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GENDER AND ETHNICITY IN THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

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Pohl's versatility as a scholar is on display here as he turns his hand to the subject of gender. The opening paragraphs of this chapter are so clear that neither introduction nor recapitulation is necessary here. One preliminary remark may be made, however. In emphasizing gender as a tool of analysis Pohl is not resorting to "first wave" women's history; he is not trying to put women into, or back into, the story. Instead, he is looking at how images of women were created and manipulated in various kinds of texts and what those manipulations might tell us. Nevertheless, Pohl is interested in the question of whether women played a role in creating and transmitting those textualized realities. Pohl's article, moreover, will shed light on the literary sources that figured so prominently in the quarrel between Wolfram and Goffart.

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Surprisingly little research has been done so far to connect gender and ethnicity in the early Middle Ages, even though research in both fields has moved in parallel directions.[1] Until fairly recently, both categories have been regarded as firmly grounded in biological terms. One was born man or woman, Goth or Roman, English or French. Only in recent decades has this biological determinism been largely abandoned in scholarship, although it has hardly been shattered in popular opinions and sometimes still lingers over scholarly debates. Both gender and ethnicity were (and still are) cultural constructs, but they were rarely perceived as such. Because they seem to be 'natural' boundaries, the cultural codification, or identification, necessary to maintain them is never transparent. In antiquity and the Middle Ages, just as in modern research well into the twentieth century, ethnicity was regarded as a matter of descent, so that our contemporary sources tend to picture it that way even where that is clearly fictive. That has made it difficult to study how the ethnic cohesion of early medieval peoples was achieved.

Paradoxically, in studies of late antique and early medieval ethnicity (including my own) the change of paradigm—culturally constructed instead of biologically determined—has not led to a systematic interest in the relationship between gender and ethnicity, or to analysis of the parallels in their construction. In part, this may be explained as a reaction to the old paradigm. If birth confers ethnic identity, mothers play a key role, which has been exploited by all sorts of racist ideologies. At some stage, historians need to step past all those ethnically distinct mothers to see what else could

confer ethnicity. When we look in the sources for traces of the historical process of the creation of ethnicity, mostly we find information about warrior groups and about the stories old men tell. Both taken together constitute the Wenskus model of a kernel of tradition, with all its merit and its limitations: a small core group that preserved the ethnic memories of a people, which could expand quickly under favourable circumstances, especially under the leadership of a successful warrior king.[2] The Wenskus model of ethnogenesis has been modified and refined, and some of its initial shortcomings have been removed.[3] But the role of women, and of gender, in ethnic processes needs further study. Did the 'recollections of the elders' and the exploits of war bands give shape to ethnic identities without female participation? The purpose of this paper is to look at both elements from a gender perspective to show that the construction of ethnic and of gender identities is in fact related and intertwined, and should be looked at in conjunction. The role of women in origin myths will be discussed in the second part of this chapter: in what ways were women 'good to remember with', and how did women contribute to the shaping of such social memories? The first part of the chapter will deal with fighting women, both as gendered fantasies expressed through the ancient myth of the Amazons, and as possible barbarian realities that stimulated such perceptions.

Amazons—gender transgression and ethnic identity

The *Historia Augusta,* written around A.D. 400, offers a detailed and fictive description of Aurelian's triumph thought to have taken place in the 270s after the emperor's victory over Zenobia of Palmyra and other enemies. In this account, Aurelian rode up to the Capitol in a chariot which had belonged to a king of the Goths and was drawn by four stags, followed by exotic animals, gladiators and captives from the barbarian tribes, among them Arabs, Indians, Persians, Goths, Franks and Vandals. 'There were also led along ten women, who, fighting in male attire, had been captured among the Goths after many others had been killed; a placard declared these women to be of the people of the Amazons *(de Amazonum genere)*-for placards are borne before all, displaying the names of their people *(praelati sunt tituli gentium nomina continent es).*'[4]

