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Writing the Barbarian Past

Studies in Early Medieval Historical Narrative

By

Shami Ghosh

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Carissimae uxori meae

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Abbreviations

AbäG	*Amsterdamer Beiträge zur älteren Germanistik*.
AQDGM	Ausgewählte Quellen zur deutschen Geschichte des Mittelalters (= Freiherr vom Stein Gedächtnisausgabe).
ARCA	ARCA Classical and Medieval Texts, Papers and Monographs.
ASC	*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*: *A* = Janet M. Bately, ed. 1986. *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*, vol. 3: *MS A*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer. *B* = Simon Taylor, ed. 1983. *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*, vol. 4: *MS B*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer. *C* = Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe, ed. 2000. *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*, vol. 5: *MS C*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer. *D* = G.P. Cubbin, ed. 1996. *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*, vol. 6: *MS D*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer.
ASE	*Anglo-Saxon England*.
ASPR 3	George Philip Krapp and Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, eds 1936. *Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*, vol. 3: *The Exeter Book*. New York: Columbia University Press.
BÉFAR	Bibliothèque des écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome.
BSEM	Brill's Series on the Early Middle Ages.
CBT	Cultures, Beliefs and Traditions: Medieval and Early Modern Peoples.
CCCM	Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis.
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina.
CÉA MÂ	Collection des Études Augustiniennes, Série Moyen Âge et Temps Modernes.
CÉA SA	Collection des Études Augustiniennes, Série Antiquité.
CELAMA	Cultural Encounters in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages.
CSMLT	Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought, Fourth Series.
DA	*Deutsches Archiv zur Erforschung des Mittelalters*.
DLH	Rudolf Buchner, ed. and trans. 1967. *Gregorii episcopi Turonensis Historiarum libri decem*. 2 vols. AQDGM 2. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.
EHD	Dorothy Whitelock, ed. 1979. *English Historical Documents, c. 500–1042*, 2nd edn. London: Eyre Methuen.
EHR	*English Historical Review*
EME	*Early Medieval Europe*
ERGA	Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde.

Etym.	W.M. Lindsay, ed. 1911. *Isidori Hispalensis episcopi Etymologiarum sive originum libri xx*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
FMSt	*Frühmittelalterliche Studien.*
GL	Germania Latina.
HD	Habelts Dissertationsdrucke, Reihe alte Geschichte.
HE	*Bède le Vénérable: Histoire ecclésiastique du peuple anglais*, ed. Michael Lapidge, trans. Pierre Monat and Philippe Robin, with introduction and notes by André Crépin. 3 vols. Sources Chrétiennes 489–91. Paris: Éditions du Cerf.
HG	Cristóbal Rodríguez Alonso, ed. and trans. 1975. *Las historias de los godos, vandalos y suevos de Isidoro de Sevilla*. Colección fuentes y estudios de historia leonesa 13. León: Centro de Estudios e Investigación "San Isidoro", Archivo Histórico Dicesano, Caja de Ahorros y Monte de Piedad de León.
Hist. Brit.	"Historia Britonnum". In Edmond Faral, ed. and trans. 1969 [orig. 1929]. *La légende arthurienne: Études et documents*, vol. 3: 2–62. Bibliothèque de l'École des Haute Études 257. Paris: Champion.
HL	Ludwig Bethmann and Georg Waitz, eds. 1878. "Historia Langobardorum". In MGH SRL: 12–187. Hanover: Hahn.
ÍF	Íslenzk fornrit.
JLA	*Journal of Late Antiquity*.
KUT	Kohlhammer Urban-Taschenbücher.
LCL	Loeb Classical Library.
LHF	Bruno Krusch, ed. 1888. "Liber Historiae Francorum". In MGH SRM 2: 215–328. Hanover: Hahn.
MGH	Monumenta Germaniae Historica.
	AA Auctores Antiquissimi.
	Epp Epistolae.
	LL Leges.
	Poet. Poetae Latini medii aevi.
	SRG Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum separatim editi.
	SRG NS Scriptores rerum Germanicarum nova series.
	SRL Scriptores rerum Langobardicarum.
	SRM Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum.
	SS Scriptores.
MGM	Monographien zur Geschichte des Mittelalters.
Mlat Jb	*Mittellateinisches Jahrbuch*.
MST	Mittellateinische Studien und Texte.

OGL	Ludwig Bethmann and Georg Waitz, eds. 1878. "Origo gentis Langobardorum". In MGH SRL: 2–6. Hanover: Hahn.
P&P	*Past and Present*.
Pan. lat.	R.A.B. Mynors, ed. 1964. *XII panegyrici Latini*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
PBB	*Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur*.
PG	J.-P. Migne, ed. 1857–1912. *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series graeca*.
PL	J.-P. Migne, ed. 1839–64. *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series latina*.
PLRE	A.H.M. Jones, J.R. Martindale, and J. Morris. 1971–92. *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*. 3 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
RWAW	Rheinisch-westfälische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Vorträge.
S&T	Studies and Texts.
SEM	Studies in the Early Middle Ages.
Sett.	Settimane di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo.
SHA	Studies in Historical Archaeoethnology.
SM	Sammlung Metzler.
TOES	Toronto Old English Series.
TRHS	*Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*.
TRW	Transformation of the Roman World.
TTH	Translated Texts for Historians.
TUMH	Texte und Untersuchungen zur mittelhochdeutschen Heldenepik.
Var.	Theodor Mommsen, ed. 1894. *Cassiodori Senatoris Variae*. MGH AA 12. Berlin: Weidmann.
VIÖG	Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung.
VKF	Veröffentlichungen der Kommission für Frühmittelalterforschung.
ZfdA	*Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum*.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

On Christmas Day in the year 800, Charles, king of the Franks and known to posterity as Karolus magnus or Charlemagne, was crowned Roman emperor by Pope Leo III in a ceremony at Rome. For the first time since 476, there was again a Roman emperor in the west, albeit one who ruled over only a limited portion of what had once been the western empire, along with some regions east of the Rhine that had always been beyond the empire's boundaries. One of the principal sources for the life of Charlemagne is the *Vita Karoli magni* by his courtier Einhard, a text composed in fluent classicising Latin, and modelled in many respects on Suetonius's imperial biographies.[1] Although, according to Einhard, Charlemagne had trouble writing, he nevertheless appears to have learnt Latin, and was clearly Christian;[2] like his empire, Charlemagne was manifestly at least in some respects—including his religion—'Roman'. But the fluently Latinate Einhard calls himself a "homo barbarus"; and immediately after telling us about his patron's coronation, he also informs us that Charlemagne ordered "barbara et antiquissima carmina" to be written, a sign of the value the new emperor placed, it could be argued, on an aspect of his 'barbarian' heritage.[3]

Like Charlemagne, Einhard was a Frank, and a native speaker of a Germanic language; although Charlemagne ruled over many regions that had been within the Roman empire, including its very heartlands in Italy, he was himself from northern Europe, and the core of Carolingian power lay in what are now northern France, western Germany, and Belgium, rather than Rome and central Italy. Charlemagne himself seems to have had some reverence for Theoderic the Great, the Ostrogothic king of Italy in the sixth century: he had a statue of Theoderic removed from Ravenna and transported to Aachen.[4] This has been seen as an indication that Charlemagne valued Theoderic as a great 'Germanic' ruler of antiquity.[5] The 'barbarian' inheritance, on this reading, was thus of

1 Holder-Egger (ed. 1911; the coronation is reported at c. 28); on Einhard and Suetonius, see further Innes (1997). On the sources for and implications of the imperial coronation, see Becher (2003): 81–119; Collins (1998): 141–59; McKitterick (2008): 114–18; Schieffer (2004).

2 Holder-Egger (ed. 1911): c. 25.

3 Holder-Egger (ed. 1911): *Prologus*; c. 29.

4 Deliyannis (ed. 2006): c. 94.

5 Löwe (1952): 394–8.

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some importance for the new Roman emperor, most likely because he was himself still, in some respects at least, not fully Roman.

Yet there can be no disputing the centrality of the Roman inheritance for Carolingian Europe, and indeed for early medieval western Europe altogether.[6] After 476, there was no longer a Roman emperor in the west, and the regions that had once been imperial provinces were all, by the early sixth century, factually independent post-imperial kingdoms, ruled in most cases by the descendants of peoples who had once been a military class within late-imperial society, but who were generally, even into the sixth century and certainly for most of the fifth, not native speakers of Latin, largely illiterate, and either not Christian, or Arian rather than Catholic. However, all of the various peoples who established these post-imperial polities in western Europe eventually adopted Catholic Christianity (and therefore the Roman religion), as well as the Latin language, the (primarily Latin) written word both for use in government and for cultural production, and many aspects of late Roman administration. These were all parts of the Roman inheritance; and as a promoter of precisely many of these very Roman aspects of cultural and administrative life in the process that has been termed the 'Carolingian Renaissance', Charlemagne was perhaps quite appropriately a Roman emperor.[7]

Charlemagne's imperial status notwithstanding, even the Franks had originally been, in Roman perception, 'barbarians', and one of the most fundamental aspects of early medieval cultural history is—to put it crudely—precisely the process of 'barbarians' becoming (more) Roman. This process did not, however, by any means imply the elimination of non-Roman aspects of the 'barbarian' heritage: a simple reading of Einhard's words cited above would suggest that at least one part of that heritage—ancient barbarian songs—were still valued at the very highest levels of this Romanising society. We could thus argue that the value placed both on "barbara carmina" (for example) and Roman, Latin texts—the production of which reach unprecedented heights during the Carolingian Renaissance—embodies the synthesis of early medieval culture, which can be said to have emerged out of a conjunction of different elements,

6 There is a vast body of work on the significance of Rome in early medieval culture; see for example McKitterick (2014); Riché (1995): 153–201; Julia Smith (2005): 28–31; 255–92; Wickham (2009): 200–1; 561–2. On the importance of the Rome as a political model and source of legitimacy, not least in the Carolingian era, see also most recently Heather (2013).

7 Of the innumerable studies of various aspects of the 'Carolingian Renaissance', see e.g. the essays in McKitterick (ed. 1994) for useful surveys; on the Latin/Roman inheritance, see in particular Brown (1994); Garrison (1994); Garrison (2000); Innes (1997); and Wood (2014), in addition to the works cited in the previous note.

some more Roman than others. Needless to say, the evolution of early medieval culture from its diverse inheritances has been the subject of much previous scholarship; the present monograph provides an examination of one very specific aspect of this process, namely the ways in which texts dealing explicitly with a past that was in some manner 'barbarian' treated that past in relation to the Roman aspect of the cultural inheritance.

The Barbarian Past and Early Medieval Historical Narrative[8]

Narratives concerning the origins and ancient histories of the peoples who established post-Roman kingdoms in western Europe were not, in the form in which they have come down to us in the texts examined below, also contained within the traditions of classical Roman or Greek secular historiography or ethnography, nor within the tradition of ecclesiastical history. The narratives studied in the following chapters are all, in one way or another, evidence of methods of utilising both the Roman and the non-Roman elements of early medieval cultural heritage to provide an expression of some sort of coherent sense of historical consciousness in the present within which these texts were composed.

