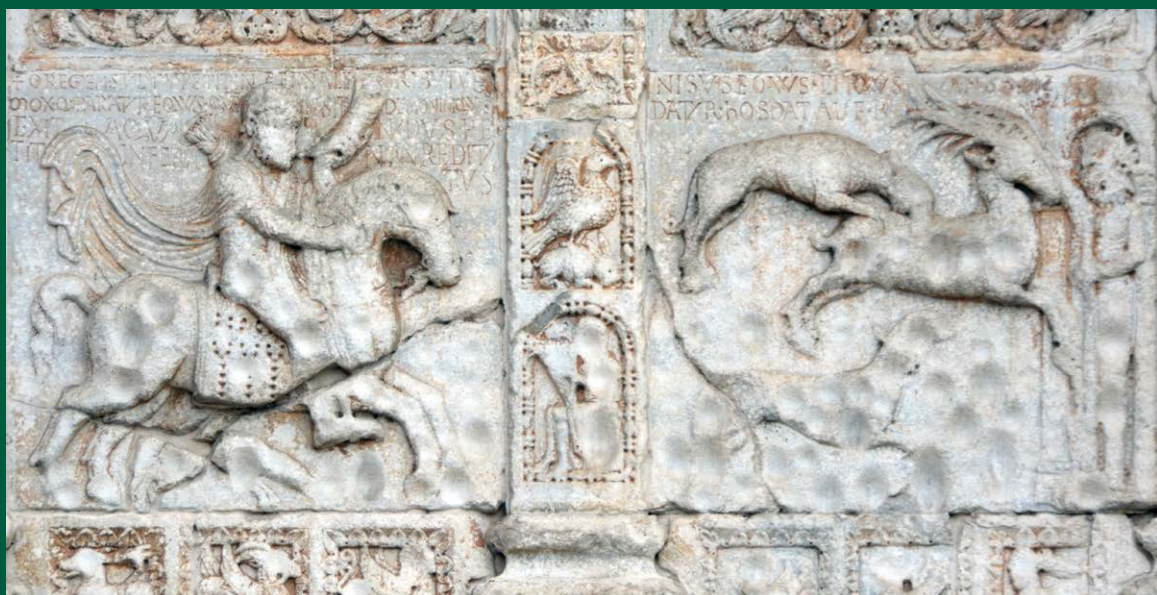# BETWEEN OSTROGOTHIC AND CAROLINGIAN ITALY

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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Between Ostrogothic and 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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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

The Creation of Two Ethnographic Identities:
the Cases of the Ostrogoths and the Langobards

by Robert Kasperski

The aim of this paper is to analyse two ethnographic identities constructed for two barbarian peoples – the Ostrogoths and the Langobards. As I try to argue, the first identity was constructed to show that the Ostrogoths were a civilized people and a better version of the Romans, and moreover, this identity communicated that the Ostrogoths could not be called a barbaric and savage people. Theoderic the Great's propagandists tried to present the Ostrogothic warriors as defenders of the Roman World. The second identity – constructed for the Langobards – presented them as a people who embodied the very antithesis of their main enemies (c. 660): the Franks and the Romans. The origin of the Langobards and the genesis of their ethnic hallmark, i.e. the long beards, were presented as signs of distinction or "limitic" structures which communicated non-*Romanitas* of this people.

Early Middle Ages; Late Antiquity; Ostrogoths; Langobards; Theoderic the Great; *Origo gentis Langobardorum*; Ethnographic Identity; Barbarians, Civilization.

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Abbreviations
CSHB = Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae.
MGH, AA 12 = Cassiodorus, *Variae*, ed. T. Mommsen, Berlin 1894 (Auctores antiquissimi, 12).
MGH, SS rer. Lang. = *Scriptores rerum Langobardicarum et Italicarum, saec. VI-IX*, ed. G. Waitz, Hannover 1878.
PLRE II = *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, vol. 2, *A.D. 395-527*, ed. J.R. Martindale, Cambridge-London-New York-New Rochelle-Melbourne-Sidney 1980.

Continete ergo possessorum intemperantes motus. Ament quieta, quos nullus ad incerta praecipitat. Dum belligerat Gothorum exercitus, sit in pace Romanus. (...) Defensorum maxima laus est, si, cum illi videantur praedictas regiones protegere, isti non desinant patrioticas possessiones excolere[1].

1. *Introduction*

Somewhere between CE 507 and CE 509, the Gothic ruler of Italy Theoderic the Great (who reigned in Italy between 493-526) sent to a certain Colosseus – as scholars believe, a Goth bearing a Roman name – a letter of nomination for the position of military and civil governor of the province of Pannonia Sirmiensis[2]. In this letter, Theoderic ordered Colosseus to defend Pannonia with weapons, and to rule it in accordance with the law. The king also reminded him that Pannonia had previously been under the authority of his royal relatives (*parentes*), and that this province would accept with gratitude its former defenders (*defensores*). Theoderic ordered Colosseus to defend innocence with bravery in order to display the justice (*iustitia*) of the Goths among the evil customs (*consuetudines perversae*) of other peoples, adding: «qui (scil. Gothi) sic semper fuerunt in laudum medio constituti ut et Romanorum prudentiam caperent et virtutem gentium possiderent»[3].

