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At the beginning of 478, Theoderic the Amal, later king of Ostrogothic Italy, was formally in alliance with the Emperor Zeno. Theoderic had established himself in the Roman Balkans in 473, engaging in a three-way struggle with Constantinople and a second, independent Gothic group led by another Theoderic, the son of Triarius (also known as Strabo 'the Squinter'). While operations for the coming campaigning season were being planned, the Emperor’s intelligence sources brought news that the forces of Theoderic the Amal had grown weaker, while those of Strabo, his Gothic rival, had increased in strength. Zeno consequently sent a secret peace embassy to Strabo, offering terms that Strabo had himself previously proposed. Strabo now rejected them, saying that he had many more people to feed than before, so that the terms would no longer suffice.

These pieces of information must surely be connected. The extra mouths which Strabo now had to feed can only have been the cause of his growing strength. And since Theoderic the Amal had at the same time grown weaker, it is only natural to conclude that the change in the balance of power between the two Gothic groups – to which Zeno was attempting to respond – was caused by some of the Amal’s followers having joined his rival. In the end, what threatened to be a serious crisis proved no more than a temporary difficulty. Strabo himself was never defeated, but, after his death, Theoderic organized the assassination of his son, Recitach (483/4). Most of Strabo’s former following then joined him, perhaps doubling the size of the Amal group.


Studies of the career of Theoderic, not least because of the balance of the surviving source material, have tended to concentrate upon Ostrogothic Italy (489/93–526). Concentrating on that period has naturally brought into sharpest focus the ways in which Theoderic used surviving Roman institutions, and, particularly after Momigliano’s influential study, the question of the extent to which he was able to conciliate the Roman landowning senatorial class to the rule of a ‘barbarian’ king. The history of Theoderic’s manoeuvres in the Balkans (473–489) demonstrates, however, that even the loyalty of his Gothic followers could never simply be taken for granted. The Gothic force he led to Italy was built up in the course of his own lifetime by the amalgamation of two previously separate Gothic groups, neither of whom, as we have already seen, gave him unquestioning obedience. It is the purpose of this study, therefore, to investigate the range of problems involved in securing the Goths’ loyalty, the measures Theoderic took to overcome them, and the extent to which these measures were effective. The focus will be primarily upon Italy, but it is worth first considering further the creation of Theoderic’s Gothic powerbase in the Balkans.

The Roots of Amal Kingship

The Variae of Cassiodorus and the Getica of Jordanes claim that Theoderic came from an ancient royal dynasty – the Amals – and derived from this descent an unquestioned right to rule; here, at least, Jordanes’ Getica was certainly following Cassiodorus’ lost Gothic History. Cassiodorus’ Variae make several references to the family’s unique pre-eminence, and the Amal genealogy and related parts of the Getica’s narrative emphasize its historical importance (14: 79 ff.; see Figure 1). For Jordanes, this is explicitly a line of Gothic kings, whose tradition of control stretched back into the distant past (Getica 13: 78). Many of them also appear in one of the Variae as royal ancestors of Amalasuintha, Theoderic’s daughter; the letter again being quite specific that Amalasuintha could count as many kings as ancestors in her family tree (11.1.19). In both these sources, therefore, Theoderic is presented as one of a long line of Amal Gothic kings of unchallenged pre-eminence: ‘not mere men, but demi-gods or Anis’ (non puros homines, sed semideos id est

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5 Heather, Goths and Romans, c. 2, esp. pp. 38–61 with references to the currently vigorous debate on the relationship between Cassiodorus and Jordanes.

6 For example, Variae 4. 1; 9. 1; 10. 1–4; see more generally 8. 2; 8. 5; 10. 11.
There is thus a basic contradiction between the picture derived from these Italian, or Italian based, sources, and Theoderic’s earlier manoeuvres in the Balkans as described particularly by Malchus of Philadelphia, who makes very clear the original frailty of Theoderic’s position.

It seems quite clear in which direction the contradiction should be resolved. While Malchus has no obvious axe to grind concerning the history of Gothic ruling houses, Cassiodorus was actually writing for the royal court of Ostrogothic Italy, and the ability of his history to pull out ‘from the hiding place of antiquity long-forgotten kings of the Goths’ was a major factor in his own promotion to the Praetorian Prefecture (Variae 9. 25. 4–5). As one might therefore expect, much of his genealogy of Amal Gothic kings is demonstrably tendentious. From Valamir downwards, other sources confirm the lines of descent, but the genealogy’s upper reaches, especially the chain of father-to-son successions,
have long been recognized as unhistorical. Gapt, Hulmul, and Hisarnis ('Man of Iron') would all seem to be legendary heroes of a general sort, and the two eponymous heroes, Amal and Ostrogotha, must be later fabrications. The whole chain of single line father-to-son successions can thus be safely discounted, as they can in many parallel cases. Moving down, most of the figures between Ostrogotha and Valamir are deeply mysterious; the majority do not otherwise appear in the Getica, let alone elsewhere. The length of Amal pre-eminence has come to revolve, therefore, around the supposed family link between Valamir and Ermanaric, the one 'older' Amal to appear in another source; known to Ammianus Marcellinus (31.3.1), he was a Gothic king of the fourth century (fl. c. 370).

On close inspection, however, Ermanaric's name has actually been added to Amal history, in all likelihood originally by Cassiodorus, from Ammianus' history: the king's reputation being exaggerated as much as possible in the process, since he was imported to play a crucial role. For as the genealogy is constructed, it is Ermanaric who provides the family link between Theoderic and Eutharic (see Figure 1), the man chosen to be the great Amal king's heir in Italy. Such a role required, of course, a king of unparalleled stature. And once this manipulation has been unravelled, a crucial related section of the Getica's narrative (48: 246-52) proves to illuminate not Amal history between Ermanaric and Valamir, but the circumstances in which Valamir came to dominate those Goths whom we find settled in Pannonia after the death of Attila (453). Appearing as 'Balamber', and mistakenly considered a Hunnic king, this section describes how he overcame rivals from at least two other Gothic

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9 Legitimizing genealogies generally begin with a totally unreliable set of such successions: Henige, Oral Tradition c. 1, pp. 34 ff. and c. 2.


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leadership lines. One Vinitharius was defeated and killed in battle, a conflict followed by marriage between Valamir and Vinitharius' granddaughter Vadamerca, presumably designed to conciliate Vinitharius' followers. A second line descended from King Hunimidum was likewise overcome, when a son, Gesimund (or Gensemund) decided to accept Amal overlordship, and a grandson, Beremud, abandoned the conflict, fleeing west to the Visigothic kingdom.

Far from contradicting Malchus' picture of Theoderic's kingship, therefore, the *Getica* actually supplements it by providing a deeper historical context for his struggle with Strabo. The competition of these two namesakes was the last of many in which the small Gothic groups which seem to have predominated at the time of Attila's death in 453 came together, via extended dynastic struggles, to form much larger ones. Theoderic Strabo, just as much as Valamir, seems to have had to create his following by uniting a number of previously separate Gothic groups, and, in the aftermath of the Hunnic Empire, the whole Gothic world was highly fragmented. More Goths led by Bigelis invaded the eastern Empire between 466 and 471, others at this date still remained under Hunnic domination (Priscus ed. Blockley fr. 49), and two more Gothic groups inhabited the Crimea (Procopius *Wars* 8. 4. 9 ff.; *Building* s 3. 7. 13). There are thus striking parallels between the rise of the Amals over at least two generations between c. 450 and c. 485, and the emergence of the Merovingians as the dominant Frankish dynasty at roughly the same time. Representatives of both families managed to defeat a series of rivals to incorporate ever larger numbers of followers under their control.

