Before Mohammed and Charlemagne:
New Studies on the Transformation of the Roman World

Yitzhak Hen

Walter Pohl ed., *Kingdoms of the Empire. The Integration of Barbarians in Late Antiquity*, The Transformation of the Roman World 1, Leiden, New York and Köln: E.J. Brill, 1997. x + 230 pp.

Walter Pohl and Helmut Reimitz eds., *Strategies of Distinction. The Construction of Ethnic Communities, 300-800*, The Transformation of the Roman World 2, Leiden, New York and Köln: E.J. Brill, 1998. vii + 347 pp., 18 figures.

Richard Hodges and William Bowden eds., *The Sixth Century: Production, Distribution and Demand*, The Transformation of the Roman World 3, Leiden, New York and Köln: E.J. Brill, 1998. 302 pp.

> The barbarians stand outlined against the sky above us. There is the beating of my heart, the heaving of the horses, the moan of the wind, and no other sound. We have crossed the limits of the Empire. It is not a moment to take lightly.[1]

The period of transition from Late Antiquity to the Middle Ages has traditionally been seen — at least since the time of Petrarch (1304-1374) — as one of chaos and decline. Too often it was described by scholars as a period in which the rise of Christianity and the invasion of 'hideous' Barbarians brought the fall of the glorious Roman empire and inaugurated a long period of obscurity in the history of Europe and the Mediterranean. 'The Dark Ages' it was called, with the full pejorative connotations which this Victorian term entails.

---

[1]   J.M. Coetzee, *Waiting for the Barbarians* (London, 1980), p. 70.

This widespread derogatory view of the period from the third to the ninth centuries is commonly, and not unjustly, associated with the name of the British historian Edward Gibbon (1737-1794). In 1776 Gibbon published the first volume of his monumental *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*,[2] in which the rapid growth of early Christianity, superstitions and supernatural considerations, violence and chaos within the later Roman empire itself and the invasions of 'uncivilised' Barbarians bulk large. Thus, according to Gibbon, the decline and fall of the Roman empire initiated a new age — the Middle Ages — marked by, to use his own acerbic irony, 'the triumph of barbarism and religion'.[3] Gibbon's work has been subject to endless criticism and revision since its publication. Yet the influence of the *Decline and Fall* on many a generation of historians has been immense. As is noted by the editors of the volume marking the bicentenary of his death, 'Gibbon established the terms of reference for the debate about the transformation of the Roman world and the emergence of medieval Europe'.[4]

It took more than a century for historians to break free of 'Gibbon's shade'.[5] Only at the beginning of the twentieth century, both in Austria and in Belgium, did Alphons Dopsch and Henri Pirenne develop new theories which challenged Gibbon's views by shifting attention from military and political history to cultural and economic developments.[6] Both Dopsch and

---

2   Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 6 vols. (London, 1776-1788). The work was later edited by H.H. Milman (London, 1846); J.B. Bury (London, 1897-1901; 2nd ed. 1909-1914); Oliphant Smeaton (London, 1910); and more recently by David Womersley (London, 1995; rep. Harmondsworth, 1996).

3   On Gibbon and his life, see the short biography by Roy Porter, *Gibbon. Making History* (London, 1988). On his views and attitudes, see G.W. Bowersock, J. Clive and S.R. Graubard (eds.), *Edward Gibbon and the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (Cambridge, MA, 1977); K. Hammer and J. Voss (eds.), *Historische Forschung im 18. Jahrhundert* (Paris, 1988); and more recently Rosamond McKitterick and Roland Quinault (eds.), *Edward Gibbon and Empire* (Cambridge, 1997).

4   Rosamond McKitterick and Roland Quinault, 'Introduction', in McKitterick and Quinault (eds.), *Edward Gibbon and Empire*, pp. 1-11, at p. 2.

5   I borrow the expression from Peter Brown, 'In Gibbon's shade', *New York Review of Books* 23 (1976), pp. 14-18 (reprinted in idem, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* [Berkeley, Los Angeles and Oxford, 1982], pp. 49-62).

6   See Alphons Dopsch, *Wirtschaftliche und soziale Grundlagen der europäischen Kulturentwicklung von der Zeit Caesars bis auf Karl den Großen*, 2nd ed. (Vienna, 1923-1924); Henri Pirenne, *Mahomet et Charlemagne*, 2nd ed. (Brussels and Paris, 1937).

Pirenne concluded that the Germanic migration and settlement of the fifth and the sixth centuries did not cause a major disruption in the cultural and economic life of most provinces of the Roman empire. Hence, continuity rather than 'decline and fall' characterised the transformation of the later Roman world.[7] Needless to say, both theories aroused much controversy and, in many respects, need to be fundamentally revised and modified. Yet both Dopsch and Pirenne opened up new perspectives and laid the foundation for a critical reconsideration of the transition between the world of Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages.

