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NEGLECTED BARBARIANS

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Florin Curta



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THE HERULES: FRAGMENTS OF A HISTORY

Roland Steinacher

Some *gentes* — armed social units or peoples such as the Goths, Franks, Burgundians, or Vandals — became an intrinsic part of European history. Others like the Herules, Sciri, Gepids, and Rugi played their somewhat vague role, but disappeared from our sources without having had the opportunity to forge new medieval national identities or form any stable *regnum* on formerly Roman provinces. To be sure, historians did not hesitate to apply to the ‘neglected barbarians’ the concept of *Völkerwanderung*, complete with historical maps showing entire peoples wandering across the page.¹ The Herules, for example, appear on a map showing the ‘Great Migration’ published in a book that used to be very popular among German readers born in the 1940s. The map shows the Herules following a trail from southern Scandinavia, along the Danube, north of the sea of Azov, along the Lower Rhine, and finally into Italy.² In this essay I will not spend too much time discussing ideas of migration, even though it is important to be aware of numerous influential tales concerning the origin and migration of the Herules from the far North. The Herules have often been imagined more as a group of wandering warriors or as a band of Viking-like robbers than as a group with a distinctive ethnic identity. Other scholars even strove to reconstruct the history of the Herules as a people moving from Scandinavia all the way to the Maeotis Lake

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¹ Walter Goffart, *Barbarian Tides: The Migration Age and the Later Roman Empire* (Philadelphia, 2006), pp. 13–22; Walter Pohl, *Die Völkerwanderung: Eroberung und Integration* (Stuttgart, 2002), pp. 1–38.

² Emil Nack, *Germanien: Land und Volk der Germanen* (Vienna, 1958), pp. 359–60.

(Sea of Azov). It goes without saying that both positions conspicuously ignore the complexity of the historical sources available for writing Herul history. Nor does the older scholarship on the topic do justice to those sources, when attempting through a seemingly contiguous narrative to write the story of a people wandering from Scandinavia to the Maeotis Lake, and then back home. In Late Antiquity there were Gothic, Vandalic, and Alanic groups acting at various settings in time and space. The sources denominate those groups by the same name; for example, Silings and Hasdings are accepted as two Vandalic clusters. It is astonishing that the Herul groups acting in the East as in the West are not accepted as such. Most scholars discussed the idea of an East- and West-Herul people, each separated from the other in its history.³ Discussing the very name Herules like other comparable phenomena is one aim of this text. It seems impossible to write a history of the Herules, even though a Herul identity existed, which was attached to a *regnum* established in Central Europe in the second half of the fifth century. Apart from that Herules were also part of the so-called 'Hunnic system', members of which joined Odoacar and fought in the armies of Justinian.⁴ Procopius knew the Herules as fierce warriors, who could fight bravely in the Roman army. It seems therefore necessary to take into account different circumstances in order to get a complete picture of what we know about third- to sixth-century Herules. What is possible is to re-examine the sources available in an attempt to put together the fragments of Herul history. Delineating a Herul identity may be a much more difficult task. Sources have already been perused and analysed for almost five centuries now, and the end result is a wide variety of interpretations, editions, and commentaries. Besides source criticism, any new approach to Herul history will have to take into account the arguments put forward by generations of historians.⁵

³ Goffart, *Barbarian Tides*, p. 206: 'The main scholarly problem they [the Herules] pose is whether "Herule" refers to one people, possibly in two branches, or two, possibly altogether distinct from each other.'

⁴ Herwig Wolfram, *The Roman Empire and its Germanic Peoples* (Berkeley, 1997), p. 123. 'Hunnic Alternative' is the title of the book's fifth chapter. That refers to the Hunnic way of remaining outside the Roman borders and trying to get money from the Romans by means of tributes and other prosperities instead of entering the empire and becoming part of the Roman world, like the Goths did.

⁵ Goffart, *Barbarian Tides*, pp. 205–10, gives a discussion of most sources related to the Herules as do Guenter Neumann and Matthew Taylor, s.v. 'Heruler', in *Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde*, XIV, 2nd edn, ed. by Heinrich Beck, Dieter Geuenich, and Heiko Steuer (Berlin, 1999), pp. 468–74; Bruno Rappaport, s.v. 'Heruli', in *Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, ed. by Wilhelm Kroll, Kurt Witte, Karl Mittelhaus, and Konrat Ziegler, VIII.1

The ethnic name 'Herules' first appears in Graeco-Latin literature during the third century. Groups of warriors identified by that name then resurface in different places and under different circumstances between the third and the sixth centuries, a phenomenon pointing to the complexity of ethnic identity in Late Antiquity. In 268, 'Scythians' are said to have attacked Greece and the Balkans, and among them were Ἐρουλοὶ (*Eruloi*). Eighteen years later, the Emperor Maximian stopped barbarian intruders across the Lower Rhine. Among them were also *Eruli*. Some of those warriors eventually settled on Roman soil and were recruited for a newly formed auxiliary unit, the *numerus Erulorum*, which appears in several sources throughout the 300s. Herul raids into Gaul and down to the Spanish coast continued to AD 400. During the first half of the fourth century, the Herules attempted to establish a base of power north of the Sea of Azov. They were defeated and incorporated first into Ermanaric's Gothic kingdom and then into the Hunnic polity. During the 400s, it was apparently expected to find Herul warriors in Attila's troops.

Following the battle at the Nedao River (454 or 455), some Herules established a *regnum* on the river Morava, not far from the Roman frontier, while at the same time others joined Odoacar's army in Italy. The Herul kingdom in the Middle Danube region was an ephemeral polity, which came to an end after only a few decades. Herul warriors had to look for glory and booty elsewhere. According to Procopius, some Herules entered the empire as federates in Dalmatia, while others tried to reach Thule, in the Far North.⁶ Procopius's story may have originated on account of the sudden interest of the Ostrogothic court in Italy for all things northern. In any case, one cannot take the story seriously, as proof of a supposed Scandinavian origin of the Herules (who now wanted to return 'home'). Instead, the story simply shows that elites in Constantinople (where Procopius may have written his *Wars*) knew about the image of the North created by and for the consumption of barbarian elites in Ostrogothic Italy. To be sure, Herul recruits fought in separate units within the Roman armies dispatched by Emperor Justinian to the eastern front against the Persians, to Africa against the Vandals, and to Italy against the Goths. After 550, the Herules completely disappear from the sources.

(Stuttgart, 1898; repr. 1992), pp. 1150–67. For a collection of sources concerning the Herules, see Pál Lakatos, *Quellenbuch zur Geschichte der Heruler* (Szeged, 1978). Two M.A. theses under Walter Pohl have been recently defended at the University of Vienna: Angelika Lintner-Potz, 'Die Eruler: Eine misslungene Ethnogenese' (2006); and Jürgen Flick, 'Die Integration barbarischer Randvölker an der mittleren Donau im 5. und 6. Jahrhundert: Am Beispiel der Rugier, Eruler und Langobarden' (2000).

⁶ Procopius, *Wars*, 6.15, ed. by J. Haury and trans. by H. B. Dewing, III (London, 1954).

The Third Century: The Herules as Enemies or Partners of the Romans

Sources relating third-century events have the *Eruli* or Ἐρουλοί as one of the 'Scythian' groups attacking the eastern parts of the Roman Empire. Dexippus, for example, mentions a people named Ἐλουροί, a name which he then explains as deriving from the swamps (in Greek ἔλος) around the Maeotis, in which those people supposedly lived.⁷ Only Jordanes, writing in the mid-500s, linked Dexippus's swamp-dwelling Ἐλουροί (*Eluri* in Jordanes's *Getica*) to contemporary Herules. Neither Jordanes nor Dexippus drew any explicit connection between Herules and the 'Scythian' invasion of 268–69.⁸ Fourth- to sixth-century authors may have employed a name commonly used to describe third-century events, and not a specific ethnic name, even though it is theoretically possible that Herules participated in the invasion of 268–69 and that Dexippus's Ἐλουροί were indeed in some way linked to the later Herules.⁹

Whatever the case, it can be no doubt that a sea-borne barbarian invasion of unprecedented size took place in the spring of 268. It is very difficult to reconstruct the exact chain of events, for there seem to have been many concurrent movements

⁷ Publius Herennius Dexippus, *Fragmenta*, 5, in *Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*, ed. by Karl Müller, II A (Paris, 1880), no. 100, p. 456; Thomas Gaisford, *Etymologicon magnum: seu verius Lexicon saepissime vocabulorum origines indagans e pluribus lexicis scholasticis et grammaticis anonymi cuiusdam opera concinnatum* (Oxford, 1848; repr. Amsterdam, 1994), no. 333, p. 952; Stephen of Byzantium, a contemporary of Procopius and Jordanes, also noted that Dexippus's Ἐλουροί were a gens *Scythica*.

⁸ Jordanes, *Getica*, 117, ed. by Theodor Mommsen, MGH AA, 5.1 (Berlin, 1882; repr. 1982), pp. 53–138; Andreas Schwarcz, 'Die gotischen Seezüge des 3. Jahrhunderts', in *Die Schwarzmeerküste in der Spätantike und im frühen Mittelalter*, ed. by Renate Pillinger, Andreas Pülz, and Hermann Vetters (Vienna, 1992), pp. 47–57 (p. 52).

⁹ All known variations of this ethnic name are discussed at length in Hermann Reichert, *Lexikon der altgermanischen Namen*, I (Vienna, 1987), pp. 254–58; Moritz Schönfeld, *Wörterbuch der altgermanischen Personen- und Völkernamen* (Heidelberg, 1911), pp. 78–80. The only doubts about the equivalence established between the two ethnic names were raised by Alvar Ellegård, 'Who Were the Eruli?', *Scandia*, 53 (1987), 5–34 (pp. 28–29): 'To summarize. Dexippus's Helouroi may have called themselves Eruli. In that case the later historians' identification of the two was in fact correct. On the other hand, Dexippus' form may be a correct rendering. In that case the identification of the Heluri and the Eruli was as mistaken as Jordanes' (and many others) identification of Gothi and Getae. We shall never know.' One can only add that Jordanes's (and, supposedly, Cassiodorus's) equation of Goths and Getae was not a 'mistake', but a central idea for the narrative strategy of the *Getica*. Roman authors interested in ethnography strove to classify barbarians, while at the same time supplying a credible version of history for their opponents and partners.

and battles. In addition, historians know the events from mostly later, not contemporary sources, primarily Zosimus, the *Historia Augusta*, Jordanes, John Malalas, George Synkellos, and Zonaras. Furthermore, all of them may have relied on the now lost works of Publius Herennius Dexippus, the author of a *Scythica* and of a Roman history from the beginnings to the reign of Claudius II Gothicus, which is often mentioned by the authors of the *Historia Augusta*.¹⁰ Later literary sources provide only vague and disparate accounts of the Herul attack on Athens, and none which refers to it is earlier than the latter half of the fourth century. A further confusion arises from the fact that the episode apparently came at the very end of Gallienus's reign, and a decisive defeat of the Scyths was achieved only by Claudius.¹¹

Large numbers of warriors from among the 'Scythian' peoples ('Scytharum diversi populi, Peuci, Greutungi Austrogothi, Tervingi, Visi, Gipedes, Celtae etiam et Eruli')¹² left the shores of the Maeotis Lake (the region of the Sea of Azov) and the mouth of the Dniester on boats to cross the Black Sea. Zosimus claims five thousand boats while the *Historia Augusta* claims three thousand boats, and the total number of warriors is said to have been 320,000.¹³ According to Ammianus Marcellinus, there were only two thousand boats and 'swarms of Scythian peoples' ('Scythicarum gentium catervae').¹⁴ Those numbers appear as exaggerated as

¹⁰ For a summary of the events, see John Wilkes, 'Provinces and Frontiers', in *Cambridge Ancient History*, 2nd edn, ed. by John Boardman, XII (London, 2005), pp. 212–68 (pp. 227–29); Emil Kettenhofen, 'Die Einfälle der Heruler ins Römische Reich', *Klio*, 74 (1992), 291–313; Herwig Wolfram, *Die Goten: Von den Anfängen bis zur Mitte des sechsten Jahrhunderts. Entwurf einer historischen Ethnographie*, 4th edn (Munich, 2001), pp. 62–65; Schwarcz, 'Die gotischen Seezüge', pp. 47–57; Rappaport, 'Heruli', pp. 1154–58.

¹¹ Fergus Millar, 'P. Herennius Dexippus: The Greek World and the Third-Century Invasions', *Journal of Roman Studies*, 59 (1969), 12–29 (p. 26). Older research assumed two separate invasions, one in the reign of Gallienus (267), the other in the reign of Claudius (269), and dated the sack of Athens and Dexippus's heroic defense of his homeland to 267. For the idea of two separate invasions, see Ludwig Schmidt, *Die Ostgermanen*, vol. I of *Geschichte der deutschen Stämme bis zum Ausgange der Völkerwanderung* (Munich, 1941; repr. 1969), pp. 215–20; Bruno Rappaport, *Die Einfälle der Gothen in das römische Reich bis auf Constantin* (Leipzig, 1899), pp. 67–92. For the theory of only one attack, dated to 268, see Wilkes, 'Provinces and Frontiers', p. 227; Schwarcz, 'Die gotischen Seezüge', p. 52 and n. 34.

¹² *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, II, Divus Claudius 6.2, ed. by Ernst Hohl (Stuttgart, 1997).

¹³ Zosimus, *Historia nova*, 1, 42, ed. by François Paschoud (Paris, 1989); *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, II, Divus Claudius 6.4. For Zosimus, see Walter Goffart, 'Zosimus, the First Historian of Rome's Fall', *American Historical Review*, 76 (1971), 412–41.

¹⁴ Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res gestae*, 31.5.15, ed. and trans. by John C. Rolfe, 3 vols (Cambridge, MA, 1935–58); Peter Heather, *The Goths* (Oxford, 1996), p. 47 and n. 35.

Ammianus's image of 'innumerae gentium multitudines' ('countless swarms of nations') pouring into the empire when the Goths arrived in Thrace in 376 in unexpected numbers. Herodotus had reported innumerable hordes of Persian barbarians invading Greece in the fifth century BC. According to Ammianus, what had happened in 376 confirmed the trustworthiness of the old stories of great numbers of barbarians living outside the known world.¹⁵ In the region of the Sea of Azov and in the Crimea, along the northern border of the empire, barbarian warriors had taken over Greek cities and soon acquired from them the knowledge of how to operate ships and the manpower to do it.¹⁶ This already announces the later takeover of Roman provinces by barbarians. In 268/69 the 'Scythians' caused a lot of havoc, and several land and sea operations by Roman forces had to be organized over the next few years in order to regain control of Greece and the Balkans. Several groups of Goths and Herules roamed freely in the area before the Romans were first able to intercept and destroy a large group of invaders on the river Nessos. Emperor Gallienus's new mobile field-army consisting of cavalry regiments (*tagmata*) are said to have killed three thousand men.¹⁷ After that crushing defeat, the Herul chief Naulobatus surrendered to Gallienus in an act of *deditio* and received in turn the insignia of a Roman consul.¹⁸ This was the earliest barbarian known to have received consular insignias.¹⁹ It is quite possible that the defeated Herules, together with their chief, were immediately recruited into the Roman army, but that is nowhere explicitly mentioned in the sources. At any rate, the episode illustrates the speed at which defeated barbarians could be integrated into the Roman system immediately following their plundering of Roman provinces.

¹⁵ Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res gestae*, 31.4.7–8.

¹⁶ Alexander V. Podosinov, 'Am Rande der griechischen Oikumene: Geschichte des Bosporianischen Reichs', in *Das Bosporianische Reich*, ed. by Jochen Fornasier and Burkhard Böttger (Mainz, 2002), pp. 21–39 (pp. 36–38); Pohl, *Die Völkerwanderung*, p. 46.

