BETWEEN OSTROGOTHIC AND CAROLINGIAN ITALY

Survivals, revivals, ruptures

edited by
Fabrizio Oppedisano

Reti Medievali E-Book

43

Ruling in hard times
Patterns of power and practices of government
in the making of Carolingian Italy

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Front cover: Nicholas and workshop: *Theodoric hunts in hell*, c. 1100-1150 (Verona, facade of the basilica of San Zeno). Photo credit: Fabio Coden, by permission of the Ufficio per i beni culturali ecclesiastici, Diocese of Verona (17 Jan. 2023).

Ruling in hard times.
Patterns of power and practices of government
in the making of Carolingian Italy

Project Coordinator Giuseppe Albertoni

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Index

Abbreviations

AE = L'Année épigraphique
CCCM = Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis
CCM = Chronicon Moissiacense Maius
CCSL = Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina
CDS = Cross Database Searchtool
ChLA = Chartae Latinae Antiquiores
CIL = Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum
CIMAH = Corpus Inscriptionum Medii Aevi Helvetiae
CSEL = Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum.
CSHB = Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae
EDCS = Epigraphische Datenbank Clauss-Slaby
EDH = Epigraphic Database Heidelberg
EDR = Epigraphic Database Roma
FSI = Fonti per la Storia d'Italia
ICI = Inscriptiones christianae Italiae septimo saeculo antiquiores
ICUR = Inscriptiones Christianae Urbis Romae septimo saeculo
ILCV = Inscriptiones Latinae Christianae Veteres
InscrIt = Inscriptiones Italiae
LLT = Library of Latin Texts
LP = Liber pontificalis
MGH = Monumenta Germaniae Historica
      AA = Auctores antiquissimi
      Capit. = Capitularia regum Francorum
      Conc. = Concilia
      Fontes iuris = Fontes iuris Germanici antiqui in usum scholarum separatim editi
      LL = Leges Langobardorum
      Poetae = Poetae Latini medii aevi
      Epp. = Epistolae III-VIII (Epistolae Merovingici et Karolini aevi)
      SS = Scriptores in Folio
      SS rer. Germ. = Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum separatim editi
      SS rer. Lang. = Scriptores rerum Langobardicarum et Italicarum, saec. VI-IX
      SS rer. Merov. = Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum
MHP, SS = Monumenta historae patriae, Scriptores
MLW = Mittellateinisches Wörterbuch bis zum ausgehenden 13. Jahrhundert
NGML = Novum glossarium mediae Latinitatis ab anno DCCC usque ad annum MCC
PIB = Prosopografia dell'Italia bizantina
PL = Patrologia Latina
PLRE = The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire
RF = Regesto di Farfa
RIS = Rerum Italicarum scriptores.
RS = Regesto di Subiaco
RT = Regesto di Tivoli
SC = Sources Chrétiennes
SupplIt = Supplementa Italica. Nuova Serie
SPV = Le antiche carte dell'archivio capitolare di S. Pietro in Vaticano

Ostrogoths vs. Franks:
Imagining the Past in the Middle Ages

by Fabrizio Oppedisano

This introductory essay aims at highlighting some aspects concerning the connections between the Ostrogoths and Franks in the Middle Ages. To this end, cases from different contexts and chronologies have been examined: firstly, Giovanni Villani's chronicle, which conveys a polarized image of the Gothic and Carolingian worlds; and then some testimonies from the ninth century, that use the Ostrogothic model in connection with the present in a more complex and ambivalent manner. The various interpretations of the Gothic world are linked by a tendency to emphasize historical analogies, that leads to an overall and protracted disinterest in the specific forms of Ostrogothic society and in the work that most documents it, i.e. Cassiodorus' *Variae*.

Middle Ages; Communal Age; Carolingian Age; Florence; Giovanni Villani; Walahfrid Strabo; Cassiodorus; Franks; Ostrogoths; Political Use of History.

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Abbreviations
CCCM = Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis.
FSI = Fonti per la storia d'Italia.
MGH, Epp. 4 = *Epistolae Karolini aevi II*, ed. E. Duemmler, Berlin 1895 (Epistolae [in Quart], 4).
MGH, Fontes iuris 7 = Marsilius of Padua, *Defensor pacis*, ed. R. Scholz, Hannover 1933 (Fontes iuris Germanici antiqui in usum scholarum separatim editi, 7).
MGH, SS 6 = *Chronica et annales aevi Salici*, ed. G.H. Pertz, Hannover 1844 (Scriptores [in Folio], 6).
MGH, SS 10 = *Annales et chronica aevi Salici. Vitae aevi Carolini et Saxonici*, ed. G.H. Pertz, Hannover 1852 (Scriptores [in Folio], 10).
MGH, SS 22 = *Historici Germaniae saec. XII.2*, ed. G.H. Pertz, Hannover 1872 (Scriptores [in Folio], 22).
MGH, SS 39 = Bartholomew of Lucca, *Historia Ecclesiastica nova*, ed. O. Clavuot, Hannover 2009 (Scriptores [in Folio], 39).
MGH, SS rer. Merov. 2 = *Fredegarii et aliorum Chronica. Vitae sanctorum*, ed. B. Krusch, Hannover 1888 (Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum, 2).
PChBE II = *Prosopographie chrétienne du Bas-Empire*, vol. 2, *Prosopographie de l'Italie chrétienne (313-604)*, ed. C. Pietri – L. Pietri, Roma 2000.

