
*Strategies of Identification* is the latest in a long line of volumes spear-headed by Walter Pohl that deal with identity and ethnicity in the early medieval world. While scholars from a variety of institutions across Europe and the USA have collaborated with Pohl over the years, the volume under review contains offerings only from Austrian scholars affiliated (or in the case of Helmut Reimitz, previously affiliated) with the Institute for History or the Institute for Medieval Studies in Vienna, including Pohl himself. The central thesis of the volume is ‘to explore the significance of ethnicity in the context of religious, political, and other early medieval identities’ (p. 52), although, as the title suggests, the focus is more specifically on the relationship between religion and ethnicity. In this way the studies presented form both continuations of past efforts in this field and new ways of addressing the ever-thorny issue of ‘ethnicity’. Between them, the studies cover a broad chronological scope – from the fifth to the ninth century – although it would have been nice to see some examples from the tenth or even eleventh centuries. Likewise, a reasonable range of authors and texts are represented, from well-known faces like Augustine of Hippo and Gregory of Tours to the (perhaps) slightly less-studied *Liber Pontificalis* and the Bavarian hagiographer Arbeo of Freising.

In his lengthy Introduction, Walter Pohl deviates somewhat from the specific theme of the volume – exploring the relationship between ethnicity and religion – although he manages to cleave to the slightly broader central thesis stated above. Nevertheless, this deviation serves an important purpose, as Pohl takes us on a thorough and comprehensive survey of the development of the study of ethnicity in an early medieval context and what he sees as the
current ‘state of research’, as well as proposing some methodological approaches and principles to take forward. If this survey seems implicitly self-reflective at times, it is because the author has been at the forefront of these developments for several decades. In this Introduction, then, we have an important re-assessment of the problems with studying identity/ies and ethnicity/ies in the early medieval world: Pohl follows Wittgenstein in allowing that the term ‘identity’ ‘does not make sense at all’ (p. 4), but he demonstrates that its study by social scientists and historians over the past sixty years has been both reasonable and fruitful. Pohl goes on to outline some of the ways in which the relationship between ethnicity and identity has been studied, including ‘kinship groups’, ‘ethnographic categories’, ‘regional identities’, ‘war-bands’ and so on (pp. 14-24), before going on to address how such categories were applied in ‘the discourse of ethnicity’ (pp. 27-48). Finally, Pohl ends with four ‘conclusions’ about ethnicity which must be borne in mind if studies of the subject are to continue to be fruitful (pp. 49-52). Much of what appears in this Introduction will not necessarily appear new or innovative to those who have followed the research of Pohl and his associates over the years, but one may justifiably argue that the importance of Pohl’s study is in having such a statement of the strengths and weaknesses, triumphs and pitfalls of this area of research.

In the only German-language contribution to this volume, Richard Corradini offers an intriguing new reading of Augustine’s works to show how the bishop used the Tower of Babel, Jerusalem and Rome as models for group identification. Corradini refers to the development of this template as Augustine’s ‘utopian project’, a template upon which to build a new understanding of the world in ethnic terms. However, while the explanation of this concept of the ‘utopian project’ is exhaustive, and the study itself incredibly novel, the
reader is left wondering whether anyone other than Augustine shared or developed this conception of the world.

Gerda Heydemann’s paper on Cassiodorus, ‘Biblical Israel and the Christian Gentes’ provides readers with a clear vision not just of a world in transition, but of Cassiodorus’s own awareness of this transition. As Heydemann shows, in his Expositio Psalmorum Cassiodorus outlines a new interpretation of the Psalms – specifically their use of the term gentes – which fits them into an increasingly ‘post-Roman’ world. Cassiodorus and his contemporaries had to find a place in this world for the legitimacy of the gentes, and – as this contribution shows – exegesis had as much to contribute to the discourse as (for example) origines gentium, although it would have been nice to hear explicitly a bit more about how exegesis fit into the wider discourse. Nevertheless, Heydemann does an excellent job of showing how Cassiodorus re-interpreted the use of the term gentes in the Psalms in a Christian context without ever committing to the idea that any one gens represented a ‘New Israel’, as well as highlighting how Cassiodorus understood the concept of Israel as a gens (or populus) in a post-Roman sense.

