Empire of Hope and Tragedy:  
Jordanes and the Invention of Roman-Gothic History

Dissertation

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the intersection of political and ethnic conflict during the emperor Justinian’s wars of reconquest through the figure and texts of Jordanes, the earliest barbarian voice to survive antiquity. Jordanes was ethnically Gothic - and yet he also claimed a Roman identity. Writing from Constantinople in 551, he penned two Latin histories on the Gothic and Roman pasts respectively. Crucially, Jordanes wrote while Goths and Romans clashed in the imperial war to reclaim the Italian homeland that had been under Gothic rule since 493. That a Roman Goth wrote about Goths while Rome was at war with Goths is significant and has no analogue in the ancient record. I argue that it was precisely this conflict which prompted Jordanes’ historical inquiry. Jordanes, though, has long been considered a mere copyist, and seldom treated as an historian with ideas of his own. And the few scholars who have treated Jordanes as an original author have dampened the significance of his Gothicness by arguing that barbarian ethnicities were evanescent and subsumed by the gravity of a Roman political identity. They hold that Jordanes was simply a Roman who can tell us only about Roman things, and supported the Roman emperor in his war against the Goths. In this study, I argue that Jordanes must be appreciated as both Roman and Gothic. His texts reveal an individual negotiating his own dual identity in reaction to the acute crisis of the Gothic War. It is my contention that through his praise for both Goths and Romans, and his incorporation of contrived Gothic origins into the fold of Roman history, Jordanes sought to establish an
inextricably entwined Roman-Gothic destiny in order to reconcile the two warring peoples with whom he personally identified.

This project examines how Jordanes’ multivalent identity informs his conception of both historic and contemporary relations between Goths and Romans, and thereby significantly enhances our ability to interpret Roman-Gothic cultural dynamics, while also advancing debates over barbarian ethnicity. Jordanes provides unparalleled insights into the complex processes that accompanied ethnic confluence and assimilation into the Roman order. This study is also the first to examine Jordanes and a chorus of other authors as interlocutors in an empire-wide polemical discourse on the nature of Gothic rule in Italy and the war that forever halted imperial ambition to reconquer the west. Importantly, at the moment when the emperor Justinian was calling for the extermination of the ‘tyrannical, barbarian’ Goths, Jordanes published a counter-narrative which praised the Goths, challenged the stereotype of Gothic barbarism, and criticized the emperor’s war of aggression. He calls for the establishment of a modus vivendi between Goths and Romans – a desire clearly reflective of his own imbricated sense of self.
For my father.
Acknowledgments

In a pursuit as seemingly solitary as spending years alone in an office researching and writing on a topic of considerable obscurity, one racks up a surprising number of debts to others. A few words of thanks at the beginning of a dissertation are insufficient repayment. Still, I offer them with great pleasure and sincerity. I express my deepest gratitude to my academic mentors Tim Gregory, Tina Sessa, and Anthony Kaldellis. Tim has provided me a sense of intellectual independence and self-sufficiency, and in the summers I spent with him doing archaeology in Greece, Tim gave me an eye for mentally reconstructing a historical world that is often no longer physically visible. This archaeological skill has informed the way I read ancient texts in no small way. Tina, in her characteristic mix of warmth and grit, has made me a leaner, meaner scholar. She has embodied the part of myself that is ever mindful that my work can always be better. This has meant more to me than I can say. And without Anthony I would have almost certainly bailed out of academia long ago. The selflessness with which he has consistently offered his time and energy for my needs has been humbling, and has inspired me to attempt to do the same for others. Anthony regularly believed that my ideas were right when even I wasn’t so sure. This, more than anything else, has made me a confident thinker. Alexander had Aristotle. I had Anthony. Not bad.

I also wish to express my thanks and love to Lillian Stockell. Her patience, unceasing kindness, and general benevolence frame every day of my life. I wouldn’t be much without her. And, finally, I thank my father for instilling in me the guiding principles of my life. Thinking matters. Ideas matter. Imagination matters.
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Fields of Study

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Introduction

This is a study of the sixth-century historian Jordanes, his texts, and his world. Despite his prominent status a source of information about Gothic history, Jordanes the individual and Jordanes the purposive historian generally have not been topics of inquiry. Most commentators over the last two centuries have considered him merely an epitomator or, often worse, a plagiarist. His texts, known to posterity as the Getica, the only discrete account of Gothic history from the ancient literary record, and the Romana, a breviary of Roman history from Creation up to 551, have usually not been thought to be his own, but rather summarized versions of other works that are now lost. Jordanes, as an author, was deemed irrelevant. His only significance was as a receptacle of other writers’ ideas. The present study argues against this approach; that Jordanes’ texts were original, that he was in command of what he wrote, and that he imbued his two histories with the political and cultural imperatives of his own time.

Jordanes is remarkable for being the earliest barbarian voice to survive antiquity. His is the first recorded testimony from one of Europe’s indigenous ‘barbarian’ peoples, and the only one to come from within the Greco-Roman world. This is extraordinarily significant. Every other written account about barbarians issues from Greek or Roman authors who had no cultural connections to these peoples. Jordanes, a Goth writing about Goths, breaks this paradigm. But Jordanes was also Roman. He wrote in Latin, knew his Virgil, practiced Orthodox Christianity, lived in Constantinople, and spent his career in
the service of the imperial armies in the Roman Balkans. Jordanes’ voice was one that bespoke a Balkan-Roman world marked by cultural hybridity. This study analyzes Jordanes’ texts as products of an individual with a multivalent identity, and explores how his imbricated sense of self shaped his conception of a shared Roman-Gothic history; a vision of the past in which Roman and Gothic destinies were bound inextricably together.

Before laying out a brief synopsis of the material to be covered in this study, it is necessary to make a few remarks about the arena of scholarship with which Jordanes is most closely associated. The field of ancient barbarian studies, in which Jordanes has played an especially prominent role, is a highly contentious one, sometimes bitterly so. For the sake of clarity, then, it will be helpful to state precisely what this study is not. It is not a history of the Goths. It is not concerned with the historicity of Jordanes’ texts or our ability to reconstruct the ancient Gothic past from them. No positions will be taken about the question of Gothic origins; that is, whether they hail from Scandinavia, Poland, or northwest of the Black Sea. Nor does it matter here whether Pytheas’ *Gutones* and Tacitus’ *Gotones* were Goths or if the Goths’ first appearance in the sources came much later in the third century. This is not to say that I lack my own leanings about these questions, but it is rather clear that positions taken on these issues have had an overly polarizing, circle-the-wagons-like effect among scholars. The present study does not engage these questions for two reasons. First, they have no actual bearing on the primary objective of this project: an inquiry into Jordanes as an original Roman-Gothic commentator on the state of Roman-Gothic relations in the sixth century. I am not, therefore, simply avoiding a touchy subject for fear of getting my hands dirty. Second,
given the fraught nature of the field, it seems beneficial to conduct a study of Jordanes that avails itself of the hugely important contributions made on both sides of these debates, and to pursue an investigation that does not, at its outset and by its very premises, alienate scholars of any particular interpretive persuasion.

Regarding these interpretations, two camps have dug in their heels on a number of positions. One group holds that Jordanes’ *Getica* summarizes the lost Gothic history of Cassiodorus, who, they believe, transcribed real Gothic oral traditions. From this orality, critics have worked to reconstruct ancient Germanic beliefs and history thought to be embedded in Jordanes’ narrative. The *Getica*’s preservation of Cassiodorus’ account is crucial to their methodology, and so they minimize the presence of Jordanes’ contributions to his text. The other camp’s positions are essentially antipodal. They emphasize Jordanes’ role in shaping his histories, reject the notion that either Cassiodorus or Jordanes preserved Gothic oral history, impugn the reliability of Jordanes’ historical accounting, and thereby dismiss him as a reliable source for ancient Germanic history. Disagreement is generally beneficial and productive in scholarly discourse, but politics have inflected these debates, and current divisions have become ossified. It is feared that a kind of entrenched intellectual inertia could set it and harm the field.

This study begins by reaffirming commonalities across the interpretive spectrum. Nearly all would admit that Jordanes claims a Gothic heritage (whatever its implications). All would consider Jordanes to be a Roman, or at least ‘Romanized.’ All would agree that he left his own mark on his texts (no matter how slight or great). And all would recognize that it was no coincidence that a Roman-Goth wrote histories of Romans and
Goths while Rome was at war with the Goths. In other words, everyone agrees that the contemporary Gothic War in Italy and the politics of the mid-sixth century impacted the creation and content of Jordanes’ texts. With this common ground in mind, the present study seeks to investigate this monumentally important ‘minor’ author without subscribing to any particular school of thought, and by operating within analytical parameters that many scholars – to a greater or lesser extent – would deem acceptable. There will be those who find my specific conclusions unconvincing. It is my hope, however, to advance our understanding of Jordanes as both an individual and as an author of two unique texts that were shaped by the dramatic times in which they were conceived. It will be a success if scholars, by turns, agree and disagree with my various arguments for different reasons, and irrespective of their place in current debates.

Chapter One charts the long record of Jordanes scholarship, and identifies the specific intellectual pedigree of the idea that Jordanes’ *Getica* is a faithful preservation of Cassiodorus’ lost Gothic history. This conflation of Cassiodorus and Jordanes, formulated in the early nineteenth century when the rigorous, academic study of history was first conceived, still generally holds the field among specialist scholars, and continues to shape the opinions of non-specialists. Despite its age, this model has never been systematically reevaluated or resubstantiated. It has become a comfortable assumption; a ‘fact’ taken for granted. Moreover, these views about Jordanes were established by German scholars in a nationalist era, and their conclusions were used, in part, to promote notions about Germanic culture, ethnicity, and nationality that have since
been rejected. Given all this, it is incumbent upon commentators on Jordanes to reassess the question of his connection to Cassiodorus, and to begin work from the ground up.

Chapter Two continues to earn the right to talk about Jordanes as an autonomous author. An extended analysis of the Getica’s preface serves as a case study for this autonomy. By his own simple statements and through a complex allusion to Rufinus, Jordanes announces both his separation from and connection to Cassiodorus’ text. Further, subtle references to current debates about Origen and the Three Chapters controversy reveal that Jordanes’ historical project was shaped by contemporary political and ideological exigencies.

Having established sufficient doubt about Jordanes’ indebtedness to Cassiodorus in the first two chapters, the third surveys the structure of Jordanes’ texts and the classical genres which shaped them. Jordanes employs established genres that had grown out a millennium of Greco-Roman literary tradition, but reconfigures their specific components to produce a body of work that is ultimately innovative. This is illustrative of the creative impulses that more broadly defined the literature produced in the late ancient period. Authors of this time, fully aware of the staggeringly long history of the literary culture in which they participated, found meaning in both reifying and reinventing this shared culture of classicism. This chapter also provides an initial analysis of some of the themes which undergird Jordanes’ program – namely the shared history and culture of Goths and Romans – for it is argued that his deployment of genre is always in the service of his greater thematic agenda. These themes are taken up again and analyzed in the context of sixth-century politics in Chapter Five.
Chapters Four and Five situate Jordanes and his texts within the tumultuous world of the sixth-century Justinianic empire. Jordanes wrote in 551, in the midst of the imperial war to destroy the Gothic state in Italy. Perhaps the most fundamental position taken in this study is that Jordanes’ inquiry into Gothic and Roman history was spurred by the immediacies of this Gothic War. Chapter Four identifies a strain in the contemporary literature being produced across the breadth of the Mediterranean that spoke to what is here termed the ‘Gothic question’; a specific discourse about the nature of the Goths, their place in the Roman world, and the conduct of the war in Italy. Interlocutors in this discourse took positions on questions concerning the barbarity, Romanity, and legitimacy of the Goths and the Gothic state. Thematic correspondences among participants speak to the existence of a coherent and conscious theater of debate.

Jordanes must be numbered among the other voices in this discourse. Chapter Five engages in a global analysis of both the Getica and Romana, and reveals Jordanes as an individual in the process of negotiating his own dual identity in reaction to the acute crisis of the Gothic War. Following a biographical interpretation which reconciles Jordanes’ person and worldview to the culturally diverse, late Roman Balkans, the chapter explores the major themes of his histories, chief among them being the classicization of Gothic history; that is, Jordanes’ effort to rescue the Goths from the barbarism with which they are generally associated by adorning them with classical characteristics, and by recasting their very history by incorporating them into the seminal events of the Mediterranean past. By positioning the Goths as respectable players on the world stage, Jordanes counters the dominant and imperially sanctioned view of the Goths...
as ‘barbarian tyrants’ whose destruction was imperative. His history valorizes the Goths, and, crucially, praises the many instances in which Goths and Romans fight alongside each other. Jordanes creates a new way of interpreting the classical past; he invents Roman-Gothic history.
Chapter One
The Question of Cassiodorus I: Methodological Problems

For an author who has exercised such far-reaching influence on questions ranging from
Germanic antiquity to the formulation of ethnicity and medieval (and modern) statehood,
it is striking that the foundational studies on Jordanes do not actually focus on Jordanes
or his two texts at all, but rather on another author and a historical work which no longer
exists. That author is Cassiodorus and the lost text is his twelve-book history of the
Goths. 1 Jordanes and Cassiodorus have been inseparable figures in scholarly research.
Because Jordanes states in the preface of the Getica that he was asked to make an
abridgement of Cassiodorus’ Gothic history, the vast majority of scholars of the past two

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1 Our information about the lost Gothic history is derived from two sources. The first is known as the
Anecdoton Holderi (Ordo generis Cassiodorum), H. Usener, Anecdoton Holderi. Ein Beitrag zur
Geschichte Roms in ostgotischer Zeit. Festschrift zur Begrüssung der XXXII Versammlung deutscher
Philologen und Schulumänner zu Weisbaden. (Leipzig, Teubner, 1877); ed. A. Galonnier, Anecdoton
Holderi ou Ordo Generis Cassiodororum: Éléments pour une étude de l'authenticité boëcienne des
Opsuela Sacra (Paris, 1997). This is a small text fragment found by Alfred Holder in a manuscript
containing Cassiodorus’ Institutiones and published a number of years later by Herman Usener in 1877; see
Usener (this note), 2. The fragment is fraught with difficulties. Various editors have had their hand at
emendation, though scholars agree that a definitive solution is likely impossible. See, for example, the text
in Mommsen’s edition of the Variae, MGH AA XII (Berlin, 1894; Munich, 1981), v-vi. J. O’Donnell,
Cassiodorus (Berkeley, 1979), 259-266 has edited the text and provided an extensive commentary,
sometimes challenging Mommsen. For a translation, see S. Barnish, Cassiodorus: Variae (Liverpool,
1992), xxxv-vi. For a recent discussion, see A. Christensen, Cassiodorus, Jordanes, and the ‘History of the
Goths’: Studies in a Migration Myth, H. Flegal (tr.) (Copenhagen, 2002), 68-70. The second source is
Cassiodorus’ Variae in four separate passages. Variae 9.25 mentions the Gothic history specifically and
briefly alludes to the methodology behind its composition; 11.1 provides a portion of the Amal genealogy
which is close in character to that found in Jordanes, Getica 79-81 and may have served as its source; in
12.20.4 Cassiodorus mentions a portion of his Gothic history which treated Alaric’s sack of Rome; and,
finally, in the preface to the Variae, Cassiodorus puts a brief description of the Gothic history into the
mouth of the individual who has beseeched him to publish his letters in the Variae. For a more recent
dition of the Variae Book 12, see Å. J. Fridh (ed.), Magni Aurelii Cassiodori Variarum libri XII, in (=
centuries have agreed that Jordanes succeeded, if inelegantly, in providing an accurate summary of that lost work.

The desire to see in the *Getica* a faithful abbreviation of Cassiodorus’ lost Gothic history is understandable. We would have in our possession an abridged version of a text from one of the late Roman west’s most celebrated literary figures, and the essence of a historical project commissioned by the near-mythic figure of Theoderic the Great, the most famous of the barbarian successor kings. Were it so, such a work could provide invaluable insight into the Gothic past, both real and imagined, and into the political and literary process whereby a Roman statesman bestowed on a barbarian people a classical pedigree to better suit their current standing in a Roman world. It is my contention, however, that in Jordanes we have something altogether different, though no less interesting. The historical corpus of Jordanes must be understood as the product of an autonomous and purposive author, decidedly reliant on sources and models, but nevertheless in control of the ideas, themes, and positions expressed in his writing. This study stands as the first of its kind in English: a monograph dedicated entirely to Jordanes not implicitly focused on Cassiodorus.

It is by deliberate design, then, that this study does not dwell overlong on past Cassiodorus-centered readings of Jordanes. Yet these readings cannot be overlooked altogether. They have, by and large, defined the field, and any new interpretation must confront them in order to redefine the analytical parameters for future work on Jordanes.

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2 That Theodoric commissioned the work is mentioned in *Anecdoton Holderi* (Leipzig, Teubner, 1877).
3 Christensen, (2002), unlike the present study, is focused primarily on the questions of the historicity and Gothicity of Jordanes’ texts. It is a thorough and exacting study whose findings have been profitably exploited throughout the present work. Some of its conclusions, however, will be challenged here.
The shadow of Cassiodorus looms large, and it is a testament to the pedigree and entrenchment of old positions that the following two chapters will be dedicated to proving a reasonable doubt, so to speak, about the established convictions concerning Jordanes’ relationship to Cassiodorus.

The aims of the present chapter are threefold: to survey the history of the major milestones in the development of the Jordanes-Cassiodorus conflation and trace their effects on the uses of Jordanes’ texts; to account for Jordanes’ political entanglements with nineteenth- and twentieth-century nationalist ideologies; and to expose the methodological and epistemological errors of this traditional position which continues to hold sway even today. The next chapter will then confront the problems inherent in the standard exegetical encounters with Jordanes’ texts. It should be noted that these two chapters do not aim to dismantle entirely the established views concerning Jordanes and Cassiodorus. Their purpose is to expose fissures in the old position and to argue for the license to begin to formulate a new one founded upon Jordanes’ authorial autonomy. Following that, the remainder of this study will be dedicated to defining this new position which, concomitantly, works further to undermine the old one.

**Jordanes and Past Scholarship: The Traditional Formulations**

"Upon the whole, there can be little doubt that it is a safe rule to attribute everything that is good or passable in this little treatise [the Getica] to Cassiodorus, and everything that is very bad, childish, and absurd in it to Jordanes."

Such is the esteem in which Jordanes was held by Thomas Hodgkin. In the introduction to his translation of Cassiodorus’ letters, Hodgkin also managed to write for five pages

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about the nature and purpose of Cassiodorus’ Gothic history, deriving nearly all of his information from the *Getica*, without mentioning Jordanes or his work even once. Again, we must remember that Cassiodorus’ history is completely lost, with only one short fragment surviving. Yet Hodgkin’s mode of analysis, already well-established by 1886, remained standard in exegetical scholarship on Jordanes throughout most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The replacement of Jordanes’ name with that of Cassiodorus, and the discussion of the contents of Jordanes’ work without mention of him was commonplace until the 1980s.

The scholarly tradition that Jordanes produced an abbreviation of Cassiodorus’ longer Gothic history is not without solid grounding. In the preface to the *Getica*, Jordanes states that he has been asked by a certain Castalius to write a history of the Goths, or, more precisely, “to condense in my own style in this small book the twelve volumes of [Cassiodorus] Senator on the origin and deeds of the Getae from olden time to the present day, descending through the generations of the kings.” The next chapter presents a thoroughgoing analysis of the *Getica*’s preface, but for now it suffices to say that from this one statement, and no others, grew the primary scholarly focus on Jordanes. To be fair, past commentators did not simply assume without requisite investigation that Jordanes preserved Cassiodorus. The simplest, but by no means easiest, way to look for marks of Cassiodorus’ craftsmanship is to read the *Getica* against

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5 *Ibid.* Only one fragment of Cassiodorus’ Gothic history remains, quoted by its author in a letter: *Variae* 12.20.4; see n.1.
7 Jordanes, *Getica*, “...ut nostris verbis duodecem Senatoris volumina de origine actusque Getarum ab olim et usque nunc per generationes regesque descendentem in uno et hoc parvo libello choartem...”
Cassiodorus’ language and an understanding of his compositional style as learned from his numerous extant works. This sort of textual analysis takes deft philological skill, and, in the case of Jordanes and Cassiodorus, has been executed with profit on but a few occasions. Yet even these skillful studies have yielded only limited results and have concluded little more than that Jordanes made good use of Cassiodorus, something already assumed by everyone. And while I remain skeptical of some attempts to identify Cassiodoran material in the Getica, believing some of these studies to be based on questionable suppositions, I still concur with the majority position that Cassiodorus’ Gothic history was the Getica’s main source. On this much, at least, virtually all can agree. What differentiates one commentator from the next is reckoning the extent to which Jordanes utilized Cassiodorus, and the degree to which the Getica preserves its main source’s themes and objectives.

Answers to these questions of extent and degree vary from scholar to scholar, but fall largely, if imperfectly, into three ‘schools’ of thought: German, Italian, and Anglophone. I acknowledge the dangers inherent in this sort of schematization, but will use it because it does have heuristic value. Put broadly, the ‘German school’ holds that Jordanes produced a faithful abridgement of Cassiodorus, and also preserved his sources’

8 H. von Sybel, De fontibus libri Jordanis de origine actuque Getarum (Berlin, 1838); C. Schirren, De ratione quae inter Iordanem et Cassiodorum intercedat commentatio (Dorpat, 1858); R. Hachmann, Die Goten und Skandinavien, Quellen und Forschungen zur Sprach und Kulturgeschichte der germanischen Völker, n.s., 34 (Berlin, 1970), 474-98; J. Weißensteiner, ‘Cassiodor/Jordanes als Geschichtsschreiber,’ in (eds.) A. Scharer and G. Scheibeler, Historiographie im frühen Mittelalter, Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für österreichische Geschichtsforschung 32 (Vienna, 1994), 308-25. For a more recent analysis in this mode see A. Amici, ‘Iordanes e la storia gotica’, Quaderni della Rivista di Byzantinistica 6 (Spoleto, 2002), 3-48.

9 See Chapter Two, ns. 6-7 and associated text for further discussion.

10 For work based on said questionable suppositions, see C. Cipolla, ‘Considerazione sulle Getica di Jordanes et sulle loro relazioni colla Historia Getarum di Cassiodoro Senatore,’ Memorie della R. Accad. di Torino ser. 2, 43 (1892), 99-134.
themes. An ‘Italian school’ is right to demand that Jordanes had an identity and a purpose of his own, but does so for the wrong reasons. The work of Italian commentators has come under scrutiny because it maintains positions that have, by broad consensus, long since been refuted. These positions are often grounded in assumptions – among them that Jordanes was bishop of this or that city, or that he worked at Cassiodorus’ Vivarium.\footnote{An early and influential voice in the ‘Italian school’ was Cipolla (1892). Similar views are expressed in the most recent critical edition of the Getica by F. Giunta and A. Grillone (eds.), Iordanis. De origine actibusque Getarum. Istituto storico italiano per il medio evo 1991. xlix, 205 S. 4, Fonti per la storia d'Italia. 117 (Rome, 1991), and persist even in Amici (2002). See also Buonomo, 'Introduzione alia lettura delle opere di Giordane, in (eds.) S. and M. Squillante, Mutatio rerum: Letteratura, filosofia, scienza tra tardoantico e altomedioevo, Il Pensiero e la Storia 37 (Naples, 1997), 115-46. See Goffart’s review of Giunta and Grillone for a discussion of these problems, Gnomon 67 (1995), 227-29.}

The far more recent ‘Anglophone school’ has, during the last thirty or so years, sought both to rehabilitate the general reputation of Jordanes as a writer and to grant him an authorial voice bound not so tightly by Cassiodoran restraints. The present study is most akin to this third school, but departs from some of its most significant conclusions; namely that Jordanes, once detached from Cassiodorus, emerges as an unapologetic mouthpiece for a Justinianic ideology of conquest.

**Jordanes in the Nineteenth Century**

The German school has stood dominant in scholarship on Jordanes due partly to having been around the longest, and partly to the sheer weight of the reputation and learnedness of some of its past proponents. Schirren’s seminal work of 1858, whose conclusions still loom large today, argued forcefully that Cassiodorus’ hand was evident throughout the Getica, and, perhaps most damningly, that Cassiodorus had knowledge of most of the authors cited by Jordanes, thereby eliminating the likelihood that the latter
did outside research of his own. The resultant image of Jordanes was as a cipher for Cassiodorus, and his work a faithful expression of not only Cassiodorus’ content, but also of his political objectives. Most of these arguments were institutionalized in Mommsen’s 1882 critical edition of Jordanes’ corpus. Even Mommsen, however, recognized that Jordanes’ dependence on Cassiodorus did not necessarily mean that he remained faithful in all respects. Mommsen pointed to subject matter and themes in the Getica that seemed incongruent with a Cassiodorolan template, yet this astute skepticism was largely overlooked by later commentators, with the result that a simpler, more streamlined argument wherein Cassiodorus and Jordanes were interchangeable entities became the orthodoxy.

But these convictions about Jordanes’ relationship to Cassiodorus were not made in a vacuum. These specific scholarly positions did not manifest themselves when and where they did by sheer coincidence, and independently of external cultural and political stimuli. Like Cassiodorus and Jordanes, Schirren, Mommsen, and the German historians of their generation were products of their time and engaged in a mode of scholarship which, though centuries old, had by the nineteenth century reached heightened levels of

13 Despite the appearance of Giunta and Grillone (1991), Mommsen’s edition remains the standard.
14 This blending of Schirren’s and Mommsen’s arguments became, as it were, the industry standard. L. von Ranke, Weltgeschichte vol. 4.2 (Berlin, 1883), 327; W. Wattenbach, Deutschlands Geschichtsquellen im Mittelalter, 5th ed. (Berlin, 1885), 6th ed. (Berlin, 1893); M. Manitius, Geschichte der lateinischen Literatur des Mittelalters I (Munich, 1911); R. Hachmann, Die Goten und Skandinavien, Quellen und Forschungen zur Sprach- und Kulturgeschichte der germanischen Völker, n.s. 34 (Berlin, 1970); E. Lönnroth, ‘Die Goten in der modernen kritischen Geschichtsauffassung’, in U. Hagberg (ed.). Studia Gotica: Die eisenzeitlichen Verbindungen zwischen Schweden und Südosteuropa (Stockholm, 1972); F. Brunhölzl, Geschichte der lateinischen Literatur des Mittelalters, 1 (Munich, 1975), 29-31.
articulation. In this period, and in previous centuries, the *Getica* was used primarily as a foundational source for reconstructing ancient Germanic history and society. Alongside the *Getica*, other ancient and medieval texts such as Tacitus’ *Germania*, the Gothic Bible, Paul the Deacon’s *History of the Lombards*, and the Icelandic sagas served as the principal sources for Germanic antiquity. This scholarly agenda – *germanische Altertumskunde* – saw its beginnings in the fifteenth century as a reaction to those Renaissance Humanists who had claimed the Roman past as the direct inheritance of the Italian states. In response, scholars from the Holy Roman Empire and Scandinavia sought to canonize the aforementioned texts for the purposes of establishing a unique antiquity for the peoples of northern Europe. Later, the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* was established in 1819 to produce critical editions of those sources, among them the texts of Jordanes. Though Germany did not yet exist as a political entity, it was nonetheless increasingly conceived as a cultural unity and nation. Between the political unification of 1871 and World War II, German philological study of these texts joined an ever-growing chorus of scholarship which sought to establish a direct, uninterrupted

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17 For further discussion, see I. Wood, ‘Barbarians, Historians, and the Construction of National Identities’, *Journal of Late Antiquity* 1.1 (2008), 61-81, here 69-72.
biological and cultural lineage between modern Germans and the Germanic tribes described by Tacitus and Jordanes.¹-eight

In the era of Schirren and Mommsen, the *Getica* was valued principally as a repository of a bona fide Gothic, and more generally Germanic, past – a history as it actually happened. German scholars expended great effort in determining the extent of the historicity of these texts. Their conclusions were optimistic, a not altogether surprising result considering that so meager a body of texts was being ‘tested’ to establish the veracity of an already commonly held belief with such far-reaching implications – namely that the modern Germanic nations (Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and Iceland) and the ancient tribes of the Roman historical record formed a coherent cultural unity. These were obviously more than mere ‘academic’ concerns, but ideas that would have a profound shaping force on the philosophical underpinnings of nationalism and the articulation of cultural and racial identities. With so much at stake in these texts, the perceived reliability of their contents became directly proportional to the quality of their authorship. Given the excellent reputation enjoyed by, say, Tacitus, there would be no cause to doubt the *Germania*. Jordanes was a different story. Whereas Tacitus is heralded as one of Latinity’s greatest composers, Jordanes’ grammar and style would have made Cicero wince. By achieving the rank of consul, Tacitus attained the highest level of civic and political achievement possible in his day. Jordanes was but a secretary to an otherwise unknown Roman general of barbarian stock. He goes entirely unattested in all

¹-eight The pseudo-scientific currents of Romanticism injected atavistic impulses into scholarly discussions, which spoke of an essential, undying, and shared ‘spirit’ among Germanic peoples, and argued that the barbarians of the classical record were the forebears of modern-day Germans and the modern German nation. M. Carhart, *The Science of Culture in Enlightenment Germany* (Cambridge, MA, 2007), 4.
contemporary and subsequent literary production, and so is known to us only through his own works.

Cassiodorus was no Jordanes. As a member of an eminent Italian noble family, Cassiodorus pursued a career with all the ranks, titles, and offices thereunto enjoyed only by the best men of his station. He had been quastor palatii, consul without a colleague, successor to the famous Boethius as magister officiorum for Theoderic the Great, and, after that king’s death, he served as praetorian prefect under the next three kings before retiring to become an important religious figure in Italy. Cassiodorus was a prolific scholar with an extensive literary output and was hand-picked by Theoderic to pen a multi-volume history of the Gothic people. Given his rank and social surroundings, Cassiodorus would have been uniquely positioned to gain direct access to the bearers of tribal memory and to preserve real Gothic oral traditions in his written history – or so the thinking went. Had it survived, a text such as Cassiodorus’ might have been held in higher regard than even the Germania by scholars in the mode of germanische Altertumskunde. The work of Jordanes, however, slight and inelegant though it was, offered the chance to make the most of a bad situation. Given what Jordanes has to say about his own text, it was clear that Cassiodorus’ history played no small role in the shaping of the Getica; though the precise nature of that role was open to debate. In


20 For the surviving information about the lost Gothic history provided by Cassiodorus himself, see Variae, praef; 9.25; 11.1; 12.20.4; and Anecdota Holderi. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte Roms in ostgothischer Zeit. Festschrift zur Begrüssung der XXXII Versammlung deutscher Philologen und Schulmänner zu Weisbaden. (Leipzig, Teubner, 1877); see also note 1.
nineteenth-century Germany, however, the debate was over before it really began. If Cassiodorus’ history would have provided a window into the Gothic past, then Jordanes was turned into a window onto that window. Efforts were made not only to demarcate Cassiodorlan material in the *Getica*, but also to attack what little reputation Jordanes enjoyed as a writer and thinker. The more feckless Jordanes was perceived to be, the less likely it was that he had historical themes of his own, and the less learned he seemed to be, the more likely it was that he reverently abridged his source. Only a mindless copyist could guarantee the transmission of the heroic Gothic traditions that were thought to be contained in Cassiodorus’ original. It is clear, therefore, that the perception of the Jordanes-Cassiodorus relationship forged in the 1800s, and which persists today, was motivated largely by a desire to access a historical account which was assumed to contain traces of Gothic oral tradition. These ideas were shaped as much by wishful thinking as by objective philological analysis.

A position founded in part on such questionable grounds which continues to hold sway must be tested. And while a growing body of recent scholarship has done just that, progress has been slow and uneven, having commenced already a generation ago, and is still far from exorcizing this outdated model. The problem is one of inertia. No one writing in English, and indeed only a few in German, still actively advances Schirren’s arguments – and they can be safely called ‘Schirren’s arguments’ because they have

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21 The formative study in this mode is R. Köpke, *Deutsche Forschungen. Die Anfänge des Königthums dei den Gothen* (Berlin, 1859), 50-93.
22 For arguments that Cassiodorus himself gives us reason to think he did not employ Gothic material in his history see, *Variae* 9.25.4; Goffart (1988), 38-9; Christensen (2002), 54-83, and *passim*.
never been meaningfully augmented since their articulation 150 years ago. Having persisted for so long, it is merely a comfortable, almost unconscious, assumption among most ancient and medieval historians that Jordanes wrote an epitome of Cassiodorus, not a positive conviction. The small cohort of scholars who have studied Jordanes’ texts closely in the last thirty years have realized quickly that the old equation is overstated, and have granted Jordanes various levels of authorial autonomy. But old habits die hard, and non-specialists continue, quite unwittingly, to entrench dated positions usually in the form of very brief, generalizing and peripheral statements about Jordanes. These practices will eventually subside, though this study aims to hasten the timetable of their departure. This, however, is not to say that old positions are so weak that they will die off without a fight. Their influence remained paramount throughout the twentieth century and their trajectories and development must be traced.

**Jordanes after the World Wars**

After World War II, the dangers inherent in nationalist and racialist theories espoused not only by German but international scholarship more generally, was painfully evident. Convictions long held about the antiquity of the nation-state, the ancestry of modern Europeans, and the heritability of ethnicity and identity underwent radical reformulation in the ensuing decades, and redefined the very foundations of all academic social sciences. Scholarly use of Jordanes, however, failed to make similar methodological transitions fully. To be clear, nineteenth-century formulations about the Jordanes-Cassiodorus relationship were not racist or nationalistic in and of themselves. They were,

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24 See below, this chapter.
though, forged in an environment which presupposed the homogeneity of ancient 
Germanic tribal groupings and the persistence and heritability of immutable Germanic 
cultural traits down through the centuries. Certain ancient texts were thought to be 
capable of establishing the contours of cultural links between ancient tribes and modern 
northern Europeans. Cassiodorus’ Gothic history was believed to be one such text 
because of the oral history it was assumed to have contained. It is this presumed 
repository of Gothic tradition surviving in an abbreviated form in Jordanes which formed 
the basis for so much nationalist and racialist scholarship. Such thinking has disappeared 
from work on Jordanes, but his dependence on Cassiodorus is still largely assumed. It 
was precisely this dependence, however, that nineteenth-century scholars sought to prove 
in order to justify their now debunked views of history. There remains, then, a marked 
disconnect between the universally accepted methodological and epistemological 
transitions made in the social sciences since the 1940s, and current scholarly encounters 
with Jordanes.

In 1948, Wilhelm Ensslin continued to demolish any semblance of originality in 
Jordanes by arguing that his epitome, the Romana, was a mere abridgement of 
Symmachus’ lost Roman history, which, like Cassiodorus’ text, was a product of the 
reign of Theodoric.25 Jordanes’ other historical work had always been something of an 
outlier in earlier scholarship, and had been attributed varying levels of inventiveness. 
Ensslin’s formulation was well received, however, and worked further to legitimize the 
arguments of Schirren and Köpke who sought to erase all traces of Jordanes’ presence

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25 W. Ensslin ‘Des Symmachus Historia Romana als Quelle für Jordanes’, Bayerische Akademie der 
Wissenschaften, Sitzungsberichte, Phil.-hist Abt. (1948).
from both of his texts. Yet, despite a full century of work in this mode, there still remained a small portion of the Getica to which commentators were willing to ascribe an original, Jordanean contribution. In particular, the date for the completion of Cassiodorus’ Gothic history is debatable but a terminus ante quem can be ascribed to 533. The Getica recounts events down to the middle of the century. Jordanes, therefore, could not have followed Cassiodorus here. Or could he? In 1955 Arnaldo Momigliano moved to put the finishing touches on the old Cassiodorus-Jordanes formula by accounting for the source which lay behind those portions of the Getica whose chronology extended beyond the scope of Cassiodorus’ original history. The answer was that Jordanes had drawn, again, from Cassiodorus, but this time from an expanded version of the Gothic history which Cassiodorus had updated while residing in Constantinople. Momigliano argued that Cassiodorus’ hand can be detected in the concluding portion of the Getica where mention is made of the marriage between Justinian’s cousin Germanus and Theoderic’s granddaughter Matasuntha, because it is described as a union of the families of the Anicii and the Amals. Only Cassiodorus,

26M. Wes, Das Ende des Kaisertums im Westen des Römischen Reichs (The Hague, 1967) accepts Ensslin’s case entirely, and treats the Romana as a repository of the views of the “Romans of Rome” as preserved by Symmachus. Enlssin’s arguments, however, have been overturned by Croke, and the Jordanes-Symmachus conflation has been abandoned in contemporary scholarship, B. Croke, ‘A.D. 476: The Manufacture of a Turning Point’, Chiron 13 (1983), 81-119, here 90-115. With the possibility of original material in the Romana renewed, recent commentators have had even more reason to doubt Jordanes’ utter dependence on Cassiodorus.


Momigliano argues, would have characterized the nuptials in such a way. Any other author would have linked Germanus to the imperial family of Justinian.

The basis for Momigliano’s argument is twofold: 1) Momigliano believed that Germanus was connected to the Anicii because his mother ostensibly belonged to that family, despite the lack of solid evidence for the fact. Further, in his *Ordo generis Cassiodororum*, Cassiodorus had sought to connect himself directly with the Anicii as represented by Symmachus and Boethius. 2) The marriage of Germanus and Matasuntha is so praised in the *Getica*, being said to bring “hope, under the Lord’s favor, to both peoples,” because it represents a shared desire among the Roman aristocratic émigrés residing in Constantinople to see reconciliation between Goths and Romans in Italy. This desire, Momigliano suggests, is what prompted Cassiodorus to update his Gothic history. But a twelve-volume history with further addenda was not an ideal medium through which to effect social and political change in Italy. A summary, though, would have been – thus the creation of the *Getica*. Momigliano is uncertain about the extent of Cassiodorus’ involvement in both the assignment and execution of the abridgement, but must have approved it given that Jordanes says that it was Cassiodorus’ *dispensator* who lent out the manuscripts. In this formulation, Jordanes is not only denied words of his own, but is stripped of even a personal motivation for putting pen to paper. He vanishes.

These and other arguments advanced in Momigliano’s article have since come under attack time and again. In a recent article, Walter Goffart, perhaps the most

29 Jordanes, *Getica* 2.
influential voice in English on Jordanes, stated that the “theory [of Momigliano] has been assailed from several different quarters, with all respect for the greatness of its author, and may be regarded as having been unanimously swept from the scene. Its details need not be retraced.”\(^{31}\) This, however, is not to say that Momigliano was without supporters.\(^{32}\) Indeed, the work of both Ensslin and Momigliano strengthened an already institutionalized model which stood dominant for another thirty years.\(^{33}\)

As already mentioned, the twilight of the fascist era saw the passing of long-held assumptions about nationality, culture, and ethnicity, and a reappraisal of the historical texts used to sustain obsolete and undesirable claims. No longer was Jordanes being used indirectly to prove the antiquity and rightness of the nation-state or racial and cultural continuities over the course of millennia. Quite the opposite. By 1961, Reinhard Wenskus had reengaged the old sources, Jordanes included, and found them to evince marked discontinuities in the history of Germanic-speaking groups in the Roman and early

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medieval periods.\textsuperscript{34} Goths, Vandals, Franks, and the like could be seen forming and reforming new political units despite our sources’ usage of the same group names across wide expanses of time.\textsuperscript{35} Wenskus argued that these groups were anything but homogeneous, having been formed on the march from a composite of peoples.\textsuperscript{36} Groupings could merge, subdivide, disappear then reappear.\textsuperscript{37} These were not stable societies based solely on descent, but groups which coalesced around a body of shared customs and traditions – a \textit{Traditionskern}. Despite an ever-changing composition of individuals, one could still speak meaningfully about ‘the Goths’ or ‘the Vandals’ because a group’s \textit{Traditionskern} remained constant or changed only slowly, and thereby provided a marked level of continuity and durability to social structures. The Goths who cut a deal with Constantine in 332 may not have had much in common with King Wamba of Hispania in 672, but all were still Goths, and this was not merely incidental.

Wenskus’ study, an immediate success, redefined the parameters for historical inquiry into the Germanic past. It also reflected broader changes occurring in


\textsuperscript{35} Heather (2008), 27.

\textsuperscript{36} This notion was not original to Wenskus, nor did he mean it to present it as such. See for example B.H. Slicher van Bath, ‘Dutch Tribal Problems’, \textit{Speculum} 24 (1949), who writes, “Today it is generally held that the tribes in the beginning of the Middle Ages consisted of a conglomerate of elements of various peoples.” Modern scholarship will directly and indirectly name Wenskus as the font of this idea because his is the most famous post-WWII study to counter biological models. See Callander Murray (2002) for a discussion of Wenskus’ influence.

anthropology and the other social sciences, notably the work of Edmund Leach, which rejected biological determinism and increasingly understood ethnicity and identity to be mutable, often evanescent social and political constructions. This, however, is not to erect a simplistic dichotomy which marks biological models of ethnicity as ‘old’ and social ones as ‘new’, as they are sometimes presented in modern scholarship. Culturally rather than biologically constituted models of ethnicity were already being espoused by the turn of the century and reflect an intellectual complexity within *germanische Altertumskunde* which is often forgotten. Wenskus’ role in forging a new path in the study of Germanic antiquity, however, is undeniable. Herwig Wolfram later advanced some of Wenskus’ ideas by pursuing the most fundamental questions concerning the notion of the *Traditionskern* that had been left open – namely: how were these cores of tradition generated, who was responsible for their transmission, and by what mechanism were they disseminated?

His answers formed the basis of the so-called ethnogenesis theory. Central to this was a significant reappraisal of how social hierarchies functioned in Germanic societies. In the nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries, due largely to the picture which Tacitus paints in the *Germania*, many scholars envisioned broad social equality and widespread

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political participation in the Germanic societies of all periods of antiquity. By the 1960s, E.A. Thompson was arguing that this egalitarianism, whether or not it existed earlier, was not evident in the social and political institutions of the fourth-century Goths in particular.41 Similar thinking has since been applied to other Germanic groupings and has replaced nineteenth-century romantic notions. Having accepted new views of Germanic groups as heterogeneous and socially differentiated, Wolfram gave greater coherence to Wenskus’ nascent theory by positing that relatively small, elite cohorts of royalty and nobility stood at the center of any given tribal grouping and that it was these elites who articulated a tribe’s Traditionskern. Wolfram was seeking to reconcile two seemingly divergent realities: the ethnically diverse and regularly fluctuating composition of a given tribe, and its nominal persistence in the sources, often over the course of many centuries. The resolution, Wolfram argues, is that despite a tribe’s largely fluid and composite nature, its continued existence over time was due to a shared, meaningful, and relatively stable corporate identity. This identity was founded on a tribe’s core of traditions - traditions which were themselves shaped and reified by certain royal or elite clans and which almost always revolved around heroic and mythologized figures connected to those elite clans. These traditions were transmitted orally from generation to generation, but were subject to alteration over time as different individuals and clans rose and fell

from prominence, tailoring tribal traditions to better suit their current circumstances. In this way, a tribe could form, reform, then form again under new leadership and amended traditions, but remain the same tribe, both in the minds of its members and in reality.\footnote{42} Given the variable size and polyethnic composition of a tribal assemblage, its unity and cohesiveness were, for Wolfram, entirely contingent upon the success of its leadership. Put differently, failed leadership, usually characterized by lack of military success, threatened group stability and was remedied by the emergence of new leaders. Tribal traditions regarding its heroic past might then be carefully adjusted by the new rulers both to legitimize their power and to connect it to previous iterations of shared tradition. As one might easily imagine, Wolfram’s approach to Gothic history in his \textit{Geschichte der Goten} is leader-centered insofar as he seeks to uncover self-articulated Gothic perceptions of their own past as shaped by Gothic leaders. The analytic mode of the work is described as “historical ethnography”, wherein one attempts to achieve access to “\textit{origines gentium}”, accounts of the origins of peoples, as preserved in the work of Greek and Roman ethnographies.\footnote{43} While appreciative of the fact that any legitimate Germanic traditions which ancient ethnographic writings might preserve have been

\footnote{42} Wolfram’s ideas have been profoundly influential. Though opposed to a great many of his positions, Goffart has called Wolfram his generation’s “most learned, eloquent, and prolific spokesman about early Germans, notably the Goths,” in ‘Does the Distant Past Impinge on the Invasion Age Germans?’ in Gillett (ed.) (2002), 31. Wolfram’s work has shaped the work of many scholars, notably P. Geary, e.g. in ‘Ethnic Identity as a Situational Construct in the Early Middle Ages’, \textit{Mitteilungen der anthropologischen Gesellschaft in Wien} vol. 113 (1983), 15-26; and L. García Moreno, e.g. in ‘History through Family Names in the Visigothic Kingdoms of Toulouse and Toledo’, in \textit{Cassiodorus: Rivista di studi sulla tarda antichità}, 4 (1998), 163-84.

\footnote{43} Wolfram (1988), 3. Elsewhere Wolfram has stated that, housed in these ethnographies, “there exists an ethnic memory which can reach back over many generations. It includes genuine onomastic material and recounts theogony and ethnogenetic processes about which we would lack all other evidence.” H. Wolfram and G. Langthaler (eds.), \textit{Treasures on the Danube: Barbarian Invaders and Their Roman Inheritance} (Vienna, 1985), 42. For Germanist discussion of the \textit{origo gentis} genre, L. Gruchmann, \textit{Nationalesozialistische Grossraumordnung}, Schriftenreihe der Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte 4 (1962), 12-17.
filtered through “an interpretatio Romana,” Wolfram is confident that collective tribal memories might still be extrapolated from Roman texts - or what he terms the “historia Romana.” In attempting to reveal authentic Gothic perceptions of the Gothic past, Wolfram begins where all before him have begun: the Getica. But this is perhaps misleading. Wolfram does, in fact, start from the Getica, but he calls it “the Origo Gothica, the work of Cassiodorus in the version of Jordanes.” Note the two steps of removal. Whereas Wolfram is making physical use of the Getica, it is assumed that Jordanes faithfully preserves Cassiodorus’ lost history, and that the latter is actually a repository of royal Ostrogothic ethnic traditions. This body of tradition is what Wolfram terms the Origo Gothica. He treats this contrivance as a discrete ‘text’ and refers to it throughout his study. Indeed it serves as Wolfram’s key piece of source material.

This conclusion regarding the nature of the Getica is not only highly debatable, it really is not even a conclusion at all. That is to say, Wolfram’s ideas do not form the end-point to an argument. They are simply a priori assumptions about Jordanes’ text. And even if we permit Wolfram to assume that Jordanes reproduces Cassiodorus, given the pedigree of past scholarship to that end, it is still problematic that he so minimizes the shaping force of even Cassiodorus by turning him into a mere vessel for Gothic oral history. Wolfram’s approach to the Jordanes-Cassiodorus-Gothic oral history question is not dissimilar to past formulations. For Wolfram and like-minded scholars of Germanic antiquity, the single best hope for locating authentic Gothic traditions is to gain access to

46 See Goffart (2005) for a critique of the Origo Gothica contrivance.
47 A quarter century later, Wolfram stated: “Jordanes changed little of the text and nothing of the outline provided by Cassiodorus.” Again, he provides no argument. ‘Origo Gentis’ (2004), 44.
Cassiodorus’ history which is assumed to have made use of oral sources. Portions of the
Getica such as the genealogy of Gothic rulers ending with Theoderic, it is argued, cannot
be anything other than the celebration of the royal Ostrogothic Amal dynasty. The
Getica becomes invaluable not for being the chronologically and historically reliable
record of Gothic prehistory, but because it enshrines a single moment in the never
completed process of Gothic ethnogenesis; a reflection of the self-reverential historical
myths being generated by Theoderic and other sixth-century Ostrogothic leaders. It is
therefore crucial that this information came from Cassiodorus because only he could have
consulted Ostrogothic rulers and the collective memory which they preserved. If this
were not so, and if Jordanes did not simply reproduce Cassiodorus, the contents of the
Getica could not support the analytic modes of either Wolfram or Wenskus. Any hope of
knowing at least one manifestation of a Gothic Traditionskern or one moment in the
process of Gothic ethnogenesis would be severely compromised.

It is not within the parameters of this study to provide a thoroughgoing critique of
Wolfram’s or anyone else’s entire methodology, as this is not a study of Gothic history.
Our current scope is limited to a review of those instrumental studies which have
conflated Jordanes with Cassiodorus. What is dubious about Wolfram’s use of Jordanes

48 Jordanes, Getica 79-81; Barnish (1984), 339, 347; Wolfram (1988), 36-7. For other discussions of this
Grande e i Goti d’Italia, Centro Italiano di Studi Sull’Alto Medioevo (Spoleto, 1993), 344-7; Christensen
(2002), 124-34.


50 For work in the ethnogenesis mode beyond Wenskus and Wolfram, see J. Jarnut, Geschichte der
Langobarden (Stuttgart, 1982); L. García Moreno, ‘La invasión del 409 en España: nuevas perspectivas
desde el punto de vista germano’, in (ed.) A. del Castillo, Ejército y sociedad (León, 1982); idem., Historia
de España visigoda (Madrid,1989); H. Moisl, ‘Kingship and Orally Transmitted Stammestradition among
Lombards and Franks’, in (eds.) Wolfram and A. Schwarcz, Die Bayern un ihre Nachbarn, vol. 1 (Vienna,
1985), 111-19; Geary, Before France and Germany: The Creation and Transformation of the Merovingian
World (New York,1988); W. Pohl, ‘Concepts of Ethnicity in Early Medieval Studies’, Archaeologia
is not the fact that he attributes his work to Cassiodorus, but that he founds the very basis of his hugely influential theory of Gothic tribal ethnogenesis on that attribution and does so without an argument to prove it. Wolfram, and any scholar who works from this premise, is employing a century and a half-old model that has never been resubstantiated meaningfully. Ideas are not necessarily wrong because they are old, but acceptance of an argument contrived in the first generation of scientific historical study that has not been significantly reevaluated is uncharacteristic of modern scholarship.

Then there is the issue of nineteenth-century nationalism. This is a thorny subject and it must be made clear that neither Wenskus, nor Wolfram, nor any other serious scholar who works in the ethnogenesis mode or who currently conflates Jordanes and Cassiodorus harbors crypto-nationalist or racialist sentiments. Recent intimations to the contrary are groundless and hyperbolic. Today, all deny the homogeneity and immutability of tribal compositions, and reject racial linkages between the ancient Germani and the modern deutsche Volk. But questions concerning Germanic antiquity, especially ethnicity and identity in the migration period, often occasion tense, even vitriolic exchange. This is, of course, the inheritance of the atrocities wrought in the fascist era. Scholarly vigilance and memory of past mistakes are good things. But over-defensiveness and suspicion are impediments to constructive debate; they promote hostility and shut off channels of interdisciplinary and even international exchange.

Both ‘sides’ would do well to help to diffuse the situation. With the spirit of collegiality in mind, the subject of the present study recommends one such way. To those who work in the mode of ethnogenesis, and specifically those who conflate Jordanes and
Cassiodorus and seek out authentic Gothic traditions, I would suggest the following. Studies that argue for the existence of something akin to Wolfram’s *Origo Gothica* or a more general *gotische Stammessage* housed within the *Getica* need to build arguments from the ground up. As already stated, these studies pivot on two key points: that Jordanes preserves Cassiodorus faithfully, and that Cassiodorus himself preserves royal Ostrogothic traditions as they were told to him by the bearers of tribal memory. The problem with studies that accept this oblique trajectory of knowledge is that they are fundamentally, though never self-avowedly, grounded in the original mid-nineteenth-century arguments that established Jordanes’ dependence on Cassiodorus. This is never explicitly mentioned, and probably not out of disingenuousness either, but because it has been ‘known’ for so long that Jordanes and Cassiodorus are interchangeable entities, and many have likely found it unnecessary to reestablish such a basic point. But the unfortunate reality is that because this ‘fact’ has not been resubstantiated for a century and a half, the Jordanes-Cassiodorus model continues to be the one which was not merely articulated in the era of German nationalism, but was concurrently used to ‘prove’ points about German cultural continuities and nationhood that have since been abandoned.

This is not to suggest that modern work which accepts the old Jordanes-Cassiodorus relationship is guilty of anything nefarious. Rather, it suggests two other points. First, it seems impossible to deny that the Jordanes-Cassiodorus formulation established in the nineteenth century was at least partially designed to advance anachronistically nationalistic views of the ancient past that have now been summarily

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rejected. Given the questionable circumstances surrounding its initial formulation, therefore, it is incumbent upon scholars in any field or discipline to reengage the question of Jordanes’ dependence on Cassiodorus before making use of the Getica. And second, all nationalist concerns aside, professionalism demands that any methodology or argument conceived one hundred fifty years ago needs to be systematically reevaluated before it is applied in modern research.

**Jordanes’ Revisionists**

During the past few decades, however, studies have appeared that, for different reasons and to various degrees, sought to enlarge the space standing between Jordanes and Cassiodorus. With the emergence of revisionist work, there exists today a spectrum of scholarly views concerning the extent to which Jordanes relied on Cassiodorus and the degree to which the Getica preserves its main source’s themes. On one end of that spectrum stand those for whom Jordanes is nothing more than a husk; an inconsequential packaging to a greater man’s work. On the other are those who would award Jordanes appreciable levels of intellectual autonomy and seek to uncover his distinctive purpose and perspective as a writer. Other commentators fall in between these two poles; most of them assume Jordanes’ heavy dependence on Cassiodorus but at least acknowledge the important choices that even an abbreviator must make in the shaping of a historical

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work. A number of Jordanes’ rehabilitators have heeded the lessons of the linguistic turn. For them, any ancient historiographical work is foremost a literary text and must be treated as a unique reflection of its author’s biases and perspectives and understood as an outgrowth of its distinctive historical and cultural context. To put this in negative terms, texts cannot be seen as mere quarries of raw data that provide the facts for a coherent historical narrative. Some revisionists have argued that fundamental methodological convictions separate their own work from that of past commentators on Jordanes, especially that in the ethnogenesis mode. More generally, however, the rehabilitation of Jordanes reflects decades of shifting paradigms in the study of the late ancient world, and specifically an increased appreciation of the genres and strategies of sixth-century authors. Closer scrutiny has been provided to both Jordanes and his two histories within the political setting of the mid-sixth-century Constantinople of Justinian. As one commentator has put it, “Jordanes has probably never had it so good.”


55 Croke (1987), 118.

Brian Croke and Walter Goffart have been fundamental in reconfiguring the received tradition on Jordanes. Crucially, Croke summarily disproved Ensslin’s contention that Jordanes’ Romana preserved Symmachus’ lost Roman history, casting further doubt on Jordanes’ derivative nature. In another study Croke pursued similar objectives, this time doing his part to separate Jordanes from a Cassiodoran mold and to account for the aims of the Getica in connection with the political context in which it was written. Croke rightly realized that the Getica, and so too the Romana, were shaped by the contemporary tensions produced by the empire’s current longstanding conflict with Gothic Italy. It was not by mere coincidence that Jordanes wrote histories about Goths and Romans while Rome was at war with Goths. Rather, that conflict was what prompted Jordanes to put pen to paper. Goffart’s seminal work, written concurrently with Croke’s, argues along similar lines. In what is likely the most influential study of Jordanes in English to come after Momigliano, Goffart pursues two lines of argumentation that have shaped all subsequent Anglophone scholarship on Jordanes. First, he demands that the texts of authors like Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, and Paul the Deacon, despite chronicling the histories of non-Roman peoples, did not represent the inauguration of a new genre of historical inquiry, namely the so-called ‘national history’. In other words, the advent of the Germanic successor kingdoms did not cause historical works about those Germanic peoples suddenly to have uniquely new thematic agendas or to preserve faithfully in writing the tribal traditions of illiterate peoples. Rather, through a detailed reading of the contents of Jordanes’ works, Goffart argues convincingly that Jordanes’

57 Croke (1983).
modes and themes fit comfortably within the established traditions of Greco-Roman historiography. In so doing, Goffart further made clear the need for classicists and ancient historians to treat late antique texts, especially those long considered to be the preserve of medievalists, as products of an ancient Mediterranean cultural continuum. Second, by way of comparative analysis of what we know of Cassiodorus’ Gothic history and the rest of his corpus with what we find in the *Getica*, Goffart convinces that there is good reason to accept a marked level of authorial independence in Jordanes. Then, correctly arguing that the *Getica* and *Romana* should be taken together, he goes on to provide an interpretation which is given shape by the political exigencies of the Roman-Gothic conflict.

As was made clear at the outset of this chapter, the current study situates itself among these recent works that have sought to provide Jordanes with a voice unique unto himself. Where this study departs from the others, however, is in reckoning what that voice actually was. If Jordanes was not simply a copyist, and if indeed he was more than a mere abbreviator, then it stands to reason that he had ideas of his own; political and ideological leanings that shaped his literary objectives. Croke and Goffart agree with this entirely. But their interpretations of those objectives and leanings, as will be borne out later in this study, differ greatly from my own. For Croke and Goffart, Jordanes is “one of the obedient agents of Justinian’s campaign of destruction,” 60 who “is urging a policy of unrestrained aggression…If the *Getica* has any propaganda purposes at all, then one such

60 Goffart (2005), 396.
overriding theme is the praise of Justinian as the vanquisher of the Goths.”⁶¹ Jordanes, therefore, is liberated from Cassiodoran constraints to be made a shill for the current regime. In the pages to come, Jordanes’ rehabilitation will be pushed further still, as it pursues an analysis of his unique historical corpus that looks beyond the interpretive delimitations of plagiarism and imperial propaganda.

The previous chapter surveyed the history of Jordanes scholarship, and, in exposing the tenuous ground upon which it was founded, sought to demonstrate a reasonable doubt about the viability of its core positions. But doubt is not disproof, nor does it provide a better, alternative model. It remains to present such an alternative; to restore a more fully realized image of Jordanes and his texts which avails itself of all, not merely select, aspects of his texts, and which establishes their connection to the literary milieu of mid-sixth-century Constantinople and the wider theater of contemporary imperial politics. But before such rehabilitation can commence we must push the aforementioned doubt a bit further and continue to undermine the support structure of those studies which treat Jordanes and Cassiodorus as a single, duplex entity. The foregoing chapter uncovered the more dubious methodological and epistemological grounds of the traditional position. Here, attention is directed to the specific textual basis of that position; namely, the interpretation of Jordanes’ own presentation of his historical project in the preface to the *Getica*.

The preface is crucial in establishing Jordanes’ autonomy. Jordanes makes few authorial interventions in either of his texts, and the *Getica’s* preface is perhaps the most significant of them. Even those who believe that Jordanes reproduced Cassiodorus still consider the preface to be Jordanes’ own creation; a moment when his voice, not
Cassiodorus’, explicitly addresses the audience. Commentators from across the interpretative spectrum agree that the preface contains Jordanes’ self-conscious discussion about the purpose of his work and the process whereby he wrote it. Yet close scrutiny of the precise meaning of Jordanes’ words has yielded a wide range of interpretations and occasioned much debate. From these initial differences in interpretation of the preface grew ever widening divergences about the nature and purpose of Jordanes’ text as a whole. It is therefore crucial that we here give the Getica’s preface its proper due.

Because of both the relative brevity of the preface and its far-reaching implications, it is worth reproducing it in its entirety here.

Though it had been my wish to glide in my little boat by the shore of a peaceful coast and, as a certain writer says, to gather little fishes from the pools of the ancients, you, brother Castalius, bid me set my sails toward the deep. You urge me to leave the little work I have in hand, that is, the abbreviation of the Chronicles, and to condense in my own style in this small book the twelve volumes of [Cassiodorus] Senator on the origin and deeds of the Getae from olden times to the present day, descending through the generations of the kings. (2) Truly a hard command, and imposed by one who seems unwilling to realize the burden of the task. Nor do you note this, that my utterance is too slight to fill so magnificent a trumpet of speech as his. But worse than every other burden is the fact that I have no access to his books that I may follow his thought. Still--and let me lie not--I have in times past read [re-read?] the books by his steward's loan for a three days' reading. The words I recall not, but the sense and the deeds related I think I retain entire. (3) To this I have added fitting matters from some Greek and Latin histories. I have also put in an introduction and a conclusion, and have inserted many things of my own authorship. Wherefore reproach me not, but receive and read with gladness what you have asked me to write. If aught be insufficiently spoken and you remember it, do you as a neighbor to our race add to it, praying for me, dearest brother. The Lord be with you. Amen.1

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1 Jordanes, Getica 1-3: “Volentem me parvo subvectum navigio oram tranquilli litoris stringere et minutos de priscorum, ut quidam ait, stagnis pisciculos legere, in altum, frater Castali, laxari vela compellis reliquitoque opusculo, quod intra manus habeo, id est, de abbreviatione chronicorum, suades, ut nostris verbis duodecem Senatoris volumina de origine actusque Getarum ab olim et usque nunc per generationes regesque descendentem in uno et hic parvo libello choartem: (2) dura satis imperia et tamquam ab eo, qui pondus operis huius scire nollit, imposita. Nec illud aspicis, quod tenuis mihi est spiritus ad inplendam eius tam magnificam dicendi tubam: super omne autem pondus, quod nec facultas eorumdem librorum nobis datur, quatenus eius sensui inserviamus, sed, ut non mentiar, ad triduanam lectionem dispensatoris eius
Admittedly, the preface is not entirely clear about the extent of Jordanes’ indebtedness to Cassiodorus or the quantity of Jordanes’ own contributions. Nevertheless, it is clear enough that, on all counts, differences among past interpretations of the preface stem not from the objective criteria given in the text itself, but from the subjective prerogative of the commentator’s placement of emphasis. That is to say, readings of the preface have engaged in a certain amount of artificiality when they propose that Jordanes is actually talking about X and not Y even though, in fact, he mentions both and affords them each comparable attention. It is unfortunate that this sort of textual analysis has been for so long applied to the preface and, by extension, to the Getica as a whole. Interpretive differences over authorial meaning are to be expected in exegetical scholarship given the marked degree of subtlety and artifice in the literary strategies of ancient writers. But past readings of the Getica’s preface have not been characterized by this sort of close analysis. It is heuristically unsound to form the basis of an interpretation on the words from one portion of the text while ignoring or arbitrarily rejecting the legitimacy of what is said in another.

There are two conflicting modes of analysis of the preface. One emphasizes the initial portion which states that Jordanes has been asked to abridge Cassiodorus, and argues that he must have done just that. The other, in reaction to the former, dwells instead on the parts where Jordanes says he drew on other Greek and Latin histories and

beneficio libros ipsos antehac relegi. Quorum quamvis verba non recolo, sensus tamen et res actas credo me integre retinere. (3) Ad quos et ex nonnullis historiis Grecis ac Latinis addedi convenientia, initium finemque et plura in medio mea dicitione permiscens. Quare sine contemptu quod exigisti suscipe libens, libentissime lege; et si quid parum dictum est et tu, ut vicinus genti, commemoratas, addes, orans pro me, frater carissime. Dominus tecum. Amen.” I have amended Mierow’s translation from “I have in times past read the books a second time…” to “…read [‘re-read’?] the books…”, to better convey the debate over the meaning of relegi. On which, see below.
added many things of his own authorship, and so diminishes the role of Cassiodorus’ text in the *Getica*. As one can see, the analytical problems of the preface form a microcosm of the wider debates regarding the nature of Jordanes’ text. Indeed, the question of faithful abridgement or original contribution has been recognized for well over a century and a half as the central problem raised in the preface and the crucial interpretive choice which the reader is required to make.\(^2\) The following discussion proposes that such a choice need not, indeed must not, be made. An absolute interpretation may remain elusive, but here it is argued that in his preface Jordanes, by means of simple statement and complex allusion, announces *both* his close relationship to and marked independence from Cassiodorus.

‘*Parvo libello choartem*’\(^3\): *That the Getica is an Abridgement of Cassiodorus’ History*

The work of Sybel, Schirren, Köpke, and Mommsen in the nineteenth century argued that Jordanes’ *Getica* was purely an abridgement of Cassiodorus and almost entirely devoid of original contribution. Their arguments, as mentioned previously, quickly became canonical. Later commentators came to take these positions for granted, and failed to remain mindful of their origins. Some would merely repeat about Jordanes what was already known,\(^4\) others based new arguments on top of the old,\(^5\) but none attempted to reestablish the veracity of the original position by inquiry. The result of this complacency

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\(^2\) Sybel (1838), 12; Schirren (1858).

\(^3\) Jordanes, *Getica* 1.

\(^4\) E.g. Hodgkin (1886); Mierow (1915).

\(^5\) E.g. Ensslin (1948); Momigliano (1955); Wenskus (1961); Wolfram (1979).
has been that today nearly all non-specialist scholars of late ancient and early medieval
history continue to compound arguments which have not been tested for over 150 years.

The arguments of the above German scholars are grounded in two positions: that
Jordanes makes clear in the preface to the Getica that he has made an abridgement of
Cassiodorus’ Gothic history, and that Cassiodoran language is evident throughout the text
of the Getica. Concerning the second of these claims, commentators on either side of the
debate over Jordanes’ originality agree that, despite the critical acumen of studies which
have sought out Cassiodoran material in the Getica, their results have been mixed and
never conclusive, and at best illustrate only that Jordanes exploited his main source to
good effect. The position taken here is not partisan. It conforms to the widely
acknowledged view that there has never been developed a reliable methodology for
detecting the traces of an alleged model as they would appear in condensed form within
an epitome, and especially when that model is now lost. There is sufficient reason to
believe that Jordanes made good use of Cassiodorus’ history, and, in specific areas, likely
followed him quite closely. Nevertheless, the present line of inquiry remains circumspect
about the ability to identify accurately and consistently Jordanes’ use of Cassiodoran
language and content, or somehow to measure objectively Cassiodorus’ presence in the
Getica.

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6 Sybel (1838); Schirren (1858); Cipolla (1892), 99-134; Hachmann (1970), 474-98; Weißensteiner (1994),
7 Momigliano (1955), 283; O’Donnell (1979), 49; Barnish (1984), 349; Croke (1987), 121; Goffart (1988),
31-2, 59 n.188; Amory (1997), 26 n.87, 306.
8 In agreement is W. Liebeschuetz, ‘Making a Gothic History: Does the Getica of Jordanes Preserve
Genuinely Gothic Traditions?’, Journal of Late Antiquity 4.2 (2011), 185-216, here 204.
The argument that Jordanes states plainly his objective to abridge Cassiodorus, however, is a matter for more general, less specialized, debate. It rests upon one line of the preface, and it is the single strongest piece of textual evidence for proponents of the traditional Jordanes-Cassiodorus conflation. Jordanes states that, “You urge me…to condense in my own style in this small book the twelve volumes of [Cassiodorus] Senator on the origin and deeds of the Getae…”\textsuperscript{9} It is clear that Jordanes has been asked to abridge Cassiodorus, but such was the impact of Schirren’s and Mommsen’s arguments that later commentators interpreted this statement as revealing that: “Jordanes himself admits that the \textit{Getica} is merely an abridgment of the history of Cassiodorus.”\textsuperscript{10} This is, in point of fact, not true. Nowhere in the preface or at any other point in the \textit{Getica} does Jordanes “admit” or otherwise state unequivocally that he abridges Cassiodorus. Jordanes states only that has been requested to make such a summary. His response to that request is borne out in the rest of the preface. Any estimation of the \textit{Getica}’s relationship to Cassiodorus’ Gothic history would benefit from considering the preface as a whole, and not merely select parts. Such a treatment of the \textit{Getica}’s preface reveals the following.

\textit{‘Plura in medio mea dictione’}\textsuperscript{11}: That the \textit{Getica} is No Mere Abridgement

Compared to the prefatory remarks of, say, Polybius or Diodorus, Jordanes is rather sparring with his words at the outset his history. Despite the brevity of the preface, revisionist scholarship has made increasingly clear that this relatively terse opening

\textsuperscript{9} Jordanes, \textit{Getica} 1, “…suades, ut nostris verbis duodecem Senatoris volumina de origine actusque Getarum ab olim et usque nune per generationes regesque descendentem in uno et hoc parvo libello choartem.”

\textsuperscript{10} Mierow (1915), 13.

\textsuperscript{11} Jordanes, \textit{Getica} 3.
portion is dense with crucial information, albeit presented obliquely, concerning the nature of Jordanes’ historiographical project. Many aspects of the preface have been scrutinized with profit recently. Contrary to the old view which holds that the preface is clear about articulating the *Getica’s* plan for abridgement, recent work has convincingly shown that Jordanes is equally clear in calling attention to the marks which he has personally left on his text. So, while Jordanes takes a couple of lines to say that he was asked to condense Cassiodorus, he uses about ten lines to explain why and how he actually wrote something substantively different. The extent of that difference is what is in question.

After stating that a certain Castalius, an otherwise unknown figure, has commissioned him, Jordanes admits that at the time of his writing he did not have access to any of Cassiodorus’ twelve books of Gothic history. One wonders how a competent abridgement of a work can be made when the abridger does not even have said work in front of him. Jordanes does, however, claim to have already read, or perhaps re-read, the scrolls of the Gothic history that, at some unclear point in the past, he received from Cassiodorus’ steward for a three-day loan. The words of the original text, Jordanes says, he cannot recall, but he thinks he retains its general content (*res actas*) and feeling (*sensus*). These qualifications have caused exercised commentators in their assessments of the *Getica*’s plan. Obviously, the fact that Jordanes did not work directly from Cassiodorus raises doubts about his ability, or even intention, to produce a faithful

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12 A point of interest here is that Cassiodorus was almost certainly residing in Constantinople at this time. Even when Momigliano’s arguments that Cassiodorus commissioned Jordanes are set aside, the former’s presence in the eastern capital during the time of the *Getica*’s composition remains an intriguing reality, though one which has been left fallow for a number of decades. This is addressed below and in Chapters Four and Five.
epitome of his supposed model. More than a few scholars have become preoccupied with
discerning the precise meaning and implications of Jordanes’ alleged three-day reading.
Commentators disagree about not only whether *ad triduanam lectionem* literally means
“for three days” or more simply “for a short time,” but also the meaning of the verb
*relegi*. Does Jordanes mean that he “read” or “re-read” Cassiodorus during this disputed,
but admittedly short, period?13 Such concerns are born of the belief that one can
‘measure’ the likelihood that the *Getica* accurately summarizes Cassiodorus or,
conversely, that it reflects the efforts of original authorship if one could know just how
long Jordanes borrowed the Gothic history and whether he read it once or twice. Surely,
this overly literalist analysis of the *Getica*’s preface cannot get us far. More useful from a
heuristic standpoint is to permit Jordanes a degree of ambiguity and to interpret, rather
than parse, his words.14

Immediately after revealing that he no longer had access to the Cassiodoran text,
Jordanes states, “I have added fitting matters from some Greek and Latin histories. I have
also put in an introduction and a conclusion, and have inserted many things of my own
authorship.”15 Far more than even the three-days-reading conundrum, Jordanes’ explicit
claims of original contribution and inclusion of material beyond his main source have
exercised those who have tried to label the *Getica* as a summary of another author’s
work. If Jordanes had been taken at his word, arguments for the survival of Cassiodorus’

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13 Wagner (1967), 50 argues for ‘three days’; while Goffart (1988), 61 suggests ‘for a short time.’
Mommsen (1882), 182; Hodgkin, *Italy and Her Invaders I* (London, 1892-99), 26; Luiselli (1980), 114
n.48; Croke (1987), 121; Goffart (1988), 60-3 argue for ‘read’; while Mierow (1915), 51, Momigliano
(1955), 218 n.63; Wagner (1967), 50; Bradley (1993), 233 suggest ‘re-read.’
14 Such an interpretation is pursued below.
15 Jordanes, *Getica* 3, “Ad quos et ex nonnullis historiis Grecis ac Latinis addedi convenientia, initium
finemque et plura in medio mea dictione permiscens.”
history and the allegedly authentic Gothic traditions contained therein would have been severely compromised. Jordanes’ claims to originality, however, fell on deaf ears. First, Schirren sought to prove that all of the authors whom Jordanes quotes or says he drew information from were likewise known to Cassiodorus, and that it was then all but certain that these citations had appeared in the original Gothic history. These arguments were readily accepted, and thereafter Jordanes’ excerpts and citations of other texts were deemed to have been lifted directly from his model. As a result, Jordanes was judged to have been less than truthful in the prefatory description of his work, and was summarily saddled with a reputation for dishonesty.