Over the last thirty years there has been an immense increase of scholarly interest in issues related to the transformation of the Roman world and the emergence of early medieval Europe. This resurgence of interest, partly inspired by the works of scholars like Peter Brown,[8] Robert Markus,[9] Pierre Riché,[10] Michael Wallace-Hadrill,[11] and Herwig Wolfram,[12] and taken

---

[7]   Lynn T. White was the first to formulate the concept of 'the transformation of the Roman world', which successfully replaced Gibbon's vision of 'decline and fall'. See Lynn T. White (ed.), *The Transformation of the Roman World. Gibbon's Problem after Two Centuries* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1966).

[8]   See, for example, his ground-breaking book *The World of Late Antiquity, AD 150-750* (London, 1971). On the seminal position of this book in the ongoing discussion of the transformation of the Roman world, see 'SO debate: The World of Late Antiquity revisited', *Symbolae Osloenses* 72 (1997), pp. 5-90 (with comments by Peter Brown, Glen Bowersock, Averil Cameron, Elizabeth Clark, Albrecht Dihle, Garth Fowden, Peter Heather, Philip Rousseau, Aline Rousselle, Hjalmar Torp, and Ian Wood). See also Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom. Triumph and Diversity, AD 200-1000* (Oxford, 1996).

[9]   See, for example, *Saeculum. History and Society in the Theology of Saint Augustine* (Cambridge, 1970); and *The End of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge, 1990).

[10]   See Riché's *Education and Culture in the Barbarian West from the Sixth through the Eighth Century*, trans. John J. Contreni (Columbia, SC, 1978) (originally published as *Education et culture dans l'occident barbare, 6e-8e siècles* [Paris, 1962]).

[11]   See, for example, *The Barbarian West 400-1000*, 3rd ed. (Oxford, 1967); *The Long-Haired Kings* (London, 1962); and *Early Medieval History* (Oxford, 1975).

[12]   See, for example, *History of the Goths*, trans. Thomas J. Dunlap (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1988) (originally published as *Die Goten. Von den Anfängen bis zur Mitte des 6. Jahrhundert* [Munich, 1979; 3rd ed. Vienna, 1990]); idem, *The Roman Empire and Its Germanic Neighbours*, trans. Thomas J. Dunlap (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1997) (originally published as *Das Reich und die Germanen. Zwischen Antike und Mittelalter* [Berlin, 1990]).

forward by younger generations of scholars from all over Europe and North America, has resulted in a better understanding of the period.[13] Unlike Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*, modern scholarship is increasingly revealing how profoundly effective and dynamic were the shifts which marked the transformation of the Roman world. Most, if not all, scholars agree nowadays that no major or absolute breaking point can be found. A slow process of transition and adaptation seems to have been the case and, consequently, a greater degree of continuity in many respects is acknowledged by historians, archaeologists, and literary critics. Far from initiating an age of obscurity and decline, the various barbarian kingdoms which succeeded the Roman empire in the West saw themselves as part of a Roman continuum. Thus, as noted by Emmanuel Kant, *in mundo non datur hiatus, non datur saltus, non datur casus, non datur fatum.*

Nevertheless, it is obvious that a gradual change and various transformations did indeed take place. After all, the Roman empire of Septimius Severus was significantly different from the Frankish kingdom of Charlemagne or the Byzantine empire of Constantine VI and Irene. Yet the questions of *how* and *how far* they were different are still open for debate. Although Gibbon's vision of 'decline and fall' has been drastically revised in the light of modern research, and although the validity of various concepts, such as 'Romans vs. Barbarians', is now seriously called into question, the debate is by no means resolved.

The three volumes under review here are the first fruits of an admirable effort to study and reconsider the transformation of the Roman world.[14] Sponsored by the European Science Foundation, this five-year project (1993-1998), entitled 'The Transformation of the Roman World', brought together scholars from Europe and North America, and from various disciplines (classicists, medievalists, byzantinists, philologists, archaeologists and art historians), in an attempt to discuss and debate the various issues related to the transition from Late Antiquity to the early Middle Ages.[15] Yet, as one

---

[13]   The shift in scholarly interest is clearly reflected in the decision to add two new volumes to the original version in the new edition of *The Cambridge Ancient History*, thus extending the scope of the series to the end of the sixth century. For the first of these volumes, see Averil Cameron and Peter Garnsey (eds.), 'The Later Roman Empire, A.D. 337-425', *The Cambridge Ancient History* XIII (Cambridge, 1998).

