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THE VISIGOTHIC KING GESALIC, ISIDORE'S *HISTORIA GOTHORUM* AND THE GOTHS' WARS AGAINST THE FRANKS AND THE BURGUNDIANS IN THE YEARS 507–514[*]

Abstract: Historians dealing with the period of the early Middle Ages do not hold a high opinion of Gesalic, the king of the Visigoths. Gesalic is blamed for the defeats they suffered in the war against the Franks and the Burgundians in 507/08–11. Modern historians' opinions are based mainly on the work of Isidore of Seville who described Gesalic as a coward and a ruler deprived of luck (*felicitas*). In this article I argue that to pass an accurate judgment on the king it is necessary to take into account the real politico-military situation of the Visigothic kingdom in the years 508–11.
Keywords: Gesalic, Visigoths, Ostrogoths, Franks, Theoderic the Great, *felicitas*, *ignavia*.

No Visigothic ruler seems to have elicited as many negative and unflattering comments as King Gesalic whose brief reign spanned the years 507/08–11/12 or 513/14.[1] Ludwig Schmidt stated that he was ill suited to

[*] This article is dedicated to Maciej Marek Kasperski. My grateful thanks go to Professor Wojciech Wrzosek (Institute of History of the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań) for drawing my attention to the way in which cowardice is evaluated in the early medieval sources. I also wish to thank Dominika Kaliszan and Hanna Rakowska for checking this text for typological errors.

[1] Gesalic's life and the chronology of his reign present historians with unsolvable problems. The last time Gesalic is mentioned in the *Chronica Cæsaraugustana* is under the year 513, *Chronicorum Cæsaraugustanorum reliquiæ* (hereafter *Chronica Cæsaraugustana*), in *Chronica minora sæc. IV. V. VI. VII.*, ed. Theodorus Mommsen (hereafter *Chronica minora*), vol. 2, Berolini, 1894, sub anno 513, p. 223, MGH Auctores antiquissimi (hereafter AA), vol. 11. On Gesalic see also John Robert Martindale, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, 3 vols, Cambridge, 1980, vol. 2: *A.D. 395–527*, pp. 509–50; Juan Antonio Jiménez Sánchez, 'El reinado de Gesaleico según la *Pseudo Chronica Cæsaraugustana*', in *La Vie des autres. Histoire, prosopographie, biographie dans l'Empire romain*, ed. Stéphane Benoist and Christine Hoët-van Cauwenberghe, Villeneuve d'Ascq, 2013,

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save his kingdom, embroiled in a war with the Franks and the Burgundians, from a disaster.[2] Another German scholar, Dietrich Claude, argued in one of his works on the Visigothic kingdom that Gesalic lost his throne in 511 because of his own ineptitude.[3] No less severe in their judgement of the king have been scholars from the British Isles. The Irish-born Marxist historian, Edward Arthur Thompson, was quite clear about his attitude to Gesalic: 'Such was the inglorious career of the first monarch of Spain' — wrote Thompson, referring to the king's turbulent reign.[4] The most distinguished nineteenth-century expert on the early Middle Ages, Thomas Hodgkin, should also be included among the severe critics of the Visigothic ruler. In his opinion the king was 'as weak and cowardly as his birth was base'.[5] Not only modern scholars have held Gesalic in utter disregard. Isidore of Seville, a historian living at the turn of the sixth and seventh centuries, was unequivocal, as I shall prove later, in his dislike of the ruler. In his *Historia Gothorum*[6] the chronicler described Gesalic as: '*sicut genere vilissimus, ita infelicitate et ignavia summus*'.[7] In Isidore's opinion the ruler certainly was not the embodiment of an ideal Visigothic warrior. He had neither bravery nor military luck — the two qualities for which Visigoths

pp. 219–30. On the Visigothic kingdom see Edward Arthur Thompson, *The Goths in Spain*, Oxford, 1969, passim; Dietrich Claude, *Adel, Kirche und Königtum im Westgotenreich*, Sigmaringen, 1971, passim; idem, *Geschichte der Westgoten*, Stuttgart, 1970; Jerzy Strzelczyk, *Goci — rzeczywistość i legenda*, Warsaw, 1984, pp. 176–221; Herwig Wolfram, *Die Goten. Von den Anfängen bis zur Mitte des sechsten Jahrhunderts; Entwurf einer historischen Ethnographie*, Munich, 2001, pp. 178–248; Roger Collins, *Visigothic Spain 409–711*, Oxford, 2004, passim; Luca Montecchio, *I Visigoti e la rinascita culturale del secolo VII*, Rome, 2006, passim; Gerd Kampers, *Geschichte der Westgoten*, Paderborn, 2008, passim; José Orlandis, *Historia del reino visigodo español*, Madrid, 2011, passim; Pablo C. Díaz Martínez, Celia Martínez Maza and Francisco J. Sanz Huesma, *Hispania tardoantigua y visigoda*, Madrid, 2007, passim; Javier Arce, *Esperando a los árabes. Los visigodos en Hispania (507–711)*, Madrid, 2011, passim; María R. Valverde Castro, *Ideología, simbolismo y ejercico der poder real en la monarquía visigoda: un proceso de cambio*, Salamanca, 2000, passim. Although some of the works to which I have referred above have been translated into Polish, I have decided — because of the defects of their translations — to quote the original versions.

[2] Ludwig Schmidt, *Geschichte der deutschen Stämme bis zum Ausgange der Völkerwanderung. Geschichte der deutschen Stämme bis zum Ausgange der Völkerwanderung. Abt. II. 2. und 3. Buch (Schluss). Die Franken*, Berlin, 1918, p. 490.

[3] Claude, *Adel, Kirche und Königtum im Westgotenreich*, p. 47. Wilhelm Junghans also claimed that Gesalic's deeds testified to his ineptitude in his *Die Geschichte der fränkischen Könige Childerich und Chlodovech*, Göttingen, 1857, pp. 109–10.

[4] Thompson, *The Goths*, p. 8.

[5] Thomas Hodgkin, *Theodoric the Goth. The Barbarian Champion of Civilisation*, New York, 1897, p. 204.

[6] *Isidori Iunioris episcopi Hispalensis historia Gothorum Wandalorum Sueborum* (hereafter Isidore of Seville, *Historia Gothorum*), in *Chronica minora*, vol. 2, pp. 241–390.

[7] Ibid., c. 37, p. 282.

were particularly desperate in the period filled with wars against the Franks and the Burgundians. It seems that this opinion was mechanically accepted by modern historians, including Hodgkin. But did the Visigothic king, who bore a proud and militant name that can be translated as 'dancing with spears', actually deserve to be subjected to such implacable criticism?[8] This sketch devoted to Gesalic consists of four parts and a brief appendix. The first part offers an analysis of the description of the king to be found in the *Historia Gothorum*. As will be shown later, Isidore held a clearly negative view of the king. According to the chronicler, Gesalic was the cause of all the disasters that befell the Visigoths during his reign and, consequently, deserved to be deprived of his power.[9] However, this view, which, as I have mentioned, became embedded in historiography, seems to be too one-sided and requires verification.[10] The second and third parts of this article offer a revision of it. The second part aims to show that Isidore's account of the war between the Goths and the Franks is unreliable, and, consequently, that his opinion about the king, whom he considered to be the only culprit of the Goths' failures, should also be treated with caution.[11] The third part aims to reconstruct the politico-military situation

[8] On the meaning of the name see Moritz Schönfeld, *Wörterbuch der altgermanischen Personen- und Völkernamen*, Heidelberg, 1911, p. 107, sub voce Gesalecus.

[9] On the ideal of the monarch in Isidore's work see Marc Reydellet, *La Royauté dans la littérature latine de Sidoine Apollinaire à Isidore de Séville*, Rome, 1981, pp. 505–97; Jaimy Wood, *The Politics of Identity in Visigothic Spain: Religion and Power in the Histories of Isidore of Seville*, Leiden and Boston, MA, 2012, pp. 138–90. On the role of ethnic identity in the Visigothic kingdom see Manuel Koch, *Ethnische Identität im Entstehungsprozess des spanischen Westgotenreiches*, Berlin, 2012. On the law and society in the Visigothic kingdom see Paul D. King, *Law and Society in the Visigothic Kingdom*, Cambridge, 1972; Ian Wood, 'Social Relations in the Visigothic Kingdom from the Fifth to the Seventh Century: The Example of Mérida', in *The Visigoths from the Migration Period to the Seventh Century: An Ethnographic Perspective*, ed. Peter Heather, Woodbridge, 1999, pp. 191–207.

[10] The main sources on which I rely for the verification of Isidore's account are: *Cassiodori Senatoris Variæ*, ed. Theodorus Mommsen, Berolini, 1894, MGH AA, vol. 12 (hereafter Cassiodorus, *Variæ epistolæ*); Iordanes, *De origine actibusque Getarum* (hereafter Jordanes, *Getica*), in *Iordanis Romana et Getica*, ed. Theodorus Mommsen, Berolini, 1882, MGH AA, vol. 5, part 1; *Gregorii episcopi Turonensis libri historiarum X*, ed. Bruno Krusch and Wilhelmus Levison, Hannoveræ, 1951, MGH Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum, vol. 1, part 1 (hereafter Gregory of Tours, *Historiæ*); Procopius, *De Bello Gothico* (hereafter Procopius, *De Bello Gothico*), in *Procopius*, ed. Wilhelm Dindorf, 3 vols, Bonnæ, 1833–38, vol. 2; *Vitæ Cæsarii episcopi Arelatensis libri duo* (hereafter *Vita Cæsarii*), in *Passiones vitæque sanctorum ævi Merovingici et antiquiorum aliquot (I)*, ed. Bruno Krusch, Hannoveræ, 1896, c. 29, pp. 467–68, MGH Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum, vol. 3.

[11] On the wars in Gaul and Spain in the years 507–514 see Junghans, *Die Geschichte der fränkischen Könige*, pp. 74–110; Felix Dahn, *Die Könige der Germanen. Das Wesen des ältesten Königthums der germanischen Stämme und seine Geschichte bis auf die Feudalzeit nach Quellen dargestellt*, 11 vols, Munich, 1861–1908, vol. 2: *Die kleineren gotischen Völker. Die Ostgothen*, 1861, pp. 139–53; Carl Binding, *Burgundisch-romanische Königreich*, Leipzig,

that actually existed during Gesalic's reign. Because this was much more complicated than Isidore's brief account suggests, it changes the perspective in which to view the king's reign. The fourth part deals with the question of whether the way Gesalic is portrayed in the *Historia Gothorum* is informed by a specific narrative strategy to which the historian resorted in his effort to show that the Goths were victorious people and the defeats to which they sometimes slumped were caused by their rulers' vices — cowardice in Gesalic's case.[12] The article concludes with a brief biographical note on the king, offered as an appendix. We start with an analysis of the description of Gesalic offered by Isidore in the *Historia Gothorum*.

