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Transformations of Romanness: The northern Gallic case

No identity can remain fixed and stable. Any perspective informed by modern continental philosophy cannot fail to see any primordialist position on ethnic identity as fundamentally wrong-headed. Identity is a question of desire, of a ‘motion towards’ an ideal. The ideal, naturally, is unattainable. No identity is coextensive with itself, nor can it be, except among the dead (which opens a different perspective on the study of identity in early medieval cemeteries). What makes an identity is, furthermore, always something more than itself; something in other words that – in elementary Lacanian – operates at least as much in the realm of the imaginary as in that of the symbolic. This is why external markers or signs of distinction never suffice. An identity is always constructed in part by what it is not, however that negation is articulated. In this purely symbolic sense it is no different from any other sign, operating within a chain of metaphor and difference. It is impossible to separate an identity from its alterity, from its negations. This is one reason why it makes no sense to study ‘othering’ or alterity as some sort of process distinct from identity-construction.¹ A strategy of distinction is always at the self-same time a strategy of identification, and vice versa, bound together like the two sides of a Möbius Strip. To raise a common identity in a social interaction is simultaneously to raise those things that both actors share in not being and those things that they do not share. The things held to constitute an identity, those things which are ‘in it more than itself’ are contingent, ever changing, and yet, at any one moment, always constructed as timeless and essential. In any given context, an identity is always already what it is. This is yet another reason to mistrust views that portray something like Gothic identity as an unchanging monolith.

In my 2007 book Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West I included a long discussion of ethnicity in which I made a number of points which, sadly, I do not think have made much impact on the study of the topic.² One is the that ethnicity is multilayered, so that ethnic change is much more about the acquisition of new layers and the reshuffling of old ones through time than it is about swapping one for another. It is this misguided notion that is at stake, for example, in Patrick Amory’s work and in Peter Heather’s critiques of it.³ I argued that everything that we might say about what we consider to be an unproblematic ‘ethnic’ identity at the level to which I will, here, provisionally (with full recognition of the problems of the term) refer as ‘gentile’ (i.e.

¹ See also Halsall 2017.
² I had actually made them in 1995 in Halsall 1995a, 56 – 58, but they are more fully worked through in Halsall 2007a, 35 – 45.

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as a *gens* ‘people’) can be applied to identities that come at perhaps lower levels, which might loosely (but misleadingly) be described as residential, local or regional.⁴ I then made the point that what we think of as the appropriately ‘ethnic’ (i.e. ‘gentile’, as above) level within this arc of the spectrum of identities is contingent upon historical circumstance. Ethnicity is *dynamic*. I hypothesized that a break-up of the UK into regional units might lead to a situation where a Yorkshire identity was considered more important than an English or British one. Again, the point concerns layers of ethnicity and their contingent reordering as part of the dynamics of historical change. Hierarchies of identity might be reordered in the opposite direction too. Some of us would rather be seen as British than English and as European rather than British. The study of Roman identity, its many levels and its change through time, is an excellent case study of these points. There are other reasons why the topic is important.

**Deconstructing the tortured historiography of Roman ethnicity**

Derrida said that ‘deconstruction is what happens’ (‘ce qui arrive’) in a reading.⁵ Let me offer a little deconstruction of my own previous writing. In Gregory of Tours’ account of the various diplomatic comings and goings in late sixth-century Gaul, he describes one embassy as including ‘Warinar [or Warmar] the Frank and Firminus the Arvernan’.⁶ Another comprised ‘Bodegisil the son of Mummolenus from Soissons, Evantius the son of Dynamius from Arles, and Grippo the Frank.’⁷ In my own work,⁸ I have used these references to talk, first, about what a *Frank* was in Gregory’s writings and, second, about the northern Gallic aristocracy and why Gregory did not think there was a Frankish nobility. Yet what one might term the ‘repressed other’ of the discussion is represented precisely by the two non-Frankish characters, Firminus and Evantius. What of their identity, which Gregory specifically tells us about in terms that seem to mark its structural equivalence to *Francus: Ses-

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⁴ The problem with the term is that it resonates with earlier uses of *Gentilismus* in the literature. However, it was felt that a term was necessary to specify the level of ethnicity concerned with named ‘peoples’, especially as the subtleties and many-layered nature of ‘ethnicity’ have become widely recognised. For the problems of *Gentilismus*, see Pohl 1999, 195–196.

⁵ Derrida’s most accessible comments on these key issues may be found in Derrida/Ronse 1972, English translation Bass 2002. Useful introductions to Derrida’s thought include: Dooley/Kavanagh 2007; Glendinning 2011; Howells 1998; Stocker 2006.


⁸ Halsall 1995b, 31, 39.
sionicus and Arelatensis?9 What passes without discussion is what it meant to be an Arvernian or from Arles, or – if Mummolenus’ sons weren’t identified as Franks – from Soissons.

