

# CONSIDERATIONS ON THE CONCEPT OF *GENS* AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE IDEA OF NOBLE IDENTITY IN THE THOUGHT OF ISIDORE OF SEVILLE (7<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY)

RENAN FRIGHETTO  
UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DO PARANÁ  
BRAZIL

Date of receipt: 30<sup>th</sup> of July, 2010  
Final date of acceptance: 19<sup>th</sup> of January, 2011

## ABSTRACT

In recent years the concept of 'identity' has gained a prominent position in historiographic studies. The search for definitions of specific terms, such as *natio*, *patria* and *regnum* in late-antiquity sources has led to research into the concept of *gens/gentes*. The concept of *gens/gentes* is loaded with double meaning, unitary in the singular and factional in the plural, and has a connotation of 'noble identities' that reinforces the idea of the shaping of a 'supranational' institution competing with royalty itself. In this study, we will analyse the construction of 'noble identity' in the Hispano-Visigothic kingdom of Toledo based on the writings of Isidore of Seville (560?-636).

## KEYWORDS

Hispano-Visigothic Kingdom of Toledo, Isidore of Seville, Political Power, Noble Identity, *Gentes*.

## CAPITALIA VERBA

Toletanum Regnum Hispanum vel Visigothicum, Isidorus Hispalensis, Potestas, Nobile genus, *Gentes*.

## 1. *Gens* and *nobilitas*: far and near

Since the beginning of the 1980s there has been a growing number of studies concerning the analysis, definition and, if possible, historic application of the concept of *gens/genus/gentes* throughout Late Antiquity. We think it is correct to state that this interest in the origins of those groups and populations that migrated into the Roman imperial world from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century onwards is related to the process of geopolitical expansion of the European Union. The search for a logical explanation for why one population group or another was involved in shaping and forming Europe has been much distorted in recent years. This has resulted in such historic research becoming mixed up with certain political positions that have unfortunately become prominent in some academic and scientific circles.<sup>1</sup> In this study we want to distance ourselves from these ideological and political disputes concerning how the concept of *gens* was used in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and focus our interest on historical research and a source-based approach, in particular Hispano-Visigothic sources, which show how the concept developed based on a socio-political structure that reveals the existence of a relationship between the concepts of *gens* and *nobilitas* in Late Antiquity.<sup>2</sup> In order to do this we must rediscover, in general terms, how the two concepts, *gens* and *nobilitas*, were used in political, social, administrative and cultural settings in the Roman world during the final stage of the Republic and throughout the Principate to find out whether these concepts were renewed and reinterpreted in other historic contexts such as in the Late Roman Empire and the Roman-barbarian monarchies.

As far as the term *gens is* concerned, in some Roman sources from the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. we find an interesting definition and characterisation that links it to family groups of high-class extraction associated with the past of the

---

1. The contribution by Thomas F. X. Noble is very pertinent: Noble, Thomas F. X. "Introduction. Romans, barbarians, and the transformation of the Roman Empire", *From Roman Provinces to Medieval Kingdoms*. London-New York: Routledge, 2006: 4, "...It served the purposes of Europe's state-builders to insist on the oldest possible claims for the coherent existence of specific groups of people on particular patches of soil. Nationalism is the ideology that in some ways animated and in other ways emerged from Europe's nineteenth-century political experiments..."; an idea also presented by Pablo C. Díaz: Díaz, Pablo C. "Los godos como epopeya y la construcción de identidades en la historiografía española". *Anales de Historia Antigua, Medieval y Moderna*, 40 (2008): 26, "...La forma en que se plantea la pregunta y la disyuntiva que propone, sobre las que podremos volver más tarde, sólo se entienden en un contexto preciso del postromanticismo, donde el empeño por fundamentar los estados nacionales había llevado a buscar obsesivamente las raíces de lo nacional en el pasado histórico particular e intransferible de cada una de las comunidades que formaban esas naciones..."; in the same line interpretative: Geary, Patrick J. *O Mito das Nações. A invenção do nacionalismo*. São Paulo: Conrad Livros, 2005: 57, "...No entanto, seria mais correto afirmar que o tipo específico de nacionalismo étnico que conhecemos hoje é algo recente...

2. An idea mentioned by Patrick J Geary: Geary, Patrick J. *O Mito das Nações...*: 93, "...A aldeia era administrada por uma assembleia de homens livres, sob a liderança de um chefe e uma série de fatores determinavam sua escolha: riqueza, influência familiar e contatos com a liderança do povo do qual a aldeia fazia parte. As gentes, ou povos, eram formadas por uma combinação de tradições religiosas, legais e políticas que proporcionavam um forte mas instável sentimento de unidade..."; the relationship between the leaders of the 'gentes' and the concept of 'nobilitas', in this case Hispano-Visigoth, appears in: Isidorus Hispalensis, *Etymologiae*, X, 184: *Nobilis, non uilis, cuius et nomen et genus scitur...*



Roman *civitas*. For example, in his *Treatise on the Laws*, Cicero establishes a clear link between Roman *gentes*, which were prominent families in the social and political sphere, and the legitimising power of the ancestors.<sup>3</sup> It is worth recalling that the *mos maiorum*, ancestral custom or preservation of ancestral tradition,<sup>4</sup> arose as a way of differentiating *gens* from the rest of the *populus* to enable effective political action by members of the *gentes*. In other words, in Cicero's treatise we find a hierarchical and functional socio-political configuration based on the tradition of major families to explain their actions in the Senate and, consequently, the administration of the Republic itself.<sup>5</sup> In this case there is a coming together of members of the *gentes* with the senatorial *optimi* responsible for government affairs.<sup>6</sup> However, we think it is correct to say that not all of the senatorial *optimi* from Cicero's time came from the universe of traditional *gentes*, as in many cases, such as those described by Sallust, which included Cicero himself and Crassus, in the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. senators often came from the group of new men, individuals who did not have illustrious ancestors but who became senators based on personal merit.<sup>7</sup> There was then a clear personal interest in finding a connection between that new senator/*nobile* and some prominent ancestor.<sup>8</sup> This gave him and his future descendants the possibility

3. Cicero, *De Legibus*, II, 55: *...Iam tanta religio est sepulcrorum, ut extra sacra et gentem inferri fas negent esse, idque apud maiores nostros A. Torquatus in gente Popillia iudicavit...*

4. According to Maria Helena da Rocha: da Rocha, Maria Helena. *Estudos de História da Cultura Clássica. Cultura Romana*. Lisbon: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 1982: 345, *Os romanos tinham como suporte fundamental e modelo do seu viver comum a tradição, no sentido da observância dos costumes dos antepassados, 'mos maiorum'...*; and as attested by Francisco Marco and Francisco Pina: Marco, Francisco; Pina, Francisco. "'Concordia' y 'libertas' como polos de referencia religiosa en la lucha política de la república tardía". *Gerión*, 18 (2000): 268, *...Toda 'seditio', en tanto que promueve cambios más o menos profundos en la estructura política o socioeconómica, es considerada como una amenaza para la 'libertas' de los 'optimates', que se basa en el respeto a su posición de preeminencia, justificada históricamente por el 'mos maiorum'...*

5. Cicero, *De Legibus*, II, 3: *...Hic enim orte stirpe antiquissima sumus, hic sacra, hic genus, hic maiorum multa vestigia...*

6. Cicero, *De Legibus*, II, 30: *...Continet enim rem publicam, consilio et auctoritate optimatum semper populum indigere...*; aspect reinforced by Emilio Gabba: Gabba, Emilio. "El consenso popular a la política expansionista romana (siglos III-II a.C.)", *Sociedad y política en la Roma Republicana (siglos III-I a.C.)*. Pisa: Pacini Editore, 2000: 242-243, *...los argumentos patrióticos iban más allá de la simple glorificación de las grandes familias...*

7. Sallustius, *De Bello Iugurthino*, 7: *...Etiam homines novi, qui antea per virtutem soliti erant nobilitatem antevenire, furtim et per latrocinia potius quam bonis artis ad imperia et honores nituntur...*; for María José Hidalgo: Hidalgo, María José. "Algunos aspectos del pensamiento político de Salustio". *Studia Historica. Historia Antigua*, 2-3 (1984-1985): 117, *...El juicio que el historiador vierte sobre este 'homo novus' es en líneas generales muy favorable, y se verifica sobre todo en la profesión de fe que le dedica en su propio discurso y que se avala con la presentación de una oligarquía auténtica basada sobre sus méritos y no sobre la herencia y el linaje...*; as Claude Nicolet indicates: Nicolet, Claude. "El ciudadano y el político", *El hombre romano*, Andrea Giardina, ed. Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1991: 63, *...Los 'hombres nuevos', hijos de notables, simples caballeros, tienen el derecho reconocido de aspirar a los honores e incluso, siguiendo los pasos de Mario o Cicerón, llegar a los primeros puestos...*

8. For Christophe Badel: Badel, Christophe. *La noblesse de l'Empire Romain. Les Masques et la Vertu*. Mayenne: Champ Vallon, 2005: 164, *...les hommes nouveaux s'émerveillaient d'obtenir les plus hautes dignités en l'absence de ce stimulant puissant qu'était l'exemple des aïeux (...) la dette envers les ancêtres représentait une impérieuse nécessité pour les 'nobiles'...*; perhaps it happened the same around Gneus Calpurnius, explained by Luís Amela: Amela, Luís. "El asesinato de Cn. Calpurnio Pisón". *Gerión*, 20/1 (2002): 257, *...De hecho,*



of forming a *gens* based on both their private clients and on political relationships with other *gentes*. We can therefore say that authors from the final stage of the Roman republic made a clear distinction between members of the traditional aristocracy, called the *ordo senatorius*, linked with gentile and ancestral tradition, and *new men/nobiles* who became members of the Roman Senate through their personal and functional merits. These *ordines*, the traditional aristocracy and the *new men/nobiles*, had to work together for the sake of *concordia*, preservation of senatorial *auctoritas* and for the common good.<sup>9</sup>

However, in spite of discourse leaning towards understanding, we find that the final stage of the Republic was marred by political clashes characteristic of the internal contradictions existing in the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C.<sup>10</sup> The civil war between Octavius and Antony was one of the most eloquent examples of this and wrought a significant change in the configuration of the Roman senatorial universe.<sup>11</sup> The elimination of several members of the traditional aristocracy<sup>12</sup> and the administrative needs of the new political regime set up after Octavius' victory, the Principate, favoured the influx of new members into the Senate, who were in turn controlled by the authority and power of the *princeps*.<sup>13</sup> That new socio-political

*da la impresión de que fue un influyente activista en la política romana del momento. Era indudablemente un 'nobilis', aunque se desconoce quien fue su padre (del cuál se sabe únicamente su 'praenomen', Cayo) o su abuelo...*

9. Cicero, *De Legibus*, III, 28: *...Nam ita se res habet, ut si senatus dominus sit publici consilii, quodque is creverit defendant omnes, et si ordines reliqui principis ordinis consilio rem publicam gubernari vuelint, possit ex temperatione iuris, cum potestas in populo, auctoritas in senatu sit, teneri ille moderatus et concors civitatis status...;* for Francisco Marco and Francisco Pina: Marco, Francisco; Pina, Francisco. "Concordia y libertas...": 267, *...La concordia que defiende Cicerón se basa en lo fundamental en que cada ciudadano acepte el lugar que le corresponde dentro de la comunidad y se asocia claramente con la conservación del orden establecido...;* according to the thoughts by Umberto Laffi: Laffi, Umberto. "El mito de Sila", *Sociedad y política en la Roma Republicana (siglos III-I a.C.)*. Pisa: Pacini Editore, 2000: 262, *...En el 70 la situación era bien diferente: copartícipes junto con la 'nobilitas' de la dirección política del estado, los 'equites' no tenían ya interés alguno en exasperar el conflicto con la 'nobilitas' misma...*