The name Amazons told an old story. Fighting women were classed as a people of their own, though at the same time we are told that they 'had been captured among the Goths'. This paradox can tell us much about the way in which barbarian identities were perceived in the late Roman empire, and in which this otherness served to reinforce Roman self-perception. For ancient society, the Amazons were, as Josine Blok has put it, an emblem of otherness.[5] But at the same time, the images they evoked were complex and contradictory; to regard the Amazons as a people opened up a field of ambiguities and paradox. The 'breastless' women, as the Greeks understood the name, were mythological figures already attested, under their queen Penthesileia, in the *Iliad;*[6] several cities in Asia Minor, for instance Ephesos, claimed to have been founded by Amazons.[7] In the age of Herodotos, the mythological women warriors from a distant heroic age reappeared in ethnographic perceptions. Tales about Sarmatian *oiorpata,* as those fighting women were called, seem to correspond somehow with the archaeological evidence, for about one-fifth of weapons found are from female graves.[8] Herodotos took some pains to bridge the gap between legends from Asia Minor and ethnographic

observations in Scythia.[9] As we shall see, this fundamental tension between myth, ethnography and barbarian realities was never really resolved.[10] The Amazon myth provided a narrative matrix to accommodate fighting barbarian women, and influenced perceptions of powerful women even when they were not called Amazons. At the same time, it served to express moral judgements that had little to do with those distant barbarians.

In the sixth century A.D., Prokopios still dealt with Herodotos' problem of localizing an Amazon people.[11] He decided (against Strabo's opinion) that they had come from the steppes near the Caucasus and then migrated to Asia Minor, and not vice versa. Today', he explains, 'nowhere in the vicinity of the Caucasus range is any memory of the Amazons preserved.'[12] In Asia Minor, on the contrary, several cities claimed to have been founded by the Amazons. The written evidence was contradictory, and therefore Prokopios relied, most interestingly, on myths and memories as clues to early history. That means that he was more convinced by the 'internal' Amazon as a source for civic identities than by the 'external', barbarian one. But then a further problem arose: had Amazons really disappeared long ago, or could they have survived somewhere? This question was repeatedly discussed by early medieval authors, with different results. Prokopios explicitly based 'my judgement on what has actually taken place in my time'. After battles with the Huns, dead women had been found on the battlefield. But, as he claims, 'no other army of women…has made its appearance in any locality of Asia or Europe'.[13] In the seventh century, Isidore of Seville in his *Etymologies* was positive that Amazons did not exist any more, because they had been destroyed by Achilles, Herakles and Alexander the Great.[14]

Paul the Deacon, in his *Historia Langobardorum* written before 796,[15] after relating an Amazon legend supposed to have occurred during the migration of the Lombards, voiced his doubts in similar fashion:

> From all that is known from the ancient histories it is evident that the people of the Amazons was destroyed long before this could have happened; except perhaps because the places where these deeds were reported to have taken place were not sufficiently known to the historiographers and were hardly published by any of them, it could have come about that up to those times a race of women of that kind might have maintained itself there. For I also heard some say that a people of those women exist in the innermost regions of Germania to this day.[16]

The complicated syntax seems to indicate how uncomfortable Paul, the monk, was with the possibility that Amazons might really have played a part in the prehistory of his people, one of the several instances when there is a polyphony of contemporary debates in his text.[17] It was not impossible that in the timeless world of barbarians, far from civilisation and history, mythological peoples had survived. If the troublesome Amazons could not be confined to a distant past, then at least they had to be at a safe distance. Only the place had changed: instead of the steppes beyond the Black Sea it was the innermost Germania.

For civilised observers, it was clear that Amazons could only exist far away in place or time, or both. For Adam of Bremen at the end of the eleventh century, there was a place

on the Baltic Sea 'that is now called the land of women'.[18] In early Christian Ireland, the mythical 'Land of Women' who beguiled the hero Bran by charms and trickery but were otherwise quite peaceful and hospitable was far away across the sea, and the bands of fighting women who had challenged even the great heroes of Irish legend such as Cú Chulainn were located in a remote heroic age.[19] In ancient and medieval cosmology, the Amazons were located on the margins of the world, beyond the barbarians, where fantastic animals also lingered. On medieval world maps, Amazons are pictured beyond the Tanais river among the griffins, the dog-headed *cynocephali* and the peoples of the Apocalypse, Gog and Magog.[20] During the later middle ages, they were gradually moved even farther into Asia, until in the sixteenth century they were transferred to the unknown regions of South America, and that is why the Amazon river has its name.

