

THE BARBARIAN PAST IN EARLY MEDIEVAL HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

by

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ABSTRACT

Title: The Barbarian Past in Early Medieval Historical Narrative
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This thesis presents a series of case studies of early medieval narratives about the non-Roman, non-biblical distant past. After an introduction that briefly outlines the context of Christian traditions of historiography in the same period, in chapter two, I examine the Gothic histories of Jordanes and Isidore, and show how they present different methods of reconciling notions of Gothic independence with the heritage of Rome. Chapter three looks at the Trojan origin narratives of the Franks in the Fredegar chronicle and the *Liber historiae Francorum*, and argues that this origin story, based on the model of the Roman foundation myth, was a means of making the Franks separate from Rome, but nevertheless comparable in the distinction of their origins. Chapter four studies Paul the Deacon's *Historia Langobardorum*, and argues that although Paul drew more on oral sources than did the other histories examined, his text is equally not a record of ancient oral tradition, but presents a synthesis of a Roman, Christian, and of non-Roman and pagan or Arian heritages, and shows that there was actually little differentiation between them. Chapter five is an examination of *Waltharius*, a Latin epic drawing on Christian verse traditions, but also on oral vernacular traditions about the distant past; I suggest that it is evidence of the interpenetration between secular, oral, vernacular culture and ecclesiastical, written and Latin learning. *Beowulf*, the subject of chapter six, is similar evidence for such intercourse, though in this case to some

extent in the other direction: while in *Waltharius* Christian morality appears to have little of a role to play, in *Beowulf* the distant past is explicitly problematised because it was pagan. In the final chapter, I examine the further evidence for oral vernacular secular historical traditions in the ninth and tenth centuries, and argue that the reason so little survives is because, when the distant past had no immediate political function—as origin narratives might—it was normally seen as suspect by the Church, which largely controlled the medium of writing.

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ABBREVIATIONS

<i>Aeneid</i>	R. A. B. Mynors, ed. 1969. <i>P. Vergilii Maronis Opera</i> , Oxford: Clarendon Press.
Ammianus	Wolfgang Seyfarth, ed. 1976. <i>Ammiani Marcellini rerum gestarum libri qui supersunt</i> , Leipzig: Teubner.
AQDGM	Ausgewählte Quellen zur deutschen Geschichte des Mittelalters (= Freiherr vom Stein Gedächtnisausgabe).
<i>ASC</i>	<i>Anglo-Saxon Chronicle</i> : <i>A</i> = Janet M. Bately, ed. 1986. <i>The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition</i> , vol. 3: <i>MS A</i> , Cambridge: D. S. Brewer. <i>B</i> = Simon Taylor, ed. 1983. <i>The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition</i> , vol. 4: <i>MS B</i> , Cambridge: D. S. Brewer. <i>C</i> = Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe, ed. 2000. <i>The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition</i> , vol. 5: <i>MS C</i> , Cambridge: D. S. Brewer. <i>D</i> = G. P. Cubbin, ed. 1996. <i>The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition</i> , vol. 6: <i>MS D</i> , Cambridge: D. S. Brewer.
<i>ASE</i>	<i>Anglo-Saxon England</i> .
<i>ASPR</i> III	George Philip Krapp and Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, eds 1936. <i>The Exeter Book</i> , New York: Columbia University Press.
BÉFAR	Bibliothèque des écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome.
<i>Beowulf</i>	R. D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork and John D. Niles, eds 2008. <i>Klaeber's Beowulf. Fourth Edition</i> , TOES 21, Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
CCCM	Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis.
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina.
CÉA	Collection des Études Augustiniennes, Série Moyen Âge et Temps Modernes.
<i>DA</i>	<i>Deutsches Archiv zur Erforschung des Mittelalters</i> .
<i>Deor</i>	<i>ASPR</i> III, 178–79.
<i>EHD</i>	Whitelock, Dorothy, ed. 1979. <i>English Historical Documents, c. 500–1042</i> , 2 nd edn, London: Eyre Methuen.
<i>EHR</i>	<i>English Historical Review</i>
<i>EME</i>	<i>Early Medieval Europe</i>
ERGA	Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde.
<i>Etym.</i>	W. M. Lindsay, ed. 1911. <i>Isidori Hispalensis episcopi Etymologiarum sive originum libri XX</i> , Oxford: Clarendon Press.

<i>FMSt</i>	<i>Frühmittelalterliche Studien</i>
Fredegar	Bruno Krusch, ed. 1888a. <i>Chronicarum quae dicuntur Fredegarii scholastici</i> , MGH SRM 2, Hanover: Hahn, 1–168.
<i>Get.</i>	Theodor Mommsen, ed. 1882. <i>Iordanis De origine actibusque Getarum</i> , MGH AA 5/1, Hanover: Hahn.
<i>HE</i>	<i>Bède le Vénérable. Histoire ecclésiastique du peuple anglais</i> , ed. Michael Lapidge, trans. Pierre Monat and Philippe Robin, with introduction and notes by André Crépin, 3 vols, Sources Chrétiennes 489, Paris: Éditions du Cerf.
<i>HG</i>	Cristóbal Rodríguez Alonso, ed. 1975. <i>Las historias de los godos, vándalos y suevos de Isidoro de Sevilla</i> , Colección fuentes y estudios de historia leonesa 13, León: Centro de Estudios e Investigación ‘San Isidoro’, Archivo Histórico Dicesano, Caja de Ahorros y Monte de Piedad de León.
<i>Hildebranslied</i>	Braune and Ebbinghaus, eds 1994, 84–85.
<i>Hist.</i>	Rudolf Buchner, ed. and trans. 1967. <i>Gregorii episcopi Turonensis Historiarum libri decem</i> , 2 vols, AQDGM 2 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft).
<i>Hist. Brit.</i>	Edmond Faral, ed. and trans. 1969 [orig. 1929]. ‘Historia Britonnum’, in <i>La légende arthurienne. Études et documents</i> , vol. 3, Bibliothèque de l’École des Hautes Études 257, Paris: Champion, 2–62.
<i>HL</i>	Ludwig Bethmann and Georg Waitz, eds 1878. Paul the Deacon, <i>Historia Langobardorum</i> , Hanover: Hahn, 12–187.
ÍF	Íslensk fornrit.
KUT	Kohlhammer Urban-Taschenbücher.
<i>LHF</i>	Bruno Krusch, ed. 1888b. <i>Liber Historiae Francorum</i> , MGH SRM 2, Hanover: Hahn, 215–328.
MGH	Monumenta Germaniae Historica.
AA	Auctores Antiquissimi.
Epp	Epistolae.
LL	Leges.
Poet.	Poetae Latini medii aevi.
SRG	Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum separatim editi.
SRG NS	Scriptores rerum Germanicarum nova series.
SRL	Scriptores rerum Langobardicarum.
SRM	Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum.
SS	Scriptores.

Stud.	Studien und Texte.
MGM	Monographien zur Geschichte des Mittelalters.
<i>Mlat Jb</i>	<i>Mittellateinisches Jahrbuch</i> .
MST	Mittellateinische Studien und Texte.
<i>OGL</i>	L. Bethmann and G. Waitz, eds 1878. <i>Origo gentis Langobardorum</i> , Hanover: Hahn, 2–6.
Orosius	Marie-Pierre Arnaud-Lindet, ed. and trans. 1990. <i>Orose. Histoires</i> , 3 vols, Paris: Les belles lettres.
<i>Pan. lat.</i>	R. A. B. Mynors, ed. 1964. <i>XII panegyrici Latini</i> , Oxford: Clarendon Press.
<i>PBB</i>	<i>Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur</i> .
PG	J.-P. Migne, ed. 1857–1912, <i>Patrologiae cursus completus, Series graeca</i> .
PL	J.-P. Migne, ed. 1839–1864, <i>Patrologiae cursus completus, Series latina</i> .
<i>PLRE</i>	A. H. M. Jones, J. R. Martindale and J. Morris. 1971–92. , <i>The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire</i> , 3 vols, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
RWAW	Rheinisch-westfälische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Vorträge.
SEM	Studies in the Early Middle Ages.
Sett.	Settimane di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull’alto medioevo.
SM	Sammlung Metzler.
TOES	Toronto Old English Series.
<i>TRHS</i>	<i>Transactions of the Royal Historical Society</i> .
TRW	Transformation of the Roman World.
TTH	Translated Texts for Historians.
<i>Var.</i>	Theodor Mommsen, ed. 1894. <i>Cassiodori Senatoris Variae</i> , MGH AA 12, Berlin: Weidmann.
<i>Waldere</i>	Arne Zettersten, ed. 1979. <i>Waldere</i> , Manchester: Manchester University Press.
<i>Waltharius</i>	Strecker, Karl. ed. 1951. <i>Waltharius</i> , MGH Poet. 6/1, Weimar: Böhlau, 1–85.
<i>Waltharius praef.</i>	Strecker, Karl, ed. 1939. [Geraldus-preface to the <i>Waltharius</i>], MGH Poet. 5/2, Weimar: Böhlau, 405–08.
<i>Widsith</i>	<i>ASPR</i> III, 149–53.
<i>ZfdA</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum</i> .

CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION

The present dissertation is an attempt to assess early medieval views (c. 550–c. 1000) of distant, non-Roman, non-biblical history that are expressed in narratives that have this past as one of their principal themes. The origins and ancient histories of the peoples who established post-Roman kingdoms in the medieval west were not contained within the traditions of classical Roman or Greek historiography, nor within the tradition of ecclesiastical history. These peoples nevertheless adopted the Christian (and therefore Roman) religion, as well as the Latin language, the written word for use both in government and for cultural production, and many aspects of late Roman administration. They therefore inherited both the cultural heritage of Rome, as well as an independent, non-Roman identity, and a concern with establishing a sense of their own, distinct, distant past.

There exists a small corpus of texts that are devoted to the histories of these peoples—the Goths, Franks, and Lombards—from their origins to the author's present, and these are, in the present work, seen as means of conjoining a sense of independent identity as Goths, Franks, and Lombards, with the inherited Roman and Christian traditions. These texts are the Gothic histories of Jordanes (c. 551) and Isidore of Seville (c. 630); the Fredegar

chronicle (c. 660) and the *Liber historiae Francorum* (LHF; c. 727), both of which provide narratives about the origins of the Franks; and Paul the Deacon's *Historia Langobardorum* (HL; c. 790). Origin narratives and stories about the distant past contribute to a notion of identity in the simplest sense, in that they provide a particular group with a narrative of where it came from, and how it reached its present geographical, temporal and social location (cf. Coumert 2007, 9). Because of this, I suggest, these narratives were important enough to be written down, and in a manner in which the discontinuity between a pagan or heretic distant past and a Catholic present was glossed over in favour of a narrative that provided a more or less seamless continuity between past and present.

In addition to these works, I also examine two epics, the Latin *Waltharius* (ninth or tenth century) and the Old English *Beowulf* (eighth to tenth century), and some shorter vernacular texts, all of which tell of a distant past that was not contained, in the way these texts report it, in any written historical tradition, and all of which derive primarily from oral vernacular sources. None of these texts were origin narratives, and there is evidence that such tales of distant heroes that existed in an oral milieu were condemned in clerical circles (cf. pp. 215–18 below). Since they could not have had any kind of immediate function beyond the provision of entertainment and the conveying of secular moral values, clerical censure of these narratives was not easy to overcome, and since writing was largely controlled by the Church, few of these texts survive from our period. They are, nevertheless, important evidence for the existence of a secular historical culture that found expression chiefly in an oral milieu. In this chapter, I provide a brief overview of the more theologically-oriented historical traditions of the early middle ages against the background of which the texts to be studied here must be understood, and outline the scope and aims of the current study.

Christian Histories in the Early Middle Ages

The texts that are the subject of the present study are divided into two categories. The first three chapters examine works that might be called ‘national’ histories, in that these texts are concerned primarily with the history of a single, non-Roman, non-biblical people.¹ They are all written in Latin, and all draw primarily on earlier written works as their sources. Chapters five, six and seven, in contrast, deal with narratives that derive largely from an oral vernacular milieu, and are in every case concerned with the distant past, but not confined to the history of a single people. These texts need to be set against the broader context of the traditions of Christian historical writing in the early middle ages, themselves derived from late antique models.²

Universal histories and world chronicles

Universal histories and world chronicles aimed to portray the history of all peoples from creation to the present. The most influential were the chronicle of Eusebius, in its modified form in Jerome’s Latin translation (c. 380), and the *Historiae adversum paganos* of Orosius (c. 417). The Eusebius–Jerome chronicle comprised short entries under each year, giving brief notices of events from all over the world. These are often drawn from other sources, and are selected with the particular theological significance of the structure of world history in mind (Zecchini 2003). There were a number of continuations in the fifth and sixth

¹ The Fredegar chronicle is an exception in that it starts as an universal chronicle, but it too increasingly focuses on the Franks, and it is clear that Frankish history is the primary concern.

² Surveys of the early medieval traditions of historiography and their late antique heritage: Allen (2003); Bonamente (2003); Ray (1974); Winkelmann (2003). On the novelty of a ‘Christian’ historiography in late antiquity: Momigliano (1963). For a very useful analysis of late antique Latin Christian reactions to Roman history and historiographical traditions, see Inglebert (1996).

centuries, and the chronicles were well-known, and widely read and copied.³ Isidore of Seville, and later Bede, wrote both world chronicles as well as more specific, local histories.

The universal history as exemplified by the work of Orosius did not present a synoptic view of the past. Rather, it followed particular great empires of antiquity from their rise to their fall, and Orosius formulated a theological conception of historical change according to which power is transferred from one empire to another until reaching its final, highest point in Rome; Rome was the natural culmination of the progress of political and cultural development because Christ was born in the Roman empire and a Roman citizen (he is called *ciuis Romanus* twice: VI.xxii,8; VIII.iii,4).⁴ Orosius, far more effectively than Eusebius–Jerome, formulated an idea of history in which political power and religious salvation were inextricably linked, and also developed the concept of a Christian *translatio imperii*. This allowed later authors to formulate histories of post-imperial kingdoms and empires that nevertheless fulfilled a key role in salvation history, following the model of Rome in Orosius’s presentation. Orosius’s history was one of the most read historical works throughout the middle ages, with many imitators, continuators, and writers who drew profusely on him; the authors of all the Latin texts analysed below seem to have been familiar with at least some part of his work (this might not be true of the *Waltharius*-poet, but given how widely Orosius was read and copied, the above statement probably applies in this case too) (von den Brincken 1957, 80–86; Goetz 1980, 148–65; Hillgarth 1992; Werner 1987). Yet unlike the narratives examined here, Orosius’s ultimate aim was to formulate a

³ On the Eusebius–Jerome chronicle and reactions to it in Latin Christianity up to the chronicle of Sulpicius (written c. 405), see Inglebert (1996, 153–393). On the chronicle tradition in the fifth century: Muhlberger (1990). On sixth-century chronicles: Croke (2001); Favrod (ed. 1993, 11–60); Markus (1986). For the chronicle tradition up to the twelfth century, von den Brincken’s survey remains indispensable (1957).

⁴ My presentation of Orosius follows Goetz (1980); see, in addition, Inglebert (1996, 507–89), for an analysis of Orosius’s treatment of Roman history and his relation to Augustine’s ideas; a brief synthesis is provided by Zecchini (2003).

concept of salvation history in which even the political aspect of the past was subordinate to its religious significance. In this he is fundamentally different from the texts examined in the present study (with the exception of Isidore), in which salvation history plays hardly any part at all.

Ecclesiastical histories

Ecclesiastical histories aimed to depict the history of the Christian Church, in the broadest sense, as a community of believers; although, in varying degrees, political history was also included, it was subordinate to the larger plan of salvation history, and was often incorporated only insofar as it had directly to do with matters of religion and the hierarchy of the Church. Eusebius, once again, provided the impetus for later writers with his *Historia ecclesiastica*, known in the Latin west in Rufinus's translation (Winkelman 2003); perhaps the most outstanding example of this genre from the early middle ages is Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* (*HE*), which, although it has a regional focus on England, leaves out much of the political history of the period concerned, focusing on conversion narratives and stories of holy men of various stripes.⁵ Gregory of Tours's *Decem libri historiarum* (*Hist.*) are not an ecclesiastical history in the Bedan sense, and Gregory includes a wide variety of profane narratives. But his work too is, at its core, concerned with the community of believers and the fate of their faith, rather than with politics; profane history is included more as a means of illustrating the ills of secular life than for its own intrinsic interest.⁶ Both Gregory and Bede were widely read during the whole of our period.⁷

⁵ Fundamental studies of Bede: Goffart (1988, 235–328); Higham (2006); for a commentary, see Wallace-Hadrill (1988). Cf. the further references at p. 174, n. 11 below.

⁶ Fundamental for Gregory: Heinzelmann (1994b); an important alternative reading: Goffart (1988, 112–234). See also the further references below at pp. 80–81, nn. 7–9.

⁷ On the dissemination of *HE*: Colgrave and Mynors (ed. and trans. 1969, xxxix–lxx); Lapidge (2006, 119; 138; 142; 145; 149; 154; 166; 234; 238; 240; 243; 248; 255; 268); Lapidge (ed. 2005, 50–60; 67–68). On the dissemination of *Hist.*: Goffart (1987); Heinzelmann (1994b, 167–75); Lapidge (2006, 212; 259; 305);

Ecclesiastical histories intended to establish the historical inevitability of Christianity and prove a particular theological point, which normally hinged on the eventual conversion to Christianity of all humanity, and pointed the way forward to the Last Judgement; in this sense, they had much in common with the theological conception of history in Orosius.

There was, then, a wide range of more or less well-known texts, providing a number of different models for how history could and should be written. The bulk of the historical narratives extant from the early middle ages followed the paradigms either of ecclesiastical history, or universal history or world chronicle, and were dominated by the perspective of salvation history. Although they do not exclude religion, Jordanes, Isidore, Fredegar, the *LHF*-author and Paul all seem to be more concerned simply with providing a secular narrative from distant past to present or very recent past, without really considering the way any of this fits into the perspective of salvation history, which was the dominant learned mode of historical understanding.⁸

In the following chapters I shall argue that the ‘national’ histories I examine were written as a means of recording and codifying a narrative of the distant past that established a continuity between that past and the present. This sense of continuity was important to the secular aristocracy, despite the fact that the distant past was pagan or heretic, and narratives about it were sufficiently important that they needed to be recorded in the medium of Latin writing that was now authoritative. But the impulse for writing these texts did not simply emanate from the secular aristocracy: the existence of such Latin histories also shows how closely related were the spheres of Church and court, and furthermore, that it was acceptable

McKitterick (2004b, 152); Reimitz (2003); and on his use by Fredegar, the *LHF* and Paul, cf. the apparatus in the respective editions, and chapters three and four below.

⁸ Although Isidore does appear to present the Goths within the framework of salvation history, this aspect is not prominent in his historical works, unlike in his other writings.

to present aspects of that past not related to religion in a positive light, as long as ways could be found to diminish the presence of a pre-Christian past. In the person of Isidore especially, but also to differing extents in the other cases presented below, it could be argued that the interests of Church and state were so closely related that stress on continuities rather than religious difference was probably as important to at least some members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy as to the secular aristocracy.

Because writing, with the partial exception of administrative literacy, was dominated by the Church in our period, the bias of most extant written sources leans heavily towards clerical attitudes, which are conditioned largely by concerns of religion and religious morality. With the exception of the texts examined in this dissertation, it is only from around the turn of the millennium, and in some parts of western Europe from considerably later, that we begin to find in any significant quantity narrative literature that gives expression to a primarily lay culture and historical consciousness: for most of the early middle ages, there was scarcely any written cultural production that was essentially of a secular nature (I exclude here administrative and documentary material).

Nevertheless, two points must be noted. The first is that there was no great gulf between the ecclesiastical and lay aristocracy: from the very beginnings of the medieval period, senior churchmen were closely linked with secular affairs, from urban administration to military service; the clergy were often expected to commemorate members of the secular aristocracy; and it was common for at least one if not more members of lay aristocratic families to join the Church at an early age, and thus the ecclesiastical and lay hierarchies were literally linked by blood.⁹ The second important point is that although the bulk of the

⁹ The literature on secular aspects of the early medieval Church is vast; see, in general, Wickham (2009, 184–90); this important new synthesis appeared too late for me to be able systematically to integrate its conclusions into

written evidence that survives betrays a marked ecclesiastical bias, we cannot assume that no secular education or culture existed: there was a large lay aristocracy, which was certainly closely connected to and influenced by the Church, but would have had some kind of lay education (in, among other things, the arts of war and politics), and secular values that we cannot assume would have been identical to those of the Church. The subjects of the present study are all texts: written material, produced (at least in their written form) in all cases by persons with some form of religious education. But these works are among the relatively few forms of literary evidence both of an independent lay aristocratic culture, and of the extent to which this was influenced by and in turn influenced the culture of the ecclesiastical elite. They constitute, therefore, the principal narrative evidence of a secular historical consciousness; they are in some cases a window into a secular culture that lived primarily in an oral context; and they are also, in all cases, witness to the interaction between the secular and ecclesiastical milieux.

The Structure of the Present Work

The present study is in two sections. The first part, comprising chapters two, three and four, examines the ‘national’ histories of the Goths, Franks and Lombards. The second part, chapters five, six and seven, looks at evidence for a secular vernacular oral historical culture in the ninth and tenth centuries, and how this relates to issues of language and ethnic identity.

the present work). The following is a very small sample of important studies on more specific issues: on episcopal administration and relationship with secular political hierarchies: Heinzelmänn (1988); Kaiser (1988); on monastic commemoration of secular aristocrats: Freise (1985); McKitterick (2004b, 162–73); Oexle (1976); Schmid (1965; 1979); on military service and the Church: Prinz (1971); on family relationships between the secular and clerical elites: Schmid (1965); Wormald (1978, 49–58); on royal patronage of churches and written, Latin cultural production: Hen (2007).

In chapter one, I examine two histories of the Goths: that of Jordanes, from the sixth century, and that of Isidore, from the seventh century. I begin by analysing the extent to which Jordanes drew on any kind of oral sources, and conclude that although he claims, at various points, to know of ancient songs, he actually uses very little oral material. Nevertheless, while it is clear that most of his narrative of ancient Gothic history is actually appropriated from earlier histories of other peoples, a few elements have no known written sources, and must come from some kind of oral milieu. I next examine his portrayal of religion in the Gothic past, and I argue that he deliberately—though not without precedent—glosses over religious difference in an effort to present the Goths in a positive light. I argue that his purpose is to show that the Goths have an independent identity founded on a past distinct from that of Rome (in his account, the Goths originated in Scandinavia); even though the Gothic past presented by Jordanes is actually appropriated from the histories of other peoples, Jordanes claims it is Gothic, and is thus able to claim that the Goths are a people of a great and glorious antiquity. Nevertheless, while asserting some form of independent Gothic identity, Jordanes believes that the Goths should be completely politically subordinate to Rome.

Isidore's approach is, in a sense, the reverse of this: he shows Goths and Romans as always politically opposed, and his history is a strong declaration of Gothic independence from Rome. But this is a political matter: Isidore knows of no ancient Gothic past; he makes no claims to record any Gothic traditions of antiquity; and the Goths have biblical, not Scandinavian ancestors. Gothic independence is not based on a unique and distinctive past, but on military might. While for Jordanes, the Goths complement Rome, I suggest that Isidore shows the Goths succeeding Rome; because they do so, they do not need an

independent identity founded on a distinct historical tradition, as they are completely politically independent of Rome. Like Jordanes, Isidore passes over the religious difference between past and present quickly; although he was himself a bishop, he seems to take pains to minimise the discontinuity in religion between past and present.

In chapter three, I examine the Trojan origin narrative of the Franks, against the background of Gregory of Tour's *Histories*, which was the text on which large sections of both the Fredegar chronicle, and the *LHF*—the two earliest works containing the Trojan myth—were based (Gregory, however, says nothing about Frankish Trojan origins). I argue that in both Fredegar and the *LHF*, the presentation of the Trojan myth is an effort to show that the Franks had a past as distinguished as that of the Romans. They are nevertheless not descendents of, but cognate with the Romans; their history is not assimilated to the Roman past, but is modelled on a Roman foundation myth. This makes it clear that, firstly, there was no ancient, independent Frankish tradition for these authors to draw on, and secondly, that they did not see any fundamental difference between a 'barbarian' or 'Germanic' people and the Romans: the barbarian past is here very Roman in nature. Once more, there seems to be an effort to gloss over religious difference: although these two texts adopt Gregory's narrative of Clovis's conversion (and much else besides), they ignore the overall perspective of Gregory's work, which is completely geared to salvation history and religious morality, neither of which seem to have much importance for either Fredegar or the *LHF*-author. I suggest, furthermore, that by providing the Franks with a distinguished antiquity, the break in continuity between pagan past and Catholic present in these works is far less apparent than is the case in Gregory.

Chapter four presents an analysis of Paul the Deacon's *Historia Langobardorum* (*HL*), against the background of the earlier origin narratives of the Lombards. As was the case with the Goths in Jordanes's version of their past, the Lombards are, in all the extant texts, given an origin in Scandinavia. This is, once more, a literary fiction. Nevertheless, in Paul's narrative, we find several elements that can only be derived from some kind of oral sources. There was probably no formal Lombard oral tradition in a Germanic language by Paul's time, and whatever oral sources he had, he clearly shaped them to his own purposes. Nevertheless, of all the histories studied here, his work seems to present the most complete synthesis of Latin literate tradition and oral-derived stories, and it is possible that Paul drew on oral narratives in other Germanic languages. More than any of the other histories, Paul passes over the question of religious difference. While in all the texts examined, the continuity with the distant past was more important than the break between a pagan and/or Arian past and a Catholic present, a moment at which the whole people converts to Christianity is nevertheless present. Paul never has any true conversion moment, and seems to ignore almost completely the past Arianism of the Lombards. His history presents an image of a Lombard historical consciousness that comfortably incorporated various inheritances: Scandinavian origins, paganism and Arianism in the past, and also Roman history and the history of the Roman Church.

The texts examined in chapters two to four all tell of the distant past of a single people, and they are able to pass over the discontinuities because these narratives were in some manner related to the identity of who those peoples were: the histories defined the people by showing where they came from, and how they got to be where they were in the present. The works studied in chapters five to seven provide a different sort of perspective on

the past. In chapter five, I examine *Waltharius*, a Latin epic that draws on Classical Latin and Christian tradition, as well as on vernacular narratives, especially in the Germanic vernaculars. Its existence shows that narratives from oral traditions about the past, which did not concord with the facts provided by Latin histories, were known to and popular in monastic circles. But the text does not simply provide a translation or adaptation of vernacular narratives; it parodies them. I suggest that this might be because in an ecclesiastical context, such narratives were—as we shall see in chapter seven—often condemned, and it is possible that the author of *Waltharius* therefore felt that they had to be presented in a less than serious manner in order to be acceptable for a monastic audience. Nevertheless, he also does not provide a moralising reading of his story: this text is not an effort to problematise the past from a Christian point of view.

Beowulf, the subject of chapter six, does problematise the distant past, and precisely because that past is not Christian. The poet alludes to various figures also present in Anglo-Saxon histories and genealogies, placing them in a world that he is often highly critical of; he does not make any explicit link between his narrative and the distant past of the Anglo-Saxons, but because of his ambiguous reading of the story he presents, and his allusions that potentially link it to important figures of Anglo-Saxon history, he—uniquely of all the texts examined—seems to be open to the possibility that the distant past, however praiseworthy in some ways, was ultimately highly problematic precisely because of the difference in religion, an aspect of the distant past that the other works studied here take pains to gloss over.

Finally, in chapter seven, I examine the other evidence for an oral vernacular secular historical culture in the ninth and tenth centuries, and argue that while such a culture apparently did exist, there was no clear division between ‘Germanic’ and Roman or biblical

pasts; nor was there any notion of a ‘Germanic’ antiquity. There was a fascination with the distant past, but the interest in it was eclectic, not really distinguishing between non-Roman and Roman inheritances. The reason why many figures of Germanic legend are present in many different languages is simply a matter of linguistic affinity; it has nothing to do with any concept of ‘Germanic’ identity. Because these narratives were not concerned with establishing any form of continuity between the distant past and the present of a people, they might have had less of a possible pragmatic function in the present. Perhaps for this reason, it was less important for them to be preserved in the now-authoritative medium of the written word. Since they represented purely secular values, much of the evidence for the existence of oral vernacular narratives from this period comprises clerical condemnation; despite this, it seems to be the case that such stories were known and even popular among members of the clergy with less strident moral views about appropriate clerical pastimes.

A few words should be said, in concluding this introduction, on what this dissertation does not do. It aims to present analyses of literary texts that have a particular historical relevance, and are read with due attention to their historical context (insofar as this can be ascertained), but it is not intended to be a study of historical consciousness at any broad level; it does not seek to match the results of analyses of specific literary texts to other, non-literary forms of evidence to arrive at a more holistic picture of how early medieval people thought about the distant past.¹⁰ Other kinds of sources present their own problems of interpretation, and are not easily amenable to the same kind of interrogation as literary narratives, thus rendering a comparison of the evidence of differing genres a process fraught with difficulty. Concentrating solely on narrative texts, which are explicitly intended to

¹⁰ In this regard, the present study follows the examples of Coumert (2007); Plassmann (2006); and Reydellet (1981).

convey to readers stories and views about the distant past, allows me to address the question of the role of this past in a more well-defined manner, focusing on the issues of religious difference and the distinctions between Romans and non-Romans. It is my hope that this study is able to identify a pattern in the way these issues were treated across a lengthy period of time. My arguments are, of course, valid in the first instance for the texts examined here, but I hope that the existence of this pattern also contributes something to our understanding of secular historical culture in the early middle ages, and the place in it of the distant, non-Roman, non-biblical past.

A further pitfall of a study such as this is that, given how little we know about the authors, their audiences, and the reception of their texts, it is difficult to say very much about the extent to which the views presented in these works reflect widespread ideas about the past, or simply the opinions of a few individual writers. The reception history of the texts can tell us a little: Jordanes, Fredegar, the *LHF* and the *HL* were widely read in the ninth and tenth centuries at least,¹¹ and the references to figures of the past in vernacular poetry examined in chapter seven suggest that narratives about them were widely known. The ideas contained in the ‘national’ histories seem to have resonated with a later audience; it is difficult to know how much they did so among contemporaries. Once again, the common elements in these works—a concern to stress continuity between origins and the present, regardless of the religious difference and the gap between a non-Roman past and a present imbued with a very Roman heritage—suggests that since several authors had similar concerns, these reflected a broader view among the secular aristocracy. To say more, however, would be purely speculative.

¹¹ For knowledge of Jordanes’s *Getica*, Fredegar, the *LHF* and Paul’s *HL* in the ninth century and later, cf. e.g. Innes (2000, 243–44); Lapidge (2006, 160; 239; 272); McKitterick (1989, 238–41; 2004b, 13–15; 37–38; 49–51; 55–58; 75–83; 201; 212). Isidore’s *HG* did not enjoy a wide reception.

Although this study is not primarily concerned with ethnic identity, the nature of any possible oral tradition, or early Germanic literary history, it touches on all three issues, and for this reason some remarks on the use of terminology in the present dissertation will be useful to prevent misunderstanding:

Barbarian is a term I generally avoid, except where it occurs in the texts themselves. When I apply it, it is to refer to peoples the Romans had called barbarian, at a time when they had done so; or to peoples who might have been called barbarians by writers applying Roman criteria: non-Roman background, ferocity and prowess in war, lack of a classical education, origins in inhospitable and distant regions.¹²

Germanic, when used without inverted commas, refers solely to language. A Germanic-speaking people, in my lexicon, is simply a people that speaks a Germanic language; this need not mean that they know it is a Germanic language; that they feel any kind of identity with other peoples who speak a Germanic language; that they particularly care that the language they speak is Germanic and not something else. A phrase such as **Germanic tradition** does not, in my usage, imply any sort of bond between peoples beyond that of language; I argue in chapter seven that narrative material travelled solely because similarities in language, and therefore in poetic techniques, made this possible. Thus **Germanic tradition** refers only to narrative elements known in more than one Germanic language, but has no further implications. The term Germanic does not, in this study, carry any implications of any kind of ancient, more or less unified, Germanic culture which would

¹² Space does not permit more than this extremely superficial treatment of the Roman discourse on barbarians here; for discussion, see Halsall (2007, 45–56); Jones (1964, 1059–62); Ladner (1976); Wickham (2009, 44–49) and on Orosius's views of barbarians, Goetz (1980b); Inglebert (1996, 566–68). On kin-relationships between barbarians and Romans in Late Antiquity, see in addition: Claude (1989); Demandt (1989); Krautschick (1989).

allow one to interpret the practices of one Germanic-speaking group by reference to the practices of another.¹³

‘National’ history is used as a shorthand term for a history that is devoted to the past of a single people. In other words, it excludes universal histories or world chronicles, but also the vernacular legendary matter that deals with many different peoples in a single narrative. But the use of the word ‘national’ is simply a circumlocution for ‘relating to a single people’, and should not be taken to have any relation to modern concepts of nationality.

Oral tradition is another term I use rarely; when I do, I refer to a formal historical tradition, normally in verse, cultivated by persons in some manner skilled in reciting and/or composing memorial narratives. By ‘formal’ in this context, I mean that the narratives, while not necessarily stable from a modern point of view, were—unless about the immediate past—thought to be authentically ancient, with some value deriving from their antiquity, and therefore were thought to remain stable in some way. Generally, I prefer phrases like **oral sources** or **oral material**, by which I mean matter that was not written, but was not necessarily considered ancient, or derived from any sort of prized memorial tradition; such matter could be derived from written sources, but garbled in the course of person-to-person oral transmission; it could be court gossip, travellers’ anecdotes, the oral explications of a text by a teacher, and so on.¹⁴

¹³ Useful critiques of the concept of a ‘Germanic culture’ are given by Amory (1997, 326–31); Goffart (1981, 12–29; 1995); Halsall (2007, 22–24; 118–31).

¹⁴ For a useful study of the interaction between a Latin education and these kinds of informal orality, see Innes (1998) on Notker I of St Gall. The standard handbook on various kinds of oral tradition is Vansina (1985), who, however, includes ‘historical gossip’ in his definition of oral tradition. Kuhn (1961) argues that historical and heroic narratives could and did exist outside formal traditions, but still operates with excessively schematised notions of lay, legend, and heroic narrative.

CHAPTER 2:

THE GOTHIC HISTORIES OF JORDANES AND ISIDORE

From the mid-third century, the Goths regularly came into conflict with the border legions of Rome.¹ Unfortunately, most sources that refer to Goths in this period are themselves of a later date, and thus not entirely reliable.² Little is known about these third-century Goths; nothing is known about their origins, a lack of clarity compounded by the fact

¹ For background: Kulikowski (2007, 18–42); cf. Giese (2004, 13–15); Heather (1996, 40–42); for the broader political background: Halsall (2007, 71–79).

² Third-century sources mentioning Goths: the *Canonical Letter* of Gregory Thaumaturgus, bishop of Neocaesarea in Pontus in the mid-third century (PG 10, 1020–48; translated in Heather and Matthews, trans. 1991, 5–10; Goths at 8; cf. 1–5 for an introduction); and the fragmentary history of Dexippus (Jacoby, ed. 1926, 452–80; Martin, ed. and trans. 2006), composed c. 250–c. 280. The existing fragments of Dexippus speak almost always of Scythians (*Σκύθαι*); the one exception is a reference to Scythians who are spoken of as Goths attacking Histria in the reign of Decius (reigned 249–51) (Jacoby, ed. 1926, frag. 22 = Martin, ed. and trans. 2006, frag. 17: *Σκύθαι [...] οἱ λεγόμενοι Γότθοι*). This might indicate that Dexippus distinguishes Goths as a subgroup of Scythians. Dexippus is accepted by Kulikowski as referring to Goths elsewhere where Scythians are mentioned (Kulikowski 2007, 18–19, with reference to [Jacoby] frags 20; 22; 25 [= Martin S7; frags 17; 22]; cf. Christensen 2002, 110–12; 233–34, for scepticism regarding Dexippus). Dexippus is used as a major source by Zosimus (c. 500); Zosimus also refers to Scythians (e.g. Paschoud, ed. and trans. 1971, I,23; I,31–35; cf. p. 146, n. 49) in his accounts of the earliest third-century events that are supposedly drawn from Dexippus and thought to refer to Goths. At I.xlii,1, Goths and Scythians are explicitly distinguished. Nevertheless, at I.xlii–xliii and I.xliv–xlv Zosimus tells us that Claudius (reigned 268–70) defeated Scythians in a battle that, according to three fourth-century sources, was fought against Goths, and earned the emperor the title *Gothicus* (Eutropius: Santini, ed. 1979, IX,11; Aurelius Victor: Pichlmayr and Gruendel, eds 1966, 34; *Historia Augusta*: Hohl, Samberger and Seyfarth, eds 1965–71: Claudius, XII,2). The *Historia Augusta* also refers to wars against Goths under Gordian III (reigned 238–44) (Hohl, Samberger and Seyfarth, eds 1965–71: Gordiani Tres, xxxi,1; xxxiv,3). We see thus that although the Goths first appear in the mid-third century, it is far from clear when Scythians are Goths and not Scythians. Other mentions of Goths before the fourth-centuries histories cited: the panegyrics on Constantius Chlorus (*Pan. lat.* VIII[V].x,4) and Constantine (*Pan. lat.* VI[VII].ii,2).

that Jordanes's *Getica*, the principal narrative source for Gothic history, dates from the mid-sixth century, and conflates stories of Goths with narratives that in earlier sources refer to Scythians and Dacians, and also to *Gutones* and *Getae*, who may have nothing to do with the Goths.³ Reliable contemporary accounts sufficient for a rough narrative history of the Goths only date from the late fourth century; the most important is the history of Ammianus Marcellinus.⁴

The existence of more material from this period is due not least to the fact that although there had been periodic conflict between Goths and Romans from the mid-third century, during the reign of Valens in 376, a group of Goths entered the boundaries of the empire, brought about at Adrianople in 378 one of the severest defeats ever suffered by the Roman army, and remained from that period onwards within the empire, and inextricably linked to the history of Rome; Roman historians were now, therefore, naturally interested in the Goths (Giese 2004, 16–28; Heather 1991, 84–213; Kulikowski 2007, 71–153; Halsall 2007, 131–36; 170–219). In 410, the Goths sacked Rome, but did not topple the empire, and soon moved into Gaul, where they were employed (as they had been before elsewhere) as Roman federates (Giese 2004, 29–38; Halsall 2007, 214–17; Heather 1991, 213–24;

³ Earlier references to peoples with names similar to 'Goth': Pliny's *Naturalis Historia* (Mayhoff, ed. 1892–1909, IV.xiv,99: *Gutones*; XXXVII.xi,35: *Guinoes*); Tacitus's *Germania* (Ogilvie and Winterbottom, eds 1975, XLIV,1: *Gotones*); *idem*, *Annales* (Heubner, ed. 1983, II,62: *Gotones*); Ptolemy (Stückelberger and Graßhoff, ed. and trans. 2006, III.v,20: *Γύθωνες*). On Jordanes's relation to the early sources, see Christensen (2002, 22–39; 40–41; 47–51; 230–49); Coumert (2007, 33–37), and see further the discussion below, with additional references at nn. 10, 17 and 20. Confusion of Goths and *Getae*: Jerome (PL 28, col. 1000) and Orosius (I.xvi,2). For a critical account of modern quests for Gothic origins: Kulikowski (2007, 43–70). Teillet (1984, 17–112) presents a detailed analysis of Goths in Roman letters, but should be approached with some caution due to the imprecise use of terms like 'nation' to apply to this period, and an undue reliance on a stark dichotomy between Roman and barbarian.

⁴ On Ammianus as a historical source: Barnes (1998); Matthews (1989); for a concise introduction: Sabbah (2003). Overviews of other sources of Gothic history from the fourth and fifth centuries: Christensen (2002, 47–51; 230–49); Coumert (2007, 37–43); Heather (1991, 71–83); Heather and Matthews (trans. 1991), which also discusses archaeological evidence and provides the principal Greek sources of the fourth century in translation. For more detailed analysis: Teillet (1984, 113–60) on Orosius's depiction of the Goths, and *eadem* (1984, 161–252) on other Roman texts dealing with Goths up to the end of the fifth century.

Kulikowski 2007, 154–84); after 418, they were settled in Aquitaine, from where they expanded during the course of the century over southern France and Spain, establishing a kingdom that lasted until its defeat by the Arabs in 711.⁵ Other Goths, who remained in the Balkans in the fourth century, entered into Italy in the late fifth century, led by Theoderic under the authority of the emperor Zeno, and established a kingdom in Italy that was ultimately destroyed by the Romans under Justinian in the mid-sixth century.⁶

Jordanes's *De origine actibusque Getarum* was written in the immediate aftermath of this defeat, probably in Constantinople; Isidore of Seville's *Historia Gothorum* was written in completely contrasting circumstances, in the early seventh century, when the Visigothic kingdom of Spain had just defeated the last imperial forces in the peninsula. Jordanes's text is significant for providing the first narrative of Gothic origins, the first extant self-conscious history devoted to a non-Roman, non-biblical people, and for its possible incorporation of Gothic traditions within the form of a written, Latin history. Isidore apparently uses no Gothic traditions, and has little to say about the origins or distant past of the Goths, but his history is nevertheless of great value as a witness to the methods by which the conjunction of cultures was negotiated in historical narratives in the post-Roman west.

In this chapter, I shall argue that Jordanes's project was to claim a place for an independent Gothic identity within the Roman empire. He did this by an appeal to Gothic

⁵ On the settlement in Gaul and the expansion into Spain: Giese (2004, 41–62; 140–50); Goffart (1980, 103–26); Heather (1991, 219–23); Heather (1996, 181–215); Mathisen and Sivan (1999). On the Visigothic kingdom in the following centuries: Giese (2004, 151–79) [a concise survey]; Collins (2004) [thorough social and political history]; cf. Halsall (2007, 338–46) [overview of social and economic structures in Spain in the fifth and early sixth centuries]; Wickham (2005, 93–102; 219–32) [discussion of the Visigothic state and aristocratic culture]. On Visigothic history within the context of Roman political history in the fifth, and post-imperial history in the sixth century: Halsall (2007, 220–82; 296–300).

⁶ On the settlement of the Goths in Italy and their kingdom there: Giese (2004, 63–139); Goffart (1980, 58–102); Halsall (2007, 278–93); Heather (1991, 227–308); Heather (1996, 216–58). For a detailed analysis of society, culture and politics in Ostrogothic Italy: Amory (1997); on the Italian aristocracy, cf. Wickham (2005, 155–68; 203–10).

oral tradition, and by appropriating silently the histories of other peoples to the Gothic past. Although in fact he drew little on any genuine Gothic tradition (oral or written), I shall argue that he nevertheless claims to present an authentically Gothic history, which stresses the independence of the Gothic past. Jordanes glosses over religious differences in an effort to portray the Goths in a positive light, but he does not, ultimately, argue for the political independence of the Goths: their proper place is within the Roman imperium. In contrast, any sort of independent Gothic culture has no meaning for Isidore: the Goths become Roman in culture, but are almost always—from the time they enter history until Isidore's present—shown as political opponents of Rome. The process of Gothic history, in Isidore's work, is meant to show the passing of Christian imperium from Rome to the Goths in Spain; there is no truly independent Gothic past or Gothic culture, but there is an independent Gothic polity, in support of which Isidore wrote. The histories of Isidore and Jordanes mark the beginning of a process by which the authors of Latin histories assimilated in some manner a non-Roman, non-biblical distant past to the Roman inheritance.

The *De origine actibusque Getarum* of Jordanes: Background and Summary

Jordanes's *Getica*, as it is known to modern scholarship, is the first extant Latin history devoted to the past of a non-Roman, non-biblical people. It is also probably the most problematic of all the works to be considered in this study: Jordanes's Latin was idiosyncratic at best, and near-incomprehensible at worst; his narrative appears not to have a very coherent structure, and is internally inconsistent in the 'facts' it conveys; furthermore, given that the Gothic kingdom was in the process of being destroyed by Rome, and that Jordanes was probably writing at Constantinople, or at least in a Roman context, it is

extremely unclear why he wrote a history of the Goths which is in many respects highly complimentary of them.⁷ Unlike the other Latin histories we shall examine, which provide narratives of a people while that people still rules and while there is thus a clear continuity between the recorded past and its context in the present, the Goths in Italy—who are Jordanes's principal subject—could not really hope for continuity between the past and the future in terms of political independence and power. The Goths, apart from being in Jordanes's own lifetime the opponents of Rome, the polity clearly supported by Jordanes, were also still largely Arian, whereas Jordanes was clearly orthodox.⁸ Nevertheless, although he was indubitably pro-Roman, Jordanes did not write a piece of anti-Gothic propaganda: as we shall see, he obviously felt that the Gothic past, however barbarian, pagan, or Arian it might have been, should be portrayed in a largely positive manner.

We know little about Jordanes:⁹ in a brief passage (*Get.* 265–66) he tells us that his grandfather was secretary to the leader of the Alans, and that he himself was secretary to a certain Baza, *magister militum* and of Amal origin. At the end of the *Getica*, a single clause might indicate that Jordanes was a Goth, but more likely does not: he says *nec me quis in*

⁷ The most detailed analysis of the complexities Jordanes presents us with is given by Christensen (2002); the other major study is Goffart (1988, 20–62). Christensen's aim is deconstruction, and he provides a very thorough analysis of the scholarship from the nineteenth century to the present, but no firm conclusions regarding the purpose and meaning of the *Getica*; Goffart presents his own controversial interpretation. On the historical value of Jordanes, cf. Amory (1997, 291–307); Gillett (2000); Heather (1991, 34–67). More credulous views with regard to the authenticity of Jordanes's reports: Anton (1994); Wolfram (1994). On the date of composition of the *Getica*: Coumert (2007, 54–59; 85–86); Goffart (1988, 97–101; 2005, 394–95): Coumert argues that it was written during 551 and 552, a timeline I am comfortable with; Goffart (2005) is more precise, suggesting it must have been written after March 551. His earlier suggestion (1988) of 554 is not compelling.

⁸ That the Goths converted to Arian and not Catholic Christianity during the reign of Valens, and that Ulfila belonged to a strand of Arianism, is not disputed, but it is possible that by the time Jordanes was writing, many Goths in Italy were in fact Catholic (Amory 1997, 236–76). There is only certainty that the group later known as Visigoths, who moved into Roman territory and thence eventually to Spain, were exclusively Arian, and that Theoderic himself and apparently his Goths were Arian too; there seem nevertheless to have been Catholic Goths in the east in the fourth century and later (see Mathisen 1997, 670–76, for a discussion of evidence for Nicene Goths through the fourth century and beyond). On the religious aims of Jordanes, cf. O'Donnell (1982).

⁹ On Jordanes's life: Christensen (2002, 85–103); Coumert (2007, 52–54); Gillett (2000); Goffart (1988, 42–47); Mortensen (1991, 51–53); Reydellet (1981, 257–59).

favorem gentis praedictae, quasi ex ipsa trahenti originem, aliqua addidisse credat, quam quae legi et comperi (316: ‘Let no one believe that I have added in favour of the aforementioned people anything beyond what I read and found, as if I myself trace my origins from it’). According to Mommsen’s index, *quasi* in Jordanes could mean *tamquam* (‘as if’) or *utpote* (‘indeed’, ‘to be sure’). Deciding which meaning we allow it to have here depends on whether we have already decided whether or not Jordanes was a Goth (cf. Christensen 2002, 89–90; Coumert 2007, 53). Jordanes mentions a *conversio* he has undergone, but it is unclear what he means by this; there is insufficient reason to believe he was in religious orders, and in fact we know nothing further about his life at all (cf. Christensen 2002, 94–102).

Apart from the *Getica*, Jordanes composed another history: *De summa temporum vel origine actibusque gentis Romanorum*, normally abbreviated as *Romana*. This work begins with Adam, with brief chronicle-like entries up to the birth of Christ. It then backtracks to Romulus, and provides a fuller narrative of Roman history continuing up to the time of Theoderic, drawing on a number of Latin histories, and with very little indeed to say about the Goths. Although largely based on secular sources, Jordanes inserts a fair amount of Christian history into his account; although he generally expresses a pro-Roman, imperial stance, it has plausibly been argued that Jordanes also presents a pessimistic attitude regarding empire, conditioned by the many setbacks he would have witnessed in his own time.¹⁰

¹⁰ The principal known sources for the *Romana* are the Eusebius–Jerome chronicle, and the histories of Florus, Festus, Eutropius and Orosius. Mommsen provides a brief overview of the sources in introduction (Mommsen, ed. 1882, xxiii–xxx) and apparatus to his edition. On the sources and *Tendenz* of this text, see especially Goffart (1988, 47–58); cf. Christensen (2002, 103–12); O’Donnell (1982); Reydellet (1981, 263–64).

The *Getica* is not only more original, in that it presents us with far more material for which sources cannot be found, it is also more complicated in its structure (though the *Romana* also contains chronological confusions). Following a brief preface, the narrative proper begins with a geographical introduction to the Gothic homeland, which also, however, contains a description of Britain,¹¹ and lists the peoples of Scandza, the island from where the Goths set off on their migrations (4–24). Little is said about the Goths while they are still in Scandza; most of the narrative before the splitting of the Goths into Visigoths and Ostrogoths concerns their residence in Scythia, their final home before they come into conflict with Rome.¹² The Gothic migration takes place in several stages: under their first king Berig, they move from Scandza to the mainland of Gothiscandza (25), and then to the land of the Ulmerugi (26); neither Gothiscandza nor the Ulmerugi can be identified, and seem not to exist outside Jordanes's text. Then, under Filimer, they move to Scythia, but on the journey, a bridge they are crossing breaks, with half the Goths in Scythia, and the rest left behind—and also, it would seem, left out of the course of history (27). After their initial arrival in Scythia, Jordanes tells us that the Goths had three homes: Scythia; Dacia, Thrace and Moesia; and finally Scythia again, this time along the Black Sea coast (38–42). In each of these three stages, with increasing detail, Jordanes narrates the exploits of the Goths and their interactions (sometimes as enemies, sometimes as allies) with a number of peoples famous in

¹¹ On the function of Britain in the *Getica*: Merrills (2005, 137–42); and Heather (1991, 66; 1996, 26–27), who suggests that like Scandinavia, Britain as a place of origin was derived from an ethnographic topos according to which barbarians came from inhospitable northern islands

¹² Although Jordanes applies the terms Visigoth and Ostrogoth to Gothic groups in the fourth century, no contemporary sources do so, and in fact the *Getica* is rare (though not unique) for a text before the eighth century in using both terms; these designations almost certainly reflect a perception of Jordanes's own time, and are influenced by non-Gothic perceptions of the Goths. Ammianus, who provides the most information about the fourth-century Goths, refers not to Visigoths and Ostrogoths, but to Tervingi and Greutungi, and also *Gothorum reliquas gentes* (XXXI.iii, 8); how these might correspond to the groups mentioned by Jordanes is far from clear. On the use of Visigoth and Ostrogoth: (Coumert 2007, 66–68); Gillett (2000, appendix); on Ammianus and possible earlier evidence of different sub-groups of Goths: Christensen (2002, 198–229).

the ancient world: they are ancestors of the Parthians (48), and engage in warfare against Persians (61–64); Gothic women are Amazons (49–50; 56–57); the Goths are involved in the Trojan war (59–60), allied with Philip of Macedonia (65), and impervious to Julius Caesar’s attempt to conquer them (68).

While they are in their third abode near the Black Sea, we also learn of the Goths’ conflicts with other peoples, who were, unlike the Persians and Macedonians and other peoples mentioned above, not prominent in the ancient Greek and Roman literary tradition: Gepids (94–100); Vandals (111–15); Herules (116–20); and Huns (121–30) (all do, however, occur in Roman sources from the fourth century onwards). It is only from the next period (in the mid-fourth century, though Jordanes provides no dates) that Jordanes’s narrative can be checked against, and in the broader details conforms to, reports from other sources, many of which were contemporary to the events recorded. It was at this time, according to Jordanes, that the Goths split into two groups: the Visigoths, who moved westwards, fought and later became allies of Rome, and eventually settled in Aquitaine and Spain (131–63); and the Ostrogoths, who remained in the east, battled with the Huns, settled along the lower Danube, and eventually established a kingdom in Italy (246–95). Jordanes provides us an extensive narrative of Visigothic history (164–245) until the time of Alaric II, who was to marry the daughter of Theoderic the Ostrogoth, thus connecting the history of the Visigoths to that of the Ostrogoths once again. The last part of the *Getica* deals briefly with the Gothic kingdom of Italy and its defeat by the Romans under Justinian; the text concludes with an expression of hope symbolised by the marriage between a descendent of the Amals and a descendent of the Anicii (296–314).

Over a third of the *Getica* concerns the history of the Goths before their partition, and relatively little space is given to the hundred years immediately preceding the writing of this text. That being said, very little time is taken by the account of the Goths before they arrive around the lower reaches of the Dnieper close to the Black Sea. In other words, Jordanes seems to know most about the Goths only from the time when they were, in his own account, settled not far from the boundaries of the Roman empire, and for which period he had access to contemporary, written, Greek and Latin sources. This in itself should give us pause when considering the extent to which Jordanes drew on authentic ancient Gothic tradition, whether oral or written. I shall focus in the following on the period before the fourth century, for which there was little precedent in terms of Gothic history in the Greek or Latin (and thus written) traditions on which Jordanes could base his narrative.

Jordanes's Sources: Oral or Written?

The difficulties posed by Jordanes begin with the preface, addressed to an otherwise unknown Castalius, in which we learn that the latter has persuaded Jordanes to interrupt his abbreviation of the chronicles,

ut nostris verbis duodecim Senatoris volumina de origine actusque Getarum ab olim et usque nunc per generationes regesque descendentes in uno et hoc parvo libello choartem.

to compress into this one very small book, in our own words, the books of the Senator regarding the origin and deeds of the Goths from former times until now, following the generations and the kings (*praef.*).

The source mentioned here is the now-lost Gothic history of Cassiodorus, minister to the Ostrogothic king Theoderic and his successors.¹³ Jordanes goes on to say that he only had a

¹³ For a study of Cassiodorus in the context of contemporary politics: Krautschick (1983); cf. also Teillet (1984, 281–304). On his *Variae* and their function: Gillett (1998); Kakridi (2005); Reydellet (1981, 183–253); on the intellectual culture of Cassiodorus and his peers, see also Momigliano (1966). See further the discussion below, pp. 36–39. The reference specifically to twelve books of history might in fact be an allusion also to the division

chance to look at this work for three days, and that *quamvis verba non recolo, sensus tamen et res actas credo me integre retinere* (*praef.*: ‘although I do not recollect the words, I believe that I do retain correctly the ideas and the events’). Nevertheless, he admits that he also adds to Cassiodorus’s history, drawing on other sources, and inserting his own words: *et ex nonnullis historiis Grecis ac Latinis addedi convenientia, initium finemque et plura in medio mea dictione permiscens* (*praef.*: ‘and from several Greek and Latin histories I added appropriate material, adding a beginning, end and much in the middle in my own words’).

The extent of Jordanes’s dependence on Cassiodorus is fraught with controversy.¹⁴ The relationship between the two histories is a matter of some importance, because Jordanes probably wrote in Constantinople, and at any rate is to be located firmly within an eastern context, at a time when Rome and the Gothic kingdom in Italy had recently been at war. Cassiodorus, on the other hand, wrote his history in the Gothic kingdom of Italy, while this kingdom was still thriving, and it would hardly be surprising for him to write a narrative presenting the Goths and their past in a wholly positive light. Moreover, given their respective situations, it has been suggested that Cassiodorus was more likely than Jordanes to have had access to genuine Gothic oral tradition, at least regarding the history of the Amal dynasty to which Theoderic of Italy belonged. For this reason especially, those scholars who

of the *Aeneid*—the primary literary source for the Roman origin narrative, which also includes a long migration—into twelve books.

¹⁴ The older views regarding the relationship between Cassiodorus and Jordanes are summarised (with more or less critique) by Goffart (1988, 23–42; 58–62), Coumert (2007, 75–78; 125–38), and Merrills (2005, 101–14); for a thorough critique, see Christensen (2002, 54–83; 115–23). Goffart, Christensen and Coumert see Jordanes as an independent author (though Christensen seems to support greater dependence on Cassiodorus than does Goffart); so does Reydellet, who points out a number of key differences in tone and function (1981, 261–67). A contrary view is presented by (for example) Anton (1994); Krautschick (1983, 21–40; based on Momigliano 1966); and Weißensteiner (1994), the last of whom claims, without evidence, that on stylistic grounds Jordanes can be seen to be Cassiodorus (cf. the critique in Coumert 2007, 126–28); his definitive study intending to prove this, announced in 1994, is still forthcoming. Many scholars agree that Jordanes should be understood as a historian in his own right, but nevertheless argue for more or less substantial dependence on Cassiodorus, while differing on the extent of such a dependence: see e.g. Croke (1987); Croke (2003, 363–67); Heather (1991, 50–52); Merrills (2005, 101–14 and *passim*); Mortensen (1991, 49–50); O’Donnell (1982). Bradley (1993) believes the matter cannot be resolved, but accepts Jordanes’s agency in his work.

believe that the *Getica* reflects authentic Gothic tradition tend also to believe that it is largely Cassiodorus's history.¹⁵

Unless we are to assume that Jordanes simply copied Cassiodorus without much thought regarding the content of what he wrote, we cannot explain the existence and attitudes of Jordanes's text by appeal to Cassiodorus's political situation. I shall operate on what I think is the only reasonable assumption: that he used a variety of sources to compile his narrative, of which Cassiodorus's history was one, albeit possibly the most important one. I believe further that it is impossible to determine how much of Jordanes's text derives from Cassiodorus, and speculation on this matter seems to detract from an understanding of what Jordanes's narrative says.¹⁶ A number of scholars have shown that Jordanes does indeed draw on several Greek and Latin works, some of which Cassiodorus appears not to have known (he does not seem to have had much Greek);¹⁷ there is no reason to doubt that he could also have inserted material in his own words, drawing on sources unknown to us, whether oral or written.

There are, however, many aspects of the early part of the narrative (before the Goths reach the boundaries of Rome) for which no extant source can be identified. The introduction, although clearly inspired by Orosius (I.ii,1), and drawing on a number of ancient writers, nevertheless also departs from all identifiable sources in its description of

¹⁵ It is worth noting, though, that Jordanes's narrative is by no means solely concerned with the Amals, and if he were only interested—as Cassiodorus, given his political circumstances, might well have been—in glorifying Amals, the inclusion of such an extensive history of the Visigoths in Aquitaine and Spain would seem to be superfluous.

¹⁶ For an attempt to judge the dependence of the *Getica* on Cassiodorus's lost history by comparing it with the latter's *Chronicon*, see Croke (1987); cf. the critique in Bradley (1993).

¹⁷ The most recent and comprehensive analysis of Jordanes's sources is that of Christensen (2002), which summarises and largely supersedes the older *Quellenkritik*; see also Coumert (2007, 62–78). Mommsen (ed. 1882, xxx–xliv) lists 24 written sources used by Jordanes; apart from Cassiodorus and the otherwise unknown Ablabius (on whom cf. Coumert 2007, 64–70; Gillett 2000; Gillett argues, because of the date of the material for which he is cited, that Ablabius was probably a third-century ethnographer, who may not have recorded any authentically Gothic oral traditions), the most important known sources are Ammianus, Justin's epitome of Pompeius Trogus, Orosius (Latin), Cassius Dio, Dio Chrysostom, and Priscus (Greek).

northern European geography (Christensen 2002, 252–300; Merrills 2005, 115–67). Scandza, the original home of the Goths, appears to be to some extent an original construction of Jordanes, although based on a number of elements borrowed from earlier writers. Jordanes names Ptolemy and Pomponius Mela as his sources, but gives us more detail about Scandza than is present in any extant earlier work.¹⁸ His description of its population also has no known sources: he tells us that it is inhabited by dozens of different peoples, some of whom, like the Dani and the Heruli, are known from elsewhere (though not necessarily as living in Scandza), although most are otherwise unrecorded (cf. Christensen 2002, 252–300; Merrills 2005, 142–55). He mentions also the Ranii, whose king Roduulf, despising his own kingdom, had recently sought refuge with Theoderic (24). Given that Jordanes differs from his named written sources in many ways, it has been suggested that the description of Scandza is based on information derived from Roduulf via Cassiodorus; nothing more is known of this character, though, so it seems unwise to place much burden on him as a potential source.¹⁹ At any rate, as far as geography is concerned, Jordanes does not claim to have explicitly Gothic sources (whether oral or written) for his description of the island whence the Goths came, even if we cannot discern any other clear sources for some parts of the text.

In his description of Scythia and of Gothic deeds while they lived in Scythia and in Moesia, Thrace and Dacia, Jordanes clearly uses material which in earlier sources concerns other peoples, primarily Scythians and *Getae*, simply transferring narratives of the latter to

¹⁸ Ptolemy's description of *Skandia* (Stückelberger and Graßhoff, ed. and trans. 2006, II.xi,16: *Σκανδία*) is followed quite extensively by Jordanes, who, however, has 27 peoples in Scandza, as opposed to Ptolemy's seven.

¹⁹ On Roduulf, cf. Christensen (2002, 270–71; 293). Goffart (1988, 94–95) compares Jordanes's story of Roduulf with Procopius's tale of the wandering Herules, who came into contact with the Romans under their king Rodolphus (Dewing, ed. and trans. 1914–28, VI.xiv–xv). That Jordanes may have drawn on this story is certainly possible; there is no warrant for believing (as did some of the earlier scholars Christensen cites) that the Herule king and the Roduulf at Theoderic's court were the same person. Merrills (2005, 128–30; 152) is also chary of placing too much value on Roduulf as a source, though he accepts that the king mentioned in the *Getica* was indeed at Theoderic's court, and was identical to the Herule king of Procopius.

the Goths (Christensen 2002, 235–47).²⁰ In this, he follows—but significantly expands on—the confusion in earlier sources. Jordanes’s descriptions of the Goths in Scythia seem to be drawn directly from extant Greek or Latin sources, but modern historians have been unable to determine any historical relationship between the Goths and the Scythians.