1. *Goths and Franks in the Chronicle of Giovanni Villani*

In Giovanni Villani's *Nuova Cronica*, Totila is the protagonist of one of the darkest moments in the history of Florence: besieged and taken by deceit, the city suffers looting and devastation; its bishop is beheaded and many of its inhabitants are slaughtered as they attempt to flee[1]. The reader is not surprised by such cruelty. From the very first pages of the work, in fact, a series of anticipations allowed him to recognise in Totila the prototype of barbarism, whose destructive fury had caused immense catastrophes in important cities (Florence, Perugia, Arezzo)[2] and, above all, the loss of a collective memory that the author of the chronicle now proposes to remedy:

> con ciò sia cosa che per gli nostri antichi Fiorentini poche e nonn-ordinate memorie si truovino di fatti passati della nostra città di Firenze, o per difetto della loro negligenzia, o per cagione che al tempo che Totile Flagellum Dei la distrusse si perdessono scritture, io Giovanni cittadino di Firenze, considerando la nobiltà e grandezza della nostra città a' nostri presenti tempi, mi pare si convegna di raccontare e fare memoria dell'origine e cominciamento di così famosa città, e delle mutazioni averse e filici, e fatti passati di quella[3].

The presence, in the proem of the work, of the name Totila next to that of Villani contributes to emphasizing the role and identity of the chronicler by opposition; on the other hand, it reinforces the exemplary value of the figure of the Gothic king, defined – here and in many other passages of the work – with the terrible epithet *Flagellum Dei*, which suggests a true hy-

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[1] Villani, *Nuova Cronica*, III, 1.
[2] *Ibidem*, I, 36 (Firenze): «Questo (il «parlatorio» del tempo di Cesare) fu poi guasto al tempo di Totile»; II, 1 (Firenze): «Del compreso e giro della città non troviamo cronica che ne faccia menzione; se non che quando Totile Flagellum Dei la distrusse, fanno le storie menzione ch'ella era grandissima»; II, 9 (Perugia): «poi Totile Flagellum Dei la distrusse, come fece Firenze e più altre città d'Italia, e fece marterizzare santo Erculano vescovo della detta città»; II, 10 (Arezzo): «la detta città d'Aurelia fu anche distrutta per lo detto Totile, e fecela arare e seminare di sale, e d'allora innanzi fu chiamata Arezzo, cioè città arata».
[3] *Ibidem*, I, 1: «for our ancient Florentines, there are few and unordered records of past events in our city of Florence, either because of their negligence or because of the fact that at the time Totile Flagellum Dei destroyed it, records were lost, I, Giovanni, citizen of Florence, considering the nobility and greatness of our city in our present times, feel it is appropriate to recount and record the origin and beginning of this famous city, and the changes that have taken place and the past events of that city».

bridization with the Hun Attila[4]. Confusion between the two names occurs quite frequently in the literature of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries[5], as they also do in the Florentine chronicles: in a section of Martin of Opava's work entirely dedicated to Pope Leo, Totila replaces Attila; before that, in the *Chronica de origine civitatis Florentiae*, Totila is evoked in the context of the Gothic war, but with the epithet *Flagellum Dei*[6]. In Villani such overlaps take on greater proportions: Totila, whose real name was Bela, was known for his savagery, of which his fratricide was the most abominable testimony. His actions – apart from distortions and hagiographic inserts taken out of context – are placed in the mid-fifth century: they partly relate to the Hunnic invasion of 452 (the battle of the Catalaunian Plains; the entry into Italy and the siege of Aquileia; the invasion of the north-eastern regions and cities of the Peninsula), they partly refer to the movements of the Goths during the war against Justinian (the alleged destruction of Florence, dated here to 28 June 450, with the rebuilding of Fiesole; the expedition towards Rome, with the destruction of many cities and the killing of many bishops, including Herculanus of Perugia). About the end of Totila's raids, says Villani, two different versions circulated: according to some, he had died suddenly in Maremma; according to others, it was the prayers of the Pope, Leo, that had freed Italy from his infesting presence («alcuno altro dottore scrisse che 'l detto Totile per li prieghi a Dio di santo Leo papa che allora regnava si partì d'Italia, e cessò la sua pestilenza»)[7].

Those who were acquainted with Paul the Deacon noted the inconsistency of these reconstructions: Bartholomew of Lucca points out the error of Martin of Opava: «istum autem regem, quem Martinus vocat Totilam, Casinensis, qui eandem historiam refert, Attilam appellat»[8]. Giovanni Boccaccio, in his *Esposizioni sopra la Commedia di Dante*, observes, more generally, how the chronicles handed down a tale tainted by anachronisms: «Sono oltre a questo molti che chiamano questo Attila Totila, i quali non dicon bene, perciocché Attila fu al tempo di Marziano imperadore, il quale fu promosso all'imperio di Roma, secondoché scrive Paolo predetto, intorno dell'anno di Cristo 440, e Totila, il quale fu suo successore, fu a' tempi di Giustino imperadore, intorno agli anni di Cristo 529»[9]. Even when one grasps these inconsistencies, however, one struggles to make distinctions in the barbarian amalgam traditionally associated with these names: thus, for Boccaccio, Totila is nevertheless a successor of Attila, in the idea that Huns and Goths of the Amal dynasty should be placed in the same chronological context. This was a deep-rooted

