

Part I
A Political History

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From Empire to Kingdom, 409-507

A Turning Point

If a date had to be set for the ending of Roman imperial rule in the Iberian peninsula, the autumn of 409 would be as good a one as any. On either September 28 or October 12 of that year – an all too typical contradiction between two contemporary sources makes it impossible to choose between them – a loose and recently formed alliance of “barbarians,” who had spent the previous three years making their way from the Rhineland and across Gaul, came through the passes over the the Pyrenees into Spain.¹ These invaders are reported to have been made up of three distinct ethnic components: the Alans, the Sueves, and the Vandals. The latter group was subdivided into the Silings and the Hasdings. Both Sueves and Vandals were thought by the Romans to be Germanic peoples, originating in lands to the east of the Rhine.²

The Alans, on the other hand, would have been seen as far more recent and exotic arrivals in the West. They were one of the peoples of the steppe of probably Iranian origin, who were mainly to be found in the area of the northern Caucasus and the lower Don in the third and fourth centuries. Some of them may be assumed to have moved westward in the years following the arrival of the Huns on

¹ Orosius, *Historiarum adversum paganos libri VII*, VII. 40, ed. C. Zangemeister (Vienna, 1882; reprinted Hildesheim, 1967), pp. 548-52; Hydatius 15th year of Arcadius and Honorius, *The Chronicle of Hydatius and the Consularia Constantinopolitana*, ed. R. W. Burgess (Oxford, 1993), p. 80; on Hydatius see also Carmen Cardelle de Hartmann, *Philologische Studien zur Chronik des Hydatius von Chaves* (Stuttgart, 1994), and Steven Muhlberger, *The Fifth-Century Chroniclers* (Liverpool, 1990), pp. 193-266.

² Tacitus, *Germania* II. 4 and XXXVIII. 1-3, ed. J. G. C. Anderson (Oxford, 1938).



Map 1 The provinces of Visigothic Spain

the fringes of the Carpathians in the 370s.³ Others of their number seem to have become subject to the Huns on the plains north of the Danube soon afterwards, and yet others were driven southward into Roman territory. How those Alans who moved west came to find themselves associated with the Vandals and the Sueves on the east bank of the river Rhine opposite Mainz in late 406 remains entirely unknown.

In the winter of that year the river froze over, and the three groups crossed into Roman territory where, despite initial resistance by some Frankish allies of the empire, they were able to force their way into the otherwise undefended Gallic provinces. Following a three-year period in Gaul, of which virtually nothing is recorded, they reached the western Pyrenees in the autumn of 409, and were able to cross unopposed,

³ Ammianus Marcellinus XXXI. ii. 12–25 and iii. 1–3, ed. J. C. Rolfe, vol. III, pp. 386–96. On the Alans in this period see Vladimir Kouznetsov and Iaroslav Lebedynsky, *Les Alains* (Paris, 1997), pp. 35–54.

possibly as the result of deliberate treachery on the part of Roman units supposed to be defending the passes across the mountains.⁴

These imperial troops were in the pay of a rebel emperor, Constantine III (407-11), who had been set up by the army in Britain in 407 and had then made himself master of much of Gaul and Spain in the ensuing period of confusion.⁵ Whether the Spanish priest Orosius, writing his *Seven Books of Histories Against the Pagans* in 417, was right in suggesting that Constantine's soldiers deliberately allowed the Vandals and the others across the Pyrenees in order to conceal the looting of the civilian population they themselves had been carrying out is impossible to tell. But the Roman government of the legitimate western emperor Honorius (395-423) was never able thereafter to reimpose its authority on all of the Spanish provinces.

As can be seen from what was happening elsewhere in this period, the migrating armies that were the Vandal, Sueve, and Alan confederacies were probably seeking to reach some form of accommodation with the Roman government, by offering to provide military service in return for regular pay and supplies and some degree of integration into the imperial administrative structure. This is what Alaric and his Gothic confederacy had been trying to persuade the emperor Honorius to agree to up to the sack of Rome in 410, and some of his successors were able to make such arrangements with the imperial government on at least two occasions in the succeeding decade.⁶

Roman military power had come increasingly to depend on the employment of soldiers, both individuals and whole units, drawn from the populations who lived beyond the empire's borders or who had been permitted to settle in it by treaties of federation. Such groups as the Vandals, driven into imperial territory, could provide valuable resources of military manpower relatively cheaply for Rome, but in such periods of disturbance there were more potential soldiers looking for government subsidy than either were required or could be afforded by the depleted imperial treasury. For their part, such relatively large bodies of non-Roman soldiers in a potentially hostile

⁴ Orosius VII. 40, ed. Zangemeister, pp. 551-2.

⁵ *PLRE* vol. 2: Constantinus 21, pp. 316-17.

⁶ For the events of these years see Peter Heather, *Goths and Romans, 332-489* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 193-224; also Roger Collins, *Early Medieval Europe, 300-1000* (2nd edn., London, 1998), pp. 47-60.

new land needed to make some kind of agreement with the imperial administration for their own security as well as employment. They were not able to maintain themselves as armies without access to regular food supplies, and they could not disperse widely over the countryside if faced by a military threat from hostile Roman forces.

The Alans, Vandals, and Sueves, after a brief but savage period of looting and destruction, seem to have made a treaty of federation with a Roman government. The two main Spanish literary sources for the history of this period, Orosius, an exact contemporary, and Hydatius, a bishop who wrote a short chronicle in northwest Spain around the year 468, agree that a period of famine, starvation, and cannibalism followed the entry of the Alans, Sueves, and Vandals into Spain in 409.⁷ While the two chroniclers' sympathies lay with the suffering civilian population, what they describe implies that the invaders were having to take short-term and desperate measures. Once they had taken what food was available and had reduced the inhabitants to starvation, they either had to move on, to inflict similar misery on other untouched areas, or to change the nature of their relationship with the Roman ruling classes. As they had devastated their way across Gaul between 406 and 409 and were at this stage unable to cross into North Africa, the latter policy was the only alternative left to them if they were not to join the civilians in starvation.

Conditions in Spain at the time meant that the ensuing treaty of federation had to be made with a rebel imperial regime that had been set up in the peninsula in 409. The emperor with whom they made the agreement was called Maximus, and his rule was centered on Tarragona and Barcelona on the Mediterranean coast, an area not then directly threatened by the presence of the invaders.⁸ Maximus had been created emperor by Gerontius, one of the generals of Constantine III, who had rebelled against his former master and in 410/11 was besieging him in Arles.⁹ In the circumstances, neither Gerontius nor Maximus was in a position to resist the Alans, Sueves, and Vandals, and might in any case have hoped to make use of them in an attempt to overthrow Constantine III and gain control of Gaul.

⁷ Hydatius, 15th–17th years of Arcadius and Honorius, ed. Burgess, p. 82; Orosius VII. 41, ed. Zangemeister, pp. 552–4.

⁸ On Maximus see *PLRE* vol. 2: Maximus 4 and Maximus 7, pp. 744–5.

