

Jennifer Neal

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Final Thesis

### Visigoths and Romans: Integration and Ethnicity

Outside of Inginius' fine home in Narbo, the January weather was far from pleasant. Inside the main apartments of the house, a woman and man sat beside each other enacting a Christian marriage ceremony. Emblems lay heavy against the woman's body, indicating her imperial rank. Poised and proper as ever, she glanced again at the man who sat beside her wearing the garb of a Roman general and looking pleased. The audience gazed at her, exclaiming quietly at her beauty and the simple gown that draped from her shoulders. She smiled and turned her attention to the youths standing before her. Fifty young men, all dressed in different colors of silk, held platters that overflowed with gold and jewels so precious they nearly took her breath away. The irony almost drew a laugh from her lips. All of the wealth on those platters might be gifts meant to impress her, but they had been stolen from the coffers of her fellow Roman nobles during the Sack of Rome.<sup>1</sup>

That woman was Galla Placidia. The year was 414 and Galla Placidia, Roman princess and half-sister of Honorius, emperor of the Western Empire, sat next to Athaulf, barbarian king of the Visigoths.<sup>2</sup> Willing as she was to marry Athaulf, there was no disguising the fact that he and his army of barbarians had pillaged her home and the surrounding areas to gain the treasure he now presented to her. Yet for all his Roman trappings, Athaulf was no Roman. He was a

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<sup>1</sup> Stewart Irvin Oost, *Galla Placidia: A Biographical Essay*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), pp. 127-129.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas S. Burns, *Barbarians within the Gates of Rome: a study of military policy and the barbarians, ca. 375-425 A.D.* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 258.

Visigoth, a member of a confederation of tribes in constant conflict with the Roman people since before the Battle of Adrianople in 378. Athaulf hoped that in marrying the princess, he would become a general in the Roman army at the very least. Everything about the wedding was Roman, yet Athaulf, wearing the uniform of a general, was not accepted by the Romans as a high ranking member of the military or as a citizen.<sup>3</sup> He was seen more as a rebel leader because he had declared himself king of the Visigoths. The marriage was more a political ploy than a love story, but any marriage Galla Placidia might have looked forward to would have been similar. If Athaulf had his own plans to use his marriage to benefit his people and himself politically, Galla Placidia certainly did as well.<sup>4</sup> She put much effort into making Athaulf's political stance pro-Roman.<sup>5</sup>

Galla Placidia's marriage was part of the process of the ethnogenesis of a mixed group of peoples from outside the Roman borders that history knows as the Visigoths (the Goths, barbarians or the Germans). In the fourth century the individual tribes became conscious of themselves as a people, and Roman opposition to these tribes facilitated their cohesion. The Visigoths constituted many different peoples that Rome conceived as one large group. The Romans were the first to identify these tribes as Visigoths, and they, in doing so, forced this identity upon the tribes; yet at the same time, they attempted to keep them separate from their own Roman population. The Romans were insistent on isolating the Visigoths in order to protect the citizens from the "uncivilized rabble." In this process, the Romans did not recognize how effectively they were changing (in fact creating) the Visigoths. The Romans used the Visigoths

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<sup>3</sup> Burns, *Barbarians within the Gates of Rome*, pp. 258-260.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 259-260.

<sup>5</sup> Oost, *Galla Placidia*, p. 122.

in the military, but hoped to keep them from the core of their society. They only wanted the Visigoths in the empire so they could support the military. The Romans sustained the myth of the Visigoths and other barbarians as “the other” who were at the disposal of the Romans. However, while Roman thinking was focused on maintaining the status quo, the Visigoths were Romanizing and finding ways to gain influence within the empire. In looking at the ethnogenesis of the barbarians, it is important to recognize that the barbarians may have been individual groups originally, but they were forced by circumstances under a single banner, and eventually Gothic culture attained many similarities to Roman culture. However, the Romans and Visigoths still considered themselves separate even though their cultures eventually became extremely similar. The process of this ethnogenesis for the Goths was inconsistent. There was no smooth timeline of changes for the Visigoths. The Romans sought to prevent Visigoth immersion into Roman life. In order to control the Goths, the Roman government had to acculturate to some degree, which facilitated the ethnic change of the Visigoths.

One of the most influential historians who focused on Rome during the late fourth and early fifth century was Edward Gibbon, author of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-1789). He argued that the barbarian tribes were one of the causes for the so-called fall of Rome. This concept still influences ideas about the Roman-barbarian interaction through the assertion that the barbarians only brought destruction to the empire.<sup>6</sup> Gibbon’s work focuses on the army and politics of the time, as well as how the Germanic tribes caused the downfall of a

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<sup>6</sup> Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire volume I*, (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc, 1952), p. v.

long lasting empire.<sup>7</sup> Lynn White, Jr (1907-1987), professor of history at the University of California, and author of *Transformation of the Roman World: Gibbon's Problems after Two Centuries*, claimed in 1966 that the fall of Rome was not caused by the Germanic peoples, but by the Roman determination to continue their corrupted and tyrannical patterns of governance.<sup>8</sup> While disagreeing with Gibbon in significant ways, they both agreed that the empire itself did fall, though for different reasons.

White agrees with and cited Alfons Dopsch, an Austrian historian of the 1920s, saying, "The Germans did not behave as enemies of culture, destroying or abolishing it; on the contrary they preserved and developed it."<sup>9</sup> This statement suggests that one hundred and fifty years after Gibbon wrote about the "fall of Rome," historians began to question whether it was really the Germans who had cause "the fall." Henri Pirenne (1862-1935), a medieval historian from Belgium, also disagreed with Gibbon. He claims that the Germans did not attempt to change the government in any way but merely desired to participate in it.<sup>10</sup> Gibbons' paradigm was accepted for a long time and his work has shaped the way that most people imagine the Roman Empire to have fallen. In the century following Gibbon's work, many scholars began to oppose Gibbon's stance that the barbarians were a major instigator of the fall of Rome.

As studies continued in the 1970s and 1980s, historians began to question whether Rome had fallen or had instead been transformed by the influence of the Germanic tribes. Patrick Geary, historian and professor at UCLA and author of *Before France and Germany*, looks at the

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<sup>7</sup> Lynn White, jr. *Transformation of the Roman World: Gibbons' Problems after Two Centuries*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966), p.33.

<sup>8</sup> White, *Transformation of the Roman World*, p. 183.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 184.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 185.

process of the evolving Roman Empire. He writes, “We shall start with the first century and the early phase of the Roman invention of the barbarian world, and end by looking forward to 800, when at last the barbarian world feels compelled to reinvent the Roman.”<sup>11</sup> He suggests in this statement that as the power of Rome came more under barbarian influence, the Germans became Romans, but they added elements of their own Germanic culture until the empire was no longer distinctly Roman. In this sense, Geary disagrees with both Gibbon and White.

In the late 1980s, historians continued to look at Germanic and Roman culture as Geary had, in such a way that they continued to theorize that the Romans did not merely make the Germans more Roman, but in some ways the Germans also influenced Rome. Theorizing on the “Germanization” of the Romans blossomed as historians shifted toward social history. In 1986, Arther Ferrill, professor at the University of Washington, argued in *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, that both the Germanic and Roman cultures were constructed around warfare, and so in fact they were quite similar.<sup>12</sup> Other authors looked further into cultural similarities and changes. Among contemporary historians, it became a common understanding that the Germanic tribes brought as much to Roman culture as the Romans brought to theirs, as has been argued by Patrick Gery. Stewart Irvin Oost, author of *Galla Placidia Augusta*, agreed with Geary that in Late Antiquity the Roman Empire was becoming “Germanized.” This argument was supported by many historians. Oost claimed that while the Visigoths were changing, they were exceedingly useful in the military and brought many new ideas to Rome, and that the Germans were

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<sup>11</sup> Patrick J. Geary, *Before France & Germany: The creation and transformation of the Merovingian world*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. viii.

<sup>12</sup> Arther Ferrill, *The Fall of the Roman Empire: The military explanation*, (New York, NY: Thames and Hudson, 1986), p. 8.

beginning to bear an influence on Rome.<sup>13</sup> Thomas Burns' *Barbarians within the Gates of Rome*, falls into the same historiographic tradition when he discusses the military policy of the empire regarding the Germanic tribes. He says that the Germanic tribes' political and social characteristics influenced the Roman military.<sup>14</sup> Most historians agree with the idea that the Germanic tribes and the Romans were influenced by each other.

In recent years historians have investigated ethnicity and the process of Romanization, as well as the social growth of the Germanic tribes that resulted from continuous contact. Peter Heather rightly suggests in his work, *The Goths* that the Visigoths did not have a single ethnic identity but were many individual tribes which the Romans placed in a single category.<sup>15</sup> J.N. Hillgarth, author of *Visigoths in History and Legend*, agrees with Heather and also argues that the Visigoths were not an ethnically unified people. Hillgarth notes that not all of the Visigoths belonged to tribes, but were instead escaped slaves and vagabonds. She also supports Patrick Geary's argument that no culture can remain unchanged when shifting into a new area.<sup>16</sup>

Ray Laurence and Joanne Berry, coeditors of the book *Cultural Identity in the Roman Empire*, focus specifically on ethnicity. The contributors to the collection look at cultural change differently from Hillgarth and Heather, suggesting that "Roman" was not a race or a group of people with a common heritage, but a citizenship.<sup>17</sup> They also suggest that the Roman Empire

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<sup>13</sup> Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta*, p. 14. The Visigoths were also responsible for bringing soap and trousers into the empire, something that had not been used commonly in Rome prior to their integration.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas S. Burns, *Barbarians within the Gates of Rome: A study of Roman military policy and the barbarians, ca. 375-425 A.D.* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994) p. xvi.

<sup>15</sup> Peter Heather, *The Goths: The Peoples of Europe*, (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1996), p. xiv.

<sup>16</sup> J.N. Hillgarth, *Visigoths in History and Legend*, (Toronto, Ontario: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2009), p. 2-3.

<sup>17</sup> Ray Laurence and Joanne Berry, eds., *Cultural Identity in the Roman Empire*, (New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 2.

succeeded in Romanizing the newly conquered through urbanization,<sup>18</sup> yet the identity of the Visigoths was maintained because they shared a similar ethnicity, language, and so forth.<sup>19</sup> This does not oppose Heather's stance, but suggests that Romanization itself was far simpler than cultural change if it is equated to citizenship, and more a legalistic designation of involving citizenship.

Florin Curta, medieval historian and archeologist at the University of Florida, coined the phrase, "frontier culture," to describe the combination of the cultures of German tribes and the Roman people.<sup>20</sup> While many historians focus on the cultural changes the Visigoths underwent, Laurence and Berry's collection suggests that Romanization did not require a cultural change. Other historians such as Heather and Geary have argued that in close proximity to another culture, such as those of Romans and Visigoths, the two would both inevitably undergo serious cultural change. Eugene E. Roosens, professor of anthropology, argues that in earlier periods ethnic groups were understood as a set of cultural traditions and ancestry; however, recently ethnic groups have been recognized as a

social organization in which participants themselves make use of certain cultural traits from their past....Cultural traits that are postulated as external emblems (clothing, language, etc.) or even as fundamental values (e.g., faithfulness in friendship) can thus be taken from one's own tradition or from another people's or simply may be created.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Kathryn Lomas, "Roman Imperialism and the City in Italy" in *Cultural Identity in the Roman Empire*, ed. Ray Laurence and Joanne Berry, (New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 65.

<sup>19</sup> Laurence and Berry, *Cultural Identity in the Roman Empire*, p. 2.

<sup>20</sup> Florin Curta, *Borders, Barriers, and Ethnogenesis: Frontiers in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), pp. 8-9.

<sup>21</sup> Eugene E. Roosens, *Creating Ethnicity: The Process of Ethnogenesis*, 10-12

Thus, he argues that ethnicity is a compilation of interchangeable cultural traits. This ideology makes it far easier to study the Visigothic process of ethnogenesis, because the changing ethnicity does not rely upon a strict bloodline.

Within Florin Curta's compilation of essays, *Borders, Barbarians and Ethnogenesis*, Michael Kulikowski takes Roosens' argument further. He argues, "In the Gothic period, we have mingling of populations, outsiders and insiders, hostile and friendly, in a polarized atmosphere of perceived ethnic difference. Their interaction produced a new society...."<sup>22</sup> Sebastian Brather, anthropologist, agrees with Kulikowski and in looking at the Visigoth and Roman interaction, he argues, "Processes of acculturation and ethnogenesis took place, sometimes concomitantly, and influenced both sides."<sup>23</sup> He argues that the ethnogenesis influenced the Romans as well as the Visigoths. Thus, the lens through which historians looked at the interactions between the Visigoths and the Romans broadened to look at how two cultures could influence each other. The work of Brather, Kulikowski and Curta suggest that neither culture went unaffected when in constant interaction with one another. Instead of discussing the way the barbarians influenced the Romans, my paper looks purely at how Rome's determination to avoid such an effect actually provoked the changes of the Visigoths.

James C. Russell, historian and author of *The Germanization of Early Medieval Christianity*, fully agrees that both groups were influenced by one another. This was not a new argument, but Russell argued specifically that the Germanic choice of Arian Christianity

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<sup>22</sup> Michael Kulikowski, "Ethnicity, Rulership and Early Medieval Frontiers, in *Borders, Barriers and Ethnogenesis*, edited by Florin Curta (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers n.v., 2005) p. 254.

<sup>23</sup> Sebastian Brather, "Acculturation and Ethnogenesis along the Frontier: Rome and the Ancient Germans in an Archaeological Perspective," in *Borders, Barriers and Ethnogenesis: Frontiers in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, ed by Florin Curta, (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers n.v., 2005), p.138.



eventually defined and divided them from the Romans. Russell argues while it is clear that Christianity augmented the Visigoth identity, the Gothic implementation of Christianity also affected the Romans. Russell claims, “An unintended result of implementing a missionary policy which accommodated Germanic concerns was the Germanization of early medieval Christianity.”<sup>24</sup> Herwig Wolfram, history professor at The University of Austria, argues that the Romans and barbarians continued as disconnected entities, differing in religion and personal habits. Wolfram writes, “Gothic Arianism preserved a sense of separateness between Romans and Goths....”<sup>25</sup> This discussion of separateness is extremely relevant to my argument in this paper, but it is also different from Russell’s opinion.

There are several main positions on barbarians, then. The first is that the Germans were one of the main causes of the fall of Rome. In opposition, there are others who argue that the Goths actually developed and enhanced Roman culture, but that Rome did not, in fact, fall. Others take that argument further, claiming that they reinvented Rome systematically. On the other hand, some historians argued that the Germans “Germanized” Rome just as much as Rome affected the Germanic tribes. Historians now began to look at the interactions between the Visigoths and the Romans as an issue not only of culture, but of ethnicity. Studies of ethnicity revealed the changes of the Goths and other tribes while under the influence of Roman culture, as well as the role of identity within the Gothic entity. Historians fully recognize that the

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<sup>24</sup> James C. Russell, *The Germanization of Early Medieval Christianity: a sociohistorical approach to religious transformation*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 4. However, as he uses almost no secondary sources, he is only reliable to repeat what other historians have claimed.

<sup>25</sup> Herwig Wolfram, *The History of the Goths*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 17. Arianism is a sect of Christianity that the Visigoths claimed as their own and was considered heretical by the traditional Christian church.

Visigoth identity evolved so that they must also look at social history, and it is essential to use the theories of ethnicity to understand how that change came about.

In this paper I will look at the Visigothic-Roman integration as well as the ethnic change of the Visigoths from a social/cultural perspective, using the theories of Curta, Roosens, Wolfram and others. My contribution to this subject is to argue that the Romans wanted both to bring the Goths into the empire to exploit their labor, and at the same time to protect the Roman people from contamination by Gothic culture. The government tried to achieve both objectives by making the Visigoths more Roman. Ironically, Romans, opposed the very acculturation they were facilitating. The Romans' internal confusion about their goals allowed for Visigothic assimilation. While Romans and Visigoths may have influenced each others' culture, the Romans fought to keep the Visigoths from infiltrating Roman society, which created an inconsistent timeline for Gothic ethnogenesis. However, their effort to isolate the Visigoths from Roman culture failed because the Romans themselves unwittingly facilitated their assimilation. The two cultures became parallel, both extremely Roman, but similar views of separateness from the other group.

There were several major ways in which the Visigoths were able to mix into the empire. Athaulf's marriage to Galla Placidia exemplifies one strategy. In addition to intermarriage, there were other ways to gain power and recognition within Rome. There were four ways in particular that the Goths were able to mix into the empire: through the military, marriage, urbanization, and religion. Since Galla Placidia's marriage to Athaulf took place in the form of a Christian ceremony, it is clear that the power of the church was strong enough that Athaulf had already converted to Christianity. The Visigoths and other barbarians had been manipulating different

elements of Roman society to become powerful figures. Although the Roman government had no desire to declare the Visigoths Roman citizens, the Goths changed ethnically and culturally so that they were more Roman than barbarian. They eventually lived very similar lives to the typical Roman citizen. But the process of ethnogenesis was complicated and messy. Romanization and contradiction through the church, settlement in cities, the military and marriage led to the mixing of Gothic and Roman culture, and this integration of the Visigoths occurred without design.

### Historical Background

Late Antiquity (4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> c.) was a tumultuous time of Roman conflict with the Visigoths and other barbarian tribes. Before the Visigoths crossed the Danube into the empire in 376 AD, Rome had been struggling with the succession of emperors, resulting in nearly twenty-five emperors reigning in a fifty year period. In 284 the empire was split into East and West, each with an emperor equal to the other. This was an attempt to create a stronger empire by giving two men the position of emperor, sharing the burden of decision-making and collectively choosing their successors.<sup>26</sup> When the Visigoths first penetrated the Roman Empire, Valens and Gratian were the emperors, Valens of the East and Gratian of the West. The Visigoths were fleeing from the Huns, “humbly begging to be admitted to [Valens’] dominions, and promising that they would live quietly and supply him with the auxiliaries if the need arose.”<sup>27</sup> Valens allowed them to enter the Eastern Empire to use them as federates.<sup>28</sup> Federates were mercenaries who fought for the army in times of need, with the understanding that they would be provided

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<sup>26</sup> Marcel LeGlay, Jean-Louis Voisin, and Yann Le Bohec, *A History of Rome*, trans by Antonia Nevill, (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), p. 465

<sup>27</sup> Ammianus Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire (A.D. 354-378)*, trans by Walter Hamilton, (London: Penguin Books, 1986), p. 416.

<sup>28</sup> Christopher Kelly, *End of Empire: Attila the Hun & the Fall of Rome*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2009), 13-14.

food, land, and protection.<sup>29</sup> As was typical policy, the Goths were required to convert to Christianity when crossing the Danube, because it was Rome's official religion. But, unlike the other barbarians with whom the Romans had interacted, the Visigoths entered the empire in the thousands, driven by the Huns, rather than as small tribes.

Although Valens allowed the Goths to cross the Danube into Thrace, the government was unprepared to feed and transport such a large number of people. The Visigoths were placed in camps, rather than given land to farm, and after mistreatment and starvation, the Goths were forced to sell their own children in exchange for food. Athanaric and Fritigern, Visigoth kings, were unwilling to settle for such brutal treatment. They led the Visigoths into battle against the Roman army on August 9, 378 at the Battle of Adrianople and emerged victorious.<sup>30</sup> Emperor Valens was killed during the battle and Theodosius I took his place as the Eastern emperor. Theodosius tried to control the Visigoths within the empire, as well as those at the Roman borders. By 382 they successfully kept most of the barbarian tribes out of the empire and there was a lull in conflict.<sup>31</sup>

The time of relative peace between the Visigoths and the Romans ended when Theodosius died in 395, leaving his sons, Arcadius (East) (d. 408) and Honorius (West) (d. 423), as emperors under the regency of the barbarian general Stilicho. The Visigoths, frustrated that the Romans were not protecting them or granting them an autonomous land settlement, revolted yet again.<sup>32</sup> Recognizing the unrest of his people as an opportunity, Alaric, Visigoth officer of the Roman army, left his post, declaring himself king of the Visigoths and called unhappy tribes

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<sup>29</sup> Ammianus Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire (A.D. 354-378)*, pp. 416-417.

<sup>30</sup> Ammianus Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire (A.D. 354-378)*, trans by Walter Hamilton (London: Penguin Books, 1986), pp. 416-7.

<sup>31</sup> Thomas Burns, *Barbarians within the Gates of Rome: a study of military policy and the barbarians, ca. 375-425 A.D.* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 88-89.

<sup>32</sup> Kelley, *End of Empire*, pp. 50-56.

and individuals to his side.<sup>33</sup> Because of this, the Western empire faced an internal threat from Alaric. Stilicho battled Alaric several times in 402 and 406. It was clear, however, that federates were essential to the continuation of the Roman army, and Stilicho could not afford to lose Alaric or his followers, so he agreed to make Alaric a Roman general and give recognition to his army if he helped support the Roman agenda.<sup>34</sup> When Stilicho fell in 408, Alaric lost his power as well. He once again proclaimed himself the king of the Goths.<sup>35</sup> Alaric led several sacks of Rome in 408, 409, and again in 410. The final sack of Rome resulted in the abduction of our bride, Galla Placidia, half-sister to Emperor Honorius.<sup>36</sup> When Alaric died, shortly after Galla Placidia was taken captive, his brother-in-law, Athaulf, became the king of the Visigoths and married the princess.<sup>37</sup> The marriage of Galla Placidia and Athaulf metaphorically portrays the dramatic fits-and-starts of the Visigoths' assimilation process and the creation of a new ethnicity.

It is important to understand what ethnicity is in order to fully comprehend what unified the Visigoths and set them on the path to Romanization. As stated above, before the assimilation of the Goths occurred, they were different tribes that eventually gained an identity as a result of certain cultural and political changes. The ethnic change that occurred for the Visigoths began when their fragmentation ended in a unified Gothic assemblage. Ray Laurence and Joanne Berry suggest:

Ethnicity can be seen to be working upon certain variables of the ancient world; these are set out by Renfrew: Shared territory or land; common descent; a shared language; a community of customs, or culture; a community of beliefs, or religion; a name, an ethnonym, to express group identity; self-awareness, self-identity; a shared history or myth of origin...These variables need not all be

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<sup>33</sup> Burns, *Barbarians within the Gates of Rome*, pp. 187.

<sup>34</sup> A.D Lee, *War in Late Antiquity: A Social History*, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2007), 220-224

<sup>35</sup> Burns, *Barbarians within the Gates of Rome*, p. 223.

<sup>36</sup> Jordanes, *The Origins and Deeds of the Goths*, pp. 95-96.

<sup>37</sup> James, *Europe's Barbarians*, p. 61.

present for ethnicity to be defined, but all contributed to the establishment of ethnic identity.<sup>38</sup>

Of these factors above, before entering the empire, the Visigoths shared only their language and an origin myth.<sup>39</sup> The scattered tribes, such as the Golthescytha, Mordens, Rogas, Tadzans, Imniscaris, Vasinabroncae and many others, had little to unify them.<sup>40</sup> Sozomen (d. 450), church historian,<sup>41</sup> emphasized that the Visigoth tribes were not a unified group when they first entered the empire. They did not share the same customs, and although they were mostly pagans, there is no documentation to tell us whether their practices were similar. They identified themselves by their individual tribes and did not perceive themselves to be a single group. However, Geary claims that the Romans unintentionally created a unified Visigoth identity. Geary thought that the Visigoths as a people was Rome's most impressive achievement, "perhaps the greatest and most enduring creation of Roman political and military genius."<sup>42</sup> Sozomen argued that the Visigoths settled their differences when they needed a common ally against the mistreatment of the Roman government.<sup>43</sup>

The Visigoths unified because they had a common purpose that encouraged them to work as a single entity. Florin Curta argues, "group identity...was a goal-oriented identity, formed by internal organization...Ethnicity thus appears as an 'artefact', created in order to bring together a group of people for some common purpose...therefore be[ing] seen as symptoms of changing social relations requiring a display of group identity."<sup>44</sup> The "common purpose," that gave the

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<sup>38</sup> Ray Laurence and Joanne Berry, *Cultural Identity in the Roman Empire*, pp. 95-96.

<sup>39</sup> Jordanes, *Jordanes: Origins and Deeds of the Goths*, trans. by Charles C Mierow, (Cambridge: Speculum Historiale, 1960), pp. 62-3.

<sup>40</sup> Jordanes, *Origins and Deeds of the Goths*, p. 84.

<sup>41</sup> Sozomen, "Ecclesiastical History," in *Goths of the Fourth Century*, trans by Peter Heather and David Moncur (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2001), p. 103.

<sup>42</sup> Geary, *Before France and Germany*, p. vi.

<sup>43</sup> Sozomen, *Goths of the Fourth Century*, pp. 107-8.

<sup>44</sup> Florin Curta, "Frontier Ethnogenesis in Late Antiquity," p. 203.

Visigoths an identity was first, protection of their people and later their desire to attain an autonomous state within the Roman Empire. Faced with Roman opposition, the Visigoths, without particular intention, united under the name that the Romans had given them. As their exposure to Roman lifestyle extended beyond the military and included the cities and the church, the habits and traits of the Visigoths became more and more Roman.

The process of splintering and uniting against a common offender began under the self-proclaimed King Athanaric. Herwig Wolfram discusses the unification of the Visigoths, claiming that even after four hundred years, the Visigoths referred to Athanaric as their “founder king.”<sup>45</sup> This argument promotes the theory that the Visigoths only began to identify as a single ethnic group, rather than as individual tribes, under Athanaric. The title “founder king,” suggests that prior to Athanaric’s rule, the tribes did not think of themselves as an ethnic group.

Visigothic identity was a matter of political issues. Florin Curta argues, “The politicization of cultural differences is, no doubt, one of the most important features of ethnicity.”<sup>46</sup> The Visigoths were identified as barbarians and outsiders because of their threat to the political and social structure of the Roman Empire. Figures such as Stilicho, who managed to infiltrate the upper class, as well as the many barbarian soldiers who fought beside the Romans as equals, suggest that it was not their ethnicity<sup>47</sup> that bothered the Roman government, but the hazard that the Visigoths’ previous lifestyle posed to Roman life. Since the issue was political, the emperors and their senate wanted to control the Goths, rather than destroy them.

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<sup>45</sup> Wolfram, *History of the Goths*, p. 64.

<sup>46</sup> Curta, “Frontier Ethnogenesis in Late Antiquity: The Danube, the Tervingi, and the Slavs,” p. 203.

<sup>47</sup> Zosimus, *Zosimus: Historia Nova: The Decline of Rome*, trans by James J Buchanan and Harold T Davis (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1967), p. 163.

## Military

The military was an institution that was so engrained in the functioning of both Roman and Visigoth society that it became a central part of their cultures. This was also the institution through which the Romans believed they might control the Goths. The military was the ground upon which the two societies first began to physically merge, and the barbarians to rise in society with little differentiation from Romans, even though the Roman government attempted to keep the Goths from interacting with Roman soldiers in other ways.<sup>48</sup> The Visigoths requested of Emperor Honorius, Galla Placidia's brother, permission to live peacefully in Italy. Jordanes said the Visigoths swore "they would so live with the Roman people that men might believe them both to be of one race...."<sup>49</sup> This promise gave Rome hope that they might be able to control the Goths. The army was also the reason that the Visigoths were necessary, and the whole reason that they had been accepted into Roman territory. As the military grew larger under Theodosius, it became swollen with barbarians. The Roman elites could not deny that the Visigoths were indispensable, and on their part, the barbarians recognized the advantage they gained from being a part of the army. Zosimus claimed, "no order existed in the camp, no distinction between Roman and barbarian: all lived intermingled, nor were there any records kept of those enrolled among the soldiery."<sup>50</sup> As a result, the military was the one institution in which the Visigoths raised themselves up into society without Roman complaint. The military became an amalgamation of different barbarian tribes and Romans.<sup>51</sup> The Visigoth soldiers lived and worked among Roman soldiers, and learned from observation.

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<sup>48</sup> Burns, *Barbarians within the Gates of Rome*, p.96.

<sup>49</sup> Jordanes, *Origins and Deeds of the Goths*, pp.93-94.

<sup>50</sup> Zosimus, *The Decline of Rome*, p. 163.

<sup>51</sup> Burns, *Barbarians within the Gates of Rome*, p. 91.



Although the Visigoths were a group of interrelated tribes, they all shared a common respect and reliance upon the military, which gave them something in common with the Roman people.<sup>52</sup> War within Visigoth society established the status and wealth of men. As a result, the majority of young Visigoth men joined bands of fighters, led by a prestigious warrior, who was in turn responsible for them.<sup>53</sup> Their loyalty to their tribes was legendary, and they were often known for their ferocity in avenging a dead comrade.<sup>54</sup> The Visigoths prevailed militarily over other barbarian tribes. Therefore, the military was the institution that the Romans and Visigoths shared. While the two groups had different fighting styles, the Romans relied on discipline and the Visigoths on impulse, the Romans found the barbarians to be good soldiers because of their experience.<sup>55</sup>

The expansion of the Roman Empire throughout its existence relied on military strength, and the continuation of a functioning army relied upon the Visigothic federates, or mercenary soldiers. Emperor Valens preferred to allow Gothic entrance than wage a war against the Visigoths with a weakened military. He also needed them to stabilize the Roman military. Refusing the Visigoths would risk war. The Roman military objective was to conquer the surrounding areas, protect the borders of the empire, and keep the defeated under the government's control.<sup>56</sup> Elites and soldiers gained power through the military as well, moving up in the ranks of the army as they showed their loyalty and talent.<sup>57</sup>

Theodosius facilitated the integration of the Visigoths because he made many military changes that favored the Goths and attempted to make peace with the angry tribes. Theodosius

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<sup>52</sup> Geary, *Before France and Germany*, pp. 45-49.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 50-56.

<sup>54</sup> Ammianus Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire*, p. 419.

<sup>55</sup> Burns, *Barbarians within the Gates of Rome*, p. 27.

<sup>56</sup> A.D. Lee, *War in Late Antiquity: A Social History*, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2007), p. 37.

<sup>57</sup> Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta*, p. 167.

himself rose to his position as emperor through the military rather than his social status.<sup>58</sup> He was able to stabilize the military, which was in ruins after the Battle of Adrianople, and succeeded in keeping the Visigoths under control for the majority of his reign. Most Goths served peacefully under his rule.<sup>59</sup> Aside from military reforms, Theodosius also sought to make peace with the barbarians, and even allied himself with certain powerful barbarians for the sake of the empire.<sup>60</sup> Theodosius created the military situation that allowed for many barbarians to rise up in society as officers. This meant that the barbarians were given the chance to gain political power where they had not been given the opportunity before. Thomas S. Burns points out that by the time Theodosius died in 395 there was a sizeable increase in the number of barbarian soldiers.<sup>61</sup> Theodosius recognized the advantage of living at peace with the Visigoths and in doing so, he succeeded in bringing the Visigoths even further into Roman society.

Burns, claims that Theodosius saved the empire, however, Roman scholars and historians in Late Antiquity, such as Zosimus, felt that Rome had not benefitted from his rule. Zosimus affirmed, “things went from bad to worse under Theodosius’ rule: nothing excellent and exemplary was applauded.”<sup>62</sup> This suggests some Romans of Late Antiquity did not approve of Theodosius, including the fact that he sympathized with the Visigoths. The elites of the Roman court looked down upon barbarians sympathizers and used such a charge to tarnish many political reputations.<sup>63</sup> While Theodosius may have made many changes in the laws and military that created peace, his perceived sympathy for barbarians was not commendable. This is another example of how unwelcome the Visigoths were within Roman society.

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<sup>58</sup> Zosimus, *Zosimus: Historia Nova: The Decline of Rome*, trans. by James J Buchanan and Harold T Davis, (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1967), p. 157.

<sup>59</sup> Holum, *Theodosian Emperors*, p. 21.

<sup>60</sup> Zosimus, *The Decline of Rome*, p. 188.

<sup>61</sup> Burns, *Barbarians within the Gates of Rome*, p. 108.

<sup>62</sup> Zosimus, *The Decline of Rome*, p. 174.

<sup>63</sup> Burns, *Barbarians within the Gates of Rome*, p. 182.

One of the barbarians who benefitted from Theodosius' friendship and new military policies, was Flavius Stilicho. Stilicho's father was a Vandal, one of the barbarian tribes that managed to gain political power through the army. His military genius outweighed his barbarian ancestry. After many years of soldiering, Stilicho was appointed as second-in-command of the Roman army, and eventually he became the regent of Emperor Honorius.<sup>64</sup> Stilicho manipulated the boy emperor and attempted to expand his power across the empire. When the Visigoth general, Alaric, began to attack cities throughout the empire, it was Stilicho who had to deal with him. As a result of his barbarian ancestry, it was necessary for Stilicho to gain power through the military rather than relying upon bloodlines. The Romans only wanted the barbarians in society under the condition that they were useful. Stilicho's usefulness was what allowed him to gain so much power. The Romans wanted to prevent the Visigoths from becoming important members of society, but the Roman military unintentionally provided opportunities for the barbarians to merge with their culture.

While there were some high ranking barbarians in the military who lived the Roman lifestyle, there were others who resented Rome's treatment. Valens had hoped that the Visigoths would make his army invincible.<sup>65</sup> While the Romans wanted to benefit from the Visigoths, the Roman government, after Theodosius died, failed to live up to its promises. Many Visigothic families were threatened by Huns outside of the empire, yet, the Goths had been promised protection. Both Alaric and Gainäs were high ranking officers in the Roman army before they deserted and began rebellions. Sozomen wrote, "Gainäs, who had taken refuge among the Romans, who had risen from the lowest ranks of the army to military command, formed a design to usurp the throne of the Roman Empire... he sent for his countrymen, the Goths, from their

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<sup>64</sup> Zosimus, *The Decline of Rome*, p. 189.

<sup>65</sup> Ammianus Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire*, p. 416.

own homes to come to the Roman territories.”<sup>66</sup> There appears to be a disconnect between Sozomen’s understanding and the truly complicated situation. He blames them for rebelling, yet he does not understand all the factors that pushed the Goths to rise up against the Romans. While Gainās brought in Visigoths from outside of the empire in an attempt to take the throne, Alaric declared himself King of the Goths and united not only the free Visigoths already inside the empire, but thousands of barbarian slaves as well.<sup>67</sup> The Goths attacked and pillaged from Rome, South to Athens and North along the Adriatic coast.<sup>68</sup> Now that the Goths had military training and rebel Visigoth officers schooled by the Roman army, Rome’s fear of their revolt within the empire was realized. This phenomenon demonstrates how the Goths were unwilling to accept full Roman rule without autonomy as part of the arrangement of being federates. The Goths expected good treatment, protection from the Huns on the border, as well as to retain some autonomy and cohesion. Without those things the Goths did not feel that they needed to accept Roman rule and they declared their own king, which was against Roman law. Gothic resentment was a result of Rome’s vacillating policy. This situation also demonstrates that the process of ethnogenesis was extremely slow. The merging and changing of the two groups was littered with mistakes and beset by reversal. Thus Gothic ethnogenesis was not a consistent process, making it more difficult to trace.

Because the Romans did not want the Visigoths in the empire, they mistreated and neglected them once they entered, but this spurred several conflicts. Classical scholars’ opinions on the Gothic rebellions reflect the ambivalence of Roman policy. Sozomen and Themistius are two of these scholars, and they believed that the barbarian rebellion against Rome was unwarranted. However, others, such as Gothic historian, Jordanes, portray the Visigoths as

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<sup>66</sup> Sozomen, “Ecclesiastical History of Sozomen,” Book VIII, Ch IV.

<sup>67</sup> Wolfram, *The History of the Goths*, pp. 155-6.

<sup>68</sup> James, *Europe’s Barbarians*, p. 54.

victims. Since Rome had originally promised protection, food and land to the Visigoths, Roman failure to follow up with their promises resulted in the Battle of Adrianople.<sup>69</sup> Zosimus, the Greek historian of the fifth and sixth century, claimed, “The barbarians encountered them [Roman soldiers] in battle fair and square and, easily victorious, wiped out almost all of them.”<sup>70</sup> These opposing perceptions exemplify the conflicting opinions of the empire and the continued Roman ambivalence and failure to develop a rationalized policy.

Although the Goths were infuriated by their treatment, according to both the treaty of 376 and 382, their actions were illegal. The Goths, “would not be settled as a compact group; and...they would not constitute an autonomous Gothia, a state within a state...in addition, [federates] were exempted from taxation...”<sup>71</sup> However, the Goths had united under King Alaric, and King Athaulf after him. Both kings sought autonomy for the Goths as an individual ethnic group within Rome. The two kings’ attempted peace treaties were not technically legal because Rome did not recognize the Goths within the empire with an official king, or group with which they could compromise. In fact, Herwig Wolfram suggests, “Gothic military kingship was successful only...when the kings succeeded in subordinating their peoples into roman statehood and integrating them into larger territorialized units...”<sup>72</sup> In other words, the only way that the Roman government was willing to negotiate with the Visigoth tribes was when they conceded to Roman rule. The Roman senate refused to recognize the Visigoths as a nation or tribal unit with its own leaders within the empire, but they did not consider them Roman either. Thus, more

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<sup>69</sup> Ammianus Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire*, pp. 436-437.

<sup>70</sup> Zosimus, *Zosimus: Historia Nova: the decline of Rome*, trans by James J Buchanan and Harold T Davis, (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1967), p.157.

<sup>71</sup> Wolfram, *The History of the Goths*, pp. 133-4.

<sup>72</sup> Wolfram, *The History of the Goths*, p. 9.

Roman ambivalence is revealed. The Romans did not want the Goths to have their own identity nor to share an identity with the Romans. They preferred them to be submissive.

As a result, the Romans were unwilling to create treaties with the Visigoths because they did not believe them worthy of a full negotiation that would result in a solid and successful treaty. The Roman government believed that Alaric's several attempts to ensure peace was a sign of weakness, and they refused to negotiate.<sup>73</sup> Ammianus Marcellinus said, "the [Goths] were driven by sheer necessity to seek the alliance of some of the Huns and Alans by dangling before them the prospect of immense booty."<sup>74</sup> However, because the Romans refused to recognize any tribal kings or leaders, Alaric had to give up his title as king if he wanted to make peace.<sup>75</sup> Yet, giving up his title essentially placed the Visigoths under Roman rule. The imperial government wanted to control the Visigoths. The Visigoths were willing to act like Romans, and work for the Romans in exchange for protection.

Other tribes, which had been colonized by Rome, were expected to be subordinate members of the Roman state system. In declaring certain Visigoth leaders to be inconsequential, and demeaning or supporting others, the Romans sought to create a structure that would allow them to control the Goths in both politics and military.<sup>76</sup> Within the system that the Romans created for themselves they expected to be the political power of the state. Kingship did not fit into this vision. The Roman government wanted to control the military, and political figures, while allowing a certain amount of self-government. These states were also expected to be "an integrated, if subordinate, part of the Roman imperial system."<sup>77</sup> For the Visigoths to concede to

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<sup>73</sup> Wolfram, *The History of the Goths*, p. 157.

<sup>74</sup> Ammianus Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire, (A.D. 354-378)*, p. 426.

<sup>75</sup> Edward James, *Europe's Barbarians, AD 200-600* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2009), p.53.

<sup>76</sup> Sebastian Brather, "Acculturation and Ethnogenesis along the Frontier: Rome and the Ancient Germans in an Archaeological Perspective, in *Borders, Barbarians, and Ethnogenesis: Frontiers in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, ed by Florin Curta, (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers n.v., 2005), pp. 150-1.

<sup>77</sup> Sebastian Brather, "Acculturation and Ethnogenesis along the Frontier, pp. 150-1.

such statehood, they would lose the ethnic identity that made them “not Roman.” Although the Visigoths began to change culturally under Roman influence, they still identified themselves as Visigoths. Also, Rome had no desire to identify themselves with the Goths, and continued to feel threatened by the violent barbarians within their empire, whom they struggled to control, but found too barbaric to willingly assimilate them. There was a muddled difference between what the Romans wanted and did not want. But it was too late for both groups; the Romans had, in a sense, created Visigothic identity, had brought them into the empire, trained them in the army, and elevated them to high military positions.

### **The City and its Cultural Construction**

High military positions allowed the Romans to control the most tactically saavy Visigoths. However, the most influential politicians wanted to maintain control over all the Goths, not just those who benefitted the Roman military. The Romans sought to control the Visigoths, while at the same time the empire fought to segregate them so that they would not merge with Roman society. Romans had no desire to allow a hoard of barbarians to influence Roman culture. The Roman government believed that if they wanted to both protect Roman citizens and allow the pagan Goths to cross into Rome, the military had to control the more extreme barbarisms of the Goths so that they could behave well in an urban setting, preventing the Goths from undermining the lives of the Roman population.

In classical thought, city-living is the very definition of civilization, of humanness. The city was also incredibly important to the empire because that was how the culture maintained power over the people they had conquered. Thomas Burns, author of *Barbarians within the Gates of Rome*, suggests that the city was one of the most defining aspects of the empire. He

recognizes that Romans believed that those who were civilized lived in cities. It is likely that this perception also came from the fact that cities were social and governmental centers.<sup>78</sup> He goes on to claim that the Visigoths likely looked at city life as a defining factor of Roman servitude, and they were right in that Roman control over their conquered subjects was directly correlated with cities. However, while the emperor wanted to control the Goths, he still did not seek to create Romans of them. The Gothic soldiers were mixed with the Roman soldiers in an attempt to prevent any uprisings.<sup>79</sup> But since the Visigoth soldiers mainly interacted with the Roman soldiers, this in itself resulted in increasing the Roman traits of the Visigoths. And in separating the Goths from their families, the Romans would have more influence on each individual Visigoth.

These individuals were placed in cities, but while all people who had Roman citizenship were connected to an urban environment, it did not mean that all the people living in cities were citizens.<sup>80</sup> The Goths were an example of a group that lived in cities, legally separate from the citizens they lived among. Roman citizenship is extremely difficult to define and the Romans were known to be extremely fastidious about who was given citizenship. In 212, Emperor Caracala gave all free Roman men citizenship,<sup>81</sup> however, this concession was more for the sake of increasing the intake of taxation.<sup>82</sup> Because Caracala's bestowal of citizenship was not based on a belief of a right to citizenship, it is not surprising that the Romans felt no compunction about refusing the Visigoths citizenship not even two hundred years later. There were many benefits to being a Roman citizen, and the barbarians enjoyed few of these rights which is

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<sup>78</sup> Jones, *The Decline of the Ancient World*, p. 239.

<sup>79</sup> Laurence and Berry, *Cultural identity in the Roman Empire*, p.64.

<sup>80</sup> Jones, *The Decline of the Ancient World*, p. 237.

<sup>81</sup> Michael L. Meckler, 1997, "De Imperatoribus Romanis: An online encyclopedia of Roman Emperors," Ohio State University. Accessed March 2011. <http://www.roman-emperors.org/caracala.htm>.

<sup>82</sup> Cassius Dio Cocceianus, *Dio's Roman History, with an English Translation*. Translated by Earnest Cary and Herbert Baldwin Foster. London: Loeb Classical Library, 1914-1927.



strange given that in 212 freeborn men were given citizenship. Yet again Rome contradicted itself. Roman citizens were legally part of the community, able to contribute to legal and state issues, did not have direct taxation and were guaranteed civil and legal rights. Citizens also had the right to benefit from spoils of war, and were given a share of the agricultural distributions.<sup>83</sup> Yet, barbarians had not been granted citizenship. They sought the protection that citizenship provided, but Rome was not willing to deliver.

Although Rome did not grant the Goths citizenship, they did bring the Visigoths into the cities. In order to protect Roman citizens from a barbarian uprising or an overwhelming number of Visigoths in a single area, Goths were divided and settled in different cities. When the Visigoths were brought to Roman territory they were settled under prefects but they were not given citizenship. They were given lands and allowed to stay in small groups. Zosimus claims, “[Rome] distributed the barbarian youth among the cities, that they might not, collected in such great numbers and far removed from their own people, have the opportunity to mount a conspiratorial revolution.”<sup>84</sup> Not only does Zosimus describe the separation of the barbarians, but he also perceives the barbarians to be unruly. In his eyes they were likely to begin a revolution. His understanding of the reason the barbarians were separated, further determines that many Romans believed the Goths to be dangerous within the cities. In keeping the Visigoths spread out, Rome successfully prevented an overwhelming number of Visigoths in any one place. Yet, the Visigoths were so surrounded by Romans that they learned how to live their lifestyle. This process demonstrates how fearful the Romans were of large groups of Goths, and the havoc they could create and how that fear led to Gothic Romanization.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Marcel LeGlay, Jean-Louis Voisin, and Yann Le Bohec, *A History of Rome*, trans by Antonia Nevil, (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), p. 116.

<sup>84</sup> Zosimus, *The Decline of Rome*, p. 159.

<sup>85</sup> Jones, *A General History of Europe*, p.221.

Another way the Romans unintentionally created amalgamation and cultural change was through the enslavement of barbarians and the hostage system. The exchange of hostages was often used in the process of peace treaties or agreements to ensure the honorable fulfillment of the terms. The hostages were treated as guests both on the Visigoth and Roman sides as an obligation.<sup>86</sup> As a result, the Visigoth and Roman hostages gained an in-depth understanding of the opposite culture. This was also true in the cases of slaves. The *Theodosian Code*, laws written during the reign of Theodosius I, declared, “freeborn persons shall not be sold to barbarians...”<sup>87</sup> But barbarians could be sold to free Romans. In fact, it is likely that the Visigoth children who were sold into slavery when their parents were starving before the Battle of Adrianople, worked amongst the Romans, and thus learned how to live like them. The fact that the Romans could not be sold as slaves to the Visigoths demonstrates how the Romans believed the Goths were not on equal standing.

The Visigoths within the cities were expected to dress as Romans. Law 14.11.4 of *The Theodosian Code* stipulated, “We command that no person shall be allowed to wear very long hair, no one, not even a slave, shall be allowed to wear garments made of skins...and hereafter no person shall be able to appropriate to himself the right to wear such clothing with impunity.”<sup>88</sup> The Romans did not want any barbarian influence within the cities that they were able to avoid. Thus, barbarians were no longer legally allowed to dress in their traditional clothing or to grow their hair long. This law forced the Visigoths to abandon some of their external differences. Slowly, the Romans were forcing changes among the Visigoths. By encouraging new

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<sup>86</sup> Herwig Wolfram, *The History of the Goths*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 154-5.

<sup>87</sup> *The Theodosian Code: and novels and the Sirmondian Constitutions*, trans, by Clyde Pharr, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1952), p. 544.

<sup>88</sup> *The Theodosian Code*, p. 415.

appearances, new religion, and giving them a common tribal name, the Romans were facilitating the changing ethnic identity of the Visigoths.

The Roman government attempted to control the Visigoths by law, not only because they feared the Goths would rise up against them, but also because one of their chief concerns was that the Goths were inferior and that it might affect Roman citizens. The Romans knew the Goths were not Roman citizens but barbarians. Romans distanced themselves from the Visigoths by classifying them as barbarians. The word “barbarian” was used to describe those groups whom the Romans considered uncivilized because of their nomadic and non-Roman lifestyle. Maria Boletsi, author of “Barbarian Encounters,” claims that etymologically the word barbarian is an imitation of a language of a foreign people that another group does not understand.<sup>89</sup> As a result, the referent group is not necessarily a barbarian. The term “barbarian” in this paper is meant to portray that the Visigoths were barbaric based upon an historical perspective, not on any particular traits or life styles. Tribes such as the Vandals, Gepids, Rugians, Burgundians, and Sciri, who shared a common language and law, were consolidated by the Romans into a single identifiable group that they called the Visigoths, but the Romans hardly recognized the tribes, and found it easier to understand them through a stereotype.<sup>90</sup>

The Romans, however inconsistent they were with barbarian policy, were consistent in their opinions that the Visigoths were “beasts.” The uncivilized were not to be trusted. We cannot know what the lower classes of Romans or the Visigoths thought because they left no records. Thus, we rely upon Roman scholars and priests who showed no sympathy in their writing for the Visigoths or other barbarians. Many Roman writers perceived the Visigoths with distaste. However, it is important to recognize that modern historians are reliant entirely upon

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<sup>89</sup> Maria Boletsi, “Barbarian Encounters: Rethinking Barbarism in C. P. Cavafy’s and J. M. Coetzee’s *Waiting for the Barbarians*,” *Comparative Literature Studies*, 44 (2007): 68.

<sup>90</sup> Wolfram, *History of the Goths*, pp. 19-20.

Roman sources. And all sources for this time period are extremely biased against the Visigoths. Even Jordanes, the only known Gothic historian of the fifth century, was a Roman bureaucrat and thus his writings also favor the Romans to some extent. But all the scholars saw the Visigoths and other barbarians as animalistic.

Zosimus, a fifth century bishop, claimed that the Visigoths showed that they were untrustworthy because of the Battle of Adrianople. He wrote, “as soon as they set foot on Roman soil, [the Visigoths] remembered neither their entreaties nor their oaths...”<sup>91</sup> Themistius, another bishop, claimed to have heard their war cries, which sounded as if animals were dying. It is clear that these elite Romans thought of the Visigoths as more animal than human. Sidonius Appollinaris (c. 430-489) was an historian, bishop, poet, and author of extant letters. Sidonius wrote, “[The barbarian] displays a mouth with leaden lips and ravening jaws of a wild beast, with festering gums and yellow teeth.”<sup>92</sup> The writing of these men speaks plainly. The Romans had no interest in associating with the Visigoths. They preferred to use the Visigoths in the military without giving them citizenship or humanity.

As Romans believed themselves to be of a higher intelligence than animals, their view of the Visigoths as such created a feeling of Roman superiority. Sidonius Appollinaris in discussing human superiority creates an image of how the church might have viewed the Visigoths as a result of their barbarity. He writes,

the mind of man takes precedence of the vital force of a beast, because, just as flesh is inferior to life, so is life inferior to reason, which God the creator has made our substance capable of attaining, but with this reservation, that a double law controls the standing of human intellect; for just as some minds, though they reason in human fashion, are dull and rather sluggish and so are over-trodden by the ability of minds which are both wise and clever, so those which derive their

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<sup>91</sup> Zosimus, *The Decline of Rome*, p.153.

<sup>92</sup> Sidonius Appollinaris, *Poems and Letters; with an English translation, introduction, and notes by W.B. Anderson Book II*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1936-1965), p. 53.

strength only from natural wisdom readily admit that they are eclipsed by the superior merits of highly trained intelligence.<sup>93</sup>

Because the Roman elites believed that the Visigoths were beasts, this quotation takes on new meaning. While Sidonius is not talking about barbarians, because of the Roman comparison of Visigoths to beasts, his perception of animals can be translated into his view of the Visigoths. This suggests that Roman authors such as Sidonius looked at the Visigoths as inferiors who lacked intellect. Thus, the Visigoths were unlikely to ever show the intelligence and ability of the Roman people. Sidonius furthers his assumption of Visigothic inferiority by going so far as to suggest that Visigothic barbarity was a result of their idiocy.<sup>94</sup> He speaks of the Goths in derisive terms: “those brutish hardened peoples would assuredly be softened and thawed and we should no longer deride, despise, and fear that dull ferocity of [the Visigoths]...senseless and stupid and inflammable like that of wild beasts.”<sup>95</sup> The Roman view was very entrenched. They were determined to keep the Visigoths from endangering and effecting the Roman families. This view of the Visigoths demonstrates why the Romans feared their inferior influence.

The Roman image of Visigoth men contrasted the way that Rome’s society viewed their own men. Roman men held an unquestionable dominance over barbarians, slaves, and women. The Romans believed that men were naturally superior to women, but also to barbarians.<sup>96</sup> A Roman man was expected to maintain “gentleness, accessibility, self-control, and compassionate feeling.”<sup>97</sup> Men gained respect both by being Roman citizens who were freeborn, and by protecting their bodies from physical indulgence.<sup>98</sup> The Roman elites viewed society rigidly and

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<sup>93</sup> Sidonius Appolinaris, *Poems and Letters*, p. 381.

<sup>94</sup> Sidonius Appolinaris, *Poems and Letters*, p.19.

<sup>95</sup> Sidonius Appolinaris, *Poems and Letters*, p. 65.

<sup>96</sup> Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual renunciation in Early Christianity*, (New York: Colombia University Press, 1988), p. 9.

<sup>97</sup> Brown, *The Body and Society*, p. 11.

<sup>98</sup> Jonathan Walters, “Invading the Roman Body: Manliness and Impenetrability in Roman Thought,” in *Roman Sexualities*, ed by Judith P. Hallett and Marilyn B. Skinner, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 38.

the conflict and change that came with the barbarians only made Roman men more determined to uphold self-control and public order.<sup>99</sup> They sought to prevent friction with stiff control in their cities as well as in individual Roman homes.<sup>100</sup> When comparing the Romans to the Goths, it is understandable that the Romans would look upon the Visigoths with both fear and disgust. The stereotypical Visigoth undermined everything that the Roman men valued. The Goths, with their uncontrolled, nomadic animalistic ways, were the antithesis of Roman values.

Initially, the differences between the Goths and Romans were accentuated when they lived in close proximity. The Visigoths were not only spread throughout the Roman Empire, but the original appearance of the Goths in the cities would have emphasized the differences of Romans and Visigoths. But the cities were the most concentrated centers of Roman culture and control, providing trade, central government, and religious gathering places. It is important to understand that the Visigoths were different from the Romans when they stood beside each other in the cities, but the Goths were also being Romanized. They were different at first, but as the interactions between Romans and Goths became more consistent, the Goths became more Roman. Yet, they did not merge because the two groups saw themselves as separate.

## **Christianity**

Although the marriage of Athaulf and Galla Placidia is a metaphor for the merging cultures, their marriage does not fully reveal the Roman and Visigothic situation that emerged as a result of Roman ambivalence. The fact that Athaulf and Galla Placidia had a Christian marriage exposes the fact that he, like many of his people, had been converted to Christianity. Athaulf and his people were forced to be baptized upon entering the empire which indicates how important

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<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>100</sup> Brown, *The Body and Society*, p. 11.

religion was to Rome. Changing from a pagan religion to a Christian one, would inevitably change the cultural and ethnic identity of any group.

Visigoth leaders such as Athanaric feared what the religious changes would do to their tribal identity. Peter Heather argues, “[the Visigoths] were afraid that Christianity would undermine that aspect of Gothic identity which was derived from a common inherited religion, and that Christianity was associated with an empire, whose influence they attempted to resist.”<sup>101</sup> This of course, was before the Visigoths entered the empire. However, their fears eventually became reality, when their tribes agreed to convert to Christianity. The previous quotation also examines the importance of religion and traditions to the ethnic identity of the Visigoths and allows us to understand how, when the Visigoths accepted a new religion, they made a serious step towards integration into a new, more Roman identity.

There were many Visigoths residing outside of the empire who disagreed with their kinsmen’s sudden conversion. The Visigoths outside of the empire were responsible for several persecutions of the converted Goths. The worst of these was led by Athanaric. Paulus Orosius, a fifth century bishop said, “Athanaric... persecuting the Christians in his own nation most cruelly, elevated many barbarians, who were put to death because of their faith, to the crown of martyrdom...”<sup>102</sup> Thus, not all Visigoths were willing to forgo their own traditional religion for the sake of social acceptance from the Romans. The opposition is an example of how the ethnogenesis was not smooth or flawless, but complicated and inconsistent. Not all Goths were willing to give up their old culture so they could be Romanized.

It is necessary to understand the conflicting Christian belief system of Late Antiquity, particularly with regard to Arianism and what I will call orthodox Christianity, in order to

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<sup>101</sup> James C. Russell, *Germanization of Early Medieval Christianity*, p. 140.

<sup>102</sup> Paulus Orosius, *Fathers of the Church*, pp. 336-7.

recognize the complication that it added in bringing the Visigoths into the empire. There was one main difference between the two factions. Those who were Arians believed that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit were different entities, while the Christians believed they were all one being.<sup>103</sup> The Goths were converted by Arian priests because Valens had been the emperor when they crossed the Danube. Ulfilas, an Arian, translated the Bible into Gothic language, was also responsible for the conversion of the Goths.<sup>104</sup>

Although the Visigoths converted to Christianity when they migrated to the empire, when Valens died, those who shared his particular set of beliefs, were no longer considered to be real Christians, but heretics. By the time the Visigoths entered the empire, Christianity had only been legal for fifty years. During that time period there was a battle of beliefs between the two factions of Christians. Before the legalization of Christianity there had been many different Christian beliefs, but the legalization necessitated an official belief system. Bishops and other church representatives attempted to come to an agreement on what Christians officially believed. However, they could not agree and people took sides, either becoming Arian Christians or becoming Orthodox Christians. Both groups believed that the people who opposed them were heretics. Because Valens was an Arian, his religion was accepted while he was alive. But when he died in 378, Theodosius, his successor and a Catholic Christian, fought to rid the empire of Arianism.

After Emperor Theodosius came into power, Arianism became socially and theologically unacceptable, which resulted in a gulf between the Goths and the Roman Catholics. Sozomen argues, “the emperor had not desired to persecute his subjects; he only desired to enforce

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<sup>103</sup> Sozomen, “The Ecclesiastical History of Sozomen,” *Freewebs*.  
<http://www.freewebs.com/vitaphone1/history/sozomen.html>, Book III, Ch XXIII.

<sup>104</sup> Peter Heather and David Moncur, *Goths in the fourth century*, p.150.



uniformity of view about God through the medium of intimidation.”<sup>105</sup> In other words, Theodosius fought to eradicate Arianism using laws instead of physical persecution.<sup>106</sup> Yet, even though the Visigoths had willingly adopted a Roman religion, Romans still found a way to view them as different, as non-Romans. The attempt to Christianize the Visigoth population was partially an effort to protect the Romans from pagan ideas. Like placing the Visigoths in the cities, many Roman policies were intended to segregate barbarians, which resulted in Romanizing them. All pagan ceremonies, sacrifices and offerings were banned by Emperor Theodosius in 381 and 385.<sup>107</sup> AHM Jones claims that Theodosius’ attempt to control the heretics and pagans, resulted in less Arianism as a whole. Arianism remained mostly among the Visigoths and other tribes.<sup>108</sup>

Some Romans felt that Ulfilas had saved the Goths from themselves, while others felt that he had ensured them eternity in Hell. Auxentius, Arian theologian of the fourth century, claimed that Ulfilas, the first known Gothic priest, was “that holy man [who] corrected the people of the Goths who were living in hunger and dearth of preaching but with no heed to their condition...he...multiplied their numbers.”<sup>109</sup> Yet, many people did not believe that Ulfilas’ and Valens’ work was holy. Paulus Orosius, a parish priest in the early fifth century, argued, “The Goths clung to the basic teachings of the first faith which they had received. And so, by the just judgement of God, the very men burned [Valens] alive who, because of him, will also burn when dead for the vice of error.”<sup>110</sup> Thus, he blamed Valens for wronging the Visigoths by teaching them Arianism. He believed that as a result of the teaching the Goths received, they would go to

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<sup>105</sup> Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History of Sozomen*, Book VII Ch XII.

<sup>106</sup> Heather and Moncur, “Sozomen,” in *Goths of the Fourth Century*, p.106.

<sup>107</sup> A.H.M. Jones, *A General History of Europe: The Decline of the Ancient World*, (New York: Longmans, Green and Co. Ltd, 1966), p.71.

<sup>108</sup> Jones, *A General History of Europe*, p.70.

<sup>109</sup> Maximinius, “Letter to Auxentius, *Goths in the Fourth Century*, p.151.

<sup>110</sup> Paulus Orosius, *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 50, trans. by Roy J. Deferrari, (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1964), p. XV & p. 340.

Hell. Thus, from Orosius' perspective, Valens' death by the hands of the Goths was just. However, because they were all heretics, he felt no compunction in keeping the barbarians at a distance. The church was one of the main institutions with which the Romans attempted to manage the Visigoths who came into their territory. The Goths were not pagans, so they could be tolerated in Roman society, but they were the wrong kind of Christian, which reinforced the sense of the Goths as "the other."

It seems strange that the Visigoths, who were baptized as a requirement for entering the empire, would be so determined to retain their Arianism, a religion that was socially, and legally unacceptable. James C. Russell claims that there is "an inherent conceptual correlation between Germanic social structure and the hierarchical structure of Arian divinity, according to which the Son is subordinate to the father."<sup>111</sup> His theory suggests that the Visigoths who were baptized as Arians were actually successfully converted. They were unwilling to give up their beliefs, heretics or not because of their spiritual commitment to them. They hoped to maintain a single faith, thus "preserving ethnic identity," in this case an identity based on a religion that was handed to them by the Romans. This desire would also explain why most of the Visigoths who entered the empire converted. The tribes that made up the Visigoths, now identified as a single ethnicity, in part because of their Arian Christianity.

The contradiction lies in the fact that the Roman clergy and elites wanted the Visigoths to become like them in their beliefs. Yet, the elites also sought to keep them apart from Roman citizens. The Goths were still thought of as barbarians because, although the Visigoths had converted to Christianity, their preferences were heretical and they still had pagan tendencies. Therein lay the danger. Because the Roman population was in some areas only superficially

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<sup>111</sup> James C. Russell, *Germanization of Early Medieval Christianity: a sociohistorical approach to Religious transformation*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p 139.

Christianized, it was even more dangerous to bring unbaptized pagan Visigoths into the empire because their beliefs could play into the hands of improperly Christianized Roman citizens.<sup>112</sup>

The Roman clergy was determined to Christianize the empire through baptism, but at the same time, they sought to find a way to maintain the stereotype of Gothic otherness. Admittedly, these two urges contradict each other. But this is the argument of the paper. In forcing conversion and a certain type of social behavior, Romans unwittingly facilitated Visigoth cohesion and Romanization. Yet again, what the Roman government and church wanted from the Goths was not clear.

Many Visigoths were willing to embrace Roman culture through religion, urbanization, and separation from their traditional tribal organization. Their practices became more Roman. Even the Roman Sozomen recognized that “under [Ulphilas’] guidance the Goths were instructed in piety and through him began to participate in a gentler way of life...”<sup>113</sup> However, the majority of the Roman elites did not agree that their piety had tamed the Goths. Rather, they believed that the Visigoths had only changed from paganism to become heretics. That being said, Christianity was another Roman institution with which the government attempted to control the Goths. It was an important factor in the ethnogenesis of the Goths but it worked to antagonize the issue between the Romans and the Visigoths. Sometimes the two cultures were merging and other times they were separate. In terms of religion, the conflict cements ethnic change that goes against the norm. The contradiction is yet another demonstration of the inconsistent process of ethnogenesis.

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<sup>112</sup> Sozomen, “Ecclesiastical History of Sozomen,” Book VII Chapter XXII. Much of the upper class was still holding on to their pagan ways. Theodosius requested that many of the members of the upper class convert to Christianity rather than holding onto their pagan beliefs and rituals. Sozomen complained that it was the men of the upper levels of society who were superstitious about animal entrails and how the stars were situated.

<sup>113</sup> Heather and Moncur, “Sozomen,” in *Goths of the Fourth Century*, pp.106-7.

## Marriage

While the Visigoths could become prominent figures in the army, their power was only as permanent as their martial success. However, some elite Goths thought they saw a way to solidify their authority among the elites, through marriage, yet another complexity within the process of ethnogenesis. The marriage of Athaulf and Galla Placidia connected the subjects of Emperor Honorius, and those of the king of the Goths. Marriage played a central role in the changing ethnic identity of the Visigoths and the unintended incorporation of Goths into Roman society. While marriage to women such as Galla Placidia was attractive to the Goths, the disapproval of the Roman elites made such unions rare.

The *Theodosian Code* had very strict regulations on marriages, which were intended to prevent nuptials between the Goths and Romans. Many of the laws were specific to barbarians, but others suggested that the process of marrying to breach class boundaries of any sort was forbidden. In section 3.14.1 of the *Theodosian Code*, Valentinian and Valens stipulated:

No provincial, of whatever rank or class he may be, shall marry a barbarian wife, nor shall a provincial woman be united with any foreigner. But if there should be any alliances between provincials and foreigners through such marriages and if anything should be disclosed or criminal among them, it shall be expiated by capital punishment.<sup>114</sup>

This law declared the illegality of any marriages between the Romans and the Visigoths showing yet another way that the Romans desired to isolate the Visigoths. Roman law also states, "...no person shall purchase a noble marriage, no person shall solicit one; but the kinsmen shall be consulted publicly..."<sup>115</sup> That is to say, no one, including the Goths, could marry a noble without already being one. Should anyone pursue a marriage with a man or woman outside of his or her class, the family would have the power to give or refuse their consent. The Roman emperors

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<sup>114</sup> *Theodosian Code*, 3.14.1: Marriages with Foreigners (De Nuptiis Gentilium).

<sup>115</sup> *Theodosian Code*, 3.7.1: Marriage (De Nuptiis).

clearly recognized what a powerful tool marriage could be for the barbarians. Refusal to accept these marriages shows that the Roman government wanted to legally prevent the Goths from becoming active and equal players in Roman society. Roman emperors wanted to control the Visigoths, hoping that while they used the Goths in the military, they would be unable to participate in Roman society in other ways.

Marriage was often used to seal a peace treaty or agreement between powerful families. In the upper classes, matrimony was primarily a result of negotiations between male relatives to determine whether the bride or groom would be a suitable choice.<sup>116</sup> Galla Placidia's marriage was different because no one in her family approved it. Although Galla Placidia consented to the marriage,<sup>117</sup> Honorius did not have to accept the marriage as legally binding. The marriage was a result of her abduction, which the Goths treated as elopement.<sup>118</sup> Their marriage still achieved Athaulf's ploy for political attention, but he also gained the resentment of Emperor Honorius because the King of the Goths had flaunted his authority, both as emperor and as Galla Placidia's closest male relative. According to the Roman laws discussed above, Honorius had the right to choose a husband for Galla Placidia whom he found politically advantageous.<sup>119</sup> In accordance to the way most Roman elites viewed the Visigoths, it is likely that most Roman families would have felt similarly betrayed and horrified if it was their daughter or sister in the same situation.

Athaulf's and Galla Placidia's marriage was illegal, but according to Visigothic marriage traditions, it was legitimate. The Visigoths had two different kinds of marriage. One of these was the same as the Romans, but the other was the use of abduction with intention to marry.<sup>120</sup> This

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<sup>116</sup> Judith Evans Grubbs, *Law and Family in Late Antiquity: The Emperor Constantine's marriage legislation*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 140.

<sup>117</sup> Wolfram, *The History of the Goths*, p. 162.

<sup>118</sup> Grubbs, *Law and Family in Late Antiquity*, p.186.

<sup>119</sup> Wolfram, *History of the Goths*, pp. 162-3.

<sup>120</sup> Yitzhak Hen. *Culture and Religion in Merovingian Gaul, AD 481-751*. (Brill: Lieden; New York, Köln, 1995), 124.

type of marriage was considered an elopement by Roman law and the woman was believed to be just as responsible.<sup>121</sup> This abduction was an example of the Roman argument that the Goths could live by no law, even as the Roman government aimed to control them. Athaulf's use of the abduction marriage, which was strictly acceptable among the barbarians, shows that although there were many ways in which the Visigoths were changing, they still lived by certain traditions in this period of ethnogenesis, which made the Romans see them as barbaric.

In marrying Galla Placidia, Athaulf hoped that Rome would find the Visigoths worthy of negotiations. Athaulf changed tactics, as the Romans continuously refused to grant the Goths their own state. Orosius claimed this was because, "the Goths, by reason of their unbridled barbarism, could not by any means obey laws, nor should the laws of the state be abrogated without which the state is not a state."<sup>122</sup> Instead of demanding autonomy for the Goths, Athaulf sought to be a general in the Roman army, protection for his people, and work for his people.<sup>123</sup> He was willing to withdraw his claim to kingship, and erase the monarchist tradition among the Visigoths.<sup>124</sup> Marriage to Galla Placidia was a further attempt, as it turns out an unsuccessful one, to gain the favor of Emperor Honorius.<sup>125</sup> The Goths sought an independent state, yet here it is also evident that the Goths vacillated in what they wanted as well. Such inconsistency shows that the Goths were becoming more willing to integrate, should the Romans allow it, because they were fairly Romanized.

Interestingly enough, the reputation of Athaulf was cleaned up, so to speak, by the writers of the time. Perhaps because he was so Romanized, so much at the heart of imperial culture, he could only be viewed as more Roman than others. Orosius argued:

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<sup>121</sup> Grubbs, *Law and Family in Late Antiquity*, pp. 186-8.

<sup>122</sup> Orosius, *The Fathers of the Church*, p. 362.

<sup>123</sup> James, *Europe's Barbarians*, p.61.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 248-9.

<sup>125</sup> Burns, *Barbarians within the Gates of Rome*, pp. 247-8.

...as it has often been said and has been proven finally by [Athaulf's] death, a very zealous seeker after peace, preferred to fight faithfully for the emperor, Honorius, and to employ the gothic forces to defend the Roman state...he strove to refrain from war; for this reason, to be eager for peace, being influenced in all the works of good government, especially by the persuasion and advice of his wife, Placidia.<sup>126</sup>

Athaulf no longer forced Rome to negotiate and it is likely that he was heavily influenced by Galla Placidia. Instead of fighting to gain Roman recognition, Athaulf sought recognition through more peaceful means. Due to his approach to Roman politics, Athaulf was believed by some contemporary European ethnohistorians to symbolize the true result of ethnogenesis.<sup>127</sup> Yet even his efforts at peace were thwarted by his marriage which had infuriated Emperor Honorius.<sup>128</sup> Honorius refused to proceed with any negotiations until Galla Placidia was returned. Honorius' actions show how reluctant the Romans were to engage in discussion with the Goths, and Athaulf's changes demonstrate how Gothic identity had changed. The Goths were Romanizing, but they had not fully gained their ethnicity, and Athaulf's role was only another step in a process that was beset by setbacks. Honorius' reluctance to accept Athaulf further demonstrates how complicated the process was.

Stilicho, as a prominent general, used his marriage to solidify his position in the Roman upper class. Stilicho married Serena, Theodosius' niece, in 384.<sup>129</sup> This marriage allowed him to gain political influence under Theodosius, giving him tremendous sway in the higher levels of Rome. As a half-barbarian, his marriage to Serena, according to Roman law, should have resulted in his execution. Edward James claims that no sources insinuate that interracial marriages were morally wrong.<sup>130</sup> But if that is the case, it is likely that most of the interracial

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<sup>126</sup> Orosius, *The Fathers of the Church*, pp. 362-3.

<sup>127</sup> Wolfram, *The History of the Goths*, p. 167.

<sup>128</sup> Burns, *Barbarians within the Gates of Rome*, pp. 247-8.

<sup>129</sup> Holum, *Theodosian Empresses*, p.9.

<sup>130</sup> James, *Europe's Barbarians*, p.195.

marriages happened among the lower class. Stilicho is an example of how barbarians improved their social standing through the military, to the extent that they were allowed to marry into Roman families. Theodosius no longer worried that Stilicho was half-barbarian because he had proved himself to be useful to the emperor through his military talent.

As barbarians or people with barbarian ancestry became influential among the upper classes, there were more conflicts between those sympathetic to the barbarians and those who believed them to be a danger to the empire. Whether it was Stilicho's influence or her own inclination, Serena sympathized with the barbarians, and was accused at the time of Stilicho's downfall, of scheming with the barbarians. Even in marriage the barbarians' power was tenuous, Stilicho's authority lay in the grace of the emperor. Should the powerful Goths lose their power, their wives were also placed under suspicion. Zosimus declared that Stilicho achieved a short peace with Alaric.<sup>131</sup> Yet, this peace resulted in Stilicho's overthrow, because he appeared to be sympathizing with Visigothic interest.<sup>132</sup> Stilicho's fall from power demonstrates how little tolerance the Romans had for barbarian sympathizers as well as what a tenuous line barbarians walked once they gained power in Rome.

The Roman emperors and the elites continuously failed to clarify whether they wanted the Visigoths to become a part of Roman society. The Romans saw the Visigoths as barbarians, and even animals. The emperors attempted to prevent all intermarriage and refused to accept the Goth's chosen Arian religion. Continuously, they dehumanized and mistreated the Visigoths within the confines of the empire. Therefore, in allowing the Visigoths into the army, accepting certain marriages between Visigoths and Romans, and attempting to urbanize the Goths, the Roman opinion appears to have fluctuated or the Romans were not entirely cognizant of how

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<sup>131</sup> Zosimus, *The Decline of Rome*, p. 225.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 235.



much they were facilitating the integration of the Visigoths into Roman society. However, by bringing the Goths into the empire, the Romans recognized the danger that the tribes presented even as Visigoth numbers filled the ranks of the army. The Visigoths were a military necessity, but their culture and barbarism threatened the Roman citizens. In an attempt to control the behavior of the Visigoths, the Romans had to make certain concessions, such as requiring Christian conversion and spreading Goths through the ranks of soldiers and into the cities so that the Visigoths would be more likely to feel the effects of Roman control. The result of these concessions was the changing ethnicity of the Visigoths.

The Visigothic ethnic identity was facilitated by Roman stereotypes and political action. Patrick Geary claims, “[The Visigothic identity] owed its very existence to Roman initiative, to the patient efforts of centuries of Roman emperors, generals, soldiers, landlords, slave traders, and simple merchants to mold the (to Roman eyes) chaos of barbarian reality into forms of political, social, and economic activity which they could understand and perhaps control.”<sup>133</sup> Roman determination to control the Visigoths in turn resulted in their changing identity. Roosens argues, “Political leaders can create stereotypes that give almost religious exaltedness to ethnic identity and, via stereotypes, lead to economic and cultural wars.”<sup>134</sup> Both of these authors agree. Through political actions the Romans successfully unified and identified the Visigoths as Visigoths. The Arian religion became a “badge of ethnic difference,” and a point of “ethnic pride.”<sup>135</sup> The Romans could use this to establish a difference between themselves and the Goths. Militarily, the Goths began to learn the Roman lifestyle, but the Romans made no attempt to catalogue each soldiers’ ethnicity. While the Goths became more Roman, at this point, the

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<sup>133</sup> Geary, *Before France and Germany*, p. vi.

<sup>134</sup> Roosens, *Creating Ethnicity*, p. 18.

<sup>135</sup> Michael Kulikowski, “Ethnicity, Rulership, and Early Medieval Frontiers,” in *Borders, Barriers, and Ethnogenesis: Frontiers in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, ed by Florin Curta, (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers n.v., 2005), pp. 249-250.

Visigoths still maintained a separate identity from the Romans as well. Their indiscernible nature within the military allowed the more ambitious barbarians to move up into higher positions of authority within the military. Some of these barbarians, such as Stilicho, were able to solidify their influence through marriage.

In this complex and seemingly problematic process, there is no traceable timeline for Gothic ethnogenesis. The process is inconsistent, because in some ways the Goths and Romans were further apart, and in other ways they were getting closer. With Gothic Romanization, the two cultures became parallel to each other. They were very similar, but Goths and Romans both saw themselves to be separate groups. Rome hated the Goths because they were animals. Yet even though they saw themselves as separate, they still eventually merged because they were, in reality, very much alike. They were not really assimilating, because in fact, neither group really realized the extent of the ethnogenesis and Romanization until much later.

Through the church, city life, military and marriage, the Visigoths were able to coexist in Roman society. These were the four institutions through which the Visigothic identity changed. It would be false to claim that the Visigoths became Romans, because Roman-ness was considered both a cultural change as well as a citizenship, something that the Visigoths lacked.<sup>136</sup> As discussed earlier, Ray Laurence and Joanne Berry believed that there were certain factors that created an ethnicity: “Shared territory or land; common descent; a shared language; a community of customs, or culture; a community of beliefs, or religion; a name, an ethnonym, to express identity; self-awareness, self-identity; a shared history or myth or origin.”<sup>137</sup> The Visigoths shared land, were predominately Arian, and identified themselves as “Visigoths.” They were also well aware of their identity, never fully assimilating into Roman society. Even more importantly,

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<sup>136</sup> Laurence and Berry, *Cultural Identity in the Roman Empire*, p. 65.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 95-96.

the Visigoths shared many of these variables with the Romans. They shared land, a similar culture of war, baptism into the Christian religion, and spoke the same language. The only thing they really lacked was Roman acceptance in the empire, because the Romans expected the Goths to be subservient so they could use them in the military, and hoped that the Goths would leave them alone aside from that. However, because they viewed each other as different, they could not merge into a single identity. The process of ethnogenesis, while Romanizing the Goths, did not unite the two groups. The Romans did not, at this time, have an identity with the Goths, nor the Goths with the Romans. Rather, Roman policies had put in motion an ethnogenesis that created the Visigoths in the Roman image.



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