Although the Amazons were thus pictured as 'the Other', the moral judgements expressed by late antique and early medieval authors are often not purely negative. Many authors, among them Justin, Orosius, Jordanes and Prokopios, explained that, initially, they had been left behind when all their men were killed in a battle and thus they had been forced to fight for their survival on their own. But after their initial victory, they began to despise men and marriage altogether, so that 'they embarked instead on an enterprise unparalleled in the whole of history, the building of a state without men and then actually defending it themselves'.[21] The Christian apologist Orosius used the Amazons as an argument that the sack of Rome by the Goths in A.D. 410, a few years before he wrote, had not been any worse than barbarian raids in the pagan period. 'Oh what grief, it is the shame of human error', begins his conclusion to the Amazon chapter: women warriors are a thoroughly pagan phenomenon.[22] The ideological potential of the Amazon myth becomes clear in such diatribes. What begins as an understandable reaction to the loss of their husbands quickly gets out of control, owing to the lack of the consolation that the church could now offer to widows (as Orosius implies), and both Europe and Asia are left at the mercy of warrior women. This Christianisation of the Amazon myth opened up new space for its contemporary use: the shameful error of the Amazons was still possible wherever paganism reigned and men failed, for whatever reason, to control women.

Orosius' account became a model for many early medieval authors.[23] Jordanes, in his *Gothic History,* gives the Amazon myth an ideological turn rather different from Orosius: he pictures them as Gothic women, so that their victories become part of the glorious achievements of the Goths.[24] Like ancient cities, many medieval peoples claimed to have originated from Amazons, or at least asserted that Amazons had played some part in their early history. Distant in time, these female origins still provided a focus for later identities, as will be discussed in the second part of this chapter. Amazons were, and had to be, barbarians, but they could easily be the barbarians in one's own past and often came to represent the stage before these barbarians had been civilised, and the conflicts involved in reaching a civilised and gendered order from which certain types of female agency and behaviour had to be expelled. These contradictions are obvious in Jordanes, for he also mentions a battle between the Goths and the Amazons.[25] The exclusion of improper femininity takes yet another form in his narrative: the *haliurunnae,* Gothic witches, are chased out into the wilderness where they mate with unclean spirits of the steppe; from this union, the Huns originate—almost a parody of the Sarmatian origin story in Herodotos.[26] At the end of his Amazon chapter, Jordanes deems it necessary to

offer a rhetorical excuse for dealing with the Amazons at such length: 'But do not say: "He has begun to tell about the men of the Goths; why does he dwell on their women for so long?"'[27]

Paul the Deacon and the Lombard origin myth will be discussed at greater length below; fighting Lombard women initially play a positive part, but then inimical Amazons block the way of the wandering Lombards at a river crossing, and not until the Lombard king Lamissio has killed their queen in an underwater fight in the river do they let the Lombards pass. As a hero who has defeated an Amazon queen, Lamissio joins the ranks of Achilles, Herakles, Theseus and Alexander the Great, and no doubt Paul the Deacon's readers were supposed to make the comparison.[28] The seventh-century *Chronicle* of Fredegar brought the Amazons into some relationship with the Frankish origin legend from Troy, at least implicitly: *Amazones Priamo tolere subsidium. Exinde origo Francorum fuit*—when the Amazons withdrew their support from the Trojans, these were defeated, and thus had to flee to become the Franks.[29] Aethicus Ister claimed that the Amazons' weapons were of such high quality that later on, among other peoples, Scythians, Franks and Trojans learnt from them. In the beginning of the twelfth century, Cosmas of Prague assumed that the Amazons had once lived in Bohemia, where they dressed, fought and hunted like men, and even founded their own city, Devin, the 'city of girls'; but Libuše, their queen, had to be removed from power to pave the way for the rule of the Přemyslids.[30]