Gesalic as a king covered in ignominy

The *Historia Gothorum* was written in two versions — a shorter one which Isidore finished in about 620 and a longer one which was brought to completion about 625. Created more than one hundred years after Gesalic's

1868, pp. 192–215; Thomas Hodgkin, *Italy and her Invaders, 476–535*, Oxford, 1885, vol. 3: *The Ostrogothic Invasion*, pp. 392–407; Wilhelm Ensslin, *Theoderich der Grosse*, Munich, 1959, pp. 128–46; Ludwig Schmidt, *Geschichte der Deutschen Stämme bis zum Ausgang der Völkerwanderung. Die Ostgermanen*, Munich, 1969, pp. 155, 343–45; Thompson, *The Goths*, pp. 7–10; Claude, *Geschichte der Westgoten*, pp. 54–62; Knut Schäferdiek, *Die Kirche in den Reichen der Westgoten und Suewen bis zur Errichtung der westgotischen katholischen Staatskirche*, Berlin, 1967, pp. 68–69; Erich Zöllner, *Geschichte der Franken bis zur Mitte des sechsten Jahrhunderts. Auf der Grundlage des Werkes von Ludwig Schmidt unter Mitwirkung von Joachim Werner neu bearbeitet*, Munich, 1970, pp. 63–68; Eugen Ewig, 'Die fränkischen Teilungen und Teilreiche (511–613)', in idem, *Spätantikes und fränkisches Gallien. Gesammelte Schriften (1952–1973)*, ed. Hartmut Atsma, Munich, 1976, pp. 114–71, especially pp. 124–28; Bernard S. Bachrach, *Merovingian Military Organization, 481–751*, Minneapolis, MN, 1972, pp. 9–12; Strzelczyk, *Goci*, pp. 141–44, 204–06; Wolfram, *Die Goten*, pp. 246–47, 309–11; Ian Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms, 450–751*, London, 1994, pp. 46–49; John Moorhead, *Theoderic in Italy*, Oxford, 1992, pp. 175–94; Andreas Schwarcz, 'Relations between Ostrogoths and Visigoths in the Fifth and Sixth Centuries and the Question of Visigothic Settlement in Aquitaine and Spain', in *Integration und Herrschaft. Ethnische Identitäten und soziale Organisation im Frühmittelalter*, ed. Walter Pohl and Maximilian Diesenberger, Vienna, 2002, pp. 217–26; Collins, *Visigothic Spain*, pp. 36–41; Michael Kulikowski, *Late Roman Spain and Its Cities*, Baltimore, MD, 2004, pp. 257–61; Biagio Saitta, *I Burgundi (413–534)*, Rome, 2006, pp. 32–35; Pablo C. Diaz and Rosario Valverde, 'Goths Confronting Goths: Ostrogothic Political Relations in Hispania', in *The Ostrogoths from the Migration Period to the Sixth Century: An Ethnographic Perspective*, ed. Samuel J. Barnish and Federico Marazzi, Woodbridge, 2007, pp. 353–75; Matthias Becher, *Chlodwig I. Der Aufstieg der Merowinger und das Ende der antiken Welt*, Munich, 2011, pp. 223–34; Justin Favrod, *Les Burgondes. Un royaume oublié au cœur de l'Europe*, Lausanne, 2011, pp. 97–99.

[12] On Isidore of Seville's *Historia Gothorum* see Roger Collins, 'Isidore, Maximus and the Historia Gothorum', in *Historiographie im frühen Mittelalter*, ed. Anton Scharer and Georg Scheibelreiter, Vienna, 1994, pp. 345–58; Hugo Hertzberg, *Die Historien und die Chroniken des Isidorus von Sevilla. Eine Quellenuntersuchung*, Göttingen, 1874.

death, Isidore's account of the Goths' history contains the following remark about the ruler under discussion: *sicut genere vilissimus, ita infelicitate et ignavia summus*. In order to understand what is really meant by the sentence, we should clarify the meaning of the three key words it contains, namely *ignavia, infelicitate* and *vilissimus*. To do so, I shall try to compare different sources in which these words are used, including Isidore's *Etymologiæ* — a source known as an early medieval encyclopaedia. Such an approach will enable me to carry out a semantic analysis of the description of King Gesalic found in the *Historia Gothorum*.[13] Ignavia. In his *Etymologiæ* Isidore devotes much space to the issue of antithesis (contradiction).[14] In order to capture its essence, he enumerates, following Cicero's *In Catilinam*, four virtues (*virtutes*) which he contrasts with four vices (*vitia*). These four virtues (*virtutes principalse*) include: *æquitas*, *temperantia*, *fortitudo*, *prudentia* while the contrasting vices are: *iniquitas*, *luxuria*, *ignavia*, *temeritas*.[15] So *fortitudo* is the opposite of *ignavia*. Courage (or valour) is contrasted with cowardice.[16] There is no doubt then that the word *ignavia* which the chronicler used in his description of Gesalic was meant to denote cowardice. That this was the case is attested to by the use of *ignavia* in the context of the ignominy with which the king covered himself when he fled the battlefield. According to Isidore's account, the withdrawal to Barcelona brought disgrace on Gesalic, and his flight (*fuga*), as the chronicler calls his retreat, left him in ignominy (*ignominia*).[17] This part of the account requires a more detailed comment. By medieval standards, commanders who fled the battlefield always disgraced themselves. Edward Gibbon indicated that the account found in Pseudo-Maurice's *Strategikon*, which shows that the Franks, to whom it is devoted, considered the retreat to be nothing but a disgraceful escape which was impossible to erase.[18] A clear link between cowardice,

[13] *Isidori Hispalensis episcopi Etymologiarum sive Originum libri XX*, ed. Wallace M. Lindsay, Oxonii, 1911, Scriptorum Classicorum Bibliotheca Oxoniensis, (hereafter Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiæ*; this edition is devoid of pagination).

[14] Ibid., II, 21.

[15] On these *virtutes* see István P. Bejczy, *The Cardinal Virtues in the Middle Ages: A Study in Moral Thought from the Fourth to the Fourteenth Century*, Leiden and Boston, MA, 2011. According to this author, in Middle Ages people endowed with these virtues were considered morally good while those characterized by *vitia* were believed to be wicked.

[16] Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiæ*, II, 21.

[17] Idem, *Historia Gothorum*, c. 37, p. 282.

[18] Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, vol. 5, New York, 1822, p. 363. However, it should be noted that the *Strategikon* presents the whole thing in a slightly different way. Cf. *Das Strategikon des Maurikios*, XI, 3, ed. George T. Dennis, transl. Ernst Gamillscheg, Vienna, 1981, p. 369: 'Die blonden Völker legen Wert auf Freiheit, sind stark und unerschrocken im Kampf, kühn und wagemutig; sie halten Angst und einen geringen Rückzug für Schande und verachten leicht den Tod. Im

escape and ignominy can be seen in other sources as well.[19] An anonymous song created during the war of the English King Henry II (reigned 1154–89) against his son Richard the Lionheart contains the following words: 'the sons of the stranger shall come unto thee; but soon they shall all fly to their country, in disorder, and covered with shame' (*Filii alieni venient usque ad te, sed pudoris ignominia cooperti ad terram suam fugient*).[20] Another example concerns a much earlier epoch, although the source to which I am referring comes from the twelfth century. An anonymous *Vita Oswini* (the Life of Oswiu) relates a disagreement between the Northumbrian King Oswiu (†670) and his warriors.[21] The monarch, having realized that the enemy forces significantly outnumbered his own, declared that he preferred to go into exile than watch his men die for him in battle. However, his decision encountered opposition from his troops who told him that 'it is better that we die in battle than that we become a byword for cowardice in the songs of the people, as deserters of our lord' (*melius est nobis mori in bello quam apud uulgus domini desertores in prouerbio cantitari*). A similar link between cowardice and escape is to be found in writings from the ninth and

Handgemenge kämpfen sie heftig zu Pferd und zu Fuß; wenn sie womöglich im Kampf zu Pferd bedrängt werden, steigen sie auf eine Vereinbarung von den Pferden ab und stellen sich zu Fuß auf, wenige gegen eine Mehrzahl von Reitern, und geben den Kampf nicht auf'. See *Maurice's Strategikon. Handbook of Byzantine Military Strategy*, transl. George T. Dennis, Philadelphia, PA, 1984, 11, 3, p. 119: 'They are bold and undaunted in battle. Daring and impetuous as they are, they consider any timidity and even a short retreat as a disgrace'.

[19] On the way in which Gregory of Tours presented wars and warriors see Phillip Wynn, 'Wars and Warriors in Gregory of Tours' *Histories* I–IV', *Francia*, 28, 2001, 1, pp. 1–35. Walter Goffart claims that one can hardly hope to find examples of military heroism in the early medieval sources: see idem, 'Conspicuously Absent: Martial Heroism in the *Histories* of Gregory of Tours and its Likes', in *The World of Gregory of Tours*, ed. Kathleen Mitchell and Ian Wood, Leiden and Boston, MA, 2002, pp. 365–93. On war and peace in the early Middle Ages, see John M. Wallace-Hadrill, 'War and Peace in the earlier Earlier Middle Ages', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 25, 1975, pp. 157–74. It is worth referring the reader to works devoted to the way in which warriors are presented in the narrative sources of the early Middle Ages; see Rachel Stone, *Morality and Masculinity in the Carolingian Empire*, Cambridge, 2012, passim; Paweł Żmudzki, *Władcy i wojownicy. Narracje o wodzach, drużynie i wojnach w najdawniejszej historiografii Polski i Rusi*, Wrocław, 2009, passim. On the image of a hero in the epic tradition see Georges Dumézil, *The Destiny of the Warrior*, transl. Alf Hiltebeitel, Chicago, IL, 1970, passim; idem, *The Stakes of the Warrior*, transl. David Weeks, ed. Jaan Puhvel, Berkeley, Los Angeles, CA, and London, 1983, passim; Brian Murdoch, *The Germanic Hero: Politics and Pragmatism in Early Medieval Poetry*, London, 1996, passim; Dean A. Miller, *The Epic Hero*, Baltimore, MD, 2000, passim.

[20] Quoted after Augustin Thierry, *Histoire de la conquête de l'Angleterre par les Normands*, Paris, 1867, vol. 3, p. 276, footnote 2.