Mommsen legitimated these views by espousing them himself in his edition of the Getica. He refused to accept that Jordanes had supplemented his work with other Greek and Latin works and assigned their provenance directly to Cassiodorus. Though, in an attempt to reconcile Jordanes’ remarks in the preface with some semblance of truth, Mommsen permitted that Jordanes’ use of Orosius was possibly original, believing that Cassiodorus held that author in low esteem and would not have used him as an authority for the Gothic history. This line of thinking continued on to Momigliano’s day, who argued that Jordanes was responsible only for “the initial quotation from Orosius, the final paragraph, and a few details in the middle.” Hodgkin would claim that Jordanes’ “range of historical reading was evidently so narrow that we may fairly suspect these

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16 Schirren (1858), 9-43, The notions persists in contemporary times: e.g. Hachmann (1970); Baldwin (1981), 142; Barnish (1984); Bradley (1993), 222.
17 A list of Jordanes’ sources both named and inferred is provided by Mommsen (1882), xxx-xliv.
18 Momigliano (1955), 223.
additions to have been of the slenderest possible dimensions,” and regarding Jordanes’ contention that he added portions of his own writing, Mierow suggested that “These are statements hard to believe.”

The image of Jordanes as an untrustworthy and dissembling plagiarist seemed to feed on itself with its every iteration over the decades so that it was eventually flatly denied that he was being honest when he claimed only to have read Cassiodorus for three days. Instead, it was argued that Jordanes had been very much in possession of his model while he abridged it, and had lied about this fact to lend his work a false air of originality. Everything that Jordanes said in his preface was, in time, ground down to naught, save the statement that he abridged Cassiodorus – a statement which, in fact, does not even exist.

The Getica’s preface and Jordanes’ aims expressed in it have been subjected to a sort of pronounced and tendentious manipulation rarely seen in the exegetical scholarship of ancient historiographical texts. Moreover, the degree of this manipulation comes into even starker relief when one assays the vastness which separates Jordanes’ words as they appear on the page from the received tradition of their meaning. This is to say that Jordanes is actually quite candid about the process whereby he composed his history – far more so than most ancient authors. And it is not an interpretation of subtleties or shades of meaning which reveals this forthrightness, but only the simple meaning of Jordanes’

19 Hodgkin (1886), 35.
20 Mierow (1915), 14.
21 J. Friedrich, ‘Über die kontroversen Fragen im Leben des gotischen Geschichtsschreibers Jordanes’, Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaftern, Sitzungsberichte, phil.-hist Kl. (1907), 379-442, here 438. Momigliano (1955) took this line of thinking to its furthest extreme by arguing that Cassiodorus was personally involved in the creation of the Getica. Jordanes’ claims to have been without the text of his predecessor as he wrote, and only to have received it once before from a steward are but fabrications.
words as they are written. Yet despite the directness with which he states his methodology, Jordanes’ self-professed program has been explained away as mere fabrication, or, more generously, as a bit of hyperbole to be taken with a grain of salt. This reading of the text is unsatisfactory and fails in its engagement of the preface on both superficial and analytical levels. Questions of intent and meaning in the preface must be taken up anew. The following reading will engage the preface on three distinct and successively penetrating levels of analysis - surface, rhetorical, and allusive. Each level of meaning works both independently and in concert with other levels toward a unified end. In this way, Jordanes lays bare his intentions to lettered and uninitiated readers alike.

**Surface Analysis**

In sum, the *Getica’s* plan as presented in the preface runs as follows: Jordanes states that he has been asked to abridge Cassiodorus’ Gothic history. He calls this a “hard command,” even a “burden,” not least because he would not have direct access to the Gothic history as we was writing the *Getica*. But, Jordanes says, he had read Cassiodorus before and, though failing to recall its words, he remembered its general drift. He goes on to state that he supplemented his writing with information from other authors, and that he provided an original introduction and conclusion, and numerous other things of his own authorship in between (*plura in medio mea dictione*).²²

Herodotus and Thucydides were of different minds regarding whether the historian need reveal the identity of his source material or the process of authorial

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interaction with those sources. Most subsequent ancient historians, each in their own measure, followed the example of Thucydides, believing that it was sufficient to present only a final, weighed evaluation of events, and chose not to leave open the door to the workshop, as it were. One might say, though, that Jordanes went the way of Herodotus - and then some. The Getica is laden with excerpts from and citations of other historians, and, like Herodotus, Jordanes provides alternative accounts of past deeds that he considers untenable. So too in the preface, Jordanes is unusually descriptive about the proposed plan for his text and the means by which he composed it. Rare is the ancient historian who makes such a directed effort to announce that he will draw on various Greek and Latin histories, or who is so sharply explicit that his own words will appear in the forthcoming pages. One is more likely to encounter this sort of transparency and self-referentiality in modern academic writing than in any ancient genre. In the case of the former, directness of language is meant to convey clarity of purpose. We might expect that Jordanes’ intentions were likewise geared to that end.

More to the point, given Jordanes’ openness about his original additions and use of outside sources, it becomes all the more difficult to convince that these were blatant untruths. At the very least, clear and unequivocal evidence of pervasive Cassiodoran language and style in the Getica would need to be established before one could begin to mount an argument for the total absence of Jordanes’ own contributions to the text. Studies that have sought to demonstrate this have not met with broad consensus for well
over a century.\textsuperscript{23} This is not to suggest, however, that the \textit{Getica} is devoid of Cassiodorus’ influence, but, without evidence of its ubiquity or substantial reason to question Jordanes’ honesty, we are required to take seriously Jordanes’ pronouncements of his role in shaping his text. It is even possible that Jordanes’ straightforwardness about his own authorship was meant to make abundantly clear that his work was not intended to be a summation of Cassiodorus.

It should also be noted that those who would contend that Jordanes simply abridges Cassiodorus’ history must reckon with the simple fact that the latter was still extant when the \textit{Getica} was published in 551. Both Cassiodorus and his text were in the same city as Jordanes and his \textit{Getica}, and at the same time. It is hard to believe that he wrote a text which only abridges Cassiodorus, but which also falsely states that he made his own additions. Presumably, those in Constantinople who were interested enough in Gothic history to read the \textit{Getica} might also have read Cassiodorus, and, in the unlikely scenario that Jordanes made merely an abridgement, readers would have realized that Jordanes was lying about his own contributions. Had word of this deceit gotten out, who would have bothered to read the work of a proven liar? And moreover, why would such a text have been perpetuated and preserved? It is more reasonable to take Jordanes at his word about his own additions to the \textit{Getica}. This provides a situational context wherein Jordanes wrote something which drew heavily from and established a close connection to the extant and physically quite present Cassiodoran text, but which was substantially different enough so that something as fundamentally important as an author’s honesty

\textsuperscript{23} Even Momigliano (1955), 222, who argued vigorously for the complete subordination of Jordanes to Cassiodorus, was never convinced by these sort of studies: “These researches, however acute, never produced conclusive results.”
and reliability was never called into question. It would have been obvious to anyone who had read the demonstrably available history of Cassiodorus that the *Getica* was not just a distillation of it.

**Rhetorical Analysis**

Analysis of the preface in a more rhetorical mode reveals corresponding intentions. It is useful to picture the entirety of the preface as a series of qualifications modifying an opening assertion. The formula goes something like this: *Yes, X, but Y; granted A, though B,* and so on. The opening assertion reveals that Jordanes has been asked to condense Cassiodorus’ longer history. This is the first substantial piece of information which Jordanes reveals to his reader, and he makes clear that Cassiodorus’ history has no small amount to do with the text of the *Getica.* Yet even in describing the request for abridgment, Jordanes inserts an oft overlooked qualifier. He says that Castalius has asked him to make the condensed version *ut nostris verbis,* that is, in Jordanes’ own words or style. So, Castalius wants an abridgement, *but* in the words of Jordanes. Moving forward, Jordanes admits that his charge has been complicated by the fact that he did not have access to Cassiodorus’ text at the time of his writing. Jordanes states, however that he had been previously acquainted with the Gothic history. So, Jordanes is bereft of his main source, *but* he has read it before. Moreover, Jordanes confesses that he cannot recall the precise wording of the Cassiodoran text while, nevertheless, retaining the memory of its events. So, Jordanes cannot reproduce Cassiodorus verbatim, *but* he can remember its general sense. Finally, Jordanes announces that, “I have added fitting matters from some
Greek and Latin histories.” So, Castalius has commissioned an abridgement of Cassiodorus, but he is being handed a work shaped by several other historians. These successive qualifications have the rhetorical effect of distancing the reader’s expectations from what was said in the opening assertion, so that most of the preface’s contents lead one away from anticipating that the Getica will be only a strict summary of Cassiodorus. It reads almost like an argument against the opening assertion. Given such a rhetorical structure, Jordanes’ intended meaning comes into tighter focus. Indeed it becomes evident that the Getica is a history of the Goths with an undefined though probably close connection to Cassiodorus’ text, but which is nonetheless shaped by the knowledge of other authors, not least of whom is Jordanes himself.

This interpretation of the preface, and, by extension, of the text as a whole, does not take a stance on Cassiodorus which is purely opposite that of Schirren or Mommsen. It does not argue for the authorial autonomy of Jordanes to the exclusion of Cassiodorus’ influence. Quite the contrary, Jordanes would not have bothered to mention Cassiodorus in his preface if the rest of his text had nothing at all to do with him. It seems all but certain that Cassiodorus’ work bore meaningfully on Jordanes’ own account of Gothic history, though, given the loss of the former, the precise nature of its role will likely remain a mystery. Though unverifiable, it remains very likely that Jordanes’ engagement with the Cassiodoran history extended beyond the use of its raw data and likely established important intertextual resonances with its themes and presentation of the Gothic past. This position is not without grounding. In the remaining portion of the analysis of the preface, I will demonstrate that Jordanes engages in a subtle and

\(^{24}\) Jordanes, Getica 3.
sophisticated intertextual discourse with an alluded to text, establishing not only that Jordanes does, in fact, use outside sources, but also that his use of those sources creates a multivalent dialogue which informs the Getica’s themes. This sort of literary strategy reflects a technical ability that did not likely exhaust itself in the preface and more likely characterized the nature of Jordanes’ engagement with other texts, namely Cassiodorus. So, despite the loss of Cassiodorus’ history, the contours of its relationship with the Getica are further elucidated by the following analysis.

**Allusive Analysis**

Surface and rhetorical readings of the preface affirm that Jordanes’ historical project interfaces closely with that of Cassiodorus, engages with material from other texts, and, crucially, offers original contributions to the sixth-century historiographical discourse on Gothic history. Yet we have overlooked the most important aspect of the preface: that it is itself very closely modeled on the preface of another work altogether. Most remarks on the Getica’s preface begin by noting this piece of crucial information, and they are not wrong to do so. Here, however, comment has been reserved until now in order to demonstrate that Jordanes designed his preface to allow simpler, less penetrating readings to piece together most of the essential information needed to engage the rest of the text. Jordanes anticipated that his work would be exposed to a readership with varying levels of erudition, and took stylistic and didactic measures to meet those exigencies. One could miss entirely the preface’s allusiveness, but still get the general message. Armchair historian and scholar alike would take from the preface an understanding that the Getica
was shaped by Cassiodorus’ text, other Greek and Latin histories, and Jordanes’ own hand. The identity of Jordanes’ audience has always exercised modern scholars. This argument for its considerable breadth should prove fodder for ongoing debates.

We can begin to identify the most sophisticated of Jordanes’ readers, those to whom Jordanes intended to grant full access to his text, by working back from the knowledge required to identify the highly allusive character of the preface. These readers would have noted straightaway the preface’s most striking feature: that it is a close re-rendering of Rufinus’ preface to his Latin translation of Origen’s commentary on Paul’s epistle to the Romans. This allusion to Rufinus is not a matter of debate. Roughly half the words are taken verbatim from Rufinus, and the tone and arguments of both prefaces are practically identical. Sybel was the first to note the borrowing, yet did nothing to account for what impact, thematic or otherwise, it had on the Getica. It is a well-worn truth about ancient historical works that their prefaces are more likely than not to contain valuable insights into an author’s methodologies, themes, objectives, and ideologies. They are almost always carefully constructed and often use highly wrought language. They can serve as a kind of guide for profitable interpretation of the events in the

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25 S. Bjornlie, Politics and Tradition Between Rome, Ravenna and Constantinople (Cambridge, 2013), 83 similarly argues that in the “dynamic and polemically charged” literary milieu of Justinianic Constantinople it was commonplace for authors to adopt “literary strategies that sought to communicate different messages to different audiences.”


28 Sybel (1838).
narrative. In short, ancient authors wanted their prefaces to be read carefully, and readers knew to do so.

There can be no doubt that, to those well-read enough to be able to spot it in the mid-sixth century, the Rufinian borrowing was the preface’s central aspect of interest, and one which readers would have known to consider carefully. Since Sybel’s discovery in 1838, all commentators on Jordanes have had the privilege of being among this savvy, inside crowd. Yet over the past 170 years there has been little said to account for Jordanes’ allusion, and what has been suggested is not not entirely helpful. Most work has been content merely to mention the borrowing without noting its possible interpretative ramifications, and instead treats the preface as though it consisted solely of Jordanes’ words. Such readings are impossible to accept because Jordanes explicitly announces that he is not using his own words by introducing the allusion with the appositive, “…as a certain writer says,…” Authors usually never identify their allusions, but here Jordanes takes pains to tell his reader to ponder his source and make the right connections between it and the Getica. This is another example of Jordanes’ overtness in the preface, and one more reason to reject the old views of his slipperiness and duplicity. Further, the allusion to Rufinus should ease remaining doubts about Jordanes’ sincerity concerning his use of sources beyond Cassiodorus. The very first word of the Getica is literally taken from another source, and it is unlikely that Jordanes stopped there. Other scholars have tried their hand at accounting for the Rufinian passage. Köpke argued that the textual parallelism reflected parallels in the experiences

30 Jordanes, Getica 1, “…, ut quidam ait,…”
of both Rufinus and Jordanes. In other words, Jordanes found in Rufinus’ preface the expression of a situation uncannily similar to his own. The contents of Rufinus are as follows.

A certain Heraclius has interrupted Rufinus, currently engaged in another piece of writing, and requested that he both abbreviate and translate into Latin Origen’s fifteen-volume commentary on Paul’s epistle to the Romans. Rufinus modestly expresses trepidation that his own skills might be inadequate to do Origen justice and then announces he had difficulty procuring the entire text of Origen from libraries and was thereby unable to restore continuity to the whole work. He then censures Heraclius for not appreciating the magnitude of the project he has requested.

In the Getica’s preface, a certain Castalius has interrupted Jordanes, currently engaged in another piece of writing, and requested that he abbreviate Cassiodorus’ twelve-volume history of the origin and deeds of the Goths. Jordanes modestly expresses trepidation that his own skills might be inadequate to do Cassiodorus justice and then announces the difficulty of no longer having access to the history following only a three-day reading, but nevertheless he retains the sense of the whole work. Jordanes likewise censures Castalius for not appreciating the magnitude of the project he has requested.

According to Köpke, Jordanes employed Rufinus as his literary model because their writing assignments, and the impediments obstructing them, were so analogous. Coincidence determined Jordanes’ artistic choice. Goffart likewise agrees that “Jordanes’s predicament fundamentally resembled Rufinus’s,” and Christensen echoes that, “Jordanes is working within the same framework as Rufinus…this is precisely why

31 Köpke (1859), 65-7.
Jordanes has chosen Rufinus’s preface.”32 Goffart, though, pushes the argument a bit further in suggesting that Rufinus’ laments about his inability to procure all of Origen’s volumes and their corresponding parallels in the Getica are meant to reflect Jordanes’ own inability to produce a painstakingly accurate abridgement of Cassiodorus.33

Goffart is surely right to think that Jordanes’ allusion to Rufinus was meant to inform the plan of the Getica, and his argument for Jordanes’ announcement of the Getica’s remove from Cassiodorus is sound.34 Yet, despite its general reasonableness, this sort of interpretation suffers from the fact that one need not even notice the Rufinian borrowing to reach the same conclusion. The words as they appear in the preface of the Getica make clear that Jordanes was bereft of Cassiodorus, made his own additions, and therefore wrote something other than a mere summary. The result is the same with or without knowledge of Rufinus. That the words come from Rufinus does not affect their meaning when they appear in the context of the Getica because their contexts, it is argued, are the same. Ultimately we have not gotten much beyond Köpke’s 1859 arguments: Jordanes has chosen to use Rufinus because Rufinus said the things which Jordanes wanted to convey. It is a simple substitution, nothing more - borrowing for the sake of borrowing.

This line of argumentation is problematic. It is characterized by a circularity of reasoning and fails to uncover all but the most apparent connections between the two

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32 Goffart (1988), 59 n.191; Christensen (2002), 58; Merrills (2005), 105 holds that it is possible that Jordanes’ use of Rufinus can be explained by recognition of their similar quandaries, but that it cannot be proven. Merrills offers no other explanation for the Rufinian allusion’s relation to Jordanes’ text.
33 Goffart (1988), 59-60.
34 Heather (1991), 39 offers a very similar argument, though would not separate Jordanes from Cassiodorus as much as Goffart has.
texts. The reasoning behind the generally affirmed connection between Jordanes and Rufinus is as follows: Jordanes alludes to Rufinus with the result that the events in their prefaces appear very similar; therefore, based on these similarities, Jordanes and Rufinus must have experienced similar things. Put more damingly, Jordanes borrows from Rufinus because they experienced similar things, and we know that they experienced similar things because Jordanes borrows from Rufinus. The proposition that Jordanes and Rufinus experienced similar things is here being used as a premise to explain Jordanes’ borrowing from Rufinus. The interpretation becomes circular. In reality, Jordanes’ and Rufinus’ prefaces and the situations described therein are similar only because Jordanes borrows from Rufinus, not necessarily because Jordanes experienced the same things as Rufinus. There is, in fact, no evidence for the latter since we cannot claim to know what Jordanes experienced himself when he merely duplicated in writing the experiences of someone else. Take, for instance, a student who copies a classmate’s test paper. When grading the tests, a teacher would not immediately assume that the two students have exactly the same understanding and misunderstanding of the subject. The teacher would know that there is an explanation for this ‘coincidence.’ So, just as one student’s copying of another explains the sameness of their test results, it is Jordanes’ ‘copying’ of Rufinus which explains the sameness of the situations described in their prefaces. And just as the cheater’s own understanding of the test material is unknown, the precise experiences of Jordanes must remain unknown. We are left, then, only with certain knowledge of Rufinus’ situation, and begin to question the primacy and even the veracity of those portions of Jordanes’ preface that are essentially copied. But this, it seems, is the point. In
his decision to make the preface to his history an extended allusion to another man’s work, Jordanes is not pointing first to himself as commentators have assumed, but to Rufinus. So it is him whom Jordanes instructs us to consult about the nature of the Getica.

**Origenism and the Upheaval of the Mid-Sixth Century**

Past explanations for Jordanes’ use of Rufinus and their analytical shortcomings underscore more generally the lack of seriousness with which many late ancient writers have been taken, especially authors of chronicles, breviaries, and epitomes.\(^{35}\) What is beginning to be appreciated as the later texts’ meaningful connection to and complex interaction with their source material was earlier written off as derivativeness and lack of originality. Even Goffart’s study, the most forceful and sustained argument to date for Jordanes’ originality and independence from Cassiodorus, accounts for the Rufinian allusion in terms reminiscent of the stand-by explanations for late ancient writers’ source use: that the source’s language is employed because it happens to contain the same general idea that the late author wanted to communicate, and because it lends the later work an air of artificial respectability. As we have shown in the case of Jordanes’ preface, the former of these two explanations fails on logical grounds. But what of the latter? Was the allusion to Rufinus a hollow gesture, a vain rhetorical flourish?

Mommsen thought so and decried it as an act of “impudent plagiarism.”\(^{36}\) Others have been less vitriolic, but likewise deny the allusion any substantive meaning. O’Donnell

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\(^{35}\) See B. Croke, *Count Marcellinus and his Chronicle* (Oxford, 2001) for a discussion and a vindication of the genre of chronicle writing.

\(^{36}\) Mommsen (1882), 53.
and Croke, despite being apologetic exegetes for Jordanes, do not attempt to account for the Rufinian borrowing in relation to the preface or to the work as a whole. They state simply that it demonstrates Jordanes’ familiarity with at least some theological writing.\textsuperscript{37} The point is valid, but does not inquire into Jordanes’ craft. In short, what is at once the most characteristic and most peculiar aspect of the \textit{Getica}’s preface has been given scant attention.

Perhaps the main hindrance to past readings of the Rufinian allusion and of the \textit{Getica} as a whole has been a failure to contextualize the figure of Jordanes and the content of his writing. Traditional scholarship, concerned primarily with Cassiodorus and firm in its conviction that Jordanes was a copyist, did not trouble itself with reconciling Jordanes’ life and times to his text. Chief among the hallmarks of recent scholarship has been the effort to remedy this deficiency, and while great strides forward have been achieved, though there is still more to be done.\textsuperscript{38} Here, reading the preface’s allusiveness in its proper historical, political, and indeed theological context, reveals its intended meaning. To repeat for the sake of clarity, the preface of the \textit{Getica} is a close re-rendering of Rufinus’ preface to his Latin translation of Origen’s commentary on Paul’s epistle to the Romans. When Jordanes wrote in 551, Origen and Origenism was a matter of considerable import not just in Constantinopolitan circles, but was one facet of the greater drama of the Three Chapters controversy that exposed fissures in both Christian

\textsuperscript{38} Croke (1983); (1987); (2005) and Goffart (1988) have done more than anyone else to situate Jordanes within a sixth-century Constantinopolitan war-time context.
theology and Roman politics, eastern and western, in the mid-sixth century.\textsuperscript{39} For a readership conversant in theology and abreast of current political and theological affairs – the two were hard to separate during the reign of Justinian – the allusion to Rufinus, and in turn to Origen, would not have gone unacknowledged. It would have been abundantly clear that Jordanes’ choice of Rufinus was not predicated upon coincidence or affectation. Rather, it was an intentional effort to allude to and thereby to position his history in relation to a theopolitical crisis which had exposed fissures not only between the eastern and western halves of the empire, but within the east itself. In 543, eight years before Jordanes wrote, Justinian had published an edict in Jerusalem condemning Origenism.\textsuperscript{40} This had been achieved by Justinian’s dissemination of a letter to all five patriarchs listing ten anathemas against Origenist doctrines which were then approved by a local council.\textsuperscript{41} Later, in 553 at the Second Council of Constantinople (Fifth Ecumenical Council), Justinian and the assembled clerics would again condemn Origenism.\textsuperscript{42} The question of Origenism, therefore, was still very much an unresolved problem.

\textsuperscript{39} An edict issued by Justinian in 544/5 condemned the ‘Three Chapters,’ consisting of the person and writings of Theodore of Mopsuestia, the anti-Cyrian writings of Theodoret of Cyrrhus, and Ibas of Edessa’s Letter to Mari the Persian. All three were accused of Nestorianism which had been condemned at the first Council of Ephesus and the Council of Chalcedon. The text of the edict does not survive, however its contents are known from the writings of its western critics, mainly Facundus. The fragments are collected in \textit{Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum} 3, (ed.) E. Schwartz (Berlin, 1940), 73-81 and in the collection of Facundus’ writings in CCSL 90A, J.-M. Clément and R. Vander Plaetse (eds.) (Turnhout, 1974), 458. For recent discussion of the Three Chapters, see C. Chazelle and C. Cubitt (eds.), \textit{The Crisis of the Oikoumene: The Three Chapters and the Failed Quest for Unity in the Sixth-century Mediterranean} (Turnhout, 2007).


\textsuperscript{41} For an analysis of the 543 condemnation of Origenism see A. Grillmeier, \textit{Christ in Christian Tradition}, vol. 2: \textit{From the Council of Chalcedon (451) to Gregory the Great (590-604)}, Pt 2: \textit{The Church in Constantinople in the Sixth Century} (London, 1995), 385-402.

\textsuperscript{42} Sacrorum Conciliorum nova et amplissima Collectio IX, coll. 383 (ed). J.D. Mansi (Florence and Venice, 1759-95; reprinted Paris, 1901-27). Also in \textit{Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum} vol. 4, part 1, 3-231, for
issue as Jordanes wrote. Given such a context, Jordanes’ use of Rufinus’ preface to his translation of Origen becomes all the more topical.\footnote{Cf. Life of Sabas, 198.20–199.9; Evagrius, HE 4.38. J. Bidez and L. Parmentier (eds.), The Ecclesiastical History of Evagrius with the Scholia (London, 1898); transl. M. Whitby, TTH 33 (Liverpool, 2000).}

Ironically, Origenism seems to have been, at most, only tangentially related to the specific theological concerns of the pro- and anti-Chalcedonian struggles of the Three Chapters controversy, though it seems to have triggered the debacle.\footnote{For a general account of Origen, his works, and his lasting impact see Crouzel, Origen: The Life and Thought of the First Great Theologian, transl. by A. Worrall (San Francisco, 1989).} Nor was Origenism the underlying cause of the conflict between Miaphysites and Chalcedonians. Tensions had been smoldering between the two camps since the Council of Chalcedon in 451, and Origenism merely stoked them sufficiently to ignite a crisis which thereafter fed upon itself. Yet despite its oblique relationship to the larger theological controversy, the role which Origenism played in it was not lost on contemporary commentators.\footnote{For discussions of the Three Chapters controversy and its connection to Origenism see W. Frend, The Rise of the Monophysite Movement (Cambridge, 1972), ch. 7; Gray (1979), 61–73; ibid. ‘The Legacy of Chalcedon: Christological Problems and Their Significance’, in M. Maas (ed.) The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian, (Cambridge, 2005); Grillmeier, Vol. 2, Part 2 (1995), 387–410, 419–21; Chadwick, The Church in Ancient Society (Oxford, 2001), ch. 55; Price (2009), vol. 1, 16–28; vol. 2, 270–86.}


\footnote{Cyril of Scythopolis, Life of Sabas; Evagrius, HE 4; Domitian of Ancyra, in a fragment preserved by Facundus, Pro defensione trium capitulorum 4.4.15; J.-M. Clément and R. Vander Plaetse, CCSL 90A (Turnhout, 1974), and in A. Fraisse-Bétoulières (ed.), Défense des trios chapitres (à Justinien), 5 vols, SC 61}
precise details of the Three Chapters affair are complicated and disputed, and its antecedents need ample contextualization in order to make sense of the whole business. A foray into such intricacies would not much serve the present line of inquiry, for Jordanes’ allusion to the controversy is impressionistic, not specific. It asks the reader to make the connection from Rufinus to Origen, and then from Origen to the current ongoing theological dispute. The express positions of Origenism itself, then, were not the endpoint of Jordanes’ allusion. Ultimately, Origenism was an otherwise inconsequential issue in the politics and even theology of the mid-sixth century. It was an isolated provincial issue, having been contained mainly within internal Palestinian ecclesiastical ranklings. So any mid-century, non-theological literary reference to Origenism could have only brought to mind its incidental involvement in the eruption of the Three Chapters controversy. The reader would be reminded of the pronounced rift between the strict adherents of the Chalcedonian doctrine in Rome, North Africa, and Antioch, and the Miaphysitism of Egypt and Syria, and the emperor Justinian caught in the middle in Constantinople, tirelessly seeking compromise positions that often alienated more than they reconciled. In a political environment where legal policy had announced that doctrinal unity was as essential to imperial destiny as territorial unity, the ecclesiastical dissonance between Chalcedonians and Miaphysites was, for Justinian, a problem of the

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46 Indeed Origenism had no ‘expressed positions’ as such. In the sixth century Origenist christologies were numerous and variegated, especially in Palestine, and it is misleading to speak of Origenism as a discrete and monolithic theology, though Justinian’s condemnation of it did as much. Cf. Grillmeier Vol. 2, Part 2 (1995), 385-410; Hombergen (2001), 21-31.
first order.\textsuperscript{47} To all those aware of the emperor’s vision, the controversy would have been seen as a barrier to his ambition of a universal empire with one church under one ruler.\textsuperscript{48} Indeed another aspect of this imperial ideal went unrealized while Jordanes wrote, as Italy remained firmly under the control of Totila and the Goths, and while Gaul and Spain kept their own barbarian masters.\textsuperscript{49} Imperial strife, discord, and disunity, therefore, are what an allusion to Origenism would evoke in the lettered, politically engaged reader in 551.

One must also bear in mind that the status of Origenism as a site of empire-wide contention in the middle of the century had not been achieved ‘organically.’ That is, Origenist theology did not become important because it actually was important to enough theologians and church leaders across the empire. Rather, its notoriety was thrust upon it quite artificially by Justinian himself. Jordanes’ allusion to Origenism, therefore, draws attention not merely to internal and ongoing imperial strife, but to an element of that strife attributable directly to Justinian. The reasons for the emperor’s condemnation of the heresy are debatable, but recent research has shed light on critical aspects of the problem. As mentioned above, any Origenist conflict in the sixth century prior to its 543 condemnation was isolated to monastic disputes within Palestine and had no appreciable effect on the rest of the empire. In fact, known Origenists in positions of power in the

\textsuperscript{47} J. Meyendorff, ‘Justinian, the Empire and the Church’, \textit{Dumbarton Oaks Papers}, Vol. 22 (1968), 43-60 for a discussion of Justinian’s ecclesiastical policies in relation to his greater imperial ideology.
\textsuperscript{48} Justinian articulates his ambition for imperial reunifications in \textit{Constitutio Summa}, pr.; \textit{Constitutio Imperatoriam} 1; \textit{Novel} 30.11.2; \textit{Novel} 69.1 pr. These and other Justinianic laws are discussed in Chapter Four.
\textsuperscript{49} Modern commentators have argued that the empire’s reconquest of Italy was a foregone conclusion early in 551, and that this fact was reflected in Jordanes’ choice to make the \textit{Getica} a celebration of inevitable Roman victory over the Goths. Chapter Five (esp. n. 4) demonstrates that neither of these positions are accurate, and that Jordanes was writing following a sharp reversal of Roman fortunes in Italy as Totila had taken control of almost the whole peninsula at the time of Jordanes’ writing: spring, 551.
capital may have been “tolerated” by the emperor. We also know that the Origenist lauras of Palestine were well represented at a council of 536 in Constantinople wherein Severus and his fellow Miaphysites were condemned. Theodore Askidas, metropolitan bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia (though permanently resident at the imperial court) was Justinian’s chief theological advisor from 536 to 553. Most ancient accounts and modern commentators hold that Theodore was himself an Origenist.

It is clear that Origenists were not inciting the fury of Romans or even the emperor just a few years before their beliefs were officially condemned. This reversal in position cannot easily be explained. But perhaps its suddenness and inexplicability speak to an important aspect of the situation: that the only substantial shift in stance against Origenism was the emperor’s own and that its condemnation in 543 was largely a political move. It occurred during the terrible devastation of the plague and amidst the wider theological context of the conflict between Chalcedonians and Miaphysites that was seriously threatening to fracture imperial Christianity. Justinian was likely looking to reassert orthodoxy and his own spiritual authority in these troubled times. Already for much of his reign, Justinian had sought out means to reconcile the two camps, and his decision to denounce Origenism should be seen as one among many moves toward that end. It was widely known that Origenist christologies contained suspect elements that

51 Schwartz (1939), 394; Evans (1970); 161-7 argues that Leontius of Byzantium, a known Origenist, was among a specifically Origenist delegation at the council. Evidence for Leontius’ presence is his own signature to three *libelli monochorum* read into the *acta* of the first and fifth sessions. *ACO* 3, 126-54 (first session); 27-123 (fifth session).
52 Justinian enforced the decision, *Novel* 168.
53 The key account of Theodore’s relationship to Justinian is Liberatus, *Breviarium* 24, *ACO* 2.5, 140. Price (2009), vol. 1, 19; vol. 2, 270-80 makes a case that Theodore was not an Origenist but gave support to the Origenists of Palestine and resented their condemnation. The minor distinction does not impact the present line of argumentation.
few besides Origenists themselves would defend against imperial censure. Its condemnation, Justinian likely hoped, was something Chalcedonians and Miaphysites could agree on, and, moreover, it was a way for him to demonstrate that he as emperor was dictating the terms of orthodoxy. But agreeing on something is hardly the same thing as not disagreeing. Few in the empire were actually self-avowed Origenists, and many more appreciated the foundational influence which Origenist biblical interpretation exerted on Christian thought. Condemnation would not bring Chalcedonians and Miaphysites as close together as Justinian had hoped. For it was not by coincidence that the denunciation of Origenism came only a year before Justinian’s move against the Three Chapters - a gambit designed largely to curry favor with Miaphysites and lead them toward an amended Chalcedonian orthodoxy. The imperial attack on Origenism can be seen as a prelude to the ensuing drama that would conclude in 553 at the Second Council of Constantinople which, interestingly, commenced with yet another condemnation of Origenism. Here, our sources hold that it was none other than Theodore Askidas who manipulated Justinian into condemning the Three Chapters in an effort to divert imperial pressure away from Origenism. These tendentious and often

54 Price (2009), 280.
55 Hombergen (2001), 183 argues that the denouncement of the Three Chapters was a measure of appeasement. F. Carcione, ‘La politica religiosa di Giustiniano nella fase conclusiva della “Seconda Controversia Origenista”’ (543-553). Gli intrecci con la controversia sui Tre Capitoli’, Studi e Ricerche sull’Orientale Cristiano 9 (1986), 131-47 argues that it was a move to achieve inner imperial stabilization at a time when there were external military threats at the empire’s borders. See also Ibid., ‘La politica religiosa di Giustiniano nella fase iniziale della “Seconda Controversia Origenista”’ (536-543). Un nuovo fallimentare tentative d’integrazione tra monofisismo e calcedonianismo alla vigilia dela controversia sui Tre Capitoli’, SROC 8 (1985), 3-18.
56 It seems that neither the condemnation of 543 nor of 553 was effective. In 563/4 the popular Origenist Macarius recovered the see of Jerusalem. See Victor of Tunnuna, 168.
anachronistic accounts, though, are no longer believed. Besides, it is well known that Justinian was hyper-active in his involvement in ecclesiastical administration and doctrinal decision making, which makes any account of his being a pawn in such matters untenable. Procopius describes Justinian in 549 as “spending most of his time on the doctrines of the Christians, striving and exerting himself to the utmost to achieve a satisfactory settlement of the matters in dispute among them.” He likewise puts a description into the mouth of one of the emperor’s critics: “[Justinian was] always sitting up at the dead of night, eagerly unrolling the Christian scriptures together with extremely aged bishops.” There is no reason to doubt Justinian’s deep, personal involvement in any of his theological activities, especially his condemnation of Origen. It may have been Palestinian monks who initially sought out the emperor in their local disputes, but it was Justinian who decided to transform this provincial disturbance into an empire-wide condemnation of heresy geared toward the greater political end of universal orthodoxy.

The year 543 did not mark the end of Origenism in the Roman empire. It would be condemned yet again by Justinian and the Church’s highest authorities in 553 at Constantinople II. That council was long in the planning. In 550 Justinian and Vigilius, bishop of Rome, had made an agreement to hold an ecumenical council with full representation by both eastern and western bishops wherein the Three Chapters would be

57 Cyril of Scythopolis, Life of Sabas, 188.25-189.7; 191.23; 192.22; 197.19; 198.8; Facundus, Pro defensione 4.4.15; Liberatus, Breviarium 24, ACO 2.5, p.140. See Hombergen (2001) and Price (2009) for recent arguments which challenge the credibility of these authors regarding the causes of the Three Chapters controversy.

58 Procopius, Wars 7.35.11, trans. Price (2009), “βασιλεὺς δὲ Ἰταλίας μὲν ἐπηγγέλλετο προνοήσειν αὐτὸς, ἀμφὶ δὲ τὰ Χριστιανῶν δόγματα ἐκ τοῦ ἐπὶ πλεῖστον διατριβὴν εἶχεν, εὖ διαθέσθαι τὰ ἐν σφίσιν ἀντιλεγόμενα σπουδάζων καὶ διατεινόμενος.”

59 Procopius, Wars 7.32.9, “…δὲ δὴ καθήσατα ἄφιλακτος ἐς ἀεὶ ἐπὶ λέσχης τινὸς ἀωρὶ νύκτωρ, ὀμοὶ τοῖς τῶν ἱερέων ἐσχατογέρουσιν ἀνακυκλεῖν τὰ Χριστιανῶν λόγια σπουδὴν ἔχον.”
finally condemned. Given that the council would essentially begin with yet another condemnation of Origenism, it is not farfetched to imagine that the recently outlawed heresy would have been on the lips of churchmen and politicians in the capital between 550 and 553. As Jordanes wrote in 551, he knew that an allusion to Origen would have a specific and topical resonance. A keyed-in reader would have thought of the emperor’s ineffectual condemnation and whatever current gossip or news was around town concerning it. Moreover, the reader would have been taken aback by Jordanes’ allusion to Justinian’s newly minted heretic. It would not have necessarily smacked of subversion - the allusion itself contained no inflammatory language and Origenism was not, after all, a dire threat to empire or emperor – but it would have been enough to raise an eyebrow. It was something for the reader to note and store away for possible use with later clues. For the modern scholar conversant in Jordanes scholarship, however, this is the first clue that past interpretations of Jordanes as an unabashed proponent of Justinianic ideology begin to falter. It becomes hard to explain why an author whose works are defined by their obedient support of the emperor would, in the very first words of his text, allude in the guise of a model to the work of a heretic recently condemned by that emperor. Again, from the preface alone, one could not know if the Getica was subversive or even critical of the current regime, but one could hardly think that an allusion to Origen in 551 was the stuff of imperial panegyric.

It likely that readers would know that they were being shown one of the empire’s still unhealed wounds – specifically the rift between east and west. This study will

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demonstrate that it was the contemporary war between Gothic Italy and the Roman empire that prompted Jordanes to inquire into the history of Goths and Romans. Both the Getica and Romana are a response to and a reflection of that ongoing struggle. On a thematic level, then, it makes sense that Jordanes would open his history of the Goths with an allusive prefiguration of east-west conflict. The Three Chapters controversy to which the preface’s Rufinian allusion points was in part rooted in disputes between the eastern and western churches that had begun during, and partially as a result of, Gothic rule in Italy. The church in Rome had come to enjoy a marked degree of independence from imperial oversight under the Gothic regime. It was during this period that Pope Gelasius (492-496) ignited hostilities between Rome and Constantinople in the Acacian schism and loudly trumpeted the authority of the papacy over that of the emperor. The Gothic War, however, portended imperial interventionism in western church affairs, and it is possible that Vigilius’ refusal to accept Justinian’s proposed condemnation of the Three Chapters was motivated by more than theological exception. The encroachment of imperial power into western ecclesiastical concerns and a mismanaged war that had resulted in the destruction of Italy were likely represented in Vigilius’ position vis-à-vis the Three Chapters – a position that led to his seizure in 545 by imperial agents who then took him to Constantinople to amend his stance.61 Six years later, as Jordanes wrote, Vigilius was still being held in the eastern capital, a testament to the badly strained relations between the eastern and western churches. Jordanes embedded an oblique reference to the dispute over the Three Chapters in the introduction to his Gothic history

because he meant for it to ground the ensuing narrative in the context of contemporary east-west conflict. The *Getica*, Jordanes announced, was not simply an accounting of the Goths, but a text with immediate political resonance for Romans and Goths in conflicted states on either side of the Mediterranean.

**Jordanes’ Use of Rufinus**

The interpretation of the preface’s allusion can be pushed further. So far we have accounted for Origen’s role in the allusion, but what of Rufinus’? Active in the late fourth and early fifth centuries, Rufinus of Aquileia was a Latin translator of the works of Origen, yet the nature of these translations was the focal point of considerable debate in their day.\(^6\) Jerome, Rufinus’ long-time friend and eventual enemy, would lead the attacks against Rufinus’ credibility as a translator and ultimately his orthodoxy by accusing him of deceitfully altering the contents of a number of Origen’s tracts when translating them. Both men had at one time been admirers of Origen, widely considered to be the Church’s first great theologian, but when in the 390s theologians began to question and condemn the orthodoxy of some of Origen’s beliefs, Jerome thought it best to follow the wave of current opinion. Rufinus remained resolute in his defense of Origen, however. So began their infamous quarrel over Origen whose “tortuous path” need not be fully retraced here.\(^6\) It is important to note that, in partial acceptance of


Jerome’s accusations, Rufinus readily admitted to altering Origen in his translations. When he encountered passages of Origen that clashed with current orthodoxy, mainly, but not only, in their espousal of subordinationist theology, he took the liberty of modifying or removing them in his translations. Rufinus, however, did not attempt to conceal this and defended his actions by arguing that the unorthodox portions of Origen had been inserted by heretics. Rufinus’ detractors also took issue with the looseness of his translation methodology, and complained that Rufinus did not accurately convey Origen’s words. In response, Rufinus stated plainly that his translations were meant only to capture the general sense of Origen, not to maintain word for word transliterations. Indeed Rufinus’ critics did much to malign his reputation in his own time and for many centuries thereafter, and they are likely the principal reason that he was never canonized. Even modern scholars, many of whom are apologists for Rufinus, have demonstrated the many liberties which he took by comparing his translations with the original Greek texts that have survived. In the final estimation, then, it must be said that Rufinus was responsible for making considerable modifications to Origen’s texts – texts which, by the

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64 Another of Origen’s subjects which Rufinus took pains to ‘correct’ was the resurrection of the body.  
65 In his preface to On First Principles 3, Rufinus argues that the text of Origen had been altered wherever he contradicted himself or wherever he contradicted Rufinus’ own view of the orthodox faith. Rufinus claims to correct the doctrinally corrupted passages in Origen by substituting what he had read in other texts of Origen (ibid. 1.3). Further, Rufinus sets out at length his arguments in defense of his theory that Origen’s writings had suffered interpolations by heretics in his preface to the Apology against Jerome and in his essay On the Falsification of the Books of Origen, appended as an epilogue to his translation of Pamphilus’ Apology for Origen. For discussion of Rufinus’ methodology as a translator see Heine (1981), 27-39; Clark (1992), 12; T. Scheck, Origen: Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans Books 1-5, FOTC, vol. 103 (Washington D.C., 2001), 10-14; ibid. St. Pamphilus: Apology for Origen with the Letter of Rufinus, On the Falsification of the Books of Origen, FOTC, vol. 120 (Washington D.C., 2010), 8-17.  
66 Rufinus, Apology against Jerome 2.40; Apol. ad Anastasium 7; Praef. ad Gaudentium.  
mid-sixth century, Justinian deemed sufficiently contrary to Chalcedonian theology to be condemned.

Therefore, in 551, Jordanes’ allusion to Rufinus’ translation of Origen would have resonated meaningfully with his readers on yet another level. Living in such a theologically charged political climate, Jordanes’ readership would have made the right connections between the two prefaces that modern commentators, centuries removed from the context, have failed to make: that any allusion made to Rufinus’ translation of Origen would have elicited thoughts of the former’s fundamental alterations of the latter. And when that allusion was embedded in the preface of the Getica, the reader would then know to interpret Jordanes’ relationship to Cassiodorus in precisely the same manner – indeed, they would know that Jordanes was tacitly announcing that his history was going to look rather different than that of his supposed model. The allusion does not reveal the degree to which Jordanes departed from Cassiodorus, only that he did. The usual extent of Rufinus’ alterations of Origen’s texts cannot be ‘measured’ against the Getica in an attempt to yield the scope of Jordanes’ alterations of Cassiodorus. Such literalist thinking, again, would likely get us stuck. We are meant only to recognize Jordanes’ dependence upon and departure from Cassiodorus. He draws explicit attention to Cassiodorus in the preface to announce its central place both in the historiography of the Goths and in the Getica as a source, but the intertextuality with Rufinus establishes the Getica’s independence from its chief source.

At the end of Rufinus’ text, the peroration to his translation of Origen may also provide insight into Jordanes’ own authorial agenda. In it, Rufinus confronts his critics
who have accused him of substantially reworking the content of Origen’s texts. His
accusers argue that he has manipulated his translations to such a degree that their
provenance should no longer be attributed to Origen. Rufinus describes the indictments:
“For they say to me, ‘In what you write, since in them there is a great deal of your own
work, put your own name in the title and write, for instance: The Books of the
Commentary of Rufinus on the Epistle to the Romans.’”68 To this, Rufinus responds: “But
I, who defer more to my conscience than to my name, even if I seem to add some things
and fill in what is missing and abbreviate what is too long, do not think it right, however,
to steal the title from him who laid the foundations of the work and supplied the material
for the construction of the building.”69 Rufinus considers his translation and abridgement
faithful enough to the original to bear the name of Origen, not his own. What then of
Jordanes’ supposed abridgement of Cassiodorus? Rufinus admits to augmenting his
translations yet still attributes their authorship to Origen. Jordanes likewise announces
that he has made his own additions to his text, but, unlike Rufinus, he nowhere ascribes
its content to Cassiodorus. The Getica mentions Cassiodorus only once, in the preface,
and even there it is never stated that the present work is in fact an abridgement of the
Italian statesman’s history. Moreover, Jordanes employs the first person throughout his
text, provides an autobiographical intervention, and again in the conclusion takes
personal credit for the ideas expressed in his history.70 There is no reason to suspect that
Jordanes did not read the entirety of Rufinus’ translation, so we must assume that he read

68 Epilogue 3. For the epilogue, the Bammel edition uses the text of M. Simonetti, Tyrannii Rufini Opera,
Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina (CCL) 20 (1961), 276-77. Translations are from Scheck (2002), here
312.
69 Epilogue 4.
70 Jordanes, Getica 265, 316.
its peroration. And given that Jordanes employed the Rufinian allusion in order to evoke the idea of textual alteration, any explicit mention of such textual alteration within Rufinus’ own work may profitably be tied back to the *Getica*. When it is, the following picture emerges: in Rufinus we have a writer who states that he has made his own additions to a text, but not so many as to warrant changing the attribution of its original author. By contrast, in Jordanes, we encounter a writer who states that he has made his own additions, indeed so many that he does, in essence, ‘change’ the authorial designation and ascribes the work to himself. Rufinus is clear that he “do[es] not think it right” that one author should “steal” credit from another when that credit is not fully deserved. So, unless we suppose that Jordanes, fully aware of Rufinus’ judgement, should consciously include himself among this dishonest lot, it makes far better sense to think that he would apply Rufinus’ criteria for authorship to himself and feel vindicated in assigning the *Getica* to his own hand.

It is not at all obvious that Jordanes’ allusion to Rufinus’ preface should entail that the reader also consult the textual surroundings of Rufinus’ work for further analytic signposts concerning the *Getica*, but such is its level of intricacy and sophistication. Given the subtlety of the allusions and other literary strategies to be treated in this study, it is almost certain that more than a few have evaded the present author’s notice. It might even be the case that Jordanes’ use of Rufinus was further predicated upon the fact that, in the preface to his continuation of Eusebius’ *Church History*, Rufinus states outright that his purpose for writing was to lift the spirits of those Italians suffering amidst the
invasion of Alaric’s Goths. If this was Jordanes’ intention, the intertext would draw a tighter connection between the figure of Rufinus and the Goths of the *Getica*. In Rufinus, the Goths not only move history, but move the hand of an author doing God’s work in chronicling the history of the Church. This sort of indirect allusiveness is harder to prove, but, as will be argued in this study, it is indicative of one of Jordanes’ primary themes: to make the Goths ‘appear’ anywhere and everywhere in the history and literature of the Mediterranean, indeed where one least expects to find them. He seeks to make the Goths relevant, enduring, and established. In so doing, Jordanes legitimates them as a people worthy of respect as participants in a shared Roman world. It does not seem incidental that, for both Rufinus and Jordanes, it was the Goths who moved them to pen histories. An allusion to Rufinus, therefore, not only evokes a contemporary theopolitical crisis and notions of textual alteration, but also points the cultivated reader back round to the Goths themselves, the very subject of the book he has before him. The multivalency of the allusion, then, works to underscore the Goths’ interconnectedness to the empire’s current dilemma. By way of a complex allusion, the *Getica*’s preface centers on the Goths both past and present, imperial turmoil, and the authorial independence of one who is about to provide a historical account of these very things. This reading of the Rufinian intertext gets us a bit further in understanding Jordanes’ historical program than past arguments predicated upon the coincidental similarity of Jordanes’ and Rufinus’ circumstances.

And yet despite the past denigration of Jordanes’ language and ability, evidence of his literary skill should not be so terribly surprising. Many of his literary coevals, some
his Constantinopolitan peers, were writers of the first rate and employed similar strategies in their works. Allusiveness, referentiality, and intertextual discourse generally were the hallmarks of the literature produced in the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries. Though early modern and modern critics have lambasted them for their unoriginality, late ancient authors took seriously their place within an ancient literary tradition. Indeed what best defined their written works was the invention of new ways of expressing and perpetuating that cultural continuum. A heavy dependence on source material in late texts, long considered uninspired plagiarism brought on by indolence and inability, was actually the articulation of novel methods of engagement with older works. Late authors established innovative ways of incorporating old texts into new ones that served to augment and enrich the latter. The new texts became informed by the old, and the old were, in turn, recast by the new. After Homer, ancient literature was always allusive and referential, but in late antiquity these stylistic traits were taken to new levels of prevalence, subtlety, sophistication, and complexity. In these ways, Jordanes’ works were indicative of much of the literary output of the sixth-century Roman capital and must be given the same consideration that has been afforded other contemporary authors.

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72 E.g. Procopius; John Lydus; Romanos Melodos; Agapetus; Paul the Silentiary; Corippus; Malalas; Agathias.

Conclusion

These past two chapters have not been dedicated primarily to disproving Cassiodorus-centered readings of Jordanes as much as they have been committed to earning the right to begin to speak about Jordanes as an author in his own right. They have endeavored to demonstrate that past formulations of the Cassiodorus-Jordanes relationship are not only markedly outdated, but built upon questionable premises. Further, they have sought to illustrate that, contrary to the ingrained model, there are in fact more reasons to think that what Jordanes wrote was the product of his own mind rather than the unthinking summation of another author’s work.

This will be a pill hard to swallow for many. Arguments for Jordanes’ autonomy are not simply a matter of saving a minor late ancient author from an unflattering critical judgement. Rather, they demand the dramatic repositioning of a key text within academic paradigms. The stakes are high. For example, it would entail that we no longer – or, better, never did – possess the trove of legitimate royal Gothic tribal traditions allegedly preserved by Cassiodorus.\(^74\) The implications of this for those who accept Wolfram’s ethnogenesis-centered reconstruction of Gothic history are considerable. It is unlikely that scholars in this mode could accept the loss of Cassiodorus’ voice and the discovery of Jordanes’. It is unsettling that one of the few avenues into the history of Europe’s pre-literate peoples is to be shut off because an insignificant secretary to an insignificant Roman general wrote his own texts instead of preserving a work which housed a

\(^{74}\) This is not to say that Cassiodorus preserved such tribal memory. There are good reasons to think that he never availed himself of Ostrogothic orality in the composition of either his chronicle or the Gothic history. See Christensen (2002), passim.
barbarian tribe’s own oral history. But we must not view the situation in these terms. We should concentrate not on what we have lost (for we never had it in the first place), but on what we have gained. Jordanes himself may have been insignificant, but perhaps that insignificance provides us with a special opportunity. The scholar of the ancient world is awash in texts produced by the hands of the elite, but is left wanting material from common origins. And while Jordanes was not himself the salt of the Roman earth, given his literacy and literary ability, his is hardly the perspective of princes or those who moved among the highest echelons of Roman society. Despite his learning, Jordanes belonged to a humbler social stratum. His views should not be said to be indicative of that stratum, but they must still be appreciated as issuing from it. Jordanes’ is the voice of a Balkan provincial, of one who lived and worked as a small cog in a vast imperial bureaucratic machinery, of an autodidact in retirement – not a preeminent intellectual.\textsuperscript{75}

But more importantly, his is our earliest voice from the Roman and post-Roman worlds to claim a barbarian ethnicity. Jordanes was a Goth. Yet, crucially, he was also thoroughly Roman – indeed so much so that he took it for granted. Jordanes’ texts provide a unique and unprecedented opportunity to probe the nature of Romanization and Roman-barbarian cultural exchange at the end of antiquity. Where the unadulterated Gothic traditions of the old Cassiodorus-Jordanes model serve an outdated dichotomy of separate and distinct barbarian and Roman cultures, a newly independent Jordanes, at once both Roman and Goth, demonstrates the far more complicated reality that ethnicities and cultures are fluid and overlapping phenomena. An autonomous Jordanes allows us to divorce ourselves further from unconscious tendencies to view the history of ancient

\textsuperscript{75} Chapter Five provides a complete treatment of Jordanes’ biography.
Europe as one of Romans on the one hand and barbarians on the other. What emerges is a far more complex, realistic, and, frankly, more interesting historical landscape.

Jordanes’ histories address the nature of the Gothic and Roman past, the Goths’ previous conflict, cooperation, and coexistence with the Roman empire, and the devastating contemporary war between those two peoples that had been raging for perhaps a third of Jordanes’ own lifetime. In these ways the *Getica* and the *Romana* illuminate the sweeping changes, shifting cultural and territorial frontiers, and transformation of late antiquity, and yet also lay bare the widespread violence and strife endemic to the later Roman empire. By taking these two texts to be the work of Jordanes, we are gifted with fresh grounds for historical inquiry heretofore untilled.
Chapter Three
Genre and Structure in the Getica and Romana

Charles Mierow, who in 1915 published what remains the only English translation of the Getica, exemplifies the traditional view of Jordanes. Describing his subject, Mierow writes:

His book is mainly a compilation, not very carefully made; his style is irregular, rambling, uneven, and exhibits to a marked degree the traits of the decadent, crumbling later Latin. Yet he is important as the earliest Gothic historian whose work has survived, and he gives much information in regard to the Goths that is nowhere else recorded…So for the matter, if not for the style of his history of the Goths, Jordanes deserves careful consideration.¹

Mierow also flatly denied that Jordanes was being honest when, in the Getica, he avers that he supplemented his history with various other Greek and Latin sources beyond Cassiodorus.² It stands as something of an irony, then, that, only eight years later, Mierow would become perhaps the first Jordanes revisionist:

The high value now set upon this book is almost solely accorded, however, to its contents… it has become the fashion to disparage any claims he might conceivably have to recognition on the ground of literary excellence… For, obviously, however much he followed others in recording matters of fact, in this acquiescing in a well-understood and recognized literary procedure, his method of presentation must still in greater or smaller measure reveal the man himself… Lists of his uncouth methods of expression, of peculiarities of form and syntax… give a wholly inadequate and unfair impression of the author's style. This unfortunate estimate of Jordanes as a man of no learning or ability whatever needs to be corrected.³

¹ Mierow (1915), 1.
² Ibid., 14.
To be sure, Mierow had not entirely reversed his previous position. He still took for
granted and overstated Jordanes’ dependence on his sources, and patronizing references
to Jordanes’ “charm” and “child-like and enthusiastic spirit” did little to alleviate his
standing as a second-rate author. Despite Mierow’s well-intentioned plea, a one and a
half page article in a weekly classics publication did not alter a firmly established
scholarly consensus. Yet Mierow’s underlying sentiment is right, and it prefigured the
motivations of latter-day Jordanes revisionism. He demanded that, despite Jordanes’
derivative content, consideration be afforded to the author’s conscious decisions
regarding editing. What got copied, what was left out, and how those portions were
arranged significantly shaped narrative structure and thematic emphasis. In short, these
were decisions of an independent and purposive historical mind. Although convinced of
the Getica’s utter indebtedness to Cassiodorus, Mierow still recognized a degree of
“literary excellence” in Jordanes.

The inevitable consequence of past encounters with Jordanes that so intently
sought out Gothic oral tradition was the virtual disappearance of Jordanes and his texts.
The alleged survival of Cassiodorus rendered Jordanes all but inert and the task of
reconstituting Gothic orality, and thereby the events of the Gothic past, discouraged study
of the Getica and the Romana as discrete works of ancient historiography. Scant attention
was paid to the structure, style, and form of Jordanes’ texts, save for derogatory jabs at
his vulgar Latin which only served to justify ignoring these concerns in the first place.
The foregoing chapter, however, has impugned the validity of Cassiodorus-centered
readings of the Getica and evinced Jordanes’ literary ability. A new image of the Gothic
historian begins to emerge. With Cassiodorus’ presence amply, though not entirely, diminished, and Jordanes’ authorial autonomy established, we must reappraise just what it is that Jordanes has left us. First steps are necessary. What follows is a discussion of Jordanes’ histories in their aggregate parts. Attention will be afforded to narrative structures as well as the various analytic modes and genres in which Jordanes engages. Questions of genre, however, cannot be discussed independent of theme, as the former is employed principally to convey the latter. Here, a number of Jordanes’ most prominent historical themes will be introduced within the context of genre, but a full analysis of their implications must be reserved for later. Once identified and accounted for, these component parts will be reassembled in Chapter Five to better contextualize Jordanes as a cultural and intellectual product of the sixth-century Roman capital, and to establish a coherent picture of the political ideology which shapes his historical project.

The *Getica* and *Romana*: A Single Corpus

It must be said at the outset that Jordanes’ corpus is just that: a single body of historical research. It has not been treated as such in the past. The *Getica*, being the only specialized account of Gothic history to survive antiquity, has received immeasurably more attention than the *Romana*, whose contents are largely derivative. But even here the *Getica* itself was not studied so much as the Gothic history it contained. It was valued only as a source of raw data, and only insofar as that data was unique. The *Romana*, too, was judged by the same rubric and therefore suffered a worse fate. It has been almost entirely neglected because most of its content derives directly from its sources. Moreover,
old assumptions that the *Getica* merely abridges Cassiodorus and that the *Romana* is a summary of Symmachus’ Roman history have rendered untenable any notion that these works were thematically consistent or that their author had literary or ideological motivations of his own.

Recent studies have begun to question these positions and this study pushes Jordanes’ rehabilitation further. I would argue that the *Getica* and *Romana*, while separate works of literature that pursue themes unique unto themselves, nevertheless form a covalent whole whose analyses of the Gothic and Roman past are meant to be read together and against each other. Jordanes demands as much himself; though, like so much else he said in his prefatory remarks, these cues have often been ignored. Jordanes alludes to the *Romana* in the preface to the *Getica* and to the *Getica* in the preface to the *Romana*. Speaking to Castalius, the addressee of the *Getica*, Jordanes writes, “You urge me to leave the little work I have in hand, that is the abbreviation of the Chronicles [*adbreviatio chronicorum*], and to condense in my own style in this small book the twelve volumes of [Cassiodorus] Senator on the origin and deeds of the Getae.”1 This *adbreviatio chronicorum* is a direct reference to the *Romana* and, as it would happen, it is a perfectly apt description of the contents of that work. Likewise, in the *Romana*’s preface, Jordanes makes mention of the *Getica*. Jordanes wrote the *Romana* for a certain Vigilius, otherwise unknown. In describing what he has provided his friend, Jordanes writes: “I have appended [to the *Romana*] another volume on the origin and deeds of the

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1 Jordanes, *Getica* 1, “Volentem me parvo subvectum navigio oram tranquilli litoris stringere et minutos de priscorum, ut quidam ait, stagnis piscicullos legere, in altum, frater Castali, laxari vela compellis relictoque opusculo, quod intra manus habeo, id est, de adbreviatiione chronicorum, suades, ut nostris verbis duodecem Senatoris volumina de origine actusque Getarum ab olim et usque nunc per generationes regesque descendentem in uno et hoc parvo libello choartem.”
Gotic people, which a little while ago I sent to our common friend Castalius, so that, learning of the disasters of various peoples, you might desire to become free from all trouble and turn to God, who is true freedom. Therefore, in reading both books, realize that compulsion constantly threatens him who loves the world.”

Jordanes wanted his two histories to be read together. It is highly doubtful that he included a copy of the Getica for Vigilius simply because he had an extra one lying about. Jordanes states clearly that, when taken together, both texts offer a single message.

From the prefatory references to his own texts, it may be posited that Jordanes began the Romana, wrote the Getica, and then returned to complete the Romana. There is no good reason that this should not have been Jordanes’ program for writing, though what seems to matter more is the symbolic weight of the notion that these texts were written together. Jordanes goes out of his way to describe his works as essentially existing within each other. As he was writing the Romana, Jordanes penned the Getica as if the Gothic history formed a sort of digression within his larger historical narrative of the Roman world. This is not to say, though, that the Getica is somehow subordinate to the Romana. The Getica is both longer than the Romana and contains much more content attributable to Jordanes’ own hand. Rather, Jordanes means to illustrate that the themes of the two histories are complementary even if their tones are purposefully at odds, as we shall see later.

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2 Jordanes, Romana 4-5, “… iungens eii aliud volumen de origine actusque Getic gente, quam iam dudum communi amico Castalio ededissem, quatinus diversarum gentium calamitate conperta ab omni erumna liberum te fieri cupias et ad deum convertas, qui est vera libertas. Legens ergo utrosque libellos, scito quod diligentis mundo semper necessitas imminet.”

3 See Chapter Five.
While Jordanes makes abundantly clear that his two works should be considered a single historical project, subtler hints are also given to reinforce this notion. The preceding chapter argued that Jordanes granted various levels of access to the Getica’s preface depending on the analytical sophistication of the reader while still providing essential information to a more general audience. Similar instances occur here. In the conclusion of the Getica Jordanes employs a flower metaphor to describe the manner in which he composed his history: “… I have followed the writings of my predecessors, and have culled a few flowers from their broad meadows to weave a chaplet for him who cares to know these things.”

Then, in the Romana’s preface Jordanes writes, “You further add that, from the accounts of my predecessors, I should pluck some little flowers and briefly relate to you how the Roman state began and endured…” And again, immediately following the preface, the narrative commences with a description of Jordanes’ historical aims: “…after sampling things from the various volumes of my predecessors, I desire... to condense a few little flowers into a single one and to collect briefly in a kind of historical summary both the sequence of years and also the exploits of those men who with great effort labored for the empire.”

Jordanes concludes one text with a flower metaphor embedded within a description of his historiographical methodology, and then opens his other text with two more of precisely the same sort of

4 Jordanes, Getica 316, “…me maiorum secutum scriptis ex eorum latissima prata paucos flores legisse, unde inquirenti pro captu ingenii mei coronam contexam.”
5 Jordanes, Romana 2, “Addes praeterea, ut tibi, quomodo Romana res publica coepit et tenuit… ex dictis maiorum floscula carpens breviter referam…”
6 Jordanes, Romana 6, “Cupio namque ad inquisitionibus amici fidelissimi, ex diversis voluminibus maiorum praelibans aliqua floscula pro captu ingenii mei in unum redigere et in modum storiunculae tam annorum seriae quam etiam eorum virorum, qui fortiter in re publica laboraverunt, gesta strictim breviterque colere.” Note, too, Jordanes’ reduplication of “pro captu ingenii meii” in both Romana 6 and Getica 316, which draws a tighter connection between the two passages.
metaphors, again, about his methods. Like his woven flowers, Jordanes means to weave
together the narrative and thematic threads of his histories. The reduplication is
intentional and designed to establish resonance between the two texts.

But the flowers are not merely self-referential. There remains a further layer to
peel back. Any reproduced image would have worked to connect the *Getica* and the
*Romana*. The choice of flowers, however, announces a direct link to none other than
Cassiodorus. Flower metaphors seem to have been something of a favorite of the Italian
senator. At least four appear in his extant works. There are two in his preface to the
*Historia Tripartita* and two occur in the *Variae*, both, importantly, in reference to his
Gothic history. Given this, it has been argued that the presence of the flower metaphors
in the *Getica* serve as further proof of Jordanes’ bondage to Cassiodorus. But the motif
also appears in the *Romana* and nobody has ever ventured to yoke that text to a
Cassiodoranic provenance, so, clearly, there is something else going on here. Flawed are
the entrenched paradigms that view literary borrowings in late ancient texts as indicative
of a superior/inferior, dominant/passive relationship between authors and texts. Dialogue,
not dependence, is more often the hallmark of these instances. The flower metaphors,
should be understood as further evidence that Jordanes’ texts, namely the *Getica*, engage
in a multivalent discourse with Cassiodorus’ Gothic history. The flowers doubly tie the
*Romana* to the *Getica*, and the *Getica* back to Cassiodorus. The loss of Cassiodorus’ text
precludes that we will ever reach a full understanding of the Jordanes-Cassiodorus

\[7\] von Ranke (1883), 314-315 initially established the floral parallel between Jordanes and Cassiodorus.
\[8\] *Historia Tripartita* pref. 2,3; *Variae* pref. 11, 9.25. For further discussion of flower metaphors in
\[9\] O’Donnell (1979), 52-3.
dynamic, though here, and in a few other instances, elements of that dynamic may be
glimpsed.

The Getica’s Geographic Introduction

Immediately following his preface, Jordanes opens the Getica with a geographic survey
of the world.\textsuperscript{10} Geography was a well established genre of classical discourse, and
Jordanes’ choice to commence his history with a geographic discussion had considerable
precedent.\textsuperscript{11} It seems certain that Jordanes was explicitly following the lead of Orosius in
this, and, in fact, he cites the Spanish presbyter by name in the very first sentence of the
geographical introduction.\textsuperscript{12} Jordanes’ purposes in immediately making reference to a
textual authority are twofold. First, Jordanes sought to establish meaningful linkages
between his text and the classical genre of geography, which, in turn, worked rhetorically
to construct the text’s Romano-centric world view. Second, Jordanes wanted to announce
straightaway that he was making good on his prefatory statement that he drew from
numerous other Greek and Latin sources in writing the Getica. The geographic
introduction is brimming with mention of textual authorities from both classical
languages. Remarkably, Jordanes, within a mere 1,500-word span of text, cites authors by

\textsuperscript{10} I follow A. Merrills, \textit{History and Geography in Late Antiquity} (Cambridge, 2005) in extending the
geographic introduction from \textit{Getica} 4-38. Merrills’ analysis of the \textit{Getica}’s geographic introduction is
unsurpassed and is itself the finest study of Jordanes revisionism in recent years.
\textsuperscript{11} E.g. Sallust, \textit{Bellum Jugurthinum}, included a description of Numidia early in the text; Caesar, \textit{De bello
Gallico}, opens with a concise survey of Gaul; Appian, \textit{Historia Romana}, supplies a wide-ranging
geographical discussion of the Roman empire in his introduction; Tacitus, \textit{Germania}, opens with a
description of that country; Orosius, \textit{Historiarum adversum paganos Libri septem}, provides a
comprehensive introductory discussion of the situation and scope of the world’s geography.
\textsuperscript{12} Jordanes, \textit{Getica} 4.
name on eleven separate occasions and refers to six unnamed authorities\textsuperscript{13} In no other author do we encounter such a barrage of source citation in a historical narrative. Jordanes was clearly taking pains to announce the \textit{Getica }’s connection to Greco-Roman literary precedent which then worked to shore up his own credentials for writing a work of history. Having commissioned him, Castalius himself knew that Jordanes was capable of writing an account of the Gothic past, but Jordanes, anticipating a wider readership, needed to demonstrate his expertise at the outset of his work. The complex Rufinian allusion of the preface established Jordanes’ literary acuity while the litany of classical authorities in the geographic introduction announced his solid grounding in historical and scientific learning.

As it commences, the geography initially resembles a predictable \textit{periplous} around Asia, Europe, and Africa – “the threefold division of the earth’s extent.”\textsuperscript{14} Discussion of rivers, oceans, islands, mountains, and peculiarities of flora, fauna, and peoples follows – the standard stuff of classical geography. Yet these common characteristics have garnered the genre an undeserved reputation. Too often geographies are considered little more than formulaic ‘digressions’ or ‘excurses’ that momentarily abandon the themes of the larger narrative. This is a mistaken perspective. A geography must be understood as the discussion of the physical nature of various lands and their inhabitants as a means to convey specific themes.\textsuperscript{15} Far from being an interruption which gets the narrative, literally, ‘off course’, geographic discussions continue to develop, or,

\textsuperscript{13} Orosius (\textit{Getica }4); Virgil (9); Livy (10); Strabo (12); Tacitus (13); Cassius Dio (14); Ptolemy (16, 19); Pomponius Mela (16); Ablabius (28); Josephus (29).
\textsuperscript{14} Jordanes, \textit{Getica }4.
\textsuperscript{15} J. Romm, \textit{The Edges of the Earth in Ancient Thought} (Princeton, 1992), 5.
in the case of the *Getica*, establish, ideas central to a text. A closer look at the islands and oceans of this opening portion reveals Jordanes’ thematic purposes.

After a swift peregrination around the Indian Ocean and its islands, Jordanes moves into the Mediterranean for a further discussion of islands before leaving that sea through the Pillars of Hercules, making his way northward. It is there, in the frozen north, that Jordanes’ geographic focus remains. Of the North Sea, Jordanes writes: “But the impassible farther bounds of Ocean not only has no one attempted to describe, but no man has been allowed to reach; for by reason of obstructing seaweed and the failing of the winds it is plainly inaccessible and is unknown to any save Him who made it.”

These sentiments recall those of Tacitus regarding the same sea: “…the immense Ocean on Germany’s further side, which one might call antipodal (*utque sic dixerim adversus*) is entered only rarely by ships from our world (*ab orbe nostro*).” Tacitus’ use of *adversus*, a term normally applied to antipodal worlds, and *ab orbe nostro*, conveys the notions that the North Sea is all but entirely removed from the *oikoumené*. Jordanes’ thematic purposes with the North Sea are very much the same and mean to emphasize the otherworldliness of Europe’s northerly climes. Further, the link with Tacitus is more firmly established when Jordanes cites the historian by name within a nearby discussion of Britain.

