, the Vigla; Nicephorus I introduced the phoideratoi (originally the foederati of the sixth century) to Constantinople for a while, by this time a tourma of the Anatolikon region based in, and closely identified with, Lykaonia, possibly because of his own family connections with the region; and so on. It is difficult to argue from this evidence that regionalism and local identities increased or grew in the seventh century. Such identities seem always to have existed to some degree. What is new is that local identities now develop that coincide also with the state’s evolving military circumscriptions, so that there appears for the first time since the third century a serious political threat to central authority based on provincial military identities, loyalties and points of view. As already noted, this is most apparent in the activities of the Opsikion soldiers in and around Constantinople. But they were by no means its only representatives.

To sum up the discussion so far, however, it would seem reasonable to conclude that one of the cumulative results of the changes that occurred between the later sixth and later seventh centuries was a certain diminution of the ‘separateness’ of the position of soldiers, as they became more closely associated with the provinces from which they were recruited and in which they were stationed. In a sense, then, while the military in the provinces remained distinct because of

74 Ibid., pp. 191–210, 228ff.
75 The issue is dealt with in detail by Guillou, Régionalisme et indépendence and Brown, Gentlemen and Officers.
77 Haldon, Byzantine Praetorians, pp. 236–52.
When we look at the Islamic side of the frontier, the evolution of the military is very different. In the ‘tribal’ societies of pre-Islamic Arabia, there was no concept of soldiers being separate from the rest of society. It is true, of course, that some members of tribes must have been more able in military skills than others and that some tribes had a more militant reputation than their neighbours. Some groups are described as *ḍaʾīf*, unable to bear arms and dependent on tribesmen for their protection, but the *ḍuʿafāʾ* were a marginal minority and did not in any sense form a ‘civilian’ population. In normal circumstances, all fighters were adult and male but beyond that there were no real distinctions between soldier and civilian.

The early development of the Islamic state altered this but did not immediately lead to the appearance of a defined military class. As has been explained in a previous paper in the Late Antiquity and Early Islam series, payment in the early Islamic state was based not on military effectiveness or skill but on *sābiqa* or precedence, that is, the principle that those who had joined the Muslim *umma* earliest should enjoy the highest rewards and that these positions should be hereditary.

In its pure form, this structure was both too expensive to finance and too inflexible to work. It produced large numbers of ill-trained and unwilling soldiers (the *muqâtila*) who were of little military value. Above all, while they might be prepared to join in campaigns against non-Muslims that would yield booty and religious merit, they were not reliable or effective for sustaining the power of the ruling elite within the Islamic community. And it was in this field of internal security that much of the military action of the early Islamic period took place.

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79 Bearing in mind our reservations about the use of the term ‘tribe’ expressed above.

Discussions of group identities within the early Islamic state usually centre on tribal or sectarian affiliations. Of course both of these were important elements in men’s self-image and self-definition. At the same time it can become a sort of orientalist paradigm: the thought world of these people belongs to an unchanging tradition in which blood relationships and religious ‘fanaticism’ are the motivating forces that guide men’s actions. The ‘military’, if this is a meaningful concept at the time, is riven with primitive, even primeval, loyalties. This to an extent is reflected in the early Arabic sources where politics are often explained in tribal terms and in which loyalties to Kharījīte beliefs, ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib or the Family of the Prophet are an important motivating force. A further reading of the sources, however, points to another important sense of identity that historians have tended to ignore, perhaps because it does not sit well with the paradigm. This is the sense of regional identity that comes across loud and clear in much of the rhetoric of the period, above all the identification of different individuals and groups as either Syrian or Iraqi.

This can first be seen clearly in accounts of the long confrontation between the supporters of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and those of the Umayyad Mu‘āwiya b. Abī Sufyān, conventionally known as the Battle of Siffin in 661. The voluminous accounts of this episode feature numerous speeches in which the commanders on both sides appeal to the loyalties of their men. In many of these speeches the appeal is to regional identities, the people of Syria (ahl al-shām) against the people of Iraq (ahl al-ʿirāq). At Siffin a number of tribes were represented in both armies and in a crucial passage we are told how Ali arranged that members of certain tribes in his own following should be pitted directly against members of the same tribe among the Syrians.

As he led his men to meet the Syrians,

‘Alī set about asking, ‘Who is this tribe?’ and ‘Who is this tribe?’ And the genealogy of the Syrian tribes was explained to him. When he knew who they were and saw their positions, he said to [the tribe of] Azd (on his own side) ‘Take care of the Azd for me’ and to the Khathʿam, ‘Take care of the Khathʿam for me.’ He asked each tribe among the men of Iraq to take care of its counterpart among the Syrians, and if there was a tribe of whom there were none in Syria he would assign against it another of whom there were members among the

81 See, for example, the chapter on ‘The Arab tribes in Khurasan’ in Julius Wellhausen’s hugely influential The Arab Kingdom and its Fall, trans. Margaret Graham Weir (Calcutta, 1927), pp. 397–491.

Syrians but not among the Iraqis. For example, he assigned those of his men of Banū Bajīla, of whom there was only a small number in Syria, to face Lakhm.\textsuperscript{83}

Tribal loyalties were important but we can see that here they were clearly and specifically trumped by regional ones. Of course it is impossible to say how far the rhetoric actually reflects opinions at the time but to the compilers of the texts in the eighth century this was clearly a plausible scenario.

Given the fact that these events occurred within a generation of the original Muslim conquests of these areas, it is surely striking that regional identities were so important and that the \textit{ahl al-ʿirāq} or the \textit{ahl al-shām} seem to have been a more effective community than the tribes whose identities were traced back through many generations. In seeking an explanation for this phenomenon the first point to note is that the term \textit{ahl}, which I have loosely translated as people, refers only to the Arab Muslim section of the population. There is no evidence that the local populations of these areas took sides or played any part in the contest.\textsuperscript{84} This was not a proto-nationalist sentiment that would have embraced the whole population.

The most important reason for the emergence of this new sense of community must lie in the exploitation of resources in the aftermath of the Muslim conquest and settlement. As has been known for a long time, the conquerors and their progeny were entitled to pensions from the tax revenues of the conquered lands, Syrians to the revenues of Syria, Iraqis to the revenues of Iraq. This in turn meant that the \textit{ahl}, while they may not have lived in the villages and farmed the land, nonetheless had a clear identification with the area which produced the incomes on which they lived and a clear sense of community and common interest with those with whom they shared these revenues.\textsuperscript{85} Above all they sought to prevent the \textit{ahl} of Iraq from appropriating the revenues of Syria and vice versa, even if they shared bonds of kinship with them.


\textsuperscript{84} In this context, it is worth noting that the Zuqnin chronicler, writing, probably, in the 770s, consistently divides the population of the area of northern Mesopotamia where he lived into ‘Syrians’, that is Aramaic speaking people, mostly of Christian faith, and ‘Arabs’, mostly but not entirely Muslim. After the Abbasid revolution, these were joined by ‘Persians’, Khurasani supporters of the Abbasids. These quasi-national identities, based presumably on language, culture and possibly dress, were more important than tribal or religious affiliations when it came to categorizing the population (Amir Harrak (ed.), \textit{The Chronicle of Zuqnin, Parts III and IV}, Mediaeval Sources in Translation, 36 (Toronto, 1999), Part IV, pp. 138–334 passim).

\textsuperscript{85} There are, perhaps, some parallels here with the increasing identification of the thematic armies of the contemporary Byzantine army with the areas where they were based and from which they derived their resources as noted above.
With these new regional affiliations, there inevitably emerged stereotypical images of the sort that were, perhaps, essential for the emergence of community solidarity. For an Iraqi observer, the followers of Muʿāwiya were ‘brutal and uncouth men and Syrian beduin’ ['arāb meaning beduin, almost always in a pejorative sense] while the Iraqis were ‘the eager heroes of the Arabs, their mighty peak, men who stayed up all night reciting the Qur’ān and summoning people to the truth when they had gone astray’. Along with this image of the Syrians as uncouth Bedouin, there developed a complementary image of them as disciplined fighters who obeyed their commanders rather than indulging in individual heroics. This reputation is already apparent in accounts of the confrontation at Ẓiffān; ‘Do you not see how splendidly equipped they appear?’, one Iraqi is said to have observed, ‘and what a wretched rabble we are?’ Later the contrast is made between the disciplined but godless Syrians and the righteous but more chaotic Iraqis. ‘He [Hāshim b. ʿUtba al-Zuhrī] attacked the Syrians with a band of followers several times, but everywhere he attacked them they held firm against him, and the fighting was fierce. He said to his men, “do not let the steadfastness of theirs that you see frighten you. By God, it is only the bravery of the beduin (‘arāb) that you see and their steadfastness beneath their banners and in their battle positions. But they are in error while you follow truth.”

It was against this background that the first professional army in Islam was created in the aftermath of the battle of Marj Rāḥit (near Damascus) in 684, when the Umayyads and their Yemeni supporters defeated the Qaysi partisans of Ibn al-Zubayr. On his accession in 685, the caliph ʿAbd al-Malik was obliged to find a way of enforcing his political authority in the whole of the caliphate that was more reliable than the patchy system of agreements and tribal alliances with which his predecessors had sought to make do. These troops are repeatedly referred to in the sources, not as the Umayyad army but as the ʾahl al-shām.

The sources for the internal affairs of Islamic Syria in Umayyad times are scanty. This means that we have little information about how and exactly where these Syrian troops were recruited, nor do we know much about the organization that was developed. We become most clearly aware of them when they appear away from their homelands enforcing the caliph’s authority in other parts of the caliphate.

Their importance becomes apparent from the accounts of ʿAbd al-Malik’s campaigns against the supporters of Mukhtār and Mus‘ab ibn al-Zubayr in Iraq and ʿAbd Allah b. al-Zubayr between 685 and 692. The support of the ʾahl al-shām (Syrians) for ʿAbd al-Malik and their identification with his cause were crucial.

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86 Al-Ṭabarī, Taʾrīkh, ed. de Goeje, I, 3301, trans. vol. 17, pp. 47f.
87 Al-Ṭabarī, Taʾrīkh, ed. de Goeje, I, 3322, trans. vol. 17, pp. 70f.
88 Al-Ṭabarī, Taʾrīkh, ed. de Goeje, I, 3322, trans. vol. 17, pp. 70f.
90 See Gerhard Conrad, Abūl-Husain al-Razi und seine Schriften (Stuttgart, 1991) for the most recent discussion of early Syrian historiography.
According to one report, when he began his attack on Mus‘ab, the chiefs of the Syrians asked him not to lead the army in person for if he were killed, their cause would be completely lost.91 The Iraqis are said to have regarded the Syrians as grasping and impoverished: when some wanted to desert Mus‘ab’s cause, they were rallied by Qays ibn al-Haytham who said, ‘Do not cause the Syrians to come among you. By God, if they taste your life they will take your dwellings (manāzil) from you. By God, I have seen the chief (sayyid) of the Syrians at the gate of the Caliph, rejoicing if he sent him on a mission. I have seen us on summer expeditions [against the Byzantines], each one of us [i.e. the Iraqis] in charge of a thousand camels while each of their chieftains (wujūh) went riding on his horse, with his provisions behind him.’92 However it was the impoverished Syrians who defeated all their enemies. Part of the reason for this may have been technical sophistication. After the defeat and death of Mus‘ab ibn al-Zubayr and the effective subjugation of Iraq to Umayyad rule, his brother ‘Abd Allah continued to resist in Mecca and al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf was sent with between 2,000 and 5,000 Syrian troops to reduce the Holy City.93 The accounts show that the Syrians were experienced and effective in the use of manjanīq (swing-beam siege engines) with which they are said to have bombarded the Kaaba itself. This incident, which was long remembered as an example of the godlessness of the Syrians,94 clearly illustrates their efficiency, an impression supported by comments about the plentifulness of supplies in the Syrian camp.

After the defeat of the Banū l-Zubayr, the ahl al-shām continued to be used to maintain Umayyad control and the sources repeatedly refer to their distinctive military style, based on order and discipline within the ranks. We can see an early example in 696–97, less than two years after ‘Abd al-Malik’s accession, when al-Ḥajjāj was facing a rebellion of the Kharijites of Iraq under Shabīb b. Yazīd. Fearing, rightly as it turned out that the local Kufah muqātila (Arab troops, ahl al-‘irāq) would be unable to resist the rebels, he wrote to the caliph requesting that he send Syrians (ahl al-shām) to stiffen his army, pointing out that they could live off the revenues previously enjoyed by the rebels. The caliph responded by despatching 4,000 men under Sufyān b. al-Abrad al-Kalbī and 2,000 under Ḥabib b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Madhhīji.95 They are said to have been divided into four groups led by ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd al-‘Udhrī, Sa‘d b. Bajal al-Āmirī, Nu‘mān b. Sa‘d al-Himyarī and Ibn Uqaysir al-Khathāmī and we have a description of how they maintained a disciplined defence all night against the Kharijites who

91 See al-Ṭabarī, Ta’rīkh, ed. de Goeje, II, pp. 804f., trans. vol. 21, pp. 178f.
94 See, for example, al-Ṭabarī, Ta’rīkh, ed. de Goeje, II, 1392f., trans. vol. 24, pp. 123–5.
were probing to discover their weaknesses. Before the crucial battle, al-Ḥajjāj is said to have addressed them thus, ‘Men of Syria! You are men who hear and obey, men of steadfastness and conviction. Let not this vermin’s [i.e. Shabīb’s] falseness overcome your truth. Lower your eyes, get down on your knees and meet the enemy with the points of your spears’ and the account, taken from Abū Mikhnaf, remarks that ‘the men got down on their knees and pointed their spears at the enemy, looking like the black Harrā’ [the lava flows characteristic of areas of the Syrian desert].’ These tactics worked and the Syrians broke the charge of Shabīb men and sent them back in disorganized retreat.

This account makes some interesting points. The first is that al-Ḥajjāj again addresses them as ahl al-shām or Syrians, appealing not to their tribal affiliations or even their loyalty to the Umayyad dynasty but to their regional identity. The second is the clear impression of discipline and order. It presumably takes considerable courage and nerve to kneel in front of the advancing cavalry until you can see the whites of their eyes, so to speak, and demonstrates the sort of solidarity that can only be the result of training and experience. The account makes a clear contrast between the courageous but wild and highly individualistic fighting techniques of the Kharijites and the solid professionalism of the Syrians. The account as it stands may, of course, not be literally accurate and there are other differing (though not essentially contradictory) accounts of the same engagement, but the general image and perception of the Syrians is surely clear. Even the nature of the reports tells something of a story: we know the names of the Syrian commanders but the men are largely anonymous and even the leaders are not set up as heroes; not for them the glories of individual combat and displays of valour to be reported in tradition and extolled by the poets.

After this promising beginning, Syrian troops were increasingly used to pursue enemies of the Umayyads through the caliphate. Later in the same year al-Ḥajjāj sent a large army of Syrians (jayshan min ahl al-shām ‘adhīman) commanded by Sufyān b. al-Abraf al-Kalbī to destroy a party of Kharijites who had fled to Tabaristan.

The years 700–702 saw the final polarization of Syrians and Iraqis. The background to this was the unsuccessful rebellion of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān...
b. Muḥammad b. al-Ashʿath against the government of al-Ḥajjāj in Iraq and the East. The main source for the history of this rebellion and the battles of Dayr al-Jamājim and Maskīn, which resulted in Ibn al-Ashʿath’s defeat, is the narrative of Abū Mikhnaf preserved in al-Ṭabarī’s Taʾrīkh. This in turn depends on a number of purportedly eye-witness accounts, including one from a Syrian participant, Abū Yazīd al-Saksākī.

Abū Mikhnaf’s account presents the whole massive upheaval as first and foremost a conflict between Syrians and Iraqis.⁹⁸ As soon as al-Ḥajjāj informed the caliph about the danger, he began sending Syrian horsemen in small groups to provide support and Sufyān b. al-Abraud al-Kalbī, who had presumably remained in Iraq after the defeat of the Kharijite Shabīb, took command. At first things did not go well for them: 1,500 Syrians are said to have been killed in an encounter with Ibn al-Ashʿath’s men near Tustar in January 701 and the Syrian garrison of the citadel of Kufa under the command of one Ibn al-Ḥaḍramī were obliged to surrender in exchange for safe conduct.

Many Syrians seem to have been reluctant to embark on an out-and-out attack on the Iraqis and they put pressure on the caliph to offer terms including the removal of al-Ḥajjāj and the equalizing of stipends (ʿatāʾ) between them and the Syrians, proof that the Syrians already had a superior level of pay. Hard line elements in the rebel army persuaded Ibn al-Ashʿath to reject the deal and a major confrontation developed at Dayr al-Jamājim between April and July 702. Al-Ḥajjāj was in overall command but the Syrian forces in battle were led by ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Sulaym al-Kalbī on the right wing, ʿUmārah b. Tamīm al-Lakhmī on the left, Sufyān b. al-Abraud al-Kalbī in command of the cavalry and ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Ḥabīb al-Ḥakamī in command of the infantry.⁹⁹ Sufyān b. al-Abraud routed the Iraqis and the fleeing supporters of Ibn al-Ashʿath were pursued far to the east, eventually to distant Zabulistan, the Syrians always close on their heels.

The account tells us something of perceptions of community current at the time. Apart from the ad hominem attack on al-Ḥajjāj, it is the regional conflict that is very much to the fore, Syrians against Iraqis, exacerbated by the privileged financial position of the former. When the supporters of Ibn al-Ashʿath were looking for a place of refuge in the East, they contemplated going to Khurasan: ‘Many [Iraqi] troops (jund) are there’, they argued, ‘and perhaps they will join us in fighting the ahl al-shām.’¹⁰⁰ In the event, they were overwhelmed by their pursuers and nothing came of the plan, but regional solidarity was clearly considered important. By contrast there is no expressed ideological or religious common ground among the parties and little evidence of tribal ʿaṣabīyya. An isolated anecdote from the build up to the final battle at Dayr al-Jamājim relates

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¹⁰⁰ Al-Ṭabarī, Taʾrīkh, ed. de Goeje, II, 1104, trans. vol. 23, pp. 52.
that two men emerged, one from each camp, to challenge each other in single combat. To their mutual consternation they both proclaimed that they were the ‘Champion of Kilāb’ (al-ghulām al-kilābī) but it was only when they fell to talking that they realized that they were first cousins (ibn ‘amm) and they called the conflict off. 101 The story demonstrates that the Kilāb were thoroughly divided in their allegiances and also that it was possible for even closely related members of the same tribe not to recognize each other without extolling their genealogy.

The separateness of the Syrians in Iraq was soon reinforced by the foundation of a new cantonment at Wasit, halfway between Kufah and Basra. We are very poorly informed about the early days of this settlement. Ṭabarī gives an explanation for its founding which is anecdotal but not without interest. A drunken Syrian had made improper advances to an Iraqi girl and was promptly killed by her husband. It was not the first time this had happened and complaints had already been made to the Syrian shaykhs about his behaviour. When the girl went to al-Ḥajjāj to explain what had happened, he ordered that the relatives of the Syrian should bury him: ‘He has been killed by God and is headed for hell fire; there will be no retaliation and no blood money.’ Once again it is Syrian against Iraqi. It was after this, and presumably other incidents like it, according to the story, that the Syrians were housed in their own city.

The campaign against Ibn al-Ash’ath must have sharpened existing solidarities and Syrians remained unpopular in the East. When Qutaybah b. Muslim attempted to assert his independence in Khurasan in 714–15, he made a naked appeal to Iraqi, anti-Syrian sentiments. ‘How long’, he is said to have demanded of his wavering troops, ‘will the ahl al-shām continue to lie in your courtyards and under the roofs of your homes? O army of Khurasan, if you investigate my ancestry you will find that I have an Iraqi mother, an Iraqi birthplace and Iraqi inclinations, opinions and religion (dīn).’ 102 It was not enough to secure their support, perhaps because they did not fully accept him as one of them, but he clearly thought such sentiments would sway them.

In the reigns of ʿAbd al-Malik and al-Walīd (685–715) we hear of the Syrian army mostly when it was operating in Iraq under the overall command of al-Ḥajjāj. After his death, also in 715, the leadership of the Syrian army seems to have passed to Maslamah, son of the caliph ʿAbd al-Malik. As early as 705 he began to lead campaigns against the Byzantines and the next year he had 1,000 men of Antakya with him. However, it was not until the great campaign against Constantinople from 717 that the connection between him and the Syrian army becomes obvious. He was supported by the wujūh (leaders of) ahl al-shām, named as Khālid b. Ma’dan, ʿAbd Allah b. Abī Zakariyyā al-Khuzāʿī and Muḥammad b. Jabr. 103

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102 Al-Ṭabarī, Taʾrīkh, ed. de Goeje, II, 1288, trans. vol. 24, pp. 10–12.
103 Al-Ṭabarī, Taʾrīkh, ed. de Goeje, II, 1314, trans. vol. 24, p. 38.
After he had been ordered by the caliph ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz to withdraw to Islamic territory, the connection still remained. In 718–19 there occurred another of the Kharijite revolts that repeatedly disturbed the Jazîra area and, somewhat reluctantly, the caliph sent Maslama against them with a regiment of the Syrian army (jaysh min ahl al-shām) that he had raised (jahhaza) in Raqqa. From then on the Syrian army is repeatedly used as a police force in Iraq.

The sharpening of regional identities and the growing hostility to the Syrians can be clearly seen in the accounts of the next great internal disturbance in the Muslim world, the rebellion of Yazīd ibn al-Muhallab against the Umayyad caliph Yazīd b. ‘Abd al-Malik in 720. Once again, hostility to the Syrians was used as a slogan to mobilize the people of Iraq against the regime. They had by now acquired an awesome reputation: ‘You have seen the armies of the West’, Ibn Muhallab was warned by ‘Adī b. Artāt, an Umayyad cadre he had captured, ‘and you are aware how God helps them in every single place where treachery and disloyalty prevail.’ Ibn Muhallab remained convinced of his ability to defeat them and in order to broaden his support he incited them to a jihād (Holy War) against the Syrians and proclaimed that those who fought against them ‘would receive a greater reward than those who fought against the [non-Muslim] Turks and Daylamis’. Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, the greatest religious leader of the day, is alleged to have disapproved strongly of them. A cautious man when it came committing himself politically, he nonetheless said of the Syrians, according at least to Abū Mikhnaf, ‘May God afflict them and render them hideous! Are they not the ones who desecrated the sacred precinct of the Messenger of God, slaughtering its inhabitants for three days and three nights, declaring them lawful for their Nabat and Copts [i.e. permitting non-Muslims to kill Muslims, perhaps implying that some of the ahl al-shām remained Christians] carrying off free pious women, and not holding back from violating the honour of any sacred thing?’

Even this quasi-religious enthusiasm was unable to sustain Ibn Muhallab against the greater discipline and organization of his enemies. Despite his overwhelming superiority in numbers (according to one account Maslama had 4,000 men against Ibn Muhallab’s 120,000) and his personal courage he was defeated in August 720 by Maslama (‘the yellow locust’) and his Syrian troops. He himself was killed in combat with the Syrian cavalry, and it was Syrians who pursued the surviving members of his family far to the East where many of them were killed.

The Syrian army, frequently led by Maslama b. ‘Abd al-Malik, continued to be important during the reign of Hishām (724–43). They are most frequently encountered on the northern frontiers of the Islamic state, whether campaigning

against the Byzantines in the Taurus or the Turks in the Caucasus. From 735 if not before we also find them active in Khurasan. However, it was in Iraq that we see the clearest evidence of Syrian distinctiveness. In 740 Zayd b. ‘Alī in Kufah led a brave but hopeless attempt to overthrow the Umayyads in the name of the House of ‘Alī. Once again we see the use of anti-Syrian rhetoric as a rallying cry. The small Syrian garrison in Kufah were identified as their main opponents by Zayd’s supporters and they are treated as if they were a distinct tribe like Madhhij, Hamdān, Tamīm or Bakr. When the rebellion finally occurred it was small groups of Syrians who confined the people of Kûfah in the mosque so that they could not come out in support of Zayd and it was Syrians who killed him and, later, Syrians who searched the houses to bring out the wounded (presumably for execution).

Hishām also used Syrian troops much further afield. In 741 a large army of Syrians was sent to combat the Berber uprising in Ifriqiya with mixed results. Some of them were cut off in the Maghreb and, under the leadership of Balj b. Bishr al-Qushayrī, this ragged and half-starved mob crossed to al-Andalus, where they established themselves by force. Known as the Shāmiyyūn to distinguish them from the Baladiyyūn or original conquerors, they tried to establish their control over the country and later some of them leant their support to the Umayyad ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Mu‘āwiya when he established himself as amīr from 756 onwards.

It was not until after the death of Hishām that the unity and effectiveness of the ahl al-shām was destroyed. His successor as caliph, al-Walīd b. Yazīd tried to secure his position by increasing their ‘atā’ and other welfare benefits, but to no avail. According to the Arabic sources, it was his dissolute lifestyle that made him unacceptable to the Syrian leaders and led to his assassination. The alienation of the Syrians from the Umayyad family was followed by the re-emergence of the deep and damaging dispute between the Yamaniya majority and the Qaysis, a dispute that had remained largely dormant since the battle of Marj Rāhit and the rise of ‘Abd al-Malik. It was this dispute above all that destroyed the identity of the ahl al-shām and with it the power of the Umayyad

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112 Al-Ṭabarī, Ta’rīkh, ed. de Goeje, II, 1754, trans. vol. 26, pp. 103f.
113 Al-Ṭabarī, Ta’rīkh, ed. de Goeje, II, 1774, trans. vol. 26, pp. 124f.
114 Most of the Syrian commanders whose names are recorded came from Yamani tribes in Syria, notably Kalb, the Syrian branches of Kinda (Saksak and Sakūn), Lakhm and Judhām. Qaysis certainly participated (as shown by the anecdote about Kilāb quoted above), and seem to have been dominant in the Syrian army in al-Andalus.
Of all God’s creatures the Syrians were the most obedient to Him, the most zealous in defending His sacred ordinances, the most faithful in keeping His covenant and the most severe in destroying anyone who deviated from, opposed, obliterated and strayed from the truth. God’s bounty flowed copiously upon them, Islam flourished through them, and polytheism and its followers were brought low by them. But recently they have violated God’s command and tried to violate His covenant. For that reason there came forward someone to fan the flames of civil war (fitnah).\footnote{Marwān b. Muḥammad writing to al-Ghamr b. Yazīd, quoted in al-Ṭabarī, Taʾrīkh, ed. de Goeje, II, 1850–51, trans. vol. 26, pp. 213–16.}

The identity of the ahl al-shām can be seen to have been a factor of major importance in the life of the Umayyad Caliphate. It is clear that from ‘Abd al-Malik’s reign until the break-up of the Umayyad state after the death of Hishām in 743, tribal solidarities had largely been replaced, or at least overlain, by regional ones. To what extent the Syrians saw themselves as distinct, except in direct contrast with Iraqis or other clearly regional groups, is difficult to say, since most of the sources that describe this Syrian identity do so from an outsider’s perspective. We have no means of knowing, for example, whether Syrians had a distinctive dress or an identifiable Arabic accent. What needs perhaps to be emphasized is not that regional identities replaced traditional ascribed ‘tribal’ affiliations (for example Qaysi/Yemeni) but rather that, from the later seventh century, regional identity became as important as kinship (real or imagined) as a marker. At the same time, however, we must also recognize that these two sets of identities were not mutually exclusive, and that the identity brought out for a particular group by the members of that group, or by their opponents, or in the sources, depended very much on both the political and cultural context as well as the perspective from which the writers of sources recorded and interpreted the events in question, and the political and military context of the events themselves. Those like Ibn al-Ash’ath, Qutaybah b. Muslim or Zayd b. ‘Alī who wished to arouse popular opinion against the Umayyad government sought to exploit regional loyalties which, at the time, had a particular ideological valence. Yet the opportunistic revival of Qaysi-Yemeni identities in other contexts illustrates the fact that throughout the early period and well into later medieval times, traditional non-regional identities lived on.

Given the context-bound nature of the use of these new regional identities and the loyalties and traditions they invoked or inspired, it is not surprising that in the second and third generations after the Muslim conquest even the new settlers from Arabia began to acquire such local patriotism, and this naturally developed earlier among the Yamaniya of Syria, most of whose ancestors had
been living there before the coming of Islam, as noted above. The *ahl al-shām* clearly emerged as a military elite, with their disciplined fighting techniques and higher salary levels. The Syrians were, however, more than just one regional pressure group among many. By the reign of Hishām (724–43) they had come, in a real sense, to form a professional army apart from the bulk of Muslims. There seems to be no parallel for the role of the Syrian army in the contemporary Byzantine state, where the evidence suggests that the military in each area was composed of locally recruited troops with local roots, although the role of the *Opsikion* forces provides a distant parallel, and regional identities and loyalties certainly played an important role. Much more importantly, in contrast to the Byzantine military, their counterparts in the Umayyad Caliphate never had any distinct legal status, though they did enjoy a privileged financial position. By the later Umayyad period, the Muslim *umma* was divided into military and non-military sections, a development that was to remain strikingly true of Muslim communities in the Near East throughout pre-Ottoman times.

It would be interesting to compare these signs of political and local cultural identities with the archaeological picture for the movement of goods and services within the empire and the caliphate, and across the shifting political boundaries between the two. What is required is good archaeological evidence for the nature of local and inter-local economic activity, in particular for the production and distribution of ceramics. Unfortunately, the study of the ceramic record for this period of Byzantine history is still in its infancy, especially for the regions lying most distant from the capital and its hinterland, so that firm conclusions about such matters cannot be attempted.116 That for the caliphate is hardly in a better position. But such material for the Byzantine side would probably reinforce the pattern of increasingly localized exchange referred to already for the region around Constantinople, while probably also showing that relations between specific sub-regions of larger economic unities, and in particular those on different sides of ‘political’ borders or border districts were more complex than is usually assumed. This is certainly the case for the later period, when literary and archaeological evidence is more readily available.117

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117 See, for example, Haldon and Kennedy, ‘The Arab–Byzantine frontier’, p. 107 and n. 107 for the question of trade in the early Abbasid period; and p. 115 on the ‘militarised transhumance’ of the spring raids into Byzantine territory in the eighth and ninth centuries (a pattern that seems to have been established early); by the middle and later tenth century the long-distance and especially the local trade across the Byzantine–Syrian frontier was enough to make the threat of Byzantine trading sanctions effective in Byzantine–Fatimid relations: see Wessam A. Farag, *The Truce of Sa’far, A.D. 998* (Birmingham, 1980); for recent work on the archaeology of the frontier zone, see also A. Eger, *The Spaces Between the Teeth: A Gazetteer of Towns on the Islamic-Byzantine Frontier* (Istanbul, 2011).
For the Syrian region, the existing available evidence suggests a relatively open pattern of local and district level commercial exchange, far less affected by the disruption that so damaged economic relations on the Byzantine side of the frontier region. What this process meant in terms of social history is impossible to say in the light of currently available material.118

118 This is not the place to introduce the problem of ‘centre–periphery’ relations, although it is relevant. In comparative social-economic history and archaeology the terms are generally employed in respect of the structure of integrated economic systems, and more particularly the imbalance in the exchange relationship between the two poles involved. Centres were defined as those regions that controlled more developed technological skills, production processes, forms of labour organization and a stronger relationship between the state and the ideological apparatus, which hence functioned to ‘exploit’ the politically and economically weaker position of the periphery. Peripheries lacked these characteristics, having had their local political and economic structures modified so as to serve the needs of the centre. This model of economic relations evolved in respect of the development of more recent international market relations, of course (classically by Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century*, vol. 1 (New York, 1974), vol. 2 (London, 1980); and André Gunder Frank, *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America* (New York, 1969)), but it has been applied, with substantial modifications, to pre-capitalist and pre-industrial economic systems too (see especially the review of literature by Michael Rowlands, ‘Centre and periphery: a review of a concept’, in Michael Rowlands (ed.), *Centre and Periphery in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 1–11); and see also H.-W. Goetz, ‘Concepts of Realm and Frontiers from Late Antiquity to the early Middle Ages: Some Preliminary Remarks’, in W. Pohl, I. Wood and H. Reimitz, eds., *The Transformation of Frontiers. From Late Antiquity to the Carolingians* (Leiden-Boston-Köln, 2001), pp. 73–82.
The Challenge of Difference:
Early Medieval Christian Europe
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In the period we call improperly the ‘Middle Ages’, many political institutions and social relations came to rest upon promissory oaths. This seems equally true for Byzantium, the emerging Muslim states and the Western kingdoms. In some Western and Eastern – Muslim as well as Christian – cultures oath-based
political relations persisted even into modernity.\textsuperscript{5} It is not easy to find a historical explanation for this ‘medieval’ feature, but it seems to be beyond doubt that one has to search for it in the formative period of the transition from Late Antiquity to the early Middle Ages.\textsuperscript{6}

On the basis of papyrological evidence, legal historians have long observed that in Late Antiquity many types of legal transaction came to be confirmed by oaths.\textsuperscript{7} This may to some extent be related to an increase in insecurity and also to broader religious developments and transformations in mentality, indicating a closer link between what we nowadays would like to keep separate as ‘law’ and ‘religion’. But there is much more behind the rise of oath-based social and legal relations. Taken sociologically, promissory oaths gain most of their importance by offering an instrument to create new social bonds based on a religious idea of trust.\textsuperscript{8} The latter is provided by the magical power that usually makes oaths work, but even more by a combined social and religious mode of operation inherent in the process of oath-taking. If a person promises to behave in a certain manner in the future and confirms this promise by swearing an oath, the same person undergoes a vital religious and social process through which his or her personal status is transformed. In his sociology of law, Max Weber introduced a distinction between ‘status contracts’ and ‘purposive contracts’ as ideal types, which he had adapted from Henry Sumner Maine’s treatise \textit{Ancient Law}, composed in 1861. Whereas – according to Weber – ‘purposive contracts have a very limited validity which made them useful within a market economy’, ‘status contracts’ involve ‘substantially a change in what may be called the universal position and the social status of the persons involved. To have this effect these contracts were originally either straightforward magical acts or at least acts having a magical significance [such as the oath] …The contract … meant that the person would “become” something different in quality (or status) from the quality he possessed before. For unless a person voluntarily assumed that


\textsuperscript{7} Leopold Wenger, \textit{Volk und Staat in Ägypten am Ausgang der Römerherrschaft}, Festreden der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2 (Munich, 1922), p. 25; Erwin Seidl, \textit{Der Eid im ägyptisch-römischen Provinzialrecht} (2 vols, Munich, 1933–35).

new quality, his future conduct in his new role could hardly be believed to be possible at all. Each party must thus make a new “soul” enter his body. Weber conceded that even ‘purposive contracts’ sometimes were confirmed by oaths, but the power displayed by oaths would become most prominently visible in ‘status contracts’. By pledging salvation after death, which would be lost in case of breaking the religious promise, the oath leads one’s life on earth into a new direction.\textsuperscript{9} Swearing an oath of promise thus enables an individual to enter into a new social relationship to another person by neutralizing existing social relationships which otherwise might have been an obstacle to the new bonds entered upon – such as kinship, friendship or ethnicity.\textsuperscript{10} Anthropologists have observed this on various occasions, perhaps most prominently in the case of the famous Mau-Mau uprising in Kenya in the 1950s, where a compulsory oath worked to transform a small radical group into a large movement.\textsuperscript{11}

This explains at least to some extent, why oaths often figure prominently within the political framework of new realms and become extended to large parts of the population by personally linking subjects with their new rulers. Since they serve to establish a new order and to enlarge a community, promissory oaths can become particularly relevant in periods of rapid social and political change. Thus we often find such oaths in a situation when a limited social group is forced to extend its scope and seeks to impose its ideas and obligations on strangers, that is, on people who may act as allies but do not come from the same group.\textsuperscript{12} This was made possible by the fact that an oath of promise quite often was not an esoteric initiation procedure,\textsuperscript{13} but rather a more abstract way of imposing obligations on members of a group or a political community by focusing on essential religious values linking individual and society.

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\begin{enumerate}
\item As observed by Jörg Rüpke, \textit{Domi militiae. Die religiöse Konstruktion des Krieges in Rom} (Stuttgart, 1990), p. 88.
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Quite obviously, in the period concerned here, the later Roman Empire must have provided some fruitful ground for such developments. For we can observe oath-based political relations between rulers and subjects in almost all of its Western successor states, in the regna of the Franks,\(^{14}\) Ostrogoths and Visigoths,\(^{15}\) Vandals,\(^{16}\) Lombards\(^{17}\) and the Anglo-Saxons in the reign of King Alfred.\(^{18}\) But we also find them in the emerging Islamic Caliphate\(^{19}\) – a fact that should be a warning not to interpret such developments in terms of ‘Germanic’ political culture. Apart from that, general oaths of allegiance also played an important role in early Byzantium at certain times, in the reign of Anastasius I, for instance, or in the Iconoclast period.\(^{20}\) But in contrast with early Byzantium, post-Roman rulers such as the barbarian kings in the West and the Muslim caliphs in the East rather continuously used promotory oaths to unite a population stemming from different ethnic origin and to build a political order upon them defined through religious terms.


\(^{19}\) Andrew Marsham, *Rituals of Islamic Monarchy: Accession and Succession in the First Muslim Empire* (Edinburgh, 2009).

As will be argued in this chapter, this had an enormous impact on the way in which ‘visions of community’ were developed. In what follows I shall roughly outline the functions oaths of loyalty served in the regna of the early medieval West. The second part will offer some comparative, but rather preliminary thoughts on sworn ‘visions of community’ in the post-Roman East and West.

EASTERN AND WESTERN OATHS OF ALLEGIANCE: COMMON ROOTS AND FEATURES

Anthropologists have characterized oaths as a universal phenomenon, a common practice firmly rooted in the tradition of most people. But in the period concerned here, these traditions were soon so radically transformed into something new that one may argue as to what extent these new oaths can be interpreted in terms of their supposed indigenous origins. Significant here is the fact that the oaths most relevant in post-Roman times were oaths of loyalty, which means that they worked on a much more hierarchical level than many indigenous oaths. This is confirmed by the notion that punishing the breach of such an oath was not left to the gods alone, but performed by earthly institutions too.

There is good reason to assume that many types of such oaths of loyalty ultimately derived from the late Roman army. 21 Being a faithful soldier, a miles fidelis, who was loyal to the emperor, was among the highest virtues within the Roman army. It was the military oath sworn personally by each soldier, be he a Roman or a federate, that made fidelity essential for his behaviour, demanded obedience and made him subject to military law. If we look at Roman inscriptions from the Rhine or the Danube, we find all sorts of military units, single alae or whole legions, even provinces, honoured by the emperor as piae fideles for their loyalty and faithfulness. 22 In Vegetius’ famous description of the Roman sacramentum militiae we find fidelis devotio as the soldiers’ prime virtue. 23

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23 Vegetius, Epitoma rei militaris II, 5, ed. Michael D. Reeve (Oxford, 2004), pp. 38–9: Iurant autem per Deum et Christum et Sanctum Spiritum et per maiestatem imperatoris, quae secundum Deum generi humano diligenda est et colenda. Nam imperator cum Augusti nomen accept, tamquam praesenti et corporali Deo fidelis est praestanda devotio et impenendus pervigil famulatus; Deo enim vel privatus vel militans servit cum fideliter eum diligat qui Deo regnat auctore. Iurant autem milites omnia se strenue facturos quae praeceperit imperator, numquam deserturos militiam nec mortem reclusatos pro Romana re publica.
became a crucial concept to describe the subjects’ adherence to their rulers in this period and later, often closely linked with *fides*. The general oaths of fidelity imposed by Frankish, Ostrogothic and Visigothic kings on the population of their realm obviously derived from their former status as Roman federates. But it was among the Franks and Visigoths that the idea of an oath-based community found its most elaborate and sophisticated expression. By exacting general oaths of fidelity, the Frankish kings developed political identity within their kingdom largely along three lines: the legitimacy of the ruling dynasty, Christianity and religious orthodoxy, and the creation of new political identities. We can find a melding of all these elements in an EastFrankish formulary from the seventh century preserved in the collection of Marculf:

King A to Count B. Since, with the unanimous consent of our great men, we decided that our glorious son C should rule in our kingdom of D, we therefore order you to summon all your pagenses, Franks, Romans, and those of any other origin, and to have them assemble in appropriate places in cities, villages, and strongholds, in order that they should promise and swear fidelity and submission to our excellent son and to ourselves, in the presence of our agent, the illustrious man E, whom we have sent out from our side for this purpose, in the places of the saints and on the relics which we have sent there through the same person.

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According to this text, the local counts had to congregate all inhabitants, notably Franks, Romans and all persons of other origin (*natio*), at certain places in order to make them swear fidelity to their king and his son. The king’s envoys, who accepted the oath on behalf of both kings, were ordered to bring relics of saints with them on which the people would swear. These relics became the common basis for establishing a regional identity based on the people’s Christian faith, accepting the king and his son as legitimate rulers, and thus establishing dynastic succession in Merovingian Austrasia from Dagobert I to Sigibert III in 633. In addition to that, sworn fidelity to a monarch created a new identity, which was regarded as more important than being a Frank, a Roman, a Burgundian or whatever. It is important to note here that the most relevant active obligation resulting from these oaths of fidelity was military service, as is documented by our main historiographic source on these events, the chronicle of Fredegar.\(^{30}\) Taken together with the translocation of relics into the border lands, it is quite likely that engaging in warfare was seen as a religious obligation too.

This became even more important, since government largely had become based on what we might call an extended military administration.\(^{31}\) It may also have to do with the fact that compulsory military service gained importance in the late Roman period and became even more relevant where taxation as a means of financing military service was diminished.\(^{32}\) In the Carolingian Empire, the king’s envoys, who accepted the oath on behalf of their king, were ordered to keep lists with the names of all adult males who had sworn fidelity. As a result of these oaths, large parts of the population would be obliged either to participate in military campaigns or, alternatively, to pay a military fee instead, the *heribannus*. Thus fidelity could be turned into fiscal debt.\(^{33}\)

But activating obligation to military service or fiscalizing it were not the only functions these oaths had. It was typical for both Roman and post-Roman oaths of fidelity that violating them caused sanctions imposed not only by God, but also by earthly institutions. Being *infidelis* was regarded as treason. An *infidelis*


therefore underwent the most severe sanctions, such as the death penalty and confiscation in Frankish and Visigothic law. This double sanction was obviously modelled on the late Roman law of treason, the *laesa maiestas*. Roman military law largely comprised the *laesa maiestas*, and it was the Roman majesty that late antique federates usually swore to respect in the treaties they concluded with the Romans. By way of their oaths, Roman federates and later the inhabitants of the Frankish and Visigothic kingdoms thus became subjected to some parts of the late Roman public law. But this law was not based on direct Roman legal tradition any longer, which was not applicable to non-Romans. Rather, it rested solely upon the oath which in the Frankish kingdom, for instance, by the Carolingian period came to be sworn by Saxons and Frisians, who had never been part of the Roman Empire. The oath thus transformed certain parts of Roman public law, putting them on a different legal basis and by the same token giving this law a more contractual appearance. This feature may also help to explain why these oaths became important as a basis for legal policy. In the Frankish kingdom, we can observe a striking coincidence between a general oath of fidelity imposed on the population and an increase in capitulary legislation at various points of time. The oath thus became a vehicle for the adaptation of legal norms to changing purposes.