I am, however, in good company. A similar deconstructive reading of Walter Pohl’s writings illustrates, as I hope to show, how a crucial misunderstanding has come about and how the present volume might deal with and ameliorate the results of that, to move the debate on in productive fashion. The debate – maybe dispute would be better – between Walter Pohl and Walter Goffart is well known. It causes me some distress. I have friends on both sides – I like to think that I get on well with both of the principals – and no one likes to see their friends arguing so bitterly. Most of the rudeness has come from the western shore of the Atlantic, but rudeness is not the only, and certainly not the most effective, form of academic aggression. This confrontation has long perplexed me, largely because I have strained to see exactly what the ‘Toronto School’s’ objection to the ‘Vienna School’ was.

I should not have to make clear that Walter Pohl’s works have been immensely valuable and important to me, or that I am almost entirely in agreement with its principal conclusions. Both points should be visible from my own previous writings. It must furthermore be stressed that deconstruction is not in and of itself a hostile move. As any aficionado of Derrida’s writing knows, it is a recognition of a text’s, or a body of writing’s, quality, importance and value. Having thus made clear that what follows is motivated not by hostility or confrontation but by respect and friendship I should like to discuss what seemed to me to emerge from a deconstructive re-reading of as much of the Pohl oeuvre as was available to me, especially the classics of the corpus.10

Throughout this work, the analysis of what makes (or does not make) and what distinguishes (or does not) a people remains at the level of those groups which have always been considered to be peoples: Franks, Goths, Lombards, Burgundians and the rest, for whom the constitutive outside is indeed formed by the Romans, the Roman Empire. For example, in his classic article, ‘Telling the difference’, Walter Pohl asked what it meant to be (inter alia) a citizen of the civitas of Tours.11 That part of the question, however, was never answered. That type of identity, Wir-Gefühl or whatever played no further role in the discussion. The ‘repressed other’ throughout the text is the non-ethnic group, whatever (if ever) that was or might

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9 I assume that Firminus, Evantius and (perhaps) Bodegisil were the people who in the Pactus legis Salicae would be termed Romani – perhaps belonging to the evidently Roman category of conviviales regi. Pactus legis Salicae 41, 8, ed. Eckhardt, 157.
10 These works included: Pohl 1998b; Pohl 1998c; Pohl 1999; Pohl 2002a; Pohl 2002b; Pohl 2005b; Pohl 2008. I am grateful to Walter Pohl not only for copies of most of these works but also for tolerating this close reading of his oeuvre with good humour. I must underline that, as any reader of Derrida’s work will know, a deconstructive reading is a mark of respect, of a text’s importance and influence.
11 Pohl 1998b, 22.
have been. Put another way, the analysis (however subtle, persuasive and brilliant) remains at the level of the ethnic groups that have always been considered to be ethnic groups and which have always been the ethnic players in the story: the barbarians. It will become clear below that this is in fact commonplace in discussions of early medieval ethnicity, from all historiographical camps, but the inevitable point is that if one limits the discussion in this way, to those social units which have always been held, a priori, to be ethnic groups, the argument runs a strong risk of circularity, or at least of simply reaffirming its initial premises.

What has therefore escaped the discussion thus far is how the Turoni, Arverni and Bituriges, or the Gauls, Spaniards and Italians, differed from each other, or what the difference was between those ethnic taxonomies and that of the Germani. Was a Batavian any more different from a Frank than from a Treverian? I doubt it, but then I think we have not sufficiently carefully kept the analysis of the Roman-Barbarian dichotomy separate from that of the taxonomic ethnography that pervades our sources. And yet, the deconstructive reader of the Pohl oeuvre (as it stood before the 2013 Vienna conference) will see an effective division between Germani – who have ethnic groups – and Romans – who, within the explicit discussion of the texts published thus far, seem not to have. Also visible is the persistence of the type of identity, which earlier I provisionally labelled gentile (identity as a people), as something somehow ‘special’, vis-à-vis other types of identity that could and should be positioned within the same, ‘ethnic’ part of any map of identities. On that basis, whether one likes it or not, seeing ethnicity in the Pohl oeuvre as a means of clothing old-style invading barbarians in new garb is one possible legitimate reading. This is permitted by two aporias: silences, or rather by the spaces left by those silences, which represent a ‘blockage’ in the reading of a text where interpretation can proceed no further but must follow the reader’s choice.¹² These are points of undecidability. One point is the silence about what distinguishes an ethnic group from a non-ethnic group within the same part of the spectrum, or layering, of identities. The other is the silence about what distinguishes such identities or layers of identity among the barbarians from their equivalents among the Romans, or more accurately among the inhabitants of the Roman Empire.

Now, as it happens, it is vital to point out that a deconstructive reader will encounter precisely the same aporetic silences – if anything – more easily, in the works of some of Pohl’s critics, and indeed with more serious consequences for their arguments, as we shall see. Leaving that aside for the moment, however, I would like to propose, in the interests of attempting to bridge the historiographical divide, that it is in the silent spaces of these aporias that the misunderstanding between the Toronto and Vienna ‘schools’ originates. The Toronto school views the silences as constitutive, integral to the argument. By contrast, in my own previous readings of the corpus Pohlianum, I never have assigned them any significance. I

¹² On the aporia in Derrida’s thinking, see Royle 2003, 92–93.
admit some positive curiosity about them but I perceived them more as a sign of incompletion, as a space yet to be filled, as an area where the argument could be advanced. The Toronto School’s critique, by contrast, is – as I see it – based on a reading of those silences that suggests that they imply a genealogical link to the more traditional Lehre of ‘Germanic’ history. Now, just as long as one sees the critique as based upon extant silences within the Pohl argument, and just as long as one acknowledges that an argument is composed of its silences as well as its statements, one must concede that the Toronto critique is based on a valid reading. If one does not accept this, one must continue either, as I did, to be unable to recognise the works of Walter Pohl in the Toronto critiques thereof and – in consequence – to be simply bemused about what was going on, or more actively to see them as a malicious and wilful distortion. I do not think that the last option is justified either. There may have been malice involved – certainly the critique could have been expressed in less hostile and offensive language – but I do not think there has been deliberate distortion.

