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Romanness at the fringes of the Frankish Empire: The strange case of Bavaria

*Onulfus vero praecepto fratris admonitus universos iussit ad Italiam migrare Romanos.*¹

When writing this sentence in 511, Eugippius had a clear perception of who was Roman and who was not.² Anachronistically, he makes Severin predict already in 480 that the *Romani* of *Noricum ripense*, in what is now upper and lower Austria, will migrate to *Romani soli provinciam* – as if the Roman Empire had already disintegrated and if the Italian peninsula was the only home-country of the Romans.³ In contrast to this account, the archaeology tells us that the life of the provincial population went on.⁴ In some cases the continuity in former Roman cities is also documented by accounts in Carolingian times. *Lauriacum*, *Iuvavum* and even *Teurnia*, the former capital of *Noricum mediterraneum*, lived on in the texts, though as settlements clearly in different and much reduced forms.⁵

By the beginning of the sixth century the Roman Empire, as an organization and a point of reference for the identity of the former provincial population, disappeared from this area. All sources from the sixth and seventh centuries describe the region as being under Frankish influence. The inhabitants are called Bavarians and, later in the eastern parts of Noricum, Slavs and Avars.⁶ Around 200 years later, in the mid-eighth century, the territory of the early medieval Bavarian duchy comprised roughly one half of the Roman province of Noricum and one half of Raetia. In the eighth century, Bavaria expanded and acquired territory in the former region of *Venetia et Histria*, in the now Slavic parts of Noricum and later even in Pannonia.⁷ Also some areas north of the Danube were part of Bavaria, areas that had never been under Roman rule.⁸

At first sight, all aspects of Romanness have left the area: by the eighth century a Germanic language was the main language spoken and Bavarian politics looked to-

1 Eugippius, *Vita Severini* 44, ed. Noll, 112: Onulfus ordered by command of his brother all Romans to migrate to Italy.

2 Even a converted catholic and long-time monk was signified as *barbarus genere*. (Eugippius, *Vita Severini* 35, 1, ed. Noll, 100).

3 Eugippius, *Vita Severini* 31, ed. Noll, 98. Eugippius evokes this image by equating the Romans with the chosen people of the Old Testament who set out for the Holy Land. This shows the exegetical background of the text, but nevertheless it remains a telling picture.

4 Konrad 2012, 46–53; Rettner 2012, 282–290 for the difficult question of ‘Romans and Germans’, see also Fehr 2012, 329–332 and Lotter 1976, 170–176.

5 Ewig 1976b, 424–425; Winckler 2012, 241–249.

6 Wolfram 1995b, 76–81.

7 Pohl 2005c, 61–65.

8 Wolfram 1995b, 290.