These examples demonstrate the power of ethnic narrative: if fighting women existed, they were likely to be designated as Amazons. The mere name evoked an elaborate narrative with two alternative endings, one allowing for the Amazons' contemporary appearance, the other one not. Nobody in late antiquity succeeded in making the Amazon myth a basis for political power, therefore we know of the Amazons as an imaginary people. The ambiguous Amazon myth could be used for very difficult aims. The various stories that had circulated in Greek antiquity, indeed a cluster of heroic legends making use of the popular stereotype, had in the course of antiquity been brought into a precarious and rather contradictory synthesis. Civic origin legends and accounts of barbarian otherness had been balanced in complicated migration legends to which some of the greatest heroes of ancient myth and history served as anchors in place and time. In late antiquity, Christendom sharpened the concepts of 'pagan' otherness and thus redrew the map of inclusion and exclusion in which the Amazon myth could acquire new meanings. This did not mean that a new story had to be told. Many late antique and early medieval authors rehearsed at least key elements of the old story, still placing it in a remote past. But its ambiguity and its inner contradictions kept the story alive, so that many texts are in fact polyphonic and contain traces of controversy on the subject. These controversies then facilitated the integration of contemporary material into a story that obviously had happened long ago, by way of comparison or allowing for a survival in regions so distant that ancient authors had passed them over in silence; for instance, in 'innermost Germany'.

Can we grasp any barbarian realities in these legends? Perhaps it is exactly the contradictory nature of the 'puzzling evidence' that late antique and early medieval authors had to deal with that makes their reports more credible. It seems that among barbarians in antiquity and the early middle ages, fighting women 'in male attire' were not imaginary at all. Barbarian women on the battlefield are prominent in most Roman

authors who deal with the wars fought against the Cimbri and Teutons, the armies of Ariovistus in Gaul or the Germanic peoples east of the Rhine. Indeed, a majority of all available sources about Germanic women before A.D. 238 deal with women at war.[31] These are variously described as taking part in the fighting, spurring on their men on the battlefield, abusing or killing them after defeat, defending their camp against victorious enemies or killing their children and themselves lest they should be taken captive.[32] Perhaps it is not astonishing that women spinning receive less attention, although we may safely assume that barbarian women spent more time with the spindle than with the sword. Ammianus Marcellinus, in the late fourth century, wrote about the Gauls:

> When in the course of a dispute, any of them calls in his wife, a creature with gleaming eyes much stronger than her husband, they are more than a match for a whole group of foreigners; especially when the woman, with swollen neck and gnashing teeth, swings her great white arms and begins to deliver a rain of punches mixed with kicks, like missiles launched by the twisted strings of a catapult.[33]

Here we are in a genre rather different from heroic epic in which the Amazons first made their appearance. Explicit rhetoric was not the only textual strategy used to remind men where women's place was: often, irony, against both women and barbarian men, would suffice.

To contemporaries, the existence of female warriors was attested by their dead bodies found after a battle, which is, for instance, reported from the Gothic raids in the Balkans in the third century.[34] A less-known example is the thwarted attack of Slavs in dug-out canoes along the Golden Horn during the Avar siege of Constantinople in 626: according to Nikephoros, writing about 150 years later, 'among the dead bodies, one could even observe those of Slavic women'.[35] Ironically, the Byzantines believed that a woman, the Virgin Mary, had defended their city: the *Chronicon Paschale* has the Avar khagan say prior to his departure: 'I see a woman in a stately dress rushing about the wall all alone.'[36] The Christian image of women allowed for some martial elements.

Archaeological evidence for women buried with weapons in the early Middle Ages is not as substantial as in the case of the Sarmatians, but it can be found.[37] Extraordinary features are sixteen graves of seventh- and eighth-century Avar women buried with horses which were found in southern Slovakia and which lacked typically female grave goods such as distaff and needle-case; female horse burials from the period also occur in other parts of eastern Europe and central Asia, though usually without weapons.[38] Bonnie Effros (in [Brubaker and Smith (eds), *Gender in the Early Medieval World*]) warns us not to overlook the possibility that even more women were buried with weapons (or men with 'female' objects), which may go unrecognised because of object-based sexing of the skeletons.[39] Warrior women are a question not only of male perceptions, but also of female agency, although it is hard to judge whether the written sources and the evidence of objects from the warrior sphere in female graves represent symbolic transgressions, exceptional cases or the regular occurrence of female warriors in certain cultures.

For male authors, women who 'converted their appearance into male habitus', 'put toughness before allure, aimed at conflicts instead of kisses, tasted blood, not lips, sought the clash of arms rather than the arm's embrace, fitted to weapons hands which should

have been weaving', as Saxo Grammaticus says about fighting women who once lived in Denmark, adding that they 'were forgetful of their true selves'.[40] Rarely do we find the idea that fighting women represented a world turned upside down so clearly expressed.[41] Women who put toughness before allure may have been common in a barbarian world where toughness was the better option for survival. A warrior society more or less required, or at least allowed, transgression of conventional gender roles, and we may assume that not only Christian authors felt the need for a good dose of rhetoric to reiterate social boundaries: let women kiss while men kill.

