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Multilingualism and Communication in Sixth-Century Italy

RÉSUMÉ-. Cet article explore, dans une perspective à la fois sociale et culturelle, le multilinguisme et la communication en Italie au VI^e siècle. Il étudie les langues parlées par l'élite barbare et les rois gothiques. Il se penche également sur le plurilinguisme qui avait cours dans le palais de Ravenne, et sur la communication entre Romains et Goths dans le royaume. Bien que la documentation soit assez clairsemée, une étude approfondie des indications fournies par plusieurs auteurs, et notamment Cassiodore et Procope de Césarée, ainsi que par quelques inscriptions, nous permet d'entrevoir les modalités de communication qui avaient cours dans la société multiculturelle de l'Italie gothique

MOTS-CLÉS-. plurilinguisme, communication, Romains et Goths, palais de Ravenne

ABSTRACT-. The following article explores, from both the social and the cultural perspective, multilingualism and communication in sixth-century Italy. It considers the languages spoken by the barbarian elite and the Gothic kings, as well as the plurilingualism at the Ravenna palace, and the question of communication between Romans and Goths in the kingdom. While the extant evidence is sparse, close analysis of passages from various authors, including Cassiodorus and Procopius of Caesarea, together with inscriptions, provides a window into the modalities of communication in the multicultural society of Gothic Italy.

KEYWORDS-. plurilingualism, communication, Romans and Goths, Ravenna palace

The question of multilingualism and communication in late antique Italy is part of the wide discussion on the modalities of coexistence of the barbarians with the Romans.¹ This ongoing debate pertains to 'the technique of accommodation' as well as to the question of whether the Gothic kings promoted a methodical integration of their tribe with the Romans, or whether they purposely maintained a level of separation, especially between army and civilians. The extent to which people coexisted and eventually assimilated depended largely on their social status and education.²

This piece analyses the sparse evidence of multilingualism and forms of communication in late fifth- and sixth-century Italy, occasionally supplemented by a few cases from the Visigothic and Vandal contexts. Following the massive settlement of the Goths from the East into Italy at the end of the fifth century, the Goths progressively began to use Latin for basic communication, especially

(1) I am grateful to the editor and the anonymous readers for their feedback. Unless specified, the translations are mine.

(2) A good overview is HALSALL 2007, p. 417-447. The thesis of GOFFART 1980 has been challenged by most scholars: cf. CESA 1982, BARNISH 1986, PORENA 2012. On the question of whether an integration between Romans and Goths was planned at the palace see now WIEMER 2018, p. 193-231; for more bibliography see below.

those who were settled in places near towns and major cities.³ However, multilingualism survived for a few decades at least, and in the more peripheral contexts the Gothic language continued to be used. Like in the rest of Italy, at the court in Ravenna the difference between spoken Latin and panegyric and bureaucratic literature remained substantial. Some of the kings needed interpreters to properly communicate with diplomats and legates. By the time the Gothic experience came to an end in Italy, communication was far less problematic, but a cultural assimilation remained incomplete.

A SAYING OF KING THEODERIC THE WISE AND THE SOCIO-CULTURAL
DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN ROMANS AND BARBARIANS

“The poor Roman plays the Goth, and the rich Goth plays the Roman” (*Romanus miser imitatur Gothus et utilis Gothus imitatur Romanum*), Theoderic used to say. This is one of the king’s *sententiae* that was still in circulation in the mid-sixth century.⁴ This saying is generally interpreted as a contrast of the social status and education of rich Romans and the poor Goths.⁵ However, it may have deep roots in the aftermath of the barbarians’ settling in the West. According to Isidore of Seville, socio-economic divisions that took place in Spain in the first half of the fifth century still persisted at his time, two hundred years later: “Whence and still now the Romans who stay in the kingdom of the Goths acknowledge that it is better to live poor with the Goths than to be powerful among the Romans and carry the heavy yoke of the tribute.”⁶ Isidore’s source was no doubt the Spaniard Orosius, who also reported this information when describing the Goths’ entry into Gaul and Spain following Alaric’s sack of Rome: “However, immediately after these events, the barbarians foreswore their swords and turned to the plough, and cherished the remaining Romans as allies of a kind and friends, with the result that some Romans who prefer freedom in poverty to trouble and taxation under Rome can be found among them”.⁷ Such a social difference was also lamented in the mid-fifth century by Salvian of Marseille, who denounced the miserable conditions of life of Romans in Spain and Gaul with these words:

so that many of them [...] escape to the enemy [...], clearly searching for humanity among the barbarians, since they cannot bear barbarian inhumanity among the Romans. And even though they differ in the way of living and in language (*lingua*) from those to whom they flee, [...] they prefer to suffer an unfamiliar way of life rather than cruel injustice amongst the Romans. Therefore, they migrate far and wide to Goths and Bagaudae or other dominating barbarians, and they do not regret to have moved; for they prefer to live free under the semblance of imprisonment than to be prisoners under the semblance of freedom. [...] And here it is, that even those who do not escape to

(3) The only good testified context also exception is Ravenna, the Gothic capital, for which we dispose of some archival materials; cf. LAZARD 1991, and the overview of PIETRI 1991.

(4) *Anon. Vales.* 61: *tanta sapientiae fuit ut aliqua quae locutus est in vulgo usque nunc pro sententia hebeantur*; on which see now FESTY, VITIELLO 2020, p. 66-68. The *Anonymus* is an early ninth-century collection of excerpts taken (probably) from only one mid-sixth century work. The source was possibly Maximianus of Ravenna’s lost *Chronica*, a work that was published sometime between the late 540s and year 556. On this hypothesis see the new arguments in FESTY, VITIELLO 2020, p. xxxi-xxxix, and VITIELLO, FESTY 2021.

(5) See FESTY, VITIELLO 2020, p. 67.

(6) *Historia Gothorum* 16 (MGH AA 11, p. 274): *unde et hucusque Romani qui in regno Gothorum consistunt adeo amplectuntur ut melius sit illis cum Gothis pauperes vivere quam inter Romanos potentes esse et gravem iugum tributum portare.*

(7) Oros., *Adv. Pag.* 7,41,7: trans. FEAR 2010, p. 407: *Quamquam et post hoc quoque continuo barbari exsecrati gladios suos ad aratra conversi sunt residuosque Romanos ut socios modo et amicos fovent, ut inveniantur iam inter eos quidam Romani qui malint inter barbaros pauperem libertatem quam inter Romanos tributariam sollicitudinem sustinere.* See also the language in Cassiod., *Var.* 12,5,5.

the barbarians are nevertheless compelled to be barbarians, like in a large part of Spain and among the Gauls: in short, all those who throughout the entire Roman world Roman inequity made non-Romans.⁸

A similar sentiment is echoed in a famous fragment from the *History* of Priscus of Panium. During an embassy in the land of the Huns, he met a man with Greek origins, who preferred to live there like the Scythians—who included groups of Goths (see below, with note 87)—rather than as a Roman in the Empire. According to him, life in the Empire was insufferable for all except the elite citizens.⁹ Fiscal pressure, taxation, and corruption in the justice system plagued the Romans in the crumbling Empire, with the result that many of them over time came to embrace a lifestyle closer to that of the invaders.

It is quite possible that Theoderic's saying derived from Orosius's historical tradition. While the king may not have had a good knowledge of Latin literature, we know that Cassiodorus, who served as his Quaestor and later Master of the Offices, entertained him with dialogues on various subjects.¹⁰ Cassiodorus highlighted Theoderic's eagerness for knowledge of the past and the *sententiae prudentium* as well as his desire to compare himself and his deeds to those of the ancients.¹¹ And, according to his own words, Cassiodorus was so good at celebrating Theoderic that the king himself wondered at his own deeds.¹²

Cassiodorus made extensive use of Orosius in his lost *Gothic History*, which he wrote under request of Theoderic.¹³ Orosius described the Goths' settling in Gaul and Spain. In the year 508/9, Theoderic took possession of Provence, which had been for three decades under Visigothic domination but which the Burgundians had recently occupied. Two years later, in 511, he began ruling over Spain as tutor of his young grandson Amalaric in a regency that stretched until his death in 526. Orosius's work largely circulated not only in the Visigothic kingdom but also in Ostrogothic Italy. An exemplar of his *Histories* was reproduced probably in Ravenna in the first half of the sixth century by a Gothic copyist, the *magister antiquarius Uiliaric*.¹⁴

(8) Salvian, *De gub. Dei* 5,21-23 (MGH AA 1, p. 59): [...] *ut multi eorum [...] ad hostem fugiant [...] Quaerentes scilicet apud barbaros Romanam humanitatem, qui apud Romanos barbaram inhumanitatem ferre non possunt. Et quamvis ab his, ad quos confugiunt, discrepent ritu, discrepent lingua [...] malunt tamen in barbaris pati cultum dissimilem quam in Romanis iniustitiam saevientem. Itaque passim vel ad Gothos vel ad Bavaudas vel ad alios ubique dominantes barbaros migrant, et commigrasse non paenitet; malunt enim sub specie captivitatis vivere liberi quam sub specie libertatis esse captivi [...] Et hinc est, quod etiam hi, qui ad barbaros non confugiunt, barbari tamen esse coguntur, scilicet ut et pars magna Hispanorum, et non minima Gallorum, omnes denique, quos per universum Romanum orbem fecit Romana iniquitas iam non esse Romanos.*

(9) Priscus, *frg.* 11,2 (= FHG 8), ed. and trans. BLOCKLEY 1983, p. 268-269: “[...] after a war men amongst the Scythians live at ease, each enjoying his own possessions and troubling others or being troubled not at all or very little. But amongst the Romans, since on account of their tyrants not all men carry weapons, they place their hope of safety in others and are so easily destroyed in war. In peace misfortunes await one even more painful than the evils of war because of the imposition of heavy taxes and injuries done by criminals. For the laws are not applied at all. If the wrongdoer is rich, the result is that he does not pay the penalty for his crime, whereas if he is poor and does not know how to handle the matter, he suffers the prescribed punishment—if he does not die before judgment is given (since lawsuits are much protracted and much money is spent on them). And this may be the most painful thing, to pay for justice.”

(10) *Var.* 9,24,8.

(11) *Var.* 9,24,8: *sententias prudentium a tuis fabulis exigebat, ut factis propriis se aequaret antiquiis.*

(12) *Var.* 9,25,1. Another anecdote also reported by the *Anonymus Valesianus II* concerning Theoderic's justice shows common features with the account of Suetonius on Emperor Claudius. *Anon. Vales.* 62; cf. Suet., *Claud.* 15,2. An episode on the justice of Theoderic is reported by John Malalas, *Chron.* 15,10 (CFHB 35, p. 308); cf. FESTY, VITIELLO 2020, p. 69-70.

(13) See *Anecdoton Holderi* ll. 20-21 ed. GALONNIER 1996, p. 299-312, esp. p. 306 and 311. The use of Orosius is clearly proved by Cassiodorus in *Var.* 12,20,4 and *Chron.* s.a. 410; see also the references to Orosius by Jordanes in the *Getica*, for example *Get.* 4, 43, 58, 121, 156.

(14) Firenze, Biblioteca Medico-Laurenziana cod. LXV, 1. See AMORY 1997, p. 256 with n. 87; FRANCOVICH ONESTI 2007, p. 110 no. 362.

No matter where Theoderic's saying originated, whether it was related to his administration of southern Gaul or Spain, or whether (as I suspect) it resulted from his conversations with Cassiodorus, the few words of the sentence reported by the *Anonymus Valesianus II* have a profound meaning that encompasses a century of coexistence between Goths and Romans. Communication is part of this important question.

THE BACKGROUND: THE BARBARIZATION OF ELITES AND THE ARMY IN FIFTH CENTURY ITALY

Although with less trauma than in Gaul and Spain, the barbarian presence in Italy also deepened its roots in the fifth century. Like in fourth-century Gaul, barbarization took place through the military channel, from the soldiers of the lowest rank to the highest military officers at the courts. A generally uneducated barbarian leadership was established around the palace, comprised of Masters of the Soldiers and their Roman-barbarian entourages. They in various cases corresponded with Roman aristocrats and intermarried with elite Romans.¹⁵ Like in Gaul in the late fourth century, the generalissimos of fifth-century Italy were mediators between the invaders and the emperors, some of whom were underage, and without military skill. Overtime these warlords took control of the imperial courts. Many had barbarian origins or backgrounds and had spent time at the barbarian courts. Stilicho, to whom Emperor Theodosius entrusted the custody of his young son Honorius, had Vandal origins from his father's side. He mediated with Alaric and his Goths, with whom he kept a strong relationship. Aetius, a Roman from the province of Moesia, held a leading role in Italy for the two-decade period 433-454. In his youth he was hostage of the Visigoths, and years later he interacted closely with the Huns. Ricimer, who shaped Western politics for the two and half decades between the Vandal sack of Rome and the year 472, had Suevic and Gothic (likely noble) origins.¹⁶ He was also related to the Burgundian Gundobad, who replaced him as Master of the Soldiers in Italy for a couple of years before succeeding his father on the Burgundian throne. Gundobad's successor, Orestes, was a Roman from Pannonia who spent the three years 449-452 as *notarius* of King Attila. At the Hunnic court was also employed for some time the father of Odoacer, the μιξοβάρβαρος king (of Hunnic father and Scirian mother) who, as spokesman of the Heruli, Scirians, and Torcilingi, assassinated Orestes in the year 476 and put an end to the Western Roman Empire.¹⁷

Because they led barbarized armies drawn from a plethora of tribes, these fifth-century warlords understood and communicated in one or more barbarian languages. These leaders often had barbarian origins, and they were well respected by a multicultural and partially multilingual army. It would be inconceivable that these leaders were unfamiliar with the Germanic languages and in some cases with the Hunnic. Because their positions required constant diplomacy and war, their cultural horizon was certainly not limited to the Latin one.

Unlike Odoacer, who operated a few years in Italy before becoming king and spoke Latin,¹⁸ his successor Theoderic spent most of his first thirty-five years of life in the Greek half of the Empire. He learned the Greek language during the decade he spent in Constantinople as a hostage. He was barely ten when he was sent by his uncle to Emperor Leo I—other members of his family may

(15) See for example GOLTZ 2002, p. 297-316. On the marriages cf. DEMANDT 1989, p. 75-87.

(16) See MACGEORGE 2002, p. 178-183.

(17) The literature on these warlords is extensive. Two comprehensive studies are O'FLYNN 1983; MACGEORGE 2002.

(18) Cf. PLRE 2, p. 791-793; see also Eugippi., *V. Sev.* 7.

have spent time in the Eastern capital as well.¹⁹ At the Eastern court he enjoyed the best teachers.²⁰ Eventually he settled with his people in the Greek-speaking Moesia. His comprehension of Latin was likely minimal when in 489 he entered Italy. In 493 he murdered Odoacer and established himself permanently in Ravenna, from where he ruled for thirty-three years. However, in spite of his long reign from the heart of the Latin culture, he never earned the title of *litteratus*.²¹ In the year 500, Theoderic was fluent enough in Latin to address his *adlocutio* to the senators and the people of Rome.²² But this king was not multicultural in a strict sense. A lack of real bilingualism or multiculturalism was often the case of the first or the second generation rulers of the Roman-barbarian kingdoms; this includes the converted Catholic Clovis in Gaul.²³ A few years earlier, if we believe Ennodius, the Visigoth Euric, whose people had been in the West for decades, used an interpreter to respond to Epiphanius of Pavia, the bishop legate of Emperor Julius Nepos.²⁴ Theoderic's mother-tongue was Gothic and one wonders to what extent he was able to fully understand the complexity of his praises pronounced by Cassiodorus, or the elitist Latin of Ennodius in his panegyric addressed to him in 507/8. These *laudationes* are stuffed with traditional motifs and historical examples difficult to appreciate without a solid Roman education.

COMMUNICATION AND MULTILINGUALISM AT THE COURTS: THE CASE OF RAVENNA

Like the other kings who established themselves in the western courts,²⁵ Theoderic provided that his family received an education in *litterae*. This is clearly testified for the women of the Amal family, and also for his nephew Theodahad, who knew Latin and had a strong interest in Platonic philosophy.²⁶ Theoderic's daughter Amalasuintha, who ruled on behalf of her son for eight years, represents the most successful case of this acculturation. When in late 533 Cassiodorus celebrated her as an exemplary ruler, he eulogized her fluency in Greek, Latin, and Gothic:

For every realm most properly reveres her. To behold her inspires awe; to hear her discourse, wonder (*loquentem audire miraculum*). In what tongue is not her learning proven (*Qua enim lingua non probatur esse doctissima*)? She is fluent in the splendour of Greek oratory; she shines in the glory of Roman eloquence; the flow of her ancestral speech (*nativi sermonis ubertate*) brings her glory; she surpasses all in their own languages, and is equally wonderful in each (*excellit cunctos in propriis, cum sit aequaliter ubique mirabilis*). For if it is the part of a man of sense to be well acquainted with his native tongue (*vernaculam linguam*), how should we value the wisdom which retains and faultlessly practices so many kinds of eloquence (*tot genera eloquii inoffensa exercitatione custodit*)?²⁷

(19) This is certainly true of his sister Amalafriada (Joh. Anth., *frag.* 214,8 [= 237,8 Mariev]), and likely of his daughter Ostrogotho Ariagni (*Anon. Vales.* 63); his mother Erelieuva was baptized with the name Eusebia (*Anon. Vales.* 58). See FESTY, VITIELLO 2020, p. 52-53, 71-72.

(20) Ennod., *Paneg.* 11; Malalas 15,9; Theoph. AM 5977.

(21) *Anon. Vales.* 61, also 79. See FESTY, VITIELLO 2020, p. 66 and 102-105.

(22) *Anon. Vales.* 66; *Vita Fulg. Rusp.* 27,13.

(23) See FLOBERT 2002.

(24) See Ennod., *V. Epiph.* 90: *taliter tamen fertur ad interpretem rex locutus*. On the use of *interpretes* in legacies and at the courts see BECKER 2012, p. 165, 172-181. The author offers an alternative explanation for Ennodius's evidence: Euric knew Latin well, but "s'adresse aux Romains dans sa propre langue pour affirmer sa supériorité politique" (p. 180-181).

(25) For example, Theoderic I in the Visigothic kingdom asked Avitus to teach his son Latin letters: cf. Sid. Ap., *Carm.* 7, ll. 215-216, 481-483, 495-499; with reference to the Merovingian successors of Clovis cf. FLOBERT 2002.

(26) Proc., *BG* 1,3,1. See VITIELLO 2006(b) and 2014, p. 43-48.

(27) Cassiod., *Var.* 11,1,6 (trans. BARNISH 1992, p. 146): *Hanc enim dignissime omnia regna venerantur, quam videre reverentia est, loquentem audire miraculum. Qua enim lingua non probatur esse doctissima? Atticae facundiae claritate diserta est: Romani eloquii pompa resplendet: nativi sermonis ubertate gloriatur: excellit cunctos in propriis, cum sit aequaliter*

Amalasuinthia was not the only trilingual at the Ravenna palace. But Cassiodorus's representation of this exceptional Gothic woman is so powerful that it reminds us of the way Bishop Wulfila had been described by his foster-son Auxentius of Durostorum: "He preached without interruption in the Greek, Latin and Gothic tongues [...] He who left behind him several works and many translations in these same three languages."²⁸ What is more important for our analysis are the advantages of Amalasuinthia's multilingualism as highlighted by Cassiodorus, which may indicate that this was not the case for her father and son: "Hence, the different races have a great and necessary safeguard, since no one needs an interpreter (*nullus eget interprete*) when addressing the ears of our wise mistress. For the envoy suffers no delay, and the appellant no damage from the slowness of his translator (*de mediatoris tarditate*), since each is heard in his own words, and is answered in the speech of his nation."²⁹ Venantius Fortunatus, who spent his youth and received his education in post-Gothic Ravenna, later at the Frankish court eulogized King Chilperic I in a similar way.³⁰

All these examples are not simply rhetoric from panegyric stock. Indeed, multilingualism was a quality that not many barbarian or imperial rulers could boast. The barbarians settled in the West adopted the languages of the chancery, Latin and Greek, to correspond with the courts.³¹ However, legacies came from far and wide to deliver written messages that were penned in a sophisticated bureaucratic style. They often accompanied oral messages, and much of the verbal communication took place in vernacular languages. Reliable interpreters were always needed.³² The *Variae* bear witness to this written and oral correspondence, upon which Andrew Gillett comments: "Almost all the letters to rulers conclude with a statement that the *legati* bearing the letter will more fully convey the Ostrogothic monarch's views orally. Like most ancient correspondence, the letters could be expected to be read publicly and possibly to circulate, thus serving as an introduction to discussions. Private negotiations could then be held with the envoys, for whom the written document served as a letter of credence."³³ Verbal messages are also testified by Procopius in his narration of the encounter between kings/emperors and Gothic/imperial legates.³⁴ After all, this was the way barbarian kings corresponded before they were established in the Latin West. Once the kings settled and began ruling over their people and the Romans, things changed at their courts.

Cassiodorus's praises for Amalasuinthia clearly indicate that during the legacies at the court, part of the communication took place in barbarian languages. At the Ravenna palace this was Gothic, the queen's *nativus sermo*, the *vernacularis lingua*. Other barbarian languages were presumably understood and perhaps partially spoken at the court. In the panorama of the western kingdoms,

ubique mirabilis. Nam si vernaculam linguam bene nosse prudentis est, quid de tali sapientia poterit aestimari, quae tot genera eloquii inoffensa exercitatione custodit? On Amalasuinthia see now VITIELLO 2017.

(28) The quotation comes from the *Letter of Auxentius*, which is preserved in one of the manuscripts of Ambrosius's *De Fide: Grecam et Latinam et Gothicam linguam sine intermissione in una et sola ecclesia Christi predicavit [...]* Qui et ipsis tribus linguis plures tractatus et multas interpretationes [...] post se dereliquit. See BURTON 2002, part. p. 393 with n. 1.

(29) Cassiod., *Var.* 11,1,6-7 (trans. BARNISH 1992): *Hinc venit diversis nationibus necessarium magnumque praesidium, quo apud aures prudentissimae dominae nullus eget interprete. Non enim aut legatus moram aut interpellans aliquam sustinet de mediatoris tarditate iacturam, quando uterque et genuinis verbis auditur et patriotica responsione componitur.* See the observations of E.F. CONSOLINO in GIARDINA *al.* 2015, p. 139. See also *Var.* 10,4,6.

(30) *Carm.* 9,1 ll. 91-94: *quoscumque etiam regni dicione gubernas, doctor ingenio vincis et ore loquax, discernens varias sub nullo interprete voces, et generum linguas unica lingua refert.*

(31) GILLET 2003, p. 247-248 with n. 119.

(32) With reference to the Greeks see for example MOSLEY 1971, p. 1-6. On the fifth century see the study of BECKER 2012. For sixth-century Italy, see Vitiges's embassy to Chosroe I to convince him to side against Justinian, in *Proc.*, *BP* 2,2-3.

(33) GILLET 2003, p. 174-190, quote at p. 182.

(34) See for example *Anec.* 16,1-5, on the affair of Amalasuinthia managed by Justinian's and Theodora's legate Peter; also *BG* 2,6, the speech of a Roman orator sent by Vitiges to Rome to speak with Belisarius; *BG* 3,2,15-17, on the secret negotiations of the legacy sent by Eraric to Belisarius in Ravenna.

the Gothic language represented a *lingua franca*. Not only it was written in the language of Wulfila's Bible and other Holy Writings,³⁵ but, even if with some differences, it unified the two largest kingdoms of the West, the Visigoths and the Ostrogoths, who had been split for a few centuries. Similarities in wordings joined other Eastern Germanic languages, like that of the Vandals (see below) and of the Burgundians, although without texts as direct evidence it is difficult to formulate conclusions.³⁶ And even if these similarities did not apply to the Western Germanic Frankish language, it seems likely that at the Ravenna court Frankish was understood. Amalasuintha herself must have had a basic comprehension at least. Her mother Audofleda was King Clovis's sister, and she had married Theoderic in ca. 493.³⁷ At that time the king of Italy did not speak fluent Latin and neither likely did Audofleda, whose Latin may well have been poor like that of her brother (see above). That she may have known Greek seems out of question. Like other queens who were given in marriage to foreign kings, Audofleda was likely accompanied to Italy by an entourage of courtiers which included bodyguards and *cubiculariae*.³⁸ Some of her intimates may have been bilingual or multilingual. Born just two or three years after their parents' marriage, Amalasuintha was a first-generation Goth on the Italic soil of parents who were fluent in two quite different Germanic languages but not much in Latin. She presumably grew up hearing a lot of Gothic and much Frankish. As a teenager, Amalasuintha benefitted from the mentoring of highly educated women of the Roman aristocracy. One of them was likely Barbara, who was called at the court with a special appointment.³⁹ Amalasuintha's education was far higher than that of her parents and also of her husband, an Amal from Spain who spoke Gothic and provincial Latin.⁴⁰

The particular multilingual environment Amalasuintha experienced justifies Cassiodorus's praises of the queen as she interacted with legates from the Empire and from other nations: *uterque et genuinis verbis auditur et patriotica responsione componitur* (translation above). As discussed above, verbal messages were an important part of the legacies. Cassiodorus makes often reference to them in the letters of presentation of the embassies, especially those sent to the imperial court.⁴¹ No matter how much communication in Latin and in Greek took place at the Ravenna palace, the Gothic language could not be neglected. Among the eulogies of Amalasuintha as active ruler for her young son Athalaric, Cassiodorus celebrates her as the leader of the army.⁴² Rhetoric apart, to exercise control over the Gothic people necessitated the knowledge of the Gothic culture, its customs, and the language. These remained fundamental components in the education of the Gothic ruler. According to Procopius, when Amalasuintha attempted to educate Athalaric in Roman manners to make him a ruler in the imperial style, she surrounded him with three elderly wise Goths. This generated a strong reaction by the conservative aristocracy at the palace, who wished Athalaric to be educated "according the custom of the barbarians," pointing out that Theoderic "would never allow any Goths to send their children to a grammarian," and that while he had built such a kingdom, "yet he had not so much as heard of letters." Finally they requested that Athalaric spend time with Gothic children of his age to develop his military virtues.⁴³ Apart from the skepticism that this anecdote has generated among some scholars,⁴⁴ it is notable that the

(35) See FRANCOVICH ONESTI 2013, p. 149-154, and the fundamental study of FALLUOMINI 2015.

(36) See the observations of MOULTON 1988, p. 9-28; important is GREEN 1998; 2007, part. p. 395.

(37) Jord., *Get.* 295-297; *Anon. Vales.* 63.

(38) See the case of Amalafriada in the year 500 according to Proc., *BV* 1,8,12 (see below with note 77).

(39) Ennod., *Epist.* 8,16; cf. PLRE 2, p. 209-210. Cf. VITIELLO 2017, p. 46-54.

(40) Eutharicus Cilliga: see PLRE 2, p. 438.

(41) See for example *Var.* 10,1,3; 10,2,4; 10,19,5; 10,22,3; 10,24,3; 10,32,4.

(42) *Var.* 11,1,10.

(43) Proc., *BG* 1,2,1-17 (trans. KALDELLIS 2014).

(44) See AMORY 1997, p. 155-158; HALSALL 2002, part. p. 106-107.

teachers originally chosen by Amalasuintha for her son were “elderly Goths.” This means that they were born before Theoderic entered Italy. Their first language was Gothic, and so was probably their mentality. To rule, Athalaric needed to be more Gothic than Roman.

Even if Athalaric was born in Italy more than two decades after his grandfather had established himself in Ravenna, the knowledge of Gothic was indispensable for a king. To rule over Goths and Romans required different skills. The Goths considered Theoderic as *fortissimus*, the Romans as *sapiens*.⁴⁵ Understanding the two cultures and speaking the two languages were fundamental to the king in order to keep together *regnum gentis sui et Romani populi principatum*.⁴⁶ Athalaric’s successor, Theodahad, lacked military experience and was never meant to become king, but was also represented as “a strong man [...] who is beloved by the Romans for his wisdom, and respected by the Goths because of his value” (*virum fortem [...] Romanis prudentia carum, gentibus virtute reverendum*).⁴⁷ Cassiodorus had also attributed this combination of elements to the Goths in a letter addressed by Theoderic to the Gothic Count of *Pannonia Sirmiensis*: “Cherish justice; defend innocence by virtue, so that, among the evil customs of the various peoples (*inter nationum consuetudinem perversam*), you may display the justice of the Goths. They have always maintained a praiseworthy mean, since they have acquired the wisdom of the Romans (*Romanorum prudentia*), and have inherited the uprightness of the tribes (*virtutem gentium*).”⁴⁸ This was the farthest Cassiodorus could go to celebrate the Gothic army (see below).

In the first half of the sixth century, the integration between Goths and Romans was taking shape, yet it did not become a complete assimilation at the both cultural and linguistic levels.⁴⁹ Of the six decades of Gothic presence in Italy, the last two were characterized by an overlong, bloody war against the Empire. Some Roman aristocrats did not hide their mockery against those Romans who pretended to play the barbarians,⁵⁰ or their dislike for the cacophonous Germanic sounds.⁵¹ Others were eager to get closer to the courts and embraced the barbarian cultures. In late fifth-century Gaul, Sidonius Apollinaris had marveled at a certain Syagrius, who had quickly learned the ‘Germanic’ language well enough to be asked to serve in the Burgundian kingdom as judge or arbitrator.⁵² A few generations later in Gothic Italy, Cyprianus, a palatine Roman officer and an intimate friend of Theoderic, spoke the Gothic language. Cassiodorus eulogizes him as *instructus trifariis linguis*, also for having served as royal legate in an embassy to the East.⁵³ Cyprianus had a military background. Together with his brother Opilio,⁵⁴ he participated in the war of the Goths against the Gepidi and the occupation of Sirmium. The two brothers sided with their king in the

(45) See for example *Anon. Vales.* 58, 60 and 61, and the commentary of FESTY, VITIELLO 2020, p. 56, 65-66. These characteristics are also attributed to King Odoacer in *Auct. Haun. margo* s.a. 476. See VITIELLO 2006(a), p. 22-28. See also Isid., *Etym.* 1,39,9: *Heroicum enim carmen dictum, quod eo virorum fortium res et facta narrantur. Nam heroes appellantur viri quasi aeri et caelo digni propter sapientiam et fortitudinem.*

(46) Jord., *Rom.* 349; cf. *Get.* 295.

(47) Cassiod., *Var.* 11,13,4; cf. *Var.* 10,3,7. See VITIELLO 2014, p. 27-31.

(48) Cassiod., *Var.* 3,23,3 (trans. BARNISH 1992), addressed to Colosseus: PLRE 2, p. 305. See VITIELLO 2006(a), p. 82-90 and 115-129.

(49) On this process see FRANCOVICH ONESTI 2013, p. 101-148.

(50) Ennod., *Carm.* 2,57: *barbaricam facies Romanos sumere cultus miror et inmodico distinctas corpore gentes.* See ARNOLD 2013, part. p. 158-160.

(51) See for example Sid., *Carm.* 12, in MGH AA 8, p. 230-231; cf. *Epist.* 5,5,3; Boeth. *De mus.* 1,1.

(52) See PLRE 2, p. 1042; Sid., *Ep.* 5,5,1 (MGH AA 8, p. 80-81): [...] *immane narratu est, quantum stupeam sermonis te Germanici notitiam tanta facilitate rapuisse*; *ibid.* 3: *adstupet tibi epistulas interpretanti curva Germanorum senectus et negotiis mutuis arbitrium te deceptatorem desumit. Novus Burgundionum Solon in legibus disserendis [...] decernis audiris.* Cf. BECKER 2012, p. 178, 194-195.

(53) Cassiod., *Var.* 5,40,5; see PLRE 2, p. 332-333.

(54) See PLRE 2, p. 808.

accusations against Albinus and Boethius. More interestingly, Cyprianus had gained Theoderic's gratitude also by providing that his children spoke the Gothic language, and that they trained in the military together with the young Goths: "For they shine with Gothic beauty and they never stop training in the strong exercise of arms. The youth of Roman stock speak our language (*nostra lingua loquuntur*), and they clearly show for the future their will to offer their faith to us, whose language they already have learned (*affectasse sermonem*). We have the reward that should be given to you, oh fortunate father, you who offered to us the very souls of your children."⁵⁵

The knowledge of the Gothic language at the Ravenna palace facilitated communication and intimacy with the king and his closest Gothic entourage, which was comprised of aristocrats deeply attached to their traditions. Theodahad would rely on some of them to depose Amalasuintha from the throne.⁵⁶ As at the other barbarian courts, Gothic kings liked to be entertained with songs about the deeds of their ancestors.⁵⁷ These were largely performed in the Gothic language. Cassiodorus may have used in his *History of the Goths* some Gothic oral traditions, which Jordanes occasionally also references in the *Getica*.⁵⁸ If this is true, these traditions were presumably told to Cassiodorus in Latin, as we do not have evidence that he knew Gothic.

In Italy, the Gothic language was an important component of the identity of the new rulers. But Latin served the imperial administration, on which the kingdom of Italy was based. Latin was spoken at the Ravenna palace, where many Romans operated in the highest administrative offices. When Athalaric reintroduced the payments to the teachers of the old capital, he revived an element of imperial policy that his grandfather Theoderic had also supported.⁵⁹ In the name of the young king, Cassiodorus insisted that education was essential for those who would be employed at his court, and he makes this a point of distinction with respect to the other barbarian tribes: "Grammar is the mistress of words, the embellisher of the human race [...]. The barbarian kings do not use her; as is well known, she remains unique to lawful rulers. For the tribes possess arms and the rest; rhetoric is found in sole obedience to the lords of the Romans."⁶⁰ Cassiodorus's rhetoric reminds us that Latin never ceased to serve bureaucracy and laws, not only in Italy, but also in other kingdoms like the Visigoths and the Burgundians. Perhaps implicitly in this passage he also evokes the dearth of written culture among the *gentes*.

Latin was necessary not only for the Gothic elite at the court, but also for highly ranked Goths in office, especially those with positions that required interaction with both Goths and Romans.

(55) Cassiod., *Var.* 8,21,7: *Relucent etiam gratia gentili nec cessant armorum imbui fortibus institutis. Pueri stirpis Romanae nostra lingua loquuntur, eximie indicantes exhibere se nobis futuram fidem, quorum iam videntur affectasse sermonem. Habemus unde tibi, felix pater, praemium debeat referri, qui et filiorum tuorum nobis animos optulisti.* See also *Var.* 8, 22, 5: *Variis linguis loquuntur egregie.*

(56) *Proc.*, BG 1,4,12-13.

(57) The evidence is sparse, and in some cases we cannot exclude that the singing was in Latin. See Jord., *Get.* 43: *Ante quos etiam cantu maiorum facta modulationibus citharisque canebant [...]*; Sid., *Carm.* 12, l. 6; Cassiod., *Var.* 2,40-41 (Clovis), in which 2,40,7: *facturum aliquid Orphei, cum dulci sono gentilium fera corda domuerit*; *Proc.*, BV 2,6,36 (Gelimer); cf. Cassiod., *Var.* 8,9,8. See RICHÉ 1976, p. 65-66 with n. 35.

(58) Cassiod., *Var.* 9,25,4-5; Jord., *Get.* 25, 28, 38, 43, 72, 79, 214: *fabulae, carmina, canebant, dicunt, fertur.* See also Tac., *Germ.* 2,2: *carmina antiqua*; Amm. 31,7,11: *barbari vero maiorum laudes clamoribus stridebant inconditis, interque varios sermonis dissoni strepitus leviora proelia temptabantur.* This use has been recently confirmed by the discovery of the Dexippus fragments published by GRUSKOVÁ, MARTIN 2014 (folio 194 recto). On Cassiodorus and the oral traditions see CHRISTENSEN 2002, *passim*; LIEBESCHUETZ 2011, p. 185-216.

(59) *Nov. Just. App.* 7,22.

(60) Cassiod., *Var.* 9,21,4 (trans. BARNISH 1992): *Grammatica magistra verborum, ornatrix humani generis [...]. Hac non utuntur barbari reges: apud legales dominos manere cognoscitur singularis. Arma enim et reliqua gentes habent: sola reperitur eloquentia, quae Romanorum dominis obsecundat.*

COMMUNICATION OUTSIDE OF THE RAVENNA PALACE

While the Gothic language was never a requirement for the Romans working at the palace, it was a desideratum in the Gothic army, which included barbarians from other tribes, like Gepidi, Alemans, and especially Rugi, as well as Italians, who probably served as local defense forces.⁶¹ Eventually, during the general chaos of the war against Justinian, the army incorporated slaves and refugees with various backgrounds.⁶² Bilingualism was not uncommon among soldiers, especially those settled in small towns, villages, and castles. It was often the result of coexistence, trade, and intermarriage.⁶³ No matter how much Latin the Goths who settled in the provinces learned over the decades, the Gothic language continued to be largely spoken in the army and it remained part of this people's identity.⁶⁴ The above-discussed choices made by Cyprianus for his children confirm this tendency. From the Cassiodoran letters in the name of Theoderic it is clear that Goths were trained for war since the childhood, and their *iuvenes* were in constant preparation; Ennodius confirms this in his panegyric to Theoderic.⁶⁵ Like other barbarian tribes, the Goths also used to sing before engaging battles, and also after, in case they had to mourn the deaths of their kings and heroes. These ancestral traditions did not end with the establishment of the Roman-barbarian kingdoms.⁶⁶

Patrick Amory has highlighted key elements of the culture in Ostrogothic Italy, including the study of the texture of the Gothic army.⁶⁷ Peter Heather has done the same but through a critical approach to Amory's book.⁶⁸ More recently, Ulrich Wiemer has further sharpened the divisions between Gothic soldiers and Roman civilians, according to his line of interpretation "Integration durch Separation." Within the multicultural texture of the Gothic army, the official definition was: "Wer für den König Waffen führt, ist Gote; nur Goten tragen Waffen für den König."⁶⁹

Due to the lack of sources, it remains uncertain how many Gothic soldiers and families learned Latin to interact with the local population during their stay in Italy and the West. In addition, the substantial lack of data on intermarriage raises the level of speculation among scholars. Amory, who is skeptical about a widespread use of the Gothic, highlights that: "A spoken Gothic language is mentioned only four times in the Italian sources, only in military contexts, and only about individuals who also spoke another language. [...] Latin was the common language of Italy, and our spoken "Gothic" must have been a specialized, minority tongue."⁷⁰ I find it difficult to believe that few soldiers spoke Gothic. I suspect that most were bilingual, though I agree with Amory that the Gothic they spoke was quite different with respect to the liturgical language of the fourth century

(61) See WOLFRAM 1990³, p. 300-302; HEATHER 2007, part. p. 42-45.

(62) For the discussion see MOORHEAD 2000, p. 382-386.

(63) For some possible examples see Cassiod., *Var.* 1,17; 5,14,6; *Proc.*, *BG* 2,28,29; AMORY 1997, p. 93-94. See the bibliography in the footnotes below. The question of the marriages between Romans and barbarians is complex (cf. Cassiod., *Var.* 5,32); see DEMANDT 1989, p. 76-80. On the numbers of the Goths and bilingualism in Italy see also FRANCOVICH ONESTI 2007, p. 7-10; 2013, p. 89-100.

(64) On language as part of identity see for example HALSALL 2007, p. 35 ff. See also GASPARRI 1993, p. 201-226; SERGI 2008, p. 289-301. The exceptional case of the city of Ravenna is excellently illustrated by LAZARD 1991.

(65) For a list of examples see VITIELLO 2006(a), p. 40-44.

(66) See above, notes 57-58. Cf. GASPARRI 1993, p. 210-215. For a broader discussion see POHL 2018, p. 192-221.

(67) AMORY 1997, p. 86-108.

(68) HEATHER 2007, p. 48-54. For a more balanced perspective see the detailed and exhaustive article of AIMONE 2012. See also SWAIN 2016, p. 203-233.

(69) WIEMER 2018, p. 193-231, quote at p. 196; see the detailed discussion on weapons in WIEMER, BERNDT 2016. See also HALSALL 2016, p. 173-199, and the very recent POHL 2020, p. 315-339.

(70) AMORY 1997, p. 102; important are also his observations on the subscriptions in the Ravenna papyri as at p. 251-256.

Wulfila's Bible. The use of this text in Ostrogothic Italy and at the Ravenna court in particular is confirmed by the Uppsala's *Codex Argenteus* and other fragments of the Holy Writings. The written Gothic of the Arian clergy was, to use Amory's words, an "archaic, artificial, and liturgical language. It was this archaism and artificiality that recommended it to the Arian clergy, seeking to differentiate themselves from the Catholic church in Italy."⁷¹ Bilingual papyri from Ravenna, by far the better-known context, testify that at least until 553, the Gothic language was still alive.⁷²

Similarities between the Gothic and the Vandal languages facilitated the use in Africa of Wulfila's Bible. The few pages of the Gießen code that presumably originate from the Vandal kingdom are in both Gothic and Latin. This allowed those who were accustomed to Latin and were less familiar with Wulfila's Gothic to better follow the traditional Gothic ritual.⁷³ Admittedly, when the Ostrogoths entered Italy, the Vandals had been settled in Africa for about six decades, after leaving the Latin-speaking Spain. Procopius describes them as Arians and Gothic-speaking people: "For they are all of the Arian faith and have one language called Gothic."⁷⁴ Perhaps with the term "Gothic," the historian refers here to barbarian language in general. The same author also considers Goths, Vandals, Visigoths and Gepids as the greatest and most important "Gothic nations," and he writes of the Rugi as a "Gothic nation" that, together with other peoples, Theoderic persuaded to join him to eventually be "absorbed into the Gothic nation."⁷⁵ Interesting in this context is a line of a Latin epigram from Africa containing 'Germanic' words—these are called *goticum* but written in Latin characters—to celebrate the joyous, festive atmosphere of a banquet: *Inter eils goticum scapia matzia ia drincan* [...] ("Hail! Waiter! Food and drink! [...]").⁷⁶ These words may be in Vandal, but they sound also Gothic, and they may be related to the Goths living in Africa. Indeed, Africa counted a Gothic presence. According to Procopius, one thousand noble warriors and bodyguards and five thousand soldiers accompanied Queen Amalafriada when in the year 500 she left Italy for Africa to marry King Thrasamund.⁷⁷ It is unlikely that these large groups of individuals communicated among each other in a language different than Gothic. Even if one wants to dispute Procopius's large numbers, the Goths who followed Amalafriada had spent barely a decade in Italy. Part of them may have had some knowledge of Latin. How fluent they were in Latin and how close their Latin—whether from Pannonia or from northern Italy—was to that spoken in Africa by the Vandals, is a different question.⁷⁸ Still another question is how close the two Germanic languages were. Vandal Africa was Latinized but still multicultural and multilingual.⁷⁹

Surviving inscriptions on buildings, churches, and tombs are exclusively in Latin. However, they are not impeccable indicators of the use of Latin as the only way to communicate. In Italy, Africa, Spain, and Gaul, those who were buried with an inscription belonged mostly to the mid and upper classes, and often they had held positions that necessitated familiarity with the Latin language.⁸⁰ More importantly, these people wished to be buried like Romans—to use Theoderic's words, they

(71) AMORY 1997, p. 102-103, quoted p. 102.

(72) See FRANCOVICH ONESTI 2013, and the solid overview of LAZARD 1991.

(73) See FALLUOMINI 2010.

(74) Proc., *BV* 1,2,5 (trans. KALDELLIS 2014); cf. Salvianus, *Gub.* 5,2,5-7 and 5,3,14; see FALLUOMINI 2010, p. 329.

(75) Proc., *BV* 1,2,2 and *BG* 3,2,1-2; see below.

(76) The epigram is published in the *Anthologia Latina* no. 285. For a recent discussion see SNÆDAL 2009, from which I take the translation; see FRANCOVICH ONESTI 2013, p. 163, 180-181.

(77) Proc., *BV* 1,8,11-13; for the date of the wedding see *Anon. Vales.* 68.

(78) See the observation of the African Latin at the time of Saint Augustine in BANNIARD 1992, p. 98-102.

(79) FRANCOVICH ONESTI 2005, p. 79-104; 2013, p. 155-195; FALLUOMINI 2010, p. 331-332.

(80) Fundamental are the observations of RICHÉ 1976, p. 60-62 (see *ibid.* p. 52-78). This is true also for the inscriptions on buildings, like those in Latin verses for the restoration of the bridge in Merida which was ordered by King Euric: see IVES 1942, no. 363. For a collection of inscriptions see FIEBIGER, SMIDT 1917.

were Goths who imitated Romans. How far they were acculturated or fluent in Latin remains uncertain. Odoacer's *comes domesticorum* Pierius, who died during the war against Theoderic at the battle of the Adda river (August 10 and 11), surely spoke the language of the Romans. However, was his spoken Latin like that of the person who wrote his tomb inscription, which abounds with phonetic errors?⁸¹ Tombs could lack inscriptions because of economic and cultural reasons. Most of the barbarians were illiterate in their own languages. Epigraphy was never a tradition of the *gentes*. Those who embraced this tradition did it in a Roman way. This may help explain the lack of epigraphy in Gothic characters. Similarly, Gothic coinage continued to be minted in the name of the emperors and with legends in Latin. Large parts of the copper and the silver production carried the monograms or the names of the kings, whose spelling (like on the coins of Vandal Africa) is irregular due to phonetic reasons. Apart from a few Gothic motifs on later copper issues, the symbolism on coinage followed the traditional Roman typology.⁸² Like in the fourth and fifth centuries, the Goths continued to trade by using imperial coinage.

The Latin language was required of those Goths who were appointed to prestigious offices like *comites* and *saiones*. Their knowledge of the Romans' language may have been better than what Pierre Riché hypothesized: "The counts, the *saiones*, sent on missions to the Roman functionaries must have known a few Latin sentences which they could have picked up just as any officer or soldier would have done in an occupied country over a period of time."⁸³ Various letters of Cassiodorus are addressed to these officers or they mention them. As a product of the court chancery, the royal letters addressed to the Gothic armies or the Goths in general were in Latin. However, it is likely that their message was announced and spread among the subjects in Gothic, or in both Latin and Gothic. This is even more likely for those documents addressed to the Goths in peripheral provinces. Outside of Italy, the kingdom of Theoderic extended over the two Raetiae, Noricum, Savia, Dalmatia, Pannonia Sirmiensis, and Provence. These provinces were entrusted to Gothic *comites* and *duces*.⁸⁴ The only exception was Provence, the most Romanized one. Theoderic reattached it to Italy in 508/9 after a thirty-year period of Visigothic administration, and entrusted it to Liberius, a Praetorian Prefect of Gaul belonging to the Roman elite.⁸⁵ The Visigoths who were settled there were largely integrated with the Roman population. Goths living in more distant provinces had a different situation. Those soldiers who were relocated with their families to these peripheral territories were far less assimilated to the local population and may have spoken less Latin. We know, for example, that Odoacer relocated into Italy the Roman population of Noricum Ripense to guarantee the safety of the last of the Romans living there.⁸⁶ The Goths who were settled in this province by Theoderic probably did not interact much in Latin. Apart from this particular case, it is likely that more than one language was spoken in these distant provinces. The multilingual context that Priscus describes in his narration of the peoples who were established north of the Danube in the mid fifth century represents a good example: "Being [i.e. the Scythians] a mixture of people, in addition to their own languages they cultivate Hunnic and Gothic or (in the case of those dealing with the Romans) Latin."⁸⁷

(81) This may be also due to the improvised circumstances in which the inscription was written. The inscription is published in AE 1993, no. 803a, on which see also SANNAZARO 1993.

(82) See METLICH 2004; FRANCOVICH ONESTI 2013, p. 165.

(83) RICHÉ 1976, p. 61 with n. 61 notes the absence of interpreters in the sources. For a solid study on the barbarian institutions in the various kingdoms see MAIER 2005.

(84) See for Raetia *Var.* 7,4, and 1,11.

(85) PLRE 2, p. 677-681; PORENA 2012.

(86) Eugipp., *V. Sev.* 44,4-5.

(87) Priscus, *frag.* 11,2 (= FHG 8), BLOCKLEY 1983 ed. and trans. p. 266-267.

Like for the far provinces, also for Italy there is no evidence in the *Variae* that the royal orders sent to the Gothic administrators were spread only in Latin among the population. With reference to the Goths settled in the peninsula, Cassiodorus's *Formula comitivae Gothorum per singulas civitates* ("Formula regarding the appointment of the Count of the Goths in each city") empowered Gothic counts to settle the disputes between Goths and Romans and to guarantee the coexistence between the two people in mutual respect.⁸⁸ While the duty of the appointee was the application of the law, an important part of his work was dealing with the cultural and linguistic barriers between Goths and Romans. When necessary, Gothic agents were sent to provinces and towns to deal with cases involving Goths and Romans.⁸⁹ Special Counts were permanently appointed in the main harbor cities of Naples and Syracuse, which counted Gothic garrisons and larger communities.⁹⁰ *Comites* were also appointed for the city of Rome, or were sent from Ravenna to announce to the Senate important messages.⁹¹ Finally, no matter in what language *comites* and *duces* in the provinces communicated the orders of the royal chancery, whether this happened as recitation or as public display in Latin, certainly this communication did not take place in the highly rhetorical Latin of Cassiodorus. This applies also to those messages addressed to the Romans. An example (though admittedly not a royal order) is the inscription(s) *CIL X 6850-6852*. The text is clearly related to the letters *Variae* 2,32 and 2,33, and it is likely that Cassiodorus himself authored the inscription as well⁹²—in any case, the inscription is based on Cassiodorus's letter. However, the text of the inscription is written in the more direct style of the epigraphic, and with very limited rhetoric.

A different question is the communication between kings and their Gothic subjects on important occasions, like the successions to the throne. A Cassiodoran letter in the name of Athalaric announces the exordium of the king's reign to the Goths in Italy. A *comes* was sent to each town and to the various Gothic settlements.⁹³ The king's message was presumably spread in Gothic. Even assuming that large part of those Goths settled in Italy communicated in Latin, it is hard to believe that they could understand Cassiodorus's language. A striking case is the letter addressed by Vitiges to all the Goths (*universis Gothis*) to announce his election to king, also to justify his coup against the inefficient Theodahad.⁹⁴ Vitiges, at that time *dux* of the army, was raised to king in the traditional way, on the open fields.⁹⁵ By removing an Amal who belonged to the family of Theoderic, the newly elected king made direct appeal to all the Goths calling for unity, and asking for their unanimous support.⁹⁶ Only the Goths are directly addressed in this letter (the Romans were also probably notified, but no letter addressed to them is recorded in the *Variae*). In spite of

(88) *Var.* 7,3, on which see PORENA 2012, p. 39-57.

(89) See the case the Gothic *vir spectabilis* Sunhivodus, whom Theoderic sent to Samnium to regulate conflicts; *Var.* 3,13: *nunc alienis moribus praeferaris et praestes provinciae disciplinam [...] Samnitarum itaque supplicatione permoti hoc remedio laborantibus credidimus subvenire, si spectabilitatem tuam iuberemus ad finienda iurgia proficisci [...] Intra provinciam itaque Samnii si quod negotium Romano cum Gothis est aut Gotho emersit aliquod cum Romanis, legum consideratione definies, nec permittimus discreto iure vivere quos uno voto volumus vindicare. Censebis ergo in commune, quae sunt amica iustitiae, quia nescit personas respicere qui meram cogitat aequitatem.*

(90) *Var.* 6,22-23.

(91) *Var.* 8,2,9, sent by King Athalaric to the Senate: [...] *illustrem Sigismerem comitem nostrum vobis cum his qui directi sunt fecimus sacramenta praestare.* See also the case of the *comes* Arigerus in Rome; PLRE 2, p. 141-142.

(92) See GIARDINA 2006, p. 73-99.

(93) *Var.* 8,5,2: *Illum vero comitem vobis fecimus iurata voce promittere, ut, sicut nobis vestrum animum proditis devotione, sic optata de nostris sensibus audiat.* See GIARDINA *al.* 2016, p. 190.

(94) *Var.* 10,31, on which see my comment in GIARDINA *al.* 2016, p. 461-464.

(95) *Var.* 10,31,2; *Jord., Get.* 309-310, *Rom.* 371; *Marc. Auct. s.a.* 536.

(96) *Var.* 10,31,3: *Quapropter [...] Gothorum favete iudiciis, quia me regem omnes facitis, qui unanimiter vota confertis; cf. Jord., Get.* 310: *Qui venientes imperata sibi perficiunt et occiso Theodahado regem qui a rege missus adveniebat [...] populis nuntiat.*

the chaotic situation, the election was officially announced by the chancery. However, formalities apart, the message was likely spread to the Goths through the traditional channels of the *comites* and the military leaders. That all this happened only in Latin—in any case not the Cassiodoran one—is not credible.

During the almost twenty-year war against Justinian, the Gothic kings, whose level of Roman-like education was far lower with respect to that of the Amals, were able to communicate directly with the Romans in Latin and with their Greek enemies who spoke Latin, or by means of a translator. These later kings were mostly warrior-leaders belonging to the Gothic aristocracy. Despite the speeches Procopius put in their mouths, it is difficult to imagine that they could fluently address Greeks and Romans in their own languages. King Vitiges may well have been an exception, because he did not belong to the nobility and he had been largely active at the palace with important functions under Athalaric, Amalasuintha and Theodahad. We know that he was sent on a legacy to Justinian. Under Athalaric, because of his military successes, he was appointed sword-bearer at the court, where he oversaw diplomacy and discussed matters with the legates (*cum legatis saepius necessaria dissertabas*). Later he operated as *dux* from Theodahad at the beginning of the war against Justinian.⁹⁷ Because of his military and diplomatic activities in the East and Italy, he was likely able to communicate in both Greek and Latin. Procopius reports that during his short stay in Rome he addressed the Pope and the Roman Senate and people before leaving the city for Ravenna in late 536.⁹⁸

We know that one of the Gothic kings, Eraric, belonged to the Rugi, a people that Procopius considers as “Gothic nation” that in previous times used to live autonomously.⁹⁹ Chosen by his people and eventually also accepted by the Goths, this king was certainly a Gothic speaker. We do not know about his knowledge of Latin, because he corresponded with Belisarius through a legacy.¹⁰⁰ However, it is clear that King Totila, a member of the Gothic nobility who may have previously served as *comes Gothorum*, spoke the language of the Romans.¹⁰¹ Gregory the Great recounted his meeting and dialogue with Saint Benedict.¹⁰² According to Procopius, in the year 546, the day after took Rome, Totila met with the Deacon Pelagius, who was representing the absent Pope Vigilius. The king gave also a speech in *adlocutio* style to both the Romans people and the senators.¹⁰³ When he took Rome again in 550 he spent there a period of time which the *Book of the Popes* reports: “the king lived together with the Romans like a father with (his) children”.¹⁰⁴

Like the kings, many leaders of the Gothic army were fluent in the language of the Romans. This is the case of Leuderis, the ἄρχων Γότθων that King Vitiges left in the old capital at the end of the year 536. A better example is Ouakis, a Gothic officer of “no mean station” (Procopius) whom Vitiges sent to Rome in year 537 to reproach the inhabitants for betraying the Gothic cause.¹⁰⁵ Ouakis should probably be identified with Wacca, the *maior domus* that in the second half of 535, King Theodahad sent to Rome at the head of Gothic troops. Because the Romans were scared of hosting Gothic soldiers beyond those already in the garrison established in the old

(97) PLRE 3, p. 1382-1286. See *Var.* 10,32,3 and 10,33,2; Cassiod., *Orat. frg.*, MGH AA 12, p. 476, ll. 14-20: *quem locum [i.e. sphatarii] tua modestia et maturitate nobilitans, otioso pro parvula aetate rege, cum legatis saepius necessaria dissertabas; et miro laudis eventu reverentiam tibi potius impendi feceras, qui senilibus curis adulto principi serviebas.*

(98) Proc., BG 1,11,26.

(99) Proc., BG 3,2,1. See PLRE 3, p. 447-448.

(100) BG 3,2,15-18; at the head of the legacy was a certain Caballarius.

(101) Proc., BG 3,2,7, according to which Totila was in command of the Goths in Tarvisium. See PLRE 3, p. 1328-1332.

(102) Greg. M., *Dial.* 2,14-15; the interaction included also Totila’s sword-bearer Riggo (PLRE 3, p. 1087).

(103) Proc., BG 3,20,22-25; 3,21,12-13.

(104) LP 61,7: *habitavit rex cum Romanis quasi pater cum filiis.*

(105) Proc., BG 1,18,39-41.

capital, Theodahad had these soldiers located in strategic places outside of the city-walls and under the monitoring of Wacca.¹⁰⁶ This official was respected by the Gothic warriors who, following his example, would abstain from abuses against the population.¹⁰⁷ The Romans had recently protested against a contingent of Gothic soldiers that they found intimidating. According to the rhetoric of the Cassiodoran letter, Theodahad had sent ‘new scary faces’ to Rome only to protect the population, and these Goths had left their own families.¹⁰⁸ The verbal message that the king sent to reassure the Romans in that circumstance may have not been enough.¹⁰⁹ No doubt, part of the tension around these intimidating outsiders resulted from the nature of their linguistic and cultural communication. These barriers were inevitably sharpened by the constant movement of troops, which increased during the war. Part of the soldiers sent to Rome in times of war may have come from far provinces and known very little Latin. Therefore, strong knowledge of the Latin language was fundamental to leaders like Wacca and Leuderis, who had to fluently communicate with the Roman population and facilitate interactions and peaceful coexistence between Gothic soldiers and Roman civilians.¹¹⁰

During the Gothic war, several of the soldiers of Justinian’s army in Italy had barbarian origins. Among them were the Goths from the East, the most outstanding case being the general Bessas, who was trilingual because he could also speak Latin. In Procopius’s account we read that his knowledge of the Gothic language turned to be indispensable more than once.¹¹¹ Other soldiers of the Byzantine army were treated as Goths.¹¹² In the *Gothic War* we also find reports about other cases of soldiers who, even though belonging to opposite armies, communicated with each other in Gothic.¹¹³ We also read of a leader of the Goths, Ragnaris, a Hun by origins but Procopius calls him a Goth;¹¹⁴ and of a Gepid named Velas, who became ‘spearman’ of the Gothic king Hildebad.¹¹⁵

Kings and military leaders maintained the communication with their soldiers based on traditional codes of values.¹¹⁶

FINAL REMARKS

Four decades after the Gothic war, in the year 591 Pope Gregory the Great addressed the subdeacon of Sicily asking him to spread his messages among the rural population (*Scripta mea ad rusticos quae direxi per omnes massas fac relegi*).¹¹⁷ Communication between peoples were

(106) Cassiod., *Var.* 10,18. See VITIELLO 2014, p. 116-118.

(107) Cassiod., *Var.* 10,18,2: *His etiam praefecimus maiorem domus nostrae Vuaccenem, qui pro suarum qualitate virtutum bellatoribus esset iure reverendus, cuius exemplo et excessus vitarent et fortitudinis instrumenta perquirent.*

(108) Cassiod., *Var.* 10,14,3: *numquid vos nova gentis facies ulla deterruit? Cur expavistis, quos parentes hactenus nominastis? Qui relictis familiis ad vos venire properabant, de vestra erant potius securitate solliciti. Quando, rogo, talis ab illo vicissitudo recepta est, cui salutis praemia debebantur?*

(109) Cassiod., *Var.* 10,14,5: *Aliqua etiam vobis per illum verbo dicenda commisimus, ut nostrum circa vos in omni parte animum propitium sentientes, iugibus, sicut oportet, obsequiis et oratione sincera devoti esse debeatis.* See also the verbal messages to the Roman senators in *Var.* 10,13,6.

(110) See Cassiod., *Var.* 10,18,2, the reassurance to the Rome about the market: *exercitui destinato ordinante illo annonas fecimus secundum forum rerum venalium comparari, ut et illis tolleretur necessitas excedendi et vobis auferretur causa dispendii.*

(111) Proc., *BG* 1,10,10; 3,20,10-11; cf. PLRE 2, p. 226-229.

(112) See HEATHER 2007, p. 54.

(113) See the anecdote described by Proc., *BG* 2,1,11-19.

(114) PLRE 3, p. 1076.

(115) Proc., *BG* 3,1,43-48.

(116) See for example Cassiod., *Orat. frg.*, MGH AA 12, p. 475 and 476, ll. 1-5.

(117) Greg. M., *Ep.* 1,42 ll. 234-235.

increasingly based on widespread comprehension of Latin as a universal language in the West. But the process by which Latin slowly replaced an imperfect and difficult multilingualism was uneven, especially in peripheral areas. This is certainly true for Italy during the six decades of the Gothic experience. In the multilingual contexts of the Roman-barbarian kingdoms, the distance between the pompous Latin of the chanceries from the everyday communication remained vast, perhaps as great as the distance between Wulfila's Gothic and the Gothic spoken in the sixth century. If royal embassies delivered messages written in sophisticated Latin like that of Cassiodorus, these communications would have been difficult to comprehend at the barbarian courts, no matter how Romanized they were. The kings needed interpreters not for basic communication with legates, but for decoding the chancellery documents and following the protocol for royal audiences. Similarly, apart from the question of their authenticity, Procopius's speeches and dialogues in the *History of the Wars* are elaborated versions of oral communication. The Latin of dialogues and speeches that we often read in the *Lives of the Saints*, or in the *Book of the Popes*, or in the *Dialogues* by Gregory the Great, probably represent the practice of oral communication for which no evidence survives.¹¹⁸

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(118) The reference point on oral and written communication in the Early Middle Ages is the work of BANNIARD 1992, in which Chapter 3 is dedicated to Gregory the Great.

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