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16 Jordaens, *Getica* 5, “Oceani vero intransmeabiles ulteriores fines non solum describere quis adgressus est, verum etiam nec cuiquam licuit transfretare, quia resistent eulva et ventorum spiramine quiescente impermeabilis esse sentitur et nulli cognita nisi ei qui eam constituit.”
17 Tacitus, *Germania* 2.1 “…et inmensus ultra utque sic dixerim adversus Oceanus raris ab orbe nostro navibus aditur.”
19 Romm (1992), 141-2.
Continuing with his insular theme, Jordanes mentions, among others, the islands of Thule, Britain, and Scandza. The remote and alien nature of each land is recounted, yet Scandza stands apart in regard to these qualities. For, despite the isolation of Britain and Thule, Jordanes associates them with Roman dominion. Concerning Thule, Virgil is quoted: “And at the farthest bound of [Ocean’s] western expanse it has another island named Thule, of which the Mantuan bard makes mention: ‘And Furthest Thule shall serve thee [Rome].’” Likewise, in his discussion of Britain, Jordanes notes that, “It was long unapproached by Roman arms, until Julius Caesar disclosed it by battles fought for mere glory.” The description of Scandza, however, is devoid of any mention of contact with the empire. Scandza is, of course, for Jordanes the origin place of the Goths and his discussion of that island forms the central portion of the geographic introduction. It becomes clear that all previous discussion of islands was meant to form a thematic frame for the eventual centrality of Scandza. Notions of the remote and fantastic nature of islands was, by Jordanes’ day, a thoroughly classical trope with antecedents reaching as far back as Plato’s Atlantis myth in the *Timaeus* and *Critias* and the fabulous islands beyond the Pillars of Hercules in the fourth-century *On Marvelous Reports*. For his physical description of Scandza, Jordanes taps Ptolemy and Pomponius Mela. In so doing Jordanes places Scandza within the realm of classical thought, yet, when compared to Thule and Britain, the home of the Goths remains beyond the meaningful knowledge,

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21 Jordanes *Getica* 9; Virgil, *Georgics* 1.30, “...tibi seruiat ultima Thule,...”
22 Jordanes *Getica* 10, “Quae diu si quidem armis inaccensam Romanis Iulius Caesar proeliis ad gloriam tantum quesisit aperuit.”
contact, or control of the Mediterranean world. It is a liminal realm - known by the Greeks and Romans, but beyond their reach. This establishes a central notion of Jordanes’ depiction of the Goths: they are an autonomous people from truly foreign origins. This remains an essential aspect of the Gothic character as they enter and become part of the Roman world later in the narrative.

Jordanes, then, ascribes Scandinavian origins to the Goths to underscore their foreignness, yet this provenance is significant in another regard. The Goths had been part of Roman historical memory for more than three centuries when Jordanes wrote and their origins were generally assigned to Scythian domains. The Getica stands as the earliest known text to name Scandza as the original home of the Goths. That is to say, for the first time in his geographic discussion Jordanes was working without classical precedent. And this almost goes unnoticed. So many were the attestations and quotations of textual authorities in the periplous, the discussion of Britain, and in the physical description of Scandza, that by the time Jordanes reaches his ethnography of that island one might easily assume that all of this Gothic business was well-worn knowledge. Quite the opposite is true. Certainly, the notion of a Scandinavian Gothic genesis stands as Jordanes’ most meaningful authorial contribution in his geography, yet he seems to work to conceal this. Indeed this has been called Jordanes’ “sleight-of-hand.”

The earlier deluge of classical citations was in part designed to disguise their absence from the Scandinavian ethnography. Jordanes’ purposes in this were perhaps motivated by the

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24 Merrills (2005), 125 was the first to point this out. It cannot be known with certainty that Scandinavian origins lacked written precedent, but given Jordanes’ well-established method in the geography to name his sources (even providing them up through the physical description of Scandza), it stands to reason that he did not name any for Scandza’s ethnography or Gothic origins because they did not exist.
expected conventions of geographic writing. Autopsy, while a long-respected method for the collection of evidence in historical research, enjoyed less esteem in geography, which relied more heavily on written precedent.\textsuperscript{25} Jordanes, operating within prescribed traditions, had to tailor his writing to satisfy the expectations of genre – or at least to supply the appearance of doing so. For Jordanes’ contention that the Goths hailed from Scandza must be understood as an unclassical notion dressed up in classical garb. It is more likely that stories of the Goths’ connection to Scandinavia were oral in nature.

Now, oral, if the previous chapters demonstrated anything, is a contentious word when applied to Jordanes. Here I do not necessarily imply that that such origin stories were long-held and culturally Gothic, or even that they were believed by sixth-century Balkan Goths.\textsuperscript{26} I mean oral in the broadest since – that these stories were being discussed by certain inhabitants of the imperial capital. Evidence for this comes from two portions of the \textit{Getica}. In the conclusion to his geographic introduction, Jordanes mentions accounts “which tell of [the Goths’] subjection to slavery in Britain or in some other island, or their redemption by a certain man at the cost of a single horse.”\textsuperscript{27} He then recommends that “if anyone in our city says that the Goths had an origin different from that I have related, let him object.” Further, in the preface Jordanes advises Castalius that: “If anything be insufficiently spoken [about the Goths] and you remember it, as a

\textsuperscript{25} \textit{Ibid.}, 126.
\textsuperscript{26} On the other hand, it is perhaps possible that they were traditional Gothic stories or that they were of sixth-century Gothic derivation. Heather (1996), 25-30 argues for a Gothic provenance. His arguments are careful and plausible, but ultimately remain unverifiable.
\textsuperscript{27} Jordanes \textit{Getica} 38, “…nec eorum fabulas alicubi repperimus scriptas, qui eos dicunt in Brittania vel in unaqualibet insularum in servitute redactos et in unius caballi praetio a quodam ereptos.”
neighbor of the race add to it [the Getica].”

28 Taken together, these comments provide the distinct impression that various accounts of the Goths and their origins were known to have been circulating in Jordanes’ day. Scandza, it seems, was not the only possible Gothic homeland known in Constantinople in 551, and, given what he says to Castalius, Jordanes implies that his is but one admittedly incomplete telling and interpretation of Gothic history.

This clearly suggests the Goths were on the minds of Romans in the capital and likely beyond. And why should shouldn’t they have been? For the better part of two centuries, the Balkans had known a tense, often violent relationship with the Goths since the Battle of Adrianople and Theodosius’ treaty of 382 which recognized them as a semi-autonomous nation within the empire.29 By 551 Roman armies, themselves comprised of a great many Gothic soldiers, had been clashing with Gothic Italy for over fifteen years. Ultimately, Jordanes’ decision to incorporate this contemporary element of Gothic discourse into his text and to construct his otherwise classicizing geographic introduction around an unprecedented Scandinavian origin of Goths is very much revelatory of a fundamental aspect of Jordanes’ historiographical methodology: the commixture of literary tradition with innovations bearing a classical facade.

Following the ethnography of Scandza, Jordanes recounts the great Gothic migration out of the northern wastes and into eastern Europe - somewhere in the vicinity

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28 Jordanes Getica 38, “Aut certe si quis eos aliter dixerit in nostro urbe, quam quod nos diximus, fuisse exortos, nobis aliquid obstrepebit.” Getica 3, “…et si quid parum dictum est et tu, ut vicinus genti, commemoras, adde.”

29 Chapter Five provides a discussion of this treaty. For further commentary and a translation of the oration of Themistius which stands as our chief source for the event, see Heather and Matthews, The Goths in the Fourth Century (Liverpool, 1991).
of modern Poland- and then eventually south to Scythia, Moesia, Thrace, Dacia, back again back to Scythia, and, later, into the Balkans, Italy, and Gaul. It should be noted that previous Roman accounts of the Goths either never addressed their origins or placed their homeland simply in Scythia. Locating the Gothic genesis so far to the north allowed Jordanes, on a thematic level, to associate the Goths with the universal literary, even mythic, archetype of the wandering people. Here, Jordanes establishes the antecedents for one of the Getica’s most meaningful thematic motifs: that of the direct juxtaposition between the Goths and the long-suffering band of Trojans lead by Aeneas, the progenitor of the Romans. The Getica is about the parallel destinies of the Gothic and Roman peoples and the providential necessitude of their coexistence and cooperation. This theme will be developed at length in Chapter Five, but it should be mentioned here to better evince the coherence and scope of Jordanes’ project.

The Classical, Biblical, and Mythical Goths

The migration to Scythia, the more widely recognized original homeland of the Goths, announces yet another of the Getica’s overarching themes: the classicization of Gothic history. After affirming their near otherworldly origins, Jordanes dedicates a significant portion of his narrative to incorporating the Goths into the fold of Mediterranean antiquity. The most obvious manifestation of this is semantic. Throughout the majority of his text Jordanes use the terms Goths and Getae interchangeably. This dual designation was not unique to Jordanes, as he himself admits: “…the Getae we have proved in a
previous passage to be the Goths, on the testimony of Orosius Paulus.”30 Yet the conflation pre-dates even Orosius and represents the far more ancient literary practice of transference: the notion that specific geographical locations continuously produce the same peoples with different names.31 First attested in Herodotus, the Getae were a Thracian tribe who, by the fourth century B.C., had settled on the lower Danube to the south and east of the Carpathians. Greek writers would often confuse them with Dacians while later writers applied their name to the Goths, with whom they had nothing in common.32 Nominal equivalences among peoples in classical ethnography, then, did not imply that they were culturally coterminous. It was from the Scythian hinterlands that the Goths emerged as a threat to Rome in the fourth century, and thereafter those areas enjoyed Gothic associations.33 Jordanes only perpetuates this tradition by referring to his Gothic history as a *volumen de origine actusque Getice gentis*.34

But there is something else at play in Jordanes use of the parallel ethnonyms. It is not precisely accurate to say the Jordanes uses Goths and Getae interchangeably. In the *Getica’s* preface Jordanes notes that he has been asked to condense Cassiodorus’ history of “the origins and deeds of the Getae.”35 Yet, aside from the preface, which stands outside the bounds of the chronological narrative, Jordanes refers to the Goths only as

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30 Jordanes, *Getica* 58. Jordanes likely refers to Orosius 1.16.2.
31 Amory (1997), 293. It was a well-worn literary practice to equate the barbarian peoples who interacted with the late Roman world with those from classical sources. For Eunapius, Priscus, and Zosimus, for example, the Goths are regularly called Scythians; for Orosius they are Getae. See O. Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns* (Berekely, 1973), 5 ff. for a discussion of ethnic transference.
32 Herodotus 4.93; Wilkes (1996), 636; *OCD*, ‘Getae’.
33 Jerome, *Hebraicae quaestiones in Geneseos* 10.2 and Orosius, 1.16.2 conflated the Goths with the Scythian Getae of ancient historiography, and Orosius 1.2.53 equates Dacia with Gothia. Orosius 7.34: “Scythicas gentes…hoc est Alanos, Hunnos, et Gothos.”
Goths when recounting their distant past in Scandza and subsequent migrations before they settle in Scythia. In other words, when and where Gothic history lies beyond classical documentation, Jordanes speaks exclusively of ‘Goths.’ It is only after the Goths enter Scythia, a land within the ambit of classical civilization, that Jordanes begins to conflate Goths and Getae. In recounting their migration to Scythia, Jordanes writes, “Wherefore the Goths have ever been wiser than other barbarians and were nearly like the Greeks, as Dio relates, who wrote their history and annals with a Greek pen.” Immediately following, Goths and Getae become synonymous in the Getica. Jordanes quietly announces the entrance of the Goths into classical history first by their migration to Scythia, then by suggesting that their history was first recorded by a Greek (which was made possible by the proximity of their new home to Greece), and finally by their new appellation as Getae. It is no coincidence that Jordanes begins to call the Goths Getae just after mentioning that a classical author wrote their history. He indicates correctly that the association of the two peoples was a classical conceit. The implication of this, however, is that Jordanes tacitly admits that the conflation of the ethnonyms does not actually reflect reality. But Jordanes does not make much ado about this. Quite differently, his thematic aims are to exploit this classicizing principle of transference in order to provide

36 Jordanes, Getica 4-39.
37 Jordanes, Getica 40, “Unde et pene omnibus barbaris Gothi sapientiores semper extiterunt Grecisque pene consimiles, ut refert Dio, qui historias eorum annalesque Greco stilo composuit.” Jordanes almost certainly refers to Dio Chrysostom of the late first century AD, not Cassius Dio (though it is Cassius Dio to whom Jordanes refers at Getica 14). Dio’s work, now lost, was probably an ethnographic study of the Dacians (Getae) at the time of Trajan’s conquest. See Gillett (2000), 487 n. 23 for relevant bibliography for Dio and his Getica.
38 W. Liebeschuetz, ‘Making a Gothic History: Does the Getica of Jordanes Preserve Genuinely Gothic Traditions?’, Journal of Late Antiquity 4.2 (2011), 185-216, here 200-3, makes the case that “writers of the late empire were well aware that Getae and Scythians were collective designations…it must have been obvious to them that true history could not be written on the assumption that every reference by classical writers to Scythians or Getae referred precisely to Goths.”
the Goths a role in some of the most meaningful historical moments of Greco-Roman antiquity. But Jordanes’ authorial persona is nonetheless present here. He affords us a glimpse into the historian’s workshop and illustrates the very mechanism by which he classicizes Gothic history. It is a subtle moment of honesty between author and reader which anticipates some of the more fantastical narrative elements that immediately follow. For, as we shall see presently, Jordanes purveys such fictions that one suspects that his text was never meant to be read in the way that one reads Thucydides or Polybius. The Getica was not, after all, a classicizing history.

With their newly earned classical pedigree, Jordanes begins the work of weaving the Goths into the Mediterranean past. Again taking full advantage of ethnographic transference, Jordanes notes that the Goths were themselves descendants of Magog, the scriptural figure from the books of Genesis, Ezekiel, and Revelation.³⁹ Jordanes here engages with the genre of biblical history, a typical literary strategy of post-Constantinian Christian historiography which sought to establish, embellish, or invent connections between modern and biblical times as a testament to the coherence of providence.⁴⁰ The authority whom Jordanes names for the Gothic connection is Josephus, who identified the offspring of Magog as the Scythians. Likewise, according to Josephus, the Greeks called Scythia Magogia.⁴¹ The identification of Gog and Magog with the Goths had late Roman precedent, and was perhaps representative of a wider trend in late antiquity to identify

³⁹ Jordanes, Getica 29; Genesis 10:2; Ezekiel 38-39; Revelation 20:7-8.
⁴¹ Josephus, Jewish Antiquities 1.6.
contemporary barbarians with biblical peoples. Also likely drawing on Josephus, Ambrose had made the connection between the Goths and Gog and Magog. In an essay for the young emperor Gratian, whom Ambrose knew was preparing a Balkan campaign against the Goths in 378, he states, “Gog is this Goth, whom we now see emerge, and whom we shall conquer in the future as promised by the Lord.” Of course, the Battle of Adrianople did not turn out as Ambrose had foretold and, later, Jerome and Augustine, in an effort to rectify Ambrose’s rhetorical gaffe, refuted any association between the biblical figures and the Goths. In both Ambrose and in scripture the connotations of Gog and Magog were entirely negative. They were portrayed as the archetypical enemies of God and associated with the apocalypse. Jordanes, however, dispenses with such unpleasantness and instead focuses only on Magog’s Scythian and, by means of transference, Gothic nature. Therefore, by way of classical associations between Scythians and Goths, Jordanes is able to connect the Goths to holy scripture, certainly the primary Roman cultural touchstone of the sixth century. Having already attached the Goths to pagan antiquity, here Jordanes succeeds in adjoining the Goths to a Christian past as well.

Jordanes continues to embellish the Gothic classical pedigree as he commences the narrative of the Getica. Immediately after establishing the Gothic-Getic conflation, Jordanes notes that, “so highly were the Getae praised that Mars, whom the fables of

43 Ambrose, De fide 2.16.137-8.
44 Jerome, Hebraicae quaestiones in Geneseos 10.2; Augustine, De civitate Dei 20.11.
poets call the god of war, was reputed to have been born among them. Hence Virgil says: ‘Father Gradivus rules the Getic fields.’”

Jordanes then recounts that the Egyptian king “Vesosis waged a war disastrous to himself against the Scythians, whom ancient tradition asserts to have been the husbands of the Amazons…Thus we can clearly prove that Vesosis then fought the Goths, since we know surely that he waged war against the husbands of the Amazons.” Here and throughout much of the early portions of the narrative Jordanes engages with the genre of mythography. That the Scythians were the husbands of the Amazons was first attested by Herodotus. Yet Jordanes stands as the first author to extend this association to the Goths via transference. Continuing in the mythographic mode, Jordanes tells of the Getic, and therefore Gothic, king Telephus who enjoyed the distinction of being both the son of Hercules and a brother-in-law to the Trojan king Priam. An enemy of the Greeks, this Telephus “slew in battle Thesander, the leader of Greece. But while he was making a hostile attack upon Ajax and pursuing Ulysses, his horse became entangled in some vines and fell. He himself was thrown and wounded in the thigh by a javelin thrown by Achilles, so that for a long time he could not be healed. Yet, despite the wound, he drove the Greeks from his land.”

46 Jordanes, Getica 44, “Tunc, ut fertur, Vesosis Scythis lacrimabile sibi potius intulit bellum, eis videlicet, quos Amazonarum viros prisca tradit auctoritas, de quas et feminas bellatrices Orosius in primo volumine professa voce testatur. Unde cum Gothis eum tunc dimicasse evidenter probamus, quem cum Amazonarum viris absolute pugnasse cognoscimus…”
47 Herodotus, 4.110-17.
48 Heather (1991), 45.
49 Jordanes, Getica 60, “Is ergo antefatus habuit bellum cum Danais, in qua pugna Thesandrum ducem Greciae interemit et dum Aiacem infestus invadit Vliximque persequitur, vitibus equo cadente ipse corruit Achillisque iaculo femur sauciatus diu mederi nequivit; Grecos tamen, quamvis iam saucius, e suis finibus proturbavit.”
Jordanes recounts the fate of Telephus’ son Eurypylus who, as a nephew of Priam, died fighting on the Trojan side in that great war.\(^50\)

The rhetorical effect of such an ancestry is impressive - if preposterous. Jordanes has just suggested that the Amazons were themselves Gothic, that Hercules, antiquity’s mightiest hero, was a forebear of the Goths, and that a Gothic king fought three of the greatest Homeric champions (at once!), and not only survived the bout but was ultimately victorious over the Greeks. Jordanes’ purposes here must be accounted for. Foremost, the elaborate mythological pedigree was designed to grant the Goths pride of place within a classicizing collective memory. By recasting the Gothic past in such a way, Jordanes sought to rescue literary representations of the Goths from the prescribed norms of barbarian discourse, and to imbue them with an air of respectability. These were not the brutal, foreign invaders of Ambrose and Orosius, but instead a storied and illustrious classical people. Jordanes very much intended for this newly reconfigured past to reflect directly on Gothic standing in the mid-sixth century.

Now, concerning the Amazons, Hercules, and the rest, we cannot suspect that Jordanes thought any of this actually true any more than we should think that it was meant to be believed. All talk of Jordanes’ “naïveté” misses the point entirely and betrays a fundamental misunderstanding about how genre was intended to function in a literary context. In ancient historiographical works, mythographic discourse operated on a completely separate rhetorical register than historical discourse. One cannot be judged on the basis of the other because each had entirely different aims. And further, the two modes of discourse might exist side-by-side in certain texts, as they do in Herodotus, and

\(^{50}\) Jordanes, *Getica* 60.
ancient readers would know to distinguish them and engage them with separate analytical strategies. An author’s candid discussion of contemporary imperial military policy, for instance, was not encountered and interpreted in the same way as a digression about Homeric heroes. Ancient authors regularly employed an array of rhetorical postures and literary genres in a single work. The conveyance of theme was paramount. What would be considered objective, factual truth by modern standards remained subordinate to the weightier, universal truths being pursued in an ancient text’s thematic program. Ancient historiography made room for both the scientific and the poetic. Jordanes’ mythography was informed by the conventions of the latter.

Here, Jordanes draws fictive ties between Scythians and Goths not only to award them a respected classical birthright, but also to establish the historical relationship between Goths and Romans in its most nascent form. Much of the Getica’s narrative details the unfolding of the complex relationship between Goths and Romans over time, but, through it all, it becomes clear that Jordanes particularly praises instances of Roman-Gothic cooperation and harmony, even concluding his text with a marriage uniting Gothic and Roman royal families which gave “hope, under the Lord’s favor, to both peoples.”\footnote{Jordanes, \textit{Getica} 314, “In quo coniuncta Aniciorum genus cum Amala stirpe spem adhuc utriusque generi domino praestante promittit.”} Jordanes uses the image of the mythic Eurypylus fighting and dying alongside the Trojans as a prefiguration of this cooperative relationship. Eurypylus, a Getic and, therefore, Gothic, king lays down his life for the cause of the proto-Roman Trojans. This is meant to prefigure, reflect, and amplify the later, verifiably historical instances wherein Goths and Roman truly did fight side-by-side against a common foe, most notably against
the Huns at the battle of the Catalaunian Plains, which stands at the center of the Getica’s action and is the single longest set piece of the text.

Immediately following the mythographic portion, Jordanes advances the chronology of the narrative “almost exactly six hundred and thirty years” to relate the story of the Gothic conflict with the Achaemenid Persians. In so doing, Jordanes shifts both genre and rhetorical register by tethering his discussion to events recorded not by poets, but by historians since Herodotus. In fact, Jordanes purposefully begins the proper historical portion of his narrative with the three most famous Persian kings of Herodotus’ history: Cyrus, Darius, and Xerxes. By selecting this narrative structure, Jordanes makes himself, in essence, the Herodotus of the Goths, and, moreover, he draws meaningful parallels between the historical experiences of the Greek and Gothic peoples. This is yet another step in Jordanes’ classicization of Gothic history. Beginning his account with Cyrus, Jordanes writes: “Elated by his victories in Asia, [Cyrus] strove to conquer the Getae, whose queen, as I have said, was Tomyris. Though she could have stopped the approach of Cyrus at the river Araxes, yet she permitted him to cross, preferring to overcome him in battle rather than to thwart him by advantage of position. And so she did.” Cyrus’ successor Darius later demands the hand of a Gothic princess in marriage, and upon the Goths’ refusal, seeks revenge by leading a purported force of seven hundred thousand soldiers against them. After some defeats, Darius retreats. Finally, Darius’ son Xerxes seeks to avenge his father’s name by marching on the Goths, but that conflict

52 Jordanes, Getica 61.
53 Jordanes, Getica 61, “Qui elatus ex Asiae victoriis Getas nititur subiugare, quibus, ut diximus, regina erat Thomyris. Quae cum Abraxem annem Cyri arcere potuisset accessum, transitum tamen permisit, elegens armis eum vincere quam locorum beneficio submovere; quod et factum est.”
54 Jordanes, Getica 63.
would end without any hostilities, as Xerxes fled after being “overawed” by the “unyielding courage” of the Goths.  

Again, the classicizing principle of transference underlies this entire discussion. Our earliest account of Cyrus’ war with Tomyris is Herodotus, and there that queen is the ruler of the Massagetae, a central-Asian Iranian steppe people.  

Concerning them, Herodotus states that, “Some say they are a Scythian tribe;” and, “In their dress and mode of living the Massagetae resemble the Scythians.” But Herodotus recognized that these peoples were separate, noting that, “Some Hellenes claim that it is Scythians who [share wives], but it is really the Massagetae, not the Scythians, who have this custom.” Nevertheless, later authors considered Tomyris a queen of the Scythians, among them Pompeius Trogus and Orosius, whom Jordanes seems to have followed and then further extended this transference from Scythians to Getae to Goths. In the context of his thematic program, Jordanes here reconfigures some accounts of Persian conflict with neighboring barbarians to cast the Goths in an almost identical role as that of the protagonists of classical antiquity’s first work of history. The Greeks, and now the Goths, both impossibly fend off multiple invasions by the Persians. And further, Jordanes’ account places the Goths on the ‘right’ side of history, at least from a Roman point of view. Where Jordanes had previously told of the Goths fighting for Troy, the forefathers of Rome, here they fight Persia, the centuries-old rival of the Roman empire.

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55 Jordanes, Getica 64.
56 Herodotus 1.201-16.
57 Ibid. 1.201.
58 Ibid. 1.215.
59 Ibid. 1.216.
60 Trogus is known through the epitome of Justin 1.8; Orosius 2.7.
Goths and Romans

Much of the subsequent narrative follows a similar pattern. Drawing from numerous Greek and Latin authors, Jordanes weaves together past accounts of the Scythians, Getae, Thracians, Moesians, and indeed ‘real’ Goths into a single history for a single people. As a Roman author drawing on Roman sources, Jordanes’ account of the Gothic past employs well-worn literary tropes. For example, Jordanes perpetuates the stereotypical portrayal of barbarians. By the mid sixth century, the designation of barbarian had been, for a millennium, a generic cultural template in ethnographic writing. Common characteristics of northern (as opposed to eastern) barbarians included general savagery, bellicosity, greatness of stature, stupidity and a way of life that did not include agriculture or urban habitation. The Getica follows these age old ethnographic practices in its portrayal of many non-Roman peoples. Concerning the Alans, Jordanes suggests that “though they live in the form of men, they have the cruelty of wild beasts.” Certain Scandinavian tribes are “a race of men bold and quick to fight”, while others “live like wild animals in hewn out rocks.” The Gepids are “slow of thought”, the Franks are simply “barbarous”, while the Huns are “fiercer than ferocity itself;” a “savage race…scarcely human… having no language save one which bore but slight resemblance to human speech.”

61 Jordanes, Getica 128, “Hi vero sub hominum figura vivunt beluina saevitia.”
62 Jordanes, Getica 22, “acre hominum genus et at bella prumtissimum;” “Hi omnes excisis rupibus quasi castellis inhabitant ritu beluino.”
Jordanes, however, departs entirely from received literary precedent and rescues the Goths from such barbarity, elevating them to an estate commensurate to other great classical civilizations. Recall that Jordanes tells us that Dio Chrysostom believed “the Goths have ever been wiser than other barbarians and were nearly like the Greeks.”64 A certain Gothic king Dicineus taught the Goths “almost the whole of philosophy…Thus by teaching them ethics he restrained their barbarous customs…he made them live naturally under laws of their own…He taught them logic and made them skilled in reasoning beyond all other races.”65 In a rare instance of emotive excitement, the voice of Jordanes intervenes and implores his reader: “Think, I pray you, what pleasure it was for these brave men, when for a little space they had leisure from warfare, to be instructed in the teachings of philosophy! You might have seen one scanning the position of the heavens and another investigating the nature of plants and bushes.”66 Jordanes means to evoke the image of Socrates, per his accusation in the Plato’s Apology (and Aristophanes’ Clouds), studying the stuff of heaven and earth.67

And this is not Jordanes’ only Platonic reference. Upon Dicineus’ death, the Goths elect as their king Comosicus, another philosopher and the intellectual equal of his predecessor. In describing the reigns of both Dicineus and Comosicus, Jordanes wants to portray the Goths as living in accordance with the ideal of Plato’s philosopher-kings.

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64 Jordanes, Getica 40, “Unde et pene omnibus barbaris Gothi sapientiores semper extiterunt Grecisque pene consimiles.”
65 Jordanes, Getica 69, “Qui cernens eorum animos sibi in omnibus oboedire et naturalem eos habere ingenium, onnem pene phyllosophiam eos instruxit: erat namque huius rei magister peritus. Nam ethicam eos erudiens barbaricos mores compescuit; fysicam tradens naturaliter proprisiis legibus vivere fecit.”
66 Jordanes, Getica 70, “Qualis erat, rogo, voluptas, ut viri fortissimi, quando ab armis quantolumcumque vacassent, doctrinis philosophics inbuebantur? Videris unum caeli positionem, alium herbarum fruticunque explorare naturas.”
67 Plato, Apology 18b, 19b, 23d; Aristophanes, Clouds 227-34
Later, the Gothic king Hermanaric is described as having “subdued many warlike peoples of the north and made them obey his laws, and some of our ancestors have justly compared him to Alexander the Great.”68 The Goths no longer remain just another barbarian rabble who quarrel endlessly with other barbarians, but are instead exalted as a civilization that imposes its own laws on lesser peoples – as the Romans do. Jordanes rids the Goths of cliché barbarisms and elevates even their warriors to the standing of philosophers and their rulers to the status of Alexander and Platonic philosopher-kings. This is a significant departure from standard Roman portrayals of the Goths. In the two centuries that the Goths had been regular players in Roman historical works, they had been cast as prototypical barbarian savages. From a literary standpoint, it did not matter that, by the turn of the sixth century, a sizable portion of the imperial army was of Gothic ancestry or that the Goths firmly controlled two previously Roman provinces, including the original seat of Roman power in Italy. Jordanes’ subversion of this convention reflects not only the shifting demographic and political realities of the late Roman and post-Roman worlds, but further illustrates Jordanes’ literary strategy of recasting the classical past with other classical norms. He substitutes one classicism for another. While Goths no longer fulfill the standard role of the savage barbarian, they nonetheless satisfy the prescribed expectations of a classically noteworthy people.

In another regard, though, Jordanes pushes the themes of his text well beyond those of any Roman history before published. The Getica does not simply free the Goths from barbarian topos. In numerous instances, it is also laudatory of Gothic achievement

and, more to the point, at times offers that praise at the expense of the Romans. In fact, this has been an element of the text recognized in older commentaries. Scholarship that sought out Cassiodorus’ presence in the text considered praise for the Goths to be evidence of Cassiodoran panegyric for the royal Amal dynasty of Theoderic. More recent revisionist studies have, differently, played down or refuted the presence of Gothic sympathies in Jordanes’ work because they envision the Getica as a textual vindication of Justinian’s eradication of the Goths. In some of the latter studies, any semblance of praise for the Goths in the Getica is explained away as trace amounts of Cassiodoran rhetoric that Jordanes, in his ineptitude, accidentally preserved while writing an otherwise pro-Roman text. Both interpretive schemes are too one-sided and prevent more nuanced readings of Jordanes’ presentation of the Roman-Gothic historical dynamic. That Jordanes applauds the Goths, and sometimes at the cost of Roman glory, does not undermine other discussions in the Getica which extol cooperation and friendship between Goths and Romans. Jordanes’ history reflects the incontrovertible truth that the Roman-Gothic relationship was complicated and often fraught. Any work of Gothic history, even one which enjoys the Getica’s artistic license, would be remiss not to convey this.

Jordanes’ praise for Gothic achievement is evident in discussions of their martial prowess. Histories written in the classical tradition revolve around warfare, and the Getica is no exception. Jordanes catalogues battle after battle as the Goths roam the barbarian hinterlands north of the Danube. In fact, for nearly the entire first half of the work, detailing some 1,800 years of Gothic history, Jordanes never once describes a

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Gothic defeat in battle. This illustrates Jordanes’ intention to establish the idea of Gothic military might. Eventually, though, Jordanes relents and recounts the Goths’ defeat at the hands of the Huns in the mid-fourth century. But even here he hardly dwells on the subject, electing instead to mention it quickly and then to interrupt his discussion of the Goths abruptly by splitting the narrative into two separate histories of the Visigoths and Ostrogoths respectively.  

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With the exception of the text’s final conflict between the Ostrogoths and Belisarius’ forces, Jordanes never recounts a battle in which the Goths lose to the Romans.  

71 In fact, the Getica’s first account of Gothic-Roman interaction of any kind highlights Gothic military superiority: “Then came Caesar, the first of all the Romans to assume imperial power and to subdue almost the whole world, who conquered all kingdoms and even seized islands lying beyond our world, reposing in the bosom of the Ocean. He made tributary to the Romans those that knew not the Roman name even by hearsay, and yet was unable to prevail against the Goths, despite his frequent attempts.”  

72 Note Jordanes’ rhetorical strategy: upon introducing him, Jordanes inflates both the name of Caesar and Rome with accolade after accolade until, with a terse line, he undercuts the picture of Roman might while enhancing that of the Goths. Jordanes’ intentions are clear, and given that the Getica’s chronology proceeds so rapidly, those episodes which Jordanes chooses to recount should be appreciated as all the more illustrative of his

70 Jordanes, Getica 131-245; 246-314.
71 Against Caesar: 68; Domitian: 76; Philip the Arab: 90-1; Decius: 102; Valens:138; Stilicho: 155; Honorius: 159.
72 Jordanes, Getica 68, “Caesar vero, qui sibi primus omnium Romanum vindicavit imperium et pene omnem mundum suae dicioni subegit omniaque regna perdomuit, adeo ut extra nostro urbe in oceani sinu repositas insulas occuparet, et nec nomen Romanorum auditu qui noverant, eos Romanis tributarios faceret, Gothos tamen crebro pertemptans nequivit subicere.”
thematic program. Conversely, the reader also considers those moments that Jordanes
neglects to mention. Take, for instance, Trajan’s conquest of Dacia or the sound beating
Claudius II delivered to the Goths at Naissus in 268 – a decisive victory for the Romans
and terrible defeat for the Goths. 73 The Roman general Stilicho’s defeat of Radagaisus’
invasion force in 406 is also markedly absent. In these, and in various other silences, the
case can be made that Jordanes not only underscores Gothic victory, but also Roman loss
at the hands of the Goths.

Jordanes’ unflattering treatment of the Romans does not stop at the recounting of
Gothic military victories. Jordanes often accuses Romans of immoral action, delights in
their defeat, and perhaps even has a laugh at their expense. Often Jordanes blames Roman
misfortune - and misfortune at the hands of the Goths - on the failings of their rulers and
generals. During the reign of Gallus and Volusianus, “the Goths frequently ravaged
Moesia, through the neglect of the Emperors.” 74 Jordanes never censures the Goths for
such action. Later, during the reign of Valens, when the Visigoths cross the Danube and
migrate into Moesia, Jordanes recounts the “glorious victory” of the Goths over the
Romans at the Battle of Adrianople - a Roman loss that is ascribed to God’s righteous
punishment of Valens for his Arianism. 75 One could argue, though, that Jordanes’ venom
in this particular case is simply a result of his antipathy towards the slain emperor’s
heresy. But even if this is granted, it is still clear that Jordanes ultimately justifies and
applauds the Visigothic victory over the Romans and characterizes the battle as

73 Due to confusion in the sources, it is disputed whether the emperor Gallienus or Claudius II led the
Roman forces into battle. Alföldi (1939) argues that it was Gallienus. Bray (1997), Potter (2004), Southern
(2001), and Watson (2003) argue for Claudius II. The latter earned his surname ‘Gothicus’ from Naissus.
74 Jordanes, Getica 104, “…Gothis saepe ob principum negligentiam Mysiam devastantibus…”
75 Jordanes, Getica 138.
comeupance for both the *avaritia* of the Romans in their brutal exploitation of the Visigoth migrants and the *dolus* of the Roman general Lupicinus against Fritigern.\textsuperscript{76} In a similar vein, during the reign of Honorius, Jordanes presents Alaric’s devastation of Italy and sack of Rome as the result of Stilicho’s treachery against him. Jordanes then commends Alaric’s restraint in forbidding his Visigoths from burning Rome “as tribal peoples do” or from doing damage to holy places.\textsuperscript{77} Finally, during the kingship of Alaric’s successor Athaulf, Jordanes describes Honorius’ impotence as both an emperor and father in his inability to prevent Athaulf from kidnapping and marrying his daughter. Jordanes writes, “the Emperor Honorius was powerless to resist,” and in his failure to protect the “nobility, beauty, and chaste purity” of his daughter, Jordanes presents a Roman emperor effectively emasculated by a Gothic king.\textsuperscript{78} Jordanes ultimately concludes this section of the narrative on a sarcastic note as he describes Athaulf “leaving Honorius Augustus stripped of his wealth, to be sure, yet pleased at heart because he was now a sort of kinsman of his.”\textsuperscript{79}

However, a consideration of the genres of ekphrasis and wrought speeches in the *Getica* reminds us that Jordanes’ overriding agenda was not the denigration of things Roman. Quite differently, the narrative portion concerning the Gothic-Roman alliance against the Huns at the Battle of the Catalaunian Plains, the thematic centerpiece of the *Getica*, celebrates the union of these two peoples. This episode, at thirty-eight chapters in

\begin{footnotes}
\item[76] Jordanes, *Getica* 134, 136.
\item[77] Jordanes, *Getica* 156, “…ut solent gentes…”
\item[78] Jordanes, *Getica* 160.
\item[79] Jordanes, *Getica* 160, “Honorioque Augusto quamvis opibus exausto tamen iam quasi cognatum grato animo derelinquens, Gallias tendit.”
\end{footnotes}
length, is the single longest portion of the *Getica*.\(^{80}\) Jordanes dedicated over an eighth of his text to detailing this alliance and battle. His intentions must be afforded due consideration. Jordanes continues to develop his thematic presentation of Gothic respectability and military prowess. Attila and the Huns, here assuming the role of the prototypical barbarians, serve as foils to the nobility of the Goths and Romans. Attila is described as “the king of all the barbarian world” who “sought to subdue the foremost nations of the world – the Romans and the Visigoths.”\(^{81}\) Note the esteem and parity in which Jordanes now holds both Goths and Romans. As Attila’s power grows, he seeks to neutralize the threat of a Roman-Gothic coalition by sowing dissension between the two nations, “thinking to shatter by civil discord those whom he could not crush in battle.”\(^{82}\) Perceiving Attila’s treachery, the emperor Valentinian III sends an envoy to the Visigoths suing for a military alliance against the Huns. Jordanes here offers the first speech of the *Getica*, followed immediately by another from the Visigothic king Theodorid affirming the Roman entreaty.\(^{83}\) The Gothic speech is far shorter than the Romans’ and characterized by epigrammatic statement: “I call no war dangerous save one whose cause is weak; for he fears not ill on whom Majesty has smiled.”\(^{84}\) Significantly, the first voices to intrude into the *Getica*, other than Jordanes’ own, are those of the Goths and the Romans, and they do so to pledge their comradeship. Upon announcing the alliance, Jordanes offers what is by far his most sentimental and impassioned intervention: “O

\(^{80}\) Jordanes, *Getica* 180-218.

\(^{81}\) Jordanes, *Getica* 179, “Hae sedes erant Attilae regis barbariae tota tenenti.” 181, “…primas mundi gentes Romanos Vesegothasque subdere praeoptabat.”

\(^{82}\) Jordanes, *Getica* 185, “…serens Gothorum Romanorumque discordia, ut, quos proelio non poterat concutere…”

\(^{83}\) Jordanes, *Getica* 187-89.

\(^{84}\) Jordanes, *Getica* 189. “…nullum bellum dixerim grave, nisi quod causa debilitat, quando nil triste pavet, cui maiestas adriserit.”
brave array, sure defense and sweet comradeship, having the aid of those who delight to share in the same dangers!”

Given this, and Jordanes’ description of the Goths and Romans as “the foremost nations of the world”, one wonders how recent interpretations can defend their claims that the Getica’s main purpose is to promote the Roman destruction of the Goths.

Shortly after the speeches, Jordanes commences his ekphrasis of the Battle of the Catalaunian Plains. He takes considerable care in the composition of this portion of the narrative. And while it must be admitted that the aesthetic of Jordanes’ prose is generally not the stuff of legend, it bears remark that his description of the battle showcases his best writing. Even Jordanes’ detractors who lambasted his “decadent, crumbling later Latin” were impressed with his efforts here.

Mierow noted that “his Gothic History contains many passages of notable strength and beauty. Strange to say, this ecclesiastic is at his best in describing the horrors of war; he even appears to take delight in the gruesome details. His account of the famous battle of the Catalaunian Plains is a notable piece of descriptive writing.” It is likely that Priscus served as a model for the depiction of the battle and Mommsen suggested that Jordanes, inspired by the beauty of Priscus’ narrative, elevated his own style to match it.

Concerning the narrative of the battle, Jordanes begins with a review of the arrayed troops. The Hunnic hordes are described as “innumerable peoples of divers tribes, which [Attila] had subjected to his sway,” whose leaders “hung upon Atilla’s nod like slaves, and when he gave a sign even by a glance,

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85 Jordanes, Getica 190, “Felix procinctum, auxilium tutum, suave collegium habere solacia illorum, quibus delectat ipsa etiam simul subire discrimina.”
86 Mierow (1915), 1.
87 Ibid. (1923), 142.
88 Mommsen (1882), xxxv-vi.
without a murmur each stood forth in fear and trembling, and at all times did as he was bid.”89 Jordanes means to present Attila’s armies, servile and subjugated, in direct contradistinction to the allied forces of the Romans and Goths, in which “Theodorid with the Visigoths held the right wing and Aëtius with the Romans the left. They placed in the centre Sangiban [leader of the Alans]…thus contriving with military caution to surround by a host of faithful troops the man in whose loyalty they had little confidence.”90 Goths and Romans are presented as equal and autonomous, “faithful” partners who together share the task of leading into battle the various tribes assembled under them. Again, Jordanes underscores the Roman-Gothic partnership. Shortly thereafter, Jordanes interposes a speech within his ekphrasis of the battle wherein Attila exhorts his troops to redouble their efforts. He lashes out against the Goths and Romans, exclaiming, “Despise this union of discordant races! To defend oneself by alliance is proof of cowardice.”91 Unquestionably, the role of Attila in the Getica is that of the villain, a man “born into the world to shake the nations, the scourge of all lands.”92 His speech, the longest in the Getica, was meant to convey his ferocity and terror, but also to serve as an interpretive guidepost. As the clear antagonist of the text, Attila’s rhetorical positions were meant to be recognized as contrary to those of the ‘heroes’, here the Goths and Romans. So, when Jordanes’ Attila maligns the coalition of Goths and Romans, the reader is urged to do just

89 Jordanes, Getica 198, “Cornua vero eius multiplices populi et diversae nationes, quos dicioni suae subdiderat, ambiebant.” 200, “Reliqua autem, si dici fas est, turba regum diversarumque nationum ductores ac si satellites notibus Attilae attendebant, et ubi oculo annuisset, absque aliqua murmuratione cun timore et tremore unusquisque adstabat, aut certe, quod iussus fuerat, exequebatur.”
90 Jordanes, Getica 197, “Dextrum itaque cornum cum Vesegothis Theoderidus tenebat, sinistrum Aetius cum Romanis, conlocantes in medio Sanguibanum, quem superius rettulimus praefuisse Alanis, providentes cautioni militari, ut eum, de cuius animo minus praesumebant, fidelium turba concluderent.”
91 Jordanes, Getica 204, “Adunatas dispicite dissonas gentes: indicium pavoris est societate defendi.”
92 Jordanes, Getica 182, “Vir in concussione gentium natus in mundo, terrarum omnium metus, qui, nescio qua sorte, terrebat cuncta formidabili de se opinione vulgate.”
the opposite.\textsuperscript{93} Jordanes employs the genres of ekphrasis and speech to good effect in the development of his literary themes.\textsuperscript{94}

**The Romana: More Than an *Adbreviatio Chronicorum***

Despite the proclamation at the outset of this chapter that the *Romana* and *Getica* form a coherent whole, it has been the *Getica* that has dominated this discussion. It has done so for a simple reason: it contains far more original material than the *Romana*. Despite being thematically tied to the *Getica*, in scope, format, composition, and tone the *Romana* is a different text. The vast majority of its content is unoriginal. That is, it comes verbatim or in an abbreviated form from other authors. Jordanes, though, is forthright about the highly derivative nature of his text, calling it an *adbreviatio chronicorum*.\textsuperscript{95} Yet despite the fact that most of the *Romana*’s content is derived from other sources, it nevertheless remains a unique and original text. This may seem counterintuitive, but it is illustrative of the late ancient literary practice, especially in the genres of breviary and epitome, of reappropriating and repurposing earlier texts.

What is initially most striking about the *Romana*, then, is the fabric of the text itself. It contains substantial and pronounced elements of four distinct ancient historiographical genres: chronicle, breviary, epitome, and narrative of recent and

\textsuperscript{93} That Jordanes makes the Battle of the Catalaunian Plains, with its Visigothic and Roman protagonists, the centerpiece of his text is itself an argument against the *Getica*’s derivation from Cassiodorus’ history, which almost assuredly heroized the Ostrogothic, and specifically Amal, past. In 451 the Ostrogoths were under Hunnic domination and fought for Attila during the battle. Despite being described as “nobler even than the king they served [Attila]” (*Getica* 199), it is highly unlikely that Cassiodorus would have made an episode in which Ostrogoths were subservient to the villainous Attila and fought on the ignominious – and losing – side central to a text designed to praise the Ostrogoths.

\textsuperscript{94} For an excellent discussion of ekphrasis in ancient literature, see R. Webb, *Ekphrasis, Imagination and Persuasion in Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Practice* (Farnham, 2009).

\textsuperscript{95} Jordanes, *Getica* 1.
contemporary events. No other text of comparable form survives antiquity. This is, itself, remarkable and stands as a testament to the literary diversity of the sixth-century. The previous neglect of the Romana is attributable to past antipathy and apathy toward late imperial breviaries of Roman and universal history. Only recently have these terse, often derivative, handbooks begun to be read with a mind to thematic originality. The following discussion will provide a basic summary of the contents of the Romana, demarcate the individual historiographical genres represented in the text, and begin to illustrate the literary process whereby the words of other authors were used to create an entirely original, thematically coherent work of history.

Following a preface attributable to his own hand, Jordanes commences his history with an epigrammatic statement from an obscure writer named Iamblichus and then, employing the genre of biblical history, draws from Genesis by listing twenty generations of genealogy from Adam to Abraham. Following this, Jordanes engages with the late antique genre of Christian chronography by taking up the chronicle of Eusebius, the progenitor of the genre. Chronicle writing influenced subsequent literary production in the late ancient and medieval periods more than any other late Roman historiographical innovation. And in the highly conservative intellectual culture of the Roman empire, innovation was not the byword of the day. Still, Eusebius may be credited with the invention of two, or perhaps three, new subtypes of historical writing: Christian

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96 The terms epitome and breviary are sometimes misused or conflated. An epitome is a condensed version of a single, longer work. A breviary is more simply a short history of what is usually an expansive period of time. For further discussion, see G. Bonamente, ‘Minor Latin Historians of the Fourth Century A.D.’ in Marasco, G. (ed.), Greek and Roman Historiography in Late Antiquity Fourth to Sixth Century A.D. (Leiden, 2003).

97 The Iamblichus in question was probably a legal critic at Beirut who wrote in Greek, according to Mommsen, ‘Jamblichos bei Jordanes’, NA 8, 352, 1883, = Ges. Schr. 7, 519-20). The biblical genealogy is in Romana 8-10.
chronography, ecclesiastical history, and possibly a third in his *Life of Constantine*, which combined elements of traditional biography, encomium, and classicizing narrative under a Christian aetiological framework. In this regard, Eusebius stands as the most innovative historian since Herodotus and the inaugurator of late antiquity’s outpouring of literary experimentation.

Christianity and that religion’s newly redefined relationship with the Roman state in the reign of Constantine played no small role in these intellectual developments. As Christianity became the favored religion of the empire’s elites, Christian thinkers beginning with Eusebius recast an old, often troubled relationship. The entwined destinies of the Roman empire and Christianity, Eusebius argued, had been prefigured by the providential coincidence of Augustus and Christ. The new religion and the new empire were destined to flourish together. Eusebius was also the first author to articulate the connection between universal empire under a sole ruler and the universal Christian religion under the one true God – a rhetorical precept central to much late Roman historiography. Furthermore, Christian eschatology profoundly affected the way time itself was conceived, which, in turn, altered the way Christian historians envisioned both past and future. By defining an end point for existence, time became limited and therefore comprehensible, and could be conceived of as having a course, a goal, or, more appropriately, a plan – one ordered by God. The chronicle’s primary function was to witness historical continuity and to demonstrate the unfolding of divine providence.\(^9^8\)

By drawing from Eusebius, Jordanes imbued his work with the authority of Christian historiography’s most important figure. More aptly, though, Jordanes’ source should be named Eusebius-Jerome. The split designation is used because it is not entirely certain whether Jordanes’ worked from Jerome’s Latin translation as generally assumed or from both Jerome and Eusebius’ Greek original. But there are two pieces of evidence for the latter. First, concerning the Persian king Artaxerxes, Jordanes notes that his epithet is *Macrochir* – long-hand.99 The Greek form is used in Jordanes’ otherwise Latin text. Jerome’s translation of Eusebius, however, renders the word as *Longimanus*. If Jordanes had been using Jerome alone it seems highly unlikely that he would depart from his source and fashion this graecism. Second, Jordanes reports that during the reign of the Assyrian king Belepares, the Hebrew judge Aod and certain tribes were in rebellion. Jordanes calls these tribes *allofili*, mirroring Eusebius, whereas Jerome uses the term *alienigenae*.100 Elsewhere, the *Romana* closely follows Jerome’s Latin, but the forms of *Macrochir* and *allofili* suggest that Jordanes worked from both the original Eusebian chronicle and Jerome’s translation.101

Employing Eusebius-Jerome, Jordanes begins with Abraham and then details the reigns of the Assyrian kings, the kings of the Medes, the Persians, and the Ptolemaic rulers of Egypt.102 All of the material in this portion of the *Romana* derives from Eusebius’ account, but Jordanes leaves his own authorial impression on his text by

99 Jordanes, *Romana* 64.
102 Assyrians (*Romana* 12-49); Medes (50-57); Persians (58-71); Ptolemaics (72-84).
electing to leave out certain sections of his source. Eusebius’ chronicle also covers the histories of the Egyptians, Spartans, Athenians, Corinthians, Sicyonians, and Lydians to name a few, yet these never appear in the *Romana*. By tracing specifically the histories of Assyrians, Medes, Persians, and Ptolemies Jordanes follows only those empires represented in the prophecy of Daniel. The opening chronographic portion of the *Romana* concludes with Augustus’ conquest of Ptolemaic Egypt whereupon Jordanes invokes Daniel’s prophesy explicitly and then commences a narrative account of Rome beginning with Romulus.\(^{103}\) On a thematic level, Rome becomes the fifth and final of the world empires treated in the *Romana*. The Four Kingdom schema of Daniel was a widely-held interpretation of providence in Jordanes’ day. In following it, Jordanes departs from Eusebius and dates the birth of Christ to A.M. 5500, adhering to the precedent of Byzantine chroniclers.\(^{104}\)

Jordanes further preserves the subject matter, if not the precise format of Eusebius, by detailing the reigns of the Hebrew kings, the tenures of the patriarchs, and other momentous events in Jewish history after each individual entry of the aforementioned kings.\(^{105}\) In fact, Jordanes dedicates more text and narrative variety to Jewish history in each entry than he does to the history of the Four Empires. In constructing the chronographic portion around Daniel’s prophesy and the Hebrews, Jordanes highlights the Christianity of his historiographical scope. Yet the *Romana* is anything but a proper ecclesiastical history – the other major historiographical genre of

\(^{103}\) Jordanes cites Daniel’s prophecy in *Romana* 84.


\(^{105}\) While Eusebius employed multiple contiguous vertical columns of text in his chronicle, Jordanes maintained a single running narrative.
late antiquity. Jordanes almost certainly had read Eusebius’ history of the Church and his continuators, but seems to have made a conscious decision not to inject typical elements of ecclesiastical history into his own work. There are no councils, no Church Fathers, no miracles, no evangelization, and scarcely a mention of heresy (except in the case of Valens’ Arianism and Basiliscus’ Nestorianism). Still, Christian concerns are at the core of the Romana, if not always the central topic of discussion.

Regarding the regal and Hebrew material, Jordanes stays close to the Eusebian text, adding nothing novel, but not copying outright either. Jordanes also seems to have supplemented Eusebius-Jerome with what Mommsen maintained was “some Alexandrine chronicle.” Alexandria was a center for chronicle production in late antiquity and decisively affected eastern chronography. This source presumably supplied Jordanes with the long series of Hebrew patriarchs and may also explain the choice of the Ptolemaic dynasty to embody the ‘Greek empire’ from Alexander on. The creative hand of Jordanes does, however, appear in this portion of the text as he inserts some pertinent early Roman material amidst the Eusebian matter. Though Eusebius had done this too, Jordanes’ Roman entries are markedly fuller. Jordanes details the fall of Troy, the arrival of Aeneas and the lives of his successors, and the foundation of Rome by Romulus, where he marks the age of the world at 4650 years. It becomes clear that within his history of the world, Rome is to play the central role. Finally, it should be noted that

106 Jordanes, Romana 308, 342.
this initial genealogical and chronographic portion of the *Romana* is not a separate work or detachable section as has been suggested. It integrates both Roman and world history in a systematic and controlled fashion akin to the model of Orosius, an author whom Jordanes explicitly follows in the geographic portions of the *Getica*.

The notion that the initial chronicle of the *Romana* represents the first part of a “three-part compilation” (the other parts being the rest of the *Romana* and the *Getica*) is unhelpful.

Upon reaching the ascendancy of Augustus, Jordanes puts his chronicle of world history on hold in order to retrace his steps back to Romulus and recount Roman history in a narrative from the kings to the consuls, and then to the emperors up to his own time in 551. This choice of format is itself noteworthy. By electing to combine the genres of chronography and narrative in a single text, Jordanes stands as an early exemplar of a practice that would become a Byzantine literary commonplace from the seventh century onwards. Distinctions between historical and chronographic writing would begin to break down not long after Jordanes’ day, and, in this regard, the *Romana* may now serve as an important marker in the evolution of Byzantine historiography. But to return to the *Romana*’s newly introduced narrative, the seven kings of Rome are each provided individual entries, though the five centuries of consular rule are compressed into a narrative of unrelieved conquest. This is a significant departure. From the first Assyrian king Nisus all the way to Tarquin, Jordanes moves forward chronologically from ruler to ruler. When Jordanes reaches the Republic, however, he states explicitly that he will

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110 Croke (2003), 371.
111 Goffart (1988), 21, 47 ff.
112 Romulus and the kings (*Romana* 87-110); consuls (111-254); emperors (255-388).
cease his strictly annalistic account. He explains that such a format would prove tedious to his readers. While this might be true, Jordanes tacitly announces a change in his historiographical methodology. His history shifts from a biographical focus to a thematic one, and the primary theme he pursues is warfare and empire building.

In recounting the age of kings and consuls Jordanes relies heavily upon Florus’ so-called *Epitomae de Titio Livio*, presumably written during the reign of Hadrian, and, to a far lesser extent, Festus’ *Breviarium*, an extremely brief account of imperial conquest of the provinces and the wars against the Parthians written probably in 369 or 370. When using Florus Jordanes generally reproduces his model verbatim, though he takes more liberties with Festus. Florus serves as Jordanes’ guide from Romulus to Philip V of Macedonia whereupon Festus is taken up briefly to recount Roman conquests in Numidia, Illyria, Thrace, Pontus and other locales. Jordanes then returns to Florus, having skipped over a significant portion of his sources’ history, to cover the period from the death of Crassus to the Battle of Actium.

The insertions of Festus among Jordanes’ more expansive use of Florus have puzzled scholars. Where Jordanes uses them, Florus and Festus cover the same chronology and many of the same events. One wonders why Jordanes elected to employ Festus at all. On one level, using Festus streamlined the primary thematic thrust of the Floran material: the recounting of Roman foreign conquests. While the first half of


115 J. Eadie holds that the work is dedicated to the emperor Valens and was written before the province called Valentia was founded in Britannia in AD 370 and after peace was achieved between Athanaric the Goth and Valens (AD 369), *The Breviarium of Festus. A Critical Edition with Historical Commentary* (London, 1967), see ch.6 for details on this peace agreement. Florus is employed in *Romana* 87-110; 115-209; 224; 236; 241-249; 251-254. Festus in *Romana* 112-13; 261; 269 270; 272; 277; 280; 290-1.
Florus’ text treats Roman history in a purely chronological narrative, Festus’ format is schematic, treating individual geographic regions and noting their wars with Rome and the event of the ultimate subjugation. Using Festus allowed Jordanes to quickly cover material consistent with the theme of imperial conquest. Making such editorial choices was central to the work of those who wrote breviaries and epitomes in the late Roman period.

More importantly, however, Jordanes’ use of Festus can be fully appreciated only when the portions of Florus that Jordanes skips are accounted for. Again, Jordanes follows Florus through the defeat of Philip V, takes up Festus momentarily, then returns to Florus with the campaigns of Crassus in Syria. A considerable amount of Florus’ text is bypassed. What becomes clear, though, is that Jordanes has very purposefully omitted all of Florus’ accounts of civil discord within the Roman state. This had occurred earlier as Jordanes was following Florus’ account of the early Republic. From Romulus through Pyrrhus, Jordanes reproduces Florus word-for-word, paragraph-after-paragraph, excising practically nothing. Yet after Pyrrhus’ defeat, Florus’ text enters into a discussion of Roman civil strife detailing battlefield mutinies and the various conflicts between patricians and plebeians known to modernity as the Struggle of the Orders. Nothing of this appears in the Romana. Jordanes simply skips it and then promptly recommences his use of Florus. In precisely the same manner, Jordanes fails to record Florus’ later accounts of the Social War, the unrest caused by the Gracchan reforms, Spartacus’ slave uprising, the civil wars of Marius and Sulla, Sertorius’ rebellion, the Catilinarian

116 An exception is the omission of a rather lengthy and rhetorically overblown account of Roman courage and sacrifice in the war against Pyrrhus. One imagines that concision dictated Jordanes’ choice of editing.
conspiracy, and the civil wars of Pompey and Caesar. Instead, Jordanes follows only Florus’ discussions of late republican imperial conquest, picking and choosing what Floran material to include, and always omitting civil conflicts.\textsuperscript{117} The resultant impression of the regnal and republican periods in the \textit{Romana} is that of unremitting strength. This differs considerably from Florus’ thematic presentation of the Roman state. Florus structures his text around the dichotomy of foreign and domestic conflicts, dedicating his first book to the former and the second to the latter. He argues that the unbridled success of Rome’s imperial ventures and the “resources and wealth thus acquired spoiled the morals of the age and ruined the state, which was engulfed in its own vices as in a common sewer.”\textsuperscript{118} This is the central thematic thrust of Florus’ text.

Nothing of this is preserved in the \textit{Romana}. By neglecting to reproduce any mention of civil conflict, Jordanes completely bypasses the underlying historical and moralistic message of Florus, and thereby repurposes the text. The authorial presence of Florus vanishes. This is illustrative of the process whereby late Roman epitomists and breviarists could produce texts comprised almost exclusively of the words of other writers, but which still possess their own unique thematic frameworks. In the past, discussions of epitomes and breviaries were colored by accusations of plagiarism. In the case of ancient histories, the ultimate moral conclusions purveyed by an author were what defined his text, not the historical events which he recounted. Plagiarism implies

\textsuperscript{117} The only civil war that Jordanes mentions is that of Octavian and Marc Antony. Given the absence of any other discussion of civil discord in the \textit{Romana}, it seems likely that the decision to include the republic’s final conflict was predicated upon the logical need to explain the Roman state’s transition to monarchy under Augustus.

\textsuperscript{118} Florus, \textit{Epitome} 1.47.8, “Illae opes atque divitiae adfixere saeculi mores, mersamque vitiis suis quasi sentina rem publicam pessum dedere.”
unoriginality of thought and the deceptive presentation of another’s ideas as one’s own. Jordanes employs the raw historical information of his sources to assemble an original work of history – one with an internally coherent thematic structure unlike any of those of his sources. Florus ultimately sought to illustrate the process whereby the Roman republic’s military success proved to be its own undoing. Jordanes’ historical conclusions about the state of the empire are markedly different. The Romana is motivated by a jeremiadic impulse and laments what Jordanes sees as the decrepit and decayed state of the empire in the sixth century.\footnote{This theme is discussed at length in Chapter Five.} The Floran material is employed by Jordanes because it offers a wide-ranging and succinct picture of the military might of republican Rome which, later in the Romana, he places in stark contradistinction to an image of the embattled and weakened empire of his own time. In other words, Jordanes uses Florus’ text to represent Rome in its ideal state. This was never Florus’ intention in his own work. Moreover, we know that Florus’ Epitome was a widely read handbook of Roman history in the late antique and medieval periods.\footnote{For recent work on Florus, see A. Núñez and J. Miguel, ‘Floro y los historiadores contemporáneos’, Acta classica Universitatis scientiarum Debreceniensis 42 (2006), 117-26} Given its popularity, it is likely that some of Jordanes’ readers would have known Florus and recognized the considerable lacunae regarding civil conflicts in the Romana. If so, then they would have appreciated the marked difference in themes between the two texts. Modern readers need to read the Romana, and the genres of epitome and breviary more broadly, with similar sensitivity.

With Augustus, Jordanes again reaches the point where he had placed his chronicle of world history on hold to treat early Roman history. Interestingly, it is also at this point that Jordanes abandons Florus and Festus as his guides and again takes up
Eusebius-Jerome as his main source through the reign of Valens, where Jerome’s chronicle terminates. Nothing has been asked of this switch. Festus covers this period. In fact, Festus ends at the exact point Jerome terminates. It is not, however, the fact that Jordanes changes sources that is noteworthy. Rather, it is when he changes that elicits curiosity. It is clear that, with the advent of the imperial age, Jordanes again wanted to alter his historical methodology, just as he had done earlier. As before, Jordanes resumes the chronicle’s pattern of serial biography, treating each emperor in turn. Here, though, Jordanes does not rely heavily on just two sources as he did in the regnal and republican portions. Rather, in the imperial narrative Jordanes draws not only from Eusebius and Jerome, but also Eutropius, the Epitome de Caesaribus, Orosius, Socrates, Count Marcellinus, his own Getica, and probably a few other unidentifiable sources. Just what is Jordanes’ telling us about the concerns of his text by altering the form and quantity of his sources upon reaching such a pivotal moment in Roman history? By again taking up Eusebius-Jerome as his main source, Jordanes announces that he is returning to the analytical perspective of world history that he put on hold at the conclusion of his chronicle of the ‘four empires’. Having finished his treatment of the Republic which, drawing from Florus and Festus, had an entirely Romano-centric point of view, Jordanes thematically situates the imperial age in a global context. The Romana, as Mommsen’s ellipsis belies, is not simply meant to be a history of Rome and Romans, but a history of the fifth and final world empire.

When Jordanes’ history reaches the end of Valens’ reign, Jerome’s chronicle is set aside and the chronicle of Count Marcellinus, itself a conscious continuation of Jerome, provides the main source material for the *Romana* through 534. This, however, is a bit of an oversimplification, as it is ultimately unknown whether Jordanes drew directly from the work of Count Marcellinus or whether both authors drew from a common source – probably a Constantinopolitan chronicle with an eastern point of view.\(^\text{122}\) After Marcellinus’ chronicle terminates in 534 it becomes even more difficult, indeed so far impossible, to ascertain the identity of Jordanes’ source or sources. And while it is entirely reasonable to assume that Jordanes worked from written sources to recount the events of the late fifth and sixth centuries, I will argue in Chapter Five that Jordanes’ own voice is articulated most forcefully in those final portions of the text that detail the reigns of Zeno through Justinian.

This discussion has laid out a brief summary of Jordanes’ history in the whole for the sake of context, and also presented the commixture of various genres that work together to form the unique fabric of the *Romana* – an amalgam which Jordanes describes as an *adbreviatio chronicorum*.\(^\text{123}\) Jordanes’ use of Eusebius-Jerome, most notably in the initial annalistic portion, reveals his implementation of Christian chronography. His faithful adherence to, but ultimate abridgement and compression of a number of his sources, most notably Florus and Eutropius illustrate his use of the style of epitome.\(^\text{124}\) In covering recent and contemporary history in the late fifth and first half of the sixth

\(^{\text{122}}\) Croke, (1983), provides the most recent and penetrating study of the *Romana*’s relationship to Marcellinus and ultimately concludes that there is no way of knowing one way or the other.  
\(^{\text{123}}\) Jordanes, *Getica* 1.  
Jordanes places himself in the oldest tradition of historiography established by Herodotus and Thucydides. And finally, the *Romana*, taken as whole, is representative of the genre of breviary in its treatment of both world and Roman history from the dawn of time to AD 551 in fewer than 19,000 words. No other extant ancient text looks quite like this – a rather simple, but salient feature of the work that has gone unnoticed due simply to the lack of attention the *Romana* has received as a historiographic and literary creation in its own right.

**Conclusion: Literary Hybridity**

Jordanes’ texts are exemplary of the ingenuity and dynamism characteristic of so much late ancient literature. Like other late texts, much of what is unique and new in the *Getica* and *Romana* stems directly from the preservation and concomitant reconfiguration of classical literary modes and genres. This inherited classicism, however, has been interpreted as the hollow pretense of talentless writers living in an era of perpetual decline. Yet this model follows decidedly outdated assumptions that have been overturned by some four decades of research attesting the vibrancy and vigor of the late ancient world. Throughout the course of this great rehabilitation numerous long-denigrated authors have been reappraised, but Jordanes requires further consideration. Misconceptions about Jordanes arise with the problems inherent in periodization – the idea that individual eras of history possess their own systems of literary norms and conventions. The notion of literary periodization is reasonable enough, but its application to late ancient literature has been both short-sighted and inconsistent. Later Roman
authors have been saddled with a reputation for unoriginality because their writings employ elements characteristic of earlier periods. Procopius’ use of Thucydidean themes has been called pretentious and derivative. Yet Polybius, who engages with Thucydides in very similar ways, has never been brought up on similar charges. Examples of this double standard abound. This uneven application of judgement is unfair and fails to account meaningfully for the perpetuation of classical modes in later contexts.

Ultimately, this artificial compartmentalization of periods and norms reflects more about our own modern academic specializations than it does the tradition and evolution of ancient literary production. Taxonomies and overly restrictive nomenclature become heuristic impediments when confronted with late ancient literature’s experimentation with form, reception and adaptation of older texts, and efforts at compilation and consolidation. This was not a period of intellectual and artistic stagnation, but one that witnessed the advent of a new dialectic which spanned the length and breadth of antiquity’s literary continuum.

The traditional binary between ‘classical’ and ‘non-classical’ falters in the face of what is perhaps the most distinctive aspect of Jordanes’ style: literary hybridity. His histories are, frankly, a bit odd. Peter Heather called the Getica “a most perplexing text.”¹²⁵ None, I think, would disagree with this appraisal, but few would agree on much else. The Getica and Romana defy neat categorization, but attempts have been made at it all the same. For many years the Getica was thought to be the earliest incarnation of the orígenes gentium, an alleged novel historiographical genre which, like Gregory of Tours’ and Paul the Deacon’s respective histories of the Franks and Lombards, enshrined the

¹²⁵ Heather (1992), 34.
histories and cultures of the ‘new’ peoples of Europe and differed from classical histories in content and form. The emergence of new typologies of writing were thought to reflect the new political and demographic realities of the post-Roman west. This model held sway until Walter Goffart deftly shifted the focus away from novelty back round to Jordanes’ literary precedents and argued that the *Getica* and *Romana* were very much indicative of the classicizing impulses of sixth-century Constantinopolitan historical writing. Goffart’s corrective was an essential step in the rehabilitation of Jordanes and it has enjoyed wide acceptance in Anglophone scholarship. Yet Goffart’s perspective, while illuminating, is perhaps a bit too tidy. For, in the end, it makes Jordanes out to be yet another Roman author who was writing about what so many other Romans authors were writing about at the time. Jordanes’ texts, however, do not fit so easily into any prescribed molds. The *Getica*, despite its self-proclaimed purpose to trace the “origine actusque” of a single people, was neither a classicizing ethnography nor a history in the vein of Thucydides, Priscus, or Procopius.  

126 Truly, we possess no contemporary text like it.  

127 And the *Romana*, while normally written off (and ignored) as just one more derivative breviary of Roman history, is far more experimental in its structure and composition than has been realized. To be sure, Jordanes was very much a Roman author who wrote histories with consciously classicizing elements. This, though, must not delimit our understanding of the scope of Jordanes’ vision, but should inform the interpretation of both the traditional and innovative aspects of his texts.

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126 Jordanes, *Getica* 1.  
127 Amory (1997), 294.
So far, this study has evinced Jordanes’ authorial autonomy, provided more than a few examples of his literary ability, and accounted for the scope and structure of his historical corpus. We have, then, the pieces of Jordanes laid before us in the aggregate. It remains for the final two chapters to push forward the efforts begun a generation ago to contextualize the person of Jordanes within a sixth-century political and literary setting; to present a more fully realized image of how Jordanes and his texts were shaped by the conflicts and upheavals of their day. Chapter Four, though, is not about Jordanes in the immediate sense. It is about his world and the political and ideological exigencies to which his texts respond. It identifies a group of interlocutors engaged in a heretofore unnoticed discourse about the place of the Goths within the empire and the meaning of the Gothic War in Italy, and argues that it is within these debates that Jordanes’ texts must be situated. Chapter Five then pursues a global analysis of Jordanes’ texts in relation to this discourse on the ‘Gothic question’, but only after providing a detailed biography of the author himself and the multiethnic Balkan world that informed his sensibilities.
Chapter Four

The ‘Gothic Question’: Contemporary Discourse Between East and West

It was not by chance that Jordanes wrote histories of Goths and Romans while Goths and Romans were at war. Both the subject matter of his texts and their specific lines of inquiry were shaped by the contemporary crisis of the Gothic War in Italy. Jordanes and his writings, though, have usually been noted for their peculiarity, plucked from their context, and treated in isolation from their immediate political and social surroundings. And while it is indeed exceptional that the *Getica* is the only Gothic history to have survived antiquity, and that Jordanes is the first barbarian voice ever recorded, we must not forget that he was also a product of his time and place. This chapter identifies that place and describes his times.

Despite the singularity of Jordanes and his texts, writing about the Goths in the sixth century was hardly unique. The *Getica* and *Romana* formed part of a broader and intense ideological and literary debate about the nature of the Goths and their place in the Roman world. The various interlocutors that participated in this discourse spanned from Italy to Constantinople, and were not limited to the voices of historians; statesmen and ecclesiastics likewise contributed. These voices are well attested, among them Procopius and Count Marcellinus, and have been used as sources for Gothic history among other things. But we cannot not take for granted that, throughout the sixth century, authors who wrote about the Goths were all addressing
essentially the same set of questions: did Theoderic seize Italy of his own volition or was it granted to him by the emperor? Was Theoderic a ruthless barbarian or essentially Roman? Was he a tyrant or a fair and just ruler? Did Gothic rule in Italy defile or defend the Roman order? These were specific points of a contemporary debate whose survival in our otherwise lacunose body of sources speaks to their broader relevance to Romans (and Goths) on either side of the Mediterranean in this time. This was a mode of discourse that had grown out of the inescapable reality that Goths, a foreign, indeed barbarian, people, ruled in the homeland of Roman civilization. For some, this was wholly unacceptable. Romans who envisioned a reunited Roman empire could never countenance a rabble of barbarians lording over the Eternal City. Others, each with their own ideological positions, appraised the situation rather differently, and sought to reconcile the advent of Gothic rule with the persistence of an essentially Roman order. Surviving sixth-century accounts of the Goths are generally aligned along either side of this interpretive divide.

The following chapter traces the contours of this discourse on the ‘Gothic question’ that developed throughout the duration of Gothic rule in Italy and the Roman war to destroy it by detailing several distinct voices, including: Count Marcellinus, Ennodius, the authors of the *Anonymus Valesianus* and *Liber Pontificalis*, Malalas, Procopius, and the emperor Justinian himself. The latter’s imperial ideology and calls for western reconquest expressed in his legislation profoundly influenced contemporary debates about the Goths. Given the emperor’s outsized role in all of this, it is first necessary to discuss the character of the Justinianic empire and the political theater in
which these debates played out before providing discrete treatments of each of the above voices.

The Reign of Justinian: Conquest and Innovation

“Then appeared the emperor Justinian, entrusted by God with this commission, to watch over the whole Roman Empire, and so far as was possible, to remake it.”

- Procopius of Caesarea, Buildings 2.6.6

“Nor do we undertake anything new, but follow in the footsteps of the best emperors before us.”

