

The Making and Qualities of Ostrogothic Kings in the Decade after Theoderic

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Writing towards the end of the nineteenth century, the English historian Thomas HODGKIN described the mechanism by which, at a time of crisis for the Ostrogothic state in 536, the ineffectual king Theodahad was deposed and replaced by Vitigis, a man thought more likely to provide effective leadership:

»That which our ancestors would have called a Folc-mote, an assembly of the whole Gothic nation under arms, was convened [in August 536], by what authority we know not, to deliberate on the perilous condition of the country.«

Despite his personal enthusiasm for the great king Theoderic, HODGKIN envisages the Goths as having been unhappy during his reign:

»Yet if there were any tradition of a healthy national life lingering among the warriors whom he had settled in Italy, they must have been continually wounded by what they saw and what they heard at the Court of Ravenna [...] we are sure [...] that [the words of Cassiodorus and others] must have grated on the ears of all that was self-respecting and genuinely Teutonic in the countrymen of Theoderic.«

Against the effusions of such Roman authors as Cassiodorus HODGKIN sets a quality one is surprised to find apparently endorsed by a Quaker, »that free heroic spirit, that love of danger and adventure which rang in every Gothic battle song.« He envisages »the nation« as having come together, and says of Vitigis: »With all his incapacity he was loyal to the nation, and the nation was loyal to him.« The elevation of Vitigis exemplified the tradition that operated even in cases of succession from a father to an eldest son: »the nation chose, the nation raised the first-born on the shield, the nation was loyal to him«.¹⁾

1) Thomas HODGKIN, *The Imperial Restoration (Italy and her Invaders 4)*, Oxford ²1896, p. 61 f., 70; the first edition was published in 1885. HODGKIN describes a folc-mote at *The Ostrogoths (Italy and her Invaders 3)*, Oxford 1896, pp. 234–36. Any tradition: *Imperial Restoration*, pp. 245, 247. Free heroic spirit: *ibid.* p. 249. Elsewhere, HODGKIN refers to the meeting that elevated Vitigis as »a nation-parliament«: *Theoderic*, New York 1891, p. 324.

HODGKIN's interest in such things as battle songs and a nation is very much of its time and place. And his concern to find some institutional authority for a gathering of Goths that could be placed in some relation to the governance of his English ancestors parallels the kind of work that William STUBBS had been carrying on. His famous *Select Charters and other Illustrations of English Constitutional History* begins with »Extracts Illustrative of the Early Polity of the English«, but the earliest extract turns out to be a passage from Caesar's »De Bello Gallico«, which is followed by a longer one from Tacitus' »Germania«, and only after presenting these does STUBBS pass on to early English laws²⁾. Every generation reads history in the light of its own preoccupations, and HODGKIN's approach reflects a feeling that the great Reform Acts of Victorian Britain were the culmination of national tendencies long at work among the English, while an interest in the political life of »our Teutonic forefathers« was one HODGKIN shared with his fellow Englishman Charles KINGSLEY, whose series of lectures published in 1864 as »The Roman and the Teuton« began: »I wish in this first lecture to give you some general conception of the causes which urged our Teutonic race to attack and destroy Rome. I shall take for this one lecture no special text-book: but suppose you all to be acquainted with the »Germania« of Tacitus, and with the 9th Chapter of GIBBON.« To some extent HODGKIN's concerns can be placed beside those of the editors of the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* (who can forget their proud motto, *Sanctus amor patriae dat animum?*)³⁾. The interests of the nineteenth century are very evident here; the approach GIBBON had taken to the deposition of Theodahad a century earlier was different⁴⁾. But HODGKIN gives us a way into the themes of this present paper. For the brief reign of Theodahad and his replacement by Vitigis raise interesting questions as to how kingship was viewed among the Ostrogoths some four decades after their settlement in Italy. I shall suggest that the approach taken towards this by HODGKIN, and a number of more recent scholars, is seriously misleading, and that the notions of kingship current among the Ostrogoths at the time make better sense when located against a different background.

Despite its extraordinary success, the Ostrogothic state established in Italy by Theoderic had a fatal flaw, the failure of its founder to produce a son who would be his heir. As early as 507, Ennodius produced at the climax of his panegyric on Theoderic a passage of

2) William STUBBS, *Select Charters and Other Illustrations of English Constitutional History from the Earliest Times to the Reign of Edward the First*, Oxford ⁸1905.

3) The Rechtsschule that originated in nineteenth century German scholarship is recently discussed by Paul J. E. KERSHAW, *Peaceful Kings. Peace, Power and the Early Medieval Political Imagination*, Oxford 2012, p. 70.

4) Teutonic forefathers: HODGKIN, *Ostrogoths* (as n. 1), p. 238. A century earlier: Edward GIBBON, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. J. B. Bury, 4, London 1898, p. 310. Indeed, Hodgkin's approach was more Germanic than that of his German counterpart Ludo Moritz HARTMANN, *Geschichte Italiens im Mittelalter 1, Das Italienische Königreich*, Leipzig 1897, p. 264.

utter poignancy expressing the wish that a purple offshoot from the king would extend the benefits of a golden age and that an heir to his kingdom would play in his lap⁵). This deficiency seems never to have been remedied, so that following Theoderic's death in 526, power passed to his daughter Amalasuintha, herself by then a widow, who exercised authority on behalf of her son Athalaric. We may note in passing the laconic descriptions of Jordanes, according to whose ›Getica‹ Theoderic, calling together the Gothic counts and the leaders among his people, established Athalaric as king (*constituit regem*), while, according to the version in his ›Romana‹, Athalaric succeeded the dead Theoderic *ipso ordinante*. HODGKIN's description of this process, »The presentation to the Gothic warriors was a sort of recognition of their slumbering right to choose the successor to the throne«⁶), is highly questionable, there being not the slightest hint in Jordanes of any slumbering right. Athalaric was later remembered as having been free of official concerns because of his young age, and Procopius told a famous story according to which he came under bad influences and fell into evil ways, taking to drink and women. While it is not clear how literally this tale is to be taken, he certainly died in 534⁷). Later in that year Amalasuintha, who had begun to style herself *regina* following the death of her son, associated another member of the family, Theodahad, with her on the throne, whereupon he became *rex*⁸). There were plenty of recent imperial precedents for a woman acting in such a way: Pulcheria chose Marcian to succeed her brother Theodosius II 450 and married him; Verina, the widow of Leo I, proclaimed her brother Basiliscus emperor in 475; Verina's daughter Ariadne, the widow of Zeno, chose Anastasius to succeed her husband and married him in 491. Similarly, among the Lombards one thinks of Rosamund, unhappily married to king Alboin, marrying the man she had prompted to kill her husband in 572 and later planning to murder him so she could marry someone else, of queen Theodelinda taking Agilulf as her husband and making him king following the death of Authari in 590, and Gundoberga, the daughter of Theodelinda by her second husband, marrying Rothari after the death of her husband Arioald. In some cases the hands of these women may have been forced, and Amalasuintha was presumably trying to shore up her position in making Theodahad *rex*, but there was a clear principle that a close female associate of a dead king could exercise her own choice and pass the royal power to another

5) Ennodius, *Panegyricus*, ed. F. VOGEL (MGH Auct. Ant. 7), Berlin 1885, 93, going on to assert that such a *sacer parvulus* would be received with joy. On the date of this work, J. SUNDWALL, *Abhandlungen zur Geschichte des ausgehenden Römertums*, Helsinki 1919, p. 43 f.

6) Jordanes: *Convocans Gothos comites gentisque suae primates Athalaricum [...] regem constituit*, *Getica*, ed. Th. MOMMSEN (MGH Auct. Ant. 5), 304; cf. *Romana*, 367. HODGKIN, *The Ostrogoths* (as n.1), p. 527.

7) *otioso pro parvula aetate rege*, in a work of Cassiodorus, ed. Th. MOMMSEN (MGH Auct. Ant. 12), 476.15 f. Procopius: *Gothic War*, ed. and transl. H. B. DEWING, London and Cambridge Mass. 1919, 1.2.1–20, 3.10, 4.4.