[21] *Vita Oswini*, quoted after Scott Gwara, *Heroic Identity in the World of Beowulf*, Leiden and Boston, MA, 2008, p. 305.

tenth centuries. Regino of Prüm provided an account of the armed conflict that flared up in 874 between the Breton dukes, Vurfand and Pasquitan, after the death of Brittany's ruler, Salomon (reigned 857–74).[22] The chronicler quotes the words which Vurfand was supposed to have uttered to his troops who, facing the army several times greater than their own, were trying to persuade him to flee the battlefield. Vurfand is made to say: 'it is better to die nobly than to save one's life shamefully' (*Melius nobiliter mori, quam ignominia vitam servare*). Vurfand's courage paid off — his army inflicted defeat on the more numerous enemy. As evidenced by these examples, it was necessary to engage in battle — even if the enemy was stronger and more numerous. Flight from the battlefield was always disgraceful and emblematic of cowardice. There is one more question which needs to be addressed in connection with Gesalic's cowardice. The *Historia Gothorum* contains information that Gesalic, captured and killed by his enemies on the 'other' side of the River Durance, 'lost his honour before losing his life'.[23] This remark leaves us with the question of why the ruler was believed to have died deprived of his honour. The most plausible explanation is because he allowed himself to be captured. The medieval ideal required the warrior to fall in battle without being taken captive by his enemies, the greatest possible number of whom he was supposed to kill first. To die in battle was to die a noble death. This belief is reflected in Jordanes' account, included in his *Getica*, of Ellac's death in the battle at the River Nedao (454 or 455).[24] Attila's son, Ellac is reported to have fallen in battle, having killed many of his enemies. Jordanes comments: 'For after killing many of the enemy he redeemed his death so valiantly that his father, had he lived, would have wished such a glorious dead for himself' (*nam post multas hostium cedes sic viriliter eum constat peremptum, ut tam gloriosum*

[22] *Reginonis abbatis Prumiensis Chronicon cum continuatione Treverensi*, ed. Fridericus Kurze, Hannoveræ, 1890, sub anno 874, p. 586, MGH SrG, vol. [50].

[23] Isidore of Seville, *Historia Gothorum*, c. 38, p. 282.

[24] Jordanes, *Getica*, c. 262, p. 125. On this battle see Franz Altheim, *Geschichte der Hunnen*, 5 vols, Berlin, 1975, vol. 4: *Die europäischen Hunnen*, pp. 330–49; Edward Arthur Thompson, *A History of Attila and the Huns*, New York, 1948, pp. 148–70; László Várady, *Das letzte Jahrhundert Pannoniens (376–476)*, Amsterdam, 1969, pp. 327–31; Otto Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns: Studies in Their History and Culture*, Los Angeles, CA, 1973, pp. 147–61; Walter Pohl, 'Die Gepiden und die Gentes an der mittleren Donau nach dem Zerfall des Attilareiches', in *Die Völker an der mittleren und unteren Donau im fünften und sechsten Jahrhundert*, ed. Herwig Wolfram and Falko Daim, Vienna, 1980, pp. 239–305; Peter Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire: A New History of Rome and the Barbarians*, Oxford, 2005, pp. 354–58; Wolfram, *Die Goten*, pp. 259–62; Edward Arthur Thompson, *Hunowie*, Warsaw, 2015, pp. 128–30 (original edition: Edward Arthur Thompson, *The Huns*, Oxford, 1996. It is an improved version of his book Thompson, *A History of Attila and the Huns*).

superstis pater optasset interitum).[25] A much better depiction of the ideal of the early medieval warrior is to be found in Gregory of Tours' account of Munderic's death.[26] Munderic was a relative of the Merovingian King Theuderic (reigned 511/12–33) and because of this kinship he laid claim to royal title. However, Theuderic was unwilling to share his domain and wanted to be rid of Munderic. He promised him part of his kingdom to lure him into a trap and then ordered his men to attack the pretender. Aware of his inability to beat the enemy in open field, the latter decided to mount resistance within the walls of *Victoriacum Castrum* (most probably today's Vitry-en-Perthois, formerly Vitry le Brûlé).[27] There he addressed his warriors in the following words: 'Let us be brave and fight together to the death without surrendering to our enemies' (*Stemus fortes et usque ad mortem pariter demicemus et non subdamur inimicis*).[28] Munderic and his warriors put up a fierce fight and the violent assault to which *Victoriacum Castrum* was subjected was of no avail. The besieging army failed to force those under siege to surrender. Then Theuderic, in order to eliminate the impostor, decided to assasinate him once the negotiations, during which the latter was given a guarantee of safety, were over. However, Munderic discovered the ruse. Determined to put up a desperate fight, he drew a sword and, accompanied by his men, inflicted great carnage upon the enemy until, breathless, he fell covered with glory.[29] The words with which he ad-

[25] Jordanes, *Getica*, c. 262, p. 125. The British scholar Janet L. Nelson has written that kings were defeated and killed or 'through self-subjection to defeat and death, in a conspicuous reversal of normal values showing themselves lacking in *felicitas* or in that martial valour which fights to the death', in her article 'Royal Saints and Early Medieval Kingship', in eadem, *Politics and Ritual in Early Medieval Europe*, London, 1986, pp. 69–74, quotation at from p. 71. Herwig Wolfram argues in favor of the identity of *virtus* and *felicitas*: idem, *Splendor Imperii. Die Epiphanie von Tugend und Heil in Herrschaft und Reich*, Graz and Cologne, 1963, p. 25.

[26] Gregory of Tours, *Historiæ*, III, c. 14, pp. 110–112.

[27] See Antoine-Augustin Bruzen de La Martinière, *Le Grand Dictionnaire géographique et critique*, 9 vols, Venice, 1726–39, vol. 9, p. 258, sub voce Vitry Le Brulé; Jim Bradbury, *The Medieval Siege*, Woodbridge, 1992, p. 17; Bachrach, *Merovingian Military Organization*, p. 21.

[28] Gregory of Tours, *Historiæ*, III, c. 14, p. 111.

[29] I cannot agree with the thesis put forward by Walter Goffart (*Conspicuously Absent*, pp. 365–93, especially p. 371), who argues that Gregory of Tours' narratives are devoid of military heroism. In my opinion the depiction of Munderic's death, even if it is not the ideal presentation of military heroism — unquestionably contains heroic motives. Goffart believes that narrative about Munderic is ironic in form and foregrounds a the satirical character of Gregory's narrative, idem, *The Narrators of Barbarian History (A.D. 550–880): Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, Bede, and Paul the Deacon*, Princeton, NJ, 1988, p. 177. In the preface to the more recent edition of the work Goffart distanced himself from the thesis that Gregory's narrative in his *Historiæ* is satirical: see idem, *The Narrators of Barbarian History (A.D. 550–880): Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, Bede, and*

dressed his people in *Victoriacum Castrum* testify that the 'fight to the death' was considered an act of valour. The defenders were ordered to fight until the very end. There was no other option available for those determined to save their honour. To die with a sword in one's hand, among a pile of dead enemy bodies, was the only way in which one could hope to retain one's dignity. Surrendering always resulted in disgrace, as did allowing oneself to be taken captive. This is quite apparent from Gregory of Tours' account of the conflict between Clovis I and King Ragnachar of Camaracum (today's Cambrai).[30] Ragnachar — perhaps these events should be dated to around 508[31] — was captured by his own people who brought him with his hands tied behind his back to Clovis. The latter said to him: 'why have you disgraced our kin by allowing yourself to be bound [...] it would have been better for you had you died' (*Cur,* [...]*, humiliasti genus nostrum, ut te vincere permitteris? Melius enim tibi fuerat mori*).[32] This example clearly shows that the warrior whom his enemies took captive brought shame both upon himself and upon his kin.[33] ***Infelicitas.*** Gesalic's second feature requiring comment is *infelicitas*. The *Etymologiæ* provides us with a scant knowledge of the meaning of the word. We are told that *infelix* (unfortunate or unhappy) is the opposite of *felix* — happy or fortunate.[34] According to Isidore *felix* is one who gives happiness and who receives it.[35] However, based on this remark, it is not possible to say something more about *infelicitas*. It is therefore necessary to turn to other sources. I will try to show that *felicitas* was

Paul the Deacon, Notre Dame, IN, 2005, p. xxii. Goffart's view was criticized by Danuta Shanzer, see eadem, 'Laughter and Humour in the Early Medieval Latin West', in *Humour, History and Politics in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Guy Halsall, Cambridge, 2002, pp. 25–47, especially pp. 32–35.

[30] Gregory of Tours, *Historiæ*, II, c. 42, pp. 92–93.

[31] On this dating see Martindale, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, pp. 934–35, sub voce Ragnacharius.

[32] Gregory of Tours, *Historiæ*, II, c. 42, p. 92.

[33] According to Gregory Clovis I and Ragnachar were relatives. Both were descended from the most noble family of the Franks (*nobiliore suorum familia*) — the family of 'long-haired kings'. That *reges criniti* were the most noble family of the Franks was — according to Gregory of Tours — proved by Clovis' victories (*Historiæ*, II, 9, p. 57). During the war against Clovis, Ragnachar tarnished not only his honour. By allowing himself to be taken captive, he brought disgrace both upon himself and upon his family. It is worth adding that Gregory presents all Frankish kings as members of the same family. Edward James (*The Franks*, Oxford, 1988, p. 163) claims that the truth might have been completely different. This scholar argues that Gregory presented all Frankish rulers as members of one royal family on purpose. According to James, Gregory had a vested interest in presenting long-haired kings as members of the family of natural rulers of the Frankish people.

[34] Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiæ*, II, 3.

[35] Ibid., X, 97.

considered essential to the ideal ruler while *infelicitas*, by contrast, was taken to mark 'a bad king'. Let us begin with an analysis of the narrative about Visigothic king Suintila (reigned 621–31), to whom Isidore devoted the second version of the *Historia Gothorum*.[36] Presented as an ideal ruler, the king was credited with a range of royal virtues such as *fides* (faith), *prudentia* (prudence) and *industria* (diligence), and these were not the only good qualities with which he was endowed.[37] The historian described him as a victorious king and a great conqueror who managed to establish his rule over the entire Spanish territory. Moreover, thanks to his 'incredible luck' (*mirabilis felicitas*), the victories he won were greater than the victories of all the other Visigothic rulers.[38] If *felicitas* was a word used to denote the ideal ruler, then, it seems, its antonym — *infelicitas* — can be treated as characterizing a 'bad king', and Gesalic, according to Isidore, was such a king. At this point we leave the analysis of the *Historia Gothorum* whose author is customarily admonished by contemporary scholars for his adherence to the ideal of *brevitas* (brevity). In this regard, E. A. Thompson ironically remarked that the author of the *Historia Gothorum* 'could hardly have told us less, except by not writing at all'.[39] The remainder of this article is devoted to the analysis of comparative material.[40] During both the Roman Republic and the Roman Empire, *felicitas* formed part of the canon of virtues. *Infelicitas* was the opposite of *felicitas*.[41] The ideal military leader — according, for example, to Cicero (106–43 BC) — should possess four

[36] Marc Reydellet, 'Les Intentions idéologiques et politiques dans la *Chronique* d'Isidore de Séville', *Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire*, 82, 1970, pp. 363–400. On the image of this ruler in Isidore's work, see Collins, *Visigothic Spain*, p. 77. See also David Rojinsky, *A Companion to Empire: A Genealogy of the Written Word in Spain and New Spain, c. 550–1550*, Amsterdam, 2010, p. 47. On Isidore's intentions who wanted to show that the Visigoths and their kings were the natural inheritors of the western part of the Roman Empire see Valverde Castro, *Ideología*, p. 157. The Spanish scholar stresses the meaning of the Isidore's use of the term *imperium*.