How did early medieval writers present aspects of the distant past that were not Christian (or at least not orthodox), not Roman, and not a part of the written Latin historical memory inherited from Rome and the Roman Church? How were these two facets of the cultural memory of the early middle ages related to each other in the narratives that explicitly have a barbarian, non-Christian past as their theme? These are the questions that the present work seeks to address, based on analyses of a number of discrete texts from quite

8 Henceforth I use the term 'barbarian' without inverted commas to refer to non-Roman peoples who would have been encompassed by the Roman usage of the term, and thus in general interchangeably with 'non-Roman'. No value judgement is implied by my use of the term, and hopefully the peoples concerned are sufficiently far removed from any living peoples and polities that my choice of vocabulary will be inoffensive. For a defence of the usage of 'barbarian' vs (for example) 'Germanic' or 'non-Roman', see James (2009): 5–8; cf. however Haubrichs (2011): 28, n. 60. The term 'barbarian' and its connotations are discussed in more detail, with further references, in the next section of this chapter. The 'barbarian past', although non-Roman, could also be Christian, and I qualify the phrase further with 'pre-Christian' or 'pre-Catholic' as appropriate. The Jewish past was also, of course, both non-Roman and pre-Christian, but none of the peoples who are the subjects of the texts discussed below had any Jewish or genuinely biblical heritage, so my usage will hopefully be unambiguous in this respect.

different contexts. While there is rarely any explicit relationship between the contexts of the evidence used here, the studies presented below nevertheless do reveal some trends in terms of the place of the barbarian past in early medieval culture. What is equally important to note, however, is that different aspects of the past served different functions within different elements of society: the values and historical consciousness of the militarised lay aristocracy were not necessarily identical to those of the clergy, and this difference is evident from comparing the perspectives adopted by, for example, the authors of the 'national' histories examined below, and those who wrote ecclesiastical histories during the same period.[9] Nevertheless, another result of this study is the demonstration that even with regard just to historical consciousness, there was no fundamental barrier between the lay and ecclesiastical spheres.

There exists a small corpus of texts that are devoted to the histories of the Goths, Franks, and Lombards from their origins to the author's present, and these are, in the present work, interpreted as efforts to conjoin a sense of an independent identity *as* Goths, Franks, and Lombards, with the inherited Roman and Christian historical traditions. These texts are the Gothic histories of Jordanes (*De origine actibusque Getarum*, hereafter *Getica*; *c.*551–2) and Isidore of Seville (*Historia Gothorum*, hereafter *HG*; *c.*630); the Fredegar chronicle (*c.*660) and the *Liber historiae Francorum* (hereafter *LHF*; *c.*727), both of which provide narratives about the origins of the Franks; and Paul the Deacon's *Historia Langobardorum* (*HL*; *c.*790). Chapters 2–4 of this book are devoted to these narratives, which are, with the exception of Fredegar, all explicitly 'national' histories in that they are concerned exclusively or primarily with the history of one people that was also the ruling class of a post-Roman kingdom, and with which the author clearly identified. (The Fredegar chronicle is an exception in that it starts as a universal chronicle, but it too increasingly focuses on the Franks, and it is clear that Frankish history is the primary concern.)

In the latter part of this book, I examine two epics, the Latin *Waltharius* (composed in the ninth or tenth century) and the Old English *Beowulf* (composed at some point between *c.*700 and *c.*1000), and finally some shorter vernacular texts, along with other evidence regarding the place of the barbar-

9 Here and in the following pages, the term 'national' history is used as a shorthand for a history that is devoted to the past of a single people. In other words, it excludes universal histories or world chronicles, as well as the vernacular legendary matter that deals with many different peoples in a single narrative. The use of the word 'national' is simply a circumlocution for 'relating to a single people', and should not be taken to have any relation to modern concepts of nationality and nationhood. For a succinct survey of 'national' histories, see Martínez Pizarro (2003); the relevant specialist scholarship is cited and discussed more fully at appropriate points below.

ian past in contemporary historical consciousness. All the works studied in second part of the present monograph tell of a distant past that was not contained, in the way these narratives report it, in any prior written historical tradition; all of these texts appear to derive primarily from oral vernacular sources. None of them were origin narratives, and there is evidence (presented and discussed in Chapter 7) that such tales of distant heroes that existed in an oral milieu were condemned in clerical circles. Since they could not have had any kind of immediate function beyond the provision of entertainment and the conveying of secular values, clerical censure of these narratives was not easy to overcome, and since writing was largely controlled by the Church, few such texts survive from our period. They are, nevertheless, important evidence for the existence of a secular historical culture that found expression chiefly in the vernacular and in an oral milieu.

All of these texts are representative of a secular historical consciousness that was nevertheless deeply imbued with Christianity, and indeed survives within a written, and for the most part Latin form—the medium and language of the Church, though not exclusively of the Church. They are also all narratives that were not just about the past, but about a distant past that had fundamental differences, in all of these texts, from the present within which they were produced: this distant past was not Roman; it was not (explicitly) Christian; and it had lived in a language that was not Latin. Nevertheless, all the works examined below betray evidence of a form of reconciliation between a perception of a barbarian, non-Christian heritage, and a Christian and Roman/Latin inheritance that had a very tangible presence.

The texts studied here are not the only works that could have been examined for the purposes of the present monograph. Other 'national' histories are extant from the early middle ages, notably the *Historia Brittonum* (*c*.830), Widukind of Corvey's *Rerum gestarum Saxonicarum libri tres* (967–73), and Dudo of St Quentin's *De moribus et actis primorum Normanniiæ ducum* (996–1015). The first of these is something of an anomaly, since it is aware of the real Roman past of its subjects, as well as their post-Roman history; all three works, however, perform a process of integrating Roman/Christian/Latin, and barbarian or otherwise non-Roman elements, within a more or less coherent historical consciousness.[10]

10 On Widukind, see fundamentally Beumann (1950); Beumann (1970); Beumann (1982); see also Eggert and Pätzold (1984): 206–22; Mortensen (1995); Plassmann (2006): 243–64; and for the text, see Hirsch and Lohmann (eds 1935). On Dudo, see Gatti and Degl'Innocenti (eds 199); and Plassmann (2006): 265–89; for the text, see Lair (ed. 1865). The relevant scholarship on the *Historia Brittonum* is cited in Chapter 6.

As such, it might appear to have been logical to extend the present book to encompass studies of these histories, not least because they present useful comparanda and examples of how approaches to this process did (or did not) change over time and across a wider range of historical contexts. However, any work of scholarship must stop somewhere: a number of even later histories also, albeit in a variety of different ways, undertake the same task of providing a synthesis between a barbarian past and a Roman inheritance, including, for example, the highly erudite and voluminous *Gesta Danorum* of Saxo Grammaticus (*c.*1208), and it would not be possible to keep expanding the scope of this monograph without sacrificing the gains of detailed close readings of the individual texts.[11] I shall argue below that Paul the Deacon's *Historia Langobardorum* is the first extant 'national' history genuinely to provide such a synthesis with a minimum of embarrassment regarding the cleavages (potential or real) within the story it tells; this makes it an appropriate point to curtail the examination of 'national' histories and move on to other material.[12]

For the most part, the Latin 'national' histories discussed below have not been studied in conjunction with the epics and brief vernacular narratives also examined in the present monograph: the one group is thought to be 'history', while the other is 'literature', and they have accordingly largely been examined by scholars of different disciplines.[13] Here I seek to bridge this divide, since both sets of texts were evidence of a historical consciousness seeking to express a view about a particular kind of past. While even in the middle ages history and literature might not have been perceived to be identical, we must recall that human consciousness does not respect modern disciplinary boundaries: the

11 On Saxo, see the essays in Friis-Jensen (ed. 1981); Friis-Jensen (1987); Friis-Jensen (1992); and the recent introduction of Riis (2006); for the text, see Friis-Jensen and Fisher (ed. and trans. 2015).

12 By this I do not mean, of course, that there would be no value to comparing the texts examined here with others that are not, including but not restricted to those named above; see for example Plassmann (2006), and from a more theoretical perspective with a wider range of comparanda, Graus (1975). For a broad-ranging survey of 'national' histories in the middle ages, see Kersken (1995).

13 An exception that briefly compares a vernacular heroic epic (*Beowulf*) with some Latin histories (including those of Paul the Deacon and Jordanes) with regard to narrative style is presented by Scheil (2008). There is, of course, a large body of Germanist literary scholarship that has mined some of the Latin narratives examined below for reflexes of Germanic heroic legend for use as comparanda to the extant vernacular texts; the relevant works are cited at appropriate points below, but it should be noted that the purpose of this scholarship has rarely been a detailed examination of the Latin narratives as what they are—Latin narratives—and there has been to my knowledge no detailed prior examination in comparative perspective of historical consciousness as manifest in these two types of text.

historical consciousness of a people, past or present, will comprise, and be influenced by, more than just texts that might be perceived formally as 'history' of some sort. After all, our own conception of our past is shaped at least as much (arguably more) by historical fiction, films, and television dramas as it is by the works of academic historians; there is no reason to believe that early medieval historical consciousness was more respectful of the segregation between genres that modern academic disciplinary boundaries might seek to impose on it.

All of these texts show that however much we might feel that there might have been sharp divides between a pre-Christian and Christian period, between a Latinate and vernacular culture, between barbarian and Roman pasts, or between the milieux of the clergy and the laity, these pairs of opposites are not necessarily the best way of understanding early medieval culture. The texts examined below do not, for the most part, present the past in terms of such oppositions, but rather stress continuities over cleavages. While the present work is not an effort to provide a holistic interpretation of early medieval culture and how it reconciled its varied inheritances, it does intend to add to the many recent reassessments of the nature of this culture from one specific angle, the attitude towards the past, and specifically, towards precisely that distant past that we might perceive today as having been discontinuous with the present of early medieval societies. For this purpose, an interdisciplinary approach seemed to me to be useful, and I hope my readers, whether students of literature or history, will also gain some stimulus from my transgression of the disciplinary boundaries.

A further rationale behind this selection of texts also has a historiographical justification. A 'Germanic' spectre has long loomed over the study of the early middle ages: historians and philologists alike have sought evidence of the survival of some sort of 'Germanic' antiquity in the extant literary and material survivals from this period, and have often felt it appropriate, for this reason, to interpret the extant evidence with reference to other sources that are also—for better or worse reasons—thought to be 'Germanic', though not necessarily contemporary or belonging to the same historical context. Furthermore, the cultural heritage of this period has often been understood in oppositional terms specifically as Roman and 'Germanic', not just Roman and barbarian. The early period of encounters between 'Germanic' peoples and Rome has been seen as a 'heroic age' (*c.*300–*c.*600, though in some versions it stretches even further back), commemorated in later narrative verse traditions in the vernacular, reflections of which are thought to be extant even in early medieval Latin texts, including some of the works to be discussed below.[14]

14 On the concept of a 'heroic age' in a broader context, see fundamentally Chadwick (1912), and Bowra (1957). Specifically on a 'Germanic' heroic age and its reflection in (later) extant vernacular works, see in particular the classic statements of Heusler (1905), and

It is certainly the case that the Goths, Lombards, Franks, Angles, Saxons, and Burgundians—the peoples who figure as the principal protagonists and/or primary or initial audiences of the narratives to be examined below—were all Germanic peoples, in that their vernacular tongue belonged to the Germanic sub-group of the Indo-European family of languages. It is also the case that the corpus of what literary scholars define as Germanic heroic poetry does contain narratives that have as a historical core events that took place largely in the period *c.*300–*c.*600—insofar as any of these narratives can in fact be related to any sort of historical realities at all. But there is little evidence from before the eighth century, at least, for any sense even of an awareness of an inter-relatedness among these peoples, and certainly not of any perception among them of any significance of such inter-relatedness—any sort of knowledge of and meaning granted to a common 'Germanentum', or 'Germanic-ness', that has any relation to the burden of significance such a concept has borne in modern scholarship. Furthermore, the historical links between the extant heroic texts and any verifiable historical fact are both invariably slender and often quite tenuous, and therefore should not be overvalued. And finally, as we shall see in Chapter 7, even when we find writers displaying a knowledge of the linguistic kinship of the Germanic languages, this did not imply either a strict division between 'Germanic' and Roman cultural heritages, nor a perception of a sense of a common identity of any kind derived from any other form of kinship, cultural or otherwise, among the Germanic-speaking peoples.[15]

All the texts discussed below concern themselves primarily with a Germanic people—in the linguistic sense. The epics and poetic texts examined in the latter chapters also contain material extant either only in Germanic vernaculars, or also, and primarily, in those vernaculars. Jordanes's *Getica*, Paul's *HL*, as

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Heusler (1943): 155–60, as well as Heusler (1909); see further, for critiques, restatements, and refinements of the concept of a 'Germanic' heroic age and its commemoration in vernacular poetry, Andersson (1988b); Ebenbauer (1988); Haubrichs (2002); Haug (1975); and Haug (1994). For a broader, comparative perspective, see Reichl (2000). A recent, thorough, and insightful synthesis is provided by Harris (2012). My own views have been presented in Ghosh (2007). For critiques that are in essence rejections of the concept altogether (or at least its validity as an analytical category for the understanding of the origins of vernacular heroic poetry in the Germanic languages), see Frank (1991); and Goffart (2002).

