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VOLUME 14

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Christian and Barbarian Identities in the Early Medieval West

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WHO IS THE BARBARIAN?
CONSIDERATIONS ON THE VANDAL ROYAL TITLE

Roland Steinacher*

* Dedicated to the memory of Yves Medrano
who died suddenly on 2 July 2010 in Paris

The Vandal royal title, Rex Vandalorum et Alanorum, is known from the reign of King Huneric (477–84) from two decrees preserved in Victor of Vita’s History of the Vandal Persecution. This Catholic polemic pamphlet itself derives from the eighties or nineties of the fifth century. As traditional diplomacy throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries considered these decrees as rather authentic, the title was seen as an important case to understand the transformation of the Roman world in the late antique Mediterranean via the ‘ethnic’ titles of its new rulers. Furthermore, there is a silver bowl bearing the same title for King Gelimer (531–33), the last Vandal king. This means that the title is comparatively well attested in our sources. But is it really possible to define Hasdai royal titulation and especially the twofold title as a special and unique case, where the use of ethnic labels occurred at an earlier stage and more prominently than in any other kingdom emerging from Roman provinces throughout late Antiquity? The royal title ‘King of the Vandsals and Alans’ was in use and implied certain political contexts. We do not know yet how exactly these backgrounds may be characterized. So the twofold

* Walter Pohl funded the research time for this article with his Wittgenstein award and provided for years an open and challenging ambience for young scholars. It was possible to write this text as part of a writing bursary funded by the Gerda-Henkel-Stiftung. Timothy Scott (Macquarie University, Sydney) assisted with the English and thus deserves many thanks for his dedicated work. Julia Ess (Wien) helped with the bibliography and proof reading. Andrew H. Merrill (Leicester) sent me his manuscripts and exchanged ideas. Philipp von Rammel (Roma), Guido M. Berndt (Erlangen), and Francesco Borri (Wien) helped enormously with many long discussions, by reading the text, giving ideas, and suggesting improvements.

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title as well as the single ethnic title 'King of the Vandals' has to be discussed again. This article will offer some considerations, by trying to put Vandal history back into its Roman and its local context.

Some years ago, Andrew Gillett presented a study in which he asked whether ethnicity was politicized in the earliest medieval kingdoms. His results were based on a count of ethnic labels in royal titles in Italy, Spain, Gaul, and Africa. The clear minority of the titles used ethnic labels. This is true as well, as we will see, for the Vandal kingdom. 'The question here is not whether ethnicity was innate or constructed, but whether it was a central and motivating political force.' At the same time, Gillett characterized the Vandal twofold title as a special case, exceptional for using strong ethnic markers. But there have been other strong markers of ethnic affiliation in use as for example in the Burgundian and the Lombard case. Gillett is right in stressing the fact that this was not very frequently the case, and he is right to call into question the importance of ethnic titles, which older research has tended to overemphasize. But ethnic titles were in use for specific purposes: they have to be understood. Their backgrounds can be explained — at least in some cases. Walter Pohl has pointed out that the Lombard kings used the title Flavius rex in charters, and the contrast to the strong ethnic accentuation Rex gentis Langobardorum in the Leges. This hints at a situational use of such ethnic titles for a specific audience interested in a certain position within late Roman society. Generally speaking, federate soldiers had taken over the political power in Roman provinces throughout Gaul, Spain, and Africa. Ethnicity, and in our case titles with an ethnic affiliation, might help us to understand the specific structures of these regions at the time.

Scyths or Goths? Roman Stereotypes on Barbarians in the Late Antique Mediterranean

Before we discuss specific sources attesting the royal titles from Vandal North Africa or try to understand how an ethnic name could have been used as part of a political identity, we have to summarize the Roman view on groups from outside the Empire. Roman and Greek ethnography had built up certain stereotypes as well as literary patterns long before, Vandals, Goths, Burgundians, or Franks had entered the Empire in the fourth and fifth century as armed forces and built up new political entities in Gaul, Italy, Spain, and Africa.

At the end of the fifth century, sources use the term 'Gothic' to label peoples as different as the Goths in Gaul, Spain, and Italy, the Vandals in Africa, the Gepids and Heruli along the Tisza and the Danube, the Rugians, Sciri, and Burgundians, even the Sarmatians, and Iranian Alans. Greek and Latin authors had already used Gothis/Gothis, or gentes Gothicae after the third century CE as a general term for peoples north of the Black Sea. These peoples were most often classified as Scyths using ethnographic bases dating back to the Greek ethnographers Hekataios, Herodotus, Erastosthenes, and many others. Unlike the late antique sources, nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholarship included the so-called Gothic peoples within the idea of widespread Germanic unity. The Gothic peoples were classed as 'East-Germanic' peoples (Ostgermanen). The development of linguistics in the early nineteenth century had a deep impact on historical considerations and was one of the reasons for these assumptions. Another reason was the deeply rooted wish to trace national origins back into a past as ancient as possible. This suggested a uniformity of different barbarian groups which had never existed. No one in late Antiquity would have known what was meant.

Procopius's introduction to his Vandal War is a good example of the Roman (or Rhomanian) ethnographical point of view. Even after a century of barbarian rule in Africa or Italy, a Roman intellectual classed kings and elites according to barbarian groupings. The Byzantine author described the biggest tribes of the Gothic peoples: the Ostrogoths, Visigoths, Vandals, Alans, and Gepids. Long ago, all these peoples were, according to Procopius, called Šauromatai and Melankblainai, or Getae all together (Prisek Šov). According to him, the Gothic peoples had different names but were similar in their habits and beliefs.


4 A good example is the work of Ludwig Schmidt. Schmidt, Geschichte der deutschen Stämme, 1: Die Ostgermanen; and 11: Die Westgermanen. In the second revised edition of his Die Ostgermanen of 1934, Schmidt changed parts of his classification data for the 'East-Germanic' peoples. He did not do so for the 'West-Germanic' peoples. Schmidt tried hard to apply ethnographic categories. Furthermore, he considered delineating 'Germanic' history together with Roman history as a handicap.
5 Pohl, 'Telling the Difference', p. 39; Haether, Goths and Romans, pp. 135–40; Winkskus, Stammesbildung und Verfasstung, pp. 462–84; Steinacher, 'Heruli, People, Third-Sixth c.'
All Procopian Goths had white skin, blond hair, were tall and very good looking, had the same laws, and were Arians. They spoke one Gothic tongue. Initially, this united people settled at the Ister river, the lower Danube. The single peoples then separated, taking their new names from the names of their leaders.  

The Sauromatai are known from Herodotus. He tells a story that made them descendants of Scythian men and Amazon women. According to Herodotus, the female fighters had been eagerly looking for strong fathers for their children, Melancho lainai could be translated as 'those with black coats'. This ethnic name appears in Herodotus's Histories and later in the Orationes of Dion Chrysostomos. Based on these Herodotean origin legends, ancient ethnographers defined Getae, Massagetae, Saka, Iosedonoi, as well as the Gothic peoples mentioned above as the offspring of the Sauromatai and Melancho lainai. Most ancient ethnographers located these peoples near the Lake Maeotis (Sea of Azov) and the Tanais (Don). In the sixth century, such ethnographic knowledge became a basis for the Gothic/Getic history of Jordanes and Cassiodorus, so much discussed in modern scholarship. Did it also influence the ethnic royal titles discussed here?  

In Italy, a new elite needed a political and historical identity and Cassiodorus was eager to create one. As the followers of Theoderic were confronted with strong traditional identities in the Roman centre, the intellectual frame had to be far reaching. In a complicated text, Cassiodorus or Jordanes managed to give the Goths an ancient andcondign history using the literary motifs available. The Getic history was one tool to link a rather young confederation that had evolved at the Roman borders opposite the Dacian and Moesian provinces to the old Herodotean tales of origin for barbarians from the north. 'The notion that the Goths were Getae gave the Romans a framework within which to respond to them.' One of the aims of this article will be to understand at least partly why the rulers of Africa had no similar origin legend created.

