

Debased roman, yet
roman still essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Before the barbarian states established themselves as replacements to the Western Roman Empire in the fifth century, Germanic soldiers had served in the imperial army, rising in rank and even all the way to the Senate; thus they had a similar material culture to Romans, and apart from their names, one could argue, they were indistinguishable. This dates back as far as the mid fourth century, where the Frank, Bonitus, served under Constantine I. Such prominent soldiers were normally more than illiterate boors.

Some were self-made, for instance Arbitio, who became Master of Cavalry under Constantius II, having begun his career as a mere soldier. Other barbarians transferred their military power into Rome. These examples indicate an ostensible absorption of barbarians into Roman society. The disappearance of 'us' and 'them' probably did occur before 476, especially in the army. Resultantly, many Germanic leaders became highly Romanised, and this was reflected in their respective societies after the fall of the Western Empire.

The Germanic people never destroyed nor restored the Roman world- they just found a home for themselves within it. One emperor in the East however, was enough for them. Romanitas is a concept of wider emporium, resulting from the Romanisation of barbarians and barbarisation of Romans. There were various degrees of Rome-ness in existence. The Ostrogothic kingdom of Italy under Theodoric was contemporary to Clovis' Frankish Gaul; traditionally historians see the former as an imitation of Roman imperial rule and the latter as a disorganised nation ruled by a militant barbarian.

However, it is perhaps more justified to say that the two were indeed very alike in their use of Roman ideology, custom and administration with the aim of strengthening and consolidating rule. Before Romanitas in both kingdoms is considered, it is important to stress that at the conception of these realms, the barbarians still recognised their roots and became hereditary rulers. Both emerged from a range of rival rulers of their respective peoples. Theodoric founded his dynasty upon an earlier Amal dynasty. He united the western-Balkan Goths and their eastern neighbours.

In 485 he was adopted into the Flavian house by Emperor Zeno and in 489 invaded Italy on his behalf. In c. 493 he murdered Odovacer and became king of Italy. Clovis ruled around Tournai, transforming the kingdom into a realm from the Channel to the Pyrenees and the Rhone valley. He was a leader of the Franks not a king. Seemingly, there is nothing strictly Roman about this turn of conquests and events. Yet, in both cases, the origo of these barbarians was written on classical Roman and Biblical models. The new gens both in Italy and Gaul had to be given a sense of its past whilst filling Roman expectations.

Indeed, Jordanes' abridgement of Cassiodorus was made to concur with Roman understanding in such a manner. Appropriately perhaps, both rulers are portrayed as Romanised barbarians. Theodoric was hostaged in Constantinople from 461-71 and he extorted the title of Master of the Soldiers twice. He was no untutored barbarian, having been educated with the basics of administrative practice. He knew about imperial courts, was given a Roman education and was well aware of the political power of the commanders of armies.

He could therefore co-operate with the East, both by fitting the Goths into Rome and by fulfilling Roman expectations of continuity in person and government. He is said to have ruled effectively in the style of an emperor, according to Procopius, and this probably left nothing to be desired. Clovis too, must have received some kind of education as he displays knowledge of civilian administrative practice. Letters from Remigius of Reims to Clovis are set in a late Roman context. Clovis took over the administration of the province of Belgica Secunda, and Remigius tells him that as a Christian he needs to listen to bishops under his rule.

It is therefore probable that Clovis continued the late Roman civil administration and upheld Roman bureaucracy. Evidently, he used the same rhetoric and administrative terminology. He employed Roman secretaries and chancellors, and hence relied on the written word in administration. Overall, these facts show that both leaders were educated in a Roman fashion. This would have given them administrative abilities and meant that they could enhance their administration. Ideology that prevailed from the Romans was employed almost everywhere in the barbaric West to legitimise and strengthen organization.

According to Wolfram, kingship took on a new monarchical/vice-imperial form. Theodoric was seen as a ready-made ruler and his followers filled important positions in Italy. He could not be a western emperor in name, but was adapted to fill most though not all functions of one. He represented an emperor and ruled over a Gothic military organisation. Leading Roman supporters transferred allegiance to Theodoric's new regime, for example

finance minister Cassiodorus. They realised that Theodoric was sent by the Eastern Emperor.

Evidently, there was, at the birth of the new establishment, Romano-Germanic co-operation and mutual appreciation. This is epitomised in the way that both Goths and Romans united in their sense of bereavement at Theodoric's death. Similarly in some respects to Theoderic, Clovis took over in a well-established Gallo-Roman and Frankish environment. Clovis it was not so much concerned with emancipation from the attraction by and domination of the Roman state, as the disputes between rival claimants over vacant political authority in Gaul.

His aspirations and achievements were conditioned by pre-existing Roman administrative and military structures in very much the same way Theodoric's were. With these similarities in mind, it is important to ascertain why these kings adopted Roman principles at the beginnings of their rule. The psychological conquest of the 500 years of Western Rome is likely to have had a profound impact upon them.

Also, and perhaps more importantly, Romanisation of rule provided it with support and legitimisation; for example, Theodoric tells Anastasius in *Variae* 1. " Our royalty is an imitation of yours, modelled on your good purpose, a copy of the only Empire; and in so far as we follow you do we excel all other nations. " Roman ideology was evidently manipulated to serve the barbaric kings, with Theodoric probably trying harder in order to regain Anastasius' partiality; in the same *Variae*, he states that he derived some of his Rome-ness from Divine help in the same way as Anastasius, thus strengthening his

own functions. Secular and imperial ideology in the two kingdoms was fortified by religion and prayers for kings and sacrality.