The content of the letter indicates that Theoderic strongly contrasted the Goths with other peoples (*nationes*) – the Goths were distinguished by their justice, whereas these *nationes* were characterised by their evil customs. Did

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[1] Cassiodorus, *Variae*, XII, 5, 4-5: «Restrain, therefore, the reckless tumult of the landowners. Let them love tranquillity, since no one is driving them into danger. While the Gothic army wages war, let the Roman be at peace. (...) It will be the greatest glory of the defenders if, while they guard the regions mentioned, the civilians continue to cultivate the lands of their own country» (transl. Barnish, *Cassiodorus*, p. 164).
[2] Cassiodorus, *Variae*, III, 23, 1-4. On Colosseus, see PLRE II, p. 305; Barnish, *Cassiodorus*, p. 58, note 13; cf. the commentary by G. Zecchini in the edition by Giardina *et al.*, 2, pp. 243-245.
[3] Cassiodorus, *Variae*, III, 23, 3: «they (i.e. the Goths) have always maintained a praiseworthy mean, since they have acquired the wisdom of the Romans, and have inherited the manliness of the peoples» (transl. Barnish, *Cassiodorus*, p. 58, with modifications).

the Gothic king then try to place his people on the civilised side of the dichotomy between barbarism and civilisation, and on the Roman side of the binary opposition between *Romanitas* and *gentilitas*[4]?

In this article, I will try to trace the ethnographic identities (I use here deliberately the term "ethnographic" instead of "ethnic") which were being constructed for the two barbarian peoples living in Italy. The first were the Goths – or more precisely the Ostrogoths – who ruled the *Regnum Italiae* from 493. The second were the Langobards who, in 568, under the leadership of their king Alboin (d. 572), invaded the Apennine Peninsula and established a kingdom on its territory. The Ostrogothic ruler Theoderic – as scholars have long emphasised[5] – tried to maintain a strict functional separation between the two peoples subjected to him – the Goths and the Romans. In his biography of the Gothic king, Hans-Ulrich Wiemer calls it «Integration durch Separation»[6]. The Goths acted as defenders of the Romans and performed the military function, while the Romans were to pay taxes to maintain their Gothic defenders. Additionally, Theoderic also promoted a kind of "ethnographic ideology", the aim of which was to give the Goths a certain ethnographic identity with a specific ideological dimension[7]. In turn, in 668 or – less likely – in 671, during the reign of Grimoald I (663-671) or that of his successor Perctarit (671-688), a work was written in the kingdom of the Langobards, which quickly received the title of *Origo gentis Langobardorum*[8]. It begins with the story of how the Langobards – originally called the Winnili – defeated the dangerous people of the Vandals on a remote northern island called Scadanan. This story, too, I believe, was intended to give the Langobards a specific ethnographic identity, which in its entire ideological dimension stood in opposition to the identities of the two peoples with whom the Langobards had to cross swords in 663[9].

Both ethnographic identities were situational constructs that were to serve specific ideological and political goals at the times of their composition. From 507, Theoderic both manifested his status as a Roman princeps (*princeps Romanus*) and promoted the role of his Gothic warriors as defenders of Italy and other provinces attached to it – including Gaul and Pannonia Sirmiensis – against the barbarian peoples. The Gothic king disseminated the image of the Goths as a thoroughly civilised people, which might have meant to communicate that they belonged to the Roman world, and not to the

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[4] Cf. Shanzer, *Two Clocks and a Wedding*.
[5] E.g. Hodgkin, *The Letters of Cassiodorus*, p. 20: «The theory of his government was this, that the two nations should dwell side by side, not fused into one, not subject either to the other, but the Romans labouring at the arts of peace, the Goths wielding for their defence the sword of war».
[6] Wiemer, *Theoderich der Grosse*, pp. 193-205. See also Cristini, *Neighbours and Strangers?*.
[7] See Amory, *People and Identity in Ostrogothic Italy*, pp. 43-85.
[8] *Origo gentis Langobardorum*, 1; see also Haubrichs, *Von der Unendlichkeit der Ursprünge*, pp. 67-89.
[9] Ethnographic identity understood as "situational construct" signifies the emergence of an identity (built mainly on ethnographic *topoi*) from a specific situation of competitiveness with rival groups, which can serve as a mode of mobilisation.

world of the barbarians. In turn, the ethnographic identity of the Langobards, codified during the reign of Grimoald (or Perctarit's rule), was a situational construct based on non-*Romanitas*, the ideological edge of which, as we shall see, could be directed against two enemies of the Langobards – the Franks and the Romans.