¹⁷ Zosimus, *Historia Nova*, 1, 43, 1–2; *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, II, Vita Gallieni 13.9. See also Dietrich Hoffmann, *Das spätrömische Bewegungsheer und die Notitia Dignitatum*, I (Düsseldorf, 1969), pp. 247–49 and nos 406–09; Schwarcz, 'Die gotischen Seezüge', p. 53.

¹⁸ Georgios Synkellos, *Chronographia*, 717, ed. by Wilhelm Dindorf (Bonn, 1829), p. 717, trans. by William Adler and Paul Tuffin, *The Chronography of George Synkellos: A Byzantine Chronicle of Universal History from the Creation* (Oxford, 2002), p. 78. See also s.v. 'Naulobatus', in *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, I, ed. by Arnold H. M. Jones, John Martindale, and John Morris (Cambridge, 1971), p. 618; Schwarcz, 'Die gotischen Seezüge', p. 53.

¹⁹ Alexander Demandt, *Die Spätantike: Römische Geschichte von Diocletian bis Justinian 284–565 n. Chr.*, 2nd edn (Munich, 2007), pp. 320 and 323; Alexander Demandt, 'Der spätrömische Militäradel', *Chiron*, 10 (1980), 609–37 (p. 610).

Taking advantage of the chaotic situation, a group of Herules moved quickly to Athens and sacked the city. The story of Publius Herennius Dexippus gathering a group of two thousand companions from Athens and launching a counterattack is well known and needs no repetition.²⁰ One of the fragments surviving from his work is actually a patriotic speech associated with those events.²¹ Another less-known episode is reported in a much later, Byzantine tradition. The Herules were about to set fire to a large pile of books in Athens, when one of them stepped forward urging that 'they should leave the Greeks something to occupy themselves in reading so that they would forget to exercise their armies and would be more easily vanquished'.²² This episode illustrates a resistant stereotype about Herules: they were often depicted as violent, rude, and fierce warriors, while at the same time ruthless and strong, fascinating and horrible. Their image is that of an almost dehumanized human group marked by bestiality: they fought naked, were capable of killing their elders, and of forcing widows to commit suicide upon their husbands' deaths.²³ In reference to Pharas, a Herul officer who distinguished himself in Belisarius's army against the Persians and who laid siege to a fortress in the African mountains to which the Vandal king Gelimer had fled, Procopius mentions that

²⁰ Peter Heather, 'Disappearing and Reappearing Tribes', in *Strategies of Distinction: The Construction of Ethnic Communities, 300–800*, ed. by Walter Pohl and Helmut Reimitz (Leiden, 1998), pp. 95–112 (p. 97 and n. 6): 'Not only do they [Herules] find specific mention in Zosimus, but some surviving fragments of Dexippus' history (Zosimus's source) make it clear that Dexippus' famous defence of Athens was actually made against Herules, rather than against Goths or any other of the participating groups.' The *Scriptores Historiae Augustae* mentions Dexippus, but only Goths as his enemies. See *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, II, Vita Gallieni 13.7–8, ed. by Hohl: 'Veneriano item duce navali bello Gothi superati sunt, cum ipse Venerianus militari perit morte. Atque inde Cyzicum et Asiam, deinceps Achaïam omnem vastarunt et ab Atheniensibus duce Dexippo, scriptore horum temporum, victi sunt. Unde pulsi per Epirum, Macedoniam, Moesiam pervagati sunt.'

²¹ For the speech, see Publius Herennius Dexippus, *Fragmenta*, 28, in *Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*, ed. by Müller, II A, 472 (for an English translation, see Millar, 'P. Herennius Dexippus', p. 26). See also Homer A. Thompson, 'Athenian Twilight: A.D. 267–600', *Journal of Roman Studies*, 49 (1959), 61–72 (pp. 61–66); Peter Heather and John Matthews, *The Goths in the Fourth Century* (Liverpool, 1991), pp. 2–3 and n. 5.

²² Anonymus, *Continuatio Dii Cassii*, ed. by Karl Müller (Paris, 1885), p. 196; Zonaras, *Chronicon*, 12.26, ed. by Jacques-Paul Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, CXXXIV (Paris, 1864), cols 401–14 and *Patrologia Graeca*, CXXXV, cols 9–326; George Cedrenus, *Compendium historiarum*, ed. by Immanuel Bekker (Bonn, 1838), p. 454. See also Thomas Burns, *A History of the Ostrogoths* (Bloomington, 1984), p. 29 and n. 34.

²³ Procopius, *Wars*, 2.27–28; 6.14.1–7; 6.14.36.

it is remarkable for a Herul not to be treacherous and drunken. Pharas is described as energetic and serious, *despite* being a Herul by birth.²⁴ Such patronizing comments come very close to the notion of racism as understood in more recent times, even if it is also true that Procopius and others may have been right in condemning the brutality of any Roman soldier, including those of Herul origin. Whatever the case, the stereotype about the Herules stuck and seems to have been reproduced in much later works of Byzantine authors.

In the spring of 269, an army under the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius Claudius Augustus Gothicus inflicted a crushing defeat on both Goths and Herules near Naissus (modern Niš) in the province of Moesia Inferior. Following his victory, Claudius II assumed the triumphal epithet of *Gothicus*, the first Roman emperor to do so.²⁵ Another Herul chieftain named Andonnoballus is said to have switched sides.²⁶ However, 'Scythian' attacks from the northern shore of the Black Sea continued unabated until 276.²⁷

In the West: Pirates and Soldiers in the Roman Army

In 286 Herules and Chaibones attacked Gaul. Emperor Maximian intercepted them and, according to a panegyric of Claudius Mamertinus, managed to kill them all. Modern commentators refused to take at face value Mamertinus's testimony and claimed instead that, following his victory, Maximian recruited barbarians for a Herul auxiliary unit.²⁸ During the fourth century, that Herul *auxilium* (*numerus*

²⁴ Procopius, *Wars*, 4.4.29. See also Averil Cameron, *Procopius and the Sixth Century* (London, 1985), p. 240 and n. 79; Felix Dahn, *Prokopius von Cäsarea: Ein Beitrag zur Historiographie der Völkerwanderung und des sinkenden Römerthums* (Berlin, 1865), pp. 121–22: 'Ganz besonders zuwider ist ihm der germanische Stamm der Heruler: er findet gar nicht Worte genug, sie herunterzusetzen, geräth in eine leidenschaftliche Heftigkeit.' Dahn assumes that Procopius had contacts with Herul warriors and did not like them because of his personal experience.

²⁵ Zosimus, *Historia nova*, 1, 45, 1; see Michael Kulikowski, *Rome's Gothic Wars: From the Third Century to Alaric* (Cambridge, 2007), p. 29 and n. 17; Wolfram, *Die Goten*, p. 65; Schmidt, *Die Ostgermanen*, pp. 216–17 and n. 7.

²⁶ Petrus Patricius, *Fragmenta*, p. 186; s.v. 'Andonnoballus', in *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, 1, ed. by Jones, Martindale, and Morris, p. 62.

²⁷ Schwarcz, 'Die gotischen Seezüge', p. 56.

²⁸ Claudius Mamertinus, *Panegyricus Maximiano Augusto dictus*, 2.5, ed. and trans. by Édouard Galletier (Paris, 1949), pp. 24–37 (pp. 28–29). See Hoffmann, *Das spätromische Bewegungsheer*, pp. 156–57; Rappaport, 'Heruli', p. 1152; Schmidt, *Die Ostgermanen*, p. 558; Kaspar Zcuss, *Die Deutschen und die Nachbarstämme* (Munich, 1837; repr. 1925), p. 479.

Erulorum seniorum) was part of the *auxilia Palatina* in Italy. Several funerary inscriptions are known, which name the unit as a whole or some of its individual members. The unit was stationed near Concordia, an important military centre in Venetia.²⁹

The *numerus Erulorum* was a troop of lightly equipped soldiers, who received much praise for their valour and was often mentioned together with the Batavians (*Batavi seniores*).³⁰ Ammianus Marcellinus mentions a Herul soldier named Vitalianus (*Erulorum e numero miles*), who began his career as *domesticus* under Emperor Jovian and later became *comes*.³¹ Herules led by Charietto fought in January 366 against Alamannic marauders from across the Rhine. Charietto died in battle, and the Alamanni captured the standard of the Herul and Batavian unit, 'which the barbarians with insulting cries and dancing with joy frequently raised on high and displayed, until after hard struggles it was recovered'.³² In 366, Julian sent the Herules against the Picts and the Scoti attacking Britannia, again accompanied by the Batavian *auxilium*. At the head of this corps was the *magister militum* Lupicinus. He crossed the channel from Gallia to Londinium,³³ only to learn that Constantius, jealous of Julian's military achievements, had ordered the transfer of the Herul and Batavian auxiliary troops to the eastern front under the pretext that they were needed for an attack against the Parthians the following spring.³⁴

Herules had a good reputation as soldiers in the Roman army, but fifth-century sources depict them as fierce marauders and pirates. Jerome knew them as one of the barbarian groups crossing the Rhine and devastating Gaul in 406.³⁵ Herul raids are also reported as having targeted the coasts of Spain. Hydatius mentions seven

²⁹ *Notitia dignitatum*, Occ. 5.162; 7.13, in *Notitia dignitatum: Accedunt notitia urbis Constantinopolitanae et laterculi provinciarum*, ed. by Otto Seeck (Berlin, 1876). For inscriptions, see Hoffmann, *Das spätromische Bewegungsheer*, pp. 77–79 and 88–91; Rappaport, 'Heruli', pp. 1152–53. See also Hoffmann, *Das spätromische Bewegungsheer*, II, 272 (index).

³⁰ Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res gestae*, 20.1.3, 20.4.2, 27.1.6, and 27.8.7. See Hoffmann, *Das spätromische Bewegungsheer*, pp. 156–58.

³¹ Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res gestae*, 25.10.9.

³² Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res gestae*, 27.1.6; Zosimus, *Historia nova*, 4, 9, tells the same story but mentions only Batavians.

³³ Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res gestae*, 20.1.3.

³⁴ Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res gestae*, 20.4.1–2; Rappaport, 'Heruli', p. 1153; Schmidt, *Die Ostgermanen*, p. 559.

³⁵ Jerome, *Ep.* 123, ed. by Isidor Hilberg (Vienna, 1916), p. 92: '[...] quod Oceano Rhenoque concluditur, Quadus, Vandalus, Sarmata, Halani, Gypedes, Herules, Saxones, Burgundiones, Alamanni [...] vastaverunt'. See Friedrich Lotter, *Völkerverschiebungen im Ostalpen-Mitteldonauraum zwischen Antike und Mittelalter 375–600* (Berlin, 2003), p. 90 and n. 313.

ships and four hundred warriors attacking his native province, Gallaecia, and then moving to Cantabria.³⁶ Four years later an even stronger attack reached the coasts of Baetica.³⁷

Scholars have traditionally treated those third- to fifth-century Herules as a separate 'West-Herul' group to be distinguished from the 'eastern Herules' mentioned in relation to the invasion of 268/69.³⁸ However, such a distinction is not mentioned by any late antique source. The idea of a separate 'West-Herul' group implies that the Herules were settled somewhere north of the Roman frontiers in the west. Ludwig Schmidt, for example, argued that such a settlement area was necessary to provide recruits for the *auxilium*. Further support for the idea of a Herul kingdom north of the Lower Rhine was found in a letter of Theoderic the Great contained in Cassiodorus's *Variae* and a cursory remark in one of Sidonius Apollinaris's letters. Theoderic's letter is addressed to the kings of the Thuringians, the Herules, and the Varni, without any specific names, and was meant to gather support for his attempt to negotiate a peace between Clovis and Alaric II. His request of assistance was apparently based on a precedent. Both Theoderic's letter and the short remark in Sidonius Apollinaris's letter have been taken as a proof for the existence of a Herul kingdom somewhere on the Lower Rhine.³⁹ However,

³⁶ Hydatius, *Continuatio Chronicorum*, 171, in *Chronica minora saec. IV. V. VI. VII.*, vol. II, ed. by Theodor Mommsen, MGH AA, 11 (Berlin, 1894; repr. Munich, 1981); English translation in Richard W. Burgess, *The Chronicle of Hydatius and the Consularia Constantinopolitana: Two Contemporary Accounts of the Final Years of the Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1993). See also Santiago Castellano's contribution to this volume.

³⁷ Hydatius, *Continuatio Chronicorum*, 194: 'Eruli maritima conventus Lucensis loca nonnulla crudelissime invadunt ad Baeticam pertendentes.'

³⁸ See for example Rappaport, 'Heruli', pp. 1152–55; Schmidt, *Die Ostgermanen*, pp. 548–64: 'Ostheruler; Westheruler'. The distinction between the 'European' or 'German' Herules and the 'Sarmatian' Herules can already be found in eighteenth-century encyclopaedias, such as *Grosses vollständiges Universalexikon aller Wissenschaften und Künste*, XII, ed. by Johann Heinrich Zedler (Leipzig, 1745), p. 1851, s. v. 'Heruli oder Eruli, Aeruli, Heluri': 'Ein altes Teutsches Volk Gothischen oder Vandalischen Geschlechts, welches von undenklichen Zeiten um und neben denen Rügen, Gothen und Wandlen gewohnt. [...] Einige von denen Herulis seyn in ihren alten Sitzen zurückblieben, die meisten aber haben sich bey denen grossen Wanderungen derer Völcker auch daraus begeben und zwar haben sie sich in 2 Hauffen getheilet. Deren einer sich gegen Osten, der andere gegen Westen gewendet. Daher man sie billig in 2 Aeste den in Teutschland und den in Sarmatia abtheilet. Jene sind die ältesten, obwohl ihre abkömmlinge, die Sarmatischen Heruli, denen Römern eher als sie bekannt worden, ihrer auch daher weder von Plinio noch von Tacito gedacht wird.'

³⁹ Cassiodorus, *Variae*, 3.3, ed. by Theodor Mommsen, MGH AA, 12 (Berlin, 1894; repr. Munich, 1981), pp. 79–80; English translation by S. J. B. Barnish (Liverpool, 1992), pp.

such an interpretation is not really necessary, for Theoderic may well have had in mind the Herul kingdom in the Middle Danube region, a point to which I shall shortly return. In fact, a Herul king in that region is the addressee of another letter written by Cassiodorus in the name of Theoderic ('regi Erulorum Theodericus rex').⁴⁰ Sidonius Apollinaris describes in his letter various envoys pressing upon one another at the court of the Visigothic king Euric. Among them is also a Herul: 'Here strolls the Herul with his glaucous cheeks, inhabitant of Ocean's furthest shore, and of one complexion with its weedy deeps.'⁴¹ Sidonius's mention of the Herul's origin from the 'Ocean's furthest shore' has been interpreted as indicating a Herul kingdom at the mouth of the Rhine.⁴² However, this may in fact be nothing more than a bookish reference to third-century accounts of Herules attacking from the sea. Indeed, a Parthian 'Arsacid' mentioned in the next line clearly points to a third-century historical context for Sidonius's allusions.⁴³ As a consequence, there is no support in either Theoderic's or Sidonius's letter for the idea of a 'West-Herul' group, which seems to have been concocted without much regard for sources. Neither a 'northern' kingdom, nor a specific settlement area is necessary in order to explain the presence of the Herules in the West as soldiers and pirates. Warriors who had started as soldiers in the Roman army could have easily turned into freebooters, and pirates may have easily become soldiers. Different Herul groups

47–48. According to Barnish, 'the Herules and Varni were probably the western branches of those tribes, between the lower Rhine and Elbe'. Elias Wessén, *De nordiska folkstammarna i Beowulf* (Stockholm, 1927), p. 86, wrongly believed that both letters of Theoderic had been sent to a Herul king in Scandinavia. Goffart discusses those sources in *Barbarian Tides*, p. 206 and nn. 93–96.

⁴⁰ Neumann and Taylor, 'Heruler', pp. 470–71. The second letter: Cassiodorus, *Variae*, 4.2.