[37] Isidore of Seville, *Historia Gothorum*, c. 64, p. 293.

[38] Ibid., c. 62, p. 292.

[39] Thompson, *The Goths*, p. 7; for a critical response to the British scholar's remarks about concision in Isidore's works see Paul M. Bassett, 'The Use of History in the *Chronicon* of Isidore of Seville', *History and Theory*, 15, 1976, 3, pp. 278–92.

[40] On the link between the king's misbehaviour and the sufferings that befell his people see Marita Blattmann, '"Ein Unglück für sein Volk". Der Zusammenhang zwischen Fehlverhalten des Königs und Volkswohl in Quellen des 7.–12. Jahrhunderts', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, 30, 1996, pp. 80–102.

[41] On *felicitas* as one of the imperial virtues see Carlos F. Noreña, *Imperial Ideals in the Roman West: Representation, Circulation, Power*, Cambridge, 2011, passim; Paul Roche, 'Pliny's Thanksgiving: An Introduction to the *Panegyricus*', in *Pliny's Praise: The Panegyricus in the Roman World*, ed. Paul Roche, Cambridge, 2011, pp. 1–28, especially p. 8, footnote 24; Axel Brandt, *Moralische Werte in den 'Res gestae' des Ammianus Marcellinus*, Göttingen, 1999, p. 81.

attributes: *virtus* (valour), *felicitas* (felicity), *auctoritas* (authority) and *scientia rei militaris* (experience in military matters).[42] It was no different with the 'good emperor'; the 'bad one', by contrast, was devoid of any of these virtues.[43] The conviction that the ideal military leader should be endowed with *virtus* and *felicitas* was also current in later centuries. *De duodecim abusionibus sæculi*, a Celtic treatise from the seventh century by Pseudo-Cyprian, was one of the sources of which Hincmar of Reims made use in writing, in about 873, his work addressed to Charles the Bald (the king of West Francia in the years 843–77).[44] Pseudo-Cyprian's treatise mentions twelve *abusiones* (misdeeds). The sixth *abusio* is epitomized by *dominus sine virtute* (literally a ruler without valour) and the ninth — *rex iniquus* (the iniquitous king).[45] *Dominus sine virtute* and *rex iniquus* are two negative types of rulers. A king who was unable to protect his own country was considered morally corrupt.[46] A monarch who was not a brave warrior and who was deprived of *virtus*, was a 'bad king'.[47] The treatise *De duodecim abusionibus sæculi* does not offer as precise a portrayal of a 'bad ruler' as Hincmar's

[42] Quoted after Noreña, *Imperial Ideals in the Roman West*, p. 166.

[43] See Brandt, *Moralische Werte*, p. 81: 'the good emperor' possessed *felicitas* which the 'bad one' lacked.

[44] *Ps.-Cyprianus, De XII abusionibus sæculi*, ed. Siegmund Hellmann, Leipzig, 1909. See Robert G. Sullivan, *Justice and the Social Context of Early Middle High German*, New York, 2013, pp. 47–48.

[45] *Ps.-Cyprianus, De XII abusionibus sæculi*, p. 32. Perhaps scholars who think that *dominus* was originally used in the Irish treatise to refer to clergymen are right. However, students of the Carolingian era who drew on the Irish source used *dominus* to refer to lay rulers; see Mary Clayton, '*De duodecim Abusiuis*, Lordship and Kingship in Anglo-Saxon England', in *Saints and Scholars: New Perspectives on Anglo-Saxon Literature and Culture*, ed. Stuart McWilliams, Cambridge, 2012, pp. 141–63, especially p. 146; Michael E. Moore, 'La Monarchie carolingienne et les anciens modèles irlandais', *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, 51, 1996, 2, pp. 307–24. On the ideology of the Carolingian monarchy see Walter Ullmann, *The Carolingian Renaissance and the Idea of Kingship*, London, 1969, passim.

[46] See Michael Szurawitzki, *Contra den 'rex iustus/rex iniquus'? Der Einfluss von Machiavellis 'Il Principe' auf Marlowes 'Tamburlaine', Shakespeares 'Heinrich V.' und Gryphius' 'Leo Armenius'*, Würzburg, 2005, p. 33.

[47] In the old Irish text of the seventh century entitled *Audacht Morainn* — which is actually a collection of proverbs regarding the monarchy and rulership — an old judge called Morann gives his adopted son, King Feradach Find Fechtnach, some advice on how to rule. Morann presents four types of monarchs, two of which are particularly relevant here. The first type was a 'real ruler' (*fírfhlaith*) who occupied the throne legitimately. He was followed by a 'cunning one' (*cíallfhlaith*) whose power was not fullly legitimate. However, a *cíallfhlaith* displayed military skills, being thus able to protect the borders of his kingdom, which in itself justified his rule. By defeating the enemies and protecting his realm he covered himself in glory. However, even a bad king could redeem himself. In the conversation with his son, Morann indicated ten things that could undo all the wrongs the king had done. Two of them are fame and

work *De regis persona et regio ministerio*. The latter takes a prominent place among the literary genre of 'mirrors for princes' (*specula regis*).[48] The text contains the famous sentence identifying *infelicitas* as a trait of a morally corrupt ruler: '*Quod populi felicitas sit rex bonus, infelicitas rex malus*', which is consistent with the point I seek to make here.[49] A strong connection between a 'bad ruler' and *infelicitas* is pointed out in a letter which an Anglo-Saxon called Cathwulf wrote in 775 to the young Charlemagne (†814). *Infelicitas* is clearly referred to in the letter as a punishment to be suffered by a morally corrupt ruler. Cathwulf (who was quoting St Patrick's words here) wrote: 'For a king's injustice he will suffer his own downfall, and there will be disagreement with wife and sons, famine among the people, plague, infertility of the land, and the fruits of the sea and land will be smashed by various storms, and he will be overthrown by his enemies and exiled from his kingdom' (*Pro regis iniustitia sui ipsius infelicitas erit, uxoris filiorum quoque dissensio, populorum fames, pestilentia, infecunditas terre, maris quoque tempestatibus fructus terrarium diversis percussis, et ab inimicis suis superatus et expulsus de regno*).[50] A bad king brought misfortune upon his own people.[51] ***Vilissimus.*** In the ninth book of his work, Isidore offers

victory. See Bernhard Maier, *Dictionary of Celtic Religion and Culture*, Stuttgart, 1997, p. 27 sub voce Audacht Morainn. The editions of this source: *Audacht Morainn*, ed. Fergus Kelly, Dublin, 1976; Anders Ahlqvist, 'Le Testament de Morann', *Études Celtiques* 21, 1984, p. 151–70; idem, 'Le Testament de Morann: Addenda et corrigenda', *Études Celtiques*, 24, 1987, p. 325. On the dating see Fergus Kelly, *Audacht Morainn*, in *Celtic Culture: A Historical Encyclopedia*, ed. John T. Koch, 5 vols, Santa Barbara, CA, 2006, vol. 1, pp. 142–43. It should be pointed out that that there are scholars who claim that the text was written as late as the eight century. Worthy of mention is the fact that some works by Isidore were known in Ireland as early as already in the seventh century see Luned M. Davies, 'Isidore of Seville, St', in *Celtic Culture*, vol. 3, pp. 1025–26.

[48] *Hincmarus, Rhemensis archiepiscopus, De regis persona et regio ministerio*, in *PL*, vol. 125, Parisiis, 1852, cols 833–856 (hereafter Hincmar, *De regis persona et regio ministerio*). On Hincmar of Reims see John M. Wallace-Hadrill, 'Archbishop Hincmar and the Authorship of *Lex Salica*', *Revue d'Histoire du Droit*, 21, 1953, 1, pp. 1–29; Janet L. Nelson, 'Kingship, Law and Liturgy in the Political Thought of Hincmar of Rheims', *EHR*, 92, 1977, 363, pp. 241–79. On a 'just king' in the Irish tradition, see Julianna Grigg, 'The Just King and *De Duodecim Abusiuis Sæculi*', *Parergon*, 27, 2010, pp. 27–52. The author tends to support the opinion that under the impact of Christianity the Irish and the Picts redefined their view of monarchy. Christian clergymen were to introduce a new idea of royal power based on, as what scholars call it, a 'moral legitimization'. Julianna Grigg advocates what is known as the 'anti-nativistic school' in Irish historiography founded by James Carney. On the school of thought see Kim McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature*, Maynooth, 1990, pp. 107–37.

[49] Hincmar, *De regis persona et regio ministerio*, c. 2, cols 835–836.

[50] *Epistolæ variorum Carolo Magno regnante scriptæ*, ep. 7, lines 36–44, in *Epistolæ Karolini ævi*, ed. Ernestus Dümmler, vol. 2, Berolini, 1895, p. 503, MGH Epistolæ, vol. 4.

[51] The dispute over the origin of *felicitas* attributed to barbarous kings continues. To quote Nicole Zeddies: 'Ob man hier allerdings ein magisch-mythisches Königsbild

the following definition of a noble man: *Nobilis non vilis, cuius et nomen et genus est scitur*, which can be translated as: 'a noble man is not base [or worthless] and his name and descent [or family] are known'.[52] As a child born out of wedlock — Gesalic was a son of the Visigothic King Alaric II by his concubine who is not known by her name — he could not be a nobleman, and in the eyes of Isidore (who was member of the Church) he was of the meanest descent — *vilissimus*.[53] As has already been noted, Isidore, in

letztendlich heidnisch-germanischer, zumindest aber archaischer Natur annehmen muss, wie es in mediävistischen Arbeiten zum Königsheil häufig getan wird, erscheint fraglich. Schon in der Spätantike war der Kaiser nicht nur für das Wohlergehen des Staates, sondern für die Ordnung der Dinge (*ordo rerum*) verantwortlich; das *elementa turbare* der Zauberer und Glaubensabtrünnigen wurde als reale Bedrohung wahrgenommen. Auch Hieronymus, der Rezeption germanischen Königsheils mit Sicherheit unverdächtlich, führt das Wohlergehen des Landes und die Ordnung der Natur auf den Herrscher zurück', eadem, 'Im Prokrustesbett der Juristen. Häresiegesetzgebung in der Spätantike und frühen Mittelalter', in *Religiöser Pluralismus im Mittelalter? Besichtigung einer Epoche der Europäischen Religionsgeschichte*, ed. Christoph Auffarth, Berlin, 2007, pp. 59–77, quotation from at pp. 71–72.

[52] Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiæ*, X, 184. See Jörg Jarnut, 'Nobilis non vilis, cuius et nomen et genus scitur', in *Nomen et gens. Zur Aussagekraft der frühmittelalterlicher Personennamen*, ed. Dieter Geuenich, Wolfgang Haubrichs and Jörg Jarnut, Berlin, 1997, pp. 116–27.