Theodoric's Goths, though Arians, were immediately accepted by the Roman senate and people. Theodoric aimed to settle all quarrels with the Catholic superpowers and avoided conflicts. He was the heart of the Arian religion, but it is fair to say that Arianism actually mattered little: Theodoric was used as a mediator by the Papacy, and he also called on synods for ecclesiastical reform and appointed bishops. Clovis grew up as a pagan, and Gregory of Tours' Ten Books of History portray his conversion ideologically.

Even though he was baptised in the Roman religion in the early sixth century, it is probable that he worshipped as an Arian beforehand, since it made more sense to rule his people in the Latin-Germanic fashion. Quite clearly, the adoption of Christianity was another means of the barbarians preserving some degree of Rome-ness and resultantly underpinning their kingship. Apart from the perhaps stronger and more enduring, ideological Romanisation of barbarian kingdoms, the aforementioned rulers took steps to preserve the Roman way of life in administration, laws and social fabric.

This was, at least in the fifth and sixth centuries, an apparent continuation of the past. Roman restoration was consciously adopted. Theodoric undertook an extensive programme of restoration and building, from aqueducts to public baths, city walls, and most vitally. palaces such as Verona and Ravenna as centres of administration. Free corn was once more provided for the poor of the City of Rome (an archaic venture), and popular circus games were held in the same manner they had been centuries beforehand.

In the year 500, Theodoric's visit to Rome was marked with spectacular circus games, and the last western Adventus – the elaborate ceremony dedicated to the arrival of an emperor in the City. The use of Roman ceremonial and tradition was a way of bringing together the Romans and Goths in Italy in admiration of their mutual ruler. Rule went almost unchanged, primarily in a compromise with the Roman citizens of Italy. Like Clovis, Theodoric was given a consulship in 484 and possessed Roman citizenship by the same time.

Theodoric the barbarian and Theodoric the Roman had been two aspects of a single personality since birth. Clovis' conversion between 496 and 506 allowed for an amalgamation of Franks and Gallo-Romans and a repudiation of Goths and Burgundians. In 508, after defeating the Visigoths at Vouille, Clovis was granted an honorary consulship by Anastasius. He accepted it in a dramatic Roman-style ceremony, using tradition in the same fashion as Theodoric to boost his status and prestige. Franks in Gaul were favoured by imperial attitude.

Clovis is eulogised as the Frankish Constantine, having in actuality been recognised as the effective ruler of an old Roman province. He made Francia and made it within the Roman Empire, and was blessed for his endowments to the Catholic Church, particularly the monastery of St. Martin of Tours. The physical preservation of Rome, through rebuilding and ceremonial was therefore a means of achieving cohesion in the barbaric kingdoms and paying respect to the past. Also, the Germanic kings tried to undertake the traditional administration, though in a reduced form.

In both incidences, taxation was used on agriculture as it had been in the Roman period; an annual sum of money paid by Constantinople to the Romanophile barbarian rulers was used to keep peace and order. The adherence to Roman traditions was paying materially as well as ideologically. Roman justice and law were generally upheld. Theodoric observed justice carefully, preserved laws on a sure basis, and protected the land from other barbarians with the highest degree of wisdom and manliness. Legal compilations were complicated by the existence of two races in Italy, although this was never a considerable problem.

In the case of Clovis, the Frankish ruler probably initiated Pactus Legis Salicae – the collation of Salic Law, although there was certainly help from Roman lawyers. Franks were undoubtedly accustomed to Roman discipline, and there was undeniably a degree of Roman influence in legislation. Indeed, rulers were the source of law as they were in Rome before, adopting it either fully or in form, and seeking to update legislation with the aid of predominantly Roman legislators. The uses of the Roman legal system would, at least in future, lead to the improvement of judicial proceedings and the maintenance of justice and order.

Finally, the preservation of the Roman socio-economic fabric in these kingdoms is also evidenced. There was a continuation of the Roman system of ownership, with elites, slaves and freemen. The traditional social structure, and respective ancestry, wealth, and legal status, was upheld to pacify Roman elites and sustain social order. The elite group were independent and yet co-operated with the king. The aforesaid transfer of tradition led to the formation of an administration run by Romans. The

municipal government of Rome was internalised and the curia (local senates) prevailed.

The reliance upon Roman elites was probably a rational move, and both Theodoric and Clovis realised the need to bind elites to court. Theodoric certainly allowed the western senators a chance to enjoy a sense of security and continuity with a much valued past. Similarly, it is wise to envisage Clovis operating in the manner of the Romans and employing northern Gallic equivalents of the Romans who worked for the Ostrogothic king in Ravenna. The Gallo-Romans were provincials rather than metropolitan senators, and whilst their administration was less complex they could still produce written documents.

Even by the early sixth century, the barbarian West was still somewhat sanctioned by Roman elites that had derived from the provincial and senatorial families. Theodoric and Clovis alike recognised the inherent need to remain on good terms with these magnates and resultantly did not break from the Roman past. From the two cases above, it seems obvious that “Roman-ness was a weapon in constructing new kingdoms”, as Peter Heather has stressed. Undoubtedly, the future belonged to Clovis’ model of kingship: his realm was distant Gaul, ultimately Catholic and out of Byzantine reach.

This was in the future an impressive Western Empire under Charlemagne. The Ostrogothic state was paradoxically divided into Goths and Romans. Regardless of these differences, altogether in the long-term there was a break from Rome. The post-Roman world was dynamic, and soon there was an erosion of the tax system and the end of professional armies. Having said

that, the case in early Antiquity was *Translatio imperii*, the transfer of the empire, where the Western barbarians, along the lines of Theodoric and Clovis used Roman ideology and government to legitimise and consolidate their rule.