

On the Origin of Radagaisus' Men: The Victohali Contra the Goths

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Abstract. *This study explores the ethnic origins and identity of the Radagaisus' army that invaded Italy in the early fifth century. Despite the fact that his people were referred to by the Romans as the Goths, their true identity remains unclear. Analysis of archaeological and historical sources suggests that Radagaisus and his men came from the northeastern part of the Great Danube Plain. Thus, they most probably were part of the Sarmatians and the Victohali tribe. The study also examines how tribal identities were shaped and redefined in the sources in the context of political and cultural changes. This case contributes to the broader discussion of barbarian tribal ethnicity and identity in Late Antiquity.*

Rezumat. *Acest studiu explorează originile etnice și identitatea armatei lui Radagaisus, care a invadat Italia la începutul secolului al V-lea. În ciuda faptului că poporul său era numit de romani goți, adevărata lor identitate rămâne neclară. Analiza surselor arheologice și istorice sugerează că Radagaisus și oamenii săi provin din partea de nord-est a Câmpiei Dunării Mari. Astfel, cel mai probabil au făcut parte din sarmați și din tribul Victohali. Studiul examinează, de asemenea, modul în care identitățile tribale au fost modelate și redefinite în surse în contextul schimbărilor politice și culturale. Acest caz contribuie la o discuție mai largă despre etnia și identitatea tribală barbară în Antichitatea târzie.*

Keywords: *Radagaisus, Goths, Victohali, Sarmatians, barbarian invasions.*

Introduction:

In AD 405 a barbarian host led by King Radagaisus invaded Italy². They wreaked havoc in the Roman Empire and plundered northern parts of Italy. Radagaisus supposedly planned to destroy the city of Rome. According to ancient sources, the barbarian host comprised over 400,000 men. The most powerful man in the western part of the Roman Empire *magister militum utriusque* Stilicho had to assemble a large army to face Radagaisus. In the spring and summer of 406 Radagaisus split his men into three parts and with his group he besieged the city of Florentia. At this moment, in August 406, Stilicho was able to defeat him in battle. After that, Radagaisus was executed and his men were either slaughtered, enslaved, or enlisted in the Roman army.

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² Sources mentioning King Radagaisus are listed in PLRE II, "Radagaisus", 934. See Aug. *Civ. Dei* V, 26; Aug. *Sermo* 105, 10, 13; Oros. VII, 37, 4 and 5; Olymp. *fr.* 9 (*Bibl. Cod. loc. cit.*); Prosp. Tiro s.a. 400; *Chron. Gall. ad 452* no. 50; Marcell. *com. s.a.* 406; *Addit. Ad Props. Haun. (marg.)* ad a. 405; Cass. *Chron. s.a.* 400; Jord. *Rom.* 321; and Zos. V, 26, 3.

This brief introduction shows that Radagaisus entered the Roman world as a sudden storm. There are no mentions of him before his army entered Italy in 405, and the sources describing his campaign are brief and concise. He left his imprint in history as a dangerous invader who the Romans still managed to stop and defeat. Such was Radagaisus' legacy as a violent and powerful raider who was defeated. However, we are still faced with the question of who Radagaisus and his men were.

The question of the origins of tribes and nations, which was popular among the previous generations of historians, seems to be outdated today but has still not been adequately answered in the case of Radagaisus' men. J. Wijnendaele analysed Radagaisus' defeat and the fate of his men after his death³. However, he did not pay much attention to his origins. With his fate already described, we can thus focus on the opposite direction – his origin. Analysing the ethnicity of Radagaisus' army and how it was perceived in the sources is essential while discussing the theories of barbarian ethnogenesis.

Our task is simplified by the fact that the route by which the barbarians came to Italy has already been reconstructed. Radagaisus is believed to have invaded the peninsula from the north via the Alps after crossing the Brenner Pass⁴. According to archaeological traces of the destruction dated to the early 5th century, he had previously passed through *Noricum*, through the towns of Flavia Solva and Aguntum⁵. His army crossed the Danube probably somewhere in the province of *Pannonia Valeria* and the local Gothic and Hunnic *foederati* assumed a neutral attitude toward his invasion⁶. The direction from which these people came can tell us more about them. We should thus try to determine the tribal identity of Radagaisus' warriors based on the areas from which they came and find a reason why the Roman sources identified them as the Goths.

Discussions about the ethnicity of barbarian tribes have been going on for quite a long time, but they have not ceased to be an important topic. For the historian, the primary concern is to work with the ethnic identity ascribed to the tribes by the Roman sources and how the tribes dealt with it later, when they were able to leave their own written records. The original identity was often forgotten and lost its meaning in the context of political and power changes. What reasons prompted Roman authors to attribute a Gothic identity to some tribes when they may not have originally claimed it? We can only speculate about the internal reasons since the tribes of the late fourth and early fifth centuries have left us no records. The Gothic ruler,

³ WIJNENDAELE 2016; 2018; 2019.

⁴ WIJNENDAELE 2016, 269.

⁵ See HUDECZEK 1977, 469; ALZINGER 1977, 403. The campaign of Radagaisus is also described in WOLFRAM 1988, 168–170.

⁶ GRAČANIN 2006a, 42–43. The Greutungii Goths, Huns, and Alans under Alatheus and Saphrax were most probably settled in 380 in the province of *Pannonia Valeria* by Emperor Gratian (Jord. *Get.* 141 and Zos. IV, 34, 2). Their settlement there is discussed by WOLFRAM 1988, 132–133,250; LOTTER 2003, 72–74; HEATHER 1996, 135; MÓCSY 2014, 340–342; WIRTH 1999, 28,43; GRAČANIN 2006b, 84–85; MEIER 2019, 186.

however, as early as 412 spoke of a new land of Goths, *Gothia*, to replace the Roman Empire (Oros. VII, 43, 6, 5). We can thus assume that some idea of an ideological ‘Gothicness’ existed, at least in the minds of Roman historians. The expanding Gothic identity, which tried, unsuccessfully, to compete with the Roman conception of the world, clashed with the identity of other barbarian tribes that the Goths encountered. Thus, in our research, in terms of methodology, we are juxtaposing whether the practical effort of Gothic commanders to expand the ranks of their armies with members of other tribes, who then subsequently adopted a Gothic identity, or, on the contrary, the effort of Roman authors and historians to simplify their texts by assigning a Gothic identity to other barbarian groups to create one great Roman enemy, was of greater importance.