⁴¹ Sidonius Apollinaris, *ep.* 8.9, ed. by Christian Lütjohann, MGH AA, 8 (Berlin, 1887; repr. 1961), p. 136 ('Hic glaucis Herulus genis vagatur, imos Oceani colens recessus algo prope concolor profundo'); English translation from *Sidonius, Poems and Letters with an English Translation*, trans. by William B. Anderson, William H. Semple, and Edward H. Warmington, II (Cambridge, MA, 1965), p. 145.

⁴² Rappaport, 'Heruli', pp. 1153–54; Schmidt, *Die Ostgermanen*, p. 560; Andreas Schwarcz, 'Die Heruler an der Donau', in *Sprache als System und Prozess: Festschrift für Günter Lipold zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. by Christiane M. Pabst (Vienna, 2005), pp. 504–12 (p. 508).

⁴³ Sidonius Apollinaris, *ep.* 8.9, ed. by Lütjohann: 'Ipse hic Parthicus Arsaces precatur, aulae Susidis ut tenere culmen possit foedere sub stipendiali. Nam quod partibus arma Bosphoranis grandi hinc surgere sentit apparatu, maestam Persida iam sonum ad duelli ripa Euphratide vix putat tuendam'. Ardashir I founded the Sassanian dynasty after defeating the last king of the Arsacid dynasty, Artabanus IV, in 226. See Jörg Wieschöfer, s.v. 'Sāsāniden', in *Der Neue Pauly: Enzyklopädie der Antike*, ed. by Hubert Cancik and Helmuth Schneider, XI (Stuttgart, 2001), pp. 89–98.

appear to have operated in close proximity to the empire, but at different locations. To regard the Herules as 'pre-Vikings' from the North is based on nothing else than the association between their seaborne attacks and the Viking raids of later centuries, all in an ill-defined Scandinavian context inspired by Jordanes's and Procopius's accounts. Where sources fail to support such farfetched theories, linguistic speculations about ethnic names are called to the rescue.⁴⁴ In reality, there is nothing special about attacks from the sea: various marauders employed such tactics at various points in history. It is just easier and not too dangerous.

*Gazing at the Dark Side of the Moon: The Herules Choose, More or Less Voluntarily, the 'Hunnic Alternative'*⁴⁵

Peter Heather has used the Herules to illustrate his idea of 'disappearing and reappearing tribes':

No fourth-century text, however, mentions them [the Herules]. This could simply be a lacuna in the evidence, but contemporary sources make it clear that first Gothic and then Hunnic groups were politically dominant in the northern Pontic areas which Herules had occupied in the third century, and Herules certainly reappeared with a bang after the crash of the Hunnic Empire in the mid-fifth century. Their subsequent history is recorded in a number of sources.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ For a particularly egregious example, see 'The Heruls', <<http://www.gedevasen.dk/heruleng.html#C7>> [accessed 1 April 2007]: 'We do not know a tribe called Wicinga and the word Viking is not known so early from other sources — long time before the Viking Ages. To the editor of Widsith in the 10th century a combination "Eorla cynn" would not make any sense in this line of names. Maybe he instead used "Wicinga" as a general word for Nordic warriors. If "wicinga" really was the original wording, this was probably a tribe giving name to the later Vikings, and as the Herules were regarded as pirates in the Atlantic Ocean and the Black Sea they are probably in both cases the best candidates to the names "Wicingas" and "Lidwicingas" ("Lid" must be the old word for a private army used by the Vikings). Widsith also used the Herul-like "Herelingas" — probably covering at that position in Widsith a personal name and therefore unchanged by the authors of Widsith.'

⁴⁵ In his conclusion to session 613 entitled 'Neglected Barbarians' and organized for the 40th International Congress on Medieval Studies in Kalamazoo (8 May 2005), Thomas F. X. Noble used this striking metaphor to describe the confusion arising from the Greek and Roman ethnographic texts and our attempts to understand the world beyond the Roman borders: The territory north, east, and south of the Roman borders is the *dark side of the moon*. We know hardly more than names and archaeological material of the societies there. Our *bright side of the moon* is the empire with its texts and inscriptions. Wolfram, *The Roman Empire*, p. 123. 'Hunnic Alternative' is the title of the book's fifth chapter.

⁴⁶ Heather, 'Disappearing and Reappearing Tribes', pp. 97–98.

Before the mid-fourth century, the Herules appear in the region north of the Sea of Azov, but we do not know much about their political structures. That was certainly a region adjacent to territories under Roman control and with substantial urban structures. The Herules living in that area must have become part of a Gothic and, later, Hunnic confederation. Historians derive further information about the Herules from Jordanes, who wrote two centuries later. According to Jordanes, under their leader Alaric (*Halaricus*), the Herules were defeated by Ermanaric, the almighty Gothic king. It is important to note that in order to refer to the Herul leader, Jordanes avoids using the title of king: 'gentem Herulorum, quibus praeerat Halaricus' ('Alaric, who presided over the Herules').⁴⁷ Nothing is known about either a Herul king or a Herul kingdom, and all we have is what Jordanes has to offer:⁴⁸

He [Ermanaric] subdued many warlike peoples of the north and made them obey his laws, and some of our ancestors have justly compared him to Alexander the Great. [...] But though famous for his conquest of so many races, he gave himself no rest until he had slain some in battle and then reduced to his sway the remainder of the tribe of the Herules, whose chief was Alaric. Now the aforesaid race, as the historian Ablabius tells us, dwelt near Lake Maeotis in swampy places, which the Greeks call *hele*; hence they were named Heluri. They were a people swift of foot, and on that account were the more swollen with pride, for there was at that time no nation that did not choose from them its light-armed troops for battle. But though their quickness often saved them from others who made war upon them, yet they were overthrown by the slowness and steadiness of the Goths; and the lot of fortune brought it to pass that they, as well as the other tribes, had to serve Hermanaric, king of the Getae.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Jordanes, *Getica*, 117; Reinhard Wenskus, s.v. 'Alarich', in *Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde*, 1, 2nd edn, ed. by Heinrich Beck, Dieter Geuenich, and Heiko Steuer (Berlin, 1973), p. 129.

⁴⁸ Like many before and after him, Schmidt, *Die Ostgermanen*, p. 335, makes Alaric a king and assumes therefore that Ermanaric conquered a Herul kingdom.

⁴⁹ Jordanes, *Getica*, 116–18: 'Nam Gothorum rege Geberich rebus humanis excedente post temporis aliquod Hermanaricus nobilissimus Amalorum in regno successit, qui multas et bellicosissimas arctoi gentes perdomuit suisque parere legibus fecit. Quem merito nonnulli Alexandro Magno conparavere maiores. [...] Sed cum tantorum servitio clarus haberetur, non passus est nisi et gentem Herulorum, quibus praeerat Halaricus, magna ex parte trucidatam reliquam suae subegeret dicioni. Nam praedicta gens, Ablavio istorico referente, iuxta Meotida palude inhabitans in locis stagnantibus, quas Graeci ele vocant, Eluri nominati sunt, gens quantum velox, eo amplius superbissima. Nulla si quidem erat tunc gens, quae non levem armaturam in acie sua ex ipsis elegeret. Sed quamvis velocitas eorum ab aliis crebro bellantibus evagaret, Gothorum tamen stabilitate subiacuit et tarditati, fecitque causa fortunae, ut et ipsi inter reliquas gentes Getarum regi Hermanarico servirent.'

After having beaten the Herules, Ermanaric turned against the Venethi. The much discussed equation of Venethi, Antes, and Sclaveni follows.⁵⁰ The Aesti, located on the farthest shore of the German Ocean, were also attacked and subdued by the great Gothic king. Finally, Jordanes remarks, Ermanaric ruled over all nations of Scythia and Germania.⁵¹ Jordanes introduces Ermanaric as Theoderic's most important harbinger, equal to the great Alexander and 'raised into a mythical figure that has borrowed several characteristics from Attila'.⁵² According to Ammianus, the mighty and famous *bellicosissimus rex* eventually committed suicide after having failed to resist the Hunnic onslaught. Ermanaric is the first Gothic king mentioned not only in Jordanes's *Getica*, but also in a contemporary, fourth-century source.⁵³ He was obviously a key character in the construction of a glorious past for the Amal dynasty. As a consequence, his deeds and merits were greatly exaggerated in Jordanes's account. Both Otto Maenchen-Helfen and Herwig Wolfram have suggested bringing Ermanaric's achievements to real size: instead of a large Gothic kingdom covering much of Eastern Europe, one should envision an area of trade relations and treaties, as well as intertribal conflicts.⁵⁴ Ermanaric was undoubtedly an important person in the 300s, but Jordanes described him as a Gothic Alexander, and the later medieval literature blew his image out of proportion even further.⁵⁵ As a consequence, as early as the mid-nineteenth century, German- and Slavic-speaking scholars began quarrelling over the true achievements

⁵⁰ See Florin Curta, 'Hiding Behind a Piece of Tapestry: Jordanes and the Slavic Venethi', *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 47 (1999), 321–40; Florin Curta, *The Making of the Slavs: History and Archaeology of the Lower Danube Region, ca. 500–700* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 39–43; Roland Steinacher, 'Wenden, Slawen, Vandalen: Eine frühmittelalterliche pseudologische Gleichsetzung und ihre Nachwirkungen', in *Die Suche nach den Ursprüngen: Von der Bedeutung des frühen Mittelalters*, ed. by Walter Pohl (Vienna, 2004), pp. 329–53 (p. 329 and n. 3).

⁵¹ Jordanes, *Getica*, 120: 'Idem ipse prudentia et virtute subegit omnibusque Scythiae et Germaniae nationibus ac si propriis laboribus imperavit.'

⁵² Ellegård, 'Who Were the Eruli?', p. 26.

⁵³ Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res gestae*, 31.3.1–2. See Heinrich Beck and Herwig Wolfram, s.v. 'Ermanarich', in *Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde*, VII, 2nd edn, ed. by Heinrich Beck, Dieter Geuenich, and Heiko Steuer (Berlin, 1989), pp. 510–15 (p. 510); Kulikowski, *Rome's Gothic Wars*, pp. 111–12.

⁵⁴ Otto J. Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns: Studies in their History and Culture* (Berkeley, 1973), pp. 19–20; Beck and Wolfram, s.v. 'Ermanarich', pp. 511–12.

⁵⁵ Beck and Wolfram, s.v. 'Ermanarich', pp. 512–15; Walter Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History, AD 550–800: Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, Bede, and Paul the Deacon* (Princeton, 1988), p. 79 and n. 283.

of Ermanaric and over the expanse of land he had under his rule. In his *Slavonic Antiquities*, Pavel Josef Šafárik (1795–1861), one of the founders of the discipline of Slavic studies, first raised doubts about the trustworthiness of Jordanes's account. In reply, Eduard von Wietersheim strove to demonstrate that, on the contrary, Jordanes's account must be taken seriously, and imagined a great Gothic Empire covering much of Eastern Europe.⁵⁶ To be sure, Jordanes's account is very imprecise, with no specific details about the location of the Herules. His etymological speculation connecting the Herules with the swamps and the Sea of Azov is entirely taken from Dexippus.⁵⁷ Ablabius is a problematic source, which is only mentioned by Jordanes. Theodor Mommsen first imagined Ablabius as the author of a now lost Gothic history, but more recent studies are much more reserved in that respect and some went so far as to raise doubts about the existence of Ablabius.⁵⁸

In order to explain the Hunnic subjugation of the Goths, Jordanes introduces the story of the *Rosomorum gens infida*. Following her husband's aborted revolt against the Gothic king, Queen Sunilda was tortured and eventually executed. According to Jordanes, her husband's treachery had aroused Ermanaric's rage. In return, Sunilda's brothers Ammius and Sarus assassinated Ermanaric, plunging a sword into his side.⁵⁹ The meaning of this episode for Jordanes's narrative strategy is obscure. The very name *Rosomoni* may be translated as either 'the quick ones' or 'people with red hair'. *Gens*, on the other hand, is a very ambiguous term, which can refer to a group of warriors regarded as a clan, to a family, or to a people. Herwig Wolfram viewed the *Rosomoni* as Herules living north of the Black Sea or as their *stirps regia*. He accordingly saw in Jordanes's episode the evidence for a Herul uprising taking advantage of the weakening of the Gothic rule. Others, however,

⁵⁶ Pavel Josef Šafárik, *Slawische Alterthümer*, I (Leipzig, 1844), p. 428: 'Nicht grundlos vermutet man, dass Jordanis die Thaten der Gothen, namentlich Ermanarich's, unverschämt übertrieben, ja dass seine ganze Geschichte von dem unermesslichen Reiche Ermanarich's auf Irrthum oder Lüge beruhe.' See also Eduard von Wietersheim, *Geschichte der Völkerwanderung*, IV (Leipzig, 1864), pp. 8–12. Ludwig Albrecht Gebhardi, *Geschichte aller Wendisch-Slavischen Staaten: Erster Band, welcher die älteste Geschichte der Wenden und Slaven, und die Geschichte des Reichs der Wenden in Teutschland enthält* (Leipzig, 1790), pp. 34–37, was more cautious and simply reproduced Jordanes's account.

⁵⁷ Ellegård, 'Who Were the Eruli?', pp. 28–29.

⁵⁸ See Goffart, *Narrators*, p. 62 with n. 208; Wolfram, *Goten*, p. 381 with n. 36; Norbert Wagner, *Getica: Untersuchungen zum Leben des Jordanes und zur frühen Geschichte der Goten* (Berlin, 1967), pp. 62–68; Theodor Mommsen, 'Prooemium', in Jordanes, *Getica*, ed. by Mommsen, pp. xxxvii–ix.

⁵⁹ Jordanes, *Getica*, 129; Maenchen-Helfen, *World of the Huns*, p. 17 and n. 23.

treat the *Rosomoni* as just another Gothic noble family. Both interpretations overstretch the evidence of Jordanes. In any case, name similarity is definitely not sufficient evidence for tracking down the 'disappearing Herules'.⁶⁰

There is no mention of Herules throughout the entire period between c. 400 and 450. It is of course quite possible that Herul warriors fought alongside the Huns in Attila's army, but there were also Herules in Roman service. According to Sidonius Apollinaris, Herules marched into Gaul in 451 with Attila.⁶¹ According to Peter Heather, they 'reappeared with a bang after the crash of the Hunnic Empire'.⁶² Attila's death brought about the disintegration of the broad coalition of many different *gentes*, which had formed the Hunnic polity. The Hunnic leader had secured the constant supply of revenue extorted from the Roman Empire. His 'warriors could enjoy the benefits of the Roman world without having to enter it'.⁶³ But the Romans were also successful in fighting the Huns back, and a great Hunnic attack on the Eastern Empire, which was planned for 453, had to be abandoned. It was no longer possible either to wait in Pannonia for Roman supplies to be shipped or to organize successful raids across the borders into the neighbouring Roman provinces. This was the end of Attila's policies, aptly called the 'Hunnic alternative' by Herwig Wolfram, which the Herules, among others, had enjoyed.⁶⁴ At Attila's death in 453, his former allies and subjects were at each other's throats. The Hunnic leader's sons attempted to forge separate polities, which included selected *gentes* that may have remained loyal to them. If successful, this would have

⁶⁰ Wolfram, *Goten*, pp. 97–98: 'Die Bedeutung von Gens ist fließend; man kann darunter ebenso Völkerschaften, Kriegerverbände wie Großsippnen verstehen, weil sich ihre Erscheinungsformen qualitativ kaum voneinander unterscheiden. Daher scheint es ziemlich gleichgültig zu sein, ob man die Rosomonen als Volk oder (königliches) Geschlecht bezeichnet, das "Ermanarich unter anderen (Völkern) in seiner Gefolgschaft hatte". Demnach wären die Rosomonen, deren Namen wie der der Eruler so viel wie die "Schnellen", die "Stürmischen" bedeuten könnten, mit der von Ermanarich unterworfenen Gens identisch gewesen.' For *Rosomoni* as a Gothic noble family, see Helmut Castritius and Guenter Neumann, s.v. 'Rosomonen', in *Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde*, xxv, 2nd edn, ed. by Heinrich Beck, Dieter Geuenich, and Heiko Steuer (Berlin, 2003), pp. 353–58 (pp. 356–57).