⁹ *PLRE* vol. 2: Gerontius 5, p. 508.

In practice this was not to be. In the winter of 410/11 the Visigoths withdrew from Italy, and the army of the legitimate emperor Honorius was thus free to try and reestablish his rule in Gaul. This was achieved quite rapidly in the course of 411. Gerontius was forced to abandon the siege of Arles and retreat toward Spain, only to be killed by his own men, while Constantine III had to surrender to Honorius, who had him executed. The ephemeral regime of Maximus on the Catalan coast collapsed and he had to take refuge with his new Alan and Vandal allies in the interior of the peninsula, while expecting an attack by Honorius's armies.¹⁰

This was slow in coming because conditions in Gaul remained chaotic, and it was not until 416 that the western imperial government, dominated since 411 by the *Magister Militum* or Master of the Soldiers Constantius (died 421), was in a position to try to regain control of the Iberian peninsula.¹¹ This operation was to be carried out not by imperial forces, but by those of Rome's new ally, the Visigothic king Wallia (415-19). The campaign that he launched on behalf of the emperor Honorius against Maximus and his Alan, Suevic, and Vandal federates saw the Visigoths make their first appearance in Spain.

The Visigoths

To attempt a synoptic history of the Visigoths in the centuries preceding this point would not be easy. This is not just due to the size and complexity of the subject, but results from the continuing high level of scholarly disagreement about it. Above all this focuses on the central questions of who "the Visigoths" actually were, and what kind of an entity did they form? The fact that the name probably ought to be put in inverted commas may give some indication of the difficulties to be faced in trying to establish even the most basic consensus on these issues. The difficulties of definition in trying to answer such questions apply equally to all comparable research into the nature and composition of the other Germanic and non-Germanic peoples to be found in the historical sources relating to these centuries. In the case of the Alans, Sueves, and Vandals, the evidence relating to

¹⁰ Heather, *Goths and Romans*, pp. 219-24.

¹¹ For Constantius see *PLRE* vol. 2: Constantius 17, pp. 321-5.

them is so limited in extent that it has seemed better to wait until the Visigoths entered the story before trying to tackle the difficulties involved in trying to make sense of the character, composition, and development of the so-called barbarian peoples.¹²

A few decades ago there would seem to have been no difficulty to be faced in trying to answer such questions. The various peoples who settled in the territories of the western Roman empire from the fourth century onward would have been taken to be just that: separate and coherent ethnic groups, united by their common culture, history, and genetic inheritance. In terms of their government, they would have been seen either as being led by war leaders elected from within their own number in times of military need, or as being permanently ruled by dynasties of kings of ancient lineage, whose authority might stem from their special relationship to or descent from the gods whom the people worshiped. Such a population group was usually called a tribe. Some elements of the culture of each tribe might be shared with others. In particular, several of them shared a common language, such as proto-Germanic or Gothic, but no doubt with dialectical differences to match their political separateness. While their particular tribal histories could include long-term rivalries and feuds between them, the mutual comprehensibility of their speech would be expected to provide a sense of Germanic solidarity in the face of the alien civilization of Rome.¹³

According to such an interpretation, the histories of these peoples had long been transmitted orally, but came to be written down only in the period after their establishment inside the frontiers of the former Roman empire. As such, they testified to the long-term survival of each individual tribe over centuries, and to the great distances that most of them may have traveled in the course of their existence, either buffeted by conflicts with their neighbors or taking advantage of Rome's increasing weakness. Some of these histories also seemed

¹² On the Alans see Kouznetsov and Lebedynsky, *Les Alains*, pp. 11–34; on the Sueves Wilhelm Reinhart, *Historia general del reino hispánico de los Suevos* (Madrid, 1952) remains the only monograph, but see the four articles devoted to them in E. A. Thompson, *Romans and Barbarians: The Decline of the Western Empire* (Madison, WI, 1982), pp. 137–229. On the Vandals the main treatment is still that of C. Courtois, *Les Vandales et l'Afrique* (Paris, 1955).

¹³ e.g. Franz Altheim. *Die Krise der alten Welt* (3 vols., Berlin-Dahlem, 1943), vol. 1, pp. 83–116.

to be confirmed by what earlier generations of Roman authors, such as Tacitus, had written about the empire's previous contacts with the various Germanic peoples.

From such a perspective there was nothing inherently incredible about the narrative that could be composed from a mixture of Roman and Germanic sources about the history of the Visigoths, which would have been presented along the following lines.¹⁴ Their origin in Scandinavia, probably southern Sweden, where Götland remains a regional name, could be dated to around the first century BC. This period of genesis was followed by a migration of the tribe across the Baltic to northeastern Germany, beyond the Elbe, in the course of the first century AD, and then a gradual southerly movement, gravitating toward the Danube. The first significant impact of the southward-migrating Goths on the Roman empire, the frontier of which was fixed on the southern bank of that river for much of its course, occurred in the mid-third century. Following their crossing of the Danube and a dramatic victory over the emperor Trajan Decius in 251, the Visigoths remained within the empire, looting and destroying for 20 years, until expelled by Claudius II Gothicus (268-70) and Aurelian (270-5).¹⁵

Likewise, a second Gothic people, who would become known as the Ostrogoths, followed a similar pattern of migration southward out of Scandinavia over the same period, but adopting a more easterly line of march than their Visigothic relatives. They eventually fetched up in the steppes of southern Russia along the shores of the Black Sea, having subjected a number of indigenous peoples in the region, thereby creating a Gothic empire. The Visigoths, finally pushed out of Roman territory in the early 270s, then established themselves between the Danube and the larger realm of their Ostrogothic cousins to the northeast, while continuing to threaten the imperial frontier.¹⁶

It was generally accepted that all of this was changed by the appearance of the Huns, a nomadic confederacy from Central Asia,

¹⁴ The classic presentation of the once generally accepted view being described here is that of Ludwig Schmidt, *Geschichte der deutschen Stämme bis zum Ausgang der Völkerwanderung: die Ostgermanen* (2nd edn., Munich, 1933).

¹⁵ For a good overview of the historiography see Peter Heather, *The Goths* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 1-18.

¹⁶ On this "Ostrogothic Empire" see T. S. Burns, *A History of the Ostrogoths* (Bloomington, IN, 1984), pp. 18-38.

whose sudden attack around 370 led to the collapse of the Ostrogothic kingdom, then ruled by Athanaric, and the flight of some of the survivors into Visigothic lands to the southwest.¹⁷ Under these pressures the Visigoths too soon packed their bags and begged to be admitted into the Roman empire. Once this had been conceded by the emperor Valens (364–78) in 376, the Gothic refugees quickly began to be exploited by the local imperial officials in the Danube region, upon whom they had to rely for supplies. The ruthless ill-treatment to which they were subjected led the Visigoths to revolt, aided by some smaller groups of Ostrogoths, who had accompanied them into the empire in 376. In attempting to suppress this Gothic revolt, Valens was defeated and killed at the battle of Adrianople in 378, leaving the Visigoths masters of much of the eastern half of the Balkans. Under the next emperor, Theodosius I (379–95), whose home had been in Spain, the various Gothic groups were soon brought to sign a treaty with the empire, and thereafter served in his armies in a series of civil wars fought against rival emperors in the West in 388 and 394. In the process they were reunited under the leadership of Alaric, a member of the ancient ruling house of the Balt dynasty.