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[4] On the attribution of this epithet to Attila and its frequency in medieval sources, see e.g. Bertini, *Attila in the chroniclers*.
[5] Maissen, *Attila, Totila e Carlo Magno*, pp. 575-576; see Riccardo Chellini's commentary on his edition of the *Chronica de origine civitatis*, p. 84.
[6] *Chronica de origine civitatis Florentiae*, 10; Martin of Opava, *Chronicon*, p. 418.
[7] Villani, *Nuova Cronica*, III, 1-6.
[8] Bartholomew of Lucca, *Historia ecclesiastica nova*, VIII, 4.
[9] Boccaccio, *Esposizioni sopra la Commedia*, pp. 587-589 (*ad Inf.* XII, 134).

idea in Italy, and in medieval culture in general. In a passage of Frutolf of Michelsberg's chronicle (who, for the history of the Goths, relies on Jordanes and Paul the Deacon)[10], the author stated that the error of associating Theoderic, Attila and Ermanaric was common to tales handed down in unwritten form («vulgaris fabulatio et cantilenarum modulatio») and to chronicles[11]. Among these was perhaps the *Chronicon Gozecense* (although the chronological relationship with Frutolf's chronicle is uncertain), in which Theoderic, the founder of Verona, is attributed the title of *rex Hunnorum*[12], according to information obtained precisely in Italy («ut ab indigenis accepimus»: it is not entirely clear whether reference is made only to the news of the foundation of the city, or, more likely, also to those of the relationship between Theoderic and the Huns).

In Villani, the tendency to confuse the names of the kings and peoples who entered Italy becomes more pronounced, leading to an almost total dissolution of the historical background to which these protagonists belonged: in the *Cronica* their actions are inserted into a single great barbarian horizon, capable of exerting such an attractive force as to encompass figures who were completely foreign to it. When the narrative shifts from Totila to his supposed successor, Theoderic (the Visigoth Theoderic II), the figure of the Eastern Roman emperor Leo I, who takes on the features of the eighth-century *basileus* Leo III, bursts into the story. Together with the Gothic king, he invades Italy, enters Rome and contaminates it with his iconoclastic fury:

> Il sopradetto Teodorigo che passò in Italia prese Roma, e tutta Toscana, e Italia, e allegossi con Leone imperadore di Gostantinopoli eretico ariano; il quale Leone passò in Italia e venne a Roma e trasse di Roma tutte le "magini de" Cristiani e arsele in Gostantinopoli, a dispetto del papa e della Chiesa. E quello Leone imperadore e Teodorico re de' Gotti guastaro e consumaro tutta Italia, e le chiese de' fedeli fecero tutte abattere, e lo stato de' Romani e dello 'mperio molto infieboliro[13].

If in the immediately preceding pages, dedicated to the years of Alaric and Radagaisus, Villani had adhered fairly faithfully to the contents of Orosius'

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[10] The reception of Jordanes is made explicit by the author: *Ekkehardi chronicon universale*, p. 130, ll. 31-33. The influence of Paul the Deacon can be deduced from some passages (concerning Totila, for instance, in ll. 12-17 he takes up almost literally *Historia Romana*, XVI, 22, which in turn derives from the life of Vigilius of the *Liber Pontificalis*). On Frutolf and the continuators of his chronicle, see McCarthy, *The Continuations of Frutolf Michelsberg's Chronicle*.

[11] *Ekkehardi chronicon universale*, p. 130, ll. 31-61. In the case of Theoderic, it may be the homonymy with the Visigothic king that favours the association with the Huns. Similarly, as we shall see, a tradition confuses Emperor Leo I with Emperor Leo III in Villani: see the text corresponding to footnote 13.

[12] *Chronicon Gozecense*, I, 23.

[13] Villani, *Nuova Cronica*, I, 5: «The aforesaid Theoderic, who passed into Italy, took Rome, and all of Tuscany, and Italy, and allied himself with Leo the Emperor of Costantinople, an Arian heretic; this Leo passed into Italy and came to Rome and removed from Rome all the images of the Christians and burned them in Costantinople, in defiance of the Pope and the Church. And that Leo emperor and Theoderic king of the Goths spoiled and consumed all of Italy, and the churches of the faithful were all destroyed, and the state of the Romans and the empire was greatly weakened».

work[14] (with the addition of a hagiographic part linked to the figure of Zeno-bius[15]), in this section one struggles to find connections with late antique or early medieval sources. At the end of paragraph six, the author advises those who wish to enrich their knowledge of those facts to look for a work to which he refers with a brief quotation: «chi vorrà più stesamente sapere le batta-glie e le geste de' Gotti cerchi i libro che comincia "*Gottorom* antichissimi etc."». This book («oggi non identificabile», according to Franca Ragone[16]) is probably the treatise on the Goths by Isidore of Seville[17]. The incipit of this work changes from one redaction to another: «Gothorum antiquissimum esse regnum certum est» is the form attested in the *recensio brevior*; «Gotho-rum antiquissimam esse gentem certum est», that of the *recensio prolixior*; «Gothorum antiquissima origo de Magog» is what we read in the *recapitula-tio*[18]. The quotation of the first two words of this sentence in the form «*Got-torom* antichissimi» leaves room for some considerations. The quotation of the adjective both in the vernacular and the noun form seems to be caused by the extrapolation from the original sentence, which, moreover, was not fixed in the tradition[19]. Villani probably did not have Isidore's work at hand, since the latter conveys a positive image of the Goths without the anachronisms and overlaps that distinguish the chronicler's narration[20]. He cites it because he knew of its existence and of the themes with which it dealt (perhaps he had heard of it, or had found it cited in a catalogue, in a list, in a repertory, such as the entry on the Goths in the *Liber Glossarum*[21]), without however having

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[14] Orosius, *Historiae*, esp. VII, 37. Villani's use of Orosius' work is extensive; it is probable that he read the *Historiae adversus paganos* in Latin (Ragone, *Giovanni Villani e i suoi continuato-ri*), even if Bono Giamboni's translation in vernacular was already circulating (see recently Fai-ni, *"Uno nuovo stato di felicitade"*; Faini, *Vegezio e Orosio*; see now Zabbia, *I cronisti fiorentini e la scelta del volgare*); Fubini, *Osservazioni*, p. 412, recognizes in the impact of this source on Villani one of the aspects from which Leonardo Bruni's work is distinguished.