There is no reason to attribute these developments to a supposed Germanic ‘Verfassungstradition’. On the contrary, most important was the fact that the Roman military oath enforced the soldier’s obligation to military service and his subjection to military law. It is for this reason that the Roman military oath had a profound impact on non-Germanic federates, too. Probably late Roman military practice also exercised such an influence on the Arab federates. There certainly had existed other traditions of oath-taking and covenant among the Arabs in pre-Islamic times, but in case of the Arab Ghassanids there is strong evidence for their Romanization. In 502, the Ghassanids converted to Christianity when settled on Roman border territory under the emperor Anastasius I, whom the *Ecclesiastical History* ascribed to Zachariah Rhetor alleges to have exacted
a general oath of loyalty every five years.\textsuperscript{39} A Greek funerary inscription from Pella (Decapolis) dating to the year 521/522 is dedicated to two ‘loyal soldiers from the Arab peoples’ (στρατιώταις ὁρμωμένοις ἀπ(ὸ) χ(ωρ)ῶν (?) τοῦ ἀράβων ἔθνους) both bearing the name John.\textsuperscript{40} In an official letter read in 628 from the ambo of St Sophia in Constantinople, the emperor Heraclius mentioned ‘the troops of the Saracens who are subject to our Christ-loving state’ (καὶ ἐκ τῶν Σαρακηνῶν τῶν ὄντων ὑπὸ τὴν φιλόχριστον ἡμῶν πολιτείαν) alongside the Roman soldiers,\textsuperscript{41} which obviously referred to the Ghassanids.\textsuperscript{42} This indicates that the Arab federates’ Romanization in the late Roman army was centred around a Christianized idea of military loyalty.\textsuperscript{43}

From the seventh century onwards, we have evidence for the Muslim \textit{bay’a}, the general oath of allegiance, which was sworn to the first caliph Abu Bakr and continued to be sworn to his successors.\textsuperscript{44} Muslim tradition relates the beginning of this practice to the time of the prophet Muhammad, when his followers, including women, made a promise of loyalty to him at Aqaba in 622, right before the Hijra.\textsuperscript{45} But even if this assumption is right, the later \textit{bay’a} obviously acquired a rather different character.\textsuperscript{46} \textit{Bay’a} may be interpreted as a pledge for ‘loyalty in

\textsuperscript{39} The Syriac Chronicle known as that of Zachariah of Mytilene, 7, 8, trans. Frederick John Hamilton and Ernest Walter Brooks (London, 1899), p. 172.
\textsuperscript{40} Quoted according to Irfan Shahid, Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century, vol. 2, 1: Toponomy, Monuments, Historical Geography and Frontier Studies (Washington DC, 2002), p. 56.
\textsuperscript{43} See Shahid, Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century, vol. 2, 1, pp. 57–65 with commentary.
\textsuperscript{44} See Marsham, Rituals of Islamic Monarchy, pp. 40–79.
\textsuperscript{46} Émile Tyan, Institutions du droit public musulman, vol. 1: Le califat (Paris, 1954), p. 119: ‘Ainsi donc, la communauté commence à prendre sa figure originale: elle comprend des membres de tribus différentes. Mais cette communauté est encore de caractère religieux; c’est l’adhésion à des idées religieuses qui constitue e lien entre les divers membres du groupe. Au surplus, cette communauté a un chef, à qui promesse de fidélité est faite. Ce sont, les seules caractéristiques de la communauté; elle ne présente pas d’aspect politique, encore moins militaire... Les nouveaux adhérents s’engagèrent seulement à suivre la nouvelle religion et certaines prescriptions morales.’ See also Ka Ka Khel, ‘Bay’a and its political role’, p. 228.
war’, enforcing an obligation of religious character that would become essential for the period of conquest and after,⁴⁷ a point made by Roy Mottahedeh:

The *bai’ah* was used to swear allegiance to kings as well to caliphs; it was an oath notorious for the completeness of its sanctions... The *bai’ah* had become by tradition distinct from a mere private compact. From the time of the *bai’ah* rendered to the first caliph at the death of Muhammad, the *bai’ah* was a voluntary offering of allegiance to a ruler. Later theory, bowing to almost universal later practice, made the *bai’ah* to the caliph more a public recognition of an established rule, a sort of ‘homage.’... To receive the *bai’ah* continued to be a sign that one claimed military authority, and not just ‘deputized’ rule.⁴⁸

Accordingly, the caliph was called the ‘commander of the faithful’ (*amīr al-mu’mīnīn*). In the fourteenth century, the scholar Ibn Khaldūn (1332–1406) related this very title ‘commander of the faithful’ to the oath of allegiance, the *bay’a*, while emphasizing its military character and importance for the Muslim conquest:

The title ‘Commander of the Faithful,’ which is characteristic of the caliph ... was created in the period of the first four caliphs. This is because the men around Muhammad and all the other early Muslims called Abū Bakr, when he received the oath of allegiance, ‘representative’ (*khalīfah*, caliph) of the Messenger of God. This form [of address] was used until he died. Then, the oath of allegiance was rendered to ‘Umar who was appointed by [Abū Bakr]. ... The leaders of (military) missions used to be called ‘*amīrs*’ ... The men around Muhammad also used to call Sa’d b. Abī Waqqās ‘Commander (*amīr*) of the Muslims’, because he commanded the army at al-Qādisīyah. [The army there] at that time was the largest agglomeration of Muslims [that existed]. Now it so happened that one of the men around Muhammad addressed ‘Umar as ‘Commander of the Faithful’ (*amīr al-mu’mīnīn*)... The caliphs inherited the title of Commander of the Faithful from each other. It became a characteristic of the ruler of the Hijāz, Syria, and the ‘Irāq, the regions that were the home of the Arabs and the center of the Muslim dynasty and the base of Islam and Muslim conquest.⁴⁹

The Umayyad Mu’āwiya is the first caliph attested to have used the title *amīr al-mu’mīnīn*, but it is very likely that his predecessors had already done so. This was a disputed matter among Muslim writers, particularly in connection with the

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Faithful believers

bay’a, for the bay’a played an important role in legitimizing the caliph’s position. Since oath-based legitimacy could be used to compensate other factors such as close kinship to the prophet, the bay’a was important in Sunni jurisprudence, whereas in Shia jurisprudence it was not.⁵⁰

As in the case of the Frankish oaths of fidelity, we find the bay’a to be a relevant means of legal policy. The lifelong obligation and its military character made the bay’a also an important legal instrument with severe sanctions – usually the death penalty, since breaking one’s own oath could be regarded as some kind of apostasy,⁵¹ but also confiscation of property.⁵² The double sanction of death penalty and confiscation resembles the practice of Roman penal law⁵³ – as, for instance, in the case of laesa maiestas, which included severe crimes against military law – but also finds its parallel in Frankish law as sanction for infidelitas.⁵⁴

Thus, the bay’a not only became vital for the establishment of the caliphate as head of the emerging Muslim community, the umma, but was also easily transformed into a means of establishing dynastic succession of the caliphate. Mu’āwiya for instance, who undertook various efforts to strengthen his rulership in imperial fashion, also used the bay’a to designate his son Yazid as his successor during his lifetime by making communities and armies swear loyalty to him⁵⁵ – a striking parallel to the case of the Frankish king Dagobert already mentioned,⁵⁶ both obviously derived from Byzantine practice either in dynastic emperorship or clientele kingship.⁵⁷ In the Umayyads’ case, it was designed to transform the caliphate into a monarchy.⁵⁸ Also, the regular renewal of the oath-taking, which became a common practice under the Umayyad caliphs,⁵⁹ reminds

⁵² See Marsham, Rituals of Islamic Monarchy, pp. 106–8.
⁵³ See Marsham, Rituals of Islamic Monarchy, p. 108.
⁵⁶ See Brigitte Kasten, Königssöhne und Königsherrschaft. Untersuchungen zur Teilhabe am Reich in der Merowinger- und Karolingerzeit, MGH Schriften, 44 (Hannover, 1997), p. 25.
one of Roman military tradition documented under the emperor Anastasius I.\textsuperscript{60} Further parallels to Roman and Western oath-taking practice may be detected in the use of literacy to provide standardized oath formulas in all regions of the empire and in the fact that the soldiers’ bay’a often coincided with the giving of a donative; the authority enhanced by the bay’a rested upon the fact that it imposed a specific, lifelong obligation upon each individual soldier.\textsuperscript{61}

It was thus relevant for Ibn Khaldūn that the bay’a was not only important with regard to dynastic succession, but also played an important part in Muslim expansion. According to Émile Tyan, this subordination of the ‘believers’ under the military command of the caliph was closely connected to their participation in the jihād.\textsuperscript{62} The political structure of the Muslim Empire has thus been called a ‘jihād state’,\textsuperscript{63} and it is not by chance that at exactly the same period when the bay’a began to play an important role, in some oath formulas it is explicitly mentioned that taking part in the jihād was included in the idea of loyalty.\textsuperscript{64} But the title ‘commander of the believers’, deliberately omitting any reference to the prophet, may have been chosen as a confessionally neutral term in order to make it attractive to adherents of any monotheistic religion.\textsuperscript{65} Taken together with the bay’a, this would offer an explanation for the caliphs’ success in keeping together large armies, the soldiers of which were very different in origin and cultural background, by giving them a common aim.\textsuperscript{66}

The caliph’s title as amīr al-mu’minīn could also indicate the very character of the new regime to all of its subjects in an appropriate manner, as has been observed by Fred Donner: ‘The very title might be taken to suggest the degree to which the whole state was conceived as a quasi-military organization.’\textsuperscript{67} In fact, in Egyptian papyri dating from the seventh century the title amīr al-mu’minīn was used as a standard formula by the provincial governor to claim on behalf

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{60} See above, n. 19.
\item \textsuperscript{61} See Mottahedeh, \textit{Loyalty and Leadership}, p. 52: ‘Since the bai’ah conveyed a real obligation, soldiers were not willing to concede it cheaply. In the time of the ‘Abbāsids, the army usually demanded from the caliph, the customary payment for the oath of allegiance or rasm al-bai’ah in exchange for the formal oaths.’
\item \textsuperscript{62} See Tyan, \textit{Institutions du droit public musulman}, vol. 1, pp. 198–9.
\item \textsuperscript{63} Khalid Y. Blankinship, \textit{The End of the Jihād State: The Reign of Hishām Ibn Abd Al-Malik and the Collapse of the Umayyads} (Albany, NY, 1994).
\item \textsuperscript{66} See Donner, ‘Growth of military institutions’, pp. 313–14.
\end{itemize}
of the caliph taxes and corvées defined by custom. The title suggested that the caliph had succeeded to the Roman emperor’s legal position in the former Roman provinces.

OATH-BASED ‘VISIONS OF COMMUNITY’ IN EAST AND WEST: A COMPARATIVE VIEW

In both East and West a notion of loyalty became crucial in defining political relations between rulers and subjects within a post-Roman monarchy. We thus enter a political culture that may be best characterized not by citizenship or legal status, but rather by individual commitment, allegiance and devotion to a ruler. This seems to have been due to a militarization of politics and society. Bearing in mind its Roman military background, post-Roman fidelity may be described as a kind of devotion and loyalty to a person, which embraced fighting until death and which was underpinned by a religious motivation to do so. In Vegetius’ description of the Roman military oath, fidelis devotio as the soldiers’ prime virtue appears already placed within a Christian context. In the fifth and sixth century and of course in the Byzantine period we see adherence to Christian dogma as an integral part of the soldiers’ loyalty – be that Arianism, Chalcedonism, Miaphysitism or Iconoclasm – entered upon their military oath. And also the Franks conducted some of their most important wars against Arian


70 See above, n. 22.

or pagan people. This indicates that becoming an ally of a Christian empire would require some sort of conversion and also accepting that the emperor or the king was the representative of God on earth.

So there are obviously some striking parallels between Western and Eastern oaths of loyalty in the post-Roman period, and regarded from this point of view the oaths sworn to the caliphs do indeed not look entirely different from their contemporary Western counterparts. As has been shown above, it seems possible that parts of this practice derived from the late Roman military and had been adapted from there by the Ghassanids or other Arab federates of the Romans. But it is not sufficient to trace back every post-Roman institution to a Roman origin. This was, of course, extremely important, but different developments in the East and the West have also to be explained on a different scale.

In this preliminary sketch, I can only mention one aspect that may bear some relevance here. The Muslims brought with them an emerging new religion when they conquered Roman and Persian territories, the Franks did not, but on the contrary decided to adapt the religion of the Roman Empire, of which they wanted to become a more or less loosely associated part. This simple difference may explain to some extent why swearing the bay’a not only meant accepting the legitimacy of the caliph and fighting for him, but in a way also adapting monotheism, whatever it may have looked like at this time. Defined in such broad terms, it could be accepted by Christian Arabs, too, who became part of the movement. But I find it difficult to judge whether it was extended to the non-Arab Christian population of the Roman provinces in the Near East, who would have to accept the legitimacy of the caliph without becoming Muslims, but on the condition that they would be allowed to keep their religious faith.

Whereas the Islamic bay’a thus possibly retained a more ethnic than religious exclusiveness, the Franks rather sought to develop further some policies of the Roman Empire. The Frankish rulers wanted to render all male adults their fideles. If we look at the complex and severe measures that Charlemagne undertook to ensure that all subjects would swear fidelity to him, one should rather speak of an ‘administered fidelity’, which not only served the purpose of expanding his Christian empire by military force, but also entailed the legislation and modification of legal custom on a large scale, attempting even to alter things on a local level.

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74 See Marsham, Rituals of Islamic Monarchy, p. 52.

This leads to a second observation. Whereas the bay’a in the conquest period seems to have embraced some kind of conversion and loyalty at the same time, in the West the oath of fidelity and baptism were treated as separate institutions.\(^{76}\) In the case of the integration of Saxons and Avars into the Carolingian Empire, oath and baptism were performed at nearly the same time,\(^{77}\) but they initiated an individual into two different legal orders which were kept separate, that is, canon law on the one hand and ‘non-canon law’ on the other, the latter of very different character with regard to authority and local application. From this point of view, baptism and the oath of fidelity were different, but comparable, as both could serve the construction of a Christian commonwealth. Hence, the people in the Frankish Empire from the Carolingian period onward were called the fideles Dei et regis – a pun that stemmed from the ambiguity of the word fidelis – that is, someone who has been baptized and also has sworn an oath of fidelity – and was firmly rooted in the idea of militia Christi.\(^{78}\) Thus we hear in a charter of Charlemagne from 797 of a group of aristocrats who had – instigated by the devil, as it is said – committed treason, were called infideles Dei et nostri, ‘treacherous to God and us’, but they could be rehabilitated, as was stated, ‘by God’s and our clemency’ (cum Dei et nostra gratia).\(^{79}\) Even some capitularies were enforced by ‘God’s and our word’ (cum Dei verbo et nostro).\(^{80}\) When the Franks made war


\(^{79}\) Die Urkunden Pippins, Karlmanns und Karls des Großen, ed. Engelbert Mühlbacher, MGH DD Karolinarum, 1 (Berlin, 1956), No. 181, pp. 244–5: Quapropter dum [ab o]mnibus non habetur incognitum, qualiter suadente [dia]bolo Pippinus filius noster cum aliquibus Dei infidelibus ac nostris in vita et regno nobis a Deo concesso impie conatus est tractare et domino Iesu Christo miserante nihil prevaluit eorum perfidia ... aliqui vero fideles per iudicium dei se exinde idoniaverunt, sicuti Theodoldus comis fidelis noster visus est fecisse. Cui ... cum Dei et nostra gratia iure firmissimo ad legitimam proprietate reddi fecimus et per auctoritatem nostram plenissima deliberatione confirmavimus. Statuentes ergo iubemus, ut quicquid ex successione parentum vel per scripturae cartarum tunc tempore, ut diximus, iuste et racionabiliter cum aequitatis ordine iure ereditario visus fuit habere vel dominare, per hoc nostrum serenitatis atque confirmationis praecipient um Dei et nostra gratia amodo et deinceps tenere et possidere valeat et suis posteris aut cui voluerit domino favente ad possedendum derelinquit.

against the pagan Slavs, taking part in this campaign was due to ‘God’s utility and ours’ (*utilitas Dei et regis*), as it is said in a charter of Louis the Pious dating from 821.81 Both sorts of loyalty – the one towards the king and the other one towards God – were closely interwoven. They could be separated in theory, but were closely linked in practice time and again. The double sanction of ecclesiastical excommunication and payment of the royal ban, which now became imposed on many different crimes, was called *bannus Dei et noster*.82 Even more, in a ninth-century document reporting a judicial inquisition procedure conducted before the king’s envoys around 870, a person was asked to say the truth ‘according to your oath of fidelity and to the promise which you gave at baptism’.83 In the long-term Western development it became extremely important that both could be separated in theory. But by contracting baptism and oath of fidelity for various purposes, the Frankish kings sought to make ecclesiastical and royal law,

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81 Urkundenbuch zur Geschichte der mittelrheinischen Territorien, no. 53, ed. Heinrich Beyer (3 vols, Koblenz, 1860–74), vol. 1, p. 59:

82 Capitulary of Koblenz (860), ed. Alfred Boretius and Victor Krause, MGH LL Capitularia regum Francorum, 2 (Hanover, 1897), no. 270, p. 301:

83 Maurice Prou and Alexandre Vidier (eds), Recueil des chartes de l’abbaye de St. Benoît-sur-Loire (Paris, 1900), no. 24, pp. 57–8: Uenerunt Leudo episcopus et Adelardus comes, missi dominici, in comitatu Augustidunense, in uilla quae dicitur in Monte, et fecerunt ibi uenire ipos pagenses nobiliores et caeteris quampluris de iam dicto comitatu per bannum domni regis, et fecerunt requisitum inter Uulfaldum episcopum et Heccardum comitem, per illos quem Uulfaldus ibi denominavit uel per caeteros, per illum sacramentum quem domno Karolo rege habeabant iurata et per illam professionem quam in baptismo promiserunt ut ueritatem dixissent de uilla quae dicitur Patriciacus, quam Uulfaldus dicebat quod de sua ecclesia esse debebat.
usually kept separate in theory, converge on certain matters. In a sociological and psychological perspective, the oath served to transform heteronomy into self-coercion.\textsuperscript{84} But given the emphasis put on this double fidelity, it seems that it became increasingly difficult to imagine one without the other. When melted into one, this double fidelity claimed universal application and demanded the individual’s self-coercion at the same time.

If we take the bay’a on the other hand, it is quite striking that the word mu’mīnīn obviously comprises, as the Latin word fidelis, two meanings, that is, someone who trusts in God and someone who is loyal to his commander.\textsuperscript{85} Part of this ambiguity can be illustrated by the fact that amīr al-mu’mīnīn may be translated as ‘commander of the faithful’, but also as ‘commander of the believers’. The double meaning of fidelis, on which the Carolingian formula of the fideles Dei et regis was based, makes it virtually impossible to translate fidelis with a single word. Perhaps this double meaning of words like al-mu’mīnīn and fidelis may be regarded as a common heritage of late Roman monotheism and its idea of religiously motivated militia. But this basic concept and the notions of oath and conversion appear to have been developed in a different way in the East and in the West in the following centuries. It seems to me that the Franks erected an elaborate structure on the oath of fidelity, culminating in the idea that the oath was a sacrament, a holy rite of initiation into a Christian society, comparable to baptism. To a Western medieval mind, oaths had to be regarded as a holy sacrament, functioning as an important means to tie together politics and society by the close bond of religion.\textsuperscript{86} In the Carolingian Empire, both meanings of fides could be separated, at least in theory. The Franks could develop different functions of oaths and use oath and baptism as parallel means rather easily within their Christian commonwealth: all inhabitants should become fideles Dei et regis. In the Eastern tradition, it would not become so easy to keep both meanings of mu’mīnīn apart. But as it seems, the Muslim rulers never went so far as to make this double fidelity a programme to which they would oblige the whole population of their realm. It would suffice them to know that their subjects were committed to monotheism.

\textbf{ADDENDUM}

The following work appeared too late to be considered in this chapter: Ella Landau-Tasseron, \textit{The Religious Foundations of Political Allegiance: A Study of Bay’a in...}

\textsuperscript{84} Holenstein, \textit{Die Huldigung der Untertanen}, p. 52.


Pre-modern Islam, Hudson Institute Research Monographs on the Muslim World, Series No. 1 (Washington DC, 2010).
DIE FRIEDLICHE KOEXISTENZ ZWEIER „VISIONS OF COMMUNITY“

Ende der 780er Jahre konnte Karl der Große auf beachtliche militärische Erfolge verweisen: 769 hatte er die Aquitanier besiegt, 774 die Langobarden unterworfen; seit 786 konnte er glauben, er habe die Sachsen bezwungen; und 788 hatte er den Baiernherzog Tassilo III. absetzen, verurteilen und in das Kloster Jumièges sperren lassen. Damit hatte er seine Herrschaft insgesamt erheblich ausgedehnt. Man darf fragen, was das Großreich, das immer weiter nach Mittel- und Westeuropa ausgegriffen hatte, künftig zusammenhalten sollte.


2 Zu den Annales regni Francorum vgl. Rosamond McKitterick, ‘Constructing the past in the Early Middle Ages: the case of the royal Frankish annals’, Transactions

Die „Admonitio generalis“ präsentiert und propagiert eine andere Gemeinschaft: Der Text begründet eine Ordnung für den populus christianus, den populus Dei. Sein Bezugsrahmen ist nicht die königliche Herrschaft über ein bestimmtes Volk.\textsuperscript{3} Sein Bezugsrahmen ist die ecclesia, die Gemeinschaft aller Christen. Die fundamentale Unterscheidung, die dieser Text trifft, ist nicht ethnisch, sondern soteriologisch. In dieser Welt ist die entscheidende Frage: Bist Du ein Christ, ein Sohn Gottes – oder bist Du einer der Verworfenen, ein Sohn des Teufels?

Wir haben demnach zwei Modelle von Gemeinschaft vor uns: Auf der einen Seite steht das Modell der „ethnic states“; hier herrschen Könige und duces


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4 Mit der älteren Literatur: Sören Kaschke, Die karolingischen Reichsteilungen bis 831. Herrschaftspraxis und Normvorstellungen in zeitgenössischer Sicht, Schriften zur Mediävistik, 7 (Hamburg, 2006).


Staatskonzept zugesprochen. Wenn man Texte wie die Reichsannalen liest, ist das plausibel: Gleich zu Beginn, zum Jahr 742, heißt es dort beispielsweise, Karlmann und Pippin hätten das *regnum Francorum* aufgeteilt. Johannes Fried dagegen hat allein die *ecclesia* als Bezugsrahmen für Gemeinschaft gelten lassen wollen; deshalb hat er die Ansicht vertreten (und 2005 noch einmal pointiert wiederholt), ein „Reich der Franken“ habe es nie gegeben. Auch das ist plausibel – sofern man Texte wie die „Admonitio generalis“ liest: Dort bildet nicht ein ethnisch aufgeladenes *regnum* als Institution den Rahmen menschlicher Gemeinschaft, sondern allein die *ecclesia*.


ECCLESIA

Der Text der „Admonitio generalis“ zerfällt in zwei Teile: Die ersten 59 Kapitel sind im wesentlichen Exzerpte aus der „Collectio Dionysio-Hadriana“; die restlichen 23 Kapitel formulieren dagegen unabhängig von dieser Vorlage, aber unter vielfachem Rückgriff auf die Bibel Mahnungen, Normen und Werte für das Christenvolk. Das Kapitel 60 markiert den Übergang zwischen den beiden Teilen. Es wendet sich an die unianimitas der Bischöfe und betont: Die Auflistung der voranstehenden Kapitel sei notwendig, damit man, „indem man den kanonischen Bestimmungen der heiligen Väter nachkomme“, das Seelenheil erlangen könne. Denn man wisse ja, daß das Anathem all denen drohe, die gegen die „Beschlüsse der allgemeinen Konzilien“ verstoßen. (Das waren eben jene Beschlüsse, die sich im Abschnitt zuvor resümiert finden.) „Deshalb ermahnen wir Euch auch besonders sorgfältig, daß Ihr mit aller Aufmerksamkeit jenes schreckliche Urteil der Verfluchung für Euch zu vermeiden sucht, sondern vielmehr, indem Ihr genauer den kanonischen Bestimmungen folgt und Euch auf friedliche Einheit (pacifica unitas) stützt, zu den ewigen Freuden des Friedens zu gelangen gewürdigt werdet.“


11 Admonitio generalis, c. 60, ed. Boretius, p. 57.
12 Ibid., c. 61, p. 58.
„Denn die Söhne des Teufels sind immer eifrig bemüht, Streit und Zwietracht zu säen; die Söhne Gottes aber streben immer nach Frieden und Liebe“. Die Passage formuliert Grundlegendes. Das wird schon darin deutlich, daß ihre Kernaussage später wieder und wieder aufgegriffen wurde, und zwar in nicht minder programmatischen Texten, bis weit in das 9. Jahrhundert hinein: so zum Beispiel auf jener Aachener Versammlung, die Karl nach seiner Kaiserkrönung, im Jahr 802 abhielt und auf der offenbar eine Art Regierungsprogramm verabschiedet wurde; dann wieder in einem Kapitular von 805/6, außerdem in einem Text, der zwischen 805 und 813 entstanden sein dürfte und in weiteren Kapitularen oder verwandten Texten mehr; später in den Konzilsakten der großen, programmatischen Reformkonzilien von 813, und zwar sowohl in Mainz und Arles, als auch in Chalon und Tours; und schließlich findet sich die Passage mehr oder minder wörtlich auch wieder in den Akten der Mainzer Synoden von 847 und 852.


So lautet das erste Zwischenfazit: Diejenige „vision of community“, die mit der „Admonitio generalis“ programmatisch ausformuliert und in der Folgezeit immer wieder aufgerufen worden ist, war gleichsam durch einen totalitären

13 Ibid.
14 Capitulare missorum generale, c. 14, ed. Alfred Boretius, MGH LL, Capitularia regum Francorum, 1 (Hannover, 1883), p. 94.
15 Capitulare missorum item speciale, c. 31, ed. Alfred Boretius, MGH LL, Capitularia regum Francorum, 1 (Hannover, 1883), p. 103.

Dazu fügen sich übrigens noch andere Deutungsmuster, nur eines sei hier exemplarisch genannt: Die ecclesia war das corpus Christi; auch das hatte zwar einzelne Glieder – aber teilbar war es nicht. Der intensive Streit über den Charakter der Eucharistie, der von den 830er bis in die 860er Jahre die Intellektuellen des Reiches beschäftigte, war demnach kein Zufall. Er hängt zusammen mit der hohen Sensibilität, die für die Frage nach dem Leib des Herrn in einer Gemeinschaft bestand, die sich selbst als eben dieser leib beschreiben konnte – und zugleich vor der heilsnotwendigen Aufgabe stand, alle Häretiker, alle Söhne des Teufels, unbedingt zu entdecken und radikal auszugrenzen ...

REGNUM

Im Vergleich dazu war die Gemeinschaft des „ethnic state“ flexibler, anpassungsfähiger konzipiert, und das heißt konkret: auch toleranter gegenüber innerer Fraktionierung. Von einer divisio regni Francorum konnte man jedenfalls ohne weiteres reden. Gleich im zweiten Jahresbericht der Reichsannalen, zum Jahr 742, heißt es über die Hausmeier Pippin und Karlmann: diviserunt regnum Francorum inter se in loco, qui dicitur Vetus Pictavis (Vieux-Poitiers). Die Passage steht keineswegs isoliert da. In normativen Texten wie den Kapitularien, aber auch in erzählenden Texten, etwa in der Historiographie, finden sich etliche ...


So 806 in der Divisio regnorum, c. 1, ed. Alfred Boretius, MGH LL, Capitularia regum Francorum, 1 (Hannover, 1883), pp. 126–30, hier 127.

Parallelen; vor wie nach 742 ist in zeitgenössischer Rede vielerorts wieder und wieder das regnum Francorum zerteilt worden.

Das aber impliziert: Auch die Gemeinschaft der Franci ließ sich weiter untergliedern und aufteilen. Ein solches Teilen war schon deshalb möglich, weil Ethnizität im 8./9. Jahrhundert immer auch eine territoriale Dimension hatte. 768 ließ König Pippin festlegen: „Daß alle Menschen ihr Recht (lex) haben sollen, sowohl die Römer als auch die Salier; und wenn jemand aus einer anderen Provinz kommt, dann soll er gemäß dem Recht seines Vaterlandes (patria) leben“\textsuperscript{24}. Das mag ethnisch gedacht sein, ist aber doch zugleich auch auf die räumliche Herkunft gemünzt. Im Bericht zum Jahr 788 ist in den Reichsannalen davon die Rede, wie der bairische dux Tassilo III. in Ingelheim verurteilt wird – eine Schlüsselszene, auf die hin die Erzählung im ersten Teil des Textes wesentlich ausgerichtet ist.\textsuperscript{25} Diejenigen Leute, die dort in Ingelheim versammelt sind und Tassilo schließlich für schuldig erklären, stammen aus vielen verschiedenen gentes, es sind Franken, Baiern, Langobarden und Sachsen. Bezeichnend ist allerdings, wie diese Aufreihung weitergeführt wird: Hinzu treten nämlich diejenigen, „die aus allen Provinzen (ex omnibus provinciis) zu dieser Versammlung zusammengekommen waren“\textsuperscript{26}. Es ist also auch kein Zufall, daß die Reichsannalen gebetsmühlenartig in etlichen Jahresberichten vermerken, der König sei „heimgekehrt“ in die Francia; reversus, heißt es fast durchweg,\textsuperscript{27} und zwar ad propria, wie zu 775 noch eigens hervorgehoben wird. Frankisch sein – das hatte auch etwas mit dieser Herkunft aus dem Raum der Francia zu tun.

Gerade weil nun aber die geographische Herkunft Ethnizität mitdefinierte, war es ohne weiteres möglich, orientales Franci von occidentales Franci zu scheiden\textsuperscript{28};

\textsuperscript{24}Pippin, Capitulare Aquitanicum, c. 10, ed. Alfred Boretius, MGH LL, Capitularia regum Francorum, 1 (Hannover, 1883), p. 43.


\textsuperscript{27}Annales regni Francorum, a. 763, ed. Kurze, p. 22; ibid., a. 772, p. 34; ibid., a. 774, p. 40; ibid., a. 776, p. 48; ibid., a. 784, p. 66; ibid., a. 785, p. 70, usw.

\textsuperscript{28}Ibid., a. 775, p. 42.

\textsuperscript{29}Orientales Franci: Annales qui dicuntur Einhardi, a. 778, ed. Friedrich Kurze, MGH Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum separatim editi [6] (Hannover, 1895), p. 53;

Kurzum: „Ethnic states“ konnten unter die Herrschaft mehrerer Könige fraktioniert werden; daraus konnten Teil-Ethnien hervorgehen, die eigene Namen trugen; und Historiographen konnten diese Teil-Ethnien als eigene politische und militärische Akteure in der Geschichte präsentieren. Um so mehr drängt sich die Frage auf, was in dieser „vision of community“ dann überhaupt Gemeinschaft herstellte? Die Reichsannalen vertreten in dieser Frage gewissermaßen eine Dreielemente-Lehre: Was den „ethnic state“ als Gemeinschaft erlebbar macht, ist hier die immer wiederkehrende Zusammenkunft der Franci im Frühjahr, ist ihre gemeinsame Beratung vor wichtigen Entscheidungen und ist ihr gemeinsamer,
nahezu alljährlicher Feldzug als exercitus (und sei es fraktioniert in „Scharen“, scarae).

Mit schöner Regelmäßigkeit verzeichnen die Jahresberichte der Reichsannalen, an welchem Ort der König jeweils sein placitum oder seine synodus gehalten habe. Mit schöner Regelmäßigkeit auch berichten sie vom Kriegszug der Franken und von der Rückkehr des Königs in Franciam. Und zumindest vor großen, wichtigen Entscheidungen ist mehrfach auch ausdrücklich von Beratungen die Rede: Als Pippin 760 gegen die Aquitanier und deren dux Waifar ziehen wollte, habe er darüber erst „eine Beratung abgehalten mit den Franken“, heißt es im Text. Bevor Karl 773 auf die Einladung des Papstes Hadrian einging, „beriet er gemeinsam mit den Franken, was er tun solle“. Ehe er seinen Winterfeldzug 784/85 gegen die Sachsen unter Widukind und Abbio führte, hielt er darüber erst „mit den Franken eine Beratung ab“.


36 Siehe oben, Anm. 27–8.
38 Ibid., a. 773, p. 34.
39 Ibid., a. 784, p. 68. – Der Feldzug war deshalb für die Verfasser des Textes wichtig, weil er aus ihrer Perspektive den entscheidenden Durchbruch zum endgültigen Sieg über Widukind, Abbio und die Sachsen 785 gebracht hatte: Dazu oben, Anm. 1.
40 Vgl. zu Beschlüssen von Sachsen beispielsweise Annales regni Francorum, a. 776, ed. Kurze, p. 44.
41 Annales qui dicuntur Einhardi, a. 741, ed. Kurze, p. 3.
Einheit" versus "Fraktionierung"


**VERHÄLTNIS VON ECCLESIA UND REGNUM FRANCORUM ZUEINANDER**


Beides – *ecclesia* und *regnum* – waren vielmehr hochwirksame und folgenreiche Entwürfe von Gemeinschaft; in beiden und durch beide wurden Machtverhältnisse ausgehandelt; und beide waren auf ihre je eigene Weise auch religiös aufgeladen. Auch innerhalb der *ecclesia* fiel bestimmten Gruppen die Aufgabe zu, die anderen zu führen, zu leiten. Von *gubernare* und *regere* sprechen die einschlägigen Texte – und die Frage, welchen genauen Anteil daran Könige und Bischöfe haben sollten, beschäftigte die Eliten in West- und Mitteleuropa das gesamte 9. Jahrhundert hindurch.43 Die Franken wiederum konnten sich

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42 Annales Mettenses Piores, a. 714, ed. von Simson, pp. 19f.
typologisch auch auf die Völker des Alten Testaments beziehen, konnten sich als Neues Israel begreifen oder doch in Beziehung dazu setzen, konnten ihren König als neuen David ansprechen. Mit der Dichotomie von „Staat und Politik“ vs. „Kirche und Religion“ konnten wir nicht weiter, wenn wir die Interdependenz von regnum Francorum und ecclesia in den Überzeugungen der Zeitgenossen verstehen wollen.

Statt dessen könnte aber auch hier wieder ein Blick auf das Verhältnis von „Einheit“ und „Fraktionierung“ weiterhelfen. Denn zumindest die Währung, in der im regnum Francorum und in der ecclesia Gemeinschaft gehandelt wurde, war jeweils dieselbe: Diese Währung hieß consensus. Der consensus dürfte mithin in der politischen Kultur der Karolingerzeit ein zentrales Scharnier gebildet haben. Denn consensus war einerseits Voraussetzung und sichtbares Anzeichen dafür, daß unitas, concordia, pax existierten – also das, was die Gemeinschaft der ecclesia konstituierte. Und consensus war andererseits auch das, was die Könige und die Franci immer wieder auf ihren Versammlungen in gemeinsamer Beratung herstellten – also Grundlage und Ziel von placita und consilia.


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Bericht darüber, wie der Graf Stephan den Auftrag erhalten habe, diese neuen capitula in Paris vor seinen scabinei verlesen zu lassen. Stephan habe diese Aufgabe auf einer Versammlung erfüllt; und alle hätten darin übereingestimmt (consenserunt), daß sie die neuen Bestimmungen künftig beachten wollten.\(^{47}\)

Der Mönch Ratramnus von Corbie konnte dementsprechend in den 860er Jahren in einem Brief an den Erzbischof Rimbert von Hamburg-Bremen kurz und knapp formulieren: „es kann kein Recht geben, das nicht der allgemeine consensus beschlossen hätte“.\(^{48}\) Und Hrabanus Maurus, zunächst Abt von Fulda, dann Erzbischof von Mainz, definierte in seiner Enzyklopädie den Begriff des populus kurzerhand als die „Zusammenkunft einer Menschenmenge, die durch ‚Rechtskonsens‘ (consensus iuris) und einträchtige Gemeinschaft zusammengeschlossen ist“.

Consensus war aber nicht nur für das Miteinander in der „Versammlungspolitik“\(^ {49}\) von König und Franci eine entscheidende Größe; es war von Bedeutung auch im Gemeinschaftsentwurf der ecclesia. Deutlich wird das etwa im Matthäus-Kommentar des Paschasius Radbertus. In Mt 18,19 sagt Jesus zu seinen Jüngern: „Wenn zwei von Euch auf Erden übereinstimmen (consenserint), werden sie alles, was sie erbitten, von meinem himmlischen Vater erhalten. Denn wo zwei oder drei in meinem Namen versammelt sind, da bin ich mitten unter ihnen“. Radbert deutete diese Stelle so folgt: Christus habe sich so sehr um Eintracht (cordia) bemüht, daß er hier als Lohn für die Eintracht (unitas) verheißen habe, alle gemeinsamen Bitten würden erhört. Denn Christus selbst, so Radbert, sei ja jene pax und jene caritas, „die aus den Herzen vieler Menschen ein einziges“ mache und „die unzähligen Seelen der Heiligen untereinander verbindet und vereint, so daß sie eine einzige Seele bilden“.\(^ {50}\) Eine derartige unitas habe auch Paulus in seinem Brief an die Korinther angemahnt (1 Cor 1,10): Sie sollten in eodem sensu et in eadem scientia sein. Und so konstatierte Radbert: „wie die Mißhelligkeit (dissensus) von der Eintracht der Liebe (cordia caritatis) trennt, so vereint die Einhelligkeit (consensus) und verbindet das Gefüge zu dem Einen der Liebe (in unum caritatis), so daß Gott durch diese Einheit (unitas) unter den Menschen sein kann“.\(^{51}\)

An einer anderen Stelle seines Matthäus-Kommentars verglich Radbert den consensus in der Gemeinschaft der Christen mit dem Chorgesang. Im Chor müsse

\(^{47}\) Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, Cod. Lat. 4995, fol. 19v.

\(^{48}\) Ratramnus von Corbie, Epistola, ed. Ernst Dümmler, MGH EE, 6 (Berlin, 1925), p. 155.

\(^{49}\) Hrabanus Maurus, De rerum naturis, lib. XVI, c. 4, PL 111 (Paris, 1864), col. 9–614, col. 452 B.


In den Überzeugungen dieses Mönchs aus Corbie war der consensus also notwendige Ingredienz für die gottgefällige Eintracht in der Christenheit, in der und durch die sich die ecclesia überhaupt erst konstituierte; und mit dieser Auffassung stand Paschasius Radbertus keineswegs allein – auch wenn man beachten muß, wann der Mönch diese Teile seines Matthäus-Kommentars geschrieben hat: Sie finden sich im achten Buch seines Werks, also in jenen späten Teilen, die Radbert erst nach der Erfahrung innerer Streitigkeiten in Corbie verfaßt hat, als er sich – nicht ganz freiwillig – aus dem Abbatiat von Corbie in das Kloster St-Riquier zurückgezogen hatte. Und während die ersten vier Bücher schon 831 abgeschlossen waren, schrieb Radbert die späteren Teile erst, nachdem Anfang der 840er Jahre ein schwerer Konflikt zwischen den Söhnen Ludwigs des Frommen blutig ausgefochten worden war und mit der Teilung des Reiches im Vertrag von Verdun 843 ein Ende gefunden hatte. Radberts „vision of community“ ist formuliert nach der doppelten Erfahrung von innerklösterlichem Streit und innerfränkischem Krieg.


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52 Ibid., lib. 8, Bd. 2, p. 896.
53 Ibid., lib. 8, Bd. 2, pp. 896f.
Die sancta ecclesia so beginnt dieser Text, sei zwar wie ein Schiff hin und hergeschleudert worden und nach dem Tod Ludwigs des Frommen in schlimmer Zeit durch die discordiae zizania belastet worden; doch nun hätten Karl und seine Brüder eine pacificatio erreicht, eine paterni regni ex consensu divisio – und damit eben zugleich auch eine sanctae ecclesiae respiratio. Man ist geneigt, das nur noch ein klein bißchen weiter zuzuspitzen: Die konsensuale Teilung des Reiches hatte die für die ecclesia essentielle Einheit wiederhergestellt!

Was in Verdun zwischen den Karolingern ausgehandelt worden war, das sollte sich nun, im Spätherbst des Jahres, auf Ebene des westlichen Reichsteils wiederholen: Der König und die Großen waren zur gemeinsamen Beratung zusammengekommen. Sie wollten sich, so heißt es im Text, alle gegenseitig dazu ermahnen, von ihrem alten Groll aufeinander abzulassen – und sich statt dessen in pacis concordia und vera amicitia zu vereinen. Damit verfolgten sie zwei Ziele: Sie wollten vor Gott Gnade finden; und sie wollten feinsinniger über die regis ac regni stabilitas et utilitas verhandeln. Communiter inito consilio, nachdem man gemeinsam die Beratung gehalten hatte, so heißt es weiter, habe man eben das vorliegende Schriftstück selbst aufgesetzt und durch die Unterfertigung aller Beteiligten zu bekräftigen beschlossen. Darin stehe geschrieben, was vordringlich „zum gemeinsamen Seelenheil und zur Festigkeit des regnum und zu unser aller Nutzen“ gehöre. Deshalb habe man auch nicht in getrennten Rollen sprechen wollen – sondern „wie ein einziger Mensch im Leib der einen Kirche – die einzelnen aber als ein Glied des jeweils anderen – alle einmütig mit einer einzigen Stimme das sagen wollen, was allen von Nutzen ist“.


FAZIT

Um es zum Schluß thesenhaft zuzuspitzen: die Dichotomie von Staat und Kirche oder von Politik und Religion hilft nicht, jenes In- und Miteinander zweier

58 Ibid., Proömium, pp. 253f.
„visions of community“ zu beschreiben, das die karolingische Welt geprägt hat. Und ebensowenig dürfte es weiterführen, wenn wir Texte wie die Reichsannalen, die „Annales Mettenses priores“, die „Admonitio generalis“, Radberts Matthäus-Kommentar oder den Vertrag von Coulaines als Ausdruck von Ideologien lesen, die es nur als solche zu entlarven und zu kritisieren gilt, um zur Wirklichkeit der Macht durchzudringen.


Chapter 21
Diaspora Jewish Communities in Early Medieval Europe: Structural Conditions for Survival and Expansion
Wolfram Drews

The Jewish community offers a unique case when analysed in the light of the topic of early medieval ethnicity: unlike Romans, Byzantines, Muslims or Barbarians, Jews living in the diaspora were not in a position of political authority. Nowhere in the Latin, Greek or Islamic world were they in power. At best, they led a semi-autonomous existence, such as in Mesopotamia under the Sasanian emperors or their successors, the Abbasid caliphs. In this respect they can only be compared to communities of Eastern Christians.¹

From the Hellenistic period onward, the ethnic or national component of Jewish identity was increasingly supplemented by cultural or religious perspectives.² To be sure, Jews had been described as an *ethnos* by ancient

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historiographers, both Greek and Jewish, such as Flavius Josephus. As Naomi Janovitz has recently argued, ‘it was the adaptation of Greco-Roman notions of identity that opened a new phase, or more correctly, a first phase, in the creation of Jewish ethnicity’. In the first centuries BCE and CE, Jews were even ruled by leaders bearing the title ethnárchēs, such as Herod Archelaos. The emperor Augustus refused to grant him the title of king, which had been the official designation of his father Herod the Great, conferring on him instead the inferior title ethnárchēs. Even though there was already a large Jewish diaspora at this time, a significant community of Jews was still living in Palestine in a typical satellite state on the Roman periphery, which was governed by rulers bearing a title reminiscent of the terminology of ancient ethnographers. The use of this title reflected the strong influence Hellenistic culture had exerted upon ancient Judaism.

However, this state of affairs changed dramatically after the defeat suffered by the Jews in the Jewish war and the destruction of the temple in 70 CE. After the death of Herod Agrippa II in Rome after the year 93, there was no longer a single Jewish political leader. The end of the Second Temple period brought about a redefinition of Jewish identity: the Jewish community no longer constituted a commonwealth based on political and religious features, governed on the one hand by kings or ethnarchs and on the other by high priests. Rather, a new intellectual elite emerged: the Rabbinic movement. Gradually the rabbis came

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3 Josephus repeatedly mentions the ‘people of the Hebrews’ (Hebraíōn éthnos: Antiquitates Iudaicae [hereafter Ant. Iud.] 4, 308; 8, 120), the ‘people of the Jews’ (Ioudaíōn éthnos: Ant. Iud. 11, 184; 11, 270) and also the ‘people of the Israelites’ (Israēlitōn éthnos: Ant. Iud. 11, 3).


5 See Josephus, Ant. Iud. 17, 317. Already in 47 bc the high priest John Hyrcanus had received this title from Julius Caesar, together with his sons (Ant. Iud. 14, 192–5, at 194). Later on Josephus relates that ‘Pompey restored the high priesthood to Hyrcanus and permitted him to have the leadership of the nation’ (tò éthnous: Ant. Iud. 20, 244). Also the Jewish community of Alexandria was ruled by an ethnarch ‘who governs the people’ (tò éthnos: Ant. Iud. 14, 117).

6 The Jewish sages are in this respect typical representatives of the so-called axial age civilizations, on which see Eisenstadt, ‘World history’, p. 112: ‘the emergence of a new social element, a new type of elite, carriers of models of cultural and social order. These were often autonomous intellectuals, such as the ancient Israelite prophets and priests and later on the Jewish sages ... Initial small nuclei of such groups of cultural elites or of intellectuals developed the new ontologies, the new transcendental visions and conceptions, and were of crucial importance in the construction of the new “civilizational” collectivities and the concomitant patterns of collective identity.’ See also
to be the representatives and leaders of the Jewish community both in Palestine and in the diaspora. This situation was to be characteristic of the medieval period and beyond, even as groups such as the Karaites presented alternative visions of communal unity. With the emergence of Rabbinic Judaism, Jewish identity was no longer defined through political, military or territorial factors, but principally through religious norms and institutions. Compared to barbarian groups migrating into Roman territory, being a Jew was much less related to shifting political circumstances, because religious codes and values, rather than ruling elites, determined the identity of Rabbinic Jews who primarily lived in the diaspora.  

The emergence of Rabbinic Judaism completed the transformation of the people of Israel into a religious community, a transformation that had begun during the Babylonian exile centuries before. Jews were still a people, but their identity was defined by their own particular religion, by the covenant between them and God and more specifically by the canon of their holy tradition. This religious identity, based on a revelation laid down in written documents, was also the single most important guarantor of the survival of the Jewish community in the European diaspora during the Middle Ages. Jewish identity was consequently marked by a religious canon that was normative for (Rabbinic) Jews only; therefore the Jews – unlike barbarian peoples in the same period – had no need constantly to renegotiate strategies of distinction or markers of identity. The single most important marker was in their case Rabbinic literature,

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7 In this respect the Jewish rabbis are markedly different from other groups in the early Middle Ages; see Walter Pohl, ‘The politics of change: reflections on the transformation of the Roman world’, in Walter Pohl and Maximilian Diesenberger (eds), Integration und Herrschaft. Ethnische Identitäten und soziale Organisation im Frühmittelalter, Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters, 3 (Vienna, 2002), pp. 276–88, at 279: ‘Neither Goths nor Franks nor Lombards were anything like a genuine ethnic community organically grown on Germanic soil. Any ruling elite on Roman territory had to construct the meaning of their rule on the basis of rather disparate elements.’


Visions of Community in the Post-Roman World

which gradually spread during the early Middle Ages. These texts distinguished Rabbinic Jews not only from Christians but also from Karaites, who rejected the Rabbinic canon and who remained a powerful group throughout the high Middle Ages, especially in the Near East. In contrast to other early medieval groups, Jewish identity was not maintained by social elites, but by religious codes and institutions rooted at the most basic level of Jewish life.

This argument becomes clearer when we look at two examples from the early medieval period, one from seventh-century Spain, the other from eleventh-century Italy, but which reaches back at least into the ninth century. As is well known, Visigothic Spain saw the most radical departure from traditional Roman policies towards the Jews. In the second decade of the seventh century, the Gothic king Sisebut (ruled 612–21) ordered all Jews of his kingdom to be baptized by force. However, many of these new Christians returned to the faith of their forefathers, acts that could be interpreted as threatening the Catholic identity of the Gothic monarchy. In spite of repeated attempts to bring the Jews into the Catholic fold, the Jewish community persisted and survived until the Muslim conquest in 711.

194: ‘identités et différences sont sans cesse recréés par des actes de communication et des formulations symboliques’.