8) Amalasuintha was Theodahad's *creatrix*, according to an addition to the *Chronicle of Marcellinus Comes*, ed. Th. MOMMSEN (MGH Auct. Ant. 11), *additamentum*, 534.

man. Yet Amalasuinthia did not take the step of marrying Theodahad; rather, we know from the letters of Cassiodorus that she made him a sharer in the government (*consors regni*)⁹.

The position to which Theodahad was admitted almost has the feel of a formal title, and there is ample Roman precedent for it. Suetonius describes Titus declaring his brother his *consortem successoremque*, and Tacitus uses the term *consortem imperii*¹⁰. The position of *consors regni* was to be a familiar one among the Visigoths, among whom Liuvigild was to make his sons Reccared and Herminigild his *consortes regni*, and Ricimer was received *in consortio regni* by Suintila¹¹. But we owe to the work of Gunther WOLF on what he terms ›Mitherrschaft‹ the acute observation that formal sharing of power was unknown among the Germans until the sixth century¹². (I might add that his discussion of the origins of the persecution of Jews in the West during the sixth and seventh centuries is similarly persuasive, except for his attributing significance to the teaching of Arius that Christ was ›similar‹ to the Father being closer to Jewish belief about God, which it is hard to see as being relevant. His ›Arian‹ sentiments did not stop Constantius from legislating against Jews; moreover, the jump between Arius and the post-Roman Germanic states is a long one.) While I wonder whether the short-lived agreement to share power concluded by Theoderic and Odovacer in 493 might be a slightly earlier example of ›Mitherrschaft‹¹³, there can be no doubt that Amalasuinthia followed a practice that would have been familiar to her contemporaries, and which they would have seen as Roman rather than Germanic.

The arrangement between Amalasuinthia and Theodahad turned out to be short lived. The new *consors* turned against his patron, having her banished to an island in lake Bolsena in Etruria, where she was murdered in 535, in the time-honoured location of a bath; according to Gregory of Tours, admittedly not the most reliable source, on Theodahad's orders she was confined to a steam bath where she fell to the floor and died, a narrative that recalls the fate of Fausta at the hands of Constantine some two hundred years earlier¹⁴. But he was not long to survive his victim. The stunning success of Justinian's in-

9) *Elegimus* [...] *consortem regni nostri*: Cassiodorus, *Variae*, (as n. 7), 10.3.2; *consortem me regni sui*, *ibid* 10.4.1.

10) Suetonius, *Titus*, 9 (ed. and transl. H. AILLOUD, Paris 1964); Tacitus, *Libri Historiarum*, 3.75, ed. H. HEUBNER, Stuttgart 1978. Note too in the Vulgate: *consortem regni nostri Esther* (Esth. 16:13).

11) Liuvigild and his sons: John of Biclarum, *Chronicon*, ed. J. CAMPOS, Madrid 1960, s.a. 573. Suintila and Ricimer: Isidore of Seville, *Historia Gothorum*, ed. Th. MOMMSEN (MGH Auct. Ant. 11), 65.

12) Gunther WOLF, *Mittel der Herrschaftssicherung in den Germanenreichen des 6. und 7. Jahrhunderts*, in: *ZRG Germ.* 105 (1988), p. 214–38 at 216; Arius' understanding of the relationship between Christ and God is touched on at 237.

13) Procopius, *Gothic War* (as n. 7), 1.1.24; John of Antioch, ed. C. MUELLER, *Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum* 4, Paris 1868, frag. 214a.

14) Jordanes reports that Amalasuinthia was *in balneo strangulata*, *Getica* (as n. 6), 307; Gregory's version occurs within a garbled account he gives at *Libri Historiarum*, ed. B. KRUSCH et al. (MGH SS rer. Me-

vasion of Africa led that emperor to think on a wider scale than he may have hitherto, and Belisarius was sent to invade Italy. It proved beyond the competence of Theodahad to deal with such an emergency. Following the loss of Naples in 536 he was replaced as king by Vitigis, a man with no connection to the family of Theoderic¹⁵). Vitigis is represented as having distinguished himself in fighting against Gepids in 504, but received no preferment from Theoderic; only in the reign of Athalaric did he receive advancement, by being made *spatharius*, and served Theodahad as *armiger*; we may note in passing that there are similarities between his elevation and that of Theudis, a former *armiger* of Theoderic, to become king of the Visigoths in 531¹⁶). Let us consider the manner in which Vitigis became king.

Almost all we know of his accession comes from just two sources¹⁷). The first of them is passage in a letter written by Cassiodorus in the name of Vitigis shortly after the elevation of the new king that was addressed to all the Goths (*Universis Gothis*):

»[...] our kinsmen the Goths, amid a fence of circling swords, raising us in ancestral fashion (*more maiorum*) upon a shield, have by divine guidance bestowed on us the kingly dignity, thus making arms the emblem of honour to one who has earned all his renown in war. For know that not in the corner of a presence-chamber, but in wide-spreading plains I have been chosen King; and that not the dainty discourse of flatterers, but the blare of trumpets announced my elevation, that the Gothic people, roused by the sound to a kindling of their inborn valour, might once more gaze upon a soldier king. Too long indeed have these brave men, bred up amidst the shock of battle, borne with a sovereign who was untried in war; too long have they laboured to uphold his dubious fame, though they might presume upon their own well-known valour.«¹⁸)

It is a fine piece of rhetoric in which Cassiodorus shows himself a spin doctor adept at accommodating himself to new political realities. It was certainly a shift in the way in which he presented the reigning monarch. In about 533 Cassiodorus had written in the name of Athalaric: »The grammatical art is not used by barbarous kings: it abides pecu-

rov. 1), 3.31. On Constantine arranging for the murder of his wife Fausta by having her placed in a hot bath, see the sources listed and discussed by C. M. ODAHL, *Constantine and the Christian Empire*, London and New York 2004, p. 353 f n. 14. In 668 the emperor Constans would be murdered while taking a bath in Syracuse: Theophanes, *Chronographia*, ed. C. DE BOOR, Leipzig 1883, AM 6160.

15) Patrick AMORY, *People and Identity in Ostrogothic Italy, 489–554*, Cambridge, 1997, p. 161 f.

16) Fights Gepids: Procopius, *Gothic War* (as n. 7), 1.11.5; Cassiodorus, *Orat. 2* (as n. 7), p. 473–76. Failure to receive advancement is explicitly mentioned by Cassiodorus: *persequamur itaque ordinem rerum, ne, dum te tardius remuneratum esse referimus, regnatorem illius temporis accusemus* (p. 476.6–9; such indirect criticism of Theoderic is extraordinary.) Appointed *spatharius*: Cassiodorus, *Variae* (as n. 7), p. 476.9–20; *armiger*: Jordanes, *Getica* (as n. 6), 309. The career of Theudis is set out in J. MARTINDALE ed., *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire vol. 2*, Cambridge 1980, p. 1112 f.

17) In addition to the accounts of Cassiodorus and Procopius, it is briefly mentioned by Jordanes, *Getica* (as n. 6), 309 f., and the *Additamenta to the Chronicle of Marcellinus comes*, (as n. 8), s.a. 536.

18) Cassiodorus, *Variae* (as n. 7), 10.31, transl. Thomas HODGKIN, *The Letters of Cassiodorus*, London 1886.

liarily with legitimate sovereigns. The nations have arms and other things: the lords of the Romans alone have eloquence.¹⁹⁾ Presumably some would have felt that, after their losses in the initial stages of the Gothic War, a *barbarus rex* would have been a good idea. While in the earlier letter the trumpet is described as sounding (*classicum canit*) for the legal fray in the forum, in the latter trumpets have a different function, for it was their blare (*tubis concrepantibus*) that announced the elevation of Vitigis. Now, with the army of Belisarius already making headway in Italy, it was arms that were stressed, and in a fragment of an oration honouring Vitigis Cassiodorus explained that the only person who could have been elected was one who had been shown to have frequently prosecuted wars²⁰⁾. Cassiodorus did not survive for over thirty years as a propagandist for the Ostrogothic state by always telling the same story. He represents Vitigis as asserting to the Goths that he acted for the *utilitas* of his people. We may be inclined to see Theodahad as an early example of the medieval *rex inutilis*²¹⁾, but the replacement of a king who had shown himself useless by a military man was no more extraordinary at that time than a queen's taking a *consors regni*. Just five years earlier Hilderic, the elderly king of the Vandals described by Procopius as having been little interested in war, was deposed after their army had been defeated by Moors and replaced by another member of the royal family, Gelimer, a proven warrior who came to power with the support of the Vandal nobility²²⁾. But again, it is the Byzantine parallels that are more significant, there having been any number of successful or attempted coups mounted by military men, such as Basiliscus (augustus 475–476), intriguingly near in time to that mounted by Odovacer in Italy in 476²³⁾, and the rebellions of Vitalian against Anastasius early in the sixth century. We may note too the case of another general from the East, Aspar. At the beginning of the sixth century Theoderic reminded bishops meeting in synod in Rome of the senate having said to Aspar that he should become emperor; no coup took place, but should the senate have acted in this way, a date of 457 seems likely²⁴⁾. We shall return to the military basis of Vitigis' coup.