Radagaisus’ people as the Goths

In the majority of sources, Radagaisus’ men are described as Goths⁷. Radagaisus himself was even referred to as *rex Gothorum*, a description he shared with his contemporary Alaric⁸. Orosius and the authors who copied his writings called Radagaisus a pagan and a Scythian⁹. Orosius’ goal was not to identify Radagaisus with the ancient tribe of the Scythians from the classical texts but to highlight the differences between Radagaisus and Alaric. The latter one was the Arian Christian and leader of the insurrection of Gothic soldiers within the Empire, while Radagaisus brought pagan barbarian hordes from across the Danube. The early sixth-century historian Zosimus gives a somewhat different description of Radagaisus’ army. According to his work under his command came to Italy up to 400, 000 men from Celtic and Germanic tribes across the Danube and Rhine (Zos. V, 26, 3). It is suggested that Zosimus wrongly merged Radagaisus’ invasion with the Great Rhine crossing of 406 into one event¹⁰. But what is important in his text is that he did not identify Radagaisus’ people with the Goths.

The modern historiography has taken the opinion of the late antique sources, that Radagaisus and his men were the Goths. Some authors even thought that Radagaisus’ people were part of the Ostrogoths, as the Visigoths were already on Roman soil¹¹. This view persists

⁷ Radagaisus is considered to be a Goth in Aug. *Civ. Dei* V, 26; Aug. *Sermo* 105, 10, 13; *Olymp. fr.* 9 (*Bibl. Cod. loc. cit.*); *Prosp. Tiro* s.a. 400; *Chron. Gall. ad 452* no. 50; *Addit. Ad Props. Haun. (marg.)* ad a. 405, and *Cass. Chron.* s.a. 400.

⁸ For Alaric’s and Radagaisus’ titlature in Roman sources see for example HALSALL 2007, 202–207; KAMPERS 2008, 98, and MESTEK 2024. Of their contemporaries, only Orosius wrote about Alaric as a king (Oros. *Hist.* VII, 37, 2 and 17; VII, 43, 2). Other sources from the beginning of the fifth century called him a *dux* or φύλαρχος.

⁹ Oros, *Hist.* VII, 37, 5: ‘Hic [Radagaisus] ... paganus et Scythia erat, ...’ Marcelli. *com. Chron.*, ad a. 406. ‘Radagaisus paganus et Scythia cum ducentibus milibus suorum totam Italiam inundavit.’ *Jord. Rom.* 321. ‘Hesperia vero plaga in regno Honorii imperatoris primum Radagaisus Scythia cum ducenta milia suorum inuandavit.’

¹⁰ HEATHER 1995, 12 and HEATHER 1996, 147. According to T. Burns the Celts in the Radagaisus host could be rebelled *limitanei* and provincials from *Noricum*, *Pannonia*, and *Raetia*, who joined the marching host, see BURNS 1994, 198.

¹¹ Radagaisus was identified as a Goth in these studies: SEECK 1913, 375–7; SCHMIDT 1934, 265–7; STEIN 1959, 249–50; DEMANDT 2007, 175; MAENCHEN-HELFEN 1973, 60–61; LOTTER 2003, 92–93; KOKOWSKI 2007, 238; BEDNÁŘKOVÁ 2013, 85–86, 115; HARHOIU 1997, 28; TODD 2004, 146; KAMPERS 2008, 102; HALSALL 2007, 206–210; WOLFRAM 1988, 168–170;

among the researchers, although P. Heather has managed to disrupt it. In his writings, he rejected the traditional view, that the Visigoths were the Thervingi and the Ostrogoths were former Greuthungi. According to him, there were several, at least six, groups of the Goths. The Visigoths of the fifth century were formed from the Thervingi, the Greuthungi under Alatheus and Saphrax, the former Radagaisus' men, and some non-Gothic groups (the Alans and the Taifals)¹². Acceptance of Heather's theories allows us further to research the origin of Radagaisus. Even for the later Procopius, the Goths were a much broader ethnic group, including the Ostrogoths, the Visigoths, the Vandals, and the Gepids (Procop. *Bell.* III, 2, 1). The situation in the *barbaricum* north of the Danube was probably much more complicated than the sources could tell us. It must be taken into account that other tribal groups may have been hidden under the name of the Goths. The Goths gained prominence with their victory at Adrianople and Alaric's sack of Rome in 410. For Roman authors, they overshadowed other barbarians – until the formation of Attila's Hunnic empire – and thus they became a cultural phenomenon and one of the labels used to describe foreign *gentes*.

The writings of P. Heather are important for another reason. He tried to determine where Radagaisus came from. The Goths of Alaric before their first invasion of Italy in 401 were stationed in *Illyricum* and they invaded the peninsula through the Julian Alps near Aquileia¹³. Before that, these Goths came to Thrace in 376 from the Romanian Plain and the Pontic steppe around the Dniester River. It is assumed that they crossed the Danube at the town of Durostorum (modern Silistra)¹⁴. In the case of Radagaisus only Zosimus tells us that he came from somewhere beyond the Danube and the Rhine. That is too vague. Heather assumed that Radagaisus' host set out from the area of the middle Danube west of the Carpathians¹⁵. He supported this claim by arguing that Italy and Rome were the targets of his campaign. The barbarians from the lower Danube, on the other hand, attacked Thrace and Constantinople. The route through the provinces of *Pannonia* and *Noricum* also indicates that Radagaisus' origin should be traced back to the middle Danube region. Besides Heather, P. Bystrický also tried to locate Radagaisus in this region¹⁶. Radagaisus most probably crossed the river somewhere in the province of *Pannonia Valeria*, as already mentioned in the introduction. However, there is

GWYNN 2017, 37–38; BLECKMANN 2009, 237; KULIKOWSKI 2007, 171–173; POHL 2005, 53,73; MARTIN 1987, 38; MEIER 2019, 207–208, and MCEVOY 2013, 174–177.

¹² HEATHER 1996, 52–53; 130–138,149,176.