10. According to María José Hidalgo: Hidalgo, María José. "Uso y abuso de la normativa constitucional en la República tardía: el 'senatus consultum ultimum' y los 'imperia extra ordinem'". *Studia Historica. Historia Antigua*, 4-5 (1986-1987): 92, *...Al margen de las consideraciones jurídicas (...) hay que comprenderlas como expresión de las condiciones de la lucha política en un período —final de la República— en el que la agudización de las contradicciones internas del Estado era grande, la 'concordia ordinum' de épocas anteriores era muy precaria, las grandes diferencias económicas y la concentración de riquezas radicalizaban más la lucha político-social, llegándose a un nivel de violencia y de gran competencia en el propio seno de la clase dirigente. Esta caótica situación finalmente desembocará en abiertas guerras civiles...*

11. According to Joaquín Muñiz: Muñiz, Joaquín. "Apio Cl. Pulcro, cónsul del 54 a.C.". *Gerión*, 21/1 (2003): 206, *Entre los Gracos y la batalla de Actium transcurre una centuria llena de sucesos graves y violentos que afectaron a la Ciudad y que ocasionaron la sustitución del sistema republicano por aquel otro modelo de gobierno que vino en llamarse principado...*

12. As recalled by María Teresa Schettino: Schettino, María Teresa. "Cassio Dione e le guerre civili di età severiana". *Gerión*, 19 (2001): 543, *...ricorre già in relazione alle guerre civili di età repubblicana: i conflitti civili depauperano il corpo dei cittadini e in particolare la 'nobilitas', sia per i caduti in battaglia sia per le epurazioni che comportano...*

13. For Céline de Jonquieres: de Jonquieres, Céline. "La crise de 19 d.C. et ses conséquences". *Gerión*, 22/1 (2004): 285, *...A partir de 19 d.C., Auguste détenait donc l'ensemble des moyens de diffusion de l'idéologie politique (...). En utilisant l'ensemble des pouvoirs que le Sénat lui avait attribués, il réussit à contrôler une grande partie de la 'nobilitas' et ainsi à éviter toute opposition de sa part...*



directive imposed by the *princeps* may explain the radical shift in the very definition of *gens* during the Principate, which was increasingly integrated and associated with *nobilitas* from a functional point of view. In other words, belonging to a *gens*, which linked the individual with illustrious, important ancestors, would have been just one requirement among many in the assessment and merit of a man interested in effectively taking part in the senatorial sphere and so being raised to administrative positions and functions in the Roman Empire that distinguished him among the *nobilitas*. Moreover, as a result of the process of hegemonic expansion promoted by the Romans between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> centuries B.C., direct contact with local and regional 'barbarian' aristocracies allied with Rome, such as those in *Africa*, *Gallia*, *Hispania*, *Britannia* and *Germania* ended up promoting and inserting them into the political and administrative setting of the Roman world, naturally incorporating them into the Roman *nobilitas*.<sup>14</sup> Hence the extension of Roman *nobilitas* to a set of *gentes* who, according to the discourse in Roman sources, gradually left their barbarian status behind, shows us the power of the process of integrating such groups in the world of the *romana civilitas*.<sup>15</sup>

The limitation that the power of the *princeps* placed on the political actions of Roman *gentes*, while *nobiles* as a group attained enhanced involvement in administrative roles, alongside the introduction of local aristocratic groups allied with the Romans throughout the process of hegemonic expansion during the final stage of the Republic, may be an indication of the spreading of an idea of the *nobilitas* that, from the Principate on, would include the members of both the ancient gentile families of the past and *nobiles* from the more recent past. We could even point to the possibility of a trend towards social and political reduction of Roman *gentes* to the level of *nobilitas*, a political and ideological practice that Augustus began and which the imperial power preserved as a way of distinguishing the *princeps* as having the most important *gens* in the Roman Empire. While this logic applied in the Roman political setting, it excluded regions in which Rome was not dominant. Even so, we find a trend among Roman authors to present 'barbarian' aristocratic groups based outside the Roman *limes* as having values and virtues close to those of ancient Roman *gentes*.<sup>16</sup> An outstanding example of this is given by Tacitus when describing the habits, traditions and customs of the inhabitants of *Germania* in the

---

14. According to Dick Whittaker: Whittaker, Dick. "Ethnic discourses on the frontiers of Roman Africa", *Ethnic constructs in Antiquity. The role of power and tradition*, Ton Derks, Nico Roymans, eds. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009: 197, "...On the western limits of Mauretania Tingitana we can see what appears to be the first stage of the evolution of this process in the celebrated Tabula Banasitana, an inscription of the later 2nd century. It records a tribe, almost certainly attributed to the colony of Banasa, whose 'princeps' with his family was awarded Roman citizenship..."

15. According to Dick Whittaker: Whittaker, Dick. "Ethnic discourses on the frontiers of Roman Africa...": 197, "...that is to say, by men drawn from the ethnic élite who at the same time became part of the Romanized, urban aristocracy..."

16. As Pablo C. Díaz indicates: Díaz, Pablo C. "Rey y poder en la monarquía visigoda". *Iberia*, 1 (1998): 176, "...Esta imagen procede de la deformación aportada por los mismos autores greco-latinos, quienes utilizaban categorías de interpretación y el léxico de su realidad político-social para describir fenómenos o situaciones que les eran absolutamente nuevos..."



work of the same name, in which he revealed that although the Germanic peoples were ‘barbarians’ they ultimately had virtues similar to those of the Romans in the past.<sup>17</sup> Principal among this set of values were *libertas* and intense warring,<sup>18</sup> which was seen as the military talent that was gradually abandoned by the Romans in the Principate<sup>19</sup> and came to be associated with ‘barbarian’ *gentes* as an inherent merit.<sup>20</sup> However, we must note that the stress placed by Greek and Roman authors during the Principate on the military skills of the ‘barbarians’ may be related to a political and ideological attempt to exaggerate and enhance the Roman legions’ military feats in the face of militarily powerful opponents. Such propagandistic discourse remained unchanged in the Late Roman Empire and stressed the military valour of the ‘barbarians’ who would end up joining the imperial forces to defend Roman territory.

With regard to these issues it is worth highlighting Herwig Wolfram's classic study<sup>21</sup> on the advent of the Goths as a military power, which culminated in their effective settlement in various *regna* that replaced the *Imperium romanorum* in western Mediterranean territories.<sup>22</sup> Rather than being an out-of-control force that only imposed its will on the embattled Roman Empire through violence,<sup>23</sup> the

17. For this question see: Frighetto, Renan. “Monarquia e poder régio nos primórdios do século V: os visigodos e a herança baixo-imperial romana”, *Un magisterio vital: historia, educación y cultura*, José Luiz Widow, Álvaro Pezoa, José Marín, eds. Santiago de Chile: Editorial Universitária, 2009: 241-242.

18. Tacitus, *Germania*, 1: ...*nuper cognitīs quibusdam gentibus ac regibus, quos bellum aperuit...*; Tacitus, *Germania*, 7: ...*Ceterum neque animadvertere neque vincere, ne verberare quidem nisi sacerdotibus permissum, non quasi in poenam nec ducis iussu, sed velut deo imperante, quem adesse bellantibus credunt...*; Tacitus, *Germania*, 10: ...*Est et alia observatio auspiorum, qua gravium bellorum eventus explorant. Eius gentis, cum qua bellum est, captivum quoquo modo interceptum cum electo popularium suorum, patriis quemque armis committunt: victoria huius vel illius pro praeiudicio accipitur*; Tacitus, *Germania*, 11: ...*Mox rex vel princeps, prout aetas cuique, prout nobilitas, prout decus bellorum, prout facundia est, audiuntur, auctoritate suadendi magis quam iubendi potestate...*; Tacitus, *Germania*, 14: ...*Principes pro victoria pugnant, comites pro principe. Si civitas, in qua orti sunt, longa pace et otio torpeat, plerique nobilium adulescentium petunt ultro eas nationes, quae tum bellum aliquod gerunt, quia et ingrata genti quies et facilius inter accipitiam clarescunt magnumque comitatum non nisi vi belloque tuere; exigunt enim principis sui liberalitate illum bellatorem equum...*

19. For the reasons for this neglect, see: Badel, Christophe. *La noblesse de l'Empire Romain...*: 156-159.

20. As Tacitus, *Germania*, 44: *Trans Lygios Gotones regnantur, paulo iam adductius quam ceterae Germanorum gentes, nondum tamen supra libertatem. Protinus deinde ab Oceano Rugii et Lemovii; omniumque harum gentium insigne rotunda scuta, breves gladii et erga reges obsequium...*

21. Wolfram, Herwig. *History of the Goths*. Berkeley-Los Angeles-Londres: University of California Press, 1990.

22. For Evangelos Chrysos: Chrysos, Evangelos. “The Empire, the ‘gentes’ and the ‘regna’”, *Regna and gentes. The relationships between late antiquity and early medieval peoples and kingdoms in the transformation of the Roman world*. Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2003: 13, “...If we base our analysis on the well established and accepted assumption about the ‘gentes’ being not solidly formed and statically established racial entities but group of peoples open to constant ethnogenetic change and adaptation to new realities, then it is reasonable to expect that their relationship with the Empire had a tremendous impact on their formation...”.

23. This vision of the destruction of Roman civilisation by the ‘barbarians’ is directly associated with the as political and historiographic perspectives of the 19<sup>th</sup> century according to Walter Pohl: Pohl, Walter. “Introduction: The Empire and the integration of barbarians”, *Kingdoms of the Empire. The integration of barbarians in Late Antiquity*, Walter Pohl, ed. Leiden: Brill, 1997: 1, “...What, in German, is known as



'barbarians' (which includes the myriad of groups, tribes and clans that moved into the Roman world) also became the principal actors throughout the historic sequence of Late Antiquity.<sup>24</sup> There can be no question that Wolfram's approach consolidated the idea, in the historiographic sphere, of a thoroughgoing political, social, cultural and religious reform brought about by the process of 'barbarian' migrations which, together with the political and institutional changes that took place in the late Roman world, characterised Late Antiquity. This viewpoint of reform that touched every aspect of late-antiquity society between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries is a far cry from the easy explanation of a total breach with the Roman past. As one can see in the various studies and analyses performed in the last twenty years, much of Roman political practice and thought remained alive among the set of Roman-barbarian monarchies in new clothes and with a new perspective.<sup>25</sup> This can be seen in the incontestable presence, especially in Hispano-Visigothic sources, of two elements that significantly contributed to the set of political, social, ideological and institutional changes that characterised late antiquity: reform of the concept of *gens/genus/gentes*, which was intimately related to the construction of *noble identity* and linked with definitive association with a *regnum* that extended its authority to the *patria* integrated within *christiana civilitas*.

However, when we direct our research attention to studying the formation of *gens* among the barbarian populations that started to enter the Roman Empire between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries, we come across the still controversial issue of ethnogenesis.<sup>26</sup>

---

'Völkerwanderung', the Great Migration, is called 'les invasions barbares', the barbarian invasions, in French. An age of romantic projections and national sentiments, roughly from Napoleon to Hitler, re-enacted the drama of a clash between northern barbarians and Roman civilisation, with very contradictory evaluations on both sides of the Rhine and the Alps: nobles savages who rejuvenate a decadent Empire; or brutal primitives who devastate civilised countries..."