- Justinian, Novel 78.5

In his suggestion that the emperor Justinian set out to ‘remake’ the Roman empire, Procopius inserts a vein of tension, albeit well buried, in an text otherwise characterized by flattery of the imperial administration. This assessment of the emperor’s reign aligns with Procopius’ indictment of Justinian as an innovator in his other works. To the modern, western ear, words like ‘innovator’ and ‘new’ have positive connotations. But the ancient Romans were a highly conservative people who valued tradition and disparaged novelty. Procopius’ critical estimation of Justinian’s reign came from personal experience of this era of violent flux. It was a time of monumental achievement and catastrophic failure; of conquest and cultural efflorescence; of chaos and strife.

1 “ἐφάνη τοίνυν Ἰουστινιανὸς βασιλεὺς τοῦτο πρὸς τοῦ θεοῦ κακομισμένος άξιωμα, πάσης ἐπιμελεῖσθαι καὶ ὡς ένι μάλιστα μεταποιεῖσθαι τῆς Ῥωμαίων ἀρχῆς.”
2 “Facimus autem novum nihil, sed egregios ante nos imperatores sequimur.”
3 ‘Remake’ is μεταποείσθαι.
4 Procopius, Wars 2.2.6; Secret History 6.21-25; 7.1, 6-7, 31-32, 39-41; 11.1-2.
Justinian’s ambitions were seemingly boundless and his frenetic energies shook almost every facet of social, religious, and political life for all Romans.\(^5\)

It was in the law that Justinian rooted both his vision of his own rulership and the change he sought to effect. Shortly after his accession to the purple, Justinian commissioned a group of jurists to revise, streamline, and collate the Gregorian, Hermogenian, and Theodosian codes - the three primary bodies of Roman law. Their product was the *Corpus iuris civilis*, completed in 533, and, by law, it was to stand as the sole source of law, and forbade reference to any other legal text.\(^6\) In essence, Justinian made himself supreme arbiter of the interpretation of juridical authority. Likewise, in the *Institutes*, a text within the *Corpus* that explained legal theory, Justinian emphasized the authority of imperial will over received tradition, thereby provisioning himself with the theoretical justification for the promulgation of his own new laws.\(^7\) And indeed between 535 and 564 Justinian would issue hundreds of new imperial constitutions, known as the *Novels*.\(^8\) The sheer scope of this legislative agenda was staggering, even radical, and

\(^6\) The *Corpus* was then revised in 534. *CJ, praefatio* 2.3 enjoins against the use of any previous Roman law code. In compiling the *Codex*, the editors were instructed to remove contradictions and obsolete rulings (*Const. Haec*, 2). Rather in contrast, the compilers of the Theodosian Code chose to include old rulings of historical and academic interest (*CTh 1.1.5* [March 25, 429]). This is indicative of the absolutist tendencies that characterized Justinian’s approach to jurisprudence and governance.
\(^7\) *Institutes, praefatio* 3, “Convocatis specialiter mandavimus, ut nostra auctoritate nostrisque suasionibus componant institutions, ut liceat vobis prima legum cunabula non ab antiques fabulis discere, sed ab imperiali splendore appetere, et tam aures quam animae vestrae nihil inutile nihilque perperam positum, sed quod in ipsis rerum optinet argumentis accipant.” “We directed them specifically to this common purpose: that they should gather under our authority and direction the principles of law, so that it should be permitted for you not to learn the earliest origins of the laws from ancient stories, but to approach them with imperial illumination, just as the portals of your soul should receive nothing erroneous and nothing placed out of context, but only what pertains to the very evidence of the matter.” T. Sandars, ed., *The Institutes of Justinian, with English Introduction, Translation and Notes* (New York, 1903).
\(^8\) Between 529 and 542 alone, Justinian promulgated 291 new constitutions. Not even the affairs of gardeners were beyond the regulatory reach of the emperor: *Novel 64*. For a chronology of this legislation see Honoré (1978), 105-38.
Justinian sanctioned it through appeal to orthodox Christianity and allusion to his own
divine authority. Justinian saw himself as the conduit of divine authority to earthly institutions: Novels 9, 69.4.1, 73 pr., 113.3. He even went so far as to call himself the nomos empsychos, the ‘incarnate law’, an unprecedented conceptualization of the consubstantiality of divine and imperial authority: Novel 105.2.4 (December 28, 537).

This association between imperial lawgiving and divine validation, while not new in the Roman world, was here given a specific articulation that would shape the future of Byzantine autocracy and western European kingship in profound ways.

More so than any of his predecessors Justinian made religion an instrument of
government, and he devoted a significant portion of his legislation to the prospect of
creating a doctrinally unified orthodox state. Justinian’s desire to codify the law and to
centralize its authority in himself was exactly paralleled in his obsession with imposing a
single, universal Christian belief on all Romans. Previous emperors certainly concerned
themselves with maintaining order, but the attempt to manufacture social cohesion
though the enforcement of doctrinal unity with such white hot intensity was hitherto
unknown in Roman life. It follows, then, that Justinian’s ideologically pure vision of an
orthodox empire was also an intolerant one. Specific groups were labeled as deviants,
among them: homosexuals, heterodox Christians, Jews, Samaritans, Manicheans,
astrologers, and practitioners of traditional Roman ‘pagan’ religion. Their continued
existence was, in Justinian’s mind, an abomination before God and had to be stamped

9 Justinian saw himself as the conduit of divine authority to earthly institutions: Novels 9, 69.4.1, 73 pr., 113.3. He even went so far as to call himself the nomos empsychos, the ‘incarnate law’, an unprecedented conceptualization of the consubstantiality of divine and imperial authority: Novel 105.2.4 (December 28, 537).
11 CJ 1.1.5, 1.5.12, 1.5.18. Honoré (1978) 14-15.
out. Even adherents of Platonist philosophies came under fire. Justinian outlawed the teachings of those who were “infected with the sacrilegious foolishness of the Hellenes,” and even shuttered the Academy in Athens, founded by Plato himself some nine hundred years earlier. In so doing, Justinian took significant strides in severing Roman culture from its classical heritage. Those whose beliefs were deemed heretical or who challenged the emperor’s authority met with violence. In 532 Justinian brutally repressed a popular uprising by slaughtering thirty thousand Roman citizens in the heart of the capital. In the aftermath, “there arose great imperial terror.” Never had a Roman ruler committed such an atrocity against his own people, and nor would one again. Procopius was right: Justinian had remade the Roman empire.

But this emperor did not portray himself as a great reformer. Autocrat that he was, Justinian could not openly forsake the mores of over one thousand years of cultural patrimony. After all, change was, for most Romans, a bad thing. He had to find a way to pursue his otherwise innovative agenda in a way that was acceptable to both the public and the ruling elite. So Justinian sought recourse, perhaps ironically, to a tried and traditional rhetorical strategy of dissimulation used to good effect by the likes of Augustus, Constantine, and Theodosius: renovatio. By proclaiming that he was restoring

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12 Failure or delay in punishment of deviants would, according to Justinian, be met with God’s wrath: CJ 1.11.10 pr.4; 5.4.23; Novel 77.1.
14 It is possible that even church fathers such as Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nazianzus studied at the Academy: Malalas, Chronographia, 18.136. Some of the most fundamental precepts of Christian theology were rooted in classical philosophy, yet the puritanism of Justinianic social engineering could not tolerate any outward acknowledgment of this fact.
15 Chronicon Paschale s.a. 531.
16 In numerous instances we see Justinian actively denying that he was innovating: Novels 78.5, 80.10 pr., 28.2, 22.1, 49.1.1, 98.2.2, 56.1; Institutes 2.14 pr. See Maas (1986) for a discussion of how Justinian couched many of his new constitutions with reference to historical precedent, whether real or invented.
the empire to a golden past, Justinian could at once appeal to Roman political conservatism while shrouding the novelty of his rule.17 The three pillars of Justinian’s reign were his legislation, his ecclesiastical activity, and his wars.18 The latter were founded firmly in notions of renewal and restoration and were inspired by the same ideological impulses for unity that drove his legal and religious efforts.19 Justinian warred with Persia intermittently over the span of his rule, at one point establishing an ‘Eternal Peace’ that would later be broken.20 Nearly four decades of sporadic conflict with its ancient enemy accomplished little, but cost the empire dearly. Yet, late in his reign, Justinian managed to incorporate never before conquered regions of the Caucasus into the empire, thus renewing the sense, eroded in the previous two centuries, that it was Rome’s birthright to extend its imperial hegemony over other peoples.21

His imperialist gaze also looked westward. Over the course of the fifth century, the entirety of the western empire – Britain, Gaul, Spain, Africa, and finally Italy - had buckled under the force of continual barbarian invasion and, by Justinian’s day, stood beyond the direct influence of Constantinople. Yet the west, though entirely lost and under the rule of barbarian masters, was not spoken of as such by contemporary commentators in the fifth century. It is not until Justinian’s age, during which time the

17 On renovatio, see P. Amory, People and Identity in Ostrogothic Italy (Cambridge, 1997), 135-48.
18 For the ideological underpinnings of Justinian’s legal, religious, and military exertions, see M. Meir, Das andere Zeitalter Justinians: Kontingenzerfahrung und Kontingenzbewältigung im 6. Jahrhundert n. Chr. (Gottingen, 2003).
19 The ideological interconnectedness of religion, law, and war is evident throughout Justinian’s legislation. See especially Constitutio Imperatoriam and Institutes 1.
20 The Eternal Peace was a treaty of indefinite duration signed in 532 that ended the Iberian War (527-531). It lasted until 540.
21 In the Fifty Years Peace of 562 Lazica was recognized as a Roman vassal state. See M. Maas, ‘Delivered from Their Ancient Customs’: Christianity and the Question of Cultural Change in Early Byzantine Ethnography’, in K. Mills and A. Grafton (eds.), Conversion in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages: Seeing and Believing (Rochester, 2003), 152-88; A. Kaldellis, Prokopios: ‘The Secret History’ with Related Texts (Hackett, 2010), xvii.
emperor made clear his vision of reconstituting the Mediterranean empire through conquest, that we witness the earliest explicit discussions of a fallen west.\(^{22}\) When he launched his naval invasion of Vandal Africa in 533, Justinian was thereafter committed to reincorporating the west back into the fold of the empire. In less than a year, Roman armies had crushed all Vandal resistance and Africa was once again under imperial control. Immediately following, Justinian hoped to extend his good fortunes in an expedition against Gothic Italy. The emperor would eventually retake the original seat of the Roman people, but at the cost of twenty years of perpetual and grinding war that would drain the imperial coffers, utterly devastate the people and landscape of the Italian peninsula, and ultimately erode all confidence that the full western expanse of the empire could be regained. In his legislation Justinian spoke of the providentiality of his campaigns of reconquest and imperial renewal. God, the emperor declared, had demanded both the reconstitution of a Roman state that spanned the entirety of the Mediterranean, and the destruction of the Arian barbarian kingdoms of the west in order to inaugurate a doctrinally homogenous orthodox empire.

But one wonders if, after two decades of this mission, circumstances had tempered the emperor’s self-assurance. By mid-century, the wars of reconquest had created a great deal of trouble for the empire. Africa had lapsed into anarchy and was suffering under Moorish raiding while the imperial occupiers, under corrupt and incompetent leadership, fought amongst each other and failed to provide relief to the

\(^{22}\) Justinian discusses the causes of the west’s fall and the imperative of its reconquest in *CJ* 1.27; *Novels* 8.10.2; 24.1; 30.11.2; 78.4. The year 476 is marked as the west’s final death knell in Count Marcellinus, *Chronicle* s.a. 476, written c. 519, and in Jordanes writing in 551, *Getica* 243-45, *Romana* 345. By comparison, the same year does not possess similar importance in the fifth-century histories of Malchus and Candidus. Malchus, fr. 14 ed. Blockley 2, 419-20; Candidus, fr. 1 ed. Blockley 2, 469.
Romans they had ‘liberated.’ Conditions on the Italian front were even more grievous. Initially, eastern forces had achieved an effective victory over the Goths in 540 after five years of fighting, but the administrative rapacity and military indiscipline of the imperial restoration sparked a massive resistance among both Goths and Italian Romans that plunged Italy back into a war that continued to rage as late as 551 when Jordanes and Procopius published their histories of that conflict. The multiple fronts of Justinian’s wars had spread imperial manpower and resources too thin. The empire’s northern border lay exposed and Justinian regularly resorted to bribing barbarians not to invade Roman territory. As a result, the empire fell victim to regular extortion and invasion. One Slavic raid penetrated so far into imperial territory that it reached the Long Walls of Constantinople. In the end, Justinian’s wars not only destabilized the territories they sought to renew, but they weakened the empire’s overall military and economic security.

It has been noted that history itself seemed to accelerate during Justinian’s reign, and it is clear that those who lived through it had a palpable sense of its momentousness. The period saw an outpouring of literature of a quantity and quality unequaled in the late ancient world, and, importantly, a significant proportion of these texts commented directly upon contemporaneous events. The tireless energy of Justinian’s imperial ambitions and the sweeping changes he inaugurated seemed to demand a

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24 Procopius, Secret History 11.5-10.
25 Procopius, Wars 7.40.43.
proportionate response from those who would bear witness to the upheavals occurring around them.  

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27 A number of the authors of our most important sources for the period were themselves in the employ of the imperial administration, and so provide us with something of an ‘inside’ view. Count Marcellinus, author of a chronicle covering the period 379 to 518, had served Justinian personally as his cancellarius, something like a chief of staff. Marcellinus then updated his chronicle in 534 likely in commemoration of the emperor’s victory over the Vandals. Unsurprisingly, Marcellinus and his anonymous continuator pursue a celebratory vision of Justinian’s reign that closely mirrors the emperor’s own imperial ideology. Tribonian, jurist and head commissioner of the legal team that compiled the Corpus iuris civilis, served as the emperor’s quaestor sacri palatii and chief editor of the Digest, a massive collection of mostly second- and third-century legal opinion that was then given the force of law by Justinian. Junillus succeeded Tribonian as quaestor and so became the highest legal officer in the empire after the emperor. He is best known for his work of biblical exegesis, the Handbook of the Basic Principles of Divine Law, which, in arguing for the consubstantiality of divine and imperial legal authority, emerges as an important source for understanding how Justinian wanted his rulership to be conceptualized (Junillus, Handbook of the Basic Principles of Divine Law 2.1. M. Maas, Exegesis and Empire in the Early Byzantine Mediterranean: Junillus Africanus and the Institutae Regulariae Divinae Legis (Tübingen, 2003), here 12-13). Paul the Silentiary, a high-ranking official responsible for securing order and silence in the imperial palace, composed perhaps the greatest surviving verse panegyric of the age in his description of Hagia Sophia. Its prologue provides allusion to Justinianic legislation and some of the clearest insight into the imperial ideology of the period (P. Bell, Three Political Voices from the Age of Justinian (Liverpool, 2009), here 14). Romanos Melodos was a liturgical poet and hymnographer who served as a sacristan in Hagia Sophia, the center of imperial orthodoxy, and composed kontakia, a collection of hymns celebrating saints’ lives, festivals of the ecclesiastical year, and other sacred subjects. Peter the Patrician, diplomat and historian, was one of the leading officials of his age and held the position of magister officiorum. He served as an envoy to Persia and Italy, where he became embroiled in the events surrounding the murder of Amalasuntha - the event which provided Justinian a pretext for declaring war against the Gothic regime. Peter also wrote a history of the office of magister officiorum from its inception under Constantine up to the reign of Justinian, and an account of his diplomatic mission to Persia, both of which survive only in fragments. John Lydus was an antiquarian and lawyer for the praetorian prefecture of the east whose treatise On Offices provides invaluable insights into the workings of the vast imperial bureaucratic machinery and the changes that Justinian forced upon its traditional functioning. The emperor also personally commissioned Lydus to deliver an imperial encomium at the court and to write an official history of the wars against Persia, though both works are now lost. Also in the employ of the imperial administration was Procopius, secretary to Justinian’s chief general Belisarius. Procopius was the greatest historian of his age and wrote three works essential to our understanding of the sixth century: the Wars, a sweeping and incisive account of the seemingly endless conflicts that characterized Justinian’s reign; the Buildings, a largely panegyric work that catalogues the massive and far-flung building projects of the emperor; and the Secret History, which stands as a salacious and penetrating indictment of the crimes of Justinian, his wife Theodora, and his administration, without which posterity surely would have made profoundly different assessments of the emperor. Finally there is Jordanes, a name usually absent from discussions of important Justinianic sources (Jordanes is not listed in the introductory list of ancient sources in The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian, ed. M. Maas (Cambridge, 2005). Nor is he treated in W. Treadgold, The Early Byzantine Historians (New York, 2007)). He was notarius – or secretary – to a Roman general, much like Procopius had been, and, also like Procopius, Jordanes was among the very few authors who wrote contemporary history while Justinian still lived. An extended discussion of Jordanes, however, must be reserved for the final chapter in favor of here fleshing out the development of debates over the ‘Gothic question.’
With its abundance of sources and almost cinematic appeal, the age of Justinian has attracted the attention of a host of scholars, and a great many facets of this tumultuous period have been illuminated. Other aspects of the age remain dimly understood. This chapter engages a well known and well documented element of Justinian’s reign that has yet gone understudied: the Gothic War. Procopius, as secretary to the imperial general Belisarius, witnessed much of the conflict in Italy firsthand and provides a detailed narrative of the war. The events of the protracted struggle are known. Its implications, however, require further analysis. The Gothic War was a monumentally important event whose reverberations affected not only Italy and the development of the medieval west, but also the future course of Roman politics in the east. More immediately, the war and its aftermath loomed large in imperial politics for over a quarter century and stood at the center of Justinian’s foreign policy. A dearth of scholarship on the topic, however, belies the gravity of the Gothic War. As Procopius and Jordanes were writing at mid-century, one imagines that a decade and a half of war to reclaim the ancestral home of the Romans which was straining the imperial treasury – and failing – was on the minds of Romans in both the eastern empire and in Italy. The following discussion of a sixth-century Gothic discourse was shaped in no small way by the events of the war in Italy.

28 Still, there are no specialized studies of the Gothic War. All accounts of the conflict are found in surveys of the period or in studies dedicated to Gothic history.
29 For the destructive results and aftermath of the Gothic war, see C. Wickham, Early Medieval Italy: Central Power and Local Society, 400-1000 (London, 1981); idem., Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean, 400-800 (Oxford, 2005).
Justinianic Legislation and Imperial Justifications for Western Reconquest

As stated at the outset of this chapter, the articulation of imperial ideology in Justinianic legislation – namely the vindication of western reconquest by blackening Vandal and Gothic rule – influenced the trajectory of contemporary debates about the Goths. The emperor had a number of ways to disseminate to the Roman public his arguments for the need to invade Italy, oust its barbarian occupiers, and reinstate Roman rule. Certainly his official propaganda would have been made known through official notices and public pronouncements, though all that remains visible to us is the rhetoric of reconquest and renewal that colors much of Justinian’s legislation from the period. It was the rhetoric of Justinian’s official justifications for invasion to which supporters and critics of the war would continually respond in their own assessments of the protracted conflict in Italy and the place of the Goths in a Roman world. An analysis of the debates over the ‘Gothic question’ must, therefore, begin with the voice of Justinian himself.

On April 7, 529 Justinian promulgated the first edition of his eponymous Codex of Roman law. In its preface, the emperor proclaimed that “the safety of the state proceeds out of two things, the force of arms and the observance of laws; for this reason, the fortunate race of the Romans, having established their own power, achieved precedence and control over all nations in former times, and will do so forever, if God should be propitious…” Though still very early in his reign, this statement lays bare the

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31 Constitutio Summa, pr., “Summa rei publicae tuitio de stirpe duarum rerum, armorum atque legum veniens vonque suam exinde muniens felix Romanorum genus omnibus anteponi nationibus omnibusque dominari tam praeteritis effecit temporibus quam deo propitio in aeternum..."
three elements that would come to undergird Justinian’s imperial administration: the law, militarism, and Christianity.\(^{32}\) This, though, should not be entirely surprising. Justinian’s subsequent tenure as emperor would reveal the depths of his convictions and the extent of his ambition. It stands to reason that his sense of purpose would be evident so early. It is Justinian’s mention of “force of arms”, though, that is of present interest. Here, years before launching his invasions of the west, the emperor associates his own reign with the Roman tradition of imperial conquest. That the Roman state rested on arms and the law, however, was an ancient and common figure of speech.\(^{33}\) What is of particular moment here is that Justinian’s imperialist mission is framed by a bipartite relationship between the Roman past and future – a temporal association that characterized much of the emperor’s own sense of rulership.\(^{34}\) The permanence of the conquests of “former times” is not simply taken for granted. Their endurance is contingent upon divine favor: “if God should be propitious.” When situated within its proper historical context – a sixth-century empire recently bereft of half of its territories – the tensions inherent in this conceptual schema of Roman imperialism become evident. The eternality of the Roman empire is not assumed. The possibility of the fall of empire becomes logically implicit. Justinian’s words suggest more than rote deference to the omnipotence of God. It is likely that they reflect his own concerns about the collapse of the entire western empire and his fear of

\(^{32}\) This tripartite formula is found in most of the other prefaces to the constitutions that sanctioned Justinian’s legislative program.

\(^{33}\) The sentiment even appears in a letter attributed to Theoderic: “It is our purpose to set the provinces which the help of God has made subject to us in order by the laws, just as we defend them with arms.” Cassiodorus, *Variae* 4.12.1. Honoré (1978) 35, n. 373 lists a number of other precedents.

\(^{34}\) For example, Justinian justified many of his individual laws with explicit reference to ancient precedent, though, taken together, the entirety of his legislative project fundamentally altered the role of the imperial office for all time by establishing unprecedented legal authority in the person of the emperor. For further discussion of the tensions between tradition and innovation in Justinianic law, see Maas (1986) and Pazdernik (2005).
future losses. Justinian declares that Rome “achieved precedence and control over all
nations in former times,” but, as this edict was issued, Rome no longer ruled over
*nationibus omnibus.* The force of Roman arms had failed and the west was no longer
subject to Roman rule. And if indeed the “safety of the state” was dependent upon these
two very things, as the edict declares, one wonders if Justinian’s subtle exposure of past
Roman failure in the very first lines of his massive legislative achievement bore with it
his tacit commitment to rectify that failure. Though Justinian does not here proclaim
openly his intention to reunify the Mediterranean polity, it is nevertheless clear that
questions surrounding the extent and permanence of empire had entered his official
rhetoric. It has already been mentioned that the first historiographical discussions of the
fall of the west coincided with Justinian’s lifetime.35 His later, ultimately failed, attempts
to reconstitute the empire would thereafter only give permanence to notions that the west
was forever lost to Rome.

It is unclear if Justinian had already determined to pursue a policy of military
adventurism in the west when he issued this prefatory statement to his *Codex,* but
sometime between the spring of 529 and the spring of 533 his mind was made up. The
naval expedition against Vandal Africa was the emperor’s entrée into a decades-long
program of reconquest. The road to war began in 530 when the aging Vandal king
Hilderic, grandson of the emperor Valentinian III, was ousted by Gelimer. Justinian,
immediately seeing a great opportunity for himself in this coup, demanded that Hilderic
be restored. Unsurprisingly, Gelimer declined. Justinian then hurled the ultimatum that if

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35 One of the first is from 518, just nine years before Justinian ascended to the purple, Count Marcellinus,
*Chronicle* s.a. 476. This, I argue below, is no coincidence. The close professional and ideological
relationship between Marcellinus and Justinian is discussed in this chapter.
Hilderic were not delivered to Constantinople hostilities between the empire and Vandal kingdom would be inevitable. Justinian likely knew that Gelimer could never willingly surrender a rival claimant, much less supply his potential rival with the resources and support of the Roman empire which could then be used against him. Gelimer refused and Justinian had his pretext for war.

Shortly thereafter in 532 Justinian pursed a peace settlement with Persia. The cost of the so-called Eternal Peace, however, fell disproportionately upon the Romans in the amount of 11,000 pounds of gold. Following the covert suggestion of Procopius, Jones has argued that Justinian was willing to pay such a high price because he wished to have his hands free for his designs in the west. But Justinian’s plans for war met with near universal disapproval from officials in Constantinople. They argued that the cost of both the war and the peace with Persia had strained the treasury too much and that the empire could not afford another contest so soon. Justinian’s generals, too, were ill disposed to a conflict with the formidable Vandal armies, and they recalled the disastrous result of the expedition against the Vandals launched by the emperor Leo and Basiliscus in 468. But Procopius suggests that Justinian’s commitment was redoubled when a bishop told him that, in a dream, God had promised to aid the emperor in waging war in Africa. A similar account is given by Victor of Tunnuna who reports that the African martyr Laetus, killed for his Catholic faith by Arian Vandals, came to Justinian in a dream to stir

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36 Procopius, Wars 3.9.6-25
37 Procopius, Wars 3.9.25; Jones (1964), 273.
38 Procopius, Wars 3.10.2-17.
39 Procopius, Wars 3.10.18-21.
up his passions against the barbarian heretics. The precise details of either of these accounts aside, it is nevertheless clear that religious concerns played no small part in Justinian’s decision to invade Africa and that the emperor himself was the principal voice in calling for invasion. Justinian would have his war.

The Roman fleet landed in Tunisia in August, 533, and, by December the decisive battle of the war was decided. Rome had won. The following spring Gelimer surrendered himself and later that year he kneeled in chains before Justinian in the capital, the much vaunted trophy in a triumph that harkened back to the old traditions of imperial Rome. The swift victory over the Vandals had been, at least in the short term, an astounding success for Justinian and a vindication of his bold ambition. It likely provided the emperor with a surge of self-assurance following the 532 Nika riots in which he was very nearly deposed. This spirit is evident in a string of legislation promulgated following the conquest of the Vandal kingdom in which Justinian’s confidence gave clear articulation to a triumphalist rhetoric of renewal and restoration.

Before the Vandal armies had been defeated, Justinian promulgated the Institutes and Digest in November and December of 533, respectively. The prefatory edicts of both texts, however, proclaim the reconquest of Africa: “Barbarous nations, subjected to our

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40 Victor of Tunnuna, *Chronica a. 534*

41 It is also likely that African elites in Constantinople who had fled the regime of the Vandal king Thrasamund between 508 and 523 played a role in Justinian’s decision to intervene in Africa following Gelimer’s usurpation. Concerning Africans in Constantinople, see A. Merrills and R. Miles, *The Vandals* (Malden, 2010), 196-233; Procopius, *Wars* 4.5.8; Zacharias of Mytilene, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 9.17.

42 The Battle of Tricamarum, December 15, 533.

43 The triumph was held for Belisarius, Justinian’s most trusted general and head of the Vandal expedition. This was the first triumph celebrated in honor of an imperial subject since the reign of Augustus. Justinian, however, asserted his dominance in the ceremonial by requiring both Gelimer and Belisarius to lay prostrate before him in view of the assembled masses of the Hippodrome.

44 Honoré (London, 1978) dubbed this period of Justinian’s reign ‘the age of hope’, beginning after the Nika riots and spanning the successes of the 530s, 17-19.
authority, acknowledge our warlike exploits, and Africa, as well as other numerous provinces after so long a period of time have submitted to the Roman dominion, and have again become a portion of our empire by means of our conquests through the aid of celestial power.”

A month later on December 16 Justinian situated the publication of the Digest “after the triumphs over the Vandals and the acquisition of all Libya.” In actuality, the battle that broke the back of the Vandal military was fought only a day earlier. Justinian could not have known, let alone written about, its results so quickly. Note, too, in the former excerpt that Justinian describes the conquest of Africa as a reestablishment of a former Roman province. While this is a simple statement of fact, it marks Justinian as the first emperor since the Vandal invasion of 429 to admit that the province had indeed been lost. This notion of imperial restoration reinforced Justinian’s previously articulated rhetoric of renovatio and return to a golden age.

It also afforded Justinian the opportunity to glorify his rule at the expense of the failures of earlier emperors. Justinian speaks of his “good hope that God will grant us rule over other countries between the confines of the two oceans, subject to the ancient Romans, but thereafter lost by their negligence.” Furthermore, this comes from a law of

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45 *Constitutio Imperatoriam* 1, “Et bellicos quidem sudores nostros barbaricae gentes sub iuga nostra deductae cognoscunt et tam Africa quam aliae innumeroseae provinciae post tanta temporum spatia nostris victorius a caelesti numine praeestitis iterum dici Romanae nostroque additea imperio protestantur.”

46 *Constitutio Tanta pr.*, “…postque Vandalicam gentem ereptam et Carthagine, immo magis omnem Libyam Romano imperio iterum sociatam et leges antiquas iam senio praegravatas per nostram vigilantiam praebuit in novam pulchritudinem et moderatum pervenire compendium.”


48 *Novel* 30.11.2, “…et spes habere bonas quis etiam reliquorum nobis detentionem annuet deus, quam prisci Romani usque ad utriusque oceani fines tenentes sequentibus neglegentiis amiserunt.” See also CJ 1.27.1, April 15, 534, a month after the surrender of Gelimer: “This grace of God was not granted to our predecessors, who were not only not permitted to liberate Africa, but who saw Rome itself captured by these Vandals, and all imperial ornaments transferred thence into Africa.” “…prae omnibus tamen hoc, quod nunc deus omnipotens per nos pro sua laude et pro suo nomine demonstrare dignatus est, excedit
March, 536, three months after imperial armies had occupied Sicily early in the Gothic War, and stands as the earliest extant statement in which Justinian makes clear his ambition to conquer all of the lost western provinces and thereby to reconstitute the Mediterranean empire. By the summer of 538, Justinian boasted to the people of Constantinople that a newly issued law applied to “all magistrates subject to our authority in the provinces, and who are distributed throughout the empire which looks upon both the rising and the setting sun, and extends from north to south,” and should be published “in all of Italy, in Libya, in the islands, in the Orient, and in Illyria.” Justinian here proclaims to the people in the Roman capital that he has restored the ancient extent of the empire. This, at least, was his message and it is illustrative of how Justinian wanted the mission and accomplishments of his reign to be perceived by both contemporaries and posterity. The reality, though, was rather different. Justinian may have had designs for the west, but they were certainly not realized by 538.

There remains to discuss the emperor’s justifications for his wars of aggression. The majority of the legislation which treats the campaigns in the west, and from which we can extrapolate official perceptions of and motivations for the wars, were issued after the invasions themselves had commenced. This does not necessarily make them unreliable sources for the imperial administration’s initial rationale for war, but one

omnia mirabilia opera, quae in saeculo contigerunt, ut Africa per nos tam brevi tempore recuperet libertatem, ante centum et quinque annos a Vandalis captivata, qui animarum fuerant simul hostes et corporum.”

49 Novel 69.1 pr., addressed to the people of Constantinople, “Et praecipimus omnibus in provinciis iudicibus quicumque nostris oboediunt sceptris in universa dicione et quae ascendentem videt et quae occidentem solem et quae ex utroque est latere.”

50 Novel 69 ep., “Gloriosissimi igitur praefecti sacrorum nostrorum praetoriorum qui per omnem subiectam terram consistunt legem hanc cognoscentes proponant et per dioecesis sub se constitutas et in omni Italia et Libya et insulis et Oriente et quodcumque in Illyrico est...”
should keep in mind the likelihood that official court rhetoric was shaped by and reacted to news coming in from the front. The initial invasion and occupation of Africa as well as the first five years of the Gothic War from 535 to 540 went exceedingly well for the Romans. It is not surprising that Justinian’s pronouncements about his wars from the 530s exuded soaring optimism. In these pronouncements Justinian laid out his threefold justification for war: the removal of barbarians from unnatural positions of power over Romans; the restitution of liberty to Roman citizens; and the confrontation and eradication of Arian heresy in the fight to restore orthodoxy.

Justinian’s religious motivations for war have already been mentioned. The Vandals, along with nearly all the other barbarian occupiers in the west, were Arian Christians, and therefore heretics in the eyes of the Orthodox church. In the case of Gothic Italy, the governance of Theoderic afforded full toleration to both Christian persuasions. Catholics in Vandal Africa sometimes fared rather worse, and relations with Rome grew chilly as a result. By the sixth century, however, the Vandal kingdom and the empire had reached a détente. Hilderic, himself a scion of the Theodosian dynasty, even visited Justinian in Constantinople. In an edict of toleration of 523 he abandoned all persecution of African Catholics and took the ameliorative measures of recalling exiled Catholic bishops and reopening Catholic churches. Romans had every reason to smile on Hilderic’s reign and his ousting by Gelimer was likely a cause for concern. It was for Justinian, however, a pretext for war. The emperor promulgated laws after the conquest that took explicit issue with the Arianism of the Vandals. A month after the fall of the

51 Matters were especially bad under Huneric (477-484) who ordered that all Catholics in his kingdom convert to Arianism.
Vandals, Justinian issued a rescript detailing the civil and military reorganization of Africa in which he spoke of

the Vandals, who were enemies both of mind and of body. For they converted minds not able to bear various torments and punishments to their faith by re-baptizing them; they cruelly subjected men born free to barbarian yoke. They even besmirched the holy churches of God with their perfidy; they made stables of other churches. We have seen venerable men, with tongues cut off at the root, eloquently bespeak the punishment visited on them. Others dispersed through the different provinces after various torments and finished their life in exile. By what language, therefore, or by what works, worthy of God, can we give thanks, that He deemed it proper that the injuries to the church should be avenged through me, the least of His servants?

The following year, Justinian issued a law concerning the organization of the African church that also laid out social and religious prohibitions against Arianism. In it, the former Arian “tyrants” are banned from any form of worship, baptism, or ecclesiastical organization, and are forbidden to take part in public assemblies or to hold public office or administrative posts. “It is enough,” Justinian wrote, “to let them live.”

Later, a law from 539 stated outright that, “we undertook such great wars in Libya and in the Occident, partially on behalf of the right faith in God and partially on behalf of the freedom of our subjects.” This edict was issued in the fourth year of the Gothic War in Italy and likewise strongly suggests that Justinian’s justifications for that conflict were also predicated upon the erasure of Arianism. In the medium of monumental architecture, too, Justinian proclaimed that religion shaped his foreign policy. Atop a column before

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52 CJ 1.27.1-5, “…qui animarum fuerant simul hostes et corporum. Nam animas quidem diversa tormenta atque supplicia non ferentes rebaptizando ad suam perfidiam transferebant: corpora vero liberis natalibus clara iugo barbarico durissime subiugabant. Ipsas quoque dei sacrosanctas ecclesias suis perfidiis maculabant: aliquas vero ex eis stabula fecerunt. Vidimus venerabiles viros, qui abscessis radicitus linguis poenas suas mirabiliter loquebantur: alii vero post diversa tormenta per diversas disperis provincias vitam in exilio peregerunt. Quo ergo sermone aut quibus operibus dignas deo gratias agere valeamus, quod per me, ultimum servum suum, ecclesiae suae iniurias vindicare dignatus est et tantarum provinciarum populos a iugo servitutis eripere?”

53 Novel 37, August 1, 535.

54 Novel 78.4, January 18, 539, “Etenim huius causa desiderii et in Libya et in Hesperia tanta suscepsimus bella et pro recta ad deum religione et pro subiectorum pariter libertate.”
the senate house in Constantinople, Justinian set a gigantic equestrian statue of himself. In his left hand the emperor held a globe, signifying the world that is subject to him, “yet he has neither sword nor spear nor any other weapon, but a cross stands upon the globe which he carries, the emblem by which alone he has obtained both his empire and his victory in war.”

Procopius’ association of weaponry with the cross is apt, for it suggests rightly that the emperor’s wars of expansion were motivated by religious zeal. Justinian wanted to convey to all that he conquered in the name of Christ.

It would be too cynical to suggest that Justinian did not have a sincere desire to restore imperially sanctioned Orthodoxy in Africa. The sources make clear the depth of the emperor’s Christian faith and the intensity with which he imposed the strictures of Orthodoxy on nearly every facet of Roman life. Nevertheless, it would be hard to deny that Justinian exploited the overthrow of Hilderic as a pious pretext for war of choice. There exists no evidence that Gelimer persecuted Catholics or had any intention of abrogating Hilderic’s policies of religious toleration. Justinian’s own laws do not even cite abuses attributable to Gelimer’s reign. Gelimer, already the heir-apparent to the Vandal throne and whose coup seems to have enjoyed the support of the Vandal nobility, was the victim of bad timing.

His seizure of power simply provided Justinian with the pretext he needed to commence a program of territorial reclamation.

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55 Procopius, Buildings 1.2.11, “καὶ φέρει μὲν χειρὶ τῇ λαιᾷ πόλον, παραδηλῶν ὁ πλάστης ὅτι γῆ τε αὐτῷ καὶ θάλασσα δεδούλωται πᾶσα, ἔχει δὲ οὔτε ξίφος οὔτε δοράτιον οὔτε ἄλλο τῶν ὅπλων οὐδὲν, ἀλλὰ σταυρὸς αὐτῷ ἐπὶ τοῦ πόλου ἑπίκειται, δι’ οὗ δὴ μόνον τὴν τε βασιλείαν καὶ τὸ τοῦ πολέμου πεπόρισται κράτος.”

56 Procopius, Wars 3.9.8.
Beyond matters of faith, Justinian campaigned in the west “on behalf of the freedom of our subjects.” In a law of 534, published only a month after the surrender of Gelimer, Justinian proclaims that

[God] deemed it proper that…the people of so many provinces should be saved from the yoke of servitude…[God] deigned…to make the whole of Africa feel the mercy of the omnipotent God and cause its inhabitants to recognize from what cruel barbarian captivity and yoke they have been freed, and with how much liberty they are permitted to pass their lives under our most felicitous reign.

A year after the conquest, a new constitution of Justinian reaffirms that “the Vandals and Moors remain in obedience, and the Carthaginians retain their former liberty, recently regained.” And another law issued a few months later asserts that, “we, not consenting to the diminution of the territory of the Roman empire, have recovered all Libya and reduced the Vandals to servitude.” Foremost, Justinian portrays himself as the restorer of liberty to the Romans of Africa. In the sixth century, libertas remained, as it had for a millennium, the definitive feature of Roman citizenship. But liberty was an abstract and mutable notion, and its interpretations and implications changed over the centuries, not only in the transition from republic to monarchy, but also from emperor to emperor. Even under the autocracy of Justinian, the rhetorical poignancy of a war to restore liberty to Romans bereft of it would have furnished the emperor with an irreproachable justification.

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57 Novel 78.4
58 CJ 1.27.5-8, April 13, 534, “Ergo post tanta beneficia, quae nobis divinitas contulit, hoc de domini dei nostri misericordia postulamus, ut provincias, quas nobis restituere dignatus est, firmas et illaesas custodiat et faciat nos eas secundum suam voluntatem ac placitum gubernare, et universa Africa sentiat omnipotentis dei misericordiam et cognoscant eius habitatores, quam a durissima captivitate et iugo barbarico liberati in quanta libertate sub felicissimo nostro imperio degere meruerunt.”
59 Novel 1, January 1, 525, “…Vandali vero cum Mauris oboediant, Carchedonii autem antiquam recipientes habeant libertatem…”
60 Novel 8.10.2, April 15, 535, “…neque nobis concedentibus despici Romanorum terram diminutam: qui et Libyam omnem reparavimus et Vandalos in servitute redegimus…”
for launching an invasion.\textsuperscript{61} We have every reason to suspect that Justinian exploited this sentiment as part of a propaganda campaign to create a consensus for the war before the expedition set off.

These laws do not simply depict Justinian’s restoration of liberty to Africa, but also his deliverance of Romans from Vandal bondage. They seek to convey the idea that Justinian had restored the natural order of things. That is, by defeating and enslaving the Vandals, Justinian once again situated Romans as the dominant partner in the popular conceptual binary that divided humanity between civilization and barbarism. Justinian would reinforce this image of himself outside of his legislation as well. Upon the ceiling of the Chalke Gate, the main ceremonial entrance to the Great Palace in Constantinople, Justinian commissioned a great mosaic that featured

many cities being captured, some in Italy, some in Libya... In the center stand the emperor and the empress Theodora, both seeming to rejoice and to celebrate victories over both the king of the Vandals and the king of the Goths, who approach them as prisoners of war to be led into bondage.\textsuperscript{62}

The public display of this sort of narrative in monumental art had considerable pedigree. Trajan’s Column, the Arch of Constantine, and the Column of Arcadius, to name but a few, all convey narrative scenes depicting the conquest and enslavement of barbarians. It was an age-old motif in Roman cultural discourse that at once evoked jingoistic celebration of victory and pride in Roman military might, but also a deeper sense of


\textsuperscript{62} Procopius, \textit{Buildings} 1.10.16-17, “ὡσαίδε ὁποῖά τά γράμματα ἐστιν ἐγὼ δηλώσω. ἐφ’ ἑκάτερα μὲν πόλεμός τε ἐστι καὶ μάχη, καὶ ἀλλισονται πόλεις παμπληθεῖς πή μὴ Ἰταλίας, πή ἐπὶ Λιβύης: καὶ νικά μὲν βασιλεῖς Ἰουστινιανόν υπὸ στρατηγοῦντι Βελισαρίῳ, ἐπάνεισι δὲ παρὰ τὸν βασιλεῖα, τὸ στράτευμα ἔχων ἀκραιφνὲς ὅλον ὁ στρατηγός, καὶ δίδωσιν αὐτῷ λάφυρα βασιλεῖς τε καὶ βασιλείας, καὶ πάντα τά ἐν ἀνθρώπος ἐξείσια. κατὰ δὲ τὸ μέσον ἐντάσειν ὦ το βασιλεῖς καὶ ἡ βασιλείς Θεοδώρα, ἐοικίτες ἁμαρὼ γεγήθοσι τε καὶ νικηθήμα αὐτάνων ἐπὶ το βασιλεῖ τον βασιλείας, δομαιλώτοις τε καὶ ἀγογόμοιος παρ’ αὐτοὺς ἦκουσι.” Malalas, \textit{Chronographia} 18.85 records that the gate was finished in 538.
purpose in imposing the serenity of Roman law and order on the erstwhile chaos of barbarous lands and peoples.

Finally, there remains to consider two comments made in two different Justinianic laws promulgated a year after the fall of Vandal Africa that bear directly on the question of western expansionism. In a law of April 15, 535 which commands Romans in Africa to pay their taxes in order to help meet the expenses of war and empire building, Justinian states, “we, not consenting to the diminution of the Roman territory, have recovered the whole of Libya, reduced the Vandals to servitude, and, with the assistance of God, hope to achieve still greater things…”63 A month later, in a law reintroducing a greatly empowered version of the praetorship, Justinian writes that “many praetors held and administered provinces, some of them Sicily, some of them the island of Sardinia, some of them Spain.”64 It seems clear that Justinian purposefully mentioned these former western holdings to intimate that he very much intended to restore them to Roman rule. In fact, he would begin to do exactly that perhaps just a few weeks later when Belisarius’ armies came ashore on Sicily that summer. Scholars have debated whether the western conquests reflected an ideological imperative that Justinian had formulated early in his career, or if each of his campaigns were reactions to contemporary circumstances and exigencies.65 The debate, at least in these terms, is probably irresolvable, but the above

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63 Novellae 8.10.2, “...neque nobis concedentibus despici Romanorum terram diminutam: qui et Libyam omnem reparavimus et Vandalos in servitutem redegimus et plurima adhuc et maiora horum speramus a deo percipere et agere…”
64 Novellae 24 pr., May 18, 535, “…multique praetores alii quidem Siciliam, alii vero Sardiniae insulam, alii Hispaniam, alii aliam et adquiserunt et gubernaverunt mare ac terram.”
65 Jones (1964), 270 holds that the western campaigns were the manifestations of Justinianic ideology, while J. Moorhead, Justinian (New York, 1994), 63-88 takes a more reserved approach, suggesting that opportunism motivated Justinian’s foreign policy. A. Louth, ‘Justinian and his Legacy (500-600),’ in J. Shepard (ed.), The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire (Cambridge, 2008), 99-129, here 105-14
two laws strongly suggest that Justinian had designs on Sicily and Italy long before
Amalasuntha’s murder presented itself as a pretext to launch the Gothic War.

By the time Justinian officially announced his intentions to invade Italy sometime
in the second half of 535, his immediate justification for war bore significant similarities
to that which he used for Africa. Hilderic, a king in good relations with Constantinople,
had been overthrown. Justinian then claimed that the illegitimacy of Gelimer demanded
imperial military response. In Italy, Amalasuntha, granddaughter of Theoderic and the de
facto power behind the throne of Athalaric before his death in 534, was murdered on
April 30, 535 by her cousin Theodahad whom she had married out of political
expediency.⁶⁶ Amalasuntha, however, had earlier arranged asylum in Constantinople
should her power or life become threatened, and, upon her death, Justinian proclaimed it
his duty to avenge the Gothic queen and oust the illegitimate Theodahad.⁶⁷ This was his
justification for Italian intervention.⁶⁸ But, as in Africa, it was merely a pretext. Novel 8
above cites Justinian’s unwillingness to accept the loss of Roman territory, his recent
reconquest of Africa, and his “hope to achieve still greater things.” In this context, it is
not a logical stretch to posit that these “greater things” constitute plans to pursue further
western reclamation; a notion further strengthened by Novel 24 issued the following
month which mentions Roman governance in the Italian islands and Spain. It is clear,
then, that Justinian had developed a desire to continue his western reconquests at the very

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⁶⁶ Procopius, Wars 5.4.12-29; V. Fauvinet-Ranson, ‘Portrait d’une regent: un panegyrique d’Amalasonthe
⁶⁷ For the arrangement between Amalasuntha and Justinian, see Procopius, Wars 5.2.23-9, 5.3.12ff., 5.4.11,
5.4.22; Secret History 16.1-5; Jordanes, Romana 368; Getica 305-307; Liber Pontificalis 59.2, 60.2.
⁶⁸ This justification for war must have been well advertised by the imperial court because it appears in very
nearly every account that treats the Gothic war even cursorily.
latest by April 15, 535, upon the promulgation of Novel 8, and almost assuredly before this. Amalasuntha, however, would not be murdered for another two weeks, and it is next to certain that Justinian had not been informed of the demise of the Gothic queen in the brief period that elapsed between her death and Novel 24 of May 18 which makes not-so-subtle hints about the Roman rule of Italy’s islands. Further, Procopius informs us that, perhaps as much as a year earlier in 534, Justinian had engaged in secret talks with Theodahad and then with Amalasuntha regarding the imperial reacquisition of Italy. For a large sum of money and senatorial rank, Theodahad had promised to sell Tuscany to Justinian. Likewise, Amalasuntha had agreed to deliver the whole of Italy to Justinian in an arrangement that “would be to the profit of either party.” Justinian’s aims on the west, therefore, antedate the death of the Gothic queen, and any notion that the imperial invasion of Italy was predicated solely on Amalasuntha’s murder can be safely set aside. The royal Gothic infighting merely provided the emperor an opportunity to advance his program of reconquest.

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69 Procopius, Wars 5.3.4; 5.4.17-20.
70 Procopius, Wars 5.4.18, “...καὶ Ἀμαλασούνθῃ ξυγγενόμενον λάθρα ξυμπάσης πέρι Ἰταλίας διοικήσασθαι, ὅπῃ ἑκατέρῳ ξυνοίσει μέλλει.” 5.3.16-29.
71 Procopius, Secret History 16.1-5 supplies a more sordid account of Amalasuntha’s death. Upon learning of the possibility that Amalasuntha might take up residence in Constantinople, Theodora, jealous of the Gothic queen’s beauty, intellect, and political gravitas, gave instructions to the envoy Peter that he was to orchestrate her assassination. Wars 5.3.30 and 5.4.17 report only that Justinian had sent Peter to Italy late in 534 to secure the surrender of Italy, but Procopius states that he was unable to divulge the whole truth out of fear of Theodora’s reprisals. This version of events is perhaps corroborated by Cassiodorus who preserves a letter from Theodahad to Theodora in which the Gothic king implies that it was she who had dispatched Peter, and then maybe even alludes to the plot to kill Amalasuntha: “For, in the case of that person too, about whom a delicate hint has reached me, know that I have ordered what I trust will agree with your intention.” (Variae 10.20). An accompanying letter from Theodahad’s wife Gudeliva to Theodora may likewise refers to the plot (Variae 10.21). J. Bury, History of the Later Roman Empire from the Death of Theodosius I to the Death of Justinian, 2 vols., (New York, 1923), 165-7 argues for Theodora’s role in the assassination using this evidence. If this is all true, it is likely that Justinian was also aware of the conspiracy, and thereby manufactured his own pretext for a military occupation that he had earlier devised. But even if one is inclined to doubt the historicity of the Secret History’s invective, the
Justinian’s legislation makes clear that imperial justifications for the invasions of Africa and Italy were predicated upon the notion that the barbarian rulers of previously Roman-controlled territories were illegitimate. The specific language of illegitimacy applied to each campaign was unique to the political and religious ferment surrounding them in the capital. In the case of the Vandals, as previously mentioned, Catholic churchmen such as Victor of Vita had written extensively about the Arian abuses of their tyrannous barbarian overlords. These sentiments, combined with the sort of rhetoric found in Justinian’s legislation, were then employed in propaganda campaigns to gin up support for the war. Concerning the invasion of Italy, Justinian likewise exploited a discourse of Gothic illegitimacy that had been taking form in both the east and the west since the early years of the sixth century. What follows is a discussion of the development of this emergent discourse concerning the ‘Gothic question’, the process of its cooption and deployment by the imperial court, and later polemical responses to both the war in Italy and to the charges of Gothic illegitimacy that were used to justify it.

**Count Marcellinus: Justinian’s Man**

Long before the opportunity of Amalasuntha’s murder presented itself (or was orchestrated), a program to delegitimize Gothic rule in Italy had already been set in motion by the imperial court in Constantinople. In this, Justinian was aided by Count

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Marcellinus. Cassiodorus, whose own views concerning the legitimacy of Gothic rule will be discussed later, supplies much of our biographical knowledge of Marcellinus, and from it we can glean that the count was a man of considerable political import. Certainly, someone of lesser status would not have been the dedicatee of a treatise on the Psalms by Athanasius II, bishop of Alexandria, written in honor of Marcellinus’ recovery from an illness. More importantly, though, Marcellinus had served Justinian as his cancellarius (chief aide) during the reign of Justin, and was later given the title of count (comes) in 527 after the accession of the former. From his literary output, only one work survives, a continuation of Jerome’s world chronicle that covers the years 378 through 518, and, by its second edition, continued down to 534. It is remarkable that there survives a historiographical text by an individual who enjoyed such exceptional proximity to the person of the emperor. As his cancellarius, Marcellinus would have had almost unparalleled access to the emperor and moved within Justinian’s most intimate circle of advisors and dependents. Already a man of renown during the patriarchate of Athanasius in the 490s, Marcellinus’ career had achieved its near high-water mark upon the elevation of Justin, in whose reign he wrote the first installment of his chronicle, detailing events though 518. Justinian’s intimate involvement in crafting the practices and policy of his uncle’s government is well attested. Given the fact that Marcellinus worked so closely and at such a high level with Justinian, and that the latter was so involved in the reign of

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73 Croke (2001).
74 Cassiodorus, Institutes 1.4.3; M. Bjornlie, Politics and Tradition between Rome, Ravenna and Constantinople: A Study of Cassiodorus and the Variae, 527-554 (Cambridge, 2013), 90. A number of Bjornlie’s positions on Marcellinus and Malalas correspond with my own, and the discussion of Cassiodorus below is in part shaped by his ideas.
75 Cassiodorus, Institutes 1.17.2; see also Croke, ‘The Misunderstanding of Cassiodorus, Institutiones 1.17.2’, Classical Quarterly 32.1 (1982), 225-6.
Justin, it is likely that Marcellinus’ text aligned with, and thereby publically disseminated, an interpretation of Roman history shaped by Justinianic imperial ideology.

One aspect of this historical perspective specifically concerned the Goths and Theoderic, and thereby had immediate political and religious resonance in a period when the Arian Gothic king continued to rule over the ancestral home of the Romans.76

Marcellinus’ chronicle commences in 378 immediately following the death of the emperor Valens at the hands of the Goths at the Battle of Adrianople. Straightaway, then, the Goths are announced as a great threat to the empire, a fact that colors the rest of the text’s treatment of this people.77 The Gothic sack of Rome in 410 is described in emotional and bitter terms. This departs significantly from other accounts of the event that note Alaric’s relative restraint.78 In fact, Jordanes would later report that the Goths “did not set the city on fire, as tribal peoples usually do,” while Marcellinus contends that they “fired part of it in a conflagration.”79 Later, Marcellinus covers the early Balkan career of Theoderic in some detail, and his antipathy toward the Gothic king is palpable. Theoderic appears on the pages of the chronicle as a devious and insatiable barbarian warlord who did the empire great harm. Theoderic is described as “raging wildly in Greece, by shrewdness rather than manliness,”80 and pillaging the Balkans81 because he is

76 For Goths in the Chronicle, see Croke (2001), 61-9.
77 Count Marcellinus, Chronicle s.a. 379.
78 Sozomen, HE 9.8.9; Jordanes, Getica 156.
79 Jordanes, Getica 156, “…non autem, ut solent gentes, igne supponunt nec locis sanctorum in aliquo paenitus iniuria inrogare patiuntur.” Count Marcellinus, Chronicle s.a. 410, “Halaricus trepidam urbem Romam invasit partemque eius cremavit incendio.” As will be discussed at length in Chapter Five, much of Jordanes’ depiction of the Goths and Roman-Gothic interaction is at odds with the imperially sanctioned view.
80 Count Marcellinus, Chronicle s.a. 479, “Theodoricum idem Sabinianus regem aput Graeciam debacchantem ingenio magis quam uirtute deterruit.”
81 Count Marcellinus, Chronicle s.a. 482.
“never satisfied by the favors of Zeno Augustus.” The next we hear of Theoderic he had occupied Italy as he desired,” and killed Odoacer who was “misled by the lies of this Theoderic and put to death.” A number of other sources report the Gothic occupation of Italy, and, with varying degrees of emphasis, concur that Theoderic and Zeno had entered into a mutually beneficial agreement whereby the Gothic king would rule Italy in the emperor’s stead and the Balkans would be spared from further violence. Marcellinus, however, withholds mention of any such imperial sanction. Theoderic emerges from the text as a vicious and untrustworthy usurper of a usurper who invades Italy in the course of his raiding. In other words, neither he nor the Goths have any legitimate claim to the rule of Italy.

It is significant that this rendering of Theoderic and his illicit authority was propagated in the period of Justin’s and Justinian’s reigns. Bearing the marks of Justinianic historical revisionism, the text was likely meant to shape the perceptions of elite, bureaucratic, and otherwise literate segments of society. The chronicle’s tendentious treatment of Theoderic sought to undermine any positive perceptions of Gothic rule in Italy that might have developed in Constantinople. Further, after marking Theoderic’s seizure of Italy, Marcellinus makes no further mention of him or the Goths. Events in Italy feature prominently in the chronicle, but suddenly fall off with the Gothic

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82 Count Marcellinus, *Chronicle* s.a. 487, “Theodoricus rex Gothorum Zenonis Augusti numquam beneficiis satiates…”
85 Malalas, *Chronographia* 15.9, discussed below, whose chronicle also faithfully reflects Justinianic ideology, narrates Theoderic’s occupation of Italy, but likewise fails to report that Zeno had ceded Italy to Theoderic.
occupation. Marcellinus’ purposes here are twofold. First, this absence acts as something akin to *damnatio memoriae*. But Marcellinus does not wish to wipe Theoderic from the annals of history altogether. Rather, the juxtaposition of a detailed treatment of the Gothic king’s rapaciousness with abrupt silence functions as an indictment of Theoderic’s actions in the Balkans and his invasion of Italy. Marcellinus’ refusal to mention him any further is an effective rhetorical strategy of delegitimation. To report any more on the Goths would be to recognize their importance and standing in imperial affairs. Second, the abandonment of Italy as a subject of inquiry in the chronicle reflects an idea familiar to all modern students of Roman history, but one that was perhaps introduced for the first time by Marcellinus: that the western Roman empire fell in 476.

Marcellinus writes: “Odoacer, king of the Goths, took Rome… With this Augustulus perished the western empire of the Roman people…with Gothic kings thereafter holding Rome.” That the west had “perished” beneath the feet of Gothic barbarians was a novel idea that enjoyed no ancient historiographical consensus. Rather, it is to be understood as the product of an eastern court propaganda campaign to delegitimize barbarian rule in the old Roman provinces. By stating that the empire no longer existed in the west,

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86 Count Marcellinus, *Chronicle* s.a. 508 is the lone exception, and recounts an imperial naval raid on Tarentum. The passage, though, makes no mention of the Goths and is meant to shame the emperor Anastasius, portrayed as a villainous enemy of orthodoxy in the chronicle, for attacking fellow Romans.

87 Later chroniclers and historians of the eastern empire and medieval western Europe appropriated this invented significance of 476. The notion seems to have been well advertised in the sixth century, too.


89 The first extant attestation of the year 476 as the western terminus is Count Marcellinus, *Chronicle* s.a. 476, written c. 519. This notion passed from Marcellinus and/or his source to Jordanes writing in 551, *Getica* 243-45, *Romana* 345. Procopius, writing in the middle of the sixth century, does not mark 476 as a turning point, contra A. Cameron, *Procopius and the Sixth Century* (London: Duckworth, 1985), 199, and
Marcellinus was directly challenging much of the official political rhetoric emanating from the western barbarian kingdoms, especially Gothic Italy. The writings of Ennodius and Cassiodorus make clear that Theoderic’s government sought to represent itself as the uninterrupted continuation of the Roman res publica. Marcellinus’ chronicle not only emphatically denies this conceit, but specifically names the Goths as the perpetrators of western Rome’s demise. It is far from certain that Justinian had been preparing for military intervention in Italy since the early 520s, but when he did decide to pursue an invasion, it is likely that Marcellinus’ chronicle worked well to demonize and delegitimize the Goths. Justinian could point to a text which declared that the west had fallen to the Goths in 476 and then demand that the Goths relinquish the imperial patrimony. In 534, probably in honor of the recent victory over the Vandals, the chronicle was updated and likely republished in its entirety. The newly reissued text would depict an illegitimate barbarian tyrant in Italy, a confidant and powerful new emperor on the

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Amory (1997), 142. Procopius does, however, subscribe to the notion that, previous to Justinian’s campaigns of reconquest, the west was not part of the Roman empire: “Rome became subject to the Romans again, after a span of sixty years,” Wars 5.14.14; so too John Lydus, On Offices 3.55: Justinian “restored to Rome what was Rome’s.” Zosimus, writing at the turn of the sixth century, and often considered the ‘first historian of Rome’s fall’, never discusses a specific ‘fall’ or terminus for any part of the Roman empire, let alone ascribes to it the date of 476. At different points in his history Zosimus generally laments the barbarization of the empire and the loss of Roman territories (2.7, 3.32, 4.59); Cf. W. Goffart, ‘Zosimus, The First Historian of Rome’s Fall’, The American Historical Review 76.2 (1971), 412-41. B. Croke, ‘A.D. 476: The Manufacture of a Turning Point’, Chiron 13 (1983), 81-119, here 117 contends that “the earliest expression of the fact that the western empire ceased with Romulus Augustulus” is attributable to Eustathius of Epiphaneia, writing just after Zosimus. Eustathius, however, is no longer extant, but is the presumed source for the late sixth-century Ecclesiastical History of Evagrius (2.16) who states only that Augustulus “was the last emperor of Rome.” Marcellinus’ notion that the west had “perished” because of barbarian invasion, however, is a far more specific and ideologically charged conceit, and is the earliest account of its kind explicitly to state that the western empire had ceased to exist, and to identify a specific reason for its downfall: the Goths. Regarding the eastern perspective of the 476 ‘fall’, see Croke (this note); Bjornlie (2013), 93-4 advances similar ideas about the propagandistic nature of 476.

90 Ennodius, Panegyricus dictus Theoderico, passim; Cassiodorus, Variae, passim.
91 The ethnic affiliation of Odoacer is ambiguous, but only a minority of sources refer to him as a Goth. Cf. PLRE II 791: he is variously called a Rugian, Scirian, Thuringian, Hun, and Goth.
throne, and the celebration of the recent conquest of Arian barbarians who dared to seize Roman lands. The defeat of the Vandals looked forward to an impending confrontation with Italy. And with the victory in Africa still fresh on the minds of Romans in 534, the re-release of Marcellinus’ chronicle would have had a pronounced resonance with the militarily and religiously charged atmosphere of the capital.

Ennodius and his Panegyric for Theoderic

Rather different views about Theoderic and Gothic were formed in Italy in the years prior to the war. Ennodius, a Gallo-Roman who served as a deacon in Milan and later bishop of Pavia during the reign of Theoderic, produced a literary corpus of especial interest for Gothic Italy. Among other works, his output included a panegyric for Theoderic written in early 507 and 297 letters addressed mostly to clergy and laity in Rome and Ravenna written between 501 and 513. The timing of Ennodius’ literary career is of particular note because it coincided with Theoderic’s initial establishment of Gothic Italy as a state and imperialist power with an essential Roman form. Ennodius emerges from his writings as a resolute partisan of this new order modeled after the old. His panegyric concerns us presently, for its primary rhetorical intention was precisely the opposite of Marcellinus’ chronicle. That is, the Panegyricus dictus Theoderico was meant not simply to praise the exploits of the Gothic king, but to legitimize his claim to ruling authority in Italy and

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93 Ennodius, Der Theoderich-Panegyricus des Ennodius, ed. and trans. (into German) C. Rohr. (Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Studien und Texte, 12.) (Hannover, 1995).
to laud him as a protector of the Roman order.\textsuperscript{94} It is not certain if the Gothic court would have employed the panegyric itself as piece of propaganda, but it is more than safe to say that the text reflects the sort of language and ideology that Theoderic’s regime used to represent itself at home and abroad.

For Ennodius, Theoderic’s legitimacy stems from his essential Roman character, defense of traditional Roman customs and government, and, his sanction from God to rule. At the outset of his panegyric, Ennodius rescues Theoderic from any association with barbarity by noting that “Greece, prescient of the future, reared you in the bosom of civilization.”\textsuperscript{95} This recalls the period of ten years in Theoderic’s youth spent as a political hostage in Constantinople, here referred to classicizingly as Greece. Ennodius speaks to Theoderic’s education and his development of a “full crop of virtues.”\textsuperscript{96} Having established his Roman upbringing, Ennodius then demonstrates the extent of Theoderic’s commitment to the Roman order by illustrating how the Gothic king single-handedly rescued the empire from the usurper Basiliscus. According to the panegyric, it is Theoderic who restores Zeno to the throne. Ennodius dwells on this fact and points to its thematic significance: “Let us read the histories! Let us search the annals! Where in these was there mentioned a monarchy that a born king had secured with his own blood and restored an exile?”\textsuperscript{97} After removing Basiliscus, Ennodius notes that “the very palace put

\textsuperscript{94} H. Laufenberg, \textit{Der historische Wert des Panegyricus des Bischofs Ennodius} (Celle, 1902), 10-16 also identifies legitimization of Theoderic’s reign as the primary theme of the panegyric.
\textsuperscript{95} Ennodius, \textit{Panegyricus dictus Theoderico} 3.11, “Educatit te in gremio civilitatis Graecia praesaga venturi.”
\textsuperscript{96} Ennodius, \textit{Panegyricus dictus Theoderico} 3.11, “virtutem messem.” Concerning Ennodius’ mention of Theoderic’s Roman education, debate continues over whether or not the Gothic king was literate. For a review of the sources and scholarship, see Moorhead (1992), 104-6.
\textsuperscript{97} Ennodius, \textit{Panegyricus dictus Theoderico} 3.13, “Ventilemus historias, interrogentur annales: apud quos constitit refusum exuli, quem cruore suo rex gentius emerat, principatum?”
itself under your authority,” and that Theoderic could have claimed the emperorship “without loss of reputation.”

Instead, Theoderic restores Zeno and, contented with the consulship, “guarded the res publica.” Theoderic is presented as a savior of Rome and an upholder of legitimate rule, as one who could have claimed the eastern empire, but whose sense of justice demanded the restoration of the rightful emperor. Theoderic emerges as a true Roman patriot.

His role in the Basiliscus affair, however, is much exaggerated, and Ennodius fashions the event in such a way in order to establish thematic linkages to Theoderic’s later rule in Italy. That Theoderic ousts a “tyrant” and restores the “legitimate emperor” bears directly on his own overthrow of the “tyrant” Odoacer and assumption of the kingship in Italy, and works to dislodge him from any associations with usurpation himself. After all, our sources indicate that the circumstances surrounding Theoderic’s conquest of Italy vis-à-vis the empire were murky, and notions of tyranny would be later associated with Gothic rule. By establishing Theoderic’s devotion to the imperial interest, especially regarding lawful rulership, Ennodius is responding to what seemed to have been persistent discussions about the ambiguity of Gothic rule in Italy, and supplies an argument for the legitimacy of Theoderic’s future kingship.

Further, Ennodius goes on to argue that the legitimacy of Theoderic’s rule is entirely independent of imperial approval, and is instead derived from divine sanction

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98 Ennodius, Panegyricus dictus Theoderico 4.15, “Iam tunc in ius tuum se palatia ipsa contulerunt.” 3.13, “…quo sine opinionis damno possis adquisita retinere.”
99 Ennodius, Panegyricus dictus Theoderico 4.16.
100 Ennodius, Panegyricus dictus Theoderico 3.12; Odoacer is called a tyrant in 6.24.
101 See below discussions of the Liber Pontificalis, Anonymus Valesianus, Malalas, and the Continuator of Count Marcellinus (Chapter Five).
and fidelity to the preservation of the Roman *res publica*. After his restoration and service to the emperor Zeno, Theoderic fights his way to Italy, ousts Odoacer, and takes up the kingship. His initial move westward is prompted by divine intervention: “celestial benevolence filled your sacred heart with love for us [Italy].” Odoacer’s ruination of Italy and the many crimes of his tyranny are recounted, one of which was the murder of some of Theoderic’s kin. The will of God and the litany of Odoacer’s misdeeds compel Theoderic to march on Italy and free the land and people from their suffering. Importantly, though, Theoderic’s campaign is also motivated by an earnest desire that “you [Rome] will have more consuls than previously you have seen candidates.” In other words, Theoderic fights for the kingship in Italy both to restore Rome and to preserve its traditions. Once enthroned, Theoderic rules over a “prosperous *res publica*,” bringing about “the revival of Roman renown,” and returning “unexpected beauty to cities risen from ashes, while the palatine roofs glow golden everywhere.” During his reign “the very mother of cities, Rome, grows young again,” while “the wealth of the *res publica* grows along with private resources.” Theoderic, whose “right hand affirms liberty,” inaugurates nothing short of a “golden age” in which Roman laws are enforced

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102 Ennodius, *Panegyricus dictus Theoderico* 6.23, “Inter haec, quae tibi cum glacie aut ardore cesserunt, unam certaminis tui lineam summotenos libet adtingere.”
103 Ennodius, *Panegyricus dictus Theoderico* 6.25. The identities of Theoderic’s relatives are unknown and they go otherwise unattested.
In short, Ennodius depicts Theoderic as a felicitous Roman ruler whose selfless dedication to the traditions and glory of the Roman people acts, in and of itself, to legitimize his kingship in Italy.

Central to understanding Ennodius’ conception of Theoderic’s legitimacy, though, is the fact that the emperor Zeno is in no way connected to the establishment of Gothic rule in Italy. This can be accounted for in a couple of ways. When the panegyric was written in 507 relations between the Gothic kingdom and the empire were strained. In 504 and 505 Gothic forces fought to recover lands in Pannonia, including the city of Sirmium, that they had previously held in the 480s, but were currently occupied by the Gepids. In any case, these were imperial lands, and in the course of the campaign Gothic forces fought against Roman federate Bulgars led by Sabinianus, the *magister militum per Illyricum*. Theoderic’s campaign in Pannonia was successful and imperial forces retaliated by raiding the southern coast of Italy in 508. Given the hostile relations between the Gothic kingdom and the empire in 507, it is likely that Ennodius thought it politically expedient to focus on the independent sovereignty of the Gothic state and to eschew any notion of dependence on the empire for legitimacy.

Momentary political exigencies aside, however, the fact that Theoderic would have found it perfectly acceptable, if not preferable, for his reign to be discussed in these terms, and that a panegyric for the Romanizing king would sing the praises of his armies clashing with Roman ones, underscores that there was in Italy a viable discourse that

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107 Ennodius, *Panegyricus dictus Theoderico* 5.19, “…libertatem dextera tua adserente…”, 21.93, “…aurei bona saeculi…”
108 Ennodius recounts these events in 12.60 ff. Despite the Gothic aggression he blames the eastern forces for the outbreak of hostilities, and refers to the Gothic soldiers as Romans.
109 Count Marcellinus, *Chronicle* s.a. 508.
conceived of Gothic rule as at once legitimate, Roman, but independent of imperial
approbation. At one point Ennodius even taunts an unnamed emperor Anastasius. In
referring to Theoderic’s honorific titles, Ennodius writes, “Let my king by right be
Alamanicus, but let another hold the title, so that divinely blessed may he live his life by
the fruit of his conscience and not require the empty titles of pompous boasting.”¹¹⁰ The
unspecified individual is almost certainly Anastasius, and the jibe is not well concealed.

This ambivalent attitude toward the empire, however, was by no means the only,
or even dominant, discourse about the Gothic regime generated in Italy. The Anonymus
Valesianus, by another Italian author, indicates that Theoderic actively sought imperial
recognition. He sent envoys to Constantinople in 490 and probably 493 that bore no fruit,
but in 497, after a third embassy, Anastasius “sent back to him all the ornaments of the
palace, which Odoacer had transferred to Constantinople.”¹¹¹ These efforts to receive
external legitimization came early, however, and, once more firmly established, the
Gothic state would assert its autonomy more confidently. It is also equally likely that,
over the years, Gothic Ravenna calibrated its message to meet the particularities of
political circumstance, sometimes deriving its legitimacy from Constantinople, at other
times trumpeting the self-sufficiency of Gothic Italy’s sovereignty.

¹¹⁰ Ennodius, Panegyricus dictus Theoderico 17.81, “Rex meus sit iure Alamannicus, dicatur alienus. Ut
divus vitam agat ex fructu conscientiae nec requirat pomposae vocabula nuda iactantiae.” Collectio
Avellana 113 indicates that Anastasius used Alamanicus as part of his official titulature, B. Hasse,
¹¹¹ Anonymus Valesianus 64, “Facta pace cum Anastasio imperatore per Festum de praesumptione regni, et
omnia ornamenta palatii, quae Odoacer Constantinopolim transmiserat, remittit.” For the envoy sent in 490,
53; in 493, 57; in 497, 64.
The *Anonymus Valesianus*: Praise and Condemnation of Gothic Rule

Like Ennodius’ corpus, the *Anonymus Valesianus* is of crucial importance for our understanding of Gothic Italy. Unlike Ennodius, however, the *Valesianus* provides a far more measured and less acutely tendentious account of Theoderic’s reign. This is not to suggest that critical engagement with the text is easy going. There remains no broad consensus concerning its authorship, date of composition, or thematic agenda. The narrative covers the period from 474 through the death of Theoderic in 526. It is not certain how long after Theoderic’s death it was written, though Barnish and others have argued for a date of mid century or slightly before.112 Moorhead, alternatively, suggests that the anonymous author was writing not long after 526.113 Both chronologies seem possible. In support of the latter dating, the *Valesianus* reports that “in [Theoderic’s] times Italy for thirty years enjoyed such good fortune that his successors also inherited peace.”114 Had the author been writing after the outbreak of hostilities in 535, it is perhaps unlikely that he would have made such a comment. In a text partially characterized by discussion of Gothic Italy’s interaction with the eastern empire, one imagines that the years of war between those states would have left a more discernible mark had the *Valesianus* been written amidst the fighting. Moreover, scholars agree that the text betrays an Italian, and likely Ravennan, provenance, which would make the conflict that much harder for an author to ignore.