In the post-Roman kingdoms, female violence was also restricted by legislation. The edict of the Lombard king Rothari in 643 stated that a woman could not be tried for armed irruption into someone's house, 'for it seems absurd that a woman, free or slave, could commit a forceful act with arms as if she was a man'.[42] Another of Rothari's clauses treats a similar issue quite differently: 'If a free woman participates in a brawl (scandalum) while men are struggling, and if she inflicts some blow or injury and perhaps in turn is struck and killed', the higher compensation normally required for women does not apply, 'since she had participated in a struggle in a manner dishonourable for women'.[43] There is little doubt that this addition to Rothari's code was based on a case that had actually happened. In the Burgundian Code, 'if a woman has gone forth from her own courtyard to fight' and suffers some injury, she forfeits all compensation altogether.[44]

These were transgressions of the gender dichotomy which pervaded that most male of all social domains, violence. A male society reacted by suspending the legal protection otherwise valid for women. The law-code does not imply any further consequences of the ensuing paradox. Those had been projected in the language of myth, creating a space of alterity that invited, and still invites, reflection and debate. Fighting women are an excellent test case to study the social dynamic of violence in ancient societies, and the way in which it established or challenged social distinctions.[45] Furthermore, they can shed light on the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion that ancient and medieval societies maintained, and on the constructions of social categories in general. Amazons were located on the margin not because they represented a very remote concern. They impersonated a lingering presence that threatened the assignment of social roles in the heart of the classical and the early medieval world. The frequent representations in ancient art of the *Amazonomachia*, the battle against the Amazons, demonstrate that this was not a minor concern. They continued into the Byzantine period, where Amazon warriors are a common textile pattern.

In many other contexts, the Amazon myth preserved its capacity to express the paradox of gender boundaries and at the same time redraw them where they threatened to become blurred. Male dress is one of the recurrent elements in descriptions of fighting women. As Homer observed, the Amazons are men's equals, at least as long as they fight.[46] But when they lie dead, they are women, and in an instant, the mechanisms of exclusion collapse, as in the epic Aithiopis after Achilles has slain Penthesileia, and Thersites mocks him that he was in fact in love with her.[47]

The ambiguity of the female body when it lacked the social signs normally attached to it (clothes, ornaments, make-up, etc.) was a threat that only subsided when the 'wrong' signs had been removed, and the 'wrong' behaviour stopped. The death of the Amazon was one way to reaffirm the proper order of gender.[48] But that apparently seemed an

unpleasant solution to many. The representations of *Amazonomachia* often depict very feminine women with full breasts and flowing hair. The feminine Amazon was not a pure projection either; the graves of armed Sarmatian women also contain a number of typically female objects, among them make-up and little mirrors.[49] The erotic element in the Amazon myth can also be directly linked with gender transgression, as in the story of Commodus wanting to dress up as an Amazon for the arena just as his favourite mistress had done.[50] In late antiquity, court poets exploited the romantic underside of the Amazon myth, for instance Claudian in his verses on the marriage of Honorius:

> Hadst thou over the heights of the snowy Caucasus gone against the cruel Amazons in all thy beauty, that warrior band had fled the fight and called to mind again their proper sex; Hippolyta, amid the trumpets' din, forgetful of her sire, had weakly laid aside her drawn battle-axe, and with half-bared breast loosed the girdle all Hercules' strength availed not to loose. Thy beauty alone would have ended the war.[51]

Unlikely flattery for an emperor with a crooked neck, indeed; but it shows how the sexual imagery of the Amazon legend could be used to draw strong images of masculinity. The half-bared breast as an erotic image, however, competed with the masculine elements in the Amazons. To be an Amazon proper required mutilation—one breast had to be cut off, or burnt away, a procedure from which the name 'without breasts' derived, as Isidore knew.[52]