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6 Procopius, Bello, ed. and trans. by Dewing, iii. 2, 3, 11, pp. 11–12; Engels, 'Getae'.  
7 Herodotus, Historiae, ed. and trans. by Godley, iv. 20, 100–02 and 110–16, 11, pp. 87, 90–91; Dion Chrysostomos, Orationes, ed. and trans. by Cohoon and Crosby, xxxvii. 3, 111, p. 362; Cf. Engels, 'Getae', pp. 563–68; Eggins and Ionik, 'Sarmaten'; Procopius, Bello, ed. and trans. by Dewing, iii. 11, 9, 11, p. 105, refers to the 'Massagetae' whom they now call Hun. For further characteristics of these men in Procopius's history, see Dewing’s index on p. 478, s.v. Massagetae.  
8 Goffart, The Narrators of Barbarian History; Goffart, 'Jordanes's Getica'; Goffart, Barbarian Tides: Wolfman, Gotische Studien; Wolfram, Die Gozen.  
10 Procopius, Bello, ed. and trans. by Dewing, iii. 2, 3, 11, p. 23.  
12 Procopius, Bello, ed. and trans. by Dewing, v. 11. 29, 111, p. 117; 'After this he began to gather all the Goths from every side and to organize and equip them, duly distributing arms and horses to each one; and only the Goths who were engaged in garrison duty in Gaul he was unable to summon, through fear of the Franks. These Franks were called Germanoi in ancient times. And the manner in which they first got a foothold in Gaul, and where they had lived before that, and how they became hostile to the Goths, I shall now proceed to relate.' Cf. Pohl, 'Der Germanenbegriff vom 3. bis 8. Jahrhundert', p. 171.  
Amazons. Contrary to research opinions of the last two centuries, Procopius therefore defined the origin of the fifth- and sixth-century Vandals not at the Baltic Sea but exactly from where all Scythian nations were derived. It may be noted that the late antique historian could not see a difference between the Vandals and the Alans and therefore did not consider that the simultaneous action of the Vandals and Alans called for comment. Furthermore, in Procopius’s view Goths and Vandals were just the same: they were Scythian barbarians causing problems in the Roman West.

When Geiseric tried to secure his position in the Mediterranean in the second half of the fifth century, Vandal fleets annually attacked the Italian coasts. When spring came, strong Vandal naval formations (numerosa classis) attacked the Roman shores. Considering the political situation, the Gallic aristocrat Sidonius Apollinaris saw the world order turned upside down. The Byrsa — the hill in Carthage where the proconsul’s palace was located, and therefore the political centre of the African provinces — was governed by the Caucassians. Once again Sidonius alluded to the Scythian as the barbarian identity of the Vandals.14

In 534, Justinian promulgated his Corpus Iuris Civilis. The opening sequence of this collection of laws lists the emperor’s titles. After the Vandal kingdom was destroyed by Belisarius in 534, Justinian used the triumphal titles Alanicus Vandalicus Africanus in various sections of the Digesta, the Novellae, the Institutiones, and the Codex Justinianus, as well as in inscriptions. The Emperor appeared as the vanquisher of different barbarian gentes, such as the Alamanni and Franks in the provinces of Germania prima et secunda at the Rhine, the Goths in Italy and Spain, the Antes at the Black Sea and, last but not least, the Alans and Vandals in the African provinces (Justinianus Alamannicus Gothicus Francicus Germanicus Anticus Alanicus Vandalicus Africanus).15

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Since the time of Augustus, such language of power had been used when neighboring groups acted against the centre’s wishes.16 Justinian wanted to make his fellow Romans believe that the world had returned to how it had been for centuries. Rome ruled the world and all the gentes were beaten and under control; even if these gentes had ruled Roman provinces for more than a century and in the end managed to keep up a Roman order in these parts of the West.17

In this world view, gentes were bound to Rome by treaties and duties, and in some cases war was necessary to put things right again at the periphery. The world (orbis terrarum) and Rome (orbis romanus) were seen as one. The dependent client states or gentes were seen as part of the Empire, whether within or outside the Roman borders. The Laterculus Veronensis lists about hundred provinces and twelve dioceses trying to give an overview of the Roman Empire at the beginning of the fourth century. As a matter of course, this list also names thirty-five gentes at the Roman Empire and even notes that these peoples were formed, or evolved, under Roman influence and reacted to Roman structures.18 In the eyes of the Roman elites in Ravenna and Constantinople, the Vandals and Alans in the African provinces never were more than barbarians under Roman rule. Whether in the provinces a different view existed or

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16 Krüter, Antike Germanenhistorie.


kings to illustrate the great variety of possible political solutions in this age of Mediterranean history.

The Vandal Royal Title 1: Gelimer’s Basin and its Possible Background Compared to Similar Objects

As has been mentioned at the beginning of this article, the Vandal royal title Rex Vandalarum et Alanorum is known from two decrees preserved in Victor of Vita’s History of the Vandal Persecution written in the eighties or nineties of the fifth century.21 According to diplomatics, these decrees can be viewed as authentic and were defined as very close to Roman imperial decrees with regard to their language, style, and juridical background.22

Some fifty years later, the last of the Hading kings was celebrated as ‘Gellamir Rex Vandalarum et Alanorum’ in an inscription on a valuable silver basin found in 1875 in northern Italy in the ruins of the Castle of Artèn (Fonzaso, BL, Veneto). The round basin with a low base as a separate piece has an engraved rosette with an aperture of approximately twenty cm in its centre. Around this rosette, the inscription was engraved in between two striaions. Together with this basin, a second one was found. It has an allegory with a woman, a man, and a child standing around an altar and is preserved today in the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris, like the bowl of Gelimer. The treasure included furthermore some copper fibules.23


23 Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, Cabinet des Médailles et Antiques, no. 88 849. The basin weighs 3030 g, is 7 cm high, with an aperture of 49 cm. Cf. Morrison, Breton, and Barrandon, ‘L’argent chez les Vandales’, with a detailed technical analysis: Erbelding, ‘Kat. no. 329’; Eger, ‘Silbergeschirr und goldene Fibeln’, pp. 72–73; Buchstiftensammlung, ed. by Fiebig and Schmidt, no. 51, p. 37; Maculevich, Byzantinische Antike, p. 52; Calvi, ‘Il piatto d’argentò di Castelvetrano’, pp. 374, 376, and a picture of the second basin tab. t. 1. Fiocco furthermore gives some considerations on when the silver objects could have come to the castle of Artèn, discussing also their modern history.


20 For example Schmidt, Geschichte der Vandalen. Schmidt’s work has a remarkably high level of discussion of the sources, but sticks to a strong dichotomy between ‘German’ and ‘Roman’. Similarly the French tradition: Courtois, Les Vandales et l’Islamique. Cf. on critical issues of Courtius: Merrills, ‘Introduction: Vandals, Romans and Berbers’, pp. 7–8, and nn. 17–20; Steinacher, ‘Gruppen und Identität’ pp. 243–44. Recently, Maier, Amsterdamer und Herrscher in der Romanische Geschicht, used such stereotypes again. A discussion of the same problems in archaeology can be found in Fehr, ‘Romansches germanische Sprachgrenze’; and Bierbrauer, ‘Romanen’. Cf. recently on the problem Fehr, Germanen und Romanen im Merowingereich, and Halsall, Barbarian Migrations and the Late Roman West, pp. 35–62.
The basin of Gelimer is an example of antique ceremonial silver dishes labelled *missorita*. They were frequently used as gifts of largess (*largitio*) to persons close to the emperor or foreign ambassadors. Luxury articles (dishes, plates, cups, and bowls in silver) were prepared for imperial celebrations such as accession to the throne and anniversaries, and handed over by the emperor on these occasions to high-ranking dignitaries of the empire. A good example is the basin found in 1721 near Geneva which bears the inscription 'Largitas D N Valentiniani Augusti'. On the engravings, the emperor appears in between six soldiers protecting him, wearing an armour and a *paludamentum* (a cloak or cape fastened at one shoulder, worn by commanders) to demonstrate his military power.  

Concerning Gelimer’s basin, Andrew H. Merrill recently assumed that the piece could have been sent to the Ostrogothic court as a diplomatic gift. Other scholars have conjectured that the piece was Hadling royal property or a present prepared during the battle of Ad Decimum in 533 by Gelimer’s followers to be presented to victorious Vandal leaders. After their wishes remained unfilled due to Belisarius’s victory, the piece may have come to Italy with Byzantine troops. A third possibility is that it was a gift handed to the Vandal king by foreign rulers to honour his position.