2. *The ethnographic identity of the Ostrogoths*

The content of the letter sent to Colosseus informs the reader that the Goths inherited the bravery/manliness (*virtus*) of the peoples, and possessed the wisdom/prudence (*prudentia*) of the Romans. Thus, according to Cassiodorus, the Goths possessed the characteristics of both the barbarian peoples and the Romans. This is supported by the fact that in the content of other letters in the *Variae*, bravery is usually associated with the barbarian peoples. In a letter to the (unnamed) king of the Heruli, Theoderic, who had adopted him as *filius per arma*, wrote that he had given him weapons, and peoples (*gentes*) «autem sibi olim virtutum pignora praestiterunt»[10]. The manliness used in reference to the barbarian peoples, and the prudence used in association with the Romans, also appear in the letter that the Senate sent to the emperor Justinian I on behalf of King Theodahad (535-536). It highlights the fact that the Gothic ruler was «dear to the Romans for his prudence, revered for his manliness/courage by the peoples»[11].

The letter to Colosseus depicts wisdom/prudence as a trait of the Romans, which they – as the letter to Justinian relates – valued in Theodahad. Is it possible, then, to believe that the ideological message of the letter to Colosseus is that the Goths combined the best of the two worlds – the prudence of the civilised Romans and the manliness/bravery of the barbarian peoples? The second question is: if the barbarian peoples were brave and the Romans prudent, does the letter imply that the Romans lacked manliness and the barbarian peoples lacked wisdom/prudence?

In late antiquity, barbarians were usually depicted in ethnographic works as extremely brave but, at the same time, devoid of mental qualities such as *prudentia* and *sapientia*[12]. This conviction appears frequently in the literature of this period. One of the most interesting depictions of a typical barbarian is that of a Heruli general in the Eastern Roman service, a certain Fulcaris, contained in the *Histories* by Agathias of Myrina (d. ca. 582)[13]. Describing Fulcaris' character and the actions taken by him, Agathias paints a picture of a stereotypical barbarian who, although insanely brave, was devoid of mental virtues such as prudence and wisdom, which naturally became the cause

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[10] Cassiodorus, *Variae*, IV, 2, 2.
[11] *Ibidem*, XI, 13, 4: «Romanis prudentia carum, gentibus virtute reverendum».
[12] See Stewart, *To Triumph Forever*, pp. 107-122.
[13] Agathias, *Historiarum*, I, 14-15.

of his defeat and death in a battle with the Franks. Rather than send ahead spies to assess the enemy's situation and plans, Fulcaris set out with his army, avoiding the thought that anything could go wrong, and putting his faith in brute force and reckless bravado. The Franks, however, managed to ambush the Heruli and killed all who were within their reach. Most of the Heruli army managed to save themselves, shamefully retreating. Fulcaris, on the other hand, remained on the battlefield with his bodyguards. Though they pleaded with him to flee from the battle, Fulcaris answered that he would rather die than expose himself to the sharp tongue of his military superior – the Eastern Roman general Narses (d. 573), who certainly would reproach him «for his folly». He took a firm stand and slew many of the Franks, but finally, badly outnumbered and severely wounded, he fell on the battlefield. Agathias comments that Fulcaris was «a man who, in my estimation, would never have died at the hands of an enemy, had but his wisdom been proportionate to his valour»[14].

As Agathias' account of Fulcaris' death illustrates, bravery alone was not enough to achieve victory. It had to go hand in hand with wisdom or prudence. Hence, in the case of the Goths, their inherited manliness/bravery of the (barbarian) peoples was supported by the acquired prudence of the Romans. However, the question arises as to whether the fact that *virtus* was a feature of the barbarian peoples implies that the Romans did not have it? Although the letter to Colosseus does not indicate that the Romans did not possess manliness/bravery, or even that they had lost it, one could suggest that its content could carry the implication – perhaps desired by Theoderic – that *virtus* was no longer a virtue of the Romans. It should be remembered that authors from the late imperial period often argued that the main reason it was impossible for the Romans to defend the empire against barbarian invasions was the loss of bravery[15]. Perhaps the most vivid representation of the loss of *virtus* by the Romans is the account of the Eastern Roman historian Zosimus. He reports that, during the siege of Rome by the Gothic king Alaric (d. 410), the city's defenders melted down statues made of gold and silver, including the statue of valour they used to call Virtus*:* «when this was destroyed» as Zosimus comments «whatever bravery and virtue the Romans possessed disappeared, as experts in religion and ancestral worship had foretold»[16].