Throughout classical antiquity and the Middle Ages, fighting women tended to be subsumed under a general mythological model that allotted them an identity apart; ethnic boundaries served to exclude what gender boundaries could not contain.[53] This is significant for the construction both of femininity and of ethnicity. The late antique concept of ethnicity allowed for a female ethnic identity. It is, however, an extreme case that allows us to test the flexibility of the concept, then and now. Late antique Amazons often fight *virili habitu,* in male attire, and do not appear to be women; their femininity can only be detected after the battle, when they lie dead or have been captured. Thus, their ethnic identity only becomes obvious when their sex is revealed; before that, they are perceived as Goths, Slavs or whatever barbarian people they belong to. Amazon ethnicity cuts across other ethnic identities. That being an Amazon is an ethnic definition and not simply a mythological designation for fighting women of all nations, however, is clear from the placard indicating the *gentis nomen* carried in front of them in Aurelian's triumph. It is no coincidence that the anonymous author of the *Historia Augusta* specifically mentions the carrying of the *tituli* in this case, to identify the most elusive of all peoples. In this case, the true self and the outward appearance are in contradiction. Here, ethnic identity is in fact defined by this contradiction: women acting like men. One might even say that, to contemporary eyes, Amazons have female sex and male gender. They thus belong to a transgender group, along with eunuchs, hermaphrodites, or cross-dressing transsexuals.[54] The connection with eunuchs was made by contemporaries. Claudian (d. *c.* 404) wrote in his invective against Eutropius: 'If eunuchs shall give judgement and determine laws, then let men card wool and live like the Amazons, confusion and licence dispossessing the order of nature.'[55] Fredegar's *Chronicle* reports,

in the mid-seventh century, the fantasy that the general Belisarios was married to an Amazon from a brothel in Constantinople (while the general Narses was a eunuch).[56]

As always, looking for paradox is a good way to test our categories. Fighting women are such a case: they affirm and transgress models of gender and ethnicity at the same time. Seen through Roman eyes, they represented a non-hegemonic, marginal form of femininity, which however tended to grab the limelight. Rather than claiming, in the wake of women's history of the seventies (the 'women-in' approach, as Liz James has aptly called it),[57] that late antique barbarians were a haven for strong and aggressive women, I would argue that Roman perceptions of the barbarians allowed for, or even promoted, a certain blurring of gender—and ethnic—roles. Consequently, strong and aggressive women of the Roman world could be qualified as barbarian: gendered and cultural prejudices overlap. Christianity adapted this model and charged it with further meanings. Now, paganism was held responsible for the 'shame' of female warriors, which further reinforced the ties between the stereotypes of the barbarian and the Amazon. In turn, these perceptions could be used to denounce powerful women in the Christian world, especially queens (such as Brunhild or Rosamund) or empresses (such as Theodora), as barbarian and shameless.[58]

Still, fighting barbarian women were not only a figment of the Roman imagination. Difficult as it is to judge from barbarian myths recorded in post-Roman kingdoms, it seems that barbarian self-perceptions also gave much space to the question of women and masculinity. Sometimes, aggressive women were demonised, such as Grendel's mother in Beowulf or the Gothic *haliurunnae,* the witches who, according to Jordanes, became the mothers of the Huns. None the less, there are also positive images of women transgressing their gender roles. Both played a surprisingly important part in early medieval origin myths. A good example is the origin legend of the Lombards, or Longobards, which I discuss in the second part of this chapter.

Female memory and masculine identity

The seventh-century *Origo gentis Langobardorum* contains a version of the Lombard origin myth, which Paul the Deacon included almost verbatim in his *Historia Langobardorum.*[59] Its core explains how the Lombards were named. The Winnili, led by Gambara and her two sons, are attacked by the Vandals, who have sought the support of Wodan, god of war; he promises victory to whomever he sees first on the battlefield. Gambara asks Frea, Wodan's wife, for help. On her advice, the women line up on the battlefield with their long hair tied in front of their faces to resemble beards. At sunrise, Frea turns Wodan's bed around so that he sees the Winnili. 'Who are these Longbeards *(Longobardi)?',* he asks; Frea answers: 'As you have given them a name, now give them victory as well'.