This, I think, suggests why the two sides have continued to talk past each other and how such bitterness and anger has arisen. To repeat: what is at stake is silence and, when silence is at stake, ‘I never said that’ will never be an adequate riposte. Hence, as I see it, one side’s frustration with the other for not dealing with what is actually written on the page and the other side’s frustration that their opponents seem to refuse to answer its criticism. When the space exposed by those silences opens onto the traditional Lehre of the Völkerwanderung and thence – inevitably – to Nazis, and where the two principals are of the precise respective heritages of those involved here, unsurprisingly tempers will flare and would have done, I suspect, even if the critique had been made in less deliberately (or carelessly) provocative terms.

The point about an aporia, or an aporetic silence, as here, is that it is, in Derridian terms, a space of différance, where a choice between two undecidable options can only be made on the basis of a purely political decision. Put another way, as intimated above, the text itself provides no empirical pointer so one must decide for oneself, for one’s own reasons, what the silence means. Thus the debate becomes as tribal as it has done: almost ethnic (meta-ethnic?) in itself. That is why we have made so little progress in resolving the issue, for all the debate’s heat. Not dealing with those aporias in the argument, once pointed out, though, will not merely not close up that space; it will actively keep it open. That is why this volume and the conference upon which it was based are so important. They overtly address – or should do – both of the silent spaces I have mentioned. I am not the sort to argue for cosily artificial rapprochement or, worse, consensus but one of the many tributes one can pay to Walter Pohl is that, in spite of the calumniation he has received, he has continued to talk to the Toronto historians. What I hope for from addressing those aporias is – one way or another – the provision of something concrete and decidable, on the basis of which those of us with no tribal affiliation can make a choice.
Roman identity

Roman identity serves as a particularly good case study of the multi-layered, situational and dynamic nature of ethnic identity. Let us return to Gregory of Tours. Edward James and Walter Goffart have both argued that ethnicity was not important for Gregory. Why not? Because he rarely ascribes a ‘gentile’ identity to the people in his stories. He does not talk all that often about Franci; Saxones crop up a couple of times, once famously or infamously cutting their hair and dressing in the Breton style; a Goth makes an appearance here and there; and that is about that. But the Historiae are full of people identified by civitas. James says that Gregory identifies himself not as a Roman but as an Arvernian. That sort of identity, according to civitas or in some cases, as with the men of Champagne, ducatus, was – very obviously – something that mattered a lot in Gregory’s world. There is nothing that allows us analytically to distinguish these types of identity from the ‘gentile’ level.

Let us pause here to note the implicit assumption within James’ and Goffart’s articles: that ethnicity is a level of identity equating with ‘people’ generally (that is to say it operates, in the term provisionally adopted here, at the ‘gentile’ level) and with Germanic people specifically. Presumably, ethnicity can only have mattered to Gregory if his works were filled with descriptions of the characters in his tales as ‘Franks’, ‘Goths’ or ‘Saxons’ or, for James, if he had self-identified as ‘Roman’ (apparently in opposition to Frankish). This is a point of considerable interest, not least because it marks a point at which Pohl’s and Goffart’s writings come together and indeed join those of many other writers on the topic. For Pohl and Goffart equally, as for James (and the early Halsall), ethnicity and its importance is to be judged according to the usage of Germanic ethnonyms as markers of identity. The implication of Goffart’s article is that people had no ethnic identity of any significance if that was not ‘Germanic’. The fact that the Libri Historiarum are replete with Arverni, Turoni, Lemovici, Turnacenses, Bituriges and the rest is a point which, for Goffart, seems to have no bearing at all upon the question of the political importance of ethnic identity in Gregory’s Gaul. Indeed, close reading and comparison of the Goffart and Pohl corpora reveals that ‘Germanic’ ethnicity is far more real for Goffart (and his followers, especially Callander Murray) than for Pohl. The crucial issues are these: first, in Goffart’s view these Germanic ethnic groups did not bring down the Roman Empire and were of no historical significance whereas, for Pohl, whether or not they brought down the Empire, ethnically-named political groups were of central importance in

14 James 1998, 66. James says that Gregory writes of the identities ‘Frank’ and ‘Arvernian’ ‘as if they were equivalent ethnic terms’ but the implications of that point are left unexplored, James 1998, 60.
16 Murray 2002.
the political changes of the fifth and sixth centuries; and second, Goffart reads Pohl’s argument (as above) as a refiguring of the old view of the conquest of the Roman Empire by Germanic peoples. Indeed – ironically – it may actually be his own view of ethnicity (especially ‘Germanic’) and its reality that predisposes Goffart to read Pohl in this way.