15 For critiques of the concept of an early 'Germanic culture', see Amory (1997): 326–31; Goffart (1980): 12–29; Goffart (1995); Goffart (2006): 187–229; and Halsall (2007): 22–4; 118–31. For a very recent effort to reinstate a (weaker) concept of "pan-Germanic identity", see Neidorf (2013a). The points made above are discussed in more detail in Chapter 7 below. See also, on classical perceptions of 'Germanic' peoples, Isaac (2004): 427–39.

well as *Waltharius*, *Beowulf*, and the shorter vernacular texts have all been seen as expressions, in some form or another, of 'Germanic' culture. (Indeed, this is even true of the *Histories* of Gregory of Tours.) They are thus a useful sample with which not only to make the point that there was, by the end of the eighth century at the latest, really no perception of a great divide between barbarian and Roman inheritances at least with regard to historical consciousness, but also to reiterate the point that—once again specifically in the context of historical consciousness—there appears to have been no special significance attached to any 'Germanic' identity or heritage.[16]

The studies below present analyses of literary texts that have a particular historical relevance, and are read with due attention to their historical context (insofar as this can be determined); but this book is not intended to be a study of early medieval historical consciousness at a more general level. It does not seek to match the results of analyses of specific literary texts to other, non-literary forms of evidence to arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of how early medieval people thought about their past(s).[17] Nor does it intend to use analyses of this particular aspect of historical consciousness to come to conclusions regarding early medieval notions of group identity. Other kinds of sources present their own problems of interpretation, and are not easily amenable to the same kind of interrogation as literary narratives, thus rendering a comparison of the evidence of differing genres an

16 A note on usage is thus apposite here: 'Germanic', when used without inverted commas, refers solely to language. A Germanic people, in my lexicon, is simply a people that speaks a Germanic language, defined as Germanic on the basis of purely linguistic criteria that have nothing whatsoever to do with ethnicity or other markers of identity. This need not mean that any of these Germanic peoples knew that their native tongue was a Germanic language; that they felt any kind of identity with other peoples who spoke a Germanic language; or even that they particularly cared that the language they spoke was Germanic and not something else. A phrase such as 'Germanic tradition' does not, in my usage, imply any sort of bond between peoples beyond that of language; it refers only to the fact that narrative elements contained in this tradition were known in more than one Germanic language, and that across Germanic languages there might have been similarities of poetic form caused not least by the similarities of the languages. There are no further implications to my use of the phrase 'Germanic tradition'. The term 'Germanic' used without inverted commas therefore does not, in this study, carry any implications of any kind of ancient, more or less unified, 'Germanic' culture which would allow one to interpret the practices or textual remains of one Germanic-speaking group by reference to the practices or textual remains of another.

17 In this regard, the present study follows the examples of Coumert (2007), Plassmann (2006), and Reydellet (1981).

exercise fraught with difficulty.[18] Concentrating solely on narrative texts, which are explicitly intended to convey to readers stories and views about the distant past, allows me to address the question of the role of this past in a more well-defined manner, focusing on the issues of religious difference and the distinctions between Romans and barbarians. I shall show, over the course of the following pages, that a pattern can be identified regarding the way these issues were treated across a lengthy period of time. My arguments are valid in the first instance for the texts examined here, but I believe that a demonstration, on the basis of these examples, of the existence of this pattern can also contribute something to our understanding of secular historical culture in the early middle ages, and the place in it of the distant, barbarian, non-biblical past.

However, given how little we know about the authors, their audiences, and the reception of their texts, it is difficult to say much about the extent to which the views presented in these works reflect widespread ideas about the past. The reception history of the texts can tell us a little: Jordanes, Fredegar, the *LHF* and the *HL* were widely read in the ninth and tenth centuries at least,[19] and the references to figures of the past in vernacular poetry examined in Chapter 7 below suggest that narratives about them were widely known. Some of the ideas contained in the 'national' histories seem to have resonated with later audiences; it is difficult to know how much they did so among contemporaries, or even the extent to which they reflected a common historical consciousness in the periods in which they were written. Once again, the common elements in these works—deriving from an effort to stress continuity between distant origins and the present, regardless of the religious difference and the gap between a barbarian past and a present imbued with a very Roman heritage—suggests that since several authors had similar concerns, these reflected a view more broadly prevalent at least among the secular aristocracy. It is also likely that the authors of these texts were responding to audience expectations, which were thus in turn reflected in their narratives.[20] To say more, however, would be purely speculative.

18 Good examples of studies using a multitude of different sources to attempt to understand ethnic identities in this period are Amory (1997), and Koch (2012). For a study exposing the complexities involved in using law-codes to understand ethnicity, see Amory (1993).

19 For knowledge of Jordanes's *Getica*, Fredegar, the *LHF* and Paul's *HL* in the ninth century and later, see Innes (2000): 243–4; Lapidge (2006): 160; 239; 272; McKitterick (1989): 238–41; McKitterick (2004b): 13–15; 37–8; 49–51; 55–8; 75–83; 201; 212. Isidore's *HG* does not seem to have enjoyed a wide reception.

20 Plassmann (2006): 22–3.

These then, are the questions posed in this book and the constraints within which they are addressed. The individual texts will be given a more detailed introduction in each of the following chapters, along with a brief (and very basic) overview of the historical background regarding the people(s) concerned, their earlier contact with Rome and Christianity in the historical record, and the relevant narrative sources available in addition to the texts to be examined here. In the remainder of the present chapter I provide, first, a more general introduction to the historical context of cultural contact between Romans and barbarians in late antiquity and the scholarship on barbarian identity; and second, a (necessarily very brief) survey of the other kinds of historical narrative extant from this period, including both texts that were demonstrably known to the authors of the works to be examined here, as well as others that must be understood as part of the intellectual and cultural furniture of the audience of these texts.

Barbarians and Romans, Christians and Pagans: Cultural Contact in Late Antiquity[21]

The term 'barbarian' already had a long history by our period; the Romans had inherited it from the Greeks and generally used the term to indicate foreign, exotic, and (in their view) uncivilised peoples around their borders.[22] There was a fairly prominent discourse in late antiquity about barbarians needing to be 'tamed' by Roman emperors, who are presented as having to keep the peace and defend Rome against the savage barbarians; and while the sources show

21 The following paragraphs present what is a necessarily superficial synthesis of a vast and often fractious body of scholarship; for a recent useful, clear, and balanced survey, see James (2009). Other important recent works include Halsall (2007), and Heather (2009); see further the essays collected in Mitchell and Greatrex (eds 2000), and Mathisen and Shanzer (eds 2011). For reasons of space—and relevance to the primary topic of the present monograph—I do not engage in detailed discussion of these or other works, nor cite profusely the earlier scholarship.

22 For a brief history of the use of the term, see Gillett (2009): 397–402; see further the surveys of barbarians and the term 'barbarus' and its cognates in late antiquity (and modern scholarship) in James (2009): 1–20; Maas (2012); and Mathisen (2011). On classical perceptions of barbarians and other 'others', cf. the contrasting views in Isaac (2004); Gruen (2011); and Woolf (2011).

barbarians being settled within the empire, the literary scheme of rebellious settler-barbarians is also quite common.[23]

It is easy to follow blindly the Roman rhetoric that differentiates starkly between Romans and barbarians, but it would be unwise to do so. Just as the narratives examined below do not operate with such a strict dichotomy between Romans and barbarians, it is also the case that in actual fact, the boundaries were less sharp than they might appear; and even the late antique sources do not present such a singular, undifferentiated image of barbarians.[24] As Ralph Mathisen and Danuta Shanzer recently stated, we should not operate with a model of "cultural and social segregation of Roman and barbarian populations [...] Romans and barbarians interacted in every way imaginable, social, cultural, political, and religious".[25]

The Roman empire had, for most of its history, engaged in the process of absorbing barbarians (and other outsiders of one sort or another) within its economic, legal, political, and cultural sphere; after the grant of citizenship to all free men within the empire in 212, distinctions between Romans and barbarians seem to have become, in law and practice, even less clear than earlier. It appears to be the case that barbarians now became citizens of the empire as long as they resided within its boundaries, and it has been suggested that many people who might still have been classified as barbarians were nevertheless now able to "enjoy the benefits of Roman civil law without having to give up

23 Ladner (1976). On Roman perceptions of barbarians in late antiquity, see further Halsall (2007): 45–56; Maas (2012); Wickham (2009): 44–9. Specifically on how barbarians are presented by fourth- and fifth-century historians, see Rohrbacher (2002): 207–36. For detailed studies on the very influential Christian historian Orosius's views of barbarians in the early fifth century, see further Goetz (1980b); Inglebert (1996): 566–8; and van Nuffelen (2012): 170–85; for a recent comparison of Orosius and Augustine's treatment of barbarians, see Clark (2011). Orosius and his significance are briefly discussed in the next section of the present chapter.

24 As Edward James states, it is likely that we "have a more black-and-white view of ethnic difference than the Romans or barbarians": James (2009): 126. In a similar vein, Hans-Werner Goetz has suggested, with regard to Merovingian sources, that "ethnische Abgrenzungen [sind] (allein) ein Problem der modernen Forschung": Goetz (2004): 555. On the difficulty of determining, from the sources, what criteria were used to distinguish between Roman and barbarian in the sixth century, see further Greatrex (2000); on the use of the term 'barbarus' and its potentially mixed connotations in Gaul/Francia *c.*400–*c.*700, see Wood (2011). With regard to classical antiquity as well, Erich Gruen has recently argued that Romans "had far more mixed, nuanced, and complex opinions about other peoples": Gruen (2011): 3; but cf. Isaac (2004).

25 Mathisen and Shanzer (2011): 4.

their own cultural identity".[26] Whatever aspects of non-Roman culture they might have retained, these Roman barbarians, by functioning as Roman citizens, were also clearly Roman; and despite a legal prohibition from the 370s, there appear to have been no real *de facto* restrictions of marriage between barbarians and Romans (at least among the elites), another suggestion that in fact, once within Roman boundaries, the distinctions could become increasingly blurred.[27]

The circumstances in which barbarians became Roman appear to have been principally military. Many were recruited by one means or another as soldiers in the Roman army, and from the third century onwards at the latest, it became common practice for some aspects of the defence of the empire to be delegated to 'warlords', leaders of armed groups settled at the borders of the empire, either just within or immediately without those borders.[28] Some of these groups were incorporated within the Roman army, while others, the so-called 'foederati', functioned as allies.[29] Over the course of the fourth and fifth centuries, many of these warlords became generals leading not just their 'own' troops (that is to say, some sort of barbarian grouping), but whole Roman armies of mixed origin. Indeed, already in the fourth century, a number of them held the title of 'magister militum' or 'magister militum utriusque militiae': commander-in-chief of the Roman armed forces in a province or in the whole of the western or eastern empire. Some even advanced to becoming consul.[30] Many of these barbarian-Roman military commanders were among the groups labelled (by the Romans) 'Franks' or 'Goths' (as well as other groups not among those to be examined in the present work).[31] Indeed, there are a number of attested marriages between such barbarian military leaders and

26 Maas (2012): 63.

27 The issues relating to law and citizenship have been examined in most detail by Ralph Mathisen: Mathisen (2006); Mathisen (2012). Specifically on the marriage laws, see Sivan (1996). See further the useful survey of barbarians in contact with Rome from the third to the late fifth century in James (2009): 33–75; 194–201.