24. According to Peter Heather: Heather, Peter. *The Goths*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996: 1, ...*The Roman Empire in western Europe, which had run Britain, France, Spain, Italy, together with parts of Hungary, Switzerland, Belgium and Germany as a single state for 400 years, had foundered. In its place, there stood a series of independent kingdoms constructed around the military power of immigrant groups. In all this, Goths had played a central role...*

25. Various studies deal with this question. I only mention those presented by María del Rosario Valverde: Valverde, María del Rosario. *Ideología, simbolismo y ejercicio del poder real en la Monarquía visigoda. Un proceso de cambio*. Salamanca: Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca, 2000: 30, ...*Los factores analizados revelan la fuerte evolución que se está dando en la realidad de poder visigodo en contacto con las concepciones políticas imperiales...*; Carrié, Jean-Michel. *L'Empire Romain en mutation. Des Sévères à Constantin 192-337*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1999: 11, ...*Quant à l'Antiquité tardive, la tendance est aujourd'hui à la prolonger jusqu'à la conquête musulmane en Orient et en Afrique du Nord, qui factionne l'unité du monde méditerranéen(...). Un tel découpage permet de mieux cerner les continuités et les ruptures entre l'Antiquité et le haut Moyen Age en Occident...*; without omitting the similarly classic of Henri Irénée Marrou: Marrou, Henri Irénée. *Decadencia romana ou Antiquidade Tardia?* Lisbon: Asper, 1979; Brown, Peter. *O Fim do Mundo Clássico. De Marco Aurélio à Maomé*. Lisbon: Editorial Verbo, 1972; Rémodon, Roger. *La Crise de l'Empire romain de Marc Aurèle à Anastase*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France-Nouvelle Clio, 1964.

26. About the question of *ethnogenesis*, a brief perspective is presented by Hans-Werner Göetz: Göetz, Hans-Werner. "Introduction", *Regna and gentes. The relationships between late antiquity and early medieval peoples and kingdoms in the Transformation of the Roman World*. Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2003: 8-9; according to Patrick J. Geary: Geary, Patrick J. *O mito das nações...*: 57, ...*Usamos os termos 'povo', 'etnicidade', 'raça' e 'etnogênese' como se tivessem um significado objetivo e imutável...*



The creation of the ethnographic and historiographic concept of ethnogenesis was first unravelled in Reinhard Wenskus's study of the idea of the notion of *gentes* being altered in the Early Middle Ages.<sup>27</sup> In this study Wenskus greatly criticised traditional historiography for the viewpoint that saw 'barbarian peoples' as stable, unisonous, ethnic identities based on the belief that each 'barbarian' group was constituted in a biological (*Abstammungsgemeinschaft*) and segregated manner. Apart from all of the political and ethnic problems involved in discussion of this concept in contemporary historiography<sup>28</sup> we can see that several prominent texts and studies put forward the closed and exclusivist notion that the Visigoths were just Visigoths and that the Franks split into two main groups —Salians and Ripuarians— with no link to other barbarian tribes or native populations located in the same region.<sup>29</sup> Wenskus's hypothesis broke with the idea centred around 'barbarian' groups being united by blood, which the author saw as diverting the focus away from the aspects that actually formed the 'barbarian' *gentes*, political matters and ancestral tradition. We must point out that, in our opinion, these aspects were directly related to the intrinsic personal links between members of 'barbarian' clans, certainly extrapolated from blood connections, which initially gives rise to the idea of a political group based on the strength of tribal leaders supported by the strength of ancestry.<sup>30</sup> Hence the importance of tradition, whether religious or socio-political, which Hans Werner Göetz also sees as an essential aspect in the formation of *gentes* in Late Antiquity (*Traditionsgemeinschaften*).<sup>31</sup>

In addition to Wenskus, Wolfram and Göetz, we can say that this notion directed at the formation of *gens* in Late Antiquity was echoed in the approach taken by Arnaldo

27. Wenskus, Reinhard. *Stammesbildung und Verfassung. Das Werden der frühmittelalterlichen gentes*. Vienna: Böhlau, 1961.

28. An excellent state of the art of the subject in European historiography between the 18<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries is presented by Ian Wood: Wood, Ian. "Barbarians, Historians, and the construction of national identities". *Journal of Late Antiquity*, 1/1 (2008): 61-81.

29. An example of this view can be seen in: Febvre, Lucien. "A Europa surge quando o Império desmorona", *A Europa. Gênese de uma civilização*. Bauru: Edusc, 2004: 90. ...*Olhemos o mapa do antigo mundo romano no final do século V:(...) na 'pars occidentalis' há toda uma floração de novas povoações: na Gália do Norte, os francos; na Gália oriental e renana, os alamanos; no Léman, no Saône, no Ródano, os burgúndios; no Sul da Gália e na Espanha, os visigodos; na Itália, o reino de Odoacro. Em resumo, o Ocidente já é o feudo dos invasores germânicos...*; an idea surpassed nowadays, according to Thomas F. X. Noble: Noble, Thomas F.X. "Introduction. Romans, barbarians...": 13. ...*Today there is a general consensus that one cannot speak of Goths, or Franks, or Lombards as discrete ethnic groups. They, and the other peoples mentioned by late Roman and early medieval writers, were all multi-ethnic confederations...*

30. According to Luís García-Moreno: García-Moreno, Luís. *Historia de España Visigoda*. Madrid: Cátedra, 1989: 29. ...*Porque tales fueron los puntos extremos de una larguísima migración popular iniciada a finales del siglo II y terminada a principios del IV, cuyo recuerdo último y persistente en la tradición nacional fue por vía del cantar de gesta o 'saga' ligado a determinados linajes aristocráticos(...). A cada una de ellas habría correspondido una particular denominación nacional para el pueblo gótico, lo que sería la más plástica expresión de haberse producido una nueva etnogénesis, al unirse nuevos y étnicamente heterogéneos fragmentos populares al núcleo atesorador de las tradiciones 'nacionales', compuesto por los jefes y representantes de los más esclarecidos clanes familiares (Sippen), cuyos orígenes la 'Saga' gótica haría derivar de los dioses, probando su carisma en la brillantez de sus éxitos militares cantada por ella misma...*

31. Göetz, Hans-Werner. "Introduction...": 4-5.





Momigliano in his studies on cultural interaction between several population groups based in the geographical area of the Mediterranean Basin during a period covering the Classical and Hellenistic eras.<sup>32</sup> Starting from this premise we can say that the construction of Roman political and social traditions underwent constant changes and updates as Rome came into contact with other regional aristocratic groups that were integrated into the Roman *civilitas*. It seems correct to us to include among these, from the first century A.D., some tribes that were part of the 'barbarian' world.<sup>33</sup> Meanwhile, in an effort to seek out greater possibilities for political participation within the *romanitas*, aristocratic 'barbarian' groups who brought with them traditions of their own, began to adopt aspects inherent to Roman tradition as their own, 'interpolating' traditions from the common ancestry of 'barbarians' with those characteristic of the Romans. In our opinion, the incorporation by 'barbarian' leaders of the characteristic signs of Roman imperial authority may be taken to be a clear sign of this 'interpolation' and mixing of traditions with a view to strengthening the political role of 'barbarian' chiefs in relation to their 'barbarian' aristocratic partners and, also, in relation to both imperial authority and the regional Roman senatorial aristocracies. Therefore the political use of marriages between members of Roman and 'barbarian' aristocratic groups may be seen as a clear symptom of this search for integration and also interaction at aristocratic level. Symbolic of this is the case of Ataulf, *rex gothorum* elected after the death of Alaric in 410, who pointed to his distant relationship with the Balthi to become king, leaning on the ancestral tradition of that powerful clan to achieve his aims<sup>34</sup>. Moreover, in Olympiodorus's narrative, in 414, when Ataulf married the Emperor's Honorius's sister, Galla Placidia, who the Goths had held hostage since 410, Ataulf is represented as a Roman and the entire ceremony is described as going according to the rites characteristic of the Roman

---

32. Momigliano, Arnaldo. *Os limites da helenização. A interação cultural das civilizações grega, romana, celta, judaica e persa*. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar editores, 1990.

33. In accordance with María José Hidalgo: Hidalgo, María José. "Algunas reflexiones sobre los límites del 'oikumene' en el Imperio Romano". *Gerion*, 23/1 (2005): 276, ...*Roma si erige así en la potencia universal civilizadora del mundo, sobre el que extiende su 'humanitas', ocultando lo que no es más que una dominación política, ideológica y lingüística en el marco del mismo imperialismo romano, y soslayando que fuera de este 'limes' quedaban pueblos no sometidos a la acción dominadora romana, que mantienen sus lenguas y sus formas culturales y tecnológicas, y que en el transcurso de los siglos muchos de ellos cruzarán las fronteras para instalarse en territorios romanos como inmigrantes autorizados y muchos se enrolaban en las tropas imperiales...*; a line very close to Víctor Alonso: Alonso, Víctor. "La 'paideia' del príncipe y la ideología helenística de la realeza". *Gerión*, 23/9 (2005): 198, ...*Príncipes y aristócratas, griegos y romanos de las capas altas, élites macedonias y élites orientales helenizadas: muchos de ellos tendían a reconocerse como pares, más allá de sus identidades étnicas y de sus adscripciones políticas, en el conocimiento de la lengua común, el griego, y en un 'ethos' cosmopolita basado en la 'civilización de la paideia'...*

34. For Pablo C. Díaz: Díaz, Pablo C. "Rey y poder en la monarquía...": 179, ...*Tal como Orosio, Hydacio y Jordanes nos dan cuenta del tránsito del poder de Alarico a Athaulfo, no se trataría tanto de un acto consciente por parte del primero, como una utilización intencionada del parentesco por parte del segundo que habría aprovechado esta circunstancia para construir una genealogía interesada, un mito sobre la ascendencia familiar y su asociación con una familia con derechos preferentes a la hora de ocupar el cargo de 'rex'...*; thus, see: Orosius, *Historiae Adversum Paganos*, VII, 40: ...*ab Athaulfo, Alarici propinquo...*



imperial court<sup>35</sup>. In this case we see Ataulf approximating Roman imperial customs and traditions as an indelible way for the king of the Goths to seek recognition as such by the imperial authority in Ravenna<sup>36</sup>, as well as creating an image of him as a friend and follower of Roman traditions before the sectors of Gallo-Roman aristocracy with which he would be able to negotiate on equal terms<sup>37</sup>. However, after analysing the observation made by Prospero of Aquitania concerning Ataulf's deposal and Wallia's election in which the former appears to wield weak and fragile royal power,<sup>38</sup> we can suggest that the marriage of the king of the Goths to the Western Roman Emperor's sister was a political strategy aimed at placing him in a prominent position in relation to the Gothic aristocratic groups that opposed him. Hence, marriage between the members of the Roman and 'barbarian' aristocracies, which is a clear sign of aristocratic interaction, may be seen as a practical way of integrating the Roman *nobilitas* and the 'barbarian' *gentes*.