Be that as it may, the eye-catching inscription hints at a representative, official, or diplomatic use. Procopius’s description of Belisarius’s triumph in Constantinople in 533 points to the sheer quantity of similar objects plundered by Byzantine troopers in Africa:

For he [Belisarius] had the fortune to be advanced to the office of consul, and therefore was borne aloft by the captives, and as he was thus carried in his curule chair, he threw to the populace those very spoils of the Vandalic war. For the people

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25 Merrill and Miles, *The Vandals*, p. 96. Morisson, Brenot, and Barrandon, *L’Agent chez les Vandales*, pp. 126–27, and Calvi, *Il piatto d’argento di Castelvetro*, pp. 353–416, mention other valuable objects (among them another silver bowl) and coins found in the near vicinity. The last coin (an Ostrogothic tremissis) was struck between 555 and 565. All this hints to a possible concentration of armed forces in the area hiding their *domatia* from whatever enemy or comrade in arms.

26 Procopius, *Belle*, ed. and trans. by Dewing, iv. 9. 15. 11, p. 283. The booty from Africa is described shortly before, explicitly naming the silver (iv. 9. 4–5, pp. 279–81): ‘And there was booty — first of all, whatever articles are wont to be set apart for the royal service —, thrones of gold and carriages in which it is customary for a king’s consort to ride, and much jewelry made of precious stones, and golden drinking cups, and all the other things which are useful for the royal table. And there was also silver weighing many thousands of talents and all the royal treasure amounting to an exceedingly great sum (for Geric had despoiled the Palatium in Rome, as has been said in the preceding narrative)?’ Cf. Berndt and Steinacher, *Münzen in Vandal North Africa*, p. 260; Steinacher, *Gruppen und Identitäten*, p. 257.

Carthage, when he tried to defend the city against the Vandals and Alans in the African provinces. The inscription on the basin reads ‘Fl(avius) Ardabur Aspar vir inultrix com(es) et Mag(ister) Militium et Consilii Ordinariorum’.

The third object is only known from written sources. Gregory of Tours refers to an impressive basin made from gold and jewellery as heavy as fifty pounds. The Frankish King Chilperic I praises himself for having ordered the basin made to honour the Franks. According to Gregory, the piece had the inscription ‘I (Chilperic) made this to adorn and to enoble the gens of the Franks’ (‘Ego hac ad exornandam atque nobilitandam Francorum gentem feci’). Immediately thereafter, Gregory describes another basin, in this case a gift of the Emperor Tiberius II Constantine (574–82) bearing the latter’s portrait and the inscription ‘Gloria Romanorum’.

Military leaders — be it a king with a barbarian background or a high-ranking Roman officer of the same descent — had their new honorary positions celebrated with prestigious and valuable presents of largesse to their closest followers. On these objects is a title, which in the case of Aspar, according to written sources, equates to official use. In the case of Alaric and Gelimer, the royal title differs from what we know from coins, inscriptions, or official documents. How should Gelimer’s basin be interpreted? As a possibility, we could think of a person of high military rank acting closely around the Hading king as the receiver of the basin. At least this was the purpose of the comparable objects discussed above. If this is the case, the engraved title was used in a special environment and forms only one possibility of political representation of a Vandals king. Why was the twofold ethnic royal title used and engraved in a valuable object deriving from the context described above? Was Gelimer wishing to stress a specific kind of political identity? We shall return to these questions in the conclusion.

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34. Cassiodorus, Variæ, ed. by Mommsen, v. 43 and 44, pp. 170 (‘Transimundo regi Wandalorum Theodorico rex’); x. 1, pp. 267 (Hilderico regi Wandalorum Astilacularis rex).
are. This means that there remains the possibility that later scribes added them
to give the different letters a clear geographical and dynastical structure.35

The dual Vandal-Alan royal title is known from Victor, Procopius, and
one Latin chronicle. Geiseric is labelled a 'King of the Vandals and Alans' (rex
Wandalorum et Alarum Geisericus) in an addition to Prosper's chronicle
deriving from the late fifth century, that is, in a text written about the same
time when Victor composed his History. Maybe Victor of Vita's History was
known and used by the author or the authors of the Continuatio of the Codex
Ambrosiani. Nevertheless, the text is not contemporary with Geiseric's rule and
it is possible that a Catholic writer labelled the famous founder of the Vandal
kingdom in the same way Victor did with his son Hanceric. Victor's text was
comparatively widespread. We know about forty manuscripts, and this makes
it probable that the text was known and used in late fifth- or early six-century
Italy or Spain.36 Be this as it may, the dual title was known and in use for Vandal
kings also outside Africa.

Aside from Victor's diplomas and Gelimer's silver bowl, Procopius provides
another attestation for the twofold royal Vandal title in our sources. Procopius
used the title 'King of the Vandals and Alans' once. The title appears in an
account of a letter sent by Tzazon, a Vandal general attacking the usurper Godas
on the island of Sardinia, to his royal brother Gelimer. Reporting that the island
was under control again and that Godas had been captured, Tzazon addressed
his brother as 'O King of the Vandals and Alani' (ο Βασιλεὺς τοῦ Βασιλείου καὶ
Ἀλανῶν ἄνδρος).37 Herewig Wolfram considered the way in which Tzazon addressed his

35 Wolfram, Historia Langobardorum et Langobardinorum, p. 241 and note 31: 'Doch bleiben die authentischen Form der 'supercapitulum' in den Variae epistulae wegen ihrer starken
Stilisierung unklar.' Cf. Clausen, Kaiserreich und Königspunkte; Heuberger, 'Vandalesche
Reichskanzleien und Königsarchive', p. 97; Mommsen, 'Orientalische Studien'; pp. 476, 536.

36 Prosper, Epistola chronicon, ed. by Mommsen, a. 455, p. 487: Rex Wandalorum et
Alarum Geisericus regis(vit), post mortem Valentiniani imperatoris anni xxvi. Cf. Wolfram,
Historia Langobardorum et Langobardinorum, p. 81 and n. 31: Courtois, Les Vandales et
Ufrique, p. 237, n. 7. For the manuscripts and the transmission of Victor's text cf. Schwenn.
'Kriseur von Textüberlieferung der Historia Peruvianensis Afriecae Provinciae'.

37 Procopius, Belli, ed. and trans. by Dewing, iv, 24, 3, 11, pp. 196–97: Καὶ ἀπολαλατάν
τὸν τέρτον οὖν τῶν ἂνθρωπων γνώσθησαν ἀριστότητα, καὶ τὴν νίκην ἀθήνην ὡστε τὴν ἀνάπολος ἔτει, οἱ Βασιλεῖς τοῦ καὶ Ἀλανῶν βασιλεῖς, οὐδὲ καὶ τὴν ἐκκλησίαν κυριακὴν ἔτει τῶν ἐκ παλαιων, οὐκ ἠξελεγός
ἐν τῇ ἀμείονα παντελῶς ὡστε τὴν ἑκτάνα, μεταφέρας δὲ τῶν ἀνθρώπων στρατευμάτων ἐξοντες.
(ʻKnow, O King of the Vandals and Alani, that the tyrant Godas has perished, having fallen into our hands, and that the island is again under thy kingdom, and celebrate the festival of triumph. And as for the enemy who have

brother as a literary strategy chosen by Procopius to illustrate the ethnic (read
barbarian) diversity in the Vandal realm. Africa was seen as the home of three
types of barbarians: Vandals, Alans, and Moors. Justinius's Novellae explicitly
listed these three barbarian groups.38 At the same time, this direct translation to
the Greek supports our evidence from the Latin sources concerning the use of
the title as we know it.

Procopius frequently mentioned different barbarians in Africa. The major
part of the third and fourth book of his History of the Wars deals with the
Moors, not with the Vandals. Furthermore, he had an interesting idea concern-
ning the identity of barbarians in Africa:

However, after that time by their natural increase among themselves and by
associating other barbarians with them they came to be an exceedingly numerous people.
But the names of the Alani and all the other barbarians, except the Moors, were
united in the name of Vandal.39

Together with a remark in the Life of Saint Augustine referring to the Vandals,
Alans, and Goths, and other different peoples fighting with them, this passage
has often been seen as a proof for the mixed nature of late antique barbarian
groups. Possidius puts it like this:

But a short time after this it came about, in accordance with the divine will and
command, that a great host of savage foes, Vandals and Alans, with some of the
Gothic tribe intermixed, and various other peoples, armed with all kinds of weap-
on and well trained in warfare, came by ship from the regions of Spain across the
sea and poured into Africa and overran it.40

had the daring to march against our land, expect that their attempt will come to the same fate as
that experienced by those who in former times marched against our ancestors').