28 Another mode of contact that could lead to forms of intercultural communication was captivity, also obviously in the context of military action: Grey (2011); Lenski (2011).

29 On the 'foederati' and the recruitment of barbarians in the Roman army, see in brief Jones (1964): 611–13; 619–23; for a more recent survey discussing the 'foederati' and their significance, see Stickler (2007); and see further James (2009): 161–73. For a more general survey of the late Roman army, see Jones (1964): 607–86.

30 On these developments, see Liebeschuetz (2007); MacGeorge (2002); Whittaker (1994): 243–78.

31 Some examples of high-ranking barbarians in the Roman army in the fourth century who are thought to be Franks or Goths, and attested in contemporary or near-contemporary

Roman aristocrats; the extent to which such cross-cultural kin-relationships were common lower down the social scale cannot really be determined, but there seems to be no particular reason to believe that there was any significant level of formal segregation.[32]

We have to conclude, therefore, that whatever the cause of the 'fall' of Rome, it was not the result of a sudden influx of completely exotic, uncivilised barbarians: the military leaders who succeeded imperial rule and established kingdoms on the continent in the post-imperial west belonged to peoples that, in every case, had had at least a century of contact with the Roman empire and often lived within its bounds, perhaps even as Roman citizens; had collaborated more or less closely with the Roman army; and had in most cases in fact been in some manner a part of the Roman army. While we can know little about the level of 'Romanisation' of the lower ranks, there is every reason to believe of the military commanders that, whatever other cultural affiliations they might have retained, they were also quite Roman.[33]

In other words: the barbarians who established post-imperial kingdoms had most certainly partaken of a great deal of Roman culture, whatever other

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sources (listed in chronological order of their first appointment to high military office): Gaiso (Goth): magister militum(?) (350); consul (351) (*PLRE* I: 380).

Silvanus (Frank): tribune (351); magister peditum (352/353–5); Augustus (355) (*PLRE* I: 840–1).

Mallobaudes (Frank): tribune (354–5); comes domesticorum *and* rex Francorum (according to Ammianus) (378) (*PLRE* I: 539; Ammianus: XXXI.x,6).

Flavius Merobaudes (Frank): magister peditum (375–88?); consul (377; 383; 388) (*PLRE* I: 598–9).

Flavius Bauto (Frank): magister militum (*c.*380–5); consul (385) (*PLRE* I: 159–60). Arbogastes (Frank): comes rei militaris (380); magister militum (*c.*388–94) (*PLRE* I: 95–7).

Modares (Goth): magister militum (380–2) (*PLRE* I: 605).

Flavius Richomeres (Frank): magister militum (383; 388–93); consul (384) (*PLRE* I: 765–6).

Gainas (Goth): comes rei militaris (395–9); magister utriusque militiae (399–400) (*PLRE* I: 379–80).

Flavius Fravitta (Goth): magister militum (395/400); consul (401) (*PLRE* I: 372–3).

32 On the generals' marriages, see Liebeschuetz (2007): 482; 489; see further, on documented kin-relationships between barbarians and Romans (principally with regard to the elites), Blockley (1982); Claude (1989); Demandt (1989); James (2009): 194–6; Krautschick (1989); Soraci (1974). Even if there was little legal enforcement of any prohibition on intermarriage, one should not automatically assume that it was common; the example of modern multicultural societies in, for example, Canada or the UK, demonstrates that even after two generations, cross-cultural marriages can remain relatively rare.

33 On the potential for conflicted loyalties or identities among these military commanders, see Chauviot (1984).

identities they might have had in addition; and while the forms and meaning of Roman-ness were also arguably altered as a result of this contact in some ways, to assume that the culture of the barbarian groups remained untouched by Roman contact is implausible, and not supported by the extant evidence.[34] Moreover, we must recall that these kingdoms were, initially at least, established as clients of the empire, rather than as truly independent polities; the process of becoming properly 'post-Roman' was a long one, and involved a good deal of Roman-ness as well, not least with regard to the religion of the people within these kingdoms, all of which were, by *c.*500 at the latest, predominantly, if not completely, Christian (though not necessarily Catholic).[35]

That being said, one should not push the argument for continuity too far. There was certainly also some amount of social and economic disruption in the fifth and sixth centuries;[36] and however much the western kingdoms inherited from Rome in terms of law, language, religion, and administrative practice, the barbarian settlers in these regions also brought with them their

34 Guy Halsall makes the important point that even the supposed 'barbarisation' of the late Roman army in terms of its practices, clothing, and customs, is overstated: Halsall (2007): 102–9. See further, with regard to dress, hairstyles, and customs in Ostrogothic Italy, Amory (1997): 338–47; Arnold (2013); and James (2009): 168–70. A detailed study of one example, the Vandals in Africa, is provided by von Rummel (2007), who concludes that what we can know of their material culture provides no evidence that it was in fact particularly distinct as non-Roman. For a recent argument that the Gothic kingdom in Italy was in fact very 'Roman', while some Italo-Romans in it also began to adopt some 'Gothic' traits, see Arnold (2014). None of this detracts from the fact that the "cultural sharing was a two-way street" in this period that resulted in a "polyethnic cultural world, with cultural frontiers between Romans and barbarians that were increasingly permeable in both directions" (Mathisen and Shanzer 2011: 4).

35 For a useful recent (and succinct) survey on the establishment and early history of the western kingdoms, see Kulikowski (2012); cf. the varying perspectives given in Halsall (2007): 220–319; Heather (2009): 266–385; James (2009): 76–94; and Wickham (2009): 76–149. A stimulating discussion of Roman/Italian views of fifth-century Gaul and the process of that region's becoming 'post-Roman' while also remaining in many respects 'Roman' is provided in Arnold (2014): 235–61. England is a rather different case from the continental successors to the empire with regard to the points made in this and the following paragraphs; see James (2009): 202–4; and Ward-Perkins (2000); further discussion and references are given below in Chapter 6.

36 Cf. e.g. Goffart (1980); and Ward-Perkins (2005). Some sort of middle ground between these two positions is probably the most plausible way of interpreting the period. Since the heated debate regarding the modalities of settlement and the extent of disruption involved is not really pertinent to my subject, I avoid further discussion of this topic, though I cite without comment the more fundamental works of scholarship on it where appropriate. For the most significant recent salvoes, see (in chronological order) Goffart (2006); Halsall (2007); Heather (2009); Goffart (2010); Halsall (2010).

own, non-Roman heritages. These settlers were always a minority of the population, but this need not necessarily mean that the barbarian aspects of their culture were swiftly or comprehensively swamped by the culture of the Roman majority.[37] While it is important to bear in mind the fact that, with the exception of England and some border regions, in almost all the lands that had been within the western Roman empire, the vernacular tongue was eventually a Latin-derived (that is to say, Romance) rather than Germanic language, we should also remember that linguistic and cultural identity are not necessarily identical. It is clear from the example of Paul the Deacon's *HL* (as we shall see in Chapter 4) that although the Lombard language was most likely no longer in common use and the Lombards where thoroughly 'Italian' by his time, some sense of cultural identity still imbued the narratives of pre-Christian, non-Roman, non-Italian origins he transmitted, which concerned a period in which the Lombards had spoken a different language.

While religious identity has sometimes been seen as an important marker of either Roman or barbarian allegiance, the continental barbarians even of the fifth century, and certainly of the sixth, appear to have been overwhelmingly Christian. Many (though not all) were Arians and thus did not accept the authority over them of the bishop of Rome. This might suggest that Arianism was a distinctively barbarian trait in the fifth century; but it was also self-evidently equally a part of the Roman inheritance rather than a specifically barbarian attribute: Christianity, in whatever form, had only come to barbarians through contact with Rome. Thus to view the Arian religion of many barbarian groups as being necessarily something that made them non-Roman is not really an accurate perspective on the matter, even though the distinction in Christian denomination could clearly be a significant cultural divide for at least some witnesses, not least the clerical authors on whom we depend for most of our evidence. The distinction between Arian and Nicene Christians is not sufficient, however, for us to postulate a clear distinction between 'barbaritas' and 'Romanitas' separating people who lived in the same regions—particularly because precisely the fact of their being clergy arguably meant that the authors of our sources might have made religious differences appear to be more divisive than they might have been in actual fact in the daily lives (or even in the political actions) of most people (or even just the secular ruling classes).

Leaving aside the hotly debated legal and economic issues (which are less relevant for the subject of this monograph), with regard to culture alone, it is clear that barbarian identity in the period between *c.*300 and *c.*600 was not static, and was also neither impervious to, nor wholly submerged by, the contact

37 On this point see also Wickham (2009): 97–102; 105–7.

with and lasting influence of Rome. Much ink has been spilt on the ways in which the barbarian and Roman cultural inheritances interacted to shape ethnic identities in the fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries in particular, and some of the relevant scholarship will be discussed at appropriate points in the following chapters. For the purposes of the present work, the most important aspects of the debate on early medieval ethnic identity have to do with the age, authenticity, value, and function of the narratives concerning the past, and views on this issue diverge considerably. Given that much of the discussion has been based precisely on narratives about the distant past, a survey of the contours of the debate and a presentation of my own position is apposite here—particularly since, as Chris Wickham recently stated, "no one in the rest of Late Antique studies gets as upset about anything" as do those who debate ('Germanic') ethnicity in this period.[38]

The participants in the debate are often divided into two camps, the so-called 'Vienna School', and the so-called 'Toronto/Goffart School'. The position of the latter can sometimes seem to be that there is in fact no authentic material (that is to say, genuinely ancient, or at least genuinely barbarian, and not derived from written Roman sources) in any of the narratives, and nothing in them derives from oral tradition of any kind: these narratives are entirely constructed on the basis of earlier Latin and Greek texts, and even the vernacular poetry extant from the ninth century and later was stimulated by a reading of Jordanes rather than originating in any vernacular oral tradition.[39] At the other end of the scale, the Vienna School can read information provided in an eighth-century source in the light of later, thirteenth-century material from Scandinavia, primarily on the basis of both sources being 'Germanic'; 'oral tradition' is seen as the source for the origin narratives, which are thought to contain something that is, because it "does not fit" with the rest of the narrative, indeed an authentic ethnic memory that served as a marker of identity.[40]

This summary is, of course, something of a caricature; both sides of the debate are (normally, but not invariably) rather more sophisticated, and both sides have produced work that (normally, but not invariably) contains much

38 Wickham (2012): 552.

39 For the extreme position, see Frank (1991); Goffart (1988): *passim*; and Goffart (2002); cf. Chapter 7 below; and Ghosh (2007): 229; 242–7.

40 For the extreme position, see Pohl (2000b): 16; and Pohl (2002): 228–9 (quote); 233; see also e.g. Wolfram (1994); and cf. Ghosh (2007): 245; 247–51. Note that Walter Pohl appears to be willing to change his views somewhat—rather more so, it seems to me, than both Walter Goffart and Herwig Wolfram; thus the Pohl position in 2000 or 2002 is not necessarily identical with that of 2013.

that has greatly enriched our understanding of the period. It is also certainly the case that there is really no monolithic 'school', as the individual scholars who have been grouped into one or another camp often have quite different approaches to the issues at hand. Nevertheless, it is equally certainly the case that the debate is often presented and carried out in precisely such starkly polarised terms as my caricature suggests. It seems to me, however, that—perhaps because this subject seems to excite passions in a manner unusual in medieval studies—these kinds of positions tend to make the discussion both unnecessarily polemical, and ultimately rather sterile, partly because the argument and evidence can both get drowned in the polemic.