Our second source for the elevation of Vitigis is a passage in the great history of Justinian's wars written by Procopius. He describes the Goths being amazed at Theodahad's

19) *Hac non utuntur barbari reges: apud legales dominos manere cognoscitur singularis. Arma enim et reliqua gentes habent: sola reperitur eloquentia, quae Romanorum dominis obsecundat*, *ibid.*, 9.21.4. Such an emphasis may not have been unexpected in a letter addressed to the senate of Rome.

20) *Non potuissent eligere, nisi qui probetur saepius bella peregisse*, Cassiodorus, (as n. 7), p. 479.17–19; cf. *plus contingit a pugnatoribus prodi quam potuit a laudatore narrari*, *ibid.* p. 476.2–5.

21) *ad gentis utilitatem respiciet omne quod agimus*, *ibid.* 5.31.4.

22) Procopius, *Vandal War*, ed. and transl. H. B. DEWING, London and Cambridge Mass. 1916, 1.9.1; he was *μολθοκός* in matters of war. Corippus describes him as *insuetus conferre manum*, Iohannidos, ed. A. PARTSCH (MGH Auct. Ant. 3), 3:199. Discussion in A. H. MERRILLS, *The Secret of my succession. Dynasty and crisis in Vandal North Africa*, in: *Early Medieval Europe* 18 (2010), p. 135–159.

23) A point discussed by S. KRAUTSCHICK, *Zwei Aspekte des Jahres 476*, in: *Historia* 35 (1986), p. 344–71.

24) *Aspari a senatu dicebatur, ut ipse fieret imperator*, Cassiodorus, *Acta synhodorum* (as n. 7), 425.

indolence (ἡσυχία) in the face of the Byzantine forces advancing northwards across Italy, and his unwillingness to engage them, which led them to suspect him of betraying the cause of the Goths to Justinian and wishing for no more than a life of idleness (ἡσυχίη)²⁵. Now there is a precedent for the feelings of the Goths towards Theodahad in the writing of Procopius, for he describes Honorius, at the time when Alaric was threatening Italy at the beginning of the fifth century, as wishing for nothing more than being quiet (ἡσυχάζειν) in his palace²⁶. But such a notion occurs elsewhere as well. The death of Theodosius I in 395 was followed by a long sequence of emperors who did not lead armies; while military men certainly became emperors they seem to have renounced fighting on coming to office, and only in the early seventh century would an emperor, in the person of Heraclius, take to the field again²⁷. Famously, Theodosius' elder son Arcadius was said by Synesius to have lived the life of a jelly fish²⁸. John Lydus describes Theodosius providing for the leisure (ραστώνη) of his sons and restricting their manliness (ἀνδρία) by forbidding emperors to set out on war²⁹. It was under these sons that the loss of the West began, and we may suspect that a negative judgment of the western emperors of the fifth century came to be felt with greater force at the time of Justinian's campaigns in the West. In a law of 536, Justinian spoke of his hope of regaining lands held by the Romans of old that had been lost *sequentibus neglegentiis* (ραθυμίαις)³⁰. Needless to say, Justinian did not lead the armies that were dispatched to those lands in person, and it is worth remembering that the practice of not doing so seems to have been adopted by Theoderic, who is not known to have led an army after establishing his authority in Italy in 493; perhaps here we have an unexpected sign of his adoption of an imperial practice. Against such an interpretation, it could be said that a king who did not lead an army was simply acting in accordance with ancient Germanic practice, for Patrick WORMALD has interpreted a famous distinction Tacitus made between the ways in which kings and war leaders were taken, *reges ex nobilitate, duces ex virtute sumunt*, as suggesting that Ger-

25) Procopius, Gothic War (as n. 7), 1.11.1.

26) Procopius, Vandal War (as n. 22), 1.2.8. Note too his madness (ἀμαθία), *ibid.* 3.2.26. The account John Malalas gives of Honorius is confused and does not explicitly make the point Procopius does (*Chronographia*, ed. L. DINDORF, Bonn 1831, 349 f.); he was clearly neither interested nor well-informed about the West.

27) Zosimos places the turning point a little earlier, describing Theodosius as having renounced warfare after his defeat of Maximus in 391: *Historia nova*, ed. F. PASCOUD, Paris 1979, 4.50 (where PASCOUD discusses the question of his sources).

28) Synesius, *De Regno*, ed. J. LAMOUREUX, Paris 2003, 14.

29) On Theodosius: Johannes Lydus, *De Magistratibus Populi Romani Libri Tres*, ed. and transl. Michel DUBUISSON and Jacques SCHAMP, Paris 2006, 2.11; on Justinian, 3.55.1 with 2.15.3 where, as SCHAMP points out, the emphasis on Justinian's going without sleep and taking little food comports with an emphasis on the same issues in Procopius, *Anecdota*, ed. and transl. H. B. DEWING, London and Cambridge Mass. 1935, 12.27.

30) *Novella* 30.11.2, ed. R. SCHOELL and G. KROLL, *Corpus Iuris Civilis* 3, Berlin 1912.

manic kings were traditionally not war-leaders³¹). But the kings of the Vandals, Visigoths, Franks and other groups clearly remained military leaders in a way that Theoderic did not after 493, and it occurs to me to wonder whether the apparent indolence of Theodahad as well answered to an imperial model. While I am not persuaded by the argument of CHRYSOS that the concessions Theodahad was prepared to offer Justinian during negotiations in 535 show that the authority of the Ostrogothic state in Italy had a legal basis, it being risky to generalize on the basis of proposals made by one king in a desperate situation, he has put it beyond doubt that Theodahad paid close attention to imperial norms³²). Conceivably a hands-off attitude to warfare that could be construed as indolence was one such norm.

Procopius goes on to explain that the suspicious Goths, having come together at a place named Regata, a site that cannot now be identified, it being known only from this incident, chose Vitigis as king (βασιλεύς) over them³³). There is no mention here of Vitigis being raised on a shield, although we need not doubt that this took place; such an act may be implied in another source, the ›Liber Pontificalis‹ of the Roman church, where we read that the tyrant Theodahad was killed and Vitigis lifted up as king (*levatur rex Witigis*; it is not clear whether ›levatur‹ is to be taken in a literal or metaphorical sense)³⁴). But Procopius' account may be compared to that he provides of people he describes as the best of the Goths, proposing that Belisarius be elevated, deciding to proclaim him emperor of the west and begging him to assume royal power (βασιλεία) when Byzantine forces seemed likely to take Ravenna in 540; Belisarius subsequently gave them to understand that he would become the βασιλεύς of the Italians and the Goths (in his translation for the Loeb Classics DEWING reverses the order of these terms, so that it becomes ›the Goths and the Italians‹, making it conform to the usage of Cassiodorus in his ›Variae‹, who always mentions Goths before Romans)³⁵). Now there is more than one way of understanding

31) Patrick WORMALD, Kings and Kingship, in: The New Cambridge Medieval History 1, ed. Paul FOURACRE, Cambridge 2005, p. 571–604, at p. 592. The words of Tacitus occur at Germania, ed. J. C. G. ANDERSON, Oxford 1938, p. 7, most interestingly discussed by R. MUCH (rev. H. JANKIEN and W. LANGE), Die Germania des Tacitus, Heidelberg 1967, p. 154 f.

