

LATE ANTIQUE AND EARLY MEDIEVAL IBERIA



Erica Buchberger

Shifting Ethnic Identities in Spain and Gaul, 500-700

From Romans to Goths and Franks

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Late Antique and Early Medieval Iberia

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Contents

Acknowledgements	7
Introduction	9
Scholarly Tradition	10
Methodology	22
Chapter Breakdown	24
Terminology	27

Part I From a Roman to a Gothic World in Visigothic Spain

1	Arians to Catholics	37
	John of Biclar's <i>Chronicle</i>	38
	Isidore of Seville's <i>History</i> (up to 589)	45
	The Third Council of Toledo	51
	The <i>Lives of the Fathers of Mérida</i>	53
	Conclusion: The Evidence Together	61
2	Church and State: Isidore and his Influence	67
	Isidore's <i>History</i> (post-589)	68
	Church Councils to 654	74
	Conclusion	78
3	The Later Seventh Century	81
	Chindaswinth, Recceswinth, and Visigothic Law	81
	Later Councils and Laws	96
	Conclusion	99

Part II From a Roman to a Frankish World in Merovingian Gaul

4	Gregory of Tours	107
	The Late Roman Empire and Clovis' Reign	110
	Contemporary Era	114
	Conclusion	130

5	Venantius Fortunatus	133
	Duke Lupus	134
	Leontius II of Bordeaux	136
	The Ruricii	137
	Vilithuta	138
	Duke Launebod	139
	King Charibert	140
	Radegund	142
	Conclusion	145
6	Fredegar	147
	Book Three: Rewriting Gregory	148
	Book Four: Fredegar's Original Work	153
	Conclusion	162
7	Frankish Hagiography	165
	Caesarius of Arles	166
	Gaugeric of Cambrai	170
	Eligius of Noyon	172
	Conclusion	177
	Conclusion	179
	Abbreviations	187
	Bibliography	189
	Index	213

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Introduction

Within the first few centuries after the collapse of the Western Roman Empire, the majority of those westerners once considered Romans adopted the identities of their barbarian rulers. They came to be identified as Franks or Goths or Saxons, and people called 'Romans' disappeared almost entirely from the written record.

How this happened is a matter of some controversy. Much progress has been made in recent years in understanding this process, but it has been hampered by a continued tendency to use terms like Goth, Roman, and Frank in a mutually exclusive manner, as if 'Frank' could mean only one thing at any given place and time. Thus historians have argued that, for example, the increasing use of 'Goth' in mid-seventh-century Spain to refer to all the king's subjects must mean that these subjects had all become ethnic Goths or, as Herwig Wolfram has suggested, that 'Goth' had ceased to have any ethnic meaning in favour of a wider, more inclusive political one.¹ The reality, however, is far more complicated. A person can have multiple identities or affiliations simultaneously. Someone living in the seventh-century Visigothic kingdom could be a Roman by descent and a Goth politically, for example. When all of these aspects of identity are conflated, historians see what seem like inexplicable contradictions or paradoxes in our sources, or sometimes instantaneous or nonsensical changes to these identities. However, when the existence of multiple layers is acknowledged and examined more closely, suddenly they become both understandable and crucial witnesses to the ways these various layers could be renegotiated to effect shifts in ethnic identities over the long term.

This book is an attempt to offer a new model for discussing the multi-layered nature of early medieval identities and for using the evidence of these layers to better understand the mechanisms by which such identity shifts occurred. By distinguishing between the political, religious, and descent overtones with which the ethnonyms Goth, Frank, and Roman were used in Visigothic Iberia and Merovingian Gaul, this study will shed light on the complex ways they interacted to shape contemporary society. By addressing both Iberia and Gaul, it will also illuminate the common mechanisms operating across both societies and the differences in the ways identity shifts played out based on the unique histories and concerns of each kingdom.

1 Wolfram, 'Gothic History', p. 52; Teillet, *Des goths*, p. 553; Claude, 'Remarks', pp. 127-29.

Scholarly Tradition

The stereotypical view of ethnic identities is that they are inherited and permanent, that something in a person's blood makes him or her German or French, Gothic or Frankish. This essentialist model is common in nationalist thought and the popular imagination and can be traced as far back as the ancient Greek distinction between Greeks and barbarians.² In ancient Rome, Romans imagined themselves as a constitutional people, united by adherence to Roman law, but others as biological peoples, linked by a common birth.³ Throughout antiquity and the Middle Ages, the biological vision of community proved a useful tool to legitimize rulers, unify populations, demonize others, and lay claim to heritage and territory traced back to a supposed primordial origin point.⁴ The Franks and Visigoths certainly included it in their strategies of identification, and we will see examples throughout the course of this book.

Early modern thinkers turned these ideas into scholarly theories.⁵ In the 1720s, French aristocrats like Henri de Boulainvilliers argued that the French aristocracy originated with the Franks who conquered Gaul in the fifth and sixth centuries, and thus held historic rights and privileges from this conquest which the monarchy needed to grant them. Their opponents, including Montesquieu, either objected that the aristocracy themselves as invaders should be ousted and the 'oppressed' Gallic people restored to power, or that the Roman Empire had conceded the territory gradually through diplomatic rather than military means, giving the Franks no absolute right to domination.⁶ During the French Revolution, most revolutionaries preferred to focus on deeds rather than birth as a criterion for membership in a 'people', but some, like the Abbé Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès, justified revolution by claiming that, indeed, the aristocracy was Frankish and therefore foreign and should be ousted.⁷

2 Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian*; Hall, *Hellenicity*; Harrison (ed.), *Greeks and Barbarians*, esp. chs. 1, 4, and 11.

3 Geary, *Myth*, pp. 49-52. For the classical dichotomy between Roman and barbarian, see Ferris, *Enemies of Rome*; Woolf, *Tales of the Barbarians*.

4 Geary, *Myth*.

5 Wood, 'National Identities'; Wood, 'Use and Abuse'; Wood, *Modern Origins*; Geary, *Myth*.

6 Goffart, 'Impinge', pp. 22-23; Wood, 'National Identities', pp. 64-5; Geary, *Myth*, pp. 20-21; Boulainvilliers, *Essais sur la noblesse de France*; Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, books 30-31, pp. 619-722.

7 Sieyès, *Qu'est-ce que le tiers-état?*, esp. pp. 10-15, 104-112.

Napoleon's conquests of the early nineteenth century inspired a wave of German nationalism as the people he conquered fought back with their own narratives of long-held identity.⁸ Johann Gottlieb Fichte, for example, wrote in 'To the German Nation' about the *Volkstum* that was based on language and an inseparable whole by nature, equating the ancient Romans with the contemporary French and encouraging German speakers to unite against this foreign conquest.⁹ The Grimm brothers, folklorists and linguists, were influenced by Johann Gottfried von Herder – who declared in 1784 that geography influenced each people's inborn characteristics and culture – to search for tales that reflected authentic German culture and landscape. In 1848, drawing on the new discipline of philology, Jacob Grimm argued for Prussia's annexation of Schleswig-Holstein based on a perception that its residents were descended from the early Germanic peoples. Ernst Moritz Arndt argued the same for Alsace-Lorraine, Belgium, and the Netherlands, and Theodor Mommsen argued throughout the second half of the nineteenth century for Prussian takeover of regions historically settled by 'Germans' based on historical use of a 'Germanic' language and early medieval sources on migrations.¹⁰

War between the French and Germans pushed the rhetoric further. After the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, and formal German unification the following year, Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges fought back by criticizing the Germanists' paradigm. He reminded historians that past and present 'Germans' were not one and the same and attacked the language-based methods German scholars, particularly Mommsen, used to analyse and present their evidence. While he did not refer to contemporary events in his writing, he was still seen as a French patriot.¹¹ Ernest Renan, who had admired German scholarship until Prussian invasion led to destruction in his homeland of France, spoke at the Sorbonne on 11 March 1882 against essentialist, biologically-centred views held by nationalists, arguing instead that nationhood was a conscious choice to live together, on the ancient Roman model.¹² These objections did not, however, stem growing nationalist

8 On nationalism in the early modern world, see Armstrong, *Nations Before Nationalism*; Anderson, *Imagined Communities*; Smith, *Ethnic Origins of Nations*; Smith, *Nation in History*; Smith, *Antiquity of Nations*; Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*; Hobsbawm (ed.), *Invention of Tradition*; Reynolds, 'Our Forefathers?'

9 Fichte, *Addresses to the German Nation*, esp. pp. 52-71 and 108-29; Geary, *Myth*, pp. 24-26.

10 Grimm, *Kleinere Schriften*, vol. 7, pp. 557-66 and 573-81; Herder, *Outlines of a Philosophy*, pp. 172-76, 188-93; Arndt, 'Des Deutschen Vaterland', pp. 7-8; Wood, 'National Identities', pp. 73-74.

11 Fustel de Coulanges, *Questions historiques*, pp. 1-16, 505-12.

12 Renan, *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?*

sentiment. In 1870, the historian Felix Dahn distributed a pamphlet supporting the war on similar grounds to Mommsen.¹³

When Germany invaded Belgium at the beginning of World War I, Karl Lamprecht defended the incursion, arguing that the Flemish were ethnically German and resented the dominance of French Walloons in Belgium, and emphasizing the idea that cultural traits were really distinguishing national characteristics inherited upon birth. This takeover directly influenced the work of Henri Pirenne, a Belgian who had worked with Lamprecht at Leipzig and had previously admired him.¹⁴ Pirenne was arrested in 1916 by the occupying Germans for dissent against their occupation. His 1937 *Mohammed and Charlemagne* removed 'Germanic' barbarians from the story of Rome's fall entirely, arguing instead that the rise of Islam disrupted Mediterranean trade and led to the end of antiquity; the 'Germanic' invaders barely made a dent in the cultural landscape.¹⁵ Certainly not all German-language scholars argued for substantial continuity and prominence of Germanic peoples – the Austrian Alfons Dopsch, for example, supported the ideas of Fustel de Coulanges and Pirenne – but the trend during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was definitely toward the alignment of scholarly stances with contemporary political and linguistic boundaries.¹⁶

A similar national sentiment also rose in Spain during this period.¹⁷ This Spanish grand narrative centred around the legitimacy of the Catholic Reconquest of Iberia from the Muslims. It depended on the belief that the Visigoths who had ruled the peninsula in the sixth and seventh centuries had survived to continue their rule in the northern kingdom of Asturias and ultimately led the push south. According to this narrative, the 'real' Spanish nation originated with these Goths and Muslim rule and influence should be ignored as illegitimate. Construction of this 'Gothic myth', as J.N. Hillgarth calls it, began within a few centuries of the Arab conquest in 711. The legend of Pelayo, first king of Asturias, as the rightful heir of the Visigoths and of a Gothic Christian manifest destiny to control the Iberian peninsula appears in the ninth- and early tenth-century *Chronicle of Albelda* and *Chronicle of*

13 Dahn, *Das Kriegerrecht*; Leerssen, *National Thought in Europe*, pp. 122-23. Interest in an Aryan or Nordic race also increased during the century, although not along national lines.

14 Lamprecht, 'Über Belgien'; Wood, 'National Identities', pp. 73-76.

15 Pirenne, *Mohammed and Charlemagne*; Bachrach, 'Pirenne and Charlemagne'. On Pirenne's wartime experiences, see Pirenne, *Souvenirs de captivité*.

16 Dopsch, *Economic and Social Foundations*.

17 Linehan, 'Religion, Nationalism, and National Identity', pp. 161-99; Davies, 'The Early Middle Ages and Spanish Identity'; Grieve, *Eve of Spain*, esp. pp. 29-31, 232; Hillgarth, *The Visigoths*; Payne, 'Visigoths and Asturians Reinterpreted'; González Fernández, 'El mito gótico', pp. 289-300.

Alfonso III.¹⁸ It served as justification and inspiration for Christians to fight for what was not, to them, an invasion of long-held Muslim al-Andalus but a reconquest of lands that rightfully belonged to them.

This narrative continued to pervade scholarship even after Reconquest had been completed.¹⁹ In the nineteenth century, Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo depicted an unbroken inheritance from the Visigoths to contemporary Spaniards. He equated Spanish identity with Gothic Catholic identity and used it to justify the exclusion of Jews and Muslims from the country.²⁰ Some scholars began to question the idea by the end of the century, but under Franco and the Nationalists it was revived with official approval in the 1930s. Claudio Sánchez-Albornoz traced Spain's origins to Pelayo and the remnants of the Visigoths in Christian Asturias and insisted that Spain and the Christian faith were intrinsically linked.²¹ Ramón Menéndez Pidal wrote in the 1950s that Spanish national sentiment was born at Gothic unification in the seventh century.²²

Early criticism came from Américo Castro, who argued that Visigoths and Spaniards were not the same and instead emphasized the role of *convivencia* of Christians, Jews, and Muslims in Islamic-ruled Spain. Modern Spain was thus impossible without the destruction of the Visigothic kingdom to make way for Arab influences.²³ Support for Castro's view was limited until the mid-1970s when democratization after Franco's death freed scholars to question the official narrative more directly.²⁴ However, the myth has not yet disappeared completely. Armando Besga Marroquín argued for a Visigothic-based central rulership in Asturias in a book published in 2000.²⁵

18 *Chronicle of Alfonso III*, pp. 114, 126; *Chronicle of Albelda*, p. 174. For continued Gothic identification in the Muslim-ruled south, see Ibn al-Qūṭīya, *History*, esp. pp. 22-24; Christys, *Christians in Al-Andalus*, pp. 181-83; Barceló, 'Els "Hispani"', pp. 189-90. García Moreno, 'Spanish Gothic Consciousness', pp. 303-24, overstates the case.

19 Hillgarth, *The Visigoths*, pp. 172-76; Grieve, *Eve of Spain*, pp. 28-31; Castellanos, *Los godos y la cruz*, pp. 15-19.

20 Grieve, *Eve of Spain*, p. 28; Menéndez Pelayo, *Historia*, vol. 3, pp. 832-35.

21 Hillgarth, *The Visigoths*, pp. 174-75; Linehan, 'Religion, Nationalism, and National Identity', pp. 163-64, 198; Grieve, *Eve of Spain*, p. 30; Sánchez-Albornoz, *España, un enigma histórico*, pp. 122-39; Sánchez-Albornoz, *El Reino de Asturias*, pp. 75-116. Despite his nationalism, Sánchez-Albornoz joined the republican cause and was exiled to Argentina when Franco won the Spanish civil war; Linehan, *Past and Present in Medieval Spain*, pp. 12-19.

22 Menéndez Pidal, *Los españoles en la historia*, p. 120.

23 Castro, 'Los visigodos no eran aún españoles', pp. 1-3. The debate between Sánchez-Albornoz and Castro is discussed in detail in Lapeyre, 'Deux interpretations', pp. 1015-37; Hillgarth, 'Spanish Historiography and Iberian Reality'. See also, Sánchez-Albornoz, 'España y el Islam', pp. 1-30.

24 Barbero and Vigil, *Sobre los orígenes*.

25 Besga Marroquín, *Orígenes hispanogodos*.

In central Europe, the essentialist view also reached its peak under fascism. The Nazi concept of the pure, superior Aryan race stemmed directly from earlier nationalist constructions of ethnicity. In the 1930s, Otto Höfler promoted the ideas of Germanic sacral kingship as a way to view the contemporary German Reich without resorting to analogies to imperial Rome, and Karl Theodor Strasser portrayed successive waves of naturally adventurous, migrating 'Germans' reinvigorating a geriatric, stagnant Roman Empire with strong German blood, as Herder had done a century and a half earlier. This *Volksgeschichte* imagined peoples as organic units, both homogeneous and unchanged over time. It also appealed to German speakers who lived outside the redrawn borders of post-World War I Germany as a way to see themselves as still part of a wider German community.²⁶ Archaeologists' theories of 'ethnic ascription' – that is, the assumption that material finds correlated directly with specific peoples migrating into or historically settled in a region – also bolstered German nationalist ambitions. German archaeologists in the 1930s and 1940s drew on the technique developed by Gustav Kossinna in 1910 to justify the identification of burials and artefacts as 'Germanic' and mark wide swaths of Europe as historically German-settled.²⁷ Row-grave cemeteries, being different in nature from the typical Roman style of burial, served to 'prove' migration of Germanic-speaking peoples into northern Gaul and Spain.²⁸ SS leader Heinrich Himmler was particularly interested in Germanic antiquity and incorporated much of these scholars' work into plans for German expansion.²⁹ The map for 'reconquest' of territories supposedly settled by early medieval 'Germans' was based on these scholars' interpretations of the texts and archaeological record, and the persecution of Jews and others by 'race' was in part justified by the narrative of German racial superiority these scholars helped bolster with their studies.

26 Höfler, *Kultische Geheimbünde*; Höfler, 'Das germanische Kontinuitätsproblem', pp. 1-26; Wood, 'National Identities', pp. 76-77; Herder, *Outlines of a Philosophy*, p. 421; Murray, 'Reinhard Wenskus', pp. 39-68; Fehr, 'Volkstum as Paradigm', p. 182. Even Engels, *Origin of the Family*, pp. 186-87, 192, portrayed the Germans as rescuing Rome.

27 Kossinna, *Die Herkunft der Germanen*; Curta, 'From Kossinna to Bromley'; Fehr, 'Volkstum as Paradigm', esp. p. 184; Härke, 'Archaeologists and Migrations', esp. pp. 267-68. Archaeologists have generally been slower to move past ethnic ascription than historians have moved beyond essentialism. For recent examples, see Bierbrauer, 'Zur ethnischen Interpretation'; Bierbrauer, 'Archäologie und Geschichte'; Kazanski, 'The Ostrogoths'; Kazanski, *Les Goths*; Brogiolo, 'Towns, Forts, and the Countryside'.

28 Fehr 'Volkstum as Paradigm', pp. 184-97; Halsall, 'Reihengräberzivilisation'.

29 Härke, 'All Quiet on the Western Front?', pp. 205-6; Wood, 'National Identities', p. 77.

All of these nationalist visions looked to the early Middle Ages for the origins of their nation-states and equated modern peoples with historical counterparts. Thus the Germans could claim rights to much of Europe on the basis that they were the direct descendants of ancient speakers of Germanic languages and their rightful heirs to the territory these ancestors had inhabited. They used an essentialist model of identity that argued for some ‘natural’ biological component that could be passed down over generations without change – despite the millennium and a half of evolving culture, language, and interactions – to legitimize their cleansing of impure genes from the population of this ‘rightfully German’ territory. Christian Spaniards could assert their right to dominate the Iberian peninsula and exclude both religious minorities and separatist movements by Basques and others based on the idea that their Visigothic ‘ancestors’ were divinely ordained to rule Iberia. The French could imagine their resistance against German occupation as descendants of ancient Gallo-Romans defending their lands against a new barbarian takeover.³⁰

After World War II, the prevailing nationalist conception of ethnic identities fell rapidly into disfavour. Given the horrors perpetrated under the nationalist/essentialist paradigm, it comes as no surprise that the war prompted historians, social scientists, and archaeologists to find less racially-oriented ways of evaluating and discussing the subject of ethnicity – and that debates on the topic can sometimes become contentious and personal.³¹ Among the most influential initial approaches among early medievalists was ‘ethnogenesis’ theory, promoted in different ways by Reinhard Wenskus and Herwig Wolfram. This approach argues that all identities are created and that examining the origin stories and ‘kernels of tradition’ (*Traditionskerne*) around which they coalesced would allow historians to study ethnic and other groups as formed by social processes, not as eternal and never-changing. Wenskus and Wolfram thus defined a ‘people’ by cultural markers rather than bloodlines.³²

30 For examples of French reactions to German invasion in World War II, see Piganiol, *L'empire chrétien*, pp. 465-56; Courcelle, *Histoire littéraire*, p. 255; Loyer, ‘Résistants et collaborateurs’, pp. 437-50. Also, Wood, ‘National Identities’, pp. 78-79; Ward-Perkins, *The Fall of Rome*, pp. 173-74; Goffart, *Barbarian Tides*, p. 231.

31 For a good overview, see Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, pp. 14-19. On rare occasions, older views were defended as containing still-useful elements, such as in Chadwick, *Nationalities of Europe*, pp. 50-90.

32 Wenskus, *Stammesbildung und Verfassung*; Wolfram, *The Roman Empire and Its Germanic Peoples*; Wolfram, *History of the Goths*; Wolfram, “Origo et religio”, pp. 19-38; Wolfram, ‘Auf der Suche nach der Ursprüngen’, pp. 11-22; Wolfram, ‘How Many Peoples are in a People?’, Murray,

Walter Pohl, once a student of Wolfram at the University of Vienna, began with this focus on a belief in common origins but moved beyond the single 'kernel of traditions' model to a wider model of varied perceptions, circumstances, and modes of identification.³³ Underlying his model are methodological tools and concepts drawn from sociology, anthropology, and literary theory – such as Benedict Anderson's 'imagined communities' and Fredrick Barth and T.H. Eriksen's description of ethnicity as a 'social construct'. These assert that ethnic or national identities are not objective, biological phenomena but instead are tools used within a social context to make sense of society, reducing some of the complexities so that peoples can be categorized along neat boundaries.³⁴ Patrick Geary has added to the model the idea of the 'situational construct', which explains seemingly conflicting information about identities that appear in primary sources as reflecting an ability to claim different identities in different circumstances.³⁵ For him, the Alamanni, the Goths, and other groups were social constructions which occurred in specific situations for specific purposes. These identities were thus capable of constant transformation as circumstances changed.³⁶

From an archaeological standpoint, Siân Jones, among others, introduced new ways to consider ethnicity that do not rely on an unprovable correlation of 'culture provinces' to ethnic groups. Like the historians above, Jones sees ethnic identity as based on a shared culture or common descent – whether real or just assumed. She therefore focuses on what the archaeological record reveals about culture and social relationships as a way to understand how they shaped people's conceptions of themselves. Cultural and material elements of a group identity would be negotiated like any other aspect in different ways according to context.³⁷ Along the same lines, Florin Curta's work has been highly influential for both archaeology and history. Curta argues that we can see traces of social practice, which may or may not relate to group identification, and can learn from them about the ways people chose to portray themselves within various social constructions,

'Reinhard Wenskus'; Wood, *Modern Origins*, pp. 299-301, 313. For the ancient world, Hall, *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity*, and *Hellenicity* follow a similar model.

33 Pohl, 'Telling the Difference', pp. 122-3; Pohl, 'Response', pp. 221-40; Pohl, 'Conceptions', esp. pp. 16-17, 21-22.

34 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*; Barth (ed.), *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*; Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, pp. 10-12, 18, 47, 60.

35 Geary, 'Situational Construct'.

36 Geary, 'Barbarians and Ethnicity', esp. pp. 108-10.

37 Jones, *Archaeology of Ethnicity*, esp. pp. 82-110, 130-31. See also Brather, 'Ethnic Identities as Constructions'; Halsall, 'Ethnicity and Early Medieval Cemeteries'; Halsall, *Cemeteries and Society*; Effros, *Merovingian Mortuary Archaeology*.

including ethnic ones.³⁸ His in-depth study of the Slavs demonstrates the construction of a people through contact with and labelling by Byzantine outsiders, drawing on pre-existing cultural traits.³⁹ In Iberia, there has been an increase in well-documented excavations in the past decade that have added to our understanding of cultural changes within the peninsula. While some tentatively associate these changes with the arrival of Visigoths and their cultural influence, the focus is increasingly on culture and strategic choices of identification rather than biology.⁴⁰

However, not everyone has agreed with these new historical and archaeological models. The most notable critiques of the 'Vienna school' have come from Walter Goffart and his former students at the University of Toronto. Goffart has criticized Wolfram especially as being too 'Germanist' and, like Pirenne, has continually sought in his work to minimize the significance of Germanic incomers on the Roman world.⁴¹ He is famous for his theory of accommodation, which states that tribal settlers within Roman territory were not invaders but guests entering on Roman terms.⁴² However, in an article from 2008, he removed the legacy of Germanic or barbarian tribes entirely, arguing that because the barbarians settled in Roman provinces and adopted Roman ways at the empire's encouragement, these peoples ceased to be barbarians and became Roman. Thus the successors to the Roman Empire were not Germanic barbarians but Romans, and through them Roman civilization fathered the early medieval kingdoms 'without interruption'.⁴³ In his 2006 *Barbarian Tides*, Goffart states that his central concern is to 'liberate barbarian history from the German nationalism that has suffused it ever since the sixteenth century', a goal which he accomplishes in part by using the term 'barbarian' rather than 'Germanic', thus including tribes which were not Germanic-speaking.

38 Curta, 'Remarks', pp. 162, 165-67, 178-81, 184-85; Curta, 'Review of Sebastian Brather, *Ethnische Interpretationen*', p. 91; Curta, 'From Kossinna to Bromley'.

39 Curta, *Making of the Slavs*. See also his critiques of ethnic ascription in Curta, 'From Kossinna to Bromley'. Walter Pohl has made similar inroads with the Avars: Pohl, 'A Non-Roman Empire'.

40 Most recently, see the contributions to Quirós Castillo and Castellanos (eds.), *Identidad y etnicidad en Hispania*.

41 Goffart was born to a Belgian diplomat and fled Europe ahead of Nazi occupation. As Ian Wood has noted, the parallel between his experience and Pirenne's is striking, though it is of course hard to know to what degree Goffart's Belgian heritage and childhood experiences have influenced his scholarship. Murray, 'Introduction: Walter André Goffart', pp. 3-7; Wood, *Modern Origins*, p. 314.

42 Goffart, *Barbarians and Romans*.

43 Goffart, 'Rome's Final Conquest', p. 86o.

Alexander C. Murray follows his mentor's lead in specifically attacking the concept of *Traditionskern* and the Vienna school, which he sees as both employing bad evidence and, in recent years, reviving ideas of biological kinship which Wenskus had rejected. He (rightly) challenges the existence of source evidence for the use of origin legends as kernels of tradition, and also (less correctly) views the concept of the situational or social construct as 'arbitrary' and merely a way to force contradictory evidence into the Vienna model.⁴⁴ Andrew Gillett highlights selective source use by early supporters of *Traditionskern* theories, particularly regarding royal titles. While literary histories employ ethnic titles like 'king of the Goths', fifth- and sixth-century official royal documents do not, leading Gillett to caution against seeing such titles as official bearers of tradition and accepting them without first interrogating the source.⁴⁵ The situational construct approach has also been rejected generally as going too far to a nihilist extreme; identity becomes meaningless and arbitrary if it is 'so evanescent as to be a will-o-the-wisp', allowing a person to choose to be a Roman one day and a Goth the next however he wished.⁴⁶

Many of these are reasonable and valid critiques. Early work by Wenskus and Wolfram did indeed make a number of assumptions that do not stand up under scrutiny.⁴⁷ In addition, some more recent work, like that of Peter Heather, claims to support the idea of social construction while continuing to rely on elements of a biological paradigm.⁴⁸ Other criticisms, though, descend into polemic.⁴⁹ The most stark of these is Murray's superfluous mention of Otto Höfler and his Nazi patron Heinrich Himmler in an article about Wenskus, which seems to exist only to encourage the reader to associate Wenskus and his followers with the stain of their

44 Murray, 'Reinhard Wenskus'.

45 Gillett, 'Was Ethnicity Politicized?', pp. 85-122; Gillett, 'Ethnogenesis: A Contested Model', pp. 241-60; Gillett, 'Introduction'. A student of Wolfram has now done a study of Vandal titles that is far more discerning: Steinacher, 'Who is the Barbarian?'

46 Quotation from Kulikowski, 'Nation versus Army', p. 74. See also Murray, 'Reinhard Wenskus', p. 58.

47 Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, pp. 457-62; Pohl, 'Response', pp. 224-25.

48 For example, as noted by Kulikowski, 'Nation versus Army', pp. 72-73; Heather, 'The Huns'; Heather, *The Goths*, p. 6; Heather, 'Disappearing and Reappearing Tribes'; Heather, 'The Creation of the Visigoths', p. 84.

49 For evaluations of the tone of these critiques, see Curta, 'Remarks', p. 160; Wood, 'National Identities', p. 79; Wood, *Modern Origins*, p. 314; Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, pp. 17-18; Pohl, 'Response', pp. 222, 239; Noble, *From Roman Provinces*, p. 91; Cusack, 'Review of Andrew Gillett (ed.), *On Barbarian Identity*', pp. 228-29; Heather, 'Ethnicity', pp. 33-36. Wolfram, *Gotische Studien*, p. 11.

nationalism.⁵⁰ Some of these criticisms, though, are simply mistaken. As both Walter Pohl and Ian Wood have noted, the specific elements used to dismiss the work of those associated with the Vienna school is extremely dated. The field has moved on, and few of those writing today can be said to represent the same ethnogenesis theory of 40 years ago.⁵¹

The intent of social constructionists is also misunderstood, in part because early presentations of the theory, at least in English, were unclear. Proponents do not view social construction as arbitrary and infinitely flexible, but as operating within the limits available within one's society.⁵² A pale-skinned, blonde American could not legitimately claim African-American identity and be accepted as such by others, for example, but someone with one African-American and one Caucasian parent whose skin and hair colour lay between the two extremes could *potentially* claim either identity depending on the circumstance. Also essential for understanding the situational construct is the fact that no individual need be identified in only one way. There are multiple forms or modes of identification – ethnic, religious, political, gender, citizenship, linguistic – and a person could be labelled according to any or all of these categories. We should consider a person's identity multidimensional, layered, and a composite of various aspects, not flat and static.⁵³ Within any given aspect of one's identity there are also layers. Christians can be subdivided into Catholics, Protestants, Lutherans, fundamentalists, and evangelists among others. A Charlestonian is also a South Carolinian, a Southerner, and an American. Some of these layers or modes of identification matter more in a given place, time, or circumstance than others, and the ways people choose to claim (or not claim) an affiliation may depend on this salience. Terms like American or Christian or Roman could also shift in meaning over time, or refer to more than one of these forms or layers at a time.⁵⁴ Thus the same person being referred to as a Goth and a Roman in the early medieval sources is

50 Cusack, 'Review of Andrew Gillett (ed.), *On Barbarian Identity*', p. 228; Murray, 'Reinhard Wenskus', pp. 55-57. See also Goffart, *Barbarian Tides*, pp. 51-52; Goffart, 'Impinge', p. 31; Goffart, 'Two Notes'; Wood, 'National Identities', p. 79.

51 Pohl, 'Response'; Wood, *Modern Origins*, p. 314; Romeny, 'Syriac Orthodox Christians', p. 187; Pohl, 'Introduction: Ethnicity, Religion, and Empire', p. 4.

52 Reimitz, *Frankish Identity*, p. 5; Geary, 'Situational Construct'; Pohl, 'Response', p. 238.

53 Pohl, 'Introduction – Strategies of Identification', pp. 4, 50; Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, pp. 38-39, 473-74; Worchel, 'A Multidimensional Model', esp. pp. 15, 17-18, 32.

54 For discussion of this concept using the example of Roman identity, see Pohl, 'Romanness: A Multiple Identity and its Changes', pp. 406-07, 414-16; Pohl, 'Introduction – Strategies of Identification', pp. 23-24; Pohl, 'Christian and Barbarian Identities', pp. 27-34; Pohl, 'Introduction: Ethnicity, Religion, and Empire', pp. 7-8.

not necessarily a contradiction; it is more likely to be a reflection of the varied possible meanings or layers each term could have, the salience of each aspect fluctuating over time, and the ability of that individual to claim each in different ways or in different situations.

The interests of Pohl and of others who draw on his methods (myself included) have moved beyond the early *Traditionskern* model to concentrate more on the processes that underlie ethnic and other forms of identification and the ways these continually transformed group identities.⁵⁵ Recent projects have asked how various ‘visions of community’ were created and reinforced by drawing on available resources from the past for use in the present, and which sorts of visions were deemed most useful for which purposes. Some scholars have made important contributions to our understanding of these visions by examining the Biblical, patristic, and early historiographical sources that authors drew on to tell new stories about who the ‘Franks’ or the ‘Christian people’ were.⁵⁶ Some have focused in on strategies of identification or distinction that helped people feel a sense of commonality that could strengthen a particular identity or add new nuances to it.⁵⁷ Some specifically analyse the repertoires or discourses that determined the limits within which the navigation of a changing social landscape could occur, and the degree of room for manoeuvre (or *Spielräume*, as Helmut Reimitz puts it) afforded as both circumstances and identities shifted.⁵⁸ Overall, practitioners of this method, which is fast becoming the new standard, concern themselves with perception and the mechanisms of social change – and identification’s role in that process.

The use of the term ‘ethnic’ and the concept of ethnicity to describe identities like Frank, Goth, and Roman has also developed since Wenskus’ time. These are particularly controversial because of the wide variety of ways scholars across disciplines have used them. Again, the stereotypical and popular image of ethnicity is linked to biology, envisioning Germanness or Gothicness as inherent in the blood and an unchangeable attribute from

55 For explanations and examples of this methodology, see the recent special issue of *Early Medieval Europe* on ‘Being Roman After Rome’: 22, no. 4 (2014); the volumes stemming from major international projects led and co-edited by Pohl: *Visions of Community, Strategies of Identification*, and *Post-Roman Transitions*; Gantner, McKittrick, and Meeder (eds.), *Resources of the Past*; Reimitz, *Frankish Identity*.

56 Wood, *Politics of Identity*; Reimitz, *Frankish Identity*; Heydemann, ‘Biblical Israel’.

57 Pohl and Heydemann (eds.), *Strategies of Identification*, and underlying it and developing the idea in slightly different ways, the earlier Pohl and Reimitz (eds.), *Strategies of Distinction*.

58 Pohl, ‘Introduction – Strategies of Identification’; Reimitz, *Frankish Identity*; Heydemann, ‘Biblical Israel’; Maskarinec, ‘Who Were the Romans?’.

birth. This is manifestly untrue, but that does not change the fact that people both in the distant past and today have used the concept to shape their visions of how society is structured and to assign identities to groups and individuals. Fredegar's descriptions of Francia as containing many different peoples, including Franks, Romans, Burgundians, and Saxons, exist regardless of our ability to easily label and understand these ways of thinking about the social landscape.

Walter Pohl has recently written an excellent explanation of the problems inherent in writing about ethnicity on a scholarly level, and of his best practice for attempting to explain ethnic visions of community despite the difficulties, which is the most workable existing model.⁵⁹ Pohl defines ethnic identity as 'a relational mode of social organization among a number of distinctive groups, which are perceived as being constituted by an ingrained common nature'. Ethnicity, then, is this way of imagining and organizing the world, as well as the discourse that gives meaning to it.⁶⁰ That is, people talk about German and French identity, or Gothic and Roman identity, *as if* they were inherent in a person's genes, even though modern science and social science shows they are not. In order to understand how people who thought in this ethnic manner understood their social landscape – how, despite the apparent paradox, the reality of social construction could coexist with the idea of permanence in people's minds and affect their interactions with each other – we must acknowledge that ethnicity and ethnic discourse could be 'real' and 'natural' phenomena in people's minds.

To do this, Pohl has moved away from looking for the 'ideal types' – defined by a list of necessary criteria to quantify what 'counted' as an ethnic identity through which Franks could distinguish themselves from Romans and other peoples – to instead focus on perception.⁶¹ When did people in the early Middle Ages choose to use ethnic discourse as opposed to other ways of imagining and discussing their society? How did they do so, and for what purposes? What use was ethnicity as a strategy of identification compared with other ways people could identify themselves and others? How did authors use ethnic visions of community (that is, visions of multiple

59 Pohl, 'Introduction – Strategies of Identification'. Among the sociological perspectives he draws on, perhaps the most helpful are Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups*; Jenkins, *Rethinking Ethnicity*. See also Banks, *Ethnicity: Anthropological Constructions*; Cornell and Hartmann, *Ethnicity and Race*; de Vos, 'Ethnic Pluralism'; Jenkins, *Social Identity*.

60 Pohl, 'Introduction – Strategies of Identification', p. 2.

61 Pohl attempted a criteria list in 'Telling the Difference', and Smith did so in *Ethnic Origins of Nations*, pp. 22-30. For his current stance, see Pohl, 'Introduction – Strategies of Identification', pp. 6-7.

peoples who could be described with ethnonyms) in concert with political, religious, civic, regional, or other identities to both describe and shape their social landscape? Considering these questions is not slipping back into essentialism; it is assessing the ways our authors played on the *idea* of essentialism – or refrained from doing so – to specific effect.⁶²

Methodology

In this book, I draw directly on this new Vienna methodology to understand the meanings of the ethnonyms Roman, Goth, and Frank in the Merovingian and Visigothic kingdoms of the sixth and seventh centuries, and the ways Romans negotiated their new social landscape – eventually losing their Roman identity in favour of the Gothic or Frankish identity of their rulers. As I will show, the essential mechanism behind this change depends greatly on the ability of these terms to be used in multiple ways in this period, especially with political, religious, and descent overtones. One could be a Goth or a Frank in a political sense as subjects of the ‘kings of the Goths/Franks’, as officials serving in their government, or as soldiers fighting for their army. This aspect of a person’s identity corresponded to their residence within a specific post-Roman kingdom and, as we shall see, would be most likely to appear in the written sources in international contexts, such as when two armies fought against each other or envoys were sent from one king to another. The most relevant identity to mention in these cases was the one that highlighted the king and kingdom on whose behalf they acted. In Visigothic Spain, one could also be Roman or Gothic by religion. Until 589, when the Visigoths converted from the Arian form of Christianity to the Catholic one, it was regularly assumed – and often true – that people born to Gothic families professed Arian Christianity, and those descended from former Roman citizens followed Catholic Christianity. After conversion, the ruling Visigoths deliberately tied their Gothic identity to their new Catholic faith instead, and so ‘Gothic religion’ came to indicate Catholicism rather than Arianism.⁶³ We will also see that, in both Gaul and Spain, one could also be a Roman, Goth, or Frank by descent from ancestors who successfully claimed these identities.

All three of these aspects of identity – political, religious, and descent – could overlap, and the ways they did so can tell us a great deal about

62 Reimitz, *Frankish Identity*, is the most sustained monographic account of this model.

63 See below, Chapter 2.

shifting scripts of identity: that is, changes in the ways people thought and wrote about being Roman or Gothic or Frankish as they found themselves in new circumstances. Gregory of Tours, writing in sixth-century Gaul, could have claimed to be Roman by descent and Catholic by faith, a Frank politically as a loyal subject of Merovingian kings, and also a variety of other identities not associated with these ethnonyms: senatorial social status, residence of the city of Tours, and descent from a prominent religious family that provided many bishops and clergymen. He did not claim all of these explicitly, but they were all among the repertoire of possible choices he had to place himself within a contemporary social context. Gregory chose to emphasize those layers of his identity that mattered most to him and served his particular strategies when writing his *Histories* and accounts of saints' lives. These included numerous references to important family members emphasized for their status as senators, bishops, and good Catholics. In the process, he implied all these things about himself as well.⁶⁴ Other authors, like Venantius Fortunatus, made different choices within the same social landscape, accentuating noble social status and Romanness in many forms. Isidore of Seville was instrumental in shaping a vision of a unified Gothic Catholic Spain, in part by playing on the intersections of religious, political, and descent scripts of Gothicism.⁶⁵ Fredegar envisioned a diverse Frankish kingdom along ethnic lines – as comprised of multiple 'peoples' labelled with ethnonyms rather than other types of identifiers like Gregory's social status or city labels.⁶⁶ His strategy of identification thus allowed ethnic diversity to coexist with political unity by acknowledging that these affiliations were compatible rather than contradictory aspects of his contemporaries' identities. Individuals' identities were not monolithic but composite, not mutually exclusive but overlapping and interacting, and each of these authors provides a different lens through which to view these identities in context.

As historians, we have a glimpse into the social world of the past through the different types of descriptions authors left behind, and these descriptions bear the marks of their authors' motives, experiences, and identities – themselves marked by the society around them. By examining the choices each author made, historians can thus see beyond the authors themselves to the shifting meanings of these identities within their societies and the ways they and their contemporaries drew on these to negotiate their place

64 See below, Chapter 4.

65 See below, Chapter 5.

66 See below, Chapter 6.

within a world that was rapidly changing. These authors provide hints as to which identities mattered most, how they were constructed, and what the consequences of their importance were in specific times and places. We will see in the chapters that follow that a decline in identification as Roman in Visigothic Iberia corresponds directly to an increase in political and religious aspects of Gothic identity. Hispano-Romans who came to feel Gothic through political loyalties and a common Catholic faith gradually ceased to connect with their Roman ancestry at all. In Merovingian Gaul, the dominance of classical ways of identifying people – such as by noble social status, city of residence, and well-known relatives – makes way by the mid-seventh century to an increase in individuals identified as Roman who now appear to be exceptions to an increasingly Frankish norm. Parallel to this development is, like in Spain, an increase in phrases that associate Frankishness with political affiliation – kings of the Franks, armies of the Franks, and ‘the Franks’ as a unit for collective action. Through an analysis of historical, hagiographical, and legal sources from both the Visigothic and Merovingian kingdoms, this study will trace the developments of these identity shifts and illuminate the reasons for differences in experience between the two kingdoms.

Chapter Breakdown

Part one of this book will address Iberia under Visigothic rule. Chapter one begins with the sixth century, which culminated in the conversion of the Goths to Catholicism. It demonstrates that the Visigothic kings Leovigild and Reccared intended to provide a common religious identity for Romans and Goths, both before and during the conversion. While an exact correlation of Goths with Arianism and Romans with Catholicism is too simplistic, as there were important exceptions who were Goths by birth and Catholic by faith (or Romans by birth and Arian by faith), the common assumption that descent and religious affiliations mapped precisely onto one another was an ideological barrier to kingdom-wide unity. It needed to be eliminated from the collective imagination before unity could progress. The idea was so integral to people’s mindsets that John of Biclar’s *Chronicle* ends with the story of the conversion as the culmination of the Goths’ journey to salvation. He presents their conquest of the Iberian peninsula as an essential part of the unification that allowed the Goths to bring everyone within the region together in a harmonious, Catholic community. Isidore of Seville’s *History of the Goths* also depicts the Visigoths as divinely ordained to unify the

peninsula, in part through their conversion. Records of the Third Church Council of Toledo – at which Reccared made the conversion official – are full of language linking the Gothic ‘people’ with Catholic orthodoxy, and showing explicit official intent to shape the social discourse to accommodate both Goths and Romans in a single community. Finally, in the *Lives of the Fathers of Mérida* – a source written in the 630s about events in the late sixth century – a Catholic Goth and a Catholic Roman are shown cooperating against a common Arian enemy, emphasizing that Iberia’s divide should be along religious, not ethnic, lines.

Chapter two covers the early seventh century, the age of Isidore of Seville, following the adoption of Catholicism through a period of growing emphasis on Gothic Catholic strategies of identification. Isidore’s own history of this period, and the Fourth Council of Toledo over which he presided, show active promotion of a Gothic identity based around Catholicism, and thus open to those of Roman descent. The subsequent Fifth and Sixth Councils of Toledo reiterate the common message that all loyal Catholic subjects were considered ‘Goths’ on both a religious and a political level. Chapter three illustrates the effectiveness of Isidore and his successors’ vision of community by examining the language of the *Visigothic Code* of 654 and later secular and canon law. The *Code* formally eliminated Roman-Gothic differences, and soon after neither ‘Roman’ nor ‘Goth’ merit regular mention in either narrative or legal sources. This suggests that assimilation was so extensive that these identities no longer needed mentioning. Difference was viewed along other lines like political factions, or Christian versus Jew. Overall, in the Iberian peninsula under Visigothic rule, the opening of religious Gothicism to all Catholics made it easier for those of Roman descent to envision themselves as Goths on a political level and eventually for this Gothicism to supersede their Roman identity on all levels.

Part Two turns to sixth- and seventh-century Merovingian Gaul, where a similar phenomenon occurs, but with less thorough assimilation in a somewhat different environment. Chapter four examines the language of Gregory of Tours, the sixth-century historian and hagiographer. Gregory is well-known for not using the term ‘Roman’ to describe himself and contemporaries. This chapter will show that the reason for this is not that no one identified as Roman by his time, nor that using ethnonyms would interfere with his ability to promote strategies of Christian identification. Instead, the main reason is that the urban identities, family connections, and social status markers that mattered greatly in Roman times remained especially meaningful and salient forms of identity in his society. They were more useful identifiers for him within this environment, in most cases,

than broader categories like Roman and Frank. Chapter five compares Gregory with his contemporary, the poet Venantius Fortunatus. Because Fortunatus did refer to some of his poetic subjects as Romans, his choice of terms illustrates the ways contemporaries negotiated identity shifts, especially the rising importance of descent as a way to identify as Roman. Fortunatus drew on literary resources from the Roman world to flatter, chastise, and eulogize his poetic subjects according to recognizable though slightly adapted scripts of identity.

Chapter six moves ahead to the seventh century and the *Chronicle* of Fredegar. This *Chronicle* uses Roman, Frank, and other ethnonyms frequently and includes many examples of political Frankishness that are mostly absent from Gregory and Fortunatus' work. Thus, it sheds light on the increasing adoption of Frankish identity, especially along political lines, which appears to have made Romanness an exception worth mentioning. Chapter seven considers the evidence of three hagiographical works that show that the language of the three major narrative sources can be considered representative of the period. The *Life* of Caesarius of Arles from the mid-sixth century reads much like Gregory's *Histories*. Locals of Roman descent are described by city of origin or residence, important or noteworthy relatives, and senatorial or other social status. Because Arles changed hands from the Visigoths to the Ostrogoths to the Franks during Caesarius' time, however, these peoples appear regularly in the narrative and are described by these ethnonyms, particularly with political nuances tying them to their roles as soldiers, officers, or envoys for the ruling kingdoms. Gauger of Cambrai's *Life*, written in the early seventh century, describes both a Roman and a Frank as possessing these identities 'by birth' and depicts a society in which these two peoples lived alongside one another, served in both church and secular offices together, and had begun to experience significant cultural overlaps. Finally, the *Life* of Eligius of Noyon from the later seventh century presents an image of a highly mixed society. Groups of soldiers and envoys include Romans, Franks, Burgundians, and even a Saxon. The author, like Fredegar, seems to assume that such intermixing is normal and that his audience will want to know the background – often specifically 'by birth' – of these individuals more than any other mode of identification he could use. Eligius himself is identified as a Roman, but only in a context in which it stands out as exceptional. Together these three saints' *vitae* confirm that ethnic forms of identification became more important in Gaul over the course of these two centuries and that Roman identity began to stand out as an anomaly and mentioned more often as one of a variety of peoples living harmoniously together under Frankish rule.

In comparing these two kingdoms that are usually studied in isolation, this study will highlight the commonalities of experience during the transition from a more Roman to a more medieval world. In the sixth century, authors like Gregory of Tours – whose society retained many Roman characteristics – saw themselves and others through a Roman lens, leading them to write about ‘barbarians’ and ‘senators’, eloquence and civility, and home cities and noble relatives. Even hagiographers in the more clearly divided Spain of this time noted these characteristics when discussing individuals on a local level. Later authors, like Fredegar and Isidore of Seville, wrote within a different framework, projecting images of a far more Frankish or Gothic society, and reinforcing these very images through the act of relating them. That they saw many of their countrymen as Franks or Goths indicates that an important mental shift had begun to take place between Gregory’s time and their own. The emphasis on political language in Fredegar’s writing and on unified political, religious, and descent rhetoric in Isidore’s reveals how these identities were reconstructed in ways that facilitated this shift from Roman to Frank or Goth. Gallo- and Hispano-Romans gradually came to associate themselves politically and religiously with their new rulers, and most of them would, over the course of a few generations, come to identify entirely as Goths and Franks. In the wake of this political shift, their social landscape and their experiences of the world – and consequently the identity they held as most essential and deeply rooted – had ceased to be ‘Roman’.

Terminology

Two of my particular choices of terminology and approach differ from other scholars and require additional explanation. In this study, I will focus more on differentiation between the political, religious, and descent overtones with which authors used the terms Roman, Goth, and Frank than on whether we should consider these examples as representing ‘ethnic’ identification. In doing so, I depart slightly from the language used by Pohl and many others writing along Vienna school lines, though not from the spirit of these studies. I have made this choice because there are still many scholars who will latch onto any use of the terms ‘ethnic’ or ‘ethnicity’ in studies of the early medieval world, and subsequently read based on their own preconceived notions and expectations of what the term should mean, whether it is useful as a category, and how to delineate it. An excellent example of this is the neglect, until quite recently, of studies of Roman

identity in the early Middle Ages.⁶⁷ Because 'Roman' in the ancient world is most closely associated with cultural and legal identities, it is regularly assumed to be unable to function as an ethnic term denoting one 'people' alongside Franks, Goths, and others. This is a scholarly blind spot caused by expectations which colour historians' views of the sources and what can be learned from them. Yet, as we will see in this study, Roman identity *did* come to be seen in some aspects as ethnic, as just one among many peoples defined in the same way (however that happened to be). By leaving aside judgement as to whether or not the political, religious, or descent overtones authors used constituted ethnic discourse, I hope to focus attention on how people re-envisioned their identities by altering the balance of these aspects and by drawing on the interplay between them. This will both highlight the multiple layers of identity which contemporaries could claim, regardless of what ethnic group they might be associated with, and allow the sources to speak more for themselves and less to any particular taxonomy into which we historians may wish to fit them.

The second terminological choice in need of explanation is my use of 'Spain' and 'Iberia' interchangeably to describe the kingdom ruled by the Visigoths and the peninsula where it was located. It has become common in the past decade to replace 'Spain' with 'Iberia' in scholarly works on the Iberian peninsula, and the title of the 'Late Antique and Early Medieval Iberia' series to which this book belongs is part of this trend. There are good reasons to make this change, most importantly that throughout history, this geographical region has been politically divided more than it has been unified, and not all of these polities have used 'Spain' in their descriptions of themselves – including, of course, modern Portugal. 'Iberia' focuses our attention on the geographical region rather than the modern borders of Spain and reminds us that there is a difference between the peninsula and the countries within it. This, however, is problematic in its own way. Visigoths regularly used *Hispania* to refer to their kingdom, referring to the Roman name for this part of the empire. The modern translation of this term is 'Spain'. But geographically neither *Hispania* nor Iberia covers the province of Gallia Narbonensis or Septimania that the Visigoths also ruled, a territory that was within Roman Gaul and is currently part of France. The Visigoths dealt with this imperfectly, sometimes using *Hispania* as an imprecise but easier way to refer to their whole kingdom, and sometimes using *Hispania* and *Gallia* instead. There are no perfect solutions to this terminological

67 See *EME* 22, no. 4 (2014) for both discussion of the reasons for this neglect and studies seeking to fill the scholarly gap.

quandary, and while I agree that Iberia has its advantages and have used it in this study, I also use Spain when it seems the more obvious choice in context. They should be read interchangeably and understood to refer to the entire Visigothic kingdom, in the same imprecise manner that *Hispania* for the Visigoths often included their Gallic territories too.

Part I
From a Roman to a Gothic World in Visigothic Spain

In the spring of 507, King Alaric II of the Visigoths was killed while fighting the Frankish King Clovis at the Battle of Vouillé in Gaul.¹ As the Franks moved in to control the former Visigothic territory in the region, the defeated Visigoths retreated from their Gallic capital at Toulouse into the territory they loosely controlled in Spain, keeping only the southern region of Septimania – which they called Gallia or Gallia Narbonensis – of all their Gallic possessions. From this point on, their home would be Spain. Over the course of the sixth century, they would come to dominate the peninsula and to wrest its other inhabitants into (sometimes uneasy) submission. These inhabitants included Germanic Sueves who had settled in Gallaecia, Basques in the north, and the citizens of the former Western Roman Empire whom we often call Hispano-Romans.

As these Romans adapted to being ruled by the Visigoths, their Roman identity would also adapt and ultimately fade away. Unlike in Gaul, as we will see later, this process in Spain was aided by the kings. After a period of Ostrogothic regency, succession crises, and a civil war leading to Byzantine control of some lands along the Mediterranean, Leovigild (r. 569-586) came to the throne.² He promptly began a campaign of unification, on multiple levels. Politically, he asserted full, central control over most of the Iberian peninsula. He conquered both semi-independent cities like Córdoba and entire regions like the Suevic kingdom in the northwest – including territory in the south which his rebelling son, Hermenegild, had claimed in the early 580s – and he asserted greater control over places which he already held, like Mérida.³ Although for purposes of propaganda, these land gains were portrayed as reconquests by a rightful ruler, much of the territory which Leovigild ‘regained’ had probably never truly been under Visigothic control.⁴ He also built a new city named for his other son, Reccared, to assert his

1 A broad overview of the material presented in this section has already appeared in Buchberger, ‘Growth of Gothic Identity’. For a good recent overview of the current state of historical and archaeological scholarship on Visigothic Spain, see Wood and Martínez Jiménez, ‘New Directions’.

2 For a more detailed account of events, see Collins, *Visigothic Spain*; Sayas Abengochea and García Moreno, *Romanismo y Germanismo*; and the older, but still useful Claude, *Adel, Kirche und Königtum* and Thompson, *Goths in Spain*. On the Ostrogoths, see Díaz and Valverde, ‘Goths Confronting Goths’, pp. 353-86.

3 Kulikowski, *Late Roman Spain*, pp. 277-86, makes a good case for the independence of many cities and minimal Visigothic control in the peninsula before Leovigild’s time. See also Collins, ‘Mérida and Toledo’, p. 202. On the conflict with Hermenegild, see Hillgarth, ‘Coins and Chronicles’, pp. 483-508.

4 Kulikowski, *Late Roman Spain*, pp. 285-86; John of Biclar, *Chronica*, pp. 212-15.

authority and to portray himself as a proper imperial successor.⁵ Along with this territorial unification, Leovigild attempted ethnic unification by giving official sanction in his revised law code to marriages between those of Gothic and Roman descent. It is possible that intermixing was already common, but Leovigild gave it the symbolic weight of his seal of approval. Finally, he encouraged religious unification by making conversion from Catholicism to Arianism easier and, in his mind, hopefully more appealing by eliminating from Arian doctrine the requirement of rebaptism for converts from Catholicism. His son, Reccared (r. 586-601), completed the unity his father had begun – though not the way Leovigild would have wished – by converting to Catholicism in 587 and taking the entire kingdom with him over the next two years. The conversion was made official at the Third Council of Toledo (589), opening the way for the collaboration between church and state that would be a hallmark of the seventh-century kingdom, though there were still a few revolts by Arians who opposed the change.⁶ Both kings were motivated in these actions by a desire to strengthen their hold over the peninsula and bring the fairly separate populations they ruled into union.

The period from 589 to the middle of the seventh century was one of consolidation. Religious unity led to increased persecution of those, like Jews, who did not conform, as with the harsh laws restricting them and forcing their conversion enacted by Sisebut (r. 612-621). Consolidation also occurred on a territorial level. During Sisebut's reign, the Byzantines were pushed out of some of their holdings, with Suinthila (r. 621-631) finally defeating them and seizing all their territory in Spain in the 620s. This was also the age of Isidore of Seville, the prolific author and influential religious leader who chaired church councils, wrote a history of the Goths, and served as both adviser and tutor to Sisebut.

After a series of short reigns and coups, Chindaswinth (r. 642-653) was elected king. He and his son, Recceswinth (r. 653-672), issued a number of laws which Recceswinth published in 654 along with a collection of old laws which were to remain in force. His *Visigothic Code* (*Lex Visigothorum*)

5 On Reccopolis, see Olmo Enciso, *Recópolis: un paseo*; Olmo Enciso, 'Royal Foundation', esp. pp. 181, 192. Other imperial imagery appears on his coins, for which, see Hillgarth, 'Coins and Chronicles'; Miles, *Coinage of the Visigoths*; McCormick, *Eternal Victory*, pp. 317-20; García Moreno, 'Prosopography, Nomenclature, and Royal Succession', p. 146.

6 *VSPE* V.12, pp. 92-93; John of Biclar, *Chronica*, p. 218; Stocking, *Bishops, Councils, and Consensus*; Díaz and Valverde, 'Theoretical Strength', p. 75; Gallego Blanco, 'Los concilios', p. 738; Geary, 'Barbarians and Ethnicity', p. 127. On Reccared as a unifier, see Castellanos, *Los godos y la cruz*.

superseded all previous codes and would remain the centrepiece of Spanish law long after the demise of the Visigothic kingdom. The promulgation of this code, and a similarly focused church council the following year, marks the last stage of the shift to Gothic identity in the seventh century. In rescinding previous laws, the *Visigothic Code* set out one law explicitly for 'Goths and Romans alike'. Though the variety of law books used in the Visigothic kingdom probably all applied universally anyway, the compilation of the valid ones into a single document made a strong statement of unity. From this point on, Roman identity virtually disappears from the record. The identities that mattered most at the end of the seventh century were allegiances to the right political factions and renunciation of Judaism in favour of Christianity. Recceswinth's successor, Wamba (r. 672-680), faced a revolt in Septimania that one of his generals, a duke named Paul, joined. He suppressed the revolt, but was later deposed in suspicious circumstances while he was ill, and Ervig (r. 680-687) took the throne. Ervig quickly held a church council to legitimize his rule and repeal some of the unpopular laws which Wamba had enacted. He added his own laws to the *Visigothic Code*, restricting the activities of the Jews, and reissued it. Civil war plagued the kingdom in the early eighth century, and in 711 the invading Arabs seized control of all but a small northern strip of the peninsula. The Visigothic kingdom in Spain had come to an end.

This section will explore the process by which the shift from Roman to Gothic identity occurred through these three main periods. First we will investigate the era of Leovigild and Reccared and the expansion of options for identifying as Gothic which the latter's conversion facilitated. The texts of Isidore's time will then be examined as deliberate promoters of political and religious Gothicness. Finally, the language of the *Visigothic Code* and later secular and church law will reveal the absence of 'Roman' and eventually even 'Gothic' labels, a sign that assimilation was so thorough that these were no longer the most salient, remarkable strategies of identification within the Visigothic social landscape.