Following Theodosius's death, Alaric tried to play off the imperial regimes in the two halves of the empire, now ruled by the infant sons of the late emperor, to secure a position for himself and an assured source of pay and supplies for his Visigothic followers. In the course of his attempts to coerce the western government, he led his forces into Italy in 408, and to stave off a crisis brought on by the emperor's refusal to compromise, he sacked the city of Rome in 410, shortly before his own death from natural causes. Alaric's successor Ataulph (410–15) led the Visigoths out of Italy into Gaul later that year.

This account of Gothic history seems a simple and comprehensible enough tale, and it is one that can easily be illustrated, as it always used to be in historical atlases and textbooks, by a long arrowed line that snakes all across Europe, from Scandinavia, through Germany and Hungary, into and across the Balkans, on into Italy and then France, finally ending in Spain. This line represents the movement of the Visigoths from their first home to their last, and all their travels as a migratory people in between.

¹⁷ E. A. Thompson, *A History of Attila and the Huns* (Oxford, 1948), pp. 20–4.

Simplicity was at least the main virtue of this presentation of events, which also chimed in perfectly with the ideologies of the days in which it came to prominence, in which German and Roman were seen as two opposed cultural polarities. In this ideological perspective, which was highly influential in the first half of the twentieth century, a vigorous young Germanic civilization, untainted by the corruption of its decaying neighbor, first drove back Roman attempts to expand into its own homelands east of the Rhine and north of the Danube, and then, as Rome declined into extinction, came to supplant it across the whole of western Europe.¹⁸

This kind of thinking remained popular, and not just in Germany, until the end of the Second World War. It may then have had some of the ideological stuffing knocked out of it, but the interpretation of the composition and movements of Germanic peoples that it sustained remained in force, albeit in an increasingly fossilized form, until new views began to be advanced in the final decades of the century. It has been only in the last 10 to 15 years that these alternative interpretations have begun to gain widespread scholarly support, but achieving a complete consensus on these issues is still hampered by disagreements over points of detail.

There are many reasons why the old view of early Gothic history is no longer tenable. For one thing, the names that are conventionally used to distinguish the two bodies of Goths - "Visigoths" and "Ostrogoths" - are anachronistic. In the texts that were written in Italy and Spain in the sixth and seventh centuries, both groups are just referred to as Goths. More significantly, quite different names for them were used before the fifth century. In the Roman sources of the mid-fourth century, two confederacies were identified as dominating the region north of the Danube and the Black Sea prior to the rise of the Hun hegemony, and these were known as the *Teruingi* and the *Greuthungi*.¹⁹ The former is often seen as being ancestral to the Visigoths and the latter to the Ostrogoths, but the contemporary narrative of the Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus, among others, makes it clear that only certain elements of both of these groups

¹⁸ For an overview of the historiography see Malcolm Todd, *The Early Germans* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 256-69; see also Walter Goffart, "Two Notes on Germanic Antiquity Today," *Traditio* 50 (1995), pp. 9-30.

¹⁹ Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae* XXXI. iii. 1-xiii. 19 *passim*, ed. J. C. Rolfe (3 vols., London and Cambridge, MA, 1952), vol. 3, pp. 394-482.

crossed into Roman territory in the 370s, leaving others still settled north of the Danube.²⁰

To cut a long story short, it is now generally accepted that the self-identification of the people who are now known as the Visigoths (and who would have thought of themselves as just being Goths) was the product of the years that followed the battle of Adrianople in 378. In this confused period all sorts of individuals and groups from a wide variety of cultural, genetic, and linguistic backgrounds were welded together, largely through recruitment by and service under the emperor Theodosius I. They were deliberately not integrated into Roman society in the Balkans, and were kept on a military footing under a leadership of their own, probably to maintain their mobility and loyalty to the emperor. By around 392 immediate leadership of this confederacy was being exercised by Alaric, who took advantage of the emperor Theodosius's death in 395, and the succeeding division of the empire, to establish the independence of his following, as effectively a mercenary army that was prepared to take service with whichever imperial regime offered the best terms.²¹ There is no real evidence that Alaric belonged to any long-established ruling house, with or without a supposedly divine ancestry.²²

It would be tempting to think that there ought to be marked and obvious differences between a Roman army and a barbarian confederacy in this period, but this would not be true. Throughout the fourth century the empire had recruited increasing numbers of its soldiers from Germanic and other peoples beyond its frontiers. In terms of material culture, Roman influence had been so pervasive that there was little to distinguish imperial troops from those recruited from outside the empire, either in terms of their weapons or of their dress and appearance.²³

²⁰ Ibid. XXXI. iv. 1-5, pp. 400-3.

²¹ Herwig Wolfram, *History of the Goths*, trans. Thomas J. Dunlap (Berkeley, CA, 1988), pp. 117-50.

²² P. Grierson, "Election and Inheritance in Early Germanic Kingship," *Cambridge Historical Journal* 7 (1941), pp. 1-22.

²³ Walter Pohl, "Telling the Difference: Signs of Ethnic Identity," in W. Pohl and H. Reimitz (eds.), *Strategies of Distinction: The Construction of Ethnic Communities, 300-800* (Leiden, 1998), pp. 17-69. Patrick Amory, *People and Identity in Ostrogothic Italy, 489-554* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 277-313 and 338-47. On Late Roman military equipment and dress see Pat Southern and Karen R. Dixon, *The Late Roman Army* (London, 1996), pp. 89-126.

Religion was also not a major differentiating factor, in that all of the Germanic groups found inside the imperial frontiers from the late fourth century onward seem to have been Christian.²⁴ This may seem rather surprising, but no indications exist to the contrary, and, to take the most pertinent case, the Visigoths were praised by Orosius for not looting ecclesiastical vessels and for not harming those of the citizens who had taken refuge in churches in the course of their sack of Rome in 410.²⁵ Whether they were so sensitive in practice is another matter. Orosius's argument would have been entirely undermined had the Goths been generally thought of as being pagans.

The social composition of a German confederate force would also not have distinguished it from its imperial equivalent. Roman armies, when moving their bases, whatever may have been true of the early empire, would by this period have always been accompanied by the families of the soldiers, and a great variety of camp followers, making them again indistinguishable from non-Roman units.²⁶ In such terms a Roman army on the march was no different to a Germanic "people" supposedly migrating.

In fact it is necessary to abandon the imagery and terminology of migration when looking at the movements of "barbarians" in this period. For one thing, there was no self-evident incentive for such people to move from what had been their traditional homelands, where their ancestors were buried and where, to judge by later parallels, their gods would have been linked to particular sacred places.²⁷ While Roman civilization served as a lure for individuals or small groups who might hope to enrich themselves through imperial service (and then possibly return home with the proceeds), this is not the same as the physical uprooting of a whole society. Only certain extreme pressures, economic, climatic, or military, could lead to a large-scale abandonment of their settlements by the bulk of the population.