38 Novellae, xxx. 11, 2, in Corpus Iuris Civilis, ed. by Behrends und others, iii, pp. 234–35;
'[...]' Et apud Persas erat pagus Uwanadusque et Alanos et Maurorum reliqua et Africam
universam insuper et Siciliam possiderunt.' Cf. Wolfram, Historia Langobardorum et
Langobardinorum, p. 81 and n. 29.

39 Procopius, Belli, ed. and trans. by Dewing, iii, 5. 21, 11, p. 53; Berndt, Konflikt und
Anpassung, pp. 142–43.

40 Possidius, Vita Augustini, ed. and trans. by Geerlings, xxviii. 4, p. 82: 'Verum brevi con-
sequentia tempore divina voluntate et potestate provenit, ut manus ingens diversis tellis armata
et bellis exercitata, immunitatem hostium Vandalarum et Alarum commixtam secum habens
Gothorum generem, aliarumque diversarum personas, ex Hispaniae partibus transmarinis navi-
bus Africæ influxisset et invasisset' (English translation: Possidius, Vita Augustini, ed. and trans.
by Weiskotten, p. 227). Cf. the speech of the rhetor Synesius to his emperor Arcadius. The
Scythian barbarians are strangers but nevertheless get the highest ranks in the Roman army.
Possidius wrote the *Life of Augustine* roughly hundred years before Procopius composed his *History of the Vandal War*. He intended to outline his and Augustine's view. It was the way the Catholic church would have liked the political organization of the African provinces to be at the time when a new military elite took over and changed their structures. Augustine had been in contact with count Boniface, one of the big players in the first third of the fifth century in the western Roman Empire. It can be shown that Augustine had clear political aims and tried to influence the count. The arriving barbarians thwarted this attempt to offer guidance to the powerful in the African provinces as well as overseas. Moreover, the Vandal King Hilderic attracted Arian clergymen from all over the Roman Empire who tried to build up a new African church, a heretical one in Possidius's eyes.41

As different as these two authors may be, they share similar views on barbarian soldiers. On the one hand, there is truth to what Procopius and Possidius tell us; the Roman army had always been open for many different peoples and individuals from diverse backgrounds fighting together. On the other hand, these remarks represent a kind of arrogance on Procopius's and Possidius's part towards the barbarians. In the end these had no specific political identity. Scythian soldiers had come to the African provinces. They were just subjects of Rome who had forgotten that. Having written his account as a member of Belisarius's invasion force, Procopius needed to cast doubt on the political system of the African provinces before 533.42 As a man of the church, Possidius tried to put the emerging new elite of federate soldiers back to the social status they belonged to in his view.

Another letter can be found in Procopius's *History of the Vandal War*. Justinian intervened against King Gelimer in the interest of Hilderic and the Vandal general Hoamer. After a coup bringing Gelimer to the throne, King Hilderic had been dethroned and imprisoned together with his cousin Hoamer. The Emperor in Constantinople defined this as an act of aggression as Hilderic was his ally. Interestingly enough, Justinian used, at least in Procopius's account, Geiseric's succession order as an argument. When Gelimer answered, he used the same title as the Emperor: 'King Gelimer to the King Justinian (Βασιλεύς Γελιμέρ Ἰουστινιανῷ βασιλεύς).43 Yves Modéran indicated that the titles of rulers normally did not appear in letters in the sixth century.44 So it cannot be excluded that Procopius simply depicted the coup as a motive for attacking the Vandal King.45 Procopius aims at justifying Justinian's wars, and an allegation seems likely. However, Gelimer was a kinsman of the Theodosian imperial house, and he may have alluded to this by putting himself on equal footing with the emperor in Constantinople. No Vandal king ever bore a Roman military title like so many other barbarian leaders.46 Whether Procopius imputed the barefacedness of claiming equal rank with the emperor to Gelimer or Gelimer deliberately did so himself is difficult to judge under these circumstances.

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44 Wolfram, *Intitulatio I: Lateinische Königs- und Fürstenstitel*, p. 135: 'Man könnte daher vielleicht sagen: Prokop hatte die Absicht das "bellum istum" des Kaisers gegen den vandalismischen Usurpator, der nicht nur die Nachfolgeordnung Geiseric's, sondern auch das Imperium selbst störte, zu demonstrieren'.

The Vandal Royal Title 3: Victor of Vita’s History of the Persecution in the African Provinces and the Depiction of the Vandal Kings

Victor of Vita’s *History of the Persecution in the African Provinces* provides the richest source that we have concerning fifth-century Africa. This fact makes it very difficult to put Victor’s view in context, let alone to confront his account with other evidence. The African Bishop outlined a longstanding religious conflict between barbarian Arians and Romano-African Catholics. He used every occasion to stress the strong and impregnable difference between these groups. Victor’s account can be understood as a nearly nostalgic attempt to reclaim a position of patient suffering for a Catholic church which, for roughly one and a half centuries, had not only been fully accepted by the Roman emperors, but which also became the main, leading, and powerful religious community in the Empire. His extremely hostile account not only attacked everybody cooperating with the Vandals severely, it also questioned the political system in Africa after 439 as a whole. And exactly this fundamental quest helps us to understand the basic conditions of Vandal North Africa as well as the use of the twofold royal title with a strong ethnic affiliation.

Whether the two edicts given in Victor’s account are fully authentic or not cannot be clarified as his text is our only source. Victor has the Überlieferungs-hoheit. The language used is pseudo-imperial. The Vandal King Huneric is styled as a ruler with divine legitimacy: ‘We do not wish for scandal in the provinces granted us by God’ (‘provincis a Deo nobis concessis scandalum esse nolimus’).

Richard Heuberger argued in the 1920s that the notaries had been Romans who knew the set phrases necessary to promulgate edicts. Furthermore, he reasoned that the title *Rex Hunirix Vandalorum et Alanorum* has to be authentic as the correct Germanic wording *Hunirix* was used. But the core problem is whether Victor tried to denounce Huneric’s edict as an act of barbarism performed by a tyrant by styling the king’s title as a truly barbarian one, or whether this title was actually in use in official documents. As there are no coins or inscriptions for the reign of Huneric, let alone other documents, absolute certainty about the issue cannot be attained. That the title existed and was in use remains a matter of fact. Gelimer’s basin together with what we know from Victor’s text hints to a use in certain circles and for certain circumstances. Apart from this, it remains a possibility that Huneric exploited the title in a heated situation to demonstrate Hasding power on a special occasion. Due to the long-standing discussions on religious practice in the Proconsular province, the king may have employed a title normally reserved for internal use in the inner circles of Hasding followers. It is difficult to judge how many persons belonged to this inner circle; maybe all soldiers labelled Vandals or only some very powerful men near to the king and the other Hasdings? Throughout his text, Victor gives a discussion of how the African provinces should be organized, especially concerning the role the Catholic church should have. Such discourses touched the core interests of the leading Vandals and the Hasding house. In such a situation, the twofold royal title could have been used willingly by Huneric to stress the right of federate soldiers — or their rich and privileged leaders — to get what they thought to be their right. Research has not yet been able to explain what happened under Geiseric in the first decades of the Vandal regime. But the imperial lands and vast parts of the senatorial property had been allocated amongst Geiseric, the Hasding family and their followers; this constituted the real basis of the system that the Vandals had established in the rich African provinces. As we still do not understand this system in detail, this is a risky argument. But we can observe that jurisdiction power and possession rights in certain provinces, as well as an Ariean religious creed, are the two basic principles needed to understand the title’s background.