32) Evangelos CHRYSOS, Die Amaler-Herrschaft in Italien und das Imperium Romanum. Der Vertragsentwurf des Jahres 535, in: Byzantion 51 (1981), p. 430–474, arguing on the basis of Procopius, Gothic War (as n. 7), 1.6.2–5.

33) Procopius, Gothic War (as n. 7), 1.11.1–5.

34) Liber Pontificalis, ed. Louis DUCHESNE, Rome 1886, p. 290.7. Consularia Italica, ed. Th. MOMMSEN (MGH Auct. Ant. 9) apparently speak of elevation to office in a metaphorical sense in the case of Theodosius I (*levatus est imp. a Gratiano*, Fasti Vind. Priores 497; *elevatus est*, Barbarus... Scaligeri 316), as does Gregory of Tours in the case of Theudegisel (Libri Historiarum 3.30, but see further on Gregory below, n. 47.) Further references in Thesaurus Linguae Latinae 7:1235.16–24.

35) Procopius, Gothic War (as n. 7), 2.29.17 f; the verb ἀνεπιέν does not seem to have any constitutional sense. Evangelos CHRYSOS, The Title βασιλεύς in early Byzantine International Relations, in: Dumbarton Oaks Papers 32 (1978), p. 29–75.

what was offered. DEWING provides upper case letters for the key phrase »Emperor of the West«, but this editorial decision may be a case of over-interpretation, for it may suggest something more formal than those who made the proposal had in mind, and of course βασιλεύς could simply mean »king«³⁶. CHRYSOS has pointed out that Greek literary sources sometimes use the word βασιλεύς of kings in the West. Hence, Procopius represents the Vandal king Gelimer as beginning a letter to Justinian »Basileus Gelimer to Justinian the basileus«³⁷. DEWING translates this »King Gelimer to the Emperor Justinian«, which doubtless reflects the constitutional reality, but one of his predecessors, Huneric, had legislated in a way that emperors did³⁸, and we may presume that a presumption of equality lay behind Gelimer's expression. How sharply could an imperial βασιλεύς be distinguished from a royal one? We enter murky territory here, as exemplified by translations of the Lord's Prayer into English, which generally take the petition ἐλθέτω ἡ βασιλεία σου as »Thy kingdom come«; given the political realities in Palestine in the first century surely its original sense was »Thine empire come«. Needless to say it is the task of translators to render a text into the idiom of their own day, but in this case such a practice may obscure the significance the phrase may have had in the first century. In any case, the terms Procopius uses for Romulus Augustulus taking over his *basileia* and Athalaric taking over his are almost identical³⁹.

Procopius seems to avoid applying any title to Theoderic, twice making what amounts to the same point: although Theoderic took neither the garb nor the title of emperor of the Romans and was called by the barbarian word ρήξ, yet he behaved as one who was by nature a βασιλεύς, and while he was in name a tyrant, in fact he was a true βασιλεύς. He also seems to avoid using the term βασιλεύς of Theodahad, although it was *basileia* to which Amalasintha summoned him. Again, DEWING's translation seems to obscure Procopius' terminology by over-interpreting the text, so that at one point ἡγεμονία is translated »kingship«⁴⁰. I wonder, then, just how great a distance lies between what one group identified as Goths saw themselves as doing when they elevated Vitigis in 535 and what others proposed to Belisarius five years later.

One might object that the description Cassiodorus provides of Vitigis being raised aloft on a shield points in another direction, such a ceremony being evidently Germanic,

36) Josephine BLOOMFIELD, Benevolent Authoritarianism in Klaeber's *Beowulf*: an Editorial Translation of Kingship, in: *Modern Languages Quarterly* 60 (1999), p. 129–59, discusses another case of mistranslation of terms pertaining to royalty in an early medieval text, suggesting that the problem »seems likely to lie in Klaeber's suppositions about ideal rulership and his particular expectation of kings and rulers in the text« (p. 151; she identifies a Prussian background).

37) CHRYSOS, (as n. 35.), Procopius, Vandal War (as n. 7), 1.9.20.

38) Victor of Vita, *Historia persecutionis*, ed. and transl. S. LANCEL, Paris 2002, 3.7.

39) Procopius, Gothic War (as n. 7), 1.1.2, 1.2.1.

40) Theoderic: Gothic War, 1.1.26, 29. Theodahad: Gothic War, 1.4.6, 8. DEWING's translation: Gothic War, 1.6.11.

but it need not have seemed this way at the time⁴¹). While Tacitus describes one Brinno, placed on a shield and shaken on the shoulders of the people who were holding him up, being chosen (*deligitur*, a rather vague verb) king in language that suggests the practice was already customary (*more gentis*)⁴², the first evidence we have for it in late antiquity relates to the elevation of Julian near Paris, perhaps in 361⁴³). The scene is described by Ammianus Marcellinus: the troops declared Justin *augustus* (*augustum appellare*; here the vocabulary has a technical feel⁴⁴) having been placed on the shield of a foot soldier and lifted on high he was declared *augustus* (the word *renuntiatus* seems more formal than Tacitus' *deligitur*)⁴⁵. The accession of the Greek speaking Julian at the hands of Germanic troops in this manner may reflect Germanic practice, of a kind later familiar among the Franks. Gregory of Tours mentions people from around Köln applauding Clovis with their shields as well as their voices, raising him on a shield and making him their king (*super se regem constituunt*) when he had taken over the »power and treasure« of king Sigibert (it is noteworthy how much Gregory is interested in Clovis' gaining control of treasure). Later, we hear of the whole army coming together at Vitry and, having placed another Sigibert on a shield, made him their king (*sibi regem statuunt*) in an attempt to overcome king Chilperic, and of the pretender Gundovald being placed on a shield and lifted up as king (*rex est levatus*) before being carried about⁴⁶). But perhaps the practice can better be seen as a reminder of the unity in late antiquity of Roman civilization, in which the post-Roman states of the West often acted in similar ways to the continuing Empire. While contemporary Greek sources were not interested in Julian's having been raised on a shield⁴⁷, Zosimos, writing in about 500, mentions it in a matter-of-fact way⁴⁸. By then there had been the case of Leo I, raised to the throne in 457⁴⁹, and we later hear of Justin II standing on a shield (*clypeus*) held aloft by four young men in 565⁵⁰, and that in

41) See the general discussion of Christopher WALTER, Raising on a shield in Byzantine iconography, in: *Revue des études byzantines* 33 (1975), p. 133–175.

42) Tacitus, *Hist.* (as n. 10), 4.15.

43) Wilhelm ENSSLIN, Zur Torqueskrönung und Schilderhebung bei der Kaiserwahl, in: *Klio* 35 (1942), p. 268–298.

44) Cff. *Regem [...] et socium atque amicum appellaret* (Tacitus, *Annales*, ed. E. KOESTERMANN, Leipzig 1965, 4.26).

45) *Ibid.*, 20.4.17.

46) Gregory of Tours, *Libri historiarum* (as n. 14), 2.40 (Clovis), 4.51 (Sigibert), 7.10 (Gundovald).

47) Julian passes over it quickly in his letter to the Athenians (*Ad Ath.*, ed. and transl. J. BIDEZ, Paris 1932, 10, 285C), while Libanios does not mention it (*or.*, ed. and transl. A. F. NORMAN, London and Cambridge Mass, 1969, 18.94–103); on the other hand, both writers have a good deal to say about the wearing of a diadem.

48) Zosimos, *Historia nova* (as n. 27), 3.9.2.

49) Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Cerimoniis*, ed. J. J. REISKE, Bonn 1829, 1.91.

50) Corippus, *In Laudem Iustini Augusti minoris*, ed. S. ANTÈS, Paris 1981, 2.137–39; see the full discussion p. 109–111.

610 troops rebelling against the emperor Maurice raised Phocas aloft on a shield; the factions would later raise him on a shield at the Hebdomon, the site of a military camp in a suburb of Constantinople⁵¹). But I doubt whether historians of Ostrogothic Italy have ever noticed that an event similar to the elevation of Vitigis seems to have taken place in Constantinople just four years earlier. According to the twelfth century author John Zonaras, during the Nika riot of 532 Hypatius, a nephew of a preceding emperor, Anastasius, and hence a potential lightning rod for discontent with Justinian, was led to the Forum of Constantine, not far from the palace, and there lifted on a shield⁵²). I therefore suspect that what occurred to Vitigis would rather have been thought of as following general contemporary practice than something that was particularly non-Roman⁵³). In such cases of shield-raising we are dealing with an unexpected transfer of power in which the army was involved that may be interpreted as having come to be seen as conventional behaviour in both the Empire and the successor states of the West rather than an explicitly Germanic practice; I shall return to this topic towards the end of this paper.