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113 Moorhead (1992), 4, 261-3.
114 *Anonymus Valesianus* 59, “Cuius temporibus felicitas est secuta Italianam per annos triginta, ita ut etiam pax perguntibus esset.”
But perhaps the Gothic War did, in fact, help to shape the thematic program of the
*Valesianus*. Taken as a whole, the text exhibits many of the conventions of the moralizing
and edifying biography genre, and tells the cautionary tale of a glorious king’s fall from
greatness because of his heresy.\(^{115}\) The latter portion of the text openly attacks
Theoderic’s Arianism, his measures against Catholics, and his unjust treatment of
Albinus, Boethius, and Symmachus.\(^{116}\) The king’s actions, induced by the devil,
ultimately incur the wrath of God who fatally inflicts Theoderic with dysentery, the same
fate suffered by Arius himself.\(^{117}\) It could be argued that so harsh a treatment of the late
king would not have been articulated in the Gothic capital if Theoderic’s own grandson
or daughter still reigned, and that a more likely context for composition was in imperially
occupied Ravenna sometime after 540. This is entirely plausible, but, if true, the
appearance in imperial Ravenna of a text that maligns Theoderic’s Arianism does not
necessarily make it a piece of imperial propaganda.\(^{118}\) Such an argument must still
contend with the fact that the majority of the text effusively praises the late king and
extols his Roman model of governance. Theoderic’s reign emerges from the *Valesianus*
as entirely legitimate. After 540, when the imperial Exarchate of Ravenna was itself in
sore need of legitimization, surrounded as it was by the legacy of two generations of
Gothic prosperity, it is highly unlikely that imperial editors would disseminate a text that
portrayed Theoderic’s rule in such a positive light just to take a shot at his Arianism. The
text’s date, however, does not impinge on the present line of inquiry. More important is

\(^{116}\) *Anonymus Valesianus* 79-96.
\(^{117}\) *Anonymus Valesianus* 83, 95. Victor of Tununna s.a 479 also ascribed this death to the Vandal king
Huneric, the worst of the Arian persecutors of Orthodox Africans.
\(^{118}\) Contra Bjornlie (2013), 94-97.
that an Italo-Roman Catholic, either before the war or during imperial occupation, published a thematically coherent analysis of Theoderic’s reign characterized by both lavish secular praise and bitter religious condemnation. This must be understood as a mode of discourse on Theoderic’s legitimacy shaped by concerns distinct from those found in Ennodius, Count Marcellinus, or Justinianic legislation.

Despite its Italian origin and subject matter, the *Anonymus Valesianus* also exhibits a marked eastward orientation. Interspersed throughout the text are brief asides about the east, primarily concerning the emperors, and the narrative itself commences with a discussion of Julius Nepos’ overthrow of Glycerius, but not before establishing chronology by marking the reign of the Zeno.\footnote{119 *Anonymus Valesianus* 36.} After a discussion of Nepos, Orestes, and Augustulus, the *Valesianus* turns its gaze east and furnishes a parallel and lengthy account of the emperor Leo, his daughter Ariadne, and Zeno, the latter receiving a laudatory treatment.\footnote{120 *Anonymus Valesianus* 36-38; 39-44.} The author was also attuned to, and employed in his text, recent political discourse emanating from Constantinople. For example, the author interrupts his discussion of Theoderic’s reign in order to relate a story about the emperor Anastasius’ selection of an heir. The latter, after fasting and prayer, received a prophetic dream that portended Justin’s future ascendency.\footnote{121 *Anonymus Valesianus* 74-78.} Such apocrypha, suggesting that God hand-picked Justin to succeed, is the sort of message that might have echoed from Justin’s and Justinian’s courts. In another instance, an account of Theoderic’s illiteracy reveals that the king used a stencil of the word *legi* to endorse documents.\footnote{122 *Anonymus Valesianus* 79.} Procopius offers
precisely the same vignette, but in his version the emperor Justin uses the stencil.\textsuperscript{123} It seems that the \textit{Valesianus} author was cognizant of this eastern account and, mistakenly or otherwise, attributed the anecdote to Theoderic. The anonymous author’s awareness of these stories speaks to his sensitivity to contemporary eastern discourse and desire to connect Italian politics to those in Constantinople.

In fact, Theoderic’s own rule is couched in terms of its relation to eastern politics. As a reward for his assistance in reclaiming the throne from Basiliscus, Zeno makes Theoderic a patrician, names him consul, gives him money, and sends him to Italy.\textsuperscript{124} Thereafter, in recounting the war against Odoacer, the anonymous author further establishes the Gothic leader’s Roman pedigree by repeatedly referring to him as \textit{Theodoricus patricius}.\textsuperscript{125} It is important to note that the \textit{Valesianus} attributes to Zeno all of the agency in the decision to send Theoderic to Italy, whereafter the newly minted Gothic king continues to seek out imperial legitimization by dispatching three separate diplomatic delegations to the emperor in an effort to receive official recognition of his rule. Once his authority is established and sanctioned by the empire, the author sets about praising Theoderic’s accomplishments. The Gothic king “governed two races at the same time, Romans and Goths.”\textsuperscript{126} He is described as “a man of great distinction and of good-will towards all men…For he did nothing wrong.”\textsuperscript{127} He used the reigns of Trajan and Valentinian as models for his own; he established justice and enriched the treasury; he

\textsuperscript{123} Procopius, \textit{Secret History} 6.15.
\textsuperscript{124} \textit{Anonymus Valesianus} 49.
\textsuperscript{125} \textit{Anonymus Valesianus} 49, 51, 52, 54.
\textsuperscript{126} \textit{Anonymus Valesianus} 60, “Sic gubernavit duas gentes in uno, Romanorum et Gothorum…”
\textsuperscript{127} \textit{Anonymus Valesianus} 59-60, “Ergo praeclarus et bonae voluntatis in omnibus… Nihil enim perperam gessit.”
put on games and gave food to the poor;\textsuperscript{128} he constructed new buildings, restored the old, rebuilt the palace, and reinforced the city walls;\textsuperscript{129} he repaired aqueducts and built new baths;\textsuperscript{130} and “coming to Rome and entering it, he appeared in the senate, and addressed the people at the Palm, promising that with God’s help he would keep inviolate whatever the former Roman emperors had decreed.”\textsuperscript{131} In short, the \textit{Valesianus} praises Theoderic for doing those things that good Roman rulers do: upholding justice, defending the state, ensuring prosperity, and protecting Rome’s laws and traditions. He is a king invested by the emperor with the authority to rule Italy. In the \textit{Valesianus}, as it was for Ennodius, the very Romanness of Theoderic’s rule is that which legitimizes it.

Despite his praise of the king, early in the account of Theoderic’s reign the \textit{Valesianus} states: “he ruled for thirty-three years. In his time Italy for thirty years enjoyed such good fortune…”\textsuperscript{132} The implication is that for three years Theoderic’s reign faltered. This judgement is best explained by linking it to the sudden rhetorical pivot in the text after which Theoderic and his administration come under attack for perceived injustices attributable to Arianism. Theoderic’s persecution of Albinus and Boethius, central to the \textit{Valesianus’} account of the king’s fall, occurred in 523 – exactly thirty years after Theoderic gained the throne in 493 – and only three years before his death in 526.\textsuperscript{133} This seems to account best for the author’s report of thirty years of good rule. That the

\textsuperscript{128} Anonymus \textit{Valesianus} 60.
\textsuperscript{129} Anonymus \textit{Valesianus} 67.
\textsuperscript{130} Anonymus \textit{Valesianus} 71.
\textsuperscript{131} Anonymus \textit{Valesianus} 66, “Deinde veniens ingressus urbem, venit ad senatum, et ad Palmam populo allocutus, se omnia, deo iuvante, quod retro principes Romani ordinaverunt inviolabiliter servaturum promittit.”
\textsuperscript{132} Anonymus \textit{Valesianus} 59, “…regnavit annos XXXIII. Cuius temporibus felicitas est secuta Italiam per annos triginta…”
\textsuperscript{133} Moorhead (1992), 263.
*Valesianus* marks the duration of Italy’s prosperity under Theoderic, and thereby foreshadows the king’s fall from grace, illustrates the author’s control of his narrative framework.\(^{134}\)

A proper understanding of the thematic principles that shape Theoderic’s downfall in the *Valesianus* is of crucial importance for a holistic appraisal of the king’s reign. For such an appraisal separates this author’s account of Theoderic from those advanced by Ennodius, Count Marcellinus, and the perceptions of heretical barbarian rule found in Justinian’s legislation. Theoderic’s descent into iniquity is likened to demonic possession: “the devil found an opportunity to steal for his own a man who was ruling the state well and without complaint.”\(^{135}\) It is important to note that, upon announcing the king’s lapse into heresy, the *Valesianus* also draws explicit attention to the precedent of Theoderic’s good governance. This juxtaposition establishes a sudden turning point in the quality of Theoderic’s rulership, and thereby attributes his corruption to the influence of Arianism alone. The text then focuses on two primary episodes of injustice. The first comes after the senator Albinus is wrongfully accused of having sent to the emperor Justin a letter hostile to Theoderic’s rule. Boethius comes to Albinus’ defense and stridently denies the allegations, whereupon Theoderic, “who was plotting evil against the Romans and seeking an opportunity for killing them,” arrests and sentences Boethius.

\(^{134}\) Barnish (1983), 573 ff. posits the thematic coherence of the *Valesianus* and argues against Cessi’s notion that the present text is actually two works stitched together: one which eulogizes Theoderic and derives its material from Cassiodorus’ lost history of the Goths, and another by an anti-Arian Catholic bent on defaming Theoderic.

\(^{135}\) *Anonymus Valesianus* 83, “Ex eo enim invenit diabolus locum, quem ad modum hominem bene rem publicam sine querella gubernantem sub riperet.”
without a trial and later has him tortured and beaten to death.\textsuperscript{136} After this, “the king… acted no longer as a friend of God, but as an enemy to his law.”\textsuperscript{137} Then Theodoric “believing, too, that the emperor Justin stood in great fear of him,” dispatches John, bishop of Rome, to Constantinople and orders him to betray his faith and demand that the emperor restore to the Arian church all of those who had converted to Orthodoxy.\textsuperscript{138} Justin, of course, refuses, and John returns to Italy where “Theodoric received him in a hostile spirit, and ordered him to be deemed as one of his enemies. A few days later John died.”\textsuperscript{139} Finally, Theodoric, now “a tyrant rather than a king,” appoints a date on which the Arians would take possession of all of the Catholic churches in Italy.\textsuperscript{140} On that day, however, God visits punishment upon Theodoric by fatally afflicting him with dysentery.\textsuperscript{141}

Note that the two main episodes of Theodoric’s deterioration concern the eastern empire, and specifically the reign of Justin. This further establishes the \textit{Valesianus’} program to link political developments in Italy to those in the east. It is possible, though unverifiable, that the anonymous author wrote during the war, sided with the imperials, and opposed further Gothic rule. But even if this were true, it is imperative to recognize precisely why the author discredits Gothic rule in order to avoid reducing this text into a one-dimensional ‘pro-imperial, anti-Gothic’ piece of propaganda. The author was not

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Anonymus Valesianus 88, “Rediens igitur rex Ravennam, tractans non ut dei amicus sed legi eius inimicus…”
\item Anonymus Valesianus 88, “…credens quod eum pertimesceret Iustinus imperator…”
\item Anonymus Valesianus 93, “Revertens Johannes papa a Iustino, quem Theodericus cum dolo suscepit et in offensa sua eum esse iubet. Qui post paucos dies defunctus est.”
\item Anonymus Valesianus 94, “…non rege sed tyranno…”
\item Anonymus Valesianus 94-95.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
anti-Gothic and certainly not anti-Theodoric. He was anti-Arian. The author aims to expose the insidiousness of heresy; to demonstrate that a glorious king who brought justice, peace, and prosperity to the land could, in the end, become an “enemy of God” because of Arianism alone.\textsuperscript{142} By the end of the king’s reign, the \textit{Valesianus} argues that Theoderic is no longer fit to rule, and, by implication, recommends against further Arian rulers in Italy. This, though, is not an attack on the Gothic governance of Roman people and institutions. It is a caution against heretics in positions of Roman power.\textsuperscript{143} This is further demonstrated by the \textit{Valesianus’} parallel treatment of Anastasius, who is described as an otherwise good ruler, but “then in the last days of his reign the devil tempted him, wishing him to follow the Eunomian sect; but the people of the faith checked him and even cried out to him in the church: ‘You shall not hurl your puny lance against the Trinity.’”\textsuperscript{144} Shortly thereafter the emperor falls dead, strongly implying God’s hand in the matter. Just as was the case with Theodoric, the specifics of Anastasius’ personality and rule are irrelevant. The defamation of heresy is of key concern. In fact, it is clear that the \textit{Valesianus} even laments that a king so great as Theoderic was brought low by heresy. He is depicted as a victim of the devil, not an independently-acting malefactor.

The \textit{Valesianus} should be understood as a contemporary commentary on the reign of Theodoric, written shortly before or during the Gothic War, which offers an analysis of Gothic rule in Italy that was shaped neither by the politics of the Gothic court in

\textsuperscript{142} Echoed by Barnish (1983), 578.
\textsuperscript{143} Amory (1997), 229 offers a similar view.
\textsuperscript{144} \textit{Anonymus Valesianus} 78, “Nam ultima vita regni sui temptans eum diabolus, vellens sectam Eunomianam sequi; quem populus fidelis repressit, ita ut ei in ecclesia clamaretur: ‘In trinitatem lanceolam non mittes.’”
Ravenna, as Ennodius’ panegyric was, nor by the imperial court in Constantinople whose message was crafted in part by Count Marcellinus and Justinian’s legislation. Ennodius’ text, following the generic conventions of court panegyric, offers only exuberant praise for Theoderic, whose sovereignty is portrayed as self-sustaining and independent of imperial legitimation. Ennodius is notably silent on the issue of Gothic Arianism, an absence that is all the more apparent given the central role which the text ascribes to God in establishing Theoderic’s authority. But such a message accords well with how a heretical foreign minority would want to present its recently-established power over a Roman state. The praise which the Valesianus offers Theoderic, however, is independent of the influences of Gothic Ravenna. And while it might be the case, given its biographical genre, that the text exaggerates praise for Theoderic in order to make the king’s later malice stand out in starker relief, one imagines that an author whose historical analysis is motivated primarily by Orthodoxy would have no problem thoroughly maligning the Arian king if he, in fact, had a low opinion of Theoderic. It is likely, then, that despite some rhetorical affection, the author held Theoderic in some esteem, and that this opinion was not an artificial reflection of the Gothic court’s own propaganda. And, of course, it is also clear that the Valesianus’ attack on Arianism bore no Gothic imprint, further establishing the independence of the anonymous author’s perspective.

The author of the Anonymus Valesianus stood within the ambit of political discourse emanating from Constantinople, employed unidentifiable eastern source material in his text, portrayed the eastern empire as a legitimizing force for Theoderic’s
kingship, and, like Justinian’s own laws, attacks Arian rule over Romans. Yet despite these linkages, the *Valesianus* does not advance imperially-sanctioned modes of antagonistic discourse regarding the Goths, about which, given his eastern connections, the author would have been aware. For Count Marcellinus, the Goths had become, since Adrianople and the sack of Rome, historical enemies of the empire, and Theoderic is depicted as a duplicitous barbarian marauder and usurper who invades and occupies Italy without imperial license. Justinian’s legal attacks on Arianism formed part of larger arguments about the unnatural state of barbarians ruling Romans that were designed to delegitimize the Vandal and Gothic kingdoms of the west. The *Valesianus* has nothing whatsoever to do with ‘barbarians’, and never once engages in classicizing ethnographic rhetoric concerning barbarian peoples. The author refers to Gothic and Roman peoples in the same way, as *duas gentes* whom Theoderic ruled *in uno*. Furthermore, the *Valesianus* does not aim to delegitimize Gothic rule; rather differently, it seeks to delegitimize Arian rule. For the anonymous author, matters of faith alone impugned Theoderic’s governance, which is otherwise praised for being thoroughly Roman. Theoderic is presented as a great and just king who ceases to be so once infected by Arianism. The *Anonymus Valesianus* should be understood as an alternative mode of Italo-Roman Catholic discourse on Theoderic’s legitimacy that stood outside the propagandizing echo chambers of both the Gothic and imperial courts.

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145 This is, in and of itself, remarkable. Nearly all late imperial texts that treat the Goths, Vandals, and other ‘barbarian’ peoples employ ethnographic stereotypes, and do so even when they are not designed to be hostile toward them. Amory (1997), 229 and Barnish (1983), 578 also recognize that *AV* does not treat the Goths as stereotypical barbarians.

146 *Anonymus Valesianus* 60.
The Liber Pontificalis: Political Recalibration and the Gothic War

The Liber Pontificalis is another contemporary text that documented the reigns of Theoderic and his successors. Like the Anonymus Valesianus, it is clear that the chroniclers and editors of the Liber were not official mouthpieces for either the Gothic or imperial regimes, and so provide separate testimony on Gothic rule in Italy. The text itself is a collection of Latin biographies of the bishops of Rome, and it is a source of the first order for the present inquiry because its authors were contemporary witnesses to the events in Gothic Italy that they record. Questions regarding the Liber’s authorship and dates of composition remain vexed, but it is generally accepted that the text which we possess was written partially in the 530s and partially sometime during the pontificate of Vigilius (537-555). The portions of the text concerned here cover the period from Symmachus in 498 through Silverius in 537. The Liber therefore provides attendant

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147 The dating schemas of Duchesne and Geertman have most influenced the field. Those of their conclusions which impact this study are as follows. Duchesne holds that there were two editions of the Liber, and that these were then supplemented by continuators. The first edition, written in 530, is lost, though we possess two epitomes of it. A second edition is another contemporaneous work that picked up where the first edition left off and treats the entries for Boniface II, John, II, Agapitus, and the first half of the entry for Silverius. The second edition also contains reworked biographies from the first edition. The second edition was written at some point during the pontificate of Vigilius (537-555), but before 546, and this is the form of the text which has come down to us. Geertman has amended Duchesne’s highly influential model, and his suggestions have gained traction. He posits that the extant Liber covering the lives from Peter to John II reflects a first redaction, likely compiled just after the death of John II in 535. Both epitomies, then, are based on this c.535 edition. McKitterick has plausibly suggested that the first redaction might be pushed to 536 or 537 to include the life of Agapitus I. L. Duchesne (ed.), Le Liber Pontificalis, Texte, introduction et commentaire, two volumes (Paris, 1886-1892); 2nd ed by C. Vogel (Paris, 1955-1957); H. Geertman, ‘Documenti, redattori e la formazione del testo del Liber pontificalis’, in H. Geertman (ed.), Il Liber pontificalis e la storia materiale, Mededelingen van het Nederlands Instituut te Rome 60-1 (Assen, 2003), 267-84. R. McKitterick, ‘Roman Texts and Roman History in the Early Middle Ages’, in C. Bolgia, R. McKitterick, and J. Osborne (eds.), Rome Across Time and Space: Cultural Transmission and the Exchange of Ideas c. 500-1400 (Cambridge, 2011), 19-34, here 20. I have been aided by the summary of Duchesne’s reconstruction by K. Blair-Dixon, ‘Memory and Authority in Sixth-century Rome: the Liber Pontificalis and the Collectio Avellana’, in K. Cooper and J. Hillner (eds.), Religion, Dynasty and Patronage in Early Christian Rome, 300-900 (Cambridge, 2007), 59-76, here 65-6. For a discussion of the text and dates of composition see also R. Davis, The Book of the Pontiffs: The Ancient Biographies of the First Ninety Roman Bishops to AD 715, 2nd ed. (Liverpool, 2000), xii-xiv; xlvi-xlviii; T. Noble, ‘A New Look at the Liber Pontificalis’, Archivum Historiae Pontificae 23 (1985), 347-58.
testimony about the vast majority of Theoderic’s reign, the lead up to the conflict with the empire, and the initial period of war in Italy. Further, the author(s) of the first part of Silverius’ biography, perhaps writing sometime between 537 and 555, had experienced years of the Gothic War, the events of which weigh heavily on the text.

Despite the complicated set of questions surrounding its composition, what remains clear is that the Liber Pontificalis was shaped (and later reshaped) by the political reverberations caused by worsening relations between Ravenna and Constantinople generally, and specifically by the events of the imperial invasion of Italy.¹⁴⁸ The Liber reveals the Roman church in a moment of profound transition, faced with the end of its effective political and theological independence under Gothic rule, and the very real possibility of the reinstatement of imperial rule in Italy. Though it is hard to identify precisely who was saying what in the text and when they wrote, it is evident that the authors and compilers of the Liber were engaged in the process of recalibrating the image of the Roman episcopacy to better adapt to violently shifting political tides.

From the pontificate of Felix III, when Theoderic is first mentioned, through the middle of Silverius’ biography, after which authorship is no longer contemporary, the text betrays three distinct impressions of Gothic rule. The first is positive; Theoderic and the Roman episcopacy have complementary objectives and the Gothic king is treated with respect. Second, Theoderic is attacked for challenging Justin’s anti-Arian measures and for persecuting Boethius, Symmachus, and the Roman bishop John. Finally, a new

¹⁴⁸ McKitterick (2011), 23-4 has noted that “the Liber pontificalis needs to be seen in the wider context of the Ostrogothic wars. This was a period of major political adaptation and re-orientation within the Roman empire, both in relation to the emperor in the east and to the Gothic rulers of Italy. The perception of the imperial past in Rome was in the process of transformation by the popes themselves. The Liber pontificalis contributed to that process.”
author probably writing in the 540s and likely reacting to imperial military intervention in
Gothic Italy, condemns the Gothic regime as heretical and tyrannical, and proclaims
imperial partisanship.

Initially, though, Theoderic is regularly referred to as “king” and named before
the eastern emperor in each biography when marking chronology.\textsuperscript{149} The author notes
that rival ecclesiastical factions sought out Theoderic to arbitrate the Laurentian schism,
about which he is applauded for rendering a “fair decision.”\textsuperscript{150} Later, during the Acacian
schism, Theoderic is portrayed as working to expel heresy from the Catholic church and
to restore ecclesiastical unity with the east. “On the advice of Theoderic,” the Roman
bishop Hormisdas dispatches a delegation to the emperor Anastasius in an effort to heal
the rift.\textsuperscript{151} Anastasius refuses, however, because of his Eutychian heresy, and is later
struck dead by God.\textsuperscript{152} Upon the ascendency of Justin, the Liber yet again attributes to
Theoderic the initiative for sending another detachment to Constantinople which
ultimately leads to the reunification of the western and eastern churches.\textsuperscript{153} In this portion
of the text, Theoderic is presented as an instrumental force in the maintenance of
orthodoxy.

The tone of the Liber quickly shifts, however, after the death of Hormisdas and
the rise of John. In marking chronology, the consuls are here named before Theoderic,
while Theoderic is simply named and not called king, thus breaking the pattern

\textsuperscript{149} Liber Pontificalis 50.1, 51.1, 52.1, 53.1, 54.1.
\textsuperscript{150} Liber Pontificalis 53.2.
\textsuperscript{151} Liber Pontificalis 54.2, “…cum consilio regis Theodorici…”
\textsuperscript{152} Liber Pontificalis 54.2-4.
\textsuperscript{153} Liber Pontificalis 54.5-8.
established with the biography of Felix III. Noteworthy, too, is that Justin is called the “Christian emperor”, a descriptive term not afforded to Anastasius because of his heresy. That the author states that Justin is a Christian in the same breath as mentioning Theoderic, who receives no such qualification, tacitly calls into question the faith of the Gothic king. These alterations are slight, but indicative of the tonal shift that is borne out in the rest of John’s biography, which revolves around the figures of Justin and Theoderic. The author announces that Justin “in the burning depths of his love for the Christian faith” made plans to consecrate Arian churches as catholic. Upon hearing this “the heretic king Theoderic…was incensed” and sends John to Constantinople to demand that the emperor restore the Arian churches lest Theoderic “destroy the whole of Italy with the sword.” Justin refuses but receives John with great honors, prostrating himself before the Roman bishop, who, in turn, re-crowns Justin as emperor. Theoderic then arrests and murders Boethius and Symmachus, seizes John upon his return from the east, and places him in prison where he dies a martyr. Following the death of John, “it was almighty God’s will that the heretic king Theoderic suddenly collapsed and died.”

The text’s shift in its treatment of Theoderic is indicative of both the Roman church’s movement toward ideological realignment with the eastern empire in the reign of Justin and its reaction against the Gothic regime’s newly strident defense of Arianism.

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154 Liber Pontificalis 55.1, “Fuit autem a consulatu Maximi usque ad consulatum Olybrii, temporibus Theodorici et Iustini Augusti christiani.”
155 Ibid.
156 Liber Pontificalis 55.1, “Nam summo ferveore christianitatis hoc consilio usus est ut ecclesias Arrianorum catholicas consecreret.”
157 Liber Pontificalis 55.2, “Pro hanc causam hereticus rex Theodorici audiens hoc exarsit et uoluit totam Italianam ad gladium extinguer.”
158 Liber Pontificalis 55.6, “Post hoc factum, notu Dei omnipotentis, XCVIII die postquam defunctus est beatissimus Iohannes in custodia, Theodoricus rex hereticus subito interit et mortuus est.”
on the international stage. The ascendency of Justin would not end all strife between the eastern and western churches, but the new emperor’s overt Chalcedonianism and his pivotal role in ending the Acacian schism did much to ingratiate Constantinople to Rome. The *Liber* offers effusive praise for Justin; indeed, the biography of John is as palpably enthusiastic about Justin as it is damning of Theodoric. This dichotomy is very much a piece of literary artifice: Justin is Catholic, attacks heresy, and honors the Roman episcopacy. Theodoric is Arian, defends heresy, and kills the bishop of Rome. Just as in the *Anonymus Valesianus*, Theodoric loses his ruling legitimacy because of his Arianism, but unlike the *Valesianus* the *Liber* combines condemnation of Theodoric with praise for the Catholic eastern emperor.

After Theodoric’s death, the text renews its attack on Gothic Arianism in the biography of Boniface II. Athalaric is called the “heretic king” and Boniface, himself a Goth who gained the Roman episcopacy through the influence of Athalaric, is treated harshly by the author who supported the rival claimant Dioscorus. Later, in the biography of Agapitus, which both Duchesne and Geertman agree was written during the pontificate of Vigilius, Theodahad is referred to not as king, but as “king of the Goths,” indicating that the author did not consider him to be the legitimate ruler of the Romans in Italy; and in the first half of the biography of Silverius, also written under Vigilius, Theodahad is simply called “tyrant” and is eventually “snuffed out by God’s will.”

Attending these remarks hostile to the Goths in the Silverius entry are also those that betray imperial partisanship. The emperor is lavished with expansive titulature: “lord

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159 *Liber Pontificalis* 57.1.
160 *Liber Pontificalis* 59.2; 60.1.
emperor Justinian Augustus;” Belisarius fought for “the name of Rome,” and Justinian is said to have launched the war “to free all of Italy from the occupation of the Goths.” The latter comment might even be an echo of Justinian’s own liberation ideology.

Again, it is exceedingly difficult to attribute authorship and precise dates to these particular portions of the Liber, but a careful consideration of the possibilities points to antagonism between Gothic Italy and the empire as an explanation for the text’s later hostility toward the Goths and its praise for Justinian and the imperial invasion. By Geertman’s dating, the initial editors compiling in c. 535 had not only witnessed and written about the careers of all the pontiffs of Gothic Italy, but had also likely experienced the outbreak of the Gothic War. After the stunningly swift imperial conquest of Vandal Africa only months earlier, a great many Italo-Romans would have predicted a similar fate for the Gothic state. The Liber’s initial author(s) may have numbered among them, and perhaps the expectation of imperial rule in Italy can begin to account for the delegitimation of the Goths in certain portions of the text. Duchesne’s model would have the author of these episodes writing during the pontificate of Vigilius and probably in the 540s, and so he, too, would have experienced first-hand the effects of the war. And, of course, both Duchesne and Geertman recognize that earlier biographies were revamped during the time of Vigilius, the marks of which are still extant, if not always apparent, in the text that has come down to us. No matter which dating schema one is inclined to

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161 Liber Pontificalis 60.2; 60.5; 60.2.
162 For arguments that the earlier biographies were subsequently overhauled during the pontificate of Vigilius, see C. Sotinel, ‘Emperors and Popes in the Sixth Century: The Western View’, in M. Maas, ed., The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian (Cambridge, 2005), 267-90; ibid, ‘Vigilius in the Liber Pontificalis: A Memory Lost, or Manipulated?’, in C. Sotinel, Church and Society in Late Antique Italy and Beyond (Farnham, 2010).
use, it remains true that those portions of the Liber that villainize the Goths as heretics and tyrants and praise the imperials were written during the period of Roman-Gothic hostilities in Italy.

The stark shift in tone from the text’s positive treatment of Theoderic to its later blackening of the Goths is attributable in part to the political pressures being exerted by the Gothic War. During the invasion, the Italian Church was forced into the terribly awkward position of having to negotiate its position with the Goths, with whom they had done business for half a century, in relation to the prospect of imperial reconquest and direct accountability to Justinian. The editors of the Liber, like so many other Italians, experienced the stresses of political realignment and the difficult decision of picking a side. During the Gothic War, it is clear that these editors threw their support behind the empire, and one suspects that some of the Liber’s rough handling of the Goths has more to do with political expediency than any genuine conviction. Despite the text’s support for the imperial invasion, though, it should not be understood as an artificially controlled cog within Justinian’s propagandistic machinery. We would do better to recognize these authors and editors as both contemporary witnesses to the war and as forced participants in the precarious political reorientation that so many Italians underwent throughout the course of the conflict.

The Liber Pontificalis is a collection of Italian clerical voices intimately associated with the Roman see. In this regard they reflect an ecclesiastical and Roman perspective, and, given that these voices both praise and reproach Gothic and imperial rulers alike, we can be certain that they were not directly calibrated by eastern or
Ravennan court politics. The Liber provides its own independent testimony about the reign of Theoderic and Gothic rule in Italy, and, like the Anonymus Valesianus, it does not employ ethnographic commonplaces about the Goths or about barbarians at all. In fact, the text does not even mention the word Goth in any of the five papal biographies that fall within Theoderic’s reign. It is not until the antagonistic latter portions of the text that the Goths are named and discussed in isolation from the rest of the Italian populace in order to advance pro-imperial, anti-Gothic sentiments. Moreover, the ascendency of Odoacer in 476 and Theoderic in 493 go unnoticed in the Liber, which suggests that its authors and/or editors considered these events peripheral to the functioning of the Roman see and hardly indicative of the momentous turning point described in Count Marcellinus’ chronicle. From the point of view of Italian ecclesiastics with close ties to the Roman episcopacy, it was not imperative to draw attention to the fact that non-Roman peoples dominated Italy’s state apparatus. Eventually, conflict stemming from religious difference defames the image of Theoderic, but this was not an indictment of the Gothic king’s entire reign or of his past legitimacy. His heresy alone is condemned, closely paralleling the condemnation of the heresy of the emperor Anastasius. The politics of the Liber’s latter portion, however, depart significantly from the text’s earlier views and those of the author of the Valesianus. Both texts may have been written shortly after the fall of Ravenna, but only the Liber excoriates Gothic rulership outright and supports the imperial invasion. The precise circumstances of these authors and editors remain unknown, but the fact that they treat similar subject matter so differently is indicative of

163 Though it is possible that later editors elected to espouse imperial conquest and liberation ideology in their open support of Belisarius’ invasion, it is important to recognize that this bears the marks of a self-imposed political reorientation, not one that was externally directed.
the wide spectrum of ways in which the vicissitudes of the Gothic War affected the political fortunes of Italians. Both texts illustrate that there was no monolithic Italian perspective concerning the Gothic regime or the imperial occupation.

**Cassiodorus’ *Variae*: A Discourse of Discontent**

The *Variae*, more than any other extant text, illuminates our understanding of what the Gothic state was, how it perceived itself in relation to other powers, and how its politics functioned. But the *Variae* is also very probably a highly edited and tendentious text, that not only fails to reflect the precise reality of Gothic politics, but also does not preserve the exact contents of its letters as they were originally written. There is good reason to believe that the letters were altered by Cassiodorus as he compiled them for publication, and that some may have even been invented. The *Variae* is a complex and opaque text whose inner workings and motivations would require a lengthy analysis that would take the current study far afield of its present line of inquiry.\(^{164}\) What matters here, though, is not necessarily *why* Cassiodorus wrote the *Variae*, but *that* he wrote it at all.

Despite the difficulties surrounding this text, all can agree on the very basic point that the *Variae* Romanizes Gothic rule. In the letters that Cassiodorus wrote on behalf of Theoderic and other Gothic rulers, the Gothic state is portrayed as the guardian and propagator of Roman governmental and cultural traditions. And while we can be certain that Theoderic, more than any other barbarian successor king, preserved and worked within a preexisting Roman political apparatus, we should not trust implicitly that

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\(^{164}\) To this end, the following comments are concise and meant only to complement and reinforce other ideas in this chapter.
Cassiodorus’ depiction of Gothic rule in Italy is entirely reflective of the situation on the ground. Cassiodorus likely exaggerated the extent of Gothic Romanity for any number of reasons: he was a Roman aristocrat with the bluest of bloodlines and he simply conceived of and articulated power and statecraft using the traditional formulae of Roman political rhetoric; he knew that presenting the Gothic state as the inheritor and curator of the Roman legacy was a point of prestige vis-à-vis the Goths’ foreign partners and rivals; it behooved the Gothic state to play up its Roman pedigree especially in relation to the Roman empire, with whom it had an uneasy partnership and from whom it received an ambiguous legitimacy. Questions about the precise representation of the Gothic state aside, however, it is highly significant that Cassiodorus published a text that legitimizes and praises Gothic rule in Italy as both Roman and good in the midst of the empire’s war to delegitimize and destroy that Gothic kingdom.

General consensus holds that the Variae was written in Italy around 538, but a new study by Bjornlie argues for a different provenance and date of publication. Bjornlie proposes that Cassiodorus advanced his sympathetic rendering of the Gothic state sometime in the 540s while residing in Constantinople, within earshot of the


\[\text{166 Bjornlie (2013).}\]
imperial court. He argues that the *Variae* is meant to proclaim how Cassiodorus and an important caste of elite Italian administrators upheld Roman civilization and advanced Roman interests during the Gothic interregnum. The text sought to vindicate the actions of this body of Italian statesmen in the hope that Justinian would grant them positions of similar honor and influence in the newly reconquered imperial Italy. Cassiodorus feared that he and other Italian elites would be politically ruined by a reputation of having collaborated with the enemy. Bjornlie’s ideas are illuminating and will likely gain wider traction. Whether Cassiodorus wrote in 538 in Italy or some years later in the eastern capital, it remains significant that Cassiodorus, having witnessed four or more years of a war in which the Roman empire was committed to conquering Italy and destroying the Gothic regime, and seemed assured of victory, would choose to write such a text at such a time. Cassiodorus would have been well aware of the claims of Justinian’s propaganda: that the west had fallen in 476, that barbarians held illicit control of lands stolen from the empire, and that the destruction of these heretical usurpers was necessary for the reunification of the Roman empire. Cassiodorus’ efforts to legitimate Gothic rule and to argue for the persistence of Roman culture in Italy flew directly in the face of the message emanating from the imperial court. In this regard, the *Variae* might be considered a text of outright defiance, or, at the very least, understood as engaging in a contemporary discourse of discontent concerning imperial measures in Italy; a mode of discourse that would be further advanced by Procopius and Jordanes not longer after.

**Malalas and the Persistence of Justinianic Ideology**
If the chronicle of Count Marcellinus helped to shape Justinianic ideology, then the
chronicle of Malalas, written a generation later, represents a text shaped in no small part
by that very ideology. Malalas, an Antiochene who entered some sort of imperial service
in Constantinople probably in the 530s or perhaps 540, wrote a world chronicle that
spanned Christian creation to Justinian’s death in 565. \(^{167}\) The text would have been
completed not long after its terminus given the conventions of historical writing and
Malalas’ own advanced age. \(^{168}\) Its final book treats the reign of Justinian and it is by far
the longest in the text. Scott has argued convincingly that Malalas made use of official
imperial notices disseminated by Justinian’s court as source material for his chronicle.
Though never designed to function as a piece of propaganda itself, Malalas’ text is in
many instances a reflection of Justinianic propaganda. A number of the topics that
Malalas discusses in Justinian’s reign correspond to those upon which Justinian’s court
had officially commented and at which polemicists such as Procopius aimed their attacks.
\(^{169}\) At many points it is evident that both Malalas’ chronicle and The Secret History
respond to the same specific nodes of political contention, with Procopius leveling a
critique, and Malalas toeing the imperial court’s line.

In other respects, too, narrative elements of the chronicle accord with a Justinianic
conception of the recent past. For example, just as in Count Marcellinus, Malalas never
states that Theoderic was given imperial license to conquer and hold Italy. He merely
says that Theoderic “set off for Rome” after rebelling and rampaging throughout

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\(^{168}\) He was probably born c.491.

Again, it should be noted that this rendering of events runs contrary to the majority of the sources that treat this subject, most of which suggest that Theoderic and Zeno had entered into an agreement concerning Italy. It might be the case that, in this instance, Malalas was merely following the account of his (now lost) source Eustathius, but it remains compelling that the deeply partisan Marcellinus and Malalas both supply historical accounts that portray Theoderic’s invasion of Italy as illicit, and, by extension, render his kingship illegitimate. Moreover, during the war in Italy, Malalas remarks that Theoderic gained “the treacherous support of the Roman senate.”  

Quite simply, Malalas suggests that the Romans in Italy who collaborated with the Goths were traitors. This comment might reflect imperial frustration over the fluidity with which Italo-Romans shifted allegiances during the Gothic War, or is perhaps even indicative of continuing tensions between Italy and the east in the 560s.

After Theoderic claims the throne of Italy in the chronicle, Malalas supplies but a single anecdote about the king and thereafter records his death. It is a thematically significant little story and illustrative of the sort of perception of Theoderic that the imperial court sought to advance. In the anecdote, a noblewoman who has been entangled in a lawsuit with another Roman noble for the unfair duration of thirty years seeks recourse to Theoderic to conclude her case. Theoderic orders that the lawyers of both parties discharge the case within two days. The lawyers obey, close the case in short order, and the noblewoman returns to Theoderic to thank him. The Gothic king, however,

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170 Malalas, *Chronographia* 15.9, “καὶ ποιήσας ἡμέρας πολλὰς καὶ μὴ δυνηθεὶς βλάψαι τὸν βασιλέα, ἀνεχώρησεν ἐκείθεν ὁρμήσας ἐπὶ τὴν Ῥώμην τότε κατεχομένην ὑπὸ τοῦ Ὀδοάκρου, ῥῆγος τῶν βαρβάρων.”
171 Malalas, *Chronographia* 15.9, “καὶ πολεμήσας αὐτῷ κατὰ γνώμην καὶ προδοσίαν τῆς συγκλήτου Ρώμης παρέλαβεν ἀνεπηρεάστως τὴν αὐτὴν Ῥώμην καὶ τὸν Ὀδόακρον βήγα.”
172 See Amory (1997) 165-8 for a discussion of shifting Italian loyalties during the war.
grows enraged at the thought of the lawyers’ past incompetence, summons them before him, demands to know why they did not do in thirty years what they could have done in two days, and then swiftly has them beheaded. After this, Malalas states only that “there was much fear.” This is a cautionary tale about the dangers of barbarian rule. It bears witness to what happens when an uncivilized barbarian is left to administer the inherently civilized institution of law. The law here represents the idea of Roman civilization itself. The story shows that the law is admittedly imperfect, as demonstrated by the unnecessarily long case, and so it becomes the job of a just ruler to attend to its proper functioning in order to preserve Roman society. Instead of preserving the law and society, however, Theoderic perverts them. He allows his rage to override the demands of justice, and in so doing betrays the public trust and shakes the foundation of civil order. He induces fear. Law, order, and civility, the tale implies, belong to the sphere of Rome. Emotion, chaos, and fear rule over the world of barbarians. Malalas means for this incongruent picture of an erstwhile Roman society upended by barbarism to be disturbing. And, as it serves as the sole description of Theoderic’s reign, it is an entirely damning assessment of Gothic rule in Italy.

Malalas does not include much about Gothic Italy in his chronicle, but what little there is works to undermine that kingdom’s autonomy and viability. Upon narrating the defeat of Odoacer, Malalas states that afterward Theoderic ruled as king and “was reconciled with the emperor Zeno and did everything in accordance with his wishes.”

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173 Malalas, Chronographia 15.10, “καὶ πέμψας ἀπεκεφάλισε τοὺς δικολόγους τῶν ἀμφοτέρων μερῶν, καὶ ἐγένετο φόβος πολύς.”

174 Malalas, Chronographia 15.9, “καὶ ἔφιλιώθη Ζήνωνι μετὰ τῶν τῷ βασιλεί καὶ πάντα ὅσα ἔπραττεν κατὰ γνώμην αὐτοῦ.”
Later, in the final book of the chronicle, Justinian orders the newly minted Gothic king Athalaric not to receive ambassadors from the Vandal king Gelimer. Athalaric quickly obeys and is never again mentioned by Malalas.\footnote{Malalas, \textit{Chronographia} 18.57.} This paucity of material concerning Gothic Italy recalls similar silences in Count Marcellinus’ chronicle, but more importantly Malalas’ rendering of the relationship between Italy and the empire is one that questions the sovereignty of the Gothic state. Theoderic has already been described as a marauding warlord and a rash and unjust barbarian king, but here he is essentially shown to be a subject of the emperor. And the only time Athalaric appears in the pages of the chronicle he is acquiescing to a direct order from Justinian. Taken together, this composite picture of Gothic rule is not only markedly negative, but also subverts the essential autonomy of the Gothic state. It is easy to see how the notion that Gothic kings had always remained under the thumb of Roman emperors could then justify later imperial measures to reclaim full dominion over Italy. Other contemporary authors also treated pre-war relations between Ravenna and Constantinople, but in the \textit{Anonymus Valesianus}, for example, Theoderic’s efforts to receive imperial recognition of his rule were not meant to position himself in subservience to the east, but were instead motivated by the conventions of diplomacy and a desire to know precisely where his fledgling monarchy stood in relation to the empire. The partisan text of Malalas, however, interprets the events of the recent past to justify imperial interventionism in the barbarian-occupied west.

Malalas’ efforts to diminish the reigns of Theoderic and Athalaric correspond with the cursory manner in which he narrates the events of the Gothic War. These efforts
at historical manipulation reveal that the Gothic War remained a sensitive political issue in Constantinople even as Malalas wrote in the 560s. That Malalas sought to weaken the image of Gothic power in Italy may reflect an effort to discredit contemporary modes of discourse well demonstrated in this chapter that legitimized the Gothic state. Malalas’ treatment of the Gothic War is very brief. He first mentions the conflict only in the year 540, a full five years after fighting had broken out. The entry concisely notes that Belisarius attacked and captured Sicily and Rome, and then took Witiges and his wife and son hostage to Constantinople. Malalas summarizes five years of war in two sentences, and, importantly, chose to reserve any mention of the conflict until the major imperial victory of 540. More remarkable, the next sentence reads: “A short time later the emperor sent Narses, the cubicularius, with a large force to Rome against the Goths.” Engaging in a substantial amount of revisionism, Malalas bypasses the entire decade of the 540s to record Narses’ arrival in Italy in 551. The empire suffered devastating losses against the Goths throughout the 540s and it was not until Narses’ command that imperial forces began to regain the upper hand in the war. The only other mention of the Gothic War in Malalas’ chronicle marks the battle of Busta Gallorum in which Narses defeats the Gothic king Totila. The remainder of the conflict and the ensuing Gothic insurgency that continued into the 560s go unnoticed. Eighteen years of war are reduced to a few terse entries marking the two major milestones of Roman victory. Malalas’ accounting bears the marks of the imperial administration’s spin doctors, and reveals the

176 Bjornlie (2013), 120 advances a similar argument.
177 Malalas, Chronographia 18.88.
178 Malalas, Chronographia 18.88, “Καὶ μετ’ ὀλίγον καιρὸν ὁ αὐτὸς βασιλεὺς ἔπεμψε Ναρσῆν τὸν κουβικουλάριον μετὰ πολλῆς βοηθείας ἐν Ῥώμῃ κατὰ τῶν αὐτῶν Γότθων.”
179 Malalas, Chronographia 18.116.
court’s efforts to control the public perception and later memory of a poorly managed war that drained the imperial coffers and devastated the people and country it sought to liberate. The fact that Malalas’ vision of the recent past is shaped by propaganda initially articulated more than a generation earlier suggests that the imperial administration maintained for many years both a consistent and persistent ideological program concerning the barbarian kingdoms and the war for Italy.

The Polemics of Procopius

Malalas’ ideologically charged account, written well after the conclusion of the conflict in Italy, demonstrates the polemical force that the memory of Theoderic and questions surrounding the Gothic state continued to exert on sixth-century politics and its commentators. So impactful were the debates over these issues that Theoderic and his Gothic kingdom would for centuries thereafter remain a fixture of literary and political discourse in the medieval west. In the Dialogues of Gregory the Great, Theoderic, in punishment for his crimes as a tyrant and heretic, is led naked to the precipice of a volcano by Symmachus and the Roman bishop John and cast into the fiery pits of hell. Paul the Deacon’s Historia Romana affords Theoderic a similar fate for the “madness of his iniquity.” But there were also apologetic perceptions of the Gothic king. Agnellus reports that Charlemagne himself had an equestrian statue of Theoderic transported from

180 A discussion of the sources that treat Theoderic from the late fifth to the ninth century which demonstrates the multiplicity and mutability of perceptions of the Gothic king is provided by A. Goltz, Barbar, König, Tyrann: Das Bild Theroderichs des Großen in der Überlieferung des 5 Bis 9 Jahrhunderts (Berlin, 2008).
181 Gregory the Great, Dialogues 4.31.
Ravenna to be displayed in the Frankish imperial capital at Aachen. Heroic memories of Theoderic preserved in oral legend were put into writing and etched upon the Rök Stone in Sweden, recorded in the *Hildebrandslied* and later in the Eddic poems *Guðrúnarkviða* II and III, the Old English *Waldere, Deor*, and *Widsith*, and in the *Nibelungenlied* and other Middle High German poems where Theoderic was transformed into Dietrich von Bern, the fire-breathing, giant-brawling, dragon slayer. But earlier, the seventh-century Frankish chronicler Fredegar recorded that Theoderic was not a Goth at all, but rather a Roman nobleman from Macedonia awarded the rank of *patriciatus Romanis seo Gothis* by the emperor Leo and charged to lead an army of federate soldiers to rescue Italy. Clearly this rendering grew out of a discourse that promoted Theoderic’s Roman connections and character. Importantly, though, Fredegar composed his narratives of Theoderic and Justinian by drawing from the *Secret History* of Procopius. That Fredegar, a seventh-century Frank, relied upon the eastern Roman Procopius is illustrative of an important point that has gone largely unarticulated in the scholarly literature: the roots of these various portrayals of Theoderic, whether as a barbarian tyrant, a legendary hero, or a Roman scion, originally germinated amidst the sixth-century debates over the Gothic state and the Italian war. The sheer multiplicity of Theoderics that appear in both the contemporary and later sources reveal the considerable

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183 Agnellus, *Liber pontificalis ecclesiae Ravennatis* 94.
184 The other MHG poems are *Dietrichs Flucht, Die Rabenschlacht, Alpharts Tod*, and the fragmentary *Dietrich und Wenzlan*.
range of opinions that were held about Gothic Italy and the war to destroy it, and attest to
the prevalence and ideological gravity of the polemics surrounding the ‘Gothic question’.

Procopius of Caesarea, greatest of the sixth-century historians, responded to and shaped these debates in no small way. He lived during the Gothic War and experienced it personally, having served as Belisarius’ secretary while on campaign. By the time Procopius wrote his account of the conflict in Italy at midcentury, the wider east-west discourse concerning the Gothic state and the war, though individually nuanced, was articulated in two primary modes. One, representing the imperial position, held that the Goths had wrested Italy from the Roman empire and that Gothic rule was barbarian, tyrannical, and heretical, and therefore illegitimate. Other voices, more varied than the imperial line, contended broadly that the Goths ruled Italy by Roman mandate, maintained Roman governing and social structures, and served as defenders of the Roman order. And while these authors did not necessarily oppose the restitution of imperial rule in Italy, they did not justify invasion by blackening the Goths or the legitimacy of the Gothic state. Procopius, like Jordanes (to be discussed in the next chapter), operated in this latter mode of discourse. Procopius’ analysis, however, does more than defend the Roman character and legitimacy of Gothic rule. His texts, both the Wars and Secret History, attack Justinian’s ideological justifications for the invasion of Italy and his gross mismanagement of the war, the negligence and corruption of the imperial generals and administrators, and the injustices committed by the occupying armies. In other words, Procopius, the most notorious polemicist from antiquity, couched
his polemic of Justinian’s regime within a contemporary pan-Mediterranean discourse about the Gothic War.

Because the following analysis draws from the *Wars* and *Secret History* alike in assessing Procopius’ views of the Goths and the Gothic War, it seems necessary to offer some methodological considerations regarding source usage. Establishing a reliable interpretive apparatus for the simultaneous use of Procopius’ texts has caused considerable consternation given that each of his three works, the *Wars*, *Secret History*, and *Buildings*, each belong, respectively, to the different genres of classicizing history, invective, and panegyric. As such, the various rhetorical stances which Procopius assumes in each text sometimes leads to contradictory descriptions and statements that are flatly hard to believe. The *Secret History*, given its dramatic language and sensationalism, has elicited real doubts not simply about its historicity, but that it even expresses Procopius’ own personal opinions. Some would say that it is all artifice; a mere literary study in the genre of invective; a pedantic exercise with little to no bearing on reality. In other words, they suggest that because the *Secret History* is an invective, its themes and ideas are predetermined and therefore cannot be used by historians in the same breath as the measured, generally historically accurate reporting of the *Wars*. I agree with this to a point. A healthy skepticism is indeed necessary when working with any ancient text, especially hyperbolic invectives and panegyrics. But this way of thinking ultimately suggests that genre controls and circumscribes authors and their ideas,
whereas I think that authors employ genre to convey, if stylistically, ideas of their own. Genre is utilized in the service of theme, not the other way around.\textsuperscript{187}

We can be confident that ideas expressed in the \textit{Secret History} reflect Procopius’ own sentiments when they are corroborated by similar views in the \textit{Wars}. No, we should not think that Procopius believed Justinian was a demon, but we can know that the low opinion of the emperor expressed in the \textit{Secret History} was actually Procopius’s own given his many subtle (and sometimes bluntly stated) criticisms of the emperor in the \textit{Wars}. Further, there are multiple points in the \textit{Wars} where Procopius criticizes Justinian’s management of the war in Italy.\textsuperscript{188} When comparable views are expressed in the \textit{Secret History}, they can be taken to be the author’s personal views.\textsuperscript{189} They do not have to be mistrusted simply because they issue from an invective text. It must be noted, though, that this line of thinking does not apply to determining the historicity of actual events and views in the \textit{Secret History}. One suspects that, while a number of episodes are surely on the level, many others are clearly exaggerated or simply false. For example, we should not literally believe that Justinian “conquered North Africa and Italy as well for no other reason than to be able to destroy the people there in addition to those who were already under his power.”\textsuperscript{190}

\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{187} See Chapter Three.
\item \textsuperscript{188} E.g. \textit{Wars} 7.36.4-6; 8.26.7, both analyzed below.
\item \textsuperscript{189} E.g. \textit{Secret History} 18.29, analyzed below.
\item \textsuperscript{190} Procopius, \textit{Secret History} 6.25, “ἐξελ \ δὲ οὐδὲν ἦν αὐτῷ μόνην καταλύσαι τὴν Ῥωμαίων ἀρχήν, Λιβύης τε καὶ Ἰταλίας οὐκ ἄλλου τοῦ ἕνεκα πεποιῆσθαι τὴν ἐπικράτησιν ἵσχυς 

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\begin{align*}
&ἐπεὶ δὲ οὐδὲν ἦν αὐτῷ μόνην καταλύσαι τὴν Ῥωμαίων ἀρχήν, Λιβύης τε καὶ Ἰταλίας οὐκ ἄλλου τοῦ ἕνεκα πεποιῆσθαι τὴν ἐπικράτησιν ἵσχυς ἢ ἄστε ἐξ ὁποῦ τοῖς πρῶτοι ὑφ’ αὐτῷ οὐσί διολέσαι τοὺς ταῦτα ἄνθρώπους.\]\end{align*}
\end{enumerate}
distortion of invective. In sum, if authors pursues ideas that complement, reinforce, or refer explicitly to those developed in their other works, regardless of genre, we can trust that they form part of a coherent thematic program.

Procopius’ analysis of the Gothic state and the war to destroy it was, as it was for other authors in this period, very much wrapped up in perceptions of Theoderic. To put it plainly, no other ruler in the *Wars* receives higher praise than Theoderic. Regarding the Gothic king, Procopius writes:

he was exceedingly careful to observe justice, he protected the land and kept it safe from barbarians, and attained the highest possible degree of wisdom and manliness… love for him among both Goths and Italians grew to be great…and when he died, he had not only made himself an object of terror to all his enemies, but he also left to his subjects a keen sense of bereavement at his loss.\(^1\)

Similar judgements were rendered by Ennodius, the *Anonymus Valesianus* and Cassiodorus, all of whom speak to Theoderic’s sense of justice and his preservation of Roman law, and it is likely that their contributions to a wider discourse informed Procopius’ own views. Procopius’ assessment of Theoderic in the *Wars* is antipodal to that of Justinian in the *Secret History*. Theoderic upholds justice and the law, and defends his land and people against barbarian invasion. Justinian, Procopius argues again and again, does the very opposite of these things.\(^2\) Here Procopius introduces an implicit thematic current that recurs throughout his discussion of the Gothic War, namely that

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\(^1\) Procopius, *Wars* 5.1.27-31, “Δικαιοσύνης τε γὰρ ὑπεμελήσατο καὶ τοὺς νόμους ἐν τῷ βεβαίῳ διεσώσατο, ἐκ τε βαρβάρων τὸν περιοίκον τὴν χώραν ἀσφαλῶς διεφύλαξε, ἔζευξεν τοιαύτα τε καὶ ἀνδρίας ἐς ἀκρον ἔληλυθε ὡς μάλιστα. καὶ ὀδύκημα σχεδόν τι οὐδὲν οὕτω αὐτὸς ἐς τοίς ἀρχομένοις εἰργάζετο οὐτε τῳ ἄλλῳ τα τοιαύτα ἐγκεχείρηκτο ἐπέτρεπε, πλὴν γε δὴ ὅτι τῶν χωρίων τὴν μοίραν ἐν σφίσιν αὐτοὶς Γότθαι ἐνείμαντο, ἤπερ Ὄδοακρος τοὺς στασίοντας τοὺς αὐτοὺς ἔδωκεν… ἔρως τε αὐτοῦ ἐς τῇ Ῥώμῃ καὶ Ἰταλίαις πολῖς ἤκμασε, καὶ ταῦτα ἃπο τοῦ ἀνθρωπείου τρόπου, ἐπέρ θαύμα ἐν ταῖς πολιτείας ἄνει αἰρετοῖς τὴν ἐφεστώσαν ἄρχην ἐς βαίνει ἀρέσκειν μὲν ἐν τῷ παραυτίκα οἷς ἤν ἐν ἡδονῆ τὰ πρασόμενα ἢ, λυπαῖς δὲ οὐ τῆς γνώμης ὑπ’ ἐναντίας χωρῆσεις. ἔτη δὲ ἐπίβιοι ἐπὰν καὶ τρίακοντα ἐπελεύσθησεν, φοβερὸς μὲν τῶς πολεμίως γεγονός ἔστη, πάθον δὲ αὐτοῦ πολίλον τινα ἐς τοὺς ὑπηκόους ἀπολιπών.”

Theoderic and the Goths regularly serve as foils to Justinian and his corrupt administration. So pronounced is this, in fact, that one suspects that the glowing esteem in which Procopius holds Theoderic and later Totila is meant foremost to underscore the failures of the emperor and his policies. While it is likely that antipathy for Justinian and rhetorical artifice inflated Procopius’ rendering of the Goths, this is not to doubt his sincerity entirely. As demonstrated above, there is abundant testimony independent of either Ravennan or Constantinopolitan propaganda that attests to the greatness of Theoderic. Fully aware of the contemporary debates about Theoderic and the Goths, Procopius decided to graft his criticism of Justinian onto this popular mode of discourse.

Beyond Theoderic’s character as a sovereign, Procopius likens the Gothic leader’s position to that of an emperor, and thereby consciously challenges opposing views that had leveled accusations of tyranny against Theoderic. Procopius contends that “though [Theoderic] did not claim the right to assume either the garb or the name of emperor of the Romans, but was called ‘rex’ to the end of his life…still, in governing his own subjects, he invested himself with all the qualities which appropriately belong to one who is by birth an emperor.”193 And further: “although in name Theoderic was a tyrant, in fact he was truly an emperor as any who have distinguished themselves in this office from the beginning.”194 The laws of Justinian, the chronicles of Count Marcellinus and Malalas, and the later portions of the Anonymus Valesianus and Liber Pontificalis all associate

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193 Procopius, Wars 5.1.26, “καὶ βασιλέως μὲν τοῦ Ῥωμαιῶν οὐτε τοῦ σχήματος οὔτε τοῦ ὄνοματος ἐπιβατεῖσθαι ἦξισεν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ρῇς διεβίου καλούμενος (οὕτω γὰρ σφῶν τοὺς ἤγεμόνας καλεῖν οἱ βάρβαροι νενομίκασι), τῶν μέντοι κατηκόων τῶν αὐτοῦ προὔστη ξύμπαντα περιβαλλόμενος ὅσα τῷ φύσει βασιλεῖ ἠμοσταῖ.”

194 Procopius, Wars 5.1.29, “ἦν τε ὁ Θευδέριχος λόγῳ μὲν τύραννος, ἕργῳ δὲ βασιλεὺς ἀληθῆς τῶν ἐν ταύτῃ τῇ τιμῇ τὸ ἐξ ἄρχῃς ἑιδοκιμηκῶν οὐδενὸς ἠμοσται.”
barbarian mastery over Roman lands with tyranny. Procopius contradicts this not only by calling Theoderic an emperor outright, but by co-opting the specific language of the oppositional discourse by likening the earlier barbarizing influences of Orestes and Odoacer to tyranny. Procopius admits that the West had indeed been subjected to barbarian tyranny before, but argues that Theoderic must not be numbered among such tyrants. Theoderic was a *basileus* who wielded *kratos*; Odoacer a *tyrannos* who held a *tyrannis*.

Moreover, Procopius describes the power held by Athalaric, Theoderic’s heir, as a *basileia*, and thereby extends Theoderic’s imperial pedigree to his successor. Noteworthy, too, is that only a few lines later Procopius announces Justinian’s rise to imperial power, which he also calls a *basileia*. The lexical parallelism is intentional. By using the same word to describe both the Gothic kingship and the imperial purple, Procopius imbues both royal stations with the same legitimacy. Likewise, Amalasuntha’s power is called *basilkon* and Witiges later becomes a *basileus*. That Theoderic and his successors should be considered tyrants and not *basileis*, however, was central to both Justinianic ideology and imperial justifications for launching a campaign to destroy the Gothic state. Procopius’ decision to employ the same terminology to characterize both

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195 Procopius, *Wars* 5.1.4-8. “And in proportion as the barbarian element among them became strong, just so did the prestige of the Roman soldiers forthwith decline, and under the fair name of alliance they were more tyrannized over by the intruders and oppressed by them… [Odoacer] held the tyranny securely for ten years.”

196 Procopius, *Wars* 5.1.26, 5.1.25.


198 Procopius, *Wars* 5.2.1.

199 Procopius, *Wars* 5.2.2.

200 Procopius, *Wars* 5.2.21; 5.11.5.
Gothic and imperial rulership was politically charged and directly countered the narratives issuing from the imperial court.²⁰¹

All participants in these debates addressed the concept of tyranny because of its historic ideological potency and its synonymous associations with illegitimacy and illegal power. Procopius, the Anonymus Valesianus, and others, though, maintain that Theoderic upheld Roman law and promoted justice. In fact, Procopius argues that “the first and last act of injustice which [Theoderic] committed toward his subjects” was to execute Boethius and Symmachus before he had “made a thorough investigation, as he was accustomed to do.”²⁰² The killing of these Italian statesmen was, even in accounts otherwise sympathetic to Theoderic, considered a heinous and irredeemable crime, and given its appearance in the Valesianus, the Liber Pontificalis, Gregory’s Dialogues, and here in the Wars, it is clear that the issue had considerable resonance among those writing about Gothic Italy in the sixth century and thereafter.²⁰³ But Procopius approaches the event rather differently. In his account, Theoderic, after ordering the executions, claims to have seen the image of Symmachus in the head of a fish, and, overcome with guilt for his misdeed, grows feverish, confesses his crime, and dies shortly thereafter.²⁰⁴ By insisting that this was literally the king’s only unjust act, and for which he seems to have paid with

²⁰² Procopius, Wars 5.1.39, “ἀποκλαύσας δὲ καὶ περιαλγήσας τῇ ξυμφορᾷ οὐ πολλῷ ὑστερον ἐτελεύτησεν, ἀδίκημα τοῦτο πρῶτόν τε καὶ τελευταίον ἐς τοὺς ὑπηκόους τοὺς αὑτοῦ δράσας, ὅτι δὴ οὐ διερευνησάμενος, ὀσπερ εἰώθει, τὴν περὶ τοῖν ἀνδροῖν γνώσιν ἤνεγκε.”
²⁰³ Boethius’ De consolatione indicts the barbarian government at Ravenna and portrays Theoderic as a tyrant and likely influenced eastern views of the Gothic state. For Boethius’ treatment of Theoderic, see P. Robinson ‘Dead Boethius: Sixth-century Accounts of a Future Martyr’, Viator 35 (2005), 1-19. For the literary reception of the executions of Boethius and Symmachus, see Bjornlie (2013), 147-59.
²⁰⁴ Procopius, Wars 5.1.35-9.
his life, Procopius reconfigures this popular and otherwise damning account to accentuate Theoderic’s innate sense of justice. So just was Theoderic, Procopius suggests, and so resolute was his commitment to the preservation of Roman law, that he could not abide even his own crimes. Procopius seizes upon what was widely regarded as Theoderic’s principal failure and works to redeem his memory in order to counter negative perceptions of Gothic rule in Italy.

These debates about the character of Theoderic and the extent to which he maintained Roman governance, law, and justice were all ultimately concerned with the legitimacy of the Gothic state. Did the Goths have the right to rule Italy, or not? Central to this question were the initial circumstances whereby the Goths came to control Italy. It has already been noted that the extant accounts of those events are numerous and divergent; their variety a reflection of the political volatility of the subject. Procopius treats this topic in multiple instances by articulating the circumstances of Gothic Italy’s foundation in his own narrative and in speeches by the Goths and Belisarius. At the very beginning of Wars, Book Five Procopius narrates the deposition of Augustulus, the rise of Odoacer, and the deal struck by the emperor Zeno and Theoderic concerning Italy. With Thrace and the Balkans beset by Gothic raiding, Zeno, “who understood how to settle to his advantage any situation in which he found himself, advised Theoderic to proceed to Italy, attack Odoacer, and win for himself and the Goths the western domain.”

Theoderic considered this and concluded that “it was better for him, especially as he had attained the senatorial dignity, to force out a tyrant and be a ruler

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205 Procopius, Wars 5.1.9-10, “δὲ βασιλεὺς, τὰ παρόντα εὖ τίθεσθαι ἐπιστάμενος, Θευδερίχῳ παρῆνε ἐς Ἰταλίαν πορεῦεσθαι καὶ Οδοάκρῳ ἐς χεῖρας ἱόντι τὴν ἑσπερίαν ἐπικράτησιν αὐτῷ τε καὶ Γότθοις πορίζεσθαι.”
over all the Romans and Italians than to incur the great risk of a decisive struggle with the emperor.” Key here is that 1) it is Zeno who initially suggests that Theoderic furnish (πορίζεσθαι) Italy for himself, and 2) Theoderic couches his decision to march west in relation to his own Roman credentials and the tyranny, and therefore illegitimacy, of Odoacer. We will return to these points after first looking at two other accounts in the Wars of the events surrounding the Gothic seizure of Italy.

In December, 537 at peace talks during the first siege of Rome, Gothic ambassadors and Belisarius each provide accounts of the origin of Gothic Italy. The Goths open by declaring the imperial invasion “an injustice,” and maintain that

the Goths did not obtain the land of Italy by wresting it from the Romans by force, but Odoacer in former times dethroned the emperor, and changed the government of Italy to a tyranny. And Zeno...was unable to destroy the authority of Odoacer. Accordingly he persuaded Theoderic...to punish Odoacer for his unjust treatment of Augustulus, and thereafter, in company with the Goths, to hold sway (kratein) over the land as its legitimate and rightful (orthōs kai dikaiōs) rulers.

Belisarius, however, claims that

Theoderic was sent by the emperor Zeno in order to make war on Odoacer, not in order to hold the dominion of Italy himself...he sent him in order that Italy might be free and obedient to the emperor...[Theoderic] never thought of restoring the land to its rightful owner. But I, for my part, think that he who robs another by violence and he who does not restore his neighbor’s goods are equal. Now, as for me, I shall never surrender the emperor’s country to any other.

206 Procopius, Wars 5.1.11, “ἀμείνον γάρ οἱ εἶναι, ἄλλως τε καὶ ἐπʼ ἀξίωμα βουλῆς ἥκοντι, τύραννον βασιλέα Ῥωμαίων τε καὶ Ἰταλίων ἀρχεῖν ἀπάντων ἢ βασιλεὶ διαμισθομένου ἢ τόσον κινδύνου ἱέναι.”

207 Procopius, Wars 6.6.14-16, “αὖθις οὖν Γότθων οἱ πρέσβεις εἶπον Ἡνίκηκατε ἡμᾶς, ἄνδρες Ῥωμαίοι, ἐπὶ φίλους τε καὶ ξυμμάχους ὄντας ὡς ἐκεῖνος δύναται ὑπακοὴν ἔρπῃ, θησαυρὸν δὲ ἁρπαγμὸν καὶ τῷ ξυμβεβασιλευκῷ ἱέναι. ἐροῦμεν δὲ τῆς ἀκούσας καὶ ὁ Ὀδόακρος ἀνεύθυνε τῷ Ἀὐγούστου τιμῆς ἀναμνησθέντα πρὸς αὐτὸν τὴν κρατῶν καὶ τοῦτον ἄρχοντα τὸν Ἱταλίων ἄρχοντα, καίπερ αὐτὸν τοῦτον τῷ Βυζαντίῳ πολιορκεῖν μέλλοντα, καταλύσας μὲν τῆς τοῦτον ἐὰν κατέλυσιν τιμῆς ἀναμνησθέντα πρὸς αὐτὸν ἢ τῆς ἄνδρῶν ἀνάζηκεν, πατρίκιος τε καὶ Ῥωμαίων ἄρχοντα, Ὀδόακρον δὲ ἀδικίας τῆς ἐς Αὐγούστου τιμῆς ἀναμνησθέντα πρὸς τὴν κρατῶν καὶ τοῦτον ἄρχοντα τοῦτον, καὶ Ἀὐγούστου τὸ κρατεῖν ὀρθῶς καὶ δικαίως.”

208 Procopius, Wars 6.6.23-5, “γὰρ βασιλέας Ζήνων Οδόακρο πολεμήσοντα ἐπεμενε, οὐκ ἔρ’ ὃς ἤτοι ἔρ’ ἤτοι Ἰταλίας αὐτὸς τὴν ἀρχὴν ἔχοι· τί γὰρ ἄν καὶ τύραννον τιμῆς τοῦ Ἀὐγούστου τιμῆς τῷ Ἱταλίων ἄρχοντα τῆς ἀπεκδακασθεῖσαν βασιλείᾳ ἐμελεῖν; ἄλλ’ ἔρ’ ὃς ἠλευθέρα
Each side of the debate provides arguments that justify their respective claims to Italy. It turns out, however, that this disputation was not merely ‘academic’, but had a clear answer whose solution had already been provided by Procopius himself. One need only recall the narrative of events at the outset of Book Five to realize that Procopius equips the reader with a critical apparatus for judging the Gothic and imperial arguments. It becomes clear that the Gothic version of events is nearly equivalent to Procopius’ earlier narrative account. Moreover, Procopius provides further reason to doubt Belisarius’ claims. In an earlier attempt to gain the support of the Franks in the war, Belisarius stated that “the Goths, having seized by violence Italy…have refused to give it back…For this reason we have been compelled to take the field against them.”209 Not only does this go against Procopius’ narrative account, but it is also contrary to Belisarius’ own later arguments which explicitly state that the Gothic crime was not in “rob[bing] another by violence”, but in failing to “restore his neighbor’s goods.” Belisarius therefore provides an internally inconsistent rationale for the imperial invasion of Italy, and one which clashes with the historical, and thus ‘correct’, account supplied by Procopius. The Goths emerge from the pages of the Wars as the honest party while the imperials appear to grasp about for a suitable pretext for invasion. These were more than abstract literary portrayals of diplomatic exchanges about Theoderic and the Goths. Procopius here furnishes a metatextual representation of the contemporary and volatile debates being...

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209 Procopius, *Wars* 5.5.8-9, “‘Γότθοι Ἰταλίαν τὴν ἡμετέραν βίᾳ ἑλόντες οὐχ ὅσον αὐτὴν ἀποδίδονει οὐδάμη ἐγνώσαν, ἀλλὰ καὶ προσηδικήκασιν ἡμᾶς οὔτε φορητὰ οὔτε μέτρια. διόπερ ἡμεῖς μὲν στρατεύειν ἐπ’ αὐτοὺς ἰηγαγκάσμεθα.’”
held in and between Italy and Constantinople regarding the ongoing war and the question of Gothic sovereignty.

Importantly, Belisarius’ accounts precisely reflect those found in imperial ideology. In Justinianic legislation barbarian rule in the west is considered tyrannical, and in the chronicles of Marcellinus and Malalas Theoderic and the Goths seize Italy illicitly and by force. By pointing to the falsity of Belisarius’ claims about the Goths, Procopius is, by proxy, pointing to the falsity of Justinian’s propaganda about Gothic Italy and the imperial invasion. This is further borne out by the fact that Procopius’ own narrative and the speech of the Goths call Odoacer a tyrant while alluding to the essential Roman character of Theoderic’s actions. Procopius suggests that Theoderic’s motivation “to force out a tyrant and be a ruler over all the Romans and Italians” was in part rooted in the fact that “he had attained the senatorial dignity.” And the Goths later argue that Zeno specifically sought out Theoderic “to free this land [Italy] from the tyrant” because of “the honor which Theoderic had already received at his hands in having been made a patrician and consul of the Romans.” Further, the Goths state that “we have preserved both the laws and the form of government as strictly as any who have ever been Roman emperors, and there is absolutely no law, either written or unwritten, introduced by Theoderic or by any of his successors on the throne of the Goths.” The image of Gothic rule which Procopius presents is distinctly un-tyrannical and decidedly Roman.