⁶¹ Sidonius Apollinaris, *ep.* 7.12 and 8.15; *carm.* 7.319–322. See Wolfram, *Goten*, p. 259 and n. 1; Schmidt, *Die Ostgermanen*, p. 473.

⁶² Heather, 'Disappearing and Reappearing Tribes', p. 98.

⁶³ Walter Pohl, s. v. 'Huns', in *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World*, ed. by Glenn W. Bowersock, Peter R. L. Brown, and Oleg Grabar (Cambridge, MA, 1999), pp. 501–02 (p. 502).

⁶⁴ Wolfram, *The Roman Empire*, p. 139; Maenchen-Helfen, *World of the Huns*, pp. 137–42.

been the equivalent of a multitude of Hunnic rulers, each striving to maximize his version of the 'Hunnic alternative'. That alternative, however, was no longer viable. A coalition of forces was formed against those Hunnic petty kings, led by the Gepid king Ardaric. These men longed for a better apportionment. What actually happened after 453 is difficult to reconstruct, for the only source for the events that followed is again Jordanes, and since his purpose was to write a history of the Goths, he had no interest in documenting Gothic losses. Nevertheless, it is quite clear that the Goths of Valamir, Theoderic's grandfather, were on the side of Attila's sons and therefore entered the conflict with smaller groups attempting to evade the Hunnic rule. Jordanes did not have anything glorious to report about the generation of Goths before the great Theoderic. In 454 or 455, a coalition of Gepids, Sueves, Herules, and others obtained a decisive victory, the last one in a series, on the river Nedao in Pannonia. Attila's son Ellac died in battle.⁶⁵ 'Once again the same tribes fought on both sides; one thing is clear, though: the majority of the Hunnic Goths under Amal leadership were amongst the losers, while the Gepids led the victorious army'.⁶⁶ At this point in his narrative, Jordanes has a 'catalogue of nations' meeting on the battlefield, each one with its 'national' weapons, but it is not clear who was on what side.

There an encounter took place between the various nations Attila had held under his sway. Kingdoms with their peoples were divided, and out of one body were made many members not responding to a common impulse. Being deprived of their head, they madly strove against each other. They never found their equals ranged against them without harming each other by wounds mutually given. And so the bravest nations tore themselves to pieces. For then, I think, must have occurred a most remarkable spectacle, where one might see the Goths fighting with pikes, the Gepidae raging with the sword, the Rugii breaking off the

⁶⁵ For a detailed analysis, see Walter Pohl, 'Die Gepiden und die gentes an der mittleren Donau nach dem Zerfall des Attilareiches', in *Die Völker an der mittleren und unteren Donau im fünften und sechsten Jahrhundert: Berichte des Symposiums der Kommission für Frühmittelalterforschung, 24.–27. Oktober 1978, Stift Zwettl, Niederösterreich*, ed. by Herwig Wolfram and Falko Daim (Vienna, 1980), pp. 239–305 (pp. 254–62).

⁶⁶ Wolfram, *The Roman Empire*, p. 139; Martin Nagy, Walter Pohl, and Agnès B. Tóth, s.v. 'Gepiden', in *Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde*, xi, 2nd edn, ed. by Heinrich Beck, Dieter Geuenich, and Heiko Steuer (Berlin, 2003), pp. 115–41 (pp. 133–34); Pohl, 'Gepiden', pp. 247–49. According to Pohl, the Ostrogoths and the Gepids were two rival groups vying for power under Hunnic rule. Valamir and Ardaric were both close companions of Attila (Jordanes, *Getica*, 199). The Gepids and the Huns were often mentioned together and sometimes even mistaken for one another. Attila, for example, is said to have been a Gepid in the *Chronicon Paschale* and in the *Chronographia* of John Malalas. See note 101 below.

spears in their own wounds, the Suevi fighting on foot, the Huns with bows, the Alani drawing up a battle-line of heavy-armed and the Herules of light-armed warriors.⁶⁷

It is also not clear whether the Herules had been on the side of Attila's sons. There seems to have been a division of several *gentes* into warring parties. Edica, Odoacar's father, one of the most powerful followers of Attila who enjoyed much influence, was not capable of gathering all Scirians on his side.⁶⁸ According to Jordanes, not only did different *gentes* fight against each other, but also 'the bravest nations tore themselves to pieces' ('se ipsos discerperent fortissimae nationes'). Several splinter groups could thus appear out of a single ethnic group within a relatively short period of time. Ethnic identities were reinvented, and previously smaller groups rose to prominence. In Jordanes's words: 'Kingdoms with their peoples were divided, and out of one body were made many members not responding to a common impulse'. Several warlords may have gone their own way, with some Herul leaders fighting on the side of Attila's sons, others against them. Still others must have waited on the side, to see who would win in the final confrontation. There is therefore no room for the nineteenth-century idea of oppressed Germanic peoples freeing themselves from the Hunnic yoke through a liberation movement. Following this rather chaotic period, the Ostrogoths, but also some Sciri, Alans, Rugi, and many others ('vero aliaeque nationes nonnullae') asked the East Roman government for permission to enter the empire. They were settled as federates by Emperor Marcian. Given the subsequent developments, it seems likely that among the 'aliaeque nationes nonnullae' were also Herules.⁶⁹ To get a clear picture of them, it is necessary to understand the milieu in which they operated. One therefore needs to turn to the events taking place in the Middle Danube region, in Pannonia, and in Italy during the second half of the fifth century.

⁶⁷ Jordanes, *Getica*, 261: 'Illic concursus factus est gentium variarum, quas Attila in sua tenuerat ditione. Dividuntur regna cum populis, fiuntque ex uno corpore membra diversa, nec quae unius passioni conpaterentur, sed quae exciso capite in vicem insanirent; quae numquam contra se pares invenerant, nisi ipsi mutuis se vulneribus sauciantes se ipsos discerperent fortissimae nationes. Nam ibi admirandum reor fuisse spectaculum, ubi cernere erat contis pugnantes Gothum, ense furem Gepida, in vulnere suo Rugum tela frangentem, Suavum pede, Hunnum sagitta praesumere, Alanum gravi, Herulum levi armatura aciem strui.' See Pohl, 'Gepiden', pp. 258–62; Helmut Castritius, s.v. 'Nedao', in *Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde*, XXI, 2nd edn, ed. by Heinrich Beck, Dieter Geuenich, and Heiko Steuer (Berlin, 2002), pp. 49–51; Heather, *The Goths*, pp. 124–29.

⁶⁸ Jordanes, *Getica*, 277; Pohl, 'Gepiden', p. 261.

⁶⁹ Jordanes, *Getica*, 263–66, the citation from 266; Lotter, *Völkerverschiebungen*, p. 103, is certain that Herules were among the federates admitted into the Eastern provinces.

The Herul Regnum on the Roman Frontier

After the battle the victorious tribes settled directly on the left bank of the Danube and established, between the Lower Austrian Wachau Valley and the Transylvanian Carpathians, a series of kingdoms linked as federates to Constantinople. At the threshold of a mighty *Gepidia* there arose, between the Danube and the Tisza, a Scirian, and a Sarmatian kingdom. West of them the Suebi had a *regnum*. The Herules and the Rugians resided at the March respectively north of the Danube. Evidently the victorious barbarians of the Danube had contractually guaranteed rights to the economic prosperity of the provincials on the right side of the Danube. To keep a rein on these claims, the defeated Goths were to be settled as federates of east Rome inside the empire.⁷⁰

The place chosen by authorities in Constantinople for the Goths of Valamir and his brothers Thiudimir and Vidimir was Pannonia. There they controlled the Danube between Vindobona and Singidunum, a key area for both West and East, as well as for other barbarian groups emerging in the aftermath of the collapse of the Hunnic polity. Throughout the second half of the fifth century, the Pannonian Goths strove to obtain hegemony over all former subjects of Attila's Huns, either as an ally or as an enemy of the empire. The other *gentes* carried out attacks on the Goths either to enter the empire as a Roman *exercitus* or to force the Romans to pay them for maintaining the peace. By 473, however, the greater part of the Pannonian Goths left for the Balkans, and in 488 they entered Italy with an imperial mandate to fight Odoacar.⁷¹ The second leading group emerging out of the Hunnic system were the Gepids, separated from the Goths by the old Roman frontier. The Gepids had occupied the territory between the Danube, the Tisza, and the Olt Rivers, on the one hand, and the Carpathian Mountains, on the other hand, an area which included the former province of Dacia. They had a contract of peace and friendship with the emperor, which lasted for nearly a century. As a consequence, they were paid *annua sollemnia*.⁷² Between the Danube and the Tisza, a Scirian polity was established by Edica and his sons, Odoacar and Onoulf (Hunulf). Priscus had known Edica to be one of Attila's confidants.⁷³ This family,

⁷⁰ Wolfram, *The Roman Empire*, pp. 139–40. The situation is also described by Pohl, 'Gepiden', pp. 268–80; Herwig Wolfram, *Grenzen und Räume: Geschichte Österreichs vor seiner Entstehung 378–907* (Vienna, 1995), p. 34; Nagy, Pohl, and Tóth, 'Gepiden', p. 134; Lotter, *Völkerverschiebungen*, pp. 103–06.

⁷¹ Jordanes, *Getica*, 264; Wolfram, *Die Goten*, pp. 261–67; Pohl, 'Gepiden', pp. 263–64.

⁷² Jordanes, *Getica*, 264; Pohl, 'Gepiden', pp. 268–73.

⁷³ Walter Pohl, s.v. 'Edika', in *Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde*, VII, 2nd edn, ed. by Heinrich Beck, Dieter Geuenich, and Heiko Steuer (Berlin, 1989), pp. 446–47.

having made themselves the Scirian *stirps regia*, was linked to several centres of power at that time. They established 'international' relations and soon became the main rivals of the Goths. Odoacar and Onoulf played important roles in barbarian society both inside and outside the empire. But the Scirian polity came to an end in c. 468, when the Ostrogoths defeated their rivals.⁷⁴ 'Thereupon the Goths proceeded to exact vengeance for the death of their king, as well as for the injury done them by the rebels. They fought in such wise that there remained of all the Scirian nation only a few who bore the name, and they with disgrace. Thus were all destroyed.'⁷⁵ Jordanes's report can be understood as a tale concerned with the end of an alternative. The Gothic solution was successful, the challengers had been beaten, and the Scirian ethnic coherence had become obsolete. The 'bearers of the Scirian name' can be understood as the royal family of Edica, Odoacar, and Onoulf, with enough warriors to act as a military power.⁷⁶ After all, they maintained an alternative to the powerful Goths by opening to other ethnic identification; the story of Odoacar in Italy demonstrates how that could actually happen. It took another twenty years for Theoderic to bring that alternative to an end.

In 470, with tacit Roman support, a broad coalition of Edica's Sciri, Sarmatians, Sueves, Gepids, and Rugi rose to challenge the Goths. There is no mention of Herules.⁷⁷ Edica died in the ensuing battle at the Bolia River, and his son Onoulf escaped to Constantinople, together with his retinue of warriors, where he entered

⁷⁴ Pohl, 'Gepiden', pp. 273–74; Helmut Castritius and Stefan Zimmer, s.v. 'Skiren', in *Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde*, xxv, 2nd edn, ed. by Beck, Geuenich, and Steuer, pp. 353–58.

⁷⁵ Jordanes, *Getica*, 276: 'Gothi vero tam regis sui mortem quam suam iniuriam a rebellionibus exigentes ita sunt proelati, ut pene de gente Scirorum nisi qui nomen ipsud ferrent, et hi cum dedecore, non remansissent: sic omnes extincti sunt.'

⁷⁶ Goffart, *Barbarian Tides*, p. 205: 'There is no evidence for the recruitment of Sciri into the Roman army until the days of Odoacer. [...] If they may be said to have a history at all, its most noticeable trait is that their final downfall as a people coincides with the prominence of two half-Scirians, sons of a famous father, in the military aristocracy of the Roman Empire.'

⁷⁷ Jordanes, *Getica*, 277: 'Quorum exitio Suavorum reges Hunimundus et Halaricus vereti, in Gothos arma moverunt freti auxilio Sarmatarum, qui cum Beuca et Babai regibus suis auxiliarii ei advenissent, ipsasque Scirorum reliquias quasi ad ultionem suam acrius pugnatueros accersientes cum Edica et Hunuulfo eorum primatibus habuerunt simul secum tam Gepidas quam ex gente Rugorum non parva solacia, ceterisque hinc inde collectis ingentem multitudinem adgregantes ad amnem Bolia in Pannoniis castra metati sunt.' Schwarcz, 'Die Heruler an der Donau', p. 509, suggests that Alaric, the king mentioned beside Hunimund, may have been a Herul because he had the same name as a fourth-century king. However, Jordanes specifically refers here to *Suavorum reges*.

Roman service and rose to the rank of *magister militum per Illyricum*. Some time later, in 479, he met his Gothic archenemies one more time, this time as a Roman officer.⁷⁸ Odoacar fled up along the Danube, met with St Severin who reputedly predicted him a great future, and then moved to Italy, where he was chosen leader by a great number of Herules, Sciri, Rugians, and Torcingi eager to grab the opportunities opening for them in the West.⁷⁹ By their victory at the Bolia River, the Goths had taken revenge for the defeat at Nedao and established themselves as the uncontested hegemonial power at the gates of the empire in Pannonia.⁸⁰

A Suevic *regnum* emerged in what is today southern Slovakia, established by those Sueves who had not left in 406 with the Vandals and the Alans. Their king Hunimund strove to establish a centre of power and to forge a strong Suevic identity. After several confrontations with the Goths, a separate Gothic strike crushed the Sueves at the Bolia River. Hunimund became a warlord with a few dozens of followers, a band mentioned in the *Vita Severini*.⁸¹ Next to the Sueves, a Sarmatian polity had maintained itself, which the Goths soon also managed to destroy. Much like the Sciri and the Sueves, the Sarmatians were attacked by Theoderic in 471, who killed their king Babai in battle, captured his treasure, and occupied Singidunum.⁸² Eliminating the royal *stirps*, capturing the treasury, and cutting off the ties to the empire were meant to deprive the barbarian elites of their basic needs.⁸³

The Rugi established themselves north of the Middle Danube, with their royal seat around modern Krems on the Danube. Their short-lived polity was destroyed

⁷⁸ Malchus, *fig. 8*, in *Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*, ed. by Karl Müller, iv (Paris, 1885), p. 117; Pohl, 'Edika', p. 446; s.v. 'Edeco', and s.v. 'Onoulphus', in *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, ii, ed. by Arnold H. M. Jones, John Martindale, and John Morris (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 385–86 and 806; Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns*, p. 388 and n. 104, rejects the idea that Edica, Attila's confident, was the same as the father of Odoacar.

⁷⁹ Eugippius, *Vita Sancti Severini*, 7, ed. by Theodor Nüßlein (Stuttgart, 1986); English translation in George W. Robinson, *The Life of Saint Severinus* (Cambridge, MA, 1914); Wolfram, *Die Goten*, p. 267 and n. 48; Goffart, *Narrators*, p. 355 and n. 88.

⁸⁰ Jordanes, *Getica*, 276; Pohl, 'Gepiden', pp. 260–62; Wolfram, *Die Goten*, pp. 266–68.

⁸¹ Jordanes, *Getica*, 274–75, 277, and 281; Eugippius, *Vita Sancti Severini*, 22. See also Helmut Reimitz, s.v. 'Hunimund', in *Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde*, xv, 2nd edn, ed. by Heinrich Beck, Dieter Geuenich, and Heiko Steuer (Berlin, 1989), pp. 245–46.