[14]   For brevity and convenience the three volumes are hereafter cited as *TRW* 1, *TRW* 2, and *TRW* 3 respectively.

[15]   On this project and its rationale, see Ian Wood, 'Report: The European Science Foundation's program on the transformation of the Roman world and the

of the project's coordinators pointed out, 'even a programme running for five years, with such a range of participants, could not hope to do full justice to a topic as wide, and as central to the emergence of Europe, as "The Transformation of the Roman World"'.[16] Nor could it present a coherent interpretation of the various issues discussed. Many questions, it seems, are doomed to remain obscure and unresolved, at least unless and until some new evidence is unearthed.

The papers collected by Walter Pohl in *Kingdoms of the Empire. The Integration of Barbarians in Late Antiquity*, are dedicated to two different but related issues — the modalities of late-antique treaties between Rome and Barbarians, and the nature of the Barbarian settlement. As pointed out by Pohl in his introduction to the volume, 'the integration of the Barbarians has traditionally been seen from the point of view of norms and institutions, and explained from the context of Roman political theory and legal concepts'.[17] However, the ambiguity of the agreements between Rome and the Barbarians, as well as the complexity of the Roman-Barbarian relations, does not always fall in tidily with the neat and clear-cut concepts of Roman law. Thus, historians must take into account 'the rhetoric and the rituals, the promises and the compromises that underlay the *de facto* flexible handling of treaties between Rome and the Barbarians. The flowery rhetoric employed by late-Roman writers both obscured the real balance of power and in a sense produced new realities' (p. 6).[18] Bearing this in mind, and given the fact that no text of a treaty between Rome and the Barbarians has survived in any detail, the entire enterprise of studying Roman-Barbarian relations and the nature of the Barbarian settlement is indeed very interesting, but inevitably an intellectual exercise of interpretation, relying on second-hand reports and panegyrics.

In his paper 'Rome and its Germanic partners in the fourth century' (pp. 13-55), Gerhard Wirth surveys at length the history of *deditio*, and arrives at the conclusion that fourth-century treaties between Rome and the Barbarians were determined, to a large extent, by the concept of *deditio*, which was 'a natural and efficient instrument for resolving questions between states which

---

emergence of early medieval Europe', *Early Medieval Europe* 6 (1997), pp. 217-27. See also idem, 'Foreword', *TRW* 1, pp. ix-x.

[16] *TRW* 1, p. ix.

[17] Walter Pohl, 'Introduction: The empire and the integration of Barbarians', *TRW* 1, pp. 1-11, at p. 5.

[18] For a similar conclusion, see Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire. The Development of Christian Discourse* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1991).

seemed otherwise insoluble' (p. 16). Those treaties, then, should be understood against the background of *deditio*, admission and integration. Rome, as Wirth explains, 'accepted Germanic Barbarians as *dediticii* and created a status for them which was in accordance with the state of the former federates but nevertheless complied with their requests' (p. 54). Thus, paradoxically, Rome accepted the conditions proposed by the Barbarians for their unconditional surrender.

The fourth-century treaties with the Goths are the subject of Peter Heather's paper.[19] After a careful examination of the contemporary evidence, Heather argues that sixth-century authors (such as Jordanes and Procopius) misrepresent the nature of fourth-century treaties because conditions and perceptions had changed, and therefore should be excluded from the discussion. As far as the terminology used by fourth-century authors is concerned, Heather concludes that the terms *foedera* and *foederati* 'were used to generate a vision of subjugation and dominance, not one of equality, in the conduct of relations with groups beyond the imperial frontiers'. Moreover, '... the monolithic definition of *foederati* found in the sources is a construct of imperial propaganda, providing a comforting framework within which foreign affairs could be safely and reassuringly discussed in front of important sections of the landowning taxpayers of the empire'. Thus, '*foedus*, *foederati* and *deditio* were part of sustaining the myth of eternal victory, and not an accurate description of the reality of Roman foreign policy' (p. 74).

An illuminating case study is presented by Walter Pohl in his paper on the relationship between Rome and the Lombards.[20] Pohl begins with a short and useful discussion of the terminology used by his sources (mainly Procopius' *The Gothic War*, Paul the Deacon's *History of the Lombards*, and the fragments of Menander's *History*) and, like Heather, concludes that the terminology of treaties between Rome and the Barbarians changed very little, even though the balance of power and the political reality had changed significantly. Pohl continues with an examination of the various treaties concluded with Lombards (not necessarily 'the' Lombards, as he appositely remarks) during the sixth century. By means of a careful analysis of the historical rhetoric, and a cautious reconstruction of the historical context, he delineates the balance of power between Rome and the Lombards, as well as between the Lombards and other Barbarians.