Ultimately, Procopius answers the question of Gothic legitimacy in the affirmative in

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210 Procopius, Wars 5.1.11.
211 Procopius, Wars 6.6.16.
212 Procopius, Wars 6.6.17, “οὕτω τοίνυν παραλαβόντες τὴν τῆς Ἰταλίας ἀρχὴν τούς τε νόμους καὶ τὴν πολιτείαν διεσωσάμεθα τῶν πώποτε βεβασιλευκότων σώποντος ἦσσον, καὶ Θεοδερίχου μὲν ἢ άλλου ὀτευκνυ διαδεξαμένου τὸ Γότθων κράτος νόμος τὸ παράπαν σώποντος οὐκ ἐν γράμμασιν.”
order to advance the polemical notion that Theoderic and the Goths – indeed barbarians\textsuperscript{213} – were better stewards of the Roman order than Justinian and his administration. Vocal praise for Gothic rulership is, in part, designed to function as unspoken scorn for Justinian.

Procopius was not a Gothic partisan. There is nothing in any of his texts to suggest his desire to see the persistence of the Gothic state, or even that he opposed the Roman reclamation of Italy. Rather, his veiled criticism of the fallacies and hypocrisy of Justinian’s ideological justifications for invasion form part of a larger effort to impugn the injustices of the imperial armies and incompetence of the emperor’s management of the war.

In the \textit{Wars}, the conduct of eighteen years of conflict in Italy is recorded with the narratological and stylistic elements of a history in the classical, Thucydidean mode: set battle sequences, accounts of valor and depravity, descriptions of siege, starvation, and disease, and highly wrought speeches that humanize the decisions of combatants and explore ethical questions about the nature of war. Through it all it becomes clear that Procopius’ view of the imperial side is a jaundiced one – a position that is corroborated and more forcefully articulated in the \textit{Secret History}. Illegality, corruption, and gross mismanagement, Procopius argues, characterized the imperial war effort. Accounts of the suffering of the Italian population at the hands of the imperials are commonplace. “The emperor’s army,” Procopius writes, “took all [the Italians’] household goods. And they were forced to suffer cruel torture and death for no good cause, being hard pressed as

\textsuperscript{213} Procopius regularly refers to the Goths as barbarians.
they were by the scarcity of food.” Elsewhere, Procopius notes that imperial troops under siege in Rome exploited the starving Roman population by selling them small amounts of grain at exorbitant prices. In the Secret History, Belisarius is said to have “plundered nearly all the Italians who lived in Ravenna and Sicily, indeed in any place that he was lucky enough to bring under his power. He scarcely put a veneer of legality on all this.” And Procopius claims that Justinian “conquered North Africa and Italy as well for no other reason than to be able to destroy the people there in addition to those who were already under his power.”

In 540 the initial phase of the war came to an end upon the surrender of Witiges. Thereafter Justinian established the imperial rule in Ravenna and dispatched the logothetai to administer the newly won city and surrounding territories. Procopius reports that the corruption of these officials and their abuse of the Goths, Italians, and even the imperial armies was so pervasive that Gothic hostilities were soon reignited and all imperial gains from the previous five years of war were lost. Alexander, chief among the logothetai, is reported to have “extorted money from the Italians, claiming that he was punishing them for having participated as citizens in the state set up by Theoderic and the

214 Procopius, Wars 7.9.2-4. “μὲν γὰρ ἀγροὺς ἐστέρηντο πρὸς τῶν πολεμίων, ὑπὸ δὲ τοῦ βασιλέως στρατοῦ ἔπιπλα πάντα. καὶ προσῆν αὐτοῖς αἰκίζεσθαι τε καὶ οὐδὲνι λόγῳ διαφθείρεσθαι, τῶν ἀναγκαίων τῇ ἀπορίᾳ πιεζομένων.”
215 Procopius, Wars 7.17.10.
216 Procopius, Secret History 5.4, “Ἰταλοὺς ἀμέλει σχεδὸν πάντας, οἴπερ ὄχιμην ἐπὶ τε Ραβέννης καὶ Σικελίας, καὶ εἰ τοῦ άλλου κατατυχεῖν ἐν ἐξουσίᾳ ἐσχεν, ἐληίσατο οὐδενι κόσμο, λογισμοὺς δὴθεν τῶν βεβιωμένων καταπραττόμενος.”
217 Procopius, Secret History 6.25, “ἐπει δὲ οὐδὲν ψῆφι καταλύσαι τὴν Ρωμαίων ἀρχήν, Λιβύης τε καὶ Ιταλίας οὐκ ἄλλου τοῦ ένεκα πεποίησθαι τὴν ἐπικράτησιν ἐσχεν ἢ ὥστε ξύν τοῖς πρότερον υφ’ αὑτοῦ οὖσι διολέσαι τοὺς ταύτῃ ἀνθρώπους.”
Goths,” so that “not only did the Italians become disaffected from the emperor Justinian, but not one of the soldiers was willing any longer to undergo the dangers of war, and by willfully refusing to fight, they caused the strength of the enemy to grow continually greater.” Thereafter Justinian prosecuted the war fecklessly by failing to provide adequate manpower or resources despite his generals’ near constant entreaties for reinforcements. “The emperor Justinian,” Procopius notes, “conducted this war very negligently,” for “he would sit back for no reason and be sluggish in directing operations because he hated the expense involved.” As a result, the Goths, under the leadership of Totila, dominated the Italian theater throughout the 540s. When Belisarius was recalled in 549 after four years of failure in Italy, Justinian began to make plans to deploy a new expedition, and Procopius argues that “if he had actually carried out this idea, I believe that…he would have overcome his opponents in the war. But…later, perhaps because some other business claimed his attention, lost interest in the matter.”

Because of Justinian’s failure to act, Procopius declares, “at this point in the war, the

219 Procopius, Secret History 24.9-11, “οὗ δὴ Ἀλέξανδρος ὁ λογοθέτης σταλεὶς τοῖς μὲν στρατιώταις ταῦτα ἐπικαλεῖν οὖν ὁκνῆσει ἐθάρρει, τοὺς δὲ Ἰταλοὺς χρήστα ἐπράττε ἐς Θευδέριχον καὶ Γότθους ἐπικαλεῖν ἀμύνεσθαι φάσκων.”
220 Procopius, Wars 7.1.28-32; 33, “διὸ δὴ ὁ Ἰουστινιανὸς βασιλεὺς ἐς κίνδυνον πολέμου καθίστασθαι ἤθελεν, ἀλλʼ ἐθελοκακοῦντες ἐπὶ μέγα χωρεῖν ἐποίουν ἄν οἱ πολέμιοι τὰ πράγματα.”
221 Procopius, Wars 5.24.8; 7.12.3; 7.27.1.
222 Procopius, Wars 8.26.7, “λιαν γὰρ τὰ πρότερα πόλεμον τόνδε ἀπημελημένως διαφέρων Ἰουστινιανὸς βασιλεὺς ἐξαρτυόμενος διαφέρων αὐτοῦ πεποίηται τὴν παρασκευὴν ἐν ὑστάτῳ.”
223 Procopius, Secret History 18.29, “οὐ γὰρ ἠξίου τοῖς καιροῖς ἐναρμόζειν τὰς πράξεις, ἀλλʼ ἀπὸ καιροῦ πάντα εἰργάζετο, ἐν μὲν εἰρήνη καὶ σπονδαῖς ἐξαρτυόμενος ἐπὶ τοῖς πέλας πολέμου αἰτίας, ἐν δὲ τῷ πολέμῳ ἀναπεπτωκώσις τὰς δοκεῖν λόγοι καὶ τὴν τῶν ἔργων παρασκευὴν ὁκνηρὸς ἄγαν διὰ φιλοχρημάτων ποιούμενος.”
224 Following the dating of Croke (2005), 482.
225 Procopius, Wars 7.36.4-6, “καὶ εἰ μὲν ἐπιτελῇ ταῦτα δὴ ἐπεποίηκε τὴν ἔννοιαν, οὐμαι ὑν, Ἦρωις μὲν ἐπὶ ὑπ’ αὐτὸν οὖς, σεσωσμένου δὲ οἱ τῶν ἐνετοῦσα στρατιωτῶν καὶ τοῖς ἐκ Βυζαντίου ἐπιμελοῦσθηκόσιν ἀναμένεσθαι δυναμένων, περιέσεσθαι τῶν ἐναντίων αὐτὸν τῷ πολέμῳ.”
barbarians became unquestionably masters of the whole west." Procopius is explicit in his contention that the emperor’s failure to properly fund and man his armies unnecessarily prolonged the war and intensified the suffering of all those affected by it.

Procopius’ criticisms were shaped by more than sheer antipathy for the emperor. His judgements reflect a real sense of urgency about the war in the west and the state of the empire more generally. Assessments of the campaign in Italy in the *Secret History* and in seven of the eight books of the *Wars* were written at midcentury, before the tide-shifting expedition of Narses, and at a time when the imperial armies and all of Italy languished in a war of attrition. Further, after some fifteen years of fighting, the Italian country and its people, the prize for which the empire fought, had been devastated.

Procopius provides graphic and sometimes disturbing descriptions of the war’s effects on the Italian population and the land. Battles and the marching of armies ruined fields had prevented the planting of crops which, in turn, led to food shortages and widespread famine. In Picenum alone, “not less than fifty thousand persons perished by famine, and a great many more north of the Ionian Gulf.”

Procopius provides exceedingly detailed and ghastly descriptions of the physical effects of those suffering from privation. Victims first became lean and pale…and as the malady developed, all moisture left them, and the skin became very dry so that it resembled leather…giving the appearance of having been fastened upon the bones. And as they changed from a livid to a black color, they came to resemble torches thoroughly burned. And their faces always wore an expression of amazement, while they always had a dreadful sort of insane stare.

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226 Procopius, *Wars* 7.33.1, “Ὑπὸ δὲ τὸν χρόνον τοῦ πολέμου τόνδε κύριοι τῆς ἑσπερίας οἱ βάρβαροι διαρρήδην εγένοντο πάσης."  
227 Procopius, *Wars* 6.20.21, “ἐν Πικηνῷ μέντοι λέγονται Ρωμαῖοι γεωργοὶ οὐχ ἕσσους ἢ πέντε μυριάδες λαοῦ λιμῷ ἀπολωλέναι, καὶ πολλῷ ἐπὶ πλείους ἄκτος κόλπου τοῦ Ἰονίου.”  
228 Procopius, *Wars* 6.20.23-5, “ὁποῖοι δὲ τὸ εἶδος εγίνοντο καὶ ὅτῳ τρόπῳ ἐθνησκον αὐτὸς θεαισίμενος ἔρθον ἔρχομαι. ἴσχοι μὲν καὶ ὀργῇ εγίνοντο πάντες· ἢ τε γὰρ σάρξ ἀποροδοῦσα τροφής κατὰ γε τὸν παλαιὸν λόγον ἐστὶν ἔστησε, καὶ ἢ χολὴ τῷ περιόντι τὸ κράτος τῶν σωμάτων ἕξασα σώρευσα ὑπὸ σωμάτων ἔτοιμα ἐκκαθαίρω ἐς ταῦτα ἥριει. προϊόντος δὲ τοῦ κακοῦ, πᾶσα τε αὐτοῦς ἰκμὰς ἐπέστελεν καὶ τὸ δέρμα λίαν ἀπεκληρικὸς
Others turned to cannibalism. In one lurid account, Procopius tells of two women who would offer lodging to wayfarers and “kill these strangers while they slept and eat them.” They were said to have eaten seventeen men.229

Grim depictions of famine, starvation, and disease were part of a larger rhetorical effort to convey that Italy and Italians suffered because of Justinian’s war. Procopius directly challenges assumptions that, as Romans, Italians welcomed and sided with the invading Roman armies. In a note to Justinian during the first siege of Rome, Belisarius requests reinforcements to prevent both the loss of the city and the support of the Roman civilians who “will probably not hesitate to choose the course which is better for their own interests.”230 This came to pass nearly ten years later at the second siege of Rome when Romans, starving and furious with the imperial occupiers, “with weeping and loud lamentation” cried, “do not consider us to be either Romans or fellow-countrymen of yours…and do not suppose that in the beginning we received the emperor’s army into the city willingly, but regard us as enemies.”231 Procopius, however, does not simply throw into question Italian loyalties to the empire, but does so in relation to the experience of Italians under the Goths. The Secret History reports that Theoderic had arranged for the public treasury to provide a generous amount of grain to the urban poor of Rome. The logothetes Alexander, however, “without a second thought… decided to cancel all these

βύρσῃ μάλιστα ἐμφερὲς ἦν, δόκησιν παρέχον ὡς ἄρα τοῖς ὀστέοις ἐμπεπηγὸς εἰη. τό τε πελιδνὸν ἐς τὸ μέλαν μεταβαλόντες δἀδιεις τισὶν ἐς ἄγαν καυθεῖσιν ἐῴκεσαν. καὶ αὐτοῖς μὲν ἀεὶ τὰ πρόσωπα ἐκθαμβὰ ἦν, ἀεὶ δὲ δεινῶς τι μανικὸν ἔβλεπον."

229 Procopius, Wars 6.20.27-9, “οὓς δὴ καθεύδοντας διαφθείρουσαι ἠσθιοῦν.”

230 Procopius, Wars 5.24.14, “καὶ Ῥωμαίοι νῦν μὲν εὐνοϊκῶς ἠμῖν ἔχουσι, τῶν δὲ κακῶν αὐτοῖς, ὡς τὸ εἰκός, μηκυνομένων, οὐδὲν μελλήσουσιν ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν ἑλέσθαι τὰ κρείσσον.”

231 Procopius, Wars 7.17.2-5, “…δεδακρυμένοι ξύνη ὠμωγή ἐπλήθη… ἡμῖν, ὁ στρατηγὸι, μήτε Ῥωμιών, μήτε ζυγενεῖς ὡς ἤμιν νομίζετε εἶναι, μήτε ὁμοσπόρους τοὺς τῆς πολιτείας ἠθείοι γεγονέναι, μήτε ἀρχὴν ἐκόντας τῇ πόλει τὸν βασιλέως δέχεσθαι στρατόν, ἄλλα πολεμίους.”

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benefits. When Justinian, the emperor of the Romans, learned about this decision, he not only ratified it but began to hold Alexander in even higher esteem than before."  

For this neglect and other abuses noted earlier, Procopius claims that "the [imperial] soldiers...made the people long for the barbarians by reason of the wrongs they committed."  

In numerous other instances too, imperial injustices stand in stark contradistinction to Gothic rectitude. Shortly after detailing the abuses of the logothetai in the beginning of Book Seven Procopius juxtaposes the corruption of those imperial officials with a vignette in which Totila executes one of his bodyguards for raping the daughter of an Italian man. Totila defends his decision to a group of indignant Gothic nobles by delivering a speech which argues for the absolute necessity of justice among the Goths because the previous injustices of Theodahad had ruined the Gothic cause in the first phase of the war. After concluding this account, in the very next sentence Procopius writes, "While Totila was thus engaged, meantime the commanders of the Roman army, as well as the soldiers, were plundering the possessions of their subjects, and they did not shrink from any act of insolence and licentiousness whatsoever." The contrast between Gothic lawfulness and imperial malfeasance speaks for itself.  

Elsewhere, Procopius makes repeated mention of Totila’s just and lenient treatment of...
prisoners, and describes his restraint in waging war. While laying siege to Rome, Totila tells the farmers in the countryside “to continue tilling the soil without fear, just as they were accustomed to do,” and, while sacking city, Totila forbids the rape of women and, respecting the wishes of the deacon Pelagius, prevents any further killing. Shortly thereafter Totila makes the strategic decision to raze Rome to the ground to prevent the city from falling into imperial hands again, but Belisarius appeals to the Gothic king to spare the city. After much consideration, Totila agrees to preserve the city because of his reverence for its “greatness and beauty” and respect for the heritage of Roman civilization. This account bears considerable symbolic weight. By showing that Totila, a foreigner and a barbarian, chose to leave Rome standing out of his admiration for the legacy of Roman culture, Procopius calls to mind the widespread suffering and destruction which the imperial armies had brought to Italy in the name of reclaiming, and indeed liberating, their patrimony from the hands of barbarian tyrants.

This idea of liberation was central to Justinian’s own ideological justifications for his wars in the west, and a notion which Procopius challenges. In deliberations prior to the siege of Naples, Belisarius tells the Neapolitans that “the emperor’s army...has come to secure your freedom and that of other Italians,” and that they were to be liberated from

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236 Procopius, *Wars* 7.5.19; 7.6.4; 7.7.11; 7.8.1, among others.
241 This is not to provide the mistaken impression that Procopius was writing a panegyric for the Goths. Though their occurrences are far fewer, Procopius also records Gothic atrocities. See, for example, the Goths’ indiscriminate slaughter of civilians in Milan and Tibur at *Wars* 6.21.38-42 and 7.10.22.
“so cruel a slavery.” This recalls Justinian’s own legislation which declared that the conquest of Africa rescued Romans “from the yoke of slavery” and “cruel barbarian captivity.” Given the appearance of this official propagandizing rhetoric in Procopius’ text and in the mouth of Belisarius, it is likely that the imperial armies employed this language of liberation and emancipation throughout their campaigns in Italy. Yet Procopius undermines the reality of this rhetoric. The Neapolitans, themselves unconvinced by Belisarius’ pitch, resist imperial occupation, and, after a twenty day siege, fall to the invading army. Procopius describes the event: “And thus it came to pass for the Neapolitans that on that day they both became captives and regained their liberty.” The paradox functions as an ironic jab at the notion of Justinian’s war of liberation. It is a sardonic suggestion that the Neapolitans under Gothic rule were never really enslaved, but in having “regained their liberty” by being occupied by the imperial, they in fact “became captives.” This reversal of Justinianic rhetoric is further borne out by the Italians serving as Gothic emissaries to Chosroes who speak of Africa and Italy as having been “enslaved” by Justinian.

But Procopius reserves the cruelest irony about the fiction of Justinian’s wars of liberation for a portion of the Secret History that relates the following. During the period of the Gothic War, Huns would raid the frontiers of Thrace and Illyria and capture and enslave Romans from local populations. Roman generals who prepared to retaliate, 

242 Procopius, Wars 5.8.13, “δέξασθε τούν τῇ πόλει τῶν βασιλέως στρατῶν ἐπὶ τῇ ἐλευθερίᾳ ύμῶν τε καὶ τῶν ἄλλων Ἰταλικῶν ήκοντα.” 5.8.18, “δουλείας οὕτω χαλεπῆς.”
243 CJ 1.27.5-7. See also Novels 1 and 78.4.1.
244 Procopius, Wars 5.10.35, “τε Νεαπολίταις ξυνηνέχθη ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ αἰχμαλώτοις τε γενέσθαι καὶ τὴν ἐλευθερίαν ἀνασώσασθαι.”
245 Procopius, Wars 2.2.9, “ἐνδήλος δὲ ἦστιν, ἢ καὶ Γότθους παντάπασιν ἐξελείν δόνηται, ὡς ἔξω ἡμῖν τε καὶ τοῖς ἴδιοις ἀδελφωμένωι ἐπὶ Πέρσας στρατεύσεις, οὕτω τὸ τῆς φιλίας ἐννοοῦν ἰνομα οὔτε τὶ τῶν ὀμοιομοσμένων ἐρυθρων.”
however, were forbidden by Justinian from doing so “on the grounds that [the Huns] would be necessary allies for the Romans in the war against the Goths. As a result, these barbarians would plunder those regions and enslave the Romans there as enemies, but… they did so as ‘friends and allies of the Romans.’” Naturally, farmers whose wives and children had been captured by the Huns would fight back, but to prevent these counter-offensives, Justinian dispatched agents from the capital to seize these farmers and “torture them, mutilate their bodies, and impose fines on them.” This scathing indictment entirely upends the basis of imperial liberation ideology. Justinian, Procopius demands, cannot claim to fight a war to liberate Romans if he willfully condones the enslavement of other Romans to achieve victory.

To be clear, Procopius was not a champion of the Gothic cause. His descriptions of the greatness of Theoderic and the Romanity of the Gothic state were meant chiefly to act as a mirror to what Procopius saw as the injustices and failures of Justinian and his administration. But Procopius’ Goths should not be understood simply as an artificially contrived mechanism for attacking Justinian. The numerous other authors in this period who had articulated very similar views of the Goths indicate that these were real perceptions and not simply rhetorical postures. Procopius was responding to and participating in a vigorous, decades-old mode of discourse concerning the nature of the Goths and the existence of Gothic Italy vis-à-vis the Roman empire. These debates had

246 Procopius, Secret History 21.26-7, “ἐπεὶ βασιλέως Ἰουστινιανοῦ γράμματα εἶδον, ἀπεροῦντα σφίσει τὴν ἐς τοὺς βαρβάρους ἐπίθεσιν, ἀναγκαίοις αὐτῶν ἐς ξυμμαχίαν Ῥωμαίοις ὀντῶν ἐπὶ Γότθους ἵσες ἐς ἀλλον πολεμίων τινὰς, καὶ ἀπ’ αὐτών οἱ βαρβαροὶ οὔτοι ἐλπίζοντο μὲν ὡς πολέμιοι καὶ ἠμφαλοδίζοντο τοὺς τῇ δὲ Ῥωμαίους, ζῶν δὲ τῇ ἄλλῃ λείᾳ καὶ τοῖς αἰχμαλώτοις ἔτε φίλοι καὶ ξυμμαχοὶ Ῥωμαίοις ὀντες ἐπὶ χίκου ἀπεκομίζοντο.”

247 Procopius, Secret History 21.29, “ἐκ Βυζαντίου γὰρ τινὲς ἐσταλμένοι αἰκὶ ἔστησαὶ τε αὐτῶν καὶ ἱσσαὶ τὰ σώματα καὶ χρήσας ζημιοῦν οὐδεμιᾷ ὄκνησι ήζέλουν.”
political potency and ideological resonance in their time, and the war in Italy gave them sense of immediacy. Procopius makes clear the he did not believe that the destruction of Goths was necessary or that they were even hostel to the Roman order in the kingdom they governed. He exposes the flimsiness of the imperial justification for war, decries the invasion’s gross mismanagement, and laments the dire cost of such incompetence. The Goths, Procopius ultimately suggests, posed far less of an existential threat to Romans than did their own emperor.

Analysis of the various interlocutors in this pan-Mediterranean discourse concerning the ‘Gothic question’ reveals there was no clear division between ‘western’ and ‘eastern’ points of view. Count Marcellinus and Procopius, both in the imperial service and resident in Constantinople, wrote about the Goths in vastly different ways. Though the authors of the Anonymus Valesianus and Liber Pontificalis were both Italian, only the later portions of the Liber explicitly endorse the imperial conquest of Italy, while the Valesianus celebrates Gothic rule and impugns only Theoderic’s Arianism. The politics surrounding the ‘Gothic question’ were diverse and complicated, and not delimited by geography or simplistic pro/anti views of the Goths. This is further borne out in the figure of Jordanes, and it is to an extended analysis of his two texts that this study now turns.
Chapter Five
The Gothic War and the Politics of Jordanes’ Historical Corpus

The Gothic War and Justinian’s vaunted program of territorial reclamation was an undertaking of massive proportions that leveraged enormous quantities of imperial wealth and manpower. Its political and economic repercussions were vast. The conflict killed tens of thousands, ruined the land and economy of Italy, upset and reshuffled positions of power among the elite in both Italy and Constantinople, and the heavy taxes imposed to fund the imperial war machine were felt by Romans at all levels of society. The war to reclaim Italy and destroy the Gothic regime was a decades-long struggle that defined the reign of the emperor who started it. It should not be surprising that its representation in contemporary literature was both prevalent and polemical, and spoke to a more widely-shared concern among Romans (and Goths) on either side of the Mediterranean.

The preceding chapter attested the existence of a theatre of debate about the Goths and the Gothic War both within the imperial capital and Italy and between them. These divergent modes of discourse constituted literary representations of competing ideologies about a political question of considerable importance. The views of Count Marcellinus, Procopius, and others were shaped by and helped to shape the specific positions in these debates, and demonstrated that the ‘Gothic question’ had engendered a marked degree of ideological ferment in its day.
We do not know, however, precisely how these debates played out in the wider political arena. Beyond the extant sources, we do not know who was involved. We do not know, for example, how others reacted to the fact that Cassiodorus’ *Variae* flew in the face of so much imperial propaganda by defending the Romanity and legitimacy of the Gothic state. Was this kind of polemic so volatile that it effectively ended Cassiodorus’ political career? We cannot know. Similarly, one wonders how Procopius’ subtle – and sometimes not-so-subtle – undercurrents of criticism of Justinian’s regime were received and what their consequences were. And what portion of the public would have accepted Malalas’ view of the conflict? – a view which was itself modeled after the official notices issuing from the imperial center and company men like Count Marcellinus. We do not know if these ideas led to ideological factionalism or the fomenting of political strife. We simply do not possess, and perhaps there never were, sources that record these finer details of social and political daily life in the mid-sixth century.

What we do know is that there is a considerable amount of extant contemporary material that addresses common questions and themes about the Gothic state that roughly align along either side of an ideological spectrum. Given the incomplete survival of ancient sources in general, and the fact that what remains to us on this particular subject is surprisingly abundant, we have good reason to believe that this production represented only a keyhole view into the debates over the legitimacy, conduct, and meaning of the Roman war to destroy the Gothic regime. The ‘Gothic question’ was one of political gravity and weighed on sixth-century Romans both east and west.

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1 Bjornlie (2013).
And there survives no other author upon whom the Gothic question weighed more heavily than Jordanes. His two histories, detailing the entirety of both Roman and Gothic history, are primarily concerned with establishing the intertwined destinies of Romans and Goths – the two peoples with whom Jordanes personally identified. It would be a mistake to think that Jordanes wrote, or even attempted to write, classicizing history in the mode of Thucydides, Ammianus, or Priscus. His texts openly display a tendentious ideological program and purvey too many fictions to be considered part of that dispassionate genre.

Rather differently, the *Romana* and *Getica* bear all the marks of texts that were compelled by the urgency and immediacy of a crisis. It was the Gothic War that moved Jordanes to inquire into the Roman and Gothic pasts and to write the *Getica*, a text dedicated to the classicization of Gothic history and the glorification of Gothic-Roman unity, and the *Romana*, a lamentation for a declining empire and a war without end. The two texts have strikingly different tones: one hopeful, one full of dread. Their polarities bespeak the environment of anxiety and tension in which they were written.

As Jordanes wrote in Constantinople in 551 he had been watching the war in Italy unfold for some sixteen years. The Gothic cause would be in ruins in just two years, but

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3 This study follows the conclusions of B. Croke, ‘Jordanes and the Immediate Past’, *Historia* 54 (2005), 473-94, that Jordanes’ texts were completed by March 31, 551. W. Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History (A.D. 550-800)* (Princeton, 1988), 2nd ed. (Notre Dame, 2009), 98 ff., argues for a date of 554, while Heather (1991), 47-9, opts for 552. Croke systematically and convincingly challenges these latter dates.
no one could have foreseen this. In fact, the opposite might have seemed more likely at mid century, as the Gothic king Totila had recently wrested control of nearly the whole of Italy after a spate of stunning victories. Ten years earlier, in 540, the imperial armies had nearly secured a complete victory over the Goths, but a disorganized and corrupt occupation galvanized a Gothic resistance that completely reversed imperial fortunes in the peninsula. Belisarius would return to Italy in 544 to take up the fight again, but, after five frustrating years, proved unable to break Totila’s momentum. Command of the imperial armies was then entrusted to the distinguished and wildly-popular Germanus, cousin of Justinian and his heir-apparent. On top of this, Germanus had recently married Matasuntha, the granddaughter of Theoderic. The nuptials were politically motivated: Germanus planned to bring his Gothic wife on campaign and hoped that the Goths would not have the stomach to fight against the house of their once great king. Imperial hopes

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4 Contra Goffart (1988), 98ff., whose argument for 554 place the text some two years after the effective conclusion of the Gothic war; however, in ‘Jordanes's "Getica" and the Disputed Authenticity of Gothic Origins from Scandinavia’, Speculum 80.2 (2005), 379-98, here 396, Goffart amends his dating schema to “at some time after March 551.” And in the preface to the paperback edition of The Narrators of Barbarian History, Goffart reaffirms his contention that Jordanes wrote “at the moment when the forces of Justinian were grinding the last Goths of Italy into the dust,” (2009), xv. A. Merrills, Historiography and Geography in Late Antiquity (Cambridge, 2005), 100-69, here 166, argues that, while Jordanes wrote, the final defeat of the Goths “could easily be envisaged, and perhaps expected.” Heather thinks that “Jordanes wrote the Getica at a time when the Italian kingdom was doomed,” (1991), 51. Even Croke, with whose dating scheme this study concurs, suggests that while Jordanes wrote, the Goths were “approaching political extinction, having reached the threshold of succumbing to the forces of Justinian,” (2005), 495; see also idem. (1987), 127. This “threshold” is for Croke the fact that Narses had been chosen to lead the next invasion of Italy and was preparing his expedition while Jordanes wrote. Croke also states that Narses’ army would not reach Italy until the summer of 552, over a year after Jordanes had completed his texts (2005), 488. Given the extent of Roman failure during Belisarius’ second campaign, coupled with the strength of Totila’s military posture in Italy, there was no reason for Jordanes to think that the success of Narses, well over a year before he ever reached Italy, and the destruction of the Gothic armies was a foregone conclusion. From Jordanes’ point of view in the spring of 551, he thought it had been a mistake to recall Belisarius (Romana 381), his replacement Germanus had suddenly died, delaying the Roman invasion (383), and the ascendant Totila had occupied Rome and retaken Sicily (382). No one would have had reason to think the defeat of the Goths to be either imminent or inevitable.

5 Procopius, Wars 7.39.9-28 describes the effect that news of Germanus’ appointment had on the imperial and Gothic armies.
were dashed, however, when Germanus fell suddenly ill and died just two days before setting out to Italy in the autumn of 550.

This was when Jordanes wrote – at a moment of increased uncertainty about the state of the war in Italy and the future of Roman-Gothic relations. And this should be the context in which we situate Jordanes when critically engaging his texts. His are works motivated by and reflective of the political tensions stirring around them. Yet despite being one of the authors who comments directly, and contemporaneously, on the Gothic War, Jordanes has seldom been tapped to further our understanding of the conflict that stifled Justinian’s ambitions, dashed all dreams of imperial reunification, and wrought more devastation in Italy than perhaps even the Hannibal invasion. This chapter works to reverse this oversight.

**Jordanes Revisionist Scholarship**

Since the nineteenth century, the *Getica* has proven to be an important text, but usually with regard only to the information it provides about the early Gothic past and irrespective of Jordanes’ authorship and the political context in which he wrote. The

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Romana goes almost entirely unmentioned in both old and new scholarship despite being one of the very few histories written during Justinian’s life that comments directly and up-to-the-minute on that emperor’s reign. There is, though, a considerable body of work that has, to varying degrees, taken into account Jordanes’ specific historical setting when judging the value, meaning, and purpose of his texts. These commentators fall mainly into two groups. The first, whose range of positions is far broader than those of the second, assumes Jordanes’ heavy dependence on his source material, but nevertheless recognizes that even an abbreviation engages in source selectivity and makes choices that result in the production of novel ideas. The second group has argued that the Getica and Romana are the products of an autonomous author and exhibit a thematic coherence that reflects the political exigencies of the mid-sixth century. These scholars believe that
Jordanes’ purposes for writing were shaped by local, Constantinopolitan political concerns about the contemporary Gothic War. The vast majority of commentators in this latter group – and a good many of those who have simply suggested that Jordanes had political views of his own – argue that Jordanes was an unwavering supporter of Justinian and applauded imperial efforts to destroy the Gothic state in Italy. Goffart argues that Jordanes was commissioned by the imperial regime to advance Justinianic propaganda about the conquest of the west, and, as such, was “a loyal and admiring subject of the emperor Justinian, whose wars for the suppression of the Goths in Italy and Spain he reports with unqualified approval.” In a 2005 article in which Goffart amended some of his earlier views on Jordanes, he again affirms that, “The Getica celebrates the destruction of the Goths in the West by Belisarius and Justinian.” Croke also posits that Jordanes “is urging a policy of unrestrained aggression… If the Getica has any propaganda purpose at all, then one such overriding theme is the praise of Justinian as the vanquisher of the Goths.” Heather holds that, “The Getica, especially when combined with the Romana, champions outright Imperial victory over the Goths.” Kulikowski speaks of “the clarity of Jordanes’ pro-imperial perspective” which “wholeheartedly

11 Croke (1987), 127.
12 Heather (1991), 51.
endorses” the annihilation of the Gothic kingdom.\textsuperscript{13} And there are others.\textsuperscript{14} Put simply, in the thirty years since the rehabilitation of Jordanes as an independent and purposive author began, it has become commonly accepted among revisionists that Jordanes was a Justinianic partisan who supported the war against the Goths.

This dominant outlook was established by the seminal studies of Croke and Goffart – still the finest pieces of Jordanes revisionist scholarship. Croke, more than any other scholar, has confirmed Jordanes’ independence from his assumed models and fleshed out a fully realized Constantinopolitan war-time context for Jordanes’ historical project. Goffart recast scholarly paradigms by demonstrating that Jordanes need not be the preserve of Germanists and medievalists by irreversibly establishing that Jordanes’ corpus did not herald a new, national, ‘barbarian’ mode of historiography, but instead fits seamlessly within the genres of classical historical writing. These positions will be taken up again below and placed in contraposition to my own arguments, which, in many cases, draw from the same body of evidence. It should be stated here, though, that arguments for Jordanes’ support of Justinian and the Gothic War are primarily rooted in the conclusion to the \textit{Getica}. There Jordanes addresses his reader directly and states that, lest one think that the primary purpose of his text had been to praise Goths, the real goal of his history was actually to praise Justinian.\textsuperscript{15} Many scholars have taken Jordanes at his word here, just as they – quite rightly – took him at his word when he said in his introduction that he

\footnotesize\textsuperscript{13} M. Kulikowski, \textit{Rome’s Gothic Wars} (Cambridge, 2007), 50.
\footnotesize\textsuperscript{15} Jordanes, \textit{Getica} 316.
drew from Greek and Latin sources beyond Cassiodorus. Pro-Justinian interpretations of Jordanes begin at the conclusion of the Getica and then work backward, looking for anything that might be construed as sympathetic to the Romans, and argue that this is proof of imperial partisanship. The problem with such a reading is that the Getica, upon on a page-by-page and word-by-word review, is not, in fact, about the praise of Justinian. The praise is simply not there. Outside the conclusion, the only other instance of a kindness paid to Justinian comes when Jordanes calls him a solers dominus, a clever or skilled ruler, and even this is not exactly beaming adulation.\textsuperscript{16} The following reading of Jordanes’ purposes, therefore, does not start by assuming his Justinianic partisanship, as others have.\textsuperscript{17}

\textbf{Jordanes and the Balkans – Who He Was and Why He Wrote}

To better come to grips with the purposes of Jordanes’ texts and what they can tell us about contemporary discourse on the Gothic War, we must begin with an accounting of Jordanes’ person and the times and setting that shaped him. Jordanes was a product of the ethnically diverse, politically fraught, and often violent world of the post-Hun Balkans.\textsuperscript{18}

Though still part of the empire, the fifth- and sixth-century Balkans belonged to Gepids,

\textsuperscript{16} Jordanes, Getica 172.
\textsuperscript{17} An analysis of the Getica’s conclusion appears in Section III of this chapter, and accounts for Jordanes’ misrepresentation of his work as praise for Justinian.
Alans, Huns, and Goths, as much as it did to Romans. Since the mass migration of the Visigoths across the Danube and into the Roman empire in 376, the Balkans had remained a patchwork of disparate, semi-independent peoples who, at various times, lived as part of and fought against the Roman order. Following the Battle of Nedao in 454, in which the armies of Attila’s sons were defeated by a coalition of previously Hun-dominated peoples led by the Gepid king Ardaric, groups of newly free Goths (some of whom would follow Theoderic to Italy a generation later) were permitted by the Roman state to settle in Pannonia. Similarly, Rome granted portions of Scythia Minor and Moesia Inferior to a groups of Sciri, Sadagrii, and Alans led by Candac.19 Jordanes tells us that his own grandfather, Paria, served this Candac as a notarius, presumably in the Balkan lands allotted by the empire.20 Candac’s sister married a certain Andag, of the royal Gothic Amal family, and produced a son, Gunthigis (also called Baza) who became a prominent Roman military commander, attaining the rank of magister militum.21 Jordanes served this Gothic general of Rome as a notarius,22 likely in the same capacity

19 PLRE II, Candac 1. He was possibly dux of Scythia Minor, a flourishing part of the Balkans in the fifth century.
20 Jordanes’ biographical digression occurs at Getica 265-66, “The Sciri, moreover and the Sadagarrii, and certain of the Alani with their leader, Candac by name, received Scythia Minor and Lower Moesia. Paria, the father of my father Alanoviumuth (that is to say, my grandfather) was secretary to this Candac as long as he lived. To his sister’s son Gunthigis, also called Baza, the Master of the Soldiery, who was the son of Andag the son of Andela, who was descended from the stock of the Amali, I also, Jordanes, although an unlearned man before my conversion, was secretary.” “Scyri vero et Sadagarri et certi Alanorum cum duce suo nomine Candac Scythiam minorem inferioremque Moesiam acceperunt. Cuius Candacis Alanoviumuthis patris mei genitor Paria, id est meus avus, notarius; quousque Candac ipse vivet, fuit, eiusque germanan filio Gunthicis, qui et Bazæ dicebatur, mag. mil., filio Andages fili Andele de prosapia Amalorum descendente, ego item quamvis agramatus Iordannis ante conversionem meam notarius fui.”
21 PLRE II Gunthigis qui et Baza and p.1292 (fasti) name him as magister militum of either Thrace or Illyricum in the early sixth century. Croke, ‘Latin Historiography and the Barbarian Kingdoms’, in (ed.) G. Marasco, Greek and Roman Historiography in Late Antiquity (Brill, 2003), 349-89, here 368 and n.45. Notarius is generally rendered as ‘secretary.’ Imperial, legal, and ecclesiastical notarii have been well-studied; see, H. Teitler, Notarii and Exceptores: An Inquiry into the Role and Significance of Shorthand writers in the Imperial and Ecclesiastical Bureaucracy of the Roman Empire (from the Early Principate to c. 450 A.D.) (Amsterdam, 1985). I am unaware of any studies on military notarii such as Jordanes and his
as his grandfather served Candac. The connection between the families of Jordanes and Gunthigis accounts for Jordanes’ occupation, and, given that Jordanes bothers to mention his grandfather at all, the two probably lived and worked in relative proximity somewhere in the northern Balkans where the Romans had settled Candac’s people.

As a secretary in a Balkan Roman army Jordanes would have needed facility in a number of languages. Latin, still the official language of the army, would have been necessary. A recent study of Jordanes’ long-disparaged Latin has found pronounced vernacular elements in its syntax and grammar. It is very possible that Latin was not Jordanes’ first language, and that the Latin he wrote was also the Latin he spoke.

grandfather, however. The Anonymus Valesianus 38 reports that Orestes, the father of Augustulus, had been notarius to Attila. The example of a kingmaker like Orestes demonstrates that a notarius could wield considerable power and influence. Following the instance in the Valesianus, Mierow (1915), 4 suggests that Jordanes held a position of “some distinction” and the possibility that he inherited it from his grandfather grants it further esteem. Jordanes, however, need not have enjoyed such standing. More convincingly, Croke (1987), 119 argues that Jordanes “would have been involved in interpreting and routine paper work. The position was by no means unimportant…” Ultimately, the term notarius is vague, and Jordanes may have been a humble scribe or an errand boy for all we know.

Jordanes served Gunthigis in the early decades of the sixth century. Croke (1987), 119 has provided the best rationale for Jordanes’ dates: “Since Jordanes’ grandfather was in his prime in the 440s/450s, a standard count of twenty-five years per generation would make Jordanes about seventy in 550, assuming that he was born about 480. He cannot have been born much later; and varying the norm of twenty-five years per generation up or down slightly still leaves Jordanes an elderly man in 550.” Likewise, Christensen (2002), 84 holds that Jordanes would have been an “elderly gentleman” when he wrote.

There are other reasons to think that Jordanes should be attached to the Balkans. Mommsen (1882), x-xiii found a disproportionately high occurrence of Moesian names in the Getica compared with those belonging to other provinces. Croke (1987), 119 points out that “lexical and grammatical analysis of Jordanes’ Latin provides evidence of a Moesian origin and of a close affinity with the Latin characteristic of the army and administration of the time.” H. Mihaēscu, La langue latine dans le sud-est de l’Europe (Bucharest and Paris, 1978), 10-11, 320, and passim. In the Getica, “Scythia”, the adoptive home of the Goths after migrating from Scandza, is initially equivalent to the Herodotean land north of the Danube, but later encompasses the Balkan provinces of Pannonia, Moesia, Dacia, Thrace, and sometimes Illyricum. The text betrays a marked degree of familiarity with the Balkans, and Jordanes describes the geography of these regions often and in detail throughout: overview of Scythia, including Moesia, Dacia, Thrace, Illyricum, and Pannonia (30-8); Moesia (58-60); Dacia (73-5); refers back to 30-8 (82-3); Marcianople in Moesia (93); gentes along the Danube (116-20); rivers of Scythia crossed by Attila (178); settlement of gentes after the death of Attila in Dacia, Pannonia, Scythia Minor, Moesia, and other regions in the Balkans (263-71). Citations from Amory (1997), 300 n.116.


Croke (1987), 120.
Jordanes certainly did not number among Constantinople’s literati, and his colloquial prose offers a fascinating prospect for both late Latin philologists and those who would engage Jordanes as a literary voice issuing from humbler strata of Roman society.\textsuperscript{27}

Further, by the time Jordanes wrote his histories he knew Greek, but he might have learned the common tongue of the eastern empire much earlier. It is clear, then, that Jordanes’ comment that, before his \textit{conversio},\textsuperscript{28} he was \textit{agramatus} surely cannot imply his illiteracy. Reading and writing would have been central to Jordanes’ duties.\textsuperscript{29} It is likely that he meant that he had not undergone specialized training in \textit{grammitice}.\textsuperscript{30}

Additionally, given that Jordanes’ commander Gunthigis was a scion of the most prestigious Gothic house, an attribute that likely attracted a great many Goths to his

\textsuperscript{27} In describing the tone and purpose of his history in the preface to the \textit{Romana} (7), Jordanes states, “For however simple I believe these facts may seem to the highly educated, I think it will be welcome to ordinary people if they can read them in abbreviated form and, without boredom or any ornate language, can understand what they may be reading.” “Quod quamvis simpliciter reor dictum videri doctissimi, gratum tamen fore aestimo mediocribus, dum et brevia sine fastidio legant et sine aliquo fuco verborum quae lectitaverint sentiant.”

\textsuperscript{28} The meaning of \textit{conversio} has been a topic of perennial inquiry that has yielded practically nothing certain. See Christensen (2002), 94-101 for a review of the debates. Mommsen believed that it meant that Jordanes was a monk. Momigliano and others pegged Jordanes as the bishop of Crotone who addressed his \textit{Romana} to Vigilius, the bishop of Rome. Some would make him an ecclesiastic serving at Cassiodorus’ Vivarium, while others believe it implies Jordanes’ conversion from Arianism to Orthodoxy. Ultimately, this is all conjecture. The only consensus holds that \textit{conversio} implies some kind of turn to a religious lifestyle. Given the rich diversity of religious and devotional life in the late ancient world, it is impossible to say more about Jordanes’ situation. Religiosity plays a relatively limited but, at times, rhetorically forceful role in Jordanes’ texts. The preface to the \textit{Romana} implores its reader to turn away from the world and toward God, who is the only truth. Jordanes is virulently opposed to Arianism and espouses his orthodoxy on a handful of occasions: anti-Arian: \textit{Getica} 132-3, 138; \textit{Romana} 308; pro-Orthodox: \textit{Romana} 85, 256, 258. We do not know how common it was for Goths to be orthodox (on Jordanes’ claim to Gothic heritage, more below). Arian Goths were certainly far more common, even within the empire. An episode from the 570s reveals that the wives of Gothic soldiers who fought for the empire petitioned the emperor for a church where they might practice Arian Christianity: John of Ephesus, \textit{HE} 3.12.26, E. Brooks (tr.), \textit{Corpus scriptorum orientalium} 106, \textit{Scriptores Syri} 55 (Louvain, 1936), 102-3, 113-14. It might also be noted that Jordanes’ visceral hatred of Arianism is yet one more reason to detach the \textit{Getica} from Cassiodorus’ Gothic history, which was commissioned by the Arian Theoderic, and could not have contained such anti-Arian vitriol.

\textsuperscript{29} Jordanes, \textit{Getica} 266.

\textsuperscript{30} Croke (1987), 119 also n.10 for the two only other instances of \textit{agram(m)atus}, both of which imply a lack for formal education, not illiteracy.
service – not to mention that Goths regularly swelled the ranks of eastern Roman armies in this period – Jordanes may have needed to know Gothic on a professional basis. But there is also reason to think that his own ancestry afforded him knowledge of that non-Roman language: Jordanes claimed a Gothic heritage.

The evidence for Jordanes’ Gothicness is threefold. On several occasions Jordanes refers to Gothic material in the *Getica.* Unless Jordanes was being disingenuous, and there is no reason to think that he was, he seems to have been aware of ancient Gothic *carmina*, or, as is the way with oral history, tales that individuals believed were ancient, but had been amended over time or recently invented and artificially imbued with an antique patina. Regardless of the antiquity or historicity of these stories, the fact that Jordanes knew of them speaks to his proximity to Gothic culture. Further, the names of his father and grandfather, Alanoviiamuth and Paria, are clearly non-Roman and some linguistic analysis confirms their Gothic origin. Lastly, and most convincingly, Jordanes states directly that he descends from Goths. This claim is made in the conclusion of the *Getica* as Jordanes defends the professional integrity of his scholarship: “Let no one believe that to the advantage of the race of which I have spoken - though indeed I trace my own decent from it – I have added aught besides what I have

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31 Gothic songs and tales are referred to explicitly at *Getica* 28, 43, 72, 79; Gothic language at 27, 69, 121, 146-7; Gothic etymology (admittedly specious) at 95. Other material may have had a Gothic provenance too. For debates over the latter, see Barnish (1984), 339 n.25; Goffart (1988), 30, 38-9, 86; idem. (2005); Heather (1991), 5-6, 36-7, 61-7; idem., ‘The Historical Culture of Ostrogothic Italy’, *Atti del XIII Congresso internazionale di studi sull’Alto Medioevo* (Spoleto, 1993), 317-53, here 317-20; idem., *The Goths* (Cambridge, MA, 1996), 9, 27-30; Amoy (1997), 295-8; Christensen (2002), *passim*; Croke (2003), 366, 369, 374-5; Merrills (2005), 111, 168; Liebeschuetz (2011).


33 For a review of the debate over Jordanes’ Gothic ethnicity, and a discussion of the origins of his family’s names, see Wagner (1967), 4-17.
read or learned by inquiry.” The Latin is admittedly vexed, and translations with opposite meanings can be rendered depending on whether quasi is read as utpote or tamquam. Still, this study and the overwhelming majority of modern commentators hold that Jordanes was signaling his Gothic heredity and accept that Jordanes was indeed a Goth.

The implications of his Gothicness, however, are a matter of real debate. For example, the extent of Jordanes’ intimate knowledge of Gothic oral tradition is open to question, as is the historicity of those traditions. Accordingly, our ability to employ him as a window into a heretofore indiscernible Germanic Ur-history is extremely problematic. Our trust in Jordanes’ treatment of Gothic history prior to the third century, before which point literary comparanda are wholly or nearly nonexistent, must remain problematic.

34 Jordanes, Getica 316. “Nec me quis in favorem gentis praedictae, quasi ex ipsa trahenti originem, aliqua addidisse credat, quam quae legi et comperi.” Further, earlier in the Getica, when describing how the Gepids are descended from the Goths, Jordanes employs the same phraseology: “Nam sine dubio ex Gothorum prosapie et hi trahent originem.” The reduplication seems to confirm Jordanes’ meaning at Getica 316.

35 A. Gillett, ‘Jordanes and Ablabius’, Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History X (Latomus, 2000), 479-500, here 483 offers a variant translation and argues against interpreting this line as an assertion of Jordanes’ Gothic ethnicity: “Nor may any think that I have added [to my account of the Goths] anything favouring this people, as if [quasi] drawing my descent from them, beyond what I have read or investigated.”

36 There are too many to list. See, for example, Wagner (1967), 14, 16; Croke (1987); Goffart (1988) and (2005) is at times reluctantly willing to accept Gothic heritage, and at others he is ambiguous ((2005), 397), though he never rejects it; Heather (1991); Amory (1997); Kulikowski (2007); Liebeschuetz (2011).

37 See note 31.

38 It is possible that Goths appear in the literary record before the third century AD, though this is a matter of debate. Pliny, Natural History 4.99 recounts a report of the fourth-century BC Pytheas who spoke of “Gutones, a people of Germany,” calling them a subgroup of the Vandili, whose own association with the Vandals is also debated; Wolfram (1988), 40 n.25 argues for, and Hachmann (1970), 131ff. against Vandal equivalence. Strabo, Geography 7.1.3 also mentions Gutones. Tacitus, Germania 44.1 mentions Gotones located roughly in what is now modern Poland. Kulikowski (2007), 55 n.14 is unconvinced that these are Goths, and suggests that they would not be regarded as such if Jordanes’ migration stories did not exist. Wolfram (1988), 40 argues the opposite. Ptolemy, Geography 3.5.8 writes of Goutai inhabiting the island of Scandia and living on the Vistula, near present-day Warsaw. For a survey of scholarship on Goutai as Goths, see Wagner (1967), 165-70. The actual antiquity of the Goths has no bearing on the current study’s line of inquiry.
severely circumscribed. Even Jordanes’ accounting of relatively recent history can be error-prone, which casts further doubt upon his reliability as a transmitter of facts. Jordanes’ methodology as a historian, however, regularly subordinates factual accuracy to his ideological project, placing himself well outside the generic conventions of classicizing history.

Countering the findings of studies in the mode of *germanische Alterskunde*, whose proponents are amenable to trusting the historical authenticity of Jordanes’/Cassiodorus’ account, Jordanes’ more recent revisionists dampen the importance of his connection to Gothic culture. For Croke, Jordanes is “a romanized Goth,” but whose “deep identification with the Roman Empire” moves him to support the “Byzantine line” in the war against the Goths in Italy. Amory holds that “Jordanes’ history is a sixth-century Byzantine history,” and, as such, believes that “there is no reason to think that Jordanes thought of the conquest of Italy as anything other than a good thing, despite his pro-Amal remarks.” Kulikowski argues that “nothing in his extant writings suggests that his Gothic descent had any claim on his sympathies, which

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39 Just how long the Goths had existed in antiquity is disputed. Compare the arguments of M. Kazanski, *Les Goths (Ier – VIIe siècles après J.-C.)* (Paris, 1991) and Heather (1996) against Kulikowski (2007). Kazanski and Heather, equipped with Jordanes’ historical narrative and the archeological record of the Wielbark culture in the Baltic and the Sântana-de-Mureș/Černjachov culture on the northern Black Sea littoral, conclude that Goths are detectable as early as first century AD. Kulikowski, however, argues that such a position is “text-hindered,” meaning that if Jordanes did not exist, no one would draw a connection between the above cultures due to lack of sufficient similarities between them. He argues that there is insufficient evidence to support Jordanes’ report of Gothic migration from the Baltic to the Black Sea, and that “there is no Gothic history before the third century” (67). See Goffart (2005) for a review of the debates over alleged Gothic origins in Scandinavia. Again, precise origins of the Goths do not impinge upon this study’s objectives.
40 Croke (1987), 126.
42 Ibid., 303.
were entirely Christian and imperial.”\textsuperscript{43} And for Goffart, “Jordanes, although a self-confessed Goth, was a thoroughgoing Byzantine in outlook” bearing a “characteristically Eastern point of view.”\textsuperscript{44} The consistent message among these commentators, and others, is: \textit{yes, sure, Jordanes says he was Goth, and he may well have been, but that is essentially meaningless because he was a Roman, and, as such, supported Roman things.} This misses the mark.

Jordanes was indeed Roman; thoroughly Roman, even. Following the \textit{Getica}’s preface, the very first words of his narrative are: “Our ancestors…” by which he means Roman authors.\textsuperscript{45} Jordanes regularly refers to his Roman \textit{maiores} throughout.\textsuperscript{46} He calls the Roman capital of Constantinople “our city.”\textsuperscript{47} He blames Roman decline on “our failures.”\textsuperscript{48} He was a devotee of imperial Orthodoxy and spent his life in service to the Roman state. He knew Virgil intimately and possessed a sure-footed knowledge of numerous Greek and Latin authors. He chose to participate in a contemporary Roman discourse about the Goths and the Gothic War by employing the Latin language and a variety of historiographical genres born from a thousand year old classical literary tradition. Scholars are right to think that Jordanes was Roman and that his Roman identity informed his understanding of both Gothic and Roman history. But to assume a-priori that Jordanes’ Romanness rendered inert any other ethnic and cultural identities he

\textsuperscript{43} Kulikowski (2007), 49-50.
\textsuperscript{44} Goffart (1988), 22.
\textsuperscript{45} Jordanes, \textit{Getica} 4, “Maiores nostri.”
\textsuperscript{46} Jordanes, \textit{Getica} 29, 59, 74, 148, 316. Contra Croke (1987), 124 who thinks that these \textit{maiores} are Gothic. \textit{Getica} 116 and 246 refer to \textit{maiores} that could be either Roman or Gothic, which speaks to Jordanes’ mixed identity as both Goth and Roman as argued below.
\textsuperscript{47} Jordanes, \textit{Getica} 38, “nostro urbe”.
\textsuperscript{48} Jordanes, \textit{Getica} 37, “peccatorum nostrorum”; 119, “peccatis nostris”; see also 265, “…the Sauromatae, whom we call (\textit{dicimus}) Sarmatians…” here the ‘we’ implies ‘we Romans’.
may have possessed is warrantless. The notion of a ‘thoroughgoing Byzantine outlook’
suggests that there was such a thing as a static, monolithic, and universally shared Roman
identity. This is too simplistic. Moreover, the above studies conflate Roman identity, at
least as it is applied to Jordanes, with support for the imperial regime. ⁴⁹ This cannot pass
muster either.

Where these studies ultimately fall short is their misunderstanding of what must
have been the staggering political and ethnic diversity of the fifth- and sixth-century
Roman Balkans. When Jordanes wrote in 551, the Balkans had been, for 175 years, a
nexus of cultures. Roman was certainly the dominant identity in these regions, but the
ancestry and customs of the myriad immigrants, both recent and established, who poured
into the Balkans created a kaleidoscopic landscape of political, ethnic, regional, and
familial ties, that would assimilate into and compete against the Roman order.

Abstracted, this situation was not a unique one for the Roman state. For as long as
Romans had been incorporating foreigners into the fold of their empire, the process and
pangs of intercultural negotiation and Roman assimilation were commonplace. ⁵⁰ The
difference in the Balkans was simply one of scale, but this was a great difference indeed.

Since the advent of the Visigoths in the late fourth century, the empire had been
implementing an ad hoc policy of permitting semi-autonomous assemblages of non-

⁴⁹ G. Greetrex, in S. Mitchell and G. Greetrex (eds.), _Ethnicity and Culture in Late Antiquity_ (London,
2000), 267-92 argues in a similar vein: “Clearly, then, loyalty to the emperor was the determining factor as
to who was Roman and who was not in the sixth century.” (274); the same argument is advanced by E.
Chrysos, ‘De Foederatis Iterum’, in W. Pohl (ed.), _Kingdoms of the Empire: The Integration of Barbarians
in Late Antiquity_ (Leiden, 1997), 185-206, here 199; and by Amory (1997), ch. 4.
⁵⁰ The emperor Augustus permitted 50,000 Getae to be settled in Moesia, Strabo, _Geographia_ 7.3.10.
Under Nero, another 100,000 transdanubians were settled in Moesia, _CIL_ XIV 3608 = _ILS_ 986. These
immigrants seems to have assimilated with relative ease and speed. A. Poulter, ‘Invisible Goths Within and
Beyond the Roman Empire’, in J. Drinkwater and B. Salway (eds.), _Wolf Liebeschuetz Reflected_ (London,
2007), 169-82.
Roman peoples to settle on imperial soil in exchange for their service as federate troops. The empire’s inability to dominate these peoples militarily necessitated this arrangement; one which, from the point of view of the central Roman government, was clearly not ideal. Over time, these resettlements became more common, especially following the dissolution of the Hunnic empire when a great many Alans, Gepids, Goths, and others were granted imperial territory to prevent their potential aggression against the empire. It is important to note that these land allotments differed from earlier closely managed migrations of peoples into the empire that required the surrender of foreign arms and the dissolution of political leadership. Fifth- and sixth-century immigrant populations were often beyond the direct control of the emperor and maintained their own military and social structures. As such, the Balkans became a politically and militarily volatile

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51 Broader debates about barbarian ethnicity, political autonomy, and assimilation vis-à-vis the Roman empire branch out from specific root questions, one of which concerns the provisions of the 382 treaty between Theodosius and the Goths. There is a broad interpretive spectrum. Wolfram (1988), 133-4 considers it “probably the most momentous foedus in Roman history” that resulted in “an autonomous Gothia, a state within a state.” Heather, while suggesting that the treaty responded to the immediate exigencies posed by one barbarian group and did not officially alter imperial policy thereafter, argues that, although the treaty was spun by Romans as an unconditional surrender, it resettled the Goths en masse, left intact Gothic social and military structures, and did not destroy the Goths’ independent identity; Heather (1991), 158-81; idem. (1996), 135-38; idem. and D. Moncur (transl.), Politics, Philosophy, and Empire in the Fourth Century: Select Orations of Themistius (Liverpool, 2001), 259-64. Conversely, G. Halsall, Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West, 376-568 (Cambridge, 2007), 180-5 argues that “the ‘foedus of 382’ did not settle a semi-independent people in Roman territory,” and that our sources do not evince the survival of Gothic leadership or their settlement as one group in a particular area. Instead, 382 saw the surrender of the Goths, their settlement on Roman land, their conscription into regular Roman military units (not semi-regular allied contingents), and the end of their own political sovereignty – a deditio not unlike past Roman arrangements with barbarians. Each of these interpretations, which are broadly representative of the field, has deep implications for how one understands the nature of Gothic ethnicity and Gothic political interests in the context of the Roman world. Heather’s analysis seems to accord best with our sources and the tenor of subsequent relations between Goths and Romans in the Balkans and elsewhere. See also W. Liebeschuetz, Barbarian and Bishops: Army, Church, and State in the Age of Arcadius and Chrysostom (Oxford, 1990), part I; R. Blockley, East Roman Foreign Policy: Formation and Conduct from Diocletian to Anastasius (Melksham, 1992), 39-42.
This is not to say that relations between the Roman state and the immigrants were always antagonistic. The newcomers would (usually) fight for the emperor when called upon, and regularly attained positions of power and prestige in the Roman military. Full assimilation to a Roman way of life was common, the seamlessness of which is reflected in its silence in the sources. Conflict, however, was regular – both against the empire and among immigrant populations. A recent immigrant serving as the general of a Roman army might, depending on the political climate and the needs of his dependents, rebel against the emperor one year, and die defending his name the next. Gaïnas (d. 400), Tribigild (d. 400), Alaric (d. 410), Theoderic Strabo (d. 481), Theoderic the Amal, (d. 526) and Vitalian (d. 520) are just a few names of Balkan Roman military commanders of mixed or non-Roman heritage who, at different times, fought for and rebelled against the Roman state.

This was the political and cultural milieu in which Jordanes spent his life. He was not simply a thoroughgoing Roman living among other thoroughgoing Romans. Things were just more complicated than that in the Balkans. It would not have been at all strange for an individual living in the sixth-century Roman provinces of Thrace, Moesia, or

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52 For Roman-Gothic conflict and fighting among rival Gothic groupings in the Balkans from the 460s to 489, see Malchus, frr. 15-22.
53 Gaïnas and Tribigild: Synesius, De Providentia; Socrates, HE 6; Philostorgius HE 11; Claudian, In Eutropium; Theodoret, HE 5; Zosimus, 5.13-22; Count Marcellinus, Chronicle s.a. 399-401; Chronicon Paschale s.a. 400. Alaric: Claudian, In Rufinum, In Eutropium, Panegyricus de Consulatu Honorii Augusti IV and VI, De Consulatu Stilichonis, De Bello Gothico; Synesius, De Regno; Eunapius, Lives of the Sophists and various fragments; Orosius 7; Jerome, Epistle 60; Hydatius, Chronicle 60 ff.; Olympiodorus, fragments; Sozomen, HE 8-9; Philostorgius, HE 12; Zosimus, Nea Historia 5; Count Marcellinus, Chronicle; Jordanes, Getica 146-58, Romana 319; Collectio Avellana, ep. 38 (CSEL 35.1.85). The two Theoderics: Priscus, fragments; Malchus, fragments; John of Antioch, fragments; Evagrius, HE; Count Marcellinus, Chronicle; Malalas, Chronographia 15; Jordanes, Getica 269-304, Romana 346-49, Theophanes, Chronicle. Vitalian: John of Antioch, fragments; Evagrius, HE 3; Zacharias of Mytilene, HE 7, 8; Count Marcellinus, Chronicle s.a. 514-15, 519; Jordanes, Romana 357-8, 361; Malalas, Chronographia 16.16, 17.5-8, 18.26.
Scythia to claim both Roman and Gothic identities, as Jordanes did. Despite being the earliest barbarian voice to survive antiquity – and the only one to issue from within the Roman empire – Jordanes’ extra-Roman identity does not ‘matter’ in and of itself for the reading of his texts. Surely an author of mixed heritage could write a history in the classical style without his ethnicity inadvertently foisting itself upon that work. Jordanes’ Gothic ties, and indeed his Roman ones, matter because he draws attention to them within his own text. He addresses his reader directly and states that he is of Gothic descent because he wants that knowledge to inform the interpretation of his historical themes. Presumably, Castalius and Vigilius, the addressees of the Getica and Romana, would have already been aware of their friend’s ancestry, so we can infer that Jordanes provides that information for the benefit of other potential readers.

In fact, Jordanes is forthcoming regarding his biography, far more so than many authors. We learn about his profession, religion, and ancestry, the mixed heritage of his employer, the lineage and exploits of his employer’s father, the names of his own father and grandfather, his grandfather’s profession, and even the name, deeds, heritage, family members, and location of his grandfather’s employer.54 The autobiographical digressions are few and brief, but deliberate, designed to provide the reader with a geographical, cultural, and political context against which to consider the historical themes and ideological program which Jordanes presents. In just a handful of sentences, Jordanes makes clear that the world of the Roman Balkans, his world, was one of ethnic hybridity, cultural commixture, and imbricated identities. Jordanes is deliberately explicit about his

use of both Roman sources, whom he calls his *maiores*, and Gothic oral tradition in constructing his histories about a shared Roman-Gothic past. There is a reason that he bothers to tell us that his patron was of combined Alan and Amal Goth heritage while also a general of Rome. Jordanes wants to show his readers that he himself and the world around him were mixed, the products of a fusion of peoples. Merrills, while not prepared to confirm or deny that Jordanes was a Goth, incisively observed that Jordanes’ “confused origins were scarcely unique within Justinianic Constantinople.”\(^5^5\) And Amory, though he argues that ‘Gothic’ was a contrived and evanescent identity whose contours were shaped entirely by the gravity of Roman power, aptly recognized that Jordanes’ Balkans were a place of “collapsing frontiers, the merging of margin and center, the workings of social, political and ideological change caused by the availability of new identities clashing with the claims of ancient and well-established notions of power and hegemony.”\(^5^6\) These observations position us atop the right vantage point from which to view Jordanes and his socio-political context.

Two essential correctives must be made to the prevailing scholarly approaches to Jordanes, one to each of the dominant discourses. First, Jordanes, either as a result of his own Gothicness or by his use of Cassiodorus and the latter’s alleged access to Gothic orality, cannot be treated as some sort of Gothic pythia who can disperse the mists obscuring the most ancient history, customs, and beliefs of northern Europe’s indigenous peoples. While it is likely that Jordanes drew from some sort of Gothic material, this line of thinking falters before research which shows that the majority of his sources and entire

\(^{55}\) Merrills (2005), 163.
\(^{56}\) Amory (1997), 307-8.
schematization for his histories are classical.\textsuperscript{57} Second, it is short-sighted to conceive of Jordanes simply as ‘a Roman’ who can tell us only about ‘Roman’ things and only from a ‘Roman’ point of view. This approach is an over-correction to the aforementioned. It disregards the rather monumental fact that Jordanes is the only author from Greek and Roman antiquity to announce his direct connection to one of the ‘barbarian’ peoples of Europe.\textsuperscript{58} It is myopic, if not chauvinistic, to suggest that Romanity supersedes all other forms of identity.\textsuperscript{59} A better approach would reconcile these two aspects of Jordanes’ personhood.\textsuperscript{60} He should be appreciated as a Roman Goth whose multicultural origins and surroundings positioned him as a commentator on a Roman empire replete with Goths, Romans, semi-Romans, non-Romans, and everything in between. Jordanes’ own keen awareness of the culturally composite and continually merging nature of the empire shapes his conception of the Gothic and Roman pasts as irrevocably interconnected. Jordanes, a Goth who became Roman, writes a history of the Goths that itself becomes

\textsuperscript{57} The bibliography is substantial, e.g. Goffart, (1988); Christensen (2002); Gillett (2006); Swain (2010); Whately (2013).

\textsuperscript{58} Concerning use of the term ‘barbarian’, Kulikowski has made this keen observation: ‘Collectively we may refer to them as ‘barbarians,’ a term of art that, despite its pejorative connotation in Greek, Latin, and English, has the signal advantage of making no assumptions about ethnicity. This is important, because the nature of barbarian ethnicity is nowadays a matter of considerable controversy, and the relationship of different barbarian groups to one another is often unclear.’ ‘Constantine and the Northern Barbarians’, in N. Lenski (ed.), The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Constantine (Cambridge, 2012), 347-76.

\textsuperscript{59} This is not to suggest that arguments that play down Gothicness in favor of Romanness are in any way motivated by some sort of misplaced pro-Roman or anti-Gothic sentiment. In an effort to conceptually regularize the highly confused and amorphous groupings of foreign and recently incorporated peoples who, at different turns, worked for and fought against the emperor, this vein of scholarship has deemed it heuristically useful to categorize all peoples whose actions were influenced by the political and cultural gravity of the empire as essentially ‘Roman.’ This model for what constitutes ‘Roman’ seems far too broad, and misses opportunities to identify and analyze competing and tangential ethnicities, identities, and political allegiances that shaped, and dismembered, the fifth- and sixth-century empire.

\textsuperscript{60} Liebeschuetz (2011), 207-8 likewise calls for the need to account for both Roman and Gothic identities in Jordanes: “Jordanes has a double identity. He was an imperial patriot but at the same time he identified with his Gothic ancestors and took pride in their past. A dual allegiance of this kind was surely felt by many federate officers in the service of the empire.”
Roman – but a vision of Roman that is inherently multiplex, and clearly not delimited by the current emperor’s attempts to enforce political, religious, and cultural homogeneity.

We now have a clearer idea of who Jordanes was and what his world looked like. Next we must account for why he wrote. The following lays out briefly a global interpretation of Jordanes’ authorial purposes and the meaning of his texts. The remainder of the chapter will provide the textual analysis necessary to prove these claims.

It has long been recognized that the chronological coincidence of the Gothic War and the production of Jordanes’ texts was not accidental. The war between Goths and Romans prompted Jordanes to write about Goths and Romans. But to what end? This study offers an alternative to those that consider Jordanes “one of the obedient agents of Justinian’s campaign of destruction.”

Far from reveling in the annihilation of the Goths, Jordanes praises them, and he is at his most rhetorically elevated when celebrating moments of Roman-Gothic cooperation and unity. Jordanes’ praise for the Goths is a widely recognized feature of his work, though more recent commentators have attempted to explain it away in accordance with their pro-Justinianic interpretations. Still, one must admit that it is striking that a text which lavishes praise upon the Goths, and has as its narrative centerpiece an episode that extols Roman-Gothic friendship, would appear at the same time and place where the emperor himself was projecting precisely the

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61 Goffart (2005), 396.
62 Chapter Three demonstrated the many instances in which Jordanes praises the Goths.
63 Praise of Goths has been long recognized: Croke (1987), 125; Goffart (1988); Amory (1997), 300. Praise explained away: The praise is actually ironic mockery of the Goths used in part to prove the absurdity of Amal kingship (Goffart, 1988); Jordanes accidentally preserves Gothic sympathies in the course of copying Cassiodorus (Heather, 1991, 52-61); Jordanes is a fervent supporter of the imperial conquest of Italy who offers plaudits for the Goths in order to present them as a worthy enemy of the Roman state (Amory, 1997, 300-4).
64 See the discussion of the Battle of the Catalaunian Plains in Chapter Three.
opposite message.\textsuperscript{65} Justinian had predicated his invasion of Italy on the notion that the Goths were barbarian tyrants who had to be expunged. Indeed, by 550/1, not long before Jordanes wrote, Justinian had rejected even the possibility of a negotiated peace, “hating as he did the Gothic name and intending to drive it out absolutely from the Roman domain.”\textsuperscript{66}

Jordanes’ historical corpus should be understood as a counter-narrative to that issuing from the imperial center. At a moment when Roman-Gothic relations were at their worst, sixteen years into a war that showed no signs of abating\textsuperscript{67}, Jordanes committed himself to the task of writing two texts that legitimated the existence of the Goths in the context of a Roman world. He recasts history in order to demonstrate that the Goths were established members of the classical Mediterranean landscape. By appropriating the classical ethnographic trope of transference, Jordanes ‘proved’, on the Romans’ own terms, that the Scythians, the Getae, the Thracians were, in fact, the Goths, and had long been players on the classical stage. He rescues the Goths from the ethnographic clichés of barbarism and appoints them with cultural characteristics that any Roman would deem laudable. Moreover, the entire narratological framework of the \textit{Getica}, punctuated by careful deployment of Virgilian allusions, is designed to parallel

\textsuperscript{65} The \textit{Getica}’s centerpiece is the Battle of the Catalaunian Plains, where Romans and Visigoths come together to defeat Attila’s armies. See Chapter Three. Amory has called Jordanes’ praise of Goths and Romans alike “the central paradox of the \textit{Getica}.” (1997), 300.\textsuperscript{66} Procopius, \textit{Wars} 8.24.5, “ἄλλα βασιλέως μάθησιν οὐδεμίαν τῶν λεγομένων ποιούμενος τοὺς πρέσβεις ἀπαντας ἀπεπέμπετο, πρὸς τὸ Γότθων ὄνομα χαλέπιδος ἔχον, ἄρδην τε αὐτὸ τῆς Ῥωμαιῶν ἀρχῆς ἐξελάσαι διανοούμενος.” Earlier that year the Gothic king Totila had sent the ambassador Stephen to Constantinople to sue for peace, but Justinian refused even to see him, \textit{Wars} 7.37.6–7.\textsuperscript{67} See note 4.
the existential experience of the Roman and Gothic peoples as long-suffering wanderers who struggle to find a home, prove their martial valor, and eventually settle in Italy.\(^6^8\)

This reimagining of the past, one which classicizes the Goths and establishes a shared Roman-Gothic destiny, was a direct reaction to the prolonged war in Italy and the imperial justification for and characterization of that conflict. It strains credulity to think that Jordanes, both a Goth and servant of the emperor, a product of the culturally composite Balkans, could have agreed with the portrayal of the Goths in Italy as tyrannical barbarians whose utter destruction was imperative.\(^6^9\) The Goths who currently clashed with the emperor were the sons and daughters of Goths who had originally resided in the Balkans. Many from this earlier generation would have served in the emperor’s armies. They would have been, to varying degrees, Romanized. Theoderic himself, reared in the imperial capital, consul of Rome, and the revered rex Gothorum et Romanorum, was emblematic of this commixture. Jordanes was perhaps eight years of age when Theoderic struck westward in 488. It is possible that he or his family or associates personally knew certain individuals who made the trek to Italy.\(^7^0\) He announces his own background, and that of his grandfather and his patron – an Amal Goth and Roman general – as testaments to both the diversity and cultural convergence of the Roman Balkans. Jordanes came from a world where Gothic and Roman were not mutually exclusive categories. Calls from the emperor that claimed the opposite and

\(^{6^8}\) The Virgilian allusions are treated at length below.