¹³ HALSALL 2007, 201–202; WOLFRAM 1988, 151–153; HEATHER 1996, 146; KULIKOWSKI 2007, 170; MCEVOY 2013, 170–171; KULIKOWSKI 2019, 134–135, BURNS 1994, 178–193, and BOIN 2020, 169.

¹⁴ KULIKOWSKI 2007n, 130.

¹⁵ HEATHER 1991, 160,228; HEATHER 1996, 103,107, and HEATHER 2010, 173,182. Heather made this conclusion after the reading of the older studies of DEMOUGEOT 1969, 422–429; MAENCHEN-HELFEN 1973, 60–61 and WOLFRAM 1988, 169.

¹⁶ BYSTRICKÝ 2008, 9. Bystrický connects the Romanian archeological sites of Crasna, Cipău, Valea Strâmbă, and Feldiora and Zărnești with Radagaisus, but does not provide any argumentation.

also the opinion that Radagaisus set out with his people from the Dniester region and crossed the entire *barbaricum*¹⁷.

Although most historians generally consider Radagaisus to be a Goth, there are also opinions that his identification as a Goth is at least questionable¹⁸. Even P. Heather has compromised his views, and although in his earlier studies, he considered Radagaisus' men to be the Goths (using the term 'Radagaisus' Goths'), in more recent works he has used the more modest-sounding term 'followers of Radagaisus'¹⁹. However, no one has attempted to answer the question of who Radagaisus' men were supposed to be if they were not Goths.

The inclusion of this barbarian group among Alaric's Goths between 408 and 410 is well documented. However, the previous development of the tribal identity of Radagaisus' group must be followed to better understand the whole process of tribal identity transformation. These processes may have been more complicated than we would expect and under greater influence of external factors.

The Danubian Regions before 405 AD

The starting point of Radagaisus' invasion could be even more closely located in the northeastern part of the Great Hungarian Plain, also known as Alföld. This area is defined by the rivers Tisza, Mureş, and Körös. We can briefly look at the entire region of the Middle Danube to see which tribes lived there. In this case, we can combine the archeological findings with the records in the written sources. Here it should be noted that the author does not follow the older archeological view that tried to assign ethnic identity to specific archeological findings. On the contrary, it is appropriate here to apply the theories of M. Kazanski and B. Ciuperercă that the concentration of finds in a given area indicates that something that can be described as a center of power or tribal *regnum* was located there²⁰. These *regna* can not be identified precisely with the tribal identities based solidly on the archeological finds. The finds can be, however, confronted with Roman written sources and thus we can describe this region.

If we proceed step by step in the area clockwise, we could describe the tribes who lived here in 400. In the Upper Tisza region, between the Hornad River and the foothills of the Carpathians, lived the Hasdingi Vandals²¹. They settled here probably during the Marcomannic wars and at the same time as Radagaisus they departed from here and migrated west. The

¹⁷ KAZANSKI 2012, 381–403. According to Kazanski it is possible to link Radagaisus with the area of the Sobari, Layo and Sumy-Sad, and the departure of his people to Italy with the disappearance of the Chernyakov culture around 400 AD.

¹⁸ JAMES 2014, 55 and GOFFART 2006, 78.

¹⁹ The most recent Heather' view is HEATHER 2020, 77–80. Heather did not emphasize that he no longer considers Radagaisus' people as Goths, but neither does he call them so.

²⁰ This theories are described in KAZANSKI 1992, 191–229; KAZANSKI 1998, 221–240; KAZANSKI 2007, 81–90, and CIUPERCĂ and MĂGUREANU 2008, 119–130.

²¹ CASTRITIUS 2007, 25–45,47; MERRILS, MILES 2010, 30–35; NAGY 1993, 157–194; SOÓS *et alii* 2016, 49, STEINACHER 2016, 23–30.

Germanic Gepids lived at that time probably in the northern Carpathians and they moved to Alföld during the Hunnic period²². In the Eastern Carpathians in the author's opinion, we could locate the tribe of the Sciri²³. The Goths are associated with the area of archeological sites of the Chernyakhov culture. This archeological culture was located on the northern coast of the Black Sea around the rivers Dniester and Dnieper and extended to the Lower Danube area, which is the Wallachian Plain in present-day Romania.²⁴ The Taifals, the allies of the Goths, lived west of them in Oltenia²⁵. In 376 they, however, migrated to the Roman Empire and were defeated in the vicinity of the Danube and subsequently joined the Goths (Amm. Marc. XXXI, 9, 3). Some of the Goths, however, remained in the *barbaricum* after the arrival of the Huns. In the area between the rivers Danube and Tisza, from Banat in the south to the Devil's Dyke in the north lived the Sarmatians²⁶. There originally lived a tribe of the Iazyges, with whom the Romans clashed since the first century AD. Later in the third century, they were joined by other Sarmatian groups, the Roxolani from the east, and the Iazygian identity slowly disappeared. Thus, in the fourth century, Ammianus Marcellinus wrote only of the free Sarmatians and *Sarmatae Limigantes*²⁷. At the end of the fourth century the Danubian Sarmatians were significantly weakened by the Gothic attacks, Roman invasions and deportations, and their internal fighting between the *Argaragantes* and the *Limigantes*²⁸. Thus they could not play a major political role on the Roman frontier.

We can notice that we have circled clockwise around the area of the Transylvanian Plateau, the Apuseni Mountains, and Alföld east of the Tisza. Here originally lay the Roman province of *Dacia*, which was abandoned in 271 by Emperor Aurelian²⁹. But who lived in this area? In the 360s Roman historian and politician Eutropius wrote in his *Breviarium*, that the former province of *Dacia* was in his time inhabited by the Tervingi, Taifali, and Victohali (Eutr. VIII, 2). If the Taifals controlled the southern parts of the former province at the confluence of the Danube

²² ISTVÁNOVITS 2000, 197–208; KHARALAMBEVA 2010, 245–248; HARHOIU 2013, 111–142, and SOÓS 2019, 697–751.

²³ There are several theories about where the Sciri lived before the arrival of the Huns. They could lived east of the Carpathians, see HEATHER 2010, 222. According to GOFFART 2006, 203–205, they lived in the area of the Lower Danube. Another possibility is that they lived north of the Black Sea, see TODD 2004, 223–225. The author favors Heather's position that they lived east of the Carpathians.