Returning to Gregory of Tours and the precise problem of Roman identity, one must ask why the bishop of Tours avoids the designation of Romani for those people he identifies by civitas or ducatus. Any answer must acknowledge first of all that this was nothing new; Roman ethnicity had always worked at multiple levels. Another key problem in so much discussion of late antique ethnicity is the failure to tease out or consistently analyse these different levels. Especially important – and perhaps confusing for the issue – is the fact that the concept of ‘Roman’ functioned at a structural as well as a taxonomic level and that these two levels could sometimes be run together. By the structural level I mean the use of the terms ‘Roman’ and ‘barbarian’ to mark an important organisational, cultural difference between civilised and savage. By the taxonomic level I mean the way in which the world was described as divided up into the territories of different peoples. The two different levels are well illustrated by the two parts of Tacitus’ Germania. The first section differentiates the Germani, qua barbarians, from the Romans in a way that, as has long been noted, cannot really be read other than as a critique of Roman society and politics under Domitian; the second half gives a taxonomy of the Germanic peoples, with few or no points of contact with the first section. Like any identity, Roman identity operated in the symbolic and imaginary realms (as above). The crucial point is that the structural level of Roman identity – that which has barbarian as its opposite or other – functions almost entirely in the imaginary register and even then in a mainly self-referential way; the taxonomic level works in the symbolic to a much greater degree. The term Romanus may confuse the issue by (unlike barbarus) being capable of being used in both levels but it is analytically vital to keep them distinct. Failure to do that has bedevilled much study of late antique ethnicity. The opposite of barbarus is Romanus; the opposite of, say, Francus is not.

The structural level mapped onto the taxonomic in historically-contingent ways. Caesar, for example, described the Gallic and Germanic peoples but there is no sense from Tacitus’ historical writings that the movement of the imperial limes in the inter-

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17 Goffart 2006, 47, 198.
18 Geary 2002, 63 – 73; Miles 1999; Mitchell/Greatrex 2000; Woolf 1998; recently, Conant 2012.
19 I owe the term ‘taxonomic’ to Michael Kulikowski. As late Roman examples of the genre, one can cite Ammianus’ ethnographic excursus on the people who live beyond the Danube (Ammianus Marcellinus, Res Gestae 22.8; 31.2, trans. Rolfe, 212–241, 380–395), the Arabs (Ammianus Marcellinus, Res Gestae 14.4, trans. Rolfe, 26–29), and so on.
21 See above, p. 41.
vening century and a half had much altered this taxonomy.\textsuperscript{22} When Ammianus launched into his periodic ethnic excursus it makes little difference whether he is talking of areas inside or outside the imperial frontiers.\textsuperscript{23} The whole world was made up of different peoples with their own characteristics. Plenty of fourth-century evidence backs up the idea that the Romans thought of the world within the \textit{limes} as a mosaic of different \textit{ethne}.\textsuperscript{24} The late Roman popularity of works on the \textit{origines} of those people, within which genre post-imperial \textit{origines gentium} are surely to be located, makes this clearer still.\textsuperscript{25}

Thus, contrary to what Walter Goffart has written,\textsuperscript{26} one of the many interesting things that happened to the Roman Empire in the fifth century was \textit{not} that it ran into a wave of ethnicity. Ethnic identity was alive and well throughout imperial history. The problem, noted above, is that Goffart’s work contains the same aporia, the same silence concerning what differentiates an ethnic from a non-ethnic identity and about what differentiated an intra-imperial ethnic group or identity from an extra-imperial one. Throughout Goffart’s work they remain tacitly present and unchallenged, and with a much more serious impact upon his argument.

### The development of Roman identity to c. 476

The questions I wish to examine in the remainder of this paper are, first, how and especially why Roman ethnicity should have defaulted to the \textit{civitas} level by Gregory’s day; and, second, why it then got worse. In \textit{Salic Law}, the Romans are clearly a parallel population to the Franks, even if legally disadvantaged in some ways.\textsuperscript{27} A century or so later, \textit{Romani} are just one of several semi-free categories in parts of \textit{Lex Ribiuaria}, who are restricted in their legal capacity.\textsuperscript{28} That situation would have been unthinkable even a century earlier, let alone in 400.