All the narratives that associate the Goths with some of the better-known peoples of antiquity (Trojans, Greeks, Macedonians, Persians, Parthians, Romans) depend on earlier works that treat of the Scythians and the Getae (cf. Christensen 2002, 235–49). The impression created by Jordanes’s narrative is of an indomitable people, perhaps barbarian, but cultured enough to be almost like the Greeks (40: *et pene omnibus barbaris Gothi sapientiores semper extiterunt Grecisque pene consimiles* ‘they had always been far wiser than almost all barbarians, and were almost like the Greeks’), and of a greatness to make them seem even more remarkable than the other great nations of antiquity known in Jordanes’s time (Teillet 1984, 312–13). The Goths, we are supposed to perceive, clearly had a past worthy of celebration—even if this past was, as some educated readers would probably discern, lifted from writings on Scythians and Getae.²¹

Jordanes does, however, also explicitly refer to oral sources on a number of occasions. Just after having told us that the Goths have arrived at the shore of the Black Sea, he writes that their journey *in priscis eorum carminibus pene storico ritu in commune recolitur: quod et Ablavius descriptor Gothorum gentis egregius verissima adtestatur*

²⁰ On third- and fourth-century confusions of Scythians, *Getae* and Goths, cf. nn. 2–3 above. Jordanes’s sources are Justin (Seel, ed. 1972, I.i,6; II.iii,8–14 [the Scythian king Thanausis]; II.iii,6; XLI.i,1–2 [Scythians and Parthians]); II.i,2–4; iv,1–33 [Scythians and Amazons]; Orosius (I.xiv–xvi) [Scythians and Amazons; Scythians and Egyptians]; Dycitis Cretensis [or his Greek source] (Eisenhut, ed. 1973, II,1) [Telephus of Moesia]. Dicineus, who, in Jordanes’s account, brought civilisation to the Goths under their king Buruista, and Zalmoxes, another learned man mentioned by Jordanes, are derived from Strabo’s account of Decaeneus and Zamolxis, who bring wisdom to the *Getae* under their king Boerebistas (Jones, ed. and trans. 1917–33, VII.iii,5; 11).

²¹ Orosius, similarly confusing Goths and Getae, also portrayed the Goths as formidable enemies of Alexander and Caesar (I.xvi,2); this is picked up almost verbatim by Isidore (cf. p. 64–65 below).

historia (28: ‘is generally recollected in their ancient songs in almost historical fashion; and Ablabius, the excellent portrayer of the people of the Goths attests to it in his most trustworthy history’). We are told that some of the ancients also agree with Jordanes’s narrative (*in quam sententiam et nonnulli consensere maiorum*),²² though Jordanes cannot understand why Josephus does not tell about the origins of the Goths, confusing them, according to Jordanes, with the Scythians (28–29).²³ Jordanes is, however, far from clear as to what exactly he draws from the songs: the whole narrative of migration, or just the story of Filimer taking the Goths through Scythia to the Black Sea? It is also unclear how much he draws from Ablabius, how much from the *prisca carmina*, and how much from the *maiores*—or are we to understand that all sources agree completely? A further reference to songs is made when Jordanes tells us that the Goths wished to be first among the neighbouring peoples in archery (43: *Quorum studium fuit primum inter alias gentes vicinas arcum intendere nervis*); this statement is derived from a passage in Lucan, which Jordanes explicitly refers to, calling Lucan more a historian than a poet (*Lucano plus storico quam poeta testante: ‘Armeniosque arcus Geticis intendite nervis’*), but we are also told that the exploits of many who were highly regarded by the Goths (*Eterpamara, Hanale, Fridigerni, Vidigoiae et aliorum, quorum in hac gente magna opinio est*) were celebrated in song: *cantu maiorum facta modulationibus citharisque canebant* (‘they sang in the song of the ancients

²² It is not entirely certain who these *maiores* are, but the reference, in context, is almost certainly to written sources. On three other occasions the term refers explicitly to written Greek works (*Get.* 59; 148; 316; cf. Gillett 2000, 484, n. 9; Coumert 2007, 81–82). At 116, we are told that Ermanaric is compared to Alexander by the *maiores*, and at 246, Jordanes says that he is following the *maiores* in telling us about the division of the Goths; the nature and identity of the *maiores* is unclear in both cases. The reference is clearly intended as an appeal to authority, which is probably here supposed to be understood as written, but no fourth- or fifth-century sources speak of a division between Visi- and Ostrogoths, and no other source compares Ermanaric and Alexander. The only clear instance of *maiores* indicating oral tradition is at *Get.* 43.

²³ Amory believes that Jordanes accepts the narratives in the *carmina* ‘but only through the medium of the historian Ablabius’ (1997, 296, n. 97). Note, though, that Jordanes mentions the songs first, and says that the same material is *also* contained in Ablabius; note also that the verb *recolo* is given in the present tense.

composed with melodies and zithers’). However, at no point when we are actually given narratives about any of these figures is reference made to oral tradition of any sort. Both references to songs, therefore, seem to be appeals to the authority of oral tradition, but are not supported by any narratives demonstrably drawn from such a tradition.

After bringing the Goths to Scythia, Jordanes provides a geographical digression on this region, and then, before the narrative resumes, there is a mysterious interjection that refers both to written record and some kind of oral source, but seems to make little sense:

nec eorum fabulas alicubi repperimus scriptas, qui eos dicunt in Britannia vel in unaqualibet insularum in servitute redactos et in unius caballi pretio a quodam ereptos. aut certe si quis eos aliter dixerit in nostra urbe, quam quod nos diximus, fuisse exortos, nobis aliquid obstrepebit: nos enim potius lectioni credimus quam fabulis anilibus consentimus.

Nor do we find written anywhere the tales of those who say that they [the Goths] were led into slavery in Britain or in any other one of the islands, and were redeemed by a certain man for the price of one horse. Certainly, if anyone in our city were to say that their origin was different from what we have reported, he will take issue with us; we would rather believe our reading than agree with old wives’ tales (38).

What does all this mean? Goffart believes that there may have been suggestions that the Ostrogoths should be given Britain as a means of ridding Rome of an unnecessary nuisance, and cites Procopius as providing a narrative of troublesome barbarians (in this case Herules) obligingly leaving Rome for a northern island (Dewing, ed. and trans. 1914–28, VI.xv,1–4). While it is impossible to determine whether this bit of contemporary politics gave rise in Constantinople to a story of Gothic origins or previous slavery in Britain, Goffart’s view that this interjection of Jordanes is intended to counter any arguments that would have the Goths being expelled from the Roman regions is certainly plausible.²⁴ If we accept this reading, it would seem that this paragraph is fabricated by Jordanes in order to assert the Goths’ irrevocable involvement in the Roman world, making the reference both to the reading and the old wives’ tales meaningless. Nevertheless, it is clear that here, as elsewhere, Jordanes is

²⁴ Goffart (1988, 94–96); opposed by Heather (1991, 66; 1996, 26–27).

making an appeal to the authority of written sources—even though there is actually no written tradition to back up his narrative of Gothic origins in Scandza. And while he is consistent in how he values writing, at this point he seems to contrast it with oral material that is not to be trusted. For this reason, a number of scholars have asserted that from this passage Jordanes can be seen to value written over oral sources (Amory 1997, 296; Croke 1987, 123–24; Gillett 2000, 485, n. 12; Goffart 1988, 89). Perhaps it is important, though, that the oral narrative referred to in this particular case is something possibly circulating in Constantinople (the *urbs* referred to), and probably to be understood as having a different value from that of the ancient songs mentioned earlier—Jordanes not only does not denigrate those songs, but also appears to refer to them as reliable authorities.

Later in the narrative, when describing how the Goths were counselled by Dicineus (cf. n. 20 above), Jordanes tells us that the Goths acquire laws, and a knowledge of physics, astronomy and philosophy (69–71). According to him, the laws are preserved in writing in his own time (69), but no written Gothic laws are now extant. Dicineus also gave Gothic priests the designation of *pilleati*, and the rest of the Goths *capillati* (71–72), *quod nomen Gothi pro magno suscipientes adhuc odie suis cantionibus reminiscunt* (72: ‘which name the Goths received as being great, and remember it until today in their songs’). Cassiodorus knows of a group of *capillati* as a part of the army in Italy, but he says nothing of their songs (*Var.* IV.xl); if Jordanes refers to the *capillati* that may have existed in his own lifetime, it is strange that he says the Goths *remember* this name in their songs, but are not called by it in the present.²⁵ We have, once more, a reference to some kind of oral tradition that need not mean anything at all, and certainly does not relate clearly to the historically attested

²⁵ Note also that Pliny refers to an Italian population called *capillati* long before any Goths were in Italy (Mayhoff, ed. 1892–1909, III.v,47).

contemporary presence of a particular group of people the oral tradition is supposed to commemorate (cf. Christensen 2002, 245–46; on hairstyles and their significance, see further Amory 1997, 344–46).

The final reference to what might be oral source material comes just before Jordanes gives us the genealogy of the Amal kings: *Horum ergo heroum, ut ipsi suis in fabulis referunt, primus fuit Gapt, qui genuit Hulmul* (79: ‘Gapt was the first of their heroes, as they themselves say in their fables, and he fathered Hulmul’). We should note that Jordanes does not state explicitly that the whole genealogy is based on or recorded in the *fabulae*: this passage could be taken to apply just to Gapt. There is no known written source for the whole genealogy in its present form in the *Getica*, but the form itself is clearly derived from written models, most prominently the Bible. Cassiodorus mentions nine of the kings in Jordanes’s genealogy (*Var.* XI.i.19), and his history is thought to be the source for Jordanes, but there is, of course, no proof of this, beyond the fact that he says that Athalaric was the seventeenth in the line of Gothic kings (*Var.* IX.xxv,4), and in Jordanes’s genealogy too he is in the seventeenth generation of Amal kings.²⁶

In terms of explicit references to oral sources, therefore, Jordanes gives us very little, and what we find in the *Getica* in this regard is of dubious value. References to oral material are paired with written sources for the same information (28); ridiculed (38); not directly related to any clearly oral-derived narrative in Jordanes’s text (43; 79); or of unclear significance because they refer to a term used in the recent past, but the oral material is said to remember the term (72). However, even if Jordanes does not often explicitly mention oral

²⁶ As Christensen has ably demonstrated, Jordanes’s genealogy does not accord with his own narrative: there are Gothic rulers who are not in the Amal genealogy, and Amals who are not Gothic rulers. In his account of the kings of the late fourth century, Jordanes also differs from Ammianus, who was a contemporary (Christensen 2002, 124–55). The significance of the number seventeen is, as Wolfram has pointed out, undoubtedly derived from the number of mythical kings of Alba Longa from Aeneas to Romulus (Wolfram 1971, 17).

sources, and his references are of doubtful value and significance, we are still left with many elements of the text for which there are no known written sources: these include names of peoples inhabiting Scandza, the narrative of migration itself, the broken bridge, the names of the earliest Gothic kings, Berig, Gadarig and Filimer; from the later section of his narrative, there are also the names of the peoples ruled by the fourth-century Gothic king Ermanaric (116–20), and the *haliurunnae*, some kind of witches from whom the Huns descended (121).²⁷ In addition to individual elements, there is also the problem of ‘legends and unverifiable barbarian exploits’ (Goffart 1988, 64).²⁸ The presence of names or stories for which no sources can be traced is an interpretative problem not just for the earlier part of the history of the Goths, but also for the narratives of the fourth and fifth centuries, in which, although much material can be traced to identifiable sources, there are nevertheless stories apparently original to Jordanes. The unverifiable nature of a number of Jordanes’s tales suggests intrusions of oral material in the narrative.²⁹

²⁷ Christensen (2002, 302–04) points out that a Berig was known to Cassius Dio as a Celtic king in the first century, and to Priscus as a (possibly Hunnic) member of Attila’s court. Either text might be a source for Jordanes’s use of the name, though he places Berig in a very different context. Heather believes that there was a genuine Gothic narrative about Berig, though not about Scandinavia (1996, 26–27). Gadarig and Filimer are otherwise unknown. On the *Haliurunnae*, see Christensen (2002, 241–42); a differing interpretation is presented by Heather (1991, 5–6), and members of the so-called ‘Vienna School’, e.g. Pohl (2002), and Wolfram (1994, 23–24; 31). Note also that while the word itself might be Germanic (a cognate occurs in *Beowulf* 164: cf. Fulk, Bjork and Niles, eds 2008, 126, for commentary), the story draws on a biblical model; Goffart presents a plausible scenario of how this might have come to pass (1995, 29). On the names of Ermanaric’s peoples, see Christensen (2002, 158–96); the same author’s work is invaluable for demonstrating the impossibility of arguing on grounds of Germanic philology that the names in Jordanes indicate that he used authentically Gothic, ancient oral tradition.

²⁸ Goffart provides a ‘conservative list’ (1988, 64, n. 218); some of the narratives of possibly legendary nature, and more importantly, lacking known written sources, include the migration story; the broken bridge (27); the foundation of Marcianople (93); the origins of the Huns (121–4); the death of Ermanaric (129–30) (I exclude material relating to Alaric and later).

²⁹ Coumert is correct that explicit references to oral sources tend to coincide with explicit reference to written sources; she suggests that this is because Jordanes (and Cassiodorus) felt that both were required to authenticate accounts of barbarian history (2007, 83), and that the reference to oral material might derive from a knowledge of Tacitus (2007, 72; 82–83; cf. Ogilvie and Winterbottom, eds 1975, II,2). This still does not explain parts of the *Getica* for which no plausible sources can be suggested; nor does it mean that there were no oral sources accessible to either Cassiodorus or Jordanes.

Christensen argues that the migration legend was a creation of Cassiodorus, and was not based on any living oral tradition; he supports this by pointing out inconsistencies in Jordanes, and the fact that Isidore knows nothing of these narratives (2002, 304–17). This is fair enough, but we are left with assuming that the narratives were original creations of Cassiodorus, with no sources. The fact is that even if Jordanes's own explicit references to oral sources are not very credible, and do not help us in any way to ascertain what oral material he might or might not have used (and as we shall see, turning to Cassiodorus's words does not make things easier), this fact does not obliterate the unexplained, un-sourced narratives. Given that all living non-literate cultures that have been studied do preserve oral material concerning their past, however widely different in form and content,³⁰ it hardly seems to be stretching the imagination to believe that the Goths could have had a historical oral tradition. What is less clear is whether and in what form such a tradition survived in Jordanes's own time, by which point Ostrogoths had been ruling Italy for three generations, and had been federates and allies of Rome, and members of the Roman army, for over a century, and had also clearly adopted the written word for purposes of government and religion, and also patronised written cultural production.³¹

Certainly, any surviving oral material would have been affected by centuries of contact with the literate culture of Rome, and over half a century, by the time the *Getica* was written, of Gothic rule in Italy. Any postulated living oral tradition would therefore have been a reflection more of current views of the past than of unchanged ancient material (cf.

³⁰ For an overview of different kinds of oral transmission of historical information in living traditions: Vansina (1985); for an introduction to orally composed and transmitted Turkic epic which is, however, also influenced by written material: Reichl (1992); Reichl (2000) for a comparison of living Turkic and medieval European traditions.

³¹ See, for a broad view of forms of government and religion, Amory (1997, *passim*); specifically on literacy and cultural production: Everett (2003, 23–33); Hen (2007, 27–58).

Amory 1997, 295–98; Heather 1991, 5–6; 61–66). We should also be wary of viewing possible oral sources as necessarily belonging to some kind of formalised oral tradition; they could derive from ‘court gossip, learned deductions or the stories brought back by travellers and soldiers’ (Amory 1997, 295), and would have borne the stamp of substantial Roman (whether Latin or Greek) influence.

Of course, Jordanes may have had no access to any oral material, and the unexplained source for narratives we cannot connect with any other written material might be Cassiodorus’s lost history. For this reason, we need to turn briefly to Cassiodorus and his remarks about Gothic history, to try and understand where he might have got his information. Cassiodorus wrote two historical works, of which one, his *Chronica*, survives. What this conveys is in many respects quite different from what we learn in the *Getica*, though not necessarily conflicting (cf. Bradley 1993; Croke 1987; Christensen 2002, 57–67). Regarding the longer *Gothic History*, we receive all the information we have from a speech Cassiodorus wrote for Athalaric to deliver to the senate in 533 on the occasion of Cassiodorus’s appointment as *praefectus praetorio*. The relevant passage is as follows:

[4] Tetendit se etiam in antiquam prosapiem nostram, lectione discens quod vix maiorum notitia cana retinebat. iste reges Gothorum longa oblivione celatos latibulo vetustatis eduxit. iste Hamalos cum generis sui claritate restituit, evidenter ostendens in septimam decimam progeniem stirpem nos habere regalem. [5] Originem Gothicam historiam fecit esse Romanam, colligens quasi in unam coronam germen floridum quod per librorum campos passim fuerat ante dispersum. [6] Perpendite, quantum vos in nostra laude dilexerit, qui vestri principis nationem docuit ab antiquitate mirabilem, ut, sicut fuistis a maioribus vestris semper nobiles aestimati, ita vobis antiqua regum progenies inperaret.

He even turned his attention to our ancient family, learning by reading what the hoary knowledge of the elders scarcely retains. He led out from the hiding-place of antiquity the kings of the Goths, who had been concealed by long oblivion. He restored the Amals and their people to fame, showing clearly that we have a royal family to the seventeenth generation. He made Gothic origins be Roman history, collecting as though in one garland the flower-buds which had earlier been dispersed everywhere in the fields of books. Consider how he loves you in our praise, he who has shown that the *natio* of your ruler was remarkable from ancient times, so that just as you have always been considered noble because of your elders, thus an ancient line of kings commands you (*Var.* IX.xxv, 4–6).

What is particularly striking about this passage, with regard to the problem of Gothic oral tradition, is that Cassiodorus is obviously at pains to discount it.³² He learnt about the Goths by reading (*lectione*), and what he learnt was material that the elders hardly remembered (*quod vix maiorum notitia cana retinebat*). By reading too, it is implied, and by writing, he restored the Gothic kings to fame, rescuing them from oblivion. He did so by collecting the flowers scattered all over the fields of books (*quod per librorum campos passim fuerat ante dispersum*). By doing so, *originem Gothicam historiam fecit esse Romanam*—a controversial phrase that is easy to translate literally, but difficult to understand in its real significance. What is obvious from this phrase, though, is that Cassiodorus was claiming to have made Gothic history Roman in some sense.³³ In other words, rather than setting up Gothic and Roman as necessary opposites, in his history he has reconciled them (cf. Goffart 1988, 36). And this point is, I think, crucial for the understanding of the rest of the passage, with its references to written works and dismissal of the memory of elders.

Goffart has suggested that ‘Cassiodorus’s Ravenna did not prize an oral “heroic memory” as a fountain of Gothic history’ and that ‘if Cassiodorus did not spurn the oral or traditional information that may have been available to him, he also did not set a high value on its contribution’ (1988, 38; 39). Even if we discard the term ‘heroic memory’ as being of little use, we might agree that Cassiodorus does not set a very high value on oral tradition—but we must be wary of taking at face value what Cassiodorus says, and be mindful of the context. While there were many kinds of Roman histories,³⁴ they were all *written*. Rome was

³² But cf. Coumert (2007, 80–81), who claims that Cassiodorus does not oppose oral and written sources, but sees them as confirming each other and thus complementary.

³³ For the whole passage, with much attention to this phrase, see Christensen (2002, 124–34); Croke (2003, 361–63); Goffart (1988, 35–39).

³⁴ Marasco (ed. 2003) provides a valuable survey of the genres of historiography in late Latin and Greek antiquity. Of the most popular Latin texts of different genres that could certainly count as ‘Roman history’, it is worth mentioning the *Liber de Caesaribus* of Aurelius Victor and the anonymous *Historia Augusta* [serial

not only a literate society in that power and administration depended on literacy; it was also a literate society in that the sources of cultural authority were all written.³⁵ In this respect, Rome differed fundamentally from all the other European cultures with which it came into contact in late antiquity, for even if these might have adopted administrative literacy fairly quickly, they certainly had not adopted literate modes of preserving their cultural traditions by the mid-sixth century (Heather 1994).

In order to make his history appear authoritative to the senate, Cassiodorus would have had to speak of a reliance on texts; his dismissal of the memory of elders and his statement that from books he found material that was otherwise forgotten need not be understood as more than a rhetorical flourish for the purpose of satisfying his—Roman, literate—audience that Goths and their history were Roman enough to be worthy rulers. Cassiodorus might well have produced Gothic history by claiming as Gothic narratives that were originally about other peoples, but it seems unlikely that Cassiodorus could have found in any books material in Jordanes's text that the known sources of the *Getica* do not contain; it is unlikely that Cassiodorus had more informative, written material to draw on, all of which is now lost to us. It appears reasonable to assume, therefore, that those portions of Jordanes's narrative—whether short stories, names, geographical descriptions—which are contained in no known written source could well have been drawn from some kind of oral reports, whether these were known to Jordanes himself, or whether Cassiodorus was responsible for

biographies]; Eutropius's *Breviarum* [a succinct compendium]; the *Origo gentis Romanae* [synthesising origin narrative]; Ammianus [Tacitean *Zeitgeschichte*]. I do not follow Goffart (1988, 37–38), therefore, in his view that the serial biography was the model of 'Roman history' meant by Cassiodorus; this seems unduly restrictive, and ignores the immense influence of other forms of Roman history.

³⁵ This is not to suggest that there was no Latin orality in Roman culture; there must have been. But 'tradition' in the Roman sense would have meant written tradition; authoritative Roman history would have been understood only as written. On the importance for the Roman elite of absorbing the written cultural inheritance of Rome, see Everett (2003, 19–35; 2009, 364–65); Heather (1994, 183–86); Jones (1964, 1001–4; 1007–12; 1021–24); Wickham (2009, 29–31); note that this becomes less important during the course of the sixth century, with the written heritage of the Church largely replacing the classical tradition (Riché 1995, 38–47; 76–85).

writing them, or whether, in some cases, they were derived from the unknown work of Ablabius.³⁶ In the latter case, of course, if we accept Gillett's third-century date, none of the origin narratives can be said to derive from any material extant in oral form in the sixth century.

I must stress, though, that if there were sixth-century oral sources, such material need not have been specifically 'Gothic' (i.e., in the Gothic language, and/or transmitted as a part of some sort of Gothic oral tradition); that even Gothic oral material almost certainly was not historically accurate by modern standards; that any putative Gothic oral tradition would certainly have undergone many changes by the time it reached Cassiodorus or Jordanes, and cannot be thought to reflect genuinely ancient material going back to the time of a migration; and that within the milieux of both Jordanes and Cassiodorus, it was writing that was considered the prime form of authoritative record. However, Cassiodorus's statements about his history certainly seem to show that he made an effort at reconciling the past of the Goths—whether his sources were Gothic or not—with the form which Romans expected history to take, and he appears to have done this as a means of cultural reconciliation of some sort. This included, quite possibly, some amount of transfer of oral material into writing, which was a tacit acknowledgement of the importance of this material, and simultaneously an assertion of the superior authority of the written word. Jordanes certainly seemed to be attempting some kind of reconciliation too, given his often highly complementary depiction of the Gothic past.

We cannot know the extent to which possibly non-Roman material was available directly to Jordanes, or reached him through Cassiodorus, but it seems to be that Jordanes

³⁶ We should note that not all the otherwise un-sourced material is attributed to Ablabius, and if Gillett's placement of him in the mid-third century is accepted (Gillett 2000), then anything of a later date with no known written source may derive directly from oral material. Note also that Gillett's arguments in support of a third-century date for Ablabius, while certainly plausible, are by no means conclusive, and there is no reason to believe that all early unsourced material derives from Ablabius, assuming that such a writer did exist.

was himself aiming to acknowledge a past not contained in authoritative Roman (whether Latin or Greek) sources, while simultaneously making the history of the Goths 'Roman' both by writing it, and by conflating it with written material on probably unrelated peoples, but available in Roman histories. In other words, the *Getica* appears to me to be a witness to a process by which Gothic history was made Roman in a very real sense: not by obliterating or denigrating the Gothic past (this would be more a denial of Gothic history), but by integrating it with both the Roman past, to the extent that this was possible, and more importantly with the present Roman form of commemorating the past and preserving cultural knowledge, thus making the *Getica* akin to other parts of the Roman cultural inheritance. That the *Getica* attempts such a form of cultural rapprochement seems all the more evident when one considers its attitude to Gothic religion.

Paganism and Arianism in the *Getica*

Jordanes says little about Gothic paganism. We are told that the Goths worship Mars, who is said to be falsely called the god of war but was actually a Goth, with human sacrifices (41); Jordanes calls this a very harsh rite (*asperrima cultura*). Immediately following this, we are told that *eratque illis religionis preter ceteros insinuatus affectus, cum parenti devotio numinis videretur inpendi* (41: 'they were imbued with deeper feeling for religion than others, since worship seemed to be paid to their ancestor as a divinity'). Although we learn later that Goths continued to deify their leaders, Jordanes suggests that in their third abode they have adopted more humane practices: *Tertia vero sede super mare Ponticum iam humaniores et, ut superius diximus, prudentiores effecti* (42: 'But in their third abode at the Black Sea, they had been made more humane and, as I said above, wiser') (the cross-

reference is to 40, where we were told that the Goths were almost as wise as the Greeks). The only other information on Gothic religion given is that while they still resided in Scythia, one of their kings, Thanausis (cf. n. 20 for Jordanes's source), was worshipped as a god after his death (48: *hunc ergo Thanausim regem Gothorum mortuum inter numina sui populi coluerunt*); and just before we are presented with the Amal genealogy, we are told that because of their victory in battle (against the Romans), the Goths regarded their leaders as demi-gods: *magnaue potiti per loca victoria iam procures suos, quorum quasi fortuna vincebant, non puros homines, sed semideos id est Ansis vocaverunt* (78: 'and having achieved a great victory over there, they called their leaders—and it was as if they had conquered by the good fortune of these leaders—not only men, but demi-gods, that is *Ansis*').

That the Goths consider their leaders to be divine is not condemned in any manner, though we should note that Dorpaneus, their leader in this battle (77) figures nowhere in the Amal genealogy.³⁷ Of course, the raising of a leader in war to quasi-divine status was hardly unusual in Roman history; and like the Amals, the current Roman rulers were not actually descended from the first emperors to achieve divine status.³⁸ The euhemeristic interpretation of Gothic paganism serves as an apologia for the Goths: they worship humans as gods because they are deceived, not because of innate wickedness.³⁹ Since the leaders they deify

³⁷ Dorpaneus is derived from Diurpaneus, king of the Dacians (Orosius VII.x,4) (cf. Christensen 2002, 126–27).

³⁸ Cf. also *Get.* 143, where we are told that Athanaric thought Theodosius was a god on earth.

³⁹ Although originating in pre-Christian times, euhemerism—an interpretation of gods as exceptional humans who were worshipped as deities—was adopted by some Christians in late antiquity as a common method of explaining the worship of pagan gods, and continued to be employed by some Christian writers throughout the middle ages. From the beginning of its use by Christian writers, euhemerism could be applied with a simply historicising and thereby often apologetic function (as in Jordanes), without moral critique, but also as a means of explicitly denigrating pagan practices and the pagan past (Cooke 1927; Orchard 1997, 101–04; von See 1989; Thraede 1966). See more broadly Inglebert (1996), for studies of how individual Christian Roman historians approached the problems posed by the pre-Christian Roman past; the earliest Christian writers to

are great warriors—to the extent that ancient poets call one of them a god of war—it seems that even this un-Christian practise implicitly praises the Goths' valour in war. Once the Goths have abandoned the practice of human sacrifice, their paganism appears to be easily excused by the fact that it stems from military prowess and is directed towards great warriors. These are the only real indications we are given in the *Getica* of Gothic paganism. Although it seems unlikely that any of what we are told regarding the ancient Gothic rites is accurate, it is certainly reported without explicit condemnation or embarrassment, and appears not to detract from the generally positive image of the Goths as superior to other outstanding warriors.

By Jordanes's time, the Goths were Christian, albeit largely Arian. Of their religion in Jordanes's own time we hear nothing at all; this is significant not just because of their Arianism, but also because Jordanes tells us nothing about Theoderic the Great's persecution of Pope John, Symmachus and Boethius (on which, cf. below, pp. 224–26); the silence can only stem from his desire not to portray the Gothic regime in a bad light. The initial conversion is treated very briefly: we are told that the Visigoths, in their fear of the Huns, promised Valens that they would submit to his laws and commands and become Christian if he would give them part of Thrace or Moesia, and send them teachers who knew their own language (131).⁴⁰ Valens grants them the land, and also sends them Christian teachers:

et quia tunc Valens imperator Arrianorum perfidia saucius nostrarum partium omnes ecclesias obturasset, suae parti fautores ad illos dirigit praedicatores, qui venientes rudibus et ignaris ilico perfidiae suae virus infundunt. Sic quoque Vesegothae a Valente imperatore Arriani potius quam Christiani effecti. De cetero tam Ostrogothis quam Gepidis parentibus suis pro affectionis gratia euangelizantes huius perfidiae edocentes, omnem ubique linguae huius nationem ad culturam huius sectae invitaverunt.

present a euhemeristic reading were Minucius Felix (late second or early third century; cf. Inglebert 1996, 105–16) and Lactantius (c. 250–c. 325; cf. Inglebert 1996, 117–44).

⁴⁰ Ulfila is only mentioned briefly, much later (267) and not clearly temporally located, as the bishop of the *Gothi minores*, a peaceful people even now residing in Moesia.

and since the emperor Valens, smitten by the perfidy of the Arians, persisted against all the churches of our faith, he sent preachers to them who favoured his faith. When they came, they infected the uncultivated and inexperienced [Goths] there with the virus of their perfidy. Thus the Visigoths were made Arians rather than Christians by the emperor Valens. Furthermore, they evangelised among both the Ostrogoths and Gepids, their relatives, because of the affection in which they held them, and taught them this perfidy, and attracted everywhere every nation of the same language to the cultivation of this sect (132–33).⁴¹

Immediately following this, they settle in the lands they had asked for (133), and soon suffer famine (134); we might view this as a punishment for choosing the wrong religion, but we are told clearly that this happens *ut adsolet genti, necdum bene loco fundatis* ('as it is wont to happen to a people that is not yet well settled in a place'). Their suffering is exacerbated by the actions of the Roman generals. The Goths, still Arian, free themselves, and from then on begin *non ut advenae et peregrini, sed ut cives et domini possessoribus imperare totasque partes septentrionales usque ad Danubium suo iuri tenere* (137: 'to rule over the landowners not as immigrants and wanderers, but as citizens and lords, and to hold in their own law all the northern regions up to the Danube'). There is thus no indication whatsoever that the Goths were punished for their Arianism. Their later history is certainly glorious enough to obliterate this blight from the reader's memory.

Valens himself, though, is explicitly said to be punished by god: at Adrianople, where the Goths defeat the Romans, Valens hides in a hut to which the Goths set fire, and Jordanes, following Orosius (VII.xxxiii,19), comments: *haut secus quam dei prorsus iudicio, ut ab ipsis igni conbureretur, quos ipse vera fide petentibus in perfidia declinasset ignemque caritatis ad gehennae ignem detorsisset* (138: 'it was because of nothing else but God's judgement that he should be burnt in fire by those who, seeking themselves the true faith, he had turned aside to perfidy and diverted them from the fire of love to the fire of hell').

⁴¹ Orosius (VII.xxxiii,19) provides the basic narrative; Jordanes adds the conversion of the Ostrogoths and Gepids, and the adjectives with which the Goths are described.

It is apparent that Arianism is in itself to be condemned, but not the Goths, even though they are Arians: their religion is not their fault, and it certainly does not hinder them from glory in the world. Even at the very end of the work, when the still-Arian Goths are overcome by the Catholic Justinian's army, we are told that Justinian overcame the *famosum regnum fortissimamque gentem* (313); Jordanes ends by telling us that he has related the origin and *nobilitas* of the Amals, and that the Goths, a *laudanda progenies*, ceded to a *laudabiliori principi* (316). Clearly, the taint of heresy does not diminish their praiseworthiness. The fact that the Arian Goths are defeated by orthodox Romans might be part of the reason for the hopeful end to the narrative: Jordanes says that the joining of the Anicii with the Amals gives, with god's favour (*domino praestante*), hope to both peoples (314).

This is all we learn about the Gothic religion. Jordanes's *Getica* does not seem to be a work that is primarily trying to make a religious point; the history of the Goths is not related to *Heilsgeschichte*. The continuing Arianism and the past paganism of the Goths is soft-pedalled or ignored in order that the Goths do not appear in a negative light: rather than stressing Gothic heterodoxy, Jordanes glossed over it, focusing instead on Gothic triumphs, and suppressing as much as possible the religious problematic in order to focus on the continuity between the distant and very recent past of their secular glory.

Goths and Romans: The Purpose of the Gothic Past in the *Getica*

What defines the Goths in Jordanes's narrative is primarily their history. Religion, geographical location, political unity or lack thereof, and the rule by a particular king or dynasty, are all factors that do not seem to unite the Gothic people, since each of these

factors can potentially include more than one people; for Jordanes, the Goths' past is what sets them apart. It seems apparent, though, that for Jordanes, being a people did mean having some kind of historical tradition; this is, after all, what Jordanes claims he sets down, and what is distinctive about the Goths is indeed their history. The uniqueness of the Gothic past is defined by their origin in Scandza, their valour in battle, and their 'long march' that eventually leads them to Rome; when the migration stops, so too does Gothic history (Reydellet 1981, 268–80). Both Alaric and Theoderic go to Italy because they and their people do not wish to lead a life of *otium* and thus dilute their valour (Alaric: 146–47; Theoderic: 290); Alaric continues to wander, whereas Theoderic and his people settle in Italy, and this ultimately brings about the end of an independent Gothic history (Reydellet 1981, 282–83). This is the point too when Gothic history is first written, in Latin, by Cassiodorus. If we are willing to see the *Getica* as a Gothic history in Roman form, drawing on and in a sense a successor to the lost history of Cassiodorus, then it would appear that differences between peoples do not come in the way of cultural assimilation as well. If the Gothic past has been made Roman history, then, given that their present is also under Roman rule, living by Roman law, and in the case of their ruling dynasty, being married to a Roman, it seems that while Jordanes preserves what he calls the Gothic past, even by doing so he signals that their independence is partially subsumed by the greater culture of Rome—though this does not come at the cost of a total oblivion of what Jordanes identifies as Gothic history.

Although its unique characteristic is the ancient migration from Scandza, this history is fullest when the Goths are in contact with Rome, and from the time of Domitian, Gothic history is inextricably bound up with that of Rome (76ff.) (Teillet 1984, 328–29). While the two peoples are initially antagonistic, they are shown to be complementary from the early

fifth century; the early opposition of Goths and Romans (e.g. 76; 78) is resolved in favour of a collaboration explicit in the phrase *Gothi et Romani* (142; 165; 166; 181; 213; 271; 272) (Teillet 1984, 307; 320). In the context of the wars against the Huns, Goths and Romans are united in the phrase *primas mundi gentes Romanos Vesegothasque* (181) (Teillet 1984, 314). Gothic valour is consistently praised—indeed this is one of the ways that the Gothic people is defined—and their might is depicted as indispensable for the defence of Rome (111; 132) (Teillet 1984, 320–21). But this very fact—that the Goths *defend* Rome, not succeed it as a power in their own right—already signals Jordanes’s perspective in praising the Goths: they are great, and they have an independent past, but they are also, ultimately, to be seen as properly subservient to Rome. Of course, he does not conceal the existence of an independent kingdom in Spain, which is an ally of Rome, but once Theoderic is established in Italy, it is his regent who rules Visigothic Spain (302); indeed he is depicted almost like a western emperor, exercising authority over the whole of western Europe: *Nec fuit in parte occidua gens, quae Theodorico, dum adviveret, aut amicitia aut subiectione non deserviret* (303: ‘there was no people in the west that did not serve Theoderic either in friendship or in subjection, as long as he lived’) (cf. Teillet 1984, 322). But although in the *Getica*, Theoderic is portrayed as taking the initiative for the conquest of Italy, asking Zeno to grant him the *regnum* (291),⁴² and he appears to rule as an independent king in Italy (cf. 295), as he dies, he nevertheless instructs his heirs to respect the emperor after god: *senatum populumque Romanum amarent principemque Orientalem placatum semper propitiumque haberent post deum* (304: ‘[that] they should love the Roman senate and people, and always ensure that the eastern emperor is pleased and propitiated after god’). This seems to be an acknowledgement

⁴² In contrast, see the *Romana* (348–49), where Theoderic is sent by Zeno; the initiative comes from the emperor.

of the importance for the Goths both of imperial authority, and of the Roman institutions by which they legitimated their rule.⁴³ Although Jordanes, unlike Isidore (see below, pp. 64–69), does not really depict the Goths becoming Roman themselves in terms of taking on Roman characteristics, from religion to rituals of rule, by the end of their history, their independence is subsumed within the empire; their distinctive characteristic of being itinerant is abandoned for a sedentary life in Italy; their history is written in Latin, Roman form. These factors taken together seem to spell the end of independent Gothic history: if there is any future, it will be fully conjoined with that of Rome.

From the preceding pages it will have emerged that the *Getica* can be read as a form of making the Gothic past Roman, without, however, transforming it in such a way that there is nothing at all Gothic left in it. The Goths have (or have had) their own stories, names, religion, and ethnic identity. They have had their own kingdoms, and they have ruled over Rome without becoming Romans. Nevertheless, they are now brought under the yoke of Rome, and they are, in the person of the heir to their ruling family, united with Rome, in the person of the heir to one of its most eminent families. These changes would presumably also bring about a change in religion (recall that Jordanes says this marriage bears hope *domino praestante*). If the Goths have been subsumed into the Roman empire, then the *Getica* is an absorption of their history into the authoritative cultural model of the written, Latin history, drawing on written, Latin and Greek sources.

This happens without, however, Jordanes ignoring the *prisca carmina* of the Goths themselves, or other sources that did not belong within the tradition of written history. In this

⁴³ As Teillet notes, Gothic kings always show great respect for the empire in the *Getica* (1984, 323); while Gothic military might is indispensable, it is Rome that provides the institutions of senate and laws, which are equally necessary for a peaceful empire (1984, 321). This follows the ideology enunciated in Cassiodorus's *Variae* (cf. Amory 1997, 43–78; Kakridi 2005, 339–47).

regard, the exact nature of Jordanes's sources (or Cassiodorus's, depending on the extent to which Jordanes drew on Cassiodorus), and the extent to which Jordanes actually used *prisca carmina* is less relevant than the fact that this work produces the first written, self-consciously Gothic history, and at least *claims* to present Gothic tradition; and in doing so creates a written historical tradition for a people previously without one. The fact that the Gothic past is actually a *mélange* of various non-Gothic pasts is also less important, if we wish to understand Jordanes's purpose, than the fact that he explicitly claims this past as Gothic, and thus independent of the dominant historical traditions: the function of the Scandinavian past is to give the Goths something that makes them stand out as independent and distinct from, yet as old as, the various peoples known in classical historiography (Mortensen 1991, 94–95).⁴⁴

One could argue that the text represents an attempt at bringing the Goths fully within the compass of Roman culture by transforming their history into a Latin, written narrative, within which the Goths, like their past, are ultimately subsumed within a larger Roman culture and polity. This transformation of Goths into Roman subjects in their historical narrative takes place, however, with a good deal of respect for Gothic independence. Continuity with the ancient, non-Roman, non-Catholic past is stressed, as are the glories the Goths enjoyed in that past. Too little is known of Jordanes to be able to determine exactly what the purpose and the audience of this text were, but it seems safe to assume that it was intended to show some class of Goths that they could maintain their pride in what was

⁴⁴ We should remember also that while no previous author had assimilated Goths to other peoples to the extent that Jordanes did, he was not the first to confuse Goths with other peoples. His audience might not, therefore, have been as aware as modern scholars that he was appropriating the histories of other peoples to Gothic history, given that this confusion was shared with a number of sources, including such prominent ones as Orosius and Jerome (cf. nn. 2–3 above on earlier sources confusing Goths with other peoples; nn. 20; 21; 36, for some examples of Jordanes's use of stories about other peoples).

projected as their own tradition, while nevertheless becoming Roman subjects. Some kind of fusion between Goth and Roman is the ultimate aim of this text.⁴⁵ It is also clear that this is brought about through a process of secular history, not by the conversion of the Goths to Catholicism.

Although Jordanes wrote a history of the Goths when they had just lost their independence,⁴⁶ his project nevertheless appears to be to effect through historical narrative a legitimization of a non-Roman, non-biblical past in order to praise a people who maintained a cultural tradition that in some aspects at least did not derive from Rome, and that was thought to be or presented as Gothic rather than Roman. The writing of the *Getica*, it could be argued, was an act not only of cultural translation—of Gothic origin into Roman history—but also of making legitimate a form of co-existence that acknowledged the dual influences of a Roman and non-Roman cultural inheritance, and in doing so stressed continuities in secular history rather than religious breaks with the past, or ethnic differences. If we consider that Jordanes is known to us from two works, a history of the Goths, and a history of Rome, it seems to me that his project was in some sense to allow for the individuality of two kinds of cultural identity, which were, however, both subsumed under one political unit. The political unity of Goths and Romans brought with it some amount of cultural assimilation (from the Gothic side) but nevertheless allowed for some preservation of cultural independence (in the form of

⁴⁵ The purpose of the *Getica* has been hotly debated. Prominent recent views: Goffart (1988) [it was a propaganda work intended to reconcile Goths to living under Roman rule]; Heather (1991, 41–42; 52–61) [historical works are not suitable for propaganda; the pro-Gothic and pro-Amal parts of the *Getica* derive from Cassiodorus, whose purpose was solely to flatter his Gothic masters]; Amory (1997, 302–04) [histories can be influenced by propaganda, and thus adhere to a particular partisan viewpoint; the purpose of the *Getica* was to emphasise the Goths' proper place, as Roman federates in the Balkans, not as independent rulers]; Merrills (2005, 162–67) [agrees with Amory, but believes that Jordanes also intends to stress Gothic independence from Rome, which explains the Scandinavian origin myth].

⁴⁶ The Visigoths retained their kingdom, but there are no grounds for believing that Jordanes's text had any relation to the contemporary Visigothic polity in any way. In any case, Rome continued to battle against the Visigoths in Spain, and although these wars lasted until the early seventh century, their continuing independence would not by any means have been a foregone conclusion at the time Jordanes wrote the *Getica*.

an independent historical narrative). Just as Theoderic had been *Gothorum Romanorumque regnator*, and had united in one polity two groups with distinct histories, so now Justinian, it could be argued, was *Gothorum Romanorumque regnator*; and the pair of histories produced by Jordanes seems to be an argument based on history in support of Roman rule and cultural superiority, but nevertheless supporting a distinct Gothic cultural identity of some sort, based on a sense of the Gothic past. The extent to which such a sense of ‘Gothicness’ was founded on authentically ancient, ‘pure’, Gothic tradition is not especially pertinent. It is surely possible, however, to assert a distinct cultural identity—and there can hardly be any dispute that Jordanes certainly intends to stress specifically Gothic glory and the Gothic past—even if this has been influenced by contact with other cultures, and even if the narrative of the people claiming this identity is in fact drawn from narratives about other people.⁴⁷

Because of the erasure both of a Gothic polity and of Gothic culture and identity in Italy during the time Jordanes was producing his text, the *Getica*’s context is very different from the other works to be examined below; nevertheless, the pattern of asserting the independent historical tradition of a particular culture for which there is no written precedent; of passing over religious discontinuity; and of simultaneously bringing the non-Roman past within the ambit of Latin, written tradition, is something we shall encounter in each of the other Latin histories of the post-Roman kingdoms of western Europe. In the case of the *Getica*, this process took place in the context of a continuing Roman empire; Isidore of Seville’s Gothic history, to which we shall now turn, was written when Roman rule was itself in the past, but when a sense of continuity with Roman culture was nevertheless, for Isidore, still obviously quite present.

⁴⁷ Needless to say, the Gothic kingdom in Italy was very ‘Roman’ indeed; see e.g. the detailed study of Amory (1997).

Isidore of Seville's *Historia Gothorum*: Background, Summary, and Sources

Unlike Jordanes, whose life is a mystery to us, and who is known only from his two historical works, Isidore of Seville was one of the most prominent writers of the middle ages. He is famous, however, not for his historiography, but for his philosophical and theological works, above all his *Etymologiae*, an encyclopaedic compilation of gleanings from a wide variety of sources, which was vastly influential on medieval thought.⁴⁸ Born c. 560 to a Hispano-Roman family, Isidore was the younger brother of Leander, who became bishop of Seville shortly before 580, a position Isidore himself attained c. 600. He was one of the leading churchmen in the Visigothic kingdom of Spain, and presided over important church councils in 619 and 633; he was also close to and received patronage from the monarchy, especially King Sisebut (612–621). It has been argued that in his non-historiographic works, Isidore articulates a theory of secular rule very different from Roman imperial ideology: his theory of kingship is grounded on royal power being derived from god and the people, and the king's duty is to serve the community of Christians, whereas in imperial ideology, the rule of the emperor was an imitation of god (*mimesis theou*) (Reydellet 1981, 554–57; 584–97). This is probably the first manifestation of a theory of Christian kingship that was to prove very influential later in the middle ages. Isidore died in 636; a brief biography was composed by his younger contemporary, Braulio, which gives us much information on his life and works.⁴⁹

Isidore's historical works comprise a chronicle that was essentially a continuation of the Eusebius–Jerome chronicle, and exists in two recensions; and the *Historia Gothorum*

⁴⁸ Coumert (2007, 108–09) provides a brief discussion of the Goths in the *Etymologiae* (cf. *Etym.* IX.ii, 27; 89–90).

⁴⁹ On Isidore's life, works, and context: Diesner (1973; 1977); Fontaine (2000). Braulio's biography, as well as other *vitae*, are edited in Martín (ed. 2006).

(*HG*), which is also extant in two recensions,⁵⁰ and is primarily a history of the Visigoths from the end of the third century to Isidore's own time, to which were appended brief narratives of the histories of the Vandals and the Sueves.⁵¹ The chronicle and the *HG* both have a clearly pro-Gothic character, and this, coupled with the praise of Spain that begins the longer recension of the *HG*, has led to the latter text being read as a piece of 'Spanish nationalist' literature.⁵² My analysis will focus on the *HG*; accepting the consensus in the scholarship that Isidore wrote in support of the Visigothic monarchy, I shall try and show that the way he negotiated the merging of Gothic and Hispanic/Roman histories in Spain resulted in an act of cultural transfer as a means of legitimation, as was the case with Jordanes. Before turning to the *HG*, though, we need to consider briefly the way in which the Goths are treated in the chronicle.

Isidore's chronicle draws on the tradition stretching back to Eusebius–Jerome, but with a few—often significant—innovations.⁵³ Unlike most works in this tradition, Isidore began his chronicle with Adam; in the longer redaction, he placed the course of history into the Augustinian scheme of the six ages of the world. In the second age, the two peoples mentioned first are the Hebrews and the Scythians (21; 25–26); Romulus only occurs in the fourth age (143). Isidore thus makes the Scythians the second historical people, and older

⁵⁰ Other works of Isidore also exist in two versions; it appears to be that the shorter version is in most cases a posthumous abbreviation (Collins 1994, 346–47).

⁵¹ The chronicle is cited from Martín (ed. 2003); the other histories from *HG*. Note that this edition gives the three histories as one text; scholarly opinion is divided as to whether they should be treated separately or not. They are transmitted together, but with separate headings; Braulio's testimony is the basis for viewing them as a single work. For an overview of scholarship on Isidore's historical writings, see Merrills (2005, 171–84); a more interpretative introduction is given by Fontaine (2000, 217–33). On Isidore's theory of history as expressed in the *Etymologiae*: Borst (1966). On Isidore in the context of historiography in Visigothic Spain: Hillgarth (1970). Reydellet's works are important analyses of how Isidore's historical writings concord with the trend of his thought that emerges from his other works (1970; 1981, 505–97).

⁵² See e.g. Teillet (1984, 463–501), with references to earlier exponents of similar views; cf. the strongly contrary view presented by Hillgarth (1970, 298–99). A sophisticated recent account of Isidore's partisan attitudes, with further references to earlier scholarship, is in Merrills (2005, 171–228).

⁵³ On the sources and Isidore's treatment of them: Martín (ed. 2003, 25–35); on the differences between the two redactions and the chronicle's place within the tradition: *idem* (ed. 2003, 13–24).

than the Romans. This is of some significance if we consider that both in the *HG* (1) and in *Etym.* (IX.ii,27), the Goths descended from the Scythians; because of their greater antiquity, the Goths therefore have a historical basis for rule over Romans (Drews 2002, 6–7). Drews argues, moreover, that since Isidore, following most patristic thought, believed that the Jews had forsaken their special place in history, the Scythians and their descendents are even more historically significant because in the chronicle, they occur just after the first chosen people of god (2002, 7–8). Because the *HG* does not contain the scheme of the six ages of the world, this is the most important aspect of the chronicle that needs to be mentioned in support of a reading of the *HG* as depicting the Goths as historically destined for glory. In other respects as well, however, the chronicle, although constrained by the requirements of the genre, nevertheless provides a positive portrayal of the Goths contrasted with a negative image of Rome.⁵⁴

The chronicle says nothing, however, of the distant past of the Goths, and as is normally the case with the genre, provides little detail, and does not focus on one specific people. While it is, insofar as the form permits, perhaps as pro-Gothic as the *HG*, the thrust of the chronicle is more religious than political (Reydellet 1970, 397; Hillgarth 1970, 296). A political focus is provided by the *HG*, which, unlike the chronicle, has no clear model (Hillgarth 1970, 262); this is also evidence that for Isidore, boosting the Goths within the constraints of a chronicle was not enough: he (or his patron) obviously felt that they needed a

⁵⁴ For example, the chronicle has a consistently negative view of the eastern empire, denying Rome and Constantinople any special status, and even after Constantine's conversion Isidore tends to portray the emperors as heretical or at least not orthodox enough (Reydellet 1970, 389–99; Wood 2005, 39–49); Rome has no special significance in salvation history, and appears to be just one of a series of *regna* (Drews 2002, 8; Reydellet 1970, 393; 396; 398–99; Teillet 1984, 467); unlike his sources, who depict Gothic conquests using a passive formulation (e.g. *per Gothos* or *a Gothis*), Isidore reports these events in the active voice, with the *Gothi* as subjects (Teillet 1984, 471).

history of their own, even if for this purpose he needed to innovate slightly more than he normally did.

There are two principal theories regarding why there exist two versions of the *HG*: the simpler solution is that Isidore himself revised and expanded his history later in his life; the other theory is that the longer version was the original one, and was shortened for political reasons by revisers after Isidore's death.⁵⁵ There are, however, some reasons to doubt both theories. The shorter version appears not to be coherent enough, especially in its ending and its chronology, to be plausibly an authentic work of Isidore (Collins 1994, 349–50). On the other hand, while the difference between the longer and shorter versions of the chronicle consists of expansions in the former, which contains everything also in the shorter version, there are some differences of content between the longer and shorter recensions of the *HG* that suggest authorial agency (Collins 1994, 350–53). The longer version uses extensively, in addition to the lost history of Maximus of Saragossa, the chronicles of Prosper and Hydatius, and is more focused on a praise of Spain and its kings; Collins argues that the shorter version was in essence an updated version of Maximus's work, whereas the longer recension is a more independent narrative, representing a progression in Isidore's thought (1994). Of the key differences, we may note that the *Laus Spaniae* with which the latter begins is not contained in the shorter recension; the longer version also has more to say on Arianism, even that of the Goths;⁵⁶ and it continues to the reign of Suinthila, who receives great praise.⁵⁷ Overall, although even the shorter version praises the Goths, the longer

⁵⁵ Cf. Merrills (2005, 179–85); Collins (1994).

⁵⁶ Collins (1994, 353), raises important questions as to why Isidore would have changed the focus of his interest in the longer recension; some of these, relating especially to the interest in Arianism, are answered by Wood (2005).

⁵⁷ Overviews of the divergences between the two recensions: Collins (1994, 349–53); Rodríguez Alonso (ed. 1975, 26–56).

recension appears to be more panegyric in its attitude, with the history of the Visigoths clearly leading up to the present unity of Catholic Spain under their rule (Rodríguez Alonso, ed. 1975, 31–39; Teillet 1984, 501). In the following summary and analysis of the narrative, I follow the view of the most recent editor, that both versions were by Isidore (Rodríguez Alonso, ed. 1975, 26–56), and focus on the longer recension, though important changes with regard to the shorter version will also be noted.⁵⁸

The narrative begins with a geographical introduction entitled *Laus Spaniae*, which ends with stating that although Romans once ruled Spain, it is now held by the Goths. This leads to an extremely brief discussion of the origin of the Goths; Isidore tells us that they may have originated from Magog, or that they might be *Getae*, but does not give us his own opinion (1).⁵⁹ The first five chapters take us up to the reign of Valens; during this time, the Goths are said to live in the Alps (4). They resist Julius Caesar (3), and overcome the eastern provinces of Rome (4; 5), and are finally beaten by Constantine (5). In the second half of the fourth century, some Goths are Christians, and these are persecuted by Athanaric, the Gothic king, and forced to seek refuge in Rome (6). After a brief description of the conversion of the Goths to Arianism (7–8), the following chapters tell us of the Goths' battles against the Romans, the sack of Rome, and the eventual settlement under Vallia in Aquitaine (9–22). From this point, the narrative simply follows the expansion of the Visigothic territory into Spain, and their wars with a number of other peoples, including Romans (23, 24), Huns (24), and Franks (36, 41, 54). Isidore lauds the Arian king Leovigild for his conquest of most of

⁵⁸ Wood (2005) provides a thorough comparative analysis of both versions of both works, though his paper is restricted to the depiction of religion; although he draws considerably on Drews (2002) in his interpretation of the longer recensions, the latter author does not include the shorter versions in his discussion. Coumert (2007, 113–19) also bases her interpretation of the *HG* on a comparison of the two versions.

⁵⁹ The shorter version says that they descend from the Scythians; the *recapitulatio* (only in the longer version) elaborates on the first chapter, saying that the Goths and the Scythians share the same origins in Magog, son of Japeth (66). Cf. *Etym.* IX.ii,27; 89, in which we are also told that the ancients called the Goths *Getae*.

Spain (49). Immediately following this, though, Leovigild is described in unmistakably negative terms (50, 51) because of his Arianism, and his successor Reccared is praised for adopting Catholicism (52). Ending the narrative with the accession of Suinthila to the throne in 621, and the raising of his son Riccimir to co-ruler (62, 65), Isidore provides a brief recapitulation (66–70), consisting primarily of unqualified praise of the Goths for their martial excellence.

Unlike Jordanes, Isidore devotes hardly any space to the origins of the Goths, or even their history before the late fourth century, from which period he has access to a number of contemporary texts. The question of the value of oral versus written sources does not really arise in this case: Isidore's history is a clearly learned work, drawing almost exclusively on known written sources, none of which belong demonstrably to any kind of Gothic tradition,⁶⁰ though for recent history he would undoubtedly have had access to oral eyewitness reports and his own memory of events.⁶¹ Almost all the narrative concerns the period after the Goths had settled in Aquitaine, from where they expanded into Spain; older migration-myths were clearly either unknown or uninteresting to Isidore. I shall focus in the following on the

⁶⁰ For the period up to c. 410, Isidore's principal source is Orosius (cf. Cannone 1984 for a detailed comparison of Isidore's *HG* and Orosius); for the following years, he relies heavily on the chronicles of the fifth and sixth centuries (Hydatius, Maximus, Prosper, John of Biclar), themselves continuations of the Eusebius–Jerome tradition; and on his own chronicle, which too drew on and adapted many of the same sources. For *Quellenkritik*: Rodríguez Alonso (ed. 1975, 70–119 [parallel texts of *HG* and sources]); Collins (1994); Coumert (2007, 110–19); Merrills (2005, 188–98; 209–11; 215–18; 221–23). For discussion of the source texts: Muhlberger (1990, 48–135 [Prosper]; 193–266 [Hydatius]); Collins (1994, 354–58 [Maximus]); Cardelle de Hartmann (ed. 2001, 124–43); Hillgarth (1970, 266–84); and Teillet (1984, 428–55) [all on John]. On Isidore's chronicle, apart from Martín (ed. 2003), see especially Reydellet (1970); in addition, see Wood (2005), who provides a comparison of the treatment of religion in the chronicle and the history; and Drews (2002), who compares the two works' treatment of ethnic difference. It is worth noting that Isidore follows even the wording of his sources very closely; his own perspective emerges from his few brief elaborations and what he chooses to take or suppress from his sources.

⁶¹ Cf. Isidore's statement in the *Etymologiae* that the ancients only wrote history based on eyewitness accounts (I.xli,1–2); this could imply that he too would have sought and used reports of eyewitnesses. At *Etym.* IX.ii.118, Isidore mentions the *opinio apud Gothos* that they are related to the Moors; this is interpreted as deriving from oral tradition by Borst (1966, 28, n. 69). Diesner points out that Isidore appears to have had personal contact with at least some military leaders of his own time (1977, 29), who might well have been able to inform him of events at least from the reign of Leovigild onwards.

treatment of religious and ethnic differences, and in my conclusion turn once more to the implications of producing a written, self-consciously Gothic history, even if it is one that makes scant mention or use of any oral or non-Latin sources.

Religious Identities in Isidore's *Historia Gothorum*

The first mention of Gothic religion in the *Historia Gothorum* informs us that king Athanaric in the late fourth century persecuted all the Goths under him who were Christian; many were martyred, and others were forced to take refuge in Rome (6; following Orosius VII.xxxii,9). The following chapter tells us that Athanaric sought Christian teachers from Valens, who, being a heretic, converted the Goths to Arianism. The shorter version only says that because of the help he received in overcoming Fritigern, Athanaric and the Goths became Arian (7: *Fritigernum Athanaricus Valentis imperatoris auxilio superans, huius rei gratia cum omni gente Gothorum in Arrianam haeresim deuolutus est* 'Athanaric conquered Fritigern with the help of emperor Valens; in acknowledgement of this, he, with the whole people of the Goths sank into the Arian heresy'), whereas the longer version makes Valens explicitly culpable for the conversion to Arianism (Wood 2005, 24–27):

Athanaricus Fridigernum Valentis imperatoris suffragio superans huius rei gratia legatos cum muneribus ad eundem imperatorem mittit et doctores propter suscipiendam Christianae fidei regulam poscit. Valens autem a ueritate catholicae fidei deuius et Arrianae haeresis peruersitate detentus missis haereticis sacerdotibus Gothos persuasione nefanda sui erroris dogmati aggregauit et in tam praeclaram gentem virus pestiferum semine pernicioso transfudit sicque errorem quem recens credulitas ebibit tenuit diuque seruauit

Athanaric conquered Fridigern with the help of emperor Valens; in acknowledgement of this, he sent messengers with gifts to the same emperor and asked for teachers in order to receive the rule of the Christian faith. Valens, however, straying from the truth of the Catholic faith and trapped by the perversity of the Arian heresy, sent heretical priests to the Goths and by abominable persuasion added them to the dogma of his error. He implanted with a pernicious

seed a pestilential virus in such a noble people, and they maintained and served for long the error that their recent credulity had absorbed (7).⁶²

Here Athanaric (the earlier persecutor of Christians) is shown asking for Christian teachers (and Isidore must in this context surely mean Catholics), but Valens converts the *praeclara gens* to Arianism. As was the case with Jordanes, Isidore builds on Orosius, but goes further than him; as in the earlier works, the culpability in the longer version clearly rests with Valens, not with the Goths, and this would support the thesis that the longer version was intended to have greater, more one-sided praise of the Goths.⁶³ Because of this passage, with its contrast between *fides Christiana* and *Arrianae haeresis perversitas*, moreover, it seems likely that the first time the Gothic religion is mentioned, in the previous chapter, and there are said to be Christian Goths who have to escape to Rome, those Christians are to be understood as Catholics; the first Goths to enter Roman territory are therefore not Arians, but Catholics (Wood 2005, 24; 29–30).⁶⁴

Isidore then goes on to describe Ulfila's translation of the Bible into Gothic (8). In the shorter version, all he says is that Ulfila translated the scripture. In the longer recension, Isidore tells us that after this the Goths began to write their laws and found a church, though

⁶² Unlike Orosius and Jordanes (*Get.* 131–33), Isidore specifies that Athanaric (not *Gothi* as in the other texts) asked for teachers and priests. Like Jordanes, Isidore follows Orosius in his description of the conversion, but note the contrast between Orosius (VII.xxxiii,19: *Valens imperator exitiabili prauitate doctores Arriani dogmatis misit. Gothi primae fidei rudimento quod acceperere tenuerunt. Itaque iusto iudicio Dei ipsi eum uiuum incenderunt, qui propter eum etiam mortui uitio erroris arsuri sunt* 'The emperor Valens, in his pernicious depravity, sent teachers of the Arian doctrine. The Goths maintained the rudiments of the religion they had received. Thus by the just judgement of God they burned him alive, who because of him, already dead in the sin of their error, shall burn because of him') and Isidore: the latter significantly expands on the evil of Arianism (though one should note that Orosius inveighs against heresy at many other points): *Arrianum dogma* (Orosius) vs *Arrianae haeresis perversitas* + *haeretici sacerdotes* + *nefanda persuasio* + *dogma sui erroris* + *virus pestiferum* + *periculosum semen* (Isidore); but he also knows that the Goths will *not* burn; and unlike Orosius, for him they are a *praeclara gens*. The burning of Valens is depicted by Isidore in chapter 9; once more, we are told that Valens consigned the Goths' souls to eternal flames (*qui tam pulchras animas ignibus aeternis tradiderat*): the Goths not only do not burn, but—unlike in Orosius—their souls are *pulchrae*.

⁶³ Drews (2002, 13) contrasts this with the depiction of the Sueves, who leave the Catholic faith because of their king, not because of an outside force (*Historia Suevorum*, 90).