This story is remarkable for a number of reasons. It is the only genealogy of a post-Roman *gens* that begins with a woman, and Gambara relies on Frea, who outwits Wodan. The long-bearded warriors the god sees are in fact women. Contemporary etymologies ignore that paradox; instead, Isidore explains the name *Langobardi* by their long beards.[60] The relationship between outward sign and ethnic identity could not be more apparent.[61] But why does the myth replace this interpretation with a reversal of gender roles?

Successful myth does not restate the obvious, it sets out to resolve tensions: here, a question of female identity and ethnicity. If the name of the *gens* is taken from a male secondary sexual characteristic, female *Langobardi,* longbeards, constitute a paradox that needs to be resolved. The story explains why women can call themselves Lombards, too.

The female origins of the Lombards, however, are only the point of departure for a male lineage. After the death of Agilmund, Gambara's grandson and first king of the Lombards, Paul the Deacon reintroduces women on the battlefield in a different role, as enemies: Lamissio, the second king, must overcome the Amazons to lead his people across a river.[62] A tradition of scholarship has regarded the Lombard origin myth as a symbolic expression of the transition from an archaic matriarchy to patriarchy, or from the cult of a mother goddess to a god of war.[63] However, these stories were written many centuries after the ethnic origins they relate. In the case of the Lombards, their name is already well attested in the first century A.D., so that the powerful women of the Winnili would have to have been remembered for at least 700 years before the myth was written down.

Here, the issue is not the reconstruction of archaic societies, but the significance of the past and of gender in post-Roman kingdoms, and the way in which contemporary problems shaped social memories. Wherever the narratives came from, they mattered to those who chose to recount, rearrange and transmit them. What did these memories mean to those who chose to picture the foundations of their identity in this way? The Lombard origin story had something to do with Lombard identity in Italy; if women played an important role in it, a study of ethnicity needs to take the female element into account.

Female interest and participation in the process of social memory is exceptionally well attested in the case of the Lombards; and women probably played a part in the transmission of the *Origo gentis Langobardorum.*[64] The first known Lombard history, the lost *Historiola* by Secundus of Trento, was probably commissioned by Queen Theodelinda around 610.[65] She also had scenes from the Lombard past painted in her palace at Monza.[66] Leslie Brubaker has underlined the role of Byzantine empresses in the shaping of dynastic memory, and Jinty Nelson has stressed similar activities of Carolingian empresses and queens.[67] Theodelinda, to a certain extent, shaped the self-perception of the Lombards. She was a Bavarian princess, but also the granddaughter of King Wacho who had led the Lombards into Pannonia after 510. She thus conferred the prestige of an ancient dynasty on two successive husbands, Authari and Agilulf, and later ruled for her son Adaloald during his minority. When Adaloald was dethroned, her daughter Gundeperga married his two successors, both from families new to the throne. The female line mattered for legitimacy: in its king-list, the *Origo* mostly enumerates a king's wives, and their children. In early medieval genealogies, this is unusual, as Ian Wood emphasises in his contribution to [Brubaker and Smith (eds), *Gender in the Early Medieval World*].

Theodelinda and Gundeperga did not simply serve as passive guarantees of legitimacy to contested rulers, they played a more active part in the politics of Lombard identity. Paul the Deacon has Queen Theodelinda, after the death of her first husband, freely choose a second one, an unusual way of selecting a ruler in the west.[68] Theodelinda brought about peace with the Romans and promoted the cultural integration of the Lombards in their Italian environment. Secundus and Paul the Deacon have created a positive image of Theodelinda for posterity; Gundeperga met with more resistance.

Fredegar pictures her as often in conflict with her husbands, who repeatedly accused her of adultery and had her confined; she was also denounced as *francigena,* of Frankish origin, and thus found defective in both ethnicity and gender.[69]

As I have argued elsewhere, Gundeperga probably played an important part in shaping the *Origo.*[70] If so, the early history of the Lombards was transmitted to us as shaped by two women, both regarded as foreigners but nevertheless representing the unrivalled prestige of ancient Lombard lineage. This prestige came through the female line, and the *Origo gentis Langobardorum* explained how. Directing the writing of history was a way in which the two women could assert their roles, but these did not go uncontested. Gundeperga's second husband, Rothari, created a different image of the past, listing his sixteen predecessors as kings and his nine forefathers, without mentioning women.[71] But in the long run, through the work of Paul the Deacon who used both Secundus and the *Origo,* the queens' vision of the Lombard past prevailed.