There are also other indications in Roman sources that also point to Roman political groups incorporating and adopting certain characteristic signs they had in common with the 'barbarians', which is a sign that 'interaction' between Romans and 'barbarians' actually went in both directions. Once again we have information from Olympiodorus who tells us about the making of 'barbarian' statues by the prefect of *Thracia*, Valerian, in the time of the Emperor Constantius II.<sup>39</sup> It is interesting to note that Olympiodorus offers a 'physical' description of the statues that, according to the author, were typically found among the 'barbarians': hand on hip, they wore 'barbarian' clothing and had long, thick hair, which was a feature of the 'barbarian' kings.<sup>40</sup> These aspects were part of the 'traditional core' specific to

35. Olympiodorus, *Excerpta*, a. 414: ...*Adaulpho studio ac consilio Candidiani nuptiae cum Placidia conveniunt. Ianuario mense nuptiis dictus dies, Narbone, Galliae urbe, in domo Ingenii cuiusdam, primarii eius urbis viri. Hic digniore loco residente Placidia in atrio, Romano more adornato, habituque regio, assedit ipsi et Adaulphus laena indutus omnique alio amictu Romano. Inter alia nuptiarum dona donatur Adaulphus etiam quinquaginta formosis pueris, serica veste indutis, ferrentibus singulis utraque manu ingentes discos binos: quorum alter auri plenus, alter lapillis pretiosis vel pretii potius inestimabilis, quae ex Romanae urbis direptione Gothi depraedati fuerant. Hinc versus canuntur epithalamii, Attalo praecinente, dein Rusticio atque Phoebadio, nuptiisque finis datus lusu gaudioque ingenti barbarorum simul, et Romanorum, qui cum iis erant...*; see also: Orosius, *Historiae Adversum Paganos*, VII, 43: ...*Gothorum tunc populis Athaulfus rex praeerat: qui post irruptionem Urbis ac mortem Alarici Placidia, ut dixit, captiua sorore imperatoris in uxorem adsumpta Alarico in regnum successerat...*

36. Orosius, *Historiae Adversum Paganos*, VII, 43: ...*is, ut saepe auditum atque ultimo exitu eius probatum est, satis studiose sectator pacis militare fideliter Honorio imperatori ac pro defendenda Romana republica...*

37. In accordance with María del Rosario Valverde: Valverde, María del Rosario. *Ideología, simbolismo y ejercicio del poder real en la monarquía visigoda...*: 38, ...*Es más fácil pensar que Ataulfo, a instancias galorromanas, celebrara suntuosamente su matrimonio con la hermana del emperador de Occidente, Gala Placidia, para manifestar simbólicamente su deseo de colaborar con el Imperio...*

38. Prosperus Tyro, *Epitoma Chronicon*, a. 415, 1257: *Athaulfus a quodam suorum vulneratus interiit regnumque eius Wallia peremptis qui idem cupere intellegebantur invait*; significantly, Prosperus said nothing about election and breve kingdom of Sigericus, explained by: Orosius, *Historiae Adversum Paganos*, VII, 43: ...*Post hunc Segericus rex a Gothis creatus cum itidem iudicio Dei ad pacem pronus esset, nihilominus a suis interfectus est. Deinde Vallia successit in regnum ad hoc electus a Gothis...*

39. Olympiodorus, *Excerpta*, a. 415: ...*Refert hic scriptor, audisse se e Valerio, clarissimo viro, de argenteis statuīs ad barbaros arcendos inauguratis. "Nam Constantii, inquit, imperatoris temporibus, praefecto in Thracia Valerio...*

40. Olympiodorus, *Excerpta*, a. 415: ...*tres solidae ex argento fabricatae repertae sunt statuetae, specie barbarica sitae, et utroque brachio ansata, veste praeterea variegata barbarico ritu indutae, et comam capite gestantes atque in*



'barbarians'<sup>41</sup>, which according to Pohl, excessively valued feminine forms<sup>42</sup>. There seem to have been clear reasons behind the making of these statues, the constant and by-now traditional 'barbarian' presence in *Thracia* and *Illyricum*, especially Goths, Huns and Sarmatians, which shows that 'barbarian' groups were continually settling in these regions well before 376<sup>43</sup>. We can also demystify the notion of political, ideological and cultural incommunicability between the 'civilised' Roman and the 'barbarian' since they both received and gave contributions in all fields of human activity, which made it possible to reform a new society, a new civilisation, based on ancestral traditions that increasingly seemed to be part of a past shared by Roman and 'barbarian' aristocratic groups<sup>44</sup>.

## 2. Development

We can see how this process of cultural interaction and exchange between Romans and 'barbarians' intensified, especially in terms of political and legal traditions, after the establishment of Roman-barbarian monarchies in the Western Roman Empire and, consequently, the forging of closer personal links between members of the provincial aristocracy of Roman origin and the nobility made up of 'barbarian' clan chiefs, who were all united under the principle of aristocratic solidarity<sup>45</sup>. The main

---

*septentrionem, quae barbarorum regio est, obversae...*

41. For Herwing Wolfram: Wolfram, Herwing. "Gothic history as historical ethnography", *From Roman Provinces to Medieval Kingdoms...*: 39, "...The leaders and chiefs of 'well-known' clans, that is to say, those families who derive their origins from gods and who can prove their divine favor through appropriate achievements, form the 'nuclei of tradition' around which new tribes take shape..."

42. According to Thomas F. X. Noble: Noble, Thomas F. X. "Introduction. Romans, barbarians...": 11, "...The former is unique among the barbarians in assigning a decisive role to women..."; a more intense approach to the question of the "core tradition" of the barbarians and female participation, see: Pohl, Walter. "Gender and ethnicity in the Early Middle Ages", *From Roman Provinces to Medieval Kingdoms...*: 139-156.

43. Olympiodorus, *Excerpta*, a. 415: ...*Quae simulatque statuae sublatae sunt, paucos post dies Gothorum primum gens universam incurrit Thraciam, futuraeque post paulo erant Hunnorum ac Sarmatarum incursiones in Illyricum et ipsam Thraciam: uti Thraciam inter et Illyricum sita sunt haec consecrationis loca, et trium statuarum numerus adversus omnes gentes barbaras inauguratus videbatur...*; in this sense, Carrié, Jean-Michel. *L'Empire Romain en mutation...*: 639, ...*Autre source sur du recrutement, contribuant à révolutionner le visage de l'armée du IV siècle, la barbarisation s'est faite de diverses façons. Ou bien des groupes barbares étaient installés en bloc sur des terres vacantes, aux termes d'un traité...*

44. In this sense it is quite interesting to consider the statement by Evangelos Chrysos: Chrysos, Evangelos. "The Empire, the 'gentes' and the 'regna'"...: 15, "...Furthermore an extensive nexus of kingships at all social levels, including the leading figures in the 'gentes' among themselves and with members of the Roman aristocracy and even the imperial families, created a new intermixed society despite the practically disregarded prohibition of intermarriage between Romans and barbarians..."

45. Concept that is present in a number of studies, but highlighting the one presented by Domingo Plácido: Plácido, Domingo. "Las formas del poder personal: la monarquía, la realeza y la tiranía". *Gerión*, 25/1 (2007): 127-166, where the notion of "aristocratic solidarity" appears which, in our opinion, is bound up with the idea of "noble identity".



motivation behind this process was to effectively impose royal political authority over a particular territory, which brought aristocratic groups of Roman and 'barbarian' origin together and this even took place through mixed marriages.<sup>46</sup> This can be seen in a Hispano-Visigothic legal formula known as the *Morgingeba vetusti*<sup>47</sup>. Here we find the convergence of characteristic aspects of 'barbarian', Roman and Christian traditions related to marriage and the dowry payable by the groom, which is part of the *order and lineage of the Goths*<sup>48</sup>. The gifts given as part of the dowry include chattels belonging to the groom's family, which are probably associated with the ancient 'barbarian' tradition of giving material gifts to members of family clans (*Sippen*), such as livestock, silver, pieces of linen, earthenware jugs and gold.<sup>49</sup> They also gave property and associated products connected with the notion of ownership characteristic of Roman law, such as land, vineyards, forests, pasture and irrigated land, as well as the associated dependants.<sup>50</sup> References to Old Testament characters such as Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob and Rachel in the formula reinforced Christian marriage vows<sup>51</sup> as well as being a clear sign of the involvement of members of the Hispano-Visigothic ecclesiastical world in drafting the formula, which was written

46. For Antti Arjava: Arjava, Antti. "The survival of Roman family. Law after the barbarian settlements", *Law, society and authority in Late Antiquity*, Ralph Mathisen, ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001: 36, "...This seems natural, given that a ban on intermarriage between Goths and Romans persisted long into the sixth century...".

47. The *Morgingeba* or *Morgengabe*, that can be translated as "gift" or "present on the morning of the wedding", is described in: Gregorius Turonensis, *Historia Francorum*, IX, 20: ...*Tam in dote; quam in Morgangeba, hoc est, matusinale dono...*; for a more detailed explanation of this practice of dowry among the "barbarians", see: du Cange. *Glossarium Mediae et Infimae Latinitatis*, IV. Magdeburg: Apud Io. Iust. Gebauerividuam et filium, 1776: 749-750; in accordance with Robert Latouche: Latouche, Robert. *Grégoire de Tours. Histoire des Francs*. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1999: 209, note 45, '*Morganegyba*' dans le text latin. C'est le don que faisait le mari à sa femme le matin qui suivait la première nuit de noces — Rappelons aussi que la dot était constituée par les parents de l'époux à la veille du mariage.

48. *Formulae Merowingici et Karolini Aevi: Accedunt Ordines Iudiciorum Dei*, XX: *Insigni merito et Getice de stirpe senatus illius sponsae nimis dilectae illi (...) ordinis ut Getici est et Morgingeba uetusti...*

49. *Formulae Merowingici et Karolini Aevi: Accedunt Ordines Iudiciorum Dei*, XX: ...*immobiles res seu mobiles, tam omne pecusque, argentum, aes, byssum, uas fictile et aurum...*; worth commented also in second half of 5th century by: *Codex Euricianus*, 278: *Si cui aurum, argentum uel ornamenta uel species fuerint commendatae, siue custodiendae traditae siue uendendae...*; *Codex Euricianus*, 310: *Si quis buccellario arma dederit uel aliquid donauerit...*; *Codex Euricianus*, 311: *Arma quae saionibus pro obsequio dantur, nulla ratione repetantur...*; interesting comparison could be done by: Tacitus, *Germania*, 15: ...*Gaudent praecipue finitimarum gentium donis, quae non modo a singulis, sed et publice mittuntur, electi equi, magna arma, phalerae torquesque...*; Tacitus, *Germania*, 18: ...*Nam prope soli barbarorum singulis uxoribus contenti sunt, exceptis admodum paucis, qui non libidine, sed ob nobilitatem plurimis nuptiis ambiuntur. Dotem non uxor marito, sed uxori maritus offert. Intersunt parentes et propinqui ac munera probant, munera non ad delicias muliebres quaesita nec quibus nova nuptiar comatur, sed boves et frenatum equum et scutum cum framea gladioque...*

50. *Formulae Merowingici et Karolini Aevi: Accedunt Ordines Iudiciorum Dei*, XX: ...*Rusticos impendam famulos per nostra manentes rura tibi, terris, uineis et praedia oliuis omnibus in rebus siluis ac pascua lymphis...*

51. *Formulae Merowingici et Karolini Aevi: Accedunt Ordines Iudiciorum Dei*, XX: ...*Abraham quippe Deum cupiens cum Sarra supernum cernere promeruit seque offerendo ministrum, cuius Isaac dispensandi de semine uoto exortus geminam genuitque ex coniuge plebem. Iacob bis septenos famulauit in annos, ut Rachel acciperet pulcherrima corpore pacte...*



in the time of King Sisebut<sup>52</sup> and was strongly influenced by the Old Testament thought that characterised the legitimacy of the Hispano-Visigothic and Catholic monarchy after the Third Council of Toledo.<sup>53</sup>