⁶⁴ For a comparison of Orosius and Isidore's description of these Goths, cf. Cannone (1984, 14–15), who believes that these martyrs symbolise the entry of the Goths into salvation history.

this was an Arian one; there follows a description and condemnation of Arianism, and the chapter ends by telling us that the Goths maintained this heresy for 213 years before converting to Catholicism. Wood's suggestion that Isidore in fact depicts the Goths in a positive light for trying to set up a church founded on scripture and law, never condemning them but only the heresy, is perhaps a little exaggerated (2005, 28). We know, certainly, that the Goths are not to blame for their heresy, and it is also noteworthy that we are told already that they later convert to Catholicism not because of any outside force (unlike their first conversion) but because they are mindful of their salvation (8: *reminiscentes salutis suae*). Nevertheless, the long description and condemnation of the Arian heresy that follows immediately after we are told that the Goths found a church could surely be read as overshadowing the positive image of the Goths to some extent. Wood is correct to point out, though, that 'by flagging up their later conversion to Catholicism, Isidore telegraphed to the reader that this was a historical discontinuity: in the long run it did not really matter' (2005, 28; similarly Cannone 1984, 17 and *passim*).

The tenth chapter of the *HG*, extant only in the longer recension, informs us that the Arian Goths encountered and had some conflict with the *Gothi confessores* who had earlier been exiled; we also learn that there were *alii montuosa loca tenentes* ('others inhabiting mountainous places') who remained Catholic. There is no mention of either the Gothic confessors or the mountainous Catholic Goths in any other source. These Goths do not occur again in the narrative. Though they might indeed have existed, given how closely Isidore normally cleaves to his written sources, it seems plausible that this departure is motivated in order to counteract the Arianism of the main body of Goths: the ancient Goths included a

Catholic group, and there were thus even in the distant past Gothic adherents to the true faith (Cannone 1984, 18; Wood 2005, 29–30).⁶⁵

In the description of the sack of Rome, Isidore describes Radagaisus as devoted to the cult of idolatry (14: *cultu idolatriae deditus*; cf. the shorter version, where he is called *paganus*), and his attack of Rome is said to be savage; in both recensions, he promises the blood of the Romans to his gods should he be victorious (14). Alaric, in contrast, is said to attack Rome in revenge for the death of Radagaisus, and is described as Christian, though heretic (15); his attack on Rome is notably milder, and he does not fight Romans in churches (15–16). The shorter recension tells us that many thousands of Romans survived because of this clemency, and that they prefer even now to live in the *regno Gothorum* as paupers rather than to pay tribute and live under Roman rule (15); the longer version tells us that the Goths were merciful because they waged war against the Romans, not the apostles (16). Clearly, while not passing over the heresy of Alaric, Isidore is at pains to make his readers see ‘that a Christian Goth was better than a pagan one’ (Wood 2005, 31), and that though Arian, the Goths were nevertheless ‘the most “catholic” Arians possible’ (Wood 2005, 33).⁶⁶

After this, we hear nothing of Gothic religion until the very recent past of the sixth century, and then only two brief mentions until we come to Leovigild, a king who ruled in Isidore’s own lifetime. We are told that Theudis, though heretic, allowed the Catholic

⁶⁵ Isidore was probably correct about the existence of Catholic Goths at this time. The passion of St Saba, from the late fourth century and referring to events of the early 370s, is about an explicitly Gothic and explicitly orthodox martyr, living in Gothic lands (the text is in Heather and Matthews, trans. 1991, 104–10); there exist also contemporary mentions of bishops of apparently Nicene Goths outside the borders of the empire throughout the fourth century and beyond (Mathisen 1997, 670–76). Though there are no known sources for mountain-dwelling Catholic Goths, it is possible that Isidore drew on some sort of garbled transmission of fourth-century sources about such Goths; at any rate, it seems likely that there were indeed Catholic Goths from the beginning of the fourth century, at the time of Athanaric, and even after the settlement of the (Visi-)Goths within Roman territory, and that Isidore was therefore not completely incorrect. This needs to be kept in mind when judging the extent to which Isidore manipulated ‘facts’ to portray the Goths positively (none of the major studies of the *HG* appear to be aware of this historical background).

⁶⁶ Isidore’s account of the sack of Rome (*HG* 14–17) is substantially based on Orosius (VII.xxxvii).

bishops to assemble freely (41), and that Agila attacked a church (45). Leovigild receives a rather mixed portrayal (49–52). He increases considerably the size of the Gothic kingdom, and we are told that he was able to do so *praeclare* (49). He conquered the Sueves *mira celeritate* (49), and he added to the laws of the Visigoths (51), but nevertheless, *offuscauit in eo error impietatis gloriam tantae uirtutis* (49: ‘the error of impiety obscured in him the glory of such valour’). We are told of his persecution of Catholics at some length (50–51), before he dies and is succeeded by Reccared, a very different sort of king: *namque ille inreligiosus et bello promptissimus, hic fide pius et pace praeclarus; ille armorum artibus gentis imperium dilatans, hic gloriosus eandem gentem fidei trophaeo sublimans* (52: ‘for the former was irreligious and most skilled in war, the latter pious in his faith and noble in peace; the former expanded the rule of the people by the arts of arms, the latter, glorious, raised the same people with the trophy of faith’).⁶⁷ Under Reccared, the Goths convert to Catholicism (53), and enjoy the greatest victory they have ever had over any people (54: *Nulla umquam in Spaniis Gothorum uictoria uel maior uel similis extitit* ‘no victory of the Goths in Spain was ever greater or comparable’). Reccared is described as a very pious, generous, merciful and peaceful king, the perfect Christian monarch (55–56).

Rather oddly, the revolt of Hermenigild is mentioned only very briefly, and all we are told is that his father Leovigild suppressed it (49). We are told nowhere that Hermenigild was Catholic, information surely available to Isidore, given that Hermenigild was based in Seville, and that his brother Leander was not only Hermenigild’s ambassador to

⁶⁷ Although Reccared is clearly the more positive figure in this passage, there is nevertheless a sense that the deeds of Leovigild are in some way brought to fruition by Reccared: the one united Spain, the other makes united Spain Catholic (Reydellet 1981, 539–40). No such comparison exists in Isidore’s sources for this period.

Constantinople, but also apparently instrumental in the prince's conversion.⁶⁸ For Isidore, Hermenigild occurs only as a pretender to the throne; in this he follows John of Biclar. Given Leovigild's Arianism, this might seem odd, but is relatively easily explained:⁶⁹ although the Catholic Church had supported Hermenigild, he was unsuccessful; his younger brother Reccared, however, also converted to Catholicism in 587, and, like Leovigild, was politically strong, ruling over a unified Spain. Reccared had not supported his brother during the uprising; more importantly, remembering an unsuccessful rebellion against politically legitimate authority could be embarrassing at a time when the ruler had become a supporter of the Catholic Church, and when it was in the interests of that Church to support a politically unified kingdom. From the point of view of a Church interested in maintaining and supporting the hierarchy, eulogising someone who had rebelled against it would scarcely be appropriate. Furthermore, Hermenigild's revolt had been, in admittedly uncertain and probably not very tangible ways, supported by the Roman empire; remembering him shortly after the last Roman outposts in Spain had been conquered (*HG* 62) would surely have been unseemly. Clearly, Isidore, in the way he approaches this episode, values the unity of Spain more than the memory of a renegade prince who endangered that unity, and places politics over religion in his depiction of this conflict between Arian and Catholic.

If we compare Isidore's history to that of Jordanes, we see that the later author, in the longer recension of his Gothic history, paid more attention to the heresy of the Goths. Given his position in the Church, this is hardly surprising. We note also, though, that he takes some care to portray even the Arian Goths in a largely positive light. Their conquest of Rome is

⁶⁸ Other contemporary sources: Gregory of Tours (*Hist.* V,38); John of Biclar (Cardelle de Hartmann, ed. 2001, 53–4, 57, 60, 64–66, 68, 73). Gregory the Great portrays Hermenigild as a Catholic martyr (de Vogüé, ed. 1978–80, vol. 2: III,31). For discussion: Collins (2004, 56–59); Diesner (1973, 10–11); Giese (2004, 146–47); Heather (1996, 282); Hillgarth (1966).

⁶⁹ I summarise here Hillgarth (1966).

gentle, and certainly preferable to conquest by pagans; their heresy (like that of Jordanes's Goths) does not prevent them from consistently achieving victory in battle, often at the expense of the Catholic Romans (on their *virtus*, cf. Teillet 1984, 477–81). Although Leovigild's Arianism overshadows his achievements, his expansion of the kingdom is nevertheless depicted in laudable terms (Teillet 1984, 487–88). Furthermore, Isidore tells us about early Catholic Goths, a means of showing that there was always a strand of Goths adherent to the true faith (Wood 2005). All of this seems to indicate that while the theologian Isidore, a man who had, moreover, experienced in his own lifetime the conflicts between Catholic and Arian (Drews 2002, 3–5; Diesner 1973, 10–11; Fontaine 2000, 101–11), could hardly pass over Arianism as easily as did Jordanes, the historian is clearly interested in presenting a view favourable to the ruling secular force in Spain, which was now also Catholic. Isidore watered down past transgressions against orthodoxy in favour of a unified, positive history of the Goths, in which their religion posed little problem. One could see this as *Realpolitik* taking precedence over religious views, but in fact, given the closeness of the Catholic Church (personified not least by the bishop of Seville) to the monarchy, there was actually little separation between the realm of politics and that of religion. If, by downplaying past heterodoxy, Isidore produced a propagandistic work in support of the current monarchy, he also equally supported the cause of the Catholic Church, which would only benefit from a strong ruler who supported it. In his treatment of religion, therefore, Isidore demonstrates that the continuity between the glories of the past and the powerful in the present was far more important than religious difference. A similar perspective informs his treatment of ethnic identity and conflict between Goths and Romans.

Goths, Romans and Barbarians in Isidore's *Historia Gothorum*

Unlike Jordanes, who calls his Goths barbarians, Isidore uses the word only once of the Goths, otherwise reserving it for other non-Roman peoples.⁷⁰ The sole occasion on which Goths are defined by this term is in Isidore's description of Radagaisus (14); as we have already seen, though, Isidore clearly wished to designate Radagaisus as a 'bad' Goth, to be contrasted to the main body of Goths, who were less savage, and also Christian (Drews 2002, 12; Teillet 1984, 492).

Not being barbarian, though, does not necessarily make the Goths Roman. The Goths are consistently opposed to the Romans throughout Isidore's narrative, and are often distinguished from the Romans by their greater *virtus* (Cannone 1984; Drews 2002, 9–10; Teillet 1984, 477–83; cf. Muhlberger 1998), which legitimates their succeeding to Roman rule over Spain (Diesner 1973, 23–24). The might of the Goths is indeed the very first quality of theirs to be mentioned in the *HG* (2), and in chapter two of both recensions, although the word *virtus* is not used in the longer version, we learn that the Goths made a strong impression on Alexander and Caesar:

Interpretatio autem nominis eorum in linguam nostram tectum quo significatur fortitudo,⁷¹ et re uera: nulla enim gens in orbe fuit quae Romanum imperium adeo fatigauerit [long recension]. Isti enim sunt quos etiam Alexander vitandos pronuntiavit, Pyrrhus pertimuit, Caesar exhorruit [both recensions] (This last sentence follows very closely Orosius I.xvi,2; Orosius, however, says that the Goths were formerly called *Getae*).

⁷⁰ Jordanes uses the term three times explicitly of Goths: Dicineus is said to restrain their barbarian customs (69); Maximin is described as *semibarbarus* (84), and as rejoicing *more barbarico* (85). In addition, although when he says that they are wiser than all barbarians (40), it is not certain that this implies that they too are barbarians, such a reading seems most likely. Note, though, that even Jordanes uses the term only with regard to the pre-Christian Goths. In his *Etymologiae*, Isidore appears to suggest that the primary difference between barbarians and Romans is one of language (I.xxxii,1: *Appellatus autem barbarismus a barbaris gentibus, dum latinae orationis integritatem nescirent. Vnaquaqueque enim gens facta Romanorum cum opibus suis vitia quoque et verborum et morum Romam transmisit*: 'It is called barbarism from the barbarian peoples, since they did not know the purity of the Latin language. For each people, once having been made Roman, brought to Rome along with its wealth also its vices with regard to words and customs'; cf. IX.i,7). This is a clear acknowledgement that barbarians can become Roman; the adoption of Latin appears to be the key component in this transformation.

⁷¹ Isidore draws on Jerome's interpretation of the name Gog (Glorie, ed. 1975, XI,38, p. 527).

the meaning of their name is in our language a roof, by which is signified strength, and truly there was no people in the world that exhausted the Roman empire so much. These are the ones whom Alexander said should be evaded, whom Pyrrhus feared, of whom Caesar was terrified.

The shorter version adds that the *Romani eorum uirtutem experti sunt* ('the Romans experienced their strength')

The Goths are shown to enter history as opponents of notable ancient peoples, including the Romans; given that the other peoples disappear from the narrative soon enough, this portrayal appears to demonstrate the ancient enmity between the two polities (Teillet 1984, 470).

Soon afterwards, Claudius receives special honour for defeating the Goths (4), and Constantine is said to be great because of his victory over many peoples, *sed de Gothorum uictoria amplius gloriosus* (5: 'but more glorious for his victory over the Goths'). *Romulea uirtus* is said to have been betrothed to *Hispania* at the beginning of the work, but is soon replaced by the *Gothorum florentissima gens (Laus)*; in the *Recapitulatio*, it is only the *virtus* of the Goths that is mentioned (67; 70). In describing Theodosius, Isidore quotes Orosius almost verbatim, but suppresses the latter's mention of the emperor's *virtus* (Teillet 1984, 479); the Goths thus become partners of Rome only because they perceive the goodness (*benignitas*) of the emperor, not because of his might.⁷²

A look at the depiction of the Vandals, both in the *Historia Gothorum* and in the *Historia Wandalorum*, highlights the way Goths are given special treatment by Isidore. As

⁷² HG 11: *Gothi autem proprio rege defuncto adspicientes benignitatem Theodosi imperatoris inito foedere Romano se imperio tradiderunt* ('The Goths, however, with their own king dead, seeing the goodness of emperor Theodosius, gave themselves to Roman rule with means of a treaty'); Orosius, VII.xxxiv,7: *Vniuersae Gothorum gentes rege defuncto aspicientes uirtutem benignitatemque Theodosii Romano sese imperio dediderunt* ('all the peoples of the Goths, with their own king dead, seeing the valour and goodness of Theodosius, gave themselves to Roman rule'). Note that before this, according to Orosius, Theodosius is the agent in bringing about a *foedus* (VII.xxxiv,6), whereas Isidore has Athanaric as the agent sealing his friendship with the emperor (HG 11); Isidore also tells us that before dying, Athanaric was honourably received by Theodosius (HG 11: *a Theodosio honorabiliter susceptus interiit*), whereas Orosius simply says he came and died (VII.xxxiv,7: *Athanarius continuo ut Constantinopolim uenit, diem obiit*) (cf. Cannone 1984, 18–19).

federates of Rome, the Goths defeat many barbarians, including the Vandals (22); the Vandal barbarity (*barbaries*) is put to flight by the Goths (68); Vandals, Sueves and Alans are described as barbarians (73); the Vandal attack on Rome is notably more savage than that of the Goths (77); unlike the Goths, the Vandals are shown to persecute Catholics (75) (Diesner 1977, 33; Drews 2002, 12–13; Teillet 1984, 492). Furthermore, although Isidore tells us little enough about the origins of the Goths, he does say that they descend from the Gog and Magog, and the Scythians (1; 66), whereas no other barbarian group has any such ancient and biblical origin (Drews 2002, 13).⁷³

Though clearly distinguished from the Romans, however, the Goths also take on many Roman characteristics (especially after their arrival in Spain).⁷⁴ The sack of Rome is described in distinctly positive and triumphal terms, and there is a clear inversion of roles implied in Isidore's use of the words *victrix* and *victa*, and *domina* and *famula* (Teillet 1984, 484–85):

sicque urbs cunctarum gentium uictrix Gothicis triumphis uicta subcubuit eisque capta
subiugata seruiuit

thus the city that was victor over all peoples was conquered and succumbed to Gothic triumphs, and having been captured and subjugated, served them (15);

ut Roma ipsa uictrix omnium populorum subacta captiuitatis iugo Geticis triumphis adcederet
et domina cunctarum gentium illis ut famula deseruiret

as Rome herself, victor over all peoples, forced into the yoke of captivity, yielded to Gothic triumphs, and the mistress of all peoples served them [*scil.* the Goths] like a maid (67).

⁷³ Jerome (Glorie, ed. 1975, XI,38, pp. 525–33) reads Gog and Magog as negative figures. Cannone (1984) argues that the identification with Gog and Magog is intended to underscore Gothic valour; while they could have negative connotations, he suggests that their use is intended to show how the Goths proceed through salvation history, gradually adding to their military *virtus* a Christian valour as well. In this reading, the potentially negative qualities of the ancient past are thus necessary to demonstrate the progression in salvation history. Coumert points out that though Isidore undoubtedly knew Jerome's negative reading of Gog and Magog, he only took from Jerome those elements that could have a positive impact on his history of the Goths (2007, 113–15); similarly, Mortensen (1991, 91) argues that Isidore simply ignored the possible negative connotations of these figures, and based himself on the neutral biblical accounts in Genesis and Chronicles (Ex 10.2; I Par 5.4) as opposed to Ezekiel (38–39) and Jerome's commentary.

⁷⁴ Thus, from different perspectives, Drews (2002); Hillgarth (1970, 269–70; 309); Teillet (1984, 463–501); Wood (2005). On the preservation of Roman culture in Visigothic Spain and in the writings of Isidore, see Fontaine (2000), summarising his voluminous earlier work; cf. also Diesner (1973); Diesner (1977).

Rome, formerly the *victrix* over all peoples, is now *victa*; the *gens Gothorum* is the *domina* of Rome, which had earlier been the conqueror of all the nations. Furthermore, in the description of the battle against the Huns at Châlons in 451, the Roman general Aetius is mentioned as an auxiliary of the Goths; other sources simply say Romans and Goths fought together (25: *auxiliante Aetio duce Romano* ‘with Aetius, the Roman leader, assisting’) (Teillet 1984, 486).⁷⁵ It is also surely no accident that the word *triumphus* is only used in the context of Gothic victories over Romans in this text (even though Roman victories are also depicted),⁷⁶ and the first time it occurs it describes the Goths’ victory at Rome—the traditional place for triumphs of the Roman emperors to be celebrated. By the end of the text, the Goths have not only conquered all of Spain and subjugated the Romans there; they have also taken on a number of Roman qualities, including of course the Catholic religion (Drews 2002, 13–14; Hillgarth 1970, 269–70). In fact, even when Arian, the one defeat of the Goths by Romans that Isidore reports is caused by the piety of the Arian Goths, who do not fight on Sundays (42). Although the Romans are the Catholics here, it is they who defile the holy day; the Goths are more pious even before their conversion (Hillgarth 1970, 277; Teillet 1984, 487).⁷⁷ The Goths now have written laws (35; 51);⁷⁸ they rebuild Rome’s walls (39);⁷⁹ they

⁷⁵ Cf. e.g. Hydatius: *Aetio duci et regi Theodori, quibus erat in pace societas* (Burgess, ed. and trans. 1993, § 142); the *Galic Chronicle of 511*, s. a. 450/451: *Aezius patricius cum Theodorico rege Gothorum* (Burgess, ed. 2001b). The lengthy description in Jordanes’s *Getica* (185–218) also has the Romans and Goths as allies; the Goths are not included in the list of Roman auxiliaries at 191. As Teillet points out, this is possibly the point in which the Goths receive the highest praise in the *Getica* (1984, 317–18); but the Goths and Romans are at most partners here, which is quite different from the wording in Isidore.

⁷⁶ In addition to chapters 15 and 67 cited above, cf. chapter 62: Sisebut is said to have greater triumphs than all other kings just after we are told he defeated the Romans in Spain (*urbes residuas, quas in Spaniis Romana manus agebat, proelio auctamque triumphi gloriam prae ceteris regibus felicitate mirabili reportavit* ‘joining battle [against the Romans] he took the remaining cities that the Roman army controlled in Spain, and with remarkable good fortune brought back a glory of triumph greater than other kings’).

⁷⁷ Cf. also Wood (2005, 39–49), on the inversion of Gothic and Roman piety in Isidore’s chronicle.

⁷⁸ The earliest extant legal collections, the laws of Euric and the *Breviarum* of Alaric, are, moreover, almost exclusively ‘Roman’ in nature, with little that is distinctly Visigothic about them (Collins 2004, 224–31).

⁷⁹ The reference here is to Theoderic the Ostrogoth; he is never, in Isidore’s text, explicitly called a Goth, and on his first mention is only defined as *Italiae rex* (36); Coumert has argued because of this that Isidore does not

hold games (70); and the Gothic king founds a city named after his son (51). In the shorter recension, we are also told how Leovigild adopts imperial regalia (51).⁸⁰ Leovigild also, following the Byzantine example rather than that of most of his Visigothic predecessors, attempted to enforce religious uniformity in Spain, which, although of course condemned by Isidore (50),⁸¹ could also be seen as an imitation of Rome (Hillgarth 1970, 270).

It seems evident that Isidore opposes Goths and Romans because he wants to show the Goths succeeding the Romans, and also ‘becoming’ Roman in their political culture.⁸² The impression that Isidore depicts the Goths as performing a kind of *imitatio imperii* (Diesner 1977, 94; Drews 2002, 14–15; cf. Hillgarth 1970, 309) is heightened when one considers the use of the word *imperium* in his history. Until the reign of Reccared, it refers consistently to the Roman empire, and never the Gothic kingdom. In the chapter on Leovigild’s reign, we are told that he enlarged the *regnum* (49: *ampliare regnum [...] statuit*). But after Reccared, who converts to Catholicism (52, 53) and achieves a greater victory for the Goths than any other (54), has assumed the throne, Leovigild’s expansion of the kingdom is referred to as broadening the *imperium* (52: *ille [...] imperium dilatans*). To be sure, this still refers to Leovigild, but it is only once a Catholic monarch rules that the Goths can be said to have an *imperium*. The term is used once more referring to Suinthila’s reign (63); it is

show any relationship between Theoderic’s Goths and his own (2007, 123). This is not quite accurate: Isidore does tell us that Theoderic restores to the Goths a part of their kingdom lost to the Franks (36); that he becomes king of the Goths in Spain (39); and that his grandson Amalaric rules after him in Spain (39).

⁸⁰ Cf. Reydellet (1981, 532–33) on this passage: he argues that the adoption of regalia was a means of showing that the king was not king just of the Goths, but now of Goths and Romans.

⁸¹ Reydellet claims that Isidore ‘ne pouvait pas comprendre le lien entre cette politique religieuse et la volonté d’unification du roi’ (1981, 530: ‘was unable to understand the link between this religious policy and the king’s desire for unification’); I would argue that Isidore understood it only too well, but kept the two kinds of unification strictly separate in his portrait because of his own religious politics: he praises Reccared for doing much the same thing, the difference being that Reccared is Catholic.

⁸² As we have seen, Isidore acknowledges that barbarian peoples can be made Roman (cf. n. 70). He also believes that peoples originate in languages, not the other way round (IX.i,14: *ex linguis gentes, non ex gentibus linguae exortae sunt*). These statements in would appear to support a reading that he portrays the Goths as becoming Roman; they have certainly adopted the Roman language.

also used in the *Laus Spaniae* and the *Recapitulatio* to refer to the reign of the Goths in Spain.⁸³

Throughout the *HG*, the political identity of the Goths is opposed to the Roman empire: Goths fight Rome repeatedly, and their defeat of Rome is celebrated on various occasions. At the end of the work, Isidore, still clearly distinguishing between Goth and Roman, tells us that the Roman *miles* serves the Goths (70). While Spain had earlier been a Roman province, it is now secure in the rule of the Goths (*Laus*). Merrills has argued persuasively that the *Laus Spaniae* and the *Recapitulatio*, which functions as a *Laus Gothorum*, are intended as a diptych, the joint function being to highlight the successful union of Spain and the Goths (2005, 197–99; 226–27); this union takes place only from the reign of the first Catholic king Reccared (Reydellet 1981, 525). Certainly, the *HG* overall clearly propagates a positive view of Gothic rule over Spain, including the *Romani* who live there, and while recognising some kind of ethnic distinctions between Goths and Romans, nevertheless portrays a unity under one *regnum*. In this regard, it seems to accord with the evidence of other seventh-century texts, which portray an ideology of a united people living in the *patria* of Spain, and ruled by one king (Adams 1969; Adams 1997; Teillet 1984, 524–33; 552–56).

The Function of Gothic History: Isidore and Jordanes Compared

There is no parallel in Isidore to the conjunction of Goth and Roman that we find in Jordanes's *Getica*; even when the two collaborate as at the Battle of Châlons, in the *Getica*, they are allies, whereas in the *HG*, the Romans are auxiliaries. Jordanes brings Goths and

⁸³ On Isidore's terminology for ethnic and political entities (*gens*; *imperium*; *populus*; *regnum*), see Adams (1969); Borst (1966, 22–28); and cf. Adams (1997) for the usages of other Visigothic writers.

Romans together, even dissolves the political independence of the Goths; they remain, though, *Gothi et Romani*, whereas for Isidore, they are always opposed, and ultimately he shows the Goths not only politically independent and militarily superior, but arguably taking on many forms of Roman political culture, in addition to Roman religion. In contrast to Isidore, Jordanes, while certainly portraying the Goths positively, does not do so at the expense of the Romans; as we have seen, the victory of Justinian is praised (*Get.* 16), and the depiction of the Gothic wars shows the Romans in a positive light (307–15). Nor does Jordanes show the Goths becoming Roman in a manner akin to Isidore: his depiction of Theoderic's rule (295–304) tells us nothing about how much continuity with Roman traditions this reign embodied; Isidore mentions Theoderic's rebuilding of Rome's walls (*HG* 39), but Jordanes does not (the depiction of Theoderic's reign is in fact remarkably muted). The many characteristics of rule mentioned by Isidore that seem to draw on Roman practice are not paralleled by anything in Jordanes's portrayal of the Gothic kingdom in Italy.

Imperium is used for the Roman empire of course, but also with regard to the Goths, even before they become Christian (*Get.* 98; 112; 253); however, since it is also used of the rule of the Huns (247; 248; 253; 259; 272), it seems to not to have exclusively Roman connotations (Suerbaum 1977, 276–77). The only *triumphus* of a Goth is that of Theoderic, when he is adopted by Zeno (289); this ceremony of adoption could be read as symbolising the subsuming of the Goths by the Romans, in line with the arguments presented above, and is certainly very different from Isidore's conception of Goths replacing Romans. Though a Goth, Maximin, does become Roman emperor, this is not followed by the establishment of a Gothic Roman imperium, and in fact appears to have no consequences at all; it seems to be a

not fully successful attempt at curbing the *mos barbaricum* with *Romana disciplina* (83–88).⁸⁴

The purpose of Jordanes's *Getica* appeared to be to diminish any sense of independent Gothic political identity, while nevertheless asserting a form of independence from Rome, manifest in an independent historical tradition. If the Goths in the *Getica* 'become Roman', it is primarily because their political identity is subsumed by Rome. Jordanes does, to be sure, turn the Gothic past into a Roman history, and the Gothic past he writes is far from authentically 'Gothic'; but even the act of writing such a history confers some legitimacy to a sense of Gothic cultural heritage and identity, and preserves a measure of difference. Isidore, however, does not seem to be interested in Gothic history as a means of cultural legitimation; his history is more a means of political propaganda in favour of the Goths, showing, perhaps paradoxically, how 'Roman' they have become. In both texts, it is clear that Romans and Goths may be united under one rule, and indeed under Gothic rule; the Gothic kingdom in Italy, however, was short-lived, and Jordanes clearly intends Roman political authority to be understood as superior, whereas Isidore does everything possible to diminish it. The *gens Gothorum* are in Isidore's work clearly a political unit,⁸⁵ opposed to Rome; their ancient past, oral tradition, pre-Christian religion and customs are never mentioned, and their history is drawn from Latin, Roman, written works. They themselves

⁸⁴ Goffart finds the passage so irrelevant to the plot of the *Getica* that he proposes it is inserted primarily for comic relief, but also to demonstrate what happens when a Goth becomes emperor (1988, 81–82). Teillet (1984, 315) suggests that Maximin is a prefiguration of Theoderic; she does not note, though, that both are unsuccessful Gothic attempts to rule Rome, the second of which is followed by the complete destruction of Ostrogothic independence.

⁸⁵ Cf. the studies of Adams (1969; 1997), which suggest that while in late antique texts, *gens* did not normally have a political significance, in seventh-century Spanish works, beginning with Isidore, a *gens* indicates a polity. This could indicate a shift from a primarily cultural or historical understanding of the term to a largely political one. Teillet argues that in the works of Isidore and of John of Biclar, the *gens Gothorum* takes shape after its conversion to Catholicism (1984, 524–27); this is not implausible, but is not, to my mind, sufficiently anchored in the actual usage of the term in Isidore's histories.

adopt Roman religion and other markers of Roman culture, while remaining resolutely anti-Roman in their politics. For Isidore, therefore, the purpose seems to be to show how the Goths have succeeded Rome politically, and now legitimately rule over *Romani*; Roman culture is nevertheless predominant for him. Although even Jordanes eventually absorbs Gothic history within Rome, he nevertheless does give the Gothic past a distinctive shape; Isidore does not attempt to provide the Goths with an independent narrative of ancient history, and knows nothing of any Scandinavian migrations, or indeed any narrative of their past independent of their contact with Rome. As we have seen, the Goths, in Isidore's work, enter history as opponents of Rome; they exist historically only insofar as they have been in contact with Rome and its territories, including the (formerly) Roman territory of Spain (cf. Reydellet 1981, 517).

Such an interpretation is consistent with the rest of Isidore's oeuvre, which is, after all, in many respects an effort to preserve the inheritance of Roman antiquity for posterity, but in which this culture has no political associations with the empire; Isidore only wished to deny significance to Rome as a political entity, while preserving a literary and religious culture he considered independent of Roman *imperium* (cf. Borst 1966, 27; Reydellet 1970, 393–94; Teillet 1984, 464). Perhaps significantly, while both authors wrote two historical works, there is a sense of balance between Jordanes's Roman and Gothic histories, both in that they are 'national' histories, and in terms of the positive portrayals of the main subjects. Isidore's other history was a chronicle, not a history of Rome alone, and even in the chronicle, Rome is, to the extent the genre allows, diminished in favour of the Goths. For Jordanes, the Goths *complement* Rome, but Rome is still dominant: the Goths may preserve an identity, but this is ultimately subordinate to Rome. In Isidore's work, the Goths *succeed*

Rome; this means that they take on the qualities that make Rome special, military might and the Catholic religion, in addition to the Roman language, written culture, and laws; they thus become, in a cultural sense, Roman, but this inheritance is completely divorced from any political identity.⁸⁶ The corpus of Isidore's writings preserves much that was inherited from Rome; the thrust of his works is consistently against heterodoxy; altogether, however, there is nothing in his thought in support of the notion—present in, for example, Orosius, one of Isidore's principal sources⁸⁷—that Rome's political existence was necessary to preserve Rome's cultural inheritance. Hillgarth has rightly pointed out that after the political collapse of Rome in the west—something that would not have appeared inevitable in Jordanes's time—the models of Christian history presented by Eusebius–Jerome and Orosius, which married Roman *imperium* to the Catholic Church, were necessarily hard to hold on to; there was no option, if a political history was to be written, other than transferring the 'Providential mantle with which Eusebius had invested Rome and Constantine' to the post-Roman kingdoms and their rulers (Hillgarth 1970, 264–65; quote from 265). Isidore's historical works 'constitute a declaration of independence on the part of Visigothic Spain and an affirmation of its worth against the ancient mistress of the Mediterranean world [...] The *Historia Gothorum* proclaimed *political* independence' (Hillgarth 1970, 296–97); Isidore's histories thus perform an act of transferring to the Visigothic kingdom the role in salvation history Orosius had assigned to Rome.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ As Hillgarth (1970) argues, this kind of portrayal is common to much of the extant historiography from Visigothic Spain, although Isidore presents it in perhaps the most clear manner.

⁸⁷ On Orosius's historical theology, cf. the references at p. 4, n. 4 above.

⁸⁸ We should note with Reydellet, though, that Isidore does not portray Catholic Gothic kings in an unambiguously positive light: although his criticism is minimal, especially when compared to the kind of providential role the Goths play in Spain's history, it is nevertheless occasionally present (1981, 528–30).

Jordanes's *Getica* and Isidore's *Historia Gothorum* present us, therefore, with contrasting ways of integrating a non-Roman, non-biblical past with the dominant cultural inheritance of Rome and the Catholic Church. The two approaches are conditioned to a very great extent by their historical context: Jordanes wrote at a time when the Gothic polity was in fact in the process of being extinguished, but when there were still Goths of the Amal line who might have been able to exercise some influence. For him, it made sense to praise the Gothic past, while still promoting its absorption into Rome. But for Isidore, in the context of early seventh-century Spain, now fully Catholic, with a minority Gothic population, ruled by laws that were founded on late Roman legal developments, there was perhaps little need to try and promote a sense of independent Gothic ethnic or cultural identity—indeed, there may have been very little such identity, given that the prime marker of difference between Goths and Romans, their religion, was no longer an obstruction.⁸⁹ Goths and Romans had lived alongside each other in Spain for nearly two centuries by the time Isidore wrote his histories; in contrast, little more than two generations had elapsed between Theoderic's arrival in Italy and the composition of Jordanes's *Getica*. There was likely to have been a greater sense of a distinct Gothic identity in Italy than in Spain; there was thus more likely to have been an audience for Jordanes that had a sense of a discrete Gothic identity than would have been the

⁸⁹ On the coexistence and cooperation between Roman and Gothic elements of the population in government: Heather (1996, 193–4; 210–15); cf. Mathisen and Sivan (1999, 28–37) on the Aquitanian kingdom of the fifth century. On continuities in social and economic organisation: (Collins 2004, 161–74); Wickham (2005, 219–32); on the conscious adoption of Roman forms of political self-representation, inspired by the royal court: Hillgarth (1966), and Hillgarth (1970). Teillet (1984, 552–55) finds that Goths and Romans alike seem to be understood as belonging to the *gens Gothorum* in literary sources of the seventh century. Collins rightly points out that the 'Roman' part of provincial identity in the later empire meant, for most, simply having the rights of citizenship (2004, 242), and implications with regard to ethnicity are unclear; provincial affiliations were probably stronger than an empire-wide sense of ethnic identity. He argues also that in Spain, a Visigothic identity developed without much trouble after the religious barrier was removed, but this identity was tied to the political and religious unity of a geographical region, not to any distinctively Visigothic language, law, custom, or religion (2004, 239–46).

case in Isidore's Spain.⁹⁰ Isidore was, moreover, also a senior figure in the ecclesiastical hierarchy, a theologian devoted to preserving the cultural and religious inheritance, inescapably tied with Rome, on which he had been raised (cf. e.g. Borst 1966; Fontaine 2000). He supported the Gothic *regnum* in Spain because it kept united a region that had—even under Roman rule—a sense of its own distinct identity, but more importantly, because the Goths ruled a united Spain under the religious guidance of the Catholic Church. As a number of studies have shown, Isidore's historical works can profitably be understood as extensions of his theology: they support a Gothic kingdom, to be sure, but a Catholic one, which is the important point (Drews 2002; Hillgarth 1970; Reydellet 1970; Reydellet 1981, 505–97; Wood 2005).⁹¹ Spain could not be united under the Romans as long as the Goths remained powerful; it could not be united under the Goths as long as they remained Arian; but the community of believers is shown to prosper under Catholic rulers who are independent of Rome. Isidore presents this view not least because Rome, in his thought, had no special place in salvation history, and was replaced by the newly-Catholic Goths as the last great kingdom before the Day of Judgement (Borst 1966, 42–47; Drews 2002, 7–8; Hillgarth 1970, 298; Löwe 1952, 364–70; Reydellet 1970, 393; 398–99; Teillet 1984, 466–67).

The Goths' past was to have an illustrious future, not just in the middle ages; the Scandinavian origin myth became one of the most popular origin narratives of our period, and the Ostrogothic kings Theoderic and (to a lesser extent) Ermanaric became prominent figures in vernacular legend. Both these aspects of the reception of Gothic history will be

⁹⁰ And, of course, Cassiodorus would have interacted with the first generation of Gothic arrivals in Italy, who would certainly have a sense of identity distinct from that of other Italians.

⁹¹ Similarly Borst (1966); Diesner (1977, 26–34), on Isidore's conception of history in other works.

considered in some detail in chapter seven; both are closer to Jordanes's portrayal than that of Isidore. Moreover, while Isidore's political support of a post-Roman polity was clearly paralleled by other texts narrating the non-Roman, non-biblical pasts of post-Roman kingdoms, his ignorance or suppression of Gothic historical traditions is markedly different from what we find in a later history that we shall examine that deals specifically with the distant past of a non-Roman people: Paul the Deacon's *Historia Langobardorum*. Before turning to Paul, though, I shall present a brief analysis of the Frankish origin narratives, which differ, in the way they merge non-Roman and Roman histories, both from the models presented by Jordanes and Isidore, and the later work of Paul.

CHAPTER 3:

THE ORIGINS OF THE FRANKS

The Franks first appear in historical sources from the end of the third century, as a people on the borders of the empire, who engaged in raids against Rome and were settled by the emperors along the Rhine border.¹ Like the Goths, from the fourth century, the Franks are known to have been federates or allies of the Romans; individual Franks served in the Roman army, with some of them reaching very senior positions.² There appear to have been several more or less distinct peoples who were grouped together under the confederate title of ‘Frank’ (cf. *Pan. lat.* VI[VII].v,3: *terram [...] a diuersis Francorum gentibus occupatam* ‘the land occupied by diverse peoples of the Franks’) even as early as the end of the third century,

¹ The earliest mentions of *Francus/Franci* are in the Latin panegyrics on the emperors Maximian (286–305: *Pan. lat.* VII[VI].iv,2; XI[III].v,4; XI[III].vii,2), Constantius Chlorus (305–306: *Pan. lat.* VIII[V].xvii,1–2; xviii,3; xxi,1; IX[IV].xviii,3), and Constantine (307–337: *Pan. lat.* IV[X].xvii,1; VI[VII].v,3; xi,3; XII[IX].xxiv,2). *Francia* occurs in the panegyric on Constantine (*Pan. lat.* VI[VII].vi,2: *Franciae nationes*; x,2: *Reges ipsos Franciae*). Aurelius Victor, writing in around 361, has references to Franks in c. 260 (Pichlmayr and Gruendel, eds 1966, 33), but it is uncertain whether this is reliable or is a projection of his own time into the past. Fourth-century references to Franks are conveniently collected in translation in Murray (trans. 2000, 1–20).

² Some examples of high-ranking Franks in the Roman army (all attested in contemporary or near-contemporary sources): Silvanus (*magister peditum*, usurper of the imperial title, mid-4th century; *PLRE* I, 840–41); Merobaudes (*magister peditum*, 375–88; *PLRE* I, 598); Richomer (*magister militum*, 383; 388–93; *PLRE* I, 765–66). Ruggini (1997) provides a prosopographical study of these and other Frankish and potentially Frankish military men of the fourth and fifth century. On Frankish relations with Rome in the fourth and fifth centuries, see Ewig (2006, 9–11); Halsall (2007, 267–71); James (1988, 35–44; 51–58); Kaiser (2004b, 15–17); Wood (1994b, 36); cf. Halsall (2007, 71–79); and Kaiser (2004b, 3–7; 66–74), for the broader political background.

though it is not clear to what extent this reflects the self-perceptions of the people the Romans called Franks; both the use of the ethnic designator and the notion that the Franks were a confederacy are more likely to manifest Roman perspectives on them than their own self-perception. Some of these peoples continue to be mentioned as having a contemporary existence in sources for several centuries afterward (Ewig 2006, 12–17; James 1988, 35–38; Kaiser 2004b, 14–24; 80–84; Wood 1994b, 35–36; Wood 1995, 53–54).³ It is scarcely possible to compose a narrative history of the Franks from contemporary sources before the end of the fifth century, as the material is too fragmentary; the sources only become more coherent with the rise of the Merovingian Franks under Clovis in the last decades of the fifth century.

There was probably no effective imperial administration in northern Gaul by the early fifth century (Ewig 2006, 12–17; Halsall 2007, 84–85; James 1988, 51–58; Kaiser 2004b, 7–15); the Franks appear to have taken the place of the Romans as the military authority during the fifth century, adopting, however, many Roman norms. Although by the early sixth century the Franks, now largely unified under Clovis, were clearly the dominant powers in most of Gaul, it appears to have remained essentially Roman in terms of culture and the forms of administration in the early sixth century (Ewig 2006, 18–31; 52–71; 97–112; Goetz 2003, 315–19; James 1988, 64–91; Halsall 2007, 143–44; 152–61; 242–45; 303–10; Kaiser 2004b, 15–24; 84–92; Wickham 2005, 178–81).

The Merovingians (c. 480–751) created a kingdom comprising most of what is now modern France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and parts of modern Germany and Switzerland;⁴

³ Note, though, that the people called ‘Franks’ by the Romans do not seem to have been an ethnic or culturally united group, and were only united politically in the late fifth century (Goetz 2003, 309–18).

⁴ Accessible overviews of Merovingian history are provided by Ewig (2006); Wood (1994b); and James (1988), who pays more attention to archaeological evidence and material culture; Ewig’s text, though the most recent, is

under the Carolingians (751–987), Frankish rule was extended over Germany, Italy and Austria, and under Charlemagne (768–814), the Franks were unquestionably the most powerful rulers of western Europe, with the most extensive reign, since the Roman empire.⁵ Under Charlemagne too, the Franks established a new empire: Charlemagne was crowned emperor at Rome in 800, reviving the title of Roman emperor in western Europe, a title that remained in use, though in the tenth century it passed from the Franks to their successors east of the Rhine, the Saxons.⁶

There is no ‘history of the Franks’ from their early period, though there are certainly texts that provide plenty of Frankish history. In this chapter, the analysis will focus on the stories of Frankish origins before Childeric, the first securely attested Merovingian king. For the most part, I shall be comparing the narratives of the early eighth-century *Liber Historiae Francorum* (*LHF*)—the first ‘national’ history of the Franks, in that it is devoted solely to Frankish history—and the mid-seventh-century Fredegar chronicle, though the histories of Gregory of Tours from the end of the sixth century will also be used for comparison where appropriate. I begin with brief summaries of the texts and their contexts, in chronological order. Following this, I present a reading of the narrative of Trojan origins in Fredegar and the *LHF*; after an examination of the written source base for these stories, I argue that it is most likely that the model for the authors of the Fredegar chronicle and the *LHF* was,

surprisingly ignorant of important recent scholarship (especially in English), for example the many works of Halsall and Murray that treat of Merovingian social and institutional history. For a quick overview of the scholarly debates (including the major works in English), cf. Kaiser (2004b).

⁵ McKitterick (1983) presents a detailed narrative account of Carolingian-period history, including that of the Church, society, and (in less detail) the economy; Schieffer (2006) provides a crisp, but strictly political narrative, focusing on the Carolingian dynasty. Becher (2003) and Collins (1998) are good political biographies of Charlemagne; Collins is the more critical of the two, and is also more sceptical with regard to his primary sources. McKitterick (2008) gives a broader view of the period, less focused on the personality of Charlemagne himself.

⁶ On the sources for the imperial coronation and its implications, see Becher (2003, 81–119); Collins (1998, 141–59); McKitterick (2008, 114–18; 235–37); Schieffer (2004). Reuter (1991, 148–80) is a succinct introduction to the early Saxon monarchy and imperium.

ultimately, the Roman Trojan origin myth, to which were added accounts linking Trojans with the Aedui and Arvernians in Gaul. I suggest further that while the adoption of Trojan origins was most likely intended to cast the Franks in a positive light, it was nevertheless coupled with a clear distinction between the Franks and the Romans: the Romans are shown as inimical to the Franks in their distant history. The use of this myth, however, clearly shows that there was no perception of a barbarian-Roman dichotomy: although Romans and Franks are certainly different, they have the same origins, and the distant past is, in this case, also a very Roman one.

Gregory, Fredegar and the *LHF*: Background and Summaries

Gregory of Tours: *Decem libri historiarum*

Georgius Florentius Gregorius came from a prominent Gallic family, and was bishop of Tours from 573 until his death in 594. In the 590s, he wrote a ten-book history that focused on the Frankish kingdoms.⁷ Despite later editorial titles, this was not a ‘history of the Franks’. Gregory was not himself of Frankish ethnic origin, and seems to have been little concerned with Frankish origins or identity; the differences that concerned him were of religion, between Catholics and heretics.⁸ His ten books of history are the principal narrative source for the history of Gaul/Francia in the sixth century, and are in fact incomparable in detail and scope to any other narrative source of the period from any part of Europe. They

⁷ Fundamental for Gregory: Heinzlmann (1994b); an important alternative reading: Goffart (1988, 112–234).

⁸ On Gregory and the Franks, and Gregory’s own biography and sense of identity, see Goetz (2003; 2004); Goffart (1982); Heinzlmann (1994b, 7–83); Heinzlmann (1994a); James (1998); Plassmann (2006, 117–47). On the date of the text, see Murray (2008). Weidemann (1982) provides a thematically oriented guide to Gregory’s information on Merovingian history and culture.

proved to be immensely popular in the following centuries, though largely in an abridged, six-book version;⁹ both Fredegar and the *LHF* are based substantially on Gregory's work.

The first book of his histories begins with Adam, and covers, for the most part, biblical and Roman history, moving towards Gaul with the narrative of the life of St Martin, with whose death the book ends. The second book covers the history of Gaul in the fifth century; chapter nine provides the most information we get from Gregory regarding the ancient history of the Franks. By the middle of this book we have reached the reign of Childeric, and book II ends with the death of Childeric's son, Clovis, the king who, according to Gregory, united the Franks, and was their first Christian king.¹⁰ By the end of book II, therefore, we are at the beginning of the sixth century, and within a generation of Gregory's birth; the rest of the work concerns the very recent past and the events of Gregory's own lifetime.

Gregory's knowledge of Frankish history before the mid-fifth century is vague, and is only expressed as a part of a quest for the origins not of the Franks, but of the institution of kingship among them. He tells us that many say that the Franks left Pannonia (II,9: *Tradunt enim multi, eosdem de Pannonia fuisse degressus*) and came to the borders of the Rhine, and the first kings Gregory knows of, from one of whom, Merovech, the Merovingians were descended (II,9), are from this period in Frankish history. It is not entirely clear when this migration took place. Although we are told that at this time the Franks were pagan (II,10),

⁹ On the manuscript history, see Goffart (1987); Heinzelmann (1994b, 167–75); Reimitz (2003).

¹⁰ On Clovis and his conversion, see the papers of Daly (1994); Shanzer (1998); and Wood (1985). For an overview of the scholarship on Childeric and Clovis, see Kaiser (2004, 84–92).

little else is said about their ancient past. For the rest of the work, Gregory does not reflect on Frankish identity in opposition to any other kind of identity.¹¹

Though we shall not consider Gregory's work in much detail below, it is important to bear in mind that the narratives both of Fredegar and of the *LHF* are in large part embedded within borrowings from Gregory, and might be considered efforts to update his text not just with regard to more recent history, but also in terms of the depiction of the distant past, as a means of bringing the principal extant narrative of Frankish history in line with current views (whether of individual authors, or more widely held theories among the aristocracy) of the distant past and its present use. For this reason, a comparison with Gregory's *Histories* as the necessary background to both Fredegar and the *LHF* is potentially useful.

The Fredegar Chronicle

The next narrative history for the Franks that survives is the so-called Fredegar chronicle, an unwieldy work from c. 660 in rather inelegant Latin, which begins in the form of a universal chronicle, but by its second half focuses almost exclusively on the history of the Franks, and is based largely on Gregory's *Histories*; book III is explicitly said, in the title, to be excerpted from Gregory.¹² We know nothing about the author, except that he probably wrote in Burgundy, and was affiliated with the Burgundian aristocracy.¹³ It has been

¹¹ The fundamental works for Gregory's use of ethnic terminology are Goffart (1982); Heinzelmann (1994a); and James (1998); see also Goetz (2003; 2004). Gregory uses the term Frank only sparingly in the sections of his work dealing with the sixth century, primarily to designate the polity ruled by the Merovingian kings (in phrases such as *regnum Francorum*); *Romanus* is not used in any sixth-century context.

¹² The most recent introduction to Fredegar is Collins (2007), which focuses on authorship and manuscript transmission; a discussion of Fredegar's sources is at pp. 27–38; 46–55. See in addition Coumert (2007, 295–301); and Plassmann (2006, 147–50). On the content and context of the narratives of Frankish origins: Coumert (2007, 293–324); Ewig (1998; 2001); Giardina (1998); Murray (1998); Plassmann (2006, 147–74). On a possible contemporary political context, see also Wood (1994a).

¹³ Note, though, the cautions voiced by Collins: we know really too little about Fredegar to be certain about his location or affiliations (2007, 20–21).

suggested that the text was actually written by two authors, though in recent years, this theory has not garnered much support.¹⁴

The first book takes us from creation to the early Roman emperors, and contains almost nothing original. The second book continues in the format of a universal chronicle, with entries on Romans, Hebrews and Assyrians, but also introduces the Franks (II,4–6; 8–9) and their Trojan past; there is, furthermore, a growing focus on the history of the Roman emperors and on the western empire. Like the first book, book II has little that is original, primarily presenting the text of the Eusebius–Jerome chronicle, though the author inserts more individual words and sentences of his own than he does in book I. There are a few chapters that are completely unprecedented, and provide more or less legendary narratives about non-Frankish figures, including Theoderic, the Ostrogothic king of Italy, and Justinian (II,56–59; II,62). The third book is based primarily on Gregory, but with more interpolations, once again of narratives that appear to be of a legendary nature. Book IV is largely original, providing a political narrative of the Franks from the late sixth to the mid-seventh century. From book III, the focus of the chronicle is almost exclusively on Francia. In the present chapter I examine Fredegar's origin narratives of the Franks, which occur in books II and III. This text is the first to provide us with a narrative of Trojan origins of the Franks. A somewhat different version is presented in the first Frankish narrative history that we could compare to the *Getica* and Isidore's Gothic history, in terms of its focus on a single people and their history from their origins to the present: the *Liber Historiae Francorum*.

¹⁴ The single-author theory was most convincingly propounded by Goffart (1963) and Erikson (1965), and is adopted by Collins (2007, 8–25), who provides a survey of the scholarship on authorship, and Scheibelreiter (1999; 2002). Gerberding (1987, 13–17) argues that there were two authors, and is followed in this by Ewig (1998; 2001). Coumert (2007, 301), Giardina (1998), Martínez Pizarro (2006), and Plassmann (2006, 148–49), remain noncommittal.

The *Liber Historiae Francorum*

The first real ‘history of the Franks’ is the *Liber historiae Francorum* (*LHF*), composed in the 720s, and a work of resolutely Frankish, secular, political history.¹⁵ It was composed by an anonymous author at a time when the Merovingian dynasty was in eclipse by the Pippinids, ancestors of Charlemagne, and although focused on the Neustrian Franks, nevertheless seems to be in support of the (Austrasian) Pippinids, and is firmly anchored within the cultural and political context of eastern Francia in the early eighth century.¹⁶

The first chapter tells us of the origins of the Franks, and the following four chapters take us up to the reign of Childeric in the middle of the fifth century. A fair amount of space is given to his son, Clovis; he enters the narrative in chapter nine, and dies only in chapter 19 (the work has a total of 53 chapters). The sixth century receives a quite detailed coverage, the seventh less so. The text ends with the rise of Charles Martel (c. 688–741).

It has been remarked that unlike Gregory, Fredegar, and especially the author of the *LHF*, adopt a ‘heroic mode’ in their narratives (Goffart 2003, 376–77). Both are also interested in legendary narratives, and seem to highlight some form of Frankish identity. Both texts draw substantially on Gregory, but use, for example, the word *Francus* much more than he does (Goetz 2004; Reimitz 2003; cf. Gerberding 1987, 166–69); this has led to the reasonable assumption that while Gregory was concerned primarily with depicting the history of his time within a framework of salvation history, and was thus more interested in religion and religious difference (Heinzelmann 1994b), Fredegar and the *LHF* have more

¹⁵ The most detailed study is Gerberding (1987); see in addition Coumert (2007, 325–39); Plassmann (2006, 174–88).

¹⁶ For an introduction to the text and its context, see Gerberding (1987, 1–10; 146–72); cf. more recently Coumert (2007, 325–28); Plassmann (2006, 174–75); on its reception and use in the Carolingian period, see McKitterick (2004a, 389–93). For an unusually unconvincing argument that the author was a nun, see Nelson (1996), cf. the discussion in Coumert (2007, 327–28). On the early Carolingians and the political history of the early eighth century, see e.g. Becher (2003, 29–35); Collins (1998, 15–31); Ewig (2006, 181–206); McKitterick (1983, 16–40); McKitterick (2008, 57–71); Schieffer (2006, 11–49); Wood (1994b, 255–85).

immediate, secular political concerns (cf. Gerberding 1987, 159–60; Plassmann 2006, 174; 186).

The Trojan Origin of the Franks

Fredegar gives us two complementary versions of the Trojan origin of the Franks, in book II (4–6), interpolated into Jerome’s chronicle, and in book III (2; 9), interpolated into Gregory’s histories. According to Fredegar, the first king of the Franks was Priam (II,4; III,2). After the Trojan war, the Franks left Troy, and one part went to Macedonia (II,4; III,2), eventually bringing forth Alexander the Great (II,4). Another group of refugees went to Phrygia, under their king Frigas (II,4–5; III,2). In book II, Fredegar says that this group later had a king called Francio (II,5), from whom they derived their name (II,5: *per quem Franci vocantur*) and under whom they settled between the Rhine, the Danube, and the sea, having travelled through Asia and fought with many peoples (II,5: [Francio] *multo tempore cum plurimis gentibus pugnam gerens, partem Asiae vastans, in Eurupam dirigens, inter Renum vel Danuvium et mare consedit* ‘doing battle for a long time against many peoples and laying waste to a part of Asia, Francio led [them] to Europe and settled between the Rhine, the Danube and the sea’). Diminished by battles and the splitting off into various groups, the Franks eventually settled on the Rhine (II,6). While they were in their central European (not yet Rhenish) location, with Pompey ruling Rome, the Franks were briefly subjugated by the Romans after the death of Francio (II,6); they were quick to shake off the Roman yoke and we are told that *post haec nulla gens usque in presentem diem Francos potuit superare* (II,6: ‘after this no people has been able to conquer the Franks up to the present day’). Fredegar also tells us of another group that derived from the original Trojans,

whom he calls *Torci* (II,6; III,2); this term presumably refers to the Turks, who appear to have had contact with Constantinople in the sixth century (Coumert 2007, 311–16; Ewig 1998, 7–8; 27–28). Fredegar could have heard the name from material brought to Francia in the course of the many diplomatic contacts between the Merovingians and the empire (Coumert 2007, 311–16; Ewig 1983).

In book III, Fredegar is more precise about the process of bifurcation of the original Trojans, specifying that the Phrygians split into two groups, one of whom went through Asia and settled along the Danube; the other group wandered through Europe and settled on the Rhine, under their eponymous king Francio (III,2). Nothing is said in book III about the conflict with Rome; after having brought the Franks to the Rhine, Fredegar tells us in this book that they begin, but do not complete, the work of building a city in the image of Troy (III,2: *civitatem ad instar Trogiae nominis aedificare conati sunt. Ceptum quidem, sed imperfectum opus remansit* ‘they tried to build a city in the likeness of the name of Troy. The work was begun, but it remained incomplete’).¹⁷ Following Gregory, in book III, Fredegar mentions the names of Marcomer and Sunno, whom he too calls *duces* (III,3; cf. *Hist.* II,9).¹⁸ He also provides an original narrative with regard to the origins of the Merovingian dynasty, telling us that their eponymous founder Merovech was born to Chlodio’s wife after an encounter with a sea-creature, and it is uncertain whether he was sired by the beast or a man (III,9: *aut a bisteia aut a viro fuisset concepta, peperit filium nomen Meroveum* ‘whether

¹⁷ The reference is most likely to the city later known as Xanten, originally Colonia Ulpia Traiana; it is not difficult to see how a change from Traiana to Troiana might have taken place, and in fact the Ravenna Cosmographer, citing a report from c. 500, also refers to a city on the Rhine as Troy (Schnetz and Zumschlinge, eds 1940, IV,24), a reference that has been taken to indicate the same city mentioned by Fredegar (cf. Coumert 2007, 286–87; 322–23; Ewig 1998, 13–14; Giardina 1998, 197–98).

¹⁸ Claudian, in the early fifth century, identifies them as kings (Platnauer, ed. and trans. 1922, I,246–56).

impregnated by beast or man, she bore a son with the name of Merovech’).¹⁹ Like the *LHF*, he also has a fair amount of legendary material surrounding Clovis and the early historically-attested Merovingian kings in book III; his treatment of Clovis’s conversion (III,21) is based on Gregory, but abbreviates the latter far more than does the *LHF*.

Unlike Fredegar and Gregory, the *LHF* is clearly focused on the Franks from its first sentence: *Principium regum Francorum eorumque origine vel gentium illarum ac gesta proferamus* (1: ‘Let us relate the beginning of the kings of the Franks and their origin and deeds and those of those peoples’).²⁰ The next sentence takes us to Troy, ruled by Aeneas; the Trojans are praised as great warriors, but they are defeated in battle by the Greeks, following which Aeneas (called a *tyrannus*) flees to Italy. Priam and Antenor, who are simply called other Trojan rulers (*alii quoque ex principibus* ‘and others of the rulers’), and whose relationship to Aeneas is not specified, move off with 12,000 of the army in boats, and make their way to Pannonia, where they begin to build a city, which they call Sicambria.²¹ This city they inhabit for many years, and grow into a *magna gens*. At this same time (2: *Eo itidem tempore*) the Alans, fleeing the Romans under the emperor Valentinian, escape to the Maeotis; Valentinian promises that whoever can flush the Alans out will not have to pay tribute for ten years (*concedam eis tributa donaria annis decim* ‘I shall grant to them the payments due for ten years’), and the Trojans successfully defeat the Alans. Then

¹⁹ On the significance of this story, see the definitive account in Murray (1998), which demolishes effectively earlier claims that some notion of sacral kingship was implied. Murray believes that while in its origins, the story might have had positive connotations, in its context in Fredegar, it is possibly intended to shed a negative light on the Merovingians; this view followed by Coumert (2007, 320–21); Plassmann (2006, 157); and Wood (2003a, 150–52; cf. 150–55 on the question of sacral kingship, on which Wood is somewhat vague). For a critical analysis of ancient sources on Germanic sacral kingship, cf. Picard (1991). Ewig (2006, 77–79) is too reliant on older views.

²⁰ It is not clear what is meant by ‘those peoples’; it is perhaps an acknowledgement of the diverse peoples that make up the Frankish polity. *origine* can only be construed as a Merovingian form for *originem*.

²¹ The name doubtless arose from the antiquarian linking of the ancient *Sigambri* with the later Franks; the *Sigambri* in fact also served as a Roman cohort in Pannonia, and there is some, albeit rather dubious, evidence that there may have been a city called Sigambria near modern Budapest (on which cf. Gerberding 1987, 20–22).

Valentinian gives them the name ‘Frank’; the *LHF* author explains this by saying that it means ‘wild’ in Greek (2: *Tunc appellavit eos Valentinianus imperator Francos Attica lingua, hoc est feros, a duritia vel audacia cordis eorum* ‘Then the emperor Valentinian called them ‘Franks’ in the Attic language, that is “wild ones”, because of the toughness and boldness of their heart’). Ten years later, when it is time for them to pay tribute again, they (now and henceforth called Franks) refuse, and rise up against the imperial *dux* who attempts to collect the tribute (3). Enraged by this, Valentinian wages war against them; the Franks realise that they cannot hold out against him, and having lost Priam in battle, they flee Sicambria and settle along the Rhine, now ruled by the *principes* Marcomer and Sunno, sons of Priam and Antenor (4). After the death of Sunno, they wish to have just one king like other peoples, and following Marcomer’s advice, they elect Faramund, his son (4).

Up to this point, the narrative is original, though overlapping with Fredegar’s in many respects; the next chapter is based on Gregory (though with some significant interpolations), and tells us about the move across the Rhine under Chlodio, to whose line Merovech, the father of the historically-attested Childeric, belongs (the *LHF* knows nothing of the watery origins of Merovech as reported by Fredegar). In the following chapters too, the narrative follows that of Gregory closely. We are told of the reigns of Childeric and Clovis, and also that the Franks are pagans (6; 10; cf. *Hist.* II,10). We also get a number of narratives not in Gregory, or not in such embellished form, regarding the marriage of Clovis (11–13). Clovis’s conversion is reported in Gregory’s words (15), though of course Gregory had not included any of the prehistory we receive in the *LHF*. The narrative now follows Gregory very closely, though once again with the insertion of brief, apparently legendary accounts not in

Gregory's text. Unlike Fredegar and Gregory, the *LHF* has a very clearly political focus on the Franks, not turning aside from them for religious history, or tales of other peoples.

While Fredegar has, in essence, the same origin story as that in the *LHF*, in that he also tells us that fleeing Trojans move along the Danube, spend some time in Pannonia, end up on the flanks of the Rhine, and are eventually called Franks, there are nonetheless a number of differences in detail.²² To begin with, while the *LHF*'s geography seems somewhat more clear,²³ its chronology, with respect to the relation of the fall of Troy and the Roman empire, is more confused. Little time elapses between the fall of Troy (whence Priam and Antenor flee) and the reign of Valentinian (when their sons rule); given that the only emperors with such names ruled in the fourth and fifth centuries, this places the fall of Troy sometime between the late third and the fifth century (cf. Coumert 2007, 333). In contrast, Fredegar places the kingdom and fall of Troy in a distant past, 300 years after the time of Moses. He also provides much more time between the fall of Troy and the eventual rise of the Merovingians, with a number of stages in between that are not included in the *LHF*. It is clear that the Franks in the *LHF* are expected to pay tribute to the Romans, though it is not apparent for how long this has been the case; in Fredegar, they only do so for a brief period under the rule of Pompey.

There is a significant shift in emphasis between Fredegar and the *LHF*: as noted above, Fredegar begins in the form of a universal chronicle, and even in his narrative of Frankish origins, the Franks are related not just to the Trojans, but also to the Phrygians, Macedonians and Turks, and this connection with peoples of great repute of the ancient

²² The versions of the Trojan origin story are helpfully tabulated by Coumert (2007, 318 [Fredegar books II and III]; 331 [Fredegar and *LHF*]).