This rapidly evolving political context largely explains, of course, why Gothic followers should have accorded their leaders only contingent loyalty in the 470s. The successes of Valamir and Theoderic stemmed not from any ancient tradition, but from their own abilities. It was not preordained that Theoderic the Amal's line would win out, and, in context, one can perhaps see why his disenchanted followers who switched allegiance to Strabo in 478 might have perceived the latter as more likely to succeed. Although hostile to Zeno, Strabo had an established history of close connections with the imperial court, and many contacts inside Constantinople. The Amal, by contrast, was a young man (c. 24), who

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12 On this, see Heather, *Goths and Romans*, pp. 239-63.
had only recently taken over from his father (474), and who, while having negotiated an agreement with Zeno in 476, seems to have been unable subsequently to hold the Emperor to his financial obligations; this may well explain the desertions.15

At least one other factor, however, was as important in these circumstances as the abilities of individual leaders. There also evolved, in their Balkan period, a basic acceptance among the relevant Goths that a new kind of Gothic monarchy, encompassing far larger numbers of followers, was in itself desirable. After the murder of Recitach in 483/4, for instance, the former followers of Strabo did not have to join the Amal; Constantinople provided an alternative possible focus for their loyalty, which some chose.16 But most did not, preferring to unite behind one leader, which created a more powerful group with a much better chance of carving out a prosperous niche for itself in the militarily competitive post-Attilan world. The logic of this was already apparent in 478, when, as Malchus presents it, the Amal’s followers refused to fight Strabo’s on the grounds that this would merely weaken the Goths as a whole in the face of the broader threat posed by Roman power. Given that Zeno had just attempted to make the two Gothic groups fight one another in order to weaken them at no cost to himself, this was a very real consideration.17 This probably explains why dynastic conflict was eventually resolved by assassination rather than open battle; the events of 478 make it unlikely that either set of followers would have been willing to pursue such a course with the power of the imperial army looming over them.

On at least two levels, then, the Goths’ reasons for joining the Amal bandwagon were deeply pragmatic. Not only were their actions dictated by the perceived differences in ability between leaders, but the need to maximize their position in the face of the eastern Empire also played a decisive role in shaping their choices.

Much less certain is the role played at this point by dynastic propaganda: the manipulation by new leaders of an ancient Gothic tradition of association and royal rule. As we have seen, it is no longer possible to take the Amal material in the Variae and the Getica at face value. Nonetheless, if the Goths united by Theoderic had strong traditions of having previously operated together under a single monarch, then, whatever their own origins, Valamir and Theoderic could have spun potent myths about their ancestral links, to encourage the Goths of Vinitharius,
Hunimund, Strabo and others to cast in their lot with their particular dynastic line. Herwig Wolfram, for instance, has seen the Amal tradition as 'real' in the sense that such a dynasty had indeed provided kings in the fourth century for the Gothic Greuthungi, who at that date, particularly under the rule of Ermenaric, encompassed within their hegemony vast numbers of Goths (and others in Moldavia, southern Russia and the Ukraine). Theoderic could thus be seen as one among several equally legitimate contenders trying to monopolize and manipulate an Amal–Greuthungian myth in the later fifth century. This reading of the evidence would make the exploitation of ancient traditions an important additional factor for leadership rivals to exploit. Two observations suggest to me, however, that such myths about the past were not a major factor in the Balkans of the 480s (Italy in the 520s is another matter: see below).

First, there is no good evidence that a huge Greuthungi realm had ever existed in the fourth century. Modern accounts of Ermanaric's empire are based entirely on the Getica's vision of the king, which has been rewritten to provide a suitable ancestor for Theoderic's heir. The Getica's account was in turn based upon the contemporary report of Ammianus, which is much less grandiose, a point which combines with a variety of other evidence to suggest that the fourth-century Gothic world consisted of a series of smaller realms, not one enormous one. The later fifth-century Ostrogoths of Valamir and Theoderic were a new creation, not the restoration of something which had used to exist in the fourth century, so that there is unlikely to have been much of a latent myth of association to exploit. Second, all the evidence suggests that it was Cassiodorus who read about Ermanaric in a copy of Ammianus and worked to establish a link between Theoderic and this ancient Gothic king. This fabrication cannot have been constructed, therefore, before c. 510 at the earliest, making it highly unlikely that ancient traditions of association based on Amal royalty and Ermanaric's Empire would have operated even as a secondary factor in dictating the political choices of fifth-century Goths. This probably explains why Cassiodorus inflated Ammianus' account of Ermanaric essentially from Roman literary sources, not oral Gothic traditions. Cassiodorus and the Getica must not be allowed to obscure the deep pragmatism which guided the Goths'
original acceptance of Theoderic as their leader. How this relationship developed in the new conditions created by the conquest of Italy will be explored in the remainder of this study.

Governing Goths: the problem

Any attempt to investigate Theoderic’s control of his Gothic following after 493 is hindered by the nature of the surviving evidence. Our two main sources for the internal workings of the Italian kingdom, Ennodius and Cassiodorus, are both Roman. Not only do they naturally tend to concentrate more on Theoderic’s relations with the native Romans of Italy than on ‘internal Gothic relations’, but both were loyalists whose writings firmly reflect the central ideological conceit of the king’s reign, that his rule represented nothing less than the direct continuation of the Roman Empire, or more particularly the Roman order of civilized life – *civilitas*: a state of society generated by the rule of God-ordained written laws. Image-making and administrative reality are woven together in the *Variae*, as in Ennodius’ panegyric and letters, in a complicated tapestry which it is far from straightforward to unravel.21 This ideological stance means that official and semi-official statements of the regime provide minimal coverage of internal Gothic matters, stressing, on the contrary, the degree to which any governmental measure might be shown to prove the continuity of classical civilisation. The material thus tends to conceal, even if it cannot altogether hide, innovative measures designed to deal with the integration of Goths into Italian society. As a result, the argument must on occasion rest on single instances or hints in the sources.

Indeed, Theoderic’s Romanophile rule makes the enquiry pursued here potentially problematic on a more profound level. There was some ideological attempt to define the Roman and Gothic populations as functionally separate: the Goths providing a military force to protect Roman civilization. But, at the same time, Theoderic was attracting new supporters from the indigenous Roman population, particularly from among its landowning elite, and there followed a degree of erosion in the original boundaries between Roman and Goth. Romans such as Liberius, Cyprian, and even Cassiodorus held, on occasion, military commands, and, famously, Cyprian’s sons are recorded as having learned Gothic at the royal court. Had there been no Byzantine invasion, there is every reason to think, therefore, that Ostrogothic Italy, like Visigothic

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Spain and Frankish Gaul, would have eventually witnessed the complete assimilation of Roman and non-Roman elites. Procopius' account of the Byzantine conquest of Italy from the 530s does not suggest, however, that boundaries had been fundamentally redefined at that point. The vast majority of the fighting against the armies of Belisarius and Narses was carried out by Goths, and, as we shall see, the 'first men' of the Goths remained a distinct political force within the kingdom (see further below).

By the time they entered Italy, the Ostrogoths probably numbered c. 100,000 men, women, and children. From indications in Malchus, Theoderic must have controlled an army of c. 20–25,000 men by the time that he added Strabo's following to his own, and it is usually thought that the ratio of combatants to non-combatants in such groups was something like 1:5. From the evidence of Procopius, the Ostrogothic army of the 530s and 540s has been calculated, similarly, at c. 25–30,000 men. None of these figures is precise, and numbers certainly fluctuated, but their broad agreement does seem to provide a fairly reliable order of magnitude.