⁸² Jordanes, *Getica*, 282; Martin Eggers and Ion Ioniță, s.v. 'Sarmaten', in *Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde*, xxvi, 2nd edn, ed. by Heinrich Beck, Dieter Geuenich, and Heiko Steuer (Berlin, 2004), pp. 503–12.

⁸³ Pohl, 'Gepiden', p. 276: 'Die geschilderte Operation des jungen Theoderich entspricht besonders gut der ostgotischen Praxis "wie zerstört man ein gentiles Herrschaftszentrum?"'

by Odoacar in 487.⁸⁴ By 454, a Herul polity was also established in the neighbourhood, namely within the eastern *Weinviertel* and in southern Moravia. The Herul polity may have extended eastward to the Little Carpathians. The Herules ruled over a mixed population of local Sueves, Huns, Alans, and others.⁸⁵ The success of the Herul polity must have attracted other tribal groups as well, but its territorial expansion was primarily the work of Herul warriors. Procopius describes the situation as follows:

But as time went on they became superior to all the barbarians who dwelt about them both in power and in numbers, and, as was natural, they attacked and vanquished them severally and kept plundering their possessions by force. And finally they made the Lombards, who were Christians, together with several other nations, subject and tributary to themselves, though the barbarians of that region were not accustomed to that sort of thing; but the Heruli were led to take this course by love of money and a lawless spirit.⁸⁶

Local Suevic and (formerly) provincial farmers seem to have secured the relative prosperity of the Herul *regnum* well after 500.⁸⁷ The Herules were able to line up an impressive number of battle-seasoned warriors. The *Vita Severini* reports a Herul attack on Ioviaco (near Batavia/Passau) around 480. The holy man Severinus tried to warn the inhabitants of Ioviaco three separate times. During the night following the third warning, the Herules sacked the city and took many people captive. They hanged the local priest, Maximianus, on a cross. According to Eugippius, the Herules led many prisoners (*plurimos captivos*) away from Ioviaco.⁸⁸ This may indicate that

⁸⁴ Thomas Andersson and Walter Pohl, s.v. 'Rugier', in *Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde*, XXV, 2nd edn, ed. by Beck, Geuenich, and Steuer, pp. 452–58; Pohl, 'Gepiden', pp. 278–80.

⁸⁵ Pohl, 'Gepiden', pp. 277–78; Jaroslav Tejral, 'Probleme der Völkerwanderungszeit nördlich der mittleren Donau', in *Germanen, Hunnen und Awaren: Schätze der Völkerwanderungszeit. Germanisches Nationalmuseum Nürnberg, 12. Dezember 1987 bis 21. Februar 1988*, ed. by Gerhard Bott (Nuremberg, 1987), pp. 351–67 (pp. 354–56), describes the rich variety of the archaeological evidence from this area. Schmidt, *Die Ostgermanen*, p. 562, has the Herul ruling class as a mixture of several 'East Germanic' groups. He conspicuously ignores any non-'Germanic' groups.

⁸⁶ Procopius, *Wars*, 6.14.8.

⁸⁷ Pohl, 'Gepiden', p. 278.

⁸⁸ Eugippius, *Vita Sancti Severini*, 24. Schwarcz, 'Die Heruler an der Donau', p. 505, interpreted the subsequent execution by hanging of a certain priest Maximianus as a ritual sacrifice to Wotan. However, the execution of the spiritual leader of a community may also be seen as an attempt to subdue that community and to prevent resistance. For the *Vita Sancti Severini*, see also Walter Goffart, 'Does the *Vita S. Severini* Have an Underside?', in *Eugippius und Severin: Der Autor, der Text und der Heilige*, ed. by Walter Pohl and Maximilian Diesenberger (Vienna, 2001), pp. 33–40.

the Herules were concerned with enlarging the population within their polity by means of prisoners of war from Noricum Ripense. From their core area north of the Danube, the Herules expanded into the territory south of that river, but north of Lake Balaton, taking advantage of the disappearance, one by one, of the Suevic and Scirian polities, both eliminated by the Pannonian Goths who soon after those struggles left for Italy, and then of the Rugians, destroyed by Odoacar in 488.⁸⁹

Herules Trying to Make Odoacar their King in Italy

'Then as the spoil taken from one and another of the neighbouring tribes diminished', as Jordanes has it, warriors from the Danube region — Herules, Sciri, and Rugians — moved to Italy to participate in Odoacar's *exercitus* of *externae gentes*.⁹⁰ Herules were among the strongest in 'king Odoacar's whirlpool of peoples in which he made his career'.⁹¹ Some sources even call him *rex Erulorum*. This underlines the key role Odoacar had in bringing at least some Herules to live the life of the rich and privileged in Italy. Odoacar himself originated from a mixed milieu at the meeting point between the Roman and Hunnic spheres of power. His brother Onoulf made his career in the East. Odoacar's career began in Italy under Ricimer. During the civil war fought by the *magister militum* Ricimer and Anastasius (471/72), he was on the side of the former. Onoulf, already a powerful man in Constantinople, joined Odoacar in Italy in 479 after having fallen out of favour with Emperor Zeno.⁹²

Odoacar's unique opportunity arrived in 476, during the conflict between soldiers of the *externae gentes* and the *patricius* Orestes. Orestes had begun his career

⁸⁹ Demandt, *Die Spätantike*, pp. 212–14; Wolfram, *Grenzen und Räume*, p. 58.

⁹⁰ Jordanes, *Getica*, 283; Pohl, 'Gepiden', pp. 267–68.

⁹¹ Robert L. Reynolds and Robert S. Lopez, 'Odoacer: German or Hun?', *American Historical Review*, 52 (1946), 36–53 (p. 37).

⁹² See s.v. 'Odoacer', in *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, II, ed. by Jones, Martindale and Morris, pp. 791–93; Wolfram, *The Roman Empire*, pp. 183–93; Herwig Wolfram, s. v., 'Odoakar', in *Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde*, XXI, 2nd edn, ed. by Heinrich Beck, Dieter Geuenich, and Heiko Steuer (Berlin, 2002), pp. 573–75 (p. 574). Wolfram rejects the proposition that Odoacer was one and the same person as a Saxon leader in Gaul around 460 and criticizes the historians' obsession with prosopography ('prosopographischer Beziehungswahn'). For an example of what Wolfram criticizes, see Reynolds and Lopez, 'Odoacer', pp. 40–41; Timo Stickler, *Aëtius: Gestaltungsspielräume eines Heermeisters im ausgehenden Weströmischen Reich* (Munich, 2002), pp. 72, 97, and 122.

as Latin secretary to Attila, but soon became the rival of the Hunnic ruler's companion, Edika, Odoacar's father. Orestes was now opposed to the demand that soldiers recruited from among the *externae gentes* be paid just like Roman soldiers (a soldier of barbarian origin seems to have received much lower wages, perhaps as a consequence of the constant supply of barbarians eager for recruitment). 'While the Roman army had a vested legal claim to a third of the curial taxes, the economic security of the federates of Italy was far less clearly established; they did not receive "regular" pay but extraordinary monies, agreed upon by treaty, to be sure, but revocable. In 476, the barbarians in Italy demanded to be given equal status with the Roman army.'⁹³ When Orestes, as the highest magistrate present, refused to yield to such demands, the soldiers turned to Odoacar who promised to fulfil their requests, 'should he attain supramagisterial power.'⁹⁴ All in all, the impression one gets from the sources makes one think of a coup d'état or a putsch performed by armed forces.⁹⁵ According to Procopius, one third of the Italian land was thus given to the barbarians, the same amount of land that Theoderic would grant to his Goths in 491. This is not the place to enter the complex debate concerning the 'accommodation of the barbarians', whether by means of land or by means of tax money.⁹⁶ Instead, it is worth re-examining our sources in order to identify those

⁹³ Wolfram, *The Roman Empire*, pp. 184–85.

⁹⁴ Wolfram, *The Roman Empire*, pp. 184–85.

⁹⁵ Goffart, *Narrators*, p. 355 and n. 88 gives an accurate idea how to understand the verb *invadere* in Jordanes, *Romana*, 344, ed. by Theodor Mommsen, MGH AA, 5.1 (Berlin, 1882; repr. 1982): 'Jordanes spoke of Odoacer "invading" Italy supported by hordes of tribesmen; he probably meant *invadere* in the sense of "to seize (from within, as by coup d'état)". [...] All in all, the underpinnings for "Odoacer's barbarian conquest of Italy" were less flimsy than those for the lady Digna and the Vandal plunder of the Campania.'

⁹⁶ Procopius, *Wars*, 5.1.5–8, trans. by Dewing, pp. 2–5: 'Now it happened that the Romans a short time before had induced the Sciri and Alani and certain other Gothic nations to form an alliance with them; [...] And in proportion as the barbarian element among them became strong, [...] so that the barbarians ruthlessly forced many other measures upon the Romans much against their will and finally demanded that they should divide with them the entire land of Italy. And indeed they commanded Orestes to give them the third part of this, and when he would by no means agree to do so, they killed him immediately. Now there was a certain man among the Romans named Odoacer, one of the bodyguards of the emperor, and he at that time agreed to carry out their commands, on condition that they should set him upon the throne. [...] And by giving the third part of the land to the barbarians, and in this way gaining their allegiance most firmly, he held the supreme power securely for ten years.' See Wolfram, 'Odoakar', p. 574, who sees in Procopius the evidence for the fact that the wages to be paid to the troops were the main reason for the conflict. The controversy regarding the accommodation of the barbarians in the later Roman

who raised Odoacar to power. According to Jordanes, although a Rugian by birth, he was the king of the Torcilingi, the Sciri, and the Herules, and of other *gentes*. The *Anonymus Valesianus* has Odoacar coming to Italy together with the Sciri.⁹⁷ But according to the *Auctarium Hauniense*, the Herul soldiers made Odoacar their king.⁹⁸

To Felix Dahn, calling Odoacar a *rex Erulorum* was a mistake.⁹⁹ In reality, taking the account in the *Auctarium Hauniense* at face value implies accepting a version of history which is not at variance with what is otherwise known about barbarian identity in the fifth century. It also involves acknowledging the fact that several processes were at work at the same time. Proclaiming Odoacar their king

Empire is too complicated to be discussed in detail here. See however Goffart, *Barbarian Tides*, pp. 119–86; Walter Goffart, *Barbarians and Romans, A.D. 418–584: The Techniques of Accommodation* (Princeton, 1980); Jean Durliat, 'Le Salaire de la paix sociale dans les royaumes barbares V^e–VI^e siècles', in *Anerkennung und Integration: Zu den wirtschaftlichen Grundlagen der Völkerwanderungszeit 400–600*, ed. by Herwig Wolfram and Andreas Schwarz (Vienna, 1988), pp. 21–72; J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, 'Cities, Taxes and the Accommodation of the Barbarians: The Theories of Durliat and Goffart', in *Kingdoms of the Empire: The Integration of Barbarians in Late Antiquity*, ed. by Walter Pohl (Leiden, 1997), pp. 135–52.

⁹⁷ Jordanes, *Romana*, 344: 'Sed mox Odoacer genere Rogus Thorcilingorum Sciorum Herulorumque turbas [...] Italiam invasit.' Jordanes, *Getica*, 242: 'Augustulo vero a patre Oreste in Ravenna imperatore ordinato non multum post Odovacar Torcilingorum rex habens secum Sciros, Herulos diversarumque gentium auxiliarios Italiam occupavit et Orestem interfectum Augustulum filium eius de regno pulsum in Lucullano Campaniae castello exilii poena damnavit.' Anonymus Valesianus, 8.37, *Consularia Italica, Anonymi Valesiani pars posterior*, in *Chronica minora saec. IV. V. VI. VII.*, vol. 1, ed. by Theodor Mommsen, MGH AA, 9 (Berlin, 1892; repr. Munich, 1981), pp. 306–28 (p. 308): 'superveniente Odovacre cum gente Sciorum.'

⁹⁸ *Consularia Italica, Auctarii Hauniensi ordo prior*, s.a. 476, 2, in *Chronica minora saec. IV. V. VI. VII.*, vol. 1, ed. by Mommsen, pp. 307–21 (p. 309): 'Intra Italiam Eruli, qui Romano iuri suberant, regem creant nomine Odoacrem X k(alendas) Sept(embris), hominem et aetate et sapientia gravem et bellicis rebus instructum.' To say that the Herules were subject to Roman right implies that their subsequent actions were illegal. See Herwig Wolfram, 'Gotisches Königtum und römisches Kaisertum von Theodosius dem Großen bis Justinian I.', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, 13 (1979), 1–28 (p. 5 with n. 17); Herwig Wolfram, *Intitulatio I: Lateinische Königs- und Fürstentitel bis zum Ende des 8. Jahrhunderts* (Vienna, 1967), p. 54 and n. 103. *Consularia Italica, Auctarii Hauniensi ordo prior*, s.a. 487, p. 313: 'Fevva rex Rugorum adversum regem Erulorum Odoachrem bellum movet.'

⁹⁹ Felix Dahn, *Die Könige der Germanen: Das Wesen des ältesten Königthums der germanischen Stämme und seine Geschichte bis zur Auflösung des karolingischen Reiches*, vol. II: *Die kleineren gothischen Völker* (Munich, 1861), p. 2 and n. 8: 'Er [Odoakar] wird fälschlicherweise sogar Herulerkönig genannt.'

meant a lot to the Herules fighting with and for him. By raising him to that position, they entrusted him with the task of looking after the entire Herul *exercitus*. Herules in the army were in competition with other *gentes*, who also claimed Odoacar for themselves in order to obtain a hegemonic position within that army. The contemporary and parallel stories of the Vandals and Alans show clearly that different groups could split up at different moments, each taking on a new identity or reinventing itself on the basis of an already existing (but alternative) identity.¹⁰⁰ It is therefore not surprising that Odoacar bore many titles, as attested in our sources. He was *rex Gothorum*, *Rugorum*, but also simply *rex*, even *rex gentium* and *rex Italiae*. Similarly, Attila could become a Gepid in the eyes of John Malalas. Roman and Greek writers seem to have had a hard time grasping the bewildering variety of identity and names for all those whom they otherwise labelled simply ‘Huns’ or ‘Scythians’. That they made mistakes and errors of interpretation in the process is only understandable.¹⁰¹ An error is just one way of understanding those sources. We do not know much about Odoacar’s self promotion during the political struggles in Italy. Perhaps he understood quite well how to manipulate different identities and ethnic affiliations to keep warriors on his side. If this was so, Roman and Greek authors just referred to a complex political situation and tried to do their best at transmitting what they knew. For sure Odoacar acted in different ways. The political symbols used to interact with Constantinople or the Roman Senate must have been very different from those used with the armed men in Italy. *Flavius* Odoacar addressed Roman aristocrats, a *rex Rugorum* the Rugian warriors. A Roman author made Odoacar the *rex gentium* to indicate the basis of his power.

If the Herules who proclaimed Odoacar their king had future dreams of a better life in Italy, their hopes were soon thwarted. Part of the problem seems to have been that they remained with Odoacar, and even when he started to slip, they did not hasten to Theoderic’s side. Instead, they were together with Odoacar in Ravenna during its siege by Theoderic’s troops. It is together with the Herules that Odoacar made his last-ditch attempt to break out of the besieged city in the night of 9 July 491. Livila, Odoacar’s general and successor of Tufa, the former *magister militum* serving Odoacar who had deserted to Theoderic in 489, died in the

¹⁰⁰ Roland Steinacher, ‘Gruppen und Identitäten. Gedanken zur Bezeichnung “vandalisch”’, in *Das Reich der Vandalen und seine (Vor-)geschichten*, ed. by Guido Berndt and Roland Steinacher (Vienna, 2008), pp. 243–60.