In fact the reform of the theoretical principles formed by church thinkers in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries highlighted the aristocratic and noble members of the Roman-barbarian kingdoms as fundamental elements that supported political power and gave legitimacy to the sovereign himself.<sup>54</sup> Such aristocratic / noble groups supported by ancestral tradition and, notably, by family links and mutual political loyalty, formed what we define as 'lineage'.<sup>55</sup> This idea is present in the thought of Isidore of Seville when he establishes a clear link between *genus* (lineage) and *gentes*, which the Sevillian saw as a large group of individuals related through certain ancestors.<sup>56</sup> These common ancestors would lend prominence to groups and individuals better prepared than the rest of the *populus*. This was a concept that brought together all of the individuals who were citizens and followed legal rules in the name of

52. *Formulae Merowingici et Karolini Aevi: Accedunt Ordines Iudiciorum Dei*, XX: ...*Aeternum tamen ut habeat haec carta uigorem, ecce sacramentorum malui conecere magnum: sidera per celsa Dei uirtute tonantis principis ac domini Sisebuti gloria nostri (...). Carta manet mensis illius conscripta calendis ter nostri uoluto domini foeliciter anno gloriosi merito Sisebuti tempore regis...*

53. As José Orlandis: Orlandis, José. "Biblia y realeza en la España visigodo-católica", *Estudios de Historia Eclesiástica Visigoda*. Navarre: Editorial Euns, 1998: 83, indicates ...*Transcurrió casi medio siglo entre la conversión de Recaredo al Catolicismo y la formulación de una doctrina que recurrió a la Realeza del Antiguo Testamento, como precedente ejemplar de la encarnada por los monarcas toledanos y como fundamento teórico de su legitimidad...*; for María del Rosario Valverde: Valverde, María del Rosario. *Ideología, simbolismo y ejercicio del poder real...*: 200, ...*En las aclamaciones de los padres conciliares, Recaredo es calificado como Apóstol de Cristo, el mismo tratamiento que se había dado al emperador Constantino, y en el 'tomus' presentado por el rey a la asamblea conciliar aparece implícito el concepto de Isaías del soberano como buen pastor de su pueblo...*

54. For this, see: Frighetto, Renan. "De la 'barbarica gens' hacia la 'christiana ciuillitas': la concepción de 'regnum' según el pensamiento político de Isidoro de Sevilla (siglo VII)", *Anuario 7. Centro de Estudios Históricos 'Profesor Carlos S. A. Segreti'*. Córdoba: Universidad Nacional de Córdoba, 2007: 213-220.

55. According to Michel Schmauder: Schmauder, Michel. "The relationship between Frankish 'Gens' and 'Regnum': a proposal based on the archaeological evidence", *Regna and gentes...*: 287-288, "...The results of the research regarding the use of the term 'nobility' emphasise the need to distinguish between indicating a social group privileged by lordship, descent, status and property, or using the term for a group with a clear and precise juridical definition(...) M. Weidemann has recently state the following on the topic of the nobility as a juridically-defined class in the Merovingian period: 'The Frankish nobility rather developed - as one may sum it up — on the basis of royal privileges, in which single persons were givens special privileges in both public and private law...'; the conceptual difference between the idea of 'lineage' in the late Roman Empire and the Roman-barbarian monarchies is cited by Christophe Badel: Badel, Christophe. *La noblesse de l'Empire Romain...*: 406, ...*Le sens statutaire apparu au Bas-Empire est inconnu d'Isidore(...). La dimension sénatoriale est absente, pas plus que es fonctions anoblissantes ne sont citées(...). En fait, la noblesse découle de la 'uirtus', seul facteur anoblissant, et l'évêque retrouve ainsi le discours de légitimation de la noblesse romaine...*

56. Isidorus Hispalensis, *Etymologiae*, IX, 4, 4: *Genus aut a gignendo et prognerando dictum, aut a definitione certorum prognatorum, ut nationes, quae propriis cognationibus terminatae gentes appellantur*; in line with Rosa Sanz: Sanz, Rosa. *Historia de los Godos. Una epopeya histórica de Escandinavia a Toledo*. Madrid: La Esfera de los Libros, 2009: 343, ...*Si acudimos a los datos recogidos en las Etimologías de Isidoro de Sevilla (IX, 1, 1; 4; 5-6), el 'genus' o linaje venía del término 'engendrar' y ligaba a sus componentes con lazos de un parentesco común(...); lo que significaba también que, aun teniendo en un pasado lejano orígenes diversos, en el presente se identificaban con un parentesco común, aunque no lo tuvieran. Lo que sería el caso de los godos, compuestos por muy diversas 'gentes'...*



consensus and concord, which also included 'lords'.<sup>57</sup> Isidore of Seville therefore recognised the social and political supremacy of 'lords' within society as a whole,<sup>58</sup> specifically because they were the ones that formed the aristocracy/nobility, who came from and led the universe of *gentes*. Hence it is a plausible hypothesis that we find a trend among thinkers in Late Antiquity to approximate the notion of aristocratic and noble *gentes* to the *optimatibus* of the Classical and Hellenistic eras in which the members of the *gentes* were the only ones capable of governing or aiding in the tasks of government.<sup>59</sup> In other words, we could propose that *gentes* in Late Antiquity, who were aristocratic and noble individuals of 'barbarian' and Roman origin united by political, social and cultural links, formed the set of members of the late-antiquity *basileia*<sup>60</sup> in the Roman-barbarian kingdoms. By this we mean the members of political society who were responsible for administering the *regnum* that replaced the Romans' own *imperium*,<sup>61</sup> as a larger group forged from the intricate symbiosis of the 'barbarian', Roman and Catholic Christian traditions<sup>62</sup> which in

---

57. Isidorus Hispalensis, *Etymologiae*, IX, 4, 5: *Populus est humanae multitudinis, iuris consensu et concordia communione sociatus. Populus autem eo distat a plebibus, quod populus universi cives sunt, connumeratis senioribus civitatis...*

58. According to: Isidorus Hispalensis, *Sententiae*, III, 47, 1: *...tamen aequus Deus ideo discevit hominibus vitam, alios servos constituens, alios dominos, ut licentia male agendi servorum potestate dominantium retringatur...*

59. This aspect is clearly present in this statement in: *Concilium Toletanum IV*, a. 633, Tomus: *...omnium nostrum pariter iam coetus adesset, tali pro merito fidei suae cum magnificentissimis et nobilissimis viris...; Concilium Toletanum IV*, a. 633, c.75: *...sed defuncto in pace principe primatus totius gentis cum sacerdotibus successorem regni concilio communi constituent, ut dum unitatis concordia a nobis retinetur, nullum patriae gentisque discidium per vim atque ambitum oriatur...*

60. Idea formed after the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, according to María José Hidalgo: Hidalgo, María José. *El intelectual, la realeza y el poder político en el Imperio Romano*. Salamanca: Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca, 1995: 224, *...En este proceso de desarrollo y de difusión de la intelectualidad pagana se encuentran contenidos de pensamiento y conjuntos de valores a partir de los que se intenta construir un hombre nuevo, que participa no sólo de los valores clásicos del patrimonio antiguo sino también de las categorías propias del pensamiento de Plotino y sus discípulos, Porfirio, Jámblico, y otros. A su vez la restauración de la racionalidad del pensamiento clásico va íntimamente unida a una adhesión ferviente a los cultos místicos y a prácticas ocultas, todo ello en el marco de lo que es modelo de la 'civitas' romana. Frente a este proceso, pero en relación con él, se desarrollará una nueva visión del mundo, del hombre y de la realidad, que está en la base de ese movimiento y que a mitad del siglo IV llevará a los intelectuales paganos a convertirse al cristianismo, cuya propuesta religioso-cultural presenta valor universal y autónomo. En esta controversia el cristianismo se alzarán con el triunfo y tomará definitivamente consciencia de su autonomía con respecto a la civilización clásica, de la que incorporará los elementos que aún sean útiles socialmente...; in the case of Visigoth Hispania, we have configured the notion of *basileia* present in: *Concilium Toletanum V*, a. 636, c. 3: *...Ut quisquis talia meditatius fuerit, quem nec electio omnium provehit nec Gothicae gentis nobilitas ad tunc honoris apicem trahit...; Concilium Toletanum VI*, a. 638, c. 17: *...nullus tyrannica praesumptione regnum adsummat, nullus sub religionis habitu detonsus aut turpiter decalvatus aut servilem originem trahens vel extraneae gentis homo, nisi genere Gothus et moribus dignus provehatur ad apicem regni...**

61. About this subject, see: Frighetto, Renan. "Imperium et orbis': conceitos e definições com base nas fontes tardo-antigas ocidentais (séculos IV-VII)", *Facetas do Império na História. Conceitos e métodos*. Sao Paulo: Hucitec, 2008: 147-162.

62. Therefore, it is worth recalling the statement of Luís García: García, Luís. *Historia de España Visigoda...: 24, ...tanto la aristocracia senatorial como la Iglesia (...) se sintieron cada vez más ajenas a la suerte e intereses de los grupos militares dominantes en el gobierno imperial, considerando en muchos casos preferible pactar directamente con los dirigentes de los invasores el mantenimiento de sus privilegios socioeconómicos y del control ideológico, al margen de un aparato estatal cada vez más distante y costoso. Y, por otro lado, no debe olvidarse que los mismos*



theoretical terms brought the ‘best’ of the members of the *gentes* to the fore so they could exercise power for the ‘common good’.<sup>63</sup>

The political, social and cultural primacy of *gentes* within the Roman-barbarian *regna* is proven by the very construction of history itself, seen as a preferred vehicle for passing on and preserving the past, memory,<sup>64</sup> thus reinforcing the role of ancestral traditions as a way of differentiating *gentes* as a whole.<sup>65</sup> It is interesting to observe that the construction of the history of the ‘barbarians’, including the times prior to their effective settlement within the Roman world, was performed based on information bequeathed by Greco-Roman authors that were preserved in Late Antiquity.<sup>66</sup> That is perhaps why we can see a fusion of elements from both traditions, Roman and ‘barbarian’, in the historic narrative of Late Antiquity. While in the more remote past the Goths were known for their *fortitudo* in the warlike sense,<sup>67</sup> Isidore of Seville presents the Hispanic-Visigothic *gentes* of his time

*cuadros superiores del ejército imperial —y por tanto, también las familias de los emperadores en Occidente— desde hacía tiempo se encontraban unidos por lazos de sangre y camaradería con los principales caudillos bárbaros de bastantes agrupaciones populares invasoras...*

63. According to, or prescribed by: *Concilium Toletanum III*, a. 589, Tomus: ...*Regia cura usque in eum modum protendi debet, et dirigi, quem plenam constet veritatis et scientiae capere rationem; nam sicut in rebus humanis gloriosus eminet potestas regia, ita et prospiciendae commoditati conprovincialium maior debet esse et providentia...*; in accordance with Céline Martin: Martin, Céline. *La Géographie du pouvoir dans l'Espagne Visigothique*. Paris: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2003: 365-366, ... *Ici, comme dans d'autres occurrences, 'gens' et 'patria' constituent un couple indissociable; la combinaison ainsi formée désigne un concept abstrait qui n'est autre que la chose publique ou État...*

64. Idea developed by Renan Frighetto: Frighetto, Renan. “Historiografía e poder: a ‘Historia Wambae’ como fonte histórica para o estudo da sociedade política hispano-visigoda em finais do século VII”, *Les médiévistes et leurs sources: une approche croisée sur le haut Moyen Âge. Colloque International d'Histoire Médiévale*. Sao Paulo: Universidade de São Paulo, forthcoming.