²³ The *LHF*-author seems to present a geography of eastern Europe that corresponds with what is found in other early eighth-century cosmographical works and early versions of the T-O maps (Gerberding 1987, 24–27).

world (and in contemporary Byzantium) is presumably—as is the case with Jordanes’s Goths—to the greater glory of the Franks. This wider world of ancient peoples is completely alien to the worldview of the *LHF*, which is focused solely on Frankish history (Coumert 2007, 306–07; 311; 322–23; 338–39; Gerberding 1987, 17–19; 166–69; Plassmann 2006, 151; 189–90). The *LHF* also differs from Fredegar in having a more ambivalent image of both Romans and Franks (Plassmann 2006, 181; 186; 190): while the former are still distinct from and enemies of the Franks, they also have the function of giving the Franks their name. The Franks, in their conflict with the Romans, do not come across in a positive light either (*LHF* 3: the Franks, rising up against Valentinian, are called *crudeles et inmanissimi*; *duritia* and *audacia* in *LHF* 2 could also have negative connotations, as indeed could *ferus*). There can be no question, however, that overall, the thrust of the work is pro-Frankish. While the original use of the Trojan myth was certainly to compare Franks and Romans, the *LHF* is, after the first few chapters, singularly uninterested in Romans, whereas much of Fredegar’s history—cast in the form of a universal chronicle—continues to deal with Romans. This difference has led Gerberding to conclude that ‘the status of Romans *vis-à-vis* the Franks was not a central theme’ in the *LHF* (1987, 30; cf. Coumert 2007, 338–39). It is debatable to what extent it was a ‘central’ theme in Fredegar, but certainly Roman history, and the Franks’ place within and emerging from this history, is more important in the earlier work.

The Sources for the Trojan Myth

Although both texts cite Gregory extensively, it is apparent from the insertions of these origin narratives, for which Gregory has no parallels, that Fredegar and the *LHF* share a concern to highlight the distant—and Trojan—past of the Franks, which Gregory was either

unaware of or uninterested in. Gregory names his sources for early Frankish history: the historians Sulpicius Alexander and Renatus Profuturus Frigeridus (*Hist.* II,9); but the Pannonian origin that he narrates clearly derives from other sources (we should note, though, that a phrase like *tradunt multi* does not necessarily indicate oral informants). But with Fredegar and the *LHF*, we have even less knowledge of the authors' sources for the narratives of Trojan origins; the only earlier extant written source for Frankish history was Gregory, and his text—lacking any hint of a Trojan origin myth—was obviously judged to be insufficient.

The story of Roman Trojan origins, at least in Virgil's version, was well known in the early middle ages; other narratives also told of the fall of Troy and the fate of the survivors, many of whom wandered far and founded other kingdoms.²⁴ The Roman origin myth obviously served as a model (though not a direct source) for the Trojan origin of the Franks, but other traditions also play a part. As early as the second century BC, the Aedui in Gaul

²⁴ Cf. Coumert (2007, 268–79) for an overview of narratives of Troy and Roman Trojan origins in the seventh century. Ewig suggests that the narrative in Fredegar derives not from the *Aeneid*, but from the Nostoi of the Greek Epic Cycle; he cites, however, only the *Ethnica* of Stephanos Byzantios, who wrote in the mid-sixth century, and who states that a third Ilium was founded in Macedonia by Priam's son Helenos (Ewig 1998, 5–6). In fact, there is no connection in the extant material of the Epic Cycle between Trojans and Macedonia; the earliest link is made by Theopompus (4th century BC), according to whom Olympias, Alexander's mother, claimed descent from both Neoptolemos (the son of Achilles) and Helenos (cited at Malkin 1998, 139; on Theopompus, cf. also Bruce 1970). Malkin does point out, though, that it was a common motif in the Nostoi to have heroes sailing west, and Helenos is mentioned as doing so elsewhere (1998, 193–94) (I am grateful to Jonathan Burgess for the reference and for clarification regarding the Nostoi). Fredegar certainly seems to have been interested in and had access to some Greek material (Borchert 2005, 447–48; Collins 2007, 51–52), and he might have been aware of Greek accounts of the Phrygians or of Macedonian origins in Troy. I am not aware of any earlier Latin texts that record such a narrative; many do, however, call Phrygians Trojans, without making the further link either with Franks or Macedonians (Cournert 2007, 305–06; Gerberding 1987, 23). As Cournert points out, the way in which Fredegar has the Trojans repeatedly change their name seems to follow a method found in Isidore, who says that the Trojans were earlier called Dardans after their king Dardanus, and became Trojans because they had a king calls Tros (Cournert 2007, 305; cf. *Etym.* IX.ii,67). It is possible, as Cournert suggests (2007, 308), that Fredegar based the Phrygian-Macedonian connection on Jerome, who calls the Phrygians *Maeones*, which could easily enough be altered to *Macedones* (cf. Jerome's chronicle, PL 27, *Anno ab Abr.* 654).

were considered (by the Romans) to be *fratres* and *consanguinei* of the Romans;²⁵ it is possible that they were thought of as descending from Troy, though that is by no means certain from the references we have. The Arvernians, however, were ascribed a Trojan origin in the first century by Lucan (Shackleton Bailey, ed. 1988b, I,427–28), and Sidonius is aware of this origin in the fifth century (Anderson, ed. and trans. 1930–65, *Ep.* VII.vii,2).²⁶ Barlow has suggested that Trojan refugees were thought to have some association with the Rhineland, where the Franks eventually settled, and he believes that the Trojan origin attached to the Franks during the fourth century, when many Franks from the Rhineland were recruited into the Roman army (1995, 88–90). There is, however, no actual evidence for a Trojan myth connected specifically to the Franks, and Barlow’s reading of his texts as linking Trojans with the Rhineland depends on a shaky interpretation of Virgil and Ammianus.²⁷ It is reasonable to assume that the Frankish myth of Trojan origins was influenced in some way by the traditions regarding Gallic peoples (but cf. Giardina 1998, 202–03, for an opposing view), though it is far from clear in what manner such a myth would

²⁵ In the *Gallic War* Caesar mentions that the Senate calls them *fratres* and *consanguinei* (Hering, ed. 1987, I.xxxiii,2); other references to them using these terms are in Cicero, *Ad Atticum* (Shackleton Bailey, ed. 1987, I.xix,2) and *Ad familiares* (Shackleton Bailey, ed. 1988a, VII.x,4); Tacitus, *Annales* (Heubner, ed. 1983, XI.xxv,1); and much later again in the panegyrics on Constantius Chlorus from 297 (*Pan. lat.* V[VIII].ii,4; iii,1; iv,3; VIII[V].xxi,2).

²⁶ The material on Gallic Trojan origins or consanguinity with the Romans is surveyed most recently in Coumert (2007, 279–81), building on Barlow (1995, 89–90); Ewig (1998, 1–2; 23–24); Giardina (1998, 200–02). I do not follow her view that since Gregory compares the Arvernians to Trojans with a citation of Virgil (IV,30), he knew of an Arvernian Trojan myth; it is certainly likely that he did, not because of this reference but because he was himself Arvernian—but he betrays no evidence of any such knowledge.

²⁷ His argument has two components: first, the fact that Virgil, in his *Aeneid*, refers to both the Tiber and the Rhine as horned rivers (VIII,77: *corniger fluius*; 727: *Rhenusque bicornis*), and that there are coins minted along the Rhine with the legend *expectate veni*, which occurs in the *Aeneid* when the Tiber addresses Aeneas (VIII,36–65)—this is interpreted as addressing, in the coins, the Franks who were recruited into the Roman army; second, Barlow cites Ammianus as stating that Trojan exiles settled across the Rhine (XV.ix,5: *aiunt quidam paucos post excidium Troiae fugitantes Graecos ubique dispersos loca haec occupasse tunc vacua* ‘some say that a few Greeks, fleeing after the fall of Troy and widely dispersed, occupied these places that were then empty’). The Virgilian references really cannot be loaded with as much meaning as Barlow would like; in the Ammianus passage, the words *loca haec* refer to regions of Gaul, the subject of the previous sentences, rather than the area around the Rhine (cf. Murray 2002, 65, n. 93).

have got transferred from the inhabitants of Gaul to the Franks.²⁸ Given the differences between Fredegar and the *LHF*, moreover, it seems likely—and this is indeed the scholarly consensus—that there were different versions of the Trojan origin myth in circulation by the second half of the seventh century, and Fredegar and the *LHF* drew on independent versions of the story.

While the Trojan aspects of the narrative do not appear in the context of Frankish history before Fredegar, other elements seem to derive from traditions extant in the sixth century and possibly earlier. The naming of the Franks after an eponymous king is mentioned by the Greek writer John Lydus in the mid-sixth century, and Isidore of Seville also says that the Franks may have got their name from one of their leaders.²⁹ Similarly, the reference to the *attica lingua* in which ‘Frank’ means fierce might be related to Libanios’s (fourth century) statement that the Franks are so-called from the Greek word φράκτοι (*phraktoi*), meaning ‘armoured’ (cited at Ewig 1998, 20; cf. Dodgeon, trans. 1996); note that Libanios knew some Frankish military commanders personally (Ewig 1998, 21; 2001, 47; cf. already Gerberding 1987, 24, with reference to earlier scholarship). Although the Greek word does not mean fierce, a slip in a Latin translation or transcription could easily produce a change from *ferreus* to *ferus* (Ewig 1998, 20–21). The name Sicamber occurs from the first century BC onwards, referring to people on the Rhine frontier; from the end of the fourth century, it

²⁸ Wood claims that ‘it is likely that the Franks, like the Burgundians, received the epithet “Trojan” within the context of imperial diplomacy’, but there is no evidence that either people were called Trojan at this point (late fourth century). The passage of Ammianus (XXVIII.v,11), cited by Wood with regard to the Burgundians, says only that the latter are *suboles* of the Romans; while this ‘could mean that they were thought of as Trojans’ (1994b, 34), there is no reason to construe it thus (cf. Wood 1995, 51–52, where he expresses himself somewhat more cautiously). See also Giardina (1998, 203–05; 207–08), who argues convincingly that there is no warrant to suppose that late imperial diplomacy made use of any kind of Trojan affiliation; the rhetoric of consanguinity seems to have been an earlier feature of Roman foreign relations with regard to the Gauls. Coumert postulates, plausibly, that the Trojan origin myth’s transference to the Franks is evidence of the use of Gallo-Roman culture by the learned in service of the Franks (2007, 379), but has no suggestions as to how exactly such a transfer took place.

²⁹ John Lydus (Bandy, ed. and trans. 1983, III,56); Isidore, *Etym.* IX.ii,101; cf. Barlow (1995, 92); Coumert (2007, 291–93); Ewig (1998, 9); Ewig (2001, 46); Gerberding (1987, 23–24).

seems to be used consistently to signify the Franks (Coumert 2007, 282–83; Gerberding 1987, 20–22). The migration from Pannonia is contained even in Gregory, though not, of course, the travels that precede this (which, in my view, should caution us from over-hasty assumptions that Gregory knew of a Frankish Trojan origin myth). In addition, of the ancient kings mentioned, while there are no sources attesting to Priam, Antenor or Faramund among the Franks, Marcomer and Sunno are Frankish kings in Claudian's early-fifth-century panegyric on Stilicho, and Gregory too mentions them (citing Sulpicius Alexander), albeit as *duces* (Platnauer, ed. and trans. 1922, I,246–56; *Hist.* II,9; cf. Coumert 2007, 290; Gerberding 1987, 20).

None of the sources mentioned above provide anything like the narratives in the *LHF* and Fredegar, only fragments from which such stories could be constructed. It is also difficult to know how most of these sources could have been accessed by the Frankish writers; in particular, there is no evidence that the *LHF*-author had access to any Greek material. The Trojan origin myth as we have it in Fredegar and the *LHF* must therefore be understood not as derived from any (single) ancient source (similarly Barlow 1995; Coumert 2007, 337; Ewig 1998). There is no reason to believe, though, that there was a coherent Trojan origin myth for the Franks extant before the seventh century; we have no evidence to suggest this.³⁰

³⁰ Cf. Coumert (2007, 286–88; 291), *contra* Barlow (1995) and Ewig (1998; 2001). Ewig's view that since the Ravenna Cosmographer refers to a source from c. 500 that knows of a 'Troy' on the Rhine, the Trojan origin of the Franks was known at the time (1998, 14), is not convincing: a Troy on the Rhine need not be Frankish (the city of Colonia Ulpia Traiana was Roman); and even if it were, it need not mean the Franks had Trojan origins (similarly Coumert 2007, 288). Giardina suggests that the Franks did indeed preserve a tradition of having founded a city somewhere on their migration, but that this was Sicambria, not a new Troy (1998, 197–99); I find this equally implausible. The arguments put forth by Barlow and Ewig, that since there were references to Trojans in Gaul and on the Rhine; since the derivation of the name 'Frank' was known in the sixth century; and since Gregory knew of the story of a Pannonian origin, there must therefore have been in the sixth century a composite narrative with *all* these elements, as in Fredegar, do not convince, though they cannot be disproved. We are left, finally, with bits of what occur in Fredegar also occurring in extremely diverse earlier sources; the whole narrative of Trojan origin does not occur anywhere before Fredegar.

There is no warrant for believing in the existence of any ancient tradition (oral or written) that suggests a Trojan origin for the Franks, and is the source for Fredegar. Like the Gothic story presented by Jordanes that is based primarily on written narratives of other peoples, it is certain that the Frankish origin myth derives from written narratives relating to exiled Trojans, with the Roman origin myth being most probably the most significant model. The Frankish origin narrative is also almost certainly a creation from the period after the Franks succeeded the Romans in Gaul, and probably only of the seventh century. As was the case with the Gothic origin narrative of Jordanes, it seems clear that regardless of what might have existed in whatever oral tradition that might have been cultivated by the Franks before their adoption of Latin and literacy, after the establishment of the Frankish kingdom in Gaul, no sufficiently coherent or suitably impressive origin narrative of the Franks survived, and one had to be put together from sources dealing with other peoples (Coumert 2007, 322–23; 334–35).

The existence of different versions of the origin myth, and the fact that isolated elements in it are extant from before Fredegar, although the origin myth itself is unknown to any earlier source, suggest that though the narrative in its different forms originated in a reading of and compilation from diverse written material, by the time of Fredegar, and certainly by the time of the *LHF*, some sort of story of a Trojan past was more widely circulated than either of these texts (Barlow 1995; Coumert 2007, 337–38; Ewig 1998). Moreover, from the nature of the early references to Trojans in Gaul and to the naming of the Franks, it seems likely that these written sources were themselves partly based on oral speculation or reports of some sort, and in turn influenced such informal oral material (cf. Giardina 1998, 177–78; 206). Given that we do not have any extant written source that could

have been a popular repository of the tale, it seems to me more than likely that the myth of Trojan origins, first created out of a reading of Roman history, entered into the popular elite imagination,³¹ and therefore circulated in some oral form (not necessarily as a coherent narrative, but perhaps only as isolated references such as those extant in the earlier written sources regarding the Arvernians), as well as in the various written versions that are extant. Although the story as we encounter it in Fredegar and the *LHF* is undoubtedly ultimately derived from written narratives regarding the Trojans, given the diversity of such tales, it seems possible that whoever came up with the Frankish myth in the first place did so on the basis of written narratives about the Roman Trojan past, combined with some kind of topoi present in aristocratic Frankish/Gallic circles concerning e.g. the origin of the name ‘Frank’, or the Trojan link with Gaul, which need not all have been written.

Whatever form these stories took, though, they were clearly developments of relatively recent history, not any ancient Frankish tradition, and were transformations and interpretations of the various written sources for the history of Troy and its relation to Rome (cf. Coumert 2007, 334–35), which provided a model for the narrative. Unlike the model of the Trojan origin and migration from Troy, the material regarding Troy and Gaul, and the naming of the Franks, is likely to have entered the narrative in a more amorphous form, as the vague early written references we have probably draw on some sort of aristocratic speculations, and seem unlikely to have been used in their extant written form by Fredegar or the *LHF*-author or their immediate sources.³² By the seventh century, someone seeking an origin for the Franks would have had a fairly broad range of material of diverse sorts from

³¹ This view is supported by the many later references to such origins: cf. Coumert (2007, 341–63) for a survey.

³² Similarly Coumert (2007, 378–80), who, while believing that the origins of this myth were in scholarly efforts to recast the past for contemporary purposes, also suggests that the story would have been passed on in informal oral exchanges, and that e.g. Paul the Deacon, who mentions the Trojan origins of the Franks (see chapter four), is likely to have heard the narrative in the course of conversations at court (2007, 379).

which the story as we have it could be cobbled together, from Roman histories (including the *Aeneid*) to casual references to Trojans in Gaul or a Rhenish new Troy. The variations in the story allow us to suggest that in this case, the written tradition of Roman Trojan origins influenced a sense of historical consciousness; this is therefore a case not of oral tradition being written down, but of written material forming the basis of a sense of the past that then enters a discourse beyond that solely of written texts.³³

The Function of the Frankish Distant Past

Rome remained, throughout the early middle ages, an important source of inspiration: it was the fount of religion, of educated culture, of political rhetoric, of the language and medium of law, religion, and administration (cf. e.g. Riché 1995, 153–201; Smith 2005, 28–31; 255–92; for the Carolingian period: McKitterick 2006, 35–61). Asserting that the past of the Franks was comparable to the past of the Romans, therefore, must certainly have been a method of glorifying the Frankish past (Coumert 2007, 306–07; 311; 322). But it is important to note that the Frankish narratives do not attempt to show the Franks as being or becoming ‘Roman’ because of their origins; they are, in fact, clearly distinguished from the Romans in both texts, and equally clearly enemies of the Romans for the periods recorded in both texts (McKitterick 2004a, 386–87; Plassmann 2006, 154–55; 180–82).³⁴ Rome is, moreover,

³³ I am assuming a pattern of development roughly as follows: a) written texts about Rome and Troy providing a model for a narrative of Trojan origins (Rome and its history were still an essential part of the schooling of Latin writers, which is why I believe the origins of Rome would have been more influential than other peoples’ Trojan origins); b) other written texts about Troy also providing a model, both for direct references in Fredegar to Trojan Macedonians, and for a notion that not just Romans, but also other people could have Trojan origins; c) oral and written speculation on the basis of these models about Frankish Trojan origins, which were in turn nourished by d) oral and written speculation about possible relationships between Frankish Trojan origins and references to the relationship between Aedui or Arverni and Rome or Troy, and early explanations regarding the origins of the name of the Franks.

³⁴ In this regard also these two texts seem to differ from Gregory, who appears not to place much value on specifically ethnic, but rather on political, and above all on religious affiliation; it has been suggested that

somewhat diminished in comparison to the Franks, though not by ever being completely defeated and thus removed from Gaul, but primarily because it simply disappears from view.

In the *LHF*, Aeneas, called a *tyrannus*, is never actually said to found Rome; we are only told that he fled to Italy (1). Any cognate relationship between Franks and Romans is never explicitly stressed in the text (Plassmann 2006, 181), and the Franks are clearly seen as different from the Romans. It would seem obvious that asserting a Trojan origin has the purpose of glorifying Frankish origins, and Trojan origins were presumably worth having precisely because the Romans claimed a Trojan past.³⁵ But it is nevertheless the link with Troy, and not the link with Rome, that serves the purposes of glorifying Frankish history; the similarity to the Romans is important, but the relationship that the common origin establishes is less so. The same is true also for Fredegar. Although we are told that Frigas and Aeneas are brothers (II,8), any further relationship between the Franks and the Romans is not mentioned. In fact, after their brief subjugation to Pompey, we are told that the Franks were never conquered by anyone; their freedom and valour is compared not to that of the Romans, but the Macedonians: *Ad ipsum instar et Macedonis, qui ex eadem generatione fuerunt* (II,6: ‘The Macedonians, who had the same origins, were of the same mould’) (Giardina 1998, 185). Notably, the only time we hear of Franks being subjugated in either text, it is by Romans (Fredegar II,6; *LHF* 3 [Franks as tributaries of Romans]), and in both texts the Franks free themselves from Roman domination. One could interpret this as being intended to show the Franks passing the ultimate test, as it were, of being able to assert their freedom

because of his interest in stressing religious and political unity, he tried to dissolve the difference between Romans and Franks within the Frankish kingdom (Goetz 2004, 551–57; Goffart 1988, 212–13; James 1998; cf. also Heinzlmann 1994a). I should note also that even in Fredegar and the *LHF*, Frankishness as a form of specifically ethnic or cultural identity seems not to be especially important: the term indicates a polity, which it is important to distinguish from Rome, and from other polities (cf. Goetz 2003, 322–44; 2004, 557–65).

³⁵ While I would agree that equating Romans with Franks was not the ‘central theme’ of the *LHF* (Gerberding 1987, 30), the fact remains that a Trojan origin myth begins this text; the equation with the Romans was important enough to be included.

against the Romans (cf. Ewig 2001, 45). In the *LHF*, although the Franks do receive their name from a Roman emperor, the Romans are nevertheless clearly their enemies for much of their distant history.³⁶ In neither text do we get a sense (as in Isidore's history) of the Romans being conquered by the Franks in the latter's effort to found their kingdom; the Romans seem to fade from the history of Gaul, rather than being driven out of it. The authors of these two texts do not, therefore, evidence a clearly antagonistic attitude towards the Romans, as does, for instance, Isidore.

Like the narratives of ancient Gothic history, the myth of Frankish Trojan origins serves the purpose of defining the past of the people concerned, and of casting them in a positive light by relating them to and simultaneously setting them apart from the Romans. The significant difference is, of course, that by providing the Trojan origin, consanguinity between Romans and Franks is established, making the Franks literally more akin to the Romans than were the Goths in either of the Gothic histories considered above.³⁷ The Franks are shown to have a history very similar to that of the Romans, thus making them more easily comparable; they are also shown to have a history that is distinct from that of the Romans, and since they have been able, in both texts, to maintain their freedom, this establishes them as praiseworthy even in comparison to Rome. We saw earlier that while for Jordanes, the Goths complement Rome, but must remain subservient, for Isidore the Goths succeed Rome. In the case of Fredegar and the *LHF*, the Franks and Romans are like siblings, of whom one ultimately survives, and rules; the other is not actually conquered, but simply vanishes from

³⁶ The *LHF*-author nevertheless seems to have a more positive attitude to the Romans, something manifest not so much by how they are depicted, but by his critical attitude to the Franks when they revolt (3). One could interpret this, though, as a respect for legitimate authority (here represented by the Romans) rather than a belief in the goodness of Roman domination or the inferiority of the Franks.

³⁷ Cf. Plassmann (2006, 171), who argues that the Trojan origin myth makes the Franks seem superior to other non-Roman peoples of western Europe, and also conferred on them a legitimacy for their rule in a formerly Roman province.

the authors' line of sight. There is no sense of complementarity, but also less stress on direct conflict. While the project of Jordanes was to show the convergence of Gothic and Roman history, the Trojan myth of the Franks shows that Franks and Romans had parallel, but also discrete pasts (Giardina 1998, 192).

The important point in this regard is, however, not just the appropriation of the Roman origin myth as a means of raising the Franks to being parallel with the Romans. What I wish to stress is that at a time in their history when the Franks had established a strong, independent kingdom, and there was no dependence on, and little threat posed by Rome, it was still felt appropriate to provide the Franks with a history directly parallel to that of the Romans: Rome remained the ideal against which others were to be measured. There was no Scandinavian origin of the Franks at this point (though Fredegar certainly knew of the possibility of Scandinavian origins of non-Roman peoples: cf. his narration of the Lombard origin story, discussed in the following chapter); the distant past of a people that the Romans had thought of as barbarian was now conceived of in terms completely analogous to the distant past of the Romans themselves. This shows, I believe, that while a distinction between Roman and Frank was certainly still held to be very important, there was no sense of a barbarian-Roman dichotomy. Nor, however, was there any sense of a need to make the Franks become Roman in any way—whether politically, as in the *Getica*, in which they are subsumed within the empire, or in terms of culture, as in Isidore's Gothic history.

These considerations will need to borne in mind when we go on to examine the nature of vernacular and oral cultures during the ninth and tenth centuries: during this period, the Franks also acquired a Scandinavian past, and apparently also an awareness of a linguistic

kinship with other Germanic-speaking peoples.³⁸ But given that the *LHF* and Fredegar continued to be copied, it would be inappropriate to think that there was, or had earlier been, some sense of distinction, as a barbarian or a Germanic people, that brought the Franks closer to the Goths or Lombards or Saxons than to the Romans. It would be equally incorrect to think of references to or recordings of vernacular traditions in the Carolingian period (from within Frankish territory) dealing with kings of the fourth to the sixth centuries as necessarily indicative of an interest in a specifically—and consciously thus acknowledged—Germanic or barbarian past, with a value somehow opposed to that of the Roman past.³⁹ This is especially the case when we consider the legends regarding the Ostrogothic king Theoderic—stories that might have been valued among the Franks not because he was a great ‘Germanic’ hero, but because he was, according to Fredegar, a great Macedonian king, and thus cognate with the Franks.⁴⁰ The examination of the Trojan origin of the Franks shows, therefore, that at least in the case of the Franks’ sense of historical consciousness, the Roman-barbarian dichotomy breaks down spectacularly: in this case, the barbarian, non-Roman past is in fact a non-barbarian, and very Roman past.

³⁸ Cf. Coumert (2007, 363–78) for a survey; and below, chapter 7.

³⁹ And in this respect it is important to note with Coumert (2007, 378–79) that the Scandinavian origins of the Franks are as based on a reading of texts, and not on any native oral tradition, as the Trojan myth.

⁴⁰ Fredegar’s narratives on Theoderic are in II,56; 57; 59; the Macedonian origin is in II,56; see further chapter 7.

CHAPTER 4:

PAUL THE DEACON AND THE ANCIENT HISTORY OF THE LOMBARDS

The earliest references to Lombards, from the first and second centuries AD, identify them as a Germanic people along the lower Elbe.¹ After this the Lombards do not impinge on Roman consciousness and appear to have had little direct contact with the empire—and are thus absent in written sources—until the middle of the sixth century, when Procopius informs us that the Lombards (whom he identifies as Christian) had been at the borders of the empire in the late fifth century, and were later given parts of Noricum by Justinian and fought with the Romans against the Goths (Dewing, ed. and trans. 1914–28, VI.xiv,9–10; VII.xxxiii,10–12; VII.xxxiv,34; 40). It is difficult to construct a narrative history of the Lombards on the basis of contemporary sources until the end of the sixth century, far later than is the case for the Goths and the Franks.²

Although the Lombards appear to have had a less lengthy history of close contact with Rome by the time they set up an independent post-imperial kingdom than had the Goths

¹ The early sources: Velleius Paterculus (Watt, ed. 1978, II.cvi,2); Tacitus' *Germania* (Ogilvie and Winterbottom, eds. 1975, XL,1); *idem, Annales* (Heubner, ed. 1983, II.xlv,1; XI.xvii,3); Ptolemy ((Stückelberger and Graßhoff, ed. and trans. 2006, II.xi,9). For discussion: Christie (1995, 1–14); Coumert (2007, 145–46); Everett (2003, 54–55); Priester (2004, 13–21).

² Lombard history up to c. 600: Christie (1995, 14–68) [based on archaeology and Paul the Deacon]; Jarnut (1982, 9–26) [essentially a summary of Paul and the *OGL*]; on the evidentiary basis, cf. Everett (2003, 55–56); Halsall (2007, 398–99); Priester (2004, 21–33); Wickham (1981, 28–30).

and Franks before the establishment of their polities, if we can trust Procopius, the Lombards had occupied a Roman province for 40 years before moving into Italy in 568, and had had close contact with the empire for roughly a century; they appear to have had some familiarity already with Christianity, as well as some elements of Roman administrative culture (Christie 1995, 31–68; Everett 2003, 56–65; Jarnut 1982, 30–32; Wickham 1981, 29–30).

The *Liber Pontificalis* reports that the Lombards were invited by Narses to enter and settle in Italy in the aftermath of the Gothic wars (Duchesne, ed. and trans. 1886–92, 63,3). This is repeated by a number of later sources, but its reliability, and the conditions of the settlement, are unclear. Whether or not there was an invitation, the Lombards did enter Italy; there certainly does not seem to have been any serious imperial effort to keep them out.³ A kingdom had been firmly established by 605, and was to last until the conquest of Lombard Italy by Charlemagne in 774; Italy remained, though, a region in which the empire retained an interest, and parts of Italy remained under imperial rule for the whole of this period.⁴

The only narrative history of the Lombards is Paul the Deacon's *Historia Langobardorum* (HL), written after the demise of the Lombard kingdom. There are extant also brief accounts of the origins of the Lombards in the Fredegar chronicle, and in a text known as the *Origo gentis Langobardorum* (OGL), of which the latter is considered a

³ For the later sources: Everett (2003, 65–67); the *Liber Pontificalis* is the earliest to record an invitation by Narses, but this section of the work was probably compiled in the 620s (cf. Davis, trans. 2000, xiii). On the early period of Lombard Italy, see Christie (1995, 73–91); Jarnut (1982, 33–46); Priester (2004, 34–58); Wickham (1981, 30–34).

⁴ For the political history of Lombard Italy: Christie (1995, 91–108) [with special attention to material culture]; Delogu (1995); Jarnut (1982); Priester (2004, 59–84); Wickham (1981, 31–47). On the culture of Lombard Italy: Christie (1995, 183–205); Everett (2003, 84–99); Jarnut (1982, 125–33); Priester (2004, 92–196). On social and economic conditions, the best work remains Wickham (1981), which, however, covers the period up to 1000, after the end of the Lombard kingdom. On the nature of the initial settlement and the absorption of Roman norms within the Lombard kingdom: Delogu (2004); Everett (2003, 61–79; 163–96); Goffart (1980, 176–205); Pohl (2001); Wickham (1981, 115–36); Wickham (2005, 115–20).

potentially important source for Paul's history.⁵ In this chapter, I discuss Paul's account of Lombard origins and some of his legendary stories, with a view to establishing the nature of any putative oral tradition on which he might have drawn to compose these narratives. I shall argue that while Paul undoubtedly drew on oral material of some sort, there is no justification for believing he had access to a formal oral tradition necessarily in epics or lays, and certainly no reason to believe that there was a Lombard oral tradition in a Germanic language that survived up to Paul's time. I suggest further that Paul treated his sources as being of equal value, regardless of whether they were oral or written; he varied his writing style depending on the nature of the material to be narrated, but the heightened tone of some of his stories cannot be traced back directly to vernacular epics or lays. Following my analysis of the legendary material, I shall examine Paul's treatment of religious and ethnic difference between Catholics and Arians or pagans, and between Romans and Lombards. I shall show that Paul took pains to diminish any sense of conflict or even real difference; Lombards and Romans under Lombard rule are treated without differentiation from Authari's reign onwards. I conclude with some remarks on the function of the distant past in Paul's history, and how it compares to the histories of the Goths and Franks examined above.

Paul the Deacon and his *Historia Langobardorum*

Paul was probably born in the 720s in Friuli, and appears to have been associated with the royal court at Pavia for much of his life. By the time of his first surviving work from 763 (a poem on the ages of the world), he was a deacon at Monte Cassino, where he remained until his death in the 790s. He remained close to the Lombard royal family, and

⁵ On the *OGL* and Fredegar's account of Lombard history, as well as other sources between Procopius and the mid-seventh century: Coumert (2007, 143–76).

after the fall of the kingdom to Charlemagne, the court of Benevento was his patron for at least some of his literary production. Paul's brother had been imprisoned by Charlemagne, and Paul spent the years 781–85 at the Frankish court, initially at least in an effort to plead on his brother's behalf. Apart from his Lombard history, he also wrote a *Historia Romana*, a version of Eutropius's *Breviarum* which was updated to bring it up to the mid-sixth century; a history of the bishops of Metz; some poems; and editions of philosophical and theological works of other writers.⁶

The *Romana* was written for the duchess Adalperga of Benevento; apart from adding six original books on Italian history from 368 onwards (when Eutropius ends), it also makes reference to Christian history even in the period dealt with by Eutropius, inserting material on Christ himself and on Peter and Paul. Extracts from Orosius are included, which, even if not explicitly Christian in content, help to lend Paul's work a more Christian view of historical progress. A notable feature of this text is the prominence given to invasions of Italy by various barbarian groups from the fifth century onwards; the history of the empire as such takes second place to the history of Italy. The *Romana* also includes, in its latter parts, a number of narratives of papal history. As a whole, the work is rather more original than Jordanes's *Romana*, and is an earlier example of the authorial intention that we shall encounter more strongly in the *HL*.⁷

It is not known for whom the *HL* was composed, but it seems likely that it, like the *Romana*, was intended for an audience of Lombard nobility, possibly at Benevento.

⁶ On Paul's biography and other works: Bullough (1991, 98–100); Coumert (2007, 215–16); Goffart (1988, 333–47); McKitterick (2004b, 66–70); Mortensen (1991, 73–76); Plassmann (2006, 191–200). Specifically on the *Gesta episcoporum Mettensium*: Goffart (1986).

⁷ On the *Romana*: Goffart (1988, 347–70), which is the basis of the summary presented here; on the manuscript contexts and reception of the *Romana*: Kretschmer (2007). For a brief analysis of Paul's other works, see Goffart (1988, 370–78).

McKitterick has argued (2004b, 60–83) that the *HL* was composed for a Frankish audience, and intended as a legitimization of Frankish rule in Italy (this argument is accepted by Plassmann 2006, 239–42), because Paul’s concept of a good king is in her mind modelled on Charlemagne, and because of widespread reception of his work in ninth-century Francia (to this Plassmann adds the view that Paul was actively trying to downplay any identity-forming influences that might have existed in the Lombard traditions he reported, and would only have done so if he were writing in support of the Franks). It seems to me that Paul’s concept of a good king could be derived from a reading of Bede or Gregory of Tours; and the fact that his work was copied in Francia does not mean it was written for a Frankish audience. Furthermore, as Coumert points out, the *Historia Langobardorum codicis Gothani*, written in the first decade of the ninth century at the Frankish court, seems completely ignorant of Paul, which argues against his having written specifically for a Frankish audience (Cournert 2007, 219; cf. 251–61 for a fuller discussion of this text). Paul certainly does not come across as a panegyrist for the Lombard kings—unlike, for example, Isidore with relation to the Visigothic monarchs—but he does present a more positive image of the Lombards than he could have, if he intended solely to justify Frankish rule over them; and there is too little in his text to support an unequivocal pro-Frankish reading. It must be conceded, though, that Paul’s purpose and audience are far from easy to discern (similarly Cournert 2007, 219).

The *HL* comprises six books of varied length, beginning with a geographical description of Scandinavia and the origins there of the Lombards, and ending with Liutprand in the 740s. The narrative is not completely homogeneous in terms of style, with some sections, especially in the first two books, written almost in the manner of an epic narrative, and the second half of the work frequently adopting a very concise, annalistic style. Even in

the early books, though, a number of chapters are brief accounts of political events; these are interspersed with longer, very detailed narratives of single incidents (for example, a wooing; a murder; an encounter between two kings).⁸ Paul's text also—unlike any of the other histories we have considered so far—includes verse, which is not strictly narrative in nature, and is apparently inserted for a heightening of tone appropriate to religious subjects.⁹ Paul would appear to have three registers of historical narration: a straightforward, often annalistic style for most events; a more epic style of prose (often including considerable alliteration) for legendary narratives; and verse for religious topics of special importance.

The first book, after describing northern Europe, Scandinavia, and the people who live there (1–6) tells us that the Lombards, initially called Winnili, left Scandinavia and started moving south (7). We are told how they get their later name of *Longobardi* (8–9), and of migrations under various kings until they reach Pannonia by the end of the book. At this point, they are ruled by Alboin, who has just killed the Gepid king Cunimund and married his daughter (I,27). Book II opens with Alboin providing support to Narses in Italy, and as a whole presents a narrative of the Lombard entry into and settlement within Italy under Alboin, as well as a geographical description of the land. The book ends with Alboin's death by the plotting of his wife (II,28), which is followed by a period of political chaos and disunity among the Lombards (II, 29–32). Book III follows the history of the Lombard

⁸ Some randomly chosen examples: II,6 tells of the migration of 20,000 Saxon men to Italy and their replacement in their homeland by Sueves; II,26 narrates Alboin's conquest of all of northern Italy, and tells us that his contingent was multi-ethnic; III,3 tells the story of a war between Lombards, Franks and Burgundians, in which the Lombards slaughter many Burgundians and take a huge booty. Despite the relatively large scale of events related, these chapters are all quite short, each less than half a printed page in the MGH edition. In contrast, II,28, telling the story of Alboin's death by the plotting of his wife; III,12, which tells of a miraculous discovery of treasure at the imperial court; and III,30 which tells the story of Authari's journey to Bavaria and his betrothal to and interaction with his future wife, all relate single, small-scale events, but take up a good deal more space, include dialogue, and also some discussion of character and motivation. Some of these passages will be discussed in detail below.

⁹ The verse passages are: I,26 [on Benedict of Nursia]; II,13 [on St Martin]; III,19 [on Droctulf]; VI,15 [on Ceodal/Cædwalla].

duchies in the late sixth century, and the interactions between the Lombards and their various neighbours (Bavarians, Franks, Saxons). As before, shorter chapters covering more or less lengthy processes are interspersed with detailed narratives of individual and relatively brief events, notably a miracle in Constantinople under Tiberius (III,12), Authari's wooing of Theudelinda (III,30), and a story about an animal appearing from the Frankish king Guntram's mouth (III,24). Book III ends with the death of Authari, and the marriage of Theudelinda to Agilulf; both incidents are reported in some detail (III,34–35). The early part of Book IV treats often of the Christian works of Theudelinda and cites her correspondence with pope Gregory; later parts of the book describe wars with Avars, and provide the story of how Paul's ancestor Lopichis entered Italy (IV,37), in what seems to be some sort of remembered oral family history. It also tells us of the deeds of Rothari, the king who promulgated the first written Lombard laws (IV,42), and ends with the accession of Grimoald in 662. Book IV has 51 chapters; we reach Agilulf's death (616) only in chapter 41, with the last ten chapters rushing through almost half a century. In comparison, books I,12 to IV,41 cover roughly 70 years. The greater part of book V is on the reign of Grimoald; by the end of the book, we have advanced another 50 years to the beginning of the seventh century, of which roughly the first half is dealt with in the sixth and final book, in which the reign of Liutprand is related in some detail.

We see that Paul expends considerably more space on the earliest period of Lombard history, just before the Lombards entered Italy and the first decades of their rule there; after the reign of Agilulf (the first Catholic Lombard king, though Paul is not explicit in stating this), things move along much faster, and while individual kings (principally Grimoald and Liutprand) receive considerable space, Paul seems to have been more interested in, or

informed about, the distant past, and the very recent past (the reign of Liutprand) that encompassed his own infancy and childhood, than most of the seventh century. Perhaps unsurprisingly, there is also more legendary matter in the sections on the Lombards up to the reign of Agilulf, with narratives such as those of Alboin and Turisind (I,24) and his death (II,28), or Authari's wooing of Theudelinda (III,30), all of which appear to be more concerned with characters and colourful stories than with dry political history, which dominates books V and VI.¹⁰

Lombard Oral Tradition in the *Historia Langobardorum*

The Lombards and Scandinavia

Like Jordanes, Paul has often been seen as a bearer of an ancient oral tradition, and like Jordanes, although we can identify sources for much of his material, there are no known sources for significant portions of his narrative.¹¹ Paul gives the Lombards a Scandinavian origin, as Jordanes did for the Goths; unlike Jordanes, he is not an innovator in this respect, as both the *OGL* and Fredegar (III,65) also provide the Lombards with origins in Scandinavia.

The *OGL*, 89 lines in Bethmann and Waitz's edition, covers very concisely the period from the origins of the Lombards to the reign of Grimoald: roughly the same period that Paul narrates in about 100 pages in the same edition. As is the case with Paul, the bulk of the text is concerned with the earlier part of Lombard history, with only 14 lines dealing with the

¹⁰ On the structure of the work, cf. Bullough (1991, 101–03); Goffart (1988, 378–424, esp. 379; 381–82; 384; 388); Mortensen (1991, 77).

¹¹ For Paul as bearer of oral tradition, see e.g. the literary historian Gschwantler (1976; 1979) and the historians Bullough (1991); and Pohl (2000b). Paul's known written sources, include, among others, the *OGL*, the histories of Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, Secundus of Trento (no longer extant), and Bede; Pliny's *Natural History*; Isidore's chronicle and *Etymologies*; the *Liber pontificalis*; and letters of Gregory the Great. On the written sources, cf. Bethmann and Waitz (eds 1878b, 25–27); Coumert (2007, 220–40); Delogu (2004, 124–26); Goffart (1988, 370–73; 380–85); Mortensen (1991, 77–80); Plassmann (2006, 192–94).

period after Authari. The *OGI* is attached to three manuscripts of Rothari's Edict of 643, and is thought to date from the same period, but all manuscript witnesses are actually from the eighth century or later, and all manuscripts that bring the Edict and the *OGI* together date from after the end of the Lombard kingdom. The oldest manuscript witness to the Scandinavian legend of the Lombards is therefore Fredegar, attested in manuscripts from around 700 (Coumert 2007, 157; 203–05). It is not especially surprising to find a story about the Lombards in Fredegar: there had been many wars and treaties between Franks and Lombards from the late sixth century onwards, and the Lombards were his immediate neighbours to the east of Burgundy.¹²

All three sources share a few common elements: the Lombards came from Scandinavia, which is in the north; they were named Lombards because the women used their long hair to pretend to be bearded men and thus scare their enemies; this name is given them by Wodan (Godan in the *OGI*). There is, however, a progressive expansion in the three accounts, from Fredegar to Paul. Fredegar specifies where Scandinavia is (*que est inter Danuvium et mare Ocianum* 'which is between the Danube and the Ocean'), and tells us that it was just before a battle with the Huns that the Lombards got their name. It is perhaps worth noting that the naming is reported to us in indirect speech: *Fertur desuper uterque falangiae vox dixisse: 'Haec sunt Langobardi', quod ab his gentibus fertur eorum deo fuisse locutum, quem fanatici nominant Wodano* ('It is said that a voice spoke from above the two phalanxes: "These are Lombards"; it is said by those peoples that this was spoken by their

¹² Fredegar (IV,45), and earlier Gregory (*Hist.* VI,42), speak of Lombards being tributaries of the Franks; the money would have gone through Burgundy, presumably along with messengers, from whom Fredegar might have got some of his information. Paul, not surprisingly, does not mention tribute, only speaking of peace being made and renewed (*HL* III,17; IV,40).

own god, whom they, in a pagan fashion, call Wodan').¹³ Immediately after this, the Lombards overpower the Huns, enter Pannonia, and we are told that Narses invited them, under Alboin, into Italy.

The *OGI*'s narrative of Scandinavian origins and the naming of the Lombards (all of which is in chapter 1, which is 20 lines long) is different in a number of respects. It says of Scandinavia that it is an island in the north.¹⁴ We are also told what the Lombards were called before they became Lombards: *Winniles*. They are said to be a *gens parua*, and we are given the name of a matriarch, Gambara, who rules with her sons Ybor and Agio. While Fredegar tells us that the Lombards left Scandinavia (III,65) before his account of the battle fought against the Huns and their acquisition of their name, in the *OGI*, it appears that the battle—in this text against Vandals, not Huns—takes place in Scandinavia itself.

Most significantly, the naming of the Lombards occurs not just by means of a voice 'said to be' that of Wodan, but by a rather more involved process:

Tunc Ambri et Assi, hoc est duces Wandalorum, rogaverunt Godan, ut daret eis super Winniles victoriam. Respondit Godan dicens: 'Quos sol surgente antea videro, ipsis dabo victoriam'. Eo tempore Gambara cum duobus filiis suis, id est Ybor et Agio, qui principes erant super Winniles, rogaverunt Fream, uxorem Godam, ut ad Winniles esset propitia. Tunc Frea dedit consilium, ut sol surgente¹⁵ venirent Winniles et mulieres eorum crines solutae circa faciem in similitudinem barbae et cum viris suis venirent. Tunc luciscente sol dum surgeret, giravit Frea, uxor Godan, lectum ubi recumbebat vir eius, et fecit faciem eius contra orientem, et excitavit eum. Et ille aspiciens vidit Winniles et mulieres ipsorum habentes crines solutas circa faciem; et ait: 'Qui sunt isti longibarbae'? Et dixit Frea ad Godan: 'Sicut

¹³ *fanatice* is derived from *fanum*, which means (in Christian Latin) a pagan temple; *fanatice* also means 'madly', which is perhaps suggestive, given that Adam of Bremen tells us that Wodan means madness (Schmiedler and Trillmich, ed. and trans. 1968, IV,26: *Wodan, id est furor*). Wodan is equivalent to the Icelandic Óðinn; the name derives from a Germanic root (cf. Gothic *wōps*; Old Norse *óðr*; modern German *Wut* and *wütend*), and the meanings of the various Germanic reflexes of this include 'fury', 'possessed by demons', 'mad' or 'frantic' (cf. Green 1998, 79–80; Cleasby and Vigfusson 1957, s.v.). It seems unlikely that any of these connotations were known to Fredegar. Further discussion of Óðinn/Wodan is below at n. 19.

¹⁴ Note that this location of the Scandinavian homeland, shared with Jordanes and Paul and ultimately derived circuitously from ancient sources (Pliny and Ptolemy; cf. above, p. 28, n. 18; below, p. 112), has no relation to independently verifiable historical reality with regard either to the Goths or the Lombards; Fredegar's location of the Lombard homeland between the Danube and the Ocean, however, seems to accord more with fact, if we disregard the name he gives this region, and if we can interpret the Ocean as meaning the Baltic.

¹⁵ One of the manuscripts has the correct *sole surgente*.

dedisti nomen, da illis et victoriam'. Et dedit eis victoriam, ut ubi visum esset vindicarent se et victoriam haberent. Ab illo tempore Winnilis Langobardi vocati sunt.

Then Ambri and Assi, that is, the leaders of the Vandals, requested Godan that he grant them victory over the Winniles. In response, Godan said: 'I will give victory to those whom I see first at sunrise'. At the [same] time Gambara and her two sons, that is Ybor and Agio, who were the leaders of the Winniles, requested Frea, the wife of Godan, that she be favourable to the Winniles. Then Frea instructed them that at sunrise the Winniles should come, and their women should loosen their hair around their faces in the manner of a beard and come with their men. In the dawn light as the sun rose, Frea, the wife of Godan, turned the bed on which her husband lay, so that his face was towards the east, and woke him, and he, looking out, saw the Winniles and their women with their loosened hair around their faces, and said: 'Who are these long-beards?' And Frea said to Godan: 'Just as you have given a name, give them victory as well'. And he gave them victory, that they could avenge themselves as they saw fit and achieve victory. From that time the Winniles have been called Langobardi.

It is obvious that while Fredegar knew the basic elements of the tale, he either had no access to the full story, or suppressed it. The further history of the Lombards is greatly truncated in Fredegar: they are in Pannonia, and then in Italy, almost immediately; he tells us in a sentence about Alboin's death, and in a few lines about the death of his wife. The *OGL*, in contrast, takes the Lombards through Anthaib, Bainaib and Burgundaib (2)—unknown elsewhere except in Paul's account—to Rugiland (3–4), before they arrive in Pannonia in chapter 5. Like Fredegar, it passes over Alboin's death briefly; the *OGL* does, however, present a fairly detailed narrative of Rosamund's death (5).

Paul's account accords in essence with that of the *OGL* rather than with Fredegar, but adds a number of elements. He begins his work with a description of Germania (*HL* 1), where he locates a number of peoples who eventually conquered much of Europe; these include the Goths, Vandals, Rugi, Herules and Turcilingi (who are all qualified as 'barbarian' peoples). Of the Winniles, Paul says that they originated in Scandinavia (1), which he then goes on to describe, citing Pliny for authority (2). His third chapter introduces us very briefly to Ibor and Aio, and their mother Gambara, before he digresses again to tell us about the miracle of the Seven Sleepers (4), whom he locates somewhere in the cold north, and who

are, according to him, both Roman and Christian, but venerated by the barbarian nations; about the Scritobini and the length of the day in northern regions (5); and about Charybdis (6), before returning to the Winniles. He tells us that they left Scandinavia and came to Scoringia (7), and it is here that they must do battle with the Vandals. The story of the name-giving is almost exactly the same as in the *OGL*, but is prefaced by Paul's dismissive remark: *refert hoc loco antiquitas ridiculam fabulam* (8: 'at this point, the ancient source provides a ridiculous fable').¹⁶ His disdain is repeated at the end of the story: *Haec risui digna sunt et pro nihil habenda. Victoria enim non potestati est adtributa hominum, sed de caelo potius ministratur* (8: 'These things are worthy only of laughter and should be given no credence; for victory is not to be attributed to the power of men, but rather is brought about from heaven'). He then tells us that the name is to be attributed not to long-haired women, but to the long beards of the ancient Winniles, and explains that 'lang' means long and 'bart' means beard in their language (9: *nam iuxta illorum linguam 'lang' longam, 'bart' barbam significat*; note that he uses the present tense). He says, furthermore, that Wotan is the same as the Mercury of the Romans, and *ab universis Germaniae gentibus ut deus adoratur; qui non circa haec tempora, sed longe antea, nec in Germania, sed in Graecia fuisse perhibetur* (9: 'is worshipped as a god by all the peoples of Germania; but he is said to have been not in these times, but long before, and not in Germany but in Greece').

Before examining Paul's account of the rest of the Lombard migration, it is appropriate to discuss briefly the sources for the Scandinavian origin myth. The location in a place called Scandinavia is itself certainly derived from written works, and quite possibly from Jordanes, though we have no definite way of knowing if the *OGL*-author or Fredegar

¹⁶ *Antiquitas* is an ambiguous word, and says nothing about the nature of the ancient source. In this case, though, it seems most likely that the reference is to the *OGL*.

knew Jordanes.¹⁷ But there are absolutely no sources before the *OGL* for the names of Gambara and her sons, and for the exact story of the naming of the Lombards as provided in these narratives. Moreover, while Jonas of Bobbio, writing in the first half of the seventh century, does mention a Wodan among the Sueves (Krusch, ed. 1902, I.xxvii,53),¹⁸ he does not mention Wodan's wife, who is not named in any other written source of this period or before;¹⁹ the name must come from some oral source (Coumert 2007, 171; 176).²⁰ There must therefore have been some sort of knowledge in the first half of the seventh century, most probably orally transmitted, containing a narrative relating to the naming of the Lombards and the names of Gambara, Ibor and Agio, and associating them with pagan gods. It is impossible to know how old any such material might have been. There is no warrant to connect the story of the naming with a migration from Scandinavia; there is no evidence for an oral tradition of Scandinavian origins (Coumert 2007, 178–96, esp. 192–93). It seems reasonable to conclude, following Coumert, that the *OGL*'s story of Lombard origins is a

¹⁷ Note, though, that both Jordanes and the *OGL* identify Scandinavia as an island.

¹⁸ Note that both Tacitus and Ptolemy (cited at n. 1) associate Lombards with Sueves.

¹⁹ Wodan is attested in a number of sources as a god of speakers of Germanic languages (Old English and Old Saxon: *Woden*; Old High German: *Wutan*; *Wuotan*; Old Norse: *Oðinn*), but the mentions of him in Jonas, the *OGL* and Fredegar are the earliest that are extant. From Old Norse sources we know that he is the god of war, and grants victory to warriors: in the early middle ages, he occurs in this role only in the Lombard narratives. Frea appears to correspond (in terms of the kind of actions attributed to her as well as the name and role as Wodan's wife) to the Old Norse Frigg, Oðinn's wife; once more, such a figure is first mentioned in the Lombard narratives. There is therefore some relation between ancient Lombard mythology and that of other Germanic-speaking peoples. This does not, however, justify interpreting the Lombard sources with the help of thirteenth-century Norse texts; even the latter are certainly not some sort of 'pure' heathen material, seeing that they were recorded in every case several centuries after the conversion of Scandinavia to Christianity, and the adoption of a significant amount of Latin learning (the possibility that Scandinavian monks knew Paul cannot be excluded). On Wodan/Oðinn and Frea/Frigg, see Orchard (1997, 119–21; 272–77); Simek (1995, 109–11; 114–16; 302–16; 480–81).

²⁰ On Jonas, cf. Coumert (2007, 167–71). Although Procopius thinks Lombards were Christian at the end of the fifth century, Gregory the Great speaks of specifically Lombard pagan rites (de Vogüé, ed. 1978–80, III,27–28). For discussion of the religion of the early Lombards and the relevant sources: Coumert (2007, 171–75; 232–37); Everett (2003, 59–65); Fanning (1981); Pohl (2000a). As is immediately clear from the vast range of material presented by Filotas (2005), practices condemned as pagan by ecclesiastics were nevertheless not uncommon among people formally Christian for several centuries after the conversion; the reference to pagan practices need not mean that the Lombards were not (nominally) Christian. See further the discussion below at pp. 128–32.

composite of oral material that probably provided the names of Gambara and her sons, and Wodan and Frea, and the story about how the Lombard name was given; and written narratives—possibly including those of Jordanes and Procopius—regarding peoples migrating from the north (Coumert 2007, 192–96).

With the exception of the story about Lamissio (*HL* 15–18), Paul’s additions to the Lombard origin narrative up to their arrival in Rugiland, at the borders of Rome, can be traced to written sources.²¹ The etymology of the Lombard name itself corresponds both to what we can deduce about Langobardic from our knowledge of other Germanic languages, and to Isidore’s explanation for the name (*Etym.* IX.ii,95)—though it is perhaps important that Paul appears to present the etymology as if he knows the Lombard language, not as something derived from Isidore. With regard to this part of Lombard ancient history, therefore, there is nothing in any of Paul’s expansions to the narrative of the *OGL* to point to his access to oral sources in the late eighth century that were independent of the *OGL*. The Lombards are unlikely to have used any native language of theirs for very long after having entered Italy; certainly by Paul’s time there is no evidence for widespread use of any Germanic vernacular in Lombard Italy.²² This would suggest that any ancient narratives in Langobardic would not have survived, and any oral narratives of Paul’s day would not have been independent of extant written versions in Latin. The narrative presented by Paul would have been known, but the source in his time was probably not any independent oral tradition; there is no evidence for any oral matter regarding the migration out of Scandinavia in Paul’s

²¹ Coumert (2007, 226–36) identifies as possible sources Aethicus Itser, Caesar, Florus, Jordanes, Isidore, Pliny, Pomponius Mela, the *Liber monstrorum*, Martial, Orosius, and Tacitus. With the exception of the story of the Cynocephali (I,11), the material from these sources does not seem to be presented as history of the Lombards, but is inserted in the form of digressions about other peoples. There is no source for the Scritobini (I,5), who seem to be a composite of barbarian stereotypes; they too seem to have no relation to the Lombard story.

²² On the question of the survival of the Lombard Germanic vernacular, see the discussion in Everett (2003, 100–29).

time (Coumert 2007, 238–40), and if there were orally circulating stories, they probably derived from the Latin *OGL*.

Paul does, however, expand on certain elements of early Lombard history with narratives that do not have parallels elsewhere: after telling us how the Lombards receive their name, he has a long narrative of their progress into Italy, in the course of which they encounter Amazons (I,15), Bulgarians (I,16–17), Herules (I,20) and Gepids (I,21–24; 27). While the Amazons are clearly taken from literary sources, they are associated with a narrative about king Lamissio and his birth that has no precedent (he is named in the *OGL* [2], but no narrative is given) (Goffart 1988, 379–80; 385). The battle with the Herules is mentioned briefly in the *OGL* (4), but Paul, unlike the *OGL*, tells us its cause.²³ Finally, while the battles with the Gepids are mentioned in the *OGL*, Paul adds a number of details regarding Alboin and Turisind, the Gepid king; in his narratives about Alboin, as in his story on Rumetrude and the Herule prince, Paul lays stress on personal characteristics and their role in political events. In the following section, I shall focus on the stories about Alboin as an illustration of the status of potentially oral-derived narratives in Paul's work.

Legendary Narratives in Paul's History

As noted above, the history of the Lombards under Alboin takes up almost all of book II, and most of it is narrated in a matter-of-fact style, without too much detail about individual incidents. Three elements of the narratives about Alboin stand out, however: his acquisition of Turismod's arms; his fashioning of a cup out of Cunimund's skull; and his death. Towards the end of book I (23), we learn that the Lombards, under their prince Alboin, win a famous victory over the Gepids, in which the Gepid prince Turismod is killed by

²³ The Lombard princess Rumetrude sends word to invite a Herule prince for a drink; when she sets eyes on his small stature, she mocks him, and he responds in kind. She dissimulates her fury, invites him to sit, and has him killed, thus instigating war. This story is not extant elsewhere.

Alboin. Following this, the Lombards suggest to Alboin's father Audoin that his son be made his companion at table (*in convivio comes esset*).

Quibus Audoin respondit, se hoc facere minime posse, ne ritum gentis infringeret. 'Scitis' inquit 'non esse apud nos consuetudinem, ut regis cum patre filius prandeat, nisi prius a rege gentis exterae arma suscipiat'.

To this Audoin responded that he certainly could not do it, as it would go against the rite of the people. 'You know', he said, 'that it is not our custom that the king's son should eat with his father unless he first receives the weapons of a king of a foreign people'.

In the next chapter, Alboin sets out to remedy his deficiency: he goes to Turisind, Turismod's father, and explains his case. The Gepid king invites Alboin to sit at his side, where his son used to sit; but he cannot contain his grief (I,24); incited by the king's anguish, another of his sons begins to provoke the Lombards with insults (*Langobardos iniuriis lacessere coepit*); the Lombards respond in kind, and a battle almost ensues.²⁴ But Turisind intervenes:

Tunc rex a mensa prosiliens, sese in medium obiecit suosque ab ira belloque conpescuit, interminans primitus eum puniri, qui primus pugnam commisisset; non esse victoriam Deo placitam, dicens, cum quis in domo propria hospitem perimit. Sic denique iurgio conpresso, iam deinceps laetis animis convivium peragunt. Sumensque Turisindus arma Turismodi filii sui, ea Alboin tradidit, eumque cum pace incolumem ad patris regnum remisit.²⁵

Then the king, jumping up from the table, interposed himself and restrained his men from anger and war, threatening to punish first the one who began a fight. He said that a victory is not pleasing to God when anyone kills a guest in his own home. With the quarrel having been thus suppressed, they then went back to the feast in good spirits. Turisind took the arms of Turismod, his son, and gave them to Alboin, and sent him back to his father's kingdom in peace and unhurt.

Having received the arms, Alboin is made his father's table-companion; he—and no less Turisind—are praised by all: *Mirantur qui aderant et laudant audaciam Alboin, nec minus attollunt laudibus Turisindi maximam fidem* ('Those present were amazed and praised Alboin's audacity; no less did they praise the great good faith of Turisind').²⁶

²⁴ Flying of the sort that ensues here is a common feature in Germanic, but also in many other literatures (cf. below, p. 144, n. 13).

²⁵ Note the alliterative nature of this passage, which is probably an indication that Paul was aiming for a more elevated style than in the bulk of his history, which is presented in a much plainer manner.

²⁶ On the story of Alboin and Turisind, see (albeit with some caution) the studies of Gschwantler (1975) and Wagner (1982).

After two chapters extolling Justinian (25) and Benedict of Nursia (26); we return to Alboin (27), and are told of Audoin's death and Alboin's accession to kingship. Turisind has died too, and Cunimund is now Gepid king; he desires war against the Lombards to avenge old insults (*vindicare veteres Gepidorum iniurias cupiens*). Alboin leads his Lombards to victory, and we are now given an important detail about the aftermath of the battle:

In eo proelio Alboin Cunimundum occidit, caputque illius sublatum, ad bibendum ex eo poculum fecit. Quod genus poculi apud eos 'scala' dicitur, lingua vero Latina patera vocatur. Cuius filiam nomine Rosimundam cum magna simul multitudine diversi sexus et aetatis duxit captivam; quam, quia Chlotsuinda obierat, in suam, ut post patuit, perniciem, duxit uxorem [...] Alboin vero ita praeclarum longe lateque nomen percerebuit, ut hactenus etiam tam apud Baioariorum gentem quamque et Saxonum, sed et alios eiusdem linguae homines eius liberalitas et gloria bellorum felicitas et virtus in eorum carminibus celebretur.

In that battle Alboin killed Cunimund, and having taken off his head, he had a drinking-chalice made of it. This type of cup is called a 'scala' among the Lombards, but in the Latin language it is called a 'patera'. Alboin took Cunimund's daughter Rosamund captive, along with a great multitude of people of both sexes and all ages, and since Clotsind [Alboin's first wife] had died, he took her to wife, causing his own doom, as later became apparent [...] Alboin had a truly great reputation far and wide, to the extent that among both the Bavarians and the Saxons, and even other men of the same tongue, his generosity and glory, and his skill and courage in war, is celebrated in their songs (I,27).

We should note here that Paul explicitly draws attention to the variance between the language of the Lombards of Alboin's time, who were presumably the ones who would have used the word *scala*, and the speech of his own period, when Latin was the appropriate language for the telling of Lombard history, and when at least some members of the audience might not know what a *scala* was. Although Paul could hardly have viewed the fashioning of a skull-cup out of an enemy's head as good Christian etiquette, if not exactly commending Alboin, he certainly does not censure him, and tells us that Alboin was greatly praised—and not just among the Lombards—and well-known for qualities that appear to have been especially prized: generosity, courage, and skill in battle. This praise, we are told, occurs in songs—an explicit reference to oral tradition, which, if we are to believe Paul, has lasted for about two centuries into his own time (*celebrare* is in the present tense). The songs are not, however,

those of the Lombards, but of the Bavarians and Saxons and others of the same languages, to which group the Lombards do not appear to belong. Paul claims here to be aware of oral material in the vernacular celebrating Alboin, but he does not claim to know oral or vernacular material among the Lombards that commemorates Alboin.