[53] A royal bastard on the throne was something not unknown in the early Middle Ages. The most famous Ostrogothic king, Theoderic the Great, was a son of a concubine. The famous Vandal ruler, Genseric, was a son of a slave who may have been of non-Germanic descent. See Helmut Castritius, *Die Vandalen. Etappen einer Spurensuche*, Stuttgart, 2007, p. 68. Among the Merovingians, kings were very often children of concubines. Suffice it to mention Clovis' illegitimate son, Theuderic. In the eyes of barbarians, a prince born of a concubine was as good a candidate to the throne as a king's son by a legitimate wife. The fact that the Merovingian princes were sons of royal concubines — women who were often slaves — became the subject of an interesting debate. Sagittarius, the bishop of Gap, announced that King Guntram's sons born of Austrechild, a slave woman, could not assume the kingdom. The line of reasoning put forward by Sagittarius, as Ian Wood showed, (*The Merovingian Kingdoms*, p. 58), was based on Roman Law, according to which the children of a free man and a slave woman inherited the status of their mother. The Merovingians, as Gregory of Tours stressed, (*Historiæ*, V, 20, p. 228), used the name 'royal sons' to refer to those who were begot by the kings. Let us quote the opinion expressed by the German legal historian of law, Rudolf Hübner, regarding the way in which the issue of illegitimate children was dealt with in the laws of the so-called western Germanic people: 'The favorable position of illegitimate children in the old law explains the fact that a legitimation of bastard children was unknown, speaking generally, to the West Germans', idem, *A History of Germanic Private Law*, Boston, MA, 1918, p. 99. On Gesalic's election see the comment by P. D. King, *Law and Society*, p. 23, footnote 1. The status granted to royal bastards by the Goths was not probably much different from the status which they were granted by the Franks see James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christain Christian Society in Medieval Europe*, Chicago, IL, 1987, especially p. 131. Ian Wood ('Social Relations', p. 192) claims that the Visigothic laws are not revealing of the way in which they treated the issue of kinship community. According to this scholar these laws did not reflect the Gothic

dealing with this issue, suggests that Gesalic's illegitimate origin was the cause of both his *infelicitas* and his *ignavia*.[54] The ignominy (*ignominia*) he brought upon himself by escaping to Spain only confirmed his illegitimacy and his innate cowardice, which was typical of royal bastard. The belief that bastardy was likely to result in cowardice can also be found in other sources.[55] It was generally believed that someone of illegitimate or uncer-

tradition. He expressed the following opinion about this issue: 'What the laws [the laws of Euric, Alaric II and Liuvigild — R. K.] reveal is a mixed society, subject to a legal tradition which was largely Roman [...]. Even the remarkable discussion of the family in the *Liber Iudiciorum* (LI IV, 1. 1–7 = LRV IV, 10. 1–8), with its seven degrees of kinship, comes from the *Lex Romana Visigothorum* and the *Sentences* of the Roman jurist Paul. The list provided by the code, therefore, is not derived from earlier Gothic traditions: it is is [sic! — R. K.], rather, an account of the Roman family transposed into the Gothic world. In so far as the laws show us the Visigothic family in action it is not as a kin group, but as a household (on the absence of the kin group [...])', idem, 'Social Relations', p. 192. Otto Seeck offered an interesting remark about Belisarius' warriors marrying Vandal women: 'Doch noch die Krieger des Belisar, die zum größten Teil Germanen waren, betrachteten die gefangenen Vandalenfrauen, mit denen sie zusammenlebten, durchaus als eheliche Gattinen (Procop. b. Vand. II 14, p. 269), nicht als Sklavinnen und Konkubinen, wie es dem römischen Kriegsrecht entsprochen hätte', idem, *Geschichte des Untergangs der antiken Welt*, 6 vols, Stuttgart, 1895–1920, vol. 1, bk 1: 'Die Anfänge Constantins des Großen und Verfall der antiken Welt', p. 52, footnote 13.

[54] It is worth quoting Andrew H. Merrills' words here: 'The *Historia* goes on to provide a substantial narrative of Gesalic's reign, concluding with his death near Barcelona, but it is the characteristics of misfortune and cowardice which are granted particular prominence within Isidore's opening summary of the king's life. In this, the historian provides a direct and obvious contrast between the illegitimate Visigothic king and the idealized image of the *Gothi* provided within the *Laus Spaniæ*. Where Gesalic is cast as *infelix*, thanks to his bastard origins, the *Gothi* are specifically identified as *felix* through their legitimate union with Spain. Similarly, where the *ignavia* of the king leads to inevitable death without honor, his gens is cast as victorious through its bravery, with Hispania presented as its ultimate reward', idem, *History and Geography in Late Antiquity*, Cambridge, 2005, pp. 224–25. There is a small mistake here. According to Isidore, Gesalic was not killed near Barcelona but 'on the other side' of the River Durance, in Gaul.

[55] The Middle Ages was not the only epoch when bastards were considered to be cowards by nature. In the literature of ancient Greece bastards (*nothoi*) were also presented as cowards: 'Thus, significantly, *nothoi* can be imagined to remain perpetually underage, never ma king the transition to manhood. Related to this notion of a lack of manhood are other statues that are secondary to the citizen: *nothoi* can be compared to slaves and foreigners, for example, in addition to women and children. These associations in turn link the lack of manhood to a lack of manly virtue: in other words, *nothoi* are cowards. This correspondence was seen in the version of the narrative of the Partheniai in which their fathers were Spartan men who refused to go to war, and the accusation of cowardice is seen as well in discourses regarding the figure of the archer as *nothos* in characters such as Teucer, Herakles, and perhaps also Paris', Mary Ebbott, *Imagining Illegitimacy in Classical Greek Literature*, Cambridge, MA, 2003, p. 110. On the literary representation of bastards in Louis XIV's France see Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Saint-Simon and the Court of Louis XIV*, Chicago, IL, 2007, pp. 49–50.

tain origin was likely to become a coward. Therefore, it was deemed advisable to avoid selecting kings from among those who were not of royal descent. Such a view was, for example, expressed in an interesting letter which the people of Kent received from Alcuin (†804), who urged them to offer command of their army to a man of royal blood. To this advice Alcuin added: 'Almost no men remain, which I say not without tears, who descend from the ancient royal line, and the more obscure their origin, the less their valour' (*Et vix aliquis modo, quod sine lacrimis non dicam, ex antiqua regum prosapia invenitur, et tanto incertoris sunt originis, quanto minoris sunt fortudinis*).[56] In Zosimos' *Historia Nova* (written at the turn of the fifth and sixth centuries) Constantine the Great himself is presented as a coward.[57] The author considered this ruler to be a bastard whom his father Constantius had begotten by a harlot.[58] Zosimos claimed that the ruler was an 'incredible coward' who, after the whole empire had come under his rule, turned out to be no longer able to win the battles he fought,[59] and one of those battles was especially revealing of the mould in which he was cast. Instead of beating with ease a small unit of Taifals consisting, according to Zosimos, of 500 riders, the emperor lost half of his army, let the enemy seize control of his camp and took flight to save his life. Moreover, as Mark Humphries has shown, Zosimos was of the opinion that the empire's defensive capacity was jeopardized by the enormity of Constantine's moral corruption.[60] According to this historian, Constantine was the cause of the fall of the empire and his reign marked the beginning of its end.[61] In the above I have tried to show that Isidore depicts Gesalic as a coward and as a man of base descent who enjoyed no luck. This leaves us justified in offering the following translation of the opinion which Isidore expressed about the emperor: 'being of base descent, he was also the most unfortunately and cowardly of men'.

I shall return to the problem of the representation of Gesalic in Isidore's work in the last section of this article. I turn now to the verification of Isidore's account of the war waged by Theoderic the Great in Gaul. By juxtaposing this account with what we can learn from other works dealing with the war Theoderic fought against the Burgundians and the Franks, it

[56] *Alcvini sive Albini epistolæ*, in *Epistolæ Karolini ævi*, vol. 2, ep. 129, p. 192.

[57] Zosimus, *New History*, transl. and commentary Ronald T. Ridley, Sydney, 1982.

[58] Ibid., c. II, 28, p. 28.

[59] Ibid., c. II, 31, p. 38.

[60] Mark Humphries, 'The Lexicon of Abuse: Drunkenness and Political Illegitimacy in the Late Roman World', in *Humour, History and Politics*, pp. 75–88, especially p. 84.

[61] Zosimus, *New History*, c. II, p. 39. On the subject of the fall of the Roman Empire is Zosimos' work see Walter Goffart, 'Zosimus: The First Historian of Rome's Fall', *AHR*, 76, 1971, 2, pp. 412–41.

will be possible to resolve the issue of whether Isidore's account reflects the real course of events — for if it does not, then the reliability of the negative picture of Gesalic drawn by Isidore in the *Historia Gothorum* can also be doubted.

The Verification of Isidore's Account of Theoderic's War in Gaul

Isidore's work is not the only source recounting Theoderic the Great's war in Gaul, which broke out in 508. Fortunately, there are sufficient other accounts of the war to verify the information provided by Isidore in the *Historia Gothorum*.[62] The latter can be summed up as follows:

1. After receiving the news of his son-in-law Alaric II's death, Theoderic the Great immediately (*confestim*) set out from Italy.
2. Then he crushed (literally trampled underfoot) the Franks (*Francos proterit*).
3. Eventually he regained part of the kingdom, which had been taken over by the enemy, and restored it to the Goths' rule.

Let us try to verify these statements.

Ad. 1. The battle between Clovis and Alaric took place — scholars are rather in agreement on this point — in 507.[63] Theoderic's army, to be sent into battle against the Franks, was to be gathered by 24 June 508, as is apparent from Theoderic's letter to 'all the Goths'.[64] Even if it is accepted that Alaric II's defeat took place towards the end of 507, there is at least a six-month interval between the battle and the departure of the Ostrogoths' army, which goes counter to Isidore's claim that Theoderic's troops set out immediately. Theoderic did not command his army in person. It was led by Ibba.[65] Two sources (*De Bellis* and *Vita Cæsarii* by Procopius)[66] record that the Gothic king actually appeared in Gaul, but their reliability, insofar as this problem is concerned, is in dispute.[67] If Theoderic actually

[62] Isidore of Seville, *Historia Gothorum*, c. 36, pp. 281–82.

[63] *Chronica Cæsaraugustana*, sub anno 507, p. 223. There is no agreement about whether the battle took place at the beginning or at the end of the year. On the battle see *The Battle of Vouillé, 507 CE, Where France Began*, ed. Ralph W. Mathisen and Danuta Shanzer, Boston, MA, 2012.

[64] Cassiodorus, *Variæ epistolæ*, I, 24, 2, p. 27.

[65] Ibba defeated the Franks, retook Narbonne and drove Gesalic out of Spain see Martindale, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, p. 585, sub voce Ibba.

[66] Procopius, *De Bello Gothico*, I, 12, p. 67; *Vita Cæsarii*, I, c. 28, p. 467.