---

[19]   '*Foedera* and *foederati* of the fourth century', *TRW* 1, pp. 57-74.

[20]   'The empire and the Lombards: treaties and negotiations in the sixth century', *TRW* 1, pp. 75-133.

In his paper Pohl also addresses the second major question covered in this book, that is, the nature of the Barbarian settlement (i.e. land vs. tax income). The modality of accommodation of Barbarians is, at least since the publication of Walter Goffart's *Barbarians and Romans*,[21] one of the most debated issues in late antique and early medieval studies. Were Barbarians given land or tax shares as part of their settlement on Roman soil? This question stands at the heart of the debate, and the answers to it still differ widely. Clause 277 of the *Codex Eurici* and clause 54 of the Burgundian *Liber Constitutionum*, have led scholars to assume that in 418 the Goths and in 443 the Burgundians were given two-thirds of the land, one-third of the slaves and half of the woodland as part of their settlement. Thus, traditionally, the Barbarian settlement has been interpreted as the direct control of land — an interpretation defended by Wolf Liebeschütz in his paper.[22]

A different interpretation has, however, been put forward by Walter Goffart and Jean Durliat.[23] According to them, the Barbarian settlers received a proportion of tax revenues rather than land, and it is this view that Durliat defends in his contribution to *Kingdoms of the Empire*.[24] Both sides, it seems, stick to their views, and as Walter Pohl justly remarks, 'the unbiased reader will possibly find that most of the evidence fits both models (or all three, as Goffart's and Durliat's solutions differ in some important respects)' (p. 9). Moreover, to my mind, it is impossible to reconstruct a single unified policy from the little evidence that survives, and it is highly probable that a considerable variety of policies — ranging from simple billeting and diversion of fiscal revenues to the confiscation and actual allocation of land — were used as part of the accommodation and settlement of the Barbarians.

---

21 Walter Goffart, *Barbarians and Romans, A.D. 418-584. The Techniques of Accommodation* (Princeton, 1980).

22 'Cities, taxes and the accommodation of the Barbarians: the theories of Durliat and Goffart', *TRW* 1, pp. 135-51.

23 Goffart, *Barbarians and Romans*; Durliat, 'Le salaire de la paix sociale dans les royaumes barbares', in Herwig Wolfram and Andreas Schwarcz (eds.), *Anerkennung und Integration: Zu den wirtschaftlichen Grundlagen der Völkerwanderungszeit (400-600)* (Vienna, 1988), pp. 21-72. See also his *Les finances publiques de Dioclétien aux Carolingiens (284-889)*, Beihefte der Francia 21 (Sigmaringen, 1990). For an apposite criticism of Durliat's theory, see Chris Wickham, 'La chûte de Rome n'aura pas lieu', *Le Moyen Age* 99 (1993), pp. 107-26. An English translation was published as 'The fall of Rome will not take place', in Lester K. Little and Barbara H. Rosenwein (eds.), *Debating the Middle Ages: Issues and Readings* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 45-57.

24 'Cité, impôt et intégration des barbares', *TRW* 1, pp. 153-83.

Herwig Wolfram's short comment on some neglected evidence from Gaul clarifies the complexity of this issue.[25]

In his conclusion to the entire volume, Evangelos Chrysos provides an illuminating survey of more than a century of research in the field.[26] Pointing out the ambiguity and inconsistency of our sources, he duly closes with the words of his mentor, Johannes Straub, that if we do not understand the sources we should at least respect them, and thus calls for more caution and less conviction in our conclusions.

The second volume, *Strategies of Distinction. The Construction of Ethnic Communities, 300-800*, edited by Walter Pohl and Helmut Reimitz, is an appropriate complement to *Kingdoms of the Empire*, and it is dedicated to the process of construction of ethnic identities. It is a commonplace today that the various Barbarian peoples emerged from political and professional groups — armies at the service of the Roman empire — and only gradually were transformed into nascent *gentes* which considered themselves as ethnic groups.[27] Therefore, the Barbarians who invaded and settled in the western provinces of the Roman empire were not enduring and stable communities or tribes constituted by common descent with shared traditions, but rather motley collections of soldiers under the military leadership of a king, which underwent a process of unification and definition in the course of the period of migration.

Throughout Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages, ethnic identities were reshaped as a basis for huge political entities, such as those of the Goths or the Franks. These large ethnic communities, we are reminded, are in no way natural facts, but 'highly abstract, culturally constructed ways of categorising people who might differ a lot among each other, and might not be so different at all from people who do not fall into that category'.[28] Hence, from the fourth century onwards, ethnicity became part and parcel of

---

[25]   'Neglected evidence on the accommodation of Barbarians in Gaul', *TRW* 1, pp. 181-3.