The ceremony was carried out by the army, and we may ask to what extent this body was thought of as enacting the will of the people. Cassiodorus makes Vitigis attribute his elevation to *parentes nostros Gothos*, and Procopius describes its agents as ›the Goths‹, a chronicle has the *exercitus Gothorum* receiving Vitigis as king, while the ›Liber Pontificalis‹ of the Roman church has Belisarius hearing that *Gothi sibi fecissent regem*⁵⁴). I concur with Gideon MAIER, who speaks of »die Ausrufung durch das Heer« in this case⁵⁵). ›The Goths‹ in Procopius' account are located in what is clearly a military camp, which is no surprise, for since the time of Mommsen we have seen the Goths as forming the military arm and the Romans the civilian arm of society in the Italy of Theoderic and his successors, and while more recent scholarship has nuanced the formulation it still largely works; as Cassiodorus put it in a letter to a praetorian prefect, *Dum belligerat Gothorum exercitus, sit in pace Romanus*⁵⁶). But perhaps the data could be arranged in

51) Troops rebelling: Theophylact Simocatta, *Historiae*, ed. C. DE BOOR and P. WIRTH, Stuttgart 1972, 8.7.7; transl. M. and M. WHITBY, Oxford 1986, p. 220. Factions: John of Antioch (as n. 13), *frag.* 218d.4.

52) Zonaras, *Epitome Historiarum*, ed. L. DINDORF, vol. 3, Leipzig 1870, 14.16, p. 272.30–32.

53) François BOUGARD, Public Power and Authority, in: *Italy in the Early Middle Ages 476–1000*, ed. Cristina LA ROCCA, Oxford 2002, p. 34–58 at p. 35.

54) Cassiodorus, *Variae* (as n. 7), 10.31.1; Cassiodorus frequently uses *parentes* of Goths, as at *Variae*, 3.24.4, 5.43.4. Procopius, *Gothic War* (as n. 7), 1.11.5, cf. 1. Marcellinus comes, *Chronicle* (as n. 8) s.a. 534, 104. *Liber Pontificalis* (as n. 34), p. 290.

55) Gideon MAIER, *Amsträger und Herrscher in der Romania Gothica*, Stuttgart 2005, p. 108.

56) Th. MOMMSEN was very explicit: *Gesammelte Schriften* 6, repr. Berlin 1965, p. 436. More recent scholarship: John MOORHEAD, *Theoderic in Italy* (Oxford, 1992), p. 71 f., and in particular AMORY, *People and identity* (as n. 15); I have suggested elements of a response to the views put forward in this book in *Carmina Philosophiae* 7 (1998), p. 81–7. The quotation is from Cassiodorus, *Variae* (as n. 7), 12.5.4; cf. *Vos autem, Romani, magno studio Gothos diligere debetis qui et in pace numerosos vobis populos faciunt et*

another way: rather than seeing the Goths as constituting the entire army, perhaps we could see ›Goths‹ as being a word used to describe members of the army, the prime significance of the term being military rather than ethnic. Hence the statement of Marcellinus Comes that the ›*Gothorum exercitus*‹ was responsible for admitting Vitigis to power may be almost a tautology, to be taken as referring not to the army of the Gothic people but an army that was known to have been made up of people who identified themselves as Goths⁵⁷), and Cassiodorus' use of the very rare word ›*procinctuales*‹ (*parentes nostros Gothos inter procinctuales gladios*) suggests a high level of readiness for battle. It is very clear from Gregory of Tours, for example, that the word ›*Franci*‹ tends to be used of bearers of weapons; one would never imagine that the Franks who fight their way across so many of the pages of Gregory's ten books of history had much in common with those whose lives were regulated by the provisions of the Salic Law⁵⁸). So I wonder whether it would make sense to see the elevation of Vitigis as not so much something done by a *folc-mote* that constituted an assembly of the nation but as a kind of military putsch familiar from Byzantine and indeed earlier Roman history that was carried out by an army made up of people identified as Goths. He had been elected *in campis late patentibus*, and when Cassiodorus writes *regem sibi Martium Geticus populus inveniret* he uses for the only time in the ›*Variae*‹ the word *Geticus* in place of the familiar *Gothus*, the former word having »connotations of a warlike past«⁵⁹). Historians may have been a little too ready to assert that the deposition of Theodahad was the work of ›a powerful group among the leading Goths‹ or that »the nobility« thrust Vitigis to power⁶⁰). Herwig WOLFRAM suggests that the Goths deserted and killed Theodahad, together with Athalaric (but did they kill Athalaric?) »because they proved failures in the battle for the survival of the *gens*«⁶¹). Nor is there any need to interpret the abandonment of Theodahad as P. D. KING does, when he describes it as a classic case of resistance »grounded in a principled conviction that the king was failing to act as a true ruler should«⁶²). Rather, it was an act of desperation grounded in no principles at all. *Me regem omnes facitis*, says Vitigis in a letter addressed to all the Goths⁶³), but if we accept that Goths were to be identified with soldiers

universam rem publicam per bella defendunt (7.3.3); *illi labores bellicose pro communi utilitate subeunt, vos autem civitatis Romanae habitatio quieta multiplicat* (8.3.4).

57) Marcellinus comes, *Chronicle* (as n. 8), s.a. 536,4. The elevation of subsequent kings, however, is simply attributed to *Gothi* (s.a. 540.5, 541.2, 542.2).

58) On Gregory, see the references collected by John MOORHEAD, *The Roman Empire Divided 400–700*, Harlow 2012, p. 84.

59) AMORY, *People and Identity* (as n. 15), p. 78 n.185, to whom I am indebted for this point.

60) Powerful group: Peter HEATHER, *The Goths*, Oxford 1996, p. 263. Nobility: T. S. BURNS, *A History of the Ostrogoths*, Bloomington 1984, p. 106.

61) Herwig WOLFRAM, *History of the Goths*, Engl. transl. Berkeley 1988, p. 342.

62) *The Barbarian Kingdoms*, in: *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought c. 350–1450*, Cambridge 1988, ed. J. H. BURNS, p. 123–53 at p. 150.

63) Cassiodorus, *Variae* (as n. 7), 10.31.3.

this may be another way of saying that Vitigis owed his elevation to the army, the military arm of society having turned against its leader.

Nevertheless, Vitigis came to the throne as an outsider, of whom Cassiodorus had to admit that the only relationship he could claim with Theoderic was on the basis of the deeds by which he imitated him: *idcirco parens illius debet credi qui eius facta potuerit imitari*⁶⁴. Again one recalls the observation of Tacitus that the ancient Germans took *duces ex virtute* but kings *ex nobilitate*, and on such an understanding Vitigis may have seemed ill-qualified for the latter office; while the exact meaning of the word *nobilitas* is not clear, so that for Cassiodorus it seems to have involved morality as well as parentage, it is not easy to see Vitigis as satisfying this requirement⁶⁵. How important was it to be the member of the royal family? Jordanes, writing in the mid-sixth century, makes much of the Amals, describing them as being referred to as Anses or semi-gods, and immediately thereafter tracing their descent across the generations⁶⁶, and a long scholarly tradition has been inclined to accept the implication of rule by one family over a long period, but Peter HEATHER, in a study that confronts the evidence of Jordanes with that of Amianus Marcellinus, has shown that traditions concerning the pre-eminence of the Amal family among the Ostrogoths were an achievement of the time of king Valamir in the mid-fifth century, and that »[t]he Getica's genealogy and associated statements, which backdate Amal rule into the distant past, are no more than dynastic propaganda«⁶⁷. This is not the only case where we must be on guard against such propaganda, for a study of the chief source for early Kievan Rus has argued that the Tale of Bygone Years, or Russian Primary Chronicle, should be seen as a source for concerns at the time of its composition, the twelfth century, as much as for hard data concerning the earlier centuries whose history it purports to narrate. Its author, the hegumen Silvestr, was commissioned to write it by a prince of Kiev, Vladimir Monmakh, and can be shown to have manipulated his material so as to legitimate the claim to power of the descendents of Riurik, and these alone⁶⁸. That membership of the Amal family had become significant at the time

64) Ibid., 10.31.5.