The sheer numbers involved thus mean that Theoderic could not have hoped to exercise much direct power over the everyday lives of his followers. In the Balkans, moreover, the Goths had had to be wary of the eastern Empire and tended to operate in a concentrated mass. Once Odovacar had been defeated, however, Theoderic settled his followers over more than a thousand square kilometres of Italian countryside (see further below). Distance thus compounded problems of government, a point of which Theoderic was well aware (see Variae 6. 22). Gothic kingship became even more difficult after 511, when Theoderic took direct control of the Visigothic kingdom of Spain and southern Gaul. This perhaps further doubled the number of Goths under his command to c. 200,000. We have some reasonable indications that Alaric had put together a force of 20–30,000 men by the end of his career, and, although

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22 Liberius: refs. as PLRE 2, pp. 677–81; Cyprian: PLRE 2, pp. 323–3; Cassiodorus: Variae 9.
23 Some commentary on the Gothic forces is provided by Hannestad in the next note.
24 Theoderic's followers: Heather, Goths and Romans, pp. 248, 256 with references to the precise numerical indications given by Malchus. T.S. Burns, 'Calculating Ostrogothic Population', Acta Antiqua 26 (1978), pp. 457–63 argues for a total of c. 40,000, but this is surely too low. Other estimates are similar to mine or higher: e.g. Wolfram, History of the Goths, p. 261, n. 98 (the Amal group alone comprising 18,000 warriors); Moorhead, Theoderic, pp. 67–8 (arguing specifically against Burns). Army of the 530s: K. Hannestad, 'Les forces militaires d'après la Guerre Gothique de Procope', Classica et Mediaevalia 21 (1960), pp. 136–83.
25 Theoderic split his forces in 479 as a temporary stratagem; even so, imperial troops ambushed and captured his baggage train: Malchus fr. 20.
numbers will again have fluctuated, this force was the direct ancestor of the group settled in Gaul in 418. 26

Given the altered conditions and the greatly increased numbers, it is hardly surprising that Theoderic required numerous subordinates to govern his united kingdom of Spain, southern Gaul, and Italy. In the Balkans, we meet such men only in a military capacity. Anstat, Invila and Soas were important generals in the 470s, and in 484 Goths campaigned in Asia Minor without Theoderic, again showing that others could be entrusted with important military commands. 27 Once in Italy, Theoderic never campaigned again in person, perhaps a reflection of his advancing age, 28 and we again find others commanding elements of the army. Pitzias led the assault on Sirmium in 505, and Ibba the army which intervened in Gaul and Spain after 508 (Getica 58: 302). Likewise, during the Gothic war, military commands were devolved to a whole range of subordinates.

Once in Italy, Theoderic also required non-military assistance. His administration depended upon a whole series of Goths, who commanded districts of varying importance as counts (comites); some held almost independent sway in frontier provinces, while others ruled single cities. 29 All the Gothic kings of Italy, Theoderic included, also involved in the formulation of policy a group variously styled the ‘first men’ or ‘most notable’ of the Goths. Theoderic used them when trying to deal with Theudis (of whom more later: Procopius Wars 5. 12. 50 ff.), while Witigis and his successors deferred to them in war and diplomacy (for example, Wars 5. 17. 29; 6. 22. 13 ff.; 7. 8. 12 ff.). The Emperor Justinian even wrote a separate letter to them on the eve of the Gothic war (Wars 5. 6–7 especially 5. 7. 21–4). 30

Between Theoderic (and his successors) and the Gothic rank and file, then, were many intermediate leaders. An obvious question is the origin of their authority. Were they prominent because of royal appointment, or powerful in their own right? The question is, of course, framed much too starkly – political power is dependent on the interaction of a number of factors – but we do have good evidence that these leaders were not appointed merely at Theoderic’s whim.

One of the Variae, for instance, records that the Goths of Rieti and

26 Conquest of Spain: Procopius, Wars 5. 12. 33 ff.; Gregory of Tours, History of the Franks, 2. 27 ff.; Jordanes Getica 58: 298 ff. The ‘Visigoths’ had been formed out of three pre-existing groups, each contributing c. 10,000 fighting men; Heather, Goths and Romans, pp. 139, 213 with refs. to Ammianus, Olympiodorus and Zosimus.

27 Getica 56: 284; Malchus fr. 20; John of Antioch frs. 214. 4–6.

28 He was about 40 in 493: Heather, Goths and Romans, p. 246, n. 15.

29 Cassiodorus, Variae passim, esp. the formulae of Books 6 and 7; see, e.g., Wolfram, History of the Goths, pp. 290–5.

Nursia in central Italy had decided that their leader (prior) was to be a certain Quidila son of Sibia. This choice was then accepted and confirmed by Theoderic who died almost immediately, so that it was necessary for them to write again to his successor, Athalaric (Variae 8.26). These Goths seem to have chosen their own leader (how is not specified), so that the prior owed his authority in part to local position. Nevertheless, the king was consulted and his approval obtained. The exchange referred to in this letter is totally unique in the surviving source material, but may well reflect, in its implied balance between local and central power, a general truth about the origins of these intermediate leaders.

In similar vein, the sources document a number of important Goths with local powerbases not under close royal control. Early in the Gothic war, one Pitzas surrendered to Belisarius with half the Goths of Samnium (Wars 5.15.1–2). These men seem to have been loyal to Pitzas first. Likewise, after Witigis’ surrender which encompassed most Goths, one group in Venetia, under the leadership of Ildebad, refused to give in (Wars 6.29.41 (cf. 30.16 ff.); 7.1.25 ff.). Similarly, at least some of the Goths of the Cottian Alps followed the advice of Sisigis (commander of the garrisons in the region) even when this again conflicted with royal policy (Wars 6.28.28 ff.). Local loyalties thus showed a marked tendency to appear under the pressure of war, and, during interregna, Goths of different localities formulated policy separately. After the defeat of Teias, Goths north of the river Po quickly negotiated with the Franks, while those south of it were much more cautious (Agathias 1.5.1–2). The common denominator in all these cases would seem to be a local cohesion that went beyond more general allegiance to the Ostrogoths as a whole.

In some cases, the ties binding these locally distinct groups were older than their acceptance of Amal kingship, as the Rugi illustrate. Under Fredericus, they had joined Theoderic in 487, but, as late as 541, still maintained an independent identity, having refused intermarriage, and had their own sub-leader, Eraric (Wars 7.2.1 ff.). Within the different Gothic groups who came together under Valamir and Theoderic to form the Ostrogoths, there was presumably more intermarriage, but not all pre-existing identities and leaderships were destroyed even when other Goths joined the Amal bandwagon. After resigning his claims in the

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31 Ensslin, Theoderich, pp. 197–8 suggests that the prior was equivalent to a comes: the military governor of a district; cf. Burns, The Ostrogoths, pp. 102–3.


33 Eugippius, Vita Severini (V. Sev.) 44.3–4 with Procopius, Wars 7.2.1–2; cf. PLRE 2, pp. 484–5.
Amals' favour, for instance, Gensemund continued to lead an at least semi-independent military force on Valamir's behalf.34 Indeed, Gothic settlements in Italy probably in part reflected the constituent groups out of whom the Ostrogoths had been formed. Of their spread, archaeological and literary sources provide similar pictures (see Figure 2). Some garrisons were established south of Rome, espe-

![Figure 2. Ostrogothic cemeteries in Italy (after Bierbrauer).](image)

cially in Naples and Sicily, and the main Alpine passes were held in strength. Others were settled in an arc around Italy in Dalmatia, Savia, and (after 508) Provence. Most Goths, however, were spread in discrete settlements across northern and central Italy: Samnium, the Adriatic coast from Picenum up to and beyond Ravenna, Liguria and the Venetias.35 The pattern obviously reflects strategic concerns. Relatively dense settlement of the Adriatic coast was surely a response to the potential threat from Constantinople (as manifested in sea raids on the Italian coast in 50836), and the arc of garrisons in and beyond the Alps needs no further explanation.37 But there is also a further point. For the Rugi to have refused intermarriage, maintaining bloodlines and identity, they

34 Variae 8. 9 with Getica 48: 246; cf. Heather, Goths and Romans, pp. 240–1, 321.
35 V. Bierbrauer, Die Ostgotischen Grab- und Schatzfunde [in Italien] (Spoleto, 1975) pp. 23–39, demonstrating the close correspondence between Procopius' evidence and archaeological remains.
36 See, e.g., Wolfram, History of the Goths, p. 322.
must have been settled together, perhaps at some distance from other elements of Theoderic's Ostrogoths (precisely where is unknowable). There is no reason to think them unique in this, and every reason to suppose that subgroups settled in different areas of Italy at least partly reflected the previously independent units out of which the Ostrogoths had only recently been formed. This adds a further dimension to the tendency to independent action on the part of Goths of different localities.