65. Therefore, critical for establishing the link between the people, traditions and development of a Hispano-Visigoth “national” *História*, see: Teillet, Suzanne. *Des Goths à la nation Gothique. Les origines de l'idée de nation en Occident du Ve au VIIe siècle*. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1984: 462 and following; see also: Hillgarth, J. N. “Historiography in Visigothic Spain”, *La Storiografia Altomedievale. Settimane di Studio del Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo XVII*. Spoleto: Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, 1970: 261-311 and more recently: Hillgarth, J. N. *The Visigoths in History and Legend*. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2009: 21-56; in line with Herwing Wolfram: Wolfram, Herwing. “Gothic history as historical ethnography...”: 46, “...In fact, the Visigothic kings had to fight this *memoria* as the political tradition of the nobles...”.

66. According to Thomas F. X. Noble: Noble, Thomas F.X. “Introduction. Romans, barbarians...”: 14, referring to the studies by Walter Goffart, “...He notes that histories of the barbarians were all written after, sometimes long after, various peoples had entered the Roman world. It was in this context that he made the point already mentioned above that while the barbarians have a past we are not authorized to transform that past into a history...”; a perspective that can be verified in: Isidorus Hispalensis, *Historia de regibus Gothorum, Vandalorum et Suevorum*, 2: ...*nulla enim in orbe gens fuit quae Romanum Imperium adeo fatigauerit. Isti sunt enim quos etiam Alexander uitandos pronuntiauit, Pyrrhus permituit, Caesar exhorruit...*

67. Isidorus Hispalensis, *Etymologiae*, IX, 2, 89: ...*quos veteres magis Getas quam Gothos vocaverunt; gens fortis et potentissima...*; Isidorus Hispalensis, *Historia de regibus Gothorum, Vandalorum et Suevorum*, 1: *Gothorum antiquissimam esse gentem...*; Isidorus Hispalensis, *Historia de regibus Gothorum, Vandalorum et Suevorum*, 2: *Interpretatio autem nominis eorum in linguam nostram tectum, quod significatur fortitudo...*; Isidorus Hispalensis, *Historia de regibus Gothorum, Vandalorum et Suevorum*, 67: *Populi natura pernices, ingenio alacres, conscientiae uiribus freti, robore corporis ualidi...*



as authentic heirs of Rome, the latter being considered the head of the *gentes*<sup>68</sup> that was defeated, but which at the same time forged the burgeoning lineage of the Goths.<sup>69</sup> In other words, according to Isidore's thought, the merger between the noble groups of Goths and Suebians and sectors of the Hispano-Roman aristocracy became effective partly due to contact with ancestral Roman traditions turned, as we know, to unity and political strengthening of royalty.<sup>70</sup> In that case it seems right to think of the proposal made in the Sevillian's *Historia*, which unequivocally stated that the Goths switched from their primordial status of 'barbarians' to 'civilised' in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries. This position was fully reached after their conversion to Catholic Christianity in the Third Council of Toledo in 589.<sup>71</sup> According to Isidore of Seville, it was Reccared, presented as the bearer of 'loyalty', 'piety' and 'peace',<sup>72</sup> who brought both the *gentis* and the rest of the Gothic *populus* into *christiana civilitas*.<sup>73</sup> Therefore, from then on, at least theoretically, the Gothic *gentes* and their Hispano-Roman fellows enjoyed a shared Catholic Christian and Roman 'tradition' validated by conciliar and royal authority,<sup>74</sup> offering a unitary concept giving *gentes* a unique role in belonging to a single *gens gothorum*<sup>75</sup>. However, we feel it is essential

68. Isidorus Hispalensis, *De Laude Spaniae*, 26: ...*aurea Roma caput gentium*...

69. Isidorus Hispalensis, *De Laude Spaniae*, 27-28: ...*denuo tamen Gothorum florentissima gens post multiplices in orbe uictorias*...; Isidorus Hispalensis, *Historia de regibus Gothorum, Vandalorum et Suevorum*, 67: ...*Quibus tanta extitit magnitudo bellorum et tam extollens gloriosae uictoriae uirtus ut Roma ipsa uictrix omnium populorum subacta captiuitatis iugo Gothicis triumphis adceteret et domina cunctarum gentium illis ut famula deseruiret*.

70. For María del Rosario Valverde: Valverde, María del Rosario. *Ideología, simbolismo y ejercicio del poder real*...: 181. ...*Es en este contexto político de fortalecimiento interno del poder real en el que se inscribe la práctica de la 'imitatio imperii', es decir, la emulación consciente de las prácticas, formas y tradiciones imperiales romanas*...

71. Concilium Toletanum III, a. 589, Homilia Sancti Leandri: *Festiuatatem hanc omnium esse sollempniorem festiuatatum novitas ipsa significat, quoniam sigut nova est conuersio tantarum plebium causa, ita et nouiora sunt solito ecclesiae gaudia*(...)Superest autem ut unanimiter unum omnes regnum effecti tam pro stabilitate regni terreni quam felicitate regni caelestis Deum precibus adeamus, ut regnum et *gens*, quae Christum glorificauit in terris...

72. Isidorus Hispalensis, *Historia de regibus Gothorum, Vandalorum et Suevorum*, 52: ...*hic fide pius et pace praeclarus*...; and as well indicated by Pablo C. Díaz: Díaz, Pablo C. "El siglo VI en Galia e Hispania a través de las fuentes escritas", *Zona Arqueológica. El tiempo de los "bárbaros"*. Pervencia y transformación en Galia e Hispania (ss.V-VI d.C.). Alcalá de Henares: Museo Arqueológico Regional, 2010: 357. ...*En el caso de Isidoro, su interés por construir una 'Historia de los godos' está intimamente asociado a su afán por elaborar una teoría política legitimadora del poder visigodo sobre 'Hispania', donde se justifica su dominio sobre toda la Península*(...). *En su narración, la conversión al catolicismo se constituye, igualmente, en el acto legitimador esencial, y le da un hilo conductor que dota de unidad a todo el texto*...

73. Isidorus Hispalensis, *Historia de regibus Gothorum, Vandalorum et Suevorum*, 52: ...*In ipsis enim regni sui exordiis catholicam fidem adeptus totius Gothicae gentis populos*...; according to Isabel Velázquez: Velázquez, Isabel. "Pro Patriae Gentisque Gothorum Statu" (4<sup>th</sup> Council of Toledo, canon 75, A.633), *Regna and gentes*...: 190. "...His historical works, the *Chronica* and the *Historia Gothorum*, have a clear purpose: to recount and praise the antiquity and courage of the people, to write the history of their kings, both their merits and blemishes, from a Christian perspective..."

74. The viewpoint of Isabel Velázquez: Velázquez, Isabel. "Pro Patriae Gentisque Gothorum Statu"....: 204. "...It is not a question of an ethnic group, of an ancient race, but of a group that retains the prestige of its origins and its virtues as a group, mythologised through literature and re-created using clichés that glorify their magnificence; although this group has gradually incorporated members of the other majority group in the land where they live, the Hispano-Romans..."

75. Ioannes Biclaensis, *Chronicon*, a. 587, 5: *Reccaredus*(...) *quam imperio conuerti ad catholicam fidem facit gentemque omnium Gothorum et Suevorum ad unitatem et pacem reuocat Christianae ecclesiae*...; conforme:





to stress that the Sevillian's historical thought included Gothic 'traditions' during their devotion to the Arian heresy, rather than excluding them, since past events played an 'educational role' for future generations,<sup>76</sup> *exempla* that should never be forgotten and that would even serve to highlight the feats achieved by the 'Goth's lineage'.

The records of the Third Council of Toledo themselves refer to the past of the Gothic *gens* positively, mentioning the military valour of the 'illustrious lineage of the Goths',<sup>77</sup> probably a reference to recent military victories during the reign of Leovigild over the Suebians in *Gallaecia*,<sup>78</sup> over the Cantabrian 'barbarians'<sup>79</sup> and also over the Eastern Roman enclaves established in the south and southeast of the Iberian Peninsula.<sup>80</sup> Thus, from 589, on the political and ideological plane, Goths, Suebians and Hispano-Romans became a single *natione*: Hispanic by location and due to full development of royal authority over the former Roman *Hispania*; and Visigothic mainly due to the hegemonic and victorious position of the Goths in the second half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century over their most direct regional competitors.<sup>81</sup> According to the Sevillian author, *Hispania* was the land common to Goths, Suebians and Hispano-Romans<sup>82</sup> which from that moment on was a single Hispano-Visigothic

Isidorus Hispalensis, *Liber Differentiarum*, I, 332: ...*Gens nationis est, ut Graeciae, Asiae; hinc et gentilitas dicitur...*; for Rosa Sanz: Sanz, Rosa. *Historia de los Godos...*: 344, ...*De este modo, cuando se citaba a la 'gens gothorum' se señalaba a un grupo concreto con un etnónimo que no demostraba una pureza de sangre, ya que ésta era imposible(...). Frente a ellos estaban las distintas 'gentes' hispanas o grupos procedentes de las diversas etnias que poblaron la Península Ibérica mucho antes de la llegada de los godos, y que se encontraban desde hacía siglos también mezclados entre sí...*

76. Isidorus Hispalensis, *Etymologiae*, I, 43: *Historiae gentium non inpediunt legentibus in his quae utilia dixerunt. Multi enim sapientes praeterita hominum gesta ad institutionem praesentium historiis indiderunt...*

77. *Concilium Toletanum III*, a. 589, Tomus: ...*Adest enim omnis gens Gothorum inclyta et fere omnium gentium genuina virilitate opinata...*; military greatness highlighted in: Isidorus Hispalensis, *Historia de regibus Gothorum, Vandalorum et Suevorum*, 69: ...*Porro in armorum artibus satis expectabiles, et non solum hastis, sed et iaculis equitando confligunt, nec equestri tantum proelio, sed et pedestri incedunt...*

78. *Concilium Toletanum III*, a. 589, Tomus: ...*quinimmo et Suevorum gentis infinita multitudo, quam praesidio coelesti nostro regno subiecimus...*; Isidorus Hispalensis, *Historia de regibus Gothorum, Vandalorum et Suevorum*, 49: ...*Postremum bellum Sueuis intulit regnumque eorum in iure gentis suae mira celeritate transmisit...*; Ioannes Biclarenis, *Chronicon*, a. 585: *Liuvigildus rex Gallaecias vastat, Audecanem regem comprehensum regno privat, Suevorum gentem, thesaurum et patriam in suam redigit potestatem et Gothorum provinciam facit.*

79. Isidorus Hispalensis, *Historia de regibus Gothorum, Vandalorum et Suevorum*, 49: ...*Studio quippe exercitus concordante fauore uictoriarum multa praeclare sortitus est. Cantabrum namque iste obtinuit, Aregiam iste cepit, Sabaria ab eo omnis deuicta est...*; Ioannes Biclarenis, *Chronicon*, a. 573, 5: *Liuvigildus rex Sabariam ingressus Sappos et provinciam ipsam in suam redigit...* Ioannes Biclarenis, *Chronicon*, a. 574, 2: *His diebus Liuvigildus rex Cantabriam ingressus provinciae pervasores interficit, Amaiam occupat, opes eorum pervadit et provinciam in suam revocat dicionem.*

80. Isidorus Hispalensis, *Historia de regibus Gothorum, Vandalorum et Suevorum*, 49: ...*Fudit quoque diuerso proelio militem et quaedam castra ab eis occupata dimicando recepit...*; Ioannes Biclarenis, *Chronicon*, a. 570, 2: *Liuvigildus Rex loca Bastetaniae et Malacitanae urbis repulsis militibus superatus vastat, et victor solio redit* and Ioannes Biclarenis, *Chronicon*, a. 571, 3: *Liuvigildus rex Asidonam fortissimam civitatem proditione cuiusdam Framidanci nocte occupat et militibus interfectis memoratam urbem ab Gothorum revocat iura.*