[15] In Paulinus, *Vita Ambrosii*, 50, 1, the bishop of Florence Zenobius is mentioned (approx. 412/413: PChBE, II, 2, p. 2378, *Zenobius 2*).

[16] Ragone, *Giovanni Villani e i suoi continuatori*, p. 17.

[17] Isidore is an author whose influence on Villani, but also on medieval Latin culture in general, had been particularly extensive. For a recent overview of Isidore's medieval dissemination see the essays in *A Companion to Isidore of Seville*, part 3. On Villani, see e.g. Salvestrini, *Giovanni Villani* (on the origins of Tuscan cities reconstructed through an etymological principle); Gros, *Un nouvel Ailleurs* (on geography).

[18] For a recent overview of the somewhat unresolved problems posed by the manuscript tradi-tion and the different redactions of the *Historia*, see the edition by Rodríguez Alonso (*Las histo-rias de los Godos*); see also Martín, *Réflexions sur la tradition manuscrite*; Velázquez Soriano, *La doble redacción de la* Historia Gothorum; Furtado, *Isidore's Histories*; Furtado, *In How Many Ways Can a Text Be Written?*; cf. Kasperski, *Was there a Revision of Isidore's* Histories *in the early 630s?*.

[19] The form *Gotorum antiquissimi* is found in Paul Ewald's transcription of quaternion 6, ff. 48-55, of the Escurialensis manuscript R II 18: Ewald, *Reise nach Spanien*, p. 276.

[20] For a comparison between Isidore and Jordanes, see e.g. Ghosh, *Writing the Barbarian Past*, pp. 87-92.

[21] *Liber Glossarum*, s.v. GO 28. In general, the presence of Isidore in the *Liber Glossarum* is notable (about a third of the entries); see e.g. Carracedo Fraga, *Isidore de Séville grammarien*; on the entry in s.v. GO 28, Furtado, *In How Many Ways Can a Text Be Written?*; M. Giani, *Il "Liber Glossarum" e la tradizione altomedievale di Agostino*, esp. p. 84.

a precise knowledge of its contents[22]. He may also not have known who the author was, whose name is not always mentioned in the manuscripts (it is absent, for example, in all the copies that contain the shorter version of the History of the Goths)[23]. All this is consistent with the way Villani deals with ancient authors, to whom he often refers even when he does not know their work (see, for example, the cases of «Escodio maestro di storie» and «Omero poeta»[24]), or at least does not know them directly.

For the invasion of Italy and the destruction of Florence, having exhausted the reservoir of Orosian information, Villani's sources are predominantly medieval. He uses Martin of Opava, the *Chronaca de origine civitatis Florentiae*, hagiographic works, chronicles of other cities, placing himself in general as the end point of a chain which, with regard to the history of the Goths, had by then lost contact with the fundamental testimonies of Jordanes, Procopius and Cassiodorus[25]. It was precisely these authors that were to be the focus of the rediscovery of the Gothic world by the humanists of the following century: when publishing *De bello Italico adversus Gothos*, Leonardo Bruni declares that he was led to pursue that endeavour precisely by the fact that there were no known works in Latin on the history of the Goths. In the proem of his epitome of Jordanes' *Getica* (this is the missive to cardinal Juan de Carvajal), Enea Silvio Piccolomini recalls how his interest in that people arose from the unreliability of the information circulating about them («nam in ore hominum sepe de Gothis est sermo, sed nec perfectus, nec tanta re dignus»). Finally, Blondus Flavius, author of a translation of Procopius' *Gothica*, is said to have underlined the importance of a little-used source, Cassiodorus' *Variae*[26].

Until then, the reconstruction of Gothic world remained predominantly subordinate to a political interpretation of the present, and Villani's work is an example of this phenomenon. He moulds the early medieval past of Florence around a great dichotomy: to that terrible moment, in which the civilization built by the Romans and then by the Church had run the risk of being overwhelmed by a plethora of ungodly enemies – Totila, Theodoric, Leo –, the author contrasts the positive action of Charlemagne, the great Christian builder

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[22] Nor can it be ruled out that Villani knew a synthesis or a reworking – if it existed – in vernacular, from which he may have derived the form «*Gottorum* antichissimi». A short translation in vernacular of Isidore's chronicle, entitled *Antica cronica d'imperatori e d'altri signori*, certainly circulated in the first half of the fourteenth century: Luti, *Un nuovo volgarizzamento del* Chronicon maius. As early as the end of the thirteenth century, works of Latin historiography began to be translated in the vernacular, including, as mentioned, the Orosius' *Historiae* (see footnote 14).
[23] On the manuscript tradition of the work, see footnote 18.
[24] Villani, *Nuova Cronica*, I, 5 and 14.
[25] Considerable efforts have been made on the sources for the reconstruction of the ancient events reported by Villani, starting with Hartwig's work, *Quellen und Forschungen*. Fundamental now is Ragone, *Il cronista e le sue fonti*, pp. 13-53 (esp. 47-53), with an extensive bibliography; for the period of interest here, see especially Maissen, *Attila, Totila e Carlo Magno*; Chellini, *Chronica de origine civitatis*, pp. 83-90; see now also Zabbia, *Perché si diventa cronisti*, pp. 62-65.
[26] Piccolomini, *Historia Gothorum*, 4. For a recent overview, with an extensive bibliography, see Sivo's introduction to her recent edition. On Blondus Flavius see also further on.