¹⁰¹ John Malalas, *Chronographia*, ed. by Johannes Thurn (Berlin, 2000) 19.5–12, p. 45: ‘ἐκ τοῦ γένους τῶν Γηπέδων’. See also Pohl, ‘Die Gepiden’, p. 247 and n. 23.

ensuing battle, together with the best of Odoacar’s Herul troops.¹⁰² In Ennodius’s words, ‘quid Herulorum agmina fusa commemorem’.¹⁰³

The Struggle in Pannonia at the Gates of Italy and the End of the Herul Regnum

Like Odoacar before him, the victorious Theoderic tried to secure the passage into Italy. Given the numerous eager and strong barbarian groups in that region, what Cassiodorus has to say about the *Raetiae* as protecting the gate to Italy (‘Raetiae namque munimina sunt Italiae et claustra provinciae’) also applies to the region of the Middle Danube and to Pannonia.¹⁰⁴ In 504, Theoderic conquered the ‘former seeds of the Goths’ from the Gepids, ‘ad Sirmiensem Pannoniam, quondam sedem Gothorum’. It is from Pannonia that various leaders had entered Italy, the core of the Western Empire, from Alaric, Radagais, and Attila to Odoacar and Theoderic himself. Theoderic’s capture of Sirmium brought him in direct conflict with the Romans, which in turn brought about the destruction of the Herul realm. Most likely Constantinople had granted Sirmium to the Gepids, and Theoderic acted against the plans of the imperial government.¹⁰⁵

By 500, the Herules had established peaceful relations with the Goths, which may have encouraged Theoderic to treat them as potential allies. He made an unnamed Herul king his son-in-arms (*adoptio per arma*). Horses, shields, and *reliqua instrumenta bellorum* were sent to that king, who was now treated as the greatest barbarian ruler in the area.¹⁰⁶ Some have assumed that the unnamed king whom

¹⁰² Cassiodorus, *Chronica*, 1326, in *Chronica minora saec. IV. V. VI. VII.*, vol. II, ed. by Mommsen, pp. 109–62 (p. 159): ‘Hoc cons. Odovacar cum Erulis egressus Ravenna nocturnis horis ad pontem Candidiani a d(omi)n(o) nostro rege Theoderico memorabili certamine superatur’. Tufa: Anonymus Valesianus, *Consularia Italica, Anonymi Valesiani pars posterior*, 11.51, ed. by Mommsen, p. 316; see Wolfram, ‘Odoakar’, p. 576; s.v. ‘Tufa’, in *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, II, ed. by Jones, Martindale, and Morris, p. 1131.

¹⁰³ Ennodius, *Panegyricus dictus clementissimo regi Theoderico*, ed. by Christian Rohr, MGH Studien und Texte, 12 (Hannover, 1995), p. 234 and n. 50. See also Rappaport, ‘Heruli’, pp. 1159–60; Wolfram, *Die Goten*, p. 283 and n. 9.

¹⁰⁴ Cassiodorus, *Variae*, 7.4.

¹⁰⁵ Cassiodorus, *Variae*, 3.23; Pohl, ‘Die Gepiden’, pp. 293–94; Wolfram, *Die Goten*, pp. 319–22.

¹⁰⁶ Cassiodorus, *Variae*, 4, 2, ed. by Mommsen: ‘Damus tibi quidem equos enses clipeos et reliqua instrumenta bellorum: sed quae sunt omnimodis fortiora, largimur tibi nostra iudicia. summus enim inter gentes esse crederis, qui Theoderici sententia comprobaris.’ See Wolfram, *Die Goten*,

Theoderic made his son-in-arms was Rodulf, a Herul leader mentioned by Procopius at the time when the reign of Emperor Anastasius (491–518) began, and by Paul the Deacon.¹⁰⁷ Jordanes had also a *Roduulfrex* seeking Theoderic's protection in Italy.¹⁰⁸ Some even went further and speculated about the kind of information about northern barbarians that Rodulf may have been able to supply to Cassiodorus for his history of the Goths.¹⁰⁹ Given the assumed influence of Cassiodorus's work upon Jordanes's *Getica*, Andrew Merrills's remarks are worth citing in full at this point:

There are several problems with this interpretation, although none of them is substantial enough to warrant its complete rejection. Perhaps chief among these is the immediate acceptance by later commentators that Roduulf's origins were precisely those claimed by the *Getica*. There is no reason to interpret Procopius's brief account of the king's background as an assertion that his homeland was in the far north of Europe or in Scandza. Indeed, the political and ideological implications of Theoderic's support for a northern exile would have been considerable in the early years of the sixth century, when his people began to assert their own affiliation with the northern parts of Europe. Roduulf's

p. 318; Procopius, *Wars*, 1.11.10–30, describes at length how the Byzantines used an *adoptio* to make peace with the Persians. According to him, 'the barbarians adopt sons not by a document, but by arms and armor'. Wolfram assumed that the Byzantine foreign policy used the *adoptio per arma* as one means to forge alliances. This would in turn mean that the *adoptio* of a Herul king by Theoderic followed Roman not barbarian customs. See Herwig Wolfram, s.v. 'Waffensohn', in *Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde*, XXXIII, 2nd edn, ed. by Heinrich Beck, Dieter Geuenich, and Heiko Steuer (Berlin, 2006), pp. 49–51. According to Paul the Deacon, *History of the Lombards*, 1.23, in *Scriptores rerum Langobardicarum et Italicarum, saec. VI–IX*, ed. by Georg Waitz, MGH (Berlin, 1878; repr. 1988); English translation from Paul the Deacon, *History of the Lombards*, ed. by Edward Peters, trans. by William Dudley Foulke (Philadelphia, 1907; repr. 1975), 'it is not the custom among us that the son of the king should eat with his father unless he first receives his arms from the king of a foreign nation' ('nisi prius a rege gentis exterae arma suscipiat').

¹⁰⁷ Procopius, *Wars*, 6.14–15; Paul the Deacon, *History of the Lombards*, 1.20. See Claus Krag, s.v. 'Rodulf', in *Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde*, xxv, 2nd edn, ed. by Beck, Geuenich, and Steuer, pp. 58–59; and s.v. 'Rodulfus', in *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, II, ed. by Jones, Martindale, and Morris, p. 946.

¹⁰⁸ Jordanes, *Getica*, 24. Jordanes mentions Rodulf immediately after his account of *Dani* driving the Herules out of their lands: 'Sunt quamquam et horum positura Grannii, Augandzi, Eunixi, Taetel, Rugi, Arochi, Ranii, quibus non ante multos annos Roduulf rex fuit, qui contempto proprio regno ad Theodorici Gothorum regis gremio convolavit et, ut desiderabat, invenit. Hae itaque gentes, Germanis corpore et animo grandiores, pugnabant beluina saevitia.'

¹⁰⁹ Peter Heather, 'The Historical Culture of Ostrogothic Italy', in *Teodorico il Grande e i Goti d'Italia, Atti del XIII Congresso internazionale di studi sull'Alto Medioevo 1992* (Spoleto, 1993), pp. 317–53 (p. 347); Arne Soby Christensen, *Cassiodorus Jordanes and the History of the Goths: Studies in a Migration Myth* (Copenhagen, 2002), p. 256.

somewhat ambiguous origins may thus have been imposed, or accentuated retrospectively by Cassiodorus, in an effort to develop the political undertones of his own work. The *Getica* may, of course, be correct in its association of Roduulf with the far north, but the possibility that it merely reflects an ideological distortion should not be overlooked.¹¹⁰

The *adoptio per arma* of a Herul king in the Middle Danube region nicely dovetails with Theoderic's known political goals. There is therefore no need for an additional explanation concerning Rodulf's relation to the Ostrogothic court. Theoderic's second letter addressed to that same king may thus be understood better in such a light.

There is a third piece in Cassiodorus's *Variae* that historians have used to reconstruct the early sixth-century history of the Herules. The officials of the city of Pavia were enjoined to provide transport by boat between their city and Ravenna and to offer five days' provisions (*annonae*) to envoys from the Herules (*supplices Erulos*) travelling to Theoderic's court. Some have assumed that the *supplices* in question were Herul refugees taken in by Theoderic after the Lombard destruction of the Herul kingdom.¹¹¹ But those men were mere envoys, either members of a military unit in Italy or subjects of the Herul king north of the Danube. Cassiodorus uses *supplices* several times in his *Variae* and often in a rather general sense. The only basis for an interpretation favouring the idea of Herul refugees is the date of the letter, as proposed by Theodor Mommsen and Stefan Krautschick: 507 to 512. However, Andrew Gillett redated the letter to before September 527.¹¹² The former date suggests that the envoys were subjects of a Herul king ruling somewhere north of the Danube, the latter that they were members of a military unit in Italy. As a matter of fact, Paul the Deacon mentions Herul warriors in Italy, under Ostrogothic rule.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Andrew H. Merrills, *History and Geography in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, 2005), p. 129.

¹¹¹ Cassiodorus, *Variae*, 4.45. See Andrew Gillett, *Envoys and Political Communication in the Late Antique West, 411–533* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 183 and 189. For the Herul *supplices* as refugees, see Wolfram, *Die Goten*, p. 318; Schmidt, *Ostgermanen*, p. 553; Rappaport, 'Heruli', p. 1160.

¹¹² Stefan Krautschick, *Cassiodor und die Politik seiner Zeit* (Bonn, 1983), pp. 50–71, gives a detailed analysis of the chronology of the *Variae*. According to him, the third and fourth books must be dated between 507 and 511. Krautschick has nothing specific to say about the chronology of 4.45. For a general discussion of the chronology of the letters, see Gillett, *Envoys*, p. 241 and n. 85; Schwarcz, 'Die Heruler an der Donau', pp. 510–11 and n. 29.

¹¹³ Paul the Deacon, *History of the Lombards*, 2.3, ed. by Waitz: 'Habuit nihilominus Narsis certamen adversus Sinduald Brentorum regem, qui adhuc de Herulorum stirpe remanserat, quos secum in Italiam veniens olim Odoacar adduxerat.'

It seems very likely that Roman diplomatic efforts were directed against the Herules by means of empowering the Lombards, in order to defeat Theoderic's attempts to create a system of alliances with other *gentes* of Central Europe.¹¹⁴ Procopius and Paul the Deacon give different accounts of the Herul-Lombard conflict. However, neither of them mentions any Roman interference. According to Procopius, the reason for the war between Herules and Lombards was that 'the people being exceedingly vexed began to abuse their leader Rodolphus without restraint, and going to him constantly they called him cowardly and effeminate, and railed at him in a most unruly manner'. The king thus felt compelled to wage war on the Lombards, without any real reason.¹¹⁵ This story is remarkably similar to what Jordanes has to say about the reasons the Ostrogoths left Pannonia. In both cases, one is left with the impression that war was a fundamental element of life in those societies. When individual warriors sought honour and booty, kings unable to meet their demands were in danger of losing face and power.¹¹⁶ 'The cohesion of a group depended very largely on a leader's success.'¹¹⁷ The Roman diplomacy must have been fully aware of such social and political mechanisms.

Paul the Deacon has a different reason for the Herul-Lombard conflict. Two hundred years after Procopius he 'gives the Herules a legitimate *casus belli*, but turns poor Rudolf into a fool'.¹¹⁸ The Lombards stayed for three years in the formerly Rugian lands, and a war started up between the Lombard king Tato and Rodulf.¹¹⁹ King Rodulf's brother had been sent as envoy to Tato, perhaps for the collection of tribute. During his stay at the Lombard court, a princess named Rumetruda deeply offended the Herul envoy, and this man defended his and his king's honour. Instead of smoothing the tension, however, Rumetruda's retainers murdered the Herul, thus causing a military conflict between Lombards and Herules. During the following battle Paul the Deacon depicts King Rodulf playing at draughts not at all wavering in his hope of victory. Two legends are then introduced about this king. In one of them, one of the King's followers is ordered to climb a tree, in order to tell the King more quickly about the victory of his troops. Rodulf threatened to cut off the man's head if he announced that the Herules were

¹¹⁴ Wolfram, *Die Goten*, p. 322; Schwarcz, 'Die Heruler an der Donau', p. 511.

¹¹⁵ Procopius, *Wars*, 6.14.11–13; see Goffart, *Barbarian Tides*, pp. 207–08.

¹¹⁶ Pohl, 'Die Gepiden', pp. 285–86.

¹¹⁷ Arnold H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire, 284–602: A Social, Economic and Administrative Survey*, I (Oxford, 1964; repr. 1986), p. 195.

¹¹⁸ Goffart, *Barbarian Tides*, p. 208.

¹¹⁹ Paul the Deacon, *History of the Lombards*, 1.19.

not fighting bravely. Seeing that the Herules were losing the battle, the man asked heaven for help. The King now asked whether the Herules were fleeing, and the man was saved as the King himself had spoken the awful truth. In the second story, the fighting Herules saw the green-growing flax in the fields and thought it was water fit for swimming. Therefore they stretched out their arms as if to swim and were beaten by the enemy. Following the victory, Tato captured Rodulf's banner and helmet and the Herules lost their identity as a *gens*: Paul the Deacon subsumes the situation with the explanatory remark that the Herules had no king anymore ('Herules regem non habuerunt').¹²⁰ Kingship was a central part of ethnic tradition and self-awareness. After a defeat, an *exercitus* often disintegrated into small groups of warriors who kept on plundering or moved into the empire to find better employment. This seems to be exactly what happened to the defeated Herules. The failure of their king destroyed any faith that his warriors may have had in him. There was no purpose in re-establishing the *regnum*. Previous ethnic identities rapidly shifted, with some Herules becoming Lombards or looking for other solutions.

Herul Soldiers in Justinian's Wars and the Second (and Final) Disappearance of the Herules

Procopius did not like the Herules. But in his *Wars* they are mentioned quite often as participating in Justinian's campaigns against the Persians, the Vandals, and the Goths and were a key component of Justinian's military system. Procopius's Herul excursus is therefore meant to clarify who these people were and how they came into an alliance with the Romans. At the same time the excursus is full of stereotypes and negative attitudes towards this primitive people and its archaic conventions.¹²¹

¹²⁰ Paul the Deacon, *History of the Lombards*, 1.20; *Origo gentis Langobardorum*, 4, in *Scriptores rerum Langobardicarum et Italicarum, saec. VI–IX*, ed. by Waitz, pp. 1–6. See Ulrich Müller, s.v. 'Langobardische Sagen', in *Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde*, XVIII, 2nd edn, ed. by Heinrich Beck, Dieter Geuenich, and Heiko Steuer (Berlin, 2001), pp. 93–102 (p. 95).

¹²¹ Procopius, *Wars*, 6.14.1–7; trans. by Dewing, III, 403–05: 'Now as to who in the world the Eruli are, and how they entered into the alliance with the Romans, I shall forthwith explain. They used to dwell beyond the Ister River from of old, worshipping a great host of gods, whom it seemed to them holy to appease even by human sacrifices. And they observed many customs which were not in accordance with those of other men. For they were not permitted to live either when they grew old or when they fell sick, but as soon one of them was overtaken by old age or by sickness, it became necessary for him to ask his relatives to remove him from the world as quickly as possible. And these relatives would pile up a quantity of wood to a great height and lay the man at the top of the wood,

Within the Herul excursus Procopius gives some fragments of a history concerning Herules at the borders of the empire. He has the Herules beaten by the Lombards fleeing to formerly Rugian territory, where they were, however, hardly pressed by famine. 'Contrary to what is sometimes said (e.g. Schmidt, *Ostgermanen*, p. 503), the land of the Rugians to which Procopius has them momentarily withdraw is not the Rugian territory known from the *Vita S. Severini*, but the lands downstream (in Moesia or Dacia?) where the survivors from the Rugian defeat fled in 488.¹²² As a consequence, they were allowed into Gepid territory. But since the Gepids tried to subdue them, many Herules crossed the Danube, entered the Roman Empire, and were eventually settled by Emperor Anastasius in Illyricum, probably near Singidunum (Belgrade) around Bassiana, which was acquired in 510 from the

and then they would send one of the Eruli, but not a relative to the man, to his side with a dagger; for it was unlawful for a kinsman to be his slayer. And when the slayer of their relative had returned, they would straightaway burn the whole pile of wood, beginning in the edges. And after the fire had ceased, they would immediately collect the bones and bury them in the earth. And when a man of the Eruli died, it was necessary for his wife, if she laid claim to virtue and wished to leave a fair name behind her, to die not long afterward beside the tomb of her husband by hanging herself in a rope. And if she did not do this, the result was that she was in ill repute thereafter and an offence to the relatives to her husband. Such were the customs observed by the Eruli in ancient times.'