81. Frighetto, Renan. "De la 'barbarica gens' hacia la 'christiana ciuilitas'...": 217-219.

82. In our view the quote: Isidorus Hispalensis, *Etymologiae*, IX, 2, 1: ...*sicut natio a nascendo...*, is linked with: Isidorus Hispalensis, *Historia de regibus Gothorum, Vandalorum et Suevorum*, 49: ...*Spania magna ex*



*patria*<sup>83</sup> protected and defended in both political and religious terms by the *Gothicae gentis*, which is clearly associated with nobles in the kingdom.<sup>84</sup>

We must stress that there were focal points of resistance among nobles to the conversion of the Visigoths to Catholic Christianity,<sup>85</sup> which is a clear sign that the idea of consensus among Visigothic nobles in favour of conversion to Catholicism was rather rhetorical. It seems correct to state that this initial difficulty was related to the fear certain political groups had of losing their status in the complex web of social and political relationships to other noble groups that, from 589, gained strength and weight in deciding future royal elections. To a certain extent this was a natural reaction by groups of nobles strongly supported by Gothic ancestral traditions, who were Arians and had an 'exclusivist' tendency in the election of the sovereign, which would disappear with conversion to Catholic Christianity. In this case we think that the problems that Reccared and representatives of the church and nobles who supported conversion to Catholicism faced were based on strong political appeal that the sovereign and his political allies managed to counter through their forceful reaction.<sup>86</sup>

We can thus say that the Third Council of Toledo in 589 brought about the effective reformulation of the concept of *gentes* in the Hispano-Visigothic kingdom, voluntarily or involuntarily integrating those who had been former *inimici* much more on the theoretical and ideological plain than in actual pragmatic terms. Noble friendships and loyalty, which we can define using the concept of 'noble identity', extrapolated the 'ethnic', cultural and religious concept that opposed Goths / 'barbarians' / Arians against Romans / 'civilized people' / Catholics. It is better to

*parte potitus, nam antea gens Gothorum angustis finibus artabatur...*, where the expansion promoted by Leovigildo configured the birth of the Visigoth *natio* in *Hispania*; *gens gothorum* that would include the Goths, Suebians and Hispano-Romans, as it is stated by Pedro Juan Galán: Galán, Pedro Juan: *El genero historiografico de la Chronica. Las crónicas hispanas de época visigoda*. Caceres: Universidad de Extremadura, 1994: 143, ...*El vocablo 'Gothi', en Juan de Biclato, designa a los pueblos que constituyen la 'gens Gothorum', esto es, los godos y los hispanorromanos conjuntamente...*, that appears in a similar form in: Isidorus Hispalensis, *Chronica*, 117[5780]: ...*Gothi, per Hermenegildum Leovigildi regis filium, bifarie divisi...*

83. Isidorus Hispalensis, *Etymologiae*, XIV, 5, 19: ...*Patria autem vocata quod communis sit omnium, qui in ea nati sunt...*; the relation between the Goths and Hispania such as their homeland emerges in: Isidorus Hispalensis, *Historia de regibus Gothorum, Vandalorum et Suevorum*, 66: ...*Spanias usque perueniunt ibique sedem uitae atque imperium locauerunt*.

84. *Concilium Toletanum III*, a. 589, Tomus: ...*vel maiores natu...*; Isidorus Hispalensis, *Etymologiae*, IX, 5, 13: *Stirps ex longa generis significatione vocatur. Gnatus dictus quia generatus...*

85. About this subject, see: Alonso, J. Ignacio. "Sunna, Masona y Nepopis. Las luchas religiosas durante la dinastía de Leovigildo", *Antigüedad y Cristianismo III-Los Visigodos. Historia y civilización*. Murcia: Ediciones Universidad de Murcia, 1987: 151-157; see also: Sanz, Rosa. *Historia de los Godos...*: 285-288.

86. According to María del Rosario Valverde: Valverde, María del Rosario. *Ideología, Simbolismo y Ejercicio del poder real...*: 261-262, ...*No discutimos que se tratase de la reacción arriana frente a la adopción de la ortodoxia, pero consideramos que el movimiento de oposición a Recaredo estuvo motivado por las repercusiones político-económicas de la conversión, no por razones de índole estrictamente religiosa(...). Por ello, aunque en estos momentos se utilizara como argumento ideológico la defensa del arrianismo, no creemos que puedan interpretarse estos movimientos de oposición a Recaredo como luchas eminentemente religiosas, sino como manifestaciones de los enfrentamientos entre diferentes grupos de poder que serán permanentes a lo largo de toda la historia del reino visigodo de Toledo...*



think of it as an effective political link that brought together noble groups interested in consolidating their political power in regional settings.

The strength of political, property and client relationships regionally brought about the creation of powerful groups of nobles who ended up competing politically to extend their powers into other spheres of action. These confrontations caused intense disputes between nobles that affected the royal election itself. We already know about the effective political and military power of *gentes* against the Hispano-Visigothic royal power from political confrontations that caused, on various occasions, attempts at usurpation and removal of sovereigns who initially enjoyed majority support from the noble groups.<sup>87</sup> These actions went against the authority delegated in the king and were supported by theoretical and rhetorical arguments that pointed to the illegitimacy of the actions carried out by the sovereign, which were given as the true motive for a particular group of nobles acting against royal power. Many of these moves to usurp the throne were based especially on uncertainty regarding Christianised perspectives, such as defining royal rectitude as a basic principal of action for the sovereign in the body of Hispano-Visigothic political society,<sup>88</sup> which was based on justice and piety. These were virtues inherent to the image of the 'good' *rex christianus* and were both supposed to bring forth a third virtue, clemency.<sup>89</sup> When the king was considered to have strayed from this ideal royal position required by the lay *gentes* and the church through which the oath of mutual loyalty was made and which reinforced the principle of a concession made by the *gentes* in the *regnum* to royal authority, that lent legitimacy to any moves by the *gentes* to depose the king. Theoretically speaking the king's authority should have been exercised for the benefit of all of his subjects, as it was a concession delegated by the members of the *gentes* to one who, through his actions, would be the person chiefly responsible for bringing stability to the Hispano-Visigothic Kingdom of Toledo.<sup>90</sup> In this case we would have something approaching the proposition made by Evangelos Chrysos who linked the creation of the late-antiquity *regna* to the profound links between the *regiae potestates* and the set of *gentes*,<sup>91</sup> aspects that

---

87. The case, for example, of the attempted usurpation promoted by Duke Argimundo against King Reccared, as indicated by: Ioannes Biclarensis, *Chronicon*, a. 590, 3: *Reccaredo ergo orthodoxo quieta pace regnante domesticae insidiae praetenduntur, nam quidam ex cubiculo eius, etiam provinciae dux nomine Argimundus adversus Reccaredum regem tyrannidem assumere cupiens, ita ut, si posset, eum regno privaret et vita. Sed nefandi eius consilii detecta machinatione comprehensus et in vinculis ferreis reductus habita discussione socii eius impiam machinationem confessi condigna sunt ultione interfecti, ipse autem Argimundus, qui regnum assumere cupiebat, primum verberibus interrogatus, deinde turpiter decalvatus, post haec dextra amputata exemplum omnibus in Toletana urbe asino sedens pompizando dedit et docuit famulos dominis non esse superbos.*

88. Isidorus Hispalensis, *Sententiae*, III, 48, 7: *Reges a recte agendo vocati sunt...*

89. Isidorus Hispalensis, *Etymologiae*, IX, 3, 5: *...Plus autem in regibus laudatur pietas; nam iustitia per se severa est; Isidorus Hispalensis, Sententiae, III, 50, 3: Reddere malum pro malu vicissitudo iustitiae est: sed qui clementiam addit iustitiae...*

90. *Concilium Toletanum IV*, a. 633, c. 75: *...pro robore nostrorum regum et stabilitate gentis Gothorum...*

91. Chrysos, Evangelos. "The Empire, the gentes and regna...": 15, "...all these and many other, more or less obvious channels of communication and means of affiliation served as the instruments for shaping the *regna* within or at the edge of the Roman Empire. Furthermore an extensive nexus of kingships at



revealed the nature of the granting of authority to the king by the noble groups, which would be sealed with an oath of loyalty between the parties.<sup>92</sup>

This argument, which valued the idea of consensus between the set of *gentes* and royalty, governed especially by *concordia*, which was supposed to emanate from the just exercising of royal power was used to justify the events that took place between 629 and 631, which culminated in the removal of the legitimate sovereign Suinthila.<sup>93</sup> He was presented in the 75<sup>th</sup> Canon of the Fourth Council of Toledo as a *criminal* and *evildoer*.<sup>94</sup> The deposed sovereign was accused of having broken the oath he had made to the Hispano-Visigothic *gentes*: 'Any of us or of the peoples of *Hispania* who breaks, through any plot or scheme, the oath he made for the prosperity of the country and the *gentes* of the Goths (...) will be anathema in the presence of God the Father and the angels'.<sup>95</sup> In fact, the contents of this sentence<sup>96</sup> proclaimed in a Church council show us the clear difficulties with effectively applying and recognising what was being sworn. It demonstrates the well-known contradictions and opposition between the sovereign Suinthila and a considerable proportion of the Hispano-Visigothic *gentes*. The noble groups most resistant to Suinthila's royal authority include those that settled in the province of *Galia Narbonensis*, a region beyond the Pyrenees over which the Visigoths had held hegemony after the disappearance of the *regnum visigothorum* of the Gauls at the beginning of the 6<sup>th</sup> century. The effective involvement of the *gentes* settled in this province in deposing Suinthila is highlighted by the Frankish Chronicle of Fredegar, which broadly and generally mentions the growing hatred between the *primates* and the king due to the iniquity of the Hispano-Visigothic royal authority.<sup>97</sup>

---

all social levels, including the leading figures in the *gentes* among themselves and with members of the Roman aristocracy and even the imperial families...".

92. A study on the relationship between the granting of royal authority by noble groups and the oath of allegiance as a way of materialising this, in: Frighetto, Renan. "‘Incauto et inevitabili conditionum sacramento’: juramento de fidelidad y limitación del poder regio en la ‘Hispania’ visigoda en el reinado de Egica (688)". *Revista Intus Legere-Historia* (2007): 67-79.