The fact is that the extant narratives are indeed substantially derived from borrowings from or adaptations of a clearly Roman (or Greco-Roman) inheritance (whether or not the producers of these texts thought of it in that manner), but equally clearly often contain some material for which no extant Roman source can be found. This does not, of course, mean that this material is necessarily ancient, or derived from some sort of long-enduring 'oral tradition', nor even that it is free of written, Latin, and Roman influence. But it does exist, and we cannot dismiss it, nor later (ninth- and tenth-century) evidence for something that can only be called an oral tradition of historical narrative in Germanic languages, as unimportant, or simply created from the reading of Latin texts. These points are elaborated on in some detail at appropriate points in the chapters below.

The principal contributions of the Vienna School and those scholars associated with it have had to do with the theory of ethnogenesis.[41] In the context of

41 For the major expositions of the theory itself, and supportive contributions to the debate from a variety of perspectives, see, in chronological order, Wenskus (1961); Wolfram (1979); Wolfram (1981); Geary (1983); Geary (1988); Wolfram (1990); Wood (1990); Wolfram (1994); Pohl (1991); Pohl (1994b); Pohl (1998a); Pohl (1998b); Wolfram (1998); Geary (1999); Pohl (1999); Geary (2002); Pohl (2002); and most recently Pohl (2013). The most succinct and recent summary of the theory and its major critics is presented in Maas (2012): 74–7; the most detailed (if excessively polemical) historiographical analysis of ethnogenesis theory and its development is in Murray (2002); see further also the surveys of the debate in Gillett (2006); and James (2009): 102–28. In addition, for useful recent surveys of the modern historiography on barbarian identity in relation to modern national identity, see Wood (2008), and in much greater detail, Ian N. Wood (2013), which should be read along with Fouracre (2014). Ian Wood's recent works perform the salutary service of placing the present debate within the larger perspective of modern scholarship on these issues from the eighteenth century onwards; while this history of historical writing is obviously not a subject one could expect most scholars of the early middle ages to be as deeply immersed in as Wood, the longer perspective is nevertheless something we should all at least be more aware of than is normally the case. Such awareness might even help to reduce just

late antique and early medieval studies, ethnogenesis theory has been almost exclusively concerned with groups that are thought to have had a 'Germanic' identity.[42] The most prominent proponents of this theory have been Herwig Wolfram and Walter Pohl, although it originated, in this context, in the work of Reinhard Wenskus. Other prominent scholars outside Vienna whose work has been sympathetic to ethnogenesis theory include Patrick Geary and Ian Wood, who—like Pohl—use the concept in a more flexible manner than Wenskus and Wolfram, with less emphasis on the concept of a more or less stable 'Traditionskern'. Patrick Amory's monograph on Ostrogothic Italy has also been claimed as an example of the use of ethnogenesis theory.[43]

The core components of ethnogenesis theory are that ethnic identity was flexible, and was constructed in a manner that included Roman and barbarian influence; much of the recent scholarship sympathetic to this theory would agree that ethnic identity was a 'situational construct', created and utilised because of and within particular historical situations. This is in itself not only plausible, but almost certainly true of the nature of identity in the period in question (and, *mutatis mutandis*, in other periods as well); the problems arise when one has to define more closely how and in what ways ethnicity or ethnic (or other forms of) identity was flexible and constructed; which aspects were malleable and how much and to what; what situations could and did give rise to what sorts of constructs; and precisely whose identity we are talking about. In other words: while it is not difficult to agree that identity was 'constructed' and not something that was static through history, it is far more difficult to gain any clarity on the manner of its construction and the factors that conditioned how it was constructed. It is also extremely hard even to be sure what precisely the identity was that was being constructed.

A further key component of ethnogenesis theory is (or at least used to be) that the material presented in the extant narratives, while constructed for contemporary purposes, also contained a 'Traditionskern' ('kernel of tradition'), which was indeed ancient, and transmitted over the generations some

how much grief is caused to modern scholars by the contours of the debate. In this context, see already Graus (1975): 240–393.

42 For discussions of the concept of ethnogenesis in the context of theories regarding ethnic identities among non-Germanic peoples, see e.g. Berend, Urbańczyk, and Wiszewski (2014): 61–81; Curta (2001): 18–35; and Curta (2005).

43 Amory's work does not present itself as explicitly in support of ethnogenesis theory, and is in fact quite critical; see Amory (1997): 34–9; 306–7; and for the claim that this book uses the ethnogenesis "approach", see Gillett (2009): 408. Nevertheless, it is fair to state that Amory certainly views identity as a 'situational construct', though in fact he sees it as far more flexible and fluid than most exponents of ethnogenesis theory.

authentic ethnic memory comprising legendary matter about ancestors and their heroic deeds, and was borne by members of a core group. The 'Traditionskern' was not, however, tied to race, and the identity contained in it transferred outwards from members of the core group to others who assimilated to it, often from completely different ethnic backgrounds. What bound this group together in a common ethnic identity was thus a common adherence to a particular narrative of origins.

This theory has been extensively debated; this is not the place to enter into the discussion in any detail.[44] To my mind the principal flaw in ethnogenesis theory (at least in its more detailed and ambitious iterations) is precisely the attempt to arrive at broadly valid conclusions about the nature of ethnic identity when the extant source base provides too little evidence for any such conclusions: the existence of narratives of origins does not really provide us with a guide to how to interpret them or understand their significance among any contemporary audience; in most cases, we do not even know who the audience was. This problem in the use of ethnogenesis theory is sometimes compounded by resorting to rather dubious sorts of evidence from much later to shore up the case for interpreting the early sources in a particular manner.

Beyond the fact that there is far too little evidence to form the basis of a theory that aims (at least in some iterations) to be as comprehensive and cogent as this one, there are two points that are most pertinent to the arguments of this monograph. The first concerns the existence and significance of the 'Traditionskern'; the second, the extent to which there was any 'Germanic' identity in this period, and the legitimacy of using material from one 'Germanic' source to interpret another. It will be argued in the following chapters that many of the texts that presented 'national' histories did indeed draw on oral sources of some sort, but also that we know too little about these sources and their provenance to dignify them with the term 'Traditionskern' in the sense meant by the proponents of ethnogenesis theory. It is impossible to know how ancient or unchanging any of this material was, and it is equally impossible to discern the extent to which it served as a motor of identity-formation—even

44 For extensive and severe critiques, see Gillett (ed. 2002), along with the response from Pohl (2002). For less polemical but nevertheless critical appraisals of ethnogenesis theory and what can be known of early medieval identity, see Halsall (2007): 455–82; and James (2009): 102–11. Goetz has made some useful, rather non-committal contributions to the discussion of many of these issues, with regard specifically to the Frankish kingdom: Goetz (2003a); Goetz (2003b); Goetz (2004). In addition, the essays in Mitchell and Greatrex (eds 2000), and Mathisen and Shanzer (eds 2011), also provide counterpoints that are not (or at least not explicitly) of the 'Toronto/Goffart School'.

within the contexts of the texts within which these oral-derived narratives are transmitted, let alone more generally among the supposed ethnic group whose tradition these narratives are supposed to reproduce.

With regard to 'Germanic' identity, even the current proponents of the ethnogenesis theory would agree (I hope) that there was really no such thing in this period. Although it is true that narratives concerning one Germanic-speaking people are often (much later) preserved by another, I shall argue below that in fact we only begin to see some evidence of an awareness of specifically *linguistic* kinship rather late in this period, and even that has little to do with any sense of a shared cultural or ethnic identity of any sort; furthermore, it is only because of the language that the extant narratives are preserved, not because of any sense that they belonged to a specifically 'Germanic', common inheritance.[45]

Nevertheless, there is a case to be made—or at least to be answered—for a 'Germanic' heroic age and its influence on later material: the extant vernacular (and much later) texts do, after all, almost invariably concern events that, insofar as they have a genuinely historical antecedent, took place in precisely the period known to earlier scholarship as the 'migration age' or 'Völkerwanderungszeit'; and even where, as in a poem such as *Widsith*, all we get are names, when it is Germanic-speakers who are mentioned (and not all the names are of Germanic-speakers!), these are generally persons who, insofar as they have a genuine historical antecedent, also lived in the 'Völkerwanderungszeit'. These were the years between *c.*300 and *c.*600, when 'Germanic' peoples came into extensive, increasing, and often violent contact with Rome, and eventually established their own post-imperial kingdoms.[46] But the later existence in Germanic vernaculars of narratives about events that took place during these centuries does not necessarily tell us anything at all about this period and the cultural identities of the

45 This point was already made with the example of the Burgundians in Ghosh (2007): 247–52.

46 The concept of the 'Völkerwanderungszeit' has itself been severely called into question in the past decades, and for many scholars completely discredited. It is certainly a fact that some amount of migration did take place, though the significance of this fact, and whether it should be allowed to characterise our view of a whole period, is a problem that is still debated. For a recent spirited reassertion of the importance of migration in the shaping of late antiquity (and indeed the middle ages that followed altogether) that is rather more sophisticated than the earlier 'Völkerwanderungszeit' theories, and is much nourished by more recent theories of migration in modern contexts, see Heather (2009); cf. however Goffart (2006); Halsall (2007); Halsall (2014); and James (2009): 174–92, for other views on the extent, nature, importance, chronology, causes, and consequences of migration.

people these narratives are about; and thus a great deal of caution is required in disentangling the threads of what ought to be a healthy collaboration between philology, literary scholarship, and history. Although one should not make too much of the similarities of some aspects of ethnogenesis theory (at least in some versions) to the discipline of Germanic philology, it is certainly the case that its exponents have sometimes relied on the presence of Germanic names and legendary or heroic material contained in later vernacular sources, just as literary scholars have plundered the earlier (Latin) narrative material to find the historical background for those later vernacular tales; and like the philologists, some historians have not been averse to taking the existence of narratives about one people (the Burgundians, for example) in the vernacular of another (Icelanders, for example) as indicative of the existence or memory of some sort of 'Germanic antiquity', or at the very least some sort of basic linkage across early Germanic cultures—sufficient, at any rate, to make it legitimate to use later sources in a Germanic language to interpret the culture of earlier peoples who spoke a Germanic language.[47]

I see no reason to reject the view that the contact with Rome was of epochal significance for various extra-Roman peoples of the period *c.*300–*c.*600, including many who spoke Germanic languages, though it was not equally significant for all Germanic-speakers, nor exclusively for Germanic-speakers; and I must stress that many Germanic-speakers who preserved narratives of this period—thirteenth-century Icelanders, for example—were far less affected by this encounter with Rome than the subjects of those narratives—fifth-century Burgundians, for example. Nor do I reject the likelihood that some historical events of this period were indeed commemorated in oral material, probably even a formal 'oral tradition';[48] nor even the probability that the later extant

47 There is a danger in this procedure in that philologists and literary historians quite justifiably tend to contextualise their work on the basis of historical scholarship, so that when some aspects of that historical scholarship are themselves—equally justifiably—based on the judgements of philologists and literary scholars, a kind of circularity is produced that can be hard to break out of.