¹²² Procopius, *Wars*, 6.14.24–25; Goffart, *Barbarian Tides*, p. 336, n. 104. For the following events, Procopius, *Wars*, 6.14.23–32 is our main source. The translation is Dewing's, III, 409–11: 'For this reason [the defeat at the hands of the Lombards] the Eruli were no longer able to tarry in their ancestral homes, but departing from there as quickly as possible they kept moving forward, traversing the whole country which is beyond the Ister River, together with their wives and children. But when they reached a land where the Rogi dwelt of old, a people who had joined the Gothic host and gone to Italy, they settled in that place. But since they were pressed by famine, because they were in a barren land, they removed from there not long afterwards, and came to a place close to the country of the Gepaedes. And at first the Gepaedes permitted them to dwell there and be neighbours to them, since they came as suppliants. But afterwards for no good reason the Gepaedes began to practise unholy deed upon them. For they violated their women and seized their cattle and other property, and abstained from no wickedness whatever, and finally began an unjust attack upon them. And the Eruli unable to bear all this any longer, crossed the Ister River and decided to live as neighbours to the Romans in that region; this was during the reign of the Emperor Anastasius, who received them with great friendliness and allowed them to settle where they were. But a short time afterwards these barbarians gave him offence by their lawless treatment of the Romans there, and for this reason he sent an army against them. And the Romans after defeating them in battle, slew most of their number, and had ample opportunity to destroy them all. But the remainder of them threw themselves upon the mercy of the generals and begged them to spare their lives and to have them as allies and servants of the emperor thereafter. And when Anastasius learned this, he was pleased, and consequently a number of the Eruli were left; however they neither became allies of the Romans, nor did they do them any good.'

Goths, now ruling Italy from Ravenna.¹²³ The Herul armed warriors shortly afterwards rose in rebellion, and a Roman army was dispatched against them. They were obviously treated as an insurgent military unit and, as a consequence, decimated. The survivors had to go through a *deditio* and were accepted as federates again. Procopius further 'emphasizes the shrinkage of their numbers from successive humblings by Lombards, Gepids, and Romans'.¹²⁴

After Anastasius's strike against the insurgent Herules, Justinian abandoned this policy and offered them a better deal in 527. According to Procopius, all Herules converted to Christianity,¹²⁵ but Malalas reports that only a Herul king called Grepes converted in 528 together with some nobles and twelve of his relatives. Justinian himself is said to have been the sponsor at Grepes's baptismal font

¹²³ Procopius, *Wars*, 6.14.23–28. See also Marcellinus Comes, *Chronicon*, AD a. 512.11, in *Chronica minora saec. IV. V. VI. VII.*, vol. II, ed. by Mommsen: 'Gens Herulorum in terras atque civitates Romanorum iussu Anastasii Caesaris introducta.' See Goffart, *Barbarian Tides*, p. 208 and n. 105; Wolfram, *Die Goten*, p. 322 and n. 103; Ernest Stein, *Histoire du Bas-Empire: de la disparition de l'Empire d'Occident à la mort de Justinien 476–565*, II (Paris, 1949; repr. 1968), pp. 156 and 305. Rappaport, 'Heruli', p. 1161, has the Herules settled in Illyricum without specifying the area: 'Wo die H[eruler] in Illyricum als Foederati zunächst angesiedelt wurden, läßt sich nicht genau sagen. Als sie sich in ihren neuen Sitzen auf römischem Gebiet schwere Übergriffe erlaubten, mußte Anastasius mit Waffengewalt gegen sie vorgehen und brachte ihnen eine schwere Niederlage bei.'

¹²⁴ Goffart, *Barbarian Tides*, p. 208 and n. 106; Procopius, *Wars*, 6.14.20–22, 27–28, 30–32.

¹²⁵ Procopius, *Wars*, 6.14.33–42; trans. by Dewing, III, 411–13: 'But when Justinian took over the empire, he bestowed upon them good lands and other possessions, and thus completely succeeded in winning their friendship and persuaded them all to become Christians. As a result of this they adopted a gentler manner of life and decided to submit themselves wholly to the laws of the Christians, and in keeping with the terms of their alliance they are generally arrayed with the Romans against their enemies. They are still, however, faithless toward them, and since they are given to avarice, they are eager to do violence to their neighbours, feeling no shame at such conduct. And they mate in an unholy manner, especially men with asses, and they are the basest of all men and utterly abandoned rascals. Afterwards, although some few of them remained at peace with the Romans, as will be told by me in the following narrative, all the rest revolted for the following reason. The Eruli, displaying their beastly and fanatical character against their own "rex" one Ochus by name, suddenly killed the man for no good reason at all, laying against him no other charge that they wished to be without a king thereafter. And yet even before this, while their king did have the title, he had practically no advantage over any citizen whomsoever. But all claimed the right to sit with him and eat with him, and whoever wished insulted him without restraint; for no men are less bound by convention or more unstable than the Eruli. Now when the evil deed had been accomplished, they were immediately repentant. For they said that they were not able to live without a ruler and without a general; so after much deliberation it seemed to them best in every way to summon one of their royal family from the island of Thule. And the reason for this I shall now explain.'

in Constantinople.¹²⁶ Malalas's account seems to be closer to reality and can serve as a good reminder that when our sources mention a 'people' in Late Antiquity, they often mean the ruling elite.¹²⁷

For one generation, at least, the Herules remained in the Balkans as federates, and as such provided recruits for the Roman army. Herul warriors fought as separate units in the Roman armies that Emperor Justinian sent against the Persians, the Vandals, and the Goths.

The pool of Herul manpower lay open to fill Justinian's armies. Procopius reports the presence of Herules under their own leaders in Persia, Africa, Italy, Thrace, and Lazica. A detachment even participated in the butchery of civilians at Constantinople that ended the Nika riots. Herule infantry receives a special description. A detachment of Herules under Pharas, whom Procopius personally praises, brought about the surrender of the Vandal king Gelimer (534). As Roman troops, Herules suffered casualties in Italy at the hands of the Gothic 'rebellion' of 541, and, at the great final battle of Narses against Totila, dismounted Herules stood alongside dismounted Lombards in the Roman centre (552). No other barbarian people compares with the Herules in contributing troops to Justinian's wars.¹²⁸

'According to Jordanes, they were the finest light infantry in the world.'¹²⁹ The sixth-century authors Jordanes and Procopius even mention some peculiar equipment in use by those highly specialized Herul soldiers. Jordanes describes the respective weapons and tactics of various troops participating in the battle at the Nedao River. The Alans drew up a line of battle made up of heavily armed

¹²⁶ Malalas, *Chronographia*, 18.6; Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, 6020, ed. by Johannes Classen (Bonn, 1841), pp. 174–75. See Goffart, *Barbarian Tides*, p. 208 with n. 107.

¹²⁷ I attempted to demonstrate the point in the case of the Vandals: Steinacher, 'Gruppen und Identitäten', pp. 244–49 and 256–60.

¹²⁸ Goffart, *Barbarian Tides*, p. 208. Some examples: Procopius, *Wars*, 1.13.19 (battle of Daras); 2.24.18; 2.25.20–22 (battle of Anglon); 3.11.11; 4.6.1–26 (a correspondance between the Herul officer Pharas and the besieged Vandal king Gelimer; see for this episode Steinacher, 'Gruppen und Identitäten', pp. 255–56); 4.14.12 (problems with Herul troops because of their Arian faith); 6.13.18 (two thousand Herules commanded by Visandus, Aluith, and Phanitheus join Narses); 8.33.19 (Herules take part in the assault of Rome). Goffart, *Barbarian Tides*, p. 337 and n. 108, and Rappaport, 'Heruli', pp. 1164–65 list all sources for Herul soldiers in Justinian's armies. See also Alexander Sarantis's contribution to this volume. Also in Agathias's histories Herules are mentioned quite often: Agathias, *The Histories*, ed. and trans. by Joseph D. Frendo (Berlin, 1975). The Herules are to be found at 1.11.3; 1.14.4–6; 1.18.8; 1.20.8; 2.7.2–7; 2.8.5–6; 2.9.7–13; 3.6.5; 3.20.10.

¹²⁹ Goffart, *Barbarian Tides*, p. 205 and n. 90. Jordanes, *Getica*, 117–18 as quoted above in note 49.

warriors, while the Herules lined up their lightly armed men.¹³⁰ Procopius describes Herul soldiers fighting against the Persians as having neither helmet nor corselet, nor indeed any other protective armor, except a shield and a thick jacket, 'which they gird about them before they enter into a struggle'.¹³¹

Apart from these structures and events modern scholarship has to deal with a part of Procopius's excursus which is harder to interpret. Some of the Herules beaten by the Lombards are said to have refused to enter the Roman Empire, and instead to have left their lands for 'the very extremity of the world' (τὰς ἐσχάτιὰς τῆς οἰκουμένης). This problem will be discussed again in the final section of this chapter. Procopius further offers an amazing account of Herul attempts to find a new royal family in Thule, at the end of the world. The story may be interpreted as a post-factum rationalization of the sudden collapse of the Herul polity and an ironic comment regarding barbarian political structures.¹³² The impression one

¹³⁰ Jordanes, *Getica*, 261: 'Alanum gravi, Herulum levi armatura aciem strui.'

¹³¹ Procopius, *Wars*, 6.14.36. Edward A. Thompson, 'Early Germanic Warfare', *Past and Present*, 14 (1958), 2–29 (p. 4 with n. 17), notes the lack of defensive armour for other Germanic tribes.

¹³² Procopius, *Wars*, 6.15.1–4; trans. by Dewing, III, 415: 'When the Eruli, being defeated by the Lombards in the above-mentioned battle, migrated from their ancestral homes, some of them, as has been told by me above, made their home in the country of Illyricum, but the rest were averse to crossing the Ister River, but settled at the very extremity of the world [τὰς ἐσχάτιὰς τῆς οἰκουμένης]; at any rate, these men, led by many of the royal blood, traversed all the nations of the Sclaveni one after the other, and after next crossing a large tract of barren country, they came to the Varni, as they are called. After these they passed the nations of the Dani, without suffering violence at the hands of the barbarians there. Coming thence to the ocean, they took to the sea, and putting in at Thule, remained there on the island.' The story of the emigrating Herules is interrupted here (Procopius, *Wars*, 6.15.5–26) by a long ethnographic description of Thule. Procopius mentions the polar night, offers a lot of information on the *Scritiphini* (maybe the *Saami*) as well as other peoples and religions of Thule. Finally he remarks that the emigrated Herules had settled near the *Gautoi*. Rappaport, 'Heruli', p. 1161, and Schmidt, *Die Ostgermanen*, p. 553, as most other traditional interpretations, took this as a historical account as it seemed clear that a 'Germanic tribe' must have originated in Scandinavia. For a critical discussion, see the final section of this chapter and Goffart, *Barbarian Tides*, pp. 209–10 and n. 117. For an illustration of how widespread the traditional interpretation still is, see Barbara Niezabitowska, 'Die Heruler', in *Die Vandalen: Die Könige, die Eliten, die Krieger, die Handwerker*, ed. by Andrzej Kokowski and Christian Leiber (Nordstemmen, 2003), pp. 387–94 (p. 390). Niezabitowska has absolutely no doubts about Procopius's account of the wandering Heruls. She refers to the story as if it were a historical account: 'Nach diesem Ereignis kehrte ein Teil der Heruler in die alte Heimat zurück, ein anderer Teil schloß sich den Langobarden an. [...] Diese kurze Eintragung bei Procopius rief ein "Gewitter" in der archäologischen Welt hervor.' She adds in relation to a Polish excavation at Ulów near

gets from this account is that Procopius did not take any barbarian political structures too seriously. 'And as late as the sixth century there were peoples, like the Herules, over whom a king exercised a dominion that was as venerable as it was chaotic and ridiculous in the eyes of the Romans.'¹³³ If a people is in need of kings from 'the very extremity of the world' it cannot be very evolved or cultivated compared to the Romans. Walter Goffart accurately summarized the complex story and I will cite him again at this point.

What became of the Herules is not easily deciphered from Procopius's account. Twenty years after baptism, King Grepes and his twelve relatives had vanished, possibly as victims of the great plague of 541–42. The Herules on imperial territory "display[ed] their beastly and fanatical character" by overthrowing their king Ochus and promptly ran out of royalty. They then remembered that there was much royal blood among their brethren who had trekked north early in the century and so sent an embassy to them. While the envoys were on their long mission, the fickle Herules asked Justinian for a king and were

Tomaszów Lubelski, 'Darf man diese Funde mit den Herulern in Verbindung setzen? — Hoffentlich ja.' Niezabitowska argues with nothing but the information from Procopius to classify that archaeological material. The following passage describing the Herul quest for a king in Illyricum is also connected with Procopius's Thule-exkursus. Procopius, *Wars*, 6.15.27–36; trans. by Dewing, III, 421–25: 'On the present occasion, therefore, the Eruli who dwelt among the Romans, after the murder of their king had been perpetrated by them, sent some of their notables to the island of Thule to search out and bring back whomsoever they were able to find there of royal blood. And when these men reached the island, they found many there of the royal blood, but they selected the one man who pleased them most and set out with him on the return journey. But this man fell sick and died when he had come to the country of the Dani. These men therefore went a second time to the island and secured another man, Datus by name. And he was followed by his brother Aordus and two hundred youths of the Eruli in Thule. But since much time passed while they were absent on this journey, it occurred to the Eruli in the neighbourhood of Singidunum [Beograd] that they were not consulting their own interests in importing a leader from Thule against the wishes of the Emperor Justinian. They therefore sent envoys to Byzantium, begging the emperor to send them a ruler of his own choice. And he straightaway sent them one of the Eruli who had on time been sojourning in Byzantium, Suartuas by name. At first the Eruli welcomed him and did obeisance to him and rendered the customary obedience to his commands; but not many days later a messenger arrived with the tidings that the men from the island of Thule were near at hand. And Suartuas commanded them to go out to meet those men, his intention being to destroy them, and the Eruli, approving his purpose, immediately went with him. But when the two forces were one day's journey distant from each other, the king's men all abandoned him at night and went over of their own accord to the newcomers, while he himself took the flight and set out unattended for Byzantium. Thereupon the emperor earnestly undertook with all his power to restore him to his office, and the Eruli, fearing the power of the Romans, decided to submit themselves to the Gepides. This, then, was the cause of the revolt of the Eruli.'

¹³³ Wolfram, *The Roman Empire*, p. 69.

given Suartuas, a reliable man, long in imperial service. The envoys returning from Thule drew near with their candidate ruler, Datus, accompanied by his brother, Aordus, and two hundred youths. The new Herule king ordered his people to go to meet the challenger and eliminate him, but they promptly defected, and Suartuas tied back to Constantinople. "Thereupon the emperor earnestly undertook with all his power to restore [Suartuas] to his office, and the Eruli, fearing the power of the Romans, decided to submit themselves to the Gepaedes." So Procopius closes his narrative, leaving us with open mouths: does the story of the Herules really end so abruptly? There is a follow-up in the next book. Apparently the Herules split apart; only two-thirds went to join the Gepids, and the rest stayed loyal to Constantinople. While King Datus's brother Aordus was serving with the Gepids against the Lombards (547), he came upon a Roman detachment and was killed in the ensuing skirmish. Later than this, Narses must have performed some magic of Herule relations and somehow extracted a mounted force of three thousand for the climactic Italian campaign (551–52). The next we hear is that Justinian was negotiating with the Avars, newly arrived on the Roman Danubian frontier (ca. 561): he offered them the lands that the Herules had vacated. The Herules, it seems, had indeed gone away.¹³⁴

The Herul captain Sinduald fought with Narses in Justinian's Italian war and was evidently one of the *magistri militum* serving under Narses. In 566, after the emperor Justinian had died, an insurgency of Herul soldiers in Northern Italy (the Trentino) is reported. Sinduald was proclaimed king by them, only to be defeated and executed shortly afterwards by Narses.¹³⁵ However, after the mid-sixth century,

¹³⁴ Goffart, *Barbarian Tides*, p. 209; see also s.v. 'Aordus', 'Datus', 'Ochus', 'Suartuas', in *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, III, ed. by John Martindale (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 94, 388, 1951, 1205; Walter Pohl, *Die Awaren: Ein Steppenvolk in Mitteleuropa 567–822 n. Chr.*, 2nd edn (Vienna, 2002), pp. 18–21.