93. The continuation of the Chronicle of Maximus of Saragossa, written by Eutrando of Toledo, reports that Maximus Caesaraugustani, *Chronicon*, a. 629: ...*Svinthila regno pulsus moritur(...) regem jam Sisenando...*

94. *Concilium Toletanum IV*, a. 633, c. 75: ...*De Suintilane vero qui scelera propria(...) propter mala...*

95. *Concilium Toletanum IV*, a. 633, c. 75: ...*Quiquumque igitur a nobis vel totius Spaniae populis qualibet coniuratione vel studio sacramentum fidei suae, quod patriae gentisque Gothorum(...) anathema sit in conspectu Dei Patris et angelorum...*

96. *Concilium Toletanum IV*, a. 633, c. 75: ...*Quod si haec admonitio mentes nostras non corrigit et ad salutem communem cor nostrum nequaquam perducit, audite sententiam nostram...;* an interesting definition of this sentence is stated by: Isidorus Hispalensis, *Sententiae*, II, 29, 10: *Recte et sententia dicit, qui veram sapientiam gustu interni saporis sentit. A sentiendo enim sententia dicitur. Ac per hoc arrogantes, qui sine humilitate dicunt, de sola scientia dicunt, non de sententia*, where the sentence is related to the advice offered by one who feels through wisdom; see also: Isidorus Hispalensis, *Etymologiae*, XI, 1, 13: ...*dum rectum iudicat, ratio est; dum spirat, spiritus est; dum aliquid sentit, sensus est. Nam inde animus sensus dicitur pro his quae sentit, unde et sententia nomen accepit.*

97. Fredegarus, *Chronicon*, LXXIII: ...*Sintela nimium in suis iniquis, et cum omnibus regni sui primatibus odium incurreret...*



The climate of hostility and confrontation encouraged the<sup>98</sup> *Narbonensis* leaders to support and advise the province's most important noble leader Sisenand,<sup>99</sup> the *Dux Narbonensis*,<sup>100</sup> in his escalation of political and military conflict with the legitimate sovereign. One of the most controversial of the positions taken by Sisenand and his supporters, which was seen as tyranny and usurpation by the author of the Mozarabic Chronicle of 754,<sup>101</sup> was to seek military support from the Frankish sovereign Dagobert to remove Suintila from the kingship.<sup>102</sup> When he began his military progress through Hispanic lands, Sisenand received great support from nobles in the province of *Tarraconense* whose *primates*, together with those from *Narbonensis*, elected and acclaimed him *rex* when he entered *Caesaraugusta* with the support of the Frankish forces led by the Dukes of Abundantius and Venerandus.<sup>103</sup> Therefore we can see how the Chronicle of Fredegarius pragmatically points to the relationship between *gentes* settled in both the Hispano-Visigothic kingdom and their noble partners in Dagobert's unified Frankish kingdom. It was precisely this noble identity, which was certainly supported by bonds of friendship and kinship consolidated by an ancestral tradition common to the ennobled individuals, which led the two Frankish-Aquitainian dukes to head an *exercitu tholosano* from the same region in which the Visigoths had up set their *sedis regiae* in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, offering significant military support to the Hispano-Visigothic nobility led by their leader Sisenand. Due to the scarcity of the information the sources contain it is impossible for us to verify whether those Frankish-Aquitainian dukes, Abundantius and Venerandus, were of Visigothic, Gallo-Roman, Frankish or Burgundian origin, but we can suggest that they were possibly close to Hispano-Visigothic *gentes* especially in terms of their belonging to the 'supranational' noble universe.<sup>104</sup> In other words,

98. In accordance with Isidorus Hispalensis, *Etymologiae*, IX, 4, 17: *Proceres sunt principes civitatis, quasi procedes, quod ante omnes honore praecedant...*; a term associated with participation in high administrative functions according to Paul Fouracre: Fouracre, Paul. "The origins of the nobility in Francia", *Nobles and nobility in Medieval Europe. Concepts, origins, transformations*, Anne Duggan, ed. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2000: 20, "...Finally, we can identify a few terms, such as *optimates*, *proceres* or *illustres*, which designate high status without reference to office...".

99. The importance of Sisenando and his noble group is highlighted in: *Versiculus Fructuosi*, 4, 1: *...qua namque pontifex Sclua sortitus opinam rexit multifariter diuina dignatione Narbonam; sique Beterrensem Petrus elimauerat urbem, deceat ut celicis talem compulari falangis. Quid Sisenandum recolam gratia precipua regem...*

100. Hypothesis defended by Luís García-Moreno: García-Moreno, Luís. *Prosopografía del Reino Visigodo de Toledo*. Salamanca: Universidad de Salamanca, 1974: 74, note 133.

101. *Chronicon*, 754, 9: *Hujus Heraclii temporibus, Sisenandus in aera 669(...)per tyrannidem regno Gothorum invaso, quinquennio regali locatus est solio...*

102. Fredegarius, *Chronicon*, LXXIII: *...cum consilio caeterorum Sisenandus quidam ex proceribus ad Dagobertum expetit ut ei cum exercitu auxiliaretur, qualiter Sintellanem degradaret a regno...*

103. Fredegarius, *Chronicon*, LXXIII: *...Abundantius et Venerandus cum exercitu tholosano tantum usque Caesaraugustam civitatem cum Sisenando accesserunt, ibique omnes Gotthi de regno Spaniae Sisenandum sublimant in regnum...*; see also: Martindale, John Robert. *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire III A-B. A.D.527-641*. Cambridge (UK): Cambridge University Press, 1992: 7 and 1370.

104. As Pablo C. Díaz indicates: Díaz, Pablo C. "El siglo VI en 'Galia e Hispania' ...": 349, *...En los últimos tiempos del Imperio Romano, el término 'Hispanogallia' o 'Spanigallia', había servido para encuadrar un espacio geográfico extendido al norte y al sur del Pirineo donde la similitud de patrones culturales, así como la frecuencia de contactos económicos e intelectuales, había permitido ignorar la existencia de una barrera geográfica que apenas*



we can see how the process of ethnogenesis in a political sense, based on a common tradition shared by the individuals belonging to a prominent socio-political group, gained force alongside a noble institution increasingly strong in regional and provincial terms.

However, as contradictory as it may seem, the strength of the *gentes* grouped together as genuine political groups that attained an 'international' dimension, and which had great prestige beyond the 'borders' of the various late-antiquity *regna*, strengthened the nobility as a whole to the detriment of the authority exercised by the royal power. There can be no doubt that the sovereign was basically part of the universe of *gentes* since he was part of that socio-political environment from which he was chosen by the rest of his noble peers. But due to the antagonistic environment of existing political relationships between the various noble factions, the king ended up being the preferred target of disputes directed, in most cases, at the members of his *genus*. Attempts by the Church to establish a valid principle of respect for royal authority that was above those political disputes between the groups that comprised the universe of *gentes*, which should be strong, consensual and, at the same time, exemplary and ideal, as proposed by people of the calibre of Isidore of Seville, remained on the theoretical and rhetorical plane.<sup>105</sup> All in all, the strength of the noble factions with regional prestige was the determining factor that accentuated the union of the set of Hispano-Visigothic *gentes* to the detriment of royal authority, which gradually suffered a loss to its institutional and political position throughout the 7<sup>th</sup> century. It is worth mentioning that the concept of *noble identity* which solidified the political strength and prominent role of *gentes* in collective terms minimised the powers of a royal institution rooted in the traditions of the Roman imperial past.

### 3. Partial conclusions

Based on these general aspects, we can offer some thoughts about the issue of *gentes* in the Hispano-Visigothic kingdom of Toledo at the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century. It initially seems right to state that the nobility mentioned in Hispano-Visigothic sources almost always seems defined by the term *gens*, which is generally associated with the concepts of *regnum*, *patria* and *natio*, all of which take a unitary perspective. It is interesting to find that in the sources

---

*separaba nada en términos administrativos y convivenciales...*; a statement that corroborates the previous one and the one by Christine Delaplace: Delaplace, Christine. "Les Wisigoths en Septimanie d'après les sources écrites", *Zona Arqueológica. El tiempo de los "bárbaros"*...: 91, ...*Les limites de la Septimanie n'ont jamais constitué une frontière linéaire définie...*

105. Isidorus Hispalensis, *Sentiae*, III, 49, 3: *...Prodesse ergo debet populis principatus, non nocere; nec dominando premere, sed condescendendo consulere...*; Isidorus Hispalensis, *Sentiae*, III, 50, 5: *Quanto quisque in superiori constitutus est loco, tanto in maiori versatur periculo; et quanto splendoris honore excelsior quisque est, tanto, si delinquant, peccator maior est...*



analysed *gentes*, in plural, are linked to the perspective of conceding the *regnum* in terms of authority being delegated to the king by the nobility. This authority was to be exercised over the *patria* and the *natio*, meaning the defined geographical space in which, in theoretical terms, there would be a concept of collective identity. This formulation could already be seen in the reign of Leovigild and took on a positive connotation when the Visigoths converted to Catholic Christianity at the Third Council of Toledo in 589, when the term *gens* came to mean the set of all aristocratic and noble Hispano-Roman and Visigothic groups as a whole. From then on the quartet of terms *gens*, *regnum*, *patria* and *natio* became inseparable and went hand-in-hand with the notion of *christianitas*. Therefore the Visigoths turned a de facto situation - being considered part of *christiana civilitas* and leaving behind their previous status as *barbarica et haereticae gens* - into a legal one. The barbarian *gentes*, in the case of Visigothic and Suebian nobles, then shared the same cultural *status* as their Hispano-Roman fellows, and political room was made for them so they could also participate in the most significant political decisions in the Hispano-Visigothic kingdom of Toledo. It is likely that even before the conversion members of the Hispano-Roman aristocracy already held positions and roles in the Visigothic royal administration but their prominent position took on actual political importance after 589. This date may be considered a turning point in forming a tradition that from then on would be both Visigothic, Roman and Christian, common to the set of noble *gentes* we call Hispano-Visigothic. But even though they were brought together by a universal tradition recognised by all aristocratic and noble groups of barbarian or Roman origin, political disputes caused by the struggle for greater prestige alongside the figure of the sovereign, which resulted in material gains for the *fideles* that were members of the royal *genus*, caused confrontations with noble *gentes* that weakened royalty as an institution that took on a personal tone, almost as a political grouping. Any sovereign who acted selfishly without care for the common good of the members of Hispano-Visigothic political society and directed his efforts solely at giving prestige to a certain group that supported him would end up exercising the royal authority he was granted by all of the *gentes* illegitimately and tyrannically. From that point on, any reaction by nobles to remove the sovereign would be legitimate. We find this reasoning in the sources provided by Isidore of Seville and in the famous 75<sup>th</sup> Canon of the Fourth Council of Toledo in 633. The latter was aimed at giving legitimacy to the position taken against the illegitimate Suinthila by part of the noble *gentes* who supported the leader Sisenand in his struggle for the throne. It is a fact that Sisenand rebelled against the recognised monarchy and even used external forces to achieve his objective. It was aspects such as these that caused his initiative to be characterised as tyrannical according to the guiding precepts of late-antiquity tradition. However, both Hispano-Visigothic sources and the Frankish Chronicle of Fredegar claim that Sisenand's action was ideal based on the fact that Suinthila had become a tyrant, acknowledging that Sisenand's actions counted on support and advice from representatives of the Hispano-Visigothic *gentes*. However, this support also extended to the Frankish-Aquitainian nobles, demonstrating the existence of genuine interaction, both political and cultural, between the set of



Hispano-Visigothic, Frankish and Aquitanian *nobilitas*, which is characteristic of the idea of the existence of a *noble identity* that went beyond all territorial limits of the Roman-barbarian *regna* in Late Antiquity.

It thus seems right to stress that the theoretical and methodological proposal presented by the concept of ethnogenesis, supported by the premise that the barbarian *gentes* and their Roman fellows formed a noble grouping united around common political and traditional elements, reached maturity, in the Hispano-Visigothic case, after the conversion of *gentes* of Gothic origin to Catholic Christianity. Furthermore, according to our interpretation, the existence of *ethnogenesis* within late-antiquity Roman-barbarian monarchies ended up contributing to strengthening the nobility as an institution, which had political and traditional values of its own based mainly on the strength of regional powers to the detriment of the longed-for ideal of unity around the figure of the Christian sovereign. This attitude undoubtedly enhanced the increase in links between members of the *christiana nobilitas*, irrespective of their origins or belonging to a *patria*, *natio* or *regnum*. It is possible that this hypothesis will throw up new ideas for us to explain the various tensions among the Hispano-Visigothic nobility that led them, in some cases, to call for intervention by other external noble actors in an attempt to solve their internal political problems. Such dissension led to the fall of the Hispano-Visigothic monarchical institution in 711 and this also shows us that the Hispano-Visigothic *nobilitas* remained in areas in the north of the Iberian Peninsula that laid the foundations for a new monarchy in the High Middle Ages.