This article is not the place to discuss in any detail the background of the Ariean policy followed by the Vandal kings in the African provinces. Only one aspect has to be stressed. In the royal edict of 484 which concerns us here and which is transmitted only by Victor, King Huneric invoked the theological adjudications of the councils of Ariminum (Rimini) and Seleucia from the year 359 on the provinces under his rule. Doing this, the Ariean church was seen as the only, holy, apostolic, and catholic (in the original sense of being universal) church with full legitimation. This reads as follows in the text of the royal edict of 484:


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On the first day our venerable bishops proposed to them [i.e. the Catholics] that they prove the homoousion in a proper fashion from the divine Scriptures, just as they had been asked to, failing which they would certainly condemn something which was done away with by a thousand and more bishops from the whole world at the council of Ariminum and Seleucia.\textsuperscript{53}

Defending the only church, Huneric persecuted Manichaeans. For this he was even praised by Victor.\textsuperscript{54} The fact that Victor relates King Huneric's edict as promulgating a ban of Catholic liturgy in the so-called sortes Vandalorum in the Proconsularian province has been discussed intensively for more than one hundred and fifty years. At the beginning of the edict, the King again alludes to the truth of Arian Christology:

It is well known that not once but quite often your priests [Huneric addresses the Catholic clergy] have been forbidden to celebrate any liturgies at all in all the territory of the Vandals (in sortibus Vandalorum), in case they seduce Christian souls and destroy them.\textsuperscript{55}

Whether these sortes can be seen as a territory of a Vandal settlement, however such may be defined, or whether the wording implies a certain juridical definition remains unclear.\textsuperscript{56} In any case, the text does not seem to refer to the entire territory of the kingdom. Different areas of jurisdiction may have existed in the African provinces. Maybe only in the territory of former imperial and senatorial latifundia of the Proconsular province now in the possession of the Hadings did the king have full juridical power. At the same time, it was in the

\textsuperscript{54} Victor of Vita, Historia persecutionis Africanae provinciae, ed. and trans. by Lancel, ii, 1-2, p. 121.
\textsuperscript{56} Cf. the chapter "Die sortes Vandalorum/kleroi Bandidon und die Organisation der Provinzen unter vandalischer Herrschaft" in Steinacher, Die Vandalen. Dahn, Die Könige der Germanen, 1-11: Die Vandalen, pp. 189, 204-10 and n. 7, started the discussion in many aspects. From then on, the sortes were seen as the settlement grounds of a Vandal people by the majority of scholars. Recently, Modéran, 'L'Établissement territorial des Vandales', stressed this again. Wolfram, Gotische Studien, p. 189, took an intermediate position, and Gottfried, 'The Technique of Barbarian Settlement', pleaded for a term meaning a certain system of taxation only. Paolo Teseco (Roma) is preparing an extensive article where he attempts to explain the African system in a broader context, which might contribute to a better solution.

Hadings' interest to secure and prolong the possession and allotment rights they had achieved. Arianism may have been a central ideological strategy for achieving this end.

Like Constantius II, who intended to change the results of Nicaea, the Vandal King Huneric attempted this for the parts of the African provinces under his full control and, in some respects, also for the rest of the Empire. He acted like a Roman emperor and the edicts cited by Victor deploy a juridical terminology known from late antique imperial chancelleries. As Peter Heather explains:

Like many mainland Roman churchmen of the mid-fourth century, the fifth-century Vandals should be seen, therefore, as adherents of a more conservative theology, unhappy with the potentially embarrassing connotations of homoousion.\textsuperscript{57}

That is to say, no rude barbarians tried to impose their strange and foreign religion on fettered Romans. The Vandal kings just had become patrons of followers of a certain Christology which was, after 381, no longer supported by other elites in Ravenna or Constantinople. Arians came from different social groups. Fidexitati, for example, were not subject to the religious laws issued by Theodosius on the accepted doctrine after 381. During the first two decades of the fifth century, the Gothic army acting in Illyricum, Italy, Gaul, and later in Spain became something like a role model for barbarian armed forces acting inside the borders of the Roman Empire. It can be observed that for decades the Vandals were in fierce rivalry with prestigious Gothic groups, but this only demonstrates that they struggled for prestige, power, and influence in the Roman world and that they developed a specific set of skills for their group identity. Becoming a barbarian soldier inside the imperial borders required specific 'strategies of distinction', and accepting the creed of Ariminum/Seleukia was one of them.\textsuperscript{58} After 439, remaining an Arian meant having used the opportunities of the Vandal realm. It was much harder to live and work in parts of the Roman Empire not dominated by a military-barbarian elite. Africa, Spain, parts of Gaul, and later Italy offered what was no longer possible outside these provinces.

Furthermore, Geiseric and Huneric performed policy to support Arian circles all over the Empire. When the Emperor Zeno tried to negotiate for the ordination of a new bishop in Carthage, Huneric had a condition:
The bishops of our religion who are at Constantinople and throughout the other provinces of the East are to have [...] the right to preach to the people in whatever language they wish in their churches and to practise the Christian religion, just as you will have this right, here [i.e. Carthage] and in the other churches which are in the provinces of Africa, to celebrate mass, preach and do the things which pertain to your religion, in whatever way you wish.59

One of the claims brought forward to the emperor is free choice of language for the homily. It is likely that the Arian clergy in Africa used the Gothic idiom as the language of liturgy. One of the differences between Catholic and Arian liturgy was the possible use of a vernacular in church instead of Latin or Greek. The Gothic liturgy and the Gothic Bible should not be interpreted as conscious responses to the needs of a Germanic cultural context, but must rather be understood as consequences of the linguistic pluralism of the eastern churches.

It remains one pattern of a military and barbarian identity to be Arian and to see Gothic as a language of church service.60

In general, Victor used two strategies to denounce the Vandal kings. First, he pictured them like Roman emperors persecuting the Christians. For example, two royal officials (comites) tried to convince Catholics to change their confession. The true Christians — according to Victor — claimed Christiannumus and confessed the trinity according to Nicaea and Constantinople.61 This wording and the whole scene is reminiscent of the imperial persecutions during the third century, and the Vandal king appears as a cruel persecutor like Diocletian or other pagan emperors. This implied depicting the Vandals as tyrants, rul-


60 Cf. Brennecke, *Lateinische oder germanische *Arianismus*?*, pp. 136-38; Howe, *Vandals, Barbarians and Arians*, pp. 269-70; Mathisen, *Sigisvult the Patriarch*, exemplifies such a bishop called Maximinus acting in Geiseric’s environment. Before joining Geiseric, Maximinus had been with Sigisvult and his Gothic troops coming to North Africa to fight count Boniface. He was styled *episcopus Arianorum* and his function seems to have been to serve as a kind of high-ranking army chaplain. For the use of the Gothic idiom in the African provinces cf. Reichert, ‘Die Sprache der Vandalen in Afrika’.


ers without any legitimacy to wield power in a Christian world. At the same time, Victor styled the Vandal kings as *Ariani*, nearly denying that they were Christians at all. Now exactly these bad guys had — again according to Victor — the chutzpah to use laws rightful Christian emperors like Theodosius the Great had proclaimed to protect the Catholic church against Arians and other heretics. Victor is quite explicit in this:

They did not blush for shame in deploying against us a law which our Christian emperors, seeking to do honour to the Catholic church, had previously issued against them and other heretics, to which they added many things of their own, just as seemed good to their tyrannical power.

Like an emperor, Huneric dared to impose laws that had been created to protect the church against the African Catholics. Victor then goes on to cite the edict under discussion.62 This forms the background that we have to keep in mind while discussing the text presented by Victor. To sum up: the twofold title handed down by Victor may have been used by Huneric’s court to stress and to defend the basic interests of the Vandal elite in the African provinces. The conflicts with the Catholic clergy were a harsh quest for power. When the core interests of the former federates, their allotments and their payment were under question, one knew how to act: a Vandal identity was used as an expression of a strong political strategy of distinction. At the same time, the Vandal quest for power in the western Roman provinces changed the political language in use. After Huneric’s marriage with Eudocia, the possibilities of a Hading king or prince as well as the chance for acceptance in the African provinces had changed dramatically. We shall return to this point in the conclusion of this paper.

The Vandal Royal Title 4: What Have the Moors Got To Do with This?

Procopius refers to fighting in the Aurès mountains at the end of Huneric's reign. Moorish leaders are said to have feared Geiseric, but after his death they "both did much harm to the Vandals and suffered the same themselves". After a short summary of Huneric's cruel persecution of the Catholics, Procopius tells us that

 [...] by that time the Moors dwelling on Mount Aurasium had revolted from the Vandals and were independent [...] and indeed they never came under the Vandals again, since the latter were unable to carry on a war against Moors on a mountain difficult of access and exceedingly steep.63

It is on the eastern foothills of the Aurès mountains that the Bir Trough ostraka from the time of Gunthamund's reign were found. This shows that the neighbouring regions of the Aurès had been under control from Carthage around the year 493. It seems likely that Procopius is trustworthy in his account and that the uplands of the Aurès after 484 developed their own political solutions as the lowlands still remained governed from Carthage. From the Aurès we know a late fifth-century inscription related to a dux and maybe later imperator Masties which reads:

I, Masties the dux am now in the age of sixty-seven years and imperator for ten years (or: ruled for ten years), never perjured myself nor broke faith with either the Romans or the Moors, and was prepared in both war and peace, and my deeds were such that God supported me well.