An answer to this question requires us to consider the role of Romanness, as a supra-regional, imperial identity in the process of subjectivization. Here in important ways, the taxonomic and the structural come together with the political and cultural. Romanness was central to the formation of the political subject. What was held to distinguish man from woman also distinguished Roman and barbarian, and

\textsuperscript{23} Thus Ammianus Marcellinus, \textit{Res Gestae} 15.11–12 (on the Gauls); 22.15–16 (on Egypt), trans. Rolfe, 188–199, 278–309, differ little if at all from the excursus referred to at footnote 19.
\textsuperscript{24} For example Ammianus Marcellinus’ excursus on the Gauls (Ammianus Marcellinus, \textit{Res Gestae} 15.11–12, trans. Rolfe, 188–199; see footnote 19).
\textsuperscript{26} Goffart 2006, 1.
\textsuperscript{27} E.g. \textit{Pactus legis Salicae} 14; 32; 41; 42, 4, ed. Eckhardt, 64–69, 122–123, 154–161, 164.
\textsuperscript{28} \textit{Lex Ribiuaria} 61, 10–11; 61, 19; 68, 2–3; 69, ed. Beyerle/Buchner, 112, 113–114, 119–120. On the meaning of \textit{Romani} in the \textit{Lex Salica} and the \textit{Lex Ribiuaria} see the contributions by Stefan Esders and Lukas Bothe in this volume.
human and animal: moderation, control of the emotions, reason. These aspects learned during socialisation, paideia, enabled participation in legitimate government and rendered Roman forms of government superior to others. Movement towards the ideal legitimised behaviour and authority of all sorts. Movement away – real or alleged – had the opposite effect. Control over the political centre, the imperial court, enabled one to define who was and who was not behaving in the correct legitimate fashion or moving in the right direction. Thus Roman identity, as something moved towards, was central to the sex-gender system and to political legitimacy. This transcended taxonomy. As is well known, a barbarian could behave in such a ‘Roman’ fashion that his non-Roman origins were held of no account or – more correctly – were held simply in the taxonomic register, just as we may suppose were the origins of aSpaniard, Gaul or African at the imperial court. This should not be controversial.²⁹

Nonetheless, the point just made is worth stressing. In the taxonomic sense, Romans had always had multiple layers of identity: as a citizen of the Empire; as originating in one of the major imperial regions, whether or not fossilised as dioceses in the Diocletianic Empire (Britain, Gaul, Spain, Africa, etc.); as the inhabitant of a particular province or civitas. The writings of the Gallic authors of the late Empire make this last level very clear.³⁰ Someone could claim different civitates as bases of identity from paternal and maternal descent.³¹ Perhaps there were lower, nested levels too, based around lesser settlements or communities, or pagi.³²

None of these levels differs fundamentally from a ‘gentile’ or similar identity.³³ The tribal origins of the Gallic and British civitates in any case made them ‘gentile’ identities of a sort. Classical ethnography provided a resource for the assigning of characteristics to such identities. We can see this in Ausonius’ jibes about a British rival or in Ammianus’ comments on the Gauls, and their differences from the Italians, or on the Pannonians who came to pre-eminence under Valentinian, or, earlier,

²⁹ For an important discussion of some of these issues, see Kulikowski 2013. On paideia, a good introduction is P. Brown 1992, 37–41.
³² In the seventh century, Fredegar identified a Frank as homo Scarponensis’ (i.e. from the pagus Scarponensis, on the Moselle above Metz), Fredegar, Chronicae 4, 52, ed. and trans. Wallace Hadrill, 43.
³³ Halsall 2007a, 39–40.
in Cassius Dio’s ascriptions of Caracalla’s diverse personal defects to his family’s origins in different regions.\(^{34}\)

It is by no means clear that any of these identities functioned differently in social relations within the Empire – that is at a level below a shared Roman political identity – from barbarian confederate or tribal identities or origins: a resource for differentiation, assimilation or other relationships. Classical ethnography played a part of course as can be seen in Ammianus’ criticism – or praise – of the inhabitants of different regions.\(^{35}\) That makes it difficult to assume a different treatment at this level of identity, of people from within or without the limes. The late Roman army’s élite auxilia palatina included regiments named after Celts and Batavians as well as after Franks and Saxons.\(^{36}\) That sort of ethnographic taxonomy played on the kinds of bio-geographical pseudo-science that was held to explain the civilised-barbarian dichotomy, so the two aspects bled into one another.\(^{37}\) This further emphasises my point about the contingency and analytical interchangeability of different levels of ethnicity.

Crucial to the development of Roman identities are the changes in the Roman army in the fourth century and its so-called barbarization. The extent to which this was an actual matter of real non-Roman influence can be debated, as in Barbarian Migrations, where I suggested the existence of a certain ‘barbarian chic’ that might usefully be considered as an analogue for the nineteenth-century French zouaves: French troops who wore a French idea of North African native dress and who adopted a number of other North African cultural practices, all of which gave them a tremendous esprit de corps.\(^{38}\) It nevertheless seems clear that following the division of civil and military services the army began to create a set of new identities that centred on the very antitheses of the civic Roman masculine ideal: animal, ferocious, braggart, barbarian.\(^{39}\) Such would of course form only one level of identity, nested within and as contingent as the others. Nonetheless that represents a crucial development that provided a hugely important resource within the political and social developments of the fifth century.

The key feature of fifth-century politics, especially after Valentinian III’s assassination, was faction fighting between groups made up of Romans and barbarians. A failure to control the centre, or a defeat by those who did, led factions cut off from traditional legitimation of status to seek other forms of legitimate political authority.