The story of the skull-cup is an important one, though it does not necessarily seem so when we first encounter it—and the way in which it is woven into the narrative is, indeed, a testament to Paul's skill as a storyteller. This narrative comes at the end of the first book of Paul's history, which begins with the story of the origin of the Lombards and of their name, and ends with Alboin, recently become king, being praised—but with a hint of foreboding, for we are told that his marriage to Rosamund would kill him. The second book follows Alboin and his Lombards again, as they fight against neighbouring peoples, are led into Italy by Alboin, and gradually subjugate all of northern Italy. Close to the end of the second book, we are told (at some length) of how Alboin dies:

Qui rex postquam in Italia tres annos et sex menses regnavit, insidiis suae coniugis interemptus est. Causa autem interfectionis eius fuit. Cum in convivio ultra quam oportuerat apud Veronam laetus resederet, cum poculo quod de capite Cunimundi Regis sui soceris fecerat reginae ad bibendum vinum dari praecepit atque eam ut cum patre suo laetanter biberet invitavit. Hoc ne cui videatur impossibile, veritatem in Christo loquor: ego hoc poculum vidi in quodam die festo Ratchis principem ut illud convivis suis ostentaret manu tenentem. Igitur Rosemunda ubi rem animadvertit, altum concipiens in corde dolorem, quem conpscere non valens, mox in mariti necem patris funus vindicatura exarsit, consiliumque mox cum Helmechis, qui Regis scilpor, hoc est armiger, et conlactaneus erat, ut regem interficeret, iniit. Qui reginae persuasit, ut ipsa Peredeo, qui erat vir fortissimus, in hoc consilium adsciret. Peredeo cum reginae suadenti tanti nefas consensum adhibere nollet, illa se noctu in lectulo suae vestiariae, cum qua Peredeo stupri consuetudinem habebat, supposuit; ubi Peredeo rem nescius veniens, cum regina concubuit. Cumque illa patrato iam scelere ab eo quaereret, quam se esse existimaret, et ipse nomen suae amicae, quam esse putabat, nominasset, regina subiunxit: 'Nequaquam ut putas, sed ego Rosemunda sum', inquit. 'Certe nunc talem rem, Peredeo, perpetrata habes, ut aut tu Alboin interficies, aut ipse te suo gladio extinguet'. Tunc ille intellexit malum quod fecit, et qui sponte noluerat, tali modo in regis necem coactus adsensit. Tunc Rosemunda, dum se Alboin in meridie sopori dedisset, magnum in palatio silentium fieri praecipiens, omnia alia arma subtrahens, spatham illius ad lectuli caput, ne tolli aut evaginari posit, fortiter conligavit, et iuxta consilium Peredeo Helmechis interfectorem omni bestia crudelior introduxit. Alboin subito de sopore expectatus, malum quod imminebat intellegens, manum citius ad spatham porrexit; quam

strictius religatam abstrahere non valens, adprehenso tamen scabello subpedaneo, se cum eo per aliquod spatium defendit. Sed heu pro dolor! vir bellicosissimus et summarum audaciae nihil contra hostem praevalens, quasi unus de inertibus interfectus est, uniusque mulierculae consilio periit, quo per tot hostium strages bello famosissimus extitit.

After the king [scil.: Alboin] had reigned in Italy for three years and six months, he was killed by the plotting of his wife. Now, there was a cause for his murder. While Alboin sat rejoicing more than was fitting at Verona, he commanded that the queen be given wine to drink in the cup which he had made from the head of king Cunimund, his father-in-law, and invited her to drink in joy with her father (lest this should appear impossible to anyone, I speak truly in Christ: I myself have seen King Ratchis holding that cup in his hand on a certain feast day in order that he might show it to his intimates). Rosamund, when she thought about the matter, felt a great pain in her heart which she was unable to restrain; a plan to kill her husband as vengeance for the death of her father soon began to take root in her, and she took counsel with Helmechis as to how she might kill the king. Helmechis was the 'scilpor', that is the shield-bearer of the king, and also his foster-brother. He persuaded the queen that she should include Peredeo, who was a very mighty man, in this plot. Since Peredeo did not want to give his consent to the queen as she persuaded him to do such an evil deed, at night she lay herself in the bed of her lady-in-waiting, who was Peredeo's mistress. Peredeo, unaware of this, entered the room and slept with the queen. And when the crime had been completed and she asked him who he thought she was, and after he had named his mistress, the queen responded: 'It is not at all as you think: I am Rosamund. You have now perpetrated such an act, Peredeo, that either you must kill Alboin, or he himself will extinguish you with his sword'. Then Peredeo perceived the evil he had done, and though he had himself not wished to, coerced by such means he agreed to the murder of the king. Following this, when Alboin had gone for his afternoon nap, Rosamund commanded that there should be complete silence in the palace, removed all other weapons, and bound his sword firmly at the head of the bed, where he would be unable to raise or unsheathe it, and following the advice of Peredeo, she led Helmechis, a killer more wild than any beast, into the room. Alboin, waking suddenly from his sleep, perceived the imminent danger and reached his hand to his sword. Finding that he was unable to pull it out, as it was bound too tightly, he nevertheless grasped his footstool and defended himself with it for a time against Helmechis. But alas, what sorrow! That most war-like man of the greatest courage was unable to prevail against his enemy, and was killed as though he was an incompetent. He, who had been so renowned for his slaughter of enemies in war, perished by the plotting of a mere woman (II,28).

After Alboin's death, for many years the Lombards had no king, and were no longer a coherent, united polity (even by the standards of their time); in this situation, the second book of Paul's history closes.

We note that Paul's sense of narrative structure is careful and skilful: the foreboding at the end of the first book, when we first hear of the skull-cup, fulfils itself by the end of the second book; the first book ends with Alboin becoming king, leading to the crossing into Italy at the beginning of the second book, which ends with the death of Alboin, and political

chaos in Lombard Italy. If Alboin embodies the fate of the Lombards, his kingship brings them success in battle and a new home, and his death leads to the falling apart of their polity. Certainly, this turmoil is ultimately brought about by Alboin's skull-cup; we could thus argue that the brutality towards Christian Italians that follows Alboin's death (see below, p. 130) is caused by Alboin's actions. This is far from explicit, though, and the lack of clear condemnation is surely to be ascribed to the author's intention not to paint the distant Lombard past in too dark a colour. There is really no explicit moral colouring to the way in which Paul presents the story of Alboin: he was a great king, who did things that had unfortunate consequences for his people, but this is never reflected on at any point in Paul's narrative. The lack of judgement on Alboin might indicate that the stories were inherited from other sources, but the way they fit within the structure of a larger narrative is clearly a matter of Paul's own construction, not deriving from any putative oral tradition (cf. Goffart 1988, 390–94); this suggests that Paul did not just lift the stories from elsewhere, and therefore that the neutral stance is intentional.

Paul had, of course, sources for this tale: it is reported first by Marius of Avenches,²⁷ who wrote in the 580s, about a decade after the events, and it is repeated within the following fifty years by Gregory of Tours,²⁸ John of Biclar,²⁹ and the continuator of Prosper's

²⁷ *Hoc anno Albuenus rex Langobardorum a suis, id est, Hilmaegis cum reliquis consentiente uxore sua Verona interfectus est* (Favrod, ed. 1991, s. a. 572: 'In that year Alboin, the king of the Lombards, was killed in Verona by his own followers, that is, by Hilmaegis and others, with the consent of Alboin's wife')

²⁸ *Mortua autem Chlothsinda, uxore Alboeni, aliam duxit coniugem, cuius patrem ante paucum tempus interfecerat. Qua de causa mulier in odio semper virum habens, locum opperiebat, in quo possit iniurias patris ulcisci; unde factum est, ut unum ex famulis concupiscens, virum veninu medicaret* (Hist. IV,41: 'With Chlothsinda, the wife of Alboin, having died, he took another spouse, whose father he had killed a short time previously. For this reason the woman, who always hated her husband, awaited an opportunity when she could avenge the injustice to her father. Therefore it happened that she, desiring one of his entourage, administered poison to her husband').

²⁹ *Aluinus Langobardorum rex factione coniugis suae a suis nocte interficitur* (Cardelle de Hartmann, ed. 2000, 24: 'Alboin the king of the Lombard is killed at night through the plotting of his wife by his own followers').

chronicle,³⁰ and shortly after by the *OGL*,³¹ and Fredegar (III,65; this is just an edited repetition of Gregory's words). In comparison to the one line in the *OGL*, Paul's narrative of Alboin's death takes up 34 lines—a significant expansion. None of the other sources contain anything of such length and detail, though they all know that the king was killed by some sort of cooperative measure between his wife and his followers.³² Paul obviously felt it appropriate to expand considerably on the terse narrative contained in his (written) sources, including the motifs of alcohol, provocation, seduction, and of course the gory skull-cup, instead of saying simply—as all other written sources do—that Alboin was killed by his own people, with the connivance of his wife. Paul's narrative includes the elements of dialogue and blackmail, and the psychological motivation missing in earlier reports—and also lacking, for the most part, as general characteristics of classical historical narratives in Latin. This marks, apart from just an expansion of the contemporary reports, a significant departure from the very dry style of the late Roman tradition of historiography, to which Eutropius's *Breviarum*, Paul's source and model for his *Historia Romana*, belonged.³³

³⁰ *uxoris suae Rosemundae regis Conimundi filiae dolo apud Veronam interfectus est auxiliante sibi Elmigisilo, cum quo adulterari credebatur: quod postea manifestum est, dum eum sibi in loco mariti tam coniugio quam etiam regno copulare conata est* (Mommsen, ed. 1892b, 337–38: 'he was killed by the cunning of his wife Rosamund, the daughter of king Cunimund, at Verona, with the help of Elmigisilus, with whom she is thought to have been having an affair; this later became known, for she tried to join herself to him in place of her husband both in marital union and in the rule').

³¹ *Regnavit Albuin in Italia annos tres, et occisus est in Verona in palatio ab Hilmichis et Rosemunda uxore sua per consilium Peritheo* (5: 'Alboin reigned in Italy for three years, and was killed in Verona in the palace by Hilmichis and Rosemunda, his wife, with the counsel of Peritheo').

³² Paul also tells us (*HL* 29–30) what happens to the plotters afterwards: Helmechis is unable to take the throne, and he flees with Rosamund to Ravenna; at the plotting of the prefect there, he and Rosamund end up killing each other. Once more, this is an expansion of what is contained in the *OGL* (5), but of far lesser proportions: ten lines become 30. In contrast, the story of the naming of the Lombards is reduced from 16 lines in the *OGL* to ten in the *HL*. On the Alboin/Rosamund material, see the detailed study of Gschwantler (1976).

³³ A brief analysis of Paul's 'oral' style is given by Martínez Pizarro (1989, 70–72; 190–92); he provides, however, no insights as to why Paul chose to write in such a manner, and his attribution of the differences in Paul's style from classical historiography to the influence of oral tradition needs further refinement and qualification. Gregory of Tours has a similarly vivid style, but in his narratives about the recent past, not a period about two centuries before he wrote.

The heightened style of the Alboin narratives and the story of Authari's wooing of Theudelinda (III,30) are clearly intended to make these parts of Lombard history stand out in the reader's mind; as we have seen, there is a link between the three legendary portions of Alboin's story in terms of how the original encounter with the Gepids ultimately leads to Alboin's death by his wife's plotting. Alboin was a king of great significance not only because he brought the Lombards into Italy, but also because he was an ally of the Romans, and entered Italy peacefully. Although we do not know his religious affiliation from Paul, he is clearly not intended to be seen in a negative light. Authari was responsible for bringing Theudelinda to the Lombards; Theudelinda is a queen greatly praised for her religiosity, and it is because of her that Agilulf converts to Catholicism (in the only conversion of a Lombard king that is reported), so it seems likely that the tale of her wooing is highlighted to stress, in advance, the significance of the marriage to Authari.³⁴

Literary historians have been happy to see in the stories about Alboin evidence of a Lombard oral tradition that corresponds to traditions in other Germanic languages: Paul is supposed simply to be drawing on available oral material in the form of lays about Alboin.³⁵ It seems reasonable to assume that Paul was indeed drawing on some kind of oral material, since despite the existence of a number of written sources, there is nothing in them that could have provided such a rich narrative without substantial supplementing from elsewhere. But we need to be cautious about the assumptions we make regarding the form and language of any putative oral sources (on the following, cf. Everett 2003, 110–14). To begin with, Paul does not mention any 'oral tradition' as a source for his stories; to be sure, he tells us about

³⁴ These aspects of Alboin and Theodelinda are discussed further below, pp. 128–31.

³⁵ See e.g. Gschwantler (1975; 1976; 1979); Wagner (1982); see also Haubrichs (1995, 96–97)—an introduction to Old High German literature. Historians have often been only slightly less credulous: cf. Bullough (1991); Moisl (1985); Pohl (2000b).

songs regarding Alboin (I,27), but these are not mentioned in the context of Paul's most lengthy elaborations on his written sources, and are not said to contain anything about Alboin's death, but rather about his deeds in war and his generosity.³⁶ Moreover, Paul makes no reference to Lombard songs anywhere: what he mentions are songs explicitly of others, and he tells us nowhere that Lombards are among those peoples who have the same language as the Bavarians and Saxons. If he understood the various words he translates for his readers as being Langobardic, he would have also known that this was a language cognate with those of the Bavarians and Saxons—but if the Lombards still spoke the same language, Paul would not have needed to translate so many Lombard words.³⁷

Paul was not exactly bashful about the distant past of the Lombards; as we have seen, he had far more to say about their pre-Italian history and the first century of their time in Italy than later periods, and he does so without censure of their religion or customs. There seems to be no reason why he should choose not to mention Lombard oral sources for his material if he had them, unless he felt that they were so widely known that they could be taken for granted. One does get the feeling that the story of Wodan and Freia is included because Paul felt it was too well-known to be left out (Goffart 1988, 386; Pohl 1994, 382; 384; 2000b, 24), but it seems to derive directly from a written source. It is perhaps significant that Paul claims to have seen the skull-cup himself: this might indicate that oral narratives were attached in some way to particular objects, in this case the cup.³⁸ But we should note that the story of the

³⁶ Of course, praise of deeds and generosity are characteristic of elegiac laments too (cf. e.g. *Beowulf* 3178–82); but what is important is that Paul does not explicitly cite songs in the context of his narrative of Alboin's death.

³⁷ Nor would he have needed to do so for the Franks, if one were to assume they were his audience (cf. pp. 105–06 above). Note that all the various Germanic words Paul uses in his narrative—of which I have cited only a few—are in fact demonstrably words belonging to a Germanic language, and Paul clearly correctly understands what they mean.

³⁸ A sensitive analysis of the use of objects as pegs for memory (albeit in a different historical context) is provided by Van Houts (1999, 93–120); on the innovations of early medieval narrators in creating 'object-centred' stories, see Martínez Pizarro (1989, 173–211). Apart from the skull-cup, Paul also tells us, after

skull-cup itself (though not necessarily all its consequences) might draw on a literary source: Pomponius Mela also mentions Asian barbarians who make cups out of their enemies' skulls (Silberman, ed. and trans. 1988, II.i,13). Overall, Paul gives us very little in the way of explicit markers on which we can hang any notion of a surviving Langobardic oral tradition. It seems safer to conclude that while Paul certainly would have drawn on some sort of Lombard oral material, this is unlikely to have been in a Germanic vernacular, and need not have been in any sort of formal narrative (epics or lays), but was more likely passed on in some sort of informal prose stories.³⁹ And it is clear that whatever the nature of sources, Paul crafted them according to his own purposes within his history: the legendary narratives are well-integrated within a larger whole, and that broader narrative context is surely unlikely to have been the same that the stories might have had in any putative epic or lay (similarly Goffart 1988, 425–28).

We know that Paul's narratives of the distant past draw on a number of written sources—and not just for the histories of other peoples and ecclesiastical matters—many of which he cites explicitly.⁴⁰ But in the Alboin narratives especially (but also in his story of Authari's wooing [III,30], or of his own ancestor's immigration to Italy [IV,27]), Paul uses material not contained in any extant written sources. Unlike Jordanes, who refers more than once to oral sources, but does not seem explicitly to cite them, and whose unsourced material

concluding his narrative of Alboin's death, about Alboin's grave, which still exists in his own time, and had recently been opened by a Lombard aristocrat, who found in it Alboin's sword; this too might indicate that narratives on Alboin were linked to objects connected with him.

³⁹ Bullough believes that Paul was 'acknowledged at Court [...] as the next link in a chain or oral transmission' (1991, 109), and was a counterpart to Icelandic storytellers of the eleventh century. Apart from the fact that our information regarding the transmission of Icelandic narratives is late, insufficient, and probably untrustworthy (cf. Ghosh forthcoming), there is no evidence at all to suggest that any such chain of transmission existed in Lombard Italy. Similar objections apply to Pohl (2000b). Gschwantler (1975; 1976; 1979) and Wagner (1982) have no suggestions as to the nature of transmission of the material they assume was oral and in the form of lays ('Lieder'). On the relationship between such informal prose stories and versified heroic legend, cf. Kuhn (1961).

⁴⁰ Explicit references to written sources: I,2 (Pliny); II,20 (*catalogus provinciarum Italiae*); IV,40 (Secundus of Trento); IV,42 (Rothari's Edict); III,19; VI,16 (epitaphs).

that could derive from oral sources tends to be similarly legendary, but generally much less elaborate,⁴¹ Paul does not explicitly refer to oral sources, but nevertheless clearly had access to reasonably detailed stories that must derive from an oral milieu. Nevertheless, there seems to be no warrant to reach a conclusion that Paul drew on any formal oral tradition of verse epics or lays, and certainly not that his sources were in a Langobardic Germanic vernacular.⁴²

We have, therefore, once more an incidence of some sort of undefined oral material being used in conjunction with a wide range of written sources to provide a history of a distant, non-Roman past. But it is crucial to note that while Jordanes and the Trojan narratives about the Franks quite clearly appropriate histories of other people to those of their subjects, Paul does not seem to turn any kind of Roman past into a Lombard history. Where he does not use written sources for Lombard history itself, he seems to use them as embellishments (for instance Pliny on geography: I,2) or for other subjects (for example, Frankish or Byzantine history⁴³); while some additions to the origin narrative draw on written sources about other peoples, the most significant elements concerning the Lombards themselves, such as the naming, the entry into Italy under Alboin, and the stories about Alboin himself, appear to be genuine Lombard tradition.⁴⁴ Unlike Jordanes, Paul does not

⁴¹ As Goffart points out, ‘Jordanes narrates facts having the appearance of legend [...] but he rarely breathes life into such scenes’ (1988, 425); Paul’s narratives of Alboin, Authari, and of Lopichis’s migration to Italy have a vividness unmatched by anything in Jordanes.

⁴² It is possible, of course, that he did have access to songs in another Germanic dialect, since he mentions them himself, though only in the specific context of praise-poems on Alboin (I,27). Bavarian songs might be a possible source for his narrative of Authari’s bridal quest, and Saxon songs might have provided him with material on Alboin (note that at I,6, Paul also tells us that Alboin, on entering Italy, asked for assistance from his old friends the Saxons: *ab amicis suis vetulis Saxonibus auxilium petit*). But no such material—or even references to it—survives; the only vernacular reference to Alboin is in the Anglo-Saxon *Widsith* (70–74), which only provides his name, the fact that he is Audoin’s son, rules Italy and is generous, certainly not anything like the full narrative of his death (on *Widsith*, see further pp. 212–13 below).

⁴³ Some examples: Frankish history: III,10; III,21; Byzantine history: II,2; II, 4; III,12; III, 13; III,15.

⁴⁴ Coumert (2007, 246–49) argues that the Lombard origin narratives derive directly from antique ethnographic traditions, much as Jordanes’s Gothic origin myth did. This may be true with regard to the exact etymology (though anyone with any knowledge of a Germanic vernacular could come up with this) and the location in

bother to claim dependence on oral tradition for his legendary narratives, but he also does not explicitly claim that written sources are better. He appears to treat oral and written sources quite indiscriminately, and as equal in terms of authority (Bullough 1991, 115; Coumert 2007, 228; 231; 239–40; Mortensen 1991, 111), and all sources serve the same purpose: to portray Lombard history, and to do so in an entertaining manner. On reading the *HL*, one does not feel that either Lombard or Roman culture is being forced to fit with the other; the conjoined nature of the historical legacy seems natural in Paul's work. This accords also with what he has to say regarding religious and ethnic difference.

Catholics, Romans and Lombards in the *Historia Langobardorum*

All of the 'national' histories examined above glide over the difference in religion between past and present; it is barely mentioned and scarcely censured, and in the case of the Gothic histories, blame for the initial conversion to Arianism is placed firmly on the Roman emperor. Paul was aware of these precedents; his own history, however, devotes more space to explicitly religious subjects than do any of the texts examined earlier,⁴⁵ and he also knew at least two histories with a marked religious, Catholic focus, those of Gregory of Tours and Bede,⁴⁶ which make it a point to stress the moment of conversion. Moreover, although Isidore and Jordanes seem to downplay religious discontinuity, both certainly stress

Scandinavia, but Gambara and her sons, Woden and Frea, and the naming of the Lombards by Woden, cannot be shown to derive from any ancient source; nor can the Alboin stories.

⁴⁵ Some examples: I,16 (on Benedict of Nursia); II,13 (on Fortunatus, a holy man); III,12 (a miracle in Constantinople); III,24–26 (the election of Gregory the Great and controversies in the Ravenna Church); VI,15 (on Ceodal [Cædwalla], the Anglo-Saxon king who came to Rome to die).

⁴⁶ An explicit reference to Gregory is at III,1; many of Paul's narratives about Frankish history are drawn from Gregory (e.g. III,2; III, 4–8; III,11; III,12). It is possible that Paul only knew an edited version of Gregory's text, from which much of the religious content had been expunged. Paul's knowledge of Bede is generally assumed, and given that Bede's history was disseminated in Francia, it seems to be a reasonable assumption, but there appear to be no clear textual dependencies. VI,15 might be a citation from Bede, but it is equally possible that Paul had read the epitaph himself. We should note, however, that like Paul, Bede also includes some poems in his work, normally about religious subjects.

differences, whether cultural or political, between the Romans and the Goths—as do, albeit to a lesser extent, Fredegar and the *LHF*. Paul presents a far more ambiguous picture.

Although the Lombards may well have been Christian, even Catholic, when they first entered Italy, Paul does not tell us so; when he mentions Agilulf's conversion in book IV, he appears to imply that they had been heathen or Arian until Theudelinda's reign:

Nam pene omnes ecclesiarum substantias Langobardi, cum adhuc gentilitatis errore tenerentur, invaserunt. Sed huius salubri supplicatione rex permotus, et catholicam fidem tenuit, et multas possessiones ecclesiae Christi largitus est atque episcopos, qui in depressione et abiectioe erant, ad dignitatis solitae honorem reduxit.

For the Lombards occupied almost all the property of the churches, as they were still held captive by the error of heathendom. But the king [scil. Agilulf], moved by her [scil. Theudelinda's] salutary entreaty, both maintained the Catholic faith, and bestowed many possessions on the Church of Christ, and led back to the honour of their accustomed dignity the bishops who lived in oppression and humility (IV,6).⁴⁷

This conversion is a personal one; unlike the conversion of Clovis in Gregory of Tours, or the many royal conversions in Bede, which are followed by the conversion of all the people, Paul says nothing about the broader implications of Agilulf's change of faith. Rothari—who reigns after Agilulf and Theudelinda—is explicitly said to be Arian (IV,42); he is the only one of the Lombard kings whose religious affiliation is made explicit, and it is remarkable that we are never told, after this, when or whether other kings—or the rest of the Lombard people—convert to Catholicism. Paul also tells us that at this point most cities had two bishops, one Arian and one Catholic. We never learn when this ceases to be the case; unlike Isidore, Paul does not care to make it clear when the whole kingdom attains the Catholic faith. Despite the taint of Arianism, though, Rothari is depicted in a positive light: surely we

⁴⁷ Although Paul does not say so, Gregory the Great tells us that Authari was Arian, and forbade the Lombards from converting to Catholicism (Ewald and Hartmann, eds 1891–99, I,17); this would suggest either that Paul is wrong in attributing heathendom to the Lombards, or that the *error gentilitatis* refers to Arianism. The exact significance of *catholicam fidem tenuit* is unclear: it probably means that Agilulf converted to Catholicism, but the most literal reading would be that he was already Catholic and remained so.

cannot view him as being under god's disapproval when we are told that St John protects his ornaments from being plundered from his grave (IV,47).⁴⁸

If we can assume that before Theudelinda and Agilulf, the majority of the Lombards were not Catholic, the positive image of the Arian Rothari has a precedent in the equally positive portrayal of Alboin (whose religion is unknown from Paul's work). We have already witnessed the praise of his military abilities; in Paul's account, furthermore, Alboin's conquest of Italy appears to be quite peaceful,⁴⁹ and is in fact instigated by the Roman general Narses (cf. Goffart 1988, 389–90). His entry into Treviso is marked by his generosity to the bishop and the church (II,12); although we are told he had vowed to slaughter the people of Pavia because they held out against him for three years, on entering the city his horse falls and only gets up when he breaks his vow and promises mercy to the Pavians. We are told that after he enters Pavia,

omnis populus in palatium, quod quondam rex Theudericus construxerat, concurrens, post tantas miserias animum de spe iam fidus coepit ad futura relevare.

all the people came to the palace which king Theoderic had constructed earlier, and after such great hardships, began to ease their minds, now putting their hope in the future (II,27).

Alboin's slayers are killed by the judgement of god (II,29: *Dei omnipotentis iudicio*

interfectores iniquissimi uno momento perierunt 'by the judgement of the omnipotent God

the most evil murderers perished simultaneously'), which appears to confirm the opinion of

⁴⁸ There is no evidence to support Goffart's contention that Rothari 'provoked' a kingdom-wide schism (1988, 404), and thus that the Lombards 'lapse into the worship of false gods' (1988, 399); from Paul's text, it seems logical enough to conclude that there were, after Agilulf's conversion, Arian and Catholic Lombards, and Rothari's Arianism was not a 'lapse'. I also see no textual support for Goffart's view that Agilulf and Theudelinda embody the conversion of the Lombards (1988, 395–96); this is dependent on reading Rothari's Arianism as a 'lapse'. Goffart contends that Paul glides over the conversion because 'he did not wish to vie with the enchantments of Bede' (1988, 388; similarly 395); the fact that Paul lays no stress on the conversion must have more significance than this, namely that Paul wished to pass over differences and stress continuities. It is only because of Goffart's belief that Paul did not wish to compete with Bede that he is compelled also to suggest that Paul expects readers to know that Agilulf's conversion implies the conversion of all Lombards; if we read Paul as deliberately not stressing the conversion moment as a break with the past because he wishes to highlight continuities—and this is the result of reading the text rather than reading into it—we receive a different picture.

⁴⁹ In contrast, cf. Gregory's contemporary account (*Hist.* IV.41).

him as a good king in the eyes of god (though we are not told how god would have viewed his creating a skull-cup out of a slain opponent). To be sure, the fact that he could initially vow to slaughter Christians does not seem to be positive, and we are also told that the people of Aquileia feared the barbarity of the Lombards (II,10); but Alboin retracts his vow, and it is far from clear whether the fear of Lombard barbarity is meant to reflect a judgement on Lombard religion, or on their lack of a Roman notion of civilisation. In any case, it seems that such a fear is largely unjustified: the Lombard conquest of Italy is depicted as being peaceful rather than savage.

Between Alboin and Authari, however, Italy suffers explicitly under Lombard rule. Cleph, the next king, kills many of the Roman nobles (II,31); in the interregnum that follows, once again many noble Romans are killed, and under the dukes, churches are despoiled, priests killed, cities demolished, and people murdered (II,32). In the same period we are given the words of a holy man in Gaul, who says that *increverit malitia eorum in conspectu Domini* (III,1: 'their [scil. the Lombards'] evil grows in the sight of god'); this holy man is responsible for a miracle, and we are also told that *qui eum venerabiliter audierunt, incolomes patriae redditi sunt; quidam vero, qui eius verba despexerant, in ipsa Provincia miserabiliter perierunt* (III,2: 'those who listened to him worshipfully returned home unhurt; certain ones, however, who despised his words, perished wretchedly in Provence');⁵⁰ it seems, therefore, that his condemnation of the Lombards is intended to be taken seriously. All this clearly indicates not just that the Lombards were different from and hostile to the Romans; their religious status, while not made explicit, is certainly not one of pious Christians behaving in a manner pleasing to god.

⁵⁰ The story is dependent on Gregory (*Hist.* VI,6).

Things change drastically with the installation of Authari as king; under him, we are told that

nulla erat violentia, nullae struebantur insidiae; nemo aliquem iniuste angariabat, nemo spoliabat; non erant furta, non latrocinia; unusquisque quo libebat securus sine timore pergebat

there was no violence, no plots were hatched; no one unjustly extorted service from another, no one plundered; there were no thefts nor robberies; each one went where he pleased safely and without fear (III,16).⁵¹

We are also told that Authari is the first of the Lombard kings to have the praenomen *Flavius* (III,16); this must indicate, in Paul's narrative, the adoption of some level of Romanness, which might have been intended partly as a form of rapprochement with the non-Lombard populace (Delogu 2004, 105–08). From this point, we hear little of Lombard brutality,⁵² and when Paul mentions Romans, he seems to mean almost exclusively the people still under Byzantine rule, or the Greeks themselves, but not Italians under Lombard rule (cf. n. 55 below). After Authari's death, but while Theudelinda is still queen, we are told of the cooperation between her and Gregory the Great (IV,8–9); from a religious point of view, this is clearly a high point in Lombard history. In terms of religious values, there does seem to be some kind of progression, however interrupted, between the good kings of the past and the

⁵¹ This passage should be weighed against Goffart's claim that Agilulf is the real 'hero' (1988, 397); Paul's suppression of Authari's Arianism (cf. n. 47 above) is also surely a conscious act. Nevertheless, while Paul certainly portrayed Authari in an extremely positive light, it is also true, as Goffart argues, that he explicitly foreshadows Agilulf.

⁵² When we do, in the context of the duke Alahis (V,38) and the civil strife under Ansprand and Aripert (VI,35), it refers not to any lack of Christianity or a targeting of Christians by Lombards in general, but to specific evil rulers. Note that the only time Paul himself designates a Lombard as barbarian it is with reference to Alahis (Mortensen 1991, 110; on Alahis, cf. Goffart 1988, 412–14); although Lombard barbarity is mentioned at II,10, this is the Aquileian view of the Lombards, and we cannot know if Paul endorses it. In contrast, various northern peoples are explicitly called barbarians (I,1; 4; 5), as are the Avars (IV,37). The one example of a reference to post-Authari Lombard brutality against Christians is a surprising instance of Lombards plundering Monte Cassino during Agilulf's reign (IV,17); it is far from clear that this episode has any basis in history, and it might have been inserted in order to make Benedict's prophecy (reported in the same chapter) come true. Paul's editors believe that the plunder occurred in an earlier period (Bethmann and Waitz, eds 1878b, 122, n. 1). We should note, though, that at I,20, Paul refers to a barbarian language (*barbaricus sermo*), by which he seems to mean the language of the Lombards; it is unclear whether any sort of cultural or religious value-judgement is implied, or whether the term simply designates the vernacular, as seems to be the case in Einhard's work from a generation later (see below, pp. 217–18).

rule of Liutprand, the last king in the *HL*. Alboin, we saw, was praised, and was an ally of a ‘good’ Roman, Narses; Authari kept his kingdom prosperous and peaceful (and Paul is silent regarding Pope Gregory’s condemnation of Authari); Agilulf and Theudelinda were (perhaps) responsible for converting some of the Lombards and worked closely with the pope; Rothari’s tomb is protected by John the Baptist. In Paul’s own lifetime, Liutprand actually protects the pope from the Romans (VI,49): by this point, the Byzantines are iconoclasts and no longer maintain the Catholic faith, and the Lombard king seems to have attained fully the mantle earlier reserved for the Romans, protecting the pope from Byzantine attack.⁵³ The only period of Lombard history that seems to be condemned on religious grounds is therefore one in which there were no kings; this moral disorder can be blamed not on the Lombards per se, but on a brief period of political turmoil.⁵⁴

Religious difference is not given much importance; nor is ethnic difference between Lombards and Romans. Certainly, in Paul’s depiction of the aftermath of Alboin’s death, there is a clear divide between the two groups. However, the Lombard-Roman relationship seems to be, at least initially, one between allies: we are told that *Omni tempore quo Langobardi Pannoniam possederunt, Romanae rei publicae adversus aemulos adiutores fuerunt* (II,1: ‘During the whole period in which the Lombards held Pannonia, they were allies of Rome against her rivals’). The Lombards enter Italy, in fact, when the Romans have lost their legitimacy, in a manner of speaking, by betraying Narses, who receives great praise from Paul. Narses is described thus:

⁵³ I follow here the arguments of Alfonsi (1975, 11–12; 15–18), though he overstates the case somewhat with regard to the Lombards becoming ‘gli eredi della civiltà antica’ (1975, 15: ‘the heirs of ancient civilisation’) under Authari. There is little rhetoric of ‘barbarism’ and ‘civilisation’ in Paul’s text. Cf. Goffart (1988, 419–23) for a more nuanced reading of Paul’s depiction of Liutprand’s reign.

⁵⁴ As we saw above (pp. 119–23), the interregnum is caused, ultimately, by Alboin’s skull-cup and his provocation with it of Rosamund. But if Paul had wished to condemn Alboin from a religious standpoint, he could surely have done so explicitly; it is difficult to find any censure in Paul’s text.

Erat autem vir piissimus, in religione catholicus, in pauperes munificus, in recuperandis basilicis satis studiosus, vigiliis et orationibus in tantum studens, ut plus supplicationibus ad Deum profusis quam armis bellicis victoriam obtineret.

He was the most pious of men, Catholic in religion, generous to the poor, sufficiently zealous in restoring churches, so fervent in vigils and prayers that he obtained victory more by the outpouring of prayers to god than by military weapons (II,3).

Because of his successes in Italy, he excites the envy of the Roman (i.e. Constantinopolitan) court, and their plotting brings about his downfall (II,5); given the way he is described, we must be meant to think that those against him are reprehensible, and his allies—the Lombards—are on the side of good. It is in reaction to the machinations against him at Constantinople that he invites the Lombards into Italy: they come not to replace the Romans as an ethnic group, but as a new political power installed by a man praised for his religious virtues (similarly Delogu 2004, 130–31). In this way, the depiction of the Lombard arrival in Italy prefigures the later conjunction of Lombards and Romans, both in terms of religion, and with regard to ethnicity and politics (Alfonsi 1975, 11–12; 16–18).

Once the Lombards are in Italy, apart from the brief period between the reigns of Alboin and Authari, we hear little of any kind of conflict between non-Byzantine Romans and the Lombards. Even after Authari's rule there are often wars between Lombards and Byzantines, but the native population under Lombard rule and the Lombards are not depicted as being different in any way. *Romanus*, used as a substantive (e.g. *bellum contra Romanos* or *civitas/regnum Romanorum*), refers exclusively to the parts and people of Italy under Byzantine rule; used as an adjective (e.g. *Romana ecclesia*; *pontifex Romanus*), it refers to the city, people, pope and church of Rome itself.⁵⁵ It is impossible to assume that we should

⁵⁵ Roman = Byzantine: III,12; III,13; III,19 [the sole occurrence of an adjectival use referring to Byzantine Romans]; IV,3; IV,8; IV,10 [?]; IV,12; IV,16; IV,28; IV,32; IV,33; IV,34; IV,36; IV,38; IV,42; IV,45; V,11; V,27; V,28; V,30; VI,11; VI,12; VI,27; VI,40; VI,44; VI,49; VI,51; VI,54; VI,56.
Roman = of the city of Rome: III,20; III,26; IV,5; IV,36; V,11; V,31; VI,4; VI,6; VI,29; VI,34 [?]; VI,36; VI,40; VI,43; VI,49.

believe, from this, that all the native population of those areas under Lombard rule were descendants of the Lombard invaders and the rest had been exterminated; Paul's usage seems to imply, rather, that he did not perceive or wish to express a clear ethnic difference among the peoples under Lombard rule (cf. Delogu 2004, 132–33; Pohl 2000b, 26). In this context, the controversial passage in which Paul actually refers to the Romans in the Lombard territories is of little assistance: he tells us that because of Lombard avarice, many of the Roman nobles were killed in the interregnum between Alboin and Authari (II,32: *multi nobilium Romanorum ob cupiditatem interfecti sunt*), but he also refers to the *reliqui* who were made *tributarii*. It is not clear whether these are the remaining nobles (which would seem to be the logical interpretation), or the non-noble native people of Italy.

The exact mechanism of settlement is not really pertinent to my purposes (which is why I do not here cite III,16, since it does not refer explicitly to a native and necessarily Roman or non-Lombard population).⁵⁶ What is important is that Paul nowhere gives us to understand that all the Romans on Lombard-controlled land had been wiped out; that he ceases to refer to Romans except for those who are under Roman (= Byzantine) rule therefore suggests either that he perceives no ethnic difference, or that he uses the term solely as a political one. Given the mixed ethnic composition of Alboin's Lombards in Paul's own terms, the latter interpretation seems plausible.⁵⁷ As in Isidore's Spain, Rome and Romans

IV,22 refers to Lombards adopting a form of dress from the Romans, by which Byzantines could be meant, but the term more likely indicates the inhabitants of Italy among whom the Lombards lived.

At V,37, Cunipert has an affair with a girl *ex nobilissimo Romanorum genere ortam*; the usage suggests that though she lived in Lombard territory, she was of a Byzantine noble family.

⁵⁶ Cf. the literature cited at n. 4 for discussion of these passages.

⁵⁷ The key passage is II,26: *Certum est autem, tunc Alboin multos secum ex diversis, quas vel alii reges vel ipse ceperat, gentibus ad Italiam adduxisse. Unde usque hodie eorum in quibus habitant vicos Gepidos, Vulgares, Sarmatas, Pannonios, Suavos, Noricos, sive aliis huiusmodi nominibus appellamus* ('It is certain, however, that Alboin at that time led in many [people] of different peoples into Italy; they either accepted him as king, or had other kings. Therefore even today we call their towns in which they live Gepids, Vulgares, Sarmatianss, Pannonians, Sueves, Noricans, or by other such names'); cf. also II,6–8. The Saxons, who accompany Alboin

had been existing realities as opponents of the Lombard polity in Italy in Paul's lifetime; unlike Isidore, though, Paul does not distinguish between Romans and Lombards under Lombard rule: in Paul's history, political unity appears to extinguish ethnic distinctions.

Of the histories considered thus far, Paul's seems to be the most eclectic. Jordanes and Isidore focus exclusively on the Goths; Fredegar certainly has a lot of stories about others, but increasingly narrows his focus; the *LHF* also concentrates on one people only. The three 'national' histories follow a more or less linear narrative of secular history from origins to the present. Paul, on the other hand, presents many more digressions: he gives us a fair amount of ecclesiastical history; apart from Lombards, he inserts a number of episodes of Frankish history, and also some amount of Byzantine history. In this case, there does not appear to be any effort, even any perceived need, to integrate non-Roman and Roman, non-Christian and Christian heritages: Paul seems not to see the difference, and therefore any need to bridge it. Nevertheless, one point must be stressed: Paul knew of the Frankish Trojan origin myth (VI,23); and the Lombards were not in a region simply neighbouring the core of the ancient Roman empire: they had occupied and now ruled that very core. Despite this, the Lombards are not given an origin in Troy, but in Scandinavia. This, it strikes me, is a choice, and given that Paul retains the story of the naming of the Lombards despite his disdain for it, it seems to me that this choice might have been made not just to satisfy an audience, but also because locating the Lombards in Scandinavia potentially gave them some sort of independence in the distant past from other historical traditions: those of the Romans, but also those of the new rulers, the Franks (cf. Mortensen 1991, 95–96).

into Italy (II,6) have to leave because they are not permitted to live under their own laws by the Lombards (III,6: *Sed neque eis a Langobardis permissum est in proprio iure subsistere, ideoque aestimantur ad suam patriam repedasse*: 'But it was not permitted to them by the Lombards to remain in their own law, and therefore they decided to return to their own homeland'); the other ethnic groups manifestly did not leave, at least in Paul's narrative.

Nevertheless, from reading Paul, we do not get any sense of a continuing conflict—political or in terms of culture and heritage—between Lombards and Romans (i.e., non-Lombard Italians in the Lombard kingdoms). Unlike Jordanes and Isidore, Paul appears not to have perceived any need to effect some sort of rapprochement between different cultural milieux through his narrative. A Lombard history in Latin does not, one gets the impression, call for any particular comment: there seems to be nothing at all extraordinary about a history of Lombards that includes a time when they were not Catholic, and draws on oral sources and presents much legendary material of dubious moral value (from a strictly ecclesiastical standpoint), but also includes religious history, and is written in Latin. Paul represents, I suggest, the end of a process that we saw beginning with Jordanes: by his period, the integration of the various cultural elements that made up the Lombard polity—a pagan past; a few surviving fragments of a Germanic language; the Catholic history of Italy; Latin, Roman history; the history of the Lombard kingdom and duchies—had in fact meshed into a coherent whole, a fact that allows Paul to present Lombard history without breaks and discontinuities.

CHAPTER 5:

WALTHARIUS AND WALDERE

Thus far, I have examined narrative prose histories in Latin that have uncertain connections to any kind of poetic oral tradition. In each case, the texts or portions of texts analysed were concerned specifically with the past of a single people. In the following three chapters, the focus shifts to poetic narratives, in Latin and the vernacular, all of which appear to have clear links to oral traditions in the Germanic vernaculars, and none of which are devoted to the past of a single people: the Latin epic *Waltharius* and the two Old English *Waldere* fragments that treat of the same material as in the Latin poem; the Old English epic *Beowulf*; and three short poems: the Old English *Deor* and *Widsith*, and the Old High German *Hildebrandslied*.¹ These texts constitute the surviving corpus of heroic literature from the early middle ages that deals with what has been thought of as a ‘Germanic’ past; they are also the only poetic texts that treat of the distant past from this period, where that past cannot (for the most part) be derived from biblical, Roman or Greek history.² These

¹ *Beowulf* is the subject of the following chapter; the shorter poems are briefly examined in chapter seven.

² We should note, though, that these texts all date from the eighth century or later: the distant past was now the so-called migration period (third to sixth century), and these texts do not treat of the origins of any peoples; nor, to the extent that the characters in these works can be placed in an actual historical context, do they tell of a time before the last years of Rome, when there had already been more or less extensive contact between Roman and the Germanic-speaking peoples of Europe for at least a century. Both *Beowulf* and *Widsith* do include some

works have all been claimed by literary scholars as representing survivals of Germanic oral tradition. It is far from clear, however, whether the distant past portrayed in any of these texts was perceived to be Germanic, or non-Roman, or non-Christian. Moreover, although I do not dispute that all of these poems draw in some manner on oral poetic traditions in the Germanic vernaculars, their relationship to Christian, Latin, and Roman written traditions also needs to be stressed, and the extent and nature of the connection with any Germanic oral tradition deserves critical scrutiny.

In the present chapter, I provide an examination of *Waltharius* and *Waldere*. I shall argue that while there is certainly a connection with Germanic poetic traditions, a deep influence of Christian tradition is equally perceptible. Furthermore, *Waltharius* is an example of secular matter, possibly drawing on heroic vernacular narratives of some sort, being transformed into Latin entertainment in a monastic context; the existence of this text shows that secular versions of the distant past that did not concord with written, Latin histories, and were transmitted in an oral and vernacular form, were accessible and of some interest to clerics as well. It demonstrates therefore that the world of the monks was not so far removed from the secular sphere in which vernacular heroic poetry is thought to have had its primary location.

***Waltharius* and *Waldere*: Authorship, Content, and Historical Background**

From our period, narratives regarding the Aquitanian warrior Waltharius or Waldere survive only in two Old English fragments (known as *Waldere* I and II), both pieces of dialogue, and in the Latin poem known as *Waltharius*. The Old English text is written on two

reference to the biblical past, and *Widsith* also to the Greek and Roman past; non-Roman and non-biblical figures, however, are most prominent in both works.

pieces of parchment that cannot be connected in any way with any other extant codices, and dates from between 950 and 1050 (Zettersten, ed. 1979, 6–11). Apart from one tenth-century manuscript, the extant witnesses for the Latin text date from the eleventh century and afterward; the poem is thought to have been composed sometime between c. 800 and c. 1000.³ Nothing is known about the author of the *Waldere*; what little we can claim truly to know about the author of *Waltharius* derives from the text's preface, which, however, might be a later addition. According to this preface, the poem was composed by a certain Geraldus for a bishop Erckambald; neither can be identified.⁴ The other possibility is that it was written by Ekkehard I of St Gall (died 973), who is said, in the *Casus Sancti Galli* composed by his namesake Ekkehard IV, to have written a *vita Waltharii manu fortis* (Haefele, ed. and trans. 2002, c. 80); some scholars identify this work with *Waltharius*. *Waltharius* is composed in elegant Latin hexameters, clearly deeply influenced by Virgil and Prudentius (cf. below, n. 27), and it belongs without doubt to a learned and monastic context.

After the preface and a geographical and ethnographical introduction (1–10), we are given the story of how Attila, king of the Huns, moves against the nations of Europe. In the following hundred lines (11–115), we are told how the kings of the Franks, Burgundians and Aquitanians make peace by providing hostages in the form of the Burgundian princess Hiltgunt and the Aquitanian prince Waltharius; the Frankish prince Guntharius is of too tender an age to be without his mother (29–30), and Hagano, a young nobleman specifically said to be of Trojan extraction, is sent in his stead (28–29; note that the epithet Trojan is

³ Views on the dating of *Waltharius* diverge strongly; I believe my interpretation would be valid for either of the dates proposed, the early ninth or the late tenth century. The prominent early daters are Dronke (1977, 66–79; 1984) and Önnarfors (1979; 1988; 1998); Jacobsen (2002) suggests a date before 915, but is not more specific. The prominent late daters are Langosch (1989–90) and Schaller (1983; 1989–90).

⁴ The preface is only in four manuscripts (Strecker, ed. 1951, 12); that it was a part of the poem and written by the author is doubted because of Ekkehard IV's testimony in his *Casus Sancti Galli* (composed in the mid-eleventh century). Cf. the works cited above (n. 3) for discussion regarding the value of Ekkehard's statement.

never used of anyone from the Frankish royal family). The hostages are treated well and educated at Attila's court, but after some years, the Frankish king Gibicho dies, and Guntharius breaks the peace treaty with the Huns; Hagano flees the Hunnish court in consequence, and makes his way back to the Frankish kingdom (116–20). There is no reprisal of any sort; one might assume that Hunnic power was waning, though no such weakening is explicitly mentioned, and in fact we are shortly told of the Huns' continued ferocity in battle (174–214)—though under the command now of Waltharius, not Attila.

We are given a fairly lengthy description of Waltharius's prowess as a warrior and leader of men (174–214) when he leads the Huns into battle against a certain recently conquered (but unnamed) people that now resisted the Huns and frequently waged war against them (170–73); since we learn later that the current Frankish king, Guntharius, had never seen Waltharius in battle (620), it is apparent that this could not have been the Franks, and given that we have heard of the Franks' revolt only some 60 lines previously, this episode seems to be deliberate irony on the part of the poet. Although the Huns under Waltharius win what appears to be a famous triumph (cf. 209–13), there is no celebration on their return. Waltharius goes alone to the royal quarters and finds Hiltgunt there; they confess their love for each other and make a plan to steal some treasure, dupe the Huns, and escape from Pannonia (221–86). As planned with Hiltgunt, Waltharius arranges a party for the court, at which he contrives to get all the Huns too drunk to move; Hiltgunt, in the meantime, manages to fill two chests with treasures, and as the Huns are sleeping off their booze, the betrothed couple steals off into the night (288–357). We have to wonder just how tongue-in-cheek the remarks about the fierce Huns and their thousand-year rule were (6–10) when we

read the following passages, describing Attila's hangover (362–64), helplessness and inactivity (380–99), and the Huns' refusal to pursue a single runaway hostage (408–18).

Waltharius and Hiltgunt make their way unmolested, travelling by night, with Waltharius refraining from enjoying carnal relations with his betrothed (419–27). They eventually reach the borders of the Frankish kingdom, and when this is made known at the Frankish court, Hagano recognises Waltharius from the way he is described, and is delighted that his old companion has escaped (464–68). Guntharius is delighted too, but for a different reason: he wants to get his hands on the treasure Waltharius bears, claiming that it is what was taken (by Attila) from his father, and thus rightfully belongs to him (469–72). Although Hagano advises against it (478–79; 487–88), the Franks get ready to fight Waltharius and take his treasure from him.

There follows an extended description of a series of battles between Waltharius and several Frankish warriors: Guntharius first sends his men to demand both Waltharius's treasures and Hiltgunt,⁵ and when this is refused, one after another, the Franks approach Waltharius, exchange insults, fight, and are finally defeated.⁶ By the time we have finished with two-thirds of the text, all of Guntharius's warriors are dead except for Hagano; the last third is devoted to the dialogue between Guntharius and Hagano as the king tries to persuade Hagano to fight, and to the battle between them and Waltharius and its aftermath. The last fight is described in rather more detail than the ones that preceded it.⁷ It is notable, though, that Guntharius—who was too tender to be sent away from his mother as hostage—is utterly

⁵ It is apparent that Guntharius wants not just the material goods (treasure and horse) but also Hiltgunt (all three are demanded at 602 and 819; in addition, Hiltgunt appears confident that she is one of the prizes for the Franks: 542–46).

⁶ The motif of single combat is common to heroic epic in most languages, but also occurs in Prudentius, where the combat is between personified vices and virtues (cf. Strecker's apparatus and Katscher 1973 on Prudentius; and Oakley 1985 on the historical incidences of single combat in ancient Rome).

⁷ Useful analyses of the last fight are given by Katscher (1973, 99–104), and Wolf (1976).

ineffective as a warrior: his lance-throw is easily shaken off by Waltharius, and the king, who wanted to seize Waltharius's treasure, is shown in a rather comic moment trying to creep up to Waltharius under cover of a diversion created by Hagano to recover his own lance—an operation he is unable to carry out. In fact, he is narrowly saved from death at Waltharius's hand by Hagano's intervention, and is scarcely fit to stand, shaking in shock (1313–32).

The battle ends in a most unusual manner, with no resolution and rather an anticlimax. Waltharius lops off Guntharius's lower leg, knee included (1363–64); as the king collapses, Hagano comes to protect him from the death-blow, placing himself between Waltharius's sword and Guntharius (1365–70). Waltharius is, we are told, unable to stop his hand, which is already extended to strike Guntharius (1371: *Extensam cohibere manum non quiverat heros*)—but his sword only strikes Hagano's helmet, and breaks on impact (1372–75). Waltharius is so enraged by this that he throws away even the hilt of his sword, and such is his fury that he extends his arm too far out of the safety of his shield when tossing his hilt away, and Hagano chops off his hand (1376–82). Waltharius, undaunted, sticks the stub of his right arm into his shield and with his left hand pulls out his short sword and slices off the right side of Hagano's face, eye and molars included (1386–95). *Tali negotio dirimuntur proelia facto* (1396: 'With all this having been done, the battle ended'). The hand, the eye and the foot lie on the ground staring up at the warriors: *Sic, sic armillas partiti sunt Avarenses!* (1404: 'Thus were the arm-rings of the Avars distributed!').

Waltharius calls out to Hiltgunt to come and bind their wounds (1407–08), and when this is done, he asks her to serve the wine: first to Hagano, who is a good warrior, then to himself, who had to endure more than the others (1412: *reliquis qui plus toleravi*), and finally to Guntharius, who is a useless warrior (1410–1415). As the alcohol gets to them, Hagano

and Waltharius indulge in a bit of light-hearted banter about their newly altered physical states (1421–42), and then they renew their bond (1443: *His dictis pactum renovant*), lift up the still incapable and suffering Guntharius on his shield, set him on his horse, and go off, each on their own way, the Franks to Worms, and Waltharius to Aquitaine (1443–46). Waltharius and Hiltgunt marry, and after the death of his father, Waltharius rules his people for thirty years (1447–50).

The Old English *Waldere* fragments are clearly about the same story; although some differences are discernible even from the few lines we have, there is too little evidence to make much of a judgement about the thrust of the narrative or its function. Fragment I consists almost in its entirety (31 lines) of a speech (only the first half-line is not a part of this speech) encouraging the (leading-) warrior of Attila (6a: *Ætlan ordwyza*),⁸ the son of Ælfhere (11) not to lose heart and to fight against Ʒuðhere (named at 25), *ðæs ðe he ðas beaduwe onzan / mid unryhte ærest secan* (26b–27: ‘because he first began to seek strife without right’).⁹ We are told that *Forsoc he ðam swurde ond ðam syncfatum, / beaza mænizo* (28–29a: ‘he [Ʒuðhere] forsook the sword and the treasures, many rings’), and will therefore have to lose the battle and seek a lord, or die (30–31). Ælfhere’s son, it is reasonably supposed, must be an equivalent to Waltharius; he is also the leading warrior of Attila, as in the Latin poem, and fights against Ʒuðhere, cognate with Guntharius, who has refused his offer of treasures. The speaker in fragment I must be Hiltgunt, assuming that the narrative framework is the same as in the Latin poem. We should note that regardless of what the rest of the lost

⁸ Cf. *Waltharius* 126–28, where Attila’s wife calls Waltharius the *imperii columna* [...] *in quo magna potestatis vis extitit huius* (‘the pillar of the empire [...], which contains the great strength of this power’); at 378 he is called *lux Pannoniae* (‘light of Pannonia’).

⁹ Note that in both versions the Guntharius figure seeks battle against what is right.

Old English poem must have been like, from this speech alone Hiltgunt can be seen to have had a larger role than in the Latin text.¹⁰ While I am not sure this amounts to taking over the role of a senior member of a *comitatus* (Schwab 1979, 245), it certainly gives her far more prominence than in the Latin text, though the reason for her long speech—that, ultimately, if she cannot successfully get Waltharius to fight and win, she herself is lost to the enemy—exists in *Waltharius* too.

Fragment II is rather more confusing, and more allusive to a wider world of legend. There are references to Deodric, Widia (4b), Niðhad (8b), and Weland (9a; he is also referred to in I, 2a), all known from other vernacular narratives in the Germanic languages; a reference to Weland occurs also in *Waltharius* (965).¹¹ It begins with a speech by someone who is obviously opposed to Waldere, and this is followed by Waldere's own rejoinder, in which he mentions that his interlocutor, the lord or friend of the Burgundians (14: *wine Burzenda*¹²) thought that Hagen would have managed to end the battle. Putting the two fragments together makes it all the more apparent that we are dealing with the same story as in the Latin; the Old English version even has the format of abusive speech between warriors before they fight.¹³ As in the Latin text, there are allusions both to the mythological figure of

¹⁰ Not also that the female figures of Guðrún/Kriemhild and Brynhild in the Norse and German versions of the Burgundian legend have very prominent roles indeed, and are far from passive figures, unlike Hiltgunt in *Waltharius*.

¹¹ On Theoderic, see further chapter seven, pp. 223–29; on the other three, cf. the references at n. 36 below.

¹² But cf. *Atlaqviða* (Neckel and Kuhn, eds 1983, 16, 3), where—if we follow the manuscript—the Huns are referred to as *vinir Burgunda*; this makes sense because in this version Atli is married to the sister of Gunnar.

¹³ This is a typical feature of much Germanic literature (including *Beowulf*), but is not restricted to works in the Germanic languages, and thus need not be seen as necessarily linking *Waltharius* to Germanic traditions. For comparative studies of flyting in a Germanic context, see Clover (1980); Harris (1979); for comparison with literature in other languages (especially the Homeric tradition), see Parks (1986; 1990). Highet lists 33 episodes of 'taunts, threats, challenges' in the *Aeneid*; as he points out, the Virgilian warriors' verbal combats, although having the same function as in the *Iliad*, are of much shorter length (Highet 1972, 116–17; 318–19 [list of passages]). On flyting in the ancient Mediterranean, see also Glück (1964). According to Oakley (1985), single combat was in fact common in the Roman world, often taking place after a challenge, but he does not examine the issue of verbal combat further.

Weland the smith, who was a character only of Germanic mythology, and to the legend of the Burgundian kings; Guntharius is here—as in the fifth-century chronicles, Paul’s *Romana*, and all later vernacular legends—Burgundian, not Frankish as in *Waltharius*. Unlike in the Latin text, Deodric is also mentioned; he is most likely connected to the Ostrogothic king Theoderic of Italy, whom we have already encountered in the context of the sixth-century Latin Fredegar chronicle, and who crops up again in three other extant shorter vernacular heroic poems from this period. At present, we need to note only that this brief fragment, like *Beowulf*, *Deor* (which also refers to the Weland legend) and *Widsith*, evokes a wider world of past kings, unrelated to each other, all of whom—whatever their afterlife might have been in the Christian conception—manifestly enjoyed quite a *Nachleben* in narrative form.

The most important way in which the Walter legend is connected with both historical fact and vernacular legendary traditions is in the naming of the historical kings Gibicho and Guntharius, and the fact that they are located along the Rhine and have some conflict with the Huns. It is crucial, though, that these kings are Franks in *Waltharius*; there is no record of any Frankish king called Gibicho or Guntharius.¹⁴ There were, however, historical kings of the Burgundians with similar names in the fifth century, who are commemorated in the Burgundian law code of the early sixth century.¹⁵ *Waltharius* is the only text that designates these kings as Frankish; in the *Waldere* fragments, *Waltharius*’s interlocutor is a Burgundian

¹⁴ The first Guntharius in the Merovingian family is a son of Chlodomer, and is killed by his uncles (*Hist.* III,18; he is named at III,6). The other Guntharius is a son of Chlothar I, who dies while his father is still alive (*Hist.* IV,3).

¹⁵ Gundicharius is attested as a Burgundian king in sources of the mid-fifth century, which state that under him, the Burgundian kingdom is destroyed; one source (Prosper’s chronicle) specifies that they were wiped out by the Huns. The fifth- and early sixth-century sources are: Prosper’s chronicle (Mommsen, ed. 1892a, 1322); Hydatius’s chronicle (Burgess, ed. and trans. 1993, §§ 99; 102); the Gallic chronicles of 452 and 511 (Burgess, ed. and trans. 2001a, s. a. 436; Burgess, ed. and trans. 2001b, s. a. 437/438). Gundicharius is commemorated as belonging to a line of Burgundian kings beginning with Gibica in the *Lex Burgundionum* (von Salis, ed. 1892, § 3). The sources are presented and discussed, with reference to their relationship with later legendary matter, in Ghosh (2007, 221–23); overviews of Burgundian history are given by Favrod (2002) and Kaiser (2004a); see also Wood (2003b); and for an archaeologically-oriented introduction, Escher (2006).

(II,14), and this is also true of all the (later) vernacular narratives that treat of these kings, as well as Paul the Deacon's *Romana*, in which—unlike the fifth-century reports, but like all the later vernacular versions—Guntharius dies fighting Attila (Droysen, ed. 1879, XIV,5). In fact, Guntharius's encounter with the Huns took place c. 436, when Attila was not yet reigning over the Huns; the chronological confusion is first evident in Paul's text. Attila's campaign through western Europe is recorded most memorably and fully in Jordanes's *Getica*; both he and Gregory of Tours inform us that the Visigoths—then ruling in Aquitaine—and the Franks fought the Huns under Attila in 451, and Jordanes also has Burgundians in his list of Roman allies fighting the Huns (*Get.* 185–218 for the battle; Franks and Burgundians at 191; *Hist.* II,7).¹⁶

There was no independent Burgundian kingdom by the middle of the sixth century, long before the *Waltharius* was written, but Burgundy remained a more or less self-conscious unit within Francia.¹⁷ Vernacular texts from the thirteenth century in Old Norse and Middle High German (the Norse *Edda* and *Völsungasaga* and the German *Nibelungenlied*) provide us with a narrative of the fall of the Burgundian kingdom on the Rhine at the hands of Attila the Hun, and it seems likely that some sort of narratives concerning these kings—as kings of the Burgundians—were known during the Carolingian period in those parts of Francia where a Germanic vernacular was spoken (Ghosh 2007). The author of *Waltharius* and any members of his audience sharing the same level of Latin education (and probably most other

¹⁶ The Franks had also fought another people from Pannonia, the Avars, in the 560s, and more recently under Charlemagne. As we have seen, the Huns are called Avars in the *Waltharius*, and the late-ninth-century historical poem of Poeta Saxo refers to the Avars as Huns, stating that they had, under Attila, also fought against the Franks (von Winterfeld, ed. 1899, III,12–53). The identification of Avars as Huns was a very old one, occurring in Gregory: *Hist.* IV,23; IV,29. For the contemporary and later ninth-century historiography on Charlemagne's Avar wars, see Collins (1998, 89–101).

¹⁷ On the place of Burgundy within the Merovingian and Carolingian kingdoms: Kaiser (2004a, 177–84); on changing forms of Burgundian identity after the collapse of the kingdom: Favrod (2002, 131–37); Kaiser (2004a, 184–200).

members of the audience as well) would have known that Gibicho and Guntharius had not been Frankish kings; they would also quite possibly have known the legend of the fall of the Burgundians under Guntharius, in which he dies in an encounter with Attila. The fact that Burgundian kings are Franks in *Waltharius* might have something to do with the absorption of the historical kingdom of Burgundy into the Frankish empire. What is equally possible, though, is that by the time the text was written, there had taken place sufficient melding between different groups as to make the differences between them in the past unclear, allowing for the conjoining of material concerning them in ways that did not represent historical fact.

Although very tenuous, there is nevertheless some relation between the basic premise of the Walter legend (conflict between Attila and his Huns and Franks, Burgundians and Aquitainians) and historical fact, and the names of some characters (Attila, Gibicho, Guntharius) are known both from historical record and later legendary tradition. The eponymous hero, however, is harder to place within any kind of historical context. There have been attempts to link him to the Visigothic king Vallia who ruled in Aquitaine for three years, but beyond the first element of the name, there is no discernible connection between Waltharius and Vallia, and it is far from certain that the latter is the historical antecedent of the former.¹⁸ Vallia's successor Theoderic (not to be confused with the Ostrogothic Theoderic) ruled the Visigothic kingdom of Aquitaine for thirty years, and in fact took part—and died—in the battle against Attila.¹⁹ How any of this historical matter could have been

¹⁸ Cf. Murdoch (1996, 90), with further references on the supposed relationship between historical king and literary character; Murdoch appears to accept the identification.