The problem with this inscription is that the characters IMPR could mean both, imperatori or imperator. Recent research, however, tends to accept the reading imperator.64 The inscription can be read as a very diplomatic act to cover

63 Procopius, Bella, ed. and trans. by Dewing, t. 8, 1–5, ii, pp. 72–75.

first publication of the inscription Carcopino, 'Un "empereur" moaï inconnu'.
65 Merrills and Miles, *The Vandals*, p. 127.
66 Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum, VIII. 9835; Marcellis-Joubert, *Les inscriptions d'Africa*, no. 194, pp. 126–27 (with illustration): 'Prae sa(lute) et incoll(umitate) reg(is) Mausmae gent(um) Maeus(en) et Roman(um)';
67 Cf. Modérán, *L'Établissement territorial des Vandales*, p. 95: 'Mais cette formule limitative avait plus pour fonction d'affirmer le maintien d'un strict éloignement ethnique et religieux entre conquérants et conquinquis que de témoigner d'une reconnaissance de la souveraineté
The Vandal Royal Title 5: Domoinus noster rex and Allusions to Imperial Status

An inscription from Henchir Koréba near Ain Milla in the province of Numidia labels Gelimer "Dom(us) Geij lime!". This inscription represents the majority of the titles used by Vandal kings in the available sources. No inscription, coin legend, or dating formula using an ethnic title is known. This is true for all the kingdoms in the transforming Roman West before the sixth century. The titulature of rulers in the former Roman provinces of the West used terms familiar from late imperial usage. As long as they were not named along with the emperor, kings of barbarian descent were labelled domini nostri. In the fifth century, even Ricimer could be a princeps, which shows a shift in terminology formerly reserved exclusively to the emperor. Later in the fifth century, Theoderic was addressed as a princeps Romanus too. He defined himself as the princeps of the West, fighting for the right of the rex publica. At the same time he was entitled Flavius Theodoricus rex as the ruler in Italy. Other possibilities to label a ruler in Italy, Spain, Gaul, or Africa were dominus with different attributes or — concerning the Gothic kings and Odacer — Flavius. Along with these late imperial terms rex was used frequently, often together with dominus. Most images depicting fifth- and sixth-century kings on material objects, such as the seal of Childeric, the medallion of Theoderic, or the visor of Agilulf carry inscriptions styling the kings simply rex. The engraved sapphire of Alaric and Gelimer’s basin do use ethnic terminology to specify the king’s background. There were thus different possibilities, different languages of power, which may have been addressed to specific social groups.

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It remains a possibility that the two Moorish inscriptions hint to an alternative which had developed by the end of Huneric’s reign in the periphery of the Vandal realm. The political and cultural environment of these Moorish polities shared many similarities with the core regions of Africa. At the very least, Latin inscriptions were in use according to a traditional Roman way. However, they remained at the periphery, with much less resources and without the opportunities for Mediterranean politics that the Hasdings in Carthage possessed. If Huneric went too far in his measures for establishing an Arian region in the Proconsularis and supporting Arian circles not only throughout Africa but in the whole Mediterranean, Moorish rulers at the periphery may have developed solutions that were more open to accommodate all groups in the African provinces during a phase of dense conflict in the core regions. The importance of these alternatives for the African situation as a whole is difficult to judge. Their political language appears to be more in line with what a Catholic would have preferred of Vandal politics in the time of Huneric. Not only were the Romans explicitly included in the groups supporting Mastiæus or Masuna’s rule; Mastiæus furthermore used different religious and cultural elements to attract disappointed Africans. If this interpretation is correct, we can deduce that titles with an ethnic affiliation had their importance and signalled distinct possibilities to organize political systems in the African provinces of the fifth and sixth centuries. This would also affirm an interpretation of Victor’s text and the use of the twofold ethnic title rex Vandalorum et Alatorum in a heated situation. Huneric’s successors looked for other solutions and went much further in their acceptance of the important role of the Catholic church in the late antique Mediterranean world. This change in Hasding church-policy may have affected the use of royal titles too.

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Not surprisingly, the Vandal kings used the portentous honorific dominus or rex. From Gunthamund’s reign onwards, dominus began to appear on silver coin issues, which is in itself an important ideological declaration. At the same time, no gold coins were issued in Africa, although the currency was based on the imperial solidus. Vandal coinage appears as a provincial issue; the emperor cared for the gold, the Vandal king guaranteed the silver and bronze issues used in daily life and economics.72

One of the Tabellae Albertini has the title rex invictissimus. These tablets are, unlike Vercori’s account, legal documents without any transformation due to literary aims.73 Furthermore, the acts of the council held in 525 at Carthage during Hilderic’s reign transmit a dating “anno secundo gloriosissimi regis Hildericis.”74 When Felixglius of Rupae had a theological dispute with King Thrasamund, he addressed the king as a “rex clementissimus” or “piissimus.”75 The attributes invictissimus, gloriosissimus, clementissimus, et piissimus are known from the Roman senatorial order of rank or the imperial court as well as from other late Roman kingdoms with a barbarian elite. Late antique emperors were frequently addressed as imperator or princeps, and the title was often used in conjunction with attributes such as piissimus, clementissimus, sapientissimus, or invictissimus.76


73 Tabellae Albertini, ed. by Courtois, t. 1, t. p. 215; [Ann]o nono d(omi)n(i) invictissimi regis sv k(rona) octoob(ese) tab(ele) [...]. Cf. the list “Titulature royale” (t. p. 315). On all other tablets ‘domini (roster) regis’ is used. The very name Gunthamund is written in different several ways. Only t. 1 has ‘invictissimi regis’.


76 Cassiodorus, Variae, ed. by Mommsen, t. 1, 1–2, pp. 10–11 (‘Theodoric to Anastasius clementissime et piissime imperator’); x. 19, 3. p. 310 (Theodahad to Justinian piissime imperator); x. 9, 1. p. 297–98 (Theodahad to Justinian sapientissime imperator); xii. 1, 1. p. 231 and x. 1, 1. p. 298 (Athalaric and Amalaswintha to Justin I. and Justinian clementissime principum).

Gloriosissimus was used initially during the time of Diocletian as a means to address a Roman emperor. In the fourth century of the fourth century, it became a term for high-ranking magistrates or bishops. All persons who bore the right to be labelled gloria vestra were allowed to use the attribute gloriosissimus. Such titles were drawn from the senatorial order of rank, the cursus honorum. Roman citizens were divided into three classes, and for members of each class a distinct career path was available. The magistrates of the consulship, praetorship, plebeian tribunate, aedileship, quaestorship, and military tribunate were only available to citizens of the senatorial class. So a vir gloriosissimus and a vir excellentissimus were of the highest magisterial rank. The exarch in Italy was a vir excellentissimus in the Byzantine order of ranks. Barbarian kings or generals often held first ranks of the cursus honorum, like the office of a magister militum or even a consulship, and were thus entitled to the attributes gloriosissimus, excellentissimus, or praecandens. Theodeoric or Hilderic were gloriosissimi reis, like the Burgundian King Gundobad.77 The latter was Ricimer’s nephew and his successor as the patriarc of Italy. Furthermore, he held the office of a magister utriusque militiae per Gallias.78 Yet, no Vandal king ever held a high ranking Roman office. It is noticeable that after Huneric’s marriage with the imperial princess Eudocia there appears titulature known for barbarian kings and accepted by Roman authorities. This is not the case for Huneric, only for his nephews Gunthamund and Thrasamund and his son Hilderic.

Gunthamund appears as a rex invictissimus on one of the Tabellae Albertini. Gloriosissimus derives clearly from imperial terminology. What German scholarship called the ‘Invictie’, the distinction of a victorious commander, was a distinc-


tive rating frequently used by emperors in Antiquity. Commodus, furthermore, created the epithet of a *Hercules Romanus*. The god Mithras, so popular among the military in the Roman Empire, was also entitled as *invictus*. In the Greek East, emperors were celebrated as *άινιχτας* in inscriptions, the Greek equation of the Latin *invictus*. This Greek term is known since the rule of Emperor Trajan (r. 98–117 CE). It needs to be stressed that the epithet had not been in use in highly official bureaucratic texts such as Roman military diplomas. But we can find it frequently in inscriptions. Emperors from Septimius Severus up to Constantine I were labelled as the unbeaten sun god, the *Ηλιος αινιχτας*. The emperor represented the victorious sun god as the *soter* *invictus* *helios* *abekatos*. From the struggle with the powers of gloom the ruler emerged as the great victor. Leo Berlinger thus described the emperor as an ‘incarnated supreme stellar goddess’.79

One further title deserves consideration, since the mistaken assumption that it could have been an official royal Vandal title is still expressed in recent publications. Frequently, scholars considered the Vandal king a ‘King of Land and Sea’ (*König des Landes und des Meeres*). This originates from a misinterpretation of a passage from the chronicle of Theophanes Confessor, a ninth-century Byzantine historian. Already in the eighteenth century, Conrad Mannert, the author of the first Vandal history in modern scholarship, assumed that Geiseric had styled himself as a ‘King of Land and Sea’ (*Land- und Wasserkönig*) after the conquest of Carthage in 439 CE. In the middle of the nineteenth century, Felix Dahn considered Geiseric a ‘King of the Sea’ (*Meerkönig*).80 The passage in Theophanes runs as follows:

In the same year a certain Giseric, who had become powerful among the Vandals, named himself rex. He took over land, sea, and many islands, previously paying tribute to the Romans. This grieved Theodosius.