[26]   'Conclusion: De foederatis iterum', *TRW* 1, pp. 185-206.

[27]   For some fuller discussions of the ethnogenesis theory, see Reinhard Wenskus, *Stammesbildung und Verfassung. Das Werden des frühmittelalterlichen Gentes*, 2nd ed. (Köln, 1977); Herwig Wolfram and Walter Pohl (eds.), *Typen der Ethnogenese unter besonderer Berüksichtigung der Bayern*, 2 vols. (Vienna, 1990); Karl Brunner and Brigitte Merta (eds.), *Ethnogenese und Überlieferung. Angewandte Methoden der Frühmittelalterlicherforschung* (Vienna and Munich, 1994), especially the paper by Walter Pohl, 'Tradition, Ethnogenese und literarische Gestaltung: eine Zwischenbilanz', pp. 9-26.

[28]   Walter Pohl, 'Introduction: Strategies of distinction', *TRW* 2, pp. 1-15, at p. 4.

the power struggle within the Roman world, having a double function of both integration and distinction.[29] The papers collected by Pohl and Reimitz in *Strategies of Distinction* discuss some of the mechanisms of this 'nation-building' process.

In his paper, 'Telling the difference: signs of ethnic identity', Walter Pohl sets out the framework for the following discussions.[30] He surveys the various objective features that may have defined ethnicity, that is, language, arms and ways of fighting, costume, hairstyle and body signs, and concludes that none of these should be taken for granted as an objective sign of stable ethnic identity. As he notes, 'the grand synthesis between polyethnic warrior groups and the Roman majority that the Barbarian kingdoms strove to achieve made it very difficult to concretise and visualise the ethnic labels they proposed' (p. 63). No doubt differences between groups and special characteristics did exist, but 'on the level of large *gentes* and *regna*, stable criteria that would have enabled outside observers to tell the difference and insiders to feel different were at best an exception' (p. 64).

Falko Diem continues Pohl's introductory piece by asking what can profitably be gained by looking at archaeological evidence.[31] 'The archaeological remains of a distant society', he writes, 'contain numerous symbols and signs with which the sense of belonging to a certain group was expressed; but nevertheless the symbolic and semiotic system of an ancient society is at first hidden to the archaeologist' (p. 84). Well aware of the danger involved in labelling one or more archaeologically defined 'cultural groups' as 'ethnic', he calls for extensive spatial comparison and extreme caution in interpreting archaeological findings.

In his fascinating paper, Peter Heather discusses what he calls 'positive disappearance and reappearance' of Barbarian groups.[32] By this he means 'that the group involved can be shown to have survived a period of political domination by another group, seemingly without having lost all sense of solidarity, cohesion and identity' (p. 95). His examination of two case

---

29   An illuminating, and rather radical, interpretation of Ostrogothic identity was put forward recently by Patrick Amory. In a well-documented and thought-provoking book, he argues quite convincingly that Ostrogothic identity in Italy was defined by the ideology propagated by their own rulers as well as by their Roman officials. See Patrick Amory, *People and Identity in Ostrogothic Italy, 489-554* (Cambridge, 1997).

30   *TRW* 2, pp. 17-69.

31   'Archaeology, ethnicity and the structure of identification: the example of the Avars, Carantanians and Moravians in the eighth century', *TRW* 2, pp. 71-93.

32   'Disappearing and reappearing tribes', *TRW* 2, pp. 95-111.

studies — the Heruli and the Rugi — clearly demonstrates that a sense of identity binding together certain groups in Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages was not only resilient, but also extremely powerful. Jörg Jarnut's short report on the interdisciplinary project of onomastics in Latin-Germanic Europe[33] concludes the first section of *Strategies of Distinction*.

In the second part of the book the editors group six studies under the title 'Distinction and acculturation', four of which are dedicated to the Visigothic kingdom. Dieterich Claude's lucid paper demonstrates that in late sixth- and seventh-century Spain the differences between the Visigoths and the Hispano-Romans were in reality less obvious and blunt than our sources would like us to believe.[34] 'During a long process of transformation, the Visigoths were assimilated to the Hispano-Romans by giving up the characteristics of their tribe, and the Hispano-Romans on the other hand took on important ideas of political order from the Goths' (p. 130). Similar conclusions emerge from the papers of Wolf Liebeschütz and Hagith Sivan, both of whom look at the relations of Visigoths and Romans through the prism of law,[35] and from Gisela Ripoll López's paper, which examines the funerary evidence from the cemetery of El Carpio de Tajo (Torrijos, Toledo).[36] All authors, it seems, agree that the marriage ban between Romans and Barbarians, taken from the *Theodosian Code* and introduced into Visigothic legislation by Alaric II, did not work as a key mechanism to preserve Gothic identity or to keep Roman and Gothic elites apart. However, their views on the reasons why Alaric II adopted this law and incorporated it into his *Breviarium* differ.