As Gothic leader, then, Theoderic had to deal with powerful subordinates, some of whom were drawing on well-established traditions of association. This underlines the a priori limitations on Theoderic's ability to influence the daily lives of the Ostrogothic rank and file, and also directs attention towards the kinds of problems that leaders with too great a powerbase could pose. A case in point is the career of Theudis. One of Theoderic's bodyguard – the Getica calls him an armiger (58: 302) – he certainly started as a trusted henchman, since Theoderic made him commander of Gothic military forces in Spain. Once there, however, he married a rich Hispano-Roman, and gathered round himself a sufficiently large personal following (2,000 strong) to make himself effectively independent. Although he never rebelled in Theoderic's lifetime, the king was unable to compel him to come to Ravenna and feared to attack him directly, because it might give the Franks an opportunity to invade, or spark off a general Visigothic revolt (Wars 5. 12. 50–4).

Theudis was particularly successful (and particularly far away), but the kind of problem he posed was not unique. Theudis was related, for instance, to Ildebad and Totila, who both became kings of the Ostrogoths after Theoderic's dynasty had eventually been ousted (see further below), suggesting that these men represent a particularly powerful non-royal clan. So too perhaps did Witigis and Urais, another related pair, the first of whom became king while the second nearly did. Procopius does say that Witigis was not from an illustrious family (Wars 5. 11. 5), but this may mean no more than that he was not an Amal, and I suspect that the later prominence of these individuals indicates that their families were already highly important within Gothic society. A final example of the pre-eminent non-royal is a certain Tuluin. Commander of the Gallic expedition in 508, he remained important throughout Theoderic's reign, playing a major role in Athalaric's succession in 526 (on which

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more later). Powerful non-royal subordinates were part and parcel, then, of Ostrogothic politics.

We have less explicit evidence for the Visigoths of southern Gaul and Spain. Cassiodorus' lengthy spell out of office, 512 to 523, began more or less at the same time as Theoderic took direct control of the Visigothic kingdom, so that the Variae provide little information, nor do Procopius' narratives cover Justinian's intervention in Spain. Dietrich Claude has shown, however, that, wherever sources exist, they document the existence of an entrenched Visigothic nobility which was difficult to control. The Goths of Gaul and Spain probably generated a similar range of problems; as the case of Theudis shows, distance will have made them more difficult.

** Governing Goths: manipulating new resources **

We must beware, then, a rigid picture of Gothic society. Theoderic was faced with a complex entity, comprising large numbers spread over very considerable distances, which combined old, well-established identities, with significant social mobility, so that rising leaders, such as Theudis, could forge new allegiances. In such a situation, there could not but be powerful intermediate leaders, whether based on old ties or personal success, and the art of successful government was so managing necessary political devolution that it did not lead to fragmentation. When the sources are re-examined with this perspective in mind, Theoderic can be seen to have developed a whole range of new resources to retain the loyalty particularly of his more important followers in the conditions created by the conquest of Italy.

To start with, no intermediate leader (in Italy at least) stood any chance against the king's wrath. Perhaps in c. 500, the general Odoin, of whom we otherwise know nothing, was executed in Italy, and in 514 Theoderic ordered the death of Pitzias, Gothorum nobilissimus according to Ennodius, who had previously been entrusted with the war against the Gepids. There is every reason to suppose that these were important leaders who, like Theudis, became, in Theoderic's eyes at least, overmighty subjects, but who did not have the protection of distance.

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40 References as PLRE 2, pp. 1131-3.
41 See below for evidence that Theoderic attempted centralized administrative control of his acquisition.
42 D. Claude, Adel, Kirche und Königum im Westgotenreich (Sigmaringen, 1971), passim.

(*Early Medieval Europe 1995 4 (2)*)
Such open confrontation between king and magnate seems to have been rare, however, and for the bulk of his reign, Theoderic managed relations with his followers without recourse to this ultimate sanction.

First and foremost, he made suitable economic provision for his followers after the defeat of Odovacar. Its nature has been much debated recently, specifically whether the Goths received actual land, or annual monetary payments based on existing tax assessments. The relevant texts are not comprehensive, so that a margin for error must remain, but Barnish's recent review of the question seems to provide pointers towards the most likely answer. This accepts, as Walter Goffart has argued, that the 'thirds' mentioned in the sources were not shares of land, but one third of the old land tax assessment paid under a separate account, now earmarked for Gothic soldiers. There is much evidence, however, that the original Gothic settlement also involved a distribution of land, and that the thirds provided additional donatives to serving soldiers rather than the total income of all Goths. The real point of interest for this study, however, is not the particular ways in which the Goths as a whole benefitted from their move to Italy, but the overall fact that they did. One third of the annual tax assessment of Italy, probably supplementing an initial grant of land, represents a major pay-off to the Gothic rank and file. As we have seen, Gothic followers were liable to seek alternative leaders if they felt dissatisfied, so that Theoderic simply had to reward—in line with their own expectations—those who had trekked with him from Pannonia into the central Balkans, and then from the Balkans into Italy.

But if substantial rewards were the sine qua non, a number of other means helped to ensure that loyalties continued to be focused upon the king. As we have seen, Theoderic had some rights to intervene in local politics, which greatly strengthened ties between himself and his followers. By chance, the point can probably be explored once more using the Goths of Rieti. A papyrus of 557 records a case where the curials of Rieti were appointed guardians for the sons of Gundihild

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femina, some of whose property had been usurped by Aderid vir inluster and Gunderit vir magnificus. The incident dates from after Justinian's reconquest, but the names suggest that Gothic families were involved. As such, it is an interesting snapshot of Goths and Italians cheek by jowl, but also reveals the presence of more than one important Gothic family (distinguished by inlustris rank) within a single locality, and the overt competition between them. In such circumstances, the right to confirm or deny local leaders' tenure of posts of distinction would represent a real power in the hands of the king. We have just the one example, but competition for status is likely to have been prevalent, so that the careful exercise of such influence over local society, especially in the course of a long reign, would result in a whole class of local leaders who owed much to royal favour.

In addition, the wealth of Italy opened up new types of patronage for Theoderic to exploit. As is well-known, he established a parallel administrative system, where Gothic counts operated alongside Roman provincial officials to administer taxation and justice. The point here, is that Gothic countships, with their honorific titles - grants of spectabilis and illustris rank were attached to these posts (as with their Roman equivalents) - and particularly their attendant salaries, were quite new resources for a Gothic king to exploit. The formula for appointing a count of Naples (Variae 6. 23) refers explicitly, for instance, to the 'liberal crop of official salaries' that came with such posts. These were paid for out of taxation, so that Italian wealth allowed Theoderic to create important new ways of rewarding his leading followers; that is, further reasons for them to seek his favour. Indeed, the relevant formulae all stress that appointments were initially for one year, but could be extended if the Count performed his duties to the king's satisfaction (Variae 6. 23; 24; 7. 1).