81 Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, ed. de Boor, a.m. 5941, p. 146: ‘Το δ’ αυτό ἦν Πέρος τοῦ Ὀὐκαθιστοῦ πλήθυς πολῖς γενόμενος καὶ ήρθα καλλίστας λαοῦ γῆς τε καὶ δῆλασθες καὶ

Theophanes only tells us that Geiseric became king. The Byzantine chronicler refers to the Greek form of the Latin *rex*, nothing more. Turning this short passage into an official titulature remains a postulate of modern research. There may be a different way to understand ‘Theophanes’ allusion. In Roman literature and epigraphy, we can trace a certain tradition that focuses on mentioning both land and sea in order to stress the power of a ruler. Theophanes alludes, albeit indirectly and polemically, to an ancient and pagan praise of an emperor. Roman emperors were labelled ‘master of land and sea’. We know inscriptions celebrating, for example, Emperor Aurelian (c. 270–75) as the ‘ruler of the land, and the sea and the whole earth’. Similar, but slightly shorter, wording is attested for Probus (276–82): ‘ruler of the land and the sea’. Vespasian (69–79) appears as ‘the deity of land and sea’ in an inscription.82 Ammianus Marcellinus reports a letter written by Constantius II (337–61) to the Persian Shahgupar II (309–79), where Constantius is styled a *victor terra marisque*: ‘i, Constantius, victor by land and sea, perpetual Augustus, to my brother King Sapor, offer most ample greeting’. Constantius II was the emperor supporting the Alienian church and organizing the councils of Ariminum and Seleucia. Before he died, he was baptized but still styled *divus Constantius* after his death.83

It is likely that Priscus was ‘Theophanes’ source in this case. Priscus tended to show his knowledge of Latin by including Western terminology in his writings. Theophanes went one step further. Putting a barbarian rex, who had persecuted the rightful Catholic church in the North African provinces, near pagan Roman emperors was meant to convey a message. To be sure, it was an
indirect allusion, but it worked. The reader was reminded of pagan titles and he knew what was meant by a cruel, heretical barbarian king. Victor of Vita used similar tactics, as described above. On the one hand, the Vandal kings, like other barbarian rulers in the West, tried to act as 'vice-emperors' themselves in their provinces and were accepted by local societies as such. On the other hand, Catholic writers used this position at a time when Arianism was used to portray the kings in question as having acted like the pagan persecutor emperors.

But the situation is even more multi-faceted. We can compare Theophanes' strategy to denounce Geiseric with a depiction of King Theodoric on a mosaic known to us only from a ninth-century description. The iconography from Ravenna could provide another example of the use of imperial signs of dignity by barbarian rulers. Agnellus in his Liber Pontificalis, a history of Ravenna's diocese, describes the mosaic in the atrium of Theodoric's palace in Ravenna. In the gable above the main entrance the Gothic king appeared — according to Agnellus — on a high horse wearing his armour, shield, and lance. To the right and to the left, the impersonations of the cities of Rome and Ravenna appeared. Near this mosaic another picture is described in Agnellus' text. On the apse behind the main entrance, the king was depicted again on a high horse. This time the patricius Theodoric has one leg over the sea and the other over land. This example illustrates the complexity of the problems discussed here quite well. In every case we have to distinguish carefully whether a Christian writer tried to depict a king, whom he believed to be a heretic, according to one of two particular traditions: that of the famous Roman imperial persecutors of the Christians or that of a ruler in the late antique Mediterranean who has adopted long-standing traditions and ancient symbols of power. In the case of the 'ruler of the land and sea', both is true.

84 Marksches, 'The Religion of the Late Antiquity Vandals', p. 93, points to Domitian (emperor between 81 and 96 CE). Christian writers frequently criticized his title 'Dominus ac Deus'. The Book of Revelation was written with Domitian in the back of the author's mind.


Conclusion: The Vandal Royal Title Understood in the Context of the Power Struggle in the Hasding Family

The strong ethnic marker as a self-assertion of a king, which appears on an engraved piece of self-representation, leads us into the question of transmission. Sources derived from the military environment of Vandal or Gothic rulers are rare, and it is therefore difficult to get a coherent picture of the exact role of titles with an ethnic label within these societies. If it were not for Victor of Vita, a letter given by Procopius and an entry in an edition of Prosper's Chronic, the situation for Vandal North Africa would be much more difficult.

The Vandal royal title with ethnic labels represents one possibility among the political terminology in use in the North African provinces ruled by the Hasdings. The Vandal kings did not act differently from other barbarian leaders who took over Roman provinces. Like Theodoric in Italy, they knew how to use Roman titles to express their power and position within late Roman society. The peripheral role played by the Vandals in the origin stories of Europe results in modern research seeing them as a unique case. Can we detect any 'African' reason for the different ways to express royal power?

In Africa, the top of the Roman senatorial elite lost their power after the changes of the first half of the fifth century. How Geiseric changed the system of land tenure and the basic economic and social conditions that were always a concern for the small ruling class remains a matter of debate. Victor of Vita and Procopius, our main sources concerning these changes, put them in a dark light and use the stereotypes of Roman versus barbarian. The bishop Victor did this in defence of the Catholic church, the Byzantine officer Procopius to justify Justinian's war. As a matter of fact, Geiseric managed to concentrate enough power to enable his Hasding family to act as a 'big player' in the Mediterranean from the middle of the fifth century onwards. Geiseric was concerned to provide for all of his sons in organizing the newly acquired vast property. After the rebellion of 442, no threat to the Hasding power came from outside the royal family. Huneric had powerful rivals among his own relatives, and Hilderic's reign saw the emerging of new alliances within the family. After Geiseric and Huneric had managed to get rid of their competitors within the army, who had prevailed in the complicated situation of the African provinces

86 Two examples: Wolfram, Das Reich und die Germanen, pp. 233–47; 'Ein vandalischer Sonderweg'; Castriuonis, 'Barbaren im Garten Eden'.
in the first half of the fifth century, the family itself became the battleground of power struggles in the African kingdom.

Huneric had a chance to be accepted into the kingdom, even by the Catholic church. The Nicene church welcomed a persecution of Manichaeans; it was, after all, what was expected from a rightful ruler. After twenty-four years a bishop was ordained in Carthage again. All this shows that Huneric tried several ways to organize his kingdom. Something went wrong, however. Victor relates murders in the royal family and the exile of others. Huneric's brother Theoderic died in exile and his wife and son were killed. The Arian Patriarch Jucundus was burnt in public because he was an adviser of Theoderic at the latter's court. Many counts and nobles close to Theoderic were persecuted. Huneric ordered to burn some of them and to execute others. Finally, King Huneric exiled Godagis, the son of his younger brother Ghezon. Mighty Vandals were tortured and removed from power as they were accused of participating in a plot against the ruling king. Victor reports that Huneric deprived of power Geiseric's comitatus, a group of the latter's closest advisers.87

Following this, Huneric tried to convince the African Catholic bishops to support a change in Geiseric's succession order in favour of his son Hilderic. Victor stressed that the violence within the royal family and the leading circles of the Vandals was motivated by Huneric's wish to secure the succession of his own son Hilderic to the Hasding throne. This would have violated the principle of agnatic seniority, which Geiseric had introduced. One interpretation suggests that Victor told the story this way in order to limit the king's concern regarding resistance within the royal house against his own rule. Securing the position of his son would have been only of secondary importance in this reading. Victor's interest in referring to the violence amongst the royal and other leading Vandals was intended to highlight the barbarity and cruelty of Huneric and his followers. By concentrating his coverage of the political action performed by Huneric on the dynastic pretensions against the constitutio of Geiseric, Victor managed to present the king as an illegitimate ruler according to his own Vandal standards.88


This fits well with Victor's textual strategies. However, there remains the possibility that Huneric really intended to change the succession order in the interest of the new legitimacy which became possible for his son only if he were the son of an imperial princess. The high prestige of Huneric's and Eudocia's offspring made a major difference to Hasding possibilities before. At the same time, all this may have caused a need to address the 'old Vandals', the military leaders in Geiseric's following who may have been disappointed with the power struggles and the executions amongst them. Huneric was in need to assert himself as the real Vandal king, the Rex Vandalarum et Alaniarum. It may well be that Victor of Vita refers to a title with a political background from the time of Geiseric, which his son took up for specific purposes in his own reign to attract and convince the privileged Vandal land owners in the African provinces who had been upset by the new political solution developed by Geiseric's son. What we can trace are the power struggles in the African elites of the time. The use of the strong ethnic title by Huneric testifies to these struggles. Victor did not invent or create a title; he gives, maybe unwillingly, a trace of the problems of his age inside the barbarian, military elite in Africa at the end of the fifth century.