11 Again this is totally different in the case of barbarian identities. See Walter Pohl, ‘Aux origines d’une Europe ethnique’, p. 207: ‘Les textes soulèvent en effet le problème de la cohésion supra-régionale de ces élites qui, chacune dans leur région, étaient déjà éracinées.’


Was there a special reason for this astonishing Jewish resilience? After all, the Goths themselves had been converted from Arianism to Catholicism some twenty years before at the initiative of their king Reccared, apparently without any lasting resistance from Arians. Reccared himself converted in 587, to be followed by all of his people two years later at the third council of Toledo. Sisebut may have thought that a conversion of the Jews might be as easy as that of his own people in the recent past, which he himself may have witnessed. However, he disregarded a major difference: not only was Judaism a separate religion rather than a mere denomination, a branch of Christianity, more important was perhaps the foundation of the Jewish religion, namely biblical and Rabbinic learning as laid down in written books that were available not only to a Jewish elite, but principally to all members of the community. In principle all Jews had access to books, which reinforced their identity. The survival of Judaism was not based on a religious or social elite alone; it was rather entrusted to all members of the community. By contrast, Gothic Arianism had no comparable intellectual dimension; as regards theological erudition, it was far below the level of Catholicism which had appropriated the philosophical tradition of antiquity.14

A remarkable source shedding light on the paramount importance of books for Spanish Jews in the seventh century is the so-called confessio Iudaeorum, which is also referred to as a placitum, drawn up by a Christian author in the 630s.15 The document relates that the baptized Jews of the capital city Toledo pledged to break off any contact with unbaptized Jews. Apparently, in the eyes of the Christian authorities these lasting contacts were one of the major incentives for baptized Jews to return to the religion of their forefathers. However, the placitum did not merely seek to inhibit all direct contacts between baptized and unbaptized Jews (whose existence is by itself a noteworthy fact). Remarkably, the Jews promised to hand out all their books, not only those that had authority, but also another category of writings which apparently had somewhat lesser authority: Sed et Scripturas omnes, quascumque usus gentis nostrae in Synagogis, causa doctrinae, habuit, tam auctoritatem habentes, quam etiam eas quas deuteram appellant,

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There has been considerable scholarly speculation regarding the distinction between the different groups of canonical writings in this document. Probably the first group of authoritative writings is the corpus of the Hebrew Bible, the Christian Old Testament. The subsequent reference to writings of apparently lesser authority is very likely a hint that contemporary Spanish Jews had access to parts of the Rabbinic canon, most probably the Mishna, perhaps also some tractates of the Talmud or some midrashim. The Greek term *deuteras* used in the Latin text of the *placitum* is probably a reference to the Mishna. Semantically, both the Hebrew word *mishna* and the Greek term *deuterosis* denote a repetition, whether a repetition of the law or of the oral tradition of authoritative teachings. The *placitum* is the earliest source that very likely attests to the diffusion of Rabbinic writings in medieval Spain. It may be irritating that the authors of the *placitum* seem to imply that the writings called *deuteras* were also used in synagogues, which is not really true in the case of Rabbinic writings studied in Rabbinic schools or study houses. But this distinction may not have been strictly observed in an early period, and perhaps the Christian authors may not have been aware of this practice, in spite of the services of their Jewish informers, whose existence we may assume with a high degree of probability.

For the present argument the reference to the biblical and Rabbinic canon in the *placitum* is of utmost importance: the Christian authorities were clearly aware that Jewish identity was based on and reinforced by continuous reading and study of authoritative, canonical books. Jewish resilience and survival in the medieval diaspora was grounded in literature accessible to all Jews, holy books available to every literate Jew opened the way to divine revelation. The detailed knowledge of the Christian authorities regarding the twofold Jewish canon is astonishing, but was certainly due to Jewish converts well informed concerning the foundation of contemporary Jewish identity. Baptized Jews directed the attention of Christian authorities to the inadequacy of prohibitions of direct contact between baptized and unbaptized Jews; from the point of view of the Visigothic authorities, it was equally important to deprive the Jews of their books. Religion as laid down in written tradition was the cornerstone of Jewish identity. ‘Ethnicity’ was in their case grounded in religion, which gave them the power to survive and resist the interference of hostile authorities. The power of diaspora Jews lay not in a position of political leadership, but in

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16 Pl. Suppl. 4, col. 1666.
18 See Drews, *Juden und Judentum*, pp. 372–6 (with discussion of literary and archaeological evidence); Drews, *Neighbour*, p. 121.
an authoritative intellectual tradition constituting the foundation of religious identity. The circulation of authoritative books, biblical or Rabbinic, was the most important strategy for integrating the Jewish diaspora communities throughout the Mediterranean world and beyond.20 The possession of these books set them apart from non-Jews, it was a strategy of distinction marking them as Jewish. In addition, the placitum is a rare piece of evidence that sheds some light on the otherwise often ‘invisible’ Jews of Visigothic Spain.21

Another source, illustrating a different aspect, is a family chronicle from early medieval Italy. In a region marked by centuries of overlapping Latin, Greek and Arab influence, members of the Jewish diaspora maintained their identity, using traditions from various cultural backgrounds, but adapting them to their own horizons.22 The chronicle written by Ahimaaz of Oria traces the history of a family belonging to the Jewish elite back to the Holy Land, the territorial foundation of the Jewish community. The chronicle was finished in 1054, but the author relates the history of his forefathers through eight generations, starting in the ninth century, claiming that his family was descended from Jews deported by the Roman general Titus from Palestine to Italy after the destruction of the temple in the first century.23 The history of the family was thus anchored in one of the major events of Jewish history and placed in the context of the mythical beginning of the European diaspora. On numerous occasions the author asserted

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20 The importance of Jewish books and of religious teaching in private is highlighted by a law issued by the Visigothic king Ervig (ruled 680–87), which renewed the prohibition of Jewish books; according to this law, it was forbidden to read such books or to teach Jewish tradition in private houses (Leges Visigothorum 12, 3, 11, ed. Karl Zeumer, MGH LL nationum Germanicarum, 1 (Hanover, Leipzig, 1902), p. 438). It becomes clear that Jewish identity is based on practices and convictions rooted at grassroots level, quite independent of any religious or social elite.


that success and well-being in this world, that is, the Jewish diaspora, was based on faithful observance of the Torah, performance of the commandments and loyalty to Jewish tradition.

The members of the family were placed within four different sets of relations. First, they worshiped the god of Israel; their identity was founded on their relationship with divine transcendence. Second, family members were presented as integral parts of past and present generations of the people of Israel. They admonished their respective contemporaries to keep the commandments; for their sake they founded schools, copied Torah scrolls and even composed piyyutim, liturgical poetry. Ahimaaz of Oria presented his forefathers as members of a Jewish aristocracy, as benefactors of the community, practising charity. On a third level, the characters of this family history interacted with their relatives. There were frequent cases of intermarriage, but the author also pointed to the bequest of books within the family, and it is safe to assume that Ahimaaz could not have traced his family history through 200 years without the help of written documents in a family archive. On a fourth level, the members of the family cooperated closely with non-Jewish contemporaries: they served as financial or political advisors, military leaders, viziers or astrologers to various Christian or Muslim princes. The author was careful to underline that social success was not an end in itself. His forefathers were rather keen to use their political capital for the benefit of their Jewish community. For instance, the miraculous healing of a Byzantine princess by a family member prevented anti-Jewish persecutions. The foundation of pious institutions and schools reinforced the foundations of Jewish identity. From this perspective, schools of learning were presented as equivalents of the temple or even as related to the ark of the covenant: ‘He [Aaron] extended his influence, he founded a place of study [seat of learning], to take the place of that which had been on the ground of the temple, where the foundations of the ark had been laid.’

The chronicle of Ahimaaz shows that historical remembrance in the medieval diaspora was primarily focused on a local level. The Jewish community was

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25 Ahimaaz, Chronicle, 11a and 21a, ed. Salzman, pp. 79f and 100.
26 Ahimaaz, Chronicle, 12d and 17a, ed. Salzman, pp. 83 and 92.
27 In view of the great importance of book-based learning in Judaism there is no reason to assume a predominantly oral tradition behind Ahimaaz’s family history, as done by Patricia Skinner, ‘Gender, memory and Jewish identity: reading a family history from medieval southern Italy’, Early Medieval Europe, 13 (2005): 277–96, at 288. Skinner herself admits the existence of ‘writings’ and ‘family papers’ (pp. 289 and 290).
28 Ahimaaz, Chronicle, 6b–7b, ed. Salzman, pp. 72f.
29 Ahimaaz, Chronicle, 4a, ed. Salzman, p. 67.
composed of families who supported their respective community to the best of their ability. The ‘private’ affairs of a family acquired ‘public’ importance,\(^{30}\) since there were no central Jewish institutions providing for the needs of particular Jewish communities or families. The chronicle especially highlighted the importance of institutions of learning:

He [Ammittai] continued his school, to promote, with the sages of his company, the study of the law of God. The day before he died, his father had demanded this of him, that he should maintain the assembly of teachers, and direct it properly, so that the teachers and pupils might not be disbanded. He held the assembly together, carried on instruction with the help of the rabbis and sages, and expounded the Torah, systematically, in its length and breadth; his principles of interpretation of the Commandments of God and His covenant were those of his ancestors.\(^{31}\)

The most important element in the survival in the diaspora was loyalty to the tradition of the fathers, which was above all a form of knowledge and learning: ‘The awe-inspiring God bestowed upon them knowledge, understanding and judgment, wisdom and power; He that putteth on light adorned them with insight and learning, with abundance of wealth and honour.’\(^{32}\) Knowledge and learning are presented as being the prerequisites for acquiring earthly possessions, social standing and political influence with gentile authorities. In earlier periods historiographical interest was focused on Rabbinic schools or on chains of tradition,\(^{33}\) or on the history of the Jewish people on a large scale, such as in the book *Josippon*, written also in southern Italy in the tenth century.\(^{34}\) Composing the history of a Jewish family may be considered a new stage in Jewish historiography during the Middle Ages: ‘I have begun at the very beginning; from the captivity of Jerusalem and the destruction of the house of

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30 It is misleading to oppose the ‘public’ and the ‘private’ aspect in this connection, as done by Skinner, ‘Gender, memory and Jewish identity’, p. 284, since the ‘personal’ affairs of a family, especially if belonging to the elite, always have public importance in Jewish diaspora communities.


32 Ahimaaz, *Chronicle*, 20d, ed. Salzmann, p. 99. See also 21a (p. 100): ‘God granted him rest on every hand and made him happy with the knowledge of the law of delight and enriched him with property.’


our glory, through the captivity of the city of Oria, in which I have settled, I have come down to the arrival of my fathers in Capua; and have ended with my own time and that of my children. In a book I have collected and compiled and narrated it for the generations to come.35

The chronicle of Ahimaaz was written at a time when Norman conquerors were successfully replacing Byzantines and Arabs as rulers of southern Italy. Precisely at this time Christian pressure on the Jews was increasing; in the city of Capua a man probably belonging to one of the leading Jewish families converted to Christianity.36 Placed within this context, the emphasis put by the author on the importance of the Jewish family and on the positive results of loyalty to Jewish tradition can be interpreted as an appeal to strengthen the institutions of the diaspora that guarantee the survival of the Jewish community and religion.

The focus on the Jewish family points to a second aspect that secured the survival of Judaism in the diaspora: the family was – next to the synagogue – one of the major institutions in the religious life of the Jews. Some of the major duties associated with sabbath festivities have to be performed in the family.37 The same is true for the seder in the course of Pessach: the family acquires an almost sacred dimension, it is transformed into a liturgical community performing prayer and major religious rites. What used to be reserved for temple service was transferred into the Jewish home during the Rabbinic period; the family table was on certain occasions almost turned into a ritual altar, the Jewish father and the Jewish mother fulfil liturgical duties such as lighting candles, preparing holy meals and reciting prayers.

The initiation of young Jews into the Jewish religion is also one of the major duties of the Jewish father and mother. Therefore it is justified to put the family on a par with the synagogue as an important institution guaranteeing the survival of Judaism in the diaspora. The chronicle of Ahimaaz highlights this particular dimension of the Jewish community. Medieval diaspora Jews wielded no power, and they were not in positions of political authority; the lack of centralized religious institutions that could have issued norms and regulations of all kinds (apart from Rabbinic academies in distant Mesopotamia) resulted in a situation where the continuation of Jewish life was based on decentralized institutions close to everyday life. Whereas for the synagogue service a minyan of ten Jewish males is required to be able to pray together in public, the family does not have such numerical restrictions: even if the number ten is not reached, the rites and ceremonies assigned to the Jewish family can still be performed in private, and Jewish children can receive religious instruction too. So even

37 Cf. Skinner, ‘Gender, memory and Jewish identity’, p. 293: ‘The liturgical life of the Jewish family centered around the home, with the father as head, and so books took on an added importance.’
if a synagogue is lacking, the Jewish family alone can serve as the institution securing the continuation of Jewish life in the diaspora.

To be able to act in this way, however, the family needs the most basic religious and cultural capital: authoritative, canonical books giving access to divine revelation, which is the basis of the Jewish identity as the people of God’s covenant. The attempt by the Visigothic authorities to confiscate and probably destroy all of the Jewish books was meant to deprive the Jewish community, and also the Jewish families, of precisely those books that could have been used for instructing children and for properly performing religious ceremonies not only in the synagogue, as explicitly stated in the *placitum*, but also in the Jewish house, the equivalent of the ancient temple on a most elementary level.

Jewish literature and the Jewish family acted as cornerstones of both religion and ‘ethnicity’ in the medieval diaspora. Both aspects constituted the link to the Jewish past; Jewish identity was founded on Jewish ancestry and, more importantly, on Jewish religion. The norms and practices of Judaism, laid down in written documents, constituted the most important religious and cultural capital. On the other hand, the conditions for the transfer of this capital from one generation to another were guaranteed by Jewish families, which provided the social capital and the institutional framework for the survival of Jewish diaspora communities. After the destruction of the temple and the loss of political power, religion and ‘ethnicity’ were guaranteed by Jewish literature and by the Jewish family.
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Chapter 22

New Visions of Community in Ninth-Century Rome: The Impact of the Saracen Threat on the Papal World View

Clemens Gantner

During the ninth century, the last major assaults of the early Islamic Empire began directly to affect Italy and Papal Rome. As a result of a Saracen raiding party’s devastating attack on Rome in 846, the papacy underwent two important changes in its world view that this chapter seeks to address.

It is important to note that direct Roman relations with Saracens had not always been bellicose: in 776, the Frankish king Charlemagne, already king of the Lombards, accused Pope Hadrian I of promoting the slave trade with Saracens. Before this accusation Saracens had scarcely been the focus of eighth-century papal writings; they had only figured in the Liber Pontificalis (hereafter LP) vita of Gregory II (pope 715–31), which narrated the fall of the Visigothic kingdom in Spain in 711 (before Gregory’s pontificate) and the subsequent attempts of the Aquitanian Franks to manage Saracen forays into their territory. The Arab siege of Constantinople in 717/718 merited a brief mention. In both episodes, the Saracens were clearly the enemies of Christendom, but received only cursory treatment.

Thereafter, despite some other opportunities, Pope Hadrian’s response to Charlemagne’s charges against Rome is the next surviving document in which

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1 I would like to thank Walter Pohl and everyone on the Wittgenstein Team, namely Francesco Borri, Richard Corradini, Max Diesenberger, Nicola Edelmann, Gerda Heydemann, Marianne Pollheimer, Roland Steinacher, Veronika Wieser and Bernhard Zeller for providing me with all the necessary advice, discussion, critique and most of all encouragement. Of course, none of the above can be implicated in any mistakes the text may have. Many thanks to Alexander O’Hara and Marianne Pollheimer for helpful discussion on the English translations of Latin passages and to Richard Payne for improving my English in this chapter.


3 Such as the Battle of Poitiers 732, the reconquest of Narbonne 759 on the Frankish side and several successful campaigns by the emperors in the east.
Visions of Community in the Post-Roman World

a pope officially addressed papal relations with Saracens. The pope objected vigorously to the allegations, informing the Frankish king that it was in fact ‘Greek’ traders who had purchased slaves from Lombards in Tuscany:

We thus respond to your mellifluous writings concerning the sale of slaves, which (as you say) have been sold by our Romans to the unspeakable people of the Saracens. And so far, we have not – God forbid – stooped low enough to (commit) such a crime; and if it was committed it would have been done without our approval. However, there are always unspeakable Greeks sailing on the Lombard coast, who accordingly bought those familiæ; they made a treaty (amicitia) with the Lombards [of that area] and from those Lombards they obtained the slaves.

Hadrian, however, neither condemned the slave trade nor suggested in any way that trade with the Saracens was uncommon. Rather, he pointed out the economic exigencies of the slave trade for the Lombards of Tuscany: under the pressure of a famine, Lombards sold their own people – possibly even kin – to the

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4 On the meaning of ‘Greeks’ in eighth-century Rome, see Clemens Gantner, ‘The label “Greeks” in the papal diplomatic repertoire in the eighth century’, in Walter Pohl and Gerda Heydemann (eds), Strategies of Identification – Ethnicity and Religion in Early Medieval Europe, Cultural Encounters in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, 13 (Turnhout, 2012, forthcoming). This letter is, however, a special case. Charles Verlinden, L’esclavage dans l’Europe médiévale, vol. 2: Italie, colonies italiennes du Levant, Levant latin, Empire byzantin (Gent, 1977), p. 114, claims that the slave traders were ‘Campanian’ Greeks, without providing any evidence for their provenance.

5 Literally: ‘...; or that it [the crime] would have been by our will.’

6 It is not exactly clear, what familia – the letter uses this exact case, not the correct familias (or familiam) – means in this context. But later in Hadrian’s letter it becomes evident that the Lombards in question were selling their own people (members of the household, maybe even relatives). See also Michael McCormick, Origins of the European Economy: Communications and Commerce, AD 300–900 (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 877f., no. 186.

7 Codex epistolaris Carolinus (hereafter CC), ep. 59 (JE 2426), ed. Wilhelm Gundlach, MGH EE, 3, Epistolae Merovingici et Karolini aevi (Berlin, 1892), pp. 469–657, at 585: Repperimus enim in ipsas vestras melliflas apices pro venalitate mancipiorum, ut quasi per nostris Romanis venundati fuissent in gentem necdicendam Saracenorum. Et numquam, quod absit, in tale declinavimus scelus, aut per nostram voluntatem factum fuisset; sed in litoraria Langobardorum semper navigaverunt necdicendi Greci et exinde emebant ipsa familia et amicitia cum ipsis Langobardis fecerunt et per eodem Langebards ipsa suscipiebant mancipia. The JE number refers to Philipp Jaffé and Paul Ewald, Regesta Pontificum Romanorum, vol. 1 (Graz, ‘1956) and will in due course be given for the papal writings at the first citation.

8 And indeed, slave trade with the Islamic territories of the Mediterranean flourished in the eighth and ninth centuries: see Verlinden, L’esclavage, pp. 114f. and McCormick, Origins.
‘Greek’ slave-traders.9 The pope also implicitly blamed the Carolingian official for the situation; the Tuscan dux Allo would in theory have been responsible for ameliorating the unfortunate living conditions in the region and would also have had the authority to prevent the slave trade. Hadrian thus essentially reversed the charges back to Charlemagne himself.10 Because we have here a refutation of charges brought against the pope, we do not know how much truth the response contained. But we can gain some invaluable insight into attitudes towards the Saracens. The Saracens were called necdicendi, an adjective that designated ‘enemies of the pope’. We have to note, however, that the pope was clearly citing or paraphrasing Charlemagne’s diction. The ‘Greeks’ were given the epithet necdicendi in the papal letter as well, presumably to equate their offence with the one allegedly committed by the Saracens. From this perspective, the language applied to the Saracens is hardly significant for papal approaches to them.

Far more interesting is Hadrian’s implicit acknowledgement of ongoing trade between Rome and the Saracens, which he could easily have suppressed. Accordingly, we may assume that the presence of Saracen traders at the Roman ports (Porto, Ostia and Centumcellae, modern Civitavecchia) was an unremarkable phenomenon.

Indeed we have an Arabic account, transmitted in Yāqūt’s famous dictionary of place names, cited from the lost work of al-Walīd b. Muslim al-Dimashqī (written around 800),11 in which the flourishing markets of Rome that attracted distant peoples to trade, including Arab traders, were described.12 Saracens in Rome were apparently no more unusual than their counterparts in Southern Italy,13 and the Romans do not appear to have viewed Muslim traders as a
threat. It may have been a result of descriptions such as al-Walīd's that reports of Roman wealth spread throughout Muslim merchant communities in the Mediterranean. These stories attracted not only merchants, but also raiders. In 846, a considerable Saracen force, most likely coming from North Africa, attacked Rome. These raiders had no difficulty overcoming the fortifications that the late pope Gregory IV had ordered to be built in the two coastal towns of Ostia and Porto explicitly against a possible Saracen attack. According to one version of the life of pope Sergius II (844–47) in the LP, the defence of the ports lacked both in competence and manpower. The LP, the semi-official papal history, reported that the Saracens reached Rome, but afterwards the account unfortunately breaks off. It is only alternative sources, written far from Rome or long after the raid, that recounted a Frankish intervention on behalf of the Romans, perhaps led by the young Carolingian king of Italy, Louis II (844/50–75).

Studia Latina Stockholmensia, 3 (Lund, Stockholm, 1956), pp. 122f. See also pp. 99f. for a Saracen delegation in Salerno.

14 It is often overlooked that Rome was an important centre of Italian trade: see McCormick, Origins, pp. 618–27. Paulo Delogu, 'L’importazione di tessuti preziosi e il sistema economico romano nel IX secolo', in Paulo Delogu (ed.), Roma medievale. Aggiornamenti (Florence, 1998), pp. 123–41.

15 Certainly more than simple raiders. Peter Partner, The Lands of St Peter: The Papal State in the Middle Ages and the Early Renaissance (Berkeley, Calif., 1972), pp. 56f., exaggerates in claiming the attack 'was not a casual raid, but the operation of a large army which must have been carefully planned by the Aghlabid government’. It is by no means certain that the Aghlabid rulers of North Africa or their subordinates operating in Sicily had anything to do with the attack (as Ekkehard Eickhoff, Seekrieg und Seepolitik zwischen Islam und Abendland. Das Mittelmeer unter byzantinischer und arabischer Hegemonie (650–1040) (Berlin, 1966), pp. 182f. also claims); this was, rather, in all likelihood a more or less private operation (like the conquest of Bari by the Khalifūn, probably a Berber: see Giosuè Musca, L’emirato di Bari, 847–871 (Bari, ’1978, 1967), pp. 35–7). It is also interesting that Rome had been warned by the Frankish marcensis (margrave) of Corsica (LP II, ed. Duchesne, p. 99), possibly indicating that the Saracen force was coming from the west. On the other hand, the LP vita of Leo IV clearly stated that they came from Africa: LP II, ed. Duchesne, p. 107.

16 LP II, ed. Duchesne, p. 81f.

17 LP II, ed. Duchesne, pp. 99–101. The account has only been preserved as an addition to Sergius II’s vita in a single manuscript from the ninth century (the Codex Farnese), now lost itself, that is very critical of the pope: Duchesne, LP I, pp. cxcixf.

18 Prudentius, Annales Bertiniani, a. 846, ed. Georg Waitz, MGH SS rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum separatim editi [5] (Hanover, 1883), p. 34, reported nothing concerning Louis II’s personal involvement. (See the translation The Annals of St-Bertin, trans. Janet L. Nelson, Manchester Medieval Sources (Manchester, New York, 1991), p. 63.) The information that the king (Louis) was leading the Frankish forces is preserved in the papal history of Pseudo-Liudprand, PL 129, col. 1245. The Pseudo-Liudprand text is based on an LP text that was, at least for the popes of the ninth century, close to the one of the Codex Farnese (see n. 17), but the compiler seemingly still had the whole text at his disposal. See Wilhelm Levison, ‘Die Papstgeschichte des Pseudo-Liudprand und der Codex
Southern Italian sources claimed that the Carolingians were defeated. Despite their initial success, the Saracens, who may have split up into smaller raiding groups, did not manage to take the city of Rome. However, they plundered the major shrines of the apostles, situated outside of the old imperial Aurelian walls, namely St Peter’s basilica in the Vatican and St Paul Outside the Walls.

This raid led to a fundamental shift in papal policy. The new pope Leo IV (847–53) seems to have stylized himself above all as a spearhead against the enemies, who were expected to return. He was correct. In 849, about two and a half years after his ordination, Leo received the chance to prove himself as the leader of a coalition of the Southern Italian maritime cities of Naples, Amalfi and Gaeta against a new attack by a Saracen fleet. In the battle of Ostia, a Saracen raiding force, quite likely comparable to the one that had arrived three years earlier, was defeated. The final victory was attributed to God, who had sent bad
weather against the Saracens in response to Leo’s prayer that is rendered as a direct speech in the LP account.\footnote{LP II, ed. Duchesne, pp. 117–19 (chapters 47–54), see p. 118 for Leo’s prayer. Herbers, Leo IV, pp. 114–17 shows that the prayer was mainly taken from the liturgy of the feast of Sts Peter and Paul, linking the battle with the key saints of Rome, whose churches had been plundered in 846.}

After the pontificate of Leo IV, we have no concrete reports about a Saracen threat to Rome during the pontificates of the next three popes, Benedict III (855–58), Nicholas I (858–67) and Hadrian II (867–72). That may well be due to the source material that has survived. The sources for Benedict are comparatively scarce and the LP lives of both Nicholas and Hadrian II concentrate on their relations with Byzantium and the Photian controversy.\footnote{See Klaus Herbers, ‘Papst Nikolaus I. und Patriarch Photios. Das Bild des byzantinischen Gegners in lateinischen Quellen’, in Odilo Engels and Peter Schreiner (eds), Die Begegnung des Westens mit dem Osten. Kongresstakten des 4. Symposions des Mediävistenverbandes in Köln aus Anlaß des 1000. Todesjahres der Kaiserin Theophanu (Sigmaringen, 1993), pp. 51–74; Klaus Herbers, ‘Rom und Byzanz im Konflikt. Die Jahre 869/870 in der Perspektive der Hadriansvita des Liber Pontificalis’, in Wilfried Hartmann and Klaus Herbers (eds), Die Faszination der Papstgeschichte. Neue Zugänge zum frühen und hohen Mittelalter, Forschungen zur Kaiser- und Papstgeschichte des Mittelalters, Regesta Imperii, Beihfg 28 (Cologne, Weimar, Vienna, 2008), pp. 55–70; and François Bougard, ‘Anastase le Bibliothécaire ou Jean Diacre? Qui a récrit la vie de Nicolas Ier et pourquoi?’, in Jean-Marie Martin, Bernadette Martin-Hisard and Agostino Paravicini Bagliani (eds), Vaticana et medievalia. Études en l’honneur de Louis Duval-Arnould, Millennio Medievale, 71, Strumenti e Studi, 14 (Florence, 2008), pp. 27–40.} Their letters were not transmitted in a concentrated form as a register, but rather have come down to us via the addressees or third parties. No letters have been preserved in or concerning Southern Italy.\footnote{See JE, nos 2662–953, of which only JE 2858 (Nicolas for Monte Cassino, probably a forgery) is addressed to Southern Italy.} What is more, during the pontificates of Nicolas and Hadrian II, the position of the Carolingian emperor Louis II, whose power was exclusively based in Italy, was at its peak, meaning that he could operate in the south as well, and was able, at least to a certain extent, to protect the papal res publica.

Only after the fall of the Emirate of Bari do the sources introduce reports of a growing threat to Rome by Saracen groups again. This seems paradoxical at first, but the southern potentates cast Louis II out because after his victory in 871 his assistance was no longer required.\footnote{The emperor was incarcerated by Adalgis of Benevento and only released on the promise never to return to the Lombard territories in the south: Erchempert, Historia Langobardorum Beneventanorum, ed. Georg Waitz, MGH SS rerum Langobardorum et Italicarum, saec. VI.–IX. (Hanover, 1878), pp. 231–64, at 247f., and Chronicon Salmantinum, ed. Westerbergh, pp. 121f. Barbara M. Kreutz, Before the Normans: Southern Italy in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries (Philadelphia, 1991), pp. 45–7.} When John VIII (872–82) ascended...
to the papal throne in 872, the situation in Southern Italy was therefore more confusing than ever before. There were the three Lombard dominions of Benevento, Salerno and Capua, the nominally Byzantine coastal towns of Amalfi, Naples and Gaeta, the influence of the duchy of Spoleto under the ever more prospering Widonids, the reappearance of the Byzantine Empire with another conquest of Bari in 875 and the capture of Taranto in 880,\(^{27}\) and last but not least the various Saracen groups, sometimes small contingents of mercenaries, sometimes mid-sized bands, mostly raiding on their own behalf.\(^{28}\) It is hardly surprising, therefore, that a sizeable part of John VIII’s 314 letters in the preserved partial copy of his register for the years 876 to 882\(^{29}\) dealt in some way or another with the issue of the Saracen threat to Rome. John VIII made ridding Rome and Southern Italy of the Saracen threat a primary goal of his pontificate,\(^{30}\) a goal that proved too ambitious. It was only under the aegis of his namesake John X in 915 that a coalition of nearly all the Italian principalities routed the last Saracen stronghold in mainland Italy in the territory of Gaeta on the banks of the river Garigliano.\(^{31}\)

In 878, the sixth year of his pontificate, John VIII was forced to pay tribute to a Saracen group, as we know from a letter sent to Carloman, king of Bavaria (876–80) and of Italy (877–79), son of the late Carolingian Louis the German and father of Arnulf of Carinthia:\(^{32}\) John, as so often, was soliciting military aid against the Saracens, who were forcing him to pay an annual tribute of 25,000 mancus.\(^{33}\) This letter is the only source to describe the pope as a tributary to a

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\(^{29}\) On the register, see the summary in Arnold, *Johannes VIII*, pp. 27–45. It is unlikely that the extant sample contains all of John’s letters of the period September 876 to August 882. Unfortunately we do not know which criteria the copyist followed in creating his excerpt. The register for the first years of John’s pontificate between December 872 and August 876 has not been preserved at all.


\(^{33}\) A mancus is a small gold coin, approx. 4.25 grams, thus smaller than a Roman/Byzantine solidus, but the equivalent of an Arabic gold dīnār. See Philip Grierson and Mark
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Saracen group. It reveals an important facet of the papal struggle against the Saracens south of Rome: its expense. John VIII not only was forced to pay this tribute, but constantly had to bribe the Southern Italian princes to stay in line with him. More than once, they simply took the money and enlisted Saracen mercenaries anyway, as the well-documented case of Amalfi clearly shows. In addition to the ever-increasing financial burdens, there was an ideological price for relative security as well, a price that may have been even harder for the Roman Church to pay. The only naval power capable of competing with the Saracens on a grander scale in the Mediterranean was the Byzantine navy, recently reinforced in Southern Italy. Only a hundred years earlier had the popes managed to detach themselves formally from the empire in the east. Just recently, Nicholas I had fought a diplomatic battle against Photios, the patriarch of Constantinople, and Hadrian II had even received the satisfaction of his deposition. Now John VIII grudgingly had to assent to his restoration and even accept the equality of the hated patriarch in 879, after he had earlier been forced to beg the Byzantine strategos in Bari to use his ships to defend Rome

Blackburn, Medieval European Coinage 1 (Cambridge, 1986; repr. 2006), pp. 327f. John VIII explicitly writes about the equivalent of the sum in silver, which was normal for most of Italy. See Paulo Delogu, 'Il mancoso è ancora un mito?', in Stefano Gasparri (ed.), 774. Ipotesi su una transitione, Seminari internazionali del Centro interuniversitario per la storia e l’archeologia dell’alto medioevo, 1 (Turnhout, 2008), pp. 139–59. Twenty-five thousand mancus was a considerable sum, theoretically 106.25 kilograms (approx. 234 pounds) of gold!


See Eickhoff, Seekrieg, and John H. Pryor and Elisabeth M. Jeffreys, The Age of the ΔΡΟΜΩΝ: The Byzantine Navy ca 500–1204, The Medieval Mediterranean, 62 (Leiden, Boston, 2006), esp. pp. 50–76. Along the Tyrrenhenian coast, we should not underestimate the naval power of Amalfi and Naples, who, however, chose not to defend Rome at this point, which was maybe due to the dispute between the pope and Amalfi after 877: see Kreutz, Before the Normans, 58f. The Franks had commanded considerable naval power in the Mediterranean, but only until around 840, when Saracen forces seem to have gained the upper hand: see John Haywood, Dark Age Naval Power: A Reassessment of Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Activity (London, New York, 1991), pp. 113–18.


against a Saracen fleet\textsuperscript{39} when a prior arrangement with Amalfi had not worked out satisfactorily.\textsuperscript{40}

While the Roman contacts with Saracens seem to have been mostly mercantile in the eighth century, the Saracen attacks brought about changes in Rome during the ninth century, from 846 through to the pontificate of John VIII, in connection with renewed conceptions of Christian community. While the great attack in the mid-ninth century does not seem to have been the sole reason for the emergence of new Roman perception of its environment – new ‘visions of community’ – the Muslim assault on the city challenged pre-existing communal paradigms. However, Rome had been under siege or even literally sacked at least once every century since the famous Gothic sack in 410. Why then were fundamental changes only undertaken in the ninth century? The reasons lay deeper, going down to the very nature of the enemy.\textsuperscript{41} The Lombards, Franks and even the Byzantines had been easy to grasp as a single entity that could be addressed as a collective via a king or another single high official, or at least a small group of nobles.\textsuperscript{42} The Saracens in Italy were totally different in this respect. They consisted of small marauding groups, operating on their

\textsuperscript{39} John wrote a letter that could well be considered as a summary of the negotiations of the past five years in 880: see John VIII, ep. 259 (JE 3323), ed. Caspar, \textit{MGH EE}, 7, pp. 228f. The letter shows that the pope in fact required Byzantine naval help quite constantly between 877 and 880: see Pryor and Jeffreys, \textit{Age of the Δρομων}, p. 166. And help was actually granted, for in ep. 263 (JE 3327), ed. Caspar, p. 233 from 880 John VIII related to the new emperor Charles the Fat that ‘the ships of the Greeks have victoriously engaged the Ishmaelites on sea and fought them, as it was God’s will’ (\textit{quia Grecorum navigia in mari Hismahelitarum victoriosissime straverunt phalanges et eos, prout Dominus voluit, debellati sunt}). In ep. 259, Bulgaria is still mentioned as being part of the Roman sphere, while de facto it was not. See Daniel Ziemann, \textit{Vom Wandervolk zur Großmacht. Die Entstehung Bulgariens im frühen Mittelalter (7.–9. Jh.)}, Kölner historische Abhandlungen, 43 (Cologne, Weimar, Vienna), pp. 390–412, esp. 397f. and 408f. for the failure of the Latin mission in Bulgaria already under Hadrian II. See also Arthur Lapôtre, \textit{L’Europe et le Saint-Siège à l’époque carolingienne}, 1: \textit{Le pape Jean VIII (872–882)} (Paris, 1895), pp. 47–90, esp. 71f. for John VIII and the Bulgar mission. See also Engreen, ‘Pope John’, p. 324.

\textsuperscript{40} Kreutz, \textit{Before the Normans}, p. 58.

\textsuperscript{41} Special thanks to Max Diesenberger for ample discussion on this topic.

\textsuperscript{42} There were, admittedly, other groups that were difficult to address as well, leading to trouble for the ones dealing with them. One could think of the very difficult situation on the Balkan side of the Adriatic (see Francesco Borri, ‘Gli Istriani e i loro parenti. Φόριγγος, Romani e Slavi nella periferia di Bisanzio’, \textit{Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik}, 60 (2010): 1–26), of the problems Charlemagne was experiencing with the Saxons (see Matthias Becher, ‘\textit{Non enim habent regem idem Antiqui Saxones. Verfassung und Ethnogenese in Sachsen während des 8. Jahrhunderts}’, in Hans-Jürgen Häßler (ed.), \textit{Sachsen und Franken in Westfalen. Zur Komplexität der ethnischen Deutung und Abgrenzung zweier frühmittelalterlicher Stämme}, Studien zur Sachsenforschung, 12 (Oldenburg, 1999), pp. 1–31) or of the great difficulties the Franks had when dealing with the Normans/Vikings (see, for example, Janet L. Nelson, ‘The Frankish Empire’, in Peter Sawyer (ed.),
own, independent of the larger polities of North Africa or Sicily, who launched small military operations in Italy themselves. Therefore, even if one were to negotiate with one group, a possible treaty would have no effect whatsoever on other Saracens. This confusing situation aggravated the already strained relations the popes had had with Saracens since the first Muslims had reached Italian shores.

This situation had an effect on the representation of Saracens in ninth-century sources, but in unpredictable ways. It may be sufficient to note that the extant rhetoric was dominated by pejorative attributions: abusive epithets, biblical allegations and words like *nefandissimi* characterized the Saracen enemy. However, it is important to point out that the abusive rhetoric did not change in any significant way when compared to, for example, the pontificate of Gregory IV (827–44), who died two years before the great attack of 846. The *LP* life of Gregory IV, quite likely written before 846, already calls the Saracens an 'ungodly, wicked and, God-hated race'. This kind of language had begun to be a consistent part of papal communication before the great raid. Its use was

*The Oxford Illustrated History of the Vikings* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 19–47). But for the popes, the Saracen menace was unique nonetheless.

Southern Italian sources such as, for example, the *Historia Langobardorum Beneventanorum* by Erchempert, a monk from Monte Cassino, or the anonymous *Chronicon Salernitanum* contain a far more diverse picture when compared to the papal sources. In ninth-century Italy we find small groups of Saracens, operating largely on their own account, as long as they were not paid by a regional power to fight for its cause. Even in the times of the rather large Saracen power base in Bari, its emir seems to have had only limited control over other Saracen groups: see Musca, *Emirato*, on the status of Taranto, which was in close contact with Bari. There is no evidence that the Saracen groups working for Naples, Gaeta or the Lombard potentates had anything to do with Bari or Taranto. See Kreutz, *Before the Normans*, pp. 48–54, esp. 49, on the different origins of the Saracens that were also noticed by contemporary South Italians.


One can discern an increased employment of the concept of paganism against the Saracens in the letters of John VIII, who uses the word *pagani* as a quasi-synonym for Saracens most of the time (but not in ep. 150, see below, nn. 77 and 78). Nicolas I and Hadrian II are writing about the Vikings and possibly pagans in general most of the time when they use the word *pagani*, although Hadrian II, ep. 6 (JE 2895) (from 868, to Louis the German), ed. Ernst Perels, *MGH EE*, 6 (Berlin, 1925), p. 703 is clearly referring to the Saracen threat to Rome.

*LP* II, ed. Duchesne, p. 81: *Et quoniam huius sacratissimi patris ac papae temporibus impia atque nefaria et Deo odibilis Agarenorum gens a finibus suis consurgens pene omnes insulas...
intensified in the early ninth century, possibly due to the imminent threats to the life of Gregory IV and the two letters by Leo III (795–816) described. But the basic features of the representation of these Others remained unaltered. What is striking about the papal mode of presenting the Saracens in the sources, however, is that they are always addressed as one homogenous community, operating in unison on the Italian peninsula. It is at least strange that this observation is equally true for most of the modern literature that deals with the relations of the popes with the Saracens. As already described, the reality could not have been more different. But still the popes, or rather the papal chancellery, stubbornly addressed the Saracens as a unity in all their letters to the Carolingian emperors, to the Byzantine officials operating in Italy and even to the Southern Italian princes. Why did they need this generalization? The popes tended to generalize in their literary output, as the example of their construction of Greci/Greeks as an image of the Other in the eighth century demonstrates. In the case of the Saracens, the popes used this excessive generalization to create a 'Feindbild', a concept of a common enemy. This strategy was vital for the papacy’s ability to handle the Saracens as a coherent Other. Another goal surely was to convey a sense of Christian unity against the Saracens.

The combination of the sheer impossibility of regular diplomatic relations and the vitally dangerous attacks on Rome in the late 840s led to two decisive changes in the self-perception and in the perception of Others by the popes. The first change resulted in a new vision of community that included the fellow Christian principalities and duchies in Italy, in addition to the Carolingian

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47 Leo III, ep. 6 and 7 (JE 2524 and 2526), ed. Karl Hampe, MGH EE, 5 (Berlin, 1899), pp. 96–9, from 812 and 813.

48 An important question would be whether the representation of Saracens in the various sources of Latin and Greek ethnography or Christian exegesis played a role in the stability of the official picture of the enemy. For the general picture of the Saracens, which certainly was quite consistent throughout the early Middle Ages, see Chapter 28 by John Tolan in this volume, plus John Victor Tolan, Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination (New York, 2002), and Ekkehart Rotter, Abendland und Sarazenen. Das okzidentale Araberbild und seine Entstehung im Frühmittelalter, Studien zur Sprache, Geschichte und Kultur des islamischen Orients, 11 (Berlin, New York, 1986). On the influence of classical ethnography on papal perspectives, see Bruno Judic, ‘Gregoire le Grand et les barbares’, in Didier Nourisson and Yves Perrin (eds), Le barbare, l’étranger. Images de l’autre. Actes du colloque organisé par le CERHI, Saint-Étienne, 14 et 15 mai 2004 (Saint-Étienne, 2005), pp. 137–46.

49 One example is Arnold, Johannes VIII, who, admittedly, is depicting the situation from a very papal perspective. However, one ought to compare the picture of the Saracens in the papal letters critically with the depiction of the closing years of the ninth century in South Italian sources.

50 Gantner, ‘Greeks’. 
rulers of Northern Italy and beyond the Alps, who had been the decisive factor in papal politics after 774. Under John VIII papal politics even to some degree re-integrated the Byzantine Empire.51 This was a major departure from the Roman position in the eighth century and before: since 568, the Lombards had been ignored or regarded unfavourably in papal writings.52 Gregory the Great himself originally coined the word nefandissimi, which we have already encountered, especially for the Lombards.53 The range actually extended from extremely scornful expressions, such as the very prominent letter 45 of Codex Carolinus54 or the many writings of Pope Hadrian I,55 to ambiguous expressions of relations, seemingly the highest of highs in papal Lombard relations before 846.56 And the Neapolitans were not presented in a much better light after sparring with the

51 Engreen, ‘Pope John’, p. 324 stated: ‘How could a pope, depending on the help of the Greeks, maintain the traditional claims on southern Italy?’ Those ‘traditional’ claims existed only in the ecclesiastical sphere, while John VIII’s quest for political domination was revolutionary (see Arnold, Johannes VIII, pp. 205–25). Still, Engreen has a good point when portraying the papal alliance with the ‘Greeks’ as born of necessity.

52 There is a long period during which the Lombards went practically unmentioned between the 630s and ca. 720: see Lidia Capo, Il Liber Pontificalis, i Longobardi e la nascita del dominio territoriale della Chiesa Romana (Spoleto, 2009), pp. 225–40. There was only the exception of an attack on Rome by Gisulf of Benevento: see Capo, Il Liber Pontificalis, pp. 217f. and 225, n. 267; LP I, ed. Duchesne, p. 383 (Vita of Pope John VI).

53 See above, n. 44.


55 See for example the depiction of the Lombards in Hadrian’s LP vita, LP I, ed. Duchesne, pp. 486–99. In diplomacy, Hadrian was still working hard against the interests of high Lombard officials: see for example CC nos 57 (against a Lombard uprising against Charlemagne) and 82 (against the instalment of Grimoald as princeps of Benevento), ed. Gundlach, pp. 582f. and 615f. On Hadrian’s relations to the Lombard dominions, see G.V.B. West, ‘Charlemagne’s involvement in central and southern Italy: power and the limits of authority’, Early Medieval Europe, 8 (1999), pp. 341–67.

56 On ambiguous relations after 774, see Hartmann, Hadrian, pp. 200–21, and Clemens Gantner, Die Wahrnehmung von Anderen in päpstlichen Quellen des achten und neunten Jahrhunderts (PhD thesis, Vienna, 2011, to be published as a monograph in 2013). Just to give one example, CC 59 (see above, nn. 5 and 9) shows us Pope Hadrian in the midst of his quarrels with the duces of Spoletto and Benevento, who is still arguing strongly in favour of slave-trading Lombards: the Lombards are forced by necessity to trade slaves, whereas in the times of Gregory the Great, Lombard leaders were accused of being the operators of slave trade: see Gregory, epp. 2, 38 and 3, 40, ed. Norberg, pp. 124 and 185.
pope for control of Terracina in the late 770s. But now, as a result of the events of the 840s, the popes modified their perception of the situation of their own patrimonium in the heart of the Italian peninsula. As a consequence, the small principalities in Southern Italy gained a degree of interest that they had never before received from the papacy, which now sought to enlarge its dominion. Relations with these polities did not proceed without frictions, as the famous controversies with Amalfi and Naples indicate. Nevertheless, for a short time during the pontificate of John VIII it even seemed remotely possible for the papacy to gain some kind of oversight, if not supremacy, in the south, excluding the still Byzantine parts of what are now Calabria and Apulia. Those ambitions failed due to the unmanageable diversity of interests in the region and due to a possibly justified fear of papal dominance in the region. The efforts of John VIII reveal a pope constantly striving to create a safe environment in Italy. For the sake of that goal he evoked a common cause of (Southern) Italian Christians, a novelty for a papacy that had in practical politics concentrated on its own Republic of St Peter/res publica Sancti Petri for the entire eighth and at least the first part of the ninth century. This policy differed from the papal invocation of Christian unity and Christianitas itself, something that we can safely regard as a constant feature of papal rhetoric for centuries. The concept was made use of extensively, to be sure, perhaps increasingly after 846. But Christianitas was not

57 Gantner, ‘Greeks’.
59 Especially in the second half of the year 876: see John VIII, epp. 3–6 (JE 3050, 3051, 3045 and 3046), ed. Caspar, pp. 2–5, and Arnold, Johannes VIII, 209f.
60 He therefore failed for the same reasons Louis II had failed in the same region only a few years earlier.
61 For example, the concept of one Christendom dominated papal writings on missionary activity: see Lutz E. von Padberg, ‘Unus populus ex diversis gentibus. Gentilismus und Einheit im früheren Mittelalter’, in Christoph Lüth, Rudolf W. Keck and Erhard Wiersing (eds), Der Umgang mit dem Fremden in der Vormoderne: Studien zur Akkulturation in bildungshistorischer Sicht, Beiträge zur historischen Bildungsforschung, 17 (Cologne, Weimar, Vienna, 1997), pp. 155–93. Padberg argues mainly on the basis of sources concerning the Bonifatian mission in the Germania. His attempt to generalize his findings for the popes of the eighth century is unfortunately not very convincing.
62 See, for example, John VIII, ep. 46 (JE 3091), ed. Caspar, p. 44, for the use John VIII made of the concept of Christian unity in a letter to bishop Aio of Benevento from 876: Huius rei gratia, quia multis studere loquelis, ne magis multiplicare verba quam gemitus videamur, non expeditat, precipue quia tua fraternitas ipsos invisibles merores nostros, sicut in litteris tuis conspicimus, non ignorat, per illum, qui te sacerdotem suum constituit, tuam reverentiam adiuramus suadentesque modis omnibus deprecamur et auctoritate principum.
new, whereas the quest for some form of Christian political union in Southern Italy was entirely novel.