²⁴ For more about the Chernyakhov (or Sântana de Mureş) culture, see HEATHER 1996, 18–50; KOKOWSKI 2007, 199–218; ŠČUKIN *et alii* 2006, and BIERBRAUER 1994.

²⁵ HEATHER 1996, 100 and WOLFRAM 1988, 57–54.

²⁶ For the Sarmatians in the fourth century, see SULIMIRSKY 1970, 155–182; ISTVÁNOVITS, KULCSÁR 1999, 67–94; IVANIŠEVIĆ, BUGARSKI 2008, 39–61; LEBEDYNSKY 2014, 91–106; TĂNASE 2015, 127–151, and ISTVÁNOVITS, KULCSÁR 2017, 183–397.

²⁷ The *Limigantes* are mentioned in Amm. Marc. XVII, 13, 1; 21, and 29; XIX, 11, 1; 5, and 9. The free Sarmatians (*Sarmatae Liberi*) are called *Argaragantes* in Hier. *Chron. ad a.* 334 and this name is used by historians.

²⁸ According to Jerome the war between the *Argaragantes* and *Limigantes* happened in 334 (Hier. *Chron. ad a.* 334). For more about these events, see KOVÁCS 2013 and DOLEŽAL 2019.

²⁹ Eutr. IX, 15. For the dating see SOUTHERN 1999, 119–120; WATSON 1999, 155–156, and ARDEVAN, ZERBINI 2007, 204–207.

and Olt, and the Tervingi the eastern parts along the Carpathians, we can assume that the Victohali resided in the northwestern part of the province³⁰.

The Victohali and Radagaisus

We first encounter the Victohali in the controversial source *Scriptores Historia Augustae*. The alleged author Iulius Capitolinus mentioned them in a book about the emperor Marcus Aurelius³¹. According to the *SHA*, they participated in the wars against the Romans on the side of the Marcomanni, Quadi, and Sarmatians. The *SHA* is a problematic text, the analysis of which has been a concern of scholars since Hermann Dessau³². What is significant, however, is that a Roman author of the fourth century found it necessary to mention that the Victohali were one of the influential tribes on the Middle Danube. Furthermore, the Victohali are mentioned by Eutropius already quoted above and the last source where we can read about this tribe is the work of Ammianus Marcellinus. He wrote that during the internal war between the Sarmatians, the *Argaragantes* were defeated by the *Limigantes* and then fled to distant lands of the Victohali³³. It could also be the same location as in Eutropius, since the distance of these lands is calculated from Roman *Pannonia* and beyond the Sarmatians, which would correspond to the regions beyond the Tisza River, or the western part of the former *Dacia*. Ammianus mentioned these events when describing the campaigns of Emperor Constantius II against the *Limigantes* in 357 and 358³⁴, Jerome, however, dated these fights among Sarmatians in 334.

It is almost impossible to decide whether the Victohali were a Sarmatian or a Germanic tribe. Some authors consider the Victohali to be Germanic, but because we do not know their names or other documentation of their language it is impossible to decide³⁵. H. Wolfram even thinks that there is corruption in the texts of Ammianus Marcellinus and Eutropius and the

³⁰ According to the view of some historians the Victohali should have lived in this era in the area of the Mureş river, where they have come under pressure from the Gepids from the north. For a discussion of this theory, see ISTVÁNOVITS, KULCSÁR 2017, 219-222.

³¹ *SHA*, *Aur.* XIV, 1. 'Profecti tamen sunt paludati ambo imperatores et Victualis et Marcomamnis cuncta turbantibus, aliis gentibus, quae pulsae a superioribus barbaris fugerant, nisi reciperentur, bellum inferentibus.' *SHA*, *Aur.* XXII, 1. 'Gentes omnes ab Illyrici limite usque in Galliam conspiraverant, ut Marcomanni, Varistae, Hermunduri et Quadi, Suevi, Sarmatae, Lacringes et Burei + hi aliique cum Victualis, Sosibes, Sicobotes Roxolani, Basternae, Halani, Peucini, Costoboci. Imminebat et Parthicum bellum et Britannicum.'

³² Among the contemporary authors, the issues related to *SHA* are discussed by BIRLEY 2003, and KEMAZIS 2022.

³³ *Amm. Marc.* XVII, 12, 19: 'Qui [Sarmates] confundente metu consilia ad Victohalos discretos longius confugerunt, ...' The parts of Ammianus works dealing with campaign of 358 against the Sarmatians is discussed in DE JONGE 1977, 279-325.

³⁴ For more about Constantius' campaign see BARCELÓ 1992; KOVÁCS 2016, and SZIDAT 1972.

³⁵ BLECKMANN 2009, 197. The same discussion is in DOLEŽAL 2019, 237-8. There is also an opinion that they were closely related to the Sarmatians, see BATTY 2007, 361.

Victohali were part of the Hasdingi Vandals or even it was the same tribal group³⁶. This perspective may be a bit overstated, but it demonstrates how little we know about the Victohali.

King Radagaisus and his men came from the area where, in the fourth century, the Sarmatians and Victohali lived. As mentioned above the Sarmatians were weakened at the end of the century. They did not disappear as a part of the Sarmatians remained in the Danube area under the rule of the Huns, as evidenced by the presence of their kings in the area still in 471 (Jord. *Get.* 277 a 282). Thus, the Sarmatians could not form the core of Radagaisus' forces. These most probably consisted of the Victohali. Given the nature of the migrating barbarian hordes in Late Antiquity, it would be a mistake to regard this marching host as ethnically homogeneous³⁷. Besides the prevailing Victohali and Sarmatians, the king's warriors may have included members of the surrounding Germanic tribes, such as the Tervingi, Hasdingi, and Gepids.