We may conclude, and indeed assume, that, on the one hand, the message conveyed by Theoderic's letter to Colosseus implies that the Goths could not be considered a barbarian people because they possessed *prudentia*, which, as was commonly believed, was not a characteristic of savage and uncivilised barbarians. In terms of mental qualities, the Goths were equal to the Romans. On the other hand, they possessed bravery/manliness, and this trait had not

[14] Frendo (transl.), *Agathias*, p. 23.
[15] See Kufler, *The Manly Eunuch*, p. 49.
[16] Ridley (transl.), *Zosimus*, p. 121.

been attributed to the Romans for a long time. This, in turn, would indicate that the Goths were better than both the Romans and the barbarians. It can also be assumed that the meaning of the letter is that the Goths entirely surpassed the Romans by the fact of having *virtus*, and in fact they combined the best qualities of both worlds – the *orbis Romanus* and the world of the barbarians.

In addition, the justice of the Goths, mentioned in the letter to Colosseus, indicates that the purpose of constructing the ethnographic identity of this people was to transmit the message that they could not, under any circumstances, be considered barbarians. Other lists from the *Variae* support this interpretation.

In a letter to all the *provinciales* of Gaul, Theoderic ordered them to abandon the barbarity (*barbaries*) and savagery of minds (*crudelitas mentium*), and a little later demanded:

> Recipite paulatim iuridicos mores. non sit novitas molesta, quae proba est. Quid enim potest esse felicius quam homines de solis legibus confidere et casus reliquos non timere? iura publica certissima sunt humanae vitae solacia, infirmorum auxilia, potentum frena. Amate unde et securitas venit et conscientia proficit. gentilitas enim vivit ad libitum: ubi magis mortem reperit propriam, qui potest habere quod placeat[17].

These words imply that living according to the rule of law is the opposite of barbarism (*gentilitas*) – rejecting the latter must go hand in hand with adopting "law-abiding" habits. Barbarians, as was commonly believed in late antiquity, had no laws and could not live by them. This thought is reflected, for example, in the words allegedly uttered by the Visigothic king Athaulf (d. 415), who once said that his Goths were too barbaric to obey laws[18]. The Goths of Theoderic, on the other hand, could not only obey laws, but – what is more – the overriding goal of their presence in Italy was to defend those who lived according to Roman law. Theoderic, moreover, expressed this thought in a letter to his sword-bearer (*spatharius*) Unigis: «Delectamur iure Romano vivere quos armis cupimus vindicare, nec minor nobis est cura rerum moralium quam potest esse bellorum. Quid enim proficit barbaros removisse confusos, nisi vivatur ex legibus?»[19].

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[17] Cassiodorus, *Variae*, III, 17, 3: «Little by little, you must take on law-abiding habits. A virtuous innovation should not be troublesome. For what can be better than for men to trust in the laws alone, and to have no fear of future chances? The public laws are the surest comforts of human life; they help the weak, and rein in the powerful. Love them, since your security comes, and your good conscience grows from them. It is barbarous to live according to one's own will, where he who can get what pleases him more often finds his own death» (transl. Barnish, *Cassiodorus*, p. 54).
[18] See Thompson, *Romans and Barbarians*, p. 45.
[19] Cassiodorus, *Variae*, III, 43, 1: «We are delighted to live under the law of the Romans, whom we desire to protect with arms; nor is attention to moral behavior less of a concern to us than matters of war. For what does it profit to have banished barbaric disorder, except that life is lived according to laws?» (transl. Bjornlie, *The Selected Letters of Cassiodorus*, p. 110).

The ethnographic identity of the Goths as constructed at the court in Ravenna presented this people as a better version of the Romans – better because, in addition to Roman prudence, the Goths possessed manliness/ bravery. The manifestation of the Gothic *virtus* justified both the presence of the Goths in Italy, and their role as defenders of the Roman provinces – Cassiodorus not only depicted the Goths as former defenders of Pannonia Sirmiensis, but also raised them to the rank of *defensores Italiae* in other letters[20]. Moreover, the entry of Theoderic into the war against the Franks and Burgundians in order to defend the Visigothic kingdom in 508 was also motivated by the need to defend the people of Gaul – the Goths then also became the defenders of the population of this province, as the Gothic king said in a letter to the commander of the Ostrogothic garrison stationed in Avignon, a certain Vandil: «vivat noster exercitus civiliter cum Romanis: prosit eis destinata defensio nec aliquid illos a nostris sinatis pati, quos ab hostili nitimur oppresione liberari»[21]. Thanks to their *virtus*, the Goths were able to contain the incursions of the barbarians and defend the Roman lands against their invasions. For this reason, they were simply indispensable to the Romans.