and re-founder of the city of Florence[27]. There is a high degree of intentionality in the definition of this contrast: Villani accentuates the nefarious picture of the devastation of «Totile Flagellum Dei», amplifies the impression of a large and indistinct barbarian agglomeration, and introduces the theme of the re-foundation of Florence by Charles, of which there seems to be no trace in his sources[28]. In this way, he proposes to his readers a vision of the past in which good and evil are polarized around two different moments, confused in their historical specificities and endowed with a certain symbolic charge, which seems to want to convey a clear message: «Firenze è sempre stata, è, e sempre sarà guelfa, legata ai papi e alla casa reale di Francia»[29].

2. *Myths of origins*

The contrast between the age of invasions and the Carolingian age appears to be reinforced by the description of the Trojan origins of the Franks, which opens an unbridgeable gap between this people and the other barbarian peoples (Goths, Vandals, Huns), lumped together in a pagan and heretical ethnic skein[30]. This myth, first attested in Pseudo-Fredegarius, was widespread in the late Middle Ages[31]. In Villani, one can perceive the influence of the narrative contained in the *Liber historiae Francorum* (1-4), probably composed in the Neustrian area in the 820s[32]: the references to the war with the Alans (as in Gregory of Tours[33]), the collaboration with Valentinian, the liberation from the tribute imposed by Rome, and then the conflict with the empire when the Roman tax collectors reappeared after ten years of suspension of the taxation, coincide. Taking up the themes of this tradition, Villani reinforces the positive link of the Carolingian world with the Roman past and with Florence, which descended from Rome and shared its Trojan origins.

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[27] Villani, *Nuova Cronica*, III, 4.
[28] See Davis, *Topographical and Historical Propaganda*, p. 50, and especially Maissen, *Attila, Totila e Carlo Magno*.
[29] Maissen, *Attila, Totila e Carlo Magno*, p. 627; cf. De Vincentiis, *Origini, memoria, identità a Firenze*, pp. 397-406.
[30] Villani, *Nuova Cronica*, I, 17-18.
[31] *Chronica Fredegarii*, II, 4-9. On the formation of the myth, the bibliography is extensive: see e.g. Luiselli, *Il mito dell'origine troiana*; Giardina, *Le origini troiane dall'impero alla nazione*; Ewig, *Troiamythos und fränkische Frühgeschichte*; Murray, *Reinhard Wenskus on 'Ethnogenesis'*; Coumert, *Origines des peuples*, part III, ch. 2-5; Ghosh, *Writing the Barbarian Past*, ch. 3. On the spread of myth in the late Middle Ages and the modern age, see e.g. Poucet, *L'origine troyenne*; Lentano, *L'ombra lunga del passato*. Cf. Robert Kasperski's paper in this volume (§3).
[32] See e.g. Gerberding, *The Rise of the Carolingians*, pp. 1-30; Stadermann, *Konstruktion und Rezeption*, pp. 433-435.
[33] Gregory of Tours, *Historia Francorum*, II, 9. Gregory's work had a wide circulation (see e.g. Goffart, *From* Historiae *to* Historia Francorum; Reimitz, *Social Networks*) and influenced both Fredegar's chronicle (on whose sources see e.g. Collins, *Die Fredegar-Chroniken*, pp. 27-38 and 46-55), and the *Liber historiae Francorum*, although important differences remain (see e.g. Gerberding, *The Rise of the Carolingians*, ch. 3; on the myth of the Trojan origins, Ghosh, *Writing the Barbarian Past*, pp. 99-110).

In that perspective, those tales which, by contrast, configured a kinship between Franks and Goths could evidently find no place. First and foremost of these was the legend of Theoderic's Macedonian and therefore Trojan origins[34], which presupposed a competitive relationship between the Franks and Rome and a sought-after bond of brotherhood between the Goths and the Franks[35]. Similarly, the tale of the common Scandinavian origins of Franks and Goths, which had been popular in the Carolingian age alongside the myth of Trojan origins[36]: «alii vero affirmant» writes Frechulf of Lisieux «eos de Scanza insula, quae vagina gentium est, exordium habuisse, de qua Gothi et caeterae nationes Theotiscae exierunt: quod et idioma linguae eorum testator»[37], was also left out. In this latter case, it is evident that the proximity of Goths and Franks is part of a perspective that seems to privilege a sort of "pan-germanism" (the *insula Scanza* is «vagina gentium» and from it «Gothi et caeterae nationes Theodiscae exierunt»), supported by the use of a unifying idiom («quod et idioma linguae eorum testator»). This would have, therefore, drawn a sharper fault line between their world and Romanitas, broadly understood as the Roman past and the Byzantine present[38].