We find John VIII’s clearest expression of such an ambition in a letter to the Lombard princeps Guaifer of Salerno. In this letter from October 876, the pope incited a coalition of Southern Italian rulers (naming Guaifer and his son-in-law Pulchar of Amalfi) ‘for the liberation of the whole patria’ (pro liberatione to[t] us patrię). This is a clear sign that the papacy had adjusted its perception of its neighbours. Although we mostly lack similarly direct expressions of such views, the pope’s actions in the second half of his pontificate may speak for themselves.

The attempt to forge some kind of alliance among the Christians of Italy at first seems to have been reciprocal. The Southern Italian city states all of a sudden came to the aid of the pope in 849, expressly in order to defend Christendom. The LP portrayed Leo IV as startled by the offer. He was at least sufficiently sceptical to arrange a meeting with only a few leaders of the Southern Italians in order to verify whether their intentions were ‘good’ or whether they were posing a threat to Rome themselves. All the more reason why the amount of ready assistance he encountered appears to have overwhelmed the pope. And nearly thirty years later – in a very different historical and political situation – John VIII found a few powerful supporters for his cause among the Southern Italians. Especially in the 870s, papal Rome attempted to cultivate allegiances in Southern Italy. First the popes pinned their hopes on Emperor Louis II, who lacking male heirs may well have been seen as a ‘lame duck’ in the 870s. Besides, throughout his

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63 John VIII, ep. 3, ed. Caspar, p. 3. Pace Arnold, Johannes VIII, p. 219, patria certainly refers to the Italian sphere of influence of papal Rome and precisely not to Christianity as a whole – even though the word could also be used that way in the ninth century: our sources for Leo IV contain both possible meanings; see Herbers, Leo IV, pp. 124 and 248. (For the concept of a Christian patria in the wider sense, see Leo IV, ep. 28, below, n. 76.)

64 Kreutz, Before the Normans, pp. 57–60.


66 Kreutz, Before the Normans, p. 58; Arnold, Johannes VIII, pp. 209–12.

67 See Ludo Moritz Hartmann, Geschichte Italiens im Mittelalter, 3, 1: Italien und die fränkische Herrschaft (Gotha, 1908), pp. 297–301, who summed up the situation from 871 onwards quite to the point.
reign the emperor lacked any real standing in Italy south of Spoleto. From the mid-870s onwards, John VIII took Southern Italian affairs into his own hands, but that project failed because the pope could not enforce their policy against the diversity of interests that prevailed in the region. The popes at the end of the ninth century and even more so in the tenth century, when the papacy was dominated by the lay leaders of the house of the Tusculani, found themselves more than ever before reduced to Rome and its small scale politics.

The second substantial change in the papal world view that was triggered by the Saracen threat proved to be far more lasting: the entire doctrine of the church regarding war against non-Christians was modified in the ninth century. A profound shift is discernible in the rhetoric used when addressing other Christians concerning the Saracens, whereas the actual epithets used for the Saracens remained the same. In previous centuries, the official papal position, at least, had not been significantly bellicose towards its enemies, whether Christian or non-Christian. At the end of the sixth century, under the impression of imminent danger for Rome from the Lombards, Gregory the Great delivered a sermon on Ezekiel, lamenting the hopeless situation of the Romans. However, his reaction was resignation. Gregory told his listeners that he had to stop his speech, as he was forced to witness Romans coming back to the city with their hands hacked off, having been slain or held captive. In mid-eighth century, while Rome was reportedly being threatened by the troops of the Lombard

68 See Arnold, Johannes VIII, p. 206.
70 Carl Erdmann, Die Entstehung des Kreuzzugsgedankens (Stuttgart, 1935; repr. Darmstadt, 1972), p. 8, cites a passage from Gregory the Great’s register (i, 73) that he reads as a bellicose development of doctrines that he had already found in Aurelius Augustine’s work (for Augustine’s construction of a bellum iustum that was in his historical circumstances certainly quite apologetic, see Johannes Brachtendorf, ‘Augustinus: Friedensethik und Friedenspolitik’, in Andreas Holzem (ed.), Krieg und Christentum. Religiöse Gewalttheorien in der Kriegserfahrung des Westens, Krieg in der Geschichte, 50 (Paderborn, Munich, Vienna, Zurich, 2009), pp. 234–53, and Jean Flori, La guerre sainte. La formation de l’idée de croisade dans l’Occident chrétien (Paris, 2001), pp. 37–9). Gregory allegedly propagated war for the cause of mission, a claim that does not correspond exactly with the cited passages. He rather justified military action already taken by Gennadius, the exarch of Africa: Gregory, ep. 1, 73, ed. Norberg, I, pp. 81f. Gregory’s thought seems far better represented by the citation that is to follow in n. 71.
71 Gregory the Great, Homilia in Hezechielam, liber II, hom. 10, c. 24, ed. Marc Adriaen, CC SL, 142, p. 397: Nemo autem me reprehendat, si post haec alocutione cessauero, quia, sicut omnes cernitis, nostrae tribulationes excreuerunt: undique gladis circumfusi sumus, undique immimens mortis periculum timemus. Alii, detruncatis ad nos manibus redeunt, alii capti, alii interempti nuntiantur. iam cogor linguam ab expositione retinere, quia taedet animam meam uita meae. [Iob 10,1] iam nullus in me sacri eloquii studium requirat, quia uersa est in luctum cithara mea, et organum meum in uocem flentium. [Iob 30,31]. It is certainly no coincidence that
king Aistulf, the LP life of Stephen II nevertheless points out more than once that the pope continually petitioned the Frankish king Pippin to try to reach a diplomatic solution. In 844, Pope Sergius II told the bishops in Francia to 'suffer persecution, for this will make you blessed' and called people promoting war 'sons of the devil'.

It was during the pontificate of Leo IV that a pope first associated fighting against 'infidels' with a promise of salvation. The most prominent expression of the fundamentally changed papal policy can be found in a letter to the Frankish exercitus, a letter that was noted, and admittedly quite over-interpreted, by the innovators of canon law in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. It has come down to us in several of their collections, always in a quite truncated form. The letter fragment is connected with an expedition of Louis II against the Saracens in Southern Italy, either in 847/48 or in 852. The critical passage reads:

We would like the karitas of all your people to know that whoever dies in the contest of this war – although we do not wish for such – will not be denied the heavenly kingdom. For the Almighty knows that, if anyone of yours dies, he will have died for the truth of the faith, the salvation of the soul and the defence of the Christian patria and hence he will be given the aforementioned reward from God.

Gregory cites the book of Job twice in this passage. The text of his homily was written between 593 and 601.

LP I, ed. Duchesne, pp. 449f., twice: ne sanguis effunderetur christianorum. Of course we cannot be sure that Stephen actually tried to persuade Pippin to try to find a peaceful solution. Yet, the LP at least tried to convey that image – which shows that it was at least not considered correct behaviour by a pope to make people go to war. The pope is rather styled as being in a totally vulnerable position, soliciting for help to guarantee the safety of his 'peculiar people' (on the expression see Noble, Republic, p. 51).


Most importantly Ivo of Chartres, Decretum X, 87, PL 161, coll. 719f. and Panormia VIII, 30, PL 161, col. 1311; further Gratian, Decretum, parts in C 23, qu. 8, c. 9 and C. 23 qu. 5 c. 46, ed. Emil Friedberg, Corpus Iuris Canonici, 1 (Leipzig, 1879), coll. 944 and 955, cited as Nicolas I. See the detailed account in Herbers, Leo IV, 120–24.

See Herbers, Leo IV, p. 124.

Leo IV, ep. 28 (JE 2642), ed. von Hirsch-Greuth, MGH EE 5, p. 601: [O]mnium vestrum nosse volumus karitatem, quoniam quisquis (quod non optantes dicimus) in hoc belli certamine fideliter mortuus fuerit, regna illi celestia minime negabuntur. Novit enim omnipotens, si quislibet vestrum morietur, quod pro veritate fidei et salvacione anime ac defensione patrie christianorum
We encounter this argument again, more clearly articulated, in John VIII’s letters. In 878, John answered a question of the West Frankish bishops (in the kingdom of Louis II the Stammerer, son of the late emperor Charles the Bald) concerning the spiritual situation of those fallen in battle against pagans: ‘the peace of the eternal life will be received by those, who die faithful to the catholic religion in the contest of war and who fight strenuously against pagans and unbelievers’. He then added an allusion to the Bible, stating that a sinner, who has been converted, will be forgiven his sins, implying that those sins shall be forgiven as a reward for fighting for the church against pagans. That the pope’s language thus became even more explicit at that point does not seem to be a coincidence, considering the situation in Rome in the late 870s. He was evidently redeploying the strategy of Leo IV, promising heavenly rewards for those defending the Catholic faith.

This style of argumentation had been emerging in Latin literature since the early eighth century. Authors had been stylizing their heroes as martyrs, because they died fighting against non-believers. But there is a considerable

\[\text{mortuus est, ideo ab eo pretitulatum premium consequetur.} \]

The letter has been preserved in the so-called Collectio Britannica (see Herbers, Leo IV, pp. 49–91) in a truncated form.

77 The concrete citation is most likely about Louis’ struggles against the Vikings. It has therefore been deemed irrelevant by Engreen, ‘Pope John’, p. 320. However, the theological position the pope is promoting in the letter is not in any way confined to the battle in question, but is, especially by using the citation from the Old Testament, presented as being of general validity.

78 John VIII, ep. 150 (JE 3195), ed. Caspar, p. 126: quoniam illi, qui cum pietate catholicę religionis in belli certamine cadunt, requies eos ėternę vitę suscipiet contra paganos atque infideles strenue dimicantes.

79 Ezra: 18, 21f.

80 And even before that, Augustine with his theology of a ‘just war’ (bellum iustum) is widely believed to have started a more aggressive phase in Christian history. But there is an immense step to be taken to reach the position the popes of the ninth century propagated. See Erdmann, Entstehung, pp. 5–8; Friedrich Wilhelm Graf, ‘Sakralisierung von Kriegen: Begriffs und problemgeschichtliche Erwägungen’, in Klaus Schreiner (ed.), Heilige Kriege. Religiöse Begründungen militärischer Gewaltanwendung: Judentum, Christentum und Islam im Vergleich, Schriften des Historischen Kollegs, Kolloquien, 78 (Munich, 2008), pp. 1–30, at 7–10, esp. 7f. However, Augustine’s teaching could be sidestepped to the ninth century, as Hincmar of Reims did: see Hincmar, De Regis persona et regio ministerio, PL 125, cols 833–56. Hincmar cited Augustine heavily throughout his argument, but when he arrived at those fallen in battle, col. 844, he referred to 2 Maccabees: 43 and 45–6 instead, arguing that offerings have to be made for the sake of their souls – quite divergent to the position taken by Leo IV and John VIII. On the Frankish view on warfare in the ninth century, see Janet L. Nelson, ‘Violence in the Carolingian world and the ritualization of ninth-century warfare’, in Guy Halsall (ed.), Violence and Society in the Early Medieval West (Woodbridge, 1998), pp. 90–107 (p. 91 for De regis persona).

difference in presenting one’s own hero in a narrative as a martyr on the one hand and in promising eternal reward and the forgiveness of sins to everyone fighting the enemies of Christianity on the other. Yet, however much these statements may resemble those of the eleventh century, we should not speak of a crusade or crusader rhetoric in ninth-century Italy. For a Crusade, if we follow Erdmann’s still valid definition from 1935, is a war waged solely on the grounds of religion and not, as he put it, the public good, the defence of one’s homeland or national honour. In ninth-century Rome, however, the defence of the papal dominion was the main driving force behind the renewed religious rhetoric.

In any case, the viewpoint presented here was a revolutionary theological position for the papacy, which seems to have consolidated this position in the times of John VIII. A further textual witness to this fact is preserved in another of John’s letters, this time to yet another new emperor, the Eastern Frank Charles III the Fat, dated October 30, 880. At the end of the letter, the pope admonished his addressee to rush to the aid of Rome in order to fight in the Lord’s stead for the benefit of Christianity. This sentence can be seen as paradigmatic for the papal view of war against non-Christian Others that had been developed by Leo IV. A letter by John’s predecessor Hadrian II is also interesting in this respect. Here, the pope advised the East Frankish Carolingian king, Louis the German, not to fight against fellow Christians. He should rather, like his nephew, the emperor Louis II, fight against ‘the sons of Belial’. Although not evident at first sight, this rhetoric differed greatly from the papal pleas and admonitions sent to the Carolingians in the eighth century, designed to persuade them to fight for Rome against the Lombards (and, should it become necessary, against the Byzantines too): then, the Carolingians were only asked to defend a) the Roman Church and b) St Peter and his vicar against whoever was threatening them, whereas pagans or a common Christian cause were nearly never mentioned as an objective of fighting.

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82 Shown in detail by Flori, Guerre sainte, pp. 51–4. He also states that John VIII had only the defence of Rome in mind, but fails to take into account that the letter may have been written in response to questions concerning Viking raids.

83 Erdmann, Entstehung, p. 1.

84 Jean Flori, ‘À propos de la première croisade: Naissance et affirmation de l’idée de guerre sainte dans l’Occident chrétien (XIe siècle)’, in Laurence van Ypersele (ed.), Imaginaires de guerre. L’histoire entre mythe et réalité. Actes du colloque, Louvain-la-Neuve, 3–5 mai 2001 (Louvain-la-Neuve, 2003), pp. 31–43, at 37f. However, the new papal approach to violence seems to have been more universal than he allows for (see n. 82).


87 See Stephen II, CC 11, ed. Gundlach, pp. 504–7 (JE 2335) for a very programmatic example.
The Saracen threat of the first half of the ninth century, culminating in two attacks on the city of Rome itself in 846 and 849, led to two considerable changes in Roman thought. First, the papacy gradually developed a new vision of its sphere of political community, which aimed at a stronger integration of Southern and Central Italian dominions. Expressions of this new policy can be found throughout the pontificate of John VIII, but the roots of this movement go deeper, back to the reign of Leo IV. This policy did not endure beyond the first years of the tenth century, however, due to the increasing involvement of the popes in Roman power struggles. The second adjustment the papacy made after 846 was a fundamental change in its theological position concerning war, concerning participation in the killing of other human beings, an act that had hitherto been considered a sin that required purgative acts of penitence even when done in a justifiable armed conflict. At least if someone died, however, after fighting for the church, that is, the papacy, he was no longer in need of purgation. The papacy had developed the ammunition for a religiously legitimated war against others. This was the basis on which the popes of the eleventh century could pave the way for the crusades.

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89 Flori, *Guerre sainte*, pp. 51f. argues in a similar direction, in order to show that this is not an early ‘crusade bull’. In this respect, he is manifestly correct. But his arguments against an implied indulgence fail to take into consideration the implications of the biblical citations.

90 For a very good summary of the differences between the crusades and the situation in the ninth century, see Flori, ‘À propos’, p. 38.
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Part III
Visions of Community,
Perceptions of Difference
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Islamic Views
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When approaching the societies of medieval Europe from a general perspective, contemporary scholars often use the terms ‘Latin Christianity’, ‘Latin Christendom’, ‘Latin-Christian Europe’ or their equivalents in other languages. These terms designate a cultural sphere that is generally regarded as the ‘product’ of the Western Roman Empire’s transformation in Late Antiquity. Accordingly, similar socio-political and socio-economic structures, a specific form of Christianity and the use of Latin as a means of communication in the intellectual sphere are considered the defining features of ‘Latin-Christian’ societies.

The beginnings of ‘Latin Christianity’ are commonly associated with the exponents of patristic literature in Latin, whose sphere of activity in the Roman Empire centred on the Mediterranean basin and its immediate surroundings rather than the European continent. The terms ‘Latin-Christian Europe’,

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‘Latin Christendom’ or their equivalents in other languages have a stronger geographic connotation. They are typically employed to demarcate a cultural zone of influence vis-à-vis ‘Byzantium’ and ‘Islam’. This ‘Latin-Christian’ sphere excludes the successors of Roman North Africa, but encompasses the bulk of the European continent as well as the ‘territorial extensions’ resulting from expansionism, such as the so-called ‘Latin East’.

The category ‘Latin-Christian’ stresses certain unifying factors of medieval Europe to the detriment of cultural variety, diversity and hybridity. Late antique and medieval sources provide us with Christian forms of self-identification in Latin and have recourse to Roman or Latin heritage. Analysis of these sources proves, however, that ‘Latin’ and ‘Christian’ elements constitute only two among many different aspects of complex and ever-changing patterns of identity in medieval Europe. In the fifth century, Orosius and Pope Leo I essentially propagated a fusion of Roman and Christian elements in a cultural sphere that was not restricted to the European continent. The former seems to have regarded the amalgamation of ‘Romanitas’ and Christianity as an ideal that had finally been attained thanks to the conversion of the empire’s elites, and to have believed that it could serve to integrate ‘barbarians’ into the folds of civilization. The

Compare the biographies of Irenaeus of Lyon, Tertullian, Cyprian of Carthage, Ambrose of Milan, Jerome, Augustine of Hippo and so on.


5 Histories of Latin literature in North Africa traditionally end with the advent of Islam. See, for example, Paul Monceaux, Histoire littéraire de l’Afrique chrétienne depuis les origines jusqu’à l’invasion arabe (7 vols, Paris, 1901–23).


latter, convinced that religious conformity should be enforced by the Roman authorities, pointed out to Emperor Theodosius II that the Roman Empire would only flourish if the Holy Trinity was venerated by all.9

Four centuries later, ‘Romanitas’ had become a thing of the past. When King Alfred set out to execute and promote the translation of patristic works into Old English in the ninth century, he emphasized the necessity of reviving a cultural heritage that was explicitly Christian and Latin, but understood that this heritage had to be adapted to a new linguistic and cultural situation.10* The renovatio imperii Romanorum, the ambitious political programme pursued by Emperor Otto III in the tenth century, unequivocally expressed the synthesis of Roman and Christian heritage in the emperor’s Latin title secundum voluntatem Iesu Christi Romanorum imperator augustus sanctarumque ecclesiarum devotissimus et fidelissimus dilatator.11 However, this short-lived project of creating a medieval Christian version of the Roman Empire never had a genuinely European dimension, but only concerned parts of central Europe and the Apennine peninsula.12

Fulcher of Chartres, chronicler of the First Crusade, stated clearly that ethnic and regional loyalties could eclipse cultural and religious commonalities even as ‘Latin Christianity’ confronted ‘Islam’. Describing the crusaders’ acculturation to the new Middle Eastern environment in the phase of transition from the first to the second generation, Fulcher comments on the evolution of the crusaders’ sense of belonging: people from different European regions had developed a local identity which began to obliterate loyalties to the respective European regions of origin. Although writing in Latin and describing events that can in no way be separated from the history of European Christianity, Fulcher chose to accentuate an aspect of identity that had divided different groups of crusaders from one another at the outset of a venture that had brought together men and women from all over ‘Latin-Christian Europe’.13

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11 Ottonis III. Diplomata, No. 388 (1001, January 18, Rome), ed. Theodor Sickel, MGH DD regum et imperatorum Germaniae [2,2] (Hanover, 1893), p. 818: ‘August emperor of the Romans by the will of Jesus Christ and most willing and faithful promoter of the holy churches’.


As is evident from the prologue of his anti-Islamic treatise, Peter the Venerable, the twelfth-century abbot of Cluny, regarded himself as a representative of one of the few remaining bulwarks of Christianity against ‘Mohammedan fury’ (Mahumeticus furor): the ‘Arab Ismaelites’ had not only seized Asia and Africa from the Christians but had even deprived Christ and his followers of parts of Europe. Nonetheless, the treatise demonstrates that even a ‘Latin-Christian’ ecclesiastic attacking Islam did not define himself exclusively in terms of religious or cultural affiliation. Having dedicated a part of his introduction to the disadvantage of writing to ‘the Saracens’ in Latin and the need to find a translator for his treatise, Peter addresses ‘the Arab sons of Ismael’ directly. He introduces himself as a person from Gaul (Gallus natione), a man of Christian faith (Christianus fide) and an abbot by profession (abbas officio), who is separated from them not only by a large distance, but also by his language, his profession, his customs and his way of life.

These examples reveal the elusiveness of a well-defined concept of ‘Latin Christianity’ common to the peoples and societies of late antique and medieval Europe. ‘Latin’ and ‘Christian’ elements pervaded contemporary patterns of identity. But they were neither dominant nor all-embracing. As a consequence, the attribute ‘Latin-Christian’ retains analytical usefulness only as a label to be used with caution when generalizing, comparing and juxtaposing on a macro-historical scale. This preliminary conclusion invites an exploration of the ways in which the Islamic world perceived the cohesiveness of ‘Latin Christendom’, the main task of the present chapter. How did Muslim scholars writing in Arabic between the ninth and the fifteenth century define Europe from a geographical, ethnic, political and/or religious point of view? Did they discern a form of unity that would merit the epithet ‘Latin-Christian’?

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15 Ibid., prologus, fol. D 180vs, pp. 229f.
16 Ibid., liber primus, fol. D 181rs, p. 231.
The term ‘Europe’ (Arab. Awrūfā) was mentioned in the earliest geographical works at our disposal in Arabic, the works of Ibn Khurradadhbih (d. ca. 300/911), Ibn al-Faqīḥ al-Hamadhānī (d. post-290/902) and al-Hamdānī (d. ca. 334/945). With reference to Ptolemy, al-Hamdānī provided us with the alternative name ‘Celto-Galatia’ (Qālṭūghālātiyyā). Mixing ethnonyms and toponyms, these descriptions of Europe include the Iberian Peninsula (al-Andalus) or the Spaniards (al-Isbān), the Slavs (al-Ṣaqāliba), the Frankish lands (bilād al-Faranja) as well as the Byzantines (al-Rūm) or part of their territory. The geographical extension of Europe as it is described by these three authors differs and does not always correspond to the Europe known to us today: in the case of Ibn Khurradadhbih and Ibn al-Faqīḥ, Europe reached the frontiers of Egypt, while al-Hamdānī included parts of Eastern Anatolia.

Later authors dispensed with the geographical category ‘Europe’: al-Masʿūdī (d. 345/956), Ṣāʿid al-Andalusī (d. 462/1070) and Abū 'l-Fidā’ (d. 732/1331) never used the term ‘Awrūfā’ but located peoples in ‘the northern regions’ or ‘the northwest quadrant’ of the earth. Other scholars, such as Ibn Rustah(d. after...
300/913), al-Idrīsī\textsuperscript{24} (d. 560/1166), al-Qazwīnī\textsuperscript{25} (d. 682/1283) and Ibn Khaldūn\textsuperscript{26} (d. 808/1406) divided the continent by describing the geography of Europe within the framework of seven climate zones, distributing European toponyms in the fifth, sixth and seventh climates. Thus, the geographical term ‘Europe’, once introduced in the ninth century when many works including geographical treatises were translated from Greek to Arabic,\textsuperscript{27} did not prevail.

AN ETHNIC ENTITY? THE PEOPLES OF THE NORTH AND THEIR PLACE IN THE GENEALOGY OF MANKIND

Faced with the many peoples of the North that are mentioned in Arabic-Islamic sources from the ninth century onwards, it seems startling that Arabic-Islamic scholars dared to think of Europe as an ethnic entity. Yet we find theories in Arabic-Islamic literature according to which the peoples of the North were genealogically related to each other. Al-Maṣūdī (d. 345/956) referred to a scholarly consensus on the matter:

The Franks, the Slavs, the Lombards, the Spaniards, Gog and Magog, the Turks, the Khazars, the Burjān, the Alans, the Galicians, and all the other peoples that we have cited as living in the northern regions, descend from Yafeth, the youngest son of Noah, according to the opinion formulated without objection

\textsuperscript{24} Al-Idrīsī divides the known world into climate zones and deals with European places in the fourth to seventh climate zone: see al-Idrīsī, Opus geographicum, ed. Alessio Bombaci and Umberto Rizzitano (9 vols, Naples, 1970–84).

\textsuperscript{25} Al-Qazwīnī, Athār al-bilād, ed. Ferdinand Wüstenfeld (Göttingen, 1848), pp. 334, 362, 387f., 396, 404, 409, 413.


by researchers and scholars among those who follow the precepts of divine revelation.  

In another text, al-Masʿūdī provided historical depth for this genealogy by asserting that the early human race split up into seven grand peoples. These peoples differed in character, in the way they shaped their environment and in language. The third grand people was made up of Greeks, Romans, Slavs and Franks as well as ‘the other peoples that lay behind them in the northern regions’ (wa man ittaṣala bi-him min al-ummam fi ’l-jarbī wa huwwa al-shimāl). They spoke one language and were ruled by one king. This theory was also formulated by Ṣāʿid al-Andalusī (d. 462/1070), who, aside from mentioning additional northern nations, stated that all seven peoples were ultimately dispersed. In consequence, their languages diverged and their religions came to differ. Thus, both authors believed that the peoples of an extended Europe had been united at some indefinite point in the past. Al-Masʿūdī even went a step further when he claimed that the genealogical kinship of the peoples stemming from Yafeth had a political quality as well:

Several times they [the Muslims of Spain] have observed how the neighbouring peoples stemming from Yafeth such as the Galicians, the Burğān, the Franks and others have united against them.

An analysis of Ibn Khaldūn’s (d. 808/1406) chapter on the genealogical relationships between the peoples of the earth shows, however, that al-Masʿūdī’s scholarly consensus was not shared by all. Furthermore, we have to recall that

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29 Al-Masʿūdī, Kitāb al-tanbīh wa ‘l-ishrāf, ed. de Goeje, p. 77.
30 Ibid., p. 83.
33 Ibn Khaldūn, Taʾrīkh, ed. Zakkār and Shahāda, vol. 2, pp. 3–14, refrains from drawing clear genealogical or ethnic connections between the peoples of Europe altogether. His chapter about the nations of the earth and the opinions about their genealogical relationship begins with a rather long disclaimer in which he emphasizes the difficulty of formulating a coherent theory in view of many conflicting opinions. Drawing on a rather random selection of sources, Ibn Khaldūn mentions several European peoples such as the Franks, the Goths, the Burğān, the Spaniards (Ashbān), the pre-Islamic population of al-Andalus, the Latins (al-Laṭīn) as well as the Slavs. According to the conflicting theories at his disposal, all these peoples are in some way related to one of the descendants of Noah. But apart from the fact that he ignores several European peoples known to geographers of the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, whom he himself even mentions in
not all northern peoples mentioned by al-Masʿūdī and Šāʿid al-Andalusī would nowadays be classified as ‘European’.

A POLITICAL ENTITY? ROME, THE FRANKS AND THE EMPEROR OF CRUSADER TIMES

Al-Masʿūdī was not the only early medieval Arabic-Islamic scholar who pointed out the political links between the peoples of Europe. In the tenth century, other theories were proposed that promoted the idea of a political and religious framework common to the peoples of the North: Ibn Rustah (d. after 300/913) defined the ‘city of Britannia’ (‘madīnat Baraṭīniyya’) as the outermost outpost of the Byzantine Empire. Ibn Ḥawqal (d. after 378/988) included the Franks and the Galicians in their description of Byzantine territory (‘balad al-Rūm’), claiming that all three peoples formed a united realm (‘wa ʿl-mamlaka wāḥid’) and practised the same religion despite linguistic differences.

Some Arabic-Islamic scholars of this period were thus aware of a close political and religious relationship between the Byzantines and certain peoples of the northern hemisphere without being able to provide detailed historical background information.

Although several sources suggest that the expanding Muslims of the seventh and eighth centuries had been confronted regularly with archaeological remnants of the Roman Empire in regions commonly assigned to ‘the Latin West’, historiographical documentation of the western parts of the Roman Empire only seems to have become available to Arabic-Islamic historiographers later chapters, Ibn Khaldūn cannot or does not want to decide which theory to follow and thus remains rather non-committal.

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34 Ibn Rustah, Kitāb aʿlāq al-nafīsa, ed. de Goeje, p. 130: ‘wa humma ākhir bilād al-Rūm’.
37 Interestingly, al-Iṣṭakhrī and Ibn Ḥawqal compare this constellation with the Islamic world of their times, claiming that there existed different languages but only one ruler. As Miquel, La géographie humaine, vol. 1, p. 269, has pointed out, this description did not correspond to the political situation of the Islamic world in the tenth century. Both authors must have been aware of this, but chose to maintain the rather utopian vision of a unified Islamic world. While Miquel suggests that both authors did not wish to face reality, alternative interpretations – the wish to propagate an ideal or to point to existing religious, economic, political and cultural ties – should also be considered.
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at a later date. At the latest, the interpolated, restructured and extended Arabic version of Orosius’ Historiae adversus paganos, the Kitāb Hurūshiyūsh, provided such information, as soon as it had been ‘translated’ in al-Andalus at some point between the end of the ninth and the beginning of the tenth century.39 The Arabic version offers insight into important aspects of Roman history as well as abundant material on the northern and western parts of the Roman Empire.40 However, judging from its reception by later historiographers, the work was not widely known outside al-Andalus in the first two centuries after its production.41 It is quite certain that al-Masʿūdī (d. 345/956), who was among the first Middle Eastern scholars to provide historical information about the northern and western extension of the Roman Empire, still had recourse to Eastern Christian sources.42 In a list of Roman emperors he established that Maxentius and Constantine’s son Constans, rulers of the early fourth century, had resided in Rome from where Maxentius had ruled the ‘Frankish’, Constans the ‘Frankish’ and ‘Slavic’ hinterland.43 In another paragraph he pointed out that the Romans had created an empire that stretched far beyond the city of Rome, reaching the surrounding ocean (al-ūqiyyānus) and encompassing the lands of the Franks (bilād al-Ifranja) as well as the Iberian peninsula (al-Andalus).44 About a century later, Sāʿid al-Andalusī (d. 462/1070) elaborated that the Roman emperor Augustus had conquered Ptolemaic Egypt, thus linking the Western Roman possessions in al-Andalus and the Frankish lands with the East and uniting Latins (al-Laṭīniyyīn) and Greeks (al-Yūnāniyyīn).45 Ibn Ḥayyān (d. 469/1076) dedicated some space to Roman Spain,46 while Ibn al-Athīr (d. 630/1233) was well aware of the Roman Empire’s western dimension as is evident from his remarks on the late antique

39 On the approximate date of translation, see Kitāb Hurūshiyūsh, traducción árabe de las Historiae adversus paganos de Orosio, ed. Mayte Penelas (Madrid, 2001), pp. 27–42.
40 Ibid., see index on Western toponyms (in Arabic with Latin equivalent).
41 It is highly probable that it was used by the Andalusian historiographer Aḥmad al-Rāzī (d. 344/955), given that this author had access to much data that originated in earlier Latin sources. See Lévi-Provençal, ‘La “description de l’Espagne” d’Aḥmad al-Rāzī’, p. 80. On its reception see: Aḥmad Badawī, Awrūsiyūs. taʾrikḥ al-ʿālam (Beirut, 1982), pp. 4–46; Kitāb Hurūshiyūsh, ed. Penelas, pp. 67–81.
43 Al-Masʿūdī, Kitāb al-tanbih wa ʿl-ishrāf, ed. de Goeje, pp. 136, 145.
44 Ibid., p. 182.

Unfortunately, it is not possible to reconstruct what the \textit{Kitāb Hurūshiyūsh} reported on the disintegration of the Roman Empire since the only extant manuscript ends with the Gothic crossing of the Danube and the Battle of Adrianople in 378.\footnote{\textit{Kitāb Hurūshiyūsh}, ed. Penelas, p. 377.} Thus, it is al-Masʿūdī again who provides us with the earliest extant theory on the topic: he informs us that Rome had been governed by Constantinople long before the rise of Islam, and that its governor did not have the right to wear a crown or to hold the title of king (\textit{malik}). Around the year 340/951–52, however, the governor of Rome felt strong enough to usurp the insignia of power reserved for the emperor in Constantinople. The troops sent out to squelch the rebellion by the ruling Byzantine emperor, Constantine, were vanquished, forcing Constantine to plead for peace. Al-Masʿūdī continued to report that all other Frankish peoples (\textit{sā'ir al-ajnās al-ifranjiyya}) – the Galicians (\textit{al-Jalāliqa}), the people of Jáca (\textit{al-Jāsaqas}), the Basques (\textit{al-Washkans}), the ‘Germans’ (\textit{Armānjas} (?)), most of the Slavs (\textit{al-Ṣaqāliba}), the Bulgars (\textit{al-Burghar}) and other peoples adhered to Christianity and recognized the authority of the ruler in Rome. Rome, he claimed, had always been the capital of the Frankish realm (\textit{dār mamlakat al-ifranjiyya}) from ancient times up to the present.\footnote{Al-Masʿūdī, \textit{Kitāb al-tanbih wa 'l-ishrāf}, ed. de Goeje, pp. 181f.}

About a century later, Ṣāʿid al-Andalusī modified this theory. Following the conversion of Constantine and the relocation of the empire’s capital to Constantinople, the city of Rome had been ruled by Latin administrators (\textit{nafātahum min al-Laṭīniyyīn}). Constantinople’s power waned when surrounding nations such as the Slavs, the Burğān and others became powerful enough to secede and to found independent kingdoms. The last one to rebel was the Latin administrator of Rome who declared himself king in 340/951–52. From this time on, the kingdom of the Latins developed independently from its Greek counterpart. Eventually, the two territories were separated by hordes of Turks (\textit{firaq al-Turk}), who limited communications between Constantinople and Rome to sea transport.\footnote{Ṣāʿid al-Andalusī, \textit{Kitāb ṭabaqāt al-ummam}, ed. Būʿalwān, pp. 98f.} Other authors from eleventh-century al-Andalus also provided information about the disintegration of Roman rule: according to
Ibn Ḥayyān (d. 469/1076), the Goths had displaced the Romans, while al-Bakrī (d. 487/1094) recounted the Gothic entry into the Roman Empire, their dealings with the emperor Theodosius, the sack of Rome under Alaric I and Visigothic settlement in late antique Gaul. The chronicle written by the historiographer Ibn al-Athīr (d. 630/1233) synthesized much of this material. Among other things, he reported that Gothic rule replaced Roman rule on the Iberian peninsula and repeated the story of secession related by al-Masʿūdī and Šāʿid al-Andalusī. But while Šāʿid al-Andalusī charged the ‘Latins’ with having instigated the secession, Ibn al-Athīr blamed the ‘Franks’. It is possible that Ibn al-Athīr followed al-Masʿūdī who also referred to the Franks in this context. His remarks show, however, that the Crusades influenced his choice of ethnic terminology: to Ibn al-Athīr, the Franks were a people who had arisen to such power after their secession from the Roman Empire that they were able to conquer the Levant at the end of the eleventh century and even to take over Constantinople in 601/1204. Thus, according to Ibn al-Athīr, the Roman Empire collapsed once with the arrival of the Goths in Spain and then again in the tenth century. Either he was unable to harmonize the information at his disposal or he regarded the disintegration of the Roman Empire as a process that had begun on the Iberian Peninsula and had ended in Rome.

A similar case in which a historiographer failed to harmonize historical data can be found in the work of Ibn Khaldūn. In keeping with the Arabic-Islamic historiographical tradition he recounted Roman history from a Byzantine perspective in his chapters on Roman and Byzantine history, only touching upon events that foreshadowed and accompanied the disintegration of the Western empire. In three other chapters on the Goths, the Muslim conquest of al-Andalus and the Franks, however, Ibn Khaldūn stated explicitly that Franks and Goths had both lived within the orbit of the Roman Empire and had created independent kingdoms as soon as the latter had disintegrated. In his chapter on the Franks he eventually proceeded to describe the rise of Frankish power in the same vein as Ibn al-Athīr.

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Thus, from the tenth century onwards, Arabic-Islamic historiographers gradually began to develop an understanding of Europe’s Roman past, becoming aware of the fact that the Roman Empire had encompassed parts of the northern and western hemispheres, and, in its disintegration, had made room for several successor states that were closely linked to Rome and dominated by ‘Franks’. In this way, an important aspect of European history was gradually uncovered.

As regards the political structure of post-Roman Europe, two different tendencies can be detected in geographical and historiographical writings. On the one hand, Arabic-Islamic scholars became increasingly aware of Europe’s ethno-political diversity. A comparison of two geographical works, written by Ibn Khurradadhbih (d. ca. 300/911) and Abū ‘l-Fidā’ (d. 732/1331), reveals that the number of European peoples known to Arabic-Islamic scholars had increased.60 On the other hand, the Crusader period seems to have reinforced the notion of a single ‘European’ people called ‘the Franks’, which can already be found in the work of al-Masʿūdī in the tenth century.61 Although all geographical and historiographical works of the Crusader period mention European peoples and rulers that were obviously not Frankish, the name ‘Franks’, which so far had been used mainly to describe the realm of Merovingians, Carolingians and early Capetians,62 increasingly served as a generic term for all European participants


61 Al-Masʿūdī, Kitāb al-tanbih wa l-‘ishrāf, ed. de Goeje, pp. 181f.

in the Crusades. In this context, the institution increasingly regarded as representing the ‘Frankish peoples of Europe’ was ‘the emperor’. In Arabic, the term ‘emperor’ (الإمبراطور, al-imbarāṭūr) is not equivalent to the term used for Roman emperors, which is ‘قَيْسَار’ (qaysar). That the term required explanation in Arabic-Islamic sources from the thirteenth century onwards suggests that it was new, introduced to the Arabic-speaking world during the Crusader period. Ibn Saʿīd al-Maghribī (d. 685/1286), Ibn Wāṣil (d. 697/1298) and Abū ’l-Fidā’ (d. 732/1331) defined him as the ruler of Germany (اللامانيا), ‘king of the Franks’ (malik al-Faranj), ‘ruler of princes’ (malik al-umarā’), or ‘sultan at the head of forty princes’ (اربة من ملکان وسلطانها) and translated the title as meaning ‘king of kings’ (malik al-malik). Ibn Khaldūn was probably the most explicit regarding the European dimension of this office. He writes:

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al-ifranjiyya al-ʿuzmā qadīman wa ḥadīthan (wa ǧadīthan)’ and then proves this assertion on the basis of an anecdote featuring Aristotle and Alexander the Great!

In the works of Usāma bin Munqidh (d. 584/1188) and Ibn al-Athīr (d. 630/1233), for example, the term ‘Franks’ is used to describe the crusaders regardless of their origin, even though other ethnic terms are employed as well: Usāma bin Munqidh, Kitāb al-iʿtibār, cap. 8, ed. Philip Khuri Hitti (Princeton, 1930), p. 132; Ibn al-Athīr, Kitāb Al-kāmil fī l-taʾrīkh, AH 497–98, ed. Tornberg, vol. 10, pp. 372, 398. On the terminological development, see François Clément, ‘Nommer l’autre: qui sont les Ifranj des sources arabes du Moyen-Âge?’, in Isabelle Reck and Edgar Weber (eds), Recherches 02 de mots en maux: parcours hispano-arabe (Strasbourg, 2009), pp. 89–105.

In view of the upcoming quotation of Ibn Khaldūn on the emperor, Gottschalk’s impression, that the title emperor only applied to Frederick II. and his sons, turns out to be false.


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It is the custom of the Pope (al-bābā) with respect to the Franks to urge them to submit to one ruler and have recourse to him in their disagreements and agreements, in order to avoid the dissolution of concord and unity. In this way, the issue of in-group solidarity (al-ʿaṣabīyya), held to be of utmost importance by them, is tackled, to the effect that [this ruler] asserts his power over all of them. They call him ‘inbarādhūr,’ with the middle letter pronounced somehow between ‘dh’ and ‘ẓ.’ A crown is placed upon his head to convey a blessing. Therefore, the emperor is called ‘the crowned one.’ Perhaps that is the meaning of the word ‘emperor’.}

Whereas scholars of the ninth and tenth century still seem to have groped in the dark, scholars writing about Western Europe from the tenth century onwards gradually began to form an impression of the continent’s political past and present. In varying degrees and in spite of their growing awareness of the ethnical and political diversity in Europe, these Arabic-Islamic scholars seem to have recognized political forces, institutions and structures that were representative of Europe to a certain extent by acknowledging medieval Europe’s Roman background, the dissolution of Roman hegemony and the rise of a Western European power defined as ‘Frankish’ led by a figurehead known as ‘the emperor’.}

A RELIGIOUS ENTITY? LATIN CHRISTIANITY, ITS EXPANSION, ITS INSTITUTIONS

Medieval Islam produced a number of theologians, apologists and heresiologists who dealt with aspects of Christian theology, mostly with the aim of refuting them. But the search for the vaguest notion of Latin Christianity seems to be in vain. Classical heresiologists such as Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq (ninth century), Ibn

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72 It should be emphasized, however, that no Arabic-Islamic historiographer ever attributed absolute powers to the emperor. In the passages by Ibn Wāṣil, Ibn Saʿīd al-Maghribī and Abū ‘l-Fidā’, which have been cited above, the emperor is always named side by side with the French king (raydā Fārans) whose power and influence are clearly acknowledged.

73 Erdmann Fritsch, Islam und Christentum im Mittelalter. Beiträge zur Geschichte der muslimischen Polemik gegen das Christentum in arabischer Sprache (Breslau, 1930).
Ḥazm (d. 456/1064) and al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153) were quite well informed about early Christian and ecclesiastical history. But they only mention three groups of Christianity: Melkites, Nestorians and Jacobites. Later polemical treatises explicitly directed against Andalusian Christians refer to many aspects of Latin Christianity but also do not define it as an entity in its own right. Refutations of Latin Christianity as such do not seem to exist.

This is all the more surprising as the Arab-Islamic expansion in the seventh and eighth centuries had brought the Muslim world in touch with 'Latin’ Christians: Latin and Arabic sources describing the expansion in regions commonly assigned to the ‘Latin West’ refer to encounters between the expanding forces on the one hand, and churches, Christian communities and even clergy on the other hand. Several geographical and historiographical sources from the ninth century onwards explicitly define several European peoples such as the Galicians, the Franks, the inhabitants of the British isles and the city of Rome, the Normans, the Bulgars, the Hungarians and others as Christians. In some cases, they provide information about the Christianization of these peoples. And occasionally, they even write about local religious customs.

As with the history of the Western Roman Empire, the tenth century represents a kind of dividing wall: Arabic-Islamic scholars of the tenth century such as al-Iṣṭakhrī (tenth cent.) and Ibn Ḥawqal (d. after 378/988) pointed to the fact that Byzantines, Franks and Galicians all adhered to Christianity, but did not clearly link the processes of Romanization and Christianization. Al-Masʿūdī (d. 345/956) is at the threshold: in one of his works he recounted the conversion of the Frankish king Clovis, but without providing a clear chronological or historical context or mentioning the Roman Empire’s contribution to Frankish

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77 Ibid., pp. 451–65.

78 Ibn Rustah, Kitāb a'lāq al-nafisā, ed. de Goeje, pp. 131f.; al-Bakrī, Kitāb al-masālik wa 'l-mamālik, § 803 and § 805, ed. van Leeuwen and Ferre, pp. 478f., both provide information about religious customs in early medieval Rome.

conversion. In another work he claimed that several (post-Roman) peoples of the northern hemisphere adhered to Christianity and followed the authority of Rome. A clear connection between Romanization and Christianization was drawn from the eleventh century onwards. Authors such as al-Bakrī (d. 487/1094) and Ibn al-Athīr (d. 630/1233) linked both processes in their passages on early Gothic history, authors such as Śā‘īd al-Andalusī (d. 462/1070) and Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406) explicitly mentioned the Roman contribution to the diffusion of the Christian faith beyond the borders of the empire. But even these historiographers do not seem to have regarded Latin Christianity as an autonomous entity. When they defined the type of Christianity to which certain personalities, institutions or peoples of Europe such as the Frankish king Clovis, the pope, the Franks or the Galicians, adhered, they classified them as Melkites together with the Byzantines.