65) *antiquam parentum eius repetimus nobilitatem* (ibid., 10.17.3); *cum generis tui honoranda nobilitas et magnae fidei documenta suasissent* (ibid. 10.29.1). Perhaps both senses are to be understood in Jordanes' use of the word in his summary of the contents of the Getica (as n. 6): *Getarum origo ac Amalorum nobilitas et virorum fortium facta* (315), although morality must be intended at Getica 116, *Hermanaricus nobilissimus Amalorum*; compare *longe a Gothici sanguinis nobilitate* (233); *Ecdicius nobilissimus senator et dudum Aviti imperatoris [...] filius* (240).

66) Ibid., 78.

67) Peter HEATHER, Cassiodorus and the rise of the Amals: Genealogy and the Goths under Hun domination, in: *Journal of Roman Studies* 79 (1989), p. 103–128, quoted from p. 126.

68) Alexandr RUKAVISHNIKOV, Tale of Bygone Years: the Russian Primary Chronicle as a family chronicle, in: *Early Medieval Europe* 12 (2003), p. 53–74. Similarly, it may be that the famous account of Russian envoys being impressed by the beauty of the Liturgy celebrated in Constantinople reflects the emphases

proposed by HEATHER is suggested by names borne by some of its members across three generations from about the middle of the fifth century: Theoderic's sister Amalfrida, her daughter Amalaberga, and Amalaberga's son Amalafriðas; Theoderic's daughter Amal-suintha, and Amalaric, Theoderic's grandson by his daughter Theodegotha. But one recalls that Gregory of Tours could only trace the Merovingian line back as far as Merovech, the grandfather of Clovis, and that Bede thought that the leaders (*duces*) Hengist and Horsa, many of whose descendents became kings, were only four generations removed from Woden⁶⁹. Moreover, as Kenneth SISAM observed, »[f]ew will dissent from the general opinion that the ancestors of Woden were a fanciful development of Christian times«⁷⁰. If we accept a view that would see significant kingship among the Germanic peoples who settled on Roman soil as being recent, against, for example, the presupposition entailed in the view that »[h]istory catches first sight of a kingdom of the Goths in the first century A.D.«⁷¹, it necessarily follows that the advent of royal families was late.

There is a fair amount in Cassiodorus' *Variae* on various people being members of the Amal family, but it is not evenly distributed across the books into which he divided his correspondence. The family is only mentioned three times in the five books of letters that Cassiodorus wrote in the name of Theoderic. Herminifrid the king of the Thoringians was told that, having married Theoderic's niece Amalaberga, he would shine owing to the brightness of Amal blood; the infamous Theodahad was told that vulgar desire was unbefitting a man of Amal blood; and Trasimund the king of the Vandals was told that Theoderic's sister Amalfrida was a singular ornament of the Amal stock⁷². The modest dimensions of this harvest from 235 letters suggests that membership of the family was not seen as having been very important during these years. In the less stable conditions that followed the accession of Athalaric in 526, membership of the Amal line came to be

that had developed in Russian Orthodoxy by the time the Chronicle was composed rather than the experience of Russian ambassadors in the late tenth century.

69) Gregory of Tours, *Libri Historiarum* (as n. 14), 2.9. Hengist and Horsa: Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.15 (ed. C. PLUMMER, Oxford 1898, p. 31 f). Later genealogies place Woden much further back; for example, Manuscript A of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles (the Winchester Manuscript) sees Cerdic, said to have landed in Britain with his son Cynric in 495, as being nine generations removed from him: *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, ed. and transl. Michael SWANTON, London 2000, p. 2.

70) Kenneth SISAM, *Anglo-Saxon Royal Genealogies*, in: *Proceedings of the British Academy* 39 (1953) p. 287–346 at p. 308.

71) Henry A. MYER, in co-operation with Herwig WOLFRAM, *Medieval Kingship*, Chicago 1982, p. 64; cf. the remark that Roman historians remained unaware of the distinctive attributes of Frankish kingship till the fifth century (ibid p. 61), an unawareness that may simply be accounted for by the absence of such kingship.

72) Herminifrid: *claritate Amali sanguinis [...] quia genus suum conspicit esse purpuratum*, Cassiodorus, *Variae* (as n. 7), 4.1.1; MOMMSEN and FRIDH (CC 96) read *Hamali* and *Amali* respectively against the *imperialis* of most manuscripts). Theodahad: *Variae*, 4.39.2. Trasimund: *Variae*, 5.43.1.

emphasised more. In a letter to the senate of Rome, a body whose members could be expected to have been interested in family descent, Cassiodorus placed the following words in the mouth of Athalaric: »The hope of our youth has been preferred to the merits of all [others], and what has been believed of us has been preferred to what has been proven of others; properly so, since the brightness of the Amal stock yields to none, and just as senatorial origin is ascribed to one who is born of you, so one who proceeds from this family is proved most worthy of reigning.«⁷³⁾ The language Cassiodorus uses for Roman and Gothic lineage elsewhere is identical. While Jordanes, referring to the marriage of Germanus and Matasuinthia, speaks of *coniuncta Anicorum genus cum Amala stirpe*⁷⁴⁾, Cassiodorus uses each of the words *genus* and *stirps* for both the Amals and Roman families; he writes of the »*Ordo generis Cassiodororum*«⁷⁵⁾, and quite apart from the overlap in vocabulary the more general point may be made that an interest in the genealogies of the aristocracy was part of the late Roman environment into which Germanic settlers came, and that such enthusiasm as Theoderic's family may have had for its putative Amal descent would have been paralleled by the concerns of the senators for their own lineage⁷⁶⁾. A letter to the Goths in Italy invites them to receive a name that is ever propitious, the royal family of the Amals, a purple sprout. And in a letter bestowing on the warrior Tuluin the dignity of patrician, Cassiodorus observes that he had been joined to the most noble Amal stock and mentions one Gensimund who had also joined himself to the Amals with great devotion. Writing to Hilderic the king of the Vandals, after the murder of Amalfrida, Theoderic's sister, Athalaric mentions both the lineage of the Hasdings and, apparently to its advantage, the purple dignity of Amal blood. Moreover, in a remarkably long letter written by Cassiodorus to the senate of Rome on the occasion of his own appointment to the office of praetorian prefect in 533, Athalaric is made to comment that in a History he had written, Cassiodorus had treated his ancient stock and brought forth the kings of the Goths who had been concealed by long forgetfulness, restoring the Amals with the brightness of their *genus* and making it clear that its *stirps* had

73) Letter to the senate: *Variae*, 8.2.3, amended transl. HODGKIN (as n. 19). Letter to the Roman people: *Variae*, 8.3.5. A letter to the Roman people that immediately follows it makes no mention of the Amal line, and asserts that Athalaric renewed the example of that people's Trajan.

74) Jordanes, *Getica* (as n. 6), 314.

75) *Ordo generis Cassiodororum*, ed. A. J. FRIDH (CC 96), p. v.

76) Interest in the genealogies of the Old Testament may also be relevant. Gregory of Tours found it noteworthy that bishop Maurilio of Cahors could recite these genealogies by heart (*Libri Historiarum*, as n. 14, 5.42). It is interesting that the form in which Jordanes presents the genealogy of the Amal line (a genuit b. b genuit c...) closely resembles that in which St Matthew presents that of Christ (Matt 1:2–16; St Luke arranges his material according to different principles (3:23–38)).

been royal for seventeen generations, propaganda that directly anticipates that of Jordanes⁷⁷.