3. *Goths and Franks in the Carolingian age*

The Frankish Carolingian world had elaborated its relationship with the Gothic past in a complex manner, unlike the schematic image conveyed by later authors. On the one hand, one senses an inclination to recover and reestablish the link with that world, which is demonstrated by several phenomena, which have been extensively studied[39]. They include the myths relating to the origins of these peoples, as we have seen; the dissemination of tales celebrating the heroic character of the figure of Theoderic[40]; the interest in

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[34] Contained in paragraphs 57-62 of the second book of the *Chronica* attributed to Fredegar, the legend reached the twelfth century *vitae* of Theoderic (*Gesta Theoderici regis*). Krusch postulates the existence of a common source for chapter 57 of Fredegar and these later biographies (MGH, SS rer. Merov. 2, p. 200).

[35] See esp. Giardina, *Le origini troiane dall'impero alla nazione*, pp. 192-195.

[36] Frechulf of Lisieux, *Historiae*, I, 2, 26: Aeneas, Ascanius and the lineage of the Latin kings are said to have given birth to the Roman people, while Friga's progeny, after wandering for an indefinite time, is said to have chosen as their king Francius, very strong in war. He is said to have led his people to the regions near the Rhine and the Danube. Among contemporaries see e.g. Ermoldus Nigellus, *Carmen elegiacum in honorem Hludovici*, vv. 1886-1899: Coumert, *Origines des peuples*, pp. 363-365.

[37] Frechulf of Lisieux, *Historiae*, I, 2, 26.

[38] See Innes, *Teutons or Trojans?*, pp. 233-235; Coumert, *Origines des peuples*, pp. 359-378.

[39] For an overview of the reception of the figure of Theoderic and the Ostrogothic world in the Carolingian age, see Goltz, *Barbar - König - Tyrann*, pp. 600-607; more specifically, Simoni, *La memoria del regno ostrogoto*; Tischler, *Remembering the Ostrogoths*; Ferrari, *Teoderico e Carlo Magno*.

[40] The literary works are intertwined with an oral tradition of some importance, as can be inferred from the passage from Frutolf quoted above (see the text corresponding to footnote 11); on these issues, see Simoni, *La memoria del regno ostrogoto*; Innes, *Teutons or Trojans?*.

the language[41] and culture of the Goths, e.g. in Jordanes' *Getica*, which Frechulf evidently knew and which Alcuin wished to read (he asked Angilbert, a man close to Charlemagne, for a copy: «Si habeas Iordanis historiam, dirige mihi propter quarumdam notitiam rerum»[42]); Agnellus' work, created in a context – the Veronese one – peripheral but nonetheless linked to the court[43]; and the construction of a symbolic link between the Carolingian and the Amal monarchy through recalling the places and symbols of Ostrogothic power[44]. On the other hand, we see how it was possible to put forward a very different view of the Goths and of Theoderic, leading to seeing the revival of that model as an insidious parallel. This is the case with what Michael Herren has called «the most challenging political poem of the Latin Middle Ages»[45], the *De imagine Tetrici* composed by Walahfrid Strabo in his early twenties in 829. In this poem, the ghost of Theoderic's unholy monarchy – which is to say the equestrian statue that Charles had had relocated to Aachen[46] – haunts the present, coagulating around it the evil that threatened the integrity of the kingdom. In the depiction of this image and its complex symbolism, there is a desire on the part of the author to recall the darker aspects of the Gothic king's reputation: some of them of great resonance, others less so. In this way, Walahfrid's *Tetricus* is distinguished not only by his impiety and cruelty, but also by his corruption, a detail not entirely common, on which Walahfrid's poetry repeatedly insists, loading it with allegorical meanings and a dense fabric of correspondences with contemporaneity (in reference to Louis the Pious Louis the Pious and Hilduin first of all, and then to the plethora of detractors and court flatterers)[47]. It is also in this perspective that Walahfrid makes the

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[41] Zironi, *L'eredità dei Goti*, esp. pp. 3-4.

[42] Alcuin, *Epistulae*, 221 (year 801). On Angilbert see e.g. Viarre, *Un portrait d'Angilbert*. On the circulation of the manuscripts of the *Getica*, see Grillone's preface to his edition (pp. XXIV-LI).

[43] Here one witnesses the formation of historical miscellanies inclined to bring together the threads along which the command over Italy had passed from the Goths to the Lombards and finally to the Franks (these are the manuscripts that contain the *Anonymus Valesianus I* and *II*). Simoni, *La memoria del regno ostrogoto*. On the historical and cultural context of Verona, see e.g. Avesani, *La cultura veronese*; on the *Liber pontificalis ecclesiae Ravennatis*, see Nauerth, *Agnellus von Ravenna*; the introductions to the editions by Nauerth (pp. 9-75) and Deliyannis (pp. 9-135); on the *Anonymus Valesianus*, see the introduction by Festy – Vitiello to their edition (pp. XXXIX-XLV). On Verona, see in this volume Stefan Esders' paper, §2.

[44] On the statue, see footnote 45.

[45] Herren, *The 'De imagine Tetrici' of Walahfrid Strabo*, p. 119.

[46] See e.g. Bredekamp, *Theoderich als König der Aachener Thermen*; in this volume, see the essay by Carlo Ferrari (in relation to the problem of the statue of the Regisole in Pavia). The transfer of the equestrian monument to Aachen was part of a broader operation of integrating architectural and decorative elements of the Ravenna palace into the Carolingian palace: see e.g. Jäggi, *Spolien in Ravenna*.