[67] It is especially Procopius' account that is in dispute. Junghans who rejected both accounts, claimed that Theoderic did not arrive in Gaul in person, idem, *Die Geschichte der fränkischen Könige*, p. 88.

set foot in Gaul, this could not have taken place at the beginning of the campaign known as *Expeditio Gallicana*. One might add that Theoderic, contrary to what Isidore says, never appeared in Spain and never exercised his power there.[68] Ad. 2. In Gaul Theoderic's army won at least one battle against the Franks. In his *Getica* Jordanes reports the defeat inflicted by Ibba on the Franks in Gaul — apparently over thirty thousand of them fell in this battle.[69] In his chronicle published in 519 in honour of, and on commission from, Theoderic's son-in-law Eutharic Cilliga († c. 522), Cassiodorus mentions a victory which the army sent by the Amal king won over the Franks.[70] The life of St Caesarius of Arles recounts the battle which the Goths fought at the walls of Arelate (today's Arles) against the Franks and the Burgundians who were besieging the city.[71] After forcing the enemy to flee, the Goths returned to the city with a great number of captives. There is no reason to doubt that the Ostrogothic army inflicted defeat on the Franks. Although there is no doubt that it was not the victory that sealed Clovis' or his sons' defeat (he died in 511/12),[72] to which Isidore referred by the mysterious phrase '*Francos proterit*'. That Theoderic — or rather the commanders of his army Ibba, Mammo, Arigern and Tuluin — did not inflict a crushing defeat on the Franks is indirectly indicated by the extent of the lands the Ostrogoths regained (more on this point below). Ad. 3. The problem of Theoderic's recapture of the lands lost by the Visigoths also looks less rosy than is suggested by Isidore's account. Ill-disposed to the Goths — to put it mildly — Gregory of Tours admitted in his Histories, finished in 594, that 'after Clovis' death the Goths reclaimed much of what he had conquered'.[73] Gregory's remark indicates that the Goths recaptured a significant part of the lands they had lost, but not all of them. The account by Procopius of Caesarea of the events also testifies to the fact that Theoderic failed to push the Germans (as the Franks are referred to by the historian) out of all the Visigothic lands of which the latter had seized control.[74] Eugen Ewig's research has also shown that Theoderic failed to retake

[68] However, Theoderic was king of the Visigoths from 511 until his death in 526. See Claude, *Geschichte der Westgoten*, p. 55; Wolfram, *Die Goten*, pp. 293, 309.

[69] Jordanes, *Getica*, c. 302, p. 135.

[70] *Cassiodori senatoris chronica* (hereafter Cassiodorus, *Chronica*), in *Chronica minora*, vol. 2, sub anno 508, p. 160.

[71] *Vita Cæsarii*, I, c. 32, p. 469.

[72] Ian N. Wood claims that Clovis' death could be dated to 512 rather than 511: 'Gregory of Tours and Clovis', *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire*, 63, 1985, 2, pp. 249–72, especially p. 254.

[73] 'Gothi vero cum post Chlodovechi mortem multa de id quæ ille adquesiserat pervasissent', Gregory of Tours, *Historiæ*, III, 21, p. 121.

[74] Procopius, *De Bello Gothico*, I, 12, p. 67.

all the lost territories.[75] The German scholar established that as a result of the victory in question the Amal king controlled the south of Novempopulana, Rodez and, most probably, Albi and Toulouse, which means that the territory he regained was smaller than the lands which the Visigoths had possessed before the battle of Vouillé. It is clear that what Isidore says is inconsistent with the real course of events. The *Historia Gothorum*'s account of Theoderic's war in Gaul will not help us answer Ranke's question, *wie es eigentlich gewesen*. If Isidore does not offer a true account of Theoderic's war against the Franks, then one must ask whether all the other remarks he makes about Gesalic should be accepted as reliable. Does Alaric II's illegitimate son actually deserve to be judged so severely by posterity?

In the next part of this article the politico-military situation will be analysed for the period from the eve of the battle of Vouillé until Gesalic's defeat and death. This will allow us to gain a broader perspective on the scale of the problems faced by the Visigoths and their king Gesalic, whom Isidore held in such disregard.

Gesalic and the Visigoths' struggles against the Franks and the Burgundians

Gesalic became the Visigoths' ruler in 507 or 508, in one of the most turbulent periods of the history of the Visigothic kingdom, when it was tottering under the pressure of the Franks ruled by Clovis and the Burgundians ruled by King Gundobad. Little is known about the Visigothic forces. We can presume that their combat value was not significant. Even before the outbreak of the conflict between the Visigoths and the Franks, Theoderic the Great, versed in the art of war, cautioned Alaric II against coming into conflict with Clovis.[76] What he had in mind was that the Visigoths had not been involved in fighting for a long time and periods of peace — as Cassiodorus dictating the letter put it — usually soften the hearts of belligerent people.[77] Indeed, there is no evidence to suggest that in the few years preceding the disaster at Vouillé the Visigoths had taken part in any major military campaigns. And during Clovis' reign his army acquired military experience winning a number of battles, including the decisive victory

[75] Ewig, 'Die fränkischen', pp. 651–715.

[76] Cassiodorus, *Variæ epistolæ*, III, 1, 1, p. 78.

[77] 'Quamvis fortitudini vestræ confidentiam tribuat parentum vestrorum innumerabilis multitudo, quamvis Attilam potentem reminiscamini VVisigotharum viribus inclinatum, tamen quia populorum ferocium corda longa pace mollescunt, cavete subito in aleam mittere quos constat tantis temporibus exercitia non habere', Cassiodorus, *Variæ epistolæ*, III, 1, 1, p. 78.

over the Alemanni in 506.[78] Of key importance in determining the state of Gesalic's forces is the account by Procopius of Caesarea. In his description of the battle of Vouillé, which he erred in locating near Carcassone, Alaric II is reported to have lost his life and his army to have suffered a resounding defeat at the hands of Clovis.[79] The majority of Visigothic warriors fell in the battle. Those who survived chose Gesalic as their king.[80] The new king began his rule under very unfavourable circumstances. Not only did the Visigoths lose their army, but they also had one more enemy to fight — the Burgundians. Whether the Burgundians joined the struggle against the Visigoths before or after the battle of Vouillé remains in dispute. Some scholars claim that the Burgundians took part in it on the side of the Franks,[81] but others advise caution in dealing with this issue.[82] Were the Burgundians present at Vouillé? In his work Gregory of Tours says nothing about the Burgundians' contribution to the victory over Alaric II, and he was not the only chronicler according to whom the Visigoths were defeated exclusively by the Franks.[83] The *Chronica Gallica* contains the following sentence: 'Alaric, king of the Goths was killed by the Franks' (*Occisus Alaricus rex Gothorum a Francis*).[84] The *Chronica Cæsaraugustana* also mentions only the Franks: 'at this time a battle between the Goths and Franks was fought at Vouillé. King Alaric was killed in the clash by the Franks and the kingdom of Toulouse was destroyed' (*His diebus pugna Gotthorum et Francorum Boglada facta. Alaricus rex in proelio a Francis interfectus est: regnum*

[78] See a discussion regarding the dating of this event André van de Vyver, 'La Victoire contre les Alamans et la Conversion de Clovis', *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire*, 15, 1936, 3–4, pp. 859–914; Ferdinand Lot, 'La Victoire sur les Alamans et la Conversion de Clovis', *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire*, 17, 1938, 1–2, 1938, pp. 63–69; André van de Vyver, 'L'Unique Victoire contre les Alamans et la Conversion de Clovis en 506', *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire*, 17, 1938, 3–4, pp. 793–813; Dieter Geuenich, 'Chlodwigs Alemannenschlacht(en) und Taufe', in *Die Franken und die Alemannen bis zur 'Schlacht bei Zülpich' (496/97)*, ed. Dieter Geuenich, Berlin, 1998, pp. 423–37; John F. Drinkwater, *The Alamanni and Rome 213–496 (Caracalla to Clovis)*, Oxford, 2007, pp. 344–45.

[79] Procopius, *De Bello Gothico*, I, 12, p. 67.

[80] Ibid.

[81] The view that the Burgundians took part in the battle is quite widespread: see Gönna Hartmann-Petersen, *Genovefa von Paris — Person, Verehrung und Rezeption einer Heiligen des Frankenreichs. Eine paradigmatische Studie zur Heiligenverehrung im Frühmittelalter*, Hamburg, 2007, p. 148; Becher, *Chlodwig I.*, p. 230; Abilio Barbero and Maria I. Lorning, 'The Formation of the Sueve and Visigothic Kingdoms in Spain', in *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, 7 vols, Cambridge, 1995–2005, vol. 1: *c. 500–c. 700*, ed. Paul Fouracre, 2005, pp. 162–92, especially p. 174.

[82] Uta Heil, *Avitus von Vienne und die homöische Kirche der Burgunder*, Berlin, 2011, p. 21.

[83] Gregory of Tours, *Historiæ*, II, 37, pp. 87–88.

[84] *Chronica Gallica*, in *Chronica minora*, vol. 1, Berolini, 1892, sub anno DXI, p. 666, MGH AA, vol. 9.

Tolosanum destructum est).[85] In one of the versions of the work by Isidore of Seville, the Franks are also presented as the only enemy with whom Alaric clashed at Vouillé (it should be added that Isidore locates the battle at Pictavium, today's Poitiers).[86] Although in the second version of the work he writes that Clovis went to war supported by the Burgundians, it does not necessarily indicate the latter's active involvement in the battle.[87] The evidence presented above unequivocally supports the view that the Burgundians were absent from the battlefield. All of this illustrates the scope of the problems with which Gesalic had to struggle from the very beginning of his reign. Since the military strength he had at his disposal was much smaller than that of his father, he had to fight an unequal fight against the enemy supported by the Burgundians. It was not difficult to predict the result of the struggle; it was probably as early as 507 that Gesalic had lost Narbonne. To make matters worse, in 507 or 508 in Toulouse, the Franks seized part of the Visigothic royal treasure.[88] Bearing in mind Napoleon's well-known phrase about three things without which it is impossible to wage war, it becomes clear that Gesalic's situation was hopeless. Given the pressure from the Franks and Burgundians and Theoderic the Great's lack of a decisive reaction in the first half of 508, the Visigothic king had no other reasonable option but to decide to withdraw to Spain. During his retreat to Barcelona his army suffered serious losses, which is attested by Isidore's account included in c. 37 of the *Historia Gothorum*. The chronicler wrote that '*iste cum multo sui dedecore et cum magna suorum clade apud Barcinonam se contulit*'.[89] The *Chronica Gallica* also reports significant losses among his men: '*et Geseleicus rex cum maxima suorum clade ad Hispanias regressus est*', although it makes no mention of Gesalic's infamy.[90] The losses are no proof that Gesalic was a poor commander. They are evidence of the fierce fighting between the Visigoths and their enemies, and the phrase *maxima suorum clade* may point to the outcome of the fighting or may suggest that the Franks and the Burgundians had an overwhelming superiority. After be-

[85] *Chronica Cæsaraugustana*, sub anno 507, p. 223.