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35 Above, footnotes 19 and 23.
36 Halsall 2007a, 106–108.
38 Halsall 2007a, 109.
39 Halsall 2007a, 101–110.
In this context, the barbarized military model of Romanness was very valuable to an aristocracy used to serving in or working alongside a ‘barbarised’ army. This surely eased the transition to the state of affairs around the 470s, where a series of regional factions existed, each grouped around a particular army, none of which was able both to gain lasting and secure control of the political centre and defeat, and establish legitimate dominance over the others.

In the course of the fifth century, barbarian military leaders had, as Michael Kulikowski has very clearly shown, using insights from postcolonial theory, developed a particular pattern of behaviour with regard to the imperial court. This involved stressing the stereotypical, threatening role of the barbarian when outside the circles of legitimate authority, as a means of being reintegrated into the latter, when such identities were dropped. Crucially, though, Roman military commanders seem to have picked up this model of behaviour too in the mid- to late fifth century. This, as I have argued, involved the adoption of the quintessential gentile title of rex as a basis for an authority that could be dealt with legitimately by Romans.

The development of Roman identity, c. 476 – c. 550

So we arrive at the situation that seems to have predominated between about 476 and the middle of the sixth century, when a Roman civil aristocracy and administration served alongside a barbarian army. This situation was importantly different from that which existed 100 years earlier but nevertheless was clearly descended and developed from the latter. It is important to stress that this was not a situation of straightforward binary oppositions but one of nested levels of identity. In the bizarre political situation that existed in the half century between Romulus Augustulus’ deposition and the death of Theodoric, when I would argue that people were aware that the Western Roman Empire was no longer functioning but not that it had ended, it is unsurprising that discussions of Roman identity largely took the form of discussions of legal relationships between Roman citizens and barbarian soldiers. This can be seen in the famous texts of Ostrogothic Italy, or in Salic or Burgundian Law. Otherwise, as with the slightly earlier writings of Sidonius Apollinaris, they concerned the traditional underpinnings of Roman identity: culture, education and so on. Yet at the same time the Roman aristocracy’s militarisation continued, as is well known. Simultaneously, the Church was adopting classical aspects of Roman civic masculinity and was, in some areas, such as Gaul, becoming a focus of Roman aristocratic.

40 Kulikowski 2013.
competition. Here too, though, there was change and an opposition to a very un-Roman competitive asceticism.\textsuperscript{44}

It is difficult to see how this situation could fail to cause the renegotiation of Roman identity. As I stated at the beginning, identity is a motion towards, an issue of desire. Any identity depends upon a set of ideal images and commensurate oppositions. In the situation that was emerging in the course of the fifth century the oppositions were neither as pronounced nor as negative. The political advantages of Romanness were lesser, too. That did not mean that there were no attractions. In the strange ‘sleepwalking’ period after 476 the emperor remained the ultimate political reference point, in whom barbarian soldier and Roman civilian, and the legitimation of the forms of authority invested in both, came together.\textsuperscript{45}

The situation is perhaps very well illustrated in the \textit{Pactus Legis Salicae}, where \textit{Romani} and \textit{Franci} have seemingly well-defined functions but both have access to the king.\textsuperscript{46} The Franks have legal privilege, which is hugely significant, but the image is of two parallel populations. We should not teleologically assume that this situation was destined to develop along particular lines. The world after 476 contained many possibilities.

One of these possibilities was the re-establishment of unity by military action. In c. 510 there existed a situation wherein two kings, Clovis and Theodoric, having between them established dominance over almost the whole western Empire, faced off against each other. Both were evidently happy to be addressed as \textit{augustus} by Roman subjects, even if neither formally adopted the title.\textsuperscript{47} To contemporaries, this situation may well have seemed simply like the next, perhaps decisive, round in the struggle between the Gallic and Italian factions that had dominated fifth-century western politics. Had such a play-off come about, and been as decisive as many other battles of the period had been,\textsuperscript{48} it is likely that a western Empire would have been re-established, however permanently or impermanently, under Amal or Merovingian rule. Who can guess what might have become of Roman identity in that event? I suspect that something closer to the fourth-century situation may have emerged, although it was unlikely to have represented a re-establishment of or reversion to precisely that state of affairs.

Such a decisive confrontation, of course, never took place. Instead, possibly motivated by the developments around 510, the Constantinopolitan court began to em-

\textsuperscript{44} Cooper/Leyser 2001.
\textsuperscript{45} On the continuity of Roman titles, see A. H. M. Jones 1964, 238–265; Barnwell 1992. On the ‘Romanness’ of ‘barbarian’ rulers, see Halsall 2007a, 488–494.
\textsuperscript{46} E.g. \textit{Pactus legis Salicae} 41, 5; 41, 8, ed. Eckhardt, 156, 157.
\textsuperscript{48} Such as the battle of Vouillé (507).
phasize its exclusive, Roman legitimacy and in time to attempt to re-impose political unity through its own military actions. What made a crucial difference to these campaigns was the well-known Justinianic ideological offensive. Famously this involved a rewriting of fifth-century history to portray the West as lost to barbarian invasions, which can be seen in works from Marcellinus Comes’ Chronicle, through at least the early books (though I would say all, to some extent) of Procopius’ Wars. ⁴⁹

The development of Roman identity, c. 550 – c. 625

The impact of the Justinianic Wars, and especially of the fact that they did not result in the West’s military domination by the eastern Emperor, cannot be overestimated. After twenty years of brutal destructive warfare waged to make the point, no one could be in any doubt that the areas beyond actual imperial authority were not part of the Empire any more. They remained lost to barbarians; the frontier between imperial Roman inside and outside had formally been redrawn. As far as Roman identity in the West was concerned, this completely changed the game. It did so for all sorts of identities, the traditional bases for which had to be redefined. As is well-known, the Old Testament became a new source of models and ideals. ⁵⁰

What could be done with Roman identity though?