Legal practices are also the subject of Brigitte Pohl-Resl's illuminating paper.[37] The notion that early medieval communities were shaped by the personality of the law has recently been called into question by a number of historians. It seems that Brigitte Pohl-Resl's analysis of the legal evidence

---

33   'Nomen et gens: Political and linguistic aspects of personal names between the third and the eighth century — presenting an interdisciplinary project from a historical perspective', *TRW* 2, pp. 113-16.

34   'Remarks about relations between Visigoths and Hispano-Romans in the seventh century', *TRW* 2, pp. 117-30.

35   'Citizen status and law in the Roman empire and the Visigothic kingdom', *TRW* 2, pp. 131-52, and 'The appropriation of Roman law in Barbarian hands: "Roman-Barbarian" marriage in Visigothic Gaul and Spain', *TRW* 2, pp. 189-203, respectively.

36   'The arrival of the Visigoths in Hispania: Population problems and the process of acculturation', *TRW* 2, pp. 153-87.

37   'Legal practice and ethnic identity in Lombard Italy', *TRW* 2, pp. 205-19.

from Lombard Italy gives this notion the decent burial it deserves. She demonstrates that the distinction between Roman and Lombard law had gradually become blurred in the Lombard kingdom, and that the principle of the personality of the law began, in fact, with the Carolingians and reached its height in the eleventh century. 'Frankish rule', she summarises, 'introduced an increasing awareness of ethnic distinctions in Italy, where not only being a Frank, a Lombard or a Roman counted, but also, for instance, an Anglo-Saxon, Bavarian, Alaman or *theotiscus*. From the ninth century onwards there is increasing evidence in charters that legal practice and ethnic identity were closely connected. Before 774 such evidence is relatively rare, and, more often than not, it does not add up to a clear overall picture of ethnic communities separated by strict legal barriers' (p. 219). Michel Kazanski's discussion of the archaeological evidence for the fourth-century Gothic settlement north of the Black Sea concludes the second part of the volume.[38]

The last section of *Strategies of Distinction*, entitled 'Political rhetoric and representation', begins with Dick Harrison's study of political rhetoric and its relation to aspects of ideology in Lombard Italy,[39] and continues with two clear archaeological papers which examine the ways in which royal and imperial ideology was represented by various objects.[40] A short conclusion by Ian Wood discusses the gradual development in the meaning of *Barbarus* and *Romanus*,[41] a key point for the understanding of our sources. As is noted by the authors of many of the papers in *Strategies of Distinction*, the process which constructed ethnic identities and formed new 'nations' in Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages affected both Barbarians and Romans. Thus, looking at the change in the late empire definition of *Romanitas* (an issue hardly touched upon by the papers in *Strategies of Distinction*) may also shed light on the mutual influences. For example, Rome the city, the ancient capital of the empire, was an integral part of Sidonius Apollinaris' *Romanitas*. He visited Rome many times, he was the *praefectus urbis* in 468/9, and he praised its beauty in his poems and letters.[42] In sixth-century Gaul,

---

38   'Le rayaume de Vinitharius: le récit de Jordanès et les donnés archéologiques', *TRW* 2, pp. 221-240.

39   'Political rhetoric and political ideology in Lombard Italy', *TRW* 2, pp. 241-54.

40   Matthias Hardt, 'Royal treasures and representation in the early Middle Ages', *TRW* 2, pp. 255-80; Michael Schmauder, 'Imperial representation or Barbaric imitation? The imperial brooches (*Kaiserfibeln*), *TRW* 2, pp. 281-96.

41   'Conclusion: Strategies of distinction', *TRW* 2, pp. 297-303.

42   See, for example, Sidonius Apollinaris, *Opera*, ed. and trans. W.B. Anderson, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA, and London, 1936-1965), *Epistulae* 1.6 and 9.14. On

however, relations with Rome were quite different. In a paper delivered at the John Rylands Library in Manchester Wallace-Hadrill states that 'when the Gaulish bishops received letters of exhortation or admonishment from the popes ..., they recognised in them the *auctoritas* not of St Peter only but of the City'.[43] There is no doubt that even in the sixth century the ancient glory of Rome still existed, especially for the senatorial aristocracy, but the *auctoritas* of Rome in sixth-century Gaul was mostly derived from the papal see.