Maximilian Diesenberger’s contribution sits firmly within a recent trend of scholarship that has helped eighth- and ninth-century Bavaria emerge from the shadows of the Franks and St Boniface and to break through the more negative implications of Carolingian history writing. Likewise, Diesenberger places his subject, Arbeo of Freising – as well as his Vitae of Emmeram of Regensburg and Corbinian of Freising – firmly within both his contemporary and historiographical contexts. What we have here, then, is a neat case study of how Arbeo acted as mouthpiece for the accomplishments of the Bavarian Church and the missionaries who worked in the region before the arrival of Boniface. That we must see these
accomplishments through the lens of Arbeo’s often incorrect or misleading ethnography was, as Diesenberger shows, precisely part of Arbeo’s strategy ‘to smear Boniface’s accomplishments’ (pp. 222). What Diesenberger ultimately highlights in this contribution, though, is not necessarily the continuing availability of the saint (and the genre of hagiography) as a model for behaviour and action – which is something of a truism for the medievalist – but rather the ways in which ‘Strategies of identification were subordinated to this availability’. In other words, how the uses of ethnic identity in a text were ‘the expression of a new appropriation of the world’ (p. 227).

Marianne Pollheimer presents us with a study of the use of the imagery of shepherd and flock in the ninth century. This is a theme often touched upon in studies of the Middle Ages but rarely examined in this amount of depth, and Pollheimer must be commended for her attention to often minute details. She focuses particularly on the place of this imagery in the discourse of correctio and admonitio that was so prevalent in the Carolingian world, and on the way Carolingian churchmen, especially Hrabanus Maurus and Hincmar of Reims re-used older works – most notably those of Gregory the Great – to place the theme of both secular and ecclesiastical leaders as shepherds within the political world of the ninth century. Yet at no point does Pollheimer touch upon the issue of ethnicity, and the concept of identification is hinted at only vaguely, leaving the reader to wonder how this study fits into the overarching theme of the volume.

In Helmut Reimitz’s contribution, we have a much more explicit study of the relationship between religion and ethnicity in the early medieval world, communicated through a clear contrast between the attitudes of Gregory of Tours and the authors of the Fredegar-Chronicle to the Franks and other ethnic groups. As Reimitz rightly points out, it is now well-
established that Gregory was far from the historian of the Franks he has traditionally been characterised as. Likewise, the *Fredegar-Chronicle* is not a mere continuation of Gregory: each author (or group of authors) had their own objectives and methods in writing history. This can perhaps be seen most clearly in how they situate the Franks in their works. Gregory, building on the model of Eusebius’s *Ecclesiastical History*, has the Franks as just one of the many groups that were part of the contemporary Gallic Church which was the true focus of Gregory’s *Histories*. It is for this reason that the Franks do not feature as much as we might expect: indeed, as Reimitz demonstrates, Gregory was likely actively denying the Franks any prominence over other groups, despite his acknowledgement on a general level that he lived in a *regnum Francorum*. The authors of the *Fredegar-Chronicle*, by contrast, followed the model of Eusebius-Jerome’s *Chronicle* – a text itself firmly focussed on the histories of peoples – in order to renegotiate the place of the Franks (and other peoples) in Roman history and, perhaps more importantly, to negotiate the importance of Frankish identity within the *regnum Francorum*. Neither Gregory nor the Fredegar-chroniclers wrote simply about the past, however. They were writing for the future, and each in their own way acted as ‘cultural brokers’ ‘who had to mediate different expectations and experiences of a common past, in order to promote their vision of a common future’ (p. 293).

In the final contribution, Clemens Gantner traces the use of the term ‘Greeks’ (*Greci*) in the papal sources of the eighth century. Gantner shows that the term was already widely used in the Latin West before this – although not in a negative context – while it only acquired wide usage in the papal sources in response to the increasing rupture between Rome and the Eastern Empire in the second half of the century, and then it took on a negative connotation rather rapidly. This development can be traced particularly clearly in the *Liber Pontificalis*, where the place of origin of popes appears not to matter before 757 and the term ‘Greek’ was
often studiously avoided, as well as in the papal letters, of which the letters relating to the 750s particularly served to highlight the distinction between East and West and the move of the papacy into the political orbit of the Franks. As Gantner highlights, however, the real turning point came in the papacy of the self-consciously Roman Pope Hadrian I, during which northern and central Italy were brought firmly within the Frankish empire and ties with the East were severed. From this point on, the term *Greci* shifted from a position of ambivalence to one of hostility, used ‘by the papacy to vilify its Byzantine enemies’ (p. 340). The use of the term *Greci* by the papacy emerged specifically as a way to distinguish between the Rome of Italy and the *Romaioi* of the East, but, while it was a term of distinction, it was never an ethnic term. Rather, it was cultural, and in this way its usage followed the shifting relations between East and West in the eighth century.

Overall, the editors of this volume deserve praise for putting together a volume that simultaneously consolidates and pushes forward the study of ethnicity and identity in the early medieval world. While all the studies present are significant contributions to their specific areas, those by Heydemann, Reimitz and Gantner in particular stand out as case studies worthy of the attention of anyone seeking to present these issues in a coherent and convincing fashion. The volume contains very few errors of either spelling or grammar and remains readable at all times, for which the editors (and those thanked for ‘help with the English’ in the Preface) should be commended.

Richard Broome

*University of Leeds*