We must also consider the tribal movement between 376 and 400. The Alans are a great example of this case. After the arrival of the Huns, some Alanic groups moved west. Some of them crossed the Danube in 377 with the Huns and joined the Goths, and were later defeated by Emperor Gratian in 380³⁸. Another, apparently small group of the Alans crossed the Danube in 378 at Castra Martis but were also defeated by Gratian (Amm. Marc. XXXI, 11, 6). A prominent portion of the Alans, however, continued through the *barbaricum* further west and allied with the Vandals and Suebi. They invaded *Raetia* in 401 and eventually in 406 crossed the frozen Rhine and sacked Gaul³⁹. Most obviously, on this journey, the Alans had to pass through the territory controlled by King Radagaisus. Thus, it is possible that some of the Alanic warriors decided to stay and reinforce the ranks of Radagaisus' army.

For some authors of the fourth century (Ammianus, Eutropius, the author of *SHA*) the Victohali were important enough that they found it necessary to mention them in their writings. Problematically, in other texts where we would expect to find references to the Victohali, they are absent. In the list of barbarian raiders defeated by Emperor Claudius II in another part of the *SHA*, the Victohali are missing⁴⁰. Similarly, we do not find them in the Verona list written around 314⁴¹. Other tribes from the Middle-Danubian region are mentioned

³⁶ WOLFRAM 1988, 58. A similar view that the Victohali were part of the Vandals and lived in the area of the upper Tisza at the end of the second and during the third century is also found in ISTVÁNOVITS, KULCSÁR 2017, 255,265.

³⁷ The discussions about polyethnicity and ethnogenesis of barbarian tribes and armies in Late Antiquity are long and often addressed in various studies. These discussions were started by WENSKUS 1961 and WOLFRAM 1988. For their critics, see GILLET 2002. Different views can be found in HALSALL 2007, 36–59; POHL, REIMITZ 1998; CURTA 2005; LIEBESCHUETZ 2015, 85–100, and MEIER 2019, 37–116.

³⁸ See footnote n. 4. This issue is discussed in more detail in GRAČANIN 2006b, 84–87.

³⁹ For more about the Great Rhine Crossing of 406, see GOFFART 2006, 73–118; HALSALL 2007, 210–212; LÓPEZ QUIROGA 2008; BACHRACH 1973, 51–55, and STEINACHER 2016, 39–67.

⁴⁰ *SHA, Claud.* 6, 2: 'Denique Scytharum diversi populi, Peuci, Grutungii Austrogoti, Tervingi, Visi, Gipedes, Celtae etiam et Eruli, ...'

⁴¹ For more about this text, see BARNES 1982, 201–208.

here, the Quadi, Taifals, Vandals, Sarmatians, Sciri, Carpi, and Goths, but not the Victohali (*Provinc. Laterc. Veron. XIII, 25–36*). This may be because the list mentions only tribes flourishing under the rule of the emperors (*'Gentes barbarae, quae pullulauerunt sub imperatoribus:'*). The Victohali living further away from the Roman border were not subjugated by the Romans and did not sign any kind of treaty with them. The Romans were then less interested in the tribes who did not neighbour their empire. This is evidenced by the Latin translation of an older text from the time of Constantius II, which states that Sarmatian tribes lived beyond the Pannonian provinces and did not describe the region any further (*Expos. mundi, 56–7*)⁴².

It is also possible that the dominance of the Victohali in the area east of the Tisza River and the former province of *Dacia* was a temporary phenomenon, catching the attention of only a few authors. The situation in the Carpathian region changed at the beginning of the fourth century after the campaigns of emperors Diocletian and Constantine the Great against the Carpi in 296, 302–303, and 317⁴³. In the 330s the Sarmatian suffered several defeats. Their territory was raided by the Tervingi Goths, then invaded by Emperor Constantine, and ultimately they were even weakened by internal fights between the *Argaragantes* and the *Limigantes*. The elimination of the Carpi and the diminishment of the Sarmatians allowed the creation of a new regional power structure. The Tervingi Goths, Taifals, and the Victohali became the dominant tribes in the disputed area, as described by Eutropius (*Eutr. VIII, 2*). The Victohali's dominance in the north-western regions of the former *Dacia* (basically Hadrian's province of *Dacia Porolissensis*)⁴⁴ was established in the 330s or 340s. After that, the importance of this tribe declined, which was one of the factors why the Roman sources did not notice them.

If we accept Radagaisus and his men as part of the Victohali tribe, we could consider his departure to Italy in 405 as the end of the Victohali rule over the area of the Körös River and Apuseni Mountains. Radagaisus must have decided to leave his homeland after considering various push and pull factors⁴⁵. Among obviously presumed reasons would be the looting of the Roman territory or the fear of the approaching enemies – the Huns. W. Goffart rejected the idea that Radagaisus' invasion was triggered by the pressure and the harassment of the Huns. According to him, we should consider the options that Radagaisus was encouraged by the East Roman government to attack Stilicho or that it was his personal initiative inspired by Alaric's success⁴⁶. Other factors must be considered as well. The Victohali from the Mureş and Körös Rivers could have been attacked by the Tervingi Goths in the 370s and the 380s similarly to the

⁴² The text *Expositio totius mundi et gentium* is discussed in ROUGE 1966; GALDI 2012, and LAMPINEN 2022.

⁴³ The Roman campaigns against the Carpi are discussed in BICHIR 1976, 137–158; ODAHL 2004, 24,59–60,91; BATTY 2007, 376–379; HEATHER 2010, 114–132; and WILLIAMS 2000, 76–77.

⁴⁴ OLTEAN 2007, 55–58 and BRODERSEN 2020, 171–173.

⁴⁵ Push and pull factors of migration were first defined by LEE 1966. They were incorporated into the research of barbarian migrations of Late Antiquity. For example, see HALSALL 2007, 418–420; HEATHER 2010, 28,33, and MEIER 2019, 114.

⁴⁶ GOFFART 2006, 78–80.

Danubian Sarmatians in the 330s. Athanaric's successful retreat from the Huns and his conquest of the *Caucaland* in 376 (Amm. Marc. XXXI, 4, 13) could indicate the final defeat of the Victohali in this region, although Ammianus wrote that the *Caucaland* was originally inhabited by the Sarmatians⁴⁷. The retreating Tervingi were not the only barbarians who entered the lands east of the Tisza River. The other passer-by tribe, perhaps even more important, was the Alans from the east. As mentioned above, Alanic warbands entered the Roman territory in 377, 378, 401, and 406. They had to pass through Radagaisus' territory on their journey west. Despite Goffart's rejection, there was probably a slow domino effect started by the arrival of the Huns forcing other barbarians to move to the west. The position of the Victohali in Alföld was destabilised by the incursions by the Goths and Alans. Radagaisus probably recognized the necessity of leaving and marched with his people into Roman *Pannonia*.