\(^{6^9}\) In the Pragmatic Sanction of 554, Justinian cites ferocitas and other barbarian clichés to describe the Goths (15.17). In a 565 Narses commissioned an inscription on the Pons Salarius, two miles north of Rome, which mentions “nefandissimo tyranno Totila.” F-S 217a-b.

\(^{7^0}\) Jordanes’ close connection to Gunthigis, who was of the same Amal stock as Theoderic, also makes this possible.
demanded the deaths of those with whom Jordanes shared cultural and regional ties, must have been unsettling. There was, after all, historical precedent that Roman-Gothic conflict could result in the mass murder of Goths already living within the empire.\footnote{B. Swain, ‘A New Strategy of Distinction: The Gothic Pogroms’, delivered at the Byzantine Studies Conference, University of Pennsylvania, 2010, discusses two instances in which Romans consciously identify Goths living within and serving the empire, and slaughter them on a large scale. In the conclusion to his historical narrative Ammianus reports that, following the catastrophe at Adrianople in 378, the Roman commander Julius ordered that every Goth serving in the eastern Roman armies should be assembled under false pretenses and killed to a man, lest they join the victorious Gothic army in spelling further danger for the empire. Some twenty years later in 400, a number of sources, among them Zosimus, Synesius, and Sozomen, report that amidst the atmosphere of heightened tensions and mutual fear in Constantinople brought on by the revolt of Gaïnas, a Roman general and Goth, and his predominantly Gothic army, the thousands of Gothic civilians and off duty soldiers within the city, fearing for their safety, prepared to leave the capital. The Roman populace, for their part fearing that the Goths would join Gaïnas, rioted and slaughtered all of the Goths in the city.}

Jordanes envisioned an empire in which relations between Goths and Romans were far more optimistic. And yet, at the same time, he seems to have doubted the feasibility of his own vision. This inherent contradiction is one of the most thematically crucial and artistically significant aspects of Jordanes’ corpus, and manifests itself in the tonal polarities of each of his two texts. In short, the *Getica* is a call for hope; the *Romana* a cry of lamentation. The *Getica* is an optimistic work, at times bordering on panegyric for certain Gothic kings and the Gothic people writ large. It gives singular emphasis to the praise of Roman-Gothic cooperation, and culminates in the celebration of a marriage that unites the preeminent Gothic and Roman families. This union symbolizes for Jordanes the ideal of Roman-Gothic coexistence, and promised “hope to both peoples.”\footnote{Jordanes, *Getica* 314. The marriage is mentioned four times (*Getica* 81, 251, 314; *Romana* 383) and bears great thematic significance. More on this below.}

It is significant, though, that the *Getica*, written in 551, concludes its narrative at 540
with the explicit suggestion that the war in Italy was over. In order to maintain the hopeful and idealistic tone of the text, Jordanes disregarded a decade of continued war. Such wishful thinking does not carry over into the *Romana*, however, which extends its chronology to present times, and provides a treatment of the Gothic War that concludes this overtly pessimistic text. From start to finish, the *Romana* argues that the empire is in a state of decline, even “worthy of a tragedy,” and blames its decrepitude on the failings of Roman rulership. He does not shrink from exposing the blemishes of Roman history. He lays bare the many conflicts between Goths and Romans, and insists that his reader Vigilius, after reading of the “devastation of various peoples,” must turn away from this wretched world.

These are not the sentiments of one screaming for the blood of the Goths. The shift in tone from hopefulness to despair is attributable directly to the continued conflict in Italy between Goths and Romans, the two peoples with whom Jordanes identified personally, and whom he fondly calls “the foremost nations of the world.” Jordanes wrote one text that praises Goths and Roman-Gothic friendship while the emperor was waging a war to destroy those same Goths, and he wrote another work about imperial decline caused by the ineptitude of Roman rulers while the current Roman ruler proclaimed the renewal of the empire. This pronounced dissonance refutes the notion that Jordanes was a mouthpiece for Justinianic propaganda. We should not make the mistake,

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73 More specifically, Jordanes ends the main narrative in 540 with the fall of Gothic Ravenna (313), skips ten years of war, and then notes the marriage of Germanus and Matasuntha of probably 549 or 550, and the death of Germanus and the birth of his son some time after July 550 (314).

74 Jordanes, *Romana* 388.


76 Jordanes, *Getica* 181.
however, of seeing Jordanes’ purposes as primarily subversive or anti-Justinianic. This would miss the point of his historical enterprise. Instead, Jordanes’ texts must be understood as being fundamentally motivated by his dissatisfaction with the current state of Roman-Gothic relations and his desire for peace and the establishment of a *modus vivendi* between those two peoples – a desire perhaps reflective of the cultural fusion that occurred within himself.

The following three-part analysis will demonstrate that Jordanes’ reinvention of both the Gothic past and the history of Roman-Gothic relations was motivated by his desire to promote political and existential reconciliation between Goths and Romans in a time of war.

**Part I – Goths and Romans: Coexistence through Classicization**

Jordanes’ texts construct a decidedly idiosyncratic version of history wherein the Gothic and Roman pasts are closely linked on a number of levels. The classicization of Gothic history is one of the primary mechanisms that Jordanes employs to this end. In Chapter Three I argued that Jordanes interweaves the Goths into the cultural fabric of the classical Mediterranean and, more specifically, Roman worlds in order to establish their antiquity and respectability. The most obvious example of this literary strategy is the conflation of Goths, known to Romans only since the first or third century,\(^\text{77}\) with the Getae, a people the Greeks had known for a thousand years or more. For the better part of two centuries, Roman writers had been associating Goths with Getae, Scythians, and Thracians. Transference, the practice of applying nominal equivalence to culturally distinct peoples,

\(^{77}\) See note 38.
was a standard ethnographic trope, and one which Jordanes used in both traditional and innovative ways.\textsuperscript{78}

Taking transference to its literal end, Jordanes transports the Goths deep into the classical past where they become the husbands of Amazons, descendents of Hercules, allies of Trojans, and victors over the Persian kings Cyrus, Darius, and Xerxes.\textsuperscript{79} Though seemingly standard, this sort of thing had not actually been done before. Goths had been called Getae, and Huns called Scythians, but there had never been any attempt, say, to delineate the precise genealogical link between Attila’s hordes and the peoples of Herodotus, Book Four. Transference had been a type of rhetorical register; a projection of cultural chauvinism. It signaled an indifference to the defining features of and distinctions among ‘lesser’, ‘peripheral’, namely barbarian peoples. Groups who had appeared on the classical horizon late in Roman history were slotted tidily into long-prescribed categories of an ancient Mediterranean thoughtscape. Late antique writers, though, would have been aware that the conflation of certain group names did not demand their ontological equivalence.\textsuperscript{80} Nor would this have been lost on Jordanes.\textsuperscript{81}

Here, Jordanes simply reappropriates a traditional practice for novel ends. Where transference usually bore undertones of condescension, in Jordanes’ hands it becomes a

\textsuperscript{78} See O. Maenchen-Helfen, \textit{The World of the Huns} (Berekeley, 1973), 5 ff. for a discussion of ethnic transference.

\textsuperscript{79} Jordanes, \textit{Getica} 44; 59; 61-64.

\textsuperscript{80} Liebeschuetz (2011), 200-3 argues along similar lines: “writers of the late empire were well aware that Getae and Scythians were collective designations…it must have been obvious to them that true history could not be written on the assumption that every reference by classical writers to Scythians or Getae referred precisely to Goths.”

\textsuperscript{81} In fact, Jordanes tacitly acknowledges this. Chapter Thee demonstrated that, before the Goths reach Scythia in the \textit{Getica}’s narrative, Jordanes only refers to the Goths as Goths. Once in Scythia and thereafter in the text, Jordanes uses Goths and Getae interchangeably. Jordanes quietly signals that the ethnynomic transference was a classical conceit, and not a reflection of reality.
mechanism to valorize the Goths. The antiquity of a people was, for Romans, one measure of their respectability. By ‘proving’ that the Goths were Getae, Jordanes could attach them to some of the major historical and cultural milestones of the classical past, and thereby enhance their esteem. For example, in suggesting that Telephus and Eurypylus, Trojan allies, were Getae and thus Goths, Jordanes establishes an ancient precedent for friendship between Goths and (proto-)Romans, and prefigures their future cooperative relationship which he develops in the rest of the Getica. This is all indicative of two of the primary features of Jordanes’ historiographical methodology: 1) the commixture of literary tradition with innovations bearing a classical façade; and 2) his intention to elevate the Goths in the eyes of a Roman readership, and by means of Roman cultural standards. In other words, through literary artifice, Jordanes Romanizes the Goths. This is not to say, however, that he seeks to merge the two peoples, or blur distinctions between them altogether. Rather, Jordanes means to demonstrate inherent similarities and compatibilities between Goths and Romans.

Early portions of the Getica detail Gothic exploits in Scandza and the Baltic, though it is their migration to Scythia, within the ambit of the classical world, that the Goths enter their golden age. It should be noted that these Scythian lands were the future imperial Balkan provinces of Thrace, Dacia, and Moesia – Jordanes’ home, and home to so many other Roman Goths in the sixth century. There, in the Balkans, Goths become

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82 Jordanes likewise ‘classicizes’ (in the context of late Roman culture) the Goths through biblical analogue by associating the Goths with Gog and Magog – a conflation attributable to Ambrose. Though usually bearing entirely negative connotations and a connection to the apocalypse, Jordanes strips Gog and Magog of harsh associations, and seeks only connect the Goths to Christian scripture, the primary Roman cultural touchstone in the sixth century. See Chapter Three.

83 Jordanes takes pains to demonstrate the cultural distinctiveness of the Goths, and to prove their corporate integrity and durability.
friends with the Trojan forefathers of Rome, and it is there that Jordanes lifts the Goths from their barbarism. Because of their proximity to Greek culture, the Goths become “more civilized” and “more learned,” in effect, more classical. The Goths worship Mars while becoming masters of jurisprudence, physics, and astronomy, and their newly gained knowledge of philosophy, ethics, and logic “restrain their barbarous customs.” Jordanes reclaims the Goths from the standard ethnographic discourse of barbarity with which they had been associated, and transforms them into a people with traits that, from a Roman point of view, would have been considered respectable. Again, Jordanes subverts one tradition by means of another. Goths were, by Roman literary precedent, considered barbarians. That Jordanes depicts them otherwise is an innovation. Yet, through Telephus, known from Greek legend, and the Getic philosopher king Zalmoxis, attested by Herodotus, Jordanes again uses the age-old practice of transference to justify his modification. Note, too, that Jordanes reinterprets the Goths from one familiar archetype to another: instead of the predictable barbarians of classical ethnography, the Goths become the standard civilized society of classical literature. Moreover, although Jordanes seeks to rescue the Goths from ingrained prejudices, he ultimately reaffirms the classically contrived binary of civilization versus barbarism by applying to other barbarian peoples the ethnographic clichés that he strips from the Goths. Ultimately, the reinvention of the Goths – actually a rather radical subversion of literary precedent – is

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84 Jordanes, Getica 42: “Tertia vero sede super mare Ponticum iam humaniores et, ut superius diximus, prudentiores effecti.”
85 Mars (41); laws, science (69); philosophy (42 and 69); ethics and logic (69); “Nam ethicam eos erudiens barbaricos mores compescuit” (69).
86 Alans “have the cruelty of wild beasts” (Get. 128); Gepids are “slow of thought” (95); Franks are “barbarous” (176); Huns are a “savage race…scarcely human” (122).
clothed in the trappings of classicism. Jordanes simultaneously amends the Roman thought-world while reifying his own connection to it.

On one level, Jordanes’ recalibration of the Goths was meant to challenge long-entrenched cultural perceptions, though, on another, it was itself reflective of demographic and intellectual shifts within the late empire that were already well underway. Despite their barbarian literary niche, the representation of Goths in late Roman texts did not always result in rote reproduction of stereotypes. The late fourth-century Ammianus was perhaps the first Roman author to treat Goths and other barbarians as the subjects of empirical description, and as actors with motivations worthy of real historiographical analysis. 87 Similarly, the Anonymus Valesianus and early portions of the Liber Pontificalis never apply ethnographic tropes to the Goths, while Ennodius, Cassiodorus, and Procopius even consider Gothic rule in Italy to be on par with its Roman model. These changing attitudes can be traced to the Tetrarchic period and, later, to the massive influx of non-Romans into imperial lands throughout the fifth century. Since Constantine’s military reforms, emperors had increasingly filled out the ranks of Roman armies with foreign, that is to say, barbarian peoples. 88 The sheer presence of these newcomers on Roman soil, compounded with their service to the emperor, must have done much to ameliorate provincial Roman perceptions of them. Initial social accommodation would eventually give way to changes in fundamental assumptions about these people from beyond the frontiers. By the late fourth century, men of barbarian origins would begin to attain Roman military positions of enormous

88 Ibid., 357 ff.
power and prestige, and throughout the fifth century independent barbarian groups
dismembered and occupied all of the territories of the western Roman empire. Their level
of importance on the geo-political stage entailed that barbarians be taken seriously, and
not simply caricatured. Further, it likely became increasingly problematic for some
Roman writers to dismiss as stupid savages the people who now ran their armies and
controlled half of all former imperial holdings.

Jordanes, a Catholic, classically learned, servant of the emperor’s armies was yet
still a Goth, and thus very much emblematic of these shifting demographic sands. In his
account of the Visigothic presence in the Balkans during the late 370s, Jordanes
challenges the notion that Goths – still called barbarians in Roman literature – could even
be considered foreigners anymore: “…the Goths no longer as immigrants and pilgrims,
but as citizens and lords, began to rule the inhabitants and to hold in their own right all
the northern country as far as the Danube.”89 Far from fitting them in the role of the
foreign invaders in which they were usually cast,90 Jordanes describes the Visigoths using
the terminology of Roman citizenship – they are cives and domini who rule “in their own
right” (suo iuri). It is clear that Jordanes’ intention is to liken the Goths to Romans; to
imbue their place in the Balkans with legitimacy and also normalcy. Surely, in the
immediate aftermath of Adrianople, no Roman would have welcomed the Visigoths, let
alone considered them fellow citizens, but Jordanes’ revisionist perspective was, in 551,
informed by 175 years of Gothic presence in the Roman Balkans. By the mid-sixth

89 Jordanes, Getica 137, “…coeperuntque Gothi iam non ut advenae et peregrini, sed ut cives et domini
possessoribus imperare totasque partes septentrionales usque ad Danubium suo iuri tenere.”
90 E.g in Jerome, Ammianus, Claudian, Themistius, Synesius, Eunapius, Orosius, Zosimus, Count
Marcellinus, to name a few.
century, Romans – and not simply Roman Goths like Jordanes – would have considered Goths living within imperial borders to be a standard aspect of Roman life. Here, Jordanes’ treatment of the Goths embodies one of the overarching themes of the *Getica*: the portrayal of the Goths as wanderers seeking a home who eventually find it within the Roman empire and among Romans.

The social and demographic realities of the mid-sixth-century empire likewise color other aspects of Jordanes’ Gothic history. After the Goths establish a treaty with Rome in 382, Jordanes describes how the emperor Theodosius invited the Gothic king Athanaric to visit him in Constantinople. Once there, Athanaric is showered with gifts and honors, and he marvels at the greatness of the city and how “people of divers nations gathered like a flood of waters streaming from different regions into one basin.” There is no doubting that the Roman capital was a true cosmopolis, and a sentiment such as this might have been uttered by any number of Roman authors. Here, though, the description becomes particularly significant because it is given in the context of, to use Jordanes’ language, the confluence of Goths and Romans into the bonds of friendship. Jordanes, then, is not simply praising Roman-Gothic unity – a theme developed throughout the *Getica* – but he also celebrates, again in his own words, the diversity of the Roman world, especially its capital and Balkan hinterland. Conversely, this episode was also purposefully designed to contrast with the political climate of 551. Writing from Constantinople, Jordanes had long been witnessing both the deterioration of the Roman-Gothic partnership, and the promulgation of imperial propaganda that characterized the

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91 Jordanes, *Getica* 143, “…miratur, populosque diversarum gentium quasi fonte in uno e diversis partibus scaturriente unda…”
Goths as barbarian tyrants. Contemporary realities were antipodal to those that Jordanes celebrates in the *Getica*, and he means for his reader to reflect on this. Further, we can be certain that Jordanes instills this episode with a pronounced level of symbolic resonance because he also embeds in it a Virgilian allusion, one of several in the *Getica* that bear directly on historic and current Roman-Gothic relations. This and other Virgilian intertexts will be discussed at length below.

Jordanes likewise speaks to the interconnectedness of the various peoples of the empire. In accounting for the name of the Getic king Telephus, Jordanes seems to allude to the porousness and cultural fluidity of the Roman Balkans that he himself had experienced: “Let no one say that this name [Telephus] is quite foreign to the Gothic tongue, and let no one who is ignorant cavil at the fact that the tribes of men make use of many names, even as the Romans borrow from the Macedonians, the Greeks from the Romans, the Sarmatians from the Germans, and the Goths frequently from the Huns.”

Jordanes’ observation represents a reconciliation of center and periphery. He normalizes the notion of cultural commixture by demonstrating the historical precedent for various peoples, both classical and barbarian, exchanging ethnic insignia such as names. Similar to his strategy of classicizing the Goths via transference, here Jordanes works to affix a Greco-Roman pedigree to the social and demographic changes that accompanied the immigration of Goths and other foreign peoples into the empire – a topic which, during the Gothic War, lacked no measure of ideological potency. As the previous chapter laid bare, there were sixth-century Roman voices, namely imperially-backed ones, that

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92 Jordanes, *Getica* 58, “Ne vero quis dicat hoc nomen a lingua Gothica omnino peregrinum esse, nemo qui nesciat animadvertat usu pleraque nomina gentes amplecti, ut Romani Macedonum, Greci Romanorum, Sarmatae Germanorum, Gothi plerumque mutuantur Hunnorum.”
worked to vilify the Italian Goths. One would be justified in thinking that the ill will toward these specific Goths being generated from the imperial center could have potentially colored some Romans’ perceptions of other Goths living within and even serving the empire.\(^\text{93}\) We reach a better understanding of the contours and functionality of the discourse on the ‘Gothic question’ when we consider that Jordanes and the other commentators discussed in this study were potentially reacting to a more broadly-based debate about the place of the Goths not simply in Italy, but within the eastern empire as well. Jordanes’ reconfiguration of Gothic history was in one sense artificial and rhetorically exaggerated (‘proving’ that Goths were Getae and ancient friends of Roman ancestors), but in another sense revelatory of contemporary reactions to a changing world and the perceptual shifts that accompanied it. Certainly, a number of Jordanes’ ideas were novel, even strange, and would have been recognized as such, but many readers would have also understood them to be in tune with a wider zeitgeist.

So far we have discussed the various ways that Jordanes classicized the Gothic past, and, more generally, sought to normalize the current place of the Goths in the Roman world. Relatedly, Jordanes also worked to construct direct historical linkages between Goths and Romans and to accentuate moments of their cooperation in order to demonstrate the interconnectedness and interdependence of these two peoples. Drawing from the lost Roman history of Symmachus, who here drew from the *Historia Augusta*,

\(^\text{93}\) One is reminded of the final episode of Ammianus wherein, following the Battle of Adrianople, Roman military leadership carried out a widespread massacre of Goths serving in the imperial armies. By all measures, these victims had no immediate connection to Fritigern’s Goths other than being (or being perceived to be) Goths. Rightly or wrongly, Romans believed that mere ethnic affiliation was enough to warrant a Gothic threat. During the sixth-century Gothic War, then, it is reasonable to think that the prolonged conflict in Italy fueled resentment of Goths in the empire among some Romans.
Jordanes notes that the third-century Roman emperor Maximinus was of Thracian origin and had a Gothic father, and was therefore himself a Goth. Jordanes provides a lengthy description and tells his reader directly that he has spoken about Maximinus “in order to show that the people of which we speak [the Goths] attained the very highest station in the Roman Empire.”\textsuperscript{94} The Maximinus episode is a prime example of Jordanes’ effort to tie together the historical experiences of Goths and Romans, and also works to introduce to the text the motif of a Roman-Gothic cooperative relationship. Closely following, Jordanes reports that the emperors Gallus and Volusianius “reigned amid universal peace and favor” in large part because “soon after they came to power they made a treaty with the tribe of the Goths.”\textsuperscript{95} Soon after that, Maximian enlists the aid of the Goths in his war against the Persians, prompting Jordanes to remark that, “it had long been a hard matter for the Roman army to fight against any nations whatsoever without them. This is evident from the way in which the Goths were so frequently called upon.”\textsuperscript{96} Constantine then summons the Goths to fight with him against Licinius, whereupon Jordanes makes the bold claim that, “it was the aid of the Goths that enabled [Constantine] to build the famous city that is named after him, the rival of Rome, inasmuch as they entered into a treaty with the emperor and furnished him forty thousand men to aid him against various

\textsuperscript{94} Jordanes, \textit{Getica} 88, “Quod nos idcirco huic nostro opusculo de Symmachii historia mutuavimus, quatenus gentem, unde agimus, ostenderemus ad regni Romani fastigium usque venisse.”

\textsuperscript{95} Jordanes, \textit{Getica} 106, “Supra dicti vero Gallus et Volusianus imperatores, quamvis vix biennio in imperio perseverantes ab hac luce migrarunt, tamen ipsud biennium, quod affuerunt, ubique pacati, ubique regnaverunt gratiosi… Hi ergo mox imperio adepti sunt, foedus cum gente pepigerunt Gothorum.”

\textsuperscript{96} Jordanes, \textit{Getica} 111, “Nam sine ipsos dudum contra quasvis gentes Romanus exercitus difficile decertatus est. Apparet namque frequenter, quomodo invitabantur sic.”
peoples. This body of men, namely the allies [foederati], and the service they rendered in war are still spoken of to this day."\(^{97}\)

Jordanes’ comments on Constantine and the Goths are important on a number of levels. By ascribing to the Goths a critical role in the very foundation of the new Roman capital and, in a sense, of the Christian empire itself, Jordanes makes the Gothic name synonymous with indispensability, and awards the historic Roman-Gothic cooperative relationship the highest possible degree of significance. Jordanes means to suggest that the very existence of the Roman empire, in its current, sixth-century form, is in no small part attributable to the Goths. This is a bold claim to make generally, but it becomes even bolder given its contemporary context. We must not forget that Jordanes was writing in Constantinople, and it was from that same city that Justinian waged his war against the Goths. Jordanes’ articulation of the Roman-Gothic relationship could not have been much further removed from that presented in the chronicles of Marcellinus and Malalas or in Justinian’s laws.

Further, Jordanes draws explicit attention to the very Gothic discourse that this study has been examining. He notes that the Goths’ service to Constantine and the empire as allies is “still spoken of to this day.” We must balance two opposing impulses when examining the significance of Jordanes’ claim. It cannot be forgotten that Jordanes is a tendentious writer who does not shrink from massaging or inventing facts to suit the thematic strains of his project. The historicity of his texts is not to be trusted without due

\(^{97}\) Jordanes, *Getica* 112, “Nam et ut famosissimam et Romae emulam in suo nomine conderet civitatem, Gothorum interfuit operatio, qui foedus inito cum imperatore quadraginta suorum milia illi in solacio contra gentes varias obtulere; quorum et numerus et militia usque ad praesens in re publica nominatur, id est foederati.”
consideration. Here, though, Jordanes’ comments seem credible to a degree. As this and the previous chapter have borne out, there is clear evidence that a discourse on the ‘Gothic question’ had emerged in sixth-century Constantinople and abroad. The rather stark realities that non-Romans ruled in Rome and Italy, and that the empire had been fighting a war for nearly twenty years to overthrow the Goths entailed that Romans of both slight and influential standing would have discussed the implications of these events. Jordanes’ suggestion that Constantinopolitans still celebrated the memory of the Gothic role in the foundation of their city is exaggerated, though it stands to reason that, during the war, many would have taken stock of the long history of Roman-Gothic relations. Despite the efforts of some chroniclers to blacken the modern reception of that historic dynamic, the real fact of past cooperation between Goths and Romans would not have been lost on all parties interested in such matters. It can be stated with some confidence, then, that voices beyond that of Jordanes were openly juxtaposing historic Roman-Gothic alliances with the current climate of war and dysfunction, and some even posited an interpretation of the past wherein Goths and Romans had once been partners and achieved much together.

After Constantine, Jordanes continues to trace the history of the martial bond between Goths and Romans throughout the fourth and fifth centuries. During the reign of Theodosius, Jordanes notes that, “The former service of the allies [foederati] under the emperor Constantine was now renewed and they were again called allies. And since the emperor knew that they were faithful to him and his friends, he took from their number more than twenty thousand warriors to serve against the tyrant Eugenius who had slain
Gratian and seized Gaul.” Again, Jordanes underscores the achievements of the Roman-Gothic military alliance which, later, after detailing other episodes of their cooperation, he calls their pristina concordia – a title that further exalts and historicizes the bond. Here, too, Jordanes purposefully interjects the ideologically charged notion of tyranny into his narrative. We have already discussed the regularity with which Justinian and other writers associated Goths and barbarian peoples with tyranny. Not surprisingly, Jordanes never once calls the Goths tyrants, despite five mentions of tyranny in the Getica and twenty-one in the Romana. Quite differently, he works to prove the very opposite. Jordanes’ Goths aid Theodosius against the Roman tyrant Eugenius, and later band together with the Romans against Attila, whom the emperor Valentinian III calls “the tyrant who wishes to enslave the whole world” in his appeal to the Goths for their aid. Tyranny was the Greco-Roman notion most closely associated with illegitimate rule. By demonstrating that the Goths fought alongside Romans against tyranny, Jordanes suggests that Goths defended traditional Roman notions of legitimate rulership.

Valentinian III’s message even legitimates Gothic rule. In his address to the Goths, the emperor exhorts: “Bear aid to the empire, of which you hold a part.” Here, Valentinian refers to the fact that, in 451, the Visigoths held much of the southern portion of the (former) imperial province of Gaul. Recall from Chapter Three that Jordanes’

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98 Jordanes, Getica 145, “…illa dudum sub Constantino principe foederatorum renovata et ipsi dicti sunt foederati. E quibus imperator contra Eugenium tyrannum, qui occiso Gratiano Gallias occupasset plus quam viginti milia armatorum fideles sibi et amicos intellegens secum duxit victoriaque de praedicto tyranno potitus ultionem exegit.”
99 Jordanes, Getica 177.
100 See Chapter Four; e.g. Novel 37, August 1, 535; Anonymus Valesianus 94; Liber Pontificalis 60.1; Procopius, Wars 5.1.29; Continuator of Count Marcellinus, Additamentum s.a. 537.1 (the Continuator, as will be demonstrated below, perpetuates Marcellinus’ Justinianic partisanship).
101 Jordanes, Getica 187, “…tyrannum, qui optat mundi generale habere servitium…”
102 Jordanes, Getica 188, “Auxiliamini etiam rei publicae, cuius membrum tenetis.”
treatment of the lead-up to and conduct of the Battle of the Catalaunian Plains forms the centerpiece of the *Getica*. This alliance forged between Goths and Romans represents Jordanes’ clearest articulation and most emphatic celebration of Roman-Gothic unity in either of his texts. He praises the “brave array, sure defense, and sweet comradeship” of the two “foremost nations of the world – the Romans and the Visigoths.” It is significant, therefore, that within this thematically crucial episode Jordanes puts into the mouth of a Roman emperor words that recognize the Goths as autonomous rulers within the Roman world. Here, Jordanes not only continues to normalize the place of the Goth in the Roman world, a strategy already discussed, but additionally legitimizes their role as rulers over Roman lands – a role that is imperially recognized and earned by their friendship with and defense of the Roman order.

Beyond the glorification of their military alliances, Jordanes advances notions of Roman-Gothic similitude, and even unity. He declares that their treaty with Theodosius in 382 caused the Goths to “form as it were one body with the imperial soldiery,” and later suggests that the 414 marriage of Galla Placidia, sister of the emperor Honorius, to the Visigothic king Athaulf had the effect that “when other peoples learned of this alliance, they were the more effectually terrified, since the empire and the Goths seemed

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103 It receives, by an order of magnitude, the lengthiest treatment of any episode in the narrative – an eighth of the entire text.
104 F. Giunta, *Jordanes e la cultura dell’alto medio evo: Contributo allo studio del problema gotico* (Palermo, 1952), likewise recognized that Jordanes placed such emphasis on the battle with Attila because it provides a clear example of friendship between Goths and Romans.
105 Jordanes, *Getica* 190, “Felix procinctum, auxilium tutum, suave collegiums...”
106 Jordanes, *Getica* 181, “…primas mundi gentes Romanos Vesegothasque…”
107 Jordanes, *Getica* 145, “Defuncto ergo Aithanarico cunctus eius exercitus in servitio Theodosii imperatoris perdurans Romano se imperio subdens cum milite velut unum corpus effecit militiaque...”
Further, during his negotiations with Honorius, Alaric states that “if [the emperor] would permit the Goths to settle peaceably in Italy, they would so live with the Roman people that men might believe them both to be of one race.” Here, Jordanes continues to compound overarching themes in the *Getica*: the playing down of difference between Goths and Romans, the normalization of Gothic existence in a Roman world, and the Gothic desire to live side by side with Romans in a single society, and, now, as a single *gens*.

Yet, for all of the declarations of unity and the prevalence of praise for Roman-Gothic friendship, there is another thematic undercurrent which runs throughout Jordanes’ rendering of Roman-Gothic relations: tension and conflict. The negotiations between Alaric and Honorius just mentioned are emblematic of this impulse. In response to Alaric’s request to settle in Italy, Theodosius decided that Alaric and his race, if they were able to so, should be allowed to seize for their own home the provinces farthest away, namely Gaul and Spain. For at this time he had almost lost them, and moreover they had been devastated by the invasion of Gaiseric, king of the Vandals. The grant was confirmed by an imperial rescript, and the Goths, consenting to the agreement, set out for the country given them.

As the Goths set off “without doing any harm in Italy,” Stilicho, the real power behind the western imperial throne, “treacherously hurried to Pollentia…[and] there fell upon the

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108 Jordanes, *Getica* 160, “…ut gentes hac societate conperta quasi adunatam Gothis rem publicam efficacius terrerentur…”

109 Jordanes, *Getica* 152, “…quatenus si permitteret, ut Gothi pacati in Italia residerent, sic eos cum Romanorum populo vivere, ut una gens utraque credere posit.”

110 Jordanes, *Getica* 153, “Cui ad postremum sententia sedit, quatenus provincias longe positas, id est Gallias Spaniasisque, quas pene iam perdidisset Gizericique eas Vandalorum regis vastaret inruptio, si valeret, Halaricus sua cum gente sibi tamquam lares propias vindicaret. Donationem sacro oraculo confirmatam consentiunt Gothi hac ordinatione et ad patrim sibi traditam proficiscuntur.”
unsuspecting Goths in battle, to the ruin of all Italy and his own disgrace.”¹¹¹ The entire episode, from Alaric’s entreaty and the prospect of Roman-Gothic unity, to Stilicho’s double-cross and the Goths’ retaliation and sack of Rome, is illustrative of the oppositional themes with which Jordanes colors the complex dynamic between Goths and Romans. While the instances of Roman-Gothic friendship in the Getica are numerous and clearly favored by Jordanes, both of his texts also reveal a legacy of conflict between the two titular peoples of his histories.

Like so much else in the Getica, the account of Alaric, Honorius, and Stilicho is riddled with gross historical inaccuracies, and reveals Jordanes’ deliberate manipulation (or sheer invention) of the past in order to establish resonances with the fraught political questions surrounding the sixth-century Gothic War. The connection to current events stems not simply from the fact that, in the Alaric episode, Romans clash with Goths in Italy, but from the circumstances preceding that conflict: Balkan Goths seeking a home in the Roman empire are granted land in the West by the emperor – provided they can win it – only to be attacked by Roman armies. Alaric’s agreement with Honorius to settle in Gaul in the Getica is designed exactly to mirror Theoderic’s 488 arrangement with the emperor Zeno to settle in Italy. The parallelism is more firmly established by Jordanes’ use of the same language to the describe both Honorius’ and, later, Zeno’s “grant” of land to the Gothic kings.¹¹² The precise terms of the 488 settlement by which Theoderic received Italy remain obscure. Inconsistencies in the sources that describe the

¹¹¹ Jordanes, Getica 154, “Post quorum discessu nec quicquam mali in Italia perpetrato… Stilico ad Polentiam civitatem in Alpes Cottiarum locatam dolose accedens, nihilque male suspicantibus Gothis ad necem totius Italiae suamque deformitatem ruit in bello.”
¹¹² Honorius: “donationem” (153); Zeno: “donantibus” (291).
arrangement reflect the political volatility of the subject, especially in the context of the imperial war to reclaim Italy and terminate whatever past deal had been struck.\textsuperscript{113}

Further, because Honorius’ land grant is meant to recall that of Zeno, it follows that Stilicho’s attack on Alaric’s Goths should be interpreted as a prefiguration of Justinian’s invasion of Gothic Italy. Jordanes admonishes Stilicho for “treacherously” \textit{(dolose)} attacking the Goths “to the ruin of all Italy and his own disgrace.” Given the firmness with which Jordanes places the Romans in the wrong in this instance, one is inclined toward the interpretation that Jordanes means implicitly to censure sixth-century Roman aggression against the Goths in Italy. Jordanes’ explicit treatment of the Gothic War in the \textit{Getica} and \textit{Romana}, however, will be discussed at length in the third part of this analysis. Here, it is enough to say that the Alaric episode reveals one of the subtler literary strategies that Jordanes employs to good effect in key portions of the \textit{Getica}: the rendering of historical accounts that underscore the discordant themes of Roman-Gothic coexistence and conflict, and that also provide indirect commentary on sixth-century political struggles. Moreover, the thematic dissonance which separates the celebration of Roman-Gothic shared experience from the historical and contemporary reality of their conflicts is characteristic of another significant element of Jordanes’ texts: allusions to the figure and poetry of Virgil. Careful analysis of these allusions is of crucial importance form any comprehensive interpretation of Jordanes’ vision of Roman-Gothic history.

\textsuperscript{113} More on this in Part III below.
Part II – Jordanes and Virgil: Janus-Faced Allusiveness

Though he and his poetry did not enjoy quite the status and ubiquity that they had in earlier centuries in the Latin quarters of the empire, Virgil yet remained a potent cultural touchstone in the sixth-century east. The Zeuxippus Baths in Constantinople housed not only a statue of Virgil himself, but of figures from the Aeneid, namely Dares, Entellus, and Creusa – the latter of whom is uniquely associated with the Augustan poet. That the baths had likenesses of both the poet himself and his characters seems to indicate that Virgil was not seen merely as some distantly important pillar of Roman culture, but that the contents of his texts were still readily known.\(^\text{114}\) The early sixth-century Egyptian poet Christodorus of Coptos described Virgil as “the clear-voiced swan dear to the Italians, breathing eloquence, whom his native Echo of Tiber nourished to be another Homer.”\(^\text{115}\) Virgil is also one of the Roman authors most cited by John Lydus, for whom he is simply “the poet.”\(^\text{116}\) Malalas routinely adduced Virgil, and notably cites the scene from the Aeneid wherein the Battle of Actium is depicted on the shield of Aeneas.\(^\text{117}\) Even the legislation of the emperor Justinian declared that, “when ‘the poet’ is spoken of, without addition or qualification, the Greeks understand Homer, and we [Romans] understand Virgil.”\(^\text{118}\) It is clear that Virgil was widely read during the Justinianic period, and it should not be surprising that Jordanes knew him well. Given Virgil’s reputation, Jordanes expected that portions of his Constantinopolitan readership would be able to

\(^{\text{115}}\) Ibid.
\(^{\text{116}}\) John Lydus, De Magistribus 1.21
\(^{\text{117}}\) Malalas, Chronographia 9.10.
\(^{\text{118}}\) Institutes, 1.2.2.
pick up on his sometimes very subtle engagement with “the Mantuan.” It was Virgil’s perennial reputation as the Latin Homer, the bard of Rome’s hard-won origins, that Jordanes sought to channel in his own tale of the beginnings and travails of another, in his view, rather similar people.

The following section argues that Jordanes both cites Virgil explicitly and engages with the *Aeneid* intertextually at several points in the *Getica* and *Romana* for two distinct, though interrelated, reasons. On one level, the Virgilian allusions further Jordanes’ efforts to establish a connection between Goths and Romans by paralleling their respective experiences as proud warrior peoples who fought and endured much in their search for a new home. Yet these moments of intertextual discourse are also carefully designed to allude to the complex and often fraught nature of Roman-Gothic relations past and present. The resultant image which Jordanes presents is seemingly at odds with itself, but is meant to reflect the complicated realities of the sixth-century Roman-Gothic dynamic. That Roman armies were comprised of many Gothic troops and yet fought to destroy a Gothic state, or that a laudatory history of the Gothic people was written in the Roman style by a proud Goth who had served in the Roman military might, at first, seem incongruous, but is in fact revelatory of the changing political and demographic landscape of the late Roman world. Jordanes’ Virgilian allusions, which celebrate unity between Goths and Romans while pointing directly to their conflicts, likewise speak to these complexities.

The narrative of the *Getica* sees only some three hundred words before Virgil is mentioned by name and quoted. Virgil is also the first author whom Jordanes cites at all,

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119 Jordanes, *Getica* 43.
a fact made all the more notable in a text that adduces its sources explicitly and often, and far more openly than do the vast majority of classical and classicizing histories. The citation comes in the Getica’s geographic opening as the wildest and farthest reaches of the earth are described.\textsuperscript{120} Jordanes names Virgil as an authority on the island of Thule. In so doing, he makes clear at the very outset of a text whose subject matter is the Goths – a foreign, non-Roman people – that a Roman perceptual framework undergirds its narrative and themes. Jordanes utilizes Virgil, one might say the most quintessential of all Roman authors, to establish that his own understanding of the history and place of the Goths is informed by a quintessentially Roman understanding of the world and its peoples. And, more obliquely, before ever even mentioning the Goths or Romans by name, Jordanes uses the Virgilian reference within a Gothic history to establish early linkages between these two peoples – a theme that he continues to develop throughout the course of the Getica.

The second reference to Virgil appears amidst the Goths’ migration to Thrace and Moesia, where they are effectively classicized due to their their proximity to Greek culture. Here Jordanes makes the claim that “Mars, whom the fables of poets call the god of war, was reputed to have been born among [the Goths]. Hence Virgil says: ‘Father Gradivus rules the Getic fields.’”\textsuperscript{121} Jordanes’ regular efforts at stitching together the shared cultural strands between Goths and Romans are clearly on display here. He stops just short of claiming that the Roman god Mars was, in fact, a Goth. In any case, Jordanes

\textsuperscript{120} Jordanes, Getica 9; Virgil, Georgics 1.30.
\textsuperscript{121} Virgil, Aeneid 3.35; Jordanes, Getica 40-1, “Adeo ergo fuere laudati Gaetae, ut dudum Martem, quem poetarum fallacia deum belli pronuntiat, apud eos fuisse dicant exortum. Unde et Vergilius: ‘gradivumque patrem, Geticis qui praesidet arvis.’”

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then notes that “Mars has always been worshipped by the Goths” in order to illustrate that yet another commonality among Goths and Romans was a shared religion. Important, too, is the fact that this Virgilian reference comes at the same point in the text where Jordanes ‘makes official’ the Goths/Getae conflation (recall that before this point in the narrative only ‘Goths’ is used; after, ‘Goths’ and ‘Getae’ are used interchangeably). This conflation is essential for tying Gothic history to the classical and, ultimately, Roman past, and it is significant that Jordanes adduces Virgil to further strengthen this connection. Soon thereafter, Jordanes again cites Virgil by name and quotes the *Aeneid* to similar ends. Here, Jordanes employs Virgil to shore up the Goth’s classical pedigree by detailing the exploits of the Amazons, whom he argues were the husbands of the Goths. By this point in the *Getica*, it becomes increasingly apparent that Jordanes uses Virgil to classicize both the Goths themselves and the means of talking about Gothic history. The three explicit Virgilian references and quotations, all of which come in the early portions of the *Getica*, make clear that the epic poet is to be a recurring and important element in Jordanes’ text, and prompt the reader to look out for further connections.

While the above references are designed to draw only positive correspondences between Goths and Romans, there are several other Virgilian allusions in the *Getica* and *Romana* that yield a more nuanced assessment of both historic and contemporary Roman-Gothic relations. These complex allusions continue to establish commonalities and shared experiences, but also reveal tensions and point directly to the Gothic War in Italy that

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122 See Chapter Three.
continued to be waged as Jordanes wrote. Six such instances of intertextual dialogue are here discussed.

The invasion of the Huns is a turning point in the Getica. It interrupts the narrative flow of the Getica by dividing the history into discrete treatments of the Visigoths and Ostrogoths, and more broadly alters the thematic tones that characterize the first part of the text. The initial portion of the Getica (consisting of roughly half of the entire work) is largely a catalogue of migrations and battles spanning some 1,800 years of history. Battle after battle, however, one notes that the Goths never once lose. It is the coming of the Huns that marks their first defeat which, in turn, inaugurates further military losses and hardships when the Goths migrate into the Roman empire. This fundamentally changes the tenor of the Getica.

Jordanes alludes to Virgil at this turning point, though a brief summary of the surrounding narrative is needed for context. The Visigoths have just fled the Huns across the Danube and into Roman territory, having made an agreement with the Emperor Valens to settle and protect the borders of Moesia provided that they convert to (Arian) Christianity and subject themselves to Roman law. Soon however, “as is usual for a people not well rooted in a land, starvation and want were upon them,” and Fritigern, one of the Visigothic leaders, begs the local Roman commanders Lupicinus and Maximus to open a market so that the Goths might barter for food. The Romans decide to exploit the vulnerable refugees, and begin to sell dog carcasses and the flesh of unclean animals

124 Jordanes, Getica 131-2. For the primary ancient account of these events, see Ammianus Marcellinus, Res Gestae 31, who was likely Jordanes’ source here, so Mommsen (1882), xxxiii, 92 n.1; Giunta and Grillone (1991), 57-8; and Heather (1991), 35. For modern discussions of these events, see Wolfram (1988), ch. 3, and Heather (1991), ch. 4.
125 Jordanes, Getica 134.
at such exorbitant prices that the Goths are compelled to sell their own children into
Roman slavery to keep from starving. The Romans then invite Fritigern to a feast and
there treacherously attack the Gothic leader and his followers. Fritigern manages to
survive, slays his Roman assailants, and incites the Goths to rebel and seize the
surrounding lands. Shortly thereafter, the Goths impose a catastrophic defeat on Valens
and the Romans at the Battle of Adrianople in 378.

Let us now back up and look more closely at a single moment in this account. As
Jordanes narrates the exploitation of the Goths, he applies a line from the *Aeneid* to the
Romans’ “ravenous hunger for gold” (*auri sacra fames*).\(^{126}\) Mommsen noted this allusion
in his 1882 critical edition but made nothing of it. He quotes the Virgil in the footnotes
and never again mentions it. Likewise, later scholars paid no heed to the quotation The
line from the *Aeneid* was probably understood to be a small flourish by which Jordanes
demonstrated that he knew some Virgil. But even on a lexical level, the Virgil bears
directly on Jordanes’ narrative. When reading the Latin, the *fames* of the Romans for gold
immediately recalls the literal *fames* of the Goths – they are starving. Mierow translates
*fames* as ‘lust,’ thereby preventing the English reader from picking up on this nuance. But
there is more to the allusion than simply this.

In *Getica* 134, the Huns had invaded the Gothic homeland, defeated the Goths in
battle, and sent them fleeing in search of foreign lands to settle. Put more broadly, a
group of people have been driven from their home by an invading enemy and now, as
pitiful refugees, seek a new home in another land. This is also the theme of Virgil’s epic.
In *Aeneid* 3.57, the passage from which Jordanes lifted the allusion, Aeneas has just

concluded his account of the fall of Troy at the hands of the Achaeans (in Book 2) and continues to tell of his search for a new home in foreign lands after his flight from Troy. The two narrative contexts are thematically identical; and, on a more specific level, both events are linked by occurring in Thrace – the significance of which I will elaborate presently. One realizes that Jordanes is not simply quoting to quote, but is rather drawing a significant parallel between his narrative and that of the *Aeneid*, a parallel strengthened, as we have seen, by many specific points of contact. This is, in itself, an unrecognized literary strategy; but there is much more going on.

In the first lines of Book 3, Aeneas has just set off from Troy looking to found a new home for his followers. His first landfall and ultimately failed attempt at foundation is in Thrace. There, Aeneas prepares a sacrifice, but after uprooting some saplings to be burnt upon the altar, the wood begins to bleed and then speak. Aeneas learns that the young trees are inhabited by the soul of the Trojan Polydorus whom Priam had sent to Thrace with gold that was to be entrusted to the Thracian king. The treacherous king, however, betrayed the Trojans by allying himself with Agamemnon and then murdered Polydorus for the Trojan treasure. It is here, in the speech of Polydorus, that Virgil offers the verse later used by Jordanes. The ghost of Polydorus beseeches Aeneas not to settle on such cursed ground. Aeneas then gives a proper burial to his fallen comrade and departs from Thrace.

But what of Thrace? Recall that, via transference, Jordanes made the Gothic name synonymous with the Thracian one. Virgil himself seemingly gives credence to Jordanes’
project by likewise referring to Thracians and Getae interchangeably.\textsuperscript{127} It now becomes clear that Jordanes has employed the quotation from Virgil not only to associate the narratives of the two works, but to announce a more discreet textual relation by drawing from a portion of the \textit{Aeneid} that specifically pertains to Thracians and Getae – i.e., in his terms, Goths. This is careful literary craft. But the analysis can be pushed further still. The sacrifice that Aeneas offers to secure blessings for his intended new home is in vain. In this, one is reminded that the Goths had to sacrifice their children by selling them into slavery so that both they and their children might at least have some hope for a future. Also, the Thracian king’s betrayal of Polydorus in Virgil vividly recalls Lupicinus’ treachery toward Fritigern in Jordanes – only now the villains are Romans and their victims ‘Getae’. Finally, ‘fate’, as it were, permits neither Trojans nor Goths from settling in their new homes, but instead pushes them continuously onward until both, in their own ways, conquer Italy. In other words, the Virgilian intertext draws Jordanes’ reader’s gaze not only to the \textit{Aeneid}, but also forward in Gothic history to Alaric’s sack of Rome and to contemporary Gothic rule in Italy. It is clear that the immediate political context of 551, as the empire prepared to launch a new expeditionary force against the Goths, bore meaningfully on how Jordanes presents both Gothic history and current relations between Goths and Romans.

\textsuperscript{127} “Terrâ procul vastis colitur Mavortia campis
(Thraces arrant) acri quondam regnata Lycurgo…” \textit{Aeneid} 3.13-14.

“Multa movens animo nymphas venerabar agrestis
Gradivumque patrem, Geticis qui praesidet arvis,
rite secundarent visus omenque levarent.” \textit{Aeneid} 3.34-6.
The allusion is multifaceted, but works on two main levels. First, it ties the ancient history of Rome to that of the Goths by connecting the *Aeneid*, Rome’s tradition of its great migration, to the Gothic migrations of the *Getica*. Jordanes suggests that because they have endured and achieved the same things, Goths and Roman are cut from the same cloth. At this level, Roman-Gothic associations are entirely positive. Though, at another, interpretation of this dynamic becomes more ambiguous. One notes that, amidst all the parallelism that the intertext evokes, the allusion reverses the roles of the players. In the *Getica*, it is the Goths who come to Roman land (Thrace) and are betrayed by the Romans; whereas in the *Aeneid* it is the Trojans (namely, the future Romans) who come to Thracian (Gothic) land and learn of Thracian treachery toward a Trojan. Jordanes’ intentions in this reversal are more difficult to discern, though one cannot but raise an eyebrow at the context in which the Virgilian quotation arises. As Jordanes relates the Romans’ foul treatment of and treachery toward the Goths, he quotes a portion of the *Aeneid* where ‘Goths’ betray ‘Romans’.

One is immediately reminded of the episode discussed above wherein Romans “treacherously” (*dolose*) waylay Alaric’s Goths after promising them land in Gaul.\(^{128}\) In the Alaric account, the context of a land grant and subsequent betrayal lends itself to an association with Zeno’s grant of Italy to the Goths and Justinian’s ultimate invasion of the Italian Gothic kingdom. Because Stilicho’s aggression against the Goths is meant to evoke Justinian’s later aggression, one cannot help but conclude that Justinian’s invasion of Italy is also meant to be considered a betrayal. Similarly, the Virgilian allusion’s role reversals also violently pit Romans and Goths against each other. This not only resonates

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with the current sixth-century Gothic conflict, but also functions as a form of retribution against the Romans. This seems an inescapable conclusion. In precisely the same place where Jordanes narrates Roman betrayal of Goths, he embeds an allusion in which Goths betray Romans. It is a kind of literary comeuppance. Jordanes uses the *Aeneid*, perhaps Rome’s most famed literary achievement, as a means to undermine the Romans. In judging the significance of this barb, however, we must bear in mind the limitations of its scope. This was a very subtle, well hidden allusion to Virgil that would have gone unnoticed by all but the most sensitive and learned of readers. It should not be considered proof that Jordanes’ fundamental purposes for writing history were motivated by subversive, anti-Roman politics. This study has already discussed, and will continue discuss, the many instances in which Jordanes praises the accomplishments of Roman-Gothic partnership. Likewise, one must not forget that readers keen enough to spot this allusion would have realized that it was designed to strengthen ties between Goths and Romans as well. The analytical tensions inherent in this sort of intertextual discourse bespeak the political tensions that motivated Jordanes to write in the first place. They reflect the realities of the sometimes peaceful, sometimes hostile historical dynamic between Goths and Romans, and reveal Jordanes in the act of negotiating his own Gothic and Roman identities in a time of internecine conflict. Jordanes’ pride in both Gothic and Roman achievement is evident, but he does not shrink from voicing his dismay at specific failures of Roman rulership. His frustration with the actions of certain Roman leaders will continue to be developed in the following analysis of other Virgilian intertexts and in further episodes from the *Getica* and *Romana*. At the very least, though, this allusion and
accounts like the Alaric episode further challenge the notion that Jordanes was simply an unquestioning supporter of Justinian’s policies against the Goths.

The next instance of intertextual dialogue with Virgil also occurs within Jordanes’ account of the initial encounter between the Visigoths and Romans in the late 370s. Here, the linked narratives of the *Aeneid* and the *Getica* yield familiar results: connections between Goths and Romans are strengthened just as tensions dividing them are revealed. Virgil mentions the Getae only twice in his poem: first, in the episode from Book 3 just discussed as the Trojans make landfall in Thrace,\(^{129}\) and, second, in Book 7 when the Trojans finally reach Italy, establish relations with the Latins, and ultimately find themselves at war with them.\(^ {130}\) As above, Jordanes incorporates Virgil into the body of his own text to bear on its themes. First, a brief summary of the contents of *Aeneid* Book 7.

After arriving on the shores of Italy, Aeneas sends emissaries to Latinus, king of the Latins, to request a parcel of land upon which to found a city. Latinus possessed no male heir and had only a daughter, Lavinia, who was sought after by the leading men of the Latins. Turnus, the greatest among them, was the leading suitor, but a prophecy had instructed Latinus to promise his daughter to a foreign visitor. Latinus then grants land to the Trojans and offers his daughter’s hand to Aeneas. Juno, enraged at the looming prospect of peace at last for her hated Aeneas, calls upon the services of the fury Allecto to arouse strife and warlust among the Latins. Latinus’ wife Amata, who favors Turnus, is infected by Allecto with hatred for the Trojans, as is Turnus, and both clamor for war.

\(^{129}\) Virgil, *Aeneid* 3.35.
\(^{130}\) Virgil, *Aeneid* 7.604.
Their desires are fulfilled after Allecto coaxes Ascanius, Aeneas’ son, into killing a tame stag beloved by Latinus’ herdsmen. Enraged by the death of the animal, the Latin herdsmen attack the Trojans. After many of the herdsmen are killed, the Latins become infuriated and enjoin their king to open the Janusian gates of war, but Latinus refuses. Juno, however, grants their sanguine request, opens the portal, and throws the two peoples headlong into war.

To distill this, long-suffering refugees have come to foreign soil, ask its leader for land, and, upon receiving both land and promises of peace and cooperation, are betrayed and forced into armed conflict. This is the exact narrative context of the above discussed Visigothic entry into Roman land in 376. Fleeing the Huns, the Visigoths send “ambassadors into Romania to the Emperor Valens, brother of Valentinian, the elder Emperor, to say that if he would give them part of Thrace or Moesia to keep, they would submit themselves to his laws and commands.”131 Whereupon, “When Valens learned this, he gladly and promptly granted what he had himself intended to ask.”132 Latinus’ land grant to the Trojans recalls that of Valens to the Visigoths, just as Latin betrayal of the Trojans evokes Roman treachery toward the Visigoths. It is fitting, then, that it is at this point in the *Getica*’s narrative that Jordanes alludes to Virgil’s second reference to the Getae. In narrating the Latin declaration of war, Virgil describes the ancient practice of opening the gates of Janus. He begins, “There was a custom in Hesperian Latium,

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131 Jordanes, *Getica* 131, “Vesegothae, id est illi alii eorum socii et occidui soli cultores, metu parentum exterriti, quidnam de se propter gentem Huminorum deliberarent, ambigebant, duque cogitantes tandem communi placito legatos in Romania direxerunt ad Valentem imperatorem fratrem Valentiniani imperatoris senioris, ut, partem Thraciae sive Moesiae si illis traderet ad colendum, eius se legibus eiusque vivere imperiis subderentur.”

132 Jordanes, *Getica* 132, “Quod Valens comperto mox gratulabundus annuit, quod ultro petere voluisset,...”
which / the Alban cities always held sacred, as great Rome / does now, when they first
rouse Mars to battle, / whether they prepare to take sad war in their hands / to the Getae,
the Hyrcanians, or the Arabs…”133 Jordanes alludes to this passage in the climax of the
drama between the Romans and Visigoths in his description of the Battle of Adrianople.
It is but a few words: “…here a sad war took place and the Goths prevailed…”134 It is
particularly striking that the battle which would have been widely regarded as the most
significant historical encounter between Goths and Romans is recounted with so few
words. They were enough, however, to establish the link to Book 7 of the Aeneid. The
occurrence of lacrimabile bellum in both texts, in conjunction with the fact that, in the
Aeneid, it appears with the second (and only other) reference to the Getae, secures this as
an instance of intertextual discourse between Jordanes and Virgil.

This Latin phrase, however, has an even more complicated provenance which
lends further texture to Jordanes’ appropriation of it. To begin, the words also appear at
Romana 314. It is one of the very few occasions in which Jordanes reduplicates a turn of
phrase in both of his texts, so its appearance deserves careful consideration. In writing the
Romana, Jordanes had been using Jerome’s chronicle as his main source for events up
through the Battle of Adrianople, at which point Jerome’s text concludes. Jerome also

133 “Mos erat Hesperio in Latio, quem protinus urbes
Albanae coluere sacrum, nunc maxima rerum
Roma colit, cum prima mouent in proelia Martem,
siue Getis inferre manu lacrimabile bellum
Hyrcanisue Arabisue parant…” Aeneid 7.604.
have used Kline’s unpublished translation because his rendering of lacrimabile bellum is the most literal
translation I have encountered, and is thus most apt in illustrating the intertextuality between the Aeneid
and the Getica.
134 Jordanes, Getica 138, “…ubi lacrimabile bello commisso vincentibus Gothis…”
calls that battle a lacrimabile bellum.\textsuperscript{135} Given his close use of Jerome, it is certain that Jordanes would have known that the phrase appeared in his source material. Continuing on with the Romana, Jordanes then took up the Epitome de Caesaribus as his main source for a while. The Epitome likewise calls Adrianople a lacrimabili bello, and probably took the description directly from Jerome.\textsuperscript{136} Because Jordanes begins following the Epitome immediately after Jerome’s account of Adrianople, it is natural to assume that he would have noticed this phrasing within the Epitome as well. Further, Orosius, an author whom Jordanes cites by name and used extensively, also employs this exact phrase to describe Adrianople, and he, too, likely took the words from Jerome.\textsuperscript{137} Surely, Jordanes knew that this “sad war” also appeared in Orosius’ text.

Ultimately, Jordanes reproduces lacrimabile bellum in order to connect his own history to what seemingly had become a nearly two-centuries-old Roman historiographical tradition for talking about the Goths and Adrianople. The intertext with Virgil works along similar lines, but on a more expansive chronological scale by extending this association even further back in Rome’s literary tradition. And it is certain that Jordanes was consciously alluding to Virgil as well, and not simply lifting the words from Jerome, for a number of reasons: like other Virgilian intertexts, this allusion connects the broad narrative themes of the Aeneid and Getica: both are accounts of wondering warriors seeking a new home. Further, the proximity of the previously discussed auri sacra fames allusion, which also appears in relation to Adrianople,

\textsuperscript{135} Jerome, Chronicon 249c, A. Abr. 2395.
\textsuperscript{136} Epitome de Caesaribus 46.2.
\textsuperscript{137} Orosius, Seven Books of History Against the Pagans, 7.13; A. Fear, Orosius: Seven Books of History against the Pagans (Liverpool, 2010).
indicates that metatextual discourse with Virgil was very much a part of Jordanes’ craft. Likewise, the fact that *lacrimabile bellum* appears with the second, and only other, reference to the Getae in the *Aeneid* secures its connection to a text that is itself about the Getae/Goths. Finally, like the first instance of intertextuality discussed, this allusion is also designed to create – both within itself and between Goths and Romans – a palpable degree of thematic tension.

Here, again, Jordanes has decided to make an allusion to Virgil that celebrates the inherent similarities in the historical experiences of Goths and Romans at a point in both of his texts where Goths and Romans are at each other’s throats. More specifically, Jordanes alludes to a line from the *Aeneid* that looks forward to the future Roman conquest of the Getae, but does so through a line in his own history where it is the ‘Getae’ who have conquered the Romans at Adrianople. As already noted, this dissonance is carefully orchestrated, and is meant to underscore the complicated history of Roman-Gothic violence and cooperation, and seems certain to point to the contemporary Gothic War in Italy. But to what end? What is Jordanes actually saying about Goths and Romans and the Italian conflict? Are the allusions’ broad experiential parallels between Goths and Romans primarily ionic in design? Or are they more hostile, perhaps suggesting that, just as the Trojans/Romans ultimately defeated their enemies and conquered Italy, so, too, will the Goths triumph over the Romans who wronged them and maintain their rule over Italy?

It is exceedingly difficult to answer these questions when an author has gone to great lengths to make Gothic history, and the Goths themselves, look as Roman as
possible, but has also obliquely justified Gothic revenge against Roman wrongdoing, and
subverted a prophesy of Roman conquest by showing the Romans themselves being
conquered by the Goths. Perhaps, though, these sort of questions do not help us reach a
better understanding of Jordanes because they seek to reduce him to something that he
was probably not. The ambiguity of his thematic program is not something that needs to
be deciphered and streamlined, but something that is, in itself, exemplary of Jordanes’
intended meaning. In other words, it is hard to reconcile these conflicting themes because
the individual who wrote them seems to have been in a similarly conflicted state and
sought to convey this in his texts. The antagonistic and vindictive strains are as vital to
the Getica and Romana as those which promote Roman-Gothic unity. Other Virgilian
intertexts provide further evidence of these polarities.

The next allusion to Virgil in the Getica is only a few hundred words away, and
comes as Jordanes narrates the peace treaty of 382 and how the emperor Theodosius
invites the Gothic king Athanaric to Constantinople and lavishes him with gifts. Jordanes
tells us that Athanaric marveled at the city, “turning his eyes hither and thither.”\footnote{Jordanes, Getica 143, “…huc illuc oculos volvens…”; Virgil, Aeneid 4.363, “…huc illuc volvens oculos…”} This is
a word-for-word borrowing from the Aeneid. In marked contrast to the happy and
celebratory moment in the Getica, this portion of the Aeneid is among that poem’s most
bitterly tense and hostile. Aeneas, duty-bound to found the Roman people, has just
concluded his long speech explaining to Dido that he must leave her forever and sail for
Italy. As Aeneas finishes, there is a brief moment of silence; Dido’s eyes dart about
frantically before she bursts forth in a rage at her lover. The tone and subject matter of
these portions of the *Getica* and *Aeneid* are entirely opposed. In one, a relationship is just beginning, in the other, one is ending. One celebrates peace, unity, and common interest, the other is characterized by acrimony, resentment, and, again, betrayal. The embedded allusion does not necessarily negate Jordanes’ positive sentiments about the Roman-Gothic peace, but the reader who recognized the Virgil would realize that such peace was being presented in counterbalance with hostility.

Further, the cause of Aeneas’ and Dido’s rift – Italy – bears on the *Getica*’s immediate political context. Aeneas’ course for Italy mirrors the Italian trajectory of Gothic migration, and, in one sense, this furthers Jordanes’ efforts at conjoining the Roman-Gothic historical experience, though, in another, it also raises questions about who has the rightful claim to Italy. After all, the *Aeneid* is about the Roman destiny to rule Italy – and an empire – and, more immediately, Justinian had recently reinvigorated those Roman designs to empire, and indeed Italy. These claims stand in contradistinction to those of the sixth-century Goths who also claimed Italy in part by right of their agreement with the emperors Zeno and Anastasius. This disparity was the crux of the sixteen-year-old Gothic War – a war that was being indirectly alluded to in a portion of the *Getica* that extolled peace between Goths and Romans. Is this cynical? Does Jordanes suggest that all past Roman-Gothic friendship was meaningless and destined to fall apart? Or is the 382 treaty meant to serve as a kind of prescriptive solution to the current conflict? It is difficult to say. Again, these tensions and ambiguities likely reflect both the purposeful design of Jordanes’ historiographical project and his own embattled political and ethnic identities.
Similar themes are explored in a portion of the *Getica* in which the Gothic king Thiudimer and his son Theodoric (the future king of Italy) are raiding in the Balkans in the late 470s. Among other cities, they capture Ulpiana, Castrum Herculis, Naissus, and “several places of Illyricum.”\(^{139}\) The besieged Romans eventually establish peace with the Goths by offering them a number of Balkan territories, whereupon the Goths “consented to peace and became quiet.”\(^{140}\) These words are lifted from an early episode in the *Aeneid* in which Venus beseeches Jupiter to provide Aeneas safe passage to Italy. She mentions that the Trojan Antenor escaped Troy and had sought a new home in “Illyrian coves” and “the Liburnians’ inland kingdoms” before founding Padua in Italy where he settled down in peace.\(^{141}\) The Virgil connects to the *Getica* on a few different levels. The narrative surrounding the intertext in the *Aeneid* reveals a specific geographic correspondence to this portion of the *Getica*: the action in both texts takes place in Illyria. Again, Jordanes links the past experiences of Goths and Romans. In showing that Goths and Trojans both sought settlements in Illyria, Jordanes attempts to make the Goths, current enemies of the Roman state, relatable to a Roman readership. Though, yet again, the mention of Italy in this portion of the *Aeneid* intensifies the resonance of the intertext. Just as Antenor settles in Italy, Jordanes’ reader would be reminded of Theodoric’s settlement in Italy, an action that is narrated on the very next page of the *Getica*, and which ultimately leads to the Gothic War. Trojans and Goths ‘settling down in peace’ stands in marked contrast to the ongoing war in Italy in 551. Like the *volvens occulos*\(^{142}\)
allusion, here, too, an episode of Roman-Gothic peace obliquely recalls the current conflict in Italy. The seemingly perpetual tides of war and peace between Goths and Romans is again laid bare.

Jordanes offers the final Virgilian allusion to be discussed in this study, again, in the context of Gothic despoliation. Here, during the reign of Gallienus, the Goths cross the Hellespont and pillage the cities of Asia, including Chalcedon, which “even today, though it is happily situated near the royal city, still shows some traces of its ruin as a witness to posterity.”¹⁴² The Goths even “sack Troy and Ilium on the way. These cities, which had scarce recovered a little from the famous war with Agamemnon, were thus destroyed anew by the hostile sword.”¹⁴³ The Goths then re-cross the Hellespont “laden with booty and spoil.”¹⁴⁴ These were originally Virgil’s words. In the Aeneid, the Trojans Nisus and Euryalus had just snuck into an enemy camp and killed a number of Latins and Rutulians in their sleep before they themselves are spotted and cut down. The bodies of the Trojans, now “the booty and spoil” of the Rutulians, are decapitated, their heads affixed on spears, and paraded in front of the Trojans.

Violence against Romans in the Getica here alludes to further violence against Romans in the Aeneid. The implications of this section, especially in conjunction with the tensions of the intertext, are seemingly entirely hostile to the Romans. Jordanes’ reference to the damage done to Chalcedon, located in the shadow of the imperial capital,

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¹⁴² Jordanes, Getica 107, “Partibusque Bithiniae delati Chalcedonam subverterunt, quam post Cornelius Abitus aliqua parte reparavit, quae hodieque, quamvis regiae urbis vicinitate congadeat, signa tamen ruinarum suarum aliquanta ad indicium retinet posteritatis.”
¹⁴³ Jordanes, Getica 108, “…vastantes itinere suo Troiam Iliumque, quae vix a bello illo Agamemnoniaco quantulum se reparantes rursus hostili mucrone deletae sunt.
¹⁴⁴ Jordanes, Getica 108, “…praedas spoliaque potiti…”; Virgil, Aeneid 9.450, “…praeda Rutuli spoliisque potiti…”
combined with an explicit reference to contemporary times, seems to be a ‘shot off the
bow’ of sorts – a reminder of the potential danger of the Goths to those currently at war
with them. Further violence is done to Romans on both literal and symbolic levels as the
Goths assault Troy, a current part of the empire and the primordial origin place of the
Romans. Indeed the Goths’ naval invasion of Roman territories and the sacking of
Rome’s ancestral home find parallels with the current Roman naval invasion of Gothic
Italy. Is this another instance of literary retribution? And just as geographic correlations
strengthened intertextual connections in the above allusions, here, the mention of Troy
more fully secures this as an allusion to Virgil’s epic. The associations of this intertext
are wholly antagonistic: plunder stripped violently from the heart of the Roman empire is
likened to the bodies of Roman ancestors that had been defiled and treated as trophies. It
is hard to find anything redeeming in this, or anything that draws positive connections
between Goths and Romans as the other allusions do. One must look to the narrative that
surrounds this episode in the Getica. Just a few lines prior to the Goths’ invasion of Asia,
Jordanes notes that the emperors Gallus and Volusianus “reigned amid universal peace
and favor” not least because “they made a treaty with the race of the Goths.145 And
immediately following the Goths’ raiding in Asia, “they were summoned at the request of
the emperor Maximian to aid the Romans against the Parthains. They fought for him
faithfully, serving as auxiliaries.”146 And a few lines after this, the Goths are shown
fighting for Constantine, “which enabled him to build the famous city that is named after

145 Jordanes, Getica 106.
146 Jordanes, Getica 110.
him.”¹⁴⁷ Peace and cooperation between Goths and Romans, therefore, bookend either side of an account of violence between them, and the intertext embedded in that account, though harsher than other Virgilian allusions, ultimately fits within the Getica’s thematic ebb and flow of Roman-Gothic hostility and unity.

In the final analysis, Jordanes’ Virgilian allusions must be understood as being at odds with themselves, and intentionally so. They attempt to associate the Goths – foreigners, barbarians, and current enemies of the Roman empire – with the most fundamental ways in which Romans viewed themselves and their own history. Jordanes imbues the story of the Goths with more than a tinge of Greco-Roman epic, and through their struggles, battles, and wanderings, the Goths become like the Romans of old. The allusions serve an integral part in Jordanes’ classicization of the Gothic past, and reinforce his primary purpose for writing: to create a Roman-Gothic history. These same allusions, however, also function as literary acts of violence and retribution against Romans, and turn moments of peace between Goths and Romans in the Getica into inverted windows to the their contemporary conflict. Ultimately, this intertextuality is indicative of the sort of thematic duality that, on a larger scale, separates the Getica and Romana – one a work of optimism and hope, the other cynical and full of dread. The complex portrait of Roman-Gothic relations that emerges from these texts is surely a refracted image of Jordanes’ own complicated experience as a Roman Goth living in a time and place where the word Goth could mean Roman citizen or enemy of Rome. Jordanes’ pride in the achievements of Roman-Gothic cooperation is real, and the lengths to which he goes to embellish and even fabricate their accomplishments represent a

¹⁴⁷ Jordanes, Getica 112.
genuine conviction about the virtue of this partnership. But his displeasure at what he sees as Roman wrongdoing against the Goths, and his angst about the current Gothic War are just as real. These opposing themes of harmony and discord persist into Jordanes’ treatment of recent and contemporary history, to which this study now turns.

**Part III – Hope and Tragedy: Goths and Romans in the Modern Empire**

This chapter has dealt predominantly with Jordanes’ depiction of Goths and Romans in the distant past. In this final section, discussion will turn to events that fell within Jordanes own lifetime or just before.\(^{148}\) This study has argued that the entire schematization for his texts was shaped by the gravity of current events, and an analysis of Jordanes’ portrayal of recent times will further contextualize him as a voice in the wider discourse concerning the ‘Gothic question’, and as a source for the Gothic War, for which he has been almost entirely neglected despite being one of our very few contemporary commentators on that conflict. In fact, Jordanes is one of perhaps just three historians from this period who continued their narratives up to the moment of their writing, and who actually commented on Justinian during his reign. There is no reason that Jordanes should not be considered an indispensible resource for the Justinianic Age.