Not surprisingly, Theoderic kept direct control of the revenues which financed these posts. Taxation both in Italy, and, after 511, in southern Gaul and Spain, was controlled from Ravenna. Procopius states that the proceeds were taken physically to Ravenna (Wars 5. 12. 47–8), and the Variae confirm this general picture, showing some Spanish revenues being put to use to feed Rome (5. 35) and that Theoderic took a very close interest in the workings of the tax machinery which produced them (5. 39). Italian and Spanish taxes thus made Theoderic a much richer and

46 See, e.g., Ensslin, Theoderich, pp. 193–202; Burns, Ostrogoths, c. 4.
47 See, e.g., Ensslin, Theoderich, pp. 197–9.
hence more attractive leader than he could possibly have been in the Balkans.\footnote{Although he had there occasionally extracted annual payments – or at least the promise of them: above n. 15.}

The king also seems to have been able, in at least one area, to make his power felt directly among the Gothic rank and file. All male Goths of military age received each year a donative in return for which they held themselves ready for military service (Procopius Wars 5. 12. 47–8). The sources do not make it explicit how this was administered, but since Theoderic paid out the money from the centre, this would suggest that his administration kept some kind of register of all Goths entitled to receive payment. Retirement from the army involved losing the donative, and, in the one specific case for which we have evidence, an honourable discharge was acknowledged by Theoderic in writing (Variae 5. 36). This involved a \textit{vir sublimis}, Starcedius, who may have been a special case, but the existence of a written document does underline the very important point, in the face of a lack of explicit evidence, that a system of donatives paid out annually from Ravenna necessitated keeping records. Another reflection of such records, perhaps, is provided by the fact that when Spain and Italy were separated after Theoderic's death, Visigoths and Ostrogoths who had intermarried were required to make a public decision about which of the two kingdoms was henceforth to command their allegiance (Wars 5. 13. 7–8). Apart from anything else, this must have been necessary for keeping the records up to date, since each kingdom now paid its Gothic soldiery separately. The careful exercise of patronage was not a new weapon in the armoury of a Gothic king – in 478, Theoderic Strabo had extracted from Zeno pay and food for 13,000 men 'whom he [= Strabo] chose' (Malchus fr. 18. 4) – but the new conditions probably forced Theoderic into greater institutional formality to keep track of his now dispersed following. This may well be a case, therefore, of Roman administrative methods being harnessed to facilitate established Gothic practice.

Control of such a register of names was an important lever of power in his hands, giving even individual Goths reason to establish themselves in royal favour. How this might have worked is illustrated by an order, preserved in the \textit{Variae}, to the Goths of Samnium and Picenum. Through Cassiodorus, Theoderic declared that their coming to Ravenna will enable him to investigate the behaviour of each soldier, so that the brave might be properly rewarded and cowards learn to tremble. The distribution by their lord of due reward to the brave is straight out of heroic poetry, and Cassiodorus' Latin rhetoric surely hides a thoroughly
Germanic event designed to preserve ties of lord and follower. I strongly suspect, therefore, that, while the order is unique, the event it mentions was not, and that military musters for the purposes of reward and contact continued in Italy a practice which had long been standard, and which was certainly used by other migration period kings, most famously Clovis.

All these channels of influence demanded Theoderic’s close involvement in the activities of his followers—whether in deciding which prominent family to support in local power struggles, or which Gothic soldiers had performed bravely. This would not have been easy at the best of times, but obviously became much more difficult once his followers had become geographically dispersed. One possibility suggests itself, however, as to how Theoderic might have attempted to counteract the problem of distance.

The sources make much of the imperially-inspired ostentation of Theoderic’s main royal palaces at Ravenna, Verona, and Pavia; there was also one in Rome, seemingly used less frequently. These buildings were designed to impress on Romans, particularly senators, that Roman order was continuing uninterrupted. It is striking, however, that there should have been three rather than one, and they were certainly supplemented by other royal residences: a renovated palace at Abona, a summer palace at Monza, and at least one magnificent hunting lodge. Moreover, the main palaces of Pavia and Verona were clearly built to function, as much as Ravenna, as full royal centres. Within the complex at Pavia was a great audience hall, with a mosaic of Theoderic himself. Less is known of Verona, but there is no doubting its scale.

A possible reason for this plethora of palaces emerges when their geographical locations are compared with the spread of Gothic settle-

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49 Variae 5, 26–7. There has been debate over their meaning. First, they summon millenarii, who, in the Visigothic kingdom, were officers commanding 1,000 men. Hence, some, despite the obvious sense of the letters, have seen them as summoning only few Goths: Ensslin, Theoderich, pp. 195–6; cf. Burns, Ostrogoths, pp. 122–3. Second, Goffart, Barbarians and Romans, pp. 82–8 argued that the letters concern the distribution of the tax shares by which he considers all Goths to have been supported in Italy. Again, the letters specifically concern only donatives to serving soldiers: Barnish, ‘Taxation, land,’ pp. 181–3; Wolfram, History of the Goths, p. 507, n. 234.

50 Jordanes, Getica, repeatedly refers to annual gifts or customary payments received by Goths from the Romans (cf. Heather, Goths and Romans, p. 108, n. 74), so that there may well have been an annual occasion where Gothic leaders passed on their cut of the funds to the rank and file. Clovis: Gregory of Tours Historiae 2. 27.


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ment in Italy. While garrisons were dotted around more generally, Gothic settlement, as we have see, was concentrated mainly in Samnium, Picenum, Liguria, and the Venetias. Comparing settlements and palaces, there would thus seem to have been a royal centre for each major concentration. We have already seen that the Goths of Samnium and Picenum were on occasion summoned to Ravenna; Pavia, likewise, was convenient for the major settlements in Liguria, and Verona for those in the Venetias (see Figure 2). It is quite true that the sources, particularly Cassiodorus' Variae, provide no direct evidence for a regular cycle of movement between the royal centres. On the other hand, neither do they deny it. Very few give any indication of where they were composed; most could have been written in any of Theoderic's residences. And although we have only occasional references to use of the other centres, it does seem unlikely that so much time and effort would have been lavished on three royal centres, unless the king was contemplating the regular display of his power in each of them. The argument cannot be pressed, but it may well be that regular royal progresses around northern Italy, facilitated by three main royal palaces and a number of other residences, were in part designed to counter the effects of widespread settlement. In other words, Theoderic may well have engaged in a form of itinerant kingship.

Financial rewards, new patronage networks, interventions in local Gothic politics, the manipulation of donatives, combined, perhaps, with a regular cycle of contact: all of these give us glimpses of the Gothic leader behind a deliberately erected Roman façade. Other, better known aspects of Theoderic's rule which helped him govern Romans, are also relevant to this enquiry.

Most of our evidence for the royal court (comitatus), for instance, comes from Ennodius and Cassiodorus, and thus tends to illustrate the court's role in relations between king and Roman senatorial aristocracy, but it also helped Theoderic to control his Gothic subjects. Children of important nobles seem to have been retained there; those of Idlebad, a major figure among the Goths of Venetia and later king (see above), had been kept at Ravenna by Witigis (Procopius Wars 6. 28. 41). The ostensible purpose of this may have been educational, for Cassiodorus records

\[ \text{Variae 2. 20 transmits an order to move any provision ships at Ravenna to Liguria; the court was presumably at this point based at Pavia. Variae 4. 45 reports travel expenses given to Heruli to go from Pavia to Ravenna to visit the king, suggesting that they had expected to find him at Pavia, but that Theoderic had in the meantime moved on. He was at Verona at a crucial moment in the indictment of Boethius: Anon. Val. 14. 81–3; Boethius De Consolatione Philosophiae (De Cons. Phil.) 14. 113.} \]

\[ \text{E. Ewig, 'Résidence et capitale pendant le haut Moyen Age', in Spätantikes und frankisches Gallien: Gesammelte Schriften (Munich, 1976), pp. 361–6 sees nothing outside the late Roman imperial pattern in Theoderic's residences, but I am sceptical.} \]
that Cyprian’s sons learned the arts of war among the Goths at court (Variae 8. 22). At the same time, the children might also make convenient hostages (a similar policy was applied to Roman children: Variae 1. 39; 2. 22), and it was no bad idea for the king to impress his influence at an early age on those destined to become important. The next stage for such important young men may have been the royal bodyguard (Latin armiger); the senior members of the two clans who dominated the throne after the Amal dynasty had been ousted, Witigis and Theudis, both passed through its ranks.56