48 'Oral tradition' is a term I shall use rarely in the following pages; when I do use this phrase, I refer to a formal historical tradition, normally in verse, cultivated by persons in some manner skilled in reciting and/or composing memorial narratives. By 'formal' in this context, I mean that the narratives, while not necessarily stable from a modern point of view, were—unless about the immediate past—thought to be authentically ancient, with some value deriving from their antiquity, and therefore were thought to remain stable in some way, and arguably, even by modern standards, might have retained a stable core. Generally, I prefer phrases like 'oral sources' or 'oral material', by which I mean matter that was not written, but was not necessarily considered ancient, nor necessarily belonged to

vernacular poetry derives in some manner from this earlier oral tradition. However, I must stress that we have no knowledge—and no way of increasing our knowledge—of what exactly this oral tradition might have contained; how, at any given point, it related to its past, functioned within its present, and was transmitted further into the future; how and whether the content of this oral tradition changed over time; and why certain stories survived and others did not. We also know little of the relationship between any formal oral tradition on the one hand, and both written texts and more informal oral material of various kinds on the other. Furthermore, by the time we get to the written vernacular texts, most of which survive only from manuscripts of the twelfth and thirteenth century (or indeed later), all the places where this material was preserved had been thoroughly imbued with both Latinity and Christianity; this is true equally with regard to the few earlier survivals, as we shall see below. This should not, I hasten to add, lead us to believe that the later vernacular stories were derived from a reading of, for example, Jordanes; there is no evidence for that whatsoever.[49] Nevertheless, this fact is, I believe, more than enough reason to disallow the use of later sources to understand material from the earlier period; and therefore ambitious statements regarding the 'oral culture of the barbarians' and how it might relate to the nature of the 'heroic age', and the meaning of this 'heroic age' in constituting any kind of 'Germanic' identity in our period (or later), are best avoided, since they can only be based on the thinnest and most tenuous of evidence.[50]

While acknowledging the tremendous industry displayed in the vast body of work on early medieval ethnic identity, the great erudition of those who

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any sort of prized memorial tradition; such matter could be derived from written sources, but garbled in the course of person-to-person oral transmission; it could be court gossip, travellers' anecdotes, the oral explications of a text by a teacher, and so on. For a useful study of the interaction between a Latin education and these kinds of informal orality, see Innes (1998) on Notker I of St Gall. The standard handbook on various kinds of oral tradition is Vansina (1985), who, however, includes "historical gossip" in his definition of oral tradition; for a broader survey of medieval orality, see most recently Reichl (2012). Kuhn (1961) argues that historical and heroic narratives could and did exist outside formal traditions, but still operates with excessively schematised notions of lay, legend, and heroic narrative.

49 This point is discussed further in Chapter 7 below.

50 Apart from Chapter 7 below, see also the detailed discussion of these points in Ghosh (2007); see further the useful and more thorough and theoretical critical musings of František Graus regarding what can and cannot be known of historical traditions, and the limits of speculation: Graus (1975): 1–28, *et passim*. For a more positive view of how much can be known of the 'oral culture of the barbarians', cf. Richter (1994).

have produced it, and indeed even the manifold usefulness of that scholarship in many respects, my own views tend more towards those of, for example, Timothy Reuter and Susan Reynolds, namely that we cannot know very much; and that what we can know suggests that we need to operate with far more flexible (and cautious) means of analysis than has normally been the case—on any side of the great divides in the scholarship.[51] Particularly given the number of studies that have been devoted to ethnic and other forms of identity in this period, it seems to me worth repeating (as Reuter cogently and elegantly suggested) that in fact we know (and can know) very little about what people actually felt about their own ethnicity and/or identity—astoundingly little, given the number of quite detailed and erudite claims made about ethnic identity in this period. It is worth recalling also that the written material until the sixth century was invariably produced by Romans presenting a perspective that was also largely Roman; and even the later works are written in Latin by (Catholic) Christian writers, which means at the very least that whatever is contained in these works, it is not undiluted barbarian matter.

The extent to which any of this material is representative of a broader sense of ethnic identity cannot be determined, and it seems to me prudent not to make over-confident claims in this respect. The main extant kinds of written sources that might provide some information about identity are law-codes and narratives; both are highly problematic genres in many respects, and all the texts available to us are thoroughly infused with Roman-ness in one way or another. At a broader level, we know almost nothing about most people—even most elite people—in the post-imperial kingdoms: at most, we have a name, a profession, and sometimes a religious affiliation and the name of some other family member. To hang on this minimal information interpretations about ethnic identity and what it meant takes us into the realm of pure speculation, backed up by almost no fact.[52]

51 See Reuter (2006b); and Reynolds (1998); both provide judicious and unpartisan discussions of the issues; see in addition James (2009): 102–28, *et passim*; and Wickham (2012).

52 The complexities involved in trying to ascertain people's identities are demonstrated in the case studies of Amory (1997), and Koch (2012), on Ostrogothic Italy and Visigothic Spain respectively; see further Amory (1993), and Amory (1994) on the Burgundians. For a recent discussion of the limits of archaeological evidence with regard to ethnic identity, see Halsall (2011). The extent and limits of what can be known about a broader population base beyond members of a royal family are presented in Amory's prosopography of Goths and potential Goths in Ostrogothic Italy: Amory (1997): 348–486; note that rather more information survives for this post-imperial kingdom than most others, and as Amory demonstrates, it is still woefully insufficient for any sort of conclusiveness in most cases.

In light of the foregoing remarks, it will not come as a surprise to readers of the present work that I offer no grand theory regarding ethnic or national identity and historical consciousness as manifest in origin narratives or other narratives about the barbarian past. My effort is rather to interpret the texts on their own terms, without making broader claims regarding how representative they might be of any larger, widely-held notions of identity. That there are certain common elements or approaches across a wide range of texts is suggestive, and the implications of this point will be discussed further in the concluding chapter of this monograph. Let it be said already, however, that the commonalities point, in my view, not to a common sense of 'Germanic' identity, nor to the establishment of distinct and discrete ethnic identities based on origin narratives, but rather to similar strategies for dealing with cultural inheritances that were heterogenous and complex, and the use, perhaps, of origin narratives to bolster a sense of political cohesion that need not have had very much to do with most people's sense of their own identity.

For the moment, the main point to be established is that each text needs to be read as an artefact that makes certain statements and takes certain positions, but we can have little or no knowledge regarding the broader validity and acceptance of what we can discern from these texts within the societies in which they were produced. It seems to me undeniable that these texts were indeed making an effort at some sort of representation and preservation of a group identity; but, equally, it is impossible to discern precisely whose group identity that was, and how representative these texts were of contemporary self-perceptions of ethnic or other forms of identity.

It has been plausibly suggested that origin narratives and stories about the distant past can contribute to a notion of identity, in that they can provide a particular group with a narrative of where it came from, and how it reached its present geographical, temporal, political, and social location; by sharing in this narrative as a collective a sense of group cohesion can be fostered.[53] Equally, it has been argued that narratives of the distant past, because they provide the stories of the origins of present, can serve as a means of conferring legitimacy to claims to power in that present.[54] Certainly it is likely that it is precisely because of this value of the past that the 'national' histories examined below were important enough to be written down; the fact that we do not find efforts simply to assimilate all aspects of the Catholic, Latinate, and in many respects

53 Coumert (2007): 9; see further Neville (2001), who suggests, drawing on Andersen (2006), that medieval narratives of origins were efforts to create 'imagined communities' by means of a narrative of shared origins.

54 Assmann (1992): 70–2; Goetz (2000): 187, *et passim*; Plassmann (2006): 22–3.

Romanised present to a Roman and Catholic past shows that for the ruling lay class and at least some of the clergy—those who wrote secular histories—the barbarian aspects of the past were valuable enough to be preserved, and in a manner in which the discontinuity between a pagan or heretic distant past and a Catholic present was glossed over in favour of a narrative that provided a more or less seamless continuity between past and present.[55]

However, an inevitable problem with modern theories about the uses of the past in past societies is that—at least for the period that the present monograph is concerned with—we generally lack the evidence to demonstrate that the past really did serve whatever function we attribute to it. It is almost certainly the case that in the middle ages as in later periods, the past had a 'social function' as a kind of 'cultural memory' with a political and social role within the society with which that past was identified, and traditions were 'invented' in order to shore up precisely this sense of identification. But it is also the case that from this period we normally have just the one text, with little evidence of how it related to other texts that might have had to do with identity and the past, and no evidence whatsoever with regard to how what we read in these individual texts related to actual practices of negotiating identity in the political and social spheres, even just of the elites, let alone society more broadly.[56] We will see below that in fact, it appears that what is presented in many of these texts might really be 'invented traditions'; but the function of these inventions, their antiquity and sources, generally remain opaque to us. Thus, in the first instance, these texts are here examined solely as individual texts, and statements about them should not be taken to have any broader significance regarding the function of the past and the nature of national or ethnic identity. I return briefly to these issues, and the possibility of making broader claims regarding early medieval historical consciousness, in the concluding chapter of the present work.

55 As Jan Assmann pointed out, insofar as the narrative of the past is used to constitute a communal identity, this is done by means of stressing both uniqueness—difference from other groups with other communal identities—and continuity, which is achieved by blanking out, wherever possible, transformative breaks in the past: Assmann (1992): 39–40.

56 In addition to Assmann (1992), and Andersen (2006), important theoretical works on these issues include Fentress and Wickham (1992); Graus (1975); Hobsbawm (1972); and Hobsbawm (1983). While these problems do not really apply to Hobsbawm's work since he deals with periods for which there is more evidence, they are not addressed in a manner in the other works that is quite satisfactory enough, to my mind, to allow the theories to be applied easily to the texts examined below.

Historical Writing in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages

Each of the texts examined below belonged within a quite specific historical and historiographical context, beyond the general context presented in the previous pages; this will be briefly introduced at the beginning of each of the following chapters. These texts also need to be set against the background of the traditions of secular and Christian historical writing in late antiquity, as this was the historiographical inheritance that influenced, more broadly, the traditions of historical writing and the understanding of the past in the early middle ages, within which context our texts must be understood.

In this section of the present chapter, I provide a brief, general overview of Latin historiography in this period.[57] Although the division is somewhat schematic, the main forms of historical writing can be grouped into the broad categories of universal histories and world chronicles, which encompassed secular and religious matter on a large scale; ecclesiastical histories, which focused on religious communities; and secular histories.

Universal Histories and World Chronicles

Universal histories and world chronicles aimed to portray the history of all peoples from creation to the present. The most influential in the Latin west were the chronicle of Eusebius, in its modified form in Jerome's Latin translation (*c.*380), and the *Historiae adversus paganos* of Orosius (*c.*417). The Eusebius–Jerome chronicle comprises short entries under each year, giving brief notices of events from all over the world. These are often drawn from other sources, and are selected with the particular theological significance of the structure of world

57 Useful surveys approaching the early medieval traditions of historiography and their late antique heritage from different perspectives are provided by Allen (2003), Bonamente (2003), Croke (2012), Ray (1974), Winkelmann (2003), and Woods (2009); a broader context for the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries is given by Rohrbacher (2002), and the essays collected in Marasco (ed. 2003). On the novelty of a 'Christian' historiography in late antiquity, see further Momigliano (1963). For very useful analyses of late antique Latin Christian reactions to Roman history and historiographical traditions, see Inglebert (1996), and Inglebert (2001): 289–554. For a comparative study of pagan and Christian approaches to historical writing and the ancient history of Rome, see Sehlmeyer (2009). In the following, I cover the Latin traditions only, since apart from Jordanes, none of the texts discussed below betrays much awareness of Greek historiography. See, however, the relevant chapters in Marasco (ed. 2003); in addition, for the principal relevant historians, see Blockley (1981); Cameron (1985); Kaldellis (2004); Paschoud (1975); Paschoud (2006); Rohrbacher (2002): 64–92; 108–34; and the studies of Inglebert already cited.

history in mind.[58] There were a number of continuations in the fifth and sixth centuries, and the chronicles were well-known, and widely read and copied.[59] Isidore of Seville, and later Bede, produced both world chronicles as well as more specific histories concerned with individual regions. The Fredegar chronicle also starts off as a continuation of Eusebius–Jerome, and only in the latter parts begins to be independent; even so, it retains something of the character of a chronicle, though now distinctly less universal. The chronicle tradition, while not otherwise particularly influential in any direct manner on the texts examined below, was certainly one of the most prominent forms of historical writing throughout the early middle ages, and was thus one of the fundamental pillars of the historical consciousness of literate people in the period.[60]

The universal history as exemplified by the work of Orosius did not present a synoptic view of the past. Rather, it followed particular great empires of antiquity from their rise to their fall, and Orosius formulated a theological conception of historical change according to which power is transferred from one empire to another until reaching its final, highest point in Rome. For Orosius, Rome was the natural culmination of the progress of political and cultural development, and the truth of this notion is supported by the fact that Christ was born in the Roman empire and a Roman citizen.[61] Orosius, far more effectively than Eusebius–Jerome, formulated an idea of history in which political power and religious salvation were inextricably linked, and also developed the concept of a Christian 'translatio imperii' (the transfer of legitimate imperial rule from one empire to another). This allowed later authors to compose histories of post-imperial kingdoms and empires that nevertheless fulfilled a key

58 Zecchini (2003): 318–19. On Eusebius and his context, see further Burgess and Kulikowski (2013): 96–126; and Winkelmann (2003): 3–10; 18–31.