¹⁹ Theoderic's death: *Get.* 209; 204; the contemporary source is Hydatius (Burgess, ed. 1993, § 142). Given that the Walter legend is—in the Latin at least—about a warrior from Aquitaine, it might be possible that the Old English *Deodric* represents the Visigothic king of Aquitaine, Theoderic, who succeeded Vallia and did, in fact, rule for thirty years.

transformed into the Walter legend as we have it is a question impossible to answer. The function of this legendary past will be addressed further in the final section of this chapter; I begin the discussion first with a look at potential Christian influences on the legend.

Christianity in *Waltharius*

Religion and religious difference are not mentioned after the opening lines of the poem, which state only that the peoples of Europe have different religions (among other distinguishing factors: 1–3). The historical Attila was not Christian, and this would have been known to a Carolingian with the kind of education necessary to compose a polished verse epic like the *Waltharius*.²⁰ At the time of Attila the Hun, the Franks were most probably pagan, and Aquitaine was ruled by the Visigoths, who were probably largely Arian: the principal protagonists of this poem, therefore, belonged to unorthodox religious denominations, an aspect of the past never mentioned by the poet.²¹ The religion of none of the actors is specified, and there is, in fact, for the most part very little in terms of behaviour that distinguishes any of the characters as Christian or pagan.²²

The exception is *Waltharius* himself. The first clearly Christian element in his character occurs when he crosses himself on receiving a drink from Hiltgunt (225),²³ but

²⁰ Poeta Saxo, for example, describes Attila plundering churches (von Winterfeld, ed. 1899, III, 21–22).

²¹ The Burgundians do not really play much of a part in this poem: their kings have been turned into Franks, and their princess has an almost completely passive role. What their religion actually was in the early fifth century has been debated: Orosius says they are Christian, which for him would have meant Catholic (VII.xxxii,12), but Gregory of Tours portrays them as Arian until around 500, after their settlement in southern Gaul (cf. *Hist.* II,32). The evidence of the Catholic bishop of Vienne, Avitus, is difficult to interpret, but attests to the presence of both Arians and Catholics among the Burgundians. Kaiser's conclusion, that the Burgundians had been Catholic in the first half of the century, and Arianism took hold only under Gundioc or his son Gundobad from the 450s, seems plausible (Kaiser 2004a, 151–52). On Burgundian religion, cf. Favrod (2002, 92–94); Kaiser (2004a, 148–57 [Arianism and Catholicism]; 157–75 [Catholic institutions in the Burgundian kingdom]), and on Avitus, cf. the discussion in Shanzer and Wood (trans. 2002, 18–19).

²² I see no evidence for Brunhölzl's assertion that the epic is set in a 'durchaus heidnischen Zeit' (1988, 8: 'completely heathen period').

²³ On the meaning of *signare* here: Önnarfors (1998, 107).

there are also two other passages in which Waltharius seems to be behaving like a Christian.

At the first sighting of the Frankish troop, there is a curious little scene:

‘Hac coram porta verbum modo iacto superbum:
Hinc nullus rediens uxori dicere Francus
Praesumet se impune gazae quid tollere tantae.’
Necdum sermonem complevit, humotenus ecce
Corruit et veniam petiit, quia talia dixit.
Postquam surrexit, contemplans cautius omnes:
‘Horum quos video nullum Haganone remoto
Suspicio [...]’

‘Before this gate I boast these arrogant words: hence no Frank shall presume to return and say to his wife that he was able to take anything of such a treasure unpunished’. No sooner had he finished speaking, behold, he fell to the ground and sought pardon that he had said such a thing. Then he rose, observing them all very carefully: ‘I fear none of those I see, except Hagano...’ (561–68; the speaker is Waltharius).²⁴

This is an expression of (Christian) religious sentiment: Waltharius asks pardon for the sin of arrogance. Brunhölzl has suggested that Waltharius does not just behave like a Christian warrior, but like a man accustomed always to observe his own behaviour in a manner befitting an ascetic ideal of perfection; in other words, he behaves like a monk (1988, 10). It is true enough that in the various panegyric poems of the Carolingian period, victorious kings do not tend to ask for pardon for their words or deeds; and Waltharius’s seeking forgiveness at this point certainly does seem—unlike, perhaps, his prayer after the slaughter (1159–67)—out of place, more monkish than heroic. But it is surely more important that Waltharius goes on not just to defeat, but to kill all of his opponents except for Guntharius and Hagano themselves; he is also completely merciless in killing his opponents even when they clearly have no fight left and plead for their lives (718; 751–53; 917; 939; 981)—a notably un-Christian lack of compassion, nowhere condemned by the poet. Furthermore, as soon as he rises from his prayer, his next words seem equally arrogant: he has no cares regarding any of

²⁴ On the meaning of *suspicio* in the last line: Önnersfors (1998, 93).

his enemies except for Hagano (cf. Parkes 1974, 461).²⁵ Later on, Waltharius proclaims his belief that his own hands (not god), will keep him safe (812–17);²⁶ if the poet is indeed trying to present Waltharius as an exemplar of a good Christian in that he is free of the sin of *superbia*, he has not, it seems, done so very well (cf. Kratz 1980, 45–48).

There are no other explicitly Christian acts in this text; we should note also that there are no churches or clerics of any sort anywhere. Nevertheless, the poem has been seen by some critics as an explicitly Christian work, expounding Christian morality as a form of critique against a warrior ethos (Katscher 1973; Kratz 1977; Kratz 1980). There is support from this view especially from the fact that apart from Virgil's *Aeneid*, which is without question the most important stylistic model for *Waltharius*, the work the author draws on the most is Prudentius's *Psychomachia* (Cunningham, ed. 1966, 149–81), an allegorical poem depicting battles between virtues and vices, in which the vices are all slaughtered.²⁷ Reading the battles in *Waltharius* allegorically as between embodiments of virtue (Waltharius) and vices (his opponents) would explain how the one clearly Christian figure in the text—its hero—can be so lacking in the Christian virtue of compassion: the battles are not to be understood as really human, but as the defeat of vice by virtue (Katscher 1973).

Such a reading runs aground, though, on the many inconsistencies in Waltharius's own character: as we have seen, he is not free from the sin of *superbia* himself, and the

²⁵ We should note also that just before this scene, when Hiltgunt perceives the approaching Franks—whom she takes to be Huns bent on revenge—and wakes Waltharius, pleading with him to kill her, since she does not want a carnal union with anyone but her betrothed (542–46), Waltharius reassures her that he can vanquish them: *Qui me de variis eduxit saepe periclis, / Hic valet hic hostes, credo, confundere nostros* (552–53: 'He who often led me out of varied dangers will be able to confound our enemies here as well'). The grammatical antecedent of *qui* in this clause (if one reads it as a relative clause with an antecedent) is Waltharius's sword, referred to at 549–50, so a reference to god need not be assumed (Kratz 1980, 47).

²⁶ With reference to this passage and 552–53, cf. *Beowulf* 2608b–09b for what seems to be a similar expression of trust in the sword and the hand that wields it.

²⁷ On the links between Virgil, Prudentius and *Waltharius*, see the apparatus in Strecker's edition, and in addition, Katscher (1973); for further references to classical and early medieval Latin works with echoes in *Waltharius*: Önnersfors (1998).

compassion he shows (initially) to Hagano's nephew Patavrid can only be understood if we see the latter as actually human, not just an embodiment of sin.²⁸ His prayers after having killed (and decapitated some of) the Franks make no sense if they are supposed to embody vice and he is virtue personified, but they also come a bit too late for a Christian with entirely monkish values; awareness of sin, furthermore, does not stop him from taking their armour (cf. Kratz 1989, 45–47). As Kratz has pointed out, Waltharius's plunder of the dead men points to a passage in the *Aeneid* (IX, 357–63), reminding the audience that Waltharius 'is behaving in accord with the pagan heroic tradition rather than a Christian attitude of compassion' (Kratz 1980, 45); and Waltharius does not really express any reliance on god to protect him, talking instead of his own prowess.

Kratz's reading is, however, equally committed to seeing this text as a work of Christian moralising. Pointing out that the end of the work, with the loss of hand, eye and foot, is modelled on the Gospel of Mark (9.42–48), which contains an injunction to cut off these body parts because they cause sin (Kratz 1980, 50–51), he suggests (*contra* Katscher 1973) that no single character embodies virtue, but that the text as a whole is supposed to exemplify the dangers of the sin of avarice; this is why the three primary figures are punished according to the biblical injunction. This is more than plausible, and the biblical reference would certainly have been recognised by the audience. Nevertheless, I am not convinced that *Waltharius* can be read solely as moral preaching against cupidity. It is true that Guntharius is depicted as avaricious, and entirely negatively, but Kratz's readings of Waltharius and

²⁸ The context is as follows: after many Frankish warriors have already been killed, Patavrid goes off to fight, an action that Hagano laments vehemently in a moving passage, cursing the avarice and lust for fame that causes such violence and suffering (855–75). Waltharius, from the distance, perceives his old friend's unhappiness (878–79), and to Patavrid—this was not the case with any of his previous opponents—he offers advice, that he should not fight (881–85). Predictably, Patavrid does not heed him, and is killed; despite his apparent earlier compassion, Waltharius does not refrain from beheading Patavrid—after he is already dead (917), thus adding desecration of a dead body to his lack of mercy with regard to the warriors he kills. Katscher admits that there is no model for this episode in Prudentius (1973, 89)

Hagano as being tainted by the sin of greed seem to overburden the text. Hagano certainly seems to have a desire for glory and vengeance (1094–96; 1277–9), but nowhere does he appear to crave gold; on the occasions when he asks the king to accept the treasures Waltharius offers, this is in order to prevent bloodshed, not out of avarice. Kratz argues that in his speech against avarice when Patavrid departs to fight, Hagano implicitly links glory and avarice (which is true) and thus when he himself goes to fight for glory (1279), he ‘involves himself with the taint of *avaritia* as a result of his own earlier equation of the desire for glory with that sin’ (Kratz 1980, 39). Hagano explicitly says, however, that he has no interest in the treasure (1276), and it seems to me equally (if not more) plausible to suggest that Hagano here differentiates between himself and Guntharius by fighting only for honour, and thus cancelling the equation of glory and sin.²⁹

As for Waltharius, to believe that ‘the treasure seems to define for Walter his view of right action’ (Kratz 1980, 41) and that Hagano’s condemnation of avarice in his lament before Patavrid fights applies equally ‘to Walter’s original greed in stealing the treasure’ (Kratz 1977, 132) is surely straining the limits of interpretation—quite apart from other matters, Kratz here forgets that Guntharius demands Hiltgunt, and defending her would certainly be reason enough to fight. Moreover, plunder was an inevitable—and economically

²⁹ The secular themes of honour in battle, and more importantly, divided loyalty—to one’s friend and to one’s lord—are key to understanding the character of Hagano, and clear evidence of the poem’s derivation from a secular milieu. Note that before the final battle, although Hagano is swayed by the pleas of his king (1092–94) that he should fight, honour appears to play a significant role in his final decision: *replicabat honorem / Virtutis propriae, qui fors vilesceret inde, / Si quocumque modo in rebus parceret sibi istis* (1094–96: ‘he considered the reputation of his own courage, which would perhaps be tarnished thereby if he were now to spare himself in this affair’). Significantly, he says that Patavrid’s death would not be enough for him to go against his vows of loyalty: *Nam propter carum (fateor tibi, domne) nepotem / Promissam fidei normam corrumpere nollem* (1112–13: ‘For [I confess to you, my lord] I would not want to break my promise of loyalty on account of my dear nephew’). Hagano agrees to fight not motivated by revenge, but rather by his loyalty to his lord (if we go by his words: see esp. 1098–1125), and in addition by considerations of his own honour. But we do not get the impression of either authorial praise or condemnation of honour or loyalty; there seems to be no moral in any of this, even of a secular nature (contrast, for example, the famous scene in the *Nibelungenlied*, in which Ruedeger von Bechelaren must decide between his loyalty to his lord and his sworn friendship with the Burgundians: Bartsch, De Boor and Wisniewski, eds 1988, *Aventiure* 37).

and socially essential—part of warfare throughout the early middle ages, and the distribution of treasure was an equally essential part of the patronage networks by which power was maintained.³⁰ A monastic audience, linked to this patronage network in multifarious ways (cf. above, pp. 7–8, at n. 9) would have been aware of the economic importance of treasure—and of the associated aristocratic values, which need not be heathen or heroic, but simply secular, martial and pragmatic—and might not necessarily have condemned them as much as Kratz might like us to believe.

Of course, one could read this work as a condemnation of the whole system of secular values of which the ecclesiastical world was also a part, but the poem does not lend itself straightforwardly to such an unambiguously theological reading. Apart from the objections voiced in the preceding paragraphs, we should remember also that the disfiguring of the three warriors after the last battle, while certainly recalling the Bible, is not the end of the work. Although Guntharius is still completely incapacitated, Hagano and Waltharius renew their friendship, and seem quite unchanged in spirit by the loss of various body parts; there is no evidence to suggest that their own concepts of honour and martial valour are in any way diminished. The epic does not conclude with the end of the battle: Waltharius returns home—with his treasure!—and marries Hiltgunt, and rules for thirty years. And in this context the treasure becomes all the more important, from a purely pragmatic point of view: a warrior returning from exile would have a hard time claiming legitimate rule without some riches to support him, and the ability to be a successful king was inextricably linked to the ability to provide wealth for members of the court. No early medieval king would have been able to rule for thirty years without being able to ensure both success in battle and enrichment

³⁰ For the Carolingian period, see fundamentally Reuter (1985); and on the dangers of a lack of treasure, Reuter (1990); more broadly, on gifts, treasure and patronage, see the less rigorous and more impressionistic picture presented in Smith (2005, 198–214), with useful further references.

for the leading men of his kingdom (cf. Halsall 2003, 24–33). The moral of the maiming of the three men, therefore, ends up being rather unclear, given the way the text continues after their crippling.

Our understanding of the motif of treasure depends, therefore, to a very large extent on whether we wish to withdraw the text completely from the context of the secular world of which it tells, seeing it solely as critical, or whether one is willing to accept that, Latin language and literary and theological references notwithstanding, it was not completely removed from the world of secular values. Ultimately, the poet provides a pragmatic solution to the conflict: with the only two capable fighting men too wounded to fight—and since neither really desired to fight anyway—the battle cannot really go on, and since it was senseless and legally not justifiable in the first place, it is simply halted (cf. Murdoch 1996, 101–03). This is in marked contrast to the normal heroic victories or defeats that we encounter in other martial epics (whether Latin or in the vernacular), with the code of honour demanding a fight to the death. Whether the work gives us such a sensible ending because ‘the Church steps in when it has to, and stops the fight at an appropriate point’ (Murdoch 1996, 103), is, however, debatable: while not ‘heroic’ in a conventional sense, it seems to me that *Waltharius* presents a pragmatic and secular solution to a secular problem; a purely theological, moralising reading is unwarranted, but a belief that this pragmatism comes from a clerical viewpoint is also, I think, not necessary.

I would like to stress, though, that being secular (in the sense of not being solely or primarily a vehicle for Christian moral preaching) need not mean being un-Christian. It seems to me perfectly possible to read *Waltharius* as a Christian warrior: he certainly believes in a Christian god, and has absorbed some of the teachings of the Church, but he is a

warrior and ruler, who must fight and acquire treasure in order to maintain his position in the world. Acknowledging this, though, does not quite solve the problem of where exactly this text stands between Classical, Latin and ecclesiastical traditions on the one hand, and vernacular and secular traditions on the other, and how it comments on these, and on the image of the past that they and it both tell of, albeit in such different ways. Moreover, accepting that the text is not primarily an allegory against avarice or arrogance does not tell us what function it serves, and why. The matter is complicated further when we turn to its potential relationship to various vernacular traditions.

***Waltharius* and Germanic Oral Tradition**

There are two reasons to assume a link between *Waltharius* and Germanic oral traditions: the existence of the *Waldere* fragments, composed in a Germanic vernacular, and the presence in it of Gibicho, Guntharius, Attila, and—crucially—Hagano as Guntharius's advisor. Gibicho and his descendants were historical Burgundian kings, who had a kingdom along the Rhine, and their defeat was in a battle against the Huns (cf. n. 15 above). In all the extant (much later) texts in the Germanic vernaculars, the figure of Guntharius (Gunnar in Old Norse, Gunther in Middle High German) has at his court a counterpart to Hagano (Hogni in Old Norse, Hagen in Middle High German); there is, however, no historical model for this character. The Middle High German works present a positive image of Attila, whereas in the Old Norse *Atlaqviða*—which is most likely the oldest surviving version of the legend—he is portrayed negatively; the Latin text seems closer to the German tradition. In the Middle High German *Nibelungenlied* and in the Old Norse *Þiðrekssaga*, the Burgundian legend is linked, albeit somewhat differently from the way this is done in the *Waltharius*, with the figure of

Walter of Aquitaine. The legends of the Burgundians and of Walter, however, do not seem to be fundamentally connected, and our Latin text is the earliest work that brings them together inextricably—although here, unlike in all other attested versions of either narrative, the Gibichungs are Franks, not Burgundians.

Vernacular oral narratives concerning these Burgundian kings and their (unhistorical) defeat by Attila were probably known during the ninth century and later until their eventual recording in writing, though the form such narratives might have had and their exact relationship to the extant poems is unclear;³¹ all that is important to note for present purposes is that we should probably reckon with an audience that knew some sort of narrative in which these kings were Burgundians, fought against the Huns (under Attila), and died, with their kingdom being destroyed in consequence (they need not necessarily have known these facts from a Germanic or oral narrative). The audience would therefore almost certainly have perceived the altering of even the legendary matter by the author of *Waltharius*.

Apart from the reference to the Burgundian legend in the Latin poem, scholars have noted also a number of potential parallels between this work and (in almost every case later recorded) texts in one or another Germanic vernacular.³² A motif that is common to the Latin text and a number of Germanic narratives is the offering of arm-rings (*armillas*) in an attempt to prevent violence; this motif is present in the ninth-century *Hildebrandslied* (33–35). It is difficult to ascertain the extent to which this might represent real practice, but arm-rings are definitely known to have been worn by early medieval aristocrats—and even Romans, for that matter (Önnerfors 1998, 92)—so the reference need not in any way be derived from specifically vernacular traditions. Attila's speech after Waltharius and Hiltgunt escape (405–

³¹ My views and a summary of the earlier scholarship are presented in Ghosh (2007).

³² A recent, fairly detailed, summary is provided by Bornholdt (2005, 49–58; 63–72); of the earlier literature, Schwab (1979) is of fundamental importance.

07), in which he says he will cover with gold whoever brings back Waltharius, has some parallels in Old Norse and Middle High German, but the resemblances are not necessarily close enough to prove a dependence of the Latin text on Germanic tradition; the extant vernacular texts are, in any case, from much later, so the possibility that they borrowed from the Latin (even if indirectly) cannot be discounted.³³ Another suggested parallel is between the phrase used when Waltharius beheads Trogus, one of Guntharius's men (1059: *His dictis torquem collo circumdedit aureum* 'Having spoken thus, he placed a golden torque around his neck'), and a passage from the Old Norse historical compendium *Heimskringla*, attributed to Snorri Sturluson, in the saga of Óláfr Tryggvason:

Hann segir: 'Ek var nú á Hlǫðum ok lagði Óláfr Tryggvason gullmen á hals mér.' Jarl svarar: 'Þar mun Óláfr láta hring blóðrauðan um háls þér, ef þú finnr hann [...]'.
 He says: 'Now I was at Hlaðir and Óláfr Tryggvason placed a golden necklace on my neck'.
 The Jarl answered: 'Óláfr will place a blood-red ring around your neck if you encounter him' (Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, ed. 1941, 49).

There is no other evidence that the author of this saga knew *Waltharius*. No other parallels are known, even in Germanic literatures, so it is possible (though probably unlikely) that in this instance, both authors drew on a motif of Germanic tradition.

Scholars have also noted that the scene where Waltharius arranges a party for the Huns and gets them drunk has some similarities to the Old Norse *Atlaqviða*, in which Guðrún, Attila's wife, arranges a feast for the Huns, where plenty of wine is served, and

³³ The texts are as follows: *Waltharius* 405–07: *Hunc ego mox auro vestirem saepe recocto / Et tellure quidem stantem hinc inde onerarem / Atque viam penitus clausissem, vivo, talentis* ('I would immediately dress him [scil. the one who kills Waltharius] in well-forged gold, cover him from the ground up where he stands, and as I live, I would block his way with talents'); *Hlǫðsqviða* (Neckel and Kuhn, eds 1983, 13,1–3): *Mun ec um þic sitianda silfri mæla, / enn ganganda þic gulli steypa, / svá at á vego alla velti baugar* ('I will measure you, sitting, with silver, and more, I will cover you, walking, with gold, so that rings roll on all the paths'). A passage in the *Nibelungenlied* is adduced most recently by Bornholdt (2005, 50), but I fail to see any real resemblance to *Waltharius*: *Si sprach: "der mir von Tronege Hagenen slüege / unde mir sin houbet her für mich trüege / dem fult' ich rôtes golde den Etzelen rant / dar zuo gaebe ich im ze miete vil guote büerge unde lant* (Bartsch, De Boor and Wisniewski, eds 1988, 2025: 'She said: "he who kills Hagen of Tronje for me and brings me his head, for him I would fill Etzel's shield with gold; and in addition I would give him many good castles and lands as reward"').

Attila gets drunk; Guðrún then sets fire to the hall (Neckel and Kuhn, eds 1983, 34–35,4; 40,1–2; 42). Olsen suggests that the fact that the Huns were too inebriated to have been able to notice even if their hall were in flames (322–23: *Et licet ignicremis vellet dare moenia flammis, nullus, qui causam potuisset scire, remansit*) would be ‘unintelligible to an audience trained only in the classical tradition’ (1993, 271; cf. 268–72 for her reading of the feast scene as essentially Germanic). This seems too large a claim; these lines surely do not require a knowledge of Germanic tradition in order to be understood as implying simply that the Huns were so intoxicated that they would not know if their hall were burning (cf. Bostock 1976, 266). Nevertheless, it is possible that some awareness of a tradition concerning Huns being tricked into getting drunk was known to the *Waltharius*-poet, though it seems much more likely that the motif of drunkenness derives from a fairly common theme in early medieval literature.³⁴ Bornholdt has recently suggested that since ‘overindulgence was a common motif in early Germanic literature’ (2005, 53), the poet of *Waltharius* was not drawing on specific knowledge of any antecedent of the *Atlaqviða* in this instance, but on a broader Germanic background.³⁵ The depiction of the feast is common in heroic epic, not just in the Germanic languages (Magennis 1999, 17–20) and the passage in *Waltharius* (288–304) clearly draws on the *Aeneid* (I,216; 699–706; 723–30; cf. Katscher 1973, 55–56; Magennis 1999, 46–47). Magennis suggests that the tone of the feast scene in *Waltharius* is actually quite distinct from what is found in vernacular works; it would seem most appropriate to follow his conclusion that the passage in *Waltharius* ‘has little flavour, so to speak, of the

³⁴ For a broader examination of the role of drink and drunkenness in Germanic literatures, see Magennis (1999, 17–50); he stresses the importance of feasting in non-Germanic heroic works as well. See also the examination of drinking in Merovingian Francia in Hen (1995, 235–49).

³⁵ With regard to the feast scene, Bornholdt cites a number of parallels of drunkenness being induced before a slaughter (2005, 53–56); since the earliest of these are in Gregory of Tours (*Hist.* IV,46; VI,13; X,27), I am doubtful about her designation of this theme as necessarily ‘Germanic’.

world of Germanic poetry [...] smacking instead of the tradition of classical epic' (Magennis 1999, 45–49 [quote at 49]).

The links adduced between *Waltharius* and any Germanic tradition can tell us, at most, only that there were some motifs and patterns available both to the author of the *Waltharius* and to later authors of vernacular texts; they do not tell us that the Latin text necessarily drew on vernacular or Germanic traditions, though this is certainly possible. The only part of this text that has to be derived from a vernacular—and Germanic—source is the reference in the Latin text to *Wielandia fabrica* (965: 'Weland's manufacture'). This corresponds exactly to *Welandes worc* in the Old English fragment (I, 2), and in *Beowulf* (455: *Welandes geweorc*). There is no precedent in any Latin text; these verses can only be understood if one is aware of the legend of Weland the smith, which is recorded most fully in the Old Norse eddic poem *Völundarqviða* (written in the thirteenth century, but composed at some indeterminate date before), but to which both *Deor* (1–12), and pictorial evidence from the early medieval period definitely alludes.³⁶

Turning aside from the Germanic vernaculars, it is apparent that the story of Walter of Aquitaine was—uniquely among the heroic material recorded in the later Germanic languages—also popular in other vernacular traditions. We should note, though, that in the Germanic vernaculars, the Walter legend is invariably brought into some kind of contact with the Burgundian legend (though the reverse is not also true); in Romance traditions, this is not

³⁶ The text is in Neckel and Kuhn (eds 1983). Von See et al provide a succinct summary of research on the Weland material (2000, 82–105; 112–16); Dronke presents a more discursive and wide-ranging treatment of sources, analogues and origins (ed. and trans. 1997, 255–90; 276–80 on *Deor* and the *Völundarqviða*). The figure of Weland occurs also on the Franks Casket, a clearly Christian artefact from Anglo-Saxon England that has a clearly non-Christian iconography alongside the Christian material. On the knowledge of the Weland material in Anglo-Saxon England, see further McKinnell (1990), who suggests that the *Völundarqviða* might originally have been composed in Scandinavian Yorkshire. On *Deor* and Germanic legend in ninth- and tenth-century England, see chapter seven.

the case. Dronke has provided a full survey of non-Germanic traditions regarding Walter (Dronke 1977; see also Bornholdt 2005, 73–79); the earliest recorded is in the eleventh-century *Chronicon Novaliciense* (Alessio, ed. and trans. 1982), a monastic chronicle, in which a part of *Waltharius* is joined to a narrative of an entirely different Walter as a means of promoting the monastery as a pilgrimage site: in old age, Waltharius became a saint and a ‘tourist attraction’ (Dronke 1977, 48–50). A figure apparently drawing on the same narrative is also attested in Spanish and Provençal narratives, and a related story is extant, many years later, from Poland. The versions of the tale in the Germanic vernaculars referred to above (p. 155–56) are all, however, much closer to the extant epic as we have it. Nevertheless, we should not discount a cross-fertilisation between the Latin work and various vernacular traditions beyond just the Germanic; vernacular legendary matter, much of it Romance, was seeping into Latin literature from the ninth century onwards, and we need to take into account not just ‘Germanic’ oral tradition, but oral tradition altogether, as a factor influencing the clerical, Latinate culture of the early middle ages (Innes 1998; Kloocke 1972; Wolf 1989, 171–78).

All we can say on surveying the evidence is that there are similarities between later vernacular texts and *Waltharius*, and because of the allusion to Weland, the Latin poet certainly had some access to some vernacular material. We should stress here that even though the Burgundian kings are present in a number of vernacular texts, they are in every case Burgundian; *Waltharius* is the only work in any language in which they are Franks—and it is impossible to determine whether or not this is a deliberate subversion by an author fully aware of the traditions about the Burgundian kings. These kings are also Burgundian in the fifth-century and later Latin historical works that refer to them, so the author would

equally have been subverting Latin historiographic tradition. Moreover, beyond the names, the existence of the Hagano-figure and of some sort of conflict with the Huns (which plays out very differently in all versions of the Burgundian legend), *Waltharius* has very little in common with the vernacular stories about the Burgundians. How exactly this text relates to oral material cannot be ascertained, but it would seem safe to say that the author and his audience were in a milieu in which, at the very least, an alternative version of the Burgundian story was known, and in which some of the motifs in this text might have been familiar from (probably Germanic) vernacular poetry.

There remains, of course, the Old English *Waldere*. Regarding this poem, Schwab has made the important point that it should not be judged in contrast to the Latin epic as some sort of archaic, purely Germanic heroic work: though it is certainly composed in the Germanic alliterative metre, she has shown convincingly that it is—like the rest of the extant corpus of Anglo-Saxon alliterative poetry—deeply influenced by Christian traditions (Schwab 1979). While on a number of occasions in the Latin text, *fortuna* is invoked (1235; 1348), and none of the figures makes any direct mention of god (*dominus* or *deus*), the Old English text has an appeal to *god* (I, 23b)—not *wyrd* (Schwab 1979, 351–52). That apart, Schwab suggests that Walter is not a typical hero as we encounter them—and not just in Germanic traditions—connected to a particular group of followers or as a follower, who journeys forth for battle and adventure (1979, 231–32). Unlike in most heroic traditions, he is the protector of a woman: every version of the Walter legend includes her, and Bornholdt has taken Schwab’s point further to argue that this legend was more a bridal-quest narrative than deriving from heroic epic tradition (Schwab 1979; Bornholdt 2005, 58–85; cf. also Dronke

1977).³⁷ The literary typologies used by these scholars are not pertinent here;³⁸ what is important, though, is that neither the Latin nor the Old English text should be seen as representing exclusively a Latin, written, clerical and un- or anti-heroic, or a Germanic, vernacular, oral and heroic tradition. Both texts attest to the cross-fertilisation that could take place across such boundaries, and also to the fact that, therefore, neither tradition can really be viewed as genuinely discrete from the other.

The existence of the *Waldere*-fragments makes it apparent that the Latin text was indeed closely related to at least one roughly contemporary vernacular narrative; that the Old English poem derives from the Latin is of course possible (though no manuscripts of *Waltharius* are known to have existed in England), though it seems more likely, as Schwab argues (1979), that they were both dependent on a lost (possibly oral) vernacular narrative—or, I would suggest, on perhaps different versions of oral vernacular (and not necessarily Germanic) narratives.³⁹ In *Waltharius* we have, then, a text that appears equally dependent on ultimately Roman tradition in the form of Virgil; explicitly Christian tradition in the references to Prudentius and the Bible; and Germanic and possibly Romance vernacular and oral traditions.

³⁷ While from the length of her speech itself it seems evident that Hildgyth is far more important in the vernacular than in the Latin epic, I am not sure that one can follow Schwab in reading 28–29a as meaning that Waldere offered *all* his treasures and his sword to Ʒuðhere, who refuses them, and thus is fighting solely for the woman (Schwab 1979, 240–43). This is a possible reading, but those lines need not mean that Waldere had actually offered all the valuables that he possesses.

³⁸ The basic distinction is that in a bridal-quest narrative, a hero journeys forth to woo a bride (not necessarily for himself), and there need not be any battle, whereas in heroic epics or lays, the hero fights for honour or treasure. A cursory acquaintance with literature in the Germanic vernaculars accepted as ‘heroic’ shows that there is, in fact, a lot of blurring of boundaries, and these genre definitions are not necessarily very helpful.

³⁹ It is worth noting that while the Old English text refers to other characters also present in other Germanic legendary works, this is not the case in *Waltharius*; the Walter-legend appears either to have been made more ‘Germanic’ in the Old English, or less so in the Latin. The question as to how ‘Germanic’ we should understand a figure like Deodric to have been for contemporary audiences will be addressed in chapter seven (pp. 223–34).

Of these elements, the classical one is the most straightforward to address: it provides a model for narrative verse, and was an indispensable stylistic guide.⁴⁰ The Christianity of *Waltharius* and *Waldere* is somewhat harder to deal with. While the Old English text seems to allude to a Christian god, there is too little of it to make any certain claims regarding its religious orientation; it does not appear to be an explicitly moralising work. The Latin text, on the other hand, is clearly inspired by a number of Christian works, but it does not, as we saw, simply present us with a subversion of secular narrative by means of Christian preaching. It appears to be, more than anything else, a light-hearted retelling of a tale of which the poet assumed his audience already had some knowledge. But if presenting a Christian moral is not what it is doing, then understanding exactly what function the distant past serves in *Waltharius* is not easy to understand: if the work were intended simply for the purpose of entertainment, the author could have taken a vernacular narrative and cast it in Virgilian verse, without any of the Christian echoes. He could also, however, have made this work much more clearly a Christian propagandist text, which he chose not to do; *Waltharius* certainly lacks the sense of earnestness present in both its models, Prudentius's *Psychomachia* and Virgil's *Aeneid*. In other words, if the distant past serves a purpose here, it seems not to be an entirely serious one, either of Christian morality, or of shoring up any kind of secular historical consciousness; the author's choice of a tongue-in-cheek approach might well have to do simply with his own taste and that of his undoubtedly monastic audience.

⁴⁰ It is worth noting here that unlike, for example, Aldhelm (c. 639–709), a poet vigorously learned in Latin literature, but nevertheless influenced in style (use of alliteration and formulaic phrases) by vernacular verse techniques, the *Waltharius*-poet seems to have taken little in the way of stylistic influence from the Germanic vernaculars. On Aldhelm: Orchard (1994, 43–60 [alliteration]; 106–25 [formulaic phrases]). Orchard notes elsewhere (2003, 136–37) that the *Waltharius*-poet does use some techniques that are often present in Germanic verse ('formulaic repetition and the use of verbal echoes, onomastic puns on character's names, and the subversive use of language'), but with regard to such techniques too, there seems to be far less Germanic influence in this Latin poem than in the works of Aldhelm or Alcuin.

The Distant Past and its Function: Heroic Narrative as Light Entertainment

The relationship of legendary material such as the narratives in *Waltharius* and *Waldere* to a sense of historical consciousness is difficult to determine not only because of the distance from historical fact, but also because these texts do not, as far as we can tell, belong in a context where they could be used to propagate some notion of self-perception or identity. *Waldere* is in Old English, and nothing in the text relates to any aspect of Anglo-Saxon history; and while *Waltharius* certainly features Franks, those Franks are actually, as we have seen, Burgundians (and would probably have been known to the audience as Burgundians), and the main focus is, in any case, on an Aquitainian.⁴¹ Aquitaine was, of course, a part of the Frankish realm in the Carolingian period, but there is no record of manuscripts of this text being linked to Aquitaine (most manuscripts are from the northern and eastern parts of the Frankish kingdoms); furthermore, unlike the narratives examined in the previous chapters, it is difficult to see *Waltharius* as contributing to any sort of political programme. The lack of clear connection between present context and the peoples in the distant past is posed by all the works to be examined the following two chapters; my argument will be that these texts speak not so much to a sense of ethnic or ‘national’ identity, but are expressions and acknowledgements of a cultural inheritance that was probably dispersed among peoples unrelated to the subjects of the narratives primarily because of the ease of communication across the Germanic vernaculars. *Waltharius*, *Waldere*, *Beowulf*, and the other shorter texts attest to different contexts and functions of this kind of cultural inheritance; *Waltharius* uses it as the object of parody and satire (Parkes 1974).

⁴¹ The Franks do not come across in a particularly positive light: their king is depicted consistently as avaricious and weak, and the Frankish warriors—with the sole exception of Hagano—do not acquit themselves well.

It would be a mistake to hang too much meaning on *Waltharius*, either as an expression of a secular historical consciousness, or as a strictly clerical moral poem. Certainly, there are Christian elements, and there is an influence from clerical works; equally clearly, the poem is set in the distant past, and draws on secular narratives. But neither element seems to be treated particularly seriously; there is no clear Christian moral, and there is also no sense that the past is used either as a means of creating a sense of identity in the present, or as a way to reflect on or legitimate present circumstances. Nor does the work appear to convey some sort of secular moral regarding themes such as honour in battle or loyalty to one's lord. In the Latin histories studied in the previous chapters, it was apparent that the distant past could, and in every case did have some function, normally of portraying the people in question in a positive light, and distinguishing them from enemies or, especially, from Romans, whether or not the latter were considered inimical. No such purpose can be discerned in *Waltharius*.

Given that the poem is framed as a historical work about the clash between peoples,⁴² it might seem that we are, in fact, supposed to expect a work about political conflict; the metre would suggest, furthermore, heroic matter of some sort (even if of a religious nature as in Prudentius). But the poet seems constantly to work against our expectations. It is perhaps not particularly surprising that there is no depiction of battle initially, and that the various peoples simply give in to Attila without a fight. But when the Franks rebel later, given that *Waltharius* exacts a crushing defeat on an unnamed rebellious group, it seems as though the poet is undercutting his own elevated views of Hunnish power; certainly, their domination

⁴² Cf. the first lines: *Tertia pars orbis, fratres, Europa vocatur, / Moribus ac linguis varias et nomine gentes / distinguens cultu, tum religione sequestrans* (1–3: 'One third of the world, brothers, is called Europe, and Europe distinguishes between various peoples with regard to customs, languages, cult and name, and also separates them according to religion'); this expression of difference is followed immediately by the description of Attila's attacks on western Europe.

over the Franks lasts not a thousand years, but barely one generation. Despite the ceremonial language used of Waltharius's victory, there is no actual ceremony to celebrate the triumph; once again, where we might expect a public occasion, all the warriors quietly go home, the king is nowhere to be seen, and we witness instead a moment of quiet domesticity between Waltharius and Hiltgunt. The celebratory banquet is arranged by Waltharius, and ends up being a bit of a farce; and for all the vaunted fierceness of the Huns—described at the beginning of the poem—their reactions to Waltharius's disappearance are remarkably meek. The hero Waltharius is nervous about thorns⁴³ and wild animals (1147–49)—and we are told this just after he has, apparently effortlessly, dispatched a troop of warriors. The Frankish king is not a worthy opponent for a great warrior; he is simply a wimp.⁴⁴ One gets the sense that the poet is not entirely serious when using the commonplaces of epic narratives dealing with war; whether this sort of parodying is intended as critique, however, and what value we are to give such a critique, is far from clear.⁴⁵

Trying to understand the function of the text brings us to a section of it not yet considered: the preface. After a conventional prayer that god should grant the author the gift

⁴³ The pun here is a further indication of the humorous nature of the poem: *Hagano* is derived from Old High German **hagen* 'thorn', and Waltharius elsewhere addresses Hagano as a thorn-bush (1351: *O paliure...*).

⁴⁴ The intention to portray Guntharius negatively might have something to do with the fact that although Hagano is consistently called a Trojan and once also a Sicamber (1453), these terms are never applied to Guntharius. If we accept the reading proposed in chapter three—admittedly for texts from an earlier period—that the Trojan origin of the Franks was intended to give them a distinguished past, calling Hagano a Trojan, but denying this epithet to Guntharius, would seem further to undercut the latter's authority and stature.

⁴⁵ I find Parkes's reading of the poem as satire, with the intent to 'expose the Germanic warrior caste' and portray 'the decline of the Germanic warrior ethos' (1974, 461) over-stated: while we need not belabour the 'Germanic' nature of the poem, or of any warrior caste or ethos, it seems to me that the poet could easily have taken a more clearly religious approach if he had wished to condemn secular values; and whenever one dates the poem, it is a bit too early to speak of the decline of the 'warrior caste', given that this class continued to rule—and wage war—in Europe for centuries.

of gab (*Waltharius praef.* 13–15), the preface states unequivocally that the poem is not intended for edification, but for amusement:⁴⁶

Non canit alma dei, resonat sed mira tyronis,
 Nomine Waltharius, per proelia multa resectus.
 Ludendum magis est dominum quam sit rogitandum,
 Perlectus longaeui stringit inampla diei.

It does not sing of the bountifulness of God, but recounts the wonders of a young warrior by the name of Waltharius, who was much curtailed⁴⁷ in battle. It is more for entertainment than for beseeching God, and its reading shortens the empty hours of long days (*Waltharius praef.* 17–20).

Whether or not this preface was an original part of the poem is, in a sense, of little import, if one wants to use it to understand the work's perceived function: obviously at least one person who read the poem did not understand it as a piece of moralistic propaganda, but simply as fun.

The fact that *Waltharius* has at least an element of parody might have to do primarily with the author's personal taste. But it is also possible that even if the author did not feel it necessary to compose a clear condemnation of the heroic values and secular past which he possibly encountered in his sources, he was nevertheless uncomfortable with leaving them unmodified. It might be, in other words, that the poet was chary of providing a secular work with purely secular values and a representation of a pre-Christian or pre-Catholic past as entertainment, without at least some elements of dilution in the form of ironic, parodistic, and not completely earnest critique. Perhaps this was because he was transferring completely secular material of the sort that was often criticised in ecclesiastical circles into a clerical context (cf. below, pp. 215–18). Nevertheless, it is clear that he did not attempt to reflect deeply on any moral problems that might have been posed by his narrative. In this respect the

⁴⁶ This aspect is stressed by Murdoch (1996, 93), but less often by other commentators. For a reading of the preface, cf. Haefele (1998).

⁴⁷ Note that *resecō* can also have the meaning of 'punish' (cf. Souter 1949, s. v.); the interpretation of this word depends on whether or not one wishes to give the text a very Christian reading.

Waltharius-poet is very different from the poet of *Beowulf*: while in the Latin work, the distant, heroic past is treated with a very light touch for a monastic audience, in *Beowulf*, a poem also deeply inspired by Christian literature, the religiosity appears to have penetrated deeper, and the text is the site of a reflection on the difference between the distant past and the present of a sort we have not encountered in any of the works examined so far.

CHAPTER 6:

BEOWULF

Beowulf is the only secular epic extant in any of the Germanic vernaculars from our period. Although there are many monuments of Old High German and Old Saxon from this age, these are almost all either glosses or more or less direct translations or adaptations from Latin sources;¹ there are very few poetic works in the vernacular (whether Germanic or Romance) from the continent before the second half of the eleventh century. In England, however, there is a modest but respectable corpus of vernacular poems, mostly on religious subjects, which share with *Beowulf* similar poetic techniques and vocabulary (cf. nn. 40–41 below).² In this chapter, before examining the poem itself, I present a brief discussion of the historical background against which it must be understood: the origins of Anglo-Saxon England; the other historical narratives concerning Anglo-Saxon history; and vernacular literary culture in Anglo-Saxon England. Following this introduction, which includes as its final section a summary of the narrative of *Beowulf*, I examine first the expression of Christian concern regarding a pagan past, and then the connection with Germanic tradition in

¹ Surveys of the vernacular religious material on the continent: Bostock (1976, 90–234); Haubrichs (1995, 160–342); Kartschoke (2000, 96–113; 132–66).

² Surveys of the vernacular religious literature from Anglo-Saxon England: Fulk and Cain (2003, 48–147); Greenfield and Calder (1985, 38–106; 183–252).

Beowulf. I shall argue that, uniquely among the extant corpus of works that deal extensively with distant non-Roman and non-biblical history, *Beowulf* presents this past as highly problematic, primarily because of the difference in religion. Nevertheless, the poet still values the history contained in his work, and clearly refers to a wider world of legend that the audience is expected to know, by means of which the audience of the present is linked in some manner with an antiquity in northern Europe. This poem, though more ambivalent than the other texts we have examined, is therefore also a witness to a process by which the inheritance of Christianity was absorbed, but the traditions of a pre-Christian and non-Roman past were still preserved, and it is thus further evidence for the continuities between past and present, and between Latinate and clerical, and vernacular and secular milieux, that I have argued are expressed in the other works studied above.

Anglo-Saxon England: Origins, Narratives, and Literary Culture

The Beginnings of Anglo-Saxon England

Like Gaul and Spain, Britain had been a Roman province for several centuries by the time imperial administration collapsed in the west. This collapse took place slightly earlier in Britain than elsewhere: administrative links with Rome appear to have suffered a final break in the 440s at the latest, and the cultivation of a Roman lifestyle and an imperial administration appears to have been in decline from the turn of the century.³ The history of Britain in the fifth century is quite opaque: there are few contemporary sources, and later accounts are unreliable. Nevertheless, it is clear that during the course of the fifth century, soldiers from regions roughly corresponding to modern northern Germany, Frisia and

³ On the end of Roman Britain and the problems of the source material, see Halsall (2007, 217–18; 242–45); Hunter Blair (2003, 1–12); Salway (1984, 415–501); Wood (1984; 1987).

southern Denmark, entered Britain; these Germanic-speaking peoples, the Angles and Saxons (and, according to Bede [*HE* I,15], the Jutes), after a period of conflict lasting well into the sixth century, eventually gained control of the region corresponding to modern England by around 600.⁴

There are a few key differences from the situation on the continent that are worth noting. While the Goths, Franks and Lombards had been federates or allies of the Romans for significant lengths of time before establishing independent kingdoms, the predecessors of the later Anglo-Saxons had not been a part of the imperial military organisation in this way (although some might first have arrived in Britain as mercenaries fighting for an emperor, the evidence for such an argument is shaky⁵). The Anglo-Saxons were not Christian at the time of their migration to Britain, and their conversion was a more protracted process than was the

⁴ The first mentions of *Angli* are in Tacitus's *Germania* (Ogilvie and Winterbottom, eds. 1975, XL,2); and in Ptolemy (Stückelberger and Graßhoff, ed. and trans. 2006, II.xi,15–16; 22); later continental sources refer consistently to Saxons rather than Angles or Anglo-Saxons, even though in England *Angli* seems to have been the preferred term, at least from Bede onwards (cf. Coumert 2007, 418–24; Foot 1996; Wormald 1983). The first possible mention of Saxons could be in Ptolemy (Stückelberger and Graßhoff, ed. and trans. 2006, II.xi,11; 17; 31), but it has been argued that this reading of Ptolemy derives from later ‘corrections’ of now-lost manuscripts, and that he never actually mentioned Saxons (Springer 2004, 27–29). Eutropius refers to Saxons in his account of Carausius in the 280s (Santini, ed. 1979, IX,61); Aurelius Victor, reporting about the same conflicts, refers only to *Germani* (Pichlmayr and Gruendel, eds 1966, XXXIX,20). No third-century text refers to Saxons; the term only begins to be used in the fourth century, the earliest source being Julian the Apostate's panegyric on Constantius (Bidez, Lacombrade and Rochefort, ed. and trans. 1932–64, I,28). On references to Saxons till the end of the sixth century, cf. Coumert (2007, 395–401); Springer (2004, 32–56). On the settlement of the Angles and Saxons in Britain in the fifth and sixth centuries, see Charles-Edwards (2003a, 24–30); Halsall (2007, 311–19; 357–68; 383–92 [against the background of imperial politics]); Hunter Blair (2003, 27–49; 116–24); Wickham (2005, 306–26 [economy and society]).

⁵ Halsall (2007, 197; 311–13; 519–26) argues on the basis of a re-reading of Gildas that continental soldiers were first invited as mercenaries by Magnus Maximus in the 380s; the conventional reading has their arrival in the mid-fifth century, which seems to be the date given by the later sources (see below, pp. 173–75). If we accept Halsall's position, the future Anglo-Saxons would have had some amount of contact with a functioning Roman administration in Britain before its collapse. Even otherwise, a case could be made that Vortigern, the British king who supposedly invited the Angles and Saxons to Britain, was in some sense ‘Roman’, and that the Anglo-Saxons were therefore, in some manner, Roman federates; it is, however, difficult to ascertain the extent to which any form of Roman law or administration survived into the middle of the fifth century, and how ‘Roman’ Vortigern might have considered himself. At any rate, it seems clear enough that the Angles and Saxons had not been integrated into any form of functioning Roman administration to the extent that the Franks and Goths had: by the time the latter groups established independent kingdoms, they had had a history of cooperation with Rome of at least a century; there is no evidence for such a lengthy alliance between Saxons and Romans.

case with the Goths and Franks, all of whom had had at least some exposure to Christianity before the establishment of their kingdoms, and in some cases had converted to some form of Christianity: the Gothic and Frankish kingdoms were Christian either at the time they were founded or very soon afterwards.⁶ The conversion of Anglo-Saxon England, on the other hand, had only been completed by the second half of the seventh century—two centuries after their arrival on the island (Charles-Edwards 2003b, 124–39; Hunter Blair 2003, 116–62; Wormald 1978; Yorke 2006, 17–22; 118–28).

Furthermore, because of the roles of the Goths and Franks within the Roman administration, the native populations of Gaul, Spain and Italy had been used to the existence of a military class of ‘barbarians’, members of whom were often in positions of military command for whole provinces, and the passing of control to Goths and Franks seems to have taken place without much military conflict between these peoples and the Roman provincials. In contrast, the British offered significant resistance to the Germanic-speaking peoples from the continent, and hostilities between the British and the Anglo-Saxons continued for close to two centuries after the arrival of the latter people.

These differences from the situation on the continent arguably contributed to the continued use of the Germanic vernacular and its early evolution into a written language in Britain. While the Anglo-Saxons were the minority in Britain just as the Goths, Franks and Lombards were minorities on the continent, the Britons remained the political enemies of the immigrants for a considerable length of time; the Anglo-Saxons had also had far less exposure to Roman culture at a time when it was thriving than had the Goths, Franks and

⁶ As we have seen (above, pp. 114, n. 20; 128–32), the question of Lombard religion is somewhat more complicated, but the kings, at least from Agilulf onwards, appear to have been either Catholic or Arian: at any rate, Christian. There is no reason to believe in the existence of Lombard paganism after the first quarter of the seventh century; the Anglo-Saxons clearly held on to their native beliefs for rather longer than a hundred years after their migration.

Lombards. There appears to have been, therefore, less of a desire to adopt Roman language and culture than had been the case among the Goths and Lombards, and the Franks in most regions west of the Rhine, all of whom soon ceased to use a Germanic language as a vernacular.⁷ Although the influence of Latin, Christian and Celtic traditions on Anglo-Saxon culture was doubtless great, the newcomers to Britain nevertheless seem to have retained more elements of a native culture tied to a Germanic language than did the Germanic-speaking peoples in Gaul, Spain and Italy.⁸

Narratives of Anglo-Saxon History

The narrative sources for early Anglo-Saxon history are, in chronological order, Gildas's *De excidio Britanniae* (early sixth century); Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* (c. 731); the *Historia Brittonum* (c. 830); and the various recensions of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (late ninth century onwards).⁹ Of these, Gildas's work has least claim to being a narrative history of any sort, as the bulk of it is an admonition on Christian morality; nevertheless, it does contain a brief and not very clear narrative of pre-Anglo-Saxon British history (2–21) and of the arrival of the Saxons on the island (22–26); Gildas forms the basis of the later narratives.¹⁰ Bede's *HE* is justly famous as one of the greatest monuments of early medieval Latin literature. Its subject is primarily the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons to Roman Christianity (and it is worth reiterating here the importance of Rome for Bede). Bede nevertheless provides us with many aspects of secular history as well, and includes a brief

⁷ On the linguistic situation in the Frankish, Gothic and Lombard kingdoms and the evolution of the Romance languages from Latin, cf. Banniard (1992, 485–533); Banniard (1997, 15–38); Everett (2003, 100–62); Wright (1982); and the essays in Wright (ed. 1991, esp. 29–43; 101–74).

⁸ This paragraph draws considerably on the ideas of Ward-Perkins (2000), though to my mind he exaggerates somewhat the opposition between British and Anglo-Saxon culture.

⁹ Succinct surveys of the narrative sources for early Anglo-Saxon history are provided by Hunter Blair (2003, 13–18) and *EHD* (109–39; 615–20).

¹⁰ On Gildas and his value as a source for early Anglo-Saxon history: Coumert (2007, 386–89; 398–400); Dumville (1977b); Higham (1994); Sims-Williams (1983a; 1983b); Lapidge and Dumville (eds 1984). See also Halsall (2007, 197; 311–13; 519–26), for a different reading of Gildas (discussed above at n. 5).

description of British history before the Anglo-Saxons, and of the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons (I,1–22).¹¹ The *Historia Brittonum* narrates in some detail the history of Roman Britain, and also tells of the Trojan origins of the Britons. It has a narrative similar, in the basic outline, to those of Gildas and the *HE* regarding the coming of the Anglo-Saxons to Britain.¹² Finally, the *ASC*, the compilation of which was begun in the ninth century during the reign of King Alfred, begins its narrative with the conquest of Britain by Caesar (in other words, with Roman history),¹³ but has little to report for the next several centuries, passing over British history almost completely until the middle of the fifth century and the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons. Even after this point, all versions consist almost exclusively of annalistic entries of a line or two until the middle of the ninth century, when we begin to get detailed narratives, and even some verse.¹⁴

While these works are dissimilar in many ways, they have in common a lack of information regarding the Anglo-Saxons before the migration to England, and (apart from the *Historia Brittonum*) the basic plot of how the migration took place: with Roman troops having left the island and no help forthcoming from imperial forces to defend the Britons against their neighbours to the north, Saxon soldiers were invited as defenders of the Britons (in the *Historia Brittonum*, there is no invitation, but the Saxons, said to be exiled from their homeland [§ 31], are welcomed by the British king). Upon arrival, the newcomers find the

¹¹ On Bede and the *HE*: Church (2008 [critical appraisal of Bede's knowledge of Anglo-Saxon paganism and his conversion narratives]); Coumert (2007, 403–39 [on his origin narratives]); Goffart (1988, 235–328 [on his political context]); Higham (2006 [an attempt at a comprehensive study, also focusing on his political context]); Plassmann (2006, 64–80 [on Anglo-Saxon identity in Bede]); Sims-Williams (1983b [Bede's value for fifth- and sixth-century history]); Wormald (1978; 1983 [Bede, Anglo-Saxon secular culture, and the origins of an Anglo-Saxon identity]). Wallace-Hadrill (1988) is a useful commentary.

¹² On the *Historia Brittonum* and fifth-century history: Dumville (1986; 1994); see also Coumert (2007, 441–95).

¹³ Bede, the *Hist. Brit.* and the *ASC*, therefore, all stress the connection and importance of Rome, even if in very different ways. On the importance of Rome in Anglo-Saxon England, cf. the (somewhat exaggerated) discussion in Howe (2004).

¹⁴ On the *ASC*: *EHD* (109–25); Hunter Blair (2003, 350–55); Sims-Williams (1983a; 1983b). On the relationship of verse and prose in the *ASC*, see e.g. Bredehoft (2001); Lutz (2000); Scragg (2003).

land to their liking, and send for more of their people from the continent, and soon revolt against the British and end up ruling the island (Gildas: Winterbottom, ed. and trans. 1978, 22–24; *HE* I, 14–15; *Hist. Brit.* §§ 31; 36–46; *ASC* s. a. 449). Apart from Gildas, all the sources specify the names of the British king (Vortigern) and the leaders of the Saxons (Hengest and Horsa). A Hengest is also mentioned, in a different context and only in passing, in *Beowulf* (1083a; 1091a; 1096b; 1127b); this is the only possible link between the epic and any extant narrative traditions of early Anglo-Saxon history (see pp. 200–01 below).

We have seen that Jordanes (chapter one) and Paul the Deacon (chapter four) provided the Goths and Lombards with extensive histories before they reached their current home; Isidore (chapter one) gave the Goths a less detailed pre-Hispanic past, but nevertheless located their origins far away in biblical history, and did tell us something about their movements before reaching Spain; and Fredegar and the *LHF* (chapter three) give the Franks both a distant past in Troy, and brief narratives of the migration from the starting point to the current home. Nothing comparable exists in Anglo-Saxon England: there is no narrative of origins, or of life ‘over there’ that leads to a migration—the history of the Anglo-Saxons starts with the migration, not with life before it, or the origins of the Anglo-Saxons.¹⁵ However, the Anglo-Saxons remained aware of their pre-insular past, as is attested by the continuing dissemination centuries after the event of the migration stories cited above; *Beowulf* is the only text that provides an extensive narrative that might be related to such a past.

¹⁵ Nevertheless, it is important to note that in the main historical narratives, history *per se* does not start with the migration, but goes back either into the biblical past or to Rome.

Beowulf and Vernacular Literary Culture in Anglo-Saxon England

Beowulf is but one of the many vernacular texts extant from Anglo-Saxon England. Old English, in its various dialects, not only became the common vernacular of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms; it also became a language that was written, both in pragmatic contexts (charters and laws) and as a medium of cultural production, far earlier than the Romance or Germanic vernaculars gained common currency as written languages on the continent. There had long been a thriving tradition of Latin learning in England (influenced a great deal by the Irish), and this background should not be forgotten when considering the vernacular texts: Anglo-Saxon England, probably far more than any place on the continent at the time, seems to have nourished a truly bilingual (by which I mean influence in both directions) learned culture, evidence of which is given not just by the many translations or adaptations of Latin works into Old English, but also by the translation of vernacular material into Latin, for example the *Chronicon* of Æthelward, based on the *ASC* (Campbell, ed. 1962).¹⁶ Vernacular literature was only written down in any significant quantity from the late ninth century: the corpus of Anglo-Saxon vernacular literature dates largely from the period after c. 900, after the reign of King Alfred and the revival of letters under him.¹⁷ There are extant in Old English a number of long religious poems on Christian topics (bible adaptations and

¹⁶ On the Anglo-Latin background, cf. the contribution of Lapidge in Greenfield and Calder (1986, 5–38). One can get a glimpse of the extent and nature of Anglo-Saxon Latinity from the data on Anglo-Saxon library collections provided in Lapidge (2006); it is important to note, though, that unlike Carolingian Francia, where a great revival in the study and copying of secular classical texts took place, Anglo-Saxon England seems not to have nurtured much of a secular classical heritage, at least not before the influence of the Carolingians made itself felt (cf. Lapidge 2006, 129–31). An example of an individual who was apparently proficient as a poet in Latin and Old English is Aldhelm of Malmesbury: see Orchard (1994, 43–60; 106–25), and more recently Remley (2005).

¹⁷ On the chronology of Old English literature, cf. e.g. Fulk and Cain (2003, 36–47); Orchard (2003b, 213–18). I refer here only to the date of extant manuscripts; the date of composition of many of the poetic works is highly controversial. It is impossible to determine the relationship of the extant texts to any putative earlier oral originals; we should note that it is not only possible but also likely that the verse texts, only recorded in tenth- or eleventh-century manuscripts, were not first written down at this point, but that the extant manuscripts are copies of earlier written versions of the poems. For a recent argument to this effect with regard to *Beowulf*, see Lapidge (2000), and for a response: Stanley (2002).

hagiographies); riddles; gnomic poems; and a wide variety of prose texts, including a number of translations from Latin, as well as more original homilies and sermons.¹⁸ The verse texts make use of alliterative metres and other compositional techniques that share much in common with *Beowulf*, and in fact the latter poem contains a large number of formulaic phrases also in other Old English poems, making it clear that the *Beowulf*-poet was working within a living tradition of verse-making in Old English—which had, however, completely absorbed Christian material within this vernacular poetic tradition (Orchard 2003a, 163–68; cf. below, nn. 38; 40–41). The other texts that belong in some way to a tradition of heroic poetry are *Deor*, the *Fight at Finnsburg*,¹⁹ *Waldere*, and *Widsith*; it is notable that for the most part, the world evoked by these works (not including the *Fight at Finnsburg*)—in terms of their reference to figures with some correspondence to historical persons—is largely set somewhere in southern and eastern Europe, whereas *Beowulf*'s world is almost exclusively in the north.

Beowulf belongs, therefore, within the context of a thriving vernacular poetic tradition, but one that, although aware of legends possibly originating in a pre-Christian period, was also Christian through and through. The poem was composed sometime between 700 and 1000, and written in its present form around 1000.²⁰ Little can be said of its author beyond the fact that he had obviously had at least the rudiments of a Christian education, and knew a wide range of legendary material set in Scandinavia and northern Europe, in addition

¹⁸ Surveys of the history and genres of Old English literature are provided by Alexander (2002); Fulk and Cain (2003); Godden and Lapidge (eds 1991); Greenfield and Calder (1986). A much briefer overview, but with more attention to broader context of Latin and Celtic literatures, is given by Orchard (2003b). A historical assessment of cultural textual production in Anglo-Saxon England, including both Latin and the vernacular, is given in Hunter Blair (2003, 301–63), and Wormald (1991).

¹⁹ This poem contains a reflex of a narrative also in *Beowulf* (1063–1159); for the text and discussion, cf. Fulk, Bjork and Niles (eds 2008, 273–90 [cf. 180–91 for commentary on the passage in *Beowulf*]); for discussion within a broader comparative context: Reichl (2000, 86–100).

²⁰ A summary of the issues regarding the date and place of composition is presented in Fulk, Bjork and Niles (eds 2008, clxii–clxxx); the main arguments are provided by the various contributions to Chase (ed. 1981).

to being a master of composition in Anglo-Saxon alliterative metre. Only one medieval copy of *Beowulf* is extant, in a manuscript that also contains a *Passion of St Christopher*; *The Wonders of the East*; *The Letter of Alexander to Aristotle*; and *Judith*. *Beowulf* is the penultimate text in this collection, coming after three prose works and just before the verse life of Judith.²¹ This manuscript once more reminds us of the intimate connection between *Beowulf* and Latinity and Christianity: all the other texts are translations or adaptations of Latin material, and at least the first and last can only be understood as religious works.²² The influence of the Christian and Latin heritage on Anglo-Saxon England is, as it were, physically bound to *Beowulf*, and this bears repeating.

The Plot of *Beowulf*

Beowulf begins with a very explicit creation of distance:

Hwæt, we Gar-Dena in geardagum
 þeodcýninga þrym gefrunon,
 hu ða æþelingas ellen fremedon.

Listen: we have heard of the greatness of the kings of the spear-Danes in the ancient days,
 how the noble ones did bold deeds (1–3).

These first lines set up a disjuncture of past and present: there is a collective in the present (*we*) that has heard about people and deeds clearly in the past (*in geardagum*). These lines, however, also make the past inextricably part of the collective consciousness of the present through the use of the (admittedly formulaic, but not necessarily any less telling) first-person plural and the verb *gefrignan* (‘to hear about’; ‘to learn about’). In contrast to the singular used at other points in the poem—and it is perhaps significant that this is the sole use of *we*

²¹ For a discussion of the *Beowulf*-manuscript, see Orchard (1995, 1–27; 2003a, 12–56; 1995, *passim* on the other texts in the manuscript), building on suggestions of Sisam (1953, 65–96).

²² We should note, however, that the codex need not have been conceived as a collection including *Beowulf*, and perhaps too much should not be read into the physical connection between *Beowulf* and the other texts in the codex.

in a *gefrægn*-formula in *Beowulf* (Fulk, Bjork and Niles, eds 2008, 110)—the plural here presents this past as a common cultural heritage.