However, Arabic-Islamic scholars seem to have recognized that one religious institution situated north of the Mediterranean increasingly regulated religious and political affairs of a rather strong Christian majority: the papacy. A chronological analysis of Muslim discussions of the pope shows that direct contacts between the seventh and late ninth century are undocumented. Documentation begins in the ninth century on the basis of information provided mainly by Eastern Christian sources reflecting the situation of Late Antiquity: thus, at the end of the ninth century, al-Ya‘qūbī still defined the bishop of Rome as one of four patriarchs who had influence on dogmatic decisions taken at the ecumenical councils of the fourth to the seventh century. He even claimed that

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80 Al-Mas‘ūdī, Murūj al-dhahab, § 914–16, ed. Barbier de Meynard, Pavet de Courteille and Pellat, pp. 147f. (Arab.), pp. 344f. (French trans.).
81 Al-Mas‘ūdī, Kitāb al-tanbih wa l-ishrāf, ed. de Goeje, pp. 181f.
the bishop of Rome ruled the Roman Empire for a period of three years. From the late ninth century onwards, direct informants transmitting information via al-Andalus, Byzantium and other ‘zones of transmission’ provided scholars with information that was more up to date. At the beginning of the tenth century, Ibn Rustah (d. after 300/913) described the pope as a kind of local sovereign ruling the city of Rome. Much better informed, the eleventh-century Andalusian scholar al-Bakrī (d. 487/1094) mentioned Roman bishops of Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages. The information at his disposal proves that the pope’s rise to authority did not go unnoticed at the fringes of European Christianity. According to al-Bakrī, protocol stipulated that Christian rulers fall to the pope’s feet and kiss them in greeting. Furthermore, he is among the first Arabic-Islamic scholars to describe the effects of excommunication. Latin-Christian expansionism of the eleventh to fifteenth centuries as expressed in the crusades and the reconquista finally established the pope as one of the main institutions of the northern Christian world, an institution that was now repeatedly defined and reflected upon in Arabic-Islamic historiography and other genres. In the thirteenth century, Yāqūt (d. 626/1229) and Ibn Wāṣil (d. 697/1298) defined the pope as a religious leader with far-reaching jurisdictional and political powers. Ibn Wāṣil additionally dedicated a lengthy passage to the conflict between the Hohenstaufen and the papacy. In the fourteenth and early fifteenth century, Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406) analysed the political role of the pope among ‘the Franks’ alias European Christians, whereas al-Qalqashandī (d. 821/1418) defined the pope as patriarch of the Melkites, equivalent to the caliph and enthroner of the kings of Christendom. Thus, from the late ninth century onwards, Arabic-Islamic sources reflected the rise of the papacy which they increasingly regarded as a major player in political affairs of Christians north of the Mediterranean. But although several of these authors described papal

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90 Al-Bakrī, Kitāb al-masālik waʾl-mamālik, § 498, ed. van Leeuwen and Ferre, p. 312, mentions the bishop of Rome as the person who converted Constantine, and, § 804, p. 478, a pope called Iohannes (Yuwaṇīsh) who built a new city near Rome, thus maybe referring to the civitas Leonina which was constructed by order of pope Leo IV (sedit 847–55) following the sack of Saint Peter by ‘Saracens’ in 846.
involvement in internal European affairs, the papacy was never fully regarded as an institution representing Europe or ‘Latin Christianity’. This is not surprising, considering that the papacy’s activities had never been confined to the European continent but had always had a Mediterranean dimension as well.

CONCLUSIONS

Returning to the question of whether medieval Arabic-Islamic scholars regarded ‘Latin-Christian Europe’ as a geographical, ethnic, political or religious entity, it is difficult to give an answer that is not ambiguous. We have seen that the Greek term ‘Europe’ disappeared from later sources to be replaced by a partition of the world into quadrants or seven climates.

Arabic-Islamic historiographers and geographers became increasingly aware of the variety of peoples who inhabited the great land mass north of the Mediterranean. Some linked these ‘peoples of the North’ to each other either by retracing their common genealogy to Noah’s son Yafeth or, less often, by classifying them as belonging to the third of seven primeval nations. Today, we would not regard all of these peoples as ‘European’.

Already in the tenth century, several Arabic-Islamic scholars had formulated theories on political and religious links between the Roman world and the peoples of Europe. Certain aspects of the Western Roman Empire’s history and transformation were only understood from the tenth century onwards, however, when hypotheses began to appear that described the emergence of a post-Roman order increasingly dominated by a people called ‘the Franks’. This went hand in hand with the introduction of the generic term ‘Franks’ to be used for European Christians active in and beyond the Mediterranean. From the thirteenth century on, Arabic-Islamic scholars acknowledged the existence of an ‘emperor’ who had a certain authority among the ‘Frankish’ peoples.

Medieval Europe was regarded as Christian but its Christianity was not distinguished from other forms of Christianity, even though Arabic-Islamic scholars became increasingly aware of the pope’s continuous presence from Roman to crusader times and his rising influence on the affairs of Northern, but also other Christians.

Hence, although a clear notion of ‘Latin-Christian Europe’ does not exist in Arabic-Islamic sources written between the ninth and the fifteenth centuries, certain details suggest that Arabic-Islamic scholars gradually understood that certain cultural, political and religious elements were characteristic of an increasingly active northern hemisphere. Step by step, Arabic-Islamic scholars began to unravel that many societies inhabiting the geographical zone north of the Mediterranean had a Roman history, adhered to the Christian faith and were represented by certain peoples and institutions such as the Franks, the emperor and, to a certain degree, the pope. This slightly blurred image is, ultimately, what one could have expected, given the fact that the concept of ‘Latin-Christian
Europe’ stands for a cluster of ever-changing societies that evolved out of the Western Roman Empire, developing different features in the course of the approximately one thousand years of history that scholarship has chosen to define as ‘the Middle Ages’.
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Modern historians of the Viking Age have paid little attention to the activities of the Norsemen in Spain and the Mediterranean. There were significant attacks in the 840s and 850s, between 964 and 971, and raids continued into the twelfth century. The impact of these attacks was documented in a wide variety of literary sources, some contemporary with the events described, and toponyms hint at Viking settlement in Galicia. In 2002, Mariano Campo claimed that this evidence was of more than local significance, since ‘it was an Andalusi, born in Jaén in the eighth century, who was the first person [Campo’s emphasis] to offer a fascinating, almost ethnographic portrait of the customs and geography of the men of Northern Europe in the Early Middle Ages’. Campo’s witness was the poet al-Ghazāl, who headed a delegation from the Umayyads in Cordoba to the court of an unnamed Viking king.

Several scholars have treated this episode as a true story. Yet the celebrated scholar of al-Andalus, Évariste Lévi-Provençal, raised a number of problems in accepting its historicity and Sara Pons-Sanz found additional reasons to question it. This chapter considers al-Ghazāl’s embassy as an illustration of the way the Vikings in Spain were remembered in the early Middle Ages, which has pushed

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them to the margins of modern histories of the period. In general, the Vikings in Spain seem to have been neglected because historians have found it difficult to evaluate the sources. A central core narrative, remembered by authors writing both in Arabic and in Latin, appears to point to ‘what really happened’, but it was simply the starting point for a wide variety of retellings in both traditions. Christian clerics deployed the Vikings as extras in battles between rival bishops, arriving on cue to punish bad bishops and providing the opportunity for a good bishop, Gonzalo of Mondoñedo, to demonstrate his sanctity; at the appearance of a Viking fleet he began to pray, and with every Ave Maria a Viking ship sank or caught fire.’ Accounts of the Vikings written in Arabic can be even more dramatic. In a description of the attack on Seville in 844, we can see the Viking fleet approaching:

They had, as it were, filled the ocean with dark red birds, in the same way as they had filled the hearts of men with fear and trembling. After landing at Lisbon, they sailed to Cadiz, then to Sidona, then to Seville. They besieged this city, and took it by storm. After letting the inhabitants suffer the terror of imprisonment or death, they remained there seven days, during which they let the people empty the cup of bitterness.8

This evocation of the terror that the Vikings inspired echoes Christian responses to the sack of Lindisfarne. As is often the case with Arabic sources, however, this passage was written in a far country and centuries after the event – in this case, by the Maghrebi historian Ibn ‘Idhārī at the turn of the fourteenth century. It is not clear where Ibn ‘Idhārī got his information, or how much creative freedom he allowed himself; he may have added a description of the defeated Vikings being hanged from palm trees. Yet his work should not be dismissed out of hand. Embellishments of a story whose details may have been forgotten help to locate the Vikings within a common culture of scholarship disseminated across the Islamic world, creating a set of sometimes contradictory preconceptions that influenced how this threatening group of outsiders was named and characterized.

A passage from a Book of Geography attributed to al-Zuhrī illustrates several aspects of the Arabic view of the ‘Vikings’; this is another late source but perhaps better informed, since the author seems to have lived in Granada in the twelfth century.9

‘Formerly, over [the Great Sea in the West]’ says al-Zuhrī, ‘many big ships sailed, which the people of al-Andalus called “qarāqīr”. These ships were capable of sailing backwards and forwards and had square sails. They were crewed by the people they called the majūs, who possessed a strength, courage and tenacity without equal for navigating the sea. When they appeared off the coast, the inhabitants fled towards the interior, in the grip of pure terror. These majūs put to sea every sixth or seventh year. They assembled fleets of at least eighty ships, sometimes more than one hundred. All those whom they encountered at sea they overcame, took prisoner and carried off.’

Al-Zuhrī, in common with most of the Arabic writers, called the Vikings majūs. This term has generated unwarranted controversy as modern scholars look in vain for terminological precision. Although used originally of Zoroastrians, ‘the term majūs was in time applied by the Arabs to all northern nations’, as the Spanish Arabist Pascal Gayangos noted as long ago as 1840. The details of al-Zuhrī’s description confirm these majūs as Vikings. Some scholars have tried to sweep all the references to majūs in Spain into the same basket. They have identified groups of majūs who allied with Alfonso II of León against the emir Hisham in 793 and with the Basques against the emir Muhammad in 816 as the first Vikings active in the peninsula. The earliest reference to majūs in Spain who are likely to be Vikings, however, comes from the Eastern geographer al-Yaqūbī, writing in 889–90 about the raids of 844. From al-Andalus, the earliest surviving narrative of this attack is probably the History of the Conquest of al-Andalus of Ibn al-Qūṭīya (d. 977), compiled in the generation after his death. Ibn al-Qūṭīya’s characterization of the raiders as majūs was repeated by later authors and the same label was attached to the protagonists of later attacks. Yet another tenth-century Andalusi, al-Bakrī, talked about ‘the land of the majūs known as al-Inglīz’, which is probably a reference to Anglo-Saxon England.

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Hawqal, who visited al-Andalus in 949, and noted that ‘from time to time, the peninsula has been attacked by the fleets of the majūs’, included among them ‘the Turks, Pechenegs and other races such as Saqāliba [Slavs or possibly slaves of Eastern European origin] and Bulgars’.16 Omeljan Pritsak, an eminent scholar of the Vikings in Eastern Europe, proposed a new way out of this confusion.17 He started from Ibn ‘Idhārī’s description of Septimania as the ‘land of the majūs’.18 This cannot possibly mean Vikings and must, argued Pritsak, mean the ‘land of markets’ from a Celtic suffix magos that appears in place names in southern France. Therefore, when Alfonso II asked for help from the majūs in 793, they were traders, not raiders, following the same profession, but perhaps not of the same ethnicity as the men who were active in the emporia of Eastern Europe, and not related to those who harried the coast of al-Andalus fifty years later. This hypothesis is too creative. Pritsak, like Ibn Hawqal, missed the point that although nearly all Vikings are labelled majūs, not all the majūs are Vikings.

Characterizing the Vikings as majūs had a number of implications. Majūs derives from the Greek μαγός, ‘magician’. It was used of the Zoroastrians of Iran, whom the Qur’an classified as one of the Peoples of the Book protected under Islamic law. By the period of the Viking attacks, however, the category majūs had been widened to include peoples other than the three monotheistic faiths, and in a twelfth-century Latin–Arabic glossary now in Leiden, majūs is glossed as ‘pagan’.19 There are several references by the historians of al-Andalus to majūs in this context. To quote the Maghrebi Ibn ‘Idhārī again: ‘It is said that the first [people] to settle al-Andalus after the Flood were called al-Andalush … and it was named al-Andalus [after them] … And it is said that they were majūs.’20 In the tenth century, al-Ma’sūdī (of whom more later) illustrated the scope of this usage by using majūs both for the kings of the Franks before their conversion to Catholicism and for the Vikings: indeed, in the same passage.21 The association of the term with Zoroastrians persisted, however, even in contexts where it is clearly inappropriate, and where greater precision might be expected. A legal

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19 Federico Corriente, A Dictionary of Andalusi Arabic (Leiden, New York, Cologne, 1997).
judgment made in the tenth century in al-Andalus refers to majūs.\textsuperscript{22} A fifteenth-century Maghrebi collection preserves a ruling against lighting a fire at night, ‘which [says the judge] is the custom of the majūs’.\textsuperscript{23} There is no other evidence for Zoroastrians, or pagans, in al-Andalus or the Maghreb at this period and majūs was often simply a term of abuse.\textsuperscript{24} Echoes of all these meanings of majūs could be incorporated into descriptions of the Viking majūs, as we shall see.

There were other ways of labelling the Vikings, but, given the imprecision of Arabic terminology, it is surprisingly rarely that we find these pagan warriors being categorized using the terms that were used of other groups of non-Muslims. Ibn ‘Idhārī occasionally used the terms kafirūn (unbelievers) and mushrikūn (idol worshippers) of the Vikings, but in the works of other Muslim authors these terms were much more often applied to Christians, particularly the enemy in Northern Spain. The Arab authors sometimes used of the Vikings a term similar to that used by the Latin authors, who called the Vikings Northmen, Nordomanni, Normani or Lodomani;\textsuperscript{25} they were, says the Chronicle of Alfonso III, ‘a pagan and extremely cruel people previously unknown to us’.\textsuperscript{26} This terminology may have been picked up in al-Andalus as a result of embassies from the Asturias; an account of one of these was concerned with the Viking threat.\textsuperscript{27} An eleventh-century writer, Ibn Ḥayyān, perhaps reliant on a tenth-century source, linked the designation ‘Northmen’ with majūs when he called the raiders al-majūs al-ardumāniyyīn.\textsuperscript{28}

Whereas the term majūs was geographically imprecise, the designation of the Vikings as men from the North fed into the Arabic authors’ knowledge of the Great Sea to the west of al-Andalus and the lands that lay beyond it, which was derived from classical Greek geography. Al-Zuhrī said that ‘the majūs ships’ that harassed the Straits came from ‘the land of Galicia which is on the shores of the Great Sea in the West’. A century later, Ibn Saʿīd al-Maghribī (d. 1286) said that

\textsuperscript{22} Ana Fernández Félix, Cuestiones legales del islam temprano: la ‘Utbiyya y el proceso de formación de la sociedad islámica andalusí (Madrid, 2003), p. 414.


\textsuperscript{24} Esperanza Alfonso, Islamic Culture through Jewish Eyes: Al-Andalus from the Tenth to Twelfth Centuries (Abingdon, New York, 2008), p. 32, n. 118.


\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., pp. 48, 88, 101, 116.
the majūs came from the islands of the North, which included Britain. Other authors said that they came from the Great Sea in the west, which formed part of an Encircling Ocean (al-Baḥr al-Muhīt) that girded the world like a ‘green sash’ (al-Ṭawq al-Akhdar). An alternative name, the Tenebrous Ocean (al-Baḥr al-Muzhlim), invoked the Greek division of the world into seven latitudinal zones that began slightly north of the Equator and ended in the perpetual darkness of the far North. Although, by the time of the second wave of Viking attacks in 859, the Andalusis were apparently able to assemble a fleet to go out into the ocean after them, the classical view of the Western Ocean prevailed over actual experience of sailing on it. In 1154, al-Idrīsī was still insisting that al-Andalus was the end of the known world; beyond was the Tenebrous Ocean, where no one dared to venture. Or almost no one: al-Idrīsī recounted the story of the Adventurers of Lisbon; he believed it to be a true story, because a street in Lisbon was named after them. The Adventurers sailed into the Western Ocean, but were advised not to sail into the total darkness to the North. They confined their exploration to some of the islands, where they found giant, strangely inedible sheep.

Al-Zuhrī claimed to have derived his Geography from a work of the caliph al-Ma’mūn, celebrated for sponsoring translation from the Greek, although the description of the world attributed to him does not survive. The geographers, however, were polymaths and open to a number of other influences. One of the most important of these was the Qur’an, and there was a tendency to try to make the world conform to the Qur’anic picture, however unlikely the result.

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34 Perhaps the first sighting of polar bears? Robert Hoyland’s observation.
37 Ferhat, ‘Al-Zuhri’.
The famous tenth-century geographer al-Muqaddasi was puzzled that the maps of the sea that stretched from China to Africa did not correspond with his experience of sailing on it. He consulted several scholars, including a sheikh, who was both a learned man and the owner of a merchant fleet, for a more credible description.\(^{38}\) When it came to the number of seas in the world, however, al-Muqaddasi thought that, since only the two seas mentioned in the Qur’an could exist,\(^{39}\) the Encircling Ocean and the other seas of which the geographers wrote had to be redefined: ‘we do not include the Encircling Ocean because it is the boundary of the world, with no limits’.\(^{40}\) Another pool of knowledge was *adab*, a common cultural heritage of secular scholarship that included poetry and fantastic ethnography, such as the description of the island of Waqwaq where men grew on trees. A poetic image comparing a ship to a dark-hued camel with wings like a bird may have been in Ibn ‘Idhārī’s mind when writing about the Vikings.\(^{41}\) There seems to have been no orthodox way of combining these influences and each individual author made his own synthesis.

Some of this may be recognized in the work of an author who was, unlike most of our sources, contemporary with the Vikings. Al-Mas‘ūdī, born in Baghdad in the 890s, was a prolific author and travelled widely in the Islamic world, although he did not visit al-Andalus. He was more interested in non-Muslim peoples than his contemporaries and made several interesting statements about the Vikings in the South. Al-Mas‘ūdī adopted the Ptolemaic world view, in which the movement of the planets governed the physical conditions in each zone of the sublunary world and in turn, the character and language of their inhabitants, though he supplemented this information from his own observations and enquiries and from books he discovered on his travels. Al-Mas‘ūdī accepted the Greek idea that the world ended near the straits of Gibraltar and noted that there was a colossus at Cadiz with its arm raised towards the West, warning travellers not to go any further.\(^{42}\) Beyond here, in the very vaguest of terms, were the ‘North’ and the ‘West’.\(^{43}\) Al-Mas‘ūdī included among the peoples inhabiting the ‘North’ not only the ‘Turks’, ‘Rūs’, ‘Slavs’ and ‘Franks’ but also the Christians of northern Spain and the Lombards (*al-Nukubarda*), of whom he says that ‘their country extends to

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39 Ibid., pp. 17–19.
40 Ibid., p. 20.
the West and their location is in the North'. He was little clearer in describing the adverse effect of the climate of the North on its peoples:

in the extreme North ... where the influence of the sun is rather alleviated and the regions abound in cold, moisture and snow, the people are characterised by good physique, rude behaviour, slow speech, harsh tongues, white complexion, thick flesh, blue eyes, thin skin, curly and red hair. All these characteristics are found due to the predominance of moisture in their lands, and their cold nature does not encourage firmness of religious belief. Those living further North are characterised by dullness of mind, harsh behaviour and barbarism.

Al-Mas'ūdī thought that it was from this region that the people came who attacked al-Andalus:

Before the year 300 ships returned to al-Andalus by sea bearing a thousand of the Aghart/Faghart people to her shores. The people of al-Andalus believed that they were a people of the majūs who successfully raided them from this sea every two hundred years. [They also believed] that they came to their country from a bay/gulf lying on the opposite coast of the Uqyans sea (possibly the Atlantic) and not from the gulf where there is a copper lighthouse. And I think – but God alone knows – that this gulf is connected to the Mayutus sea and Buntus and that this people are the Rūs whom we mentioned earlier in this book for they are the only people who sail across those seas, which are connected with the Atlantic Ocean.

Although al-Mas'ūdī was not the first to link the attacks of the majūs on al-Andalus with the Rūs, he may have been the first to suggest that these majūs came from beyond the Encircling Ocean. Al-Mas'ūdī knew the Rūs from his travels in the eastern Islamic lands and in the Caucasus. They were pagans who travelled by boat, and traded with Byzantium; he thought that they owed no allegiance to any law or king. Like the Turks, they consisted of different peoples (ajnās, the plural of jins, the Arabic gens). Al-Mas'ūdī labelled one group of the Rūs as al-lawdā'āna, perhaps an echo of the term al-ardumānīyyīn, which some authors used for the majūs in Spain: al-Mas'ūdī said that this group traded with al-Andalus, Byzantium and the land of the Khazars.

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45 Al-Mas'ūdī, Kitāb al-tanbih, ed. Goeje, pp. 23f.
50 Ibid., p. 18.
It seems that there is a core of direct observation, but at every point we can see al-Mas'ūdī's reading triumphing over his personal experience, as in this passage (the attribution to al-Mas'ūdī is not certain):

Concerning ... the majūs who worship the sun. They live by a pleasant sea that runs from the region of the North to the South and also a sea that runs from the West to the East until it meets another sea that runs from the direction of the Bulgars. They have many rivers which are all in the North and they do not have a salt-water sea because their land is far from the sun, and their water is sweet. No one lives in the North because of the cold and frequent earthquakes. Many of their tribes are majūs whose bodies are burned by fire which they worship. There are many towns and fortresses and they have churches with bells hanging in them which they strike like al-Nuwāqish. Among them is a people between the Saqāliba and the Ifranja [Europeans] of the faith of the Sabians who profess worship of the stars.51

Al-Mas'ūdī probably knew that these majūs were not Zoroastrians, whose beliefs he describes in some detail, having travelled in Iran, talked with Zoroastrian priests, read their religious texts and visited their fire temples.52 Nevertheless, false etymology and the desire to include all the information at his disposal led him to attribute some of their practices to the men of the North just because they too are labelled majūs.

This portmanteau ethnography provides the background to the story of the poet al-Ghazāl’s embassy to the Viking court with which I began. It survives in an encyclopaedic collection of adab composed in Egypt in the thirteenth century by an Andalusi, Ibn Diḥya; his source for the embassy is a ninth-century history of al-Andalus up to the reign of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān II (822–52) by Tammām b. Alqama, now lost, which Ibn al-Qūṭīya also used. In fact, the account of the embassy is probably based on another mission reportedly undertaken by al-Ghazāl, to Constantinople.53 The episode related by Ibn Diḥya is clearly meant to relate to the Viking attack on Seville in 844, since it begins: ‘A majūs ambassador came to make peace with the Sultan'Abd al-Raḥman, after they had left Seville.’54 ‘Abd al-Raḥmān equipped al-Ghazāl and his companions with a ship and they sailed to

52 Al-Mas'ūdī, Les Prairies d’Or, ed. Meynard and Courteille, vol. 2, pp. 123–6; Al-Mas'ūdī, Kitāb al-Tanbih, ed. Goeje, p. 95; Shboul, Al-Mas'ūdi, pp. 61, 107f.
the majūs king, ‘who lived on a great island in the ocean, three days journey from al-Andalus’. Ibn Dihya’s account must have been composed, or interpolated, in the eleventh century or later, because it says: ‘The majūs were heathens, but now they follow the Christian faith.’ It would be nice to be able to read it in the spirit of Michael McCormick’s remark that ‘imaginary travellers shed real light on early medieval travel and communications’. The account of the embassy, however, was not written as an essay in ethnography. The section of Ibn Dihya’s encyclopaedia devoted to al-Ghazāl concentrates on two aspects of the poet’s biography: his works, which Ibn Dihya cites extensively, and his wit. One episode shows how al-Ghazāl’s quick response saved him from imprisonment after he had accused a wazīr of hoarding grain at a time of shortage, forcing up the price. The embassy to the Vikings illustrates both these aspects of al-Ghazāl. When the poet arrived at the majūs court, their king tried to demean him by making him enter the court through a very low door; the Byzantine emperor had supposedly presented al-Ghazāl with the same dilemma. In both cases, al-Ghazāl went in feet first, a perennial insult. Three poems punctuate the account of the embassy to the Vikings. Ibn Dihya emphasized the poet’s skill and interrupted the narrative to lament the neglect of Andalusi and Maghrebi poets compared with those in the eastern Islamic world: the published translations omit this section of the text, thus skewing the meaning of the whole. More than half the passage describes al-Ghazāl’s flattery of the queen of the majūs to whom he improvises a poem that begins: ‘You have to resist, Oh my heart, a love that troubles thee, and against which you defend yourself as a lion. You are in love with a majūsiyya, who never lets the sun of beauty set, and who lives at the rarely visited extremity of the world.’ His portrayal strays little from the standard representation of the ‘barbarian’ as the inversion of normality. It is hardly surprising to find that the religion that the majūs have abandoned in favour of Christianity is fire-worship. A discussion of marriage and divorce among the majūs women shows them as the object of the type of textual strategy housing both barbarian and female otherness that Walter Pohl has analysed. Sexual freedom for barbarian women and the lack of jealousy of their men were topoi of this genre. Another example is Bertha, the queen of the Franks, who is supposed to have proposed marriage to a caliph. Neither of these stories contributes to the discussion of barbarian

ethnography that was, in a slightly less garbled fashion, taking place in the work of geographers such as al-Mas'ūdī.

Al-Mas'ūdī and perhaps al-Zuhrī knew quite a lot about the ‘real’ Vikings, but this sort of knowledge contributed little to their picture of them. The Vikings remained resolutely ‘Other’, both geographically and as pagans. Scholars writing in Arabic put the Vikings into a category – majūs – with which they were already familiar. In doing so, they tried to put in everything they knew about this category, no doubt gaining credibility with their readers as they lose it with us. Later readers were more interested in the anecdotes than geography; descriptions of the peoples from beyond the Western Ocean began to lose ‘their precision, becoming descriptions of marvels which transport us from tangible reality to the realm of fancy constituted by the oriental tales’.60 It is there that we must leave the story of al-Ghazāl.

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Chapter 25

Identities of the Ṣaqāliba and the Rūsiyya in Early Arabic Sources

Przemysław Urbańczyk

Our picture of Central and Eastern Europe during the early Middle Ages is rather obscure because this part of the continent is hardly accessible historically given the scarcity and limited reliability of the relevant evidence. Archaeologists have revealed fascinating finds which are, nevertheless, hard to ‘translate’ into a historical narrative. Their discoveries are well localized, both in time and in space, but provide neither names nor ethnic affiliations.

In the absence of contemporary vernacular sources, we have to rely on evidence that originated in four very different intellectual milieux: Frankish, Saxon or Anglo-Saxon, Byzantine and Persian, Arabic or Jewish. Their authors painted culturally specific portraits of the societies they encountered contingent upon both their social location and the uneven quality of the information at their disposal. Even documents that pretend at accuracy – for instance, a ‘spy’s’ report from ca. 848 commonly known as the Bavarian Geographer – appear misleading under detailed scrutiny.1

Extensive scholarly discussions concerning the reliability of the early Arabic geographies and travelogues may be used as an illustration of the problems faced by scholars studying early medieval Eastern Europe. These ‘exotic’ accounts are the main, or sometimes even the only, literary sources concerning territories beyond the hinterlands of both European empires and thus inaccessible to West European and Byzantine authors. Therefore the reports of Persian, Arab and Jewish authors have consistently attracted scholars over the past 200 years. Unfortunately, in the Islamic world most knowledge concerning northern peoples was secondary, based on indirect, often fragmentary information procured from merchants visiting Baghdad and from the European slaves who were abundant in Islamic countries. Another problem derives from the varied relations of Andalusia, the Maghrib and the Mashriq with Europe, which resulted in different understandings of these same terms. Moreover, most sources

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1 Przemysław Urbańczyk, Trudne początki Polski, Monografie Fundacji na Rzecz Nauki Polskiej, Seria humanistyczna (Wrocław, 2008), ch. 5; also Przemysław Urbańczyk, ‘Before the Poles: problems of ethnic identification in Polish archaeology of the Early Middle Ages’, in Walter Pohl and Mathias Mehofer (eds), Archaeology of Identity/Archäologie der Identität, Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters, 17 (Vienna, 2010), pp. 203–9.
survived fragmentarily in secondary, tertiary or even more corrupted copies. All of these problems demand a critical approach rarely present in the relevant literature.

Two collective names of key importance have always been of special importance: Rūs/Rūsiyya and Ṣaqāliba, which have often been identified specifically with the Swedish vikings and the Slavs respectively. Sometimes the two names have been analysed together to explain the process through which the Scandinavians ‘were rapidly incorporated into the Slav elite, acquiring Slavic names, language and habits, and losing the remains of their Scandinavian identity’. Another theory suggests that the term Rūs ‘was certainly associated with marine and riverine traders and merchants-mercenaries/pirates of “Ṣaqāliba” stock’. A way out of these controversies was sought in the tendency to view the two names as rather ambiguous concepts, evidence of largely unsuccessful Arabic attempts to grasp the ethno-geographic complexity of distant parts of Europe.

This century-old discussion has not brought conclusive results, which is quite understandable considering that distant ‘observers’ of Slavic Europe had different goals than ours. Muslim geographers placed themselves in a ‘global’ perspective, trying to classify the known world in ‘climates’ settled by various peoples viewed in rather general terms and occasionally decorated with haphazardly collected mirabilia. The lack of ethno-geographic details did not necessarily result from a lack of relevant knowledge, which could have been provided by the so-called Radhanites who travelled between France and China and were frequent guests in the central lands of the caliphate. According to Ibn Khurradadhbih and Ibn al-Faqih, these Jewish merchants, known by the mysterious collective name al-Radhaniyya, had allegedly ‘monopolized’ the vast trade network reaching from the Atlantic to the Pacific by the ninth and tenth centuries. They also spoke several European languages, including Slavic. We probably know one of them by name: Isaac, who in 797 joined Charlemagne’s deputation to the famous caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd. He was probably ‘hired’ because he had the valuable linguistic, geographic and logistical knowledge necessary for such a trip. It may have been because of such experience that he was the only member of this deputation to return to France.

The two available direct reports from personal trips to the areas of our interest – those of Ibn Faḍlān and Ibrāhīm ibn Ya’qub – indicate that visitors from

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6 Lewicki, Źródła arabskie do dziejów Słowiańszczyzny, vol. 1, p. 119.
the Arabic lands concentrated on identifying political organizations, religious differences and economic opportunities. The ethno-topographic accuracy that we would require to describe the cultural complexity of Europe should not be expected from early medieval authors writing in Arabic. Therefore, analyses of these accounts in isolation from one another encounter serious interpretational problems. Even sources as rich in information as Ibn Faḍlān’s travelogue may lead to divergent interpretations of his ‘ethnic’ terminology.\(^7\)

The way beyond these historiographical challenges lies in the critical consideration of all available reports, which have often been treated separately. Short notices, lengthy travel reports and scattered comments seemingly devoid of clarity and of importance, when placed in chronological order and included in historical contexts, may reveal much of the shifting ethnic landscapes of early medieval Eastern Europe.

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The oldest accounts that mention the Ṣaqāliba were written in the second half of the eighth century, for instance by al-Fazārī (?–796/806). These are merely brief notes that place the ‘land of the Slavs’ (arḍ al-ṣaqāliba) vaguely within Europe.\(^8\) When Persian geographers turned their eyes to the Ṣaqāliba, knowledge in the Umayyad Caliphate concerning the ethno-geographic structure of distant Europe was rather diffuse. However, the Ṣaqāliba were considered important inhabitants of the continent and were frequently mentioned. The first geographer to locate them more precisely was al-Khūwārizmī (ca. 780–ca. 850) in the ‘Book of the Earth’s picture’ (Kitāb śūrat al-arḍ), written in the second quarter of the ninth century. There we learn that ‘the land Germania is identical with the land of the Slavs’.\(^9\)

The Persian director of the Abbasid post, Ibn Khurradadhbih (ca. 820–ca. 912), wrote ca. 847 the first versions of his ‘Book of Roads and Kingdoms’ (Kitāb al-masālik wa’l-mamālik). He divided Europe into four parts: Andalusia, [the land of] Slavs, Byzantium and Francia.\(^10\) He significantly identified three parts with political names (al-Andalus, al-Rum and Firanja) and one using an ethnonym (al-ṣaqāliba), which reflects well the geopolitical situation of the early ninth century when no Slavic state yet existed in the vast territories they inhabited.

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Ibn Khurradadhbih imagined that ‘the lands of the Ṣaqaḥība ... are north of Andalusia’ \(^{11}\) probably because Slavic, like Frankish and Longobard, slaves came from the north to Iberian markets. Other Slavs he correctly located north-west of Macedonia. \(^{12}\) He was aware that Slavic settlements stretched into Eastern Europe, where other Slavs are correctly placed ‘in the North’ between the Khazars and the Avars. \(^{13}\) All northern lands were for him Ṣaqaḥība and even Itil (= Volga) was called ‘Slavic river’. \(^{14}\) He mentioned the al-Rūs merchants who were coming via Khazaria to Baghdad. They belonged to ‘one of the Ṣaqaḥība tribes’ and were Christians. \(^{15}\)

This description may appear confused if we adhere to the traditional Scandinavian identification of the al-Rūs. However, Ibn Khurradadhbih claims that they used some Ṣaqaḥība translators in Baghdad and he boasts information that ‘the king of the al-ṣaqaḥība is called Qnaz’. \(^{16}\) This old Slavonic term (Polish kniaż) indicates direct contact with Slavs. This quotation excludes linguistic confusion and confirms Slavic connotation of Ibn Khurradadhbih’s Ṣaqaḥība. Therefore, we should accept that merchants who used the Slavic slaves in Baghdad as translators were themselves Slavic-speakers, or they at least spoke Slavic very well.

If we consider their supposed Christianity, the individuals likely were, or included, Moravians. For Christian Great Moravia had been politically well established since the mid-ninth century and it controlled the strategic trans-Carpathian pass along the east–west transcontinental route that led directly to the Volga and thence south to Khazaria and Baghdad. Anyway, we should accept that the Rūs described by Ibn Khurradadhbih were or included Slavs.

In the ninth-century sources written in the western provinces, Andalusia and Maghrib/Ifriqia, the Ṣaqaḥība were also frequently mentioned, not as inhabitants of distant lands but as actors on the local stage. Apparently Slavic servants actively participated in internal developments. The stable presence of numerous Ṣaqaḥība and the continuous influx of new slaves from Europe meant that they ‘did not lose their mother tongue ... for they could find countrymen among many slaves serving at the court’. \(^{17}\) There should not have been any problems with the linguistic identification of those people. Thus, during the Aghlabid period (800–909), ‘the writers usually apply the name Ṣaqaḥība to Slavs. In the works of writers who used evidence borrowed from other sources, the word Ṣaqaḥība is occasionally applied to non-Slavs, but this is due to the compilers’

\(^{11}\) Ibid., p. 67.
\(^{12}\) Ibid., p. 71.
\(^{13}\) Ibid., p. 73.
\(^{14}\) Ibid., pp. 73 and 75.
\(^{15}\) Ibid., p. 77.
\(^{16}\) Ibid., p. 67.
mishandling of their sources.\textsuperscript{18} Remarkably, the Persian known as Ibn al-Faqīh claimed in his ‘Book of lands/towns’ (Kitāb al-buldān), written in 902–903, that ‘Ṣaqāliba merchants bring hides of foxes and beavers from the farthest Ṣaqlabiya … Sometimes they come from the Ṣaqāliba Sea [= Baltic] along the river which is called Ṣaqāliba river [= Volga].’\textsuperscript{19} These two accounts by eminent geographers allow us to question the traditional view of East Europe as dominated by Scandinavians actively exploiting resources of the lands inhabited by passive Slavs.

Ibn al-Faqīh also informs us that ‘the Slavs have crosses’,\textsuperscript{20} which in his time might have already indicated not only Moravians but also the Balkan Bulgars who converted in 866 and underwent quick Slavicization. He could also have been referring to the numerous Slavic inhabitants of Byzantine Greece. This third option is strongly supported by his conviction that the Slavic language was the second in importance in Byzantium, where ‘Slavs and Greeks are all Christians’.\textsuperscript{21}

Another Persian geographer, Ibn Rustah, compiled the ‘Book of Precious Jewels’ (Kitāb al-a‘lāq al-nafīsa) ca. 903. He made a clear distinction between the Ṣaqāliba, who observed the ritual of cremation burial, and the Rūs, who buried complete dead bodies. His knowledge of the Slavic culture resembles a typical collection of various mirabilia, but his general knowledge of the extent of Slavic settlement was correct. Following the mid-ninth-century work of Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Katir al-Farghani,\textsuperscript{22} Ibn Rustah correctly identified as Slavs the people living west of the Balkan Bulgars\textsuperscript{23} and those who lived north of the old land of the Magyars in the Black Sea steppe zone,\textsuperscript{24} as well as those who inhabited the lands west of the Volga Bulgars.\textsuperscript{25}

Of the Mashriq authors, only Ibn Faḍlān personally experienced part of Eastern Europe, which he visited with the delegation dispatched in 921–22 by Caliph al-Muqtadir. In his ‘Book on the King of Slavs’ (Kitāb ila Malik al-Ṣaqāliba) he described his visit to the balad Ṣaqāliba (land of Slavs) ruled by the malik al-Ṣaqāliba (King of Slavs) who, unfortunately, appears to be Almush b. Shilki,
the Muslim ruler of the Volga Bulgars. However, he twice mentioned king Almush’s correct titles: *malik Bulgar* and *amir Bulgar*. This confusion led the Bashkir historian Ahmed Zeki Validi Togan, who in 1923 discovered the oldest eleventh-century manuscript of Ibn Faḍlān’s report, to suggest that the name *Ṣaqāliba* had been ambiguous in the caliphate and had not necessarily referred to Slavs in Arabic texts.

Accepting such a radical opinion for all Arabic sources would undermine their value for any discussions of early Slavs. It may be true only for the Ibn Faḍlān’s travelogue, where the Volga Bulgars were indeed identified as *Ṣaqāliba*. Apparently, he had no idea who the early medieval Slavs were, where they lived or what their language and religion were. He simply knew that the *Ṣaqāliba* were important Northerners. Or perhaps the Bulgar ruler had presented himself as the ‘king of *Ṣaqāliba*’ in an attempt to impress the caliph with the range of his rule. Another explanation infers, on the unreliable basis of much later accounts recorded by al-Damashqī and Ibn al-Athīr, that the Volga Bulgars considered themselves descendants of both Turks and Slavs.

In order to resolve the confusion we should rather refer to the situation in the Balkans during the early tenth century. There, south of the lower Danube, lived descendants of those Bulgars who in 681 had migrated from the east and settled under agreement with the Byzantine emperor, to curb the Balkan Slavs. According to al-Fazārī, al-Farghānī, Ibn Qutayba and Ibn Rustah, Bulgars inhabiting the region in the eighth and ninth centuries were clearly distinguished from the Slavs. Gradual Slavicization of this branch of Bulgars led Tsar Simeon to declare in 893 that the Slavic language was now the official form of communication within his realm. This shift in linguistic identity was recognized by external observers such as Ibrāhīm b. Yaqūb, who in 965 listed the Balkan Bulgars among the *Ṣaqāliba* tribes. Thus, in learned Arabic circles the well-known Slavic identity of the Balkan Bulgars had probably extended to encompass all peoples bearing the same name. Therefore, Ibn Faḍlān, even before his departure, knew that Bulgars were *Ṣaqāliba*, and this understanding led him uncritically to apply the ethnonym to the Turkish Bulgars living in the

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upper Volga region. Such a pre-conception may be suspected from the fact that even in Baghdad he identified his Bulgar interpreter Bars as ‘the Slav’.  

Between 943 and 955 al-Mas‘ūdī (896–956) wrote three versions of the ‘Meadows of Gold and the Mines of Gems’ (Murūj al-dhahab wa ma‘ādin al-jawhar) in which he combined history and geography. His description of the known world was partly based on his own extensive travelling experience. The farthest north he ventured was to the Caspian region, but he also included available information on the Slavs.  

He realized that the Slavs inhabited vast territories stretching from the Franks to the Khazars, but his ethno-geography of the Slavs was chaotic. He listed ‘tribal’ names (for example Ostotrana, Manćin, Šachin, Gušanin, Braničabin) and alleged royal names (for example Madžak, Basklabić, Čirana) which cannot be identified today. The only concrete (and correct) information concerns the burning of dead bodies by the Slavs,  

repeated by al-Mas‘ūdī’s contemporary Ibn Wahsiya al-Kaldani.  

When referring to Muslim Spain, which al-Mas‘ūdī had visited personally, he listed the known inhabitants of the ‘North’ and ‘West’, which included not only Franks but also the Rūs and the Slavs. This indicates acknowledgement of the different ‘ethnicities’ of the peoples in question. Ibn Ḥawqal, moreover, who visited Andalusia in 949, mentioned Šaqāliba as distinct participants in attacks of the sea-borne plunderers on the Spanish coasts. He was evidently aware of the diversity of South Eastern Europe because he also listed Turks, Pechenegs and Bulgars among the raiders.  

In contrast to all of the Arabic-writing authors so far mentioned, a Jewish merchant from Andalusia, Ibrāhīm b. Ya’qūb (ca. 912–after 966), personally visited Slavic lands when he joined the 965 deputation sent by the Cordoban caliph al-Hakam II to Emperor Otto I. His report is replete with details and some Slavic words may even be recognized (for example ghrad = stronghold, meh = moss; istba = room; tetra = blackcock), which leaves no doubt as to whom he meant by the Šaqāliba. He observed that the Slavs consisted of ‘various peoples’ and correctly informs us that ‘the country of Slavs extends from the Syrian Sea [east Mediterranean] to the Surrounding Sea [Baltic] in the north’. He also referred to the current political situation and correctly identified and briefly described the states of the Abodrites ruled by Naqun (Nakon), the Bohemians.

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34 See Chapter 24 by Ann Christys in this volume.
ruled by Boyslav (Boleslav I), the Poles ruled by Mashaqqah (Mieszko I) and the Bulgars. The Slavic affiliation of the Balkan Bulgars is supported by Ibrahim’s correct information that they ‘translated the Gospel into Slavonic’ after they ‘embraced Christianity in the country of the Rum [Byzantium].’

This short review shows that geographic knowledge about the seats of Slavs was generally correct in Arabic-speaking lands, despite a lack of ethno-geographic details. Ibn Kurradadhbih’s and Ibrāhīm b. Ya’qūb’s employment of undoubtedly Slavic terminology leaves no doubt about the ‘ethnic’/linguistic identity of the Saqaliba. Such a conclusion is not undermined by the evident mistake made by Ibn Faḍān, who was probably misled by the presence in Europe of two branches of Bulgars, of whom those in the Balkans had already undergone full Slavicization.

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The ethnicity of the Rūs has also been widely discussed for more than a hundred years by many scholars who had difficulty grasping the connotations of the name. As a response to the long-dominant conviction that the Rūs were of Scandinavian (namely Swedish) origin, a specific current of the debate has developed in Russia. The so-called anti-Normanist theory was forcefully promoted by the Soviet historiography, which did not allow ‘strangers’ to be the founders of the Kievan Rūs state – a view that is still accepted by many East European scholars, who claim that the Rūs were proper Slavs. In less radical version it was argued that ‘Arabic writers … viewed the ar-Rūs as warriors and merchants regardless of their ethnic affiliation. The same applies to Byzantine sources.’

This politically inspired concept of Rūs multi-ethnicity has recently found growing support among scholars analysing Arabic sources. Some have tried to avoid the difficult question by suggesting that ‘[t]he principal historical question is not whether the Rūs were Scandinavians or Slavs, but, rather, how quickly these Scandinavian Rūs became absorbed into Slavic life and culture.’ In contrast, James E. Montgomery has argued that ‘[t]he Rūsiyyah … are a fine example of ethnic/social fluidity, combining, as Ibn Faḍān portrays them ... both essentially Varangian (costumary, among others) and Khazarian (regal) ethnic traits’ with some ritual elements indicative of Slavic traditions.

36 Ibid., pp. 184–9.
37 Ibid., p. 189.
38 For example, Peter Hayes Sawyer, Kings and Vikings: Scandinavia and Europe AD 700-1100 (London, 1989), p. 29.
39 Dolukhanov, Early Slavs, p. 190.
42 Ibid., nn. 32, 35, 65.
would mean that, as with Ibn Khurradadhbih’s Radhanites, the name Rūs in the caliphate would have indicated only ‘a commercial and political organization’ with no reference to the ethnicity of the participants.

However, a review of available sources reveals that for many Arabic authors the term Rūs had strong Nordic connotations. Therefore al-Ya’qūbī, like Liutprand of Cremona, thought that ar-Rūs seized and plundered Sevilla in 844. Al-Ma’sūdī also claimed that the Rūs attacked Andalusia some time before 912/913. These opinions show how ethnic presumptions resulted in the misidentification of the Western European Vikings/Normans with the Eastern European Rūs. Therefore, they cannot be used as proof of the predominance of a Nordic identification of the Rūs among learned elites of the caliphate.

Ibn Rustah, who clearly distinguished the Ṣaqāliba from the Rūs, had a surprisingly large amount to say about the way of life of the latter. They are portrayed as mobile non-agriculturalists and warrior-merchants who prefer water transport. Besides trading they exploit their Slavic neighbours whom they sometimes enslave and sell at the eastern markets of the Volga Bulgars and Khazars.

Ibn Faḍlān described his own observations of specific traits and similarities in the behaviour of the various autochthons encountered during his long journey to the Volga Bulgars in 921–22. Leaving Baghdad, he already knew that on his way to the north he would visit ‘the land of the Turk, the Khazars, the Rūs, the Ṣaqāliba, the Bashkirs, and others’. He thus made use of the resources available in the caliphate and gathered a suitably multi-ethnic/linguistic group of people for the Arabic–Bulgar diplomatic negotiations: Takin the Turk, Abdallah b. Bashtu the Khazar, Sawsan the Rūs and Bars the Slav [= Bulgar]. Some of these useful people, like Sawsan, Takin and Bars, were even included in the deputation, in which, surprisingly, Ibn Faḍlān was ‘the only Arab’. These preparations show the professionalism of the caliph’s diplomatic staff, who tried carefully to plan crucial segments of the long journey. When the delegates’ own broad linguistic skills did not suffice, they hired local ‘guides’ or ‘interpreters’ who would prove helpful when a direct conversation required translation.

However, even if Ibn Faḍlān was aware of the ethnic complexity of the northern lands, his pre-travel ethnographic knowledge must have been very limited. When reading his report, one may suspect that he used a checklist

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43 Lewicki, Źródła arabskie do dziejów Słowiańszczyzny, vol. 1, p. 75.
48 Ibid., p. 13.
49 Ibid., pp. 21 and 47.
50 Ibid., p. 41.
with earlier prepared questions which he tried to answer each time when the
deputation arrived among a new people. The most interesting for him were
physical appearance of the locals, their sexual life, the way they buried their
death, their religion and the political system, which should have had a ‘king’ at
the top. He was also eager to classify all peoples according to their faiths, as
Muslims, Christians, Jews and unbelievers/infidel (kuffar), among whom were all
those strange worshippers of fire, wooden idols, jinns, wooden phalluses, snakes,
fish and birds.