If we examine, for instance, when and where Gregory of Tours mentions Rome in his *Ten Books of History*, the point becomes even clearer. Rome is first mentioned when Gregory tells how Peter arrived there. The city is then mentioned as the place where Cornelius was martyred, and according to Gregory, made Rome famous as Cyprian did Carthage. In the story of Bishop Briscus' expulsion, the papal curia in Rome is mentioned as his place of refuge. We are told that a deacon from Tours went to Rome to collect some relics, and the longest paragraph on Rome describes the election of Pope Gregory the Great.[44] All of these passages refer to Rome as a Christian city. Gregory does not mention that Rome had been the capital of the empire, and he only once mentions it as the city of residence of the senate.[45] The conquest of Rome by Alaric and the Goths, to which Augustine devoted much thought and his monumental *De civitate Dei*, is mentioned by Gregory in passing while discussing his sources for the reign of Clovis.[46] It is obvious that although Gregory calls Rome 'ipsa urbs urbium et totius mundi caput ingens',[47] his attitude towards Rome was utterly a Christian one.[48]

Sidonius Apollinaris, see Jill Harries, *Sidonius Apollinaris and the Fall of Rome* (Oxford, 1994).

[43] J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, 'Gothia and Romania', in idem, *The Long-Haired Kings* (London, 1992), pp. 25-48, at pp. 36f.

[44] Gregorius Turonensis, *Libri Historiarum X*, ed. Bruno Krusch and Wilhelm Levison, MGH SRM I.1 (Hannover, 1951), 1.25; 1.32; 2.1; 6.6; 10.1 respectively.

[45] Ibid. 1.24.

[46] Ibid. 2.9.

[47] Ibid. 5: praef.

[48] This was already observed by K.F. Stroheker, 'Die Senatoren bei Gregor von Tours', *Klio* 34 (1942), pp. 293-305, at p. 304. The bibliography on Gregory of Tours and his work is enormous and cannot be listed here. For a good introduction, see Ian Wood, *Gregory of Tours* (Bangor, 1994), and see there for further bibliography.

Sidonius' *Romanitas* was also distinguished by its hauteur.[49] Such an attitude does not appear in Gregory of Tours' writings, or in those of his contemporary Venantius Fortunatus. An examination of the words used by Gregory and Fortunatus reveals the *humilitas* in their attitudes. Venantius does not use the word *Barbarus* in a pejorative way,[50] and Gregory uses *Barbarus* as a synonym for *paganus*.[51] Thus, the relation between *Barbarus* and *Romanus* has changed from a cultural to a religious one.[52] In his book *On the Glory of the Martyrs*, to give just one example, Gregory writes that the Visigoths 'Romanos enim vocitant nostrae homines religionis'.[53] *Romanus* for him described religious affiliation, and the contrast between *Romanus* and *Barbarus* was therefore parallel to the contrast between 'Catholic' and 'Arian' or 'Christian' and 'pagan'.[54] Hence, when the senatorial aristocracy called itself 'Roman', it was defining its status — or rather its *Romanitas* — in Christian terms. This must have had some significant implications as far as the process of distinction, acculturation and integration is concerned.

The papers collected in both *Kingdoms of the Empire* and *Strategies of Distinction* are not only the latest contribution to the burgeoning literature on Barbarian settlement and integration, but also an important contribution to the ongoing debate on some other crucial issues. The editors have done an excellent job in producing coherent volumes, without obscuring the complexities of the issues discussed and the different interpretations offered. These volumes will certainly become indispensable reading not only for those studying the subject in detail, but also for those looking for introductory surveys. This, however, does not apply to the third book under review here — *The Sixth Century. Production, Distribution and Demand*.

Richard Hodges and William Bowden have assembled here ten loosely connected papers, framed by an extremely vague introduction (by Hodges

---

49   See, for example, Sidonius Apollinaris, *Epistulae* 4.17.2; 5.5; 7.14.10.

50   See Peter Godman, *Poets and Emperors. Frankish Politics and Carolingian Poetry* (Oxford, 1987), p. 4. On Venantius Fortunatus, see also Judith W. George, *Venantius Fortunatus. A Poet in Merovingian Gaul* (Oxford, 1992).