The *Origo gentis Langobardorum* provides some idea of the way in which history was perceived through influential women's eyes. However, this does not mean that it was a female creation, or, even less, that its vision transcended gender stereotypes. What is extraordinary about the Lombard origin myth is the amount of female agency that the narrative implies. But the women fall into well-known categories. Gambara rules as a mother of princes, together with them.[72] This implies a mother's guardianship over her sons, much in the same way as Theodelinda ruled in the name of her son Adaloald during his minority.[73] Yet Paul the Deacon, in one of his few substantial changes to the story of the *Origo,* omits this indication of female rule.[74] He underlines another aspect of her position, wisdom, which is also implicit in the etymology of her name.[75] Wise women among the barbarians are one of the recurrent features in ancient literature, especially in the historiography of the wars fought against Germanic peoples during the early empire. They were compared to the Sibyls; the most prominent of them was Veleda, who resided among the Bructeri in a high tower and supported the rebellion of Civilis in A.D. 69.[76] Gambara also acted in a sphere in which oracles and prophecy played a role. She was not a virgin like Veleda, but combined the roles of the wise woman/priestess, the mother and the princess/queen.

A display of female power is more likely to occur at the beginning than at the end of an origin story. The outcome is a happy ending for the Lombards, but under male leadership. Wodan 'adopts' the Lombards by his act of name-giving, and they march on under the sole leadership of the two ducal brothers. Paul the Deacon adds a long story about the second king Lamissio. His mother is a whore, *meretrix,* who abandons the baby in a pool, where King Agilmund finds and adopts him, impressed that the boy has immediately grabbed his lance. This motif is more reminiscent of Moses and Romulus than of Nordic saga; and Lamissio's victory over the Amazons also suggests classical models rather than archaic Germanic lore.[77] This need not mean that Paul the Deacon invented it, but it most likely originated among the Lombards in Italy. The Lamissio story directly counters the implications of the name-giving legend. Gambara is a strong mother figure, whereas Lamissio is a motherless child; Gambara's Lombards receive support from the goddess Frea by the turning of a bed, whereas Lamissio is adopted by Agilmund by means of a lance; in the origin story, Lombard warrior women bring victory to their *gens,* whereas the Amazons figure in the Lamissio story as the defeated enemies of the Lombards. The story symbolises the ejection of women from the sphere of war and

government. As shown above, this is an element that many *origines gentium* contain. Ethnic identity is rooted in female origins, but then the gender hierarchy has to be symbolically reestablished by the expulsion, or the removal from power, of wise and/or warlike women.

A few conclusions

Whenever women entered male domains and took part in their power games, this was likely to create a stir in discourse: debates about fundamental issues, heated value judgements, strong and paradoxical images, dramatic narratives. Often, women were the objects of textual strategies directed against the blurring of gender roles. In the case of the Amazons, defining fighting women as belonging to a distinct ethnic group was also a way of containing them, confining them to a country distant in space and time. Similarly, many powerful queens were depicted as Jezebels.[78] But as the example of Theodelinda shows, women could also play an active role in the shaping of meanings and memories, and muster intellectual support. The outcome of such debates was not always predictable. Women's role in ethnic processes should not be underestimated. Historians usually equate polyethnicity, for instance, with male mobility, although *alienigenae uxores* (foreign wives), such as Theodelinda or Brunhild, are equally important. Royal brides often arrived with a huge retinue; around A.D. 500, Theoderic's sister Amalafrida travelled to Carthage with 1000 Gothic warriors to marry the Vandal king Thrasamund.[79] Archaeologists have been more attentive for markers of ethnicity on women, and interpreted female graves with objects from another archaeological culture as those of foreign wives, which probably underrates the complexity of the symbolical language of burial.[80] The example of Theodelinda choosing Agilulf as her husband (however much that may be Paul the Deacon's stylisation of events) shows that women were conceivable not only as objects, but also as subjects of marriage alliances. Her case, and that of Gundeperga, also demonstrates that women could have more than one ethnic identity.

Women played a double role in the construction of ethnic identity. On the one hand, in a society that regarded ethnicity as a matter of descent, mothers had a strong symbolical role in that respect. On the other hand, in a patrilineal and virilocal society, mothers had usually come from somewhere else, and especially in the leading families of a people, that might also