59 On the Eusebius–Jerome chronicle and reactions to it in Latin Christianity up to the chronicle of Sulpicius (written *c.*405), see the overview in Burgess and Kulikowski (2013): 119–31; for a more detailed analysis, see Inglebert (1996): 153–295; 357–93. On the chronicle tradition in the fifth century, see Muhlberger (1990). On sixth-century chronicles, see Croke (2001); Favrod (ed. 1993): 11–60; Markus (1986).

60 For the chronicle tradition up to the twelfth century, von den Brincken's survey remains indispensable, along with the more recent work of Burgess and Kulikowski, which provides greater detail regarding the antique and Mediterranean origins of the genre: von den Brincken (1957); Burgess and Kulikowski (2013).

61 He is called "ciuis Romanus" twice: Orosius: VI.xxii,8; VIII.iii,4. Fundamental studies of Orosius are Goetz (1980a), and Inglebert (1996): 507–89; and in addition the more recent work of van Nuffelen (2012), who sees Orosius's historical thought in a less purely theological light than Goetz and Inglebert (but cf. Goetz 2014). Brief surveys are provided in Rohrbacher (2002): 135–49, and Zecchini (2003): 319–29.

role in salvation history, following the model of Rome in Orosius's presentation. Orosius's history was one of the most widely read historical works throughout the middle ages, with many imitators, continuators, and writers who drew profusely on him;[62] the authors of all the Latin texts analysed below seem to have been familiar with at least some part of his work. (This might not be true of the *Waltharius*-poet, but given both how widely Orosius was read and copied, and this poet's erudition, the above statement probably applies in this case too.) Yet unlike the narratives examined here, Orosius's ultimate aim was to formulate a concept of salvation history in which even the political aspect of the past was subordinate to its religious significance. In this respect not least, his universal history is fundamentally different from most of the texts examined in the present study (Isidore's Gothic history is something of an exception to this statement), in which salvation history appears hardly to play any part at all.

Ecclesiastical Histories

Ecclesiastical histories aimed to depict the history of the Christian Church in the broadest sense, namely as a community of believers; although, in varying degrees, political history was also included, it was subordinate to the larger plan of salvation history, and was often incorporated only insofar as it had directly to do with matters of religion and the hierarchy of the Church. Although there were a number of later Greek ecclesiastical histories, it is Eusebius, once again, who provided the impetus for later writers with his *Historia ecclesiastica*, which was widely known in the Latin west in Rufinus's Latin adaptation.[63] Perhaps the most outstanding example of this genre from the early middle ages is Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* (*HE*; *c.*731), which, although it has a regional focus on England and does include political events as well, focuses on conversion narratives, the institutional history of the Church in England, and stories of holy men of various stripes.[64] Gregory of Tours's *Decem libri historiarum* (*DLH*; *c.*590–4) are not an ecclesiastical history in the Bedan sense, and Gregory includes a wide variety of manifestly profane narratives. But his work too is, at its core, concerned with the community of believers and the fate of

62 von den Brincken (1957): 80–6; Goetz (1980a): 148–65; Hillgarth (1992); Werner (1987).

63 Winkelmann (2003): 3–10; 18–31 (on Eusebius); Inglebert (1996): 325–55; Rohrbacher (2002): 93–107 (Rufinus).

64 Fundamental studies of Bede: Goffart (1988): 235–328; and Higham (2006); for a historical (but not theological) commentary, see Wallace-Hadrill (1988); for the broader context, see the essays in DeGregorio (ed. 2010). See also the further references cited in the first section of Chapter 6.

their faith, rather than with politics; secular history is included more as a means of illustrating the ills of a worldly life than for its own intrinsic interest.[65] Both Gregory and Bede were widely read during the whole of our period.[66]

Ecclesiastical histories intended to establish the historical inevitability of Christianity and prove a particular theological point, which normally hinged on the eventual conversion to Christianity of all humanity, and pointed the way forward to the Last Judgement; in this sense, they had much in common with the theological conception of history in Orosius. They differed in the relative narrowness of the subject matter they covered, not just in terms of its ecclesiastical focus, but also because these works tended to focus on the history of one nation or region; they had no pretensions to being 'universal' histories, and thus could—as in the case of both Bede and Gregory—appear to have some characteristics of 'national' histories.

Secular Histories in Late Antiquity

While ecclesiastical histories and chronicles generally provided a specifically Christian view of the past (though the extent to and manner in which this shaped the narrative could vary widely), this period also saw the production of a number of secular histories. These were perhaps less influential in that they were less widely read, but some, such as the *Breviarum* of Eutropius, evidently did also provide important models for later authors within the period. These texts were, naturally enough, concerned with the history of Rome, and ranged from those that covered the whole period from its founding to the historians' present (the minor Latin historians of the fourth century), through the more expansive imperial biographies of the *Historia Augusta*, to the voluminous Tacitean 'Zeitgeschichte' of Ammianus Marcellinus. Also produced in this period was a short narrative about Roman origins, the *Origo gentis Romanae*, which, in its mingling of varied kinds of sources ranging from what seem to be mythical to more factual accounts, appears to be in some ways comparable to some of the 'national' histories to be discussed below.

There are four brief histories of Rome from the second half of the fourth century that appear to draw on common sources and on each other, of which

65 Fundamental for Gregory: Heinzelmann (1994b); for an important alternative reading, see Goffart (1988): 112–234; further references are given below in Chapter 3.

66 On the dissemination of *HE*: Colgrave and Mynors (ed. and trans. 1969): xxxix–lxx; Lapidge (2006): 119; 138; 142; 145; 149; 154; 166; 234; 238; 240; 243; 248; 255; 268; Crépin (2005): 50–60; 67–8. On the dissemination of *DLH*: Goffart (1987); Heinzelmann (1994b): 167–75; Lapidge (2006): 212; 259; 305; McKitterick (2004b): 152; Reimitz (2003); on his use by Fredegar, the *LHF* and Paul, see the apparatus in the respective editions, and Chapters 3–4 below.

Eutropius's *Breviarum ab urbe condita* seems to have been the best known for the period under consideration in this monograph.[67] This text is, as the title indicates, a brief history of the Roman state from Romulus down to 364, and was written *c*.369.[68] Not long before, Sextus Aurelius Victor—like Eutropius, a career civil servant—had composed his *Liber de Caesaribus*, a history of emperors from 31BC to AD361 (when his work was published); and in *c*.370, Festus, again a civil servant, composed his *Breviarum*, a shorter work covering the same period as Eutropius's *Breviarum*.[69] Finally, there is the anonymous *Epitome de Caesaribus* from the end of the fourth century.[70]

A common source for these short histories is believed to be a now lost text known to modern scholarship as the *Kaisergeschichte*, which is also thought to be a source for Jerome's continuation of Eusebius, and is supposed to have been composed at some point in the fourth century. None of these histories have a noticeably prominent religious angle to their narratives; none of them was written by a Christian. All of these works continued to be read; Eutropius's history in particular was used by Jerome and many later Christian historians, and also formed the basis for Paul the Deacon's *Historia Romana* (though Paul added considerably to it). Aurelius Victor and the *Epitome de Caesaribus* seem to have been less well known until the ninth century, but from that point onwards probably did exercise some influence on later Latin writers. None of these histories, however, were as extensively and widely received in our period as either Orosius or the Eusebius–Jerome chronicle. They nevertheless need to be borne in mind as alternative, resolutely non-religious models of historical writing available to later historians: while in terms of the brevity which they cover events they might have something in common with the chronicle tradition, in terms of the approach to history and the choice of material, they are quite different.

67 On the minor Latin historians of the fourth century, in addition to the survey in Bonamente (2003), see den Boer (1972); and Rohrbacher (2002): 42–63.

68 For introductory material on Eutropius, apart from the edition of Santini (ed. 1979); see Bird (trans. 1993): vii–lvii, along with Bird's extensive commentary: 71–164; den Boer (1972): 114–72; Rohrbacher (2002): 49–58.

69 On Aurelius Victor, in addition to the edition of Pichlmayr and Gruendel (eds 1966), see Bird (1984); Bird (trans. 1994): vii–xxx, along with Bird's extensive commentary: 55–207; den Boer (1972): 19–113; Rohrbacher (2002): 42–8. On Festus, see den Boer (1972): 173–223; Eadie (ed. 1967): 1–41, along with Eadie's extensive commentary: 70–153; Rohrbacher (2002): 59–63.

70 On this text, in addition to the edition of Pichlmayr and Gruendel (eds 1966), see Schlumberger (1974).

The other principal secular Latin histories are the *Historia Augusta*, a compilation of imperial biographies from the later fourth century covering the emperors from Hadrian to the sons of Carus, and largely anonymous; and the contemporary history of Ammianus Marcellinus. The *Historia Augusta* has long been a thorn in the side of scholars: it is inconsistent in style and content, as well as in its treatment of different emperors, and it is generally no longer thought to be a particularly reliable historical source; nor is it normally considered to have any particular literary merit.[71] The text's date cannot be firmly determined, with estimates ranging from the 360 s to the decade after 395; and even the fourth-century dating is not necessarily secure. It is a work of pagan historiography, a "reaction to Christianity triumphant and intolerant" that showcases the greatness of the pagan and tolerant Roman past as a counterpoint to the intolerant Christian present.[72] Although there is little evidence that it was used by any of the historians studied below, its existence is an example of yet another way of looking at the past that focused on secular achievement and the biographies of rulers, enlivened by what some modern scholars have suggested is a good dose of fiction.

Ammianus Marcellinus, in contrast, has been seen as an exceptionally factual, sober historian of his own time. He also has his bias, of course, which is not a Christian one—though precisely what the attitude of his *Res gestae* to the new religion is remains a matter of some dispute.[73] A Greek-speaker himself, Ammianus chose to write his *Res gestae* in Latin. The extant text begins in 353 and extends to 390; the first thirteen books have been lost, but Ammianus says that he presented a history from the principate of Nerva onwards.[74] Ammianus was an administrator and staff officer posted in various parts of the Roman empire; despite his own personal experience, he often appears to have drawn on written sources for his descriptions rather than presenting an eyewitness account.

Because of the period in which he wrote, he is naturally an especially informative source for contact and conflict with various barbarian groups, and he is particularly useful as providing the principal contemporary narratives concerning

71 On the *Historia Augusta*, in addition to the edition of Hohl, Samberger, and Seyfarth, see the introductory survey in Birley (2003); see further especially the fundamental studies of Barnes (1978); Syme (1968); and Syme (1971).

72 Birley (2003): 144.

73 There is a vast body of work on Ammianus, and there appears often to be very little consensus. For introductions, see Sabbah (2003); and Rohrbacher (2002): 14–41; see further the important studies of Barnes (1998); Blockley (1975); Demandt (1965); Kelly (2008); Matthews (1989); and Syme (1968).