51   See, for example, Gregorius Turonensis, *Libri Historiarum* 4.35; 4.48; 7.29.

52   This was also noted by Pohl and Liebeschütz, see *TRW* 2, pp. 68 and 151 respectively.

53   Gregorius Turonensis, *Liber in Gloria Martyrum*, ed. Bruno Krusch, MGH SRM I.2 (Hannover, 1885), c. 24.

54   For the compiler of the longer prologue of the *Lex Salica*, writing in the second half of the eighth century, *Barbari* meant pagans, the pre-Christian Franks. See *Lex Salica*, ed. E. Eckhardst, MGH LNG iv.2 (Hannover, 1969), p. 3.

himself), and a splendid conclusion (by Chris Wickham). The purpose of this volume is to examine the question of production and distribution in the sixth century, since, as Hodges puts it, 'Pirenne forgot the sixth century'.[55] Thus we are given an extremely learned study of Pirenne's historiographical approach from 1895 till 1937, the year of the posthumous publication of *Mahomet and Charlemagne*;[56] a study of the production and distribution of books in Late Antiquity, a subject close to Pirenne's heart;[57] an examination of late antique and early medieval treasures;[58] a review of the commercial activity in the sixth century;[59] an illuminating study of politico-economic developments in sixth century Italy;[60] and a survey of economic developments in eastern Spain.[61] Various aspects of economic life in Frankish Gaul receive special treatment in three excellent papers, which examine commercial activity in northern Gaul,[62] at the city of Marseilles,[63] and developments east of the Rhine.[64] The Scandinavian world is covered by Ulf Näsman.[65] The entire volume ends with a piece by Chris Wickham, who succeeds magnificently in threading the various papers together into a coherent overview of sixth-century economy.[66] One is well advised to start with Wickham's conclusion.

---

[55]   'Henri Pirenne and the question of demand in the sixth century', *TRW* 3, pp. 3-14, at p. 6.

[56]   Paolo Delugo, 'Reading Pirenne again', *TRW* 3, pp. 15-40.

[57]   Carlo Bertelli, 'The production and distribution of books in Late Antiquity', *TRW* 3, pp. 41-60. For Pirenne's interest in this subject, see his 'De l'état de l'instruction des laïques a l'époque mérovingienne', *Revue bénédictine* 46 (1934), pp. 165-77.

[58]   Klavs Randsborg, 'The migration period: Model history and treasure', *TRW* 3, pp. 61-88.

[59]   Jean Durliat, 'Les conditions du commerce au VIe siècle', *TRW* 3, pp. 89-117.

[60]   Federico Marazzi, 'The destinies of the late antique Italies: Politico-economic developments of the sixth century', *TRW* 3, pp. 119-59.

[61]   Sonia Gutiérrez Lloret, 'Eastern Spain in the sixth century in the light of archaeology', *TRW* 3, pp. 161-84.

[62]   Stéphane Lebecq, 'Les échanges dans la Gaule du Nord au Ve siècle: Une histoire en miettes', *TRW* 3, pp. 185-202.

[63]   Simon T. Loseby, 'Marseille and the Pirenne thesis, I: Gregory of Tours, the Merovingian kings, and "un grand port"', *TRW* 3, pp. 203-29.

[64]   Ian Wood, 'The frontiers of western Europe: Developments east of the Rhine in the sixth century', *TRW* 3, pp. 232-53.

[65]   'The Justinianic era of south Scandinavia: An archaeological view', *TRW* 3, pp. 256-78.

[66]   'Overview: Production, distribution and demand', *TRW* 3, pp. 279-92.

The problem with *The Sixth Century*, however, is not the quality of its papers (there are some very good and thought-provoking papers in this collection), but its concept. To carp at Pirenne's mishandling of the sources and at the way he visualised the economic transformation of the Roman world does not provide a sufficient rationale for a collection of papers. Research has moved forward in the last sixty years, and no one accepts Pirenne's thesis at face value any more. Notwithstanding the fact that Pirenne was emphatically wrong in some of his interpretations, stupid he was not. The fact that he did not dedicate much space in his studies to the sixth century should not be taken to imply that he ignored it. Pirenne was a highly sophisticated historian, and it may well be that leaving aside the sixth century simply served his cause. After all, Pirenne, I believe, would have agreed with Hodges that 'the sixth century is of particular interest because the imperial economy was still functioning despite the palpable collapse of imperial society' (p. 7). It is particularly this continuity that Pirenne sought to stress by skipping the sixth century. Thus, to paraphrase Johannes Straub, if we do not agree with our predecessors or understand them, we should at least respect their work and give full credit to their intellect.

These reservations aside, *The Sixth Century*, together with *Kingdoms of the Empire* and *Strategies of Distinction*, deserves a very warm welcome indeed. This survey does less than justice to the many valuable discussions and interesting ideas crammed into these three volumes, but I hope that it will arouse others to read the papers for themselves. As many of the contributors to this laudable project note, the debate on many issues discussed here will undoubtedly continue and, I dare say, will probably never end. But this debate certainly makes us all realise that the transformation of the Roman world, to quote the words of the novelist cited at the beginning, 'is not a moment to take lightly'.

Haifa University