²⁴ E. A. Thompson, "Christianity and the Northern Barbarians," in Arnaldo Momigliano (ed.), *The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century* (Oxford, 1963), pp. 56-78; see also D. H. Green, "Problems of Christianization," in idem, *Language and History in the Early Germanic World* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 275-90, and A. Schwarcz, "Cult and Religion among the Tervingi and the Visigoths and their Conversion to Christianity," in Heather (ed.), *The Visigoths*, pp. 447-59.

²⁵ Orosius VII. 39, ed. Zangemeister, pp. 544-8.

²⁶ Southern and Dixon, *Late Roman Army*, pp. 85-6.

²⁷ Green, *Language and History*, pp. 13-29.

Some such pressures were clearly exerted in the 370s, possibly from all three causes, but it is still important to note that many of the inhabitants of the lands north of the Danube did not abandon their lands to enter Roman territory, even if this involved their becoming subject to the Huns, whose “empire” depended upon the continuing existence of large elements of earlier populations in the lands north of the Danube and the Black Sea.²⁸

It makes more sense to see new ethnic identities being formed among those who had, for whatever reasons, been forced to leave their homeland, who had been thrown together in a new location, and who had come to adopt a new and predominantly military life-style.²⁹ As previously mentioned, the so-called Visigothic confederacy in the Balkans after the treaty of 381 was a permanent military force in the service of the emperor and was generally supplied by the imperial administration or was permitted to requisition from the civilian population. This was quite different to the self-sufficient agrarian lifestyle of the peoples north of the Danube, who were not normally on such a permanent war footing, except when under attack.³⁰

If it be accepted that a new Gothic identity was created in the eastern Balkans in this period, just as a second one, that of the so-called Ostrogoths, would also emerge in the very same area about a century later, it should be asked what gave it its distinguishing characteristics. The old view that saw the Visigoths as the *Teruingi* under a new name would not have found this a question in need of asking. But Alaric’s confederacy of Goths, which took shape in the 390s, was actually made up from elements not just of *Teruingi* and *Greuthungi* but also from several other ethnic groups from both north and south of the Danube. Furthermore, this confederacy would subsequently pick up and drop off components of itself in the course of its movements through the western Balkans, Italy, and Gaul between the years 405 and 415.³¹ Its composition was thus both varied and constantly changing.

²⁸ Heather, *The Goths*, pp. 109–29.

²⁹ Peter Heather, “The Creation of the Visigoths,” in idem (ed.), *The Visigoths from the Migration Period to the Seventh Century* (Woodbridge, 1999), pp. 43–73.

³⁰ Michel Kazanski, *Les Goths (Ier-VIIe après J.-C.)* (Paris, 1991), pp. 39–55.

³¹ J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, “Alaric’s Goths: Nation or Army?” in John Drinkwater and Hugh Elton (eds.), *Fifth-century Gaul: A Crisis of Identity?* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 75–83; Heather, *The Goths*, pp. 174–8; see also Wolfram, *History of the Goths*, pp. 150–71, who emphasizes the importance of the period up to 416 in the processes of “Visigothic ethnogenesis.”

What, therefore, provided the sense of identity and continuity that kept this grouping of disparate elements united? Several of the most influential modern scholars who have been studying these processes, for which they have coined the term “ethnogenesis,” have come from the University of Vienna, and hence have come generically to be called “the Vienna School.”³² For them the answer to the question of what gave a confederacy such as that of Alaric its sense of identity was the existence of what they call a *Traditionskern*, or core tradition. This provided the sense of a common history for the group, stretching back into the distant past, and was primarily embodied in the existence of an ancient royal lineage, whose dynastic traditions became those of the people they ruled. Allied to and supporting this central ruling family was an inner core of a warrior elite, which formed an aristocracy.³³ Other historians have disputed this interpretation, preferring, for example, to see the *Traditionskern* as being provided by the presence of a wider social group of families of middling economic and social standing.³⁴

It must be admitted that neither view is entirely satisfactory, as there is no evidence at all, other than for claims made at much later dates, that Alaric and his successors were linked in any way to the former rulers of the *Teruingi*. The latter do not seem in any case to have had permanent war leaders of the kind represented by Alaric.³⁵ Similarly, none of the various and often rival leaders of the Goths in the years immediately following the entry into the empire in 376 and the battle of Adrianople in 378 can be shown to be related to Alaric. He emerges as if from nowhere in 392. Nor can the long-term survival of significant sectors of either the upper or the middle echelons of this society be established across the divide represented by the years around 376 to 392. Neither an aristocracy nor a hypothetical class of “yeomen” can thus provide the core on which a sense of common identity and shared tradition might be based.

³² See the works by Wolfram and Pohl previously referred to; for criticism of the approach adopted see A. C. Murray, “Reinhard Wenskus on ‘Ethnogenesis’, Ethnicity, and the Origin of the Franks,” in Andrew Gillett (ed.), *On Barbarian Identity: Critical Approaches to Ethnicity in the Early Middle Ages* (Turnhout, 2002), pp. 39-68.

³³ See Wolfram, *History of the Goths*, pp. 36-116.

³⁴ Heather, *The Goths*, pp. 299-321.

³⁵ Herwig Wolfram, “Atharic the Visigoth: Monarchy or Judgeship. A Study in Comparative History,” *Journal of Medieval History* 1 (1975), pp. 259-78.

It is worth noting too that arguments about the movements of the *Teruingi* in the centuries before 376 remain equally porous. Central and Eastern European archaeologists have tried to link the material remains of two specific cultures with the literary evidence relating to the prehistory of the Goths, and they believe that this substantiates the idea that a coherent body of people moved from the area south of the Baltic to the Danube and the Black Sea in the course of the first three centuries AD.³⁶ Virtually everyone would now discard the idea of a prior origin in southern Scandinavia. However, this archaeological argument depends in part upon purely negative evidence, such as the lack of weapons burials in the two cultures.³⁷ In the absence of literary sources, it is also impossible for us to know if a sense of common identity existed between the two archaeologically defined populations.

For present purposes, however, it is enough to accept that the Goths who came to make themselves masters of Spain in the course of the fifth century derived from a confederacy of different ethnic groups that was brought together and given a new common sense of identity in the Balkans in the last quarter of the fourth century. They formed a mercenary army that tried to secure employment for itself from successive imperial regimes, and when this was not forthcoming, was increasingly obliged to look to its own interests.

An obvious question is that of the probable size of this and other such confederacies, not least as this has an important bearing on the understanding of what happened when the Visigoths finally came to settle permanently in Spain. The figures that are normally quoted suggest that the Visigoths may have numbered around 100,000, while smaller confederacies, such as those of the Alans, Sueves, and Vandals, are more likely to have been in the order of 20,000 strong.³⁸ There are no firm quantitative grounds for making these or other estimates of population size, which depend upon a handful of statements in early sources, and no real reliance should be placed in them.