The ability to live according to the law, which was the essence of the idea of *civilitas*, joined two separate ethnic communities – the Goths and the Romans – in one mechanism in which each played a different role. The Goths were a warlike but non-barbaric people. They possessed the virtues of civilised peoples, but were superior to the Romans thanks to their in-born manliness/ bravery. The Romans, whom the Goths defended with their weapons, were the ones who, thanks to the toil of their hands, supported their defenders. This separation also gave the two peoples different functions in the Italy of Theoderic (Romans = providers and tax-payers, Goths = warriors and defenders). Nevertheless, both were on the civilised side of the binary opposition between *Romanitas* and *gentilitas*, or the binary opposition between the civilised world and the barbarian world. The ethnographic identity that was constructed for the Goths explained that they could not be considered barbarians because their characteristics included the attribute of the mind, that is, *prudentia*, which only civilised peoples possessed. Hence, another implication followed – the Goths could not be classified as *exterae gentes* (external peoples). The Goths belonged within the *orbis Romanus*, not beyond its borders.

The role of defenders of Roman lands – which Theoderic's propagandists attributed to the Goths – was also in line with the goal behind Theoderic's expedition to Italy in 489. According to *Anonymus Valesianus*, the emperor Zeno sent Theoderic to Italy «in order to defend Italy for him» («ad defendendam sibi Italiam»)[22]. Theoderic might have emphasised the role of the Goths

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[20] See e.g. Cassiodorus, *Variae*, IV, 36, 3.
[21] Cassiodorus, *Variae*, III, 38, 2: «Let our army live with the Romans according to the rule of law: do not let the army sent to defend them become a burden to those whom we are trying to free from hostile oppression».
[22] *Anonymus Valesianus*, 49*;* Ammianus Marcellinus (transl. Rolfe), p. 539.

as the defenders of Italy in order to show that he and his people perfectly fulfilled the role that the Eastern Roman emperor had assigned to them when sending the Gothic king against Odoacer (d. 493).

Although Theoderic tried to maintain the separateness of the Goths and, through the ethnographic identity constructed by his propagandists, he highlighted that they differed from the Romans, he nevertheless presented his people as representatives of *Romanitas*. On the other hand, the other ethnographic identity of interest – that of the Langobards – was much more clearly associated with *non-Romanitas*.

3. *The ethnographic identity of the Langobards*

Some scholars believe that the work commonly known as the *Origo gentis Langobardorum* was completed on the occasion of Grimoald's legal additions to the *Edictum Rothari* (the edict itself was published in 643)[23]. Perhaps Grimoald's successor, Perctarit, updated the text of the *Origo*, which would explain why Grimoald is the last-mentioned king of the Langobards in one version, and Perctarit in the other. It is certain, however, that the *Origo* was written down during the Langobard war with the Eastern Roman Empire, which started in 663 and (possibly) ended with peace between the conflicting parties in 680[24]. Scholars have long wondered whether this work – like other origin myths or tales about the past – has «a function for the ethnic communities in which they were written down?»[25]. No definite answers can be given to this question, but it is certain that the account of the Langobard victory over the Vandals as presented in the *Origo* explains both the origin of this people and that of their trademark – the long beards that gave rise to their tribal name. Could this really have played a role in the social life of the Langobard community in the second half of the seventh century? Or should it perhaps be treated as a kind of "counter-identity", which was ideologically directed against the enemies of the Langobards[26]?

The work of interest to us certainly belongs to the period characterised by a *sui generis* "obsession" with the origins of peoples[27]. In the seventh century, it was not only the Langobards who began to codify their own ethnic identity.

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[23] See Pohl, *Memory, Identity, and Power*, p. 18. Another theory states that the *Origo gentis Langobardorum* was compiled at about the same time as the *Edictum Rothari*. See also Heath, *The Narrative Worlds of Paul the Deaco*n, pp. 140-141: «The *Origo gentis Langobardorum (OGL),* as one would expect, as a product of Rothari's time (i.e. 636-651), has a more detailed story». Haubrichs, *Von der Unendlichkeit der Ursprünge*, p. 80, argues for the years 668-671 as the time of the composition of the *Origo*».

[24] On this peace treaty, see Christie, *The Lombards*, p. 101; but cf. Brown, *680 (?) and All That*.

[25] Pohl, *Memory, Identity, and Power*, p. 10.

[26] My argument is further developed in Kasperski, *Some Considerations on Barbarian Ethnicity*, pp. 130-138. On the Lombards and their identity, see Gasparri, *La cultura tradizionale dei Longobardi, passim*; Cingolani, *Le Storie dei Longobardi, passim*.

[27] See Curta, *Slavs in Fredegar and Paul the Deacon*, p. 151.

In the same century, in the *Regnum Francorum*, the story of the origin of the Franks from Troy began to be popularised[28]. It was written down – though probably not created – by a historian known to us as Fredegar, somewhere around 660[29]. In the two redactions of his *Historia Gothorum* (published respectively ca. 619 and ca. 624), Isidore of Seville presented his version of the origin of the Goths[30]. The Langobards also codified the story of their beginnings, which explained where they came from, why they wore long beards, and what characteristics they possessed as an ethnic group. Now let us introduce this story.