One other consideration may be relevant to our enquiry at this point. In his letter to the Goths on Athalaric's behalf, Cassiodorus applies to the young king the terms *blat-teum germe* and *infantiam purpuratam*⁷⁸, language that recalls Ennodius' hope that a *purpuratum germen* would proceed from Theoderic to extend the golden age⁷⁹. The word *purpuratus* refers to someone clad in a purple garment, and is applied by other authors to emperors, kings and usurpers⁸⁰. In Cassiodorus it evokes morality, when Theodahad is told by Theoderic that vulgar desire does not befit a man of Amal blood, because the stock is seen to be always *purpuratus*. It is used of Theoderic who, having profited from the instruction of Cassiodorus, is described as having the appearance of a *purpuratus* [...] *philosophus*⁸¹. Among the 58 letters written in the name of Athalaric, six refer to the Amal line, a far higher proportion than in the letters written in the name of Theoderic, which is doubtless a sign of the weakness of the monarchy in the latter period. Similarly, the haste with which Vitigis married Matasuinthia, the daughter of Amalasuinthia and granddaughter of Theoderic, after coming to power suggests that he felt that marrying into the family would strengthen his position⁸².

The last two references to the Amals in the correspondence of Cassiodorus occur in letters written after the death of Athalaric. In the following year, Cassiodorus wrote to the senate of Rome on behalf of Amalasuinthia, now referred to as *regina*, announcing that she had chosen as her *consors regni* Theodahad, described as a man conspicuous from the brightness of his family who had been born into the *stirps* of the Amals and so was of royal dignity in his actions⁸³. Finally, a letter of the senate of Rome to Justinian written during the opening stages of the Gothic war places a speech in the mouth of the *patria*, who is made to say »I love the Amal, nourished at my breasts [...] dear to the Romans for

77) Letter to the Goths: Cassiodorus, *Variae* (as n. 7), 8.5.2. Letter to Tuluin: *Variae*, 8.9.7 f. Letter to Hilderic: *Variae*, 9.1.2. Letter to the senate: *Variae*, 9.25.4, where Cassiodorus is described as turning the origin of the Goths into Roman history.

78) *Ibid.*, 8.5.2

79) Ennodius, *Panegyricus dictus Theoderico*, 93, ed. F. VOGEL (MGH Auct. Ant. 7), p. 214.

80) *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* 10:2706 f.

81) Compare Boethius: *vel studiosi sapientiae regerent vel earum rectores studere sapientiae contigisset*, *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, 1.4.5 (ed. Claudio MORESCHINI, Munich and Leipzig 2005).

82) Jordanes notes that a few days before the Roman army entered Rome Vitigis set out for Ravenna where he married Matasuinthia (*Getica*, as n. 6, 311); having dealt with Vitigis' coming to power, the *Liber Pontificalis* states that *eodem tempore* he went to Ravenna and married (as n. 34, p. 290.7 f). Cassiodorus emphasises one quality of the bride: *quae tantorum regum posteritas potuit inveniri* (as n. 7, 480.14 f). She was unwilling to marry Vitigis (*plus vi copulat quam amore*, Marcellinus comes, *Chronicle*, as n. 8, s.a. 536), and later turned against him (*Procopius Gothic War*, as n. 7, 2.10.11).

83) Cassiodorus, *Variae* (as n. 7), 10.3.3.

his prudence, esteemed by the *gentes* for his manliness.⁸⁴⁾ We may pause briefly here. The collocation of *prudentia* and *virtus* was something of a habit for Cassiodorus, who elsewhere refers to the Goths as having both the *prudentia* of the Romans and the *virtus* of the *gentes*, although exactly the same qualities are attributed to Theoderic by Procopius (ξυνέσεως ... και ἀνδρίας), and Jordanes speaks of Theoderic's son-in-law Eutharic as mighty in both *prudentia* and *virtus*⁸⁵⁾. While Cassiodorus could attribute prudence to Theoderic in a roundabout way⁸⁶⁾, he saw it as being chiefly a characteristic of the Romans of old times, and one that he frequently refers to in apposition to the *maiores*. Hence he can write in a letter to Boethius: *O inventa prudentium! o provisa maiorum!*, in a form letter conferring the office of *comes sacrarum largitionum*: *O magna inventa prudentium! o laudabilia instituta maiorum*, and in another letter bestowing the office of Count of the Port of Rome: *O inventa maiorum! o exquisita prudentium!*⁸⁷⁾ Such language prompts one to ask who the *maiores* whose *mos* was followed when Vitigis was lifted on a shield may have been. As we have seen, Tacitus saw the ceremony as being carried out *more gentis*, and in his description of the elevation of Vitigis Cassiodorus describes it as having been carried out *more maiorum*. HODGKIN typically gives the phrase a Germanic twist by translating it »in ancestral fashion«, but *maiores* in Cassiodorus need not be Goths, nor ancestors in a literal sense, and it is possible, although I would not argue the point too strenuously, that he meant the phrase to refer to people of old times in general rather than bygone Goths⁸⁸⁾.

Our discussion of the Amals has covered a lot of territory, but let me point out three things. Emphasis on membership of a family such as the Amals could answer to the situation of those who had recently come to power, just as it seemed to become more important when the monarch was weak; as Marc REYDELLET points out, Theoderic had no need to rely on anything other than his own authority, but the situation of Athalaric was different⁸⁹⁾. Secondly, it is surely noteworthy that of these seven letters three were ad-

84) Morality: *Variae*, 4.39.2; cf mention of the *purpuratum decus* of Theodahad's ancestors, 10.1.2. Theoderic: *Variae*, 11.13.4.

85) Cassiodorus, *Variae* (as n. 7), 3.23.3. Procopius, *Gothic War* (as n. 7), 1.1.27. Jordanes, *Getica* (as n. 6), 298. Paul KERSHAW is more inclined than I am to see Avitus of Vienne using the word *virtus* in the sense of »virtue« (*Peaceful Kings*, as n. 3, p. 86).

86) As where he writes of the *magna voluptas* [...] *prudentissimae mentis pulcherrima* of a person living in a palace; the mind in question is presumably that of Theoderic: Cassiodorus, *Variae* (as n. 7), 7.5.1.

87) To Boethius: *Variae*, 1.10.6. Form letters: *Variae*, 6.7.3; 7.9.2. Note as well *ubi prudentium sensa servantur? Periclitabantur ante hoc dicta sapientium, cogitata maiorum* (*Variae*, 11.38.3).

88) Walter GOFFART has noted that in *Variae* 10.31 the word is twice used within a few lines, on the first occasion in an implicitly Gothic sense (*maiorum notitia cana*, 10.31.4) and on the second in an implicitly Roman one (10.31.6): Jordanes's *Getica* and the Disputed Authenticity of Gothic Origins from Scandinavia, in: *Speculum* 80 (II, 2005), p. 379–98 at p. 389.

89) Marc REYDELLET, *La Royauté dans la littérature latine de Sidoine Apollinaire à Isidore de Séville*, Paris 1981, p. 242.

dressed to the senate and a fourth written to Justinian in the name of that body; contrary to what one might have anticipated, membership of this family with its alleged roots far back in the Germanic past was emphasised in letters not written to those who may be imagined as having chanted ancient Germanic songs but in those to and indeed from the senate. Finally, the terminology we have been considering, exemplified by the use of *genus* and *stirps*, the notion of *purpuratus*, and the concepts of *prudentia* and *virtus*, seem remarkably ambiguous in their application, being hard to identify with either Goths or Romans. The point made concerning possible ambiguity in the term βασιλεὺς is thus reinforced.