[86] Isidore of Seville, *Historia Gothorum*, c. 36, p. 282. On the location of the battle see Auguste Longnon, *Géographie de la Gaul au VI^e siècle*, Paris, 1878, pp. 576–87; Richard A. Gerberding, *The Rise of the Carolingians and the Liber Historiæ Francorum*, Oxford, 1987, p. 41; Ralph W. Mathisen, 'Vouillé, Voulon, and the Location of the Campus Vogladensis', in *The Battle of Vouillé, 507 CE*, pp. 43–61, where a great number of works dealing with the problem are listed.

[87] Isidore of Seville, *Historia Gothorum*, c. 36, pp. 281–82.

[88] Gregory of Tours, *Historiæ*, II, 37, pp. 87–88.

[89] Ibid.

[90] *Chronica Gallica*, sub anno DXI, p. 666.

ing deprived of his power by Theoderic the Great, Gesalic was unstinting in his efforts to regain the throne. C. 38 of the *Historia Gothorum* contains information that he went to the African Kingdom of the Vandals in the hope of securing their support and restoring his position.[91] The Vandals gave him money, but refused him military support. His return to Spain ended in failure as he was driven out of it by Ibba. Gesalic went north to Aquitaine.[92] In 511/12 or 513/14 he set out from Aquitaine with the goal of invading Spain. At the twelfth milestone from Barcelona he fought a battle against Ibba, who was one of the best (if not the best) of Theoderic the Great's commanders. The battle which took place near Barcelona ended in Gesalic's defeat who one more time turned out to be no match for the Ostrogothic commander and his warriors famous for the victories they won over the Franks and the Burgundians. After his defeat in the battle against Ibba, Gesalic took flight — Isidore, who drew in his work a negative picture of the king, would have been unhappy to learn that the king had died heroically on the battlefield — and tried to get to the Burgundian territory. In Gaul, on the Burgundian side of the River Durance, he was captured and killed, losing — according to the chronicler — first his honour and then his life. The account of the Visigoths' situation in Gaul in the years 507–10 and especially of Gesalic's political and military conduct at this time, leads us to pose the question of whether one is justified in accepting Isidore's view of Gesalic as a coward. First, in spite of the extremely difficult situation in which he found himself after the battle of Vouillé, he agreed to accept the Visigothic throne and remained in a war-torn Gaul. Second, it is known that at least twice he attempted to regain power. Third, he twice threw down the gauntlet to the commander of the Ostrogothic forces in Spain — Ibba, who had established himself as a great commander (he had defeated the Franks in 508, had relieved the besieged city of Arles, had retaken Narbonne from Gundobad and had seized control of Visigothic Spain). Theoderic the Great himself had a high opinion of his commander's military

[91] Isidore of Seville, *Historia Gothorum*, c. 38, p. 282.

[92] *Chronica Cæsaraugustana*, sub anno 513, s. 223. See Isidore of Seville, *Historia Gothorum*, c. 38, p. 282. It worth quoting here the comment by Michael Kulikowski (*Late Roman Spain*, p. 398 and footnote 30): '*His consulibus Gisalecus de Africa rediens ob metum Helbanis Aquitaniam petiit ibique latuit annum unum*. Isid., *HG* 38 does not note this initial battle between Gesalic and Ibba and has Gesalic go directly from Africa to Aquitaine before encountering Ibba in the following year. While either source may simply have reversed the order of events, it is just as likely that each has recorded one part of a complicated series of brief campaigns between Gesalic and Theoderic's chief general'. Let us note that *Chronica Cæsaraugustana* and *Historia Gothorum* differ from each other not only in their description of the events that took place after the Visigothic king left Africa.

skills and referred to him as 'glorious in wars' (*gloriosum in bellorum certamine*) and 'renowned for his military prowess' (*bello clarus*).[93] Challenging him can be regarded as a sign of recklessness, but it can hardly be conceived of as evidence of cowardice. His decision to invade Spain and to give battle to the hitherto undefeated Ostrogoths indicates that he may have been a fool, but not a coward.

Gesalic and the narrative strategy of Isidore's *Historia Gothorum*

In the first section of this article I have shown that Gesalic is presented in Isidore's *Historia Gothorum* as an incredible coward who, just because his conduct was inconsistent with the dignity of royal power — according to the principle *Rex eris si recte feceris; si non feceris, non eris*[94] — brought upon himself shame and finally, having been deprived of his throne by Theoderic the Great, an ignominious death.[95] In the second part I have argued in favour of the acceptance of a critical view of Isidore's account, since on many points it deviates from the way the events it claims to recount actually unfolded. In the third part I have tried to show that — contrary to what Isidore wrote — Gesalic was not a coward and his political conduct required much stamina and testified to his bravery. In the remainder of this article I wish to return to the issue of *ignavia*. I will try to highlight the meaning of the concept by placing it in a wider context. I will juxtapose it with *fortitudo* which, according to Isidore, was the main characteristic of the Goths. The narrative structure of Isidore's *Historia Gothorum* has recently received much attention from Anglo-Saxon historians.[96] The British scholar Roger Collins has advanced the thesis that the older version of Isidore's *Historia* is either identical with the work by Maximus of Saragossa, which has not survived and which is known as *historiola*, or is to a significant extent based on it.[97] However, some British historians of younger generation argue that there is a specific narrative strategy to be found in the *Historia*

[93] Cassiodorus, *Variæ epistolæ*, IV, 17, 3, p. 122. see Martindale, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, p. 585, sub voce Ibba.

[94] Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiæ*, I, 156.

[95] Isidore of Seville, *Historia Gothorum*, c. 37–38, p. 282. The Irish royal tradition also contains the belief that the king should preserve his honour and prove his value as a warrior see McCone, *Pagan Past*, pp. 121–23.

[96] See Collins, *Isidore*, pp. 345–58; Kenneth Baxter Wolf, *Conquerors and Chroniclers of Early Medieval Spain*, Liverpool, 1991, especially pp. 11–24; Merrills, *History and Geography*, pp. 170–228.

[97] Collins, *Isidore*, pp. 345–58.

Gothorum, especially in its later version.[98] These authors claim that because the *historiola* is not fully preserved, the question of the relationship between this work and the *Historia Gothorum* needs to be set aside. What really matters are the intentions of the author of the *Historia Gothorum*. The goal Isidore pursued was to legitimize the Goths' rule over Spain.[99] According to these scholars, Isidore's narrative strategy placed particular emphasis on the portraying of the Goths as the victorious people who wielded power over their country by the law of conquest. Andrew H. Merrills, one of the leaders of the new wave of the research into Isidore, argues that the work's narrative goal was to show that it was bravery and military prowess that had given the Goths their right, or even their destiny, to rule over Spanish lands.[100] It is worth following this lead. In Isidore's *Etymologiæ*, *fortitudo* and *sapientia* (wisdom) were the virtues of heroes. 'For men who are, as it were, "airy", and worthy of heaven, are called "heroes", because of their wisdom and courage' (*Nam heroes appellantur viri quasi ærii et cælo digni propter sapientiam et fortitudinem*).[101] In the *Historia Gothorum* fortitude is the Goths' main virtue. This characteristic is even reflected in their name as the 'Goths' means *tecti* (covered), which in turn is to be translated as *fortitudo*.[102] Portrayed as unequalled warriors, versed in the use of all sorts of weapons,[103] they frightened Pyrrhus, struck terror in Caesar, and Alexander the Great claimed that they should be avoided.[104] According to Isidore's account included in the *Historia Gothorum*, the Goths' military prowess was not attested to only by the fears of ancient commanders. Nobody gave the

[98] Kenneth Baxter Wolf (*Conquerors and Chroniclers*, p. 95 and footnote 91) takes a different view of this issue: 'The Chronicle of Zaragoza, which survives only as a fragment, may have provided Isidore with some of the factual basis for HistGoth 36–47, but the textual ties between the two are tenuous at best'. For a discussion of different views see J. Wood, *The Politics of Identity*, pp. 72 and 73, footnote 20. I agree with those scholars who claim that it is impossible to prove the hypothesis that the shorter version of the *Historia Gothorum* was not written by Isidore.

[99] Merrills, *History and Geography*, pp. 170–228; Wolf, *Conquerors and Chroniclers*, pp. 11–24; J. Wood, *The Politics of Identity*, passim.

[100] Merrills, *History and Geography*, pp. 170–228.

[101] Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiæ*, I, 39. My translation of this sentence is in part based on the translation by Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, New York, 1953, p. 175.

[102] Isidore of Seville, *Historia Gothorum*, c. 2, p. 268. See Curt Weibull, *Die Auswanderung der Goten aus Schweden*, Gothenburg, 1958, pp. 3–28; Josef Svennung, *Zur Geschichte des Goticismus*, Uppsala, 1967, passim; Wolfram, *Die Goten*, pp. 39–41; Axel Klopprogge, *Ursprung und Ausprägung des abendländischen Mongolenbildes im 13. Jahrhundert. Ein Versuch zur Ideengeschichte des Mittelalters*, Wiesbaden, 1993, p. 62.

[103] Isidore of Seville, *Historia Gothorum*, c. 70, pp. 294–95.

[104] Ibid., c. 2, p. 268.

Romans as much trouble as the Goths who captured the heart of the Empire — Rome.[105] The Goths' virtues clearly stood in opposition to the vices which Isidore attributed to Gesalic. Moreover, the Goths' *fortitudo* and Gesalic's *ignavia* fit the antithesis to which I have referred at the beginning of this article. Is this juxtaposition of *virtus* and *vitium* a matter of chance? Perhaps not. Historians pointed out long ago that Isidore attempted to justify the Goths' failures with their rulers' vices. Following this line of thought, Kenneth Baxter Wolf, in commenting on Isidore's narrative strategy, wrote:

> Isidore's attempt to compose a history of the Goths that would place their recent accomplishments within an appropriately positive historical context involved considerable manipulation of the information to which he had access. But his decision to approach his subject reign by reign meant that it was difficult for him to smooth over the frequent setbacks that the Goths experienced in their 'inevitable rise' to peninsular domination. Sometimes he attributed the problem to the moral failings of individual ruler, as in the case of Theudis, who murdered a general; Gesalic, who was a bastard; and Theudigisel, who had adulterous relations with the wives of the magnates. [...] The best that Isidore could do with the ignominious defeat of the Gothic army at the hands of the Franks at Vouillé in 507 was to report it and get on with his account.[106]

In following Wolf's thesis, to which I am inclined to subscribe, Isidore's description of Gesalic can be conceived of in terms of a narrative strategy whose goal was to explain the reasons why the Goths had lost Narbonne and why they had had to withdraw from Spain, having suffered heavy losses. What stood in the way of upholding the view of the Goths' military prowess were the facts — the Goths had suffered defeat at the battle of Vouillé and, consequently, had lost a significant part of their Gaulic territories. Isidore gave little thought to Alaric II's defeat. He gave a very brief account of the event and offered no reasons for the defeat. He did not neglect to mention the loss of Narbonne and of the other territories. The problem was that the successive defeats suffered by the Gothic army during its retreat cast doubt on Isidore's portrayal of the Goths as the bravest and most victorious people who had captured Rome and who filled all the barbarian *gentes* with terror.[107] The way to overcome this difficulty was by pinning the blame for all their failures, including the loss of the terri-

[105] Ibid.
[106] Wolf, *Conquerors and Chroniclers*, p. 23–24.
[107] On the Goths' *fortissima gens* see Isidore of Seville, *Historia Gothorum*, c. 4, p. 269.

tories in question, on their king. The narrative strategy employed by Isidore consisted in propagating the view that the Goths had lost their lands not because they lacked bravery but because their king was a coward.