According to the *Origo*, in the north there was an island called Scadanan – which the anonymous author translates as *excidia* – inhabited by many peoples[31]. One of them was a small ethnic group called the Winnili. Once upon a time, the Vandals, led by two chiefs named Ambri and Assi, set out against them. They gave the Winnili an ultimatum – they should either pay tribute to the Vandals or they should get ready to fight. The Winnili leaders – a woman named Gambara and her two sons Ibor and Agio – chose the latter. Meanwhile, Ambri and Assi went to Wodan and asked him to give them victory in the war over the Winnili. Wodan, however, replied that he would bestow victory on those he shall see first at sunrise. At the same time, Gambara and her sons approached Wodan's wife, Freya, to win her favour for the Winnili cause. She advised that the Winnili should go to the battlefield with their wives, whose hair was to be untied around their faces like beards. As the glare of the rising sun began to light up the world, Freya turned Wodan's bed so that his face was facing east, and woke him up. Seeing the Winnili and their women with their hair loose around their faces, he asked: who are these Longbeards? To which Freya replied that just as he had given them a name, so he should give them victory. And Wodan gave the Winnili victory so that they might take revenge and triumph over their enemies. Since then, the Winnili have been called the Langobards.

While it has long been argued that the story is based to some extent on an original Langobard myth – which may or may not be true – it is important to take account of when it was written. From 663 onwards, the Langobards waged war against two peoples who claimed to be descended from Troy. One of them was the Eastern Romans, the other the Franks.

The story of the Trojan origin of the Franks became popular among them in the seventh century[32]. It conveyed – as scholars point out – two readable messages. The first was that the Franks and the Romans came from the same

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[28] See i.e. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Long-Haired Kings*, p. 80; Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms 450-751*, p. 34.
[29] See Collins, *Die Fredegar-Chroniken*, pp. 54-56.
[30] On these problems, see Fabrizio Oppedisano's paper in this volume (§2).
[31] *Origo gentis Langobardorum*, 1.
[32] Wallace-Hadrill, *The Long-Haired Kings*, p. 80; cf. Giardina, *Le origini troiane dall'impero alla nazione*.

cradle – which was Troy – and so they «were one»[33]. The second was that the Frankish origins were in the eastern Mediterranean, and not in the non-Roman world east of the Rhine[34].

Of course, the Romans, not only those living in Italy, but also those living in the territory of the Eastern Roman Empire, also admitted to having Trojan roots. As Anthony Kaldellis emphasises: «In the sixth century, the emperor Justinian traced the "ancient history of the government" back to Aeneas, the king of Troy, Prince of the Republic, from whom we are said to descend»[35]. In the centuries that followed, many Eastern Roman historians were convinced that their history had begun with Aeneas. There was also a widespread belief among the Romans that their history had begun with the fall of Troy. Why did the Franks also trace their roots back to Troy?

Perhaps the frequent referencing to the Trojan origin by the Franks in the seventh century should be associated with their attempts to build an alliance between them and the Romans against their common enemy – the Langobards. This kind of explanation would certainly fit in with the so-called "kinship diplomacy", based on the conviction that they shared brotherhood and blood ties with their potential allies, and therefore that an alliance between them was natural – it was, in fact, a consequence of their common origin. In the fourth century, there was a tradition that the Burgundians were descendants of the Romans[36]. Although – as Ian Wood argues – this is not stated *expressis verbis* in the source account, the mention of the Burgundians as descendants of the Romans may mean that Roman observers considered the former to be Trojans[37]. This scholar – rightly in my opinion – links the mention of the Burgundians as *suboles* of the Romans with the diplomatic initiative of the emperor Valentinian I to enlist them to fight against the Alemanni[38]. In the seventh century, the common enemy of the Romans and the Franks could also bring the two peoples closer together and lead to the birth of the idea that they had both originated from the same cradle – from Troy. This idea would justify the alliance of the two communities, related through kinship, which was the basis of the above-mentioned "kinship diplomacy"[39].