Due largely to their peculiarity of content and form, Jordanes’ texts have long been treated in isolation from other more easily catagorizable works, with the result that the *Getica* and *Romana* have yet to be fully integrated into their contemporary literary and political milieu. Repositioning these writings within a mid-sixth-century context is essential for understanding not only their purpose and meaning, but also their socio-

\(^{148}\) Late fifth to mid-sixth century.
political resonance. Jordanes was making a pointed intervention in an eminently relevant
debate about the Goths, the history of Roman-Gothic relations, and, most importantly, a
devastating, two-decades long war that showed no signs of ending. He invents a new
conception of Gothic history, one which legitimizes the Goths as a praiseworthy, classical
people, and ties the Roman and Gothic pasts together. Yet, in the process of celebrating
the Goths and their age-old partnership with the Romans, Jordanes also makes clear that
the empire’s current failure to foster that historic relationship was contributing
significantly to Roman decline. This was indeed an ambitious historiographical project,
and one with many points of contact with the current discourse on the ‘Gothic question.’

It was also a potentially contentious line of inquiry on a number of levels: it
challenged deeply-ingrained Roman assumptions about the inherent barbarity of the
Goths, extolled past Roman-Gothic unity despite their current conflict, and spoke openly
about imperial decline. At every level, these ideas countered the carefully articulated
message of the imperial administration, as a number of Justinian’s laws and the court-
influenced chronicles of Malalas and Count Marcellinus (and his continuator, argued
below) demonstrate.149 And there were other concurrent voices that did not espouse the
emperor’s ideology: Cassiodorus and Procopius praised the integrity and Romanity of
Gothic rule in Italy, while the latter hurled barbs against the efficacy of Justinian’s Gothic
War and against the emperor’s reign and character more generally. The Anonymus
Valesianus and earlier portions of the Liber Pontificalis reveal a positive vision of Gothic
rulership unaffected by any imperial message, though later entries of the Liber, probably
written during the war, toe Justinian’s line and demonstrate the gravity of imperial

149 See Chapter Four.
propaganda about the Goths and the force with which it was disseminated in Constantinople and abroad. The quantity of surviving sixth-century sources attesting to this Gothic discourse is decidedly rich, and bespeaks an even broader political and conversational relevance among contemporaries that is no longer historically visible. Who were the Goths? What was their place in history and in the present Roman world? Why was the current Gothic War being fought? These were the questions that thinking people were asking in this period, and Jordanes contributed to this vigorous and polemically charged pan-Mediterranean discourse in no small way.

It is doubtless that the Gothic War moved Jordanes to write. All revisionist scholars who grant him some degree of autonomy would concur with this. They would also recognize that Jordanes praises the Goths and classicizes the Gothic past. They, however, ultimately hold that the war prompted Jordanes to write about Goths and Romans in order to justify that same war and to celebrate Justinian’s destruction of Gothic Italy. This study has argued that Jordanes’ elaborate and unprecedented endeavor to Romanize Gothic history and the Goths themselves was meant to challenge and reconcile contemporary perceptions of Gothicness and Romanness in order to promote the military and political reconciliation of Goths and Romans in a time of war. This position will here be additionally substantiated through an analysis of Jordanes’ continued celebration of Roman-Gothic unity in the figure of Theoderic and in the “hope to both peoples” occasioned by the marriage of the foremost families of Goths and Romans. Moreover, pro-Justinian interpretations are further challenged by pronounced jeremiadic elements, especially in the Romana, that lament a decaying empire whose

150 Jordanes, Getica 314.
wretched state is attributed to the failures of Roman rulers – almost certainly including Justinian himself. The resultant image of Jordanes’ corpus is of two texts which extol the union of Goths and Romans in the face of an imperial policy to eradicate the Goths, and which describe a moribund empire while the emperor was proclaiming its revival. Such works cannot be said to be motivated primarily by Justinianic partisanship. Careful consideration of Jordanes’ treatment of recent and contemporary history reveals an even clearer and more emphatic articulation of the themes that this study has already identified.

One such overriding theme has been the Romanization of things Gothic coupled with Jordanes’ unqualified approval of this cultural fusion. The figure of Theoderic is, in both the Getica and Romana, the embodiment of this thematic strain. The previous chapter has already demonstrated that Theoderic was a crucially important node around which debates were held about the nature of the Goths and the legitimacy of the Gothic state. Those associated with the imperial regime described Theoderic as a dangerous and grasping barbarian tyrant, others praised his reign while impugning his Arian heresy, and still others portrayed him as a stalwart defender of the Roman order who ruled by Roman mandate. Both the range and multiplicity of these contemporary opinions attest the importance of their subject for sixth-century Romans. Jordanes would have been fully aware of the ideological gravity that the idea of Theoderic had accrued, and we should read his discussions of the famous Gothic king against the wider polemical discourse.
In both the *Getica* and *Romana* Theoderic is described in strikingly positive terms. He enters the historical narrative having been born “a child of good hope.” Possible messianic associations and connections to Virgil’s *Fourth Eclogue* aside, an analysis of Theoderic’s entire career reveals that this ‘hope’ refers to his capacity to unite Goth and Roman, and is meant to accord directly with the “hope to both peoples” engendered by the later marriage of Germanus and Matasuntha. Theoderic spends his childhood as a hostage in Constantinople “so that peace between Romans and Goths might thus be assured.” Upon gaining the kingship, he is invited to the capital by the emperor Zeno and awarded with titles and honors. Almost all of Theoderic’s tenure in the Balkans goes unmentioned, and his conflicts with the empire, most notably his devastation of Thrace in 486 and his march on Constantinople a year later, are conspicuously absent. These accounts do, however, appear in Count Marcellinus’ chronicle. This is of note because, prior to its treatment of Theoderic, the *Romana* had been closely following Marcellinus, or perhaps a common source, and so Jordanes would have been aware of these entries, but suppressed them. Imperial clashes with the Goths

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151 Contra Goffart (1988), 67-8 who, holds that Jordanes paints Theoderic as “an authentically untrustworthy barbarian.”
152 Jordanes, *Getica* 269, “Ipso si quidem die Theodoricus eius filius, quamvis de Erelieva concubina, bonae tamen spei puerosus natus erat.”
153 Eusebius is the first known author to associate Christ with the subject of Virgil’s poem in his *Oratio de Laudibus Constantini*.
156 Theoderic is given a triumph and made consul ordinary (*Get*. 289; *Rom*. 348), elevated to the rank of *magister militum* (*Rom*. 348), adopted as Zeno’s son-at-arms, and presented with an equestrian statue set before the royal palace (*Get*. 289).
158 It is ultimately unclear if Jordanes was following Marcellinus or if they both drew from a common source. D. Bartoňková, ‘Marcellinus Comes and Jordanes’s *Romana*, *Sborník Prací Filosofické Fakulty*
were surely well documented in Constantinople, and Jordanes’ decision not to report them reflects his desire to present relations between Theoderic and the empire in almost entirely peaceful terms.159

This irenic impulse also colors Jordanes’ depiction of Theoderic’s arrangement with Zeno to gain control of Italy. Interpreting the conditions whereby Italy came to be under Theoderic’s rule would later become an immensely important ideological pivot point in discussions about the legitimacy of Theoderic and Gothic Italy. From the vantage point of the year 551, one’s opinion about the Goths’ claim to Italy and the Romans’ war to wrest it from them would have certainly been influenced if one thought that Zeno had, say, officially granted Theoderic and his heirs perpetual kingship in Italy, or, conversely, if one believed that Theoderic had illicitly seized Italy without imperial approbation. There was much at stake politically in the interpretation of these events, and, not at all surprisingly, various versions were recorded.160 The volatility of this subject matter became grist to the mill of historical revisionism. Count Marcellinus and Malalas, whose chronicles were colored by imperial propaganda, both mention Theoderic’s seizure of Italy, but state that he acted on his own, and never suggest that it had been approved by

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159 Noteworthy, too, is Jordanes’ silence about Theoderic’s military support of Zeno against Illus. This Roman-Gothic alliance might seem ripe for Jordanes’ picking, but its absence is perhaps explainable. John of Antioch, *frag.* 214.4-6 reports that Theoderic was recalled during the conflict because Zeno began to question his loyalty. This led to a breakdown in relations between the two men, and Theoderic raided Thrace the following year. Mutual mistrust, then, seems to have been a primary reason for Theoderic’s exodus to Italy. It is understandable that Jordanes would remain silent about the strain which the Illus conflict placed on Theoderic’s and Zeno’s relationship.

160 Modern scholars do not recognize a single, authoritative account.
Zeno.\textsuperscript{161} Both authors also portray Theoderic as a murderous and untrustworthy barbarian. Differently, the Anonymus Valesianus and Procopius, authors who stood outside the influence of imperial ideology, claim that it was Zeno’s idea to send Theoderic westward.\textsuperscript{162} These writers praise Theoderic and his preservation of the Roman order.\textsuperscript{163} The influence of political ideology on historical interpretation is evident.

Jordanes’ offers two slightly different accounts of these events in his two texts, but both are designed to convey that friendship between Goths and Romans stood at the core of Theoderic’s move to Italy. In one sentence in the Romana, Zeno showers Theoderic with gifts, and in the next he wishes “to entrust [Italy] to Theoderic, as though to one already his own client,” because he would rather that he rule there than Odoacer.\textsuperscript{164} Zeno then orders (mandans) Theoderic to Italy and “committed the Roman people and the senate to his care.”\textsuperscript{165} In the Getica, while Theoderic is enjoying the comforts of the imperial capital he learns of growing discontent among his Goths, and delivers the following address to Zeno:

‘Though I lack nothing in serving your empire, yet if your piety deem it worthy, be pleased to hear the desire of my heart.’ And when as usual he had been granted permission to speak freely, he said: ‘The western country, long ago governed by the rule of your ancestors and predecessors, and that city which was the head and mistress of the world,—wherefore is it now shaken by the tyranny of the Torcilingi and the Rugi? Send me there with my race. Thus if you but say the word, you may be freed from the burden of expense here, and, if by the Lord’s help I shall conquer, the fame of your piety shall be

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{161} Count Marcellinus, Chronicle s.a. 489, “Theoderic, king of the Goths, occupied Italy as he desired.”
  \item \textsuperscript{162} Anonymus Valesianus 49; Procopius, Wars 5.1.10-11.
  \item \textsuperscript{163} Other accounts: Ennodius, Panegyricus dictus Theoderico 6.25; Evagrius, HE 3.27; Theophanes AM 5977; John of Nikiu, Chronicle 115; Fredegar, Chronicle 2.5.7.
  \item \textsuperscript{164} Jordanes, Romana 348, “Sed quia tunc, ut diximus, Odoacer regnum Italiae occupasset, Zenon imperator cernens iam gentes illam patriam possidere, maluit Theodoricum ac si proprio iam clienti eam committi quam illi quem nec noverat.”
  \item \textsuperscript{165} Ibid., “Secumque ita deliberans, ad partes eum Italiae mandans, Romanum illi populum senatumque commendat.”
\end{itemize}
glorious there. For it is better that I, your servant and your son, should rule that kingdom,
receiving it as a gift from you if I conquer, than that one whom you do not recognize
should oppress your senate with his tyrannical yoke and a part of the republic with
slavery. For if I prevail, I shall retain it as your grant and gift; if I am conquered, your
piety will lose nothing--nay, as I have said, it will save the expense I now entail.’
Although the emperor was grieved that he should go, yet when he heard this he granted
what Theodoric asked, for he was unwilling to cause him sorrow. He sent him forth
enriched by great gifts and commended to his charge the senate and the Roman people.166

Different than the Romana, the Getica makes the Italian conquest Theoderic’s idea. This
is usually noted as further proof of Jordanes’ inconsistency and unreliability as an
historian. On one level, this is of course true; Jordanes’ texts, if viewed as a collection of
facts, are terribly unreliable. Yet they were never meant to function as such. Historical
inaccuracies and pure fictions spill forth from these works at such a rate that it is wrong
to think that they were ever meant to be taken as ‘factual’. Jordanes texts do, however,
maintain an ideological consistency, and the Zeno-Theoderic agreement is no exception.

Modern historians who approach Jordanes with their own specific demands (just whose
idea was it for Theoderic to conquer Italy? What were the precise terms of the
arrangement?) have disregarded the internal logic that reconciles the two accounts: both
are designed foremost to convey the spirit of friendship and cooperation that motivated
the decision. Zeno “entrusts” the Roman homeland and its people to Theoderic, his
“client” and “servant and son”; Italy is a “gift” to Theoderic that is to be conquered for

166 Jordanes, Getica 290-2, "‘Quamvis nihil deest nobis imperio vestro famulantibus, tamen, si dignum
ducit pietas vestra, desiderium mei cordis libenter exaudiat.’ Cumque ei, ut solebat, familiariter facultas
fuisset loquendi concessa: 'Hesperia, iniquid, plaga, quae dudum decessorum prodecessorumque vestrorum
regimine gubernata est, et urbs illa caput orbis et domina quare nunc sub regis Thorcilingorum
Rogorumque tyrannide fluctuatur? Dirige me cum gente mea, si praecepis, ut hic expensarum pondere
careas et ibi, si adiutus a domino vicero, fama vestrae pietatis inradiet. Expedit namque, ut ego, qui sum
servus vester et filius, si vicero, vobis donantis regnum illud possedam: haut ille, quem non nostis,
tyranico iugo senatum vestrum partemque rei publicae captivitatis servitio premit. Ego enim si vicero,
vestro dono vестroque munere possedebo; si victus fero, vestra pietas nihil amittit, immo, ut diximus,
lucratur expensas.’ Quo audito quamvis egrae ferret imperator diessum eius, nolens tamen eum contristare
annuit quae poscebat, magnisque ditatum muneribus dimisit a se, senatum populumque ei commendans
Romanum.”
the “glory” of the emperor; Zeno is saddened by the prospect of no longer having his friend near him, but acquiesces out of his affection for Theoderic. Finally, the fact that each text claims that the Italian conquest was the other leader’s idea implies that the decision was essentially mutual. And, ironically enough, this was probably pretty close to the reality. Certainly both men had something to gain from the undertaking: Zeno would be rid of a powerful and rebellious rival without the cost of a war, and Theoderic stood to gain his own kingdom while avoiding the dangers of challenging the Roman emperor.\footnote{Heather (1991), 305-8.}

Jordanes’ celebration of Roman-Gothic unity achieves even clearer expression in his account of Theoderic’s reign in Italy. Theoderic’s rulership is specifically characterized as both Gothic and Roman. He is described as being, at once, “\textit{rex gentium et consul Romanus.”}\footnote{Jordanes, \textit{Romana} 349.} Following the advice of the emperor Zeno, “he laid aside the garb of a private citizen and the dress of his race and assumed a costume with a royal mantle, as he had now become the ruler over both Goths and Romans.”\footnote{Jordanes, \textit{Getica} 295, “… privatum abitum suaeque gentis vestitum seponens insigne regio amictu, quasi iam Gothorum Romanorumque regnator.”} In this, Jordanes suggests that Theoderic avoided outward identification with either people, but clothed himself in such a way as to signify his connection to all his subjects. He becomes a synthesis of Goth and Roman. And as king of both Goths and Romans, “he wisely and peacefully maintained the kingship of his own tribe and the principate of the Roman people for thirty years.”\footnote{Jordanes, \textit{Romana} 349, “… regnum gentis sui et Romani populi principatum prudenter et pacifice per triginta annos continuit.”} On his deathbed, “as though uttering his last will and testament, Theoderic adjured and commanded them to honor their king, to love the senate.
and the Roman people, and to make sure of the peace and good will of the emperor of the east, as next after God.”171 There is in Jordanes’ treatment of Gothic Italy the implication that Theoderic’s reign laid the foundation for an ideal state of coexistence between Goths and Romans. It is evident that Jordanes approves of this society in which Goths and Romans live at peace with one another and, crucially, with the Roman emperor. Given the political context in which this characterization was written, it is impossible not to compare Jordanes’ admiration for Theoderic’s Italy with the shattered state of Roman-Gothic relations at midcentury. Jordanes’ vision of the peaceful state of coexistence between Goths and Roman in the time of Theoderic must be understood as a recommendation for such peace in the present day.172

A few paragraphs later, at the very end of the Getica’s narrative, Jordanes, in a sense, manufactures this peace. A swift and seamless summary of events from the Roman invasion of Italy in 535 to Gothic capitulation in 540 rounds off the Getica. It is a brief enumeration of Roman victories. The Goths never win an encounter. Witiges surrenders and then Jordanes concludes the body of his text with these words:

171 Jordanes, Getica 304, “… eisque in mandatis ac si testamentali voce denuntians, ut regem coherent, senatum populumque Romanum amarent principemque Orientalem placatam semper propitiumque haberent post deum.”

172 Also of note is that neither of Jordanes’ texts mention Boethius or Gothic Arianism in relation to the reign of Theoderic. The previous chapter illustrated that even authors otherwise sympathetic to Theoderic considered the execution of Boethius to be an irredeemable crime, and Bjornlie (2013), 147-59 has shown that the execution became a polemical touchstone among contemporaries debating the memory of Theoderic and the Gothic state. Boethius’ absence from Jordanes’ texts is glaring, but easily explainable. Jordanes sought to sidestep a profoundly contentious issue, and perhaps the most significant blight on Theoderic’s reputation, in order to portray the Gothic king as positively as possible. His silence about Gothic Arianism is similarly understandable. Jordanes, engaged in writing texts meant to ameliorate Roman perceptions of Gothicness, would not have wanted to draw attention to essential religious difference between Goths and Romans. One imagines, though, that if Jordanes, whom all recognize was vehemently anti-Arian, were actually clamoring for the destruction of the Goths, he would have likely leveled an attack against their heresy.
And thus a famous kingdom and most valiant race, which had long held sway, was at last overcome in almost its two thousand and thirtieth year by that conqueror of many nations, the emperor Justinian, through his most faithful consul Belisarius. He gave Witiges the title of patrician and took him to Constantinople, where he dwelt for more than two years, bound by ties of affection to the emperor, and then departed this life. But his consort Matasuntha was bestowed by the emperor upon the patrician Germanus, his cousin. And of them was born a son (also called Germanus) after the death of his father Germanus. This union of the race of the Anicii with the stock of the Amali gives hope to both peoples, under the Lord's favor.\textsuperscript{173}

There is much of importance here. Jordanes terminates his narrative at 540 with the explicit claim that Gothic War was over and that the Romans had conquered the Goths. He then jumps ahead ten years and records the marriage of Germanus and Matasuntha of probably 549 or 550, the birth of their son sometime after July 550, and then the death of Germanus in the fall of that year.\textsuperscript{174} The war, of course, had not ended in 540. That Jordanes, writing in the 551, makes the bogus claim that the conflict was over while all contemporary readers would have known otherwise is striking and demands careful consideration. And, to boot, Jordanes published another work of history at the exact same time that documents the decade of war that his other text ignores. Absolutely nothing like this survives in the ancient literary record. It is both a testament to the formalistic inventiveness of Jordanes and an essential thematic element illustrative of the tonal polarities which characterize the \emph{Getica}\textsc{’s} relationship to the \emph{Romana}.

Jordanes presents the ending in this way order to culminate his largely invented Roman-Gothic history with one final articulation of peace and unity between Goths and


\textsuperscript{174} For the dating schema, see Croke (2005), here 494.
Romans. With their war concluded and a marriage uniting them, there would now be “hope” for a shared future. The definitiveness of it, the marking of the termination of the Gothic kingdom at exactly 2,030 years seems like the articulation of a counterfactual history – a Roman-Gothic history that might have been. There is no mention that Germanus was to lead an army against the Goths, none of the failures of Belisarius’ second campaign, no hint of Totila’s continued resistance. All of this, though, was so obviously inaccurate that no reader in 551 could have thought that Jordanes simply got his facts wrong. Instead, readers would have known that they were being asked to consider the thematic significance of this alternative version of the recent past. It would have become clear that the ‘end’ of the Gothic War and the marriage of Germanus and Matasuntha, though separated by ten years, were combined to function as a final celebration of Roman-Gothic unification and peace. It is a culminating moment, and one to which Jordanes had been looking forward: he had already mentioned the nuptials twice before in the Getica and does so again in the Romana.\textsuperscript{175} The frequency with which the marriage and the birth of Germanus appear in his texts reveals their thematic significance.

These arguments run contrary to those that make Jordanes an unwavering supporter of Justinian’s war against the Goths. Those studies interpret this final episode as a celebration of the defeat of the Goths and attribute little to no importance to the union of Germanus and Matasuntha and the birth of their child.\textsuperscript{176} This in unconvincing.

\textsuperscript{175} Jordanes, Getica 81, 251; Romana 383.

\textsuperscript{176} Croke (1987), 132-3 argues that the marriage is not meant to represent the symbolic union of Goths and Romans, but only the literal union of the royal Amal and Anicius families. “Its position in the Getica is significant, not because it represents the culmination of a doctrine of reconciliation inherent in the work as a whole, but for the more prosaic reason that it is simply the last significant even to have taken place before the Getica was written… It is a nice personal touch on Jordanes’ part, nothing more.” Heather (1991), 44 also thinks that the marriage refers only to the union of two dynasties, and holds that a “doctrine of
Jordanes’ language does not celebrate Roman victory. If anything, it celebrates the Goths themselves – “that famous kingdom and most valiant race” – and their close ties to Rome – their king is “bound by ties of affection to the emperor.” More important than the commemoration of Gothic greatness, though, is the announcement of the marriage and birth of the child. Jordanes meant for this child to represent a glimmer of hope; a chance for rapprochement in his own time. In this, Jordanes reveals that his alternate past was very much intended to bear on the politics of the present. It has been suggested that Jordanes could not have granted the marriage any real measure of importance because of the cynical politics that motivated it: it was designed to exploit the Goths’ loyalties to the house of Theoderic and to undermine their will to fight.\textsuperscript{177} It is true that Jordanes would have been aware of these machinations, but given the \textit{Getica’s} well-established program of praise for Roman-Gothic unity, it is perfectly consistent that he would have hoped for exactly this sort of cessation of hostilities, even if it meant the surrender of the Goths.\textsuperscript{178}

\textsuperscript{178} Jordanes was not the only one to place hope in the generalship of Germanus and his union with the house of Theoderic. D. Bradley, ‘The Composition of the \textit{Getica}, \textit{Eranos} vol. 64 (1966), 67-79, here 70 argues that a great many of the inhabitants of Italy – both Gothic and Roman – would have seen in Germanus “promise of a more benevolent regime. Goths who has been persuaded of the wisdom of Theoderic’s policies could take hope both from the marriage and from the reputation of the family with which the imperial general was connected, Romans could feel satisfaction at the family ties which ensured powerful representation at Constantinople.” Likewise, Bury (1923), vol.2, 255 argued that the death of Germanus caused “the destruction of the hopes which were swaying opinion in Italy both among Italians and Goths.” In the original installment of his \textit{Gothic War}, which carried the narrative to 550, Procopius states that Germanus “hoped” (ἦλπιζε) that his marriage to Matasuntha would weaken Gothic resolve (\textit{Wars} 7.39.15). It is possible that Jordanes, writing in March 551, could have read or heard Procopius or
Indeed Jordanes had just narrated one such Gothic surrender and applauded its figurative results. He does not lament the downfall of Gothic Ravenna in 540, but nor does he revel in Gothic defeat or exalt Roman victory. Instead his focus remains on the marriage, the child, and the “hope to both peoples, under the Lord’s favor.” In the end, the “hope” of the young Germanus provides the same “hope” which the birth of Theodoric had presaged: the unity of Goths and Romans.179

Despite Jordanes’ manipulation of the events of 540 in order to promote peace, he was well aware of the tenuousness of this hope. Germanus had been dead for many months when Jordanes wrote and hostilities in Italy showed no signs of abating.180 Jordanes must have understood the unlikelihood that Matasuntha or her infant child, despite the fame of their Gothic bloodline, could sway the course of the war. Given this bleak reality, we can begin to account for an important element of Jordanes’ project that this study has addressed, but will now treat in full: the tone of foreboding and despair which permeates the Romana.

Jordanes’ desire for harmonious relations between Goths and Romans was decidedly sincere. He had dedicated an entire work of history to the furtherance of this ideal. But recent events portended a grimmer outcome to the Gothic War, and this seems to have contributed in no small way to Jordanes’ conviction that the Roman empire was in decline. The jeremiadic intonations of the Romana have long been recognized, and its

heard an unfinished version of his text, or that both authors were responding to and reflecting an explicit notion of hope that had come to be attached to the marriage in Constantinopolitan discourse about the war. 179 Others have also seen in the concluding marriage and in his praise for Roman-Gothic cooperation more generally, Jordanes’ call for peaceful reconciliation: Ebert (1889), 560-62; Manitius (1911), 214; Momigliano (1955). These studies, though, hold that Jordanes envisioned cultural coexistence only in the Goths’ submission to the will of the emperor, and so differ only in degree of emphasis from those that understand Jordanes to be cheering on Justinian’s conquest of the Goths. 180 Germanus died of illness at Serdica in the autumn of 550.
preface offers a particularly clear articulation of this.\textsuperscript{181} It should be noted first that, unlike the \textit{Getica}'s preface, the opening of the \textit{Romana} is not modeled after that of another work, and stands as one of the longest sustained instances of Jordanes' own voice in a work that is itself mostly comprised of large swaths of text written by other hands. As such, readers seeking Jordanes’ own particular purposes should pay especial attention to this portion of the text. In it, Jordanes provides the apparatus for interpreting the presence of ‘foreign’ texts in the \textit{Romana} in accordance with his own perception of history. Speaking to Vigilius, the \textit{Romana}'s addressee, Jordanes writes:

\begin{quote}
You want to be taught to understand the tribulations (\textit{erumnas}) of the present world; what it has endured from the beginning up to our own time...that I should summarize from my ancient sources how the Roman empire began, how it grew, how it subjected virtually the whole world to its dominion, and how it continues to hang on to its hegemony, at least in pretense, even now.\textsuperscript{182}
\end{quote}

Jordanes describes his history as the record of humanity’s ‘enduring’ of ‘tribulations.’ This is not cheery stuff. Moreover, \textit{erumna} has the more basic meaning of ‘labor,’ a word loaded with biblical and eschatological implications about the toil to which mankind was consigned following its fall from grace. Sin and toil bring the promise of death and, ultimately, the end of all things. Jordanes, therefore, colors the description of his history with undertones of apocalypticism. This is further substantiated by the implications of his next sentence. He plans to record how the Roman empire began, achieved its height, and how it currently exists in a state of decline. Recall from Chapter Three that the \textit{Romana}'s

\textsuperscript{181} O'Donnell (1982), \textit{passim}; Goffart (1988)53-4, “Jordanes is “one of the most explicit early witnesses to an Untergangsstimmung, a developed sense that the Empire had fallen from a once-high estate.” Amory (1997), 299; Liebeschuetz (2011), 210.

\textsuperscript{182} Jordanes, \textit{Romana} 2, “Vis enim praesentis mundi erumnas cognoscere aut quando coepit vel quid ad nos usque perpessus est, edoceri. Addes praeterea, ut tibi, quomodo Romana res publica coepit et tenuit totumque pene mundum subegit et hactenus vel imaginariae teneat, ex dictis maiorum floscula carpens breviter referam.”
opening chronographic portion is structured around the five empires from the prophesy of Daniel, which Jordanes invokes explicitly.\textsuperscript{183} Rome is treated as the world’s fifth and final empire. If, as Jordanes suggests, that empire is in a moribund and diminished state, then the end times cannot be very far off.\textsuperscript{184}

It should also be noted that Jordanes’ doubts about the viability of Rome’s current claims to its previous imperial extent cannot be considered reflective of a Justinianic worldview. Given the conquest of Vandal Africa and the current campaigns in Italy, it would not have been unreasonable for Romans to argue that Rome had a better grip on its empire in 551 than it had just twenty years earlier. Still, though, Jordanes had his doubts, and he develops these ideas throughout the \textit{Romana} and even the parts of the \textit{Getica}.\textsuperscript{185}

At the end of the preface, Jordanes writes:

I have written this little book in your name, joining it with the volume on the origin and deeds of the Getic race, which not too long ago I sent to our common friend Castalius, so that when you understand the devastation of various peoples you might desire to be freed from all trouble (erumna) and turn yourself toward God, who is true freedom. Therefore, in reading these two little books, know that desire always threatens him who loves the world. Listen to the apostle John when he says, ‘Beloved, do not love this world of the things in it. This world passes away, together with its desires. But he who does the will of God endures forever.’\textsuperscript{186} Love God and your neighbor with your whole heart, obey his law, and pray for me, most noble and splendid brother.\textsuperscript{187}

\textsuperscript{183} Jordanes, \textit{Romana} 84.
\textsuperscript{184} Eschatological concerns also appear at \textit{Romana} 265 where Jordanes states that Domitian exiled John “to the island of Patmos, where he saw the apocalypse.” This appears in a portion of the text where all of the surrounding narrative is taken almost verbatim from Jerome. Mommsen, however, noted that this bit about John of Patmos was Jordanes’ own addition, thereby indicating his personal interest in the subject matter.\textsuperscript{185} O’Donnell (1982), 225 likewise argues that this is Jordanes’ “shrewd assessment of the flimsiness of Justinian’s pretentions to world-wide empire.”\textsuperscript{186} 1 John 2.15-17.
\textsuperscript{187} Jordanes, \textit{Romana} 4-5, “…in tuo nomine et hoc parvissimo libello confeci, iungens ei aliud volumen de origine actusque Getice gentis, quam iam dumum communi amico Castalio ededessem, quatinus diversarum gentium calamitate contorta ab omni erumna liberum te fieri cupias et ad deum convertas, qui est vera libertas. Legens ergo utrosque libellos, scito quod diligenti mundo semper necessitas imminet. Tu vero ausculta Iohannem apostolum, qui ait: ‘carissimi, nolite dilegere mundum neque ea que in mundo sunt.
Jordanes twice mentions the *Getica* here, just as he mentioned the *Romana* in the *Getica*’s preface. He is emphatic that his two histories with markedly different themes and conclusions must be read together because they both ultimately bear on the same thing: the state of the Roman-Gothic relationship in the present day. And while the *Getica* built bridges between these two peoples and made the case for their coexistence, it is clear that the *Romana* is an expression of profound doubt about the viability of their peaceful future. The “devastation of various peoples,” Jordanes says, has made him turn away from the world. Goths and Romans are implied to number among these ruined nations.

Similar despair is given voice at the conclusion to the *Romana*. In a remarkable prefiguration of Gibbon, Jordanes states:

> These are the calamities (*casus*, literally ‘fall’) of the Roman empire, aside from the daily inroads of the Bulgars, Antes, and Scalveni. If anyone wishes to know them, let him go through the annals and the history of the consuls without cynicism, and he will find a modern-day empire worthy of a tragedy. And he will know whence it arose, how it grew or in what way it subjected all lands to itself and how again it lost them through inept rulers.\(^{188}\)

Aside from reiterating his objective to trace the rise and fall of the Roman empire, here Jordanes articulates the cause of Rome’s ruin: bad rulers. This, though, was not an idea new to the conclusion. Jordanes had decried poor Roman rulership throughout both of his texts. During the reign of Decius, the Gothic leader Cniva chooses to invade Moesia “knowing it was undefended through the negligence of the emperors,” and, again, after

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Quia mundus transit et concupiscentia eius: qui autem fecerit voluntatem dei, manet in aeternum'. Estoque toto corde diligens deum et proximum, ut adimpleas legem et ores pro me, novilissime et magnifice frater.”

\(^{188}\) Jordanes, *Romana* 388, “Hi sunt casus Romanæ rei publicæ preter instantia cottidiana Bulgaram, Antium et Sclavinorum. Que si quis scire cupid, annales consulumque seriem revolvat sine fastidio repperietque dignam nostri temporis rem publicam tragydiae. Scietque unde orta, quomodo aucta, qualiterve sibi cunctas terras subdiderit et quomodo iterum eas ab ignaris rectoribus amiserit.”
the emperor’s death, “the Goths frequently ravaged Moesia, though the negligence of the emperors.”

Because Valerian “became too degenerate in the emperorship and did nothing manly,” he opened the empire up to attacks from Parthians, Germans, Alans, Goths, and Sarmatians. Marcian is said to have “repaired with divine foresight the empire that his effeminate ruling predecessors and forerunners had by turns diminished for sixty years.” In the *Getica*, Jordanes declares that Vandals were able to conquer Africa “by reason of the cowardice of emperors and the treachery of generals,” and in the *Romana* he reiterates that Africa was lost due to the failure of Roman leadership.

Following the death of Anastasius, the empire is described as “ground down” (*contrita*), and, under Justin, it “hardly even caught its breath.” Critics would be hard-pressed to explain what such a poor view of the current emperor’s uncle is doing in a supposedly pro-Justinianic text. And in comparing his own time to an earlier period, Jordanes states that “the Venethi, Antes, and Sclaveni…now (*nunc*) rage in war far and wide, in consequence of our errors, yet at the time they were all obedient to Ermanaric’s commands.”

Despite blunting the barb with the inclusive “our errors,” Jordanes implies subtly that the famous Gothic king Ermaneric better protected against the violence of foreign invaders than Justinian was able to do in present times. The dangers threatened by these Slavic peoples is of major concern for Jordanes. He speaks of the present dangers posed by “the Bulgars, well known from the disasters that our blunders

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193 Jordanes, *Romana* 359, “…contritaque res publica vix Justino ei succedente quantolum respiravit.”
194 Jordanes, *Getica* 119, “…Venethi, Antes, Sclaveni; qui quamvis nunc, ita facientibus peccatis nostris, ubique deseviunt, tamen tunc omnes Hermanarici imperiis servierunt.”
have brought upon us,” and again notes the “daily inroads” of the Slavs in the conclusion to the *Romana.* This does much to account for the view that the current empire is “worthy of a tragedy.”

Moreover, it is possible that Jordanes alludes directly to Justinianic legislation in these caustic concluding remarks. In *Novel 30* from March, 536, Justinian speaks of his reclamation of Africa and Sicily, and his intention to recover all other lands which “the Romans lost though negligence.” (*neglegentiis amiserunt*) Jordanes states that his history has explained how the empire “lost [its lands] through inept rulers.” (*ignaris rectoribus amiserit*). The two phrases bear lexical similarity and are further linked by their same subject matter. Where Justinian proclaims the restitution of previously lost lands, Jordanes declares that these lands remain lost. Jordanes may very well have been using the emperor’s own words against him. But even if this specific correspondence does not convince, it is evident that Jordanes’ insistence on the attenuated state of the empire directly counters the well-advertised claims of imperial *renovatio* in Justinian’s legislation. Indeed, Jordanes had expressed his doubt candidly about these vaunted proclamations of a return to a golden age in the *Romana’s* introduction where he promised to show “how [the empire] continues to hang on to its

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195 Jordanes, *Getica* 37, “Ultra quos distendunt supra mare Ponticum Bulgarum sedes, quos notissimos peccatorum nostrorum mala fecerunt.”
196 *Novel* 30.11.2, “…et spes habere bonas quis etiam reliquorum nobis detentionem annuet deus, quam prisci Romani usque ad utriusque oceani fines tenentes sequentibus neglegentiis amiserunt.”
198 Harder to ascertain are possible linkages to the “negligence” of *Novel 30* within the two portions of the *Getica* in which Moesia is despoiled “though the negligence of the emperors” (101: *neglegentibus principibus*; 104: ob principum neglegentiam). In all instances Roman territory is jeopardized through imperial neglect. Justinian announces the restoration of that territory. Jordanes insists upon its withered state.
199 See also *Novel* 8.10.2 from 535 where Justinian “not consenting to the diminution of the Roman territory” promises to reclaim Rome’s lost patrimony, and *Novel 69* ep. in which the empire of 538 is described as possessing its former east-west expanse.
hegemony, at least in pretense (*vel imaginariae*), even now." In response to the perceived disasters occurring around him, Jordanes had written a history of Roman decline caused by the ineptitude of Roman rulers. It cannot be suggested that Justinian, the presiding emperor during these disasters, would have been spared Jordanes’ indictment. This seriously impugns the notion that Jordanes’ texts should be primarily indentified as sounding boards for a Justinianic ideology of reconquest. The destruction which Jordanes witnessed clearly disturbed him and moved him to retreat from the world. It simply does not hold that Jordanes was “urging a policy of unrestrained aggression.”

Jordanes’ belief that the empire of his own time was diminished and imperiled was an attitude shaped primarily by the continued hostilities between Goths and Romans in Italy which, it cannot be over-emphasized, gave no indication of slackening in the spring of 551. The Gothic War is of vital importance for the *Romana*. The conflict comprises three-fourths of Jordanes’ treatment of the reign of Justinian, and the latter is itself by far the lengthiest portion of the text. This only makes sense. The *Getica* and *Romana*, together, are about the Roman-Gothic relationship, and it was the war which moved Jordanes to write in the first place. In the period of Jordanes’ writing, the war had reached a previously unsurpassed level of urgency in the imperial capital. After the fall of Ravenna in 540, Constantinopolitans began to experience the reality and consequence of the Gothic War far more acutely. Belisarius’ return brought to the capital an influx of

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201 Croke (1987), 127. At 126-8 he argues that the regular mention of eminent barbarian threats, criticism of Roman rulership, and fatalistic view of the present empire are a reflection of Justinian’s propaganda and represent Jordanes’ support for the emperor’s project of imperial renewal. It is all a call for the empire “to stiffen its resolve.”
202 See note 4 for my own and others’ arguments about this.
Goths. There would have been a great many Gothic prisoners in tow who were then either enslaved or drafted into the imperial armies. Other arrivals included the royals Witiges and Matasuntha, and also “the notables of the Goths.”\textsuperscript{203} It is unclear who and how many comprised this group, but Procopius calls them a “throng” (τὸν ὅμιλον), so their number might have been quite large.\textsuperscript{204} Presumably, they were the nobility most closely tied to the Gothic royals, together with their retainers, dependents, and servants. The record does not state what became of them, but it is intriguing to consider how the presence in the capital of a Gothic ruling elite who had held sway in the Roman homeland for two generations might have informed or altered discussions about the place of the Goths in the Roman world, and indeed about the future course of the war.

The 540s also saw a number of Italo-Roman aristocrats immigrate to Constantinople. Some, such as Liberius and Cethegus, advocated the destruction of the Goths, and were empowered and enriched by the emperor.\textsuperscript{205} Cassiodorus, who likely came to the capital with the fall of Ravenna, sought to defend his reputation and that of other Italian nobles who had served the Goths by presenting Gothic rule in Italy as entirely Roman and therefore legitimate. Perhaps this bold stance, one which countered Justinian’s propagandizing image of Goths as tyrants, resulted in Cassiodorus’ political marginalization.\textsuperscript{206} In any case, it is certain that Jordanes knew that Cassiodorus was in the capital, knew his work and probably knew the man himself, and it is likely that Jordanes’ classicization of the Gothic past was influenced by and responded to

\textsuperscript{203} Procopius, \textit{Wars} 7.1.1, “Γότθων τοῖς δοκίμοις”; Continuator of Count Marcellinus, \textit{Additamentum} s.a. 540.3 also notes “Gothosque nobiliores.”

\textsuperscript{204} Procopius, \textit{Wars} 7.1.2.

\textsuperscript{205} Liberius: Procopius, \textit{Wars}. 7.36.6, 7.37.26-7; Cethegus: Liber Pontificalius 61.7.

\textsuperscript{206} Bjornlie (2013).
Cassiodorus’ Romanization of the Goths. Perhaps the presence of these recently arrived Goths – and the Italians who had lived among them – can help to account for Jordanes’ comments that Constantinopolitans were discussing a shared Roman-Gothic past, and that various versions of the Goths’ origins were known to be circulating in the capital. It is unlikely that Castalius and Vigilius, the men for whom Jordanes wrote his histories, were the only individuals with a pronounced interest in this foreign but familiar people.

And the Goths would have been on the minds of Romans because of the deteriorating progress of the war in Italy throughout the decade. Roman confidence in their 540 victory crumbled after a regalvanized Gothic resistance under their new king Totila dislodged much of the empire’s hold over Italy. The ensuing years saw further Roman losses. Even Belisarius, again deployed to the Italian theater in 544, proved unable to break the Goths after five hard-fought years, and was recalled by Justinian in 549. Despite his position of strength, however, Totila sued for peace. In 549 and 550 Totila sent embassies to Justinian seeking peace in exchange for the Goths’ military service to the empire. These overtures were rebuffed. Late in 550 or early 551, during or just before Jordanes’ writing, Totila dispatched another envoy to the capital, though this proposal, while offering the same military service as the previous two, also pledged the Gothic surrender of Sicily and Dalmatia, and the promise of annual tribute. These were substantial concessions that signaled the real possibility for peace, and must have stirred debate in the capital about the direction and exit strategy for the Italian enterprise.

207 Jordanes, Getica 112.
208 Jordanes, Getica 3, 38. See Chapter 3.
209 Again, following the dating of Croke (2005), 482.
210 Procopius, Wars 7.21.20-5, 7.37.6-7.
211 Procopius, Wars 8.24.4-5.
Though they remain mute to us now, surely there were voices in the capital who sought a diplomatic solution. After fifteen years of war and next to nothing to show for it, Italy had become a quagmire. Belisarius, the most successful Roman commander in generations, had failed against the Goths, and the recent hopes placed in Germanus had been dashed late in 550. For many, an immediate peace would have been attractive, and the Goths’ offer had now made that a viable political option. At this moment, with talk of a negotiated settlement in the air, Jordanes conceived of writing a history that itself negotiated the Gothic past in accordance with the standards of Roman culture. His aim was peace. It was not to be.

Those clamoring for war proved louder. Among them were the former consul Gothigus and Vigilius, bishop of Rome, who “gave the emperor no respite from his entreaty to stand forth with all his power as champion of Italy.”212 Eventually, Justinian committed himself entirely to the war, “hating as he did the Gothic name and intending to drive it out absolutely from the Roman domain.”213 To the great surprise of many, the emperor elevated the Armenian eunuch Narses to the supreme command no later than the beginning of winter 550/1.214 The prospect of peace was lost, and with it went much of Jordanes’ hope as well. In the early months of the year our author would have personally witnessed a fevered pitch of activity in the capital as the empire mobilized for war: an entire Roman invasion force being recruited, equipped, and trained; hugely complicated

212 Procopius, Wars 7.35.9, “Βιγίλιος δὲ, ὁ τῆς Ῥώμης ἀρχιερεὺς, ξὺν Ἰταλοῖς τοῖς ἑνταῦθα τηνικάδε παροῦσι, πολλοῖς τε καὶ λογιμωτάτοις ἐσάγαν οὕσιν, ὡσκέτι ἀντεῖ, ἀλλ' ἔχρηζε βασιλέως Ἰταλίας μεταποιεῖσθαι δυνάμει τῇ πάσῃ.”
213 Procopius, Wars 8.24.5, “ἀλλὰ βασιλεὺς μάθησιν οὐδεμίαν τῶν λεγομένων ποιούμενος τοὺς πρέσβεις ἀπαντας ἀπεκέμεπτο, πρὸς τὸ Γότθων ὄνομα χαλεπῶς ἔχων, ἀρδήν τε αὐτῷ τῆς Ρωμαίων ἀρχῆς ἐξελάσαι δυναύσιμον.”
214 Procopius, Wars 8.21.5-22.
campaign logistics being planned; massive quantities of resources levied to supply the armies. War must have been on the lips of everyone. Fittingly, this atmosphere of heightened tensions, of anticipation and dread, saw the publication of Jordanes’ Gothic-Roman histories and Procopius’ first installment of his record of Rome’s recent wars. These texts, in different ways, Romanized and legitimized the nature of Gothic rule in Italy, and criticized the prosecution of the war. They, like Cassiodorus, were voices in a wider discourse about the place of the Goths in history and in the present Roman world. For now, though, the place of the Goths would remain as enemies of Rome. On April 1, 551, Narses set forth from the capital and marched for Italy.

It was the empire’s renewed commitment to the conquest of Italy and, with it, the promise of an ever deepening crisis that colored Jordanes’ depiction of the Gothic War in the Romana. Unlike the Getica, where the conflict is treated not unlike the many other instances of intermittent Roman-Gothic dispute that invariably end in the reestablishment of a peaceful and cooperative relationship, the war in the Romana is a “disaster.” This bleak outlook is directly reflective of the state of the conflict as Jordanes saw it in the spring 551, and of his sense of anxiety about the future for Goths and Romans. Moreover, the narrative of the war in no way espouses a triumphalist ideology of reconquest. In fact, it is surprisingly apt at conveying, if impressionistically, the complicated negotiation of political and cultural allegiances among the Goths, imperial armies, and Italo-Romans that did not neatly align on either side of a Roman/Gothic divide. Upon Belisarius’ arrival

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215 Croke (2005), 484.
in Sicily in the fall of 536, Jordanes notes that the Gothic commander Ebermud immediately surrendered and “urged [Belisarius] to come to the aid of Italy, which longed for him and was looking forward to his arrival.”\(^{218}\) The truth of this assertion, however, is challenged in the very following lines as Jordanes describes Naples’ resistance to Belisarius, who, after a siege, “killed both the Goths and rebellious Romans in it, and plundered it thoroughly.”\(^{219}\) Goths side with Romans, and Romans with Goths, and, in this, Jordanes speaks to the complex political axes of Roman-Gothic social fluidity that were thrust into focus by imperial invasion. Jordanes suggests that this was no simple war of liberation; of Goths vs. Romans. Time and proximity had linked these peoples, and a war between them would destroy them both in unexpected ways.

Further, this episode is illustrative of Jordanes’ general tendency to portray the war as highly destructive to Goths and Romans alike. This is brought into higher relief through comparison of the essential differences in the ways that Jordanes and the Continuator of Count Marcellinus portray the war. The \textit{Additamentum}, as the latter’s work is called, picks up in 534 where its precursor ended, and the extant manuscripts cut off after 548, but the addition probably continued on for a period of several years.\(^{220}\) Its tone indicates that the outcome of the war had already been settled, and so publication might have been as early as the mid 550s, but possibly as late as the 560s or 570s.\(^{221}\) The

\(^{218}\) Jordanes, \textit{Romana} 370, “Ubi mox Evermud Theodahadi Gothorum regis gener, qui contrarius cum exercitu venerat, cernens prosperitatem consulis ultro se ad partes dedit victoris hortaturque, ut iam anhelantem suique adventui suspectam subveniret Italiam.” Procopius, \textit{Wars} 5.8.3 notes that Ebermud was then sent to the emperor, received many gifts of honor, and attained the rank of patrician.

\(^{219}\) Jordanes, \textit{Romana} 370, “…tam Gothis qui aderant quam Romanis rebellantibus interfectis urbem plenissime spoliavit.” Procopius, \textit{Wars} 5.8.5 ff. supplies a similar but far more nuanced treatment of the siege.

\(^{220}\) Croke (2001), 223.

\(^{221}\) \textit{Ibid.}
Continuator’s perspective is orthodox, rooted in Constantinople, and primarily focused on the events of the Gothic War (more so even than Jordanes), which is presented in the light of imperial ideology: the war is Justinian’s rightful revenge against the Goths; Witiges is a “tyrant;” Totila commits acts of “savagery.” The Additamentum is an important text for this study because its focus on the Gothic War reveals the continued ideological potency of representations of that conflict even after its conclusion, and, given its precise correspondence with the Romana at a number of points, it seems fairly likely that Jordanes and the Continuator worked from a common source. By comparing each texts’ treatment of the same events we can see how each author deliberately manipulates his representation of the recent past. In the case of the imperial sack of Naples, the Continuator states simply that Belisarius “devastates” (vastat) the city, whereas Jordanes notes not only his looting of the city and killing of the Goths, but also his slaughter of Romans. It is unclear if one or both authors departed from their source in these descriptions of Roman violence, but it must be true that the Continuator either dialed down its severity or chose not to embellish it, and that Jordanes either accentuated it or wanted to preserve his source’s high level of violence. This accords with the perspective of both texts more generally: Jordanes, writing about the “devastation of various peoples,” sought to convey the intensity of Naples’ destruction, while the Continuator, sympathetic to Justinian’s mission, avoided mention of excessive force or violence against fellow Romans.

222 Revenge: 534; tyrant: 537.1; savagery (crudelitatem): 545.1.
223 Croke (2001), 234.
224 Continuator of Count Marcellinus, Additamentum s.a. 536.3.
Conversely, it is Jordanes who remains mum in another instance. The depredations of the Goths against the people of Milan are perhaps the very worst of the crimes perpetrated by either side in a very long and very bloody war. Procopius tells us that, following their siege of Milan, the Goths razed the city, killed all 300,000 men and boys in it, reduced its women to slavery, and executed the city’s prefect by hacking his body to pieces and feeding his flesh to dogs.\(^\text{225}\) The Continuator notes that the Goths “tore down its walls, took booty, and killed all the Romans.”\(^\text{226}\) Jordanes mentions nothing. Neither the siege nor the desolation of its inhabitants appear in either of his texts. The omission is glaring, and it speaks to his bias. Jordanes was simply not in the business of defaming the Goths. Despite the Romana’s cynicism and Jordanes’ own doubts about the viability of peace, it seems that he was unwilling to sabotage what little hope remained for Goths and Romans. Jordanes’ failure to include the destruction of Milan in his histories is among the foremost testaments to the tendentiousness of his historical project.

Thematic consistency across both of his texts is again evident in Jordanes’ treatment of the first five years of the imperial invasion. The Getica and Romana describe the action from Belisarius’ initial invasion of Sicily to the fall of Ravenna in 540 as a succession of imperial victories until Witiges’ surrender, at which point Jordanes declares, “Thus within a short time the emperor Justinian, through his most faithful

\(^\text{225}\) Procopius, Wars 6.21.38-41.
\(^\text{226}\) Continuator of Count Marcellinus, Additamentum s.a. 539.3, “Gothi Mediolanum ingressi muros diurunt praedamque potiti omnes Romanos interficiunt.”

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consul, subjected two kings and two states to his rule.” Belisarius is called Vandalicus and Geticus. Both texts declare the war over at 540, and reinforce the notion that peace could have – indeed should have – been achieved between Goths and Romans already. But where the Getica purports peace in 540 to recommend peace in 551, the Romana details the grim realities of the ensuing years. After the surrender of Ravenna, Jordanes describes “the disaster in Italy which occurred after [Belisarius’] departure.” Again proclaiming it “the disaster in the West,” Jordanes notes that the Goths on the other side of the Po “revived their spirit for war,” and despite Justinian’s deployment of “various strike forces from not just one, but several armies against them, the Goths proved themselves the stronger and held firm.” Not long after, “to the misfortune of Italy” (malo Italiae), Totila ascends to the Gothic kingship. Interestingly, this Latin phrase also appears in the Continuator, and probably originated in their common source. In different contexts, though, the words imply different meanings. Indeed the majority of the Romana’s contents are the words of other authors repurposed to new ends. For the Continuator, a supporter of the imperial conquest, Totila is a destructive force to the Roman homeland and a hindrance to Roman victory. For Jordanes, Totila is slandered because he is a hindrance to Roman-Gothic peace. It is important to keep in mind that,

despite Jordanes’ obvious pride in his Gothic heritage, he was not advocating for Gothic victory or the Goths’ rightful claim to Italy. He wanted peace, and Totila, like Justinian, was standing in the way of that peace.

Jordanes continues to handle Totila and Justinian roughly in the remainder of the narrative. After Totila defeats some Roman armies, “destroys Rome,” and divests the senators of their wealth, Belisarius is sent back to Italy to take up the fight again, but a lack of troops and disagreements with other commanders prevent him from engaging Totila. Eventually, though, Belisarius manages a victory, but suddenly Justinian recalls him to the capital. This, Jordanes, suggests, was a fatal error of judgement, and one that Justinian had made before. Jordanes describes it in the following way:

But as often happens, the turn of events clashed with the emperor’s decision. When the empress Theodora died, Belisarius was called back to Constantinople from Sicily. After his departure, Totila, unhampered and with new fury, attacked Rome…then he drew his forces together from everywhere and, strengthened with auxiliaries, invaded and conquered Sicily.

Jordanes’ words, though not dripping with invective, are clear enough: he blames Justinian for the continuation of hostilities in Italy. In an attempt to rectify the Italian dilemma, Justinian then appoints Germanus to the command, but the latter’s untimely death brings these plans to naught. After his death, “[Matasuntha] bore him a posthumous son and named him Germanus,” and, adding insult to injury, Jordanes notes that, “when Totila heard of this stroke of luck, mocking the Romans, he laid waste almost the whole

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233 Jordanes, Romana 380, “demolita Roma.”
234 Jordanes, Romana 381-2, “Sed ut adsolet, rerum mutatio et principum voluntate diversa. Quiescenti in domino Theodora Augusta evocatur ad urbem Belesarius de Siciliam. Post cuius discessum Totila securus iterata rabie tradentibus Isauris invadit Romam; et sic sumptis undique viribus militarique vallatus auxilio ingreditur capitique Siciliam.”
of Italy.” The marriage of the Roman and Gothic royals and the birth of their child could not be portrayed more differently from one of Jordanes’ texts to the other. In the Getica, the marriage represents the union of Romans and Goths, and their child the ideal of their cultural fusion. It symbolizes, as Jordanes plainly states, hope to both peoples. In the Romana, this union is utterly devoid of meaning. Jordanes instills in it a desperate, almost nihilistic quality. It is the butt of a joke, a point of derision, and spells only further pain and suffering for the titular peoples of his histories. What little narrative remains is simply a litany of conflict, sedition, and rebellion in all other corners of the empire before Jordanes concludes by proclaiming that this fallen empire, deserving of a tragedy, was brought low by its own incompetent rulers.

At its core, the Gothic War in the Romana is the story of a squandered early victory, Totila’s lamentable destruction of Italy, and Justinian’s complete failure to control and end its violence. Jordanes does not let his emperor off easily. His critical tone has been discussed above and observed elsewhere. Earlier in his description of Justinian’s reign, Jordanes describes how the emperor executed the Romans Hypatius and Pompeius, “insurgents against their own state,” and afterwards, “as though a great enemy

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235 Jordanes, Romana 383, “Contra quem Germanus patricius dum exire disponit cum exercitu, Mathesuentham Theodorici regis neptem et a Vitigis mortuo derelictam, tradente sibi principe in matrimonio sumptam, in Sardicense civitate extremum halitum fudit, relinquens uxorem gravidam, quae post eius obitum postumum ei edidit filium vocavitque Germanum; qua felicitate sibi Totila conperta totam pene insultans Romanis devastat Italianam.”

236 Heather (1991), 43, “The Romana is really quite critical of important aspects of Justinian’s reign... [Jordanes is] insistent that Justinian had made a mistake in recalling Belisarius from Italy, and Getica 5.37 comments that the Bulgars have been able to damage the state because of ‘our’ (=imperial) neglect. This is not enough to turn Jordanes into a dissident, but it does make him an improbable court employee.” Goffart (1988), 58, recognizing the Romana’s harsh tone regarding Justinian’s recall of Belisarius, went on the defensive lest Jordanes’ criticism undermine his thesis: “Isolated in a basically appreciative context, these sentences cannot turn Jordanes into a critic of the regime. At most, they provide him with a small claim to the historian’s virtue of uttering distasteful truth.”
had been defeated, he celebrated a triumph with their spoils.” Just a few lines later, though, following his victory in Africa, “Belisarius celebrated a triumph with the Vandal spoils.” Jordanes sharply contrasts Justinian triumphing in the execution of his rivals “as though a great enemy had been defeated,” with the actual triumph of Belisarius over foreign enemies. The intentional comparison is further born out lexically; the same words are used to describe the actions of both men: de manubiis triumphavit. In reality, Justinian did not hold an actual triumphal procession in his own honor, but the suggestion that he did, at least semantically, reflects two things: Justinian’s own widespread proclamations of victory over his internal enemies; and Jordanes’ participation in the established literary practice of criticizing Romans who gloried in conquering their own countrymen. Jordanes’ criticism of the current imperial administration is also detectable in its direct connection to Justin, whose reign in the Romana is characterized entirely by the imprisonment, exile, and sometimes disturbingly violent execution of his alleged enemies (e.g. Theocritus is crushed with huge rocks and thrown into the sea). Justin’s victims, though, are only those whom he ‘felt’ (sentiens) and ‘suspected’

237 Jordanes, Romana 364, “regni sui insidiatoribus”; “…veluti grande hoste prostrato de manubiis triumphavit.”
238 Jordanes, Romana 366, “…de manubiis Vandalicis Belesarius triumphavit.”
240 Malalas, Chronographia 18.71, “The emperor announced his victory and the rebels’ destruction to all the cities.”
241 Ammianus, Res Gestae 21.16.15, “Constantius prided himself on his success in civil conflicts, and bathed in the blood which poured in a fearful stream from the internal wounds of the state. Perverting the normal and honorable grounds for such an action, he erected triumphal arches in Gaul and Pannonia at great expense to commemorate the ruin of the provinces.” “Ut autem in externis bellis hic princeps fuit saucius et adfectus, ita propere succedentibus pugnis civilibus tumidus et intestinis ulceribus ret publicae sanie perfusus horrenda: quo pravo proposito magis quam recto vel usitato triumphalis arcus ex clade provinciarum summibus magnis erexit in Gallis et Pannoniis titulis gestorum adfixis, quoad stare poterunt, monumenta lecturis.”
(suspicionem habens) were plotting his overthrow.\textsuperscript{242} Jordanes never confirms these suspicions. Following this litany of purges, then, it strikes an odd note to hear that Justin, “taking into consideration his own old age and the welfare of the state, ordained Justinian... as his consort in power and successor.”\textsuperscript{243} While Justinian is not accused of any misdeed directly, his close ties to an emperor described, again, solely as a butcher and persecutor of Romans is hardly a propitious association.

The cynicism and fatalism of the *Romana* are an outgrowth of Jordanes’ ailing hope for peace in the face of the continued Gothic War. In his estimation, the current regime had countenanced far too much destruction and discord. Beyond simply recounting the debacle in Italy, Jordanes rounds off the end of the *Romana* with a series of brief scenes of insurgency, civil war, political assassination, and treason that do much to account for the *casus* of the empire.\textsuperscript{244} The theme of Rome beset by crisis and conflict is not isolated to the *Romana*, however. The *Getica’s* repeated mention of the threat of Slavic invasion, and the many allusions to Roman-Gothic conflict in the Virgilian intertexts have already been discussed. But also recall from Chapter Two the implications of the *Getica’s* preface, the whole of which is modeled after the preface to a translation of a text by Origen, whose writings were ineffectually condemned by Justinian in 543. Origenism, though, remained in 551 a volatile issue, and was closely linked to the Three Chapters controversy, a theopolitical crisis that worsened fractures between east and west, and within the east itself. Even as Jordanes wrote, Vigilius, bishop of Rome, was

\textsuperscript{242} Jordanes, *Romana* 360-1.
\textsuperscript{243} Jordanes, *Romana* 362, “Hic quoque imperator ante quarto mense obitus sui, senectute sua consulens et rei publicae utilitibus, Iustinianum ex sorore sua nepotem consortem regni successoremque imperii ordinans, rebus humanis excessit.”
\textsuperscript{244} Jordanes, *Romana* 384-88.
resident in Constantinople after having been pressured by imperial agents to travel there to settle the disputes over the Three Chapters. This conflict threatened the doctrinal unity of the empire, which was as crucial to Justinian’s imperial vision as political and territorial unity. In pointing to Origen, the emperor’s newly decreed heretic and contemporary topic of theological dispute, Jordanes was, in effect, pointing to yet another instance of conflict and disunity within the empire that was meant to be considered alongside the ongoing strife between Goths and Romans in Italy and the other crises buffeting the empire. Even the *Romana*’s idealized image of the Republic, constituted from carefully edited textual borrowings meant to portray the period as one only of strength, unity, and freedom from civil discord, is designed primarily to accentuate the failures of the later emperors. The portion of the *Romana* which treats the period after 378, when Jordanes stops following Jerome’s chronicle, is both especially pessimistic about the empire and the part of the text written largely by Jordanes’ own hand. Aside from occasional praise-worthy figures like Theodosius and Theoderic, the last century and a half of imperial history is presented as one of inexorable decline that reaches an acutely pronounced level of crisis in Jordanes’ own time.

One wonders how the tone of Jordanes’ texts would have been received in 551. Admittedly, they were not infused with vitriol, but the *Getica* and *Romana* are openly critical in some regards, and subtly so in many more instances. But it is this aspect of his texts that helps to account for a peculiar claim that Jordanes makes. As noted at the outset of this chapter, Jordanes states plainly in the conclusion of the *Getica* that, if anyone thought that the objective of his text had been to praise the Goths, they should know that

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245 See Chapter Three.
its actual purpose was the praise of Justinian. Put simply, this is not true – on both literal and thematic levels. In literal terms, the description of the emperor as *solars* (clever/skilled) stands as the only complementary or otherwise kind thing Jordanes says about Justinian outside of the conclusion. Literally, the *Getica* is not about the praise of Justinian. Thematically, though, was Jordanes’ text ultimately dedicated to the glory of his emperor and the conquest of Gothic Italy? A number of scholars have argued as much, and have, by and large, built their interpretations of Jordanes atop the foundation of the *Getica’s* concluding remarks. From the many arguments offered in the preceding study, it is clear that I disagree with their position. It remains, then, to explain why Jordanes would append to the end of his work an inaccurate, indeed misleading, description of his own purposes.

An answer can be found in much of what has been discussed in this chapter. A number of the themes in Jordanes’ texts, while not explicitly subversive or intended to undermine the emperor directly, were not in accord with, and in some instances countered, the dominant imperial ideology of the day. Jordanes had, after all, written a sympathetic and even laudatory history of the Goths in the midst of the imperial war to destroy those Goths. He seems to have thought it wise to affix a kind of safety coating to his text; to make the proper noises and assurances that his writings, despite their praise for Roman enemies or charges of imperial mismanagement, were ‘actually’ dedicated to the glory of the emperor. It is not at all beyond the realm of possibility that, in the sixth-century Roman capital, one – especially a former member of the imperial military – could be punished for speaking or writing something at odds with the regime’s interest.

246 Jordanes, *Getica* 316.
Certainly, Procopius voiced such concerns, and spoke of the emperor’s “legions of spies and informers.” The precise meaning of Jordanes’ histories has long been a matter of debate, and all commentators agree that they are not the easiest texts to penetrate. It seems, though, that their lack of clarity is exactly indicative of their potentially sensitive subject matter. Jordanes sought recourse in ambiguity and indirection to soften the sharper edges of his contemporaneous commentary on the current emperor and the current war.

Despite analytical challenges, especially the tonal expanse separating the Getica and Romana, this study has argued that there runs throughout both texts a consistent thematic and ideological program: the denunciation of the war; a call for peace; and the promotion of coexistence and cooperation between Goths and Romans. This message is advanced through all of Jordanes’ major themes: the Romanization of Goths; praise for Roman-Gothic alliance and unity (e.g. the alliance against Attila, Theoderic’s Italy, the marriage of Germanus and Matasuntha and the birth of their child); cultural parallelism and conflict in the Virgilian allusions; the failures of Belisarius and the intractable state of the war; and direct declarations of failed Roman leadership and imperial decline. Given that the Getica promised hope to Goths and Romans through unity, coupled with the fact that the core concern of both texts is the Roman-Gothic dynamic, one arrives at the inevitable conclusion that the Romana’s moribund empire is the result of imperial failure to nurture good relations with the Goths. It is an oblique way to promote peace, but Jordanes could not have published histories that explicitly and heavy-handedly

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247 Procopius, Secret History preface 2, “πλήθη κατασκόπων.”
rejected the war, and besides that would have been artless. He chose instead to offer two visions of the empire – one of hope and one of tragedy. It is clear which he preferred.

**Conclusion: Being Goth and Roman in the Sixth Century**

Jordanes and his writings signaled changed and changing times. In 551, for over a century and half the Roman state had been undergoing continuous and periodically very violent alteration in the form of invasions by and immigration of non-Roman, barbarian peoples. The macroscopic political effects of this are apparent: half of the empire was conquered, then partially reconstituted, and then ultimately lost again. Less readily evident are the cultural and sociological effects that accompanied these monumental shifts. How did the very fabric of Roman society change when, after Adrianople, a semi-autonomous nation of Goths was living within imperial borders and among Romans; when assimilated, partially-assimilated, and entirely foreign barbarians were the Roman army; when Romans elsewhere were faced with the fact that a barbarian king ruled over all of Italy and the Eternal City itself? Conversely, how did these non-Roman peoples perceive and experience these very things? And, perhaps most importantly, just who were these barbarians? The state of our ignorance about these questions is well understood: the barbarians themselves did not write anything down, and Roman writers were not interested in answering such questions, and generally did not write about the kind of things that help us to answer them ourselves.

For centuries Jordanes has been a critical figure in these discussions about the Goths and their relation to the Roman empire, and over the past fifty years, debates about
him have solidified into two opposed positions. One side, treating his texts as vessels of authentic Gothic tribal traditions, has used Jordanes as a means for understanding how Theoderic’s Goths conceived of their own history. The other has argued that Jordanes, far from preserving a uniquely Gothic historical view, was simply a Roman and supported Roman imperial interests, and so projects only a specifically Roman cultural standpoint. These views are so radically opposed that it is worth considering what aspects of Jordanes’ texts and times might account for their divergence. Current analytical uncertainties about Jordanes seem themselves to bespeak the political uncertainties, military upheavals, and cultural shifts occurring across the breadth of the late ancient world. Jordanes was himself a product of this time of flux, and as such, it is difficult to situate either a purely Gothic or entirely Roman Jordanean monolith atop the shifting geopolitical and cultural sands beneath him. This study has argued that Jordanes was both Goth and Roman, and that his texts reveal an individual negotiating his own dual sense of self in the face of a major conflict that pitted against each other the two peoples with whom he identified. The Getica and Romana were a response to propaganda and other works of history that portrayed the Goths as barbarous and tyrannical; the very opposite of Roman. Jordanes demanded instead that Goths and Romans were inextricably linked by their shared history and inherent cultural similarities. His texts aid us in understanding how groups recently added to the empire constructed their histories and identities by drawing from native traditions and classical learning alike.

Jordanes’ multivalent identity should really not be so surprising. There must have been many thousands of people living within the Roman state who understood their
ethnic, cultural, and political identities in ways very similar to Jordanes. Intercultural exchange was a byproduct of Rome’s imperial project, just as it was part of the fabric of earlier and later world empires. Many individuals would have reconfigured their own ethnicities in accordance with the cultural norms of Roman civilization, as Jordanes did. But, also like Jordanes, many clearly maintained extra-Roman identities. These processes were a constant and widespread feature of Roman society, but have remained generally invisible to us. When we accept that Jordanes was both Goth and Roman, however, his texts can begin to be studied as artifacts of those very processes.

Just as the Goths had migrated from the *barbaricum* into imperial lands, Jordanes draws the foreign Goths out of the conceptual hinterlands of barbarism and repositions them within the dominant modes of discourse about the classical and respectable peoples of the ancient Mediterranean. Jordanes’ historical account, though fictionalized, sought to recalibrate literary representations of Goths to better reflect what was, in point of fact, their rather familiar place in the Roman world. Goths had been interacting with Romans at least since the third century and had been living within and serving the empire for 175 years. Not all Goths were necessarily Roman to the extent that Jordanes was, but their presence was well known, and it is likely that much of the historiographical and state-sponsored representations of them as violent savages did not represent a commonly held view among Romans, especially inhabitants of the Balkans, Constantinople, Italy, Gaul, and Spain where Gothic presence was substantial. Jordanes’ texts articulated these demographic and perceptual shifts in literarily stylized ways.
The resultant image of these ‘new’ Goths was both innovative and familiar. Though he challenges rote depictions of Goths as brutish foreigners, Jordanes ultimately reinforces the age-old conceptual binary of civilization and barbarism by portraying the Goths instead as paragons of classical culture. In other words, Jordanes subverted specific aspects of the traditional Roman world view without refuting its fundamental veracity. This at once new but well-worn understanding of things was necessarily shaped by the environment in which Jordanes lived. The sixth-century Balkans were a place where hard and fast frontiers – both territorial and conceptual – had long since collapsed. Jordanes, a Roman Goth, lived within the Roman empire and served a Roman general who himself belonged to the royal Gothic Amal family and commanded a Roman army that was almost certainly comprised of Goths who were themselves variously Romanized. This was not a world of black and white, of Romans on the one hand and barbarians on the other. Here, many of the barbarians were the Romans, so to speak. The figures of Theoderic and the infant Germanus stand out from the Getica and Romana as principle examples of this merging of Gothic and Roman, and it is clear that Jordanes idealized them and likely identified with them on a personal level.

But it must be stated emphatically that Jordanes’ texts do not represent, nor does he intentionally describe, the Goths’ inevitable absorption into the greater Roman collective. The recalibration of Gothic in light of Roman culture, as it occurred stylistically in Jordanes’ texts and in historical reality, is not the same thing as the erasure of Gothic in favor of Roman. Jordanes does not tell the story of how the Goths became Romans. Rather, he depicts their similitude and the benefits of their cooperative
association. The Goths remain distinct from Romans, both in Jordanes’ histories and in fact. And Jordanes himself is the all-important proof of this: he states directly that he is a Goth. His personal affiliation with Roman culture is made clear at numerous points in his texts, yet his claim to Gothic descent must be understood as a discrete mode of self-association. This was not an incidental and ultimately meaningless assertion. Readers were being told that an individual at once both Goth and Roman had written the histories of Goths and Romans before them. This revelation profoundly impacts one’s understanding of these texts.

But just who was Jordanes speaking to when he wrote these peculiar histories that proclaim his Gothic and Roman identities? An elderly former secretary to a barbarian Roman general could not have possessed the social and political standing such that his texts could effect a groundswell of attention to the cause of Roman-Gothic reconciliation. His texts were no more the widely-circulated pamphlets of an eminent intellectual than they were the state-sponsored propaganda calling for the destruction of the Goths. Jordanes’ humble command of language seems to speak to his humble social standing, and it is more than likely that his writings did not ‘do’ much of anything in their time. And yet they survived. They were read. For as strange as Jordanes’ texts might seem in comparison to their antecedents, the political realities of the mid-sixth century can readily account for both the production and consumption of texts that provided a historical account of Roman-Gothic relations. The Getica and Romana represent a solitary survival of what must have been a prevalent concern among Goths, Romans, and those who claimed any aspect of either of these identities during the Gothic War. For
Constantinopolitans, that conflict had brought into stark and renewed focus the fact that a familiar yet still foreign people ruled over the old heart of the Roman empire. Perhaps it was the familiarity of the barbarian West, the reality that parts it, namely Gothic Italy, preserved and nourished ancient Roman traditions which, when set against the emperor’s commitment to the destruction of those barbarians and the reunification of the empire, engendered an interest in a pair of texts that interpreted in Roman terms a shared Roman and Gothic history.

The Getica and Romana are unique among surviving ancient texts and a unique reflection of an individual negotiating both his own identity and the history of Roman-Gothic relations as refracted through the many genres of the classical literary canon. We wish that we still possessed other voices like Jordanes’. And yet, despite its singularity, it can be said with confidence that it is broadly representative of the kind of intercultural convergence and bleeding together of peoples and ethnic traditions that characterized the late ancient Roman world. Both the peoples who comprised the empire and the characteristics that defined Romanity remained an ever-changing formula shaped by the peoples with whom the empire interacted and often subsumed. Jordanes, both Roman and Goth, is merely a rare testament to a phenomenon that was actually quite common, and indeed characteristic of the Roman imperial condition.
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