Huneric did not prevail. After his death his nephew Gunthamund, our rex invictissimus, acceded to the Hasding throne. Other circles took over and followers of Huneric's policy may have been persecuted themselves. The Latin poet Blossius Aemilius Dracontius was imprisoned for having supported the wrong ruler. For a long time, research defined Draconius' situation as being motivated by supporting the Roman emperor overseas. But the background of the Satisfactio ad Gunthamundum Regem fits all too well into the picture of a power struggle between members of the African elite. Draconius had written for Huneric, and the new king did not like this. This was the reason for the poet's imprisonment.89 We also find a deliberate analogy with the imperial position in the Satisfactio. Gunthamund is compared to Caesar, Augustus, and Titus, who are famous for their clemency.90

As we do not know much about Gunthamund's reign, the situation after the end of Victor's account is difficult to explain. What we do know is that the few sources we have did not use the title Rex Vandalarum et Alaniarum. On the contrary, Gunthamund, Thrasamund, and Hilderic are labelled as rul-

89 Merrill, 'The Perils of Panegyric', Claude, 'Probleme der vandalischen Herrschaftsnachfolge', p. 346, analyses Draconius' imprisonment as a proof of an anti-Vandal Roman bourgeoisie celebrating the emperor as their master.

ers in the western Roman Mediterranean with a political language comparable to what we know from Gaul, Spain, or Italy. But such a 'Roman' language of power was present in Huneric’s time too. It was Huneric who adopted an air of unmistakable imperial arrogance in renaming an African city in his own honour. Hadrumetum was known as Unircopilos for the duration of his reign. After the end of the Vandal realm, the city was renamed as Justinianopolis.92 Gunthamund, Thrasamund, and Hilderic all had panegyrics composed in their honour, as a Roman emperor would have.

Hilderic was a special case. The son of Valentinian’s daughter Eudocia and the Vandal King Huneric could claim direct descent from the imperial and prestigious Theodosian house. This lineage may have been stressed in the wall paintings of a new palace complex in the Carthaginian suburb of Anaela. The poet Luxorius celebrated Hilderic as the mighty Vandal king and offspring of the imperial house. This made him the heir of a twin crown (‘Vandariane potens, gemini diadematis heres’). Valentinian’s victorious grandson had finally beaten all the enemies of Rome (‘hostes et gentes’), at least in the described wall paintings of a palace near Carthage.93 The offspring of barbarian federates stresses his maternal Roman rights more than his barbarian roots. In Italy, Theoderic was labelled dominus gentium and victor gentium, which recalls the praise addressed to Hilderic.94 After Belisar’s victory, the Vandal King Gelimer and his followers were taken to Constantinople. In Procopius’ account the deposed King is clothed with a purple coat and treated as a relative of the great emperors of the Theodosian dynasty. Gelimer is offered a landed estate north of the capital where he could live in peace with his family. It is only because he does not convert to the Catholic faith that he cannot become a senator of

Constantinople. One might expect a different treatment of a beaten and conquered barbarian king.95

The emphasis on imperial ideology that we find in Luxorius’s poem illustrates the range of opportunity of Hasding policy after the marriage of 455 quite well. The four sons of Geilatath, Tazao, Gunthimere, Annamatas, and the later King Gelimer were not, however, directly related to the imperial Theodosian house. This made a difference, even if Gelimer was treated in the way it is reported by Procopius in Constantinople. Hilderic’s propaganda may have indicated the new direction he wished the Vandal monarchy to take. Hilderic’s obvious attempts to reposition the Hasding monarchy along pseudo-imperial lines may have caused Gelimer’s fear of disinheritance in favour of Hoamer or Hoasges, Hilderic’s nephews. Hoamer was praised by Procopius as the Achilles of the Vandals and appears to have been a distinguished military leader.96 This would explain Gelimer’s usurpation and the harsh treatment of his relatives. Hilderic was killed and Hoamer blinded. The fact that after the coup close relatives of Gelimer, such as Tazzon and Annamata, staffed important positions in the kingdom and replaced the nephews of Hilderic strengthens this point of view.

There are similar structures behind the problems Huneric had with his family and Gelimer’s usurpation. In both cases, the Theodosian lineage after Huneric’s marriage with Eudocia could be the background. Two rulers saw murder and heavy conflicts within the royal family: Huneric and Gelimer. As has been proposed here, it seems likely that this had to do with the various claims to the throne by different branches of the family. One part operated with the imperial lineage and obviously preferred titles common to other provinces of the transforming Roman West as a language of power. In opposition to this branch of the family around Huneric and his lineage, a kind of ‘Vandality’ may have been stressed by other Hasdings in order to convince certain Vandal circles of the validity of their bid for power in the African provinces.97 At the same time, Huneric would have been in need to stress his support of certain rich Vandals and their interests by using the twofold title with its strong ethnic affiliation. There are two supporting documents for the use of the title Rex Vandalorum et Alarum. Victor of Vita attests the use of the title for Huneric. Huneric may have imposed such a title to emphasize his vigour in acting against the Catholic

94 Wolfram, Institutio r: Lateinische Königslist- und Feiertitel, pp. 54 (n. 103) and 56 (n. 1); Wirth and Wolfram, ‘Auguratus’; Neumann, ‘Auguratus’; Inschriftensammlung, ed. by Fiehler and Schmid, p. 193; Gold coin of 500: Schram, Herrschaftszeichen und Staatsymbolik, 1, pp. 227–28; Kraus, Die Münzen Ostvandals und des Ostgotenreiches, p. 82, n. 1.
church. More likely, however, the ethnic title was intended to demonstrate to the Vandal elites that the son-in-law of an emperor knew how a true Vandal king should articulate his power. At the same time, Huneric's church policy can be understood as an attempt to establish a strong Hasing rule with an Arian church in the interest of military circles around the Mediterranean.

A similar explanation is possible for Gelimer. When he took power, he had to stress certain aspects of Vandal identity once more. The silver bowl can be interpreted as part of a quest for power by groups in opposition to Hilderic's policy. It reveals the situation: one branch of the royal family against the other, a power game within rather small cliques in the African provinces.

The title may have sparked memories of Geiseric and evoked feelings of glory and power in the hearts of certain privileged offspring of members of the Vandal-Alan army of the first half of the fifth century. Or it may have been an invention of Huneric's advisers trying to convince followers of his brother, or other royals as mighty Vandals, that this king was also supporting them and their privileges. At the same time, Huneric had the ability to widen the Hasing circles of power beyond the African provinces, and to be accepted in these provinces as a ruler married to an emperor's daughter. This in itself may have caused conflicts in the inner circles of Vandal power, who may have feared for their system of allotment and their privileged position as military leaders in a late Roman society. We lack detailed knowledge about this. The first half of the fifth century was an agitated period and identities emerged and disappeared quickly. The late Roman society in the African provinces between 439 and 533 had attenuated the harsh conflicts between military barbarian groups and other elites in the Western Roman Empire in the fourth and fifth centuries. Much of Geiseric's and Huneric's reign was focused on solving problems related to these tensions. The history of the twofold Vandal royal title can be explained in such terms. No self-perpetuating memories of a glorious Vandal past are involved — rather, it should be viewed against the background of a struggle for power and wealth in the African provinces, most likely the disputes within a single royal family, whose different branches operated with two different languages of power.

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