Is the idea of codifying the identity of the Langobards in the second half of the seventh century the result of a deliberate creation of a *sui generis* counter-identity, ideologically directed against both the Romans and the Franks? The cradle of the Langobards, Scadanan, which, according to the *Origo*, was located in the north, places their origin in the *non-Romanitas* tradition. In

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[33] Goffart, *Barbarian Tides*, p. 279, note 21.
[34] Collins, *Die Fredegar-Chroniken*, pp. 54-56.
[35] Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium*, p. 62.
[36] Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res gestae*, XXVIII, 5, 11.
[37] Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, p. 34.
[38] *Ibidem*.
[39] On "kinship diplomacy", see Jones, *Kinship Diplomacy in the Ancient World*, pp. 6-17.

the second half of the sixth century, the Eastern Roman historian Jordanes wrote that the Goths had come from a northern island called Scandia/Scandza[40]. In turn, in the eighth century, the anonymous author of the *Passio Sancti Sigismundi regis* claimed that the Burgundians had come from an island called Scanadavia[41]. Locating the origins of this people in the far north is undoubtedly part of the *non-Romanitas* tradition. According to Jordanes, Scandza/Scandia was a distant northern land where peoples «fighting with the ferocity of wild beasts» lived, even greater than the *Germani* (i.e. the ancient Germans; let us add that the *Germani* were synonymous with savagery and barbarity in the sixth and seventh centuries) in terms of body and spirit[42]. The features of the peoples inhabiting Scandza, as described by Jordanes, indicate not only their barbaric and uncivilised character, but also that they constituted a specific antithesis to civilised peoples. Scandza was therefore the exact opposite of the Roman world[43].

Thus, in terms of origins, the Langobards differed from their enemies – the Eastern Romans and the Franks – in a diametrical way. After all, they were supposed to come from beyond the civilised *orbis*, from the farthest part of the barbarian world, while the Romans and the Franks derived their origins from the eastern part of the Mediterranean world, with the starting point of their history in Troy. One may thus suggest that the *Romanitas* represented by the Franks and Romans met with a response from the Langobards, who in turn began to communicate a new identity based on the idea of *non-Romanitas*. The *Origo* – as Francesco Borri argues – «reflects a broader will among the Lombard elites to understand their own past as particularly barbarian and alien to the Mediterranean world»[44].

In a way, manifesting *non-Romanitas* by placing one's own origins outside the Roman world could be interpreted as constructing a *sui generis* "counter-identity" directed against the identities of the Franks and Romans. These two peoples placed their origins in the Mediterranean world. If their Trojan roots naturally connected the Romans and the Franks through the idea of common descent, the manifested origin from the north gave the Langobards' identity the role of something that separated them from both of these peoples. In other words, this origin was a "limitic structure", creating a boundary between the identities of the Langobards and their enemies[45]. However another question arises: were the beards – which had played a fundamental role in the story of the victory of the Langobards over the Vandals – also an ethnic sign serving as a limiting structure?

[40] Iordanes, *Getica*, 25.
[41] See Goffart, *The Theme of The Barbarian Invasions*, p. 114.
[42] Iordanes, *Getica*, 24.
[43] See Kasperski, *Jordanes versus Procopius of Caesarea*, pp. 1-23.
[44] Borri, *Romans Growing Beards*, p. 64.
[45] On the theory of "limitic structure", see Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization*, p. 134; cf. *Strategies of Distinction*.

It should be noted that, in the seventh century, the main enemies of the Langobards, the Eastern Romans, underwent a specific cultural transformation. While in the sixth century they had clean shaven faces, in the seventh century they began to have luxuriant beards on their faces. In the seventh century, the Eastern Roman Empire was essentially «the world of bearded men»[46]. The emperor Constans (641-668), not without reason called "the bearded", is considered the creator of the fashion for wearing luxuriant beards in the Eastern Roman Empire. Numismatists' research shows that, from 651 until the end of his reign, the emperor was depicted with a «gigantic beard» on the coins he minted[47]. Did the beards of the Eastern Romans carry some ideological message and symbolise a specific feature?

In general, experts in the problem of facial hair in late antiquity claim that «a beard may be a definition of manliness, rather a sign of "a man"»[48]. This statement is supported, for example, by the words of saint Jerome, who wrote that «barba indicium virilitatis est»[49]. Did the beards of Constans and his subjects also symbolise their masculinity/manliness? The causes of the cultural transformation that took place in the Eastern Roman Empire are not often discussed. However, in one of his papers, Shaun Tougher puts forward the thesis that it was a sign of the progressive Hellenisation and Christianisation of the empire, a process that began in the seventh century[50]. The Eastern Roman Empire was then going through a military and political crisis. According to Tougher, the fashion for beards in the Eastern Roman Empire was a response to this very military crisis. According to him, beards were «a sign of a desire to enhance masculinity»[51].