Why the Goths?

The remaining question is why the sources described Radagaisus' men as the Goths. For fifth-century sources, the Goths were more or less an ethnic label or a generic term. Only later texts from the first half of the sixth century distinguished between the Ostrogoths and Visigoths. Even at that time, it was an external designation. At the time when both of the Gothic kingdoms were fully established, their people referred to themselves simply as the Goths. But this was the culmination of all the events of the fifth century that gave rise to the fame of the *nomen Gothorum*.

The texts mentioning the Victohali were written between 369 and 400 and no fifth-century text mentioned them again⁴⁸. The sources where the mentions of Radagaisus can be found were all written after 410 when Gothic leader Alaric sacked Rome. We could identify three historiographical tendencies dealing with the identity of Radagaisus and his men.

The first one could be called Latin-Christian. This historiographical point of view was formed by Radagaisus' contemporaries who lived at the edges of the empire and had the information probably from the Italian refugees. Their writings had a strong theological-apologetic theme that was set in the virtual dispute between Christians and pagans over the

⁴⁷ The *Caucalandenses locus* described by Ammianus is identified with mountainous regions of Transylvania or the southeastern parts of the Carpathians, see CONSTANTINIU 2011, 52; HARHOIU 1997, 27; HEATHER 1996, 103, KULIKOWSKI 2019, 86; WOLFRAM 1988, 73.

⁴⁸ Eutropius wrote his work during the reign of Emperor Valens, in 369 or 370, see BIRD 1993, XIII and BLECKMANN, GROSS 2018, 4. The date of publication of Marcellinus' *Res gestae* is assumed to be between 392 and 400, and it was supposed to have been written during the 380s, cf. BARNES 1998, 54; KELLY 2008, 104; HANAGHAN, WOODS 2022, 1–16. Dating the *SHA* is a bit more difficult. The text itself claims to have been composed during the reigns of the emperors Diocletian and Constantine the Great, but analysis of the corpus suggests that it was composed sometime during the second half of the fourth century. Contemporary historiography states that the corpus was composed between 395 and 400, see SYME 1983, 129; BIRLEY 2006; ROHRBACHER 2016, 8, 146; and KEMAZIS 2022, 223–224. There are, however, also views that the *SHA* was written later in the 5th century, see SAVINO 2017, or, conversely, earlier between 360 and 380, see CAMERON 2010, 743–746.

fate of Rome⁴⁹. The main theme of this group was created by Augustine and taken over from him by Orosius (See Aug. *Civ. Dei* V, 26; Aug. *Sermo* 105, 10, 13; Oros. VII, 37, 4 and 5). The focal point is the similarity and contrast between Alaric and Radagaisus. They both were Goths and enemies of Rome. While Radagaisus as a pagan was destined to fail, Alaric as an Arian Christian succeeded in conquering and sacking Rome⁵⁰. For Augustine and Orosius it was more important Radagaisus' identity was a pagan and barbarian (Orosius referred to Radagaisus as a Scythian). In their writings, the king and his people were labeled as the Goths to make the difference between their paganism and Alaric's Christianity more apparent⁵¹. Eastern Latin authors (Marcell. com. s.a. 406 and Jord. *Rom.* 321) of the sixth century adopted Orosius' description of Radagaisus as a pagan and Scythian⁵².

The second group, which we can call Latin-Chronicler, was established in the middle of the fifth century. It consists of brief Latin texts in chronicle style, which Theodor Mommsen included in his edition of the *Consularia Italica*. They are a continuation of the earlier Christian chronicles of Eusebius and Jerome, which ended in 379. Concerning the events of the late fourth and early fifth centuries, these chronicles were based on a common template, the unpreserved consular *Fasti* that were written in Italy⁵³. The purpose of these chronicles is to record the development of Christian society. A faithful record of the events is thus not to be found in these texts. These chronicles were written in a minimalistic style and they tried to make the individual entries as concise as possible. Radagaisus is thus described as *rex Gothorum* (Prosp. Tiro s.a. 400; *Chron. Gall. ad 452*, no. 50; and Cass. *Chron.* s.a. 400)⁵⁴. However, his comparison with Alaric, which we have encountered in the previous type of sources, is absent. Yet Prosper Tiro, the author of one of the chronicles and a pupil of Augustine, must have known this view of the two barbarian invaders. However, his chronicle is the best illustration of his attempt to simplify the description of events when he erroneously dated Radagaisus' invasion of Italy to 400 and merged it with Alaric's first Italian campaign of 401–402 (Prosp. Tiro s.a. 400). This erroneous

⁴⁹ For more about these texts, see KEYS 2022; MECONI 2021; VAN NUFFELEN 2012, and WETZEL 2012.

⁵⁰ VAN NUFFELEN 2012, 181–184 and KAHLOS 2022.

⁵¹ Here we may mention the contrast described by Orosius between Alaric and Radagaisus, where during the sack of Rome Alaric spared all those who sought refuge in the church spaces and forbade the sacking of the Christian temples (Oros. VIII, 39, 1), and Radagaisus, on the other hand, planned to sacrifice the Romans to pagan gods (Oros. VIII, 37, 4). However, the cultural assimilation of Alaric's Goths by the Romans may also have played a role here.

⁵² Comes Marcellinus relied in his writing on the work of Orosius and subsequently Jordanes during writing his *Romana* copied Marcellinus' Chronicle, see TREADGOLD 2007, 233; CROKE 2001, 197–200; CHRISTENSEN 2002, 103–112; DOLEŽAL 2012, 30–33.

⁵³ On the Latin chronicles of the fifth century, see MUHLBERGER 1990; BURGESS, KULIKOWSKI 2013, 173–187; ZECCHINI 2006, 317–345.