After a brief opening section in which we are told of the four glorious warrior-kings of the Danes—Scyld Scefing, his son Beow, his son Healfdane, and his son Hroðgar, the current king (1–85)—and how Hroðgar’s court is terrorised by a monster (86–193), Beowulf is very cursorily introduced as the *þegn* of Hygelac the Geat (194–198a). Having heard of Hroðgar’s troubles, Beowulf decides to go to Denmark since he thinks Hroðgar could do with some good men (199b–201). As Beowulf and his men are introduced at Hroðgar’s court, we hear that Beowulf has already earned himself some renown for his strength (377–81a), enough to warrant Hroðgar saying that god must have sent Beowulf (381b–84a). There follows a verbal bout between Hroðgar’s retainer Unferð and Beowulf (499–606), in which Beowulf gives us, in his own words, a further narrative of his prowess.²³ That night, Beowulf fights and kills the monster Grendel (702b–836). This is followed by much rejoicing, which includes a *scop*’s narration of two stories of past heroes—the dragon-slayer Sigemund and the apparently negative exemplum of Heremod (864–924)—and a ceremonial feast in which another story is told, this time of the battle between the Danes and the Frisians (1063–1159). These stories within the story highlight the strife-ridden world against which the narrative of *Beowulf* takes place. Grendel’s mother now comes to take revenge, and after she has killed one of Hroðgar’s men, there is a fight between her and Beowulf (1492–1569), which Beowulf wins. Before Beowulf leaves Denmark, Hroðgar makes a long speech (1700–84),²⁴ which contains a further allusion to Heremod as a negative exemplum, as well as an explicit

²³ For an insightful reading of this episode compared with the Old Norse *senna*, see Clover (1980); note that in this poem—in contrast to *Waltharius*—such abusive speech never takes place between the hero and his martial opponents.

²⁴ This speech seems to draw on homiletic material and other Anglo-Saxon Christian verse: Klaeber (1911–12, 128–33; 457–58; 461–62); Fulk, Bjork and Niles (eds 2008, 213–14); Orchard (1995, 47–54; 2003a, 158–62).

warning against pride (1760b). Beowulf returns home, tells the king of the Geats of his exploits (1999–2151), receives land (2195), and after no other heirs remain, assumes the throne and rules for fifty years (2200–2210a); we should note that this is exactly the same amount of time that Grendel’s mother was undisturbed in her mere (1497–98), and that Hroðgar ruled the Danes before Grendel began his attacks (1769–76). At this point, we are told that there is an ancient hoard of heathen gold, being guarded by a dragon (2110b–2116a); later we learn that the treasure had been cursed, and those who plunder it shall face the tortures of hell (3069–75), unless expressly allowed to touch it by god (3051–57).²⁵ Somewhat oddly, a thief (2219b) seems to receive such permission, approaching and taking some gold with apparent impunity; the punishment follows on the Geatish people as the dragon terrorises them (2309b–2323).²⁶ Beowulf, now old and in a clearly elegiac mood,²⁷ and saddened by his belief that he must have offended god in some way, decides he must fight the dragon (2332–54a); he declines to take his men with him to battle (2345–46).²⁸ This might be seen as prophetic since after he does eventually take them with him, his men desert him when he needs them most (2596–99a); at this point, we already know that Beowulf’s days are over, for he is called the one who once ruled the people (2595b: *se ðe ær folce weold*). In the fight, aided by his one faithful thane Wiglaf, he kills the dragon (2694–709a²⁹), but since both his men and his sword fail him (2584b–86a; 2680b–82a), the dragon also kills him (2709b–15a). In his dying speech, he expresses the hope that the treasure he

²⁵ Given the nature of the matter, it seems a bit peculiar that this passage ‘describes a pagan curse in unmistakably Christian language’ (Irving 1997, 178).

²⁶ On the possible implications of the fact that a thief can gain access to the treasure, cf. n. 50 below.

²⁷ See Harris (1992) for a moving and insightful reading that places *Beowulf* within a postulated Germanic elegiac tradition.

²⁸ We are told that Beowulf ‘scorned’ to fight the dragon with his troop; the use by the poet of *oferhogode* (‘scorned’) here seems to be a clear evocation of Hrothgar’s warning against pride at 1740b and 1760b, though how much of a criticism of Beowulf this is must remain unclear (cf. Burrow 2008, 56; Orchard 2003a, 260).

²⁹ But note *begen* (‘both’) at 2707a, referring to the killing of the dragon by both Beowulf and Wiglaf.

has bought with his life—and he asks Wiglaf to bring him some so that he may see it before he dies (2743b–51)—should be useful to his people (2799–801a), and immediately prior to that appears to give a moral accounting of himself (2736b–42a). It is obvious that Beowulf sees himself—and the narrative of the poem has largely confirmed this—as free from many of the flaws, primarily conflict among kin, that the poet has shown as plaguing the society in which his hero lives (and this is a kind of crime, we should note, that was excoriated not just in Christianity, but equally by pre-Christian moral codes, to the extent that we know of them).³⁰ Following his death, we hear a prophecy of hard times ahead for the Geats (2999–3007a; 3015b–27); it is worth noting that the foretold wars are a continuation of the conflicts that took place before and even during Beowulf’s reign, the difference being that now, without Beowulf, there seems to be no hope for the Geats. At the end of the poem, the dragon is pushed into the sea (3131b–33), and Beowulf is cremated, with the remains placed in a barrow, according to his own request (2802–08; 3140b)—along with the treasure that had been removed from the hoard: *þær hit nu gen lifað, / eldum swa unnyt swa hit æror wæs* (3167b–68: ‘it still lies there now, as useless to men as it was before’). In the last lines, Beowulf is mourned and praised; his people

[...] cwædon þæt he wære wyruldcyninga
 manna mildust ond monðwærust,
 leodum liðost ond lofgeornost.

[...] said that he was of the world’s kings the mildest and most benevolent of men, most gracious to the people and most desirous of glory (3180–82).

³⁰ Narratives of feud, or of conflict between and within groups linked by kinship ties: 459–72 (Beowulf’s father involved in a feud); 587 (Unferð as kin-slayer); 1063–1159 (war between and much killing amongst the Danes and the Frisians, related by marriage); 1713–14b (Heremod turning against his retainers and friends); 2024b–69a (feud between the Danes and the Heaðobeards, related by marriage); 2200–06; 2379b–96; 2472–89; 2472–89 (wars between Geats and Swedes); 2897b–3030a (prophecy of further wars between Swedes and Geats, and between Geats and Franks). On kin-conflict in *Beowulf*, see further the insightful treatment of Georgianna (1987).

Though the explicit praise of the king is unambiguous, the poem is clearly immensely equivocal in its attitude towards the world it depicts; a major question that emerges from it is the extent to which the statement regarding the gold—that it *still* lies there, but is as *useless as it was before*—might apply to the values of Beowulf’s world (and indeed to Beowulf himself: his remains lie with the gold). These two lines sum up, in a sense, the feeling of discomfort regarding the (often highly problematic, always very complex) interweaving of past and present that runs through the work like a thread.

Christianity in *Beowulf*: The Pagan Past as a Problem

In the poem, the first king of the Danes, Scyld Scefing (4), who subjugated all the peoples across the seas and is explicitly called a good king (9–11), is not said to be either Christian or pagan; but when a son is born to him, we are told that god sent him as a solace to the people (13b–14a: *þone God sende / folce to frofre*). A few lines later we are told that his renown was granted by the *Lif-frea*, / *wuldres wealdend* (16b–17a: ‘lord of life, the ruler of glory’); when Scyld dies, he goes *on Frean wære* (27b: ‘to the lord’s keeping’). Given that there are plentiful indications that the poem was composed by a Christian, references to ‘god’ without specification would almost certainly refer to the Christian god. And the poet’s description of the song of creation sung in the Danes’ hall (90b–98), though once again not necessarily Christian in its sentiment, definitely seems to draw on Genesis (Klaeber 1911–12, 113–16); given that this song grieves Grendel (86–89a), who is, we are told, of the kin of Cain and therefore condemned by god (104b–108), it seems all the more likely that it tells of the Christian god.

Nevertheless, the famous ship-burial given to Scyld Scefing is not an orthodox Christian rite: he is placed in a boat, which is piled up with treasures and set afloat in the sea, at Scyld's express command (28–50b).³¹ After Grendel starts attacking the Danes they turn to heathen customs, and this is explicitly condemned by the poet:

Hwilum hie geheton æt hærgratfum
 wigweorþunga, wordum bædon
 þæt him gastbona geoce gefremede
 wið þeodþreaum. Swylc wæs þeaw hyra,
 hæþenra hyht; helle gemundon
 in modsefan, metod hie ne cuþon,
 dæda demend, ne wiston hie drihten God,
 ne hie huru heofona helm herian ne cuþon,
 wuldres waldend. Wa bið þæm ðe sceal
 þurh sliðne nið sawle bescufan
 in fyres fæþm, frofre ne wenan,
 wihte gewendan; wel bið þæm þe mot
 æfter deaðdæge drihten secean
 ond to fæder fæþmum freoðo wilnian.

At times they made vows of sacrifices at heathen temples, with words they asked that the soul-slayer give them aid against the great distresses of the people. Such was their custom, the hope of heathens; they were mindful of hell in their hearts, they did not know the Ruler, the judge of deeds, they did not know the lord God, indeed they did not know to praise the protector of heaven, the governor of glory. Woe to him who shall thrust the soul into fire's bosom through cruel enmity, who cannot hope for comfort, or any change; well it will be for him who is able to seek the lord after death's day and to desire peace in the bosom of the father (175-88).

Paradoxically enough, the heathen Danes, apparently condemned to hell for their religion, are in trouble because of Grendel, someone equally or more alien to god,³² who is twice described as *hæþen* (852a; 986a; on the use of this word elsewhere, cf. p. 187 below).

Although Beowulf does not bring any sort of religious sustenance to the Danes, by freeing

³¹ Although ship-burials were not the rites prescribed by the Church, there are some recorded instances of Christian ship-burials in a Breton life of St Gildas and among Rhenish saints (Cameron 1969; Meaney 1989, 30–32); it is nevertheless most likely that these were themselves influenced by pre-Christian insular or Scandinavian practices (cf. Owen-Crocker, 2000, 27–34). In her discussion, Owen-Crocker concludes that the rite is probably closer to pre-Christian than Christian practice, but it is impossible to determine exactly how the poet or his audience perceived Scyld's burial (see also the discussion with extensive references in Fulk, Bjork and Niles, eds 2008, 114–15).

³² One should note, though, that from the Christian poet's perspective, such a creature could nevertheless be god's instrument. Klaeber adduces many parallels between the depiction of the Grendels and portrayals of the devil and the kin of Cain in other vernacular and Latin works (1911–12, 249–65; cf. Orchard 1995, 58–85 on the kin of Cain).

them from the terror of the monsters, he also, in a sense, frees them from what is described explicitly as an anti-Christian menace, and functions thus as a quasi-religious saviour.³³ But does this make Beowulf either Christian, or someone worthy of admiration by Christians?

Beowulf is not given a Christian burial: he is cremated, and this according to his express wishes (3137–40).³⁴ Thus, although he kills heathen monsters, and is assisted in doing so by god³⁵—presumably, given that the poet is clearly Christian, a Christian god, though we are told that Beowulf, not the poet, attributes the victory to god—this does not mean that he is himself Christian, though it does seem to imply that he is admirable as a figure from the past even within the poet’s Christian present. At Beowulf’s death, we are told that *him of hræðre gewat / sawol secean soðfæstra dom* (2819b–20: ‘from his heart the soul departed to seek the judgement of the righteous’). These words are ambivalent: is the judgement of the righteous that which Beowulf may expect because he is one of them? Or should we understand, rather, that Beowulf’s fate is uncertain, awaiting the judgement of the righteous?³⁶ Beowulf himself, at his death, appears to have some doubts about his moral status in the eyes of god (2329b–31a; 3066–8); his sadness at having done something displeasing to god (2327b–32) might be interpreted as the poet’s placing into Beowulf’s mouth some sort of acknowledgement of his audience’s worry regarding Beowulf’s lack of

³³ On some not fully convincing attempts to link Beowulf with Christ, see Klaeber (1911–12, 189–93); Orchard (2003a, 148).

³⁴ On Beowulf’s last rites, cf. Fulk, Bjork and Niles (eds 2008, 269–70), with further references; and Owen-Crocker (2000, 88–105). There are parallels between what is described in *Beowulf* and what is known of pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian customs; similarities with pre-Christian Roman rites have also been noted by Hill (2007). I am not aware of any instances of Christian cremation.

³⁵ 1553b–56; Beowulf seems to acknowledge god’s contribution at 1658b; before the fight with Grendel, Beowulf states that god—not *wyrð*—will decide what is to happen (685b–87). This is in contrast to Waltharius’s apparent trust in his own prowess and his sword, as opposed to god—though note that Beowulf too seems to express trust in himself and his sword, but not god, at 2508b–09, just before fighting the dragon.

³⁶ The interpretation of these lines and their implication regarding Beowulf’s fate in the afterlife is controversial: cf. Cavill (2004, 20–22); Greenfield (1985); Hill (1988); and Stanley (1963), for contrasting views, with reference to the overarching meaning of the poem.

Christianity. Beowulf's own account of his life, which belongs to his final speech, his elegy to himself (Harris 1992), is couched in curiously negative terms:

Ic on earde bad
 maelgesceafta, heold min tela,
 ne sohte searoniðas, ne me swor fela
 aða on unriht. Ic ðæs ealles mæg
 feorhbennum seoc gefean habban;
 forðam me witan ne ðearf Waldend fira
 morðorbealo maga [...]

I awaited at home my fate, kept well what was my own, I did not seek conflicts, nor did I swear many oaths falsely. I may have joy for all this, weakened by life-wounds; for the ruler of men cannot charge me with the murder of kin (2736b–42a).

The extent to which this is an expression of Christian faith is debatable in the extreme, though the phrase *Waldend fira* could be taken to refer to a Christian god.

Given that Beowulf is himself not Christian, it would seem that he can only expect the fate of the heathens described at lines 175–88. It is also perhaps significant that in the praise of him as *moncynnes mægenes strengest / on þæm dæge bysses lifes* (196–97; repeated at 789b–90: ‘among mankind the strongest in might on that day of this life’), the alliteration is carried—highly unusually—by the demonstrative pronouns: is this supposed to draw our attention to the fact that the praise applies in *this* life, but of the future we are uncertain?³⁷ The text complicates matters further still, because Beowulf's deeds themselves, and the way they are narrated, do not make it completely clear whether he was, in the Christian present, a figure of the past that could safely be admired.

The poem itself is clearly to be placed within a Christian tradition of vernacular writing in Anglo-Saxon England, being related in one way or another to a wide variety of explicitly Christian works (including some in Latin).³⁸ A number of parallels have been noted

³⁷ Cf. Frank (1982, 54), who sees the alliteration as stressing ‘the remoteness of the past’, but reads no religious significance in these lines.

³⁸ The fullest examination of Christian elements, with special attention to other (vernacular) material from Anglo-Saxon England, is provided by Klaeber (1911–12); a summary is in Orchard (2003a, 130–68); an

between the figure of Beowulf and various biblical figures, as well as early medieval saints—about whom vernacular narratives existed in Anglo-Saxon England, and largely in a similar form of alliterative metre (Orchard 2003a, 137–47). The biblical parallels are drawn almost exclusively from the Old Testament, which is hardly surprising: this is equally the case in secular Latin prose histories, since it is only in the Old Testament that there is a real scriptural precedent for warrior-kings.³⁹ Perhaps more significant are the number of shared formulaic phrases and similarities in language style between *Beowulf* and the Old English hagiographic verse epic *Andreas* (Orchard 2003a, 163–66): the number of parallels shared by these two works alone would suggest that one of the poets knew the work of the other.⁴⁰ There are further correspondences of language and style between *Beowulf* and other explicitly Christian vernacular epics,⁴¹ which tell us clearly that the poet functioned within a

overview of the scholarship on Christian and pagan elements is in Irving (1997). On the closeness of *Beowulf* to Old English poems dealing with biblical and hagiographic matter, see also nn. 40–41 below.

³⁹ That explicit references are largely to figures of the Old Testament does not mean that the general religious worldview expressed is any less Christian (Cavill 2004). Just as *Beowulf* does not mention Christ and explicit Christian references are to the Old Testament, so too the Old English *Exodus* and *Genesis* do not mention Christ (Cavill 2004, 38–39). Given that they are adaptations of Old Testament matter, this is hardly surprising, but does not make those poems any less Christian. On Old Testament typology in early medieval historical consciousness, cf. e.g. Heinzelmänn (1994b) on Gregory of Tours; and Garrison (2000) on diverse Carolingian texts.

⁴⁰ On the parallels between the two poems, see further Powell (2002, 105–67; 273–82); a more detailed comparison between the two poems is in Friesen (2008, 107–241). Based on these studies, it seems almost certain that the *Andreas*-poet borrowed from *Beowulf* (cf. Fulk, Bjork and Niles, eds 2008, clxxv). Anlezark (2006, 347–59) argues that *Andreas* was a theological response to the problem of ancient paganism posed in *Beowulf*.

⁴¹ The poems with which *Beowulf* shares the most parallel passages are *Andreas*, *Christ* (I, II and III), *Exodus*, *Genesis* (A and B), and *Guthlac* (A and B); in addition, there are a sizeable number of phrases (135 at a conservative estimate) shared with the Old Saxon bible epic, the *Heliand* (I draw here on a database of formulaic phrases shared in poetic works across the older Germanic languages [Old English, Old High German, Old Norse, Old Saxon] prepared by me under the direction of Andy Orchard for the Anglo-Saxon Formulary Project at the Centre for Medieval Studies in the University of Toronto). On the closeness of *Beowulf*'s poetic technique to that of other Old English verse, cf. Fulk, Bjork and Niles (eds 2008, clxxiv–ix); Orchard (2003a, 163–68).

Christian tradition—albeit one that manifestly used a manner of poetic diction that in many elements must have predated the coming of Christianity.⁴²

There are other reasons beyond the closeness of *Beowulf* to explicitly Christian works for believing Beowulf might be portrayed as a positive character (from a Christian point of view). The first is that, as noted above, he kills the kin of Cain, and is aided by god in doing so.⁴³ But Beowulf dies not fighting heathen monsters, but a force of nature: a dragon. This dragon guards gold that is explicitly heathen (2216a; 2276b); the word *hæpen* is otherwise used only to describe Grendel (852a and 986a), and the heathen custom of the Danes when they sacrifice for fear of Grendel (179a).⁴⁴ It seems clear enough that both the dragon and the gold—and indeed, we shall see, the dragon-fight itself—may be understood as symbols of heathendom.⁴⁵ Ruling for fifty years (2208b–09a)—and apparently successfully, for the two half lines are all we hear about this period—and killing explicitly heathen monsters and dragons ought to be a good thing. In fact, Beowulf is not the only dragon-slayer known to the Anglo-Saxons: a discussion of Sigemund follows below (pp. 189–92), but here we should note that in the description of the dragon-fight, the *Beowulf*-poet seems to be much closer to hagiographic texts than he is to any Old Norse or other Germanic parallels (Rauer 2000, 74–

⁴² Here it is worth noting that *Waltharius* too is composed in a poetic form that certainly predated Christianity; there seems to have been no sense of hindrance in adopting Virgilian verse for Christian purposes, and it seems to be the case that Saxon poets—in England and on the continent—similarly felt no compunctions about using a traditional, pre-Christian verse form for Christian matter. The fact that *Beowulf* is in Germanic alliterative metre, therefore, says nothing about the religious background or convictions of its poet.

⁴³ Cf. Orchard (1995, 58–85) on other depictions of the kin of Cain in Old English verse.

⁴⁴ The manuscript also reads *hæðnū* at 1983a, referring to the Geats; the ‘ð’ has apparently been erased. Even if the Geats are here referred to as heathens, my argument still stands, for Beowulf has in many ways hitherto been depicted as distinct from and better than the society around him; the Geats are particularly embroiled in the cycle of murderous conflict against kin, and referring to them as heathen might thus be appropriate, though such conflict was not restricted to pre-Christian society (cf. n. 30 above). If we understand this line as stating that the Geats are heathen, however, this could indicate that Beowulf too is heathen, like the other Geats. The most recent editors choose to emend to *hæleðum*; cf. their commentary on the passage (Fulk, Bjork and Niles, eds 2008, 28). Note also 2468–71: the poet describes Hreðel’s death by saying that he *godes leoht geceas* (‘chose god’s light’), presumably here meaning the Christian god.

⁴⁵ Cf. Kaske (1963, 300–01) on the gold as a symbol of heathen values. This is different from the situation in *Waltharius*, where there is little reason to link treasure with heathendom.

86; 136; 140–42). The hagiographic dragon-fights Rauer examines all have a number of structural elements in common with the dragon-fight in *Beowulf*.⁴⁶ This would seem to make Beowulf all the more positive a figure in a Christian world, drawing him close to the Christian saints.

But the similarities between Beowulf and Christian figures, whether from the Bible, or more recent dragon-destroyers, should not blind us to the key differences. Unlike Beowulf, the saints always survive the encounter (which is in fact rarely a real ‘fight’; cf. Orchard [2003a, 151])—and what is probably equally important, their dragons are just dragons: symbols, to be sure, of horrors that heathens had to face, which are frightened away by the new religion, but never, as in *Beowulf*, guardians of heathen gold. Although the connection between *Beowulf* and the saintly dragon encounters is significant, the combination of similarities with the hagiographic texts and the key differences—heathen gold, and the death of the dragon-slayer—is suggestive: one could argue that even though Beowulf does not, it seems, pursue the gold out of avarice, his fight against the dragon who guards heathen gold itself might be an indication that he is still caught in the world of heathen values, and thus, unlike the saints, he must not only die, but face an uncertain future in the afterlife.

Such a reading seems supported by the fact that the poet’s choice of vocabulary appears to bring Beowulf and the dragon close together in a common semantic field: both are called *eald* (‘old’; 2210a, 2271a), *frod* (‘wise’; 2513a, 2277a), *hordweard* (‘hoard-guardian’; 1852a, 2293b, 2302b, 2554b; 2593a; this is particularly interesting since we have no other

⁴⁶ Rauer lists the following similar elements (2000, 74): ‘the dragon’s destructiveness and its social repercussions, the presence of frightened spectators during the fight and their relationship with the hero, the loyalty and trust displayed by a smaller number of companions, the common journey to the dragon’s habitat, the presence of guides, the summoning of the dragon from its cave, the messengers who are sent out after the fight and the refreshing water created and distributed after the fight’.

indication that Beowulf guards a hoard),⁴⁷ *beorges weard* ('mountain's guardian'; 2524b, 2580b; 3066b), and *gebolgen* ('enraged'; 2220b, 2401b) (Georgianna 1987, 848, n. 61; Orchard 2003a, 236, n. 108). In his own words, Beowulf seems to align himself with the dragon by his use of the dual form (2525b; 2526b; 2532a; Orchard 2003a, 233). The word *aglæca* ('formidable opponent') is used in this poem principally to refer to Grendel (159a, 425a, 433b, 592a, 646b, 732a, 739a, 816a, 989b, 1000b and 1269a; this last instance could potentially refer to Beowulf), his mother (1259a: *aglæcwif*), sea-beasts (556a), and the dragon (2520a, 2534a, 2557a, 2905a); it is also (possibly) used once of Beowulf alone (1512a; it could here equally well apply to the sea-beasts, and probably does), and, interestingly, once of Beowulf and the dragon together (2592a).⁴⁸

Beowulf is not the only dragon-slayer in this text; at line 879a, we learn that the *scop* tells of Sigemund's *fæhðe ond fyrena* ('hostile acts/battles and wicked deeds/crimes'). The narrative concerning the Wælsing (877a) Sigemund is—in contrast to some of the other stories within stories that we hear in *Beowulf*—oddly unsatisfactory, giving us really very little information, even though we are told that the *scop welhwylc gecwæð / þæt he fram Sigemundes secgan hyrde / ellendædum* (874b–876a: 'told everything that he had heard said regarding the bold deeds of Sigemund'); it is especially mysterious that the poet discloses so little about Sigemund, given that the *scop* apparently said much that was unknown (876b: *uncupes fela*). We hear of how Sigemund and his sister's son Fitela were close allies in their fights, but how Sigemund nevertheless killed the dragon alone, without his nephew being

⁴⁷ Note, though, that *hordweard hæleþa* is also used to describe Hroðgar (1047a). Robert Getz suggests that when referring to Beowulf and Hroðgar, it refers to 'a ruler and guardian of the nation's wealth' and is thus just 'a formulaic phrase for a human ruler': the dragon hoards without any function; Beowulf and Hroðgar guard treasure for their people, and there is thus a fundamental distinction between Beowulf and the dragon with regard to treasure (pers. comm., 7th April 2009).

⁴⁸ Cf. Griffith (1995); and a rejoinder in Robinson (1997). Beowulf seems not just similar to the dragon in some ways, but is also drawn close to the monsters (Orchard 1995, 31–37).

present (881b–889). In contrast to Beowulf, Sigemund took all the treasure and was able to use it as he wished (894b–95a: *brucan moste / selfes dome*). Sigemund was, moreover, *wreccena wide mærost / ofer werþeode* (897–98a: ‘the most widely known exile/hero among people’). Following the narrative of Sigemund, we are given what is clearly a negative exemplum in the form of the story of Heremod (901–15); it has conventionally been assumed that these two present contrasting exempla of good and bad heroes. Sigemund is, however, potentially not a wholly positive figure; the possibly negative implications of the narrative of Sigemund have been examined in detail by Griffith (1995) and Orchard (2003a, 105–13), and the arguments can be very swiftly summarised before moving on to what is of more immediate concern: the place of Beowulf and Sigemund within the poetic tradition, and how we are supposed to judge them.⁴⁹

The negative reading of Sigemund is, in essence, based on the words used to describe him: *fyren* elsewhere in this text appears to have a solely negative connotation (101a; 164a; 628a; 750b; 811a; 915b; 1932b), being used primarily to describe Grendel’s deeds; the phrase *fæhðe ond fyrena* is also used of Grendel’s deeds (137a and 153a), and by Beowulf regarding the attack of the Swedes (2480a). Sigemund’s deeds are, it seems from the term used to describe them, of an uncanny kind (876b: *uncupes fela*); *uncup* (‘unknown/uncanny’) is otherwise used to characterise Grendel’s malice (276b), Grendel himself (960a), and the paths to Grendel’s mere (1410b) and the dragon’s lair (2214a). In all these cases, the word is linked to an unambiguously negative figure,⁵⁰ with whom, therefore, Sigemund is associated

⁴⁹ For a response to Griffith, see Robinson (1997).

⁵⁰ That the dragon might have some right on his side does not detract from the fact that he is evil, any more than Grendel’s mother’s legal justifications remove the taint she bears as kin of Cain; note also the references provided by Klaeber (1911–12, 188–89) for a dragon as the image of Satan, which relate surely to the hagiographic dragon-fights in which the saints bring Christianity and defeat the dragon (above at n. 46). Leyerle states correctly that over the course of Beowulf’s three fights, his own justification is weakened and that of his opponent increases (1965), but this is to ignore the clearly negative aspects of Beowulf’s opponents; even the

by the choice of words. Another word, not examined in this context by either Griffith or Orchard, is *frecne* ('terrible', 'daring', 'dangerous'), first used in this poem at 889a to describe Sigemund's deeds. Five other instances of *frecne* being used adjectivally are unambiguously negative (1359a; 1378a; [Grendel's mother's surroundings] 2250a; 2537a; 2689a [the dragon]), with another occurrence being ambiguous, though I would opt for the negative reading (1104b [Frisian taunting]). It is used in association with the kin of Cain twice (1359a; 1378a), and the very last use of this word in the poem is in describing the dragon (2689a), which could potentially be read as an ominous reminder of the word's first use, to describe Sigemund's (the dragon-slayer's) deeds.⁵¹

This is not necessarily conclusive evidence that Sigemund is a negative figure; even if it were, that need not tell us much about how to view Beowulf himself. But Sigemund is not just another dragon-slayer who happens to be mentioned. He (and not a Christian saint) is the only other dragon-slayer in this text, and his dragon, unlike those of the saints, guarded treasure, so a comparison of the Beowulf and Sigemund is hardly counter-intuitive: Sigemund can have no function in the poem other than serving as a foil to Beowulf. And in this context it is important that Sigemund is a well-known figure in Old Norse and Middle High German literature; his son was famous as a dragon-slayer, and both were known to have been heavily embroiled in a cycle of kin-conflict, murder and incest. These details are not given in *Beowulf*, but it certainly seems to be the case that the poet expects the audience to

dragon, while rightly incensed by the theft (for which Beowulf himself is hardly to blame), nevertheless causes much damage to Beowulf's people. But perhaps we should also consider, from a much more providential point of view, whether the thief really did wrong in stealing the gold: have we not been told that only one permitted by god would be able to access the treasure (3051–57)? Are we supposed to understand the whole process of the destruction of Beowulf and eventually his kingdom as one brought about, or at least permitted, by god, who allowed the thief to wake the dragon?

⁵¹ Note, though, that much depends on how one chooses to interpret *frecne*; if read as 'dangerous' rather than 'terrible', the usage would indicate that it is not Sigemund, but rather the deeds he does, which are dangerous, with no necessarily negative connotations.

know more about Sigemund than is in this poem. The name Sigemund would therefore probably have conjured up in the minds of the audience some associations with the pagan figure of legend we know from other contexts.⁵²

As Griffith has pointed out, if we view Beowulf as being akin, in his deeds and character, to Sigemund, then we place him firmly in a vernacular, originally pagan, heroic tradition, compared to one of the most famous figures of that tradition—but also, therefore, closer to the taint of heathendom. If he is less like Sigemund, he loses such a clear location within the tradition, but is also more free of the taints associated with the pagan past (Griffith 1995, 40). It seems to me that he is comparable to Sigemund only in that both kill treasure-hoarding dragons; but this is hardly an insignificant detail. The figure of Beowulf therefore falls somewhere uncomfortably between the Christian saints who kill treasure-less dragons, and the pagan hero who kills a dragon that does guard a treasure; unlike either of them, he dies in the effort. Sigemund prefigures Beowulf in a way, for he is the exemplary pagan dragon-slaying hero, fully embroiled in all the flaws inherent in his society, but nevertheless, within the values of his own milieu, apparently an admirable figure (I say ‘apparently’ because kin-conflict was no less problematic for pagans than for Christians, however endemic it might have been). Beowulf manages to preserve himself, to some extent, from the constant strife (especially between kin) and apparently hopeless destruction of his world (of which the narrative of *Beowulf* provides numerous examples),⁵³ and in some ways perhaps

⁵² We should note also that Sigemund’s dragon-fight is, as Orchard has noted, very different in the Norse material: the *Beowulf*-poet has deliberately made it more like Beowulf’s own dragon-fight (Orchard 2003a, 108), thus potentially drawing the two closer together than tradition would have had it. Though the story of Sigemund is told after Beowulf fights a monster, there is no attestation anywhere of Sigemund or anyone associated with him doing any such thing.

⁵³ Incidences of kin-conflict in *Beowulf* are listed at n. 30. Conflict between (royal) kin was not, of course, a uniquely pagan problem, being quite prevalent even in kingdoms that had long been Christian. The consequent problems of succession and lack of adequate rulership were therefore certainly current or recent in Anglo-Saxon

prefigures the Christian dragon-slayers to come; he is certainly favoured by god when he fights god's enemies, the kin of Cain.⁵⁴ But it is perhaps legitimate to suggest that he is unable to survive the dragon-fight precisely because although he is the best of his time, he is not yet the one to usher in a new time. Neither fully a saint nor fully a sinner, and thus lacking perhaps the very sinfulness of the one that allows him to slay a dragon with impunity,⁵⁵ and the divine grace of the other, Beowulf, is, it seems, destined to die, and perhaps face eternal damnation for his deeds.

The poet's attitude to past heroism is, therefore, highly ambiguous: at the end of the poem, Beowulf's remains are buried—under ground, as the dragon had been for so many years—with the heathen gold the dragon had been guarding, overlooking the sea, where the dragon's corpse has been pushed out by his men. One could suggest that both because of the words used to describe Beowulf and the dragon and the odd way in which Beowulf seems to take the dragon's place with the gold under ground—and despite his dying hope that the gold would be useful to his people (2800b–2801a), we know, from the poet's words at the end of the poem that it shall remain useless, as it had been with the dragon (3168)—Beowulf seems himself almost to assume, at the end of the poem, some of the qualities of the dreadful force of nature that he has killed, guarding useless heathen gold. Just as in Paul the Deacon's narrative, the death of Alboin—another apparently great king of uncertain religion—brings

England, regardless of when one chooses to date the poem; in reflecting on this kind of sinfulness, the poet certainly critiques his own era as well as the past (cf. Stanley 2005).

⁵⁴ On the theme of the noble heathen prefiguring the good Christian in the context of the Scandinavian sagas, see the important papers of Harris (1986), Lönnroth (1969) and Weber (1987). 'Noble heathens' presented in Icelandic material also stay away from most of the attributes of their pagan world, especially idolatry and sorcery, though they are nevertheless fully implicated in the system of revenge and feud for the sake of honour; Beowulf seems to be partly (but only partly) exculpated from even these taints (note that he does seek to avenge the deaths of Hygelac and Heardred; cf. Georgianna [1987, 841–6; 848]). Weber argues convincingly that many Scandinavian writers present noble heathens in a manner that shows they prefigure the coming of Christianity; there is no such clear message in *Beowulf*, but considering the hagiographic parallels adduced by Rauer (2000), such an implication should not be excluded from the work.

⁵⁵ We should note that in the Norse version of the story, Sigemund is a shape-shifter, an explicitly pagan attribute.

with it political chaos for his people (see above, pp. 118–23; 132, n. 54), so we hear a prophecy at the end of *Beowulf* that the death of the *frod* and *god cyning* (2209b; 2390b; in the latter case the phrase might not apply to Beowulf) who ruled for fifty years will bring in its wake catastrophe for his people (2999–3007a; 3015b–27). Unlike in the *HL*, the poet here gives us no future narrative with a positive outlook: we are left looking back to a world facing destruction because of the deeds of a hero portrayed with wonder, but without unambiguous admiration.

As Orchard points out (referring to 2166b–69a), after the description of the defeat of Grendel and his mother, ‘praise of Beowulf is somewhat undermined by the implied criticism of others [...] the poet implicitly reminds us [...] that the men against whom he is measured are not themselves beyond reproach’ (2003a, 256). This praise comes after Beowulf’s successful struggles against the two monsters, and even a Christian poet could have appreciated the value of these battles, for the monsters were the kin of Cain, and therefore biblically sanctioned as potential enemies of good. Thus in this case the unambiguously ‘good deeds’ are slightly tainted by the fact that the praise at the end of this phase in the hero’s life is always measured against the negative qualities of others, rather than simply expressing absolute positive attributes of Beowulf. This is perhaps justifiable, for Beowulf has not, as yet, been a ‘good king’ by any standards: what he has done is fight monsters, but he has not ruled, ensured peace, or distributed treasure and ensured prosperity. Fifty years on, Beowulf has been a good king, and has ruled his people in peace, yet what he himself chooses to stress (2736b–42a) are again his ‘negative achievements’ (Hill 1982, 168) (though he does also mention his peaceful rule).⁵⁶ In fact, Beowulf appears to be contrasted

⁵⁶ Harris (1992, 17–18) believes that Beowulf’s claims of not having sworn false oaths or killed kin are ‘inessential’ and ‘a carryover from the underlying genre’ (18). While agreeing that the speech does represent a

throughout the poem against the flawed and ultimately destructive values of his society,⁵⁷ but although his peaceful rule for fifty years is surely an achievement, he is ultimately still inextricably caught up in the social ethos of his time.⁵⁸ He takes his place in the pantheon of heroes by doing what the most famous⁵⁹ of them had done: killing a dragon; he leaves his people to face the fate common in their day: unending strife, and possible extinction; he himself faces an uncertain judgement, not necessarily different from that of others of his day: better, perhaps, than the certain condemnation of most heathens, but still not necessarily the eternal life promised to the Christian.⁶⁰ And it seems that his single loyal follower also tempers his praise with criticism: Wiglaf refers to his deeds as *dæda dollicra* (2646; ‘foolish/audacious deeds’),⁶¹ and later appears to suggest that the Geats suffer because of Beowulf’s will (3077-84a). Orchard suggests that here, ‘Wiglaf takes on the voice of the poet, marvelling at a heroism that he cannot quite condone’ (2003a, 263). Although Beowulf has been something of a saviour to the Danes and preserved peace as a king, and despite the

part of the poet’s absorption of and reflection on his literary inheritance (as Harris has cogently argued elsewhere with regard to the whole poem: cf. 1985, 272), the very fact that these elements of the speech are ‘inessential’ could be telling, and not just a matter of literary heritage: Beowulf and the poet know why he is especially worthy of praise, and thus implicitly hint at what praise he cannot deserve.

⁵⁷ That the heroic ethos of revenge and honour, which perpetuates a circle of violence, is criticised by the poet has been pointed out by several scholars; see especially Georgianna’s stimulating reading (1987). Georgianna demonstrates very effectively how in the second part of the poem we are shown the inherent tragedy of the heroic society, and how Beowulf himself, by inheriting Hreðel’s mantle, ultimately also inherits even that great king’s inability to step out of the circle of loss and destruction.

⁵⁸ It is interesting that if any censure is explicitly applied to Beowulf, it relates to the fight against the dragon—and this dragon was not only explicitly wronged, but also, unlike the Grendels, had no specifically biblical taint attached to him (at least in this poem). It can hardly be a coincidence that Beowulf is helped by god to kill the kin of Cain (Grendel’s mother), but he dies when fighting a force of nature (cf. Tolkien 1936, 276: ‘Triumph over the lesser and more clearly human is cancelled by defeat before the older and more elemental’). One might say that pagan valour is still effective against men and quasi-humans, but only Christian virtue can defeat the wrath of nature.

⁵⁹ Whether one translates *wrecca* in 898a negatively or positively, it is of some import that Sigemund was the best known (898b: *wide mærost*) of exiles (or heroes).

⁶⁰ We should note the curious contradiction that the treasure is cursed by pagans, but the curse takes on some validity in the Christian viewpoint too: perhaps Beowulf does indeed suffer the effects of the curse, for the barrow, with the heathen treasure, is not quite a heathen temple, to which those who break in on the treasure are condemned (3072a)—but is it, from the poet’s viewpoint, necessarily that different?

⁶¹ Even if we accept ‘audacious’ as the correct translation, we have seen that this quality can be problematic in the poem; cf. Orchard (2003a, 210, n. 25; 262) on the interpretation of this word.

parallels to the dragon-quelling saints in the hagiographies, we must remember that ultimately the future he leaves for his people is disaster: he is not, in the final analysis, a saviour, a bringer of peace in any lasting form.⁶²

The past, in this poem, is really a foreign country, both temporally and geographically. Not only are the events of the poem *in geardagum*, they are also not in the poet's own land: not once is England, or indeed any part of the British Isles, mentioned in this poem. For the poet, the past is another country spiritually too. However much the poet and his audience might think back to the past with nostalgia as a time of glorious heroes, it was still, deeply and inexorably, foreign. While some aspects of it could well be adopted and admired profitably, at its core, it was still alien, and ultimately hopeless in its prospects for the future—as long as heathendom ruled. The tragedy of the past, as we see it in this poem, was twofold: the perpetual strife and the prevalence of the sin of murdering one's kin; and the fact that even if one avoided such conflicts and lived an exemplary life, the afterlife was ultimately insecure. Although Beowulf might have been a noble heathen, free from many of the flaws of his world and anticipating in some ways the men of faith to come after him, his own fate was uncertain at best,⁶³ and at the end of the poem we see that however much he may have preserved himself from most of the fatal flaws of his society, he was still a man only great *on þæm dæge pysses lifes*. As he is buried with the heathen gold, that must remain

⁶² This is not, however, necessarily a criticism of Beowulf himself: he is *not* a saint, simply a good, if not yet Christian, human being. The criticism applies to the world in which he lives, which cannot know peace precisely because there are no saints, and no Christ, to provide respite from human strife. For a more positive, 'heroic' reading of Beowulf than that presented here, see most recently Burrow (2008, 50–60), with further references; cf. also Greenfield (1985); Robinson (1997), for some prominent exponents of a contrasting viewpoint.

⁶³ Cf. the important paper by Benson (1967), which anticipates some parts of my argument; on the sometimes contradictory attitudes of the theologians regarding the fate of pre-Christian pagans (and the remnants of their literature), see also Wormald (1978, 42–58), with a wealth of comparative material.

unnyt (3168a; ‘useless’) to the people, we are left to wonder how useful his heroism was, and would be in the world of the poem’s present.

***Beowulf*, Germanic Tradition, and the Anglo-Saxon Past**

The fact that *Beowulf* is clearly a Christian work cannot be argued away; nor, however, can its close relationship to Germanic vernacular and originally oral traditions be denied. The poem alludes, primarily by the naming of various characters known from elsewhere, to a very wide world of quasi-historical narrative tradition; much of the material occurs again, much later, in Scandinavian narratives that cannot be shown to have any dependence on *Beowulf*, though how exactly these traditions relate to one another can also not be determined. It is certainly beyond dispute that this poem is very heavily steeped in a tradition shared by Norse legendary histories as well as mythological and heroic poetry, far more than is the case for *Waltharius*.⁶⁴ For our purposes, it is enough to note that the *Beowulf*-poet’s evocation of the dynasty of Scyld Scefing has parallels in the twelfth- and thirteenth-century texts recording the (historically extremely dubious) histories of the Skjöldungar kings of Denmark, one of whom, Hrólfr kraki (possibly corresponding to the Scylding Hroðulf of *Beowulf*) was to become a major figure in Old Norse legend; also mentioned in the Scandinavian material are other dynasties occurring in *Beowulf*: the Wulfings, and the Swedish royal line of Ongenþeow.⁶⁵ We should note that while Scef

⁶⁴ A summary of the narrative elements that can be connected with other known Germanic traditions is provided by Fulk, Bjork and Niles (eds, 2008, xxxvi–lcvii; clxix–xxii; clxxxiii–xv); suggested parallels and analogues are printed in the same edition (291–315). Cf. also Orchard (2003a, 98–129), for further references to the Germanic background of this work; and Andersson (1997) for an overview of the scholarship on influences ranging from Germanic to Virgil.

⁶⁵ The earliest Scandinavian sources with mentions or narratives of these kings that provide names resembling those in *Beowulf*: *Hyndluljóð* (Neckel and Kuhn, eds 1983, 9; 11; 14); *Grottasöngur* (Neckel and Kuhn, eds 1983, 19; 22); Snorri Sturluson’s *Edda* (Faulkes, ed. 1982–98: *Prologue* 9; 11; *Gylfaginning* 49;

occurs also in *Widsith* (32), he is there the ruler of the Langobards—a people not mentioned or alluded to in any form in *Beowulf*. Some of the narrative elements in *Beowulf* also seem to relate closely to Norse material, most especially to the fourteenth-century *Grettis saga* (Guðni Jónsson, ed. 1936).⁶⁶ The figure of Sigemund the Wælsing with a nephew Fitela corresponds well to the *Völsungr* Sigmundr and his nephew Sinfjötli of the eddic poems and the *Völsunga saga* from thirteenth-century Iceland; we should note that in the saga account, Sigmundr's nephew is also his son by his incestuous relation with his sister (Finch, ed. and trans. 1965, 7),⁶⁷ and of course, in all other known traditions, the *Völsungr* who slays a dragon is Sigurðr (in Middle High German: Siegfried), Sigmundr's son. There is also a single passing reference—the only one to a non-Northern figure—to Eormenric (1201a), the Gothic king Ermanaric mentioned also in Jordanes (*Get.* 116–20; see further p. 229, with n. 33 below) and (as Jǫrmunrekr) in the Old Norse *Hamðismál*. As in *Waltharius*, *Waldere* and *Deor*, there is also a reference to Weland (455a).

The wide range of correspondences, the number of allusions, and the style and language, make it uncontroversial to state that this poem draws heavily on oral, vernacular traditions that circulated in some form in the various Germanic vernaculars; it is also clear that there are particularly close links with Scandinavian traditions. This should not be taken to mean, though, that these traditions themselves represented some sort of unchanged blast from the pagan past: we should remember that the 'least disputed correspondence' between *Beowulf* and another vernacular text is that between *Beowulf* and the Anglo-Saxon *Genesis A*

Skáldskaparmál 43; 44; 58); the *Ynglinga saga* in *Heimskringla* (Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, ed. 1941, 5; 23; 27; 29); Saxo Grammaticus's *Gesta Danorum* (Friis-Jensen, ed. 2005, II.i,1–4; II.v,1–2; II.v,5–6; II.vi,1; II.vi,11; II.vii,1; II.vii,4–viii,1; VIII.v,1); a genealogy (*Langfeðgatal*) (Kålund, ed. 1917–18); the *Chronicon Lethrense* (Gertz, ed. 1917–18a, c. 3); and Sven Aggesen's *Brevis historia regum Daciæ* (Gertz, ed. 1917–18b, cc. 1–2).

⁶⁶ The parallels are stressed by Orchard (1995, 140–68); an opposing view is given in Fjalldal (1998).

⁶⁷ On the possible implications of this, see Orchard (2003a, 108–10).

(Andersson 1997, 144), an indisputably Christian work, though in equally indisputably vernacular language and style that must derive from pre-Christian traditions,⁶⁸ and as pointed out above (n. 41), the works with which *Beowulf* has most in common in terms of phrasing are all undeniably and fundamentally Christian.

While the various correspondences with secular vernacular traditions in *Beowulf* make it clear that the poet was aware of and drew on a wide range of secular oral tradition, there is little historical underpinning for most of these narrative threads, and other sources with analogous material are almost universally from much later. There is only one element in the text that is generally agreed to be historical: this is the description of the raid on the Franks by Hygelac, king of the Geats (2910–15), which is thought to refer to an event recorded by Gregory of Tours, who states that a Dane called Chlochilaichus was killed in a raid sometime in the early sixth century (*Hist.* III, 3).⁶⁹ Like the other figures of the Germanic material briefly mentioned above, there is nothing to connect Hygelac with the histories of the Anglo-Saxons; like most of the material of *Beowulf*, he seems to belong, therefore, not just to the distant past, but also to an ‘other’ past.⁷⁰

There are, however, various figures in *Beowulf* who appear to be connected to names mentioned not just in later Norse material, but also in Anglo-Saxon historical sources. The *ASC*, Asser’s *Vita Alfredi*, and Æthelweard’s *Chronicon* (based on the *ASC*), all compiled before or shortly after 1000, list as ancestors of Æthelwulf figures (as far as we know unhistorical) with names similar to Scyld (in these works written as Scaeldwa, Scyldwa or

⁶⁸ Something equally true of Christian Latin verse, which is influenced primarily by Virgil and Ovid.

⁶⁹ A cognate name, Huggleikr, is given to a king of the Swedes in the *Ynglinga saga* in the *Heimskringla* (Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, ed. 1941, 22), but his brief life seems to have nothing remotely to do with that of Hygelac.

⁷⁰ It is worth noting here that Hygelac occurs also in the *Liber monstrorum*, as a monster (cf. Orchard 1995 on the monstrousness of Beowulf and his connection with other monsters; on the *Liber monstrorum*: 86–115).

Sceldwa), Heremod, and Beow, all of whom occur in *Beowulf*,⁷¹ as well as a historical Ingeld. The *ASC*, and also Sven Aggesen and Saxo Grammaticus's Danish histories, also tell us about Offa of Angel, who occurs in *Beowulf* at 1931b–62.⁷² In *Beowulf*, Heremod is the clearly negative exemplum sung of by the *scop* immediately after the song about Sigemund (901–15), and Ingeld is the lord of the Heaðobards, and betrothed to Hroðgar's daughter (2023). Like Scyld and Scef, Heremod and Ingeld also occur in Scandinavian legend, and the latter might have been known in more detailed narratives in Anglo-Saxon England too, given that Alcuin notoriously feels that he has nothing to do with Christ (Dümmler, ed. 1895, ep. 124, p. 183).⁷³ In the Anglo-Saxon genealogies, though, all of these figures are placed into a biblical context, ultimately descending from Adam; we should note also, however, that they are in turn not just ancestors of historically attested Anglo-Saxon kings, but also of Woden.⁷⁴ Although there is no figure called Geat in *Beowulf*, the hero belongs to the people of the Geats, so it is interesting that the genealogies record a Geat, and both Asser's life of Alfred and the *Historia Brittonum* state explicitly that he had been worshipped as a god (Stevenson, ed. 1959, 3; *Hist. Brit.* § 31). A further figure who receives only passing mention in *Beowulf*, Hengest (1083a; 1091a; 1096b; 1127b), is of some importance for Anglo-Saxon historiography (cf. above, pp. 174–75): he and his brother are at the head of the expedition

⁷¹ We should note that Beow, Scyld's son, is in the manuscript called Beowulf; this would disturb the metre at 53b, but not at 18a. Editors generally emend to Beow, largely on the basis of the extraneous genealogical material.

⁷² *ASC*: Ingeld, Beaw, Scyld, Heremod, Scef [only in *B*, *C*, and *D*] (*ABD*: s.a. 855; *C*: s.a. 856); Asser: Ingeld, Beaw, Scyld, Heremod (Stevenson, ed. 1959, 2–3); Æthelweard: Ingeld, Beaw, Scyld, Scef (Campbell, ed. 1962, 32–3). Offa: *ASC C*, s.a. 755; Sven Aggesen: c. 2 (Gertz, ed. 1917–18); Saxo: IV.ii,1; IV.iv,1–11 (Friis-Jensen, ed. 2005).

⁷³ It has recently been argued that Alcuin most likely refers here to the performance of genealogies, and his point is that bishops should not have too close relationships with kings, or provide patronage of royal memorial or propaganda works (Garrison 2005). This does not, however, mean that no narrative material about Ingeld was known. For discussion of the Alcuin passage, see below, pp. 215–16.

⁷⁴ On the significance of the descent from Noah and Adam in the genealogies: Anlezark (2006, 240–73).

that first brought the Anglo-Saxons to England.⁷⁵ Hengest is also, at least in the *Historia Brittonum*, a descendent of Geat (*Hist. Brit.* § 31); in Bede, however, he descends from Woden, of whom Bede says *de cuius stirpe multarum provinciarum regium genus originem duxit* (*HE* I, 15: ‘from whose lineage the royal family of many provinces traced its origin’).⁷⁶

It is clear that traditions of some sort regarding people bearing these names were current in Christian Anglo-Saxon England, at least from the ninth century (and in the case of Hengest, at least from the early eighth century). Obviously, none of these figures were actually attested in the Bible, or in any contemporary Latin sources; because of its allusions to them, therefore, *Beowulf* fits into a context—similar in some ways to that of the continental ‘national’ histories—of an attempt to unite oral narratives of a pre-Christian, non-Roman history with the written traditions of the Christian, Latinate and more or less Romanised (in terms of authoritative language, religion, and institutions) present.

The genealogical material, like *Beowulf* itself, was clearly written by clerics, and in both cases it is legitimate to ask why they should record material containing a pagan god and pagan Anglo-Saxon leaders. One explanation is a resort to euhemerisation, because it would have been too difficult to falsify the claims to authority of the ruling monarchs that derived from native, vernacular, oral tradition, which encompassed pre-Christian material (Fulk 2002, 235).⁷⁷ This seems more than likely, but we should remember that from Anglo-Saxon England, all that exists for these distant ancestors is genealogies: none of the narratives

⁷⁵ It is not, of course, certain that the Hengest referred to in *Beowulf* must have something to do with the character in the migration myth, but given the latter’s central place in Anglo-Saxon histories, it seems most likely that audiences would associate the Hengest in *Beowulf*, located in a place where the the Hengest of the migration myth came from, with the leader of the Anglo-Saxons who first came to Britain in the historical accounts of the *HE*, *Hist. Brit.* and *ASC*.

⁷⁶ On the function of the genealogies, and their possible origins, see fundamentally Dumville (1977a). Hengest descends from Woden also in the so-called Anglian genealogies from the end of the eighth century (Dumville 1976); the other figures in *Beowulf* do not feature in these lists.

⁷⁷ On euhemerisation, see also n. 39 at p. 41 above.

provide us with stories of the pre-migration Anglo-Saxon rulers. *Beowulf* is in fact the only text that could be said to fill this gap: it is what provides us with a narrative of peoples clearly related (in the Anglo-Saxon genealogies at any rate)—through figures such as Scyld and Hengest—to the Anglo-Saxons, before they came to Britain, and before they became Christian.⁷⁸

It is perhaps worthwhile stressing that in *Beowulf*, although the allusions to a wider world of legend and myth are just as significant as in the other vernacular material we have examined, they are restricted, with the single exception of Ermanaric, to northern Europe;⁷⁹ there is no reference to any of the legendary figures from central, southern and eastern Europe so popular in other vernacular (and occasionally Latin) material, even in Anglo-Saxon England. Furthermore, regardless of when one dates this poem,⁸⁰ by the time the extant copy was written, there had been at least two centuries of fairly involved interaction between the peoples along the North Sea and in Scandinavia, and substantial Danish and Norse settlement in England; the Anglo-Saxons, moreover, themselves had some historical roots around the area that is now Denmark or northern Germany and probably Frisia.⁸¹ The Goths, Huns, Lombards and Burgundians that we encounter in the other vernacular poems had no discernible relation to the ethnic group that must have been the audiences of those texts. *Beowulf*, therefore, unlike all the vernacular poems that treat of (quasi-)historical material from this period, seems to restrict itself to material that had, potentially, a discernible relation to what the audience might have thought of as ‘our’ past. By the

⁷⁸ Note, though, that the portion of *Beowulf* containing Hengest is the so-called ‘Finnsburg Episode’, which overlaps with the narrative in the *Fight at Finnsburg*; the mention of Hengest in two poems attests to a narrative tradition concerning his life before any migration to Britain.

⁷⁹ This is if we see Scef as Danish, as he is in *Beowulf*, and not as a Lombard as in *Widsith*.

⁸⁰ For discussion of the difficulties involved with dating, cf. the works cited above at nn. 17; 20.

⁸¹ On Anglo-Saxon origins on the continent, see above, pp. 170–71; 173–75. On Scandinavians in England, see Hadley (2006); Hunter Blair (2003, 55–115; 166–72); and on English responses to the Vikings, Page (1987).

inclusion of Hengest, who is one of the major figures of the Anglo-Saxon foundational migration myth, and other figures who have significant places in Anglo-Saxon genealogies—and therefore, we may assume, in the Anglo-Saxon historical consciousness—*Beowulf* implicitly makes itself a text relating to the pre-migration Anglo-Saxon past. *Beowulf*, in other words, comes closest to being the narrative of the pre-Christian, non-Roman, and pre-insular past of the Anglo-Saxons. But once more, this past should not be viewed as in opposition to the Christian, Roman inheritance: the genealogies, after all, include Scyld, Hengest and Woden, within a line stretching back to Noah and Adam.⁸²

As in the other texts we have examined, it might be the case that in *Beowulf* too, there is no clear demarcation between the pagan Germanic and the pagan Roman past: at least in its manuscript context, *Beowulf* may profitably be viewed against a background of criticism of both Germanic and classical pagan heroes, including not just Beowulf, but also Alexander, all of whom fight against supernatural enemies and appear to be somewhat monstrous themselves (Orchard 1995). In *Beowulf*, the description of the dragon's lair shares some (albeit very slight) resemblance to depictions of Roman ruins in other Anglo-Saxon works (Thornbury 2000); and Beowulf's last rites seem to be similar to Roman military funerals (Hill 2007).⁸³ The Anglo-Saxons did not differentiate clearly between the ancient Roman and the ancient Germanic past (Hunter 1974), though—unlike, for example, the Franks—they

⁸² As noted above (n. 39), Old Testament verse epics in Old English, while Christian, also do not mention Christ; perhaps the *Beowulf*-poet saw his subjects as belonging to a similarly worthwhile past, but one that was pre-Christian and therefore had to be left behind and in some manner overcome?

⁸³ As Hill notes, this does not mean that the poet knew or thought he was representing Roman rites; military funeral practices of the Romans undoubtedly influenced the many 'barbarians' who made up much of the late Roman military, and if the *Beowulf*-poet was reflecting some memory of genuine pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon practice (as Hill argues), this need not have been known to be Roman. Even if Hill is wrong about the ethnic origins of the funeral rites, there is certainly a poetic truth in his belief in the appropriateness of the poem concluding 'with a funeral which in its origins reflects the blending of the customs of two peoples and two cultures in a harmonious and dignified whole' (2007, 335).

clearly drew their genealogical legitimation from the Germanic aspect of antiquity; it would seem that in terms of criticism of heroism too, the pagan pasts are equally to be condemned.

Beowulf seems simultaneously more deeply Christian and more concerned with the pagan past than *Waltharius* and the Latin histories examined above: certainly, it treats the difference in religion between past and present as a matter of greater concern than do the authors of any of those texts (or the compilers of the *ASC*). This might be partly precisely because *Beowulf* is not, certainly not in the first instance, a pragmatic text with any kind of current political purpose (as were the ‘national’ histories), but a poetic work of art.⁸⁴ As Harris has suggested, it is something of a *summa litterarum*, looking back at a whole tradition with a fair amount of nostalgia and admiration (cf. Frank 1982), but also a sense of mourning for the irrecoverable loss of something that was, however flawed, nevertheless grandly awesome, without being completely capable of partaking of this tradition it both embodies and in some sense overcomes (Harris 1985; Harris 1992; Harris 2000). A work that is ‘culturally postheroic and retrospective’, containing as it does elements of a wide range of genres, from varying traditions (pagan and Christian, Germanic and Roman, Latin and vernacular), *Beowulf* represents ‘the poet’s “reading” of antecedent literature’ (Harris 2000, 161; 163). Unlike the other extant vernacular heroic material, it is not a more or less simple reflection of secular (primarily orally transmitted) material or traditions about the past, however much those traditions might have been, even in the other texts, infused by the values and inheritance of Christian culture. Nor is it, in contrast to most of the Latin histories examined above, a direct effort to provide an authoritative version of a past cherished by the aristocracy as a means of establishing a sense of origins and continuity with a distant past

⁸⁴ I find North’s arguments (North 2007), to the effect that *Beowulf* was in fact composed as a propaganda-text for a Mercian ealdorman named Wiglaf, hard to follow (cf. also the reviews by Lapidge [2007] and Owen-Crocker [2007]).

(possibly with some sort of legitimating function), which therefore, once again, present that past in largely unreflective terms, with problematic elements being heavily concealed. It seems to me that this work is a highly (self-)reflexive discourse with the past, in which the poet, more or less deliberately, presents to his audience that past as the problem that it could potentially be, if one were to choose to dwell on how incompatible it might be with what claimed to be the authoritative moral discourse of the time (regardless of whether that time was the eighth or the tenth century), that of the Church. But if the text is a reflection on the sin of pride inherent in the heroes of the past (Orchard 1995), it is not devoid of a sense of admiration for their achievements (Harris 1985; Orchard 2003a); and the criticism of the social mores could certainly apply to the secular values of the early medieval aristocracy as well, which was almost exclusively made up of a warrior class, and maintained its position through the sword, not the book.

If *Beowulf* might be read in Christian terms as criticisms of pride, heroism, and war, it is nevertheless a fact that war—and often between related families—was a frequent facet of early medieval political life, and successful rulership depended to a certain extent on the ability to lead in battle (cf. Halsall 2003, 20–33). Criticism is therefore probably equally applicable to the secular mores of the present as those of the past; that being the case, one must wonder also to what extent those values that are criticised might nevertheless have held an important place among the secular aristocracy who might have been the audience of *Beowulf*—and from whose traditions, we must presume, the poet got his raw material (cf. Wormald 1978, 65–67). In other words, if the pagan, heroic past is problematic, some of the concerns surrounding it also probably attach to the Christian secular society that cultivates a memory of that past. The question as to the place of the potentially but not necessarily

problematic past in a secular sphere whose morality was dominated by the Church will be considered in greater detail in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 7:

VERNACULAR ORAL TRADITION AND THE 'GERMANIC' PAST

From the late sixth century till the end of the eighth, the written culture of western Europe was confined almost exclusively to the spheres of ecclesiastical learning and pragmatic literacy. If one excludes documentary material, the vast majority of texts surviving from this period belong to the realm of religious production of some form; this includes even historical works, the majority of which were composed to present definite religious views (though this fact does not exclude political functions for such texts). The histories examined in chapters two to four are not free of religious influence; they are nevertheless among the few Latin narratives of the period that are primarily secular in their function. We should not be blinded by the weight of numbers of manuscripts and texts, however: while there was certainly no vast gulf between the secular and clerical elites, the former would have had a cultural education different from that dictated by religious doctrine, and the secular aristocracy's sense of the past would also not have been bound by strictly religious concerns.

The secular culture must have been manifest primarily in an oral form, influenced by Latin literary culture, but not by this alone. I have argued above (chapters two, three and

four) that the Latin ‘national’ histories are evidence of the assertion of a secular historical consciousness within a literate, Latinate, Church-dominated context. Although it is generally difficult to prove direct dependence on oral sources, we have nevertheless seen that material is included in the histories that could only be derived from an oral milieu, even if, as was the case with the Frankish origin myth, the oral material itself was ultimately based on Latin texts. More importantly, I argued that despite the often competing influence of ecclesiastical thought and the weight of written, Roman tradition, the sense of continuity with a non-Roman, non-biblical, and often pre-Christian past was sufficiently strong that it needed to be written, in Latin, and in a way that stressed this continuity, at the expense of the significance of the conversion to Catholic Christianity and the concomitant condemnation of the pre-Catholic past. That these histories were written, and in Latin, is an acknowledgement both of the importance of a historical consciousness rooted in secular values and traditions, as well as of the authority of the Latin written word. We should note that although these historical texts providing a primarily secular viewpoint are few (relative to the total corpus of non-documentary written matter surviving from our period), they were nevertheless very popular, and continued to be copied well after the end of our period (cf. above, p. 14, n. 11).

Works like *Waltharius* and *Beowulf* (less popular than the ‘national’ histories, judging from the manuscript survivals) are further examples of the existence of this secular culture, and also of its close connections with the Church. They attest to a discourse about the distant past that took place primarily in an oral culture, but was deeply influenced by Latin learning. As we have seen, the relationship of these texts to the extant Latin historical narratives that cover—to the extent to which any do—the same material is uncertain, but both *Beowulf* and *Waltharius* show that there were independent traditions about the past that differed from the

Latin histories, in terms of the stories told, the identification of the characters, and the chronological location of people and events. Unfortunately, because the secular historical culture was largely oral, little evidence of it survives beyond *Waltharius* and *Beowulf*, and what was incorporated into the Latin histories. There exist five short vernacular poems (the Old English *Deor*, the *Fight at Finnsburg*, *Widsith*, *Waldere*, and the Old High German *Hildebrandslied*) and some disapproving references to what might be some kind of historical oral narratives, which do not, however, tell us anything about what these narratives contained, or even what value they had for their audiences.