[47] The theme of corruption is already present in the *Visio Wettini*, which precedes *De imagine Tetrici*: see e.g. Stella, *La Visione di Vetti*, esp. pp. 17-20; Stella, *Carlo e la sua ombra nelle testimonianze poetiche*, pp. 16-29. The complexity of the references to current events has left room for different interpretations regarding the author's position towards Louis' court; see in particular, with different nuances, Godman, *Poets and Emperors*, pp. 133-144 (on Walahfrid, pp. 129-147); Godman, *Louis 'the Pious'*; Herren, *Walahfrid Strabo's "De imagine Tetrici": an*

force of Boethian reminiscences felt in the work, a hypotext that evidently acts as a warning for the present[48].

The relations between the Franks and the Goths as expressed by Walahfrid in *De imagine Tetrici* are consistent with that which emerges from the *Excerpta codicis Sangallensis*, the epitome obtained by Walahfrid from the very same manuscript from which the Vienna codex of the *Fasti Vindobonenses priores* and *posteriores*[49] descends. In this miscellany, the story of the Gothic kingdom contributes to sketching a gloomy picture, which is only partly common to the tradition of the *Consularia Italica* from which Walahfrid draws his inspiration, notably because the image that these texts convey is far from univocal[50]. Walahfrid seems to choose aspects of the tradition that would allow him to express a clear position within a polemic between the intellectuals of the Ludovician circle and the Carolingian court: in the miscellany, he does so by merely selecting the material transmitted by the *Consularia*, while in the poem dedicated to the equestrian statue of Theoderic he does so through a more creative form of reworking. In this way, the poet animates a clearly topical debate on the use of an ideologically relevant model for the monarchy[51]; a model endowed with flexible symbolic meanings, so as to make it susceptible to new semanticisations from time to time, of which his contemporaries were evidently aware (it is perhaps the ambiguity of the figure of Theoderic that prevents the *comparatio* with the Carolingian monarchs from going as far as full identification)[52].

4. *Conclusions: Cassiodorus, the* Variae *and the evanescent memory of Roman-Ostrogothic society*

Medieval culture interpreted the figure of Theoderic and the Ostrogothic world in different ways, sometimes through the reception of literary traditions that had settled over time, sometimes through more circumstantial and conscious operations of selection and rewriting of the past. With regard to relations with the Carolingian world, as we have seen, two broad tendencies prevailed: one inclined to emphasize distinctions, and one that, on the contrary, seeks analogies and elements of continuity, to the point of imagining, albeit in vari-

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Interpretation; Stella, *Paesaggio degradato come scenario metapoetico*; more generally, De Jong, Admonitio *and Criticism of the Ruler.*

[48] Cf. Tischler, *Remembering the Ostrogoths*, pp. 85-99. On Boethius, see Danuta Shanzer's paper in this volume.

[49] See Simoni, *La memoria del regno ostrogoto*, pp. 369-370.

[50] For instance, the *Chronicon Paschale* testifies to the existence of rumours which associate certain natural disasters with the Goths, but immediately distances itself from them; moreover, this work probably came from Vivarium, and it is difficult to imagine a deliberately anti-Gothic vocation (this is the interpretation of Troncarelli, *Il consolato dell'Anticristo*).

[51] On the problem and interpretations of the relationship between poetry and power in this period see e.g. Stella, *La dinamica del consenso.*

[52] Godman, *Louis 'the Pious'*, pp. 276-277.

ous ways, common origins. These strands do not lend themselves to a clear-cut differentiation on a geographical basis, although it is undoubtedly true that in Italy a somewhat ghostly vision of the Ostrogothic past predominated throughout the Middle Ages, marked by what Fiorella Simoni has called «un'impressionante *damnatio memoriae* ecclesiastica» (which is not, however, without exceptions, as the case of Verona, for example, demonstrates)[53]. In the Frankish world, on the other hand, a greater fluidity and more accentuated nuances are perceived. There is, in any case, an element that unites these perspectives, and it concerns the relationship between the Gothic world and the Roman world. This is an important point, which has only partly been dwelt on here. In the medieval works that reconstruct, celebrate or stigmatize the history and image of the Ostrogoths in Italy, one can detect the absence of a perspective capable of perceiving the specificities of Roman-Ostrogothic society: there is a lack of details, references, reconstructions, that would reflect – even if only in a fragmentary way – an image of sixth-century Italy as a laboratory of a new society, marked by the prospect of a stable coexistence of different groups. In short, there is a lack of what we could call a "Cassiodorean perspective".

The reasons for this absence are manifold. The authors who favour a viewpoint hostile to the Goths (starting with the late antique and early medieval works such as the biography of Pope John in the *Liber pontificalis*, Gregory, Bede, the *Consularia Italica*) give a strong emphasis to the serious conflict of 523, are attracted by the figure of Boethius, and are led to identify the Ostrogothic experience *tout-court* with the moment in which Arian barbarism had prevailed, with its blind violence, exercised against figures who embodied the fundamental institutions of the late antique *res publica*, the Church (Pope John I) and the senate (Boethius and Symmachus). In this anti-Gothic tradition, there can be no consideration for the Roman-barbaric compromise of 476 with Odoacer, and revived by Theoderic a few years later. And although such a perspective does not necessarily result in a pro-Byzantine outlook, it does share the tendency to make a systematic distinction between Romans and Goths, through drawing a picture of the period between 476 and 554 as a long «barbarian interlude», the signs of which had to be removed in the name of a Roman and Catholic re-appropriation of Italy[54]. On the other hand, authors who express a positive view of the Goths by celebrating a kinship with the Franks inevitably end up emphasizing the emancipation of the Germanic peoples from Rome[55]. This split has repercussions, for example on the connections between Theoderic and the monuments of ancient Italy, which extends