⁵⁴ Among the authors of the Latin chronicles, Prosper Tiro titles Radagaisus and Alaric with the term *dux*. We can assume that the Gallic chronicler did so under the influence of his teacher Augustine, who also did not refer to the two barbarian rulers as kings.

simplification was subsequently adopted by Cassiodorus (Cass. Chron. p.a 400)⁵⁵. Radagaisus is not mentioned in Jordanes' *Getica*, so we do not know how he was perceived in Cassiodorus' unpreserved and more extensive Gothic history. The view of Radagais as 'king of the Goths' is also preserved in an anonymous continuation of Prosper's *Chronicle* from the early seventh century (*Addit. ad Props. Haun. (marg.) ad a. 405*)⁵⁶.

The last and third group of sources are Greek texts written as part of the late antique classicizing historiography. In this group, Radagaisus is mentioned by the significant author of the sixth-century Zosimus and his predecessor Olympiodorus of Thebes, whose work survives only in fragments. Zosimus held anti-Christian views⁵⁷. Thus, we can not look for a dichotomy between Alaric's Christianity and Radagaisus' paganism in his work. In his text, which was written some 200 years after described events, we read that Radagaisus brought 400,000 men from Germanic and Celtic tribes from beyond the Danube and the Rhine into Italy (Zos. V, 26, 3: Ῥοδογαΐσος ἐκ τῶν ὑπὲρ τὸν Ἴστρον καὶ τὸν Ῥῆνον Κελτικῶν τε καὶ Γερμανικῶν ἐθνῶν ...). This passage is often considered an error⁵⁸. As mentioned above, according to P. Heather, the later author here confused the Radagaisus invasion with the invasion of the Alans, Vandals, and Suebi in December 406⁵⁹.

Zosimus based his description of the early fifth-century event on the fragmentary surviving work of Olympiodorus. Here, however, we encounter a few significant difficulties. Olympiodorus served as a diplomat in the service of the emperors Honorius and Theodosius II and came into contact with the rulers of the barbarian tribes on several occasions. He thus brings us valuable information and his diplomatic career makes him a reliable observer of foreign peoples. In a short fragment preserved in Photius' *Bibliotheca*, Olympiodorus uses Radagaisus' name in the form Rhodogaïσος and refers to his men only as Goths (Olymp. fr. 9 [*Bibl. Cod. loc. cit.*]). In his work, which ends in 425 and was most probably written in the 440s⁶⁰, we would expect a different description of Radagaisus' men than the generalizing statement that they were Goths.

The main difficulty of Olympiodorus' fragments for our research is that his work began in 407 - the invasion of Gaul by the Vandals and Alans - was not incorporated into the excerpts of Emperor Constantine VII and we have only Photius' notes. His other readings may have influenced them. Radagaisus invaded Italy in 405 and was defeated in 406; Olympiodorus'

⁵⁵ Cassiodorus' *Chronicle* is analysed by KLAASEN 2010.

⁵⁶ This text is discussed in MUHLBERGER 1984.

⁵⁷ For more about Zosimus, see TREADGOLD 2007, 107–114; LIEBESCHUETZ 2006, 206–215; ZIMMERMANN, RENGAKOS 2022, 643–645.

⁵⁸ For a discussion of this error of Zosimus, see. PASCHOUD 1986, 200–201. Only VÁRADY 1969, 193,473, has suggested that Zósimos, by mentioning the Celts and the Rhine, was referring to the possible connection of the Vandal Silingi to the army of Radagais and its route through Raetia, where it seems to have approached the Rhine.

⁵⁹ HEATHER 1995, 12; HEATHER 1996, 147.

⁶⁰ BLOCKLEY 1981, 29; ROHRBACHER 2002, 75–76; TREADGOLD 2004, 727–729.

predecessor Eunapius ended his work in 404, and none of his surviving fragments mention Radagaisus⁶¹. For us, the key events have never been the primary concern of the Greek historiographical tradition. However, Olympiodorus may have analysed Radagaisus' invasion in the introduction to his history, which described the transitional period from 405 to 407 and served as a glorifying description of the career of the Roman commander Stilicho⁶². The surviving note of Photius about Olympiodorus' introduction, however, did not mention Radagaisus (*Olymp. fr. 1 [Bibl. Cod. 80]*). The barbarian king thus probably only played in the text the role of Stilicho's enemy, whose defeat was one of the crowning achievements of the Roman general. The surviving Photius' note mentioning Radagaisus refers to the events of 408⁶³, when some of Radagaisus' former men were incorporated into Stilicho's army. Here Olympiodorus could already generalise, since he had already discussed the origins of these warriors in his introduction.

Assuming that Radagaisus was a Sarmatian or a Victohal and not a Goth, we must identify Olympiodorus' reason for this description. The author himself may have referred to Radagaisus as a Goth in an attempt to simplify his text like other fifth-century authors or Radagaisus' tribal identity may have been later modified by Photius because, from the reading of other authors, he considered Radagaisus to be a Goth. This second option should be also preferred because of how Zosimus worked with his source. If Olympiodorus had simply identified Radagaisus as a Goth in his introduction, then Zosimus should have adopted this ethnic characterization from him. However, as we know, Zosimus made a mistake in his description in his text, describing the invading host as Germanic and Celtic. Thus, it is possible that the reason for Zosimus' error was that he did not fully understand the original text of Olympiodorus. Olympiodorus could have characterized the 405 barbarians in an utterly different manner, and Zosimus, who relied entirely on his predecessors' works and his knowledge was probably limited to events of the late fifth century in the eastern parts of the empire, was not familiar with the Victohali and associated the Sarmatians with different events, and so the original text made no sense to him.

Conclusion

While we need not accept the identification of Radagaisus' men with the Victohali tribe mentioned by the late fourth-century authors, several doubts arise regarding why his men should be considered Goths. Firstly, Radagaisus' origin from an area that only came under

⁶¹ Eunapius' work described the period from 270 to 404 and was probably written between 404 and 408. As in the case of Olympiodorus, this writing survives only in fragments and served as one of the sources for Zosimus. Eunapius was a sophist who, unlike his successor, did not serve the state. His ambitions were thus purely literary, and his history aimed to imitate the style of the classical authors. He thus paid little attention to contemporary wars against barbarians. For more on his work, see BLOCKLEY 1981, 1–26; ROHRBACHER 2002, 64–72; LIEBESCHUETZ 2006, 177–201.