Where does *consensus* fit into all this? When I began thinking about Ostrogothic monarchy in this period and the possible application of the notion of *consensus*, I had no idea how little it would obtrude. But it is there in an unexpected way, and it will be worth our while returning to the series of letters Cassiodorus wrote in 526 seeking acceptance of Athalaric as king following the death of Theoderic. The first of these in the order in which he laid them out in the ›Variae‹, that despatched to the emperor Justin seeking from him on behalf of the new king *pax* and *amicitia*, has nothing for our purpose, but the second, addressed to the senate of the city of Rome, does. Athalaric is made to tell the senate that power had passed so swiftly from Theoderic to himself that one would have believed that a change of clothes rather than of government had taken place. The support that had been received from the military is emphasised. (*Tot proceres manu consilioque gloriosi nullum murmur, ut assolet, miscuerunt.*) Towards the end of this letter, Athalaric is made to observe that divine providence had disposed that a general *consensus* of Goths and Romans had given its approval to him (*Gothorum Romanorumque nobis generalis consensus accederet*), and they had confirmed their will, which they had offered with pure hearts, by swearing an oath. Athalaric was therefore sending count Sigismer to administer an oath of loyalty to the senate⁹⁰. The letter immediately following is addressed to the Roman people, and makes a similar point in a different way: with God's approval, and in accordance with what Theoderic had disposed, a most sweet *consensus* of Goths and Romans had been given to Athalaric's coming to power (*Gothorum Romanorumque in regem nostrum suavissimus consensus accederet*; extraordinarily, HODGKIN's typically Germanizing translation omits ›and Romans‹), and swore oaths. The bearers of the letter would in turn receive the oaths of the Roman people⁹¹. In what sense is the word *consensus* being used? A parallel letter suggests the answer. Writing to all the provincials in Gaul, Cassiodorus makes Athalaric ask that »the Goths give their pledge to the Romans

90) Cassiodorus, *Variae* (as n. 7), 8.2.

91) *Ibid.* 8.3; cff. *unum crede promittere, quod generalitas videbatur optare* (*ibid.* 8.5.1); *cui ordinatione Gothorum Romanorumque desideria convenerunt* (*ibid.* 8.6.2); *unum loqui crederes quod generalitas insonabat [...] Romani Gothis sacramento confirmant se unanimiter regno nostro esse devotos* (*ibid.* 8.7.3). See further S. TEILLET, *Des Goths à la nation gothique* (Paris, 1984), p. 289 f.

and the Romans confirm by an oath to the Goths that they are unanimously devoted to our reign.«⁹²⁾ The situation envisaged here is one in which Goths and Romans were in agreement, and this is the sense in which Cassiodorus speaks of *consensus*; it describes agreement between Goths and Romans, rather than agreement to the accession of a new king.

Let me conclude by offering a coda. There is a chronologically exact parallel to the way Cassiodorus uses the word *consensus* in canon law. The principle that if the bishops of a province were unable to attend the ordination of a new bishop they were to display their consent in writing (*per scripta consentientibus*, συντιθεμένων διά γραμμάτων) was as old as the Council of Nicaea⁹³⁾. But later practice envisaged another kind of *consensus*, of the kind Ruricius of Limoges had in mind when he observed, *Bene facitis, si hominem quem communis consensus elegit, ordinatis*⁹⁴⁾. We read in Gregory of Tours that in 555 the people of Tours informed king Lothar that they had agreed that the priest Euphronius was to be their next bishop (*facto consensu in Euphronio presbitero*). Shortly afterwards a group of bishops sought to appoint a new bishop of Saintes, Heraclius: *consensum fecerunt in Heraclium [...] presbiterum quod regi [...] transmiserunt*⁹⁵⁾. Hence, a document of about 475, the *Statuta Ecclesiae Antiqua*, prescribes that episcopal appointment is to be made *consensu clericorum et laicorum*, and such legislation is recurrent across the Merovingian period⁹⁶⁾. A comment made by Venantius Fortunatus on the accession of Gregory as bishop of Tours in 573, *hoc commune bonum praedicet omnis homo* has been interpreted as indicating that the celebration was to be one of *consensus*⁹⁷⁾. It was a nice idea, although Sidonius Apollinaris elsewhere writes of a bishop being consecrated *dissonas inter partium voces*⁹⁸⁾. But reading these texts carefully, it is clear that, again, the

92) Cassiodorus, *Variae* (as n. 7), 8.7.3.

93) Can. 4, *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Generaliumque Decreta*, edd. Giuseppe ALBERIGO et al., Turnhout 2006, p. 21 f.

94) Ruricius of Limoges, Ep. 2.30, ed. J.-P. MIGNE (PL 58) Turnhout ²1967, p. 107.

95) Euphronius: Gregory of Tours, *Libri Historiarum* (as n. 14), 4.15, p. 147. Heraclius: *ibid.* 4.26, p. 158. Gregory uses the word loosely when he describes the future Gregory the Great begging the emperor Maurice not to give his *consensus* to his elevation to papal office, but his plan came to nothing when Germanus informed the emperor of the *consensum quod populus fecerat* (10.1, p. 478).

96) *Statuta Ecclesiae Antiqua* 1, ed. Charles MUNIER (CC 148), p. 165.37; see further a metropolitan being chosen *cum consensu clericus* [!] *vel civium* (Council of Orléans (538), can. 3, ed. Charles DE CLERCQ, CC 148 A, p. 115.32 f; here and elsewhere I leave the Latin unchanged); *ad consensum faciendum cives aut clirici* (Council of Orléans (549), can. 11, *ibid.* p. 152.101); *cleri consensu vel civium* (Council of Paris (641), can. 2, *ibid.* p. 275.19 f) and *consensus ad episcopum instituendum* (Council of 673–675, can. 5, *ibid.* p. 315.23 f.). Cf. Marculf, Form. 1.7 (ed. Karl ZEUMER, *Formulae Merovingici et Karolini Aevi* (MGH Legum section V), Hannover 1886 reprint Hannover 1963).

97) Michael ROBERTS, *The Humblest Sparrow – The Poetry of Venantius Fortunatus*, Ann Arbor 2009, p. 108, on Venantius *carm.* 5.3.4.

98) Sidonius Apollinaris, *epp.* ed. and transl. W. B. ANDERSON, London and Cambridge Mass., 1965, 4.25.4.

consensus envisaged is thought of as being consent between people rather than being consent to the ordination of a particular person. While community *consensus* was doubtless desirable, there is no sense that it was necessary to a new person entering an office.

Javier ARCE, in a most interesting discussion of the description of the funeral rites of Attila provided by Jordanes, raises the possibility that they were those of a Romanized barbarian king⁹⁹). If the Huns could behave in a Romanized fashion, how much more would this be likely of Goths, long exposed to Roman ways, who had been living in Italy for over four decades? The elevation of Theodahad to be *consors regni*, the lifting up of Vitigis on a shield, the ambiguous nature of the word βασιλεύς, and the occurrence of the most strident emphasis on the Amal line in letters connected with the senate are among the circumstances that suggest that the political culture of Ostrogoths several decades after their arrival in Italy had come to resemble that of the Romans far more than any ancestral Germanic way of doing things. I therefore agree with Joseph CANNING that »[t]he form of kingship which [...] emerged in the post-entry barbarian kingdoms was overwhelmingly Roman and Christian in character and stressed the power and authority of the monarch«¹⁰⁰), although it seems to me that the evidence we have been considering suggests that its Christian element was secondary¹⁰¹). And what was true of any putative Germanic past was similarly true of *consensus*, particularly in a time of crisis, which our sources show no sign of seeing as important. Just as Theodahad had become the *consors* of Amalasuintha when she was in a desperate situation, so he in turn was replaced by Vitigis because the army was in a desperate situation. No less than any concept of nationhood, any notion of *consensus* was definitely secondary to Realpolitik.

SUMMARY

When examining the ways in which the successors of Theoderic came to power in times of war and crisis, consensus is found as an argument of legitimacy especially in Cassiodorus' letters to and from the senate of Rome. It refers to the unanimity of Goths and Romans so crucial to the coherence of the Ostrogothic kingdom, which should be confirmed by oaths of loyalty. As comparable wordings of the ordinations of bishops in canon law suggest, consensus coined by Cassiodorus meant agreements between people

99) Javier ARCE, Imperial Funerals in the Later Roman Empire, in: *Rituals of Power from Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages*, ed. F. THEUWS and J. L. NELSON, Leiden 2000, pp. 95–114 at 126 f.

100) Joseph CANNING, *A History of Medieval Political Thought 300–1450*, London 1996, p. 17.

101) D. H. GREEN feels that two terms used by Cassiodorus, *deo favente* and *iuuante deo*, imply that Theoderic saw himself as having received his royal authority from God, but the usage seems to me formulaic: *The Carolingian Lord*, Cambridge, 1965, p. 224. Note as well *divina providentia fuisse dispositum* (Variae, 8.2.7, to the senate of the city of Rome).

rather than approval of the accession of a particular person. This leads to the conclusion that the political culture of the Ostrogoths several decades after their arrival in Italy had become essentially romanized (more than Christianized).