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[53] Simoni, *La memoria del regno ostrogoto*, p. 370.
[54] Croke, *A.D. 476*. Among the Byzantine texts, the *Pragmatica sanctio*, promulgated in 554 and intended for the new Byzantine prefecture of Italy, is not included in this perspective. In this package of rules, the need to pacify a still divided land prevailed, and in this perspective the legitimacy of the Ostrogothic governments (except Vitiges and Totila) is admitted; see on this issue Oppedisano, *The end of the Roman Senate*.
[55] This aspect was already highlighted by Löwe in a 1952 study (*Von Theoderich dem Großen zu Karl dem Großen*).

well beyond the sixth century: much of what is Roman – in particular the symbols of power (palaces, equestrian statues) – may appear Theoderician, and thus provide an expression of a more autonomously Germanic experience[56]. Finally, even when Theoderic and the Goths become a positive model for the construction of a new Carolingian kingdom in Italy, there is no perceived need to explore the form of Ostrogothic society within it (the relations between the Gothic people and the Romans, or between the Amal monarchy and the senate). The focus is shifted, if anything, to external relations with the Byzantine empire, because that is the horizon that most urgently activates a comparison between the present and the past; and it does so, in this case, with the otherwise extremely rare quotations from the documents of Cassiodorus' epistolary works that concern relations with Byzantium, starting with *Variae*, I, 1[57]. What, on the other hand, concerns the social, administrative, and institutional fabric of sixth-century Italy – on which the *Variae* offer the most ample testimony – goes beyond the interest of the culture and politics of the Carolingian age. In the contents of those texts, one can hardly find elements capable of evoking a comparison with the present.

This discourse can be extended to a wider context and period: compared to the other works of Cassiodorus, his letters circulate late in medieval Europe (no witnesses known to us date back to before the eleventh century)[58]. Among these readers, Cassiodorus' epistolary collection is rarely used to make a political or ideological point. Specific interests prevailed, which favoured the formation of *florilegia* and anthologies: they were linked at times to the encyclopaedic contents of the work[59], at others to the chancery formularies elaborated by Cassiodorus, which was taken up in the circles of the administration, the chanceries and the notaries from the tenth-eleventh centuries (first in Rome and Latium[60], later also in other areas[61]). In some cases, there are revivals in a political context, but these are limited to individual letters, in particular the first of the *Variae*, which probably circulates independently from the rest of the work (from the Frankish Carolingian world, as we have seen, to fourteenth-century Italy)[62]. The relationship between medieval readers and

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[56] For a bibliographical overview of this topic see the commentary by Cristina La Rocca, Yuri Marano, on *Variae*, I, 6, in the edition by Giardina *et al.*, 1 (forthcoming).

[57] For a survey of the reception of the *Variae* in Carolingian and post-Carolingian times, see Marco Cristini's paper in this volume.

[58] On the problems and debate surrounding the tradition of the *Variae,* see the section "Tradition of the Text" in the edition by Giardina *et al.*, 1 (forthcoming).

[59] See e.g. Michel, *Les* Variae*, témoin d'un passé gênant?*.

[60] See Dario Internullo's paper in this volume.

[61] Consider, for example, the *arenga* of the document concluding the peace of Castelnuovo di Magra (year 1306): Piattoli, *Codice diplomatico dantesco*, n. 99, pp. 118-125.

[62] Among the quotations from *Variae*, I, 1, see the opening paragraph of Marsilius of Padua's *Defensor pacis* (I, 1); earlier still are the *arenga* of 1306, composed by Dante (see previous footnote), and a letter by Cangrande della Scala of 1312, whose authorship is debated (according to the recent hypothesis of Paolo Pellegrini the author is Dante): Bertin 2005; Casadei 2019; see now Andrea Giardina's commentary on *Variae* I, 1, in the edition by Giardina *et al.*, 1 (forthco-

the Ostrogothic world shifted more sharply between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, when the richness and complexity of Roman-Ostrogothic society, the Amals' commitment to defending Roman *civilitas* in its various forms, and Cassiodorus' role in shaping this complex reality, began to be appreciated. At this point, the *Variae* burst in among the sources of the history of the Goths, and so, while Villani had addressed his readers by directing them to «i libro che comincia "*Gottorom* antichissimi etc."», Blondus Flavius advised his audience to read the twelve books of Cassiodorus' epistles:

> Nam Theodericus Ostrogothorum rex licet Ravennae sedem habuerit, amavit tamen ornavitque urbem Romam, et multa publice providit ac neglectae instaurationis supra fidem eorum qui barbarum fuisse meminerint maximam suscepit curam. Quod qui a fideli et copiosissimo teste voluerit certius intelligere, legat Cassiodori eius epistularum scriptoris Variarum libros, in quibus videbit ipsum regem religionis christianae, sacrorum locorum ceromoniarumque et pontificum romanorum dignitatis curam gessisse[63].

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ming). The first of the *Variae* is also used by John of Neumarkt: Michel, *Les* Variae *, témoin d'un passé gênant?.*
[63] Biondo Flavio, *Historiarum*, Decadis primae, liber tertius, pp. 33-34. Cf. e.g. Blasio, *Memoria filologica e memoria politica*; Mastrorosa, *Cassiodorus, Biondo Flavio.*

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