⁶² For more about Olympiodorus introduction, see MATTHEWS 1970, 88–89; BLOCKLEY 1981, 30; LIEBESCHUETZ 2006, 202.

⁶³ BLOCKLEY 1981, 30.

Gothic control in the mid-fifth century during Attila's era suggests that while Sarmatians, Vandals, or Gepids may have fought in his army, the Goths were not the essential part of his army. They did not control the eastern areas of Alföld, Apuseni Mountains, and western Transylvania by the end of the fourth century.

Equally important is the analysis of why Roman authors depicted Radagaisus as a Gothic king. All the sources describing Radagaisus' invasion were written after his death and crucially, after Alaric sacked Rome in 410. The significance of such an event need not be doubted⁶⁴. The Goths thus confirmed their preeminence among barbarian tribes thirty years after defeating the Roman army at Adrianople. The Romans began to clash with the Goths as early as the first half of the third century, and the empire was most threatened by them in the 260s when they plundered Greece and parts of Asia Minor. At that time, however, the symbolic position of the greatest enemy of Rome was held by the young Sasanian Empire. The sack of Rome thus represented the pinnacle of Gothic military success, and Alaric could be seen as the empire's fatal enemy.

Consequently, of course, the Roman view of Alaric and his Goths differed markedly before and after 410. Unlike in the case of Radagaisus, we have sources predating 410 that mention Alaric. These are the works of the poets Prudentius and Claudian. However, we lack a view of Radagaisus written during his lifetime. His role in history was thus distorted by Alaric's sack of Rome, which took place four years after his death. As mentioned above, Augustine and his disciple Orosius needed Radagaisus to be a Goth to underscore the contrast between his paganism and Alaric's Arian Christianity, which they saw as the reason for Alaric's partial success and Radagaisus' complete defeat. For subsequent Roman historiography, it was expedient to retrospectively classify Radagaisus as a Goth. This narrative served to highlight Alaric's sack of Rome as a singular Gothic triumph amid ongoing Roman-Gothic conflicts. Alaric's first incursion into Italy in 401/402 was repulsed, and the great invasion of Radagaisus' second "Gothic" group in 406 was decisively defeated, Alaric's second Italian campaign in 408 failed to achieve any significant successes, and subsequent victories of Alaric's successor Athaulf in Gaul between 412 and 415 faded due to his assassination and subsequent subjugation of the Goths.

Rome needed a victory over the Goths, and the inconclusive outcomes of the clashes with Alaric in 402 and 408, or the signed agreement with the Gothic king Walia in 416, were not enough to compensate for the sack of Rome. The crushing defeat of Radagaisus was the answer to social demand. The executed king must have been a Goth, regardless of his actual origins. This intent can be seen in the emphasis placed by the authors on the description of the numerical strength of the king's army. The overestimation of the number of defeated barbarians was not mere rhetorical hyperbole, but it did save the Roman reputation from

⁶⁴ On the catastrophe and demise of the Roman Empire according to the catastrophic discourse, see WARD-PERKINS 2005.

subsequent setbacks. Therefore, Radagaisus' Gothic identity was created by Roman sources probably due to the following events. If Alaric had not sacked the Eternal City in 410, the invaders of Italy in 405 might have been described very differently.

Radagaisus' men could not maintain their identity after the death of their king. We have no reports of another power faction among the Goths that would have continued the Radagais tradition. J. Wijnendaele believes that Alaric's successor Athaulf and his rivals, the brothers Sarus and Sigeric, were originally warriors in Radagaisus' army⁶⁵, who fought for control of the Gothic army after Alaric's death. However, none of the Roman authors notes that any of them claimed Radagaisus' legacy. It was not until later, under the sons of Theodoric I, that the Gothic kings claimed the legacy of Alaric (Sidon. Apol. *Carm.* VII, 505). The tradition and identity of Radagaisus' former men with their history thus disappeared completely.

However, this was not the rule. P. Heather described the phenomenon of disappearing and reappearing tribes, where some barbarian groups managed to maintain their identity even under foreign rule⁶⁶. Within the Gothic kingdom of Aquitaine, such case occurred. The Taifals, an old ally of the Gothic Tervingi from the lower Danube, joined the Gothic army at the same time as Radagaisus' men⁶⁷. But we have evidence of their existence in Merovingian Gaul as late as the middle of the sixth century (Greg. Tur. *HF* IV, 18). Thus, unlike Radagaisus' men, the Taifals retained their identity throughout their coexistence with the Goths.

This study thus leads us to the conclusion that while we can consider barbarian identity as multilayered and performative⁶⁸, we can raise some doubts about its fluidity. A society that was based on blood ties and oral tribal law could not accept new members very quickly⁶⁹. Although opinions about the exclusivity of barbarian identity are sporadic⁷⁰, we still have to reckon with this idea. Animosity between members of different tribes was only minimally documented in the sources. This is, however, due to the Roman authorship and one of the rare examples of such animosity is the relationship between the Goths and the Vandals in the early fifth century (Olymp. *fr.* 29 [*Bibl. Cod.* 80]). Rather than considering the identity of Radagaisus' men as fluid, we can describe it as externally generalized. Fluid were the descriptions of these tribes in Roman texts. The performativity of barbarian identity was two-sided. Tribes needed to impress their enemies or partners for political, prestigious, and ideological reasons. It was this context that later chroniclers worked with tribal identity. However, the Romans also worked with

⁶⁵ WIJNENDAELE 2016, 274; 2019, 490.

⁶⁶ HEATHER 1998.

⁶⁷ The question of exactly when the Taifal joined the migrating Goths is a bit more complicated. It could have happened shortly after the Danube crossing in 376, when we know that under the command of the Gothic chieftain Farnobius, the Taifal fought alongside the Goths. However, they could have joined later, as the Taifalos were stationed as Laetae in Italy and Gaul.

⁶⁸ HALSALL 2007, 36–59.

⁶⁹ For more about the barbarian society, see MURRAY 1983 and MODZELEWSKI 2004.

⁷⁰ For references to the exclusivity of the tribe of the Heruli, see HEATHER 1998, 108.

identity with deliberate intention, so that it would fit into their narrative, which was the case with Radagaisus. The externally generalized identity of these barbarians thus was a performance of Roman politics and historiography.

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