We may infer that his instructions put special stress on the Rūsiyyah and
Ṣaqāliba (in his case they were the Volga Bulgars), both of whom were described
in a highly detailed way. The importance of the former is indicated by the
nomination of Sawsan the Rūs as the official caliph’s envoy. It appears that Ibn
Faḍlān eagerly sought out these people but showed little interest in others. He
was therefore satisfied with the information that the Bulgar King taxed ‘the
Rūs and other peoples of whatever sort’ and did not concern himself with the
names of those ‘other’.51 His description of the awaited encounter starts with the
satisfied announcement: ‘I saw the Rūsiyyah.”52 He did not hide his ambivalent
emotions, which were a mixture of admiration for their physical attractiveness
and disgust for them as ‘the filthiest of all Allah’s creatures’, who ignore basic
hygiene and engage in obnoxious sexual behaviours.53

His eagerness to produce a description of the Rūsiyyah led him to compile a
report in which he rather artificially included recognizable Scandinavian, Slavic
and Khazar elements. Or perhaps we should regard this description as simply
another significant indication that the early tenth-century Rūs merchants
consisted of representatives of various peoples. Such an interpretation may
be substantiated by al-Masʿūdī’s claim that they ‘consist of numerous different
nations’. More precise was al-Iṣṭakhrī, who wrote in his version of the ‘Book of
Roads and Kingdoms’ (written between 933 and 950) that ‘the Rūs are made up
of three tribes’. The anonymous author of ‘The regions of the world’54 wrote
about ‘three centers of Rūs’. This was again repeated by Ibn Ḥawqal, whose own
version of the ‘Book of Roads and Kingdoms’ was finally finished ca. 988. This
shows that the idea of the Rūs tripartite division became a cliché among the
caliphal learned elite of the tenth century, who, at least before Duke Vladimir’s
baptism in 988, had hitherto apparently not regarded the Rūs state as ethnically
or culturally homogenous.

Ibrāhīm b. Yaʿqūb in 965 did not identify the Kievan Rūs as Slavs but correctly
located them east of the kingdom of Mieszko I, and wrote that Slavic merchants
exported their merchandise to Byzantium via the Rūs country, using the traditional

51 Ibid., p. 58.
52 Ibid., p. 59.
53 Ibid., p. 60.
transcontinental trade route leading from Regensburg to Prague, Cracow and Kiev. He clearly distinguished the Slavs from the Rūš who were travelling between Prague and Cracow,\(^{55}\) which was on the route leading directly from Kiev. Such a distinction means that Ibrahīm’s informants in Bohemia in 965 did not attach Slavic affinity to the subordinates of Duke Svyatoslav. He reported, moreover, that ‘the northern tribes have subjugated some of [the Slavs] and have been living among them up to now’ and that ‘many northern tribes speak the Slavic language for they are mixed with the Slavs’.\(^{56}\) Such a description confirms our knowledge that Svyatoslav’s Scandinavian ancestors had settled among the eastern Slavs ca. 882 and had demonstrated their solidarity with the pre-existent Slavic-speaking population by introducing Slavic names in the dynasty in the 940s.

Ibrahīm b. Ya’qūb’s separation of the Rūš from the Slavs in ethnic, cultural and political terms implies that the alleged Slavicization of Svyatoslav’s state was not as advanced ca. 965 as has often been claimed. Perhaps the original multi-ethnicity survived long after 882, when in Kiev ‘there were Warangians, and Slavs, and others, and they called themselves Rūš’.\(^{57}\) The common name referred more to the political facts than to the ethno-cultural reality, and inhabitants of the Rūš state retained their cultural and linguistic differentiation which was evident to external observers and recorded in the Arabic sources.

Archaeological evidence has confirmed the enduring cultural and ethnic diversity of the Kievan state. The famous mound cemetery in Gnezdovo indicates that in the tenth century, up to at least 979 (the youngest dendro-date), ‘the Norsemen staying, living and dying here were preserving their identity, at the same time adding to it new features by accepting different elements from various East European cultures’.\(^{58}\) The great mound Black Grave (Chernaya Mogila), raised in the middle of the tenth century north of Chernigov, ‘was the grave of a man buried in a form in which were mixed nomadic and Norse traditions’.\(^{59}\) Materials excavated at Ryurikovo Gorodišče near Lake Ilmen show that ‘the population was ethnically mixed, with elements of both Scandinavians and Slavs’. In late tenth-century Novgorod ‘the material culture of the inhabitants was influenced by Slavs, Baltic Finns, and Scandinavians’. Similar ethnic diversity characterized the inhabitants of Staraya Ladoga, where Balts were also present.\(^{60}\) The late tenth-century burial barrows near Lake Ladoga ‘conflate the Scandinavian and

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\(^{56}\) Ibid., pp. 184 and 190.

\(^{57}\) Primary Chronicle, a. 882, ed. Franciszek Sielicki, Powieść minionych lat (Wrocław, 1999).


\(^{59}\) Ibid., p. 240.

Finnish cultures’, which ‘clearly emphasizes the close co-existence of groups of Svear and Finno-Ugrian population’. The variegated nature of Vladimir the Great’s polity may well explain the earnestness with which he sought out and imposed a single religion on a population lacking in ethnic or cultural uniformity. The story concerning his cautious investigation and comparison of Islam, Judaism and eastern and western Christianities (Primary Chronicle, a.a. 986–87) may represent a response to a serious political problem: how to pacify the existing religious factions? Duke Vladimir Svyatoslavich did not try to please them all, as had that king of Kaytaks (today in Dagestan) mentioned by Ibn Rosteh who ‘prayed on Fridays with the Muslims, on Saturdays with the Jews, and on Sundays with the Christians’. Instead, the Kievan duke chose one religion and imposed it with iron will in 988. And only then did he finally achieve his main political goal, the ideological (and soon ethno-cultural) unification of the country. Perhaps this was the point when the Scandinavian identity of the Rūs elite, sustained for several generations, finally ‘became relatively rapidly transformed into an autochthonous identity – Finno-Ugrian and Slav’.  

Thus, after the protracted efforts of the Rurikid rulers, imposed religious change created the new Rūs and its Slavic-Orthodox face. Since then, and until today, this ethno-national but also political name has been unavoidably connected to the Orthodox Church. As time passed, the rather late (post-988) date of the ethno-cultural ‘unification’ of the state could have become uncomfortable for the ruling dynasty. The author of the twelfth-century Primary Chronicle thus projected the unification of ‘the Warangians, Slavs, and others’ deeper into the past, to the year 882 when Oleg seized Kiev and turned it into his capital.

This review of selected Arabic sources shows that in the Abbasid Caliphate the Rūs had not just one ‘ethnic’ connotation, even if their Scandinavian face was identified and stressed. Living among the Slavs, they adopted some local traditions (for example the wooden idols of various divinities in Ibn Faḍlān’s account) but were sufficiently different to be separately recorded in the early Arabic sources. As Duczko has argued, ‘the permanent Rus dwellers [in Eastern Europe] were always a minority among indigenous populations, but a minority that through its contact with Scandinavia was able from time to time to rise in number and revitalize itself’. This made their ethno-cultural unification with the Slavs a rather lengthy process, finalized only by Duke Vladimir’s strategy to reinforce his power by imposing a new identity.

61 Logan, Vikings in History, p. 205.
64 Duczko, Viking Rūs, p. 255.
65 Ibid., p. 127.
Thus even if ‘many Islamic writers had only vague, and often muddled ideas of the situation in Russia [because] they depended on information that had passed through many hands or mouths’, this did not lead to serious contamination of their ethno-geographic interpretations of Eastern European societies.

The ambiguous meaning of the term Ṣaqāliba suggested by some West European scholars may result from ignorance of the fact that inhabitants of the caliphate had extensive and sometimes direct contacts with the Slavs. The presence of 5,000 Slavs, who as a result of the Arab–Byzantine war settled in 663/665 near Apamea, may be still recognized in the name of the Syrian village Seklebije. Another 20,000 Slavs were resettled in 690 from Asia Minor, where four years earlier they had been deported by Emperor Justinian II, to the area between Antioch and Cyrrhus in Syria. A memory of this could be reflected in al-Ahtal’s poem of ca. 691, where ‘a crowd of light haired Ṣaqāliba’ is mentioned. The author lived in Syria, which makes the meaning of his Ṣaqāliba unambiguous. Other Slavs stayed on the Byzantine side of the border where they had their strongholds, such as the ‘fort of the Ṣaqāliba’ mentioned by Ibn Khurradadhbih.

In the second quarter of the eighth century the governor Marwān b. Muhammad resettled in his northern provinces some Slavs whose descendants later acquired high army ranks. When he became the last Umayyad caliph Marwān II (744–50), he tried to repeat such action elsewhere in the Caucasus, but the 20,000 resettled Slavs escaped and were executed for their non-cooperation. Those Slavs who adapted well to their north-Syrian settlements even took part in the civil war provoked by the Abbasid coup d’état of 750.

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66 Sawyer, Kings and Vikings, p. 27.
68 All these high numbers should be understood as ‘a lot of’.
69 Theophanes, Chronographia, ed. de Boor, p. 364.
71 See Avraam Ja. Garkavi, Skazania muslimskih pisateley o slavyanskih i Rūsskih (s poloviny VII v. do konca X w. po r. Chr.). Sobral, perevel i obyasnil A.J. Garkavi (St Petersburg, 1870), pp. 3–5.
74 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 225.
75 Theophanes, Chronographia, ed. de Boor, vol. 1, p. 428.
One hundred and fifteen years later some Slavic troops freed al-Mutazz, a challenger for the rule of the caliphate who took the throne in 866. Some of these Slavic soldiers revolted against Caliph al-Mustain, who was himself half Slav after his slave mother Muhariq. Besides rendering martial services, the Slavs settled in Syria also contributed to the economy, as may be ascertained from the name al-ṣaqlabī, applied to a certain type of grape available in the caliphate at the turn of the ninth and tenth centuries.

Apart from the presence of local Slavic settlers and soldiers, contact with the proper Slavs was possible all over the Arab lands where numerous Slavic slaves were constantly present and highly prized. According to the poet al-Husaymi, before the turmoil of 812/813 the streets of Baghdad were flooded with the ‘Ṣaqliba locust’. In many centres of the caliphate there was probably a persistent Slavic ‘culture in exile’, as the ongoing arrival of new slaves provided a stable influx of Slavic speakers who could sustain a sense of identity. Bearers of that culture were a direct and ever-available source of information for eager geographers such as Ibn Khurradadhbih, who correctly noted the Slavic word qnaz. Ibrāhīm b. Ya'qūb’s record of several obviously Slavic words also leaves no doubt as to his familiarity with the Ṣaqliba, whom he must have known well even before his departure from Andalusia to Prague. Arabic elites interested in ethno-geography knew who the Slavs were and recognized their language. And this fact is not undermined by the rather obvious mistake of Ibn Faḍlān, who confused Slavicized Balkan Bulgars with their ‘cousins’ living by the upper Volga.

In the Aghlabid Maghreb and Ifriqiya ṣaqlabī slaves were also numerous and frequently active on the political stage. In 817 the revolt against new emir Ziyadat Allah I ibn Ibrahim (817–38) was led by a certain Ziyad Ibn Sahl called Ibn al-Ṣaqlabiy ye after his Slavic mother. In 890 the Ṣaqliba servants of Emir Ibrahim II ibn Ahmad (875–902) planned to murder their master, but the conspiracy was discovered and its participants were exterminated. Some time later, the influential Balagh the Servant, who commanded army troops and had his name struck on coins, used to speak ‘in the language of the Slavs’ (bi-l-ṣaqlabiyya) at this same emir’s court. The next emir, Abd Allah II ibn Ibrahim (902–903), was assassinated by his Ṣaqliba servants, who were subsequently executed. When the last Aghlabid ruler Ziyadat Allah III ibn Abd Allah (903–909) had to flee to the east, he took with him numerous Ṣaqliba servants. Little changed under the Fatimids’ rule, during which the import of Ṣaqliba slaves to North Africa continued. Caliph Ma‘add al-Muizz li-Din Allah (953–75) even decided to learn the Slavic language in order to understand his servants.

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The position of the Ṣaqāliba party in Andalusia was even stronger. 'In Islamic Spain the Ṣaqāliba were palace servants; however, they formed a strong and influential group which took part in the political struggles at the end of the tenth and at the beginning of the eleventh century.'80 Only after the disruption of the slave trade network in the 1020s–1030s, which led to the end of the import of Slavic slaves, did the connotation of the term change, and in the second half of the eleventh century all pale-skinned slaves were called Saqaliba in Arabic.81

The meaning of the Arabic terms Rūs and Rūsiyyah, which have been less clear ethnically, also changed at the same time, although in a different direction. It is possible that it was originally the name of a profession of ‘entrepreneurs’ operating in Eastern Europe (as with the Jewish Rhadanite merchants active in Euro-Asiatic trade), rather than an ethnonym. They were the ‘waterborne’ warrior merchants, including numbers of Scandinavians, who with their trade- and-plunder expeditions penetrated the rivers and lakes of Eastern Europe.82 There they mingled with Finns and Balts, but most of all with the Slavs, who took part in these trips just as they participated in the viking expeditions to the West. The presence of Slavic members among the Rūs bands is well testified by Ibn Khurradadhbih’s observations.

The ambiguity of the name increased when the Rurikids settled in Kiev and commenced the construction of their own state in lands predominantly inhabited by the Slavs. Ibn Faḍlān’s travelogue, which gives us ‘a picture of people in the process of ethnic, social and cultural adaptation, assimilation and absorption’,83 well illustrates the process. Forty years later Ibrāhīm b. Ya’qūb observed that ‘many northern tribes speak the Slavic language, for they are mixed with the Slavs. Among them are … the Rūs’.84 Thus the process of ethn-cultural adaptation progressed while ethnic differences remained visible. Only after the conversion of 988 was the Slavicization of the Kievan state accelerated and soon completed, just as had happened earlier to the Balkan Bulgars.

At the turn of the millennium, the term Ṣaqāliba was thus losing its Slavic connotation while the term Rūs became increasingly to designate Slavic speakers.

80 Mishin, ‘Ṣaqāliba servants in Islamic Spain’, p. 312.
81 Examples in Lewicki, Źródła arabskie do dziejów Słowiańszczyzny, vol. 1, p. 95.
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Byzantine Views
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Stattdessen soll es hier um eine ganz spezifische, durchaus auch topisch zu nennende, „Beschreibung“ angeblicher magischer Praktiken der Hunnen gehen, die meist in einem eschatologischen Kontext geschildert werden.2

Neben den eben angesprochenen Vorstellungen der antiken Ethnographie – man denke z.B. nur an Herodots Skythenschilderungen und deren Nachwirkungen


bis in die Völkerwanderungszeit – gilt es auch christlich bedingte Einordnungen, Kategorisierungen und Identifizierungen im Auge zu behalten.3

Die Kirchenhistoriker Theodoret und Sokrates, beide schrieben in der ersten Hälfte des 5. Jahrhunderts,4 berichten – offenbar verschieden Quellen ausschreibend – von einem Angriff der Hunnen unter ihrem König Rua (auch Rougas, Rolilas oder Rugila in den Quellen genannt), dem Onkel Attilas, in Richtung Konstantinopel.5 Im Jahre 422 war es zu einem Konflikt zwischen dem Oströmischen Reich und den Hunnen wegen der üblichen von den Hunnen geforderten Tribute gekommen.6 Die Einzelheiten der berichteten Ereignisse sind kaum noch zu eruieren, und man hat an der Historizität des erwähnten Angriffs


gezweifelt. Obwohl aller Wahrscheinlichkeit nach Rua mit seinen Hunnen gar nicht bis in die unmittelbare Nähe Konstantinopels kam, berichten Theodoret und Sokrates (und ihnen folgend z.B. Cassiodor/Epiphanius und Johannes von Nikiu8), der Hunnenkönig sei nach der Überquerung der Donau, während des Vormarschs auf Konstantinopel, vom Blitz erschlagen worden. Tatsächlich starb er etwa 434.9 Kaiser Theodosios II. (408–50) habe, so berichtet Sokrates, auf die Nachricht hin, daß die Barbaren (also die Hunnen) sich auf einen Angriff gegen Konstantinopel vorbereiteten, „die Erledigung dieser Angelegenheit Gott anvertraut, und in ernstem Gebet fortfahrend, rasch erreicht, was er wünschte. Denn der Führer der Barbaren mit Namen Rua wurde von einem Blitzschlag getötet. Darauf folgte eine Seuche, die den Großteil seiner Männer dahinräffte, und, als ob das nicht genügte, kam Feuer von Himmel herab und verzehrte viele der Überlebenden. Bei dieser Gelegenheit hielt der Bischof Proklos eine Predigt in der Kirche, in der er eine Prophezeiung des Hesekiel auf die Errettung durch Gott in der jüngsten Notlage bezog, wofür er sehr bewundert wurde.”

Ähnlich der Bericht des Theodoret: „Er [Theodosios] errntete beständig die Frucht von einem so guten Samen [gemeint ist seine Frömmigkeit]; denn der Herr steht ihm mit seiner Fürsorge stets zur Seite. So zum Beispiel als Roilas

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[man beachte die Namensvariante], ein Fürst der nomadischen Skythen, mit einem äußerst zahlreichen Heere den Ister, die Donau, überschritt und Thrakien verheerte und plünderte und drohte, die Kaiserstadt zu belagern und in raschem Anlauf einzunehmen und zu zerstören, da sandte Gott vom Himmel her Blitz und Donner, streckte ihn selbst nieder und vernichtete sein ganzes Heer.“11 Gott strafte die frevelnden Barbaren mit Blitz und Donner, er agierte gleichsam als Schlachtenhelfer.12 Der Vorgang erhält dann, im weiteren Bericht des Sokrates, eine ausgesprochen eschatologische Dimension. Dieser berichtet weiter, daß die bereits erwähnte Predigt des Patriarchen Proklos über Hesekiel 38,2 und 22 ging und großes Aufsehen erregte („Du Menschenkind, richte dein Angesicht auf Gog, der im Lande Magog ist und der Fürst von Rosch, Meschech und Tubal, und weissage gegen ihn“ ...bzw. „Und ich will ihn richten mit Pest und Blutvergießen und will Platzregen mit Hagel, Feuer und Schwefel über ihn und sein Heer und über die vielen Völker kommen lassen, die mit ihm sind.“) Man bewunderte Proklos außerordentlich. Gog und Magog, die aus der erwähnten Prophetie des Hesekiel sowie aus der Johannesoffenbarung des Neuen Testaments (20,8) bekannten Völker der Endzeit, mit den Hunnen gleichzusetzen, hatte sicher aktuelle Implikationen.13

Der Text der Predigt ist leider nicht erhalten – im Unterschied zu zahlreichen anderen Homelien des Proklos.\textsuperscript{14} Theodoret gibt keine weiteren Informationen. Er scheint, wie sein Hesekielkommentar zeigt, ohnehin ein Gegner einer eschatologischen Deutung von Ereignissen seiner Zeit gewesen zu sein.\textsuperscript{15} Seine Polemik gegen eine solche Zeitdeutung allerdings, wie sie im Hesekielkommentar deutlich wird – er nennt sie „jüdische Mythen“ (am Ende seiner Kommentierung von Hes 38 und 39) – kann durchaus als Zeugnis dafür gesehen werden, daß es viele unter seinen Zeitgenossen gab, die eben eine solche Zeitsicht teilten. „Ich wundere mich aber nicht nur über die Unvernünftigkeit der Juden, sondern auch einiger, die den Christennamen tragen und dennoch jüdischen Mythen anhängen. Sie sagen nämlich, daß die Erhebung von Gog und Magog nicht eine Sache der Vergangenheit sei, sondern erwarten sie als ein kommendes Ereignis … Es werde in den letzten Zeiten geschehen.“\textsuperscript{16} Auch in seinem Jesaja-Kommentar und an anderen Stellen\textsuperscript{17} wird dies deutlich. Dies zeigt aber, wie schon Friedhelm Winkelmann anmerkte, „die tiefe Verankerung der apokalyptischen Modelle in weiten Schichten der Bevölkerung.“\textsuperscript{18} Der Erfolg der Predigt des Proklos ist nur vor diesem Hintergrund verständlich.


\textsuperscript{15} Winkelmann, ‘Bewertung der Barbaren’, p. 227.


\textsuperscript{18} Winkelmann, ‘Bewertung der Barbaren’, p. 227.
oder Quodvultdeus.19 Es gab aber auch immer Stimmen, die einer eschatologisch „kontaminierten“ Deutung der Zeitereignisse widersprachen, wie etwa Augustin20 oder Hieronymus, der sich ausdrücklich gegen eine Gleichsetzung von Gog mit den Goten wandte.21


In der älteren Literatur wurde – wohl berechtigt – vermutet, daß bei dieser Deutung die Hunnen genannten Völkerschaften Ereignisse der Jahre 395/396 eine entscheidende Rolle spielten. Bis dahin kannte man die Hunnen als furchtbare Völkerschaft, die nördlich des Schwarzen Meeres operierte, das Gotenreich des Ermanerich zerstört hatte und die große Völkerbewegung, die man heute Völkerwanderung nennt, auslöste. Sie tauchten bald an der Donau auf und hatten bereits erste Vorstöße in Richtung Gallien unternommen.24


21 Siehe die Belege bei Bousset, ‘Beiträge’, p. 119.


24 Siehe allgemein Pohl, Völkerwanderung.

In bewegenden Worten schilderte Cyrillonas (Qûrillônâ), der als Edessener die Furcht seiner Landsleute teilte, die eingetretenen Verwüstungen. Genauer berichtet Philostorgios über die Ereignisse. Die Hunnen drangen zunächst via Armenien bis Melitene (Malatya) vor, wandten sich von dort der Provinz Euphratensis zu und fielen in Koelesyrien ein. Sie kamen bis Antiochea und Edessa, konnten aber offenbar diese wichtigen Städte nicht einnehmen. Dafür haunten sie schrecklich auf dem flachen Land.


südlich von der Mauer. Sie ist sehr schwierig und unüberwindlich deshalb, weil sie in großer Höhe steht und (nur) ein Tor hat. Die Hunnen aber nahmen das Tor der Mauer und auch gegen die Wasserleitungen, welche zum Deqlath und zum Dēbā hinabgingen, erhoben sie sich und nahmen sie, so daß die Leute darin umkamen vor Durst, und die, welche übrig blieben, überliefernten später die Festung. Die Hunnen aber, weil sie erbarmungslos sind, vernichteten alles Volk durch die Schärfe des Schwertes und den Rest führten sie in Gefangenschaft, und verbrannten (die Festung) mit Feuer, und sie ward ferner ganz und gar nicht mehr bewohnt.\footnote{Weitere syrische Quellen berichten ebenfalls relativ ausführlich über das schockierende Ereignis.}31


Es wird berichtet, wie Alexander zur Euphratquelle zieht, von da zum Tigris und von dort gen Norden, nach Armenien, Aserbaidshan und Innerarmenien. Dort traf er auf alte Männer, die ihm Auskunft über die Völker gaben, die hinter riesigen Bergen hausten.


Sie kleiden sich in Felle und essen rohes Fleisch von allem was starb (intendiert ist: auch ihre eigenen Toten). Sie trinken Menschen- und Tierblut.


38 Ibid., p. 150.

39 Ibid., p. 151.

Sie unternehmen keine Belagerungen von Städten oder Festungen; sie berennen jedoch die Tore derselben und umzingeln die aus den Toren kommenden Verteidiger. Sie sind schneller als der Wind usw. usw. Es folgen ausgeführliche Hinweise auf ihre Kampfesweise sowie der Hinweis, daß jeder von ihnen zwei oder gar drei Ersatzpferde mit sich führt. Sie sind Zauberer und ihr Kampfesgeschrei ist fürchterlicher als die Stimme des Löwen. „Und der Schrecken, den die Hunnen verbreiten (ihre Name wird explizit erwähnt) fällt auf alle Kreaturen.“

Und nun folgt die Story (mit einigen Variationen) von ihrer Zauberei, die eben schon aus Pseudo-Ephräm zitiert wurde.

Die syrische Alexanderlegende fährt fort – immer noch den Bericht der alten Männer bietend: Diese verweisen auf zerstörte Festungen „in unserem Land (vorher wurde mitgeteilt, daß das Volk der alten Männer dem sagenhaften Tubarlak, dem Perserkönig unterstand), also in Persien, und im Lande der Römer, die von ihnen einst überrannt und zerstört worden sind.“ Dann wird nochmals betont, daß sie, die Hunnen bzw. Gog und Magog, die Länder der Römer und Perser verheerten, ein klassisches *vaticinium ex eventu*.


Das Jahr 515 sah eine Invasion von sabirischen Hunnen, auch wieder via den Kaukasus, wobei eigens angemerkt wurde, daß sie die Kaspiischen Pforten durchquerten, nach Süden bzw. Südwesten zogen und insbesondere die Pontosregion und Kappadokien heimsuchten. Obwohl Syrien nicht betroffen

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42 Ibid.: 'When they go forth to war, they fetch a pregnant woman, and pile up a fire, and bind her in front of the fire, and cook her child within her, and her belly bursts open and the child comes forth roasted. Then they lay it in a trough and throw water upon its body, and its body melts away in this water; and they take their swords and bows and arrows and spears, and dip them in this water.'
43 'A Christian legend', ed. Budge, pp. 149f. (Tubarlak), 154: "The Huns shall go forth and conquer the countries of the Romans and of the Persians ..."


Unsere ekelerregende Geschichte vom Waffenzauber der als Gog und Magog stilisierten Hunnen findet sich, das sei noch erwähnt, in der syrischen Weltchronik des Pseudo-Dionysios von Tel-Mahrē, entstanden in der zweiten Hälfte des 8. Jahrhunderts. In dieser wichtigen Weltgeschichte taucht sie da auf, wo man sie auch erwarten könnte, nämlich integriert in die Geschichte Alexanders des Großen.\(^{49}\)

Anklänge an die zitierte Beschreibung der Hunnen bzw. Gog und Magog, oder, wenn man so will, eine engere Verwandtschaft, findet sich in der Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodios, geschrieben in der Gegend von Edessa zu Beginn der

\[ \text{τῷ πλήθει ταῖς πάσαις σχεδὸν ἐπεχέθησαν ἑπαρχίας τῆς καλουμένης Ποντικῆς, δράσαντες δὲ φόνον μῷρόν καὶ ἀγέλας αἰχμαλώτων ἀπήγαγον}; \]


\(^{49}\) *Chronicon Pseudo-Dionysianum*, ed. Chabot, Bd. 1, pp. 33f.: *Ex historia de Alexandro*. 

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Und dadurch tritt dann das ein, was im syrischen Alexanderlied oder bei Pseudo-Ephraem die Hunnen durch ihr magisches Kochen von ungeborenen Kindern erreichen: „Und sie werden die Erde verheeren, und keiner wird ihnen widerstehen können.“

Es sei nicht verschwiegen, daß die Schilderung der unreinen Völker bei Pseudo-Methodios in die byzantinischen Rezensionen des Alexanderromans einging und auf diese Weise stets einem größeren Publikum bekannt war.

Man kann sich nun fragen, ob die geschilderte gruselige Zeremonie, das Rösten einer Schwangeren und das Kochen des Embryos, um einen wirksamen Waffenzauber durchzuführen, vielleicht doch auf tatsächliche Aktionen der Hunnen zurückgehen. Der Vorwurf der Zauberei, der „schwarzen“ Magie trifft Gog und Magog wie auch die Hunnen. Letzteres deutete schon Jordanes in seiner mythischen Schilderung des Ursprungs der Hunnen an: Filimer rex Gothorum ..., qui et terras Scythicas cum sua gente introisse superius a nobis dictus est, repperit in populo suo quasdem magas mulieres (vulgo: Hexen), quas patrio sermone ‚Haliarunas’ is ipse cognominavit, easque habens suspectas de medio sui proturbat, longeque ab exercitu suo fugatas in solitudine coegit errare. quas spiritus immundi per eremum vagantes dum vidisset, et eorum complexibus in coitu miscuissent, genus hoc ferocissimum ediderunt...


Die bekannten großen kupfernen Kessel der Hunnen, von denen eine größere Anzahl gefunden wurde und deren genauer ritueller Verwendungszweck längst


626 Konstantinopel belagerten, verfaßte ein gewisser Theodoros Synkellos im folgenden Jahr zum Jahrestag der erfolgreichen Abwehr der schrecklichen Feinde, deren Auftreten durchaus Erinnerungen an die Hunnen wecken konnte (und tatsächlich bezeichnete man sie im griechischen Osten wie im lateinischen Westen als Hounnoi bzw. Hunni), eine Homilie. Er brauchte einige Druckseiten, um ausführlich Hes. 38–39 zu analysieren. Da ja die hesekielsche Weissagung gegen Israel, Jerusalem, das Heilige Land gerichtet ist, kommt Theodoros nach längeren Überlegungen dann doch dazu, die Weissagung des Hesekiel über Gog und Magog auf Konstantinopel zu beziehen. Denn Konstantinopel ist das „neue Israel“ bzw. das „neue Jerusalem“. Der erfolgreiche Ausgang verbot allerdings eine explizite eschatologische Deutung der Ereignisse des Jahres 626. Allerdings wird eine solche, gleichsam durch die Hintertür dann doch eingeführt, auch wenn nur, um die Größe der überstandenen Gefahr zu kennzeichnen.


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Der erstaunliche Umstand, daß es die byzantinischen Einwohner (bzw. die hier stationierten Soldaten) waren, die sich dieser hunnischen Zauberei schuldig gemacht und somit die Eroberung der Festung Pergamon verschuldet haben, spricht meines Erachtens ebenfalls für eine Entstehung außerhalb der Grenzen des Byzantinischen Reiches. In Frage kommen wohl in erster Linie die florierenden Klöster in Palästina, vielleicht auch Edessa in Syrien. Hier, das weiß man inzwischen recht genau, hat eine griechische Gelehrsamkeit das 7. Jh. überlebt, die der zeitgenössischen byzantinischen (also in erster Linie konstantinopolitanischen) in vielen Punkten überlegen war.

Es ist nicht auszuschließen – wenn meines Erachtens aber sehr unwahrscheinlich –, daß die ebenso fürchterlichen magischen Praktiken diverser (sog. libertinistischer) gnostischer Sekten als historischer Hintergrund der oben behandelten hunnischen Zaubereien anzusehen sind; natürlich im Sinne einer literarisch-topischen Vorlage. Der Kirchenvater Epiphanios († 403) berichtete in seinem „Panarion“ von den Phibioniten, alexandrinischen Gnostikern, deren


Kultus besonders abstoßende Züge trug. Es ist bemerkenswert, daß Epiphanios aus eigener Anschauung schrieb: „Wenn aber einer von ihnen ertappt wird (?), den natürlichen Ausfluß auszusäen und die Frau schwanger wird, dann vernimm, was sie an noch Schlimmeren wagen. Sie reißen den Embryo zu einer Zeit, wo sie ihn fassen können, heraus, nehmen das fehlgeborene Kind und stoßen es in den Mörser mit einer Keule, mischen Honig und Pfeffer und einige andere Gewürze und Myrrhen dahinein, um sich nicht zu erbrechen, kommen alle zusammen, und (dann) nehmen alle Mitglieder der Herde von Schweinen und Hunden, jeder mit dem Finger, von dem zerstoßenen Kind.“


zu stellen." Man brachte dies mit Codex Theodosianus 9.14.1 vom 7. 2. 374 zusammen, was durchaus möglich ist. Schon die zeitliche Nähe (Numerius’ Opferung muß ca. 371/372 stattgefunden haben) spricht dafür.


‘Hence the evils caused by the Turks began.’ With these words John Scylitzes, a prolific writer of the early Comnenian period, commenced his account of one of the most far-reaching political and ethnic upheavals that had afflicted Eastern Christianity and the Islamic world since the Arab conquests of the seventh century. In the first half of the eleventh century the Turkic Oghuz tribes and their leading clan, known as the Seljuk dynasty, left their homelands in the steppes beyond the Oxus River and within a few decades created a vast empire reaching from the eastern Iranian fringes to the shores of Palestine and the highlands of Anatolia. The Abbasid Caliphate of Baghdad submitted to a new secular overlord replacing the Shiite Buyids. A military elite of Turkish descent and Persian cultural identity established itself in the urban centres of the Arab-Islamic world, creating a highly fragmented hegemonial group of rival minor dynasties and local lordships. Large parts of the Byzantine Empire’s eastern provinces, which for centuries had successfully resisted the Arab raids, were gradually transformed into Turkish-Islamic principalities, a historical process that in retrospect came to be known as the Turkification and Islamization of Asia Minor. Contemporary eyewitnesses, both Muslim and Christian, were fully
aware of the historical implications of these events, as can be seen, for example, in the very structure of the Syriac universal chronicles written by Michael the Syrian and Bar Hebraeus, who considered the Seljuk expansion the starting point of a new historical era.3

In what follows I will attempt to give a survey of the prevailing concepts and strategies that enabled eleventh- and twelfth-century Byzantine authors to conceive and define the character and nature of this new ethno-political entity, thereby offering a Roman-Christian interpretation of what constituted Turkish-Seljuk identity. The longevity of classical rhetorical rules, inherited stereotypes and ancient modes of perception resulted in a high degree of uniformity in Byzantine discourses of barbarian peoples from Late Antiquity onwards.4 In many respects the extant narratives on the Seljuk Turks resembled descriptions of other nomadic tribes of the Eurasian steppes, such as the Goths, Huns, Hungarians and Pechenegs, and drew upon the same sources of ethnographic knowledge.5 Yet there are some basic differences, which are partly due to the

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4 For this topic in general, see, for example, Klaus Erich Müller, Geschichte der antiken Ethnographie und ethnologischen Theoriebildung (2 vols, Wiesbaden, 1972–80); Yves Albert Dauge, Le Barbare: recherches sur la conception romaine de la barbarie et de la civilisation, Collection Latomus, 176 (Brussels, 1981).

5 The classic handbook on Byzantine knowledge concerning the Turkic peoples from the Huns to the Ottoman Turks is Gyula Moravcsik, Byzantinoturcica, vol. 1: Die byzantinischen Quellen der Geschichte der Turkvölker and vol. 2: Sprachreste der Türkvolker in den byzantinischen Quellen, Berliner Byzantinistische Arbeiten, 10–11 (Berlin, 1958; repr. 1983); for a comprehensive case study, see Elisabeth Malamut, ‘L’image byzantine des Petchénègues’, Byzantinische Zeitschrift, 88 (1995): 105–47; for modern approaches to Roman perceptions of barbarian peoples in Late Antiquity, see Walter Pohl, Die Völkerwanderung.
process of acculturation the Seljuk Turks underwent in the Eastern Islamic lands during the first stage of their expansionist movement, before coming into contact with the Byzantine cultural sphere. Thus, apart from Byzantine and Eastern Christian narratives reflecting the perspective of either the enemy or the victim, there also came into being a Muslim version of the Seljuk Turks’ origin and rise to power, which was created and transmitted by court historians and authors of local and universal chronicles. The oldest, though not surviving, work on the Seljuk Turks’ origin and ascent was the so-called Malik-nāma (‘King’s Book’), which can be dated to the reign of the second Seljuk Sultan Alp Arslan (1063–72) and was used extensively by virtually all subsequent authors referring to the subject. As a result, a multifaceted narrative emerged that combined a Turkish substrate of myths and traditions of the nomadic tribal society with newly adopted concepts of Muslim-Persian kingship. The Seljuk clan came to be presented as a powerful and wealthy family of warlords chosen by God to overcome the tyranny of the Iranian Ghaznavids and to re-establish righteous rule and order in the Islamic world. Most intriguingly, John Scylitzes, who wrote in the late eleventh century and was copied by younger historians such as John Zonaras and Nicephorus Bryennius, had a vague, but clearly discernible knowledge of this Islamic version. This is all the more remarkable given that the two main historiographical sources of twelfth-century Eastern Christianity, the chronicle of Michael the Syrian and the Latin Crusader history of William of Tyre, relied almost exclusively on older layers of ethnographic materials related to the Gog-and-Magog tradition of the Old Testament or information on the sixth-century Gök-Turkic Empire. John Scylitzes, too, incorporated traditional ethnographic concepts into his report, such as the idea of the barbarians’

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7 See, for example, the version transmitted by Zahīr al-Dīn Nīshāpūrī, The History of the Seljuq Turks from the Jāmi al-Tawārīkh, an Ilkhanid Adaption of the Saljūq-nāma, trans. Kenneth Allin Luther, ed. Clifford Edmund Bosworth (Richmond, 2001), pp. 25f.: ‘The kings are the shepherds of the flock and the protectors of the creatures from all kinds of calamity and dread ... and it is in the nature of kings to have justice and the ability to govern ... and among all these there were no sultans greater or kinder to the flock or more worthy in their regard for the people than the kings of the house of Saljuq.’


breeding grounds in the high north and the motif of a primordial deed, in this case the crossing of a well-guarded bridge over the Oxus River. The core of his knowledge, however, consisted of clearly identifiable individuals and events known to us from the aforementioned ‘King’s Book’ and its later derivatives. There is no evidence whatsoever for possible paths of transmission, but it is beyond doubt that at quite an early stage and at all events before 1100 the Muslim-Persian self-image of the Seljuk dynasty has been partly transmitted to the Byzantine intellectual elite of Constantinople.

The construction of ethnic identities by foreign observers begins with the categorization of a newly arrived barbarian group through ethnonyms provided by collective memories and pre-existing ethnographic categories. The enemy not only acquires a name, but also becomes part of a broader historical and ideological context that offers a sound explanation for his sudden appearance and his unexpected exploits. Regarding the Seljuk warriors, our sources described ‘Huns’ and ‘Scythians’, terms that served as collective umbrella names for a great variety of Eurasian nomadic tribes: the ‘Turks’ referred to the sixth-century Turkic Empire, and the ‘Persians’ evoked Byzantium’s most powerful eastern opponents in pre-Islamic times, the Sasanians. All of these terms appeared in Byzantine texts at roughly the same time, but they were not used in an undifferentiated way and certain authors show a clear preference for one or a combination of them. John Scylitzes describes ‘τὸ τῶν Τούρκων ἔθνος’ (‘the gens of the Turks’) according to a traditional classificatory system attested from the sixth century as a subgroup of the Huns, situating them in their mythical homeland beyond the Caucasian mountains and attributing to them familiar marks of distinction, such as great numbers and a spirit of anarchy. The same pattern of identification was employed by Scylitzes’ slightly older contemporary Michael Attaleiates, who alternately used the terms ‘Turks’ and ‘Huns’, adding from time to time a further specification, namely ‘Ὁύννοι Νεφθαλίται’

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11 Compare, for instance, the facts and names mentioned by John Scylitzes, Synopsis Historiarum, ed. Thurn, pp. 443–6, 449, 454, with the details given by Nīshāpūrī, Saljūq-nāma, trans. Luther, pp. 29–34, 37f., 40–42: the lord of Persia Mouchoumet, son of Imrael = Malmūd, son of Sabutagīn (head of the Ghaznawīd dynasty); the archon Tourkias = Ilak Khān, the ruler of Turkestan and Samarqand (head of the Qarakhanīd dynasty); Tangrolipex Moukalet, the son of Mikel = Abug Tālib Tughril Beg Muhammad, the son of Mikā’īl; the leader of the Arabs Pissasirios = Basāsīrī, the commander and chief of the army of Baghdad; Koutloumous, son of the brother of Tangrolipex’s father = the sultan’s cousin Qutlumush b. Isrā’īl; the leader of the Arabs Karbeses = Qirwāsh b. Muqallad, the Amir of Mecca and ruler of Mosul; Abramios Aleim, Tangrolipex’s half-brother = Ibrāhīm Inâl, his brother on his mother’s side; battle in the Karbonitis dessert = the Battle of Dandānqān; Koutloumous because of the sultan’s anger became his enemy = Qutlumush after the sultan’s death rose up to seek the kingship.

12 John Scylitzes, Synopsis Historiarum, ed. Thurn, p. 442.
or ‘White Huns’, who were to be located on the eastern Iranian fringes and were often confused with the Gök-Turks.\textsuperscript{13} Evidently, the earliest Byzantine authorities did not underline the Seljuk Turks’ adherence to Islam. Rather, they emphasized their nomadic identity much more strongly than their religious one, although the latter represented a basic element of the Seljuk leaders’ self-representation as protectors of the caliphate and Sunni Islam. The tendency to equate the Turks with the ‘sons of Ismail or Hagär’ is a later development of the Comnenian era, which becomes perceptible for the first time in the encomiastic poems of Theodore Prodromos on the eastern campaigns of Emperor John II during the 1130s and, subsequently, in Anna Comnena’s \textit{Alexiad} from the 1140s.\textsuperscript{14}

The ethnonym ‘Πέρσαι’ adds another dimension to Byzantine strategies for identifying the Turks. The early sources used the term mainly when referring to the Seljuk sultanate as the newly established centre of political power and supreme authority in the eastern Islamic lands. Hence, John Scylitzes described its founder Tughril Beg or Tangrolipex, as he calls him, as ‘king of Persia’ and interpreted his title ‘σουλτάνος’ as ‘almighty ruler and king of kings’.\textsuperscript{15} Anna Comnena called Sultan Malik Shāh and his successors ‘lord of Persia’ (ὁ τῆς Περσίας κρατῶν). Likewise, the texts employed this designation for outstanding individuals belonging to the Seljuk dynasty’s entourage. Attaleiates referred to the military commander Amertikes as ‘a man of royal descent from Persia’ and presented the sons of Tughril Beg’s cousin Qutlumush, who in 1078 allied with the insurgent Nicephorus Botaneiates, as ‘noblemen from Persia’.\textsuperscript{16} Through the shift from a barbarian-nomadic to a royal-Persian terminology the Seljuk Turks became associated with historical memories concerning the competition between Rome and the Sasanian Empire for political and cultural supremacy. Anna Comnena appears to have drawn upon these memories when formulating Alexius I’s refusal of Sultan Malik Shāh’s marriage proposal: ‘My little daughter would have been very unlucky, had she been forced to go to Persia and acquire an empire that is more miserable than every sort of poverty.’\textsuperscript{17}

In addition, invocations of Persian ethnicity served to exalt decisions made by prominent members of the Constantinopolitan ruling elite. When


\textsuperscript{14} Theodore Prodromos, \textit{Historische Gedichte}, ed. Wolfram Hörandner, Wiener Byzantinistische Studien, 11 (Vienna, 1974), no. 3, l. 15; no. 5, l. 85; no. 15, l. 3; no. 17, l. 364; no. 18, l. 61 (sons of Hagar); no. 11, l. 128; no. 27, ll. 2, 105, 141, 364; no. 18, ll. 25, 61; no. 19, l. 21; no. 25, l. 33 (sons of Ismail or Ismailites).


\textsuperscript{16} Michael Attaleiates, \textit{Historia}, ed. Pérez Martín, pp. 82, 191.

Attaleiates described the aforementioned Nicephorus as negotiating with ‘Persian aristocrats’ who, while refusing to recognize their own supreme lord, were willing to submit to the emperor of Constantinople,18 he stressed the rebel’s legitimate basis for his claims, founded on his personal abilities to impose his authority not only on Byzantine subjects but also on the empire’s most dangerous eastern adversaries. In the same way twelfth-century encomiastic texts praised the Comnenian emperors’ wars against the Seljuk Turks as major achievements against the Persians, who now repulsed beyond the Halys River were to be threatened in their very homeland at the Euphrates and the Tigris.19 When in 1162 Sultan Qilij Arslan II of Konya came as a refugee to Constantinople and concluded a peace treaty with Manuel I, he was granted the privilege of being addressed as the emperor’s son in letters issued by the imperial chancery.20 Whereas from Late Antiquity onwards this diplomatic practice was strictly reserved for representatives of the Western Germanic kingdoms, in the late eleventh century it was revived by Alexius I for prominent leaders of the First Crusade.21 Especially from the tenth century, the Byzantine government tended to bestow court titles of increasing importance upon Muslim allies, but in the period prior to Qilij Arslan II they were never honoured with a form of spiritual kinship binding them to the emperor. Hence, this event constituted a striking innovation in the framework of Byzantine–Muslim relations. The only precedent within the sphere of the empire’s eastern politics was Emperor Maurice’s spiritual father–son relationship with the Sasanian king Khusro II in the late sixth century.22 The previous revival of this practice by Alexius I, one might conclude, may have induced Byzantine court officials to recall older models of communication with the Sasanian Empire and to apply them to their new neighbours in Konya.

Apart from names and stereotypes associated with them, the Byzantine perception of Seljuk-Turkish identity was formed by a conventional set of specific non-Roman or barbarian features concerning outward appearance, behaviour, customs, moral attitudes and emotions. Since most statements referring to these phenomena form part of descriptions of war and conflict, they usually express an emotionally charged adversarial image, which in turn is embedded in a given text’s conceptual structure and ideological framework.

Well-known interpretative patterns originating from late antique historiography were combined with biblical notions of divine punishment and the Graeco-Roman dichotomous concept of a civilized world opposing countless barbarian peoples.  

Eleventh- and twelfth-century Byzantine sources significantly differed from their contemporary Armenian and Syriac counterparts, composed in regions that were directly affected by the Turkish attacks, in the strong emphasis of the latter on the motif of God’s wrath developed through moral exhortations amid vivid depictions of the invaders’ killing and pillaging. The reason for the devastation caused by God’s anger, their argument goes, lay in the treacherous behaviour of the Byzantine emperor and the moral decadence of the local aristocracy. Byzantine authors, instead, while speaking of these ravages rather indirectly, dwelled on the military aspects of imperial warfare against the Turks, thereby stressing the superiority of their compatriots, who despite major setbacks persisted on the battlefield by means of Roman moral virtues and cultural values.