In this context it is not surprising to see the dramatic decline in Roman identity at the end of the sixth century in Gaul. The parallel societies of Lex Salica disappeared. In the sixth century the personnel of the Gallic church was dominated by people with Roman names. Around 600, that changed so that bishops overwhelmingly had Frankish names. The episcopal list of Metz, for instance, reveals only a couple of non-Roman or non-biblical names before about 600. After that the situation is reversed. This is fairly typical for northern Gaul. ⁵¹ One might read that change in several ways. The families who provided members of the episcopate changed their naming practices; the people entering the episcopate ceased to adopt Roman names as more appropriate to their status; or the Roman families that had provided the bishops dropped in status. Either way, the significance of this change for Roman status remains and cannot be ignored.

This is also the period when Gregory of Tours was writing his Histories. In this context I think it is unsurprising that Roman identity is conspicuous by its absence. As Edward James says, Gregory does not self-identify as Romanus but as Arvernus. ⁵²

What might have been seen as the imaginary element of classical Roman identity is

⁴⁹ Croke 1983. The historiographical tradition is most recently represented in the writings of Peter Heather, notably the somewhat ironically-subtitled The Fall of Rome: A New History (London, 2005).
⁵¹ Halsall 1995b, 14–17, 29; Gauthier 1980.
⁵² James 1998, 66. See also the contribution by Helmut Reimitz in this volume.
displaced into senatorial noble identity and into Christian behaviour. Otherwise Roman identity has defaulted to the level of the *civitas* identity as in the case of the embassies mentioned earlier. It is no surprise that *civitas* identifiers are mostly confined to the south. This identity is no less ethnic than that of Frank. Like all such identities, it could be the object of violence, as with the killing that broke out along the Loire after the death of Chilperic.

Gregory’s own rather sneering view of the men of Bourges further illustrates the point. A comparison of Gregory’s story of the foundation of the see of Bourges with that of his home town of Clermont reveals the men of Bourges to have been much more unwilling than the Auvergnats to receive the word of God. Only the intervention of a distant relative of Gregory’s even enables the embryonic church to acquire a place of worship. After their deaths the burial places of the first bishops of both cities are forgotten but whereas the grave of Stremonius was revealed by a vision received by a future bishop of Clermont and his body translated in fairly standard fashion, at Bourges, Ursinus’ grave was only revealed after a member of the bishop’s staff received a cure (at St. Martin’s, Tours, significantly) and even this revelation was disputed by the local bishop. Only the intervention of St. Germanus of Paris and further visions led to a translation.

In contrast to the numerous saintly figures of Tours and Clermont catalogued by Gregory, the Berruyard holy men are fairly nondescript, and manifest a very frequent association with Tours, Clermont or St. Martin. Otherwise they are faintly ridiculous. Witness St. Marianus: Marianus, a recluse, was found dead under an apple tree and consequently was rumoured to have died by falling out of a tree. ‘But it was not known for certain because no one had been an eye-witness.’ Whatever the case, it was hardly the most dignified form of death for a holy man, and the locals, perhaps understandably enough from a modern point of view, were not over-impressed, in spite of unspecified healing miracles. One local, rebuked for working on St. Marianus’ feast day, angrily replied: ‘Do you think that a man who slipped from a tree whilst satisfying his appetite has been included in the company of angels, so that he ought to be venerated as a saint?’ Needless to say, his house burnt down. Only after another miracle, where some stolen oxen miraculously wandered home on their own, does Gregory say: ‘after these events, the people of Bourges began to honour this confessor of God with more diligent concern.’ What better part of the world

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53 A classic study is Van Dam 1985.
54 Heather 2000.
55 Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, 7, 2, ed. Krusch/Levison, 327.
56 Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, 1, 30 – 31, ed. Krusch/Levison, 22 – 24. Gregory’s oppositional attitude doubtless relates to the fact that Bourges was the metropolitan see of *Aquitanica Prima*, the province in which Gregory’s home town of Clermont was located.
for a bogus holy man to emerge? Towards the end of the *Histories* a man from Bourges is attacked by a swarm of flies and as a result goes mad. Eventually, after a career which exactly parodies that of a proper holy man, he was killed by the *pueri* of the bishop of Le Puy. ⁶⁰ Clearly, identities like these, could operate in the register of the imaginary as well as the symbolic. There is no way, analytically, of distinguishing these identities as somehow less ‘ethnic’ than those associated with the recognised ‘peoples’ of Late Antiquity. Their status as a rung below more ‘gentile’ identities was only contingent upon the nature of fifth- and sixth-century politics and the larger size of western kingdoms at that time. In some ways this was the golden age of *civitas* identity. ⁶¹