More generally, the court functioned as a centre of patronage and legal appeal as much for Goths as for Romans. In one letter, Theoderic reassured people that absence from court did not mean that they would lose out in the scramble for honours (Variae 9. 22), but this is certainly wishful thinking. Any Goth desiring a lucrative countship was no doubt well-advised to press his suit at court, and access to court was carefully controlled; among the Variae are formulae permitting attendance and departure.17 The king also tried to have some say in the settlement of disputes among the Goths. The formula for appointing a Comes Gothorum stresses that he was to settle inter-Gothic disputes by the king’s edict (Variae 7. 3), and the Variae document a few purely Gothic cases (5. 29; 30; 32–3). In all probability, a stream of cases found their way to the king; the coimitatus is reported besieged with petitioners and Theoderic is even reported settling cases on horseback (Variae 2. 20; 5. 41).58

But royal justice had distinct limitations, and its administration provides a good example of what Theoderic could and could not achieve as king in Italy. To start with, a case had actually to reach the king. Specialist officials, such as Boethius’ accuser Cyprian, provided the king with a summary of the arguments involved in appeals (Variae 5. 40–1). Such summaries were meant to be unbiased, but clearly a sympathetic hearing from the summarizer was a major advantage. The letters of Ennodius make it clear, as we might anyway expect, that for Romans at least—and there is no reason to suppose it was different for Goths—friends at court were crucial in obtaining a successful outcome.59 After a favourable decision had been obtained, it still needed enforcing, however, and patronage could enable individuals to avoid the results even of an order issued from the comitatus. One royal lady, Theodagunda, was warned, for instance, to show prompt obedience to royal commands, and, in

56 See Ensslin, Theoderich, p. 169; see further n. 39.
17 Variae 7. 34–6; cf. individual invitations: 3. 21; 22; 28.
18 See Ennodius’ Epp. 2. 23; 3. 20; 6. 5 for appeals against the decisions of local Gothic judges.
59 Ennodius’ relatives turned to him because he had some access to Faustus Niger: Moorhead, Theoderic, esp. pp. 136–8; cf. Edictum Theoderici 33 which prohibited potentes, whether Roman or barbarian, from interfering in other people’s law suits.
similar vein, Theoderic had to write to his nephew Theodahad in harsh terms to make him co-operate (Variae 4. 37; 4. 39; 45. 12). One particularly intractable case was even transferred to Theodahad, perhaps because it involved people over whom he had more influence than the king himself (Variae 3. 15; cf. 10. 5).

These letters refer to members of the royal family, but probably each intermediate level of leadership between king and the Gothic rank and file presented similar obstacles to royal justice. There is no specific evidence, but it is far from unlikely that men such as the prior of Rieti had important roles in the settlement of dispute, much of which would never have reached the level of the court. Likewise, the distinct identity of the Rugi within the Ostrogoths could only have been maintained, in all probability, if, in addition to the ban on intermarriage, they formed their own self-sufficient legal community. These limitations on royal reach are perhaps reflected in Starcedius’ honourable discharge, where Theoderic specifically stated that he retained the king’s legal protection (Variae 5. 36), suggesting that access to royal justice was valuable but far from automatic. Some at least of the local political solidarities so evident in Procopius’ account of the Gothic war may also have been, in legal terms, largely independent.

Theoderic’s long and prosperous reign shows how well the available levers of power could be pulled. In practice, at least, he seems to have accepted basic limitations on his authority such as those observed here. Local politics and dispute settlement may have been to a considerable extent beyond his reach, and particular cases were transferred to individuals likely to have had the necessary influence to produce lasting settlements. Further up the scale, however, the latent threat posed by powerful intermediate leaders was usually controlled successfully, and more often by the careful manipulation of patronage, than head-on confrontation. And in most respects, Theoderic’s control presumably grew over time. Not only did a string of victories add to his prestige, but the longer a skillful leader manipulated the levers of patronage, the more he could use them to keep the unruly ambitions of intermediate leaders in check. In one vital area, however, Theoderic failed to enforce his will.

Succession

The reigns of Valamir and Theoderic brought the Amals a long way. From one among several more or less equally prominent families, they made a dynasty of unique stature which united around itself first, most of the Goths left in eastern Europe after the collapse of Attila’s Empire, and then more Goths from southern Gaul and Spain. That Amals ruled in some capacity both before and after these great achievements is, in a

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sense, misleading, for the nature of the lordship being exercised, as we have seen, had changed dramatically. This change was signalled, among other things, by a major alteration in familial inheritance practice, with a single heir now claiming an undivided inheritance, where previously surviving male heirs seem to have enjoyed equal and largely independent shares. Theoderic himself also went through a series of distinct ceremonies to mark the ascent of his power. First a subordinate commander to his father Thiudimer (Getica 55: 282), a second ceremony made him undisputed overall commander of the Amal-led Goths (Getica 56: 288), and, finally, his followers declared him king of Italy (Anon. Val. 12: 57). Valamir and Theoderic thus passed through the Darwinian fire of a selection procedure which produced around them a Gothic kingdom of unprecedented dimensions.

In the reign of Theoderic, matching this change, there are distinct signs of an attempt to change the nature of Gothic kingship. In the 470s and 480s, loyalty was contingent upon practical success; in that period of political revolution, established dynastic traditions had little, if any role to play. At least from the time of his arrival in Italy, however, Theoderic’s court started to generate dynastic propaganda, which reached its peak in the claims of the Amal genealogy that his family had possessed its unique stature for several centuries. In other words, Theoderic’s propaganda attempted to add descent from a particular bloodline to the practical ability that had always been the essential qualification of a Gothic leader. Members of the Amal family had created a unique Gothic superpower, and Theoderic asserted the idea that only Amals were fit to rule it. The Variae express this precisely, declaring that the Amals were not merely another Germanic royal family, but an imperial dynasty attuned to the purple (4. 1; 9. 1; 10. 1–4; cf. more generally 8. 2; 8. 5; 10. 11).

This is an expression in Roman terms of a claim to special royal charisma, but there was probably a Gothic equivalent. The Getica

60 Valamer’s brothers – Thiudimer (father of Theoderic) and Vidimer – had their own followings in separate areas of Pannonia (Getica 52: 268), and even fought alone (52: 269; 53: 276; 53: 274). After Valamer’s death, Thiudimer first broke with Vidimer, and then designated Theoderic alone to succeed (Getica 56: 288), ignoring the claims of at least one other son (Theodimund: Malchus fr. 20); cf. Wolfram, History of the Goths, pp. 248, 270.


62 Getica 13: 76 ff. implies that the Amals first established their power by defeating Cornelius Fuscus in 76 AD (a defeat actually inflicted by Dacians). The propaganda started before Italy, since Thiudimir named his children Amalfrida, Theoderic and Theodemund, in one case recalling the eponymous Amal (above n. 8). Theoderic named his, Ostrogotha, Areagni, Theodegotha and Amalasuintha: Wolfram, History of the Goths, pp. 31–2.
reports that Goths regarded particularly victorious leaders as demi-gods or Ansis (13: 78), and evidence for an association between successful kingship and semi-divine status can be found among several Germanic groups. Such leaders, it seems, were regarded not so much as divine in themselves, but as having a particularly close relationship with the gods. After two generations of staggering success, the Amal family had no doubt acquired a very special aura, and there is no reason to doubt that, in Gothic eyes, Theoderic acquired an extraordinarily high prestige.

The dynasty’s expanding self-image created considerable problems, however, when Theoderic produced no sons, but only daughters. By c. 515, Theoderic had given up hope of a son, and adopted instead a succession plan centred on a Goth called Eutharic, who was brought to Italy from Spain to marry his daughter, Amalasuintha; Eutharic was probably declared his heir at the same time. Formal recognition of Eutharic was then extracted from the Eastern Empire. The Emperor Justin accepted Eutharic as co-consul in 519, and adopted him as son-at-arms; Dietrich Claude has shown that emperors used a gift of arms in Germanic fashion formally to express recognition. As we have seen, Eutharic was also turned into an Amal by the addition of Ermanaric to the Amal genealogy. While this was surely one of Cassiodorus’ manipulations, his descent from Hunimund and Thorismud (supposedly his great-grandfather and grandfather: see Figure 1), may have been real enough. If so, he was descended from one of the non-Amal royal lines which had previously ruled some of the Goths united by Valamir. Theoderic’s choice of him as heir would then make sound sense.

Whether really an Amal or not, he was presented as such, and having married Theoderic’s daughter and been formally declared his successor, Eutharic would have had a good chance of exercising authority in Italy, especially if he really was descended from Hunimund’s line. In addition, Theoderic had deliberately imported him from Spain, and it is recorded that Eutharic’s immediate ancestors had been prominent at the Visigothic court (Getica 33: 174–5). Theoderic might well have thought, then, that Eutharic would also be able to maintain central authority in Spain. Theoderic thus cannily combined in Eutharic his new Amal dynastic approach to kingship, while taking good care to respect older

66 See Schmidt, Die Ostgermanen, p. 351.
prerequisites by picking someone with a host of useful associations. I think it likely, therefore, that under this plan, Amalaric (Theoderic’s Spanish grandson) was not destined for kingship, and it is perhaps no accident that Theudis was sent to Spain at more or less the same time as Eutharic came to marry Amalasuintha. As commander of the army in Spain, Theudis’s remit may well have included a watching brief over Amalaric.

Theoderic’s plans went astray, however, because Eutharic died before him, probably in 522 or 523. The exact date is not known. Subsequent plans came to centre on his eight-year-old young grandson, Athalaric, offspring of Eutharic and Amalasuintha. Jordanes reports that, in 526, Theoderic, on his death-bed, called together the leading men of the Goths, and commanded them to obey Athalaric whom he had just appointed king (Getica 59: 304). The odds are against this being a spur of the moment decision, since Theoderic had known for some time that he needed a new heir. In a number of ways, Athalaric’s succession was far from smooth.

First, the approval of Constantinople was not obtained beforehand. One of the Variae, written to Justin shortly after Athalaric’s succession, complained that he had not been adopted as son-of-arms like his father Eutharic, and expressed the hope that relations between Ravenna and Constantinople would continue to be good. Given that Theoderic had probably already chosen Athalaric well before his death, this suggests that Justin had deliberately withheld acknowledgement of Theoderic’s new heir, even though he had previously acknowledged Eutharic. This could not have been well received at Ravenna, and adds another dimension to the worsening relations between Theoderic and Constantinople, which are such a striking feature of his last years.

Second, the united kingdom which Theoderic had ruled since 511, and to which Eutharic was surely meant to succeed in its entirety, split apart after his death: Italy and Spain being divided respectively between Theoderic’s two grandsons, Athalaric and Amalaric. This had not been pre-planned by Theoderic. It is hard a priori to imagine that he would have acquiesced in such a development, and, in fact, the division was arranged only after his death. Procopius tells us that it was Amalaric and Athalaric

67 Eutharic married Amalasuintha in 515; Jordanes, Getica 58: 302 implies that Theudis went to Spain shortly after 511, but the exact date is unknowable.


69 Procopius, Wars 5. 2. 1 and Jordanes, Romana 367 indicate that he was born in 518; Jordanes Getica 59: 304 calls him vix decennem in 526: surely a rounded, approximate, figure, rather than a contradictory account (contra PLRE 2, p. 175).

70 Variae 8. 1. 3; see above n. 64 on its significance.


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themselves, for which we must read the young men and their supporters, who decided how to split the kingdoms (Wars 5. 13. 4 ff.). As we have seen, Theudis was de facto ruler in Spain before Theoderic’s death (Wars 5. 12. 51), so that he was probably the main mover behind Amalaric’s elevation in 526. Indeed, the split between Theoderic and Theudis to which Procopius refers may well have been caused by the latter starting to intrigue on behalf of Amalaric, against Theoderic’s wishes, once Eutharic had died. That Theudis subsequently succeeded Amalaric as king of the Visigoths in 531, after the latter’s relatively early death, confirms Procopius’ account of his dominant position in Spain in the latter part of Theoderic’s reign, adding further substance to the thought.

Third, and even more striking, Athalaric nearly failed to become king even of the Italian Goths, presumably because of his minority. One of the Variae implies that there was a move to elevate instead a senior noble, Tuluin by name, since it specifically compares him to a hero of an earlier time, Gensemund, who had refused the Gothic crown in favour of the Amals. Tuluin also received very special rewards for supporting Athalaric’s succession – being made, among other things, Patricius Praesentalis, the first Italian Goth to receive such a distinction72 – confirming that there had been particular need to conciliate him at this point.73 Theoderic’s nephew Theodahad likewise received a considerable pay-off. Variae 8. 23 records gifts made to him at the beginning of Athalaric’s reign because he had been obedient, and expressed the hope that he would prove to have deserved them. According to Procopius, he was lazy and academic, but Theodahad was also an Amal male of majority age (the only one in Italy), so that these gifts surely signal that he posed another potential threat to Athalaric’s succession.74 The threat, it seems, was real. Cassiodorus took up a military command at this time (Variae 9. 25. 9), and there was some kind of disturbance in Liguria, perhaps a demonstration in favour of one of the other candidates (ibid. 8. 16). It was only with considerable difficulty, therefore, that even half of Theoderic’s dominion was salvaged for Athalaric.

Theoderic’s attempt to make kingship the preserve of Amal blood thus survived its first test, but only just. Both Amalaric and Athalaric were

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27 Ensslin, Theoderich, p. 201.
28 Variae 8. 9–11. Variae 8. 3 provides a further hint that an non-Amal succession was contemplated, referring to the possibility of someone not of the Amal line (externus heres imperii) succeeding Theoderic. For a similar account: Wolfram, History of the Goths, p. 335.
29 Boethius had associations with Theodahad, and his fall may well have been caused by his finding himself on the losing side of a factional dispute over succession: S.J.B. Barnish, ‘Maximian: A Poet and Three Contemporaries in Ostrogothic Italy’, Nottingham Medieval Studies 34 (1990), pp. 16–32; The view that Boethius was involved in a conspiracy to establish Constantinopolitan rule is very unconvincing: Moorhead, ‘Last Years’, pp. 114–15; see Heather, ‘Historical Culture’, pp. 332–41 for a reconsideration of Boethius’ relations with Theoderic.
related to him, but his united kingdom had fallen apart, and Amalaric was also directly descended from the house which had ruled the Visigoths since the 410s: perhaps a more significant factor in rallying Visigothic support to his cause. Even in Italy, Theoderic's plans had not won simple acceptance. The principle of direct blood-line descent from Theoderic did not go unchallenged; there were other candidates, and some indications that they had their supporters.

The degree to which the prestige attached to Theoderic’s name helped carry the day for Athalaric is an intriguing question. As we have seen, Theoderic’s claims to a unique royal charisma probably did strike a genuinely Gothic chord. Moreover, what evidence there is would suggest that Cassiodorus was working on his Gothic history precisely towards the end of Theoderic’s reign, and it was in this work that the Amal claim to unique historical prestige found its fullest expression. Stressing the uniqueness of the Amals at this moment would have been very much to the point as far as Theoderic was concerned, engaged in trying to secure the succession for his minor grandson in the face of potential rivals.75

Cassiodorus’ Amal propaganda surely played some role in adding extra authority to the king’s choice, but its significance should probably not be overstated. For while Cassiodorus used some genuinely Gothic traditions, particularly about the rival kings defeated by Valamir, much of his source material was literary and Roman in origin. The claim that there had been precisely seventeen generations of Amal kings was almost certainly made to equate Gothic and Roman history (seventeen generations separating Romulus from Aeneas), the starting date of Amal pre-eminence was identified with an event recorded in Roman histories, and, as we have seen, Ermanaric was imported from the text of Ammianus Marcellinus to play a critical role in Cassiodorus’ reconstruction.76 Would Goths really have been persuaded to give their support to Athalaric by these historical inventions based upon Roman literature, if they were not already going to do so? It must surely be rather doubtful, especially as some Goths may well still have been alive who had personally witnessed the origins of Theoderic’s kingship. After all, only forty-three years separates the defeat of Strabo’s line from Theoderic’s death in 526. I strongly suspect, therefore, that Theoderic’s personal choice rather than Cassiodorus’ Amal propaganda carried most weight among the Goths, and it is striking that even this was nearly not enough to secure

75 The argument of Barnish, ‘Genesis and Completion’.
76 Heather, ‘Cassiodorus and the Rise of the Amals’; cf. above n. 62 on the starting date of Amal pre-eminence.

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the throne. Despite all his successes, some Goths did not consider that Theoderic had won the right simply to nominate his successor.

Moreover, there may have been a further motive among the Gothic nobility for supporting the minor Athalaric's candidacy over that of any adult male, Amal or otherwise. Political struggles after Athalaric's succession, as we shall see, centered on who should exercise power in his name, and this may well have been part of the point of supporting Theoderic's choice of him, since it offered the great men of the kingdom the chance to compete for power. Be that as it may, these struggles again demonstrate the power of the Ostrogothic nobility, even if they were not immediately successful.

In the first instance, Theoderic's daughter Amalasuintha acted as regent for her son, but faced a direct challenge from three unnamed Gothic nobles. The threat was so severe, that at one point she loaded a ship with treasure and sent it to the eastern Empire in case she had to flee. As it was, she won out, sending the three men to distant frontier commands and then murdering them, but it had clearly been a close run thing (Wars 5.2.1 ff. especially 23 ff.). One of the three was perhaps Tuluin who held large estates in Provence (that is, a frontier command) and who disappears from the sources shortly after 526.77 Another may have been Osuin. He was sent to Dalmatia, another frontier command, early in Athalaric's reign, and is not heard of again (Variae 9.8–9). The identity of the third is completely obscure. Amalasuintha thus survived, but the threat posed to her position by leading Gothic nobles had been profound, and it reasserted itself on Athalaric's death in 534.

To retain political control in changed circumstances, Amalasuintha elevated Theodahad, her cousin and Theoderic's nephew, to the throne, making him swear to follow her commands.78 However, as we have seen, Theodahad had probably figured in the earlier debates on succession, and the new arrangements proved far from secure. The relatives of the three murdered nobles — according to Procopius, they were ‘numerous and of very high standing’ — successfully plotted with Theodahad to have her removed and killed (Wars 5.4.12 ff.). Killing her three chief rivals had not, in fact, solved the problem; in the end, Amalasuintha could not overcome the united hostility of a significant portion of the nobility.

The final act of Amal rule in Italy underlines the point. While Gothic supremacy remained secure, the nobles tolerated Theodahad. As soon as Belisarius threatened their position, however, they took matters into

77 See PLRE 2, p. 1132–3, Cassiodorus Variae 8.25 of c. 527 is the last dated reference to him. This identification has also been suggested by Wolfram, History of the Goths, p. 336.
78 Procopius, Wars 5.4.4 ff.; cf. Variae 10.1–4.
their own hands. When Theodahad failed to act, they murdered him, and in his place elected Witigis, who had previously shown himself a capable commander in Pannonia. An Amal connection was maintained, since Witigis then married Theoderic’s grand-daughter Matasuintha, but Procopius is explicit that he was chosen for his military ability (Wars 5. 11. 1–9). This is confirmed by Witigis’ own propaganda, which stressed that he belonged to Theoderic’s line only because his deeds were of similar stature, and made no mention of Matasuintha. Witigis referred to the marriage, in fact, only in a letter to Justinian where he claimed that the purpose of Justinian’s war had now been fulfilled, since Amalasuintha’s daughter had been raised to royal dignity, and her murder avenged (by the killing of Theodahad: Variae 10. 32; 33). This would suggest that the marriage was not aimed particularly at a Gothic audience, but at countering Constantinople’s pretext for war, a conclusion not out of line with what we have observed in Athalaric’s succession, where his ‘Amalness’ was probably not as important as the survival of Cassiodorus’ propaganda might lead us to suggest.79 After Witigis, Ildibad, Eraric, Totila, and Teias were elected by different factions of the Gothic nobility; none had Amal connections.80

Conclusion

Theoderic was an extraordinarily long-lived and successful king. Surviving conflict with the eastern Empire and rival Gothic dynasts, he won the overwhelming support of the Goths of eastern Europe, and with them carved out and extended a kingdom based on Italy, using its new resources to reward his original supporters and attract new ones, most notably from among established Roman elites. The participation of the latter maintained useful institutions, financial and other, and helped sustain the ideological portrayal of the king as the legitimate Roman head of an imperial dynasty, destined to preserve Roman social order – civilitas – in the west. There can be little doubt, indeed, that Theoderic’s reign thus laid the foundations, had Justinian not intervened, for the successful integration of Roman and non-Roman within his kingdom.

The evidence of Procopius suggests, however, and this is the main thrust of the paper, that the speed of the process should not be overstated. Despite some militarized Romans, Theoderic’s original Gothic powerbase emerges from The Gothic War as still the main military and political force within the kingdom. Even the self-consciously Romaniz-

79 Variae 10. 31. I therefore take a different view on the importance of the marriage to Wolfram, History of the Goths, p. 351.
80 Ildibad: Procopius, Wars 6. 30. 4–17; Eraric: 7. 2. 4–5; Totila: 7. 2. 10–13; Teias: 7. 33. 6.

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ing Variae, when re-examined with this in mind, offer much evidence that Theoderic was well aware of the importance of this fact and took a whole series of measures, in the new conditions created by the conquest of Italy, to retain the loyalties of his original supporters.

This vision of the underlying source of the king's success, as opposed to its more famous Romanizing façade, is extended by a close examination of succession: a key test of kingship throughout the medieval period. As both the sequence of events and Witigis' propaganda make clear, attempts in Italy, using the new financial and ideological resources it offered, fundamentally to redefine the basis of kingship had fallen, as far as the Gothic nobility was concerned, largely on deaf ears. They not only remained a distinctive force within the kingdom, sustained, as we have seen, by largely independent local powerbases, but exercised a collective veto over succession, and did not accept Theoderic's pretensions that only his line could rule the Goths. In the face of Byzantine pressure, leaders were taken from other families without destroying group cohesion; contrary to Theoderic's propaganda, the Ostrogoths could exist without the Amals, and did so because an overall leader continued to have the practical function for them of co-ordinating the war against the East Romans. This was very much a repeat of the context in which, as we have seen, acceptance of the monarchy had been born in the 470s and 480s. None of this would deny the importance to Theoderic in his own lifetime of Roman elites, nor the reality of his prestige, nor even that some residual loyalty to his dynasty survived its fall. The achievements of Theoderic's lifetime were indeed prodigious, but not automatically heritable by members of his family; for many Goths, the essence of kingship remained precisely as it had begun, namely, practical leadership ability.

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82 See above. I thus believe that the nobility, while no doubt trying to gather as much wealth and power as possible, was instrumental in creating and sustaining the Ostrogothic monarchy. Different perspectives: Schmidt, Ostgermanen, p. 374; Burns, Ostrogoths, pp. 127–8; cf. idem., History of the Ostrogoths, c. 9.

83 Justinian attempted to exploit such feelings in 550 when his cousin Germanus, newly appointed commander in Italy, married Matasuentha in the hope of confusing Gothic loyalties: Wars 7. 39. 14–15.