Assuming the scholars' thesis that the Eastern Romans' beards were a sign associated with Christianity and a manifestation of the desire to strengthen masculinity in times of military crisis, let us try to compare these ideas with what we know about the Langobard beards from the *Origo* narrative. They had a pagan origin – the Winnili owed their beards to Freya's idea, and their tribal name to Wodan. Was the story known from the *Origo* meant to manifest the pagan origin of the Langobards' ethnic sign and intentionally communicate that, unlike the beards of the Eastern Romans, their facial hair did not have a Christian origin and symbolism? It is difficult to find an answer to this question. However, as Borri points out, in the seventh century, the Langobard kingdom passed through what he calls a «barbarian turn»[52]. Therefore, the non-Christian genesis of Langobard beards might have been deliberately emphasised in order to stress that this was radically different from the origin

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[46] Quoted from Browning, *The Byzantine Empire*, p. 38.
[47] Grierson, *Byzantine Coins*, p. 90.
[48] Quoted from Tougher, *Cherchez l'homme! Byzantine Men*, p. 85. On the meaning of facial hair in general, see Bartlett, *Symbolic meanings of Hair in the Middle Ages*, pp. 43-60.
[49] See Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns*, p. 361.
[50] Tougher, *Bearding Byzantium*, pp. 153-166.
[51] *Ibidem*, p. 161.
[52] Borri, *Romans Growing Beards*, p. 70.

of the facial hair of their Roman enemies. However, the question arises of whether beards were also supposed to carry some symbolic and ideological message. According to the *Origo*, false beards appeared on the faces not of the men of Winnili, but of their women, and it was thanks to them that the Winnili community received victory from Wodan. Perhaps the purpose of this narrative was to signal the hyper-masculinity of the whole Langobard *gens*, since long beards – as *Origo*'s account shows – appeared on the faces of the female members of the community. This can testify to the total masculinity of the entire community, since it was the women of the Langobards – the feminine part of the society – who had the symbol of *virilitas* on their faces. In addition to masculinity, victory is another possible trait symbolised by Langobard beards. As Michael McCormick writes:

> According to a tradition current in the first half of the seventh century, the presettlement Lombards emerged as an ethnic unit named "Langobarbi" only with their first great victory, when Wodan granted them a crushing defeat of the Vandals. The victoriousness of the Lombards was bound up with and emblematized their awareness of their emergence as a unique people. Rather than characterizing an individual, like Augustus, or an institution, like the late Roman imperial office, victory has now become what Jordanes had hinted for the Goths: a characteristic of a tribe[53].

The beards that were behind the transformation of the Winnili into the Langobards contributed directly to their victory over the aggressive and warlike enemy, the Vandals. It was to these artificial beards, as the *Origo* suggests, that the Langobards owed their first victory. It can therefore be assumed that the beards which gave birth to the community of the Langobards, and which stood behind its primeval victory, symbolised not only the masculinity of this people, but also their ability to be victorious on the battlefield.

The above considerations lead to the conclusion that the identity of the Langobards as manifested in the *Origo* may be, in relating their origin, or rather the beginnings of the Langobard community, a creation of the seventh century, a situational construct created in response to an external threat from two peoples – the Franks and the Eastern Romans. This identity also defined the masculinity of the Langobards, and perhaps even the *sui generis* hyper-masculinity of this people[54]. Although in the seventh century both the Langobards and the Romans expressed, through their beards, the notion that they were manly and masculine peoples, the former nevertheless located the origin of their facial hair in pagan, pre-Christian times, while the latter manifested the Christian character of their community through the beards.

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[53] McCormick, *Eternal Victory*, p. 296.
[54] See Kasperski, *Some Considerations on Barbarian Ethnicity*, p. 131.

4. *Conclusions*

The considerations presented in this paper lead to some conclusions regarding the construction of group identities in the kingdoms of the Ostrogoths and Langobards. Certainly, both analysed ethnographic identities could constitute the so-called "limitic structures" or boundaries that separated the Goths and the Langobards from neighbouring ethnic groups. The components of these structures, that is, the features of the peoples (as is the case with the Goths), or the issues of origins (as is the case with the Langobards), could have played the role of signs of distinction, signs separating these peoples from other, neighbouring groups. Thanks to the identity constructed by Theoderic's propagandists, the Goths clearly distinguished themselves from the barbarian peoples by having the trait of prudence/wisdom and, at the same time, they differed from the Romans in possessing the virtue of manliness/bravery. The Langobards, in turn, differed significantly from the Eastern Romans and Franks in terms of origin. Unlike them, they came from outside the Mediterranean world. Thanks to a kind of "barbarian turn", they signalled their *non-Romanitas*.

It does not seem possible to argue that the ethnographic separation of the Langobards from the Romans was a deliberate continuation, or even an imitation, of the model that was initiated by Theoderic the Great, who wanted to introduce the functional and ethnographic distinctiveness of the two peoples over which he ruled – the Goths and the Romans. Certainly, the fundamental difference between the ethnographic identities of the Goths and the Langobards lies in the fact that the former were included in the *Romanitas* and were in fact – as the account of *Variae* shows – a better version of the Romans. In turn, in the case of the Langobards, the story as written in the *Origo* emphasised a peculiar *non-Romanitas* of this people. While the Gothic identity indicated that the Goths were not barbarians, the identity of the Langobards placed their beginnings in the pagan and barbarian world. Nevertheless, both identities share the ideas of distinction, separation and the manifestation of group boundaries.

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