Byzantine judgements on Turkish ethnic particularities, therefore, though frequently reiterating inherited stereotypes, also reflected the emergence of new attitudes towards altered historical circumstances. As a result, Byzantine approaches to the Turks, despite a common basis provided by literary traditions and intertextual links, were by no means uniform. Illustrative examples can be drawn from descriptions of Turkish behaviour during the highly confused situation in the Anatolian provinces in the mid-1070s. Following the outbreak of civil strife after the Byzantine defeat at Manzikert (1071), the imperial government was confronted with an overall dismemberment of the provincial organization in the eastern provinces; several seditious elements, such as the Frankish mercenary Roussel of Bailleul, were creating independent lordships; for the first time marauding Turkish invaders were pillaging the coastal region of Bithynia. Byzantine historians often explain this general state of instability, with front lines and alliances changing from one day to the next, by employing the commonly known motif of the ‘deceitful barbarian’. Emir Tutach (Artuk), for instance, arrested his former ally Roussel in the course of a meal, to which he had invited him, in order to hand him over to Emperor Michael VII. The Turks for money are used to betray each kind of friendship’, Attaleiates argued, ‘for they consider it legal to deceive, kill and betray the Romans and to respect no oath.’ By uttering this statement, however, the author implicitly directed

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23 For a thorough analysis of ‘otherness’ in Roman literature, see Dauge, Le Barbare, pp. 381–579; for the concept of divine punishment, see Pohl, Völkerwanderung, pp. 43, 105f.
25 For this episode and its historical background, see Turan, Selçuklular zamanında Türkiye, pp. 51f.
criticism against the emperor as well. According to his reconstruction of events, the Turkish commander was induced to this action by the offer of a bribe by the imperial government, for Michael VII preferred to see the Turks controlling Roman affairs than a Latin taking initiative against Turkish assaults. Instead, pro-Comnenian historiography represented by Nicephorus Bryennius and Anna Comnena focused on the direct involvement of Alexius Comnenus, who at that time served as commander of the imperial troops stationed in Amaseia. This version depicted the bribery in a positive way, thus demonstrating the diplomatic skills and statesmanship of Alexius, who by virtue of his eloquence and generosity was able to convince the barbarian to support his plans. The emperor and the sultan, according to this argument, were friends opposing a common enemy, that is, Roussel, so that Tutach, if he were to collaborate, would gain the double advantage of enjoying the emperor’s friendship while simultaneously satisfying his own lord, the sultan. Consequently, the stereotype of the deceitful Turk was replaced by that of the barbarian’s greed, which, in turn, demonstrated the Byzantine general’s moral superiority and offered a convincing explanation for the imperial government’s success even under the double threat of a rebellious mercenary commander and a Turkish warlord. On the other hand, both pro-Comnenian authors, while presenting Alexius as the emperor’s faithful servant, had to pass over in silence the alliance’s negative impacts so emphatically highlighted by the critical Attaleiates. Thus, one observes the occurrence of two competing interpretative patterns that are based on different features of the enemy’s identity: Turkish deceitfulness, which in combination with the emperor’s moral failure brought about the downfall of Byzantine provincial administration, versus Turkish greed, which was successfully exploited by a future emperor’s skilfulness and permitted further consolidation of the Byzantine central government’s supremacy. The two qualities might not have had any significance for the factual course of events, but were introduced into the historical discourse with hindsight, thereby providing models for meaningful explanations of Turkish–Byzantine political interactions.

The case of Tutach stands as an example of a frequently actualized set of stereotypes to which Byzantine authors invariably resorted in presenting conflicts and peaceful relations with the Turks. There is, however, one remarkable exception, namely Attaleiates’ well-known depiction of Sultan Alp Arslan as the victor against Emperor Romanos IV in the Battle of Manzikert (1071). In this

27 Ibid.
30 Michael Attaleiates, Historia, ed. Pérez Martín, pp. 122f.; for this event, see Spyros Vryonis, ‘The Greek and Arabic sources on the eight day captivity of the emperor Romanos IV in the camp of the Sultan Alp Arslan after the battle of Mantzikert’, in Claudia Sode and
case the Byzantine historian turned things upside-down, presenting a reversal of the well-established order of Roman–barbarian relations. Suddenly it is the infidel Seljuk lord who plays the part of the righteous and pious ruler, taking pity on his defeated opponent and showing respect to his captive’s rank by offering him a seat at his table and dining with him.\textsuperscript{31} Moreover, as a special gesture of humility, the sultan attributed his victory to God’s will rather than to the strength of his weapons.\textsuperscript{32} Although Alp Arslan’s moderate and lenient attitude constituted a common feature of almost all surviving accounts of the battle and certainly can be accepted as an echo of the historical facts, it also fulfilled a specific function in the framework of Attaleiates’ presentation of Romanus IV’s overthrow by the coup of the Dukas clan.\textsuperscript{33} Moral superiority was now a characteristic feature of the Muslim sultan, who here acted as an instrument of God’s will and as the guarantor of the empire’s law and order on account of the peace treaty he had concluded with his defeated opponent. In contrast, the potentates of Constantinople and their weak-willed pawn Michael VII, through their sacrilegious treachery against Romanus IV and their inability to handle the situation in Asia Minor following the events of 1071–72, lost their legitimacy and incited God’s anger, which could be overcome only through the successful intervention of the ‘saviour’ Nicephorus Botaneiates.\textsuperscript{34} Alp Arslan, therefore, functioned in Attaleiates’ narrative as the barbarian counterpart of the Christian general, who eventually in 1078 restored the empire’s order and consequently managed to conclude peace with the Turkish warriors, integrating them into his army as auxiliary troops.\textsuperscript{35} The figure of a barbarian ruler became an effective means of expressing ‘Kaiserkritik’.


\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.: μήτε τῇ οἰκείᾳ δυνάμει τὸ γεγονός ἐπιτρέψαντες ἄλλα τὸ πᾶν τῷ Θεῷ ἀναφέροντες.


\textsuperscript{34} Michael Attaleiates, \textit{Historia}, ed. Pérez Martín, pp. 130–32 (blinding of Romanus IV despite the safe conduct granted to him), 135 (God’s anger strikes the eastern provinces), 145f. (the imperial palace acts against God’s will and is incapable of confronting the Turkish attacks), 155f. (men’s prayers induce God to send Nicephorus Botaneiates).

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., pp. 157f., 173f. (the Turks come to terms with Botaneiates).
Naturally, the arrival and establishment of Seljuk commanders and Turcoman warriors in Asia Minor, apart from conflicts, also entailed various forms of coexistence, collaboration and mutual approach. From a very early stage onwards, former prisoners of war, rebels and seditious relatives of the ruling sultan frequently sought refuge in Constantinople and became commanders in the Byzantine army and members of the imperial court through the bestowal of incomes and titles or sometimes even through baptism and bonds of marriage. Moreover, the de facto acknowledgment of Turkish lordships on Byzantine soil, the earliest attested case of which was Sulayman ibn Qutlumush’s emirate in Nicaea established through a treaty concluded with Emperor Alexius I in June 1081, resulted in the intensification of diplomatic contacts, including official meetings and receptions of Seljuk lords in the imperial capital. In this way, members of the Turkish ruling class had the opportunity to experience Byzantine ideological attitudes and concepts of rule and were gradually integrated into the empire’s inner circle. On the other hand, Armenian and Syriac sources mention isolated cases of Christian potentates in the border region who closely collaborated with or defected to the Turks and converted to Islam, a form of behaviour that in the twelfth century was adopted even by members of the ruling Comnenian dynasty. The old border mentality of the Byzantine–Arab frontier zone, with its blurred identities and constantly shifting allegiances, seems to have acquired new dimensions in the course of the Turkish expansion and establishment in Asia Minor.

These quotidian experiences of exchange and acculturation enriched Byzantine discourses on Turkish identity with, on the one hand, references to a common code of shared, principally military values and, on the other, descriptions of the Byzantine Empire’s integration of barbarians and their transformation into faithful subjects of the imperial government. An exemplary case of martial virtues was the dux of Nicaea, Eustathius Kamytzes, who according to Anna Comnena’s account earned the Turks’ admiration for his courage and

37 Anna Comnena, Alexias, ed. Reinsch and Kambylis, pp. 115f.
38 Turan, Selçuklular zamanında Türkiye, pp. 62–6; Cahen, Pre-Ottoman Turkey, pp. 75–7, 91f.
39 Bar Hebraeus, Chronicon Syriacum, ed. Bedjan, p. 244 (trans. Budge, p. 218) (the Armenian patrikios Aristakis); Matthew of Edessa, Chronicle, trans. Dostourian, p. 101 (the daughter of King Gurgen II of Lori and Albania married to Sultan Alp Arslan), p. 104 (King Gagik-Abas II of Kars pretended loyalty to the sultan); for twelfth-century Comnenian defectors, see Cahen, Pre-Ottoman Turkey, pp. 93–5.
40 For the presence of Christians at the Seljuk court of Konya, see Vryonis, Decline, pp. 199–213; see further Nevra Necipoğlu, ‘Turks and Byzantines (eleventh and twelfth centuries)’, in Çağatay Ergun (ed.), The Turkic Speaking Peoples: 2000 Years of Art and Culture from Inner Asia to the Balkans (Munich, 2006), pp. 255–63.
steadfastness while trying to fight his way out of an ambush the enemy had laid for him in Mysia in 1113. When at last he was hopelessly encircled, the Turkish commander Muhammad allegedly said to him: ‘Do not prefer death over your salvation! Give me your hand and let me save you.’

By contrast, signs of physical weakness could become the target of nasty mockery. When Emperor Alexius, because of painful attacks of gout, was forced to postpone his 1116 campaign against the sultan of Konya, Turkish soldiers satirized their enemy’s sickness by performing sketches showing the emperor lying on his bed and wailing in pain.

Unsurprisingly, in Anna’s account the Turks’ contemptuous jeering inspired the emperor to overcome his illness and to initiate a campaign. The war eventually concluded with a peace treaty preceded by an official meeting between Alexius and Sultan Shāhinshāh, where both sides through carefully orchestrated gestures of submission and benevolence publicly presented their newly established state of friendship.

Apart from political alliances, the empire’s integrative force could also operate through the concession of court titles and even through the arbitrary usurpation of Byzantine symbols of authority. The former case is illustrated by Sultan Alp Arslan’s brother-in-law Arīsghī (Chrysoscoulos), who in 1070 arrived as a refugee at the court of Romanus IV. Attaleiates depicts the reception ceremony as the transformation of an ‘ugly and wicked Scythian’ into a Byzantine court official.

When the exotic guest entered the hall of the Chrysotriklinos, the senators uttered shouts of astonishment and disapproval at the sight of the misshapen dwarf in an undisguised gesture of disrespect. Thereafter, by bestowing the title of proedros upon him, the emperor turned the Turkish warlord into a high-ranking Byzantine subject, thus presenting his arrival as evidence of Byzantine moral and cultural supremacy.

The Turkish potentate Tzachas (Çaka) laid claim to Byzantine symbols of power through unrecognized acts of usurpation. A former prisoner of war who ascended to the rank of protonobelissimos during the short reign of Nicephorus III (1078–81), he lost his position with Alexius I’s rise to power. Based on alliances with other Turkish warlords he managed to create an independent lordship in the region of Smyrna and the adjacent Aegean islands.

In Anna’s account, Çaka appeared as an ambitious local ruler fully assimilated into the cultural and ideological environment of the Constantinopolitan elite. In his self-representation he adopted Byzantine symbols, behaving as a basileus

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42 Ibid., pp. 461f.: καὶ κωμῳδίας ἐγίνετο πρόφασις ἡ τῶν ποδῶν ἀλγηδών.
43 Ibid., pp. 477f.
and bearing imperial insignia. In his negotiations with Alexius’ general Constantine Dalassenos he demanded the restitution of his former privileges and the establishment of bonds of marriage with the new dynasty. His final goal, Anna maintained, was the throne of Constantinople itself. Hence we may envisage a man who because of his personal history came to embody a cross-cultural mixture combining markers of Turkish identity with an ideological self-consciousness firmly rooted in the Byzantine imperial environment and probably with a Christian religious background.

In summary, Byzantine perceptions of the Seljuk Turks, though based on a core of stereotypes, ethnographic models and conceptions of difference deriving from late antique literary traditions and biblical examples, betray an awareness of circumstantial exceptions and individual differences and reflect a willingness to manipulate inherited patterns of perception according to a given text’s intentions and aims. Images of the Seljuk Turks form a colourful potpourri encompassing a wide range of possibilities to define barbarian otherness, such as Scythian nomads, ferocious Hunnic representatives of divine wrath, avaricious enemies, Persian noblemen and adherents of Roman-Christian cultural values. Interestingly, at least in the first decades of their appearance they were hardly perceived as Muslims. While initial attempts in Byzantine texts to identify them more consistently with the ‘sons of Ismail’ date to the 1130s, it was not until the Chronike Syngraphe of George Acropolites, written in the second half of the thirteenth century, that the Seljuk Turks were regularly called ‘μουσουλμάνοι’. Nevertheless, in the years following the Byzantine Empire’s disastrous downfall of 1204, when the Seljuk sultanate reached the zenith of its political power, the lords of Konya, at least in their correspondence with the Christian states, began to style themselves as the heirs of Byzantine imperial claims and forms of self-representation.

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48 Ibid., p. 259: τὴν τῆς βασιλείας ἀνενεχθῆναι περιωπῆν.
Western Views
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Throughout most of the Latin Middle Ages, ‘Saracen’ (Saracenus, Sarracenus, Sarrasin etc.) was the standard term used by Latin authors to refer to Muslims. By the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, it had clearly religious overtones: Islam was known as ‘lex Sarraceni’ or ‘lex Mahometi’, terms which were used more or less interchangeably. Yet ‘Saracenus’ was originally a term used by Greek and Roman geographical and ethnographical authors to refer to certain peoples of the Arabian peninsula. The medieval image of ‘Saracens’ was in fact a fusion of two traditions: biblical discourse on the ‘Ishmaelites’, descendants of Abraham’s eldest son, and Roman discourse on the marauding ‘scenitae’ or ‘Sarraceni’ of the Arabian peninsula.¹ This fusion emerged well before the rise of Islam in late antique authors such as Jerome. In this chapter, I concentrate on the image of the Saracen/Ishmaelite in three Latin authors: Jerome, Isidore and Bede. We will see that the image of fierce marauding Saracens found in Jerome was still quite operative in Bede and that the rise of Islam had not fundamentally altered it.

First I will briefly explore the two strands that early Christian authors (notably Eusebius and Jerome) will unite, beginning with the term Σαρακηνός/Saracenus from classical ethnographic tradition. Ptolemy (in his Geography, c. 150) makes the earliest recorded use of the term Σαρακηνός.² Ammianus

¹ See Chapter 4 by Jan Retsö in this volume. For an introduction to the topic, see Alain Ducellier, Chrétiens d’Orient et Islam au Moyen Age, VIIe-XVe siècle, Collection U. Série Histoire, 335 (Paris, 1996); John Tolan, Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination (New York, 2002); John Tolan, Sons of Ishmael: Muslims through European Eyes in the Middle Ages (Gainesville, 2008); Ekkehart Rotter, Abendland und Sarazenen: das okzidentale Araberbild und seine Entstehung im Frühmittelalter (Berlin, 1986).

² Claudius Ptolemaeus, Geographia, 6, 7, 21: Κατέχουσι δὲ τὴν μεσόγειαν παρὰ μὲν τὰς ὀρεινάς τὰς πρὸς ἀρκτοὺς ὡς ἐπίπαν Σκηνιταί, καὶ ἐπὶ ὑπὲρ αὐτοὺς Θαδίται, μεσημβρινώτεροι δὲ τοῦτον Σαρακηνοί, καὶ Θαμυδηνοὶ; the name seems to be associated with the region of Σαρακηνή, which Ptolemy places between the mountains of the Sinai
Marcellinus (writing in the mid-fourth century) says that *scenitae* (tent dwellers) are now called *Saraceni.*

Irfan Shahid has argued that the term may come from the Arab *sharqi* (Easterner) or from the term *sariq* (thief, marauder, raider); for Shahid, the Arabic origins of the term would suggest that it was first used by settled Arabs (notably in the Nabataean kingdom) to refer to the nomadic Arabs of the peninsula. Shahid argues that by the second century, Σαρακηνός/Saracenus had entered Greek and Latin to refer to the nomadic Arabs of the peninsula, distinguishing them from the Nabataeans and other Arabs who were part of the empire.

The term ‘Saracen’ does not occur in the Bible, but the Saracens were quite early associated with biblical traditions concerning the Ishmaelites. Ishmael, according to Genesis, was Abraham’s eldest son, born of Hagar, handmaid of his wife, Sarai (subsequently Sarah). The angel of the Lord who announced to Hagar the birth of her child tells her ‘he will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man’s hand will be against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren.’

Sarah later bears a child, Isaac. When Sarah sees Ishmael mocking his younger brother at a feast to celebrate his weaning, she tells Abraham ‘Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son’ (Gen. 21: 10). God tells Abraham to heed his wife, consoling him by announcing that ‘of the son of the bondwoman will I make a nation’. This is the same message God sends to Hagar in despair in the desert. Indeed, Ishmael lived to father twelve sons, ‘twelve princes according to their nations’ who ‘dwell from Havilah unto Shur, that is before Egypt, as thou goest toward Assyria’ (Gen. 25: 16–18). The scheme of twelve tribes of Ishmael is no doubt meant to correspond to the twelve tribes of Israel, and in the list of Ishmael’s sons one finds names that correspond to tribes or peoples, but also to towns. It seems that the biblical term Ishmaelite was first used to refer to small groups in the Transjordan, and later expanded to designate a wide range of nomadic peoples living south and east of Palestine. It is a band of Ishmaelite merchants who buy Joseph in the desert from his brothers and who resell him in Egypt. The Christian allegorical interpretation of the story of Abraham and his two sons begins in the New Testament itself, in Paul’s letter to the Galatians.

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5 Gen. 16: 12: *Ecce ait concepisti et paries filium vocabisque nomen eius Ismahel eo quod audierit Dominus adictionem tuam. Hic erit ferus homo manus eius contra omnes et manus omnium contra eum et e regione universorum fratrum suorum figet tabernacula.*


7 Gen. 37–9.
The two sons signify the two covenants: the first, born of the flesh from Hagar (which Paul associates with 'mount Sinai in Arabia'), is the covenant of bondage, while the second, born of the spirit from Sarah, associated with Jerusalem, is the covenant of freedom.8

We see the fusion of these two traditions in Eusebius, who is of course one of Jerome’s principal sources. Eusebius mentions Σαρακηνοί in several of his works, in particular his Onomasticon and his commentary on Isaiah. In these works, it is now the Σαρακηνοί (and not the Arabs) who are presented as the descendants of Ishmael: the relationship between the two groups is not clear, but in the Isaiah commentary it seems that the Saracens are one group among the Arabs.9

In this brief essay I will examine passages where Jerome, Isidore and Bede discuss the Saracens and place them in the context of biblically informed geography and history. We will be looking first at biblical commentaries of the three authors, to see how they understand the role of the Saracens as part of the biblical narrative (and part of a biblical-based conception of divinely authored history). Next we will look at geographical and ethnographical texts dealing with Saracens as well as hagiographical texts in which they appear. And then we will look at chronicles. Of course these categories overlap and inform each other. But they are nevertheless different exercises, and it can be useful to keep in mind the specific requirements of these different types of texts when we look at how these three authors portray Saracens.

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

Let us look first at how our three authors understand and explain Genesis 16: 11–12, where (as we have seen) the Angel of the Lord speaks to Hagar who has fled from her mistress Sarah. In Jerome’s commentary to this passage, we see a clear fusion of the exegetical and ethnographic traditions.

*And she called his name Ishmael, because God has heard my humiliation. Ishmael is interpreted as ‘the listening of God’. And he shall be a boorish man; his hand shall be upon all, and the hands of all men shall be upon him. And he shall dwell over against the face of all his brothers.* Instead of boorish man stands written in the Hebrew *phara*, which means ‘wild ass’. Now it means that his descendants would dwell in the desert, and refers to the Saracens who wander with no fixed abode and often invade all the nations who border on the desert; and they are attacked by all.10

Jerome of course has access to the Hebrew text of Genesis, and the translation he gives here (rusticus homo, contra faciem omnium fratrum suorum habitabit) is different from that of the Vulgate (ferus homo, e regione universorum fratrum suorum figet tabernacula; ‘a wild man, who sets up his tents in the regions of all his brothers’). He explains the meaning of specific Hebrew words: fara, Jerome’s transliteration of pere’ 'adam (אָדָם פֶּרֶא), a wild ass, which Jerome has here translated as rusticus homo (and which in the Vulgate he renders as ferus homo). The angel’s prophecy that Ishmael will be a rusticus homo and that his hand will be against all signifies semen eius habitaturum in heremo, ‘his seed is the seed of those who will live in the desert’, whom he identifies with the nomadic Saracens, who invade and fight all peoples who live at the edges of the desert.

Bede, writing 300 years after Jerome, does not of course have access to the Hebrew text, but relies on the Vulgate. His perspective is quite similar:

Behold, he said, you have conceived and you will give birth to a son, and you shall call his name Ishmael. Ishmael means ‘catching the sound of God.’ And the reason for the name is explained when it is immediately added: Because the lord has heard your affliction. Moreover, it should be observed that the first son Ishmael received his name from the Lord before he was born, as did the second son Isaac, undoubtedly for the sake of a settled mystery, because the heirs both of the Old Covenant, which is signified by Ishmael, and of the New, which is signified by Isaac, were foreknown among the divinely elect before their times. He will be a wild man, his hand will be against all men, and all men’s hands against him, and he will pitch his tents over against all his brethren. This means that Ishmael’s seed was to dwell in the desert, and without fixed habitations. These are the nomadic Saracens who raid all the peoples on the edge of the desert, and who are attacked by all. But this was long ago. Now, however, his hand is against all men, and all men’s hands are against him, to such an extent that the Saracens hold the whole breadth of Africa in their sway, and they also hold the greatest part of Asia and some part of Europe, hateful and hostile to all. The phrase, he will pitch his tents, reveals the ancient custom of a people who always used to live in tents rather than houses.11

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Like Jerome, Bede explains that Ishmael means ‘exauditio dei’, a ‘hearing out’ by God. For Bede, Ishmael prefigured the Old Testament and Isaac the New. To explain the signification of this passage, he repeated Jerome’s text word for word: Significat semen eius habiteturum in eremo, id est saracenos uagos, incertis que sedibus. Qui uniueras gentes quibus desertum ex latere iungitur incursant, et expugnantur ab omnibus. Bede then adds Sed haec antiquitus: Jerome’s day is ‘ancient’. Since then the Saracens have made major new conquests: now (nunc autem) his hand is truly against all: as the Saracens have conquered all of Africa, most of Asia and part of Europe. And the angel of the Lord was all the more clearly speaking of the Saracens since he says that they will pitch their tents (tabernacula) over and against their brothers; the Saracens always used to live in tents, never in houses, Bede affirms. In another passage, Bede etymologically explained the derivation of Agareni from the Hebrew ger (enemy); who could thus be surprised at the Agarenes’ hostility towards Christendom?12

For Jerome and for Bede, the words that the Angel spoke to Hagar bear important meaning not only for understanding biblical history, but for understanding eternal truths about the descendants of Ishmael, the Saracens, whose ferocity is clearly announced by the angel: it is an immutable characteristic of a clearly identifiable people. While for modern historians (not to mention medieval Muslim writers) the rise of Islam marks a clear break in the history of the ‘Saracens’, from the biblically informed vision of Christian history, that transformation is imperceptible: Bede’s Saracens are essentially the same as Jerome’s. Other exegetical works by Jerome and Bede confirm and complement this picture. What is the relationship between the Saracens and other peoples of Arabia mentioned in the Bible? In his commentary on Ezekiel, Jerome mentioned the Midianites, Ishmaelites and Hagarenes, saying that the Hagarenes ‘now call themselves Saracens, falsely usurping the name of Sarah, thus appearing to be born of a free lady’.13 The Agareni are the descendants of Hagar (Jerome is

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12 Bede, Interpretatio nominum Hebraeorum, PL 93, col. 1102; Rotter, Abendland und Sarazen, p. 98.

the first author I know of to use this term); they can also be called Ishmaelites, descendants of Ishmael. As for the term ‘Saracen’, Jerome gave it a polemical etymology: these descendants of the illegitimate child of a slave-girl want to usurp the rights of the free-born descendants of the patriarch Isaac. This etymology seems to have been Jerome’s own invention; it was destined to have a long posterity.

In his commentary on Isaiah, Jerome develops this perspective further and clearly connects the biblical *Agareni* with bands of marauding Saracens of his day:

The book of Genesis teaches that Kedar and the Agarenes, who now perversely call themselves by the name of Saracens, were born from Ishmael. These live everywhere in solitude; I think the poet [Virgil] was speaking of them when he said: ‘The wide-wandering Barcaeans.’ And the above-mentioned text also: *And he shall dwell over against the face of all his brothers.* Indeed they are found in the deserts from India to Mauritania on the Atlantic Ocean. I believe Jeremiah spoke about them: *Concerning Kedar and the kingdoms of Hazor, which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon attacked, this is what the Lord says: ‘Arise, and attack Kedar, and destroy the people of the East. Their tents and their flocks will be taken; their shelters will be carried off with all their goods and camels. Men will shout to them, “Terror on every side!” Flee quickly away! Stay in deep caves, you who live in Hazor,’ declares the Lord. ‘Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon has plotted against you; he has devised a plan against you. Arise and attack a nation at ease, which lives in confidence,’ declares the Lord, ‘a nation that has neither gates nor bars; its people live alone. Their camels will become plunder, and their large herds will be booty. I will scatter to the winds those who are in distant places and will bring disaster on them from every side,’ declares the Lord. ‘Hazor will become a haunt of jackals, a desolate place forever. No one will live there; no man will dwell in it.’* All of Jeremiah’s testimony concerning who Kedar is you will understand without a doubt. And consider how he described Ishmael, that is the people of the Saracens, who live in tents, who make camp where night compels them to, who are armed and have flocks of sheep and camels, who have neither doors nor locks, nor do they stay in cities, but live in the desert. And thus they were destroyed by the Babylonians, and the city of Hazor, which was the metropolis of this nation in the desert, was razed to the ground. And their flocks of camels and sheep were captured, and the skins which served as their tents divided up as spoils. This does not mean that the whole of that nation was destroyed, as they were accustomed to flee in a single day across a vast wilderness with hundreds or thousands of camels. He said that all the

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*falso nomen sarae quo scilicet de ingenua et domina uideantur esse generati.*

According to Jerome, Genesis tells us that Kedar and the Hagarenes are the descendants of Ishmael, and that they now perversely call themselves Saracens. These people live (note the present tense) in solitude. Jerome here associated the Saracens with the Barcaei, whom Virgil evoked in the Aeneid as desert savages living at the borders of Dido’s Carthage; in one of his letters, Jerome explained that the word referred to the inhabitants of the oppidum of Barca, but that now, corrupto sermone, it is used generally for Afri. The Angel’s proclamation (in...
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Genesis) that Ishmael will dwell contra faciem omnium fratrum suorum, for Jerome, has been realized in the wide swath of desert that stretches from India to the Atlantic shores of Mauritania. Jerome then gave a lengthy citation from the prophet Jeremiah, referring to Nebuchadnezzar’s smiting of Kedar and Hazor. Jerome explains that these passages apply to the Ishmaelites, who live in tents, who herd camels, who have ‘neither doors nor locks’, who live not in towns, but in the wilderness. They once lived in the desert city of Hazor (Asor), Jerome explains, but God punished them at the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, who razed Hazor; the remnant of the Ishmaelites wanders the desert to this day. They are adept in the art of fighting, in particular with bows and arrows. This passage is a good illustration of how Jerome works: gleaning passages from his readings of classical poets (in this case Virgil) and biblical texts (Genesis, Jeremiah), Jerome brings his erudition to bear on a passage from Isaiah which mentions Arabs and the ‘Children of Kedar’.

In his commentary on Amos, Jerome addresses the religion of the Saracens:

‘Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings forty years in the desert, O house of Israel? You have lifted up the shrine of Melchom, the pedestal of your idols, the star of your god Repham which you made for yourselves. Therefore I will send you into exile beyond Damascus,’ says the Lord, whose name is God Almighty [Amos 5: 25–7]. From this passage we learn that all the offerings and sacrifices that Israel offered in the desert they offered not to God but to their king Moloch, whose tabernacle they carried. They worshipped the image of his idols and his statues. And what image this was is seen in the following passage the star of your God, which in Hebrew is chocab, which means Lucifer, whom the Saracens still venerate today.

This is shown to be the reason why God sent them in exile beyond Damascus, that is among the Syrians and Chaldeans, who, through God’s omnipotence, acted as his army. We ask why in the desert they did not offer victims and sacrifices to God, but to their king, who is called Lucifer?17

separatos, Arabas et Agarenos, quos nunc Sarracenos vocant, in vicinia urbis Ierusalem. Pudet dicere latitudinem terrae repromissionis, ne ethnicis occasionem blasphemandi dedisse videamur. Ab Ioppe usque ad viculum nostrum Bethleem, quadraginta sex millia sunt, cui succedit vastissima solidudo, plena ferocium barbarorum de quibus dicitur, contra faciem omnium fratrum suorum habitabit [Gen. 16: 12]; et quorum facit Poeta eloquentissimus mentionem. Lateque vagantes Barcaei, a Barca oppido, quod in solitudine situm est; quos nunc corrupto sermone, Afri Baricianos vocant. Hi sunt qui pro locorum qualitatisibus, diversis nominibus appellantur; et a Mauritania per Africam et Aegyptum, Palaestinaeque et Phoenicam, Coelen Syriam et Osrhohenem, Mesopotamiam, atque Persidem tendunt ad Indiam. Haec est, Iudaee, tuarum longitudo et latitudo terrarum; in his gloriaris, super his te per diversas provincias ignorantibus iactitas. Ad populum phaleras, ego te intus et in cute novi. [Persius, Saturae, 3, 30].

This is a commentary to Amos 5: 25–7 which, in Jerome’s translation, following the Septuagint, accuses the Israelites of having erected a tent to Moloch and to the star Repham, and having venerated their idols. Jerome explained that the ‘star of your god’ was the morning star, Lucifer, ‘which the Saracens worship up to this day’. Jerome reiterates this in his Life of Hilarion, where he again affirmed that the Saracen nation was devoted to Lucifer, the morning star, and he described the cult of Venus at Elusa. It should be noted that for Jerome Lucifer signifies the ‘light-bearing’ morning star, and is not associated with the devil. The association, however, would be made by later authors.18

What is the picture of the Saracens that emerges from Jerome’s biblical commentaries? These Ishmaelites, descendants of the slave-girl Hagar, ‘perversely’ call themselves Sarraceni in a futile effort to usurp the heritage of Isaac. They worship the morning star. Punished by God, driven out of their desert kingdom of Hazor by the Babylonians, they until this day wander the wide deserts between Mauritania and India with huge herds of camels, marauding and fighting.

What does Bede do with this information in his biblical commentary? In his commentary on the Song of Songs, Bede explained that Kedar was the son of Ishmael, citing the angel’s prophecy that his hand shall be against all: ‘The truth of which is demonstrated today by the nation of the Saracens, hateful towards all.’ Bede developed this idea further in his commentary on the Acts of the Apostles. Acts 7: 43 reproduces the passage from Amos on which Jerome had commented: ‘You have lifted up the shrine of Molech and the star of your god Remfam, the idols you made to worship.’ In Acts, this passage is part of a long litany, recited by Stephen to the Jewish high priest, of how the Jews have disobeyed God and his prophets. Here is Bede’s commentary:

And the star of your God Remfam. He says: You have abandoned the living and true God and taken for your God the star Remfam, that is ‘of your own making.’

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It signifies, however, Lucifer, the morning star, to the worship of which the Saracen people were devoted, in connection with the honor paid to Venus. Because Remfam, as I have said,\textsuperscript{20} means your making, or your repose, as the prophet adds accordingly: the images you made to worship.\textsuperscript{21}

Bede says that Stephen accuses the Jews of having abandoned the True God and of taking the star Remfam, an idol of their own making, for God. He then explains that the Saracen people was ‘enslaved’ (mancipata) to the cult of Lucifer, in honour of Venus: Lucifer and Venus are of course two names for the same planet. Thus here, as with Bede’s Genesis commentary, it seems that the Saracens are essentially the same as Jerome’s: Bede still associates the Saracens with the cult of Remfam, although the use of the past tense (Jerome’s dedita est and hucusque uenerantur become for Bede erat mancipata) perhaps suggests that Bede has read in the Life of Hilarion that the Saracens of Elusa had accepted Christianity (as we shall see).

ETHNOGRAPHY AND HAGIOGRAPHY

Let us now look at a second group of texts, grouping together hagiography and ethnography. Jerome wrote a series of lives of desert hermits, inspired by the model of Athanasius’ Life of Anthony. In the Life of Malchus, Jerome related how the young Malchus, rejecting worldly pleasures and resisting his parents who wanted him to marry, went off to join a monastery. Years later, when he received word that his father had died, he set off to return home and settle his inheritance. His abbot warned him in vain of the spiritual dangers that this breach of his monastic oath entailed, but Malchus would not listen. And indeed Saracen marauders awaited him in the desert: in Jerome’s text, it is the older and wiser hermit Malchus who relates his youthful misadventure:

\begin{quote}
Lying near the public highway from Beroa to Edessa, there is a desert through which nomad Saracens are always wandering back and forth. For this reason, travellers along the way group together and, by mutual aid, decrease the danger of a surprise attack. There were in my company men, women, old men,
\end{quote}


young people, children, numbering in all about seventy. Suddenly, Ishmaelites, riding upon horses and camels, descended upon us in a startling attack, with their long hair flying from under their headbands. They wore cloaks over their half-naked bodies, and broad boots. Quivers hung from their shoulders; their unstrung bows dangled at their sides; they carried long spears, for they had not come for battle but for plunder. We were seized, scattered, and carried off in different directions. A woman of the company and I, after my long absence an hereditary owner, too late regretting my decision to leave the monastery, fell by lot into the hands of the same master. We were led – actually, we were lifted up onto camels – through the vast desert, clinging to the beasts in constant fear of falling off. Our food was half-cooked meat; our drink, the camels’ milk.22

The picture that emerges is vivid: the Saracen raiders surge suddenly out of the desert: they are hairy, half-naked, wearing pallia (some sort of cloak or tunic), boots, their hair tied back with headbands; longbow in hand and quiver on the shoulder. Malchus describes his terror as he was borne off into slavery, clinging to the back of a camel, across a vast and desolate wilderness, reduced to slavery. The barbarism of the Saracens is accented by their diet, which the captive is forced to share: half-cooked meat and camel milk.23 Jerome subsequently described how Malchus escaped and, thanks to the intervention of a lioness who killed his erstwhile master, regained his freedom and returned to his monastery. Jerome’s description, a rhetorical gem, offered a vivid image of marauding desert savages.

In his Life of St. Hilarion, Jerome reported how Hilarion, followed by a large group of monks, came to the desert city of Elusa, on a feast day when all the inhabitants of the town were gathered at the temple of Venus. Yet, Jerome


continued, the people showed a great devotion to Hilarion, who freed many Saracens from demonic possession, despite their worship of Lucifer. The saint enjoined them to worship God instead of stones. The Saracens would not let him leave until he had traced the outlines of their new church in the sand and marked their priest with the sign of the cross.24

Let us turn now to Isidore, to two passages in the *Etymologies* where he mentioned Saracens. These are both from book eleven, where Isidore presented the names of the world’s different peoples, trying usually to place them in the framework of biblical genealogy. In other words, where in Jerome’s and Bede’s exegetical works we saw ethnography employed in the service of exegesis, here biblical narrative and exegetical tradition are used to provide a coherent schema for the peoples and languages of the world. The Ishmaelites fit neatly into a biblical pattern: ‘Ismael filius Abraham, a quo Ismaelitae, qui nunc corrupto nomine Saraceni, quasi a Sarra, et Agareni ab Agar’ (Ishmael was a son of Abraham from whom arose the Ishmaelites, who are now called, with corruption of the name, Saracens, as if they descended from Sarah, and the Agarenes, from Hagar).25

The Ishmaelites are the descendants of Ishmael, also known as the Hagarenes from Hagar, and now their name has been ‘corrupted’ as Saracens, as if from Sarah. He clearly has read Jerome’s polemical etymology, as is even clearer in the following passage:

> The Saracens are so called either because they claim to be the descendants of Sarah or, as the pagans say, because they are of Syrian origin, as if the word were Syringinae. They live in a very large deserted region. They are also Ishmaelites, as the Book of Genesis teaches us, because they sprang from Ishmael. They are also named Kedar, from the son of Ishmael, and Agarenes, from the name Hagar. As we have said, they perversely call themselves Saracens because they pride themselves in being descended from Sarah.26

He affirmed that the Saracens live in the ‘wide desert’ (*peramplam solitudinem*) and gave two possible etymologies for their name: their proclamation of descent from Sarah, or the derivation of the appellation from Syringinae, Syrians (the only author known to me to have proposed such an etymology). Yet he reiterated Jerome’s polemical etymology a few lines later, saying that Agareni *ut diximus*,

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26 Ibid., 2, 57, p. 69: *Saraceni dicti, vel quia ex Sarra geniti se praedicent, vel, sicut gentiles aient, quod ex origine Sorum sint, quasi Syringinae. Hii peramplam habitant solitudinem. Ipsi sunt et Ismaelitae, ut liber Geneseos docet, quod sint ex Ismaele. Ipsi Cedar a filio Ismaelis. Ipsi Agareni ab Agar; qui, ut diximus, perverso nomine Saraceni vocantur, quia ex Sarra se genitos gloriantur.*
A wild man, whose hand will be against all

perverso nomine Saraceni vocantur, quia ex Sarra se genitos gloriantur (as we have said, they perversely call themselves Saracens, because they pride themselves in being descended from Sarah).

For Isidore, who was contemporary with Muhammad, the clearest guides to understanding the complexity of human geography and the cacophony of the world’s languages were the Bible and the church fathers. Genesis and Jerome explained who the Saracens were and placed them in a clear and immutable relationship with God’s people. If Agarenes, Saracens and Ishmaelites are three synonyms denoting the same people (descendants of Shem via Ishmael), they are distinct, for Isidore, from the Arabs, descendants of Ham (according to the Etymologies).²⁷

Bede, like Isidore, as we have seen, was also quite dependent on Genesis and Jerome, particularly in his biblical exegesis. Yet elsewhere he relied on more recent information and offered a more ambivalent image of the Saracens. This is notably the case in two passages which deal with churches or temples of the Saracens. In these texts, Bede’s principal source was the De locis sanctis of Adomnán, abbot of the monastery of Iona.²⁸ Adomnán had based his descriptions, in part, on the narration of a pilgrim, Arculf, bishop in Gaul, who had been in Palestine during the reign of Umayyad Caliph Mu’āwīya (661–80). Bede reworked Adomnán’s text to produce his own De locis sanctis, which in turn became a source of information for various other works, including his treatise on place names in the Acts, where he gave the following description of Damascus:

Damascus: Noble Phoenician city which once held dominion over all Syria and which now is said to be the metropolis of the Saracens, where their king Mavias established a famous basilica for himself and his nation, while Christian citizens living nearby frequent the church of John the Baptist.²⁹

Bede identified Damascus as the current metropolis of the Saracens (it was indeed the capital of the Umayyad Caliphate), with two places of worship. In his De locis sanctis Bede explained that the Christians had the Church of St. John the

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²⁷ Ibid., 2,13–14, using Genesis 10: 6–7 and Vergilius, Georgicon, 2, 117.


²⁹ Bede, Nomina regionum atque locorum de actibus apostolorum, 9,2, ed. Max Laistner, CC SL, 121 (Turnhout, 1983), pp. 165–78, at 171: Damascus: nobilis urbs Foenicis quae et quondam in omni Syria tenuit principatum et nunc Sarracenorum metropolis esse perhibetur, unde et rex eorum Mauuias famosam in ea sibi suae que genti basilicam dicavit, Christianis in circuitu ciuibus beati baptistae iohanniis ecclesiam frequentantibus.
Baptist and that the King of the Saracens with his people had built and sanctified another church. Here he gives essentially the same information: the Saracens’ ‘king Mauuias’ (Umayyad Caliph Mu‘āwīya, 661–80) consecrated a ‘famous basilica’ for himself and his people, while the Christian citizens frequented the church of John the Baptist.

In his account of Jerusalem in De locis sanctis, Bede provided the following description of the temple mount:

But in the lower part of the city – where the temple was situated near the eastern wall and joined to the city by a bridge that served as a passage between them – the Saracens now assemble for prayer. There they have built a square house of shoddy workmanship with upright planks and great beams over certain remains of the ruins. It seems to hold three thousand people.

Whereas in his Expositio actuum apostolorum Bede portrayed the Saracens as adepts of Venus and Rempham, here they seem much closer to Christianity. The passage about Jerusalem is quite neutral: the structure they build is described as a domus, avoiding terms specifically associated either with Christianity (ecclesia) or with Judaism (synagoga) or paganism (templum, fanum). The purpose of the structure is oratio, a term which could easily apply to Christian worship. The passage on Damascus is even more striking. In the De locis sanctis, Bede reported that the Saracen king built an ecclesia, and in his Nomina regionum atque locorum de actibus apostolorum he employed the term basilica. Whereas Bede’s source, Adomnán, specified that this was a ‘church for infidels’ (ecclesia incredulorum), Bede does not. His reader would presumably conclude that this good Saracen king was a Christian. His name, ‘Mavias’, is curiously close to that of a fourth-century Christian Saracen queen. Bede’s readers could only conclude that the Saracens and their king were Christian, or that they were a people most favourably inclined towards Christianity.

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In their chronicles, our three authors also discussed the Saracens and their role in sacred history. In his translation of Eusebius’ *Chronicle*, Jerome explained that Abraham and his slave Hagar begat Ishmael, ancestor of the Ishmaelites, who were later called Agareni and finally Saraceni. In his continuation of his translation of Eusebius’ *Chronicle*, Jerome related that Saracens attacked the monastery of St Anthony and killed a Samaritan. This is one example among many in Jerome’s works that relates the incursions of Saraceni (or in some cases Arabes). He complains in one of his letters, for instance, that the raids of the Saracens threatened the very existence of his religious community in Bethlehem. In such passages he used both Saraceni and Arabes, but elsewhere (for example in his *Life of Hilarion*) he described settled communities of Arabs, in the Negev or in Petra, as Arabes, never Saraceni. Isidore, in his *Chronica maiora* merely repeated the genealogical information in Jerome’s translation of Eusebius’ *Chronicle*.

Two passages from Bede illustrate the explicative force of this biblical view of history. In his universal chronicle *De temporum ratione*, Bede described the raids of the ‘Saracens’ in North Africa, Sicily and Sardinia, and their siege of Constantinople.

4639. Constantine, the son of the previous Constantine [ruled for] 17 years. The Saracens invaded Sicily, and then returned to Alexandria, taking with them much booty ...

4649. Justinian the Younger, the son of Constantine, [ruled for] 10 years. He made a ten-year peace on land and sea with the Saracens. But the province of Africa was brought under the control of the Roman empire. It had been occupied by the Saracens and Carthage itself was captured by them and destroyed ...

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The Saracens, coming to Constantinople with an immense army, besieged it for three years until, with the citizens calling on God on numerous occasions, many of [the Saracens] died of hunger, cold and pestilence, and withdrew, as if wearied of the siege. Hearing that the Saracens had depopulated Sardinia and had dug up the place where the bones of holy bishop Augustine had once been moved on account of the barbarian raids and honourably buried, Liutprand sent and paid a great price [for them], received [them] and translated them back to Pavia, and reburied them there with the honour due to so great a Father.39

Here the Saracens are no longer quasi-Christians like the ‘King Mavias’, but the ferocious raiders foreseen in the Bible. It is in his Genesis commentary, as we have seen, that Bede clearly made the link between the Angel’s prophecy in Genesis and the current ferocity of the Saracens. Here, in his descriptions of the Saracen raids, this connection is implicit.

In the *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, Bede told of twin comets that appeared in the sky in the year 728, divine signals of coming catastrophe, east and west: in the west, the deaths of kings Egbert of Kent and Osric of Northumbria; in the east, the Saracen invasions of Gaul.

In the year of our Lord 729, two comets appeared around the sun, striking terror into all who saw them. One comet rose early and preceded the sun, while the other followed the setting sun at evening, seeming to portend awful calamity to east and west alike. Or else, since one comet was the precursor of day and the other of night, they indicated that mankind was menaced by evils at both times. They appeared in the month of January, and remained visible for about a fortnight, pointing their fiery torches northward as though to set the heavens aflame. At this time, a swarm of Saracens ravaged Gaul with horrible slaughter; but after a brief interval in that country they paid the penalty of their wickedness (*perfidia*). During this year the man of God Egbert departed to our Lord on Easter Day as I have mentioned, and immediately after Easter,

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on the ninth of May, King Osric of Northumbria departed this life after a reign of eleven years.\textsuperscript{40}

These Saracen marauders received due punishment in Gaul itself. Some historians have suggested that Bede referred to ‘Abd al-Rahmān Al Ghafiqi’s defeat to the forces of Charles Martel at Poitiers, though it may well refer instead to the Battle of Toulouse (721), in which Eudes, Duke of Aquitaine, routed Emir al-Samh.\textsuperscript{41} Here was a ‘dreadful plague’ (\textit{grauissma lues}), reminiscent of the trials and punishments faced by the Hebrews in the Old Testament, followed by a satisfying vindication of Christian superiority. Moreover, Bede specified that the Saracens are punished for their \textit{perfidia}, a term he and other contemporary writers usually use to denote religious error: pagan, Jewish or heretical (though it can on occasion mean ‘treachery’ in a non-religious sense).\textsuperscript{42} Their punishment seems to be more for their religious error than for their devastating raids on Christian Gaul; indeed, for Bede, the brutality of the Saracens was probably the direct consequence of their \textit{perfidia}. After all, his Ecclesiastical History related accounts of other groups of \textit{perfidi} who waged violent war until they were converted: the Kentish before the arrival of Augustine of Canterbury, the Angles, Picts and others.