Gregory is famously tacit about the end of the Roman Empire in Gaul. What is less often remarked upon is the fact that he is at least as reticent about the beginning of the Roman Empire in Gaul. ⁶² Roman history, as one might expect, has been displaced in favour of Christian history. The eschatological implications of this are unclear. Obviously, after several centuries of Christian linkage of the Empire with the Sixth Age the end of the Roman Empire should have produced a great deal of concern about the end of the world, and in my view it did. But Gregory’s precise position on this is vague. His most overt statement on the issue can be read in diametrically opposed ways. ⁶³ Nonetheless he certainly had concerns, as the Preface to Book 5 of the *Histories* makes very clear. ⁶⁴

By around 600, then, it is difficult to see Roman identity in Gaul as a pole of attraction. Much of its component elements had been displaced into other areas. The ideal behaviour associated with legitimate political authority was no longer exclusively associated with Roman education and subjectivization. One has to recall the oppositions and differences inherent in all identities. For Roman identity in Gaul the key opposition involved the legal privilege, tax exemption and military-political avenues for advancement associated with Frankish identity. ⁶⁵ Such issues had, I suggest, less important implications for *civitas* identity. For one thing, there was no binary opposition between *Arvernus* and *Francus* any more than there was between *Arvernus* and *Arelatensis* in the embassies mentioned by Gregory. For another, *civitas* identity might coexist with Frankish in a nested way, as perhaps with Bobo and Bodegisel or the *Franci Tornacenses* of Book 10 of the *Histories*. ⁶⁶ For a third, in at

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61 Lewis 2000. See also Handley 2000; Halsall 2007a, 480–482.
62 Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, 1, 18, ed. Krusch/Levison, 16–17, claims that Julius Caesar was the first emperor and mentions the foundation of Lyon but there is no overt statement about the conquest of Gaul.
least the southern parts of Merovingian Gaul, civitas identity was part and parcel of political and military activity. Military service was structured differently.\textsuperscript{67}

If the components of identity are perpetually renegotiated but always already in existence, then the disadvantages of Roman identity in northern Gaul around 600 would be perceived as natural. In that context it is not surprising that those who could had laid aside this level of identity and that those who could not had sunk to the level of a legally-dependent stratum of society. It was possibly not until the category of the half-free \textit{Romanus} had been absorbed within a general economically class of the dependent, perhaps by the later eighth century or perhaps earlier,\textsuperscript{68} that Roman identity could again emerge as something to be stressed, created or fought for at high levels.

Clearly, the transformations of Romanness in late sixth-century northern Gaul were varied. I have not mentioned the peculiarly Roman population of Trier.\textsuperscript{69} Nor have I mentioned the attempts by Chilperic I to incorporate traditional elements of legitimate Roman rule within the image of Frankish monarchy.\textsuperscript{70} Across the West that diversity would be magnified. Seventh-century Spain for example shows some similarities with the Frankish situation and perhaps a more sustained attempt to adopt a solution similar to Chilperic’s.\textsuperscript{71} For Lombard Italy and Anglo-Saxon England we simply do not have the relevant data but general similarities might be suggested.

\section*{Conclusion}

Roman identity had never been an immutable or monolithic identity – like any other identity it never could have been – and it is important that we early medievalists remember that. Roman identity survived the supposed barbarian invasions of the fifth century in the West as perhaps diminished – temporarily inconvenienced – but nonetheless as an important resource in political activity. The mid-sixth-century crisis associated with Justinian’s wars put an end to that. However it was responded to, after that, Roman identity could not survive in anything like the old way. In this as in so many other areas it seems correct to say that the post-Justinianic transformations that took place in the West around 600 marked the end of the Roman world.\textsuperscript{72}

\textsuperscript{67} Halsall 2003, 48.
\textsuperscript{68} Halsall 1995b, 59.
\textsuperscript{69} Halsall 2010a, 225–229, 258. See also Jamie Kreiner’s paper in this volume.
\textsuperscript{70} Gregory of Tours, \textit{Decem libri historiarum}, 5, 17; 5, 44; 6, 2; 6, 46, ed. Krusch/Levison, 214–216, 252–254, 266–267, 319–321.
\textsuperscript{71} On Isidore of Seville, see J. Wood 2012.
\textsuperscript{72} This is the title of a project I am currently working on, for which I received generous support in the form of a Leverhulme Major Research Fellowship in 2009–12.
Post-script

I want to thank Walter Pohl for his thoughtful reactions to this chapter in the introduction to this volume. Walter offered me the opportunity to respond to those thoughts here but I want to leave the two readings to stand without further comment. It is usually the temptation to attempt to pursue a debate until a consensus is reached (publicly at least!) or – worse – where one side or other ‘wins’. There are, to be sure, points of contact between my reading and Walter’s but, rather than developing those, or insisting more heavily on the issues on which we disagree, or declaring that one area is more significant than the other, I want instead to leave the space between us open for the reader. The aim is to give two alternatives between which a reader’s own interpretations might resonate. This keeps the active element of historical debate open, rather than closing it down, and seems to me to be the ethical option in furthering interpretations of the elements under discussion.