In this chapter, I first present an overview of the evidence available for vernacular oral historical narratives. I next consider the value in the ninth and tenth centuries of what is often considered the ‘Germanic’ past, and whether in fact it is appropriate to think of these narratives as Germanic in anything more than a linguistic sense. I shall examine the extent to which we may consider a secular, vernacular, oral historical consciousness distinct from clerical traditions of written Latin historiography, and the value the distant past might have had for the secular elite in this period. An important part of my argument will be the issue of language: it is a striking fact that in all of those regions where the historical equivalents of Germanic heroes such as the Goths Theoderic the Great and Ermanaric, and the Burgundian Guntharius, had lived, the language spoken by the ninth century was no longer a Germanic one. Moreover, with the exception of the legend of Walter, Germanic legends do not survive in the Romance languages, and the Romance reflexes of the Walter material are very different from what we find in all the Germanic vernaculars. Although there were written narratives about the Gothic and Burgundian kings in Latin histories, the fact that there seem never to have been any Romance traditions about them suggests that their popularity in

narratives among Germanic speakers around 800 and later derives not primarily from written Latin sources, but from oral narratives in Germanic vernaculars.

I argue that the secular oral historical culture of northern Europe allowed narratives about a ‘Germanic’ past to flourish as a form of cultural inheritance not related to a sense of political or ethnic identity, and this was only because of the ease of transmission between closely related languages. Meanwhile, in the Romance vernaculars, new traditions arose, none of which had any relation to the figures of Germanic narrative tradition. In both the Romance and the Germanic cases, the vernacular historical narratives that were not written in our period—or that have survived only in very fragmentary form—were of interest primarily as bearers of secular cultural values and as some form of entertainments. Stories of the distant past that could have had more political relevance were transferred from the oral and vernacular sphere to that of Latin literacy. I conclude this chapter by summing up the results of the foregoing studies with regard to the place of the non-Roman, non-biblical past, and oral and vernacular narratives about this past, within the secular historical consciousness of the aristocracies of the early medieval west.

Oral Vernacular Historical Material

There are two categories of sources for an oral secular historical culture: narratives which have made the transfer from an oral to a literate milieu; and references to such oral narratives that have not been written, or do not survive in written form. *Waltharius* and *Beowulf* are the only two complete texts that survive that belong to the first category, but most of the works examined above do contain some kind of references to or recordings of otherwise unwritten oral narratives (cf. above, pp. 29–40; 115–28). In the Latin histories, it is

extremely difficult to decipher what derives from a genuine oral source, and what does not; nevertheless, Paul and Jordanes both seem to cite some originally orally transmitted stories, and the Trojan origin myth probably underwent some transformations in a milieu of informal oral speculation. The remaining narrative material is extremely fragmentary, and consists only of a few short poems, before a new flourishing of the writing of oral-derived narratives takes place from the late tenth century.¹ In the following pages, I present a brief overview of the extant narratives, followed by a survey of references to vernacular oral stories, before examining, in the next section, the value of the ‘Germanic’ past.

Deor

Deor is an Old English poem of 42 lines recorded in the second half of the tenth century in the manuscript known as the *Exeter Book*,² comprising seven stanzas of unequal length, each of which is followed by a refrain. The first stanza is on Weland; the second on Beaduhild; the third on Mathild; the fourth on Theoderic; the fifth on Ermanaric; the sixth on an anonymous depressed man; and the seventh on the poet himself. No stanza can truly be called narrative; each contains allusions to figures that cannot be made sense of without prior knowledge of some sort of narrative concerning them.³ The stanza on Ermanaric will suffice as an example:

We geascodan Eormanrices
 wylfenne geboht; ahte wide folc
 Gotena rices. þæt wæs grim cyning.
 Sæt secg monig sorgum gebunden,
 wean on wenan, wyscte geneahhe
 þæt þæs cynerices ofercumen wære.

¹ The *Fight at Finnsburg* is a reflex of an underlying tale that also occurs in *Beowulf* (1068–1159), and is not considered independently here (cf. above, pp. 175; 177, n. 19; 201, nn. 75–76, for references and discussion of Hengest).

² This codex, written c. 965–c. 1000, is a collection of Old English poetic works, primarily religious, but also including, apart from *Deor* and *Widsith*, a number of riddles and some wisdom poetry. On the manuscript and its contents, cf. *ASPR* III, ix–lxvii., Muir (ed. 2000, 1–41).

³ For introductory readings of *Deor*: Fulk and Cain (2003, 216–17); Greenfield and Calder (1986, 47; 295–96); Harris (1987); North (1994); and the introduction and notes in Malone (ed. 1977).

We learnt of Ermanaric's wolfish thought; he had a great army of the Gothic kingdom; that was a grim king. Many a warrior sat bound up in sorrows, expecting misery, [and] wished frequently that the kingdom be overthrown (21–26).

All we know from this is that Ermanaric was a Gothic king, and that his men were miserable and wished him overthrown. The stanza on Theoderic, similarly, only tells us that it was known to many that he ruled the *Mæringa burg* (19a), an otherwise unknown and unidentifiable location, for thirty years.⁴ In order to comprehend these allusions, an audience would have had to associate the figures mentioned here with some sort of narratives, however brief; given that Weland, Theoderic and Ermanaric also occur elsewhere in the corpus of Old English literature, it is reasonable to assume that the poet of *Deor* does indeed count on a general awareness of who these figures were. *Deor* has also been read as a philosophical poem of consolation, inspired by Boethius (cf. Greenfield and Calder 1986, 296); the link is somewhat tenuous, but what seems certain is that the *Dryhten* ('Lord') referred to in the poem (32a) is the Christian god.

Widsith

Widsith, a poem of 144 lines also recorded in the *Exeter Book*, is even more allusive than *Deor*. It is a poet's report of his travels among various peoples, and the many kings he has encountered, but it contains almost no narrative, comprising almost exclusively names of kings, who are qualified by geographical markers and epithets of praise.⁵ The poem mentions the Goth Ermanaric; the Burgundians Gifca and Guðhere; a Scaef who ruled the Lombards; a number of other figures also occurring in *Beowulf* (e.g. Hroðwulf, Hroðgar, Offa,

⁴ Marold suggests that this refers to the region known as 'Meran' in the middle ages: Histria, Croatia and Dalmatia (1988, 165–66). This is, in fact, where Theoderic came from, before he conquered Italy. According to Marold, this becomes the location of his exile because in the legend (as we see in the *Hildebrandslied*), Theoderic is understood as having been exiled from Italy by Odoacer, but returns to conquer Italy; thus his historical homeland becomes the place of exile, but both in history and legend is where he set out for Italy from.

⁵ Malone's extensive commentary and notes remain an indispensable source of information, even if his interpretations are not always reliable (Malone, ed. 1962). In addition, see Fulk and Cain (2003, 217–20); Greenfield and Calder (1986, 146–48); Hill (1994); Niles (2007).

Ongenþeow); Ingeld (his ethnic identity is not given); Alboin the Lombard and his father Audoin (Ælfwine and Eadwine). There are a host of other figures who are said to have ruled people we can identify as belonging to Germanic-speaking peoples; but this poem also mentions a number of non-Germanic speakers, including Alexander and Caesar (21: ruler of the Greeks; 77–79: ruler of Rome), and the poet claims to have practised his art among the Hebrews, Indians, Egyptians, Medes and Persians, among others. Once again, we see that this work counts on the knowledge of some sort of narrative traditions concerning various non-Roman, non-biblical, and in some cases probably pre-Christian figures,⁶ but it is apparent also that characters who could only have been known ultimately (and quite probably also immediately) from written sources, and have nothing whatsoever to do with any kind of ‘Germanic’ tradition, are happily cast into a larger pantheon of great figures of the past without distinction between ‘Germanic’ and Roman or biblical traditions.⁷

Both *Deor* and *Widsith* are poems that, precisely because of their almost exclusively allusive nature, are extremely hard to interpret. Their place within Old English literary history need not detain us here; what is important is that they, just like *Beowulf* and *Waldere*, clearly draw on secular historical traditions about figures of the past, which would have been transmitted orally in the vernacular. Nevertheless, both also show evidence of contact between the spheres of written, Christian learning and the oral vernacular milieu of the secular aristocracy.

⁶ Hill (1994) suggests, however, that the mentioning of names need not in all cases imply a broader knowledge of narratives attached to those names. This is probably the case with many of the names in *Widsith* about which there are no records elsewhere, but it seems to be reasonable to assume that figures also occurring in other works were indeed more widely known, with some sort of narrative attached to them.

⁷ Given the extensive recording of Christian and Latin-derived material in the vernacular in Anglo-Saxon England, there is no need to suppose that these figures are immediately derived from any Latin texts; the sources could very well be Old English written works.

Hildebrandslied

The Old High German *Hildebrandslied* is a fragmentary lay of 68 lines telling of the battle between Hildebrand and his son Hadubrand.⁸ It is preserved on two outside leaves of a manuscript otherwise containing biblical and patristic texts (in Latin), written at Fulda probably between 830 and 840, apparently by two different hands. It is thought to be a copy from a now lost exemplar, and is composed in an unusual mix of several Germanic dialects.⁹ It is important in our context because Hildebrand is said to have been in exile for thirty years; he fled with Theoderic when the latter had to escape Odoacer's hostility (17–19). No more is said of Theoderic, but the allusion would seem to assume some prior knowledge of who he was, and why he had to flee from Odoacer. Given the manuscript context, it seems certain that the poem was known in a monastic environment where Latin historical material on Theoderic was available, where Charlemagne's appropriation of Theoderic's statue for his palace at Aachen would have been known (cf. below, pp. 223–24; 226–29), but where, manifestly, oral material touching on Theoderic and contradicting sixth-century accounts of his war with Odoacer also circulated. It is further evidence of the existence of some sort of vernacular historical culture, which was, however, clearly accessible to monks who knew Latin, and would have had access to Latin historical material.

References to Vernacular Historical Narratives

Apart from *Beowulf* and *Waltharius*, the poems outlined above comprise the total extant corpus of narrative material that we can reasonably claim reproduces in writing something of the oral vernacular historical traditions of the Germanic-speaking peoples of the

⁸ The best introduction remains Bostock (1976, 43–82); in addition, see the more concise accounts in Haubrichs (1995, 116–27); Kartschoke (2000, 125–30). An insightful reading, placing the poem in the context of a broader Germanic literary history, is given by Harris (1988).

⁹ On the language, cf. Bostock (1976, 74–81); a comprehensive study (800 pp.!) is provided by Luhr (1982).

ninth and tenth centuries. There exist also a number of more or less cryptic references to historical poetry of some sort, which tell us little about its content or function, but should nevertheless be noted as evidence of the existence of a historical consciousness parallel to that expressed in Latin histories. A number of passing references prove that there was some kind of oral secular culture that clerics habitually disapproved of, which comprised, among other things, songs performed to the accompaniment of harp or zither.¹⁰ Only a small number of the references are unambiguously to historical material, and it is not always evident whether in these cases we are dealing with necessarily non-Roman or non-Christian narratives, or simply secular material deemed inappropriate for a monastic context. It is clear, nevertheless, that clerics indulged in secular pastimes of various sorts, including hunting, feasting, and listening to secular music, and that this was often condemned by senior churchmen as being unsuitable for those in religious orders (Wormald 1978, 42–47). It would be wise not to confuse a clerical condemnation of secular pursuits among the clergy with evidence for a necessarily ‘barbarian’ oral culture, by which I mean something containing pre-Christian and pre-Roman material.¹¹ It is equally important to stress that the very condemnation voiced by someone like Alcuin shows that there was no divide between the secular and clerical spheres, however much some clerics might have wished it so.

Alcuin’s famous question, *Quid Hinieldus cum Christo?*, occurs in a letter addressed to a Mercian bishop in the 790s.¹² The context of these words is as follows:

Verba dei legantur in sacerdotali convivio. Ibi decet lectorem audiri, non citharistam; sermones patrum, non carmina gentilium. Quid Hinieldus cum Christo? Angusta est domus: utrosque tenere non potuit. Non vult rex caelestis cum paganis et perditis nominetenus

¹⁰ Much of the material is collected in Richter (1994, 125–58).

¹¹ I differ here from the interpretation of Richter (1994); a better guide to much the same material (with a focus on Anglo-Saxon England) is Wormald (1978, 42–47), who discusses many of the same sources as Richter.

¹² I follow Bullough’s interpretation; he thinks it is most probably addressed to Bishop Unuuona of Leicester (Bullough 1993). On this letter, in addition to Bullough, and Garrison (2005), cf. Wormald (1978, 43; 50–51).

regibus communionem habere; quia rex ille aeternus regnat in caelis; ille paganus plangit in inferno. Voces legentium audite in domibus tuis, non ridentium turbam in plateis.¹³

Let the words of God be read at the banquet of priests. It is fitting that the lector be heard there, not the *citharista*; the teachings of the fathers, not the songs of the pagans. What does Ingeld have to do with Christ? The house is small: it cannot contain both. The heavenly king does not wish to commune with so-called kings who are pagan and damned, for the king who is eternal reigns eternally in the heavens, and the pagan king cries out in hell. Hear the voices of the readers in your houses, not the crowd of laughing ones in the streets (Dümmler, ed. 1895, ep. 124, p. 183).

It is clear from this letter that Alcuin feels that recitations of pagan material are unsuitable for an ecclesiastical context, and given the reference to Ingeld, it is reasonable to assume that he has in mind historical narratives about pre-Christian kings (though this might not be all that he believes is improper). Garrison (2005) argues that Alcuin here polemicises against pagan songs, but also against king-lists in which pagan and Christian kings are juxtaposed, and we cannot necessarily infer from this letter that it is the *carmina* that have references to Ingeld and are therefore historical lays of some sort. This is certainly a plausible suggestion; it does not alter the basic facts that oral historical traditions about pagan kings are here seen as inappropriate, and that they are sufficiently popular among clerics that Alcuin must specifically condemn them.

Richter (1994) and Wormald (1978, 42–47) adduce a number of further examples in which clerics state that one should not cultivate vernacular poetry or listen to a *citharista*; it is certainly possible that these references also imply the existence of vernacular historical songs, but we cannot be certain about this (there are a number of other possible genres of secular song that might be deemed inappropriate entertainment for clerics). There is an explicit reference to songs about past kings in a life of St Ethelbert from a twelfth-century manuscript (James, ed. 1917, 238), but no other such references survive from Anglo-Saxon England. It is far from certain, moreover, that these songs about past kings must also be

¹³ I follow Garrison's emendation of *audire* to *audite* in the last line (2005, 241).

about pagan kings. There is no further evidence from Anglo-Saxon England for vernacular oral historical traditions, but given that texts exist that not only contain some historical material, but also allude to a wide range of figures extraneous to the main narratives of these texts, it seems certain that there was in fact a lively oral historical tradition on the island, in the vernacular, but operating, as we see in all the extant texts, under significant influence of written, clerical culture.

More references to oral vernacular historical narratives survive from continental Francia. Most famous is Einhard's report concerning Charlemagne, that just after his coronation, *barbara et antiquissima carmina, quibus veterum regum actus et bella canebantur, scripsit memoriaeque mandavit* (Holder-Egger, ed. 1911, c. 29: 'he had written down the barbarian and most ancient songs in which the deeds and wars of the ancient kings were sung, and commanded that they be preserved for posterity'). To be sure, Einhard models his work on Suetonius's biographies of the early Roman emperors, and, Innes suggests, on Tacitus's *Germania*.¹⁴ But given that there does exist one lay from this period, the *Hildebrandslied*, which is certainly historical in nature, it definitely seems plausible that there were in fact vernacular historical poems in existence at the time known to Einhard, and probably also Charlemagne, whether or not Charlemagne actually had any *barbara et antiquissima carmina* written.¹⁵ There is no indication that these *veteres reges* need have

¹⁴ Chapters 26–29 of the *Vita Karoli* show Charlemagne performing various activities related to language, law, religion, the calendar and history, which are similar to Suetonius's descriptions of various emperors (Ihm, ed. 1933: Caesar 40; 44; 56; Augustus: 31; 34; Tiberius 26; Caligula 15; Claudius 41). Tacitus tells us that the *Germani* commemorated their past in song (Ogilvie and Winterbottom, eds 1975, II,2). Cf. Haubrichs (1987, 40–42); more generally on Suetonius in Carolingian letters, see Innes (1999); on Einhard and Tacitus, see Innes (2000, 237–39).

¹⁵ It is possible that the *Hildebrandslied* was originally written as a result of Charlemagne's impulse, but this can never be more than speculation. What is certain is that the only extant exemplar cannot be seen as a part of a programmatic desire to record ancient barbarian songs: its existence on the fly-leaves of a manuscript with completely unrelated texts clearly shows that the current manuscript context is not that of some sort of 'Heldenliederbuch Karls des Großen'.

been exclusively of Charlemagne's own family, or even Frankish.¹⁶ It is not, however, entirely clear what is meant by the adjective 'barbarus'; the term certainly need not necessarily mean 'pagan'. But it must refer either to vernacular songs, or to Latin songs about non-Roman (and probably Germanic-speaking) kings: in two other occurrences of the word in the text it seems to be used with regard to the Germanic language, and in the fourth instance, it describes Einhard himself—who was a Germanic-speaker, though his identification of himself as *homo barbarus* occurs as part of the standard humility-topos of the preface, and the term should here not be loaded with much significance.¹⁷

Charlemagne's son Louis the Pious also apparently learnt pagan songs, according to his biographer Thegan: *poetica carmina gentilia, quæ in iuventute didicerat, respuit nec legere nec audire nec docere voluit* (Trempp, ed. and trans. 1995b, c. 19: 'he spurned the pagan poetic songs that he had learnt in his youth and wished neither to read, nor to hear, nor to teach them'). That Louis learnt such songs in his youth seems to indicate a current interest in the court circles at the time, even if he repudiated them later. Whether these songs were Germanic or not is difficult to tell—it is conceivable that they might have been the *peregrinorum aliquid [...]* *morum, quibus difficulter expeditur aetas semel imbuta* (Trempp, ed. and trans. 1995a, c. 4: 'foreign customs [...] which are difficult to cast off at a mature age once they have been absorbed') that his father was worried Louis would learn while he was

¹⁶ Innes states that 'the orally transmitted material to which Carolingian sources referred was thus resolutely royal, dynastic and Frankish' (2000, 240); this applies only to one of the references in Poeta Saxo (see below, pp. 220–21), and the panegyric poem *Ludwigslied*, but certainly not to Einhard, of whom we can only say that the songs referred to must be royal, but need not be dynastic or Frankish.

¹⁷ A thorough discussion of the passage's various possible interpretations, as well as later reflexes in Thegan and Poeta Saxo, is given in Haubrichs (1987); he does not, however, consider all other uses of *barbarus* in Einhard's work. As Haubrichs notes (1987, 29), it occurs again in the same chapter with regard to the names of the months, but it is not entirely clear from the context that it means a Germanic vernacular. The other two instances of the word are in the preface, where Einhard refers to himself as a *homo barbarus* inexperienced in *Romana locutione* (which, given his command of Latin, tells us nothing of what *barbarus* is supposed to mean elsewhere), and finally when he tells us that Charlemagne conquered all the *barbaras ac feras nationes* who are *lingua [...] poene similes* and live in *Germania* between the Rhine and the Vistula, and the ocean and the Danube (Holder-Egger, ed. 1911, c. 15).

in Aquitaine, in which case they might not have had anything to do with any Germanic tradition at all. A further reference to historical songs in a Germanic vernacular comes from the *Vita* of St Liudger, a missionary in Frisia; the saint is said to encounter among the Frisians a blind singer by the name of Bernlef, who *antiquorum actus regumque certamina bene noverat psallendo promere* (Diekamp, ed. 1881, c. 25: ‘he knew well how to narrate to the accompaniment of a zither the deeds of the ancients and the battles of kings’).

There exist also some references to written Germanic poetry, in at least one instance unmistakably dealing with legendary matter. The library catalogues of Reichenau contained two volumes of vernacular poetry: *De carminibus Theodiscae volumen I; In XXI. libello continentur XII carmina Theodiscae lingua formata* (Lehmann, ed. 1918, 248 [catalogue of 821–22]: ‘One volume of German [?] poetry’; ‘12 poems composed in the German language are contained in the 21st book’); and in another volume are, apart from a number of penitentials by various theologians, *carmina diversa ad docendum Theodiscam linguam* (Lehmann, ed. 1918, 260 [Reginbert’s catalogue, 835–42]: ‘various songs to teach the German language’). These catalogue entries need not be taken as references to secular poetry; they might refer to religious verse such as the Old Saxon *Heliand*. There is no way of determining the content of these German songs. In addition, Flodoard of Rheims includes a letter of Fulco of Reims from 893 in his history, which makes a clear reference to a written vernacular narrative about Ermanaric: *subicit etiam ex libris Teutonicis de rege quodam Hermenrico nomine, qui omnem progeniem suam morti destinaverit* (Stratmann, ed. 1998, IV,5: ‘he also adduces, from German books [a story about] a certain king by the name of Ermanaric, who caused the death of his whole lineage’).

There is some evidence also that in the ninth century, a tradition of historical vernacular poetry dealing with relatively recent events was still current. Poeta Saxo refers to (probably vernacular; not necessarily Germanic) songs about Charlemagne's ancestors: [...] *vulgaria carmina magnis / Laudibus eius avos et proavos celebrant, / Pippinos, Carolos, Hludowicos et Theodricos / Et Carlomannos Hlothariosque canunt* [...]; *Necnon, quae veterum depromunt proelia regum, / barbara mandavit carmina litterulis* (von Winterfeld, ed. 1899, V, 117–20; 545–46: '[...] vernacular [?] songs celebrated with great praise his grandfathers and great-grandfathers, they sang of the Pippins, Caroli, Hludowici and Theoderici and the Carlomanni and Hlotharii [...]; Moreover, those barbarian songs that depicted the battles of the ancient kings he commanded to [be written] in letters'). It is not certain that the *vulgaria carmina* are identical with the *barbara carmina*; the latter reference is derived from Einhard, though this need not mean that no songs of the ancient past were sung, and indeed suggests that a contemporary audience in the late ninth century would have found the idea of such songs plausible. The reference to *vulgaria carmina* provides information not contained in Einhard, namely that vernacular songs celebrated Charlemagne's ancestors; Einhard's *veteres reges* are not necessarily equivalent to Saxo's *avi et proavi* (Haubrichs 1987, 37–38). In addition to the Saxon poet, the existence of the *Ludwigslied* (Braune and Ebbinghaus, eds 1994, 136–38), a poem of uncertain genre that praises the exploits of a young Carolingian king in his battles against the vikings to save his people, is testament to a still existing vernacular tradition of historical poetry in the 880s.¹⁸

¹⁸ Scholars have been uncertain as to whether the *Ludwigslied* should be placed in the genre of praise-poetry or heroic lay; I myself find such genre distinctions unhelpful as many extant works appear to sit uncomfortably on the boundaries constructed by modern scholarship. Another such work is the Old English *Battle of Maldon* (Scragg, ed. 1981) On the genre of the *Ludwigslied* and *Maldon*, in comparison with works in other Germanic languages, cf. Beck (1972); Szarmach (1993); more broadly on the problem of genre definition of historical poetry in the Germanic languages: Ebenbauer (1988); Reichl (2000, 70–73); my views on the problem are set out in Ghosh (2007, 239–48), with further references.

Vernacular poetry about very recent events is not, of course, the same thing as vernacular poetry about the distant past. But the cumulative evidence of all the references above, when taken together with the brief, allusive vernacular narratives that do survive, and *Waltharius*, *Beowulf*, and Paul's statement that songs about Alboin were sung among the Saxons and Bavarians (*HL* I,27; pp. 118–19 above) appears to show that there was in fact a continuing practice of historical poetry in the Germanic vernaculars, mostly performed and transmitted orally, though also sometimes written down.¹⁹ This sort of poetry met with a mixed reaction: while some clerics clearly enjoyed it—as is evidenced by the need to condemn it—it generally seems to have been met with censure.

With the possible exception of Poeta Saxo's *vulgaria carmina*, all the material presented above refers to a Germanic vernacular. By the ninth century, however, there was a considerable divergence also between the Romance vernaculars and Latin; there is some evidence also that there were oral vernacular historical traditions in the Romance vernaculars too. We have no actual historical narratives in any Romance language from this period, and the possibility that the later *Chansons de geste* derive from oral material of the ninth and tenth centuries is fraught with difficulty.²⁰ Nevertheless, it seems to be the case that Ermold the Black is aware of vernacular narratives concerning Louis the Pious (Faral, ed. and trans. 1932, 842–45); Notker's *Gesta Karoli magni* is thought to contain an early reflex of the later *Chanson* on Ogier of Denmark (Haefele, ed. 1959, II,17); and although direct textual links cannot be ascertained, the epics of the Guillaume cycle, the *Chanson de Roland*, and a

¹⁹ The scholarship on this subject is vast and diffuse. The most relevant recent works for my purposes are Geuenich (1983); Haubrichs (1987); Innes (2000), all of which deal with the issue of historical poetry. The standard surveys of Old High German literature are Haubrichs (1995) and Kartschoke (1990); Bostock (1976), though somewhat outdated, is nevertheless often more sound than more recent work.

²⁰ The various arguments regarding the genesis of the *Chansons de geste* are carefully presented in Kloocke (1972), whose conclusions I follow in this paragraph. On the historical background and function of the *Chansons de geste*, see in addition Duggan (1986); Zink (1995, 3–17; 24–32).

number of other *Chansons de geste* are thought to originate in oral vernacular narratives of the ninth century and tenth centuries (Kloocke 1972). Furthermore, it is possible that the *vulgaria carmina* about Charlemagne's ancestors referred to by Poeta Saxo were not Germanic, but Romance (cf. Kloocke 1972, 362–63). However, the bulk of the reflexes in Latin of oral historical poetry in a Romance vernacular come from the very end of the tenth century or later, suggesting that—as with the Germanic material on kings of the distant past—a certain amount of time elapsed between the historical events and the evolution of a vernacular poetic tradition.

It is important to stress that Latin historiography would not have been sufficient to create a collective memory among what one would presume was a very important class in Carolingian society—the military, possibly including senior aristocratic commanders, whose language would have been the vernacular, whether Germanic or Romance.²¹ We know from Nithard's histories that both vernaculars were deemed appropriate for the swearing of oaths by kings before a military assembly (Müller, ed. 1907, III,5). The later beginnings of writing in the Romance languages suggests that they were still sufficiently close to Latin to make a written form of Romance as yet unnecessary; this is, of course, not the case for the Germanic tongues. Nevertheless, there must have been some means of collective memory beyond the written Latin histories; it is hardly plausible that only those who had access to written Latin material had any kind of historical consciousness. I should like to stress, however, that there is no record, from this period or any other, of vernacular Romance narratives concerning the Germanic kings of southern Europe who were so popular in the Germanic vernaculars, even though in the lands those kings had ruled Romance languages were now spoken. Stories

²¹ On the Germanic and Romance vernaculars and their use in this period, see Banniard (1992, 485–533); Banniard (1997, 15–38); Everett (2003, 100–61); Hellgardt (1996); Geuenich (1983); Rexroth (1978); Wright (1982); Wright (ed. 1991, 29–43; 101–74).

about Theoderic (who ruled in Italy), or the legend of the Burgundians (who settled in southern France and most likely spoke vulgar Latin/Proto-Romance before the Franks did), both among the most popular topics of legendary narrative in the Germanic vernaculars, are not extant in any Romance poetry. In the next section, using the example of narratives about Theoderic, I examine the value of the ‘Germanic’ past, and the extent to which we are justified in speaking of ‘Germanic’ oral traditions.

Fashionable Gothicism? The Value of the ‘Germanic’ Past

The Reception of Theoderic the Great in the Carolingian Age

Writing in the 830s, Agnellus of Ravenna informs us that a statue of Theoderic that used to stand in Ravenna was taken away by Charlemagne and installed at his palace in Aachen (Deliyannis, ed. 2006, c. 94). We do not know, from this account, why Charlemagne wanted this statue, and what exactly Theoderic meant for him, though it is clear from another Carolingian reference, a poem by Walahfrid Strabo, that Theoderic did not have a wholly positive image at the Carolingian court (Herren, ed. and trans. 1991). The figure of Theoderic also occurs in *Deor*, *Widsith*, *Waldere* and the Old High German *Hildebrandslied*, and in the later middle ages becomes one of the most popular characters of Germanic heroic literature. But although we identify Theoderic as a Gothic, and therefore Germanic, king, it is far from clear that this is the image he had during his lifetime and later. As mentioned above (p. 101), Fredegar thought Theoderic was of Macedonian (II,56), and therefore ultimately Trojan descent. Furthermore, although Charlemagne’s interest appears to attest to a positive reception of Theoderic, there was also a long tradition among ecclesiastical writers of denigrating him because of his Arianism. The figure of Theoderic, therefore, is a useful

means of examining the value of the barbarian/‘Germanic’ vs Roman dichotomy in the ninth and tenth centuries, a period in which there was a growing awareness of the linguistic similarities between the various Germanic languages; an increased interest in Scandinavian pasts; a growth in the recording of literature in the Germanic vernaculars, both religious and secular; but also, in the course of the Carolingian Renaissance, a resurgence of the rhetoric of Romanness, of which the coronation of Charlemagne as emperor at Rome is only one indication.²²

It is not possible to know what exactly Charlemagne thought about Theoderic, but we can assume that it was something positive; there seems to be no reason why he would have taken the statue from Ravenna and installed it at Aachen if it was of a negative character. There were a large number of Latin written sources on Theoderic that would have been available in Carolingian court circles, but it is striking that these are overwhelmingly hostile. As early as the so-called *Excerpta Valesiana*, a narrative of Theoderic’s life and deeds probably compiled soon after his death, we receive negative reports about his reign (König, ed. and trans. 1997, XV–XVI; cf. Goltz 2008, 476–541). This text may not have been known outside Italy in the Carolingian period, but a number of other sources from the sixth century that certainly were also known provide an inimical portrayal of Theoderic: the *Liber pontificalis*,²³ Gregory the Great,²⁴ and Gregory of Tours.²⁵ These texts are followed or cited

²² Studies of Theoderic with discussions of the contemporary and later sixth-century sources: Ausbüttel (2003); Heather (1995); Moorhead (1992). Goltz (2008) presents a thorough analysis of the reception of Theoderic in early Greek and Latin sources (excepting Fredgar); I was unfortunately unable to access this massive study early enough to incorporate it properly into my work. A study of Theoderic in Fredegar is presented by Borchert (2005). Earlier historical analyses of note: Löwe (1952, 392–99); Innes (2000, 241–45); Hammer (2005, 309–18). Literary studies on Theoderic in the Germanic vernaculars are legion; most deal with material from outside our period. A good, comprehensive guide is Wisniewski (1986); most recently, see Kragl (2007), which also addresses the early historical sources, and provides extensive references to earlier literary scholarship; in addition see Haubrichs (2000); Marold (1988).

²³ After Theoderic has had Boethius and Symmachus killed, on their return from Byzantium, Pope John and his entourage *suscepti sunt a rege Theoderico cum dolo et grande odio* (‘were received by king Theoderic with

many years later by, among others, Bede in his chronicle and martyrology (Mommensen, ed. 1898, 501; 511; PL 94, cols 928–29), Paul the Deacon in his *Romana* (Droysen, ed. 1879, XVI,8–11), and the martyrologies of Hrabanus Maurus (PL 110, col. 1147c), and Notker I of St Gall (PL 131, col. 1090). In all cases, Theoderic is clearly described as a heretic who persecuted a pope, and certainly does not come across as a figure worthy of emulation.²⁶

Nevertheless, there was also a positive tradition about Theoderic. Apart from the works produced by his courtiers Ennodius and Cassiodorus (cf. Goltz 2008, 310–29; 342–54), earlier portions of the *Liber pontificalis* presented him in a neutral manner (Goltz 2008, 330–41), and the first part of the *Excerpta Valesiana* presents Theoderic as an ideal king (Goltz 2008, 485–500). In the mid-sixth century, the *Vita Fulgentii* (PL 65, 117–50) and the *Vita Caesarii* (Krusch, ed. 1896) mention Theoderic only in passing, but present him as a beloved and wise king (Goltz 2008, 436–46). Longer narratives with a positive portrayal are in Fredegar and Jordanes. According to Fredegar, the Goths remained in Italy after the sack of Rome in 410, but being harassed by Odoacer, they asked the emperor to appoint Theoderic, who is said to be of Macedonian origin, as patrician (II,57). The Macedonian

treachery and great hatred’) and although *gladio eos voluit punire* (‘he wanted to punish them by the sword’) *metuens indignatione Iustini Aug. orthodoxi, non fecit: tamen in custodia omnes cremavit* (‘fearing the wrath of the emperor Justin, who was orthodox, he did not do so, destroying them in prison by maltreatment instead’) (the text is at Duchesne, ed. and trans. 1886–92, c. 55; for commentary, cf. Goltz 2008, 400–25; n. 241 on the meaning of *cremare*; I have followed the translation in Davis, trans. 2000).

²⁴ [...] *quia Iohannem papam adfligendo in custodia occidit, Symmachum quoque patricium ferro trucidavit, ab illis iuste in igne mitti apparuit, quos in hac vita iniuste iudicavit* (de Vogüé, ed. 1978–80, IV,31: ‘since he killed Pope John by casting him into prison and slaughtered the patrician Symmachus with the sword, he seems rightly consigned to flames by those whom he unjustly judged in this life’; for commentary, cf. Goltz 2008, 590–95).

²⁵ Theoderic persecutes the Catholics in Italy, and when Pope John beseeches him not to, the latter is imprisoned: *Positus vero sanctus Dei in carcerem, tantis adtritibus est iniuriis, ut non post multum tempus spiritum exaleret* (‘Consigned to prison, God’s saint was so worn down by injuries that not long afterwards he gave up the ghost’); Theoderic is shortly afterwards punished by god and we are told that *suscepitque protinus perpetuum gehennae flammantis incendium* (‘he suffered the perpetual fire of flaming hell’) (Krusch, ed. 1885, c. 39; for commentary, cf. Goltz 2008, 588–90).

²⁶ The Latin texts presenting a negative image of Theoderic are studied in some detail in Goltz (2008, 377–432; 501–21; 587–98).

origin is important: as we have seen, Fredegar thought Macedonians were, like Franks and Romans, descendents of Trojans, so Theoderic is here of a people cognate with the Franks, and distinct from other non-Roman peoples, including the Goths over whom he rules. Fredegar presents a number of colourful stories about Theoderic that are not known from elsewhere;²⁷ he is the earliest source to tell us that Theoderic had to flee from Odoacer (albeit very briefly); a flight from Odoacer also occurs in the *Hildebrandslied* and in other vernacular narratives outside our period, in which, however, he is in exile for thirty years, and flees not to Ravenna (as in Fredegar), but out of Italy. We are also told that Theoderic defeated, in single combat, the Avar king Xerxes, who, when freed by Theoderic, recognises the latter's superiority and decides to submit to him (II,57).²⁸ However, after having presented an overwhelmingly favourable narrative, Fredegar does tell us that Theoderic was killed by divine anger for having caused the death of Pope John (II,59). Jordanes also provides a positive account of Theoderic (*Get.* 269–304; cf. Goltz 2008, 267–99); uniquely, he makes no mention of the deaths of Pope John, Symmachus and Boethius. Nevertheless, although Theoderic's heresy and killing of a pope are excluded from the *Getica*, Jordanes's narrative of Theoderic 'turns out to fall far short of glorification' (Goffart 1988, 66), and seems unlikely to have inspired Charlemagne to want a Theoderic-statue at his palace (Hammer 2005, 314–15).

Walahfrid's objections to Theoderic are his heresy and his threat to legitimate power: he is viewed as an usurper. Importantly, Walahfrid's poem is not solely a polemic against Theoderic, but against those Franks who see him as a positive exemplum (Herren 1992, 40).

²⁷ Large portions of the narrative are, however, based on literary models: Borchert (2005) names Jonas's *Vita Columbani* and Orosius as some of the sources, as well as other known narratives about Theoderic.

²⁸ In reality, Theoderic fought neither Huns nor Avars. As we have seen, Huns and Avars were confused in later times, for example in *Waltharius*, and in later reflexes of the Theoderic legend in Germany, he is often associated with the Hunnish court of Etzel (Attila).

Such people therefore must have existed, and as they surely could not have seen Theoderic as a positive figure because of any religious virtues, the reason could only have been his secular achievements. Whether these consist of his rule of Italy, his battle against the Avars, or the fact that he was an eminent king from a people (Macedonians) cognate with the Franks, is unclear. The opposing attitudes to Theoderic attest to conflicting views deriving from primarily secular or clerical viewpoints;²⁹ none of this need have taken place outside the realm of written, Latin discourse, but there is no necessary dichotomy between oral/vernacular and written/Latin traditions regarding Theoderic (Innes 2000, 244). The poles here are of clerical vs. secular attitudes to a past ruler, who might perhaps have been viewed as barbarian, or at least anti-Roman in the sense of usurping imperial authority, and might have been seen as a Germanic ruler, but who might equally well have been understood as a king of Macedonian and thus Trojan descent, who fulfilled an important office, but under the authority of the Roman emperor.

Even in the vernacular poems, the attitudes to Theoderic—‘a bad-luck Goth if ever there was one’ (Frank 1991, 90)—are not easy to decipher. In the *Hildebrandslied* we are told that he fled Odoacer and was in exile for thirty years, and the return of Hildebrand—Theoderic’s follower—seems to imply the return also of Theoderic. In *Deor* (18–20) we again get a reference to thirty years, the period for which Theoderic ruled *Mæringa burg*. In the garbled narrative of *Waldere*, we learn that Widia, Weland’s son, frees Theoderic from monsters (II, 4–10; the text gives no explanation as to who these monsters are, or how Theoderic was trapped). And the Theoderic of *Widsith* (115) is just a name, and most likely unrelated to Theoderic the Ostrogoth. All that we can say, from these fragmentary references,

²⁹ Note that Freculph, a contemporary of Walafrid’s, combines in one text somewhat diverging views of Theoderic apparently derived from a combination of Jordanes and Gregory the Great (Allen, ed. 2002, II.v,18; cf. Coumert 2007, 369).

is that there is no explicit record in the vernacular poems of a negative image of Theoderic, though he is, once more, hardly presented as a figure really worthy of emulation. We do not hear of him ruling Rome, conquering peoples, or doing anything particularly grand: he is forced into exile, rules an unidentified *burg*, and when trapped by monsters (as in *Waldere*) cannot free himself without help.

We can conclude that Theoderic was obviously a figure known both in clerical and in secular aristocratic circles; that there was a long (and very authoritative) tradition condemning him; and that there were also texts, from Jordanes to the vernacular material, that apparently elided the negative aspects of his rule, but did not, nevertheless, portray him as a particularly glorious figure. Charlemagne, nevertheless, saw fit to install a statue of Theoderic at Aachen. Given the way Theoderic is portrayed by such a towering figure as Gregory the Great, there must have been a strong secular tradition, possibly deriving from Fredegar or a written source of his, and possibly, but not necessarily, available to Charlemagne in oral vernacular form, that acted as a counterweight and presented Theoderic positively.³⁰ We cannot come to any conclusions regarding putative stories about Theoderic, but we can certainly conclude that there was a debate regarding how to interpret such a figure, and that he must have had a significant import among a secular elite who were willing

³⁰ Unlike Innes (2000, 243–44), I find it hard to see Jordanes's narrative as being sufficiently positive or authoritative to outweigh the condemnation from the more prominent clerical sources. Hammer (2005, 314–15) believes Charlemagne, a conqueror of Avars, wished to associate himself with Theoderic as an earlier conqueror of Avars, and his inspiration is thus drawn from Fredegar, not Jordanes; this still does not satisfactorily deal with Fredegar's mention of Theoderic's killing of a pope. Löwe argues that Theoderic was known as the first 'Germanic' ruler of Rome, and Charlemagne wished to associate himself with Theoderic for this reason after becoming Roman emperor, and also to indicate to the Byzantines that he laid no claims on the east (1952, 394–98). This ignores Odoacer, and assumes too much in the way of a sense of 'Germanic' kinship, but it is certainly possible that there was some current political significance to Charlemagne's act, potentially connected to relations with Byzantium.

to discount his crimes against the Catholic Church.³¹ It is possible that the reason only fragmentary vernacular narratives survive is precisely because of the clerical disapproval of Theoderic, which would have prevented any really positive narrative—of the sort that might inspire Charlemagne to install his statue at Aachen—from reaching parchment.³²

In this context, the fact that Theoderic was a Goth is significant: in the ninth century and after, there was a growing awareness that the various Germanic-speaking peoples were linguistically related, and it might be that legends about Theoderic were now especially valued because he was seen as being an ancient Germanic-speaking king. This might also be an explanation for the apparent popularity of Ermanaric: he occurs in *Deor*, *Widsith* and *Beowulf*, and in Fulco's letter cited above (p. 219), and unlike Theoderic, his appeal cannot lie in his having been a non-Roman ruler of Rome, or a Macedonian.³³ In the following section, I present a survey of material that seems to betray a knowledge of some sort of relationship between the Germanic-speaking peoples.

The Germanic Languages and the Scandinavian Past

Jordanes was the first historian to bestow origins in Scandinavia on any Germanic-speaking people. In this, he appears to have been followed by the Lombards, beginning with the *OGL*. The first Frankish histories to talk of Frankish origins locate them in Troy, not Scandinavia, even though the possibility of a Scandinavian origin was clearly known. But

³¹ Godden (2002), examining translations into Old English of Orosius, Boethius and Bede, shows that in Alfredian England too, there were contrasting opinions of the Goths and of Theoderic; see further, on the function of Goths in England with reference to *Widsith*, the stimulating remarks of Niles (2007), though he exaggerates, in my view, the importance of Goths for contemporary reflections on ethnicity and identity.

³² This is the reason also why so little vernacular secular narrative survives from this period, in comparison to the amount of religious material: there were, as Wormald notes, 'severe ideological pressures on the channels of transmission' (1978, 48).

³³ The fullest treatment of legends of Ermanaric in the Germanic languages remains that of Brady (1943); her conclusions regarding origin and transmission are, however, outdated. We should note that while Theoderic does not seem to be a figure either of particularly positive or negative qualities, Ermanaric seems to have aroused stronger opinions: in *Deor*, he certainly seems to be a negative figure, and Fulco too sees him as a clearly negative exemplum, but in *Widsith*, he is praised for his generosity, and the characterisation of him as fierce and wrathful to traitors cannot really be said to be negative.

things change for the Franks in the ninth century. Ermold the Black, writing between 826 and 828, closes his description of the Danes by saying that they are reputed to have given birth to the Franks (Faral, ed. and trans. 1932, 1899: *Unde genus Francis adfore fama refert*).

Writing c. 830, Freculph, bishop of Lisieux, provides the Franks with two sources of origin in his chronicle (Allen, ed. 2002, I.ii,26). He tells us first of their Trojan past: Frigas was Aeneas's brother, according to some (*ut quidam uolunt*), and ruled in Frigia, and from Frigia came the Franks. He then gives us an alternative version:

Alii uero affirmant eos [scil. Francos] de Scanza insula, quae uaginae³⁴ gentium est, exordium habuisse, de qua Gotthi et ceterae nationes Theotiscaae exierunt, quod et idioma linguae eorum testatur. Est enim in eadem insula regio, quae, ut ferunt, adhuc Francia nuncupatur. Domino autem annuente de his in sequenti opere plenius enarrare cupimus.

Others state, however, that they [the Franks] had their origin in the island Scanza, which is the womb of peoples from which the Goths and other Teutonic nations came, which is also attested to by the idiom of their language. There is moreover in that same island a region which, it is said, is still called Francia. With the Lord's favour, I desire to tell of this more fully in my next work.

The next work referred to was never written, or if it was, has left no trace. But it is clear that Freculph drew directly on Jordanes for *Scanza* and the *uagina gentium*;³⁵ what is new, however, is the identification of *Theotiscaae nationes* by means of a common language, a factor we shall consider further below.

Two other texts written within Carolingian Francia around 800, but dealing with the Burgundians, also attest to what appears to be a new interest in the Scandinavian past. The universal chronicle up to the year 741 tells us that *Burgundiones tempore Tyberi augusti egressi sunt de insola maris cuius vocabulo est Scatanavia* (Waitz, ed. 1881, 4: 'the Burgundians, in the time of the emperor Tiberius, departed from the island in the sea of

³⁴ It is not clear to me why—beyond an extremely conservative approach to editing—Allen has chosen not to emend to *uagina*.

³⁵ Freculph includes in his history a good deal of Jordanes's Gothic migration myth (I.ii,25), and clearly knew both the *Getica* and the *Romana* quite well; he mentions Jordanes explicitly at II.v,18. On his knowledge of Jordanes, cf. Allen (ed. 2002, 213*; 311*–15* [list of passages from Jordanes cited by Freculph]).

which the name is Scatanavia’). An almost identical account of Burgundian origins is given by the *Passio Sigismundi*, about the Burgundian king Sigismund: *Tempore Tyberii senioris augusti [...] egressa est gens de insula, quam mare Oceanum cingit, cuius vocabulum est Scandanavia, qui ex vocabulo quoque regionis Scanadavii nuncupati sunt* (Wattenbach, ed. 1888, c. 1: ‘At the time of the emperor Tiberius [...] the people departed from the island which the great ocean surrounds, the name of which is Scandanavia; they were called Scanadavii from the name of the place’). No earlier testimony of a Scandinavian origin of the Burgundians exists.

It is not clear why there should be such an interest in distant Gothic kings or a Scandinavian past, but it could have to do with a new awareness that the Germanic vernaculars were related tongues. Freculph is the only source that unambiguously assigns one language to all peoples who came from Scandinavia, and he and Paul (*HL* I,27) seem to be the only sources that know of a common Germanic language shared by several named peoples. There are, however, other Carolingian sources that link the Goths and the Franks on the grounds of language, while stopping short of assigning the same language to all the peoples we now identify as speakers of Germanic tongues. Walahfrid Strabo (died 849), in his *Libellus de exordiis et incrementis*, refers to his own tongue as a *Theotisca barbaries*; he knows that *barbari* fought in the Roman military, and the Franks learnt many Greek words from them, especially from the Goths, who had a *Theotiscus sermo* (Harting-Corrêa, ed. and trans. 1996, c. 7). Smaragdus of St Mihiel (died c. 840), in his discourse on naming patterns, finds that Gothic and Frankish names are similar, and appears to suggest that both Goths and Franks spoke a *Teodisca lingua* (Löfstedt, Holtz and Kibre, eds 1986, 22–24). Neither author explicitly suggests any kinship beyond that of the languages of Franks and Goths, though it is

certainly possible that they are aware that a *Theudisca lingua* is shared by other peoples too; other uses of this term appear to indicate solely a Germanic vernacular, distinct from Latin or a Romance vernacular, but do not connote any sense of a linguistic kinship between different Germanic-speaking peoples.³⁶

To sum up the evidence so far: from around 800 onwards, it is clear that oral, vernacular, historical material was extant, occasionally written, and known not just to the secular aristocracy, but also to clerics. There was clearly an interest in rulers of the distant past whom we may identify as Germanic in terms of their language; this interest was shown in regions different from where those rulers had reigned. There was also a discovery of the Scandinavian past; it is probably not a coincidence that the Gothic, Burgundian and Lombard kings who appear to have been the subjects of oral narratives in the Germanic vernaculars—not, therefore, within the areas they had once ruled—were kings of people who, by this time, were thought to have had a Scandinavian past. There was also, in the ninth century, a new awareness that the Germanic languages were related. All of this seems to support the view that ‘Gothicism [...] suddenly became fashionable around 800’ (Frank 1991, 93).

This fashion was undoubtedly nourished by an awareness in learned circles of Jordanes’s history of the Goths, but also, I would suggest, by the existence of vernacular oral material concerning Gothic kings such as Theoderic and Ermanaric. There is nothing in Jordanes to make a Scandinavian past intrinsically more attractive to Franks (or eighth-century Burgundians) than their Trojan past, but popular narratives about Gothic kings

³⁶ For detailed discussion of the references to a *lingua Theodisca* and its political significance, cf. Coumert (2007, 373–378); Geuenich (1983; 2000; 2004); Rexroth (1978). It is used generally to differentiate between Germanic and Romance segments of the Carolingian empire, but not to draw these peoples into any kind of affinity with other Germanic speakers, with whom they certainly had plenty of contact: Anglo-Saxons and Danes. In Anglo-Saxon England, the occasional use of the term simply seems to indicate the Germanic vernacular spoken there, with no inference of kinship to any other peoples.

coupled with an awareness of linguistic kinship could have been an incentive to discover a Scandinavian past where earlier there had been none; and of course, there might have been an attraction in the sheer difference of the Scandinavian origin from the Roman model. I do not see, however, how a knowledge of Jordanes and an awareness of linguistic kinship could have fuelled the production of vernacular poetry about Gothic kings in Francia or Anglo-Saxon England. Cases of vernacular borrowing from written, Latin material are exclusively confined, until the end of the Carolingian period at least, to religious or philosophical literature, and arise largely from conscious clerical efforts to disseminate the message of Christianity. It is impossible to establish direct textual relationships between any extant Germanic legend and any extant contemporary Latin text; this is not the case for the many vernacular religious works of this period. I would argue, therefore, that the existence of oral vernacular narratives stimulated an interest in a ‘Germanic’ past among writers of Latin, rather than, as Frank (1991) and Goffart (2002) propose, knowledge of Jordanes causing vernacular poets to compose the extant works.³⁷ Nor need it be surprising that there were oral vernacular historical poems; literacy was far from universal, and there is no reason to suppose that only the Latin-educated and literate had any kind of historical consciousness. Early medieval Europe would also not be the only location in which oral and written traditions interact.³⁸

The stories about a ‘Germanic’ past were cultivated by Germanic-speaking Franks and Anglo-Saxons not because of any shared past—the past of the legends was shared by the Romance speakers more than by the Germanic speakers—but because closely related

³⁷ I have set forth in detail elsewhere my arguments regarding the survival of Germanic legends in this period, using the example of the Burgundian legend (Ghosh 2007).

³⁸ On oral historical traditions in the twentieth century, see Vansina (1985), the standard handbook; see also Reichl (2000) for a thoughtful comparative study of Turkic oral traditions extant within a literate culture, with medieval Germanic oral-derived poetry.

languages and common forms of poetry (for example, similar alliterative metres³⁹) facilitated preservation, adaptation and transmission. Although possible antecedents might have been composed by Germanic-speaking peoples closer to the subjects of the narratives, the stories died out among those peoples when their language changed from Germanic to Romance: hence the survival only among distant and unrelated peoples. This explains also the fact that Romance languages preserve for us no legends from before the shift from Germanic to Romance that are also preserved in a Germanic language. In their new environment, narratives about Gothic kings would have been received and passed on not as a form of maintaining ‘our past’, but simply as a part of inherited tradition, ‘folklore’, with a purpose quite different from that of current historical poetry (Innes 2000, 247–48; Mostert 2006, 121), but also differing in function from origin narratives or ‘national’ histories. These stories were not origin narratives, or songs about the *avi et proavi* of the reigning king, and thus had little immediate political significance: they were just narratives about *veterum regum actus et bella*, which served as bearers of moral values of importance to a secular aristocracy, but had nothing whatsoever to do with self-identification as a people or nation or polity of any sort—unlike, for example, origin narratives (cf. Innes 2000; Mostert 2006; Reichl 2000, 177–79; Wormald 1978, 57–58; 65–67). The characters could have somewhat different values in different stories; they were not important so much for their historical deeds as for the moral values attributed to them in the legends. By the ninth century, although a tradition of historical poetry dealing with the relatively recent past remained current, there existed also a

³⁹ The fundamental work on Germanic metre remains Sievers (1893); for more accessible and concise introductions, cf. Bostock (1976, 304–22); von See (1967). A more wide-ranging comparative study of vocabulary, formulaic phrases, and thematic elements in the older Germanic languages is presented by Meyer (1889).

tradition of such inherited legendary narratives, the value of which did not lie in their power to help form identity by identification with common ancestors.

Unlike this sort of legendary matter, which only reached parchment in rare cases, origin narratives, which could have a more direct political relevance, were often written and widely copied, in Latin. It seems plausible to suggest that because of the greater religious and political authority of Latin writing, material of sufficient current significance was transferred into this medium, whereas other narratives with less immediate political potential were not. If this theory is correct, it would seem to be the case also that in Anglo-Saxon England, the story of Hengest and Horsa's arrival in Britain was of crucial political importance, but no narratives about the pre-migration past were. The only work that does link, albeit very obliquely, the pre-migration past with the founding myths and therefore the present dynasties of the Anglo-Saxons, is *Beowulf*. It seems to occupy a strange place in Anglo-Saxon historical consciousness, making a link with the pre-migration past, but doing so in order to raise moral and religious questions, rather than for any kind of immediate political purpose. I believe that it does, however, attest to the fact that some sort of narratives about the pre-migration period were cultivated: the Anglo-Saxons knew more about their distant past than just the names in their genealogies, and the *Beowulf*-poet sees that past as highly problematic, more so than the view of the pagan past presented by any of the 'national' histories from the continent (cf. chapter six above).

Conclusions

In the Carolingian age, there was a widespread interest in secular circles in the past, both recent and distant, but there was no particular discrimination between 'Germanic' or

‘barbarian’ and any other kind of past. A so-called ‘Germanic’ hero like Theoderic may very well have been thought of as Macedonian rather than ‘Germanic’, and as we see in Freculph, both Trojan and Scandinavian pasts of the Franks were known and both seem to have been considered plausible. Although Charlemagne appears to have been interested in Theoderic, and this interest might have been nourished by his reception of vernacular narratives about Theoderic, he was equally concerned with promoting a Roman- and biblically-inspired image of Frankish rulership; we should note also that there was a great revival of interest in classical learning in Carolingian Francia, and the traditions of Roman and ecclesiastical historiography certainly had a significant impact on secular Carolingian historical consciousness (Garrison 2000; Goetz 2000; Innes 1999; McKitterick 2004b, 28–32; 39–48; 218–64; 273–83; McKitterick 2006, 35–61). Theoderic was Germanic, but also Macedonian, just as the Franks were Trojan but also Scandinavian: secular historical consciousness was influenced by whatever traditions of distant history were available, without necessarily differentiating clearly between the Roman and the non-Roman past.

If there was no real discrimination between ‘Germanic’ and Roman heritages, there was also no impermeable boundary between oral and written secular culture. But Latin writing was a necessary medium of preservation for the secular narratives only when these concerned origins, and/or explicitly demonstrated a continuity between the distant past and the present of a particular people. Other kinds of secular historical narratives did not need to be written, and as we have seen in this chapter, there was in fact a strong resistance from the Church to their cultivation (cf. Wormald 1978, 46–48). Because of this too, origin narratives were especially influenced by written traditions, not necessarily about the same peoples that were the subjects of the histories (as demonstrated especially by Jordanes). Given that there

was no real split between the ecclesiastical and the secular elite, there was considerable give and take between these two milieux; we have seen the extent to which narrative matter in the Germanic vernaculars was influenced by Christianity (chapter six), and also how, in *Waltharius*, a secular tale drawing on oral vernacular tradition was composed in Virgilian verse (chapter five).

Written literature was in the hands of clerics, who were often censorious of narratives that seemed to praise pagan rulers. Nevertheless, the ecclesiastical hierarchy also produced texts that reflected the historical consciousness of the secular elite. For this reason, from the very beginning of the middle ages, Latin histories were written that minimised any sense of break between a pagan or heretical past and a Christian present, drawing to some extent on oral material, and legitimating a secular historical consciousness that saw a direct continuity between a Christian present and a distant, non-Christian or non-Catholic past. By c. 800, the sense of history was influenced equally by a secular historical consciousness, which embraced historical narratives in Latin that told of a non-Roman, pre-Christian past of a particular people; largely orally transmitted legendary narratives that were not necessarily restricted to a single ethnic or political group; and an educational background grounded in the Latin, Roman tradition, which included the secular histories of Rome, and a Christian tradition of historical writing which framed its narratives within the perspective of salvation history. Furthermore, although the clerical influence was indeed very strong, to the extent that material not sufficiently Christian has not survived in great quantity, there was a constant intercourse between the ecclesiastical and secular milieux. The continued copying of the Latin 'national' histories and the occasional recordings of secular vernacular texts attest to the fact that the secular tradition, with its stress on continuity across religious boundaries,

was judged important enough to be recorded in Latin. However, as a text like *Beowulf* shows, the influence of clerical moral judgement also entered into the sphere of vernacular, secular, non-Roman narratives that had an oral origin.

In chapters two to four, we examined how authors of the early ‘national’ histories negotiated the inheritance of Roman letters to create their visions of the histories of peoples whose origins did not feature in Roman or Christian historical traditions. We saw also the different ways in which oral or vernacular material might have influenced the view of the ancient, non-Roman and non-biblical past. Jordanes and Isidore (chapter two), Fredegar and the *LHF*-author (chapter three), and Paul the Deacon (chapter four), all reveal different strategies in dealing with the fact that the peoples about whom they wrote inherited much from Rome, but had no real place in ancient history according to the Roman, Latin tradition in which these authors were, to greater and lesser degrees, schooled. All these texts show a concern with establishing a continuity between a distant past that was not Christian, and the present, which was. In all cases, this discontinuity is minimised in some way or another. With the exception of Isidore’s *HG*, all the stories of the distant past draw on material not contained within earlier written historical narratives; even when, as in the case of the Frankish Trojan myth, the ultimate source is a written work, the authors drew to some extent on some form of oral speculation or storytelling about the distant past (above, pp. 95–97). But it is crucial to note that, ultimately, both the Trojan and the Scandinavian origin myths do not draw substantially on any ancient, non-Roman, non-biblical, oral, vernacular traditions: the myths are, for the most part, learned constructions based on classical ethnographic models. Nevertheless, the exact narratives themselves have no parallel in earlier writings; they were constructed by the authors, possibly on the basis of some form of earlier written or

oral speculation about origins. The writing of these histories in Latin was a means of formulating an authoritative version of the distant past in the now-authoritative medium and language, but the transfer into a medium largely in ecclesiastical hands did not mean the abandonment of a pre-Christian past potentially open to ecclesiastical censure. It did mean, however, that that pre-Christian past was dealt with in a way that minimised the significance of religious difference.

By the ninth century, all the narratives of origins were available in written form; there is no evidence for origin stories that were independent of the written histories (which is not to say that oral versions derived from the written histories did not exist). But there were still other stories circulating orally, with less of a potential political impact, but of some cultural value among the secular aristocracy. All of these together made up the sense of the past of that aristocracy. The evidence of extant vernacular narratives and references to oral stories shows that there was a great interest in the distant past, even if that past was of other peoples (and unlike in Jordanes, for instance, remained presented as being about other peoples); precisely because it was not ‘our’ past, it was not neatly compartmentalised into ‘Germanic’ and ‘Roman’, or even Gothic or Lombard or Danish or Frankish or Anglo-Saxon. Roman and non-Roman pagan pasts were equally objects of criticism and interest; the rhetoric of rulership could draw on Gothic kings and Scandinavian origins as well as biblically-inspired models of sacred kingship; narratives about the distant past could have some kind of cultural function even if they were about completely unrelated peoples and set in faraway locations.

The cumulative evidence presented in the foregoing chapters shows that there was a thriving secular aristocratic culture that, however much influenced by the teachings of the Church, nevertheless retained historical traditions, sometimes orally transmitted, and

sometimes in the vernacular, in which continuities with the distant past were more important than breaks in the flow of history. Because the Church had a virtual monopoly on writing, there is a far greater number of texts that propagate the ecclesiastical viewpoint. But from the point in which Catholic Christianity became the official religion of the western kingdoms, the culture of the Church and the culture of the lay aristocracy were not in opposition to each other and were in fact—the clerical hard core notwithstanding—very much alike (Wormald 1978, 42–58; 64–65). Vernacular texts such as *Beowulf*, references to secular pastimes amongst the clergy, and, equally, the Latin ‘national’ histories, are evidence of the cross-fertilisation of lay and clerical, oral and literate, vernacular and Latin cultures, to the extent that it would in fact be wrong to talk in terms of such pairs of opposites. While there were certainly varying emphases between the different milieux, there were no stark dichotomies; this is not a period of cultural clash, but of conjunction and compromise. There is a difference between secular (but not un-Christian) and pagan, just as there is a difference between secular Christian and clerical. Secular literature—whether pagan Roman or pagan non-Roman—might have been suspect because it was not ‘Christian’, and the Church clearly attempted to impose strict religious standards on lay people, but it nevertheless had to accept that lay believers could not be held to the same standards as ordained clergy (Wormald 1978, 44–46).

The secular aristocratic historical culture of the early middle ages was one imprinted with a pervasive sense of continuity regardless of religious difference; this continuity, however, included all kinds of historical material, not discriminating particularly between what modern historians can, with hindsight, classify as non-Roman, non-Christian, Roman, or biblical narratives of the distant past. The most important continuities were those that

established a clear link between the aristocracy of the present and a past that was in some way perceived to be prestigious; the fact that this distant past, in every case, extended beyond the time of conversion is testament to the importance of secular concerns for the preservation and creation of historical consciousness, no matter how great was the influence of Christian teaching and ecclesiastical historical traditions. But these influences are just as important: religious difference was denatured, in a manner of speaking, precisely because a too explicit link with a too dangerously unorthodox past would have been unacceptable. For this reason, a text like *Beowulf* is so unusual, in that it looks back at the distant past and sees it, explicitly, as a problem because of the difference in religion, but nevertheless cannot refrain from presenting the past as also something admirable and wondrous. But because of the ambiguous value of the distant past, *Beowulf* makes no direct links between that distant past and the present: in a secular sphere, to do so would be to undermine the foundations of aristocratic self-consciousness. Ancient history could only be allowed to be problematic if treated in a manner that abstracted it from an explicit connection with the present; the sense of continuity was too important to the aristocracy of the present to allow for a shadow to be cast on its past.

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