¹³⁵ Agathias, *The Histories*, 2.7–9; Marius of Avenches, *Chronica*, a. 566, in *Chronica minora saec. IV. V. VI. VII.*, vol. II, ed. by Mommsen, p. 238: 'Eo anno Sindewala Erolus tyrannidem adsumpsit et a Narseo patricio interfectus est'; Paul the Deacon, *History of the Lombards*, 2.3, calls Sinduald a 'Brentorum rex'. See s.v. 'Sinduald', in *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, III, ed. by Martindale, pp. 1154–55; Richard Heuberger, *Rätien im Altertum und Frühmittelalter* (Innsbruck, 1932; repr. 1971, 1981), pp. 155–59; Evagrius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 4.24, ed. by Adelheid Hübner (Turnhout, 2007), p. 158. Evagrius gives Emperor Justin II the epithet of *Eroulikos* (*Ecclesiastical History*, 5.4). As most university professors in pre-war Austria embraced the cause of German nationalism, there have been several attempts to trace the national, 'Germanic' roots to the Alpine parts of Austria-Hungary, in sharp opposition to Italian scholars tracing their national roots to the Romans. Before World War I, the Tyrol had a mixed population speaking Italian, Ladinian, and German. Sinduald's title recorded by Paul the Deacon, 'Brentorum rex', was appropriately associated to the name of the river Brenta near Trento (although the supposed *Brenti* are nowhere to be found in the sources). As a consequence, the population of some Tyrolean valleys was given a Herul origin. See Josef Egger, 'Die Barbareneinfälle in die Provinz Rätien und deren Besetzung durch Barbaren', *Archiv für österreichische Geschichte*, 90 (1901), 214–15; Richard Heuberger, *Das*

there is no mention of the Herules in any source. They apparently lost their identity as a separate *gens*, much like the Vandals after 533.

Myths and Final Considerations

Few are the issues of late antique history that stirred and still stir more interest among scholars, as well as within the general public, than that of the origin of the barbarians. To write the history of the barbarians without approaching the question of their origin and migration back and forth is hardly acceptable.¹³⁶ The much-cited *Encyclopaedia Britannica* has the Herules as ‘a Germanic people originally from Scandinavia’,¹³⁷ thus reproducing Jordanes’s and Procopius’s migration myths, which have otherwise seeped through the boundaries of modern scholarship. Scandinavia (*Scandza*) as the womb of nations (‘officina gentium aut certe velut vagina nationum’)¹³⁸ is a very powerful image, whose appeal, as Walter Goffart recently noted, has not at all been eroded by decades of scholarly criticism.¹³⁹

Burggrafnamt im Altertum (Innsbruck, 1935), p. 42: ‘Nach der Vernichtung des italischen Ostgotenreiches legte nämlich der byzantinische Feldherr und Statthalter Narses anscheinend die 3000 von dem *magister militum* Sindual befehligten erulischen Reiter in das *territorium Tridentinum* und hier werden diese Leute auch nach der Niederwerfung des Aufstandes verblieben sein, den sie um 565 gegen den Vertreter des Kaisers unternommen hatten. Berichten die Quellen doch nur von einer Wiederunterwerfung, nicht aber von einer Vernichtung oder Verpflanzung der Auführer.’ Schmidt, *Die Ostgermanen*, p. 558 and n. 3 mentioned but at the same time doubted the influence of Sindual’s Herules on ‘the ethnographic situation in the Tyrolean valleys’: ‘Die hier vorgetragenen Argumente haben freilich, abgesehen etwa von den aus den Rechtsverhältnissen abgeleiteten, keine besondere Beweiskraft.’

¹³⁶ This is particularly true for the numerous websites dedicated to the problem that mushroomed in recent years. They all offer a bizarre mixture of scholarly opinion and non-academic penchant for sensationalism. All seem preoccupied with linking the Herules to the ancestry of some modern Scandinavian nation. See ‘Heruli the History 268–568 AD’, <<http://freepages.history.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~catshaman/24erils4/0horse2.htm>> [accessed 1 April 2007]; ‘The Heruls’, <<http://www.gedevasen.dk/heruleng.html#C7>> [accessed 1 April 2007]; ‘New Northvegr Center’, <<http://www.northvegr.org/secondary%20sources/germanic%20studies/guthones/001.html>> [accessed 1 April 2007].

¹³⁷ s.v. ‘Herules’, in *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/263960/Heruli>> [accessed 1 April 2007].

¹³⁸ Jordanes, *Getica*, 25.

¹³⁹ Walter Goffart, ‘Jordanes’s *Getica* and the Disputed Authenticity of Gothic Origins from Scandinavia’, *Speculum*, 80 (2005), 379–98 (p. 398); Goffart, *Barbarian Tides*, pp. 14, 16, and 46.

When Konrad Peutinger first edited and published Jordanes’s *Getica* in 1515, his volume also contained Paul the Deacon’s *History of the Lombards*. Together with Tacitus’s *Germania*, first published in a modern edition in Venice in 1470, those texts represent the starting point for the study of the ‘Germanic’ past as a source of inspiration for modern national identity and as a justification for territorial claims and war.¹⁴⁰ Felix Dahn (1834–1912) may have borrowed from Procopius the story of the Herul trek back ‘home’ to Thule and applied it to the Goths for his novel *A Struggle for Rome* in which a Viking jarl named Harald (*der Wiking*) arrives with a fleet of Viking drakkars (*Drachenboote*) to bring back to Scandinavia the remnants of the Gothic troops defeated by Justinian’s armies around Naples. Together with them, he also returned to the northern homeland the body of the great Theoderic and the royal treasure. Dahn even strove to create the impression of an authentic Germanic *Stabreim*: ‘Go on Freia’s wise bird, fly, my falcon. And she threw the falcon in the air. “Show us the way to the north, to Thule!” Let’s bring home the last of the Goths.’¹⁴¹ At a time and within a generation mesmerized by Richard Wagner’s music and obsessed with the reconstruction of a heroic Germanic past as a warranty for the present glory, Dahn’s literary endeavours resonated with the political aspirations of the young German nation. But Dahn’s novel is a constant reminder of the problems involved in the invention of a national identity out of sources several times removed, in terms of both time and space, from the real historical roots of the nineteenth-century German nation. This is, after all, still a challenge for contemporary scholarship.

Ever since the early sixteenth century, the idea of a Herul migration from the north into Europe and the Black Sea region was enthusiastically embraced by many scholars and never seriously doubted. At the root of this myth is Jordanes’s account of how the Dani, who traced their origin to the same stock as the Suetidi he mentioned before, had driven the Herules from their homes, even though the Herules

¹⁴⁰ Heinz Heubner, ‘Die Überlieferung der Germania des Tacitus’, in *Beiträge zum Verständnis der Germania des Tacitus*, 1, ed. by Dieter Timpe and Herbert Jankuhn (Göttingen, 1989), pp. 16–27; Ulrich Muhlack, *Geschichtswissenschaft im Humanismus und in der Aufklärung: Die Vorgeschichte des Historismus* (Munich, 1991), pp. 386–87. For the first printed version of Jordanes and Paul the Deacon, see *Jornandes, episcopus Ravennas, ‘De rebus Gothorum’*. Paulus Diaconus ‘*de gestis Langobardorum*’, ed. by Peutinger (Augsburg, 1515).

¹⁴¹ Felix Dahn, *Ein Kampf um Rom* (Leipzig, 1888), p. 488: ‘Auf, Freias kluger Vogel, flieg, mein Falke. Und hoch warf sie den Falken in die Luft, “weise den Weg nach Norden, gen Thuleland!” Heim bringen wir die letzten Goten.’ The end of Dahn’s novel is also discussed by Goffart, *Narrators*, p. 96 and n. 365.

had laid claim to pre-eminence among all the nations of *Scandza* for their tallness.¹⁴²

A tradition described at length by Walter Goffart associated the Gothic origin with Britain. This points out the likelihood that Procopius's association of the Herules with Thule was something like the manifestation of a third myth of 'Gothic' origins. According to Goffart, Procopius used the account of the Herules wandering back to Thule, at the end of the world, in order to make a point about how the Goths should be treated after their expected defeat in Italy. The most likely source for this idea would have been Procopius's own interpretation of circulating Gothic (oral) traditions.¹⁴³ Recently Goffart added a remark concerning the story of a Herul migration to Thule: 'Intriguing though these and related questions are, they are more relevant to Procopius than to the Herules. Our information on the latter has enough substance to provide at least the whisper of a history.'¹⁴⁴ This is so far the most likely interpretation of Procopius's account of a Herul migration to Thule. According to Andrew Merrills, the idea of Goths originating in a large island of the Far North is an outgrowth of ancient geographical literature. The sole purpose of this idea was to find a place for the barbarians within the world as known to educated Romans. In other words, instead of a genuinely Gothic tradition, this idea is a by-product of Graeco-Roman ethnography.

Similarly, Merrills argues, 'it seems unlikely that the historic conflict between Dani and Herules would have been included in an oral mercantile source'.¹⁴⁵ One needs to take into consideration the tradition of the ethnographic literature written in both Greek and Latin when approaching Jordanes's account. Procopius and Jordanes certainly assumed a Scandinavian origin of the Herules, but this is nothing more or less than the story about Goths originating in the Far North: an explanatory device introduced by Roman ethnographers, not a genuinely 'native' tale of origins. (Further parallels, postulated quite often for example in religious — so called cultic — structures, between the history of Paul the Deacon and northern

¹⁴² Jordanes, *Getica*, 23: 'Suetidi cogniti in hac gente reliquis corpore eminentiores, quamvis et Dani, ex ipsorum stirpe progressi, Herulos propriis sedibus expulerunt, qui inter omnes Scandiae nationes nomen sibi ob nimia proceritate affectant praecipuum.' See Georg Kappelmacher, s.v. 'Jordanes', in *Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, ed. by Wilhelm Kroll and others, IX.2 (Stuttgart, 1916; repr. 1992), pp. 1908–29 (p. 1920).

¹⁴³ Procopius, *Wars*, 6.15.1–4. See Goffart, *Narrators*, pp. 88–96; Merrills, *History and Geography*, p. 126. *Contra*: Heather, *Goths*, p. 66 and n. 82.

¹⁴⁴ Goffart, *Barbarian Tides*, p. 210.

¹⁴⁵ Merrills, *History and Geography*, p. 152 and nn. 227–28.

sagas and Middle High German epic poems may thus be explained in terms of the diffusion of manuscripts containing the *History of the Lombards* and, by default, the dissemination of Paul the Deacon's work in medieval Central and Northern Europe. Writers and scholars working in Scandinavia or Iceland during the High Middle Ages like Snorri Sturluson were able to use manuscripts like we do.)¹⁴⁶ Attempts by several German and Scandinavian scholars to tie the Heruls known from late antique sources to Sweden are therefore futile.

There is nothing historically true about the story of a Herul wandering from, as well as returning to, a northern homeland. Equally problematic are attempts to present the Herules as a loose group of warriors, instead of a people, a *gens*. Some concluding remarks regarding such arguments are therefore needed at this point. According to Procopius, Herul warriors use neither helmet nor corselet nor any other protective armor, only a shield. He also mentions that Herul slaves go into battle without any shield at all. Upon proving themselves in combat, their masters allow them to carry shields in battles to come.¹⁴⁷ This account has been taken as evidence for 'Germanic' initiation rites and brotherhoods of warriors. In fact, denying the Herules the status of a *gens* implies turning them into a military brotherhood. This is exactly what Otto Höfler proposed in his work on Germanic secret societies.¹⁴⁸ Moreover, *Männerbünde* and brotherhoods of warriors (*Kriegervereinigungen*) immediately invite comparison with the Vikings. At a closer examination, the only basis for such a line of reasoning appears to be etymological speculations about the name of the Herules and the rather loose use of sixth-century sources. The fact that the Herules had a reputation for good fighting is of course no indication of military brotherhoods. The Herules were a *gens* like any other, such as Goths or Vandals, different only on account of their smaller size. Nevertheless, the idea that the Herules were an association of warriors, not a *gens*,

¹⁴⁶ See Walter Pohl, *Die Germanen* (Munich, 2000), pp. 78–80; Heinrich Beck, 'Probleme einer völkerwanderungszeitlichen Religionsgeschichte', in *Germanische Religionsgeschichte: Quellen und Quellenprobleme*, ed. by Heinrich Beck, Detlev Ellmers, and Kurt Schier (Berlin, 1992), pp. 475–88.

¹⁴⁷ Procopius, *Wars*, 2.27–28.

¹⁴⁸ Otto Höfler, *Kultische Geheimbünde der Germanen*, I (Frankfurt am Main, 1934), pp. 267–69. See also Mischa Meier, s.v. 'Männerbund', in *Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde*, XIX, 2nd edn, ed. by Heinrich Beck, Dieter Geuenich, and Heiko Steuer (Berlin, 2001), pp. 105–10. Höfler also discussed the Taifalian manners mentioned by Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res gestae*, 31.9.5. According to Ammianus Marcellinus, among the Taifali, grown men have sexual relations with boys. Some act of bravery in hunting often seals such liaisons.

seems to be responsible for the peculiar position accorded to them in scholarship. It is striking that exactly in books defining 'Germanic' ethnicity as very severe, the Herules form an exception. But also in recent scholarship, such explanations were reused when they seemed to fit in new concepts. Beginning with their very name, allegedly meaning 'hero' or 'noble warrior' (on the basis of a contested comparison with such words as *erul*, *eorl*, or *jarl*, translated as 'hero' or 'noble warrior'), scholars have assumed that the Herules were initially groups of 'special' warriors known for their bravery or for particular military skills. According to Ellegård they may have been groups of warriors following a certain model rather than belonging to a well-defined people. As such, they appeared in different parts of Europe, but they eventually got together and formed both a people and a *regnum* on the river Morava.¹⁴⁹ This means telling the story of a *gens* while at the same time treating the Herules as a special case. One gets the impression that earlier scholarly debates subconsciously influenced Ellegård and thus resulted in a tautology.

It is of course far from clear exactly what Procopius had in mind when writing about Herul 'slaves'. But he surely provided plenty of evidence that any *gens* was open to newcomers. As in any other human community, both in the past and in the present, such newcomers had to prove themselves worthy before receiving full membership in that community. This must have been even truer for a community geared towards warfare. In other words, what Procopius has to say about Herul slaves earning their shields is perhaps no more than his (admittedly confused) description of a practice of accommodating new warriors within the already existing *gens*. An initiation rite, perhaps, but certainly not for admission into a military brotherhood. The Herules, therefore, were no different from other *gentes*. It is striking that tokens of *gentes* were and are used in the Herul case to define a special case in the rich field of identities in Late Antiquity. The discussion concerning the criteria of ethnic identity in Late Antiquity is ongoing, one of the most vivid in the field. Nothing justifies the neglect and at times distortion with which the Herules are currently treated in modern scholarship.

¹⁴⁹ Ellegård, 'Who Were the Eruli?', pp. 29–31; Wolfram, *Goten*, p. 62 and n. 32.