74 Ammianus: XXXI.xvi, 9.

the Goths at a time when they were having an ever-greater impact on the empire, as well as being the earliest real source for Gothic history that is likely to be in any manner reliable; Ammianus can indeed be used as a check against some aspects of Jordanes's narrative of the same period.[75] Like the histories of Tacitus, Ammianus's history is formulated in a rather dense Latin, and like Tacitus, he has much to say about Roman contacts and conflicts with barbarians. Ammianus has therefore, like Tacitus, been much utilised by modern scholars interested in barbarians. Like Tacitus once again, it is hard to know both just how accurate he is about the barbarians, and just how much influence his work had on historians in the following four centuries: there is little evidence of direct use. As his *Res gestae* are 'Zeitgeschichte' rather than an origin narrative, they are of little immediate relevance to our understanding of how the distant past was treated by the later 'national' histories.

In contrast, the *Origo gentis Romanae* was explicitly about the distant past. It is a rather unusual text that exists only from fifteenth-century manuscripts, but was apparently composed in the late fourth century and provides a narrative of Roman origins based both on Virgil and on other sources, not all of which have as yet been properly identified.[76] Unlike some of the other works just discussed, this text has attracted relatively little attention in the scholarship, and seems not to have excited the imagination of any of the many scholars dealing with later narratives of barbarian (as opposed to Roman) origins.[77]

Presenting as it does a rather heterogenous use of sources and a combination of what seem to be both more factual and more fictional elements, it might be a useful comparandum as a specifically *Roman* prose narrative of origins that, even if no direct influence can be shown, might nevertheless be well worth studying alongside the many stories of barbarian origins that are extant. In particular, it is a demonstration that not just early medieval barbarians, but also non-Christian Romans in late antiquity were interested in a mythologising prose narrative of origins that synthesised a number of different and not always harmonious versions of the distant past, and thereby

75 References to some of the relevant passages are provided in the next chapter; for Ammianus's value regarding the Alamanni, another contemporary barbarian group frequently in conflict with Rome, see Zotz (1998).

76 On this text, in addition to the edition of Pichlmayr and Gruendel (eds 1966), see most recently the extensive material in Sehlmeyer (ed. and trans. 2004): 7–27; 65–160; and the discussion in the context of its place among other contemporary histories in Sehlmeyer (2009): *passim*; see further Momigliano (1958); and Christopher Smith (2005).

77 See, however, the brief comments of Pohl (2014): 410–11; 413; this paper appeared after the paragraphs above had already been written.

encompassed many elements that do not seem to 'fit' with the rest of the narrative, but seem nevertheless clearly to derive from written rather than oral sources. It is also a demonstration that the sort of eclectic manner of collecting material relating to 'ethnic' or 'national' origins that we find in, *inter alia*, Jordanes's Gothic history, was by no means invented by or unique to the authors of the later 'national' histories of what had earlier been barbarian peoples.[78]

By the fifth century, therefore, there was a wide range of more or less well-known narratives, providing a number of different models for how history could and should be written. With the exception of the *Breviarium* of Eutropius (and to a lesser extent that of Festus), most of the historical narratives extant from late antiquity that were widely received and served as models in the early middle ages followed the paradigms either of ecclesiastical history, or universal history or world chronicle; the most well-known models for historical writing were thus dominated by the perspective of salvation history, and this perspective is accordingly shared by the majority of early medieval histories.

Although they do not exclude religion, the authors even of the Latin histories to be considered below—Jordanes, Isidore, Fredegar, the *LHF*-author and Paul—seem to be more concerned simply with providing a secular narrative from the distant past to the present or very recent past, without really considering the way any of this fits into the perspective of salvation history.[79] They are thus perhaps more akin to the *Historia Augusta* in its form as serial biography and the *Origo gentis Romanae* in its quest for (what appear to us to be mythical) origins cobbled together apparently indiscriminately from a variety of sources. Somewhat frustratingly, however, there seems to be little evidence that either of these texts were indeed read by the authors of the works to be examined below; Eutropius's *Breviarum* was more widely known, but in terms of style, form, and historical ideology appears not to have had as much influence as the text's dissemination might suggest, except insofar as it tends to avoid religious issues.

The differences between the histories to be examined below and those just discussed notwithstanding, there are a few points to be made regarding the inheritance that the latter group of texts represent. To begin with, let me reiterate that we should always be aware that there was a broad palette of approaches

78 I am grateful to Sandy Murray for alerting me to the existence and possible significance of this text.

79 Although Isidore does appear to present the Goths within the framework of salvation history, this aspect is not prominent in his historical works, unlike in his other writings.

to the past among later Roman historians writing in Latin, and it should not surprise us therefore that early medieval approaches to the past could be equally varied. While it is true that the challenges faced by early medieval historians were different at least in one respect—late Roman authors did not have to try and integrate a barbarian past (with little written material about it at least in its furthest reaches) with a Roman inheritance, and could rely on extensive written sources for the early history of Rome—there was also one basic challenge that they shared with the Christian Roman historians of the fourth and fifth centuries (and indeed earlier), namely the need to integrate a pre-Christian past, and indeed a pre-Christian cultural heritage inherent in the very language in which the texts were written, with a Christian present.[80]

This was a task approached in different ways, but one aspect common to most Christian histories was an effort to stress the providential place within Christian history of the people or polity that was the focus of the history being written. Such a focus on salvation history is not to be found in most of our 'national' histories; nevertheless, one lesson that the authors of the latter texts might have learnt was the importance of papering over the cracks that could appear from too close a scrutiny of the differences between the pagan past and the Christian present. One of the methods of harmonising past and present was euhemerism: although originating in pre-Christian thought as a means of interpreting pagan myths, euhemerism—an interpretation of gods as exceptional humans who were worshipped as deities—was adopted by some Christians in late antiquity as a method of explaining the worship of pagan gods, and continued to be employed by some Christian writers throughout the middle ages. From the beginning of its use by Christian writers, euhemerism could be applied with a simply historicising and thereby often apologetic function, without moral critique; it could, however, equally well be used as a means of explicitly denigrating pagan practices and the pagan past.[81]

The salvific aspect of history, a focus on which was one of the principal means by which the authors of ecclesiastical histories were able to pass over potential breaks between past and present, was not prominent in the later

80 Admittedly, for Christian Roman historians, the problem was arguably less a matter of legitimising Roman rule, and more a question of not wanting to abandon Roman culture.

81 For basic introductions, see Cooke (1927); Orchard (1997): 101–4; von See (1989); and Thraede (1966). See more broadly Inglebert (1996), for studies of how individual Christian Roman historians approached the problems posed by the pre-Christian Roman past; the earliest Christian writers to present a euhemeristic reading of that past were Minucius Felix (late second or early third century) and Lactantius (*c.*250–*c.*325) (Inglebert 1996: 105–44). On the relevance of this point for Jordanes, for example, see Chapter 2 at n. 90.

'national' histories. Yet it is possible, indeed likely, that the authors of the latter learnt just as much from their more religiously-oriented predecessors as from the secular or pagan historians of late antiquity—and in fact probably more. Arguably, their task was in some respects to produce a synthesis of both approaches: to provide a secular history of a people that had formed a polity, and to do so from the origins of that people to the present in a manner that portrayed the present in a flattering light, and therefore could not present too negative an image of the past; but also, precisely because of this last requirement, to provide a history that would not offend the current religious sensibilities because of the difference in religion in the past. Unlike late antique Christian historians, who had to find a way of coming to terms only with the non-Christian aspect of their Roman cultural inheritance, but not with the language or medium *per se* in which the rest of that inheritance was transmitted, the historians of the post-imperial, barbarian kingdoms had to harmonise their current, Romanised, Christian, Latin present with a barbarian past that had not already been through a process of assimilation in the Latin written word to the Roman inheritance.

In the following chapters I shall argue that the 'national' histories I examine were written as a means of recording and codifying a narrative of the distant past that established a continuity between that distant past and the present. This sense of continuity was arguably important to the secular aristocracy, since, despite the fact that the distant past was pagan or heretic, continuity with ancestral greatness was one of the principal means of legitimising rule in the present. Because of this lay interest, therefore, narratives about this distant past were sufficiently important that they needed to be recorded in the now authoritative medium of Latin writing.

But the impulse for writing these texts did not simply emanate from the secular aristocracy: the existence of these Latin 'national' histories also shows how closely related were the spheres of Church and court, and furthermore, it demonstrates that it was acceptable to present aspects of the distant past not related to religion in a positive light, as long as ways could be found to diminish the presence of elements of that past that could have been interpreted as opposed Christianity. In the person of Isidore especially, but also to differing extents in the other cases presented below, it could be argued that the interests of Church and state were so closely related that a stress on continuities rather than religious difference was probably as important to at least some members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy as to the secular aristocracy; and in any case the former were invariably linked to the latter by ties of blood.

Because writing, with the partial exception of administrative literacy, was dominated by the Church in our period, the bias of most extant written sources

leans heavily towards clerical attitudes, which were conditioned to a much greater degree by concerns of religion and religious morality. With the exception of the texts examined in this book, it is only from around the turn of the millennium, and in some parts of western Europe from considerably later, that we begin to find in any significant quantity narrative literature that gives expression *primarily* to a lay culture and historical consciousness: for most of the early middle ages, there was scarcely any written cultural production that was essentially of a secular nature. (I exclude here administrative and documentary material.)

Nevertheless, two final points must be noted here, which will recur throughout the following pages. The first is that there was no great gulf between the ecclesiastical and lay aristocracy: from the very beginnings of the medieval period, senior churchmen were closely linked with secular affairs, from urban administration to military service; the clergy were often expected to commemorate members of the secular aristocracy; and it was common for at least one if not more members of lay aristocratic families to join the Church at an early age: thus the ecclesiastical and lay hierarchies were literally linked by blood.[82]

The second important point is that although the bulk of the written evidence that survives betrays a marked ecclesiastical bias, we cannot assume that no secular education or culture existed: there was a large lay aristocracy, which was certainly closely connected to and influenced by the Church, but would have had some kind of lay education (in, among other things, the arts of war and politics), and secular values that we cannot assume would have been identical to those of the Church. This is a further significant difference in context between the secular Latin histories reviewed in the previous pages, and the works to be examined below: late antique secular Latin histories were written for and embedded within a lay culture just as much as early medieval secular histories were; but it was (at least with regard to the elites) a highly literate secular culture, within which the written and Latin cultural heritage was

82 The literature on secular aspects of the early medieval Church is vast; see, in general, Wickham (2009): 184–90. The following is a very small sample of important studies on more specific issues: on episcopal administration and relationship with secular political hierarchies, see Heinzelmann (1988); and Kaiser (1988); on monastic commemoration of secular aristocrats, see Freise (1985); McKitterick (2004b): 162–73; Oexle (1976); Schmid (1965); and Schmid (1979); on military service and the Church, see Prinz (1971); on family relationships between the secular and clerical elites, see Schmid (1965); and Wormald (1978): 49–58; on royal patronage of churches and written, Latin cultural production, see Hen (2007); on these topics and the royal promotion of ecclesiastical reform and particular forms of piety and religious representation, see McKitterick (2008): 292–380.

fundamental.[83] In contrast, early medieval secular culture (even of the elites) was, to a large extent, not set down in writing; we can know little about it, relative to what we know about religious culture in the same period.

The subjects of the present study are all texts: written material, produced (at least in their its form) in all cases by persons with some form of religious education in Latin. These works are among the relatively few forms of literary evidence both of an independent lay aristocratic culture, and of the extent to which this was influenced by and in turn influenced the culture of the ecclesiastical elite. They constitute, therefore, the principal extant narrative evidence of a secular historical consciousness; they are in some cases a window into a secular culture that lived primarily in an oral context and in the vernacular rather than in Latin writing; and they are also, in all cases, witness to the interaction between the secular and ecclesiastical milieux. They are not, however, anything approaching the totality of expressions of that secular culture, even just with regard to historical consciousness and the distant past; much more must have existed that we can never know about, and our conclusions must therefore be appropriately cautious.

83 On this point, see e.g. Jones (1964): 988–91; 997–1006; 1007–12; 1021–4; and Wickham (2009): 29–31.