\textbf{CONCLUSIONS}

What does this survey of scattered passages in Jerome, Isidore and Bede tell us about how these authors perceived the Saracens, and more broadly about how they perceived what we call ethnicity? The classification of different human groups, for the three authors, is based on the understanding of key texts: classical authorities of antiquity, indeed, but especially the Bible. To understand


\textsuperscript{41} On this identification, see Plummer’s notes to Bede, \textit{Ecclesiastical History of the English People}, vol. 2, pp. 338–9; cf. Sherley-Price, trans. \textit{Bede}, p. 375n.

\textsuperscript{42} On Bede’s use of \textit{perfidia}, see Plummer’s notes to Bede, \textit{Ecclesiastical History of the English People}, vol. 2, pp. 18–19; see Chapter 19 by Stefan Esders in this volume for other examples of the double signification of \textit{infidelitas} (as treason or as rejection of Christianity).
the place and nature of these groups, one has to place them in the genealogy of Noah’s three sons and of the other key figures of Genesis.\textsuperscript{43} The Ishmaelites are the offspring of the rejected bastard son of Abraham, obliged to inhabit the fringes of the civilized world. Hence their hostility towards the sons of Isaac, who enjoy the grace of God’s covenant. These desert barbarians preposterously attempt to usurp the rights of their betters by calling themselves ‘Saracens’, as if they were descended from Abraham’s free-born wife. They are desert savages who destroy and pillage, who eat raw meat and drink camel milk. Yet they are not unredeemable: Saint Hilarion managed to convert some of them, and Bede described their king Mavias as a quasi-Christian. Jerome demonstrated that the key elements of this image of the Saracen were firmly established two centuries before the \textit{hijra}; Bede shows us that the rise of Islam (of which he was totally ignorant) little altered this picture, that Genesis and Jerome provided him with the intellectual tools necessary to explain the ferocity of the Saracens of his day. In the following centuries, European authors would integrate scattered information about Muhammad and Islam into this schema, without fundamentally altering it.

\textsuperscript{43} See Chapter 16 by Mischa Meier in this volume, which shows how the Isaurians were demonized by being associated with Esau (who, like Ishmael, is denied God’s covenant in favour of his brother).
Chapter 29
Where the Wild Things Are
Ian N. Wood

Writing in 1981 John Block Friedman claimed, in his Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought, that ‘[t]he monstrous races were always far away’.¹ This point of view was echoed in 1996 in David Williams’ highly regarded Deformed Discourse.² For these two scholars monsters are never close at hand. This is the picture presented by our classical sources, which place the monstrous in India, Ethiopia or beyond the Caspian Gates, and it is also that presented in the late Middle Ages by the likes of John de Mandeville. From the seventh to the eleventh century, however, it was quite simply not the case. During the intervening period the monsters were to be found in the North, and especially on the islands of and in the territories surrounding the Baltic, which for some were a few hundred miles away, but for others were very close indeed. Why this should be is a matter of some interest. Clearly, the sudden arrival of the monsters in the North does not reflect an Ungeheuerwanderung: what is at issue is a question of the currency of certain categories at a particular period of time.

Perhaps the earliest text to place one of the monstrous races in the North is the infamous Cosmography of Aethicus Ister, for it includes the cynocephali within a whole clutch of exotic and uncivilized peoples.³ In the fictitious description of the journey round the world made by the Istrian (the Aethicus Ister of the title), the supposed author, who calls himself Jerome, talks of Ireland and Britain, the Orkneys and Germania, before he gets to Munitia – the name would suggest that the Isle of Man is referred to, but in the author’s imagination it was clearly a good deal closer to Germany.⁴ There he places the cynocephali:

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² David Williams, Deformed Discourse (Exeter, 1996), p. 14: ‘the monster existed, but far away, not here’.
they have the likeness of a dog’s head, but their other limbs are human in form; their hands and feet are like those of the other type of men ... The people of Germania, especially those who administer taxes and their tradesmen, say that they often travel by sea to their island, and that they call that people Canaanite. Those foreigners travel with bare legs; they preserve their hair, anointing it with oil giving off an excessive greasy smell; they lead the most foul life, eating unlawful meat of unclean quadrupeds, mice, moles and so forth. They have no worthy houses, but beams with woven tents, in wooded and out-of-the-way places, marshes and reedy spots, with numerous herds and flocks of birds and many sheep.\footnote{Aethicus, Cosmographia, 2, ed. Prinz, p. 114–16: 28, ed. Herren, pp. 26–9. The translation is my own. See Wood, ‘Aethicus Ister’, pp. 199–201; also Ian Nicholas Wood, ‘Categorising the cynocephali’, in Richard Corradini, Matthew Gillis, Rosamond McKitterick and Irene van Renswoude (eds), Ego Trouble, Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters, 15 (Vienna, 2010), pp. 125–36, at 127–30.}

Having dealt with the cynocephali, the author goes on to list a series of people he associates with Germania, including the Turchi, Alans, Meotae, Chugni (that is, Huns or Avars), Frigi (Frisians) and Danes.\footnote{Aethicus, Cosmographia, 2, ed. Prinz, p. 116: 29, ed. Herren, pp. 28–9; Wood, ‘Aethicus Ister’; Ian Nicholas Wood, ‘Beyond satraps and ostriches: political and social structures of the Saxons in the early Carolingian period’, in Dennis Green and Frank Siegmund (eds), The Continental Saxons from the Migration Period to the Tenth Century (Woodbridge, 2003), pp. 271–97, at 273–5.} After an excursus on people lacking the Old Testament,\footnote{Aethicus, Cosmographia, 3, ed. Prinz, pp. 117f.: 30, ed. Herren, pp. 28–31. Herren prefers habet to haben.} he returns to the northern peoples, and especially those to be found to the east of the Baltic: the Gripphas who live near the headwaters of the Don are ‘the most stupid of peoples, who are like kinds of wild beasts and ostriches or crocodiles and scorpions’.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 119–25: 34, ed. Herren, pp. 34–7; Ian Nicholas Wood and George Indruszewski, ‘An eighth-century written source on ships and navigation: the Cosmography of Aethicus Ister’, in Anton Englert and Athena Trakadas (eds), Wulfstan’s Voyage: The Baltic Sea Region in the Early Viking Age as seen from Shipboard, Maritime Culture of the North, 2 (Roskilde, 2009), pp. 220–34, at 222.} Having moved on to the Turks, the Cosmographer backtracks to deal with the islands of Viarce and Bridinno, to the north of Germania – he seems to be talking of Usedom and Wollin.\footnote{Aethicus, Cosmographia, 4, ed. Prinz, pp. 130–34: 37, ed. Herren, pp. 36–43.} This passage is followed by descriptions of the isles of Gadarontas and Meoparonitas, whose inhabitants are defined by their naval skills.\footnote{Aethicus, Cosmographia, 4, ed. Prinz, pp. 125–30: 35–6, ed. Herren, pp. 36–43.} Their neighbours, on the island of Riffarica, are presented as being adept at siege warfare.\footnote{Aethicus, Cosmographia, 4, ed. Prinz, pp. 130–34: 37, ed. Herren, pp. 36–43.} Information on the next two islands, Bizas and Crisolida seems to relate to what the Liber Historiae
Francorum has to say about Thuringian military tactics.\textsuperscript{12} All these, we are told, are the peoples that Alexander the Great wished to shut up behind the Caspian Gates, but was unable to.\textsuperscript{13} With this, the account moves further to the East, although a subsequent chapter adds further information on the ships of the North.\textsuperscript{14}

Where, when and why the \textit{Cosmography} was written is the subject of many incomplete debates. The latest editors have rejected the idea that it was written by an Irishman, and while the first has not provided an alternative scenario, the second has rather indulged in a flight of fantasy.\textsuperscript{15} The \textit{Cosmography} may be cited by a mid-seventh-century author,\textsuperscript{16} but it also seems to draw on a version of Pseudo-Methodius, which dates apparently to the very end of the same century: the only certain \textit{terminus ante quem} is the earliest manuscript witness, which is a fragment from the eighth century.\textsuperscript{17} The manuscript evidence, while it does not help identify an author, does indicate that the \textit{Cosmography} was read in Bavaria. Famously Heinz Löwe argued that the author was none other than Virgil of Salzburg, one of a number of mid-eighth-century bishops who came into conflict with Boniface,\textsuperscript{18} and while few would now accept that ascription, it would seem that the work was circulating in Virgil’s milieu.\textsuperscript{20} This would suggest that it was being read by churchmen interested in mission, and this may be of relevance for the excursus on those who did not have the Old Testament.\textsuperscript{21} Indeed, would-be missionaries might have been interested in what the Cosmographer had to say about non-Christian peoples. Given the fantasy and humour in the

\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Liber Historiae Francorum}, 22, ed. Bruno Krusch, \textit{MGH SS rerum Merovingicarum}, 2 (Hanover, 1885); Wood and Indruszewski, ‘Eighth-century written source on ships and navigation’, p. 223.


text it is difficult to argue that mission was a significant issue for the author, but the audience we can reconstruct from the manuscripts may have discovered different ideas from those that were originally intended.

Perhaps a more fruitful question is why should a late seventh- or early eighth-century author have placed so many bizarre peoples, in one instance monstrous, in North Germany and the Baltic? Here it may be significant that the Cosmography was written either just before or just as this region was attracting attention. At the end of the seventh century, or more probably in the eighth, Willibrord visited the Danish king Ongendus: he also landed on the island of Helgoland. Ongendus, or a near-contemporary, must have had a hand in the fortification of the Danewerk and in cutting the Kanhave canal. Although the Danewerk suggests a concern with the Saxons and beyond them the Franks, perhaps more important in terms of relations with the outside world is the evidence for Ribe, deliberately planned at this time, and, to judge by the coin finds, part of an international sceatta-economy. The chronological coincidence between the evidence for the development of Denmark in particular, and the interest shown in the North by the Cosmographer might suggest that the latter was responding to a growing awareness of change in the Baltic region. And while much of the information included in the Cosmography is taken from literary sources, whether from classical geography and Reiseromane, or from hagiography or the book of Leviticus, there are some points that seem to have a basis in reality. Thus the discussion of the cultivation of spelt on the Gadarontas islands is, at least, appropriate for the islands of the Baltic region. Above all, however, there is the extraordinary fact that the Cosmographer focuses a good deal on the different ships of the Baltic islands: again much of this information is stock-in-trade, though in some cases it may be possible to link specific details with what is now known of the maritime archaeology of the region.

28 Wood and Indruszewsky, ‘Eighth-century written source on ships and navigation’, p. 222.
29 Ibid.
these individual connections are not thought to be convincing, the simple point that a late seventh- or early eighth-century author chose to define the Baltic in terms of its shipping, a generation or two before the Vikings erupted onto the consciousness of western Europe, demands consideration.

The next major text to draw attention to the *cynocephali* is very much easier to assess. At some point in the second half of the ninth century, by which time the Viking impact was clear to all, Rimbert, disciple and successor of Anskar, missionary bishop of Hamburg-Bremen, wrote to Ratramnus, abbot of Corbie. He had become aware that *cynocephali* were present in areas close to the mission field, and he wanted to know how he should react, were he to come across such a beast. Was a *cynocephalus* an animal, in which case it might be killed? Or was it human, in which case it had to be converted? Although we do not have Rimbert’s letter, we do have Ratramnus’ reply, which makes it plain that a good deal of evidence on the lifestyle of the *cynocephalus* had been included. Rimbert had told Ratramnus that the dog-heads lived in communities, they ploughed and reaped, they were clothed and they obeyed the law. They also kept domestic animals. All this led Ratramnus, using criteria very close to those advanced by Levi-Strauss in his twentieth-century consideration of civilization, to conclude that they were rational beings. But Ratramnus went on to note that St Christopher was a *cynocephalus*, and indeed a giant, and that giants are attested in the Bible.

The account of the *cynocephali* supplied by Rimbert to Ratramnus was clearly extraordinarily level-headed. As far as we can tell, nothing in what he had to say was drawn from the abominations of Leviticus, in contrast to the account supplied in *Aethicus Ister*. The monstrosity of the *cynocephali* is a marginal issue, which could be ignored in the light of all the indications of their humanity – the modesty of their dress, their communal lifestyle, their use of law, their agriculture and their keeping of domestic animals. Whence then did Rimbert derive the notion that there were monstrous people living in the vicinity of his mission? Ever since the discovery of felt animal masks in the excavations of the harbour of Haithabu, historians have made a connection between those masks and the discussion of *cynocephali* in Ratramnus’ letter. Some have gone further and linked the wearing of masks to later accounts of groups of devotees of Odin, discussed most fully (and alarmingly) by Otto Höfler in his *Kultische Geheimbünde*

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31 Wood, ‘Categorising the *cynocephali*’, p. 133.


Visions of Community in the Post-Roman World

of 1934  – a work that endeared its author to Heinrich Himmler. More sober is recent work on the importance of dogs in Scandinavian funerary archaeology. There is, however, nothing in Ratramnus’ comments to suggest that cynocephali had any connection with religious practices – or indeed with violence, though Notker, in the Gesta Caroli, does use cynocephalus as a synonym for Viking. What we can be certain about, is that in the Ratramnus letter cynocephali are part of the discourse about mission. Their importance is that they are used to define the frontiers of humanity, which during the mid-ninth century was a matter of particular concern: the missionaries, with Isaiah’s prophecy that they had to evangelize to the ends of the world in mind, were only too conscious of the need to identify where those ends were to be found. The cynocephali provided one means of debating the matter.

The Haithabu masks could indicate that there was genuine observation at the core of information circulating about the cynocephali. Ratramnus’ discussion of the monsters also, of course, depended on a set of categories that were current in discourse. There were the classical geographers who provided information on the monstrous races; there was the Bible, which also incorporated standard rhetoric, on the dog as a creature to be despised, but also to be looked up to in its role as guard; and there was also hagiography. Ratramnus noted that Christopher was a cynocephalus – a view that is to be found in the earliest Latin Vita Christopheri, known from a Fulda manuscript of the eighth century, and thus certainly familiar to one group of missionaries. There the saint is said to have come from Canaan, and it may well be that the assonance of canis and Canaan is part of the explanation for his supposed dog-headedness. We have already seen that Aethicus Ister called cynocephali Canaanites. That the people of Canaan were monstrous was known from the Bible: when the Hebrew scouts set off for that country in the Book of Numbers (I: 32–3), we learn: Hic monstra sunt de genere giganteo.

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34 Otto Höfler, Kultische Geheimbünde der Germanen (Frankfurt, 1934).
40 Passio Christopheri, AASS, July [25th], vol. 6, pp. 146–9.
Interestingly Hrabanus Maurus, an exact contemporary of Rimbert, and indeed abbot of Fulda, seems to have been unaware of, or at least uninterested in any debate about the proximity of *cynocephali*. Indeed his view of the monstrous was largely that of Isidore of Seville, whose *Etymologies* are in many ways a seventh-century representation of classical learning. Large sections of Hrabanus’ *De Universo* are nothing other than a mystical commentary on the *Etymologies*. Hrabanus copies the Spaniard in stating that it was dangerous for pregnant women to see *cynocephali,* who he describes as being ape-like rather than canine. Although he provides allegorical commentary on dogs, he gives the *cynocephali* no theological gloss. He does, however, offer a moral interpretation of the *Gripes*, who are presumably to be equated with Aethicus’ *Griphas*: for Hrabanus, as for Isidore, these are not a people, but are clearly monsters, to be found in the Hyperborean mountains – and they represent the ferocity of persecutors and the elation of the proud. Hrabanus also offers a number of allegorical interpretations of giants, which are seen as representing a whole range of beings, ranging from Christ to the Devil.

The Ratramnus letter provides the most explicit discussion of *cynocephali* to have survived from the early Middle Ages, but the image of the dog-headed man does not thereafter vanish from missionary texts. At the end of the tenth century the author of the so-called first *Life of Adalbert of Prague* described the martyr’s persecutors as snarling like dogs. One might, of course, see this as being no more than an allusion to their gentile nature, following one of the allegorical meanings proffered by Hrabanus Maurus. Indeed, there was a long tradition of treating pagans like dogs: famously, in the ninth-century *Conversio*

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Bagoariorum et Carantanorum the priest Ingo forced his pagan visitors to eat outside, off dishes placed on the ground, while serving their Christian servants more decorously indoors.\(^49\) Equally prosaically a question of language may be involved. Perhaps the unknown speech of the Prussians was thought to be closer to the snarling of dogs than it was to any recognizable human language. Certainly animal comparisons in this period could be merely descriptive: the tenth-century author of the \textit{Vita Altera Bonifatii} describes the Frisians as living like fish, an image that reflects the landscape in which they lived.\(^50\)

Almost immediately after its composition, the first \textit{Life of Adalbert} was revised by Bruno of Querfurt, to say that the persecutors actually were dog-headed.\(^51\) Bruno’s reference to \textit{cynocephali} is all the more remarkable in that the author of the original \textit{Vita Adalberti} was writing in Rome,\(^52\) and was quite clearly a long way from the mission field. Bruno, by contrast, was a missionary, intent on carrying on Adalbert’s work. Yet, although he was very much closer to the world in which Adalbert died, it was Bruno, not his source, who thought that the missionary had actually come into contact with \textit{cynocephali}. Bruno himself would go on to work and die in the same area. His acceptance of the reality of the dog-heads is thus directly parallel to Rimbert’s.

Nearly a century later the \textit{cynocephali} were still thought to inhabit the North, as Jacques Le Goff noted,\(^53\) though Adam of Bremen rather oddly describes them not as having dog-heads, but rather as having their heads on their chests,\(^54\) which makes them similar to the monstrous \textit{Blemmyes} as represented by Isidore


\(^{52}\) It is possible that a version of the Life was written in the Aachen region, but it is clear that the author of the text on which Bruno based his account was working in Rome, probably in the monastery of Sts Bonifatius and Alexius on the Aventine: he has been identified as John Canaparius. For the Aachen/Liège Life, see Jürgen Hoffmann, \textit{Vita Adalberti. Früheste Textüberlieferungen der Lebensgeschichte Adalberts von Prag}, Europäische Schriften der Adalbert-Stiftung-Krefeld, 2 (Essen, 2005).


and his classical predecessors.\footnote{Isidore, Etymologiae, XI,3,17, ed. Lindsay.} But Adam does claim that they bark.\footnote{Adam, Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum, 4,19, ed. Trillmich and Buchner, p. 459.} He remarks that dog-heads have often been seen in captivity in Russia. He adds the further information that they are the result of sex between Amazons and passing merchants: the female children turn out to be beautiful, the male to be \textit{cynocephali}\footnote{Ibid.} – this, of course, takes us back to \textit{Aethicus Ister} and his insistence that there was no female equivalent to the male \textit{cynocephalus}.\footnote{Aethicus, Cosmographia, 2, ed. Prinz, p. 115.} The placing of the Amazons in the North, and their supposed intercourse with merchants may indicate that there is a grain of truth in what Adam is saying: perhaps merchants trading in the north Baltic came across social groups whose menfolk travelled north to the Sami during the summer, leaving what looked like communities of women.

A century and a half before Adam, Otto the Great had apparently placed the Amazons on the south coast of the Baltic, or so the Andalusian merchant Ibrāhīm b. Ya‘qūb claimed: ‘To the West of the Rus lies the city of women. They possess land and slaves. They get themselves impregnated by their servants, and if a woman has a male child, she kills it. They ride horses, go to war in person, and are brave and courageous. Ibrāhīm b. Ya‘qūb the Jew says “the account of this city is true: Otto king of the Germans told me about it.”’\footnote{Georg Jacob, Arabische Berichte von Gesandten an germanische Fürstenhöfe aus dem 9. und 10. Jahrhundert (Berlin, Leipzig, 1927), p. 14.} Otto must have derived his information in part from classical texts: the idea that Amazons killed their male children is already present, for instance, in Justin’s \textit{Epitoma Historiarum Philippicarum}, written in Late Antiquity.\footnote{Justin, Epitoma Historiarum Philippicarum, 2,4, ed. Marie-Pierre Arnaud-Lindet, Corpus Scriptorum Latinorum, \url{http://www.forumromanum.org/literature/justin/texte2.html} (accessed 7 September 2010).} This version of their behaviour also recurs in Orosius, and is taken up in the account of Aethicus Ister.\footnote{Orosius, Historia Adversus Paganos, 1,15, ed. Karl Zangemeister, CSEL, 5 (Vienna, 1882); Aethicus, Cosmographia, 6, ed. Prinz, pp. 179f.; see Wood, ‘Aethicus Ister’, pp. 201f.} We thus find that even one of the greatest of early medieval rulers had recourse to literary information on the monstrous races when considering peoples who dwelt only just beyond the horizon of his own kingdom.

Ibn Ya‘qūb’s text continues: ‘o the West of this city there is a Slavic tribe, called the Ûbûba. They live in the swampy regions to the North-West of the territory of Miesko. They have a great city on the ocean, which has twelve towers and a harbour, built out of logs. They fight against Miesko [the Polish ruler], and their forces are enormous. They have no king and will not be ruled by any single
person, but their rulers are the oldest amongst them.\textsuperscript{62} The editor thought that Úbūba should be emended to Ûnāna, and thus identified as Jumne or Jomsburg, which Adam describes as being opposite Birka.\textsuperscript{63} Whether or not this is right, the description of the swamp dwellers with their remarkable architecture seems to take us to the strange world of the southern Baltic presented by Aethicus.

Adam returns to the \textit{cynocephali} in his description of Scandinavia. Having described the city of Sigtuna, he explains that to the east of it lay the Riphaean mountains (which also appear in \textit{Aethicus}). There one could find Amazons, \textit{Cynocephali}, Cyclops and Ymantopods.\textsuperscript{64} This he had heard not from any old traveller, but from King Sven Estridson, who had himself spent time in exile among the Swedes! Exactly what Adam actually learnt from Sven is an interesting question, for much of the information he peddles clearly derives from classical sources, mainly Solinus, though, like \textit{Aethicus Ister} he transfers his information to a new northern setting. Was it only Adam who knew his classical geography? Or was Sven, like Otto I, equally informed?

We may guess that Adam’s archbishop, Liemar, knew his classical ethnography, for he decided to use Birka as a metropolitan see to deal with the errors of the \textit{Getae}, Dacians, Sarmatians, Alans, \textit{Neutri}, \textit{Geloni}, \textit{Anthropophagi} and Trogladites – a list of peoples derived from Martianus Capella’s \textit{De Nuptiis}.\textsuperscript{65} Although there are no \textit{cynocephali} in this list, Liemar expected a bishop of Birka to deal with Trogladites and \textit{Anthropophagi}, both of whom appear in lists of monstrous races.

Rimbert, Otto, Bruno, Sven Estridson, Liemar and Adam were northerners, or men who spent a good deal of time in the North. Yet they all placed monsters close to the world they inhabited. What three of them have to say about the \textit{cynocephali} in particular, therefore, stands in sharp contradiction to the notion that the monstrous races were always far away. Here, instead, they are only just over the horizon. In Rimbert’s case, they quite clearly have a function in determining the limits of missionary activity.\textsuperscript{66} In that of Bruno, we might additionally want to set his sense that there were \textit{cynocephali} in the area he hoped to evangelize in the context of his own very complex reaction to danger – for as an individual he personally was both pusillanimous and heroic.\textsuperscript{67} Adam’s comments on the presence of monstrous races in Sweden should doubtless be

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{63} Adam, \textit{Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum}, 4,20, ed. Trillmich and Buchner, p. 461.
\bibitem{64} Adam, \textit{Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum}, 4,25, ed. Trillmich and Buchner, p. 469.
\bibitem{67} Ibid., pp. 226–40; Ian Nicholas Wood, ‘Shoes and a fish dinner: the troubled thoughts of Bruno of Querfurt’, in Richard Corradini, Matthew Gillis, Rosamond
set alongside his rather puzzling presentation of Uppsala as a continuing centre of paganism— he would seem to have wished to see the land of the Swear as distinctly dangerous and exotic, perhaps for reasons to do as much with conflict within Christianity as with any real cultural difference between Uppland and Denmark. In all three cases, however, the monstrous seems to play a role in helping define a world that was newly opening up, and was not fully understood.

In this respect what these three authors have to say about the *cynocephali* seems comparable to what we have observed about the information on the Baltic regions to be found in *Aethicus Ister*. As we have seen, at approximately the time that Danes and the Slav peoples of the southern Baltic were starting to impinge on the consciousness of western Europeans, the *Cosmographer* transferred legendary peoples who the classical geographers had placed in the East, to territory that lay just over the Frankish, and particularly Carolingian, horizon. Thus, in precisely the centuries in which the western Europeans were becoming acquainted with the Baltic and Scandinavia, a number of authors came to envisage their New World as being peopled by strange and sometimes monstrous races.

After Adam, descriptions of the Baltic become tamer. Although both Helmold of Bosau and Henry of Livonia describe pagans, they do not resort to images of the monstrous to do so. And the nearest that Helmold comes to describing *cynocephali* is to be found in his account of a famous confrontation between Margrave Dietrich and the Slav prince Mistivoi. Having heard that the margrave had said ‘that a kinswoman of the duke should not be given to a dog’, Mistivoi is said to have answered: ‘it is only right that the highborn niece of a great prince should be married to a man of exalted rank and not, indeed, given to a dog. The great thanks that are given us for our service is that we are now considered dogs, not men. Well then, if the dog be hale he will take big bites.’ We are back in the world in which dog is a term of abuse, as it had been in the days of Dagobert, whose ambassador insulted Samo and his Slavs as dogs, and also of the Salzburg priest Ingo, as he dealt with the local pagan aristocracy.

When the monstrous races reappear it will not be over the near horizon, but in the far distance, as can be seen above all in *Mandeville’s Travels*. But just as

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there had been no original *Ungeheuerwanderung*, there had not been a reverse migration; rather the category of the monstrous was no longer central to a discourse about the limits of humanity. Western Europeans had ceased to use the exotic to help them categorize their neighbours. Yet, for a period of almost four centuries the monstrous had provided a useful category for debating a world with which western Europeans were coming into contact, but that was still only partially understood. In other words, the monstrous was very specifically not far away, but on the doorstep: the mixture of human and animal provided an entrée into a new world. Something similar would happen in the sixteenth century, when the discovery of the Americas would cause a resurgence in the use of the monstrous in discourse. The monstrous could be close at hand, and the varying location of such hybrid peoples as the *cynocephali* is a matter of some significance. Discourses (and they are plural) about monstrous neighbours might have a very different meaning from those in which the monsters were far distant.

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72 Ibid.
Conclusions
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Conclusions
Leslie Brubaker

In his opening remarks at the conference that generated most of the papers in this volume, Walter Pohl remarked that the meeting represented a first attempt to bring a comparative approach to the formation of communities and identities. I certainly learned a lot, and thank Walter – and all of the rest of the participants – for a fruitful and productive series of discussions.¹

In the papers delivered, and now published here, the comparative aspect remained largely implicit rather than explicit, but across the four days of the conference itself three broad themes emerged – ethnicity, religion and power – and this focus is represented in the published papers. In his half of the conclusions, Chris Wickham will concentrate on the theme of ethnicity, so I will limit my brief remarks on that topic to an area that he will not specifically address, and focus on religion and power.

ETHNICITY

With very few exceptions (and there are exceptions), the papers presented here that incorporate ethnicity explicitly into their arguments show how the concept was used to define ‘otherness’, to assign blame or to isolate groups. Ethnicity used in this way is a comparative term, but virtually always applied as a pejorative: ‘they’ are the problem; ‘we’ are the solution.

This sort of negative use of ethnicity is interesting both for what it tells us about apparent, and very blunt, commonalities across the early medieval world and for what it tells us about our own patterns of interpretation: to see ‘otherness’ as an analytical category was introduced into historians’ discourse thirty years ago via Edward Said’s Orientalism,² and came into common usage in the mid-1990s. ‘Otherness’ is only one star in the ethnicity constellation, but the fact that it surfaced so regularly in the papers and discussions at the conference and now in print – my ethnic identity is what yours is not – suggests that we need to rethink ethnicity as part of any vision of community: at the very least,

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¹ This text closely follows my oral presentation at the end of the original conference, though I have incorporated references to the papers collected in this volume.
our discussions have shown that we are talking about visions of communities. Chris will develop this point; I will now move on to religion and power.

RELIGION AND POWER

Religion was usually (though, again, not always) considered together with power, implicitly or explicitly, in the papers presented, and the two continue to be linked in the chapters in this volume, so I will consider them together here. This linkage is at least in part because the focus here has been pretty resolutely on elites: as Kate Cooper pointed out in Vienna, non-elite women, children and monks were notably absent from most of the discussions. So registers of power and religion have been less touched upon than they might have been in a conference about visions of communities – our visions have been top down rather than bottom up or, put in Christian religious terms, from the cathedra rather than from the nave. In various papers, religious communities and state communities have sometimes been set in opposition to each other (as in Augustine, as we learn from Richard Corradini), and sometimes the two are seen as hinged together (as Steffan Patzold argues convincingly for the Carolingians in Chapter 20); sometimes (as in Orthodox Syria, according to Bas ter Haar Romeny, Chapter 11) Christian dogma was seen as the most important component of communal identity; sometimes, as in Petra Sijpersteijn’s ninth-century Egypt, religion and identity walked hand in hand; and sometimes, as in Conrad Leyser’s analysis of the ninth-century letter to Boris-Michael of Bulgaria, dogma was irrelevant, subsumed by political power struggle.

Context is, clearly, important here. But beyond that, there is one point – made in passing by a number of contributors to this volume – that I would like to draw out here, by adding one nuance to the discussion.

The point that some of the contributions gathered here make explicitly, and others dance elegantly around, is that formulations of identity that have been conveyed to us in written form always present a framework for negotiation, not a monolithic dogmatic ideological definition. They are visions of communities, not blueprints for communal life. This has been particularly well brought out by the Carolingianists and Islamicists, but Byzantinists can think of comparable examples, especially those who deal with iconomachy, the image debate of the eighth and ninth centuries. It is to the Byzantine visions that I will now turn.

The Byzantine vision of communities that I will consider here is found in the vast body of pro-image literature produced from around 700 until around 850. There are two main textual strands woven into this vision of communities: dialogues addressed against heretics, on the one hand, and justifications for the veneration of images, on the other. In both cases, the ‘others’ threatening this ideal community are iconoclasts, Muslims and Jews. In the dialogues, the literary formulae used consistently originated in the anti-heretical literature that
proliferated in the seventh century, which was directed primarily against Jews; the main modulation found in the pro-image texts is precisely the introduction of images (icons) into the argument, which begins with Stephen of Bostra at the very end of the seventh century. In the justifications for religious imagery, the literary formulae depend on Byzantine understanding of logic and philosophy, with heavy reliance on Aristotle.

In both textual strands, though it is particularly clearly stated in the latter, the framework for negotiation is a theology of icons that states categorically that a painting is, simply, a painting. In this formulation, an icon is not a window to the saint represented – as we have come to think of the Byzantine icon – but a flat image ‘made with material colours’. From the Orthodox theological point of view, an icon cannot capture the essence of the saint represented because that would confuse reality (the saint him or herself) with painting (the icon) and lead to charges of idolatry. The Orthodox theological icon must be an artefact, a material object to contemplate. It is through this contemplation that the Orthodox worshipper is able to come closer to God: the agent is the person praying, not the icon. The distinction between the material, artefactual icon and the saint portrayed is clearly expressed in the Acts of the Seventh Ecumenical Council, held at Nicaea in 787 (the image resembles the saint ‘in name only, and not in nature’), as well as by all the major churchmen of the period: it is particularly well expressed by John of Damascus (ca. 675–ca. 750), Nikephoros (patriarch 806–15), and Theodore of Stoudion (759–826). It is a theological

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6 The phrase quoted appears – in various versions – throughout the writings of the period: for examples and detailed discussion, see Charles Barber, Figure and Likeness: On the Limits of Representation in Byzantine Iconoclasm (Princeton, NJ, 2002), esp. pp. 122–3.


point of view quite similar to that expressed by western ecclesiastics from the time of Gregory the Great onwards. But the status of this communal theory as a framework for negotiation is evident from other visions of this same community, written by the same authors, where it becomes clear that the icon-as-artefact is not only a negotiable position, it can be flatly contradicted.

For in Byzantium there is also another strand of thought, this one radically different from the theological position adopted officially by the church at Nicaea in 787. The same learned churchmen who professed belief in the icon-as-artefact also, and without any apparent sense of contradiction, invested icons with the real presence of the saint portrayed. In these circumstances the icon works like a relic, standing in for the saint him- or herself. Theodore of Stoudion, a monk whose strict adherence to Orthodox dogma got him into considerable trouble with imperial and ecclesiastical authorities during the course of his life, is very clear in his theological writings, and in letters to other churchmen, on the distinction between a ‘natural image’ (for which his example is the relationship between God the Father and Christ the Son, who share a single nature but are two persons) and an ‘imitative image’ such as an icon, where there is a ‘difference between the image and the person represented’. And yet in a letter to his friend, the official John, he praised him for substituting an icon of St Demetrios for a human godfather, and wrote unequivocally that ‘here the bodily image took the place of its model ... here the great martyr was spiritually present in his own image and so received the infant’. The icon of theological discourse does not share the essence of the saint portrayed, but is to be contemplated; the icon of lived experience shares the essence of the saint portrayed, and is to be interacted with. The icon-in-theory and the icon-in-practice are quite different beasts which co-exist, apparently happily, in the Byzantine literature that shapes the way we understand Byzantine visions of communities.

We are talking about two registers here: an official, theological, framework that co-existed with a different, daily life framework. The two were inexorably mixed: the ways that icons were used in practice generated the way that icons became legitimized in theory, and the theory then justified the practice in a reinforcing circle of practice, belief and dogma. This supposes a constant renegotiation between the theory/theology owned by churchmen and the practice of these same churchmen and, so far as we can determine, everyone else as well. This process of negotiation is presumably much clearer to us, watching it through our analytical historical lens, than it was to the Byzantines who lived it. But it is precisely that level of habitus – of lived experience so ingrained that

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our sources rarely tell us about it except, like Theodore on the godfather icon of St Demetrios, in passing, as an aside – that is at the core of community in practice, and on which visions of community (the theory of community) are built.

That, at least, is what the comparisons implicit in the papers presented in this volume have taught me.
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Conclusions
Chris Wickham

This conference has been very stimulating for all of us. We learned new things; and what remains with me, at least, is the elegance of so many of the papers. We have access, as a result, to many new possibilities for comparison. I cannot cover them all, but I was most struck, for example, by the homologies between the Armenian sense of ‘Armenian-ness’, set against their near complete political disunity (‘being Armenian’ was a very strong ideology, but did not help at all as an ideological weapon to collect the Armenians together politically (Lynn Jones, Chapter 13; see also Ralph-Johannes Lilie, Chapter 17), and the exact Irish and Welsh equivalents – ‘being Irish’ was an equally strong sentiment, at least once the Vikings began to attack and thereafter, but it did not serve political unity there either (Angela Gleason; see also Catherine McKenna for the Welsh, Chapter 8). And I was above all struck by the multiple forms of the crystallization of identities – using the plural, as Leslie Brubaker has – in the ‘Abbāsid Caliphate. This will be my way into a wider set of comments about the conference as a whole.¹

Let me begin with a simple list of the different ‘Abbāsid identities presented and discussed here. They include the separate identities of neo-Persians in the army, in the bureaucracy and in their former aristocratic strongholds (Hugh Kennedy, Chapter 18); the identity of the Turks in the army – here this identity was not new but, as with the Persians, was newly crystallized, because these Turks were not part of the old ruling elite of the period of the Kül-Tigin inscription, and indeed were initially almost wholly déclassé (Andrew Marsham); the identity of the West Syrian Christians, which was changing from a religious into an ethnic identity (Bas ter Haar Romeny, Chapter 11); an East Syrian identity largely focused on cities (Richard Payne, Chapter 12); the identity of the Arabs in Egypt, which formed in a provincial space thanks to the symbolic appropriation of land, and became a provincial rather than an ethnic identity as a result (Petra Sijpesteijn – there are plenty of western parallels here); the changing identity of individual Arab tribes, constantly forming and reforming even at this late stage

¹ This conclusion is essentially the written version of my notes for my spoken comments at the Vienna conference. I have updated it to fit the written version of the papers, but it maintains the oral style of the comments I gave at the time. It refers to some papers that were not in the end submitted, but they formed an important part of the intellectual fabric of the conference, so deserve reference here.
(Robert Hoyland); and a wider set of religious identities crystallizing around autonomous systems of laws, I guess in effect in a proto-millet system (Michael Morony, Chapter 9). These manifold forms of local, often ethnic, community identities are all to be set against the traditional identities of Arab ruling groups, but they were, of course, also by now accompanied by a steady Arabization, and this raises the problem of the fate of an overarching Arab identity in the ‘Abbāsid period: how it would be able to construct itself if other communities were successfully trying to join it (Michael Cook; Michael Morony, Chapter 9). And, finally, what space in all this was there for a specifically Muslim identity, how conscious and uniform was it in this period, and did it divide up differently in the context of these other Muslim and non-Muslim realities?

One important point is that all these varied identities have to be seen as parts of different registers. Not only were there doubtless many other identities in a political system as large and complex as that of the ‘Abbāsids, but one could beyond doubt hold many of them at once. Identity could be provided by city, province, family/tribe, ethnicity, language, a memory of a vanished past, religion, a sense of belonging to an overarching empire (as Roman ‘imperial’ identity had provided in an earlier age) – and also, though these were not discussed here, trading/artisanal/professional groupings, gender and, not least, class. Of all of these, I want here to focus on ethnicity, for it seems to me the most problematic. I shall discuss it for the rest of my comments.

Since I am a western early medievalist, the issue of ethnicity is of course familiar to me. It has been contested a lot, often fairly unhelpfully – exactly why it is such a hot topic in fifth- and sixth-century studies is worth a study in itself, for no one in the rest of Late Antique studies gets as upset about anything as do the five or six schools of late antique/early medieval ‘Germanic’ ethnicity. We did not hear so very much about this issue here, perhaps because it was in Vienna, the home of ethnogenesis, taken as a given; but this is not in itself a problem for me, for, as it happens, the school of thought on the issue that is least far from my own is that of the Viennese. All the same, what actually is ‘ethnicity’? Bas ter Haar Romeny was the person who tried to characterize it in most detail here (Chapter 11, though see also Walter Pohl (Introduction) and Andre Gingrich (Chapter 1) for briefer comments, especially Pohl’s neat phrase ‘ethnic groups are secondary social groupings that are believed to be primary’). The former’s characterization – as he implies, more an ideal type than a definition (a point I will come back to) – taken from Hutchinson and Smith, will do as well as any as a starting point: a name; myths of ancestry or common origin; shared historical memories; a link with a territory; a common culture (including religion and language); and a sense of solidarity (is that Ibn

\[\text{Reference: Richard W. Bulliet,} \quad \text{Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period (Cambridge, Mass., 1979).}\]

\[\text{Reference: I discuss the issue in Chris Wickham,} \quad \text{‘Cosa c’è di “germanico” nei regni romano-germanici?’}, \quad \text{to appear as a web article.}\]
Conclusions

Khaldūn’s ‘aṣabiyya? That would also fit with Pohl’s insistence on ‘an ingrained common nature’). We can manipulate this characterization – I’ll come to how shortly – because it does, indeed, seem to cover most of the bases, as long as we never forget that every element can be constructed, often from scratch or nearly, as separate social groups negotiate constantly, situationally, though self-refashioning, with the changing socio-political world that surrounds them. I would add that even language can be constructed; Hugh Kennedy showed it for neo-Persian. The different fates of Latin and Arabic show it very clearly too – Latin was beginning to be refigured as a different language from the Romance volgari already in the ninth century, whereas Classical Arabic remains generally constructed as, and therefore actually is, ‘the same’ language as the mutually incomprehensible spoken versions of it across the Arab world.

One of ethnicity’s most important characteristics is that it is very often asymmetrical. When the Romans confronted the ‘barbarian’ gentes, in their own self-imagery, and thus, very often, ours too, Romana was not ‘ethnic’ (see for the other end of the empire Hartmut Leppin, Chapter 14, and John Haldon and Hugh Kennedy, Chapter 18), but the identity of the gentes was. Indeed, as Helmut Reimitz (Chapter 7) and Steffen Patzold (Chapter 20) showed in different ways, the Franks themselves had to face problems with the strictly ethnic nature of Frankishness once there was no longer a Roman Empire to define themselves against. But this sort of asymmetry is also one of the problems with ethnicity. Quite a lot of the papers here spent time discussing how different social groups ‘became ethnic’ in their consciousness, or – this was more implicit – ‘ceased to be ethnic’. Three examples out of several were Fritz Mitthof’s discussion of the increasing use of ethnic elements as part of Roman provincial identity (Chapter 3), Bas ter Haar Romeny’s analysis of West Syriac Christian consciousness turning ethnic by 1000 (Chapter 11) and Conrad Leyser’s citation, picking up from Helmut Reimitz, of Tim Reuter’s distinction between ethnogenesis and ‘natiogenesis’ in the post-Carolingian period – by when, they would argue, the French and German versions of the Franks were slowly moving out of ethnic and towards national identity.

I am undecided as to whether I think this latter form of analysis is a useful way of thinking or not. It is useful in that it shows how the internal structures of identity can change, which indeed they can. It is easy to see how the localization of a religious identity and its attachment to memories of common origin could push it in an ‘ethnic’ direction; the same could perfectly well happen to, for example, an imperial identity. And this allows us to ask other questions, not actually asked here but implicit in the discussions: for example, what was, or would have been, needed to make ‘Roman’ an ethnic, rather than an imperial, term? When the Aquitainians called themselves Romani, which they did (sometimes) by the seventh and eighth centuries, what did they mean by that, surviving Roman legitimacy or local collectivity, and, if the latter (which is most likely), was that enough to make it ‘ethnic’? Maybe it was, indeed, though one would have to deploy as clearly characterized an ideal type as one could to argue
it. Perhaps a more problematic example is, however, what about the Roman-ness of the inhabitants of Rome, after the empire ended? Because that raises something that I see as a real problem: can cities see themselves ethnically? Or, better, what would it mean if we claimed that the inhabitants of any given city saw themselves as an ethnic group? The thirteenth-century Florentines, for example, had a common name and location, a myth of common and exclusive ancestry (like many, they saw themselves as the ‘true’ Romans, as opposed to the Fiesolani, supporters of Catiline – and implicitly as against the Romans of Rome too); common memories for sure; a common culture, religion, language (although these at least were shared with their neighbours); and very strong solidarity indeed. So, were the Florentines an ethnic group? And, if not, why not?

If not, is this because ethnicity is in reality more, as one might say, tribal? But, if so, then why do we have difficulty, shown several times here, about using ethnic terminology for each Arab tribe, even though, as Robert Hoyland said, they show numerous ‘ethnogenetic’ tendencies – the Arab tribes are less different from various Germanic groups than people often say – and even though a pan-Arab consciousness seems very weak before Muhammad (see Jan Retsö, Chapter 4), almost (though not quite) as non-existent as a pan-Germanic consciousness? And here is the danger: that ethnicity might, in the medieval period at least, become something that marks northern Europeans out as something special, which other people are not allowed to have, for reasons that are subconscious and not fully scientific. Like nationalism and national consciousness, which are fought over between and inside too many national groups (are the Catalans allowed to have it; if so, are the Asturians?), and are also fought over between modernists and medievalists (are medieval societies allowed to have it?), with medievalists simultaneously trying to fight the teleological discourse of modernity and to join it.

I am, therefore, uncertain whether the usefulness of ethnicity outweighs its dangers. But what is clear to me more than anything else is that, if we use the concept at all, we have to use it the same way in every society: as a neutral scientific term, stripped of as many implicit values as we can manage; and we have to accept that, if we do, we might end up saying that thirteenth-century Florentines did, indeed, have an ethnic consciousness.

My final point is that, if we do use ethnicity as a scientific term, we have to be more flexible about how to use it. Walter Pohl said at the start that ethnicity has not been discussed comparatively very often. He is right; and – as Leslie Brubaker has also observed – there was not much comparative discussion in this congress either (Andre Gingrich, Chapter 2; Stefan Esders, Chapter 19; and Michael Morony, Chapter 9 are laudable exceptions here). This is, really, because comparison is hard; and it is above all hard when one does cultural history (I have been a comparative historian for many years, but my field is socio-economic history, where it is easier). If, however, you want to adopt the comparative method, I would argue very strongly for adopting a set of Weberian ideal types, such as the one for ethnicity characterized here, for these seem to me to be far more useful,
for all the reasons Max Weber himself set out, than simple definitions. Ideal types are abstractions from real societies, which you can then compare several diverging real societies with, which thus allows you to compare these with each other; and you can do that even though each real society will have only some of the elements you wish to stress, and not necessarily all of them. So, for example, sticking with ethnicity in the early medieval West, we can discuss not only 'easy' groups like the Burgundians or Visigoths, but also the Heruls, who meet some of Hutchinson and Smith's different elements of ethnicity but not all, because they were scattered across several locations; or the Jews, for whom, obviously, the same was true (Wolfram Drews, Chapter 21); or indeed the Franks, who had very many elements of the ideal type, but did not all (after around 550, at least) speak one language, a fact that does not seem to have bothered them at all. This seems to me the most useful way to locate ethnicity, ethnic identity, the ethnic discourse. If we employ it, then, instead of saying 'Is this a real ethnic identity or not?', we would say 'What elements of ethnic identity does this social group stress, and how/why do they do so?' Weber said that ideal types are only worth keeping if they are useful; you would have to see whether an ethnic ideal type – or this version of it – actually did explain anything for you, or actually did allow you to compare usefully, and if it did not, then it would be best to abandon it. But it might allow you to privilege its usefulness, rather than its dangers.

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