Even if only from the vantage of common sense, it must be recognized that a group such as that of the Goths, almost continuously on the move between 392 and 419, and for most of that time depending

³⁶ For a helpful overview of these arguments see Peter Heather and John Matthews, *The Goths in the Fourth Century* (Liverpool, 1991), pp. 51-101; also Heather, *The Goths*, pp. 11-50.

³⁷ Heather, *The Goths*, pp. 23, 72-3.

³⁸ A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire* (3 vols., Oxford, 1964), vol. 1, pp. 195-6.

on its own resources, could maintain its coherence only as long as it was able to support itself materially. If food was not being provided from the granaries of the Roman state, drawing primarily on the resources of Africa, it would have to be acquired locally and by force. Far smaller quantities of supplies would have been available under such circumstances, and these would depend on seasonal and other conditions. It is very hard to believe that a body of people as large as 100,000 could support itself in such conditions, and in a hostile environment. It is probably more realistic to see the Visigothic confederacy as being no more than the size of a small Roman army. Together with family members, this may have amounted to something in the region of 30,000 people at most. The number of the Vandals, Alans, and Sueves would certainly have been fewer, as their history would suggest; 10,000 might not be too conservative an estimate in their cases. If these numbers seem small, it is important to remember that by this period there were few if any larger military forces that might challenge them.

It may still be wondered why a clear ethnic distinction seems to have existed between Goths and Romans, and also why it was that various Roman emperors, legitimate and otherwise, needed to make use of the military services offered by the Visigoths (as for convenience we shall continue to call them, not least to help distinguish them from the second Gothic confederacy, that of the Ostrogoths). The second of these questions is the easier to answer, in that as the history of the fifth century unfolds, it becomes harder and harder to find traces of the presence of a specifically Roman army, in either the eastern or the western half of the Empire.³⁹ Units that had existed at the beginning of the century disappear rapidly, especially in the West. The army in Britain, one of the largest concentrations of military forces in the western provinces, was taken to Gaul by Constantine III in 407 and does not seem to have survived his fall in 411. The smaller number of troops in Spain were withdrawn by Gerontius to fight in Gaul in 410, and were not returned to the peninsula following his killing.⁴⁰ Thus by around 416, while there were still imperial armies commanded by generals appointed by the emperor to be found in

³⁹ Southern and Dixon, *The Late Roman Army*, pp. 179-80; Collins, *Early Medieval Europe* (2nd edn.), pp. 80-99.

⁴⁰ Orosius VII. 42, ed. Zangemeister, p. 556.

Italy and Africa (until 432) and in parts of southern Gaul, the Roman units that had once had their bases in Britain, Spain, and northern Gaul had all been withdrawn from those provinces or had been disbanded. Into the vacuum thus created came the mercenary armies of the so-called barbarians.

The Gothic Conquest of Hispania, 456-507

Alaric's successor Ataulph (410-15) is said by the contemporary Spanish historian Orosius, who was quoting a former friend of the king, to have contemplated the creation of a Gothic state, thus replacing *Romania* by *Gothia*.⁴¹ However, he decided instead to put his forces at the service of the Roman state. He married Galla Placidia, the half-sister of the emperor Honorius, who had been carried off in the sack of Rome in 410, and he began negotiating a military role for himself and his following with the imperial government. These plans may already have been far advanced when he was murdered in 415 in Barcelona, in a short-lived coup led by a personal enemy.⁴² The murderer, Sigeric, was himself killed a week later.

That Ataulph was in Spain at this time probably means that the arrangements for Gothic military service in the peninsula, which were finalized under his successor Wallia (415-19), had already been made by the time of his death. Under Wallia, who returned Galla Placidia to her brother's court, the Goths carried out a series of campaigns for the emperor in the Iberian peninsula, to eliminate the Alans, Sueves, and Vandals, and to put an end to the regime of the usurping emperor Maximus.⁴³ The details of this war have not been preserved, but the Visigoths proved highly effective, destroying the Alans and the Siling Vandals, before being withdrawn from Spain in 419 to be established in Aquitaine in southwestern Gaul as the result of a new treaty with the empire.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Orosius VII. 43, ed. Zangemeister, p. 560. On this see J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, "Gothia and Romania," in idem, *The Long-Haired Kings and Other Studies in Frankish History* (London, 1962), pp. 25-48.

⁴² Orosius VII. 43, ed. Zangemeister, p. 561.

⁴³ Wolfram, *History of the Goths*, pp. 170-1.

⁴⁴ T. S. Burns, "The Settlement of 418," in Drinkwater and Elton (eds.), *Fifth-century Gaul*, pp. 53-63.

It has been suggested that the imperial government, dominated by the *Magister Militum* Constantius, had become worried by the success of the Goths and feared that they would merely take over from the Vandals and Sueves as the new masters of the Iberian peninsula. On the other hand, if that was the case it would have to be asked why they were given control of the important Gallic province of *Aquitania Secunda* instead. It is more likely that the Roman administration felt that military problems facing southern Gaul were of greater and more pressing importance than what by then may have seemed no more than mopping-up operations in Spain. It could have been the growth of the threat from the *Bagaudae* north of the Loire in these very same years that influenced imperial policy into moving the Goths from Spain to Aquitaine.

While the presence of *Bagaudae* does not seem to have been a problem affecting Spain at this time, it would soon become one. So it is worth trying to understand what was meant by this term, which appears in a number of fifth- and sixth-century chronicles.⁴⁵ Unfortunately, these references are far from informative, in that they tend to do no more than mention the presence of *Bagaudae*, the damage they may have caused, and their violent suppression by military forces in the pay of the empire, without ever once defining the term itself. Its significance must have been self-evident or well known to contemporary readers. In consequence a number of suggestions have been made as to what the word may have meant.

That the *Bagaudae* were a class or group and that they represented some form of threat to the Roman landowners is clear enough from the mention of the destruction they wrought and the urgency of the military steps taken to counter them. Beyond that there is less agreement, and they have been seen as standing somewhere on a spectrum that extends from starving peasants to class-conscious social revolutionaries.⁴⁶ In reality they are most likely to have been bandits, drawn from a number of different social classes, including

⁴⁵ J. F. Drinkwater, "The Bacaudae of Fifth-century Gaul," in Drinkwater and Elton (eds.), *Fifth-century Gaul*, pp. 208-17.

⁴⁶ J. F. Drinkwater, "Patronage in Roman Gaul and the Problem of the Bagaudae," in A. Wallace-Hadrill (ed.), *Patronage in Ancient Society* (London, 1989), pp. 189-203; E. A. Thompson, "Peasant Revolts in Late Roman Gaul and Spain," *Past and Present* 2 (1952), pp. 11-23, and idem, "Some Recent Studies of the Bacaudae," in idem, *Romans and Barbarians*, pp. 221-3.

slaves and dispossessed small farmers, driven by the political and economic upheavals of the time into joining ever-expanding gangs of those unable any longer to support themselves from their own resources. Although not a well-known phenomenon in western Europe, such large-scale bandit gangs are frequently encountered in the history of other parts of the world during comparable periods of political and economic disturbance.⁴⁷

It is one way in which a rural population can try to support itself when normal patterns of production and economic exchange have broken down over a wide area or an extended period. By combining to raid those, such as the landowners and the town-dwellers who still controlled food supplies and other resources previously acquired from the countryside, the rural population could maintain itself in conditions that had temporarily made agriculture and marketing impossible. Similarly, such a large-scale combination was a possible reaction in times when the rural population's own resources were being taken from them by force by other armed gangs, such as unemployed mercenary units or unpaid government soldiers. Once a certain critical momentum had been reached, such groups of bandits would be able to raid the estates of the landowning classes, attack and sack towns and other settlements, and even try to take on professional troops in battle or guerrilla warfare.

Britain had passed out of imperial control in 410, and Gaul north of the Loire seems to have been left to look after itself from 406 onwards. The unchecked growth of bandits in this area is thus not surprising, and the relative lack of large aristocratic estates in the region meant that the reimposition of order was less of a priority for the imperial government than would have been the case with the wealthier provinces in the south.⁴⁸ The fear of the extension of the Bagaudic threat across the Loire may thus explain the decision to establish a permanent military presence, as provided by the Goths, in the southwest in 419.

⁴⁷ The best-documented cases of this phenomenon are to be found in the history of China, particularly in the periods of dynastic decline and replacement. See Frederic Wakeman Jr. *The Great Enterprise: The Manchu Reconstruction of Imperial Order in Seventeenth-Century China* (2 vols., Berkeley, CA, 1985), vol. 1, chs. 3-4 and 7-8 for some interesting parallels.

⁴⁸ E. A. Thompson, "The Settlement of the Barbarians in Southern Gaul," reprinted in *idem, Romans and Barbarians*, pp. 23-37.

Meanwhile in Spain, the remnants of the Alans took refuge with the Hasding Vandals, and some later references suggest they retained their ethnic distinctiveness within the confederacy until both disappear completely from the historical record in 535.⁴⁹ Of the Siling Vandals no more is heard. The Sueves, who seem to have been established in garrisons in the northwest of the peninsula, may have been quite untouched by the Visigothic campaigns of 416 to 419, which were probably concentrated in the areas to the south and east. They retained their hold on northern Lusitania and Galicia in the aftermath of the Gothic withdrawal.

The Hasding Vandals, now swelled by the influx of Alan and other fugitives, were the main beneficiaries of the premature termination of the Gothic attempt to regain Spain for the Roman government. They made themselves masters of much of the peninsula in the absence of further military opposition. Not until 422 would another attempt be made to eliminate them. On this occasion an imperial army was sent from Italy under the *Magister Militum* Castinus, which was intended to cooperate with Gothic auxiliaries provided by the new king of the Visigoths, Theoderic I (419-51). The latter was less interested in the Roman alliance than his predecessor, and whether with his connivance or not, his detachments failed to support Castinus, who was defeated by the Vandals in the province of Baetica and forced to withdraw.⁵⁰ The only achievement of his campaign was the capture of the fugitive emperor Maximus, who was taken to Ravenna and executed. Direct Roman rule in the peninsula was thereafter confined to the coastal parts of the province of Tarraconensis and the mid to lower Ebro valley.

Castinus himself went on to serve as the military leader behind the short-lived regime of Johannes, who was made emperor following the death of Honorius in 423. Refused recognition in the East, he was overthrown in 425 by an expedition sent from Constantinople, which installed a new western emperor in the person of Valentinian III, the son of Honorius's sister Galla Placidia and of Constantius, the military supremo of Honorius's last years, who had himself briefly been emperor in 421.

⁴⁹ Courtois, *Les Vandales*, p. 229: a silver *missorium* of Gailamir (530-3), the last Vandal king, is inscribed: GAILAMIR REX VANDALORVM ET ALANORVM.

⁵⁰ Hydatius, 28th year of Honorius, ed. Burgess, pp. 86, 88; *PLRE* vol. 2: Castinus 2, pp. 269-70.

The weakness of Johannes's regime and the rivalries of military commanders in Italy, Africa, and Gaul in the first five years of the reign of Valentinian III meant that no attention was given to further attempts to reimpose imperial rule in Spain. However, the jockeying for power between rival Roman military commanders did have a significant impact upon the Vandals, who by now were the unchallenged masters of most of the Iberian peninsula. In 427 a civil war broke out between Boniface, the Count of Africa, and Felix, Master of the Soldiers in Italy, possibly as the result of a plot by Aetius, the commander in southern Gaul. Although the first expedition Felix sent against his rival was defeated, the threat of a second may have led to Boniface entering into an agreement in 428 or 429 with the Vandal king Gaiseric, to bring his forces into Africa.⁵¹

Soon after, Aetius's role in setting Felix and Boniface against each other was revealed, but in May 430 he was able to murder Felix and seize power in Italy. The imperial court, led by Galla Placidia, the emperor's mother, turned to Boniface, and he withdrew his army from Africa for a confrontation with Aetius. He won the battle but died soon after from wounds received, and control over the now much diminished empire in the West fell into the hands of Aetius, who continued to exercise it until his murder by the emperor himself in 454. One consequence of all this was the removal of the last Roman military presence, and the introduction into the African provinces of the Vandals and Alans, who completed their conquest with the capture of Carthage in 439.⁵² Their possession of Africa was recognized by a treaty with the empire in 442.

What does seem clear, though, is that initially the Vandals did not give up their position in Spain. In the aftermath of the transfer of their forces to Africa in 429, various Suevic bands moved into the south from Galicia, where they had been confined since 411/12, but the Vandal king sent a detachment of his army back, and the over-optimistic Sueves, led by Hermigar, were defeated near Mérida in 430.⁵³ This, however, was the last Vandal involvement in the peninsula. Faced with the need to impose themselves by force in Africa and until 442 by the threat of imperial attempts to eliminate them,

⁵¹ *PLRE* vol. 2: Bonifatius 3, pp. 237–40.

⁵² Courtois, *Les Vandales*, pp. 169–74.

⁵³ Hydatius, 5th year of Theodosius II, ed. Burgess, p. 90.

the Vandals concentrated all their efforts on making themselves masters of their new territories, leaving Spain to the Sueves, now the sole survivors in the peninsula of the invaders of 409.

Under their kings Rechila (438-48) and his son Rechiarius (448-55), the Sueves established themselves in Mérida (439) and extended their rule over most of the west and the south of Spain, with only the province of *Tarraconensis* remaining under direct imperial control. This was exercised in the emperor's name by a succession of military commanders, of whom several are known.⁵⁴ Among the problems now faced by the latter were outbreaks of Bagaudic activity in the middle Ebro valley, in which a number of towns seem to have been sacked.⁵⁵

In the 430s and 440s, the imperial government based in Ravenna became concerned almost exclusively with preserving its control over southern Gaul, and by extension *Tarraconensis*, and was even willing to concede Africa to the Vandals in 442. The invasion of Gaul by the Huns under Attila in 451 undermined the authority of Aetius, leading to his murder by the emperor in 454, which in turn resulted in Valentinian III's own assassination as an act of revenge in 455. In the period of chaos that ensued the Sueves raided the province of *Carthaginiensis*, perhaps as a preliminary to its complete conquest. Imperial attempts at a diplomatic solution were rejected, and the Suevic king launched an attack on the province of *Tarraconensis*, but his ambition proved fatal not only to himself but also to his kingdom.⁵⁶

In the disorder following the elimination of Valentinian III and with him the Theodosian dynasty in 455, a Gallic aristocrat called Avitus took the throne with Visigothic military backing.⁵⁷ Sharing the perspective of Aetius on the primary importance of retaining direct rule over southern Gaul, he allowed or encouraged his Gothic allies, now ruled by Theoderic II (453-66) to counter the new Suevic threat to *Tarraconensis*. In 456 Theoderic led his army into Spain against Rechiarius, although the latter was his brother-in-law. The Sueves were completely defeated at a battle on the river Orbigo near Astorga.

⁵⁴ These include Astyrius (441-3), Merobaudes (443), Vitus (446), Nepotianus (458/9-61), and Arborius (461-5): *PLRE* vol. 2, p. 1289, and individual entries for each of them.

⁵⁵ Hydatius, 17th and 19th years of Theodosius II, ed. Burgess, p. 96.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 4th and 5th years of Marcian, ed. Burgess, pp. 104.

⁵⁷ *PLRE* vol. 2: Avitus 5, pp. 196-8.

In the subsequent flight Rechiarius was captured and executed, and the Suevic monarchy disintegrated.⁵⁸ A number of rival warlords are reported fighting among themselves and against the Goths in the course of the next decade, before an evidential silence descends for nearly a century.⁵⁹ It seems, though, that the remnants of the Sueses and their feuding rulers were driven back into northern Lusitania and Galicia in the aftermath of 455, while the Visigoths took direct control of most of the rest of the peninsula, other than for the coastal regions of Tarraconensis and parts of the Ebro valley, which still remained under imperial rule.

The last emperor to visit the Iberian peninsula was Majorian (458–63), whose primary concern was the launching of an attack on the Vandals, who, after they had carried out the second sack of Rome in 455, were now regarded as the main threat to the very diminished imperial interests in the West. According to some of the few surviving entries from a sixth-century chronicle that may well have been written in Zaragoza, Majorian arrived in Spain in 460.⁶⁰ He made a formal entry or *adventus* into *Caesaraugusta* (Zaragoza) in that year, but does not seem to have interfered with Visigothic control over most of the peninsula. The fleet that he was preparing for the invasion of Africa was captured in the harbour of Cartagena in a surprise attack by the Vandals, and the emperor was forced to abandon his plan.⁶¹ Returning to Italy in 461, he was deposed by his Master of the Soldiers, Ricimer, who was of mixed Suevic and Gothic origin, and Majorian was executed.⁶²

Roman rule in the Ebro valley and on the Mediterranean coast was finally terminated by the Visigothic king Euric (466–84), who murdered

⁵⁸ Hydatius, 5th and 6th years of Marcian, ed. Burgess, pp. 104, 106.

⁵⁹ The few available references to the doings of the rival Suevic warlords of the years 456–64 will be found in the final section of Hydatius's chronicle. Attempts have been made to identify an early sixth-century Suevic king "Veremundus" on the basis of an inscription found at Vairão, between Oporto and Braga in northern Portugal, but this can only refer to the Leonese king Vermudo II (982–99).

⁶⁰ See Carmen Cardelle de Hartmann (ed.), *Victoris Tunnunensis Chronicon cum reliquiis ex Consularibus Caesaraugustanis et Jobannis Biclarenensis Chronicon* (= *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina*, vol. CLXXIII, Turnhout, 2001): Victor 23a, p. 10; see also the *Commentaria Historica* by Roger Collins, *ibid.*, pp. 96–7.

⁶¹ Hydatius, 4th year of Leo and Majorian, ed. Burgess, p. 112.

⁶² *Ibid.* 5th year of Leo and Majorian, ed. Burgess, p. 112. For Ricimer see *PLRE* vol. II: Fl. Ricimer 2, pp. 942–4.

his brother Theoderic II in 466.⁶³ At the time southern Gaul still remained the primary area of Visigothic occupation, and Toulouse served as the administrative center and principal royal residence, despite the conquest of much of Spain in 455/6.⁶⁴ As imperial rule in the West further declined in the 460s and 470s, more Gallic territory was acquired by Euric by war or by treaty, culminating in the Gothic occupation of Provence and the Roman cession to him of the Auvergne in 474. Following the deposition of Romulus in 476, Euric's generals rapidly overran the remaining parts of northeastern Spain still administered directly by the empire.⁶⁵

By about 480 at the latest the Visigothic kingdom in Gaul had come to extend from the valleys of the Loire and the Rhône to the Pyrenees and now also encompassed all of the Iberian peninsula, except for Galicia, which remained in the hands of the Sueves. Euric himself died of natural causes in 484, and the kingdom he had so greatly enlarged was inherited by his son Alaric II (484-507). Under the new king some major, if poorly recorded, changes took place. The *Consularia Caesaraugustana*, or "Consular(-dated) Chronicle of Zaragoza," contains an entry assigned to the year 494, reporting that "in this consulship the Goths entered Spain." A second one, for the year 497, adds "in this consulship the Goths acquired settlements (*sedes acceperant*) in Spain."⁶⁶

While these brief statements raise more questions than they answer, it has generally been accepted that they record a process of the relocation of Visigothic settlement out of southern Gaul and into Spain, taking place in the mid-490s. It should firmly be noted that this can not be corroborated archaeologically. The royal court, however, remained at Toulouse, and following Alaric's marriage to the daughter of the Ostrogothic king Theoderic, who had made himself ruler of

⁶³ *PLRE* vol. 2: Euricus, pp. 427-8.

⁶⁴ Ana María Jiménez Garnica, *Orígenes y desarrollo del Reino visigodo de Tolosa* (Valladolid, 1983) remains the only book devoted to the Visigothic kingdom of Toulouse, but there is a substantial treatment of it in Wolfram, *History of the Goths*, pp. 172-246.

⁶⁵ *Chronica Gallica A. DXI*, items 651 and 652, ed. T. Mommsen, *Chronica Minora*, vol. 1, *MGH AA* vol. IX, pp. 664-5.

⁶⁶ Entries taken from this source are to be found as marginalia in some of the manuscripts containing the chronicles of Victor of Tunnunna and of John of Biclarum. On this text see *Victoris Tunnunmensis Chronicon*, ed. Hartmann, pp. *115-*124; for the two entries - Victor, 71a and 75a - see pp. 22-3; also the *commentary*, pp. 100-1.

Italy in 493, economic and political interests became even more strongly focused on southern Gaul.⁶⁷

What had happened in the intervening decades to the descendants of those warriors who had followed the Gothic king Ataulph out of Italy in 410/11 is not easy to say. Were the followers of Alaric II still little more than an occupying army, distributed in garrisons across the major towns and cities of southern Gaul and to a lesser extent Spain? Or had there been a major social transformation in the course of the fifth century, involving a redistribution of Roman senatorial estates, which had turned the upper levels of Gothic society into a landed aristocracy? What roles were played by those who would have called themselves Goths but who did not belong to the upper stratum of this society? May they have become the dependents of those Visigothic nobles who wished to build up their own individual military followings, or did there now exist a class of Gothic peasant proprietors, freely owning small amounts of land?

None of these questions can receive a certain answer. The issue of whether the Goths benefited from a redistribution of Roman estates that they farmed directly, or whether they only received the taxation due on such lands, and thus remained as no more than a garrisoning army of occupation, has aroused much scholarly debate.⁶⁸ This has focused above all on the meaning of the term *Hospitalitas*, which was used to describe divisions carried out at the behest of the Roman imperial government between the local civil aristocracy and incoming barbarian "guests" in various parts of the western empire at different times in the course of the fifth century.

In the case of Gaul, this involved the assigning to the Goths of two-thirds of Roman estates. That this formally took place can be established from a variety of sources, but what it involved in practice is much less easy or even impossible to determine. An expropriation of land on such a scale would have been totally unprecedented, and it is hard to see what legal justification could have been used to validate it. An adjustment in the payment of tax, with two-thirds of what was owed on each estate going directly to designated Gothic recipients, rather than to the imperial government's increasingly inefficient fiscal

⁶⁷ Jiménez Garnica, *Orígenes y desarrollo*, pp. 97-130.

⁶⁸ Walter Goffart, *Barbarians and Romans A.D. 418-584: The Techniques of Accommodation* (Princeton, NJ, 1980).

administration, might seem the more logical explanation. Even so, the available evidence does not prove that this is what actually happened, and some of it may support the older view of a physical distribution of land.⁶⁹ The reassignment of tax revenue theory would, however, make more sense of the cryptic references in the *Consularia Caesaraugustana* to the movement of Goths into Spain in the 490s, as it is otherwise not easy to see why at that period they would have been so willing to move from what by the other interpretation would have been well-established farming properties in Gaul.

Whatever happened, and whatever their causes, these events coincided with a period of political turmoil in the peninsula that is only dimly recorded in a handful of entries in the *Consularia*. In relation to the year 496 it is reported that “Burdunellus became a tyrant in Spain,” and in the following year he was “handed over by his own men and having been sent to Toulouse, he was placed inside a bronze bull and burnt to death.”⁷⁰ “Burdunellus” means “Little Mule” and may be only a nickname. To say that he tried to establish a tyranny would almost certainly imply that he tried to set himself up as emperor, though where he did so is unfortunately not recorded. The distinctively Zaragozaan character of some of the *Consularia*’s information may suggest that it was in this city, or at least in the Ebro valley, that Burdunellus made his bid for local authority. His bizarre execution, while unparalleled, seems to belong to the Roman tradition of the public humiliation and degrading killing of failed political rivals.⁷¹

This was not the only case of its kind in this period. For the year 506 the *Consularia* reports that the Goths took Dertosa, and killed “the tyrant Peter,” whose head was then sent to Zaragoza for public exposure.⁷² Lacking in clarity and context as these two episodes may be, they certainly seem to indicate that Visigothic royal authority in Spain was far from widespread and securely established, and that

⁶⁹ S. J. Barnish, “Taxation, Land and Barbarian Settlement in the Western Empire,” *Papers of the British School at Rome* 54 (1986), pp. 170-95.

⁷⁰ *Victoris Tunnunnensis Chronicon*, ed. Hartmann: Victor 74a, 75a, p. 23; commentary, pp. 100-1.

⁷¹ On the survival of Late Antique forms of exemplary punishment for political offenses, such as a failed bid to seize the throne, see Michael McCormack, *Eternal Victory: Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium and the Early Medieval West* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 80-130.

⁷² *Victoris Tunnunnensis Chronicon*, ed. Hartmann: Victor 87a, p. 27; commentary, p. 102.

local rulers could try to set themselves up in various parts of the peninsula – a phenomenon that was equally marked in the sixth and seventh centuries (and for a long time after the Arab conquest as well). In the light of the very limited nature of the evidence relating to Spain in the fifth century, it is very likely that Burdunellus and Peter were not the only rebels who attempted to establish a “tyrannical” local regime in this period.

It was not from threats such as these, however, that the Gothic kings had most to fear. While they had conquered much of Spain in 456 as allies of the emperor Avitus, and had close ties with the military dictator Ricimer, who dominated the imperial government from 463 up to his death in 472, a succession of independent Roman warlords had established control over much of Gaul north of the Loire, and there were frequent clashes between them and the Visigoths. More significantly, the breakdown of local order in this region gave some of the Franks, another Germanic confederacy, the opportunity to expand their power westward from the area of the lower Rhine, where they had been established since the mid-fourth century.⁷³

Clovis, one of a small number of rival Frankish leaders, proved particularly successful, in ca.486 eliminating Syagrius, the last of the independent Roman rulers in northern Gaul, and thus making his Merovingian Frankish kingdom the new northern neighbors of the Visigoths in the valley of the Loire. Clovis and his followers next expanded eastward at the expense of the Alamans, and then southward down the Rhône, greatly reducing the territory and power of the kingdom of the Burgundians.⁷⁴ By the beginning of the sixth century the Goths had become the next likely targets of Clovis’s expansionary ambitions.

While diplomatic efforts were made, not least by the Ostrogothic king Theoderic, to contain Clovis, war between him and Alaric II broke out in 507. The Burgundians allied themselves with the Franks. In a battle fought at Vouillé near Poitiers, the Visigothic army was defeated and king Alaric was killed. In the aftermath the Franks and Burgundians rapidly overran most of the Gothic kingdom in Gaul. Toulouse fell, and Frankish forces briefly reached as far as Barcelona.⁷⁵

⁷³ Edward James, *The Franks* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 35-77.

⁷⁴ Ian Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms 450-751* (London, 1994), pp. 41-9.

⁷⁵ *Chronica Gallica A. DXI*, items 688-91, ed. Mommsen, pp. 665-6.

Further losses were prevented by the armed intervention of the Ostrogoths, who overran Provence in 508 and forced Clovis to withdraw from Septimania, the region between the lower Rhône and the Pyrenees, which thereafter remained the sole enclave of the Visigothic kingdom in Gaul up till the Arab conquest.

It may be that the outcome of the battle of Vouillé had to some extent been determined by the processes so obliquely referred to in the *Consularia*, and that significant movements of Visigothic forces out of Gaul into Spain in the 490s left the Gallic part of the kingdom more vulnerable to Frankish assault. In any event, the loss of Toulouse and most of their Gallic territories in 507/8 meant that it would be in the Iberian peninsula that the Visigothic kings would have to rebuild their weakened authority.