Appendix. A biographical note on Gesalic

Gesalic was the older son of the Visigothic king Alaric II, who reigned in the years 484–507, and his concubine whose name is unknown to us. He was a brother of Amalaric. Amalaric's mother — Thiudigoto — was Theoderic the Great's daughter. After his father's death in the battle against the army of Clovis I at Vouillé in 507, he was elevated to the Visigothic throne in Narbonne in 507 or 508 (Amalaric was at that time still under age).[108] The new Visigothic king lost Narbonne to Gundobad, the Burgundian king, and, having taken heavy losses, retreated to Spain. In 510, in the palace in Barcelona, Gesalic killed the *comes* Goiaric who had worked closely with Alaric II.[109] In the same year the Visigothic kingdom in Spain was attacked by the Ostrogothic army led by Ibba.[110] The Ostrogoths pushed Gesalic out of the

[108] Gregory of Tours (*Historiæ*, II, c. 37, p. 88) claims that Amalaric fled from the battlefield at *Campus Vogladensis* to Spain and 'prudently' (*sagaciter*) took over his father's kingdom. Gregory is certainly wrong about the person. Alaric II was succeeded on the Visigothic throne by Gesalic, of whom Gregory made no mention and whom he probably did not know. Amalaric was a small boy when the battle at Vouillé was taking place (Gregory seems to think that Amalaric took part in it), and there is no evidence to suggest that he became king as early as 507 or 508.

[109] *Chronica Cæsaraugustana*, sub anno 510, p. 223. Gerd Kampers (*Geschichte der Westgoten*, p. 158) wrote as follows: 'Angesichts der Erfolge der Ostgoten, denen in Carcassone mit dem dorthin geretteten Teil des wisigotischen Königshortes wohl auch der legitime Königssohn in die Hände gefallen war, gewann die Opposition gegen Gesalech an Boden, die auf die amalisch-ostgotische Karte setze. Trotz des Versuches, seine Herrschaft durch die Ermordung seiner führenden Gegner zu sichern, mußte Gesalech vor den Truppen, mit denen Ibba die Pyrenäen überschritten hatte, zu den Wandalen fliehen'. Kampers's comment is mere speculation. There is no evidence that Goiaric was favourable to Theoderic the Great's Ostrogoths. We do not know if Amalaric stayed in Carcassonne or if he found himself in the care of the Ostrogoths' care after they took over the city.

[110] At the beginning of his reign Gesalic was in Theoderic's good graces. Ultimately both rulers fell out with each other and Ibba's army was ordered to attack Spain. Ibba pushed Gesalic out of Spain. What was the cause of the conflict between the two kings? Theoderic explained the reasons for the war against Gesalic in a letter to Thrasamund, the Vandals' ruler (Cassiodorus, *Variæ epistolæ*, V, 43, 2, p. 170). He wrote that Gesalic had joined his enemies. Who were Theoderic's enemies? E. A. Thompson (*The Goths*, p. 10) claimed that they were Visigoths themselves who wanted to throw off the yoke of Ostrogoths' rule over Spain. However, Thompson's view presents a serious problem. It is true that Ostrogoths' sovereignty over Spain actually began after Gesalic was deprived of his power and fled to Africa. Thompson's thesis becomes even more problematic when we remind ourselves of the fact that some accounts indicate

country, depriving him of royal power. After abandoning Spain, he went to Africa, to Thrasamund's court, the king of the Vandals, whom he asked for military support with which he hoped to regain his power. The Vandals gave him money but refused to support him militarily.[111] What happened to Gesalic later is unclear and so is the chronology of the events. According to *Chronica Cæsaraugustana*, in 513 Gesalic returned to Spain, from where he was pushed out by Ibba to Aquitaine where he hid for a year.[112] The chronicle remains silent about what happened to him later. *Variæ epistolæ* report that Gesalic, having taken the money from the Vandals, was sent to 'foreign peoples'. One of the letters from this collection contains the phrase, *quondam regis* (once a king) which, according to Wilhelm Junghans, may indicate that when the letter was written, that is, in 511 or 512, Gesalic had already been dead.[113] The *Historia Gothorum* records that upon his return from Africa, Gesalic went to Aquitaine out of fear of Theoderic. After a year spent in Aquitaine he mounted an invasion of Spain. At a distance of twelve mile-

Theoderic began to rule over Spain after Gesalic's death which, according to these accounts, took place in 511. Moreover, in his letter Theoderic writes that Gesalic joined his enemies while he, that is Gesalic, was still in Theoderic's good graces (*qui nostris inimicis, dum a nobis foveretur, adiunctus est*). The letter indicates that the conflict broke out because the Visigothic king joined the Amal's enemies. Hence, the British scholar's argument needs to be considered as ill-founded. German scholars took a different view of the problem. In dealing with the causes of the conflict between the Visigoths and the Ostrogoths, they have not ruled out the possibility of Gesalic concluding a separatist peace with the Franks and the Burgundians. However, there is no evidence to prove this view. On the alleged peace which Gesalic was to reach with the Franks, see Wolfram, *Die Goten*, p. 246; Zöllner, *Geschichte der Franken*, p. 66. Ludwig Schmidt stated authoritatively: 'Gesalech, der von einem Teile der Westgoten zum König ausgerufen, von Theoderich jedoch nicht anerkannt worden war', see idem, *Geschichte der Wandalen*, Leipzig, 1901, p. 119. However, it is advisable to exercise caution in treating the claim put forward by Schmidt. A different opinion about the problem is held by Herwig Wolfram (*Die Goten*, p. 246), who argues that Cassiodorus' letter (*Variæ epistolæ*, V, 43, 2) justifies the opinion that Gesalic's accession to the Visigothic throne went down well with Theoderic. It was only later that the two kings go into conflict with each other.

[111] Isidore of Seville, *Historia Gothorum*, c. 38, p. 282. However, Thrasamund was Theoderic's brother-in-law and the Vandals' military suport for Amal's enemies would have led to the war with the Ostrogoths. Thrasamund's conduct allows us to suggest that he wanted to see everybody win. Spain was too close to Africa and the Hasdingi did not like the prospect of bordering in the north-west with Theoderic's Spain.

[112] *Chronica Cæsaraugustana*, sub anno 513, p. 223. Michael Kulikowski (*Late Roman Spain*, p. 259) offers a different reconstruction of events 'Gesalic returned to Gaul and tried to regain his position, but Ibba again defeated him'. However, according to the *Chronica Cæsaraugustana* Gesalic did not return to Gaul but to Spain.

[113] Junghans, *Die Geschichte der fränkischen Könige*, p. 93. On the dating of the letter see *Cassiodorus Selected Variæ*, transl. and ed. Samuel J. B. Barnish, Liverpool, 1992, p. XLV, footnote 94.

stones from Barcelona, Gesalic clashed with Ibba. Defeated, he took flight. Eventually, he was captured on the other side of the River Durance and executed. According to the source, Gesalic was killed in 511. The *Historia Gothorum* contains information that after Gesalic's death Theoderic assumed the throne in Spain in 511.[114] This corresponds to the regnal years mentioned by Isidore — a four year reign that he claimed began in 506/07 and ended in 511/12. The invasion of Spain may have taken place in 511–12 — a chronology which is supported by Isidore's account and Theoderic's letter to Thrasamund. However the *Chronica Cæsaraugustana* containing information about Gesalic in Aquitaine supports the years 513–14.[115]

(Translated by Artur Mękarski)

Summary

Historians dealing with the period of the early Middle Ages do not hold a high opinion of Gesalic, the king of the Visigoths. Gesalic was the older son of the Visigothic king Alaric II, who reigned in the years 484–507, and his concubine whose name is unknown to us. He was a brother of Amalaric. Gesalic is blamed for the defeats they suffered in the war against the Franks and the Burgundians in 507/08–11. Modern historians' opinions are based mainly on the work of Isidore of Seville who described Gesalic as a coward and a ruler deprived of luck (*felicitas*). In this article I argue that to pass an accurate judgment on the king it is necessary to take into account the real politico-military situation of the Visigothic kingdom in the years 508–11. The Visigoths who suffered heavy losses at the battle of Vouillé were unable to resist the

[114] Isidore of Seville, *Historia Gothorum*, c. 39, p. 283, although it is necessary to add that one of the manuscripts of Isidore's work indicates that Theoderic assumed power after Gesalic's expulsion — (*expulso*). I am not convinced that Jamie Wood is right in claiming (*The Politics of Identity*, p. 155), that Isidore 'mentions him [Theoderic the Great — R. K.] assuming the "kingship of the Goths in Spain"'. In Isidore's remark the word *Gothorum* is used to refer to the term *rex*, that is to Gesalic, the king of the Goths' king (*rex Gothorum*). It does not refer to the 'Goths' kingdom in Spain' see Valverde Castro, *Ideología*, p. 118, footnote 11.

[115] Theoderic was the Visigoths' king until his death in 526. It was originally planned that that after the death of the Amal king, power would devolve on his son-in-law Eutharic. The latter was to become the ruler of both kingdoms — that of the Visigoths and that of the Ostrogoths. Let us quote an interesting remark by German medievalist Karl Hauck 'Cassiodor rühmte die Aera Eutharichs 519 von 514 an, also bereits als eine Fünfjahresperiode', idem, 'Von einer spätantiken Randkultur zum karolingischen Europa', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, 1, 1967, pp. 3–93, quotation from at p. 24. See Cassiodorus, *Chronica*, sub anno 514, p. 160. If it is accepted that Gesalic died in 514, Hauck's suggestion that Eutharic's era began in that year holds some appeal because it was Eutharic who was envisaged to rule in Spain, Gaul and Italy after Theoderic's death.

Franks supported by the Burgundians and their King Gundobad. The fact that during the first eight months of 508 the Visigothic king could not count on the Ostrogoths' help also argues in favour of treating Isidore's account with caution. Through the verification of the meaning of Isidore's work by comparing it to relations contained in other sources dealing with the Goths' war with the Franks and Burgundians (*De Bellis* by Procopius of Caesarea, the *Chronica Gallica* 511, the *Chronica Cæsaraugustana* and the *Historiae* of Gregory of Tours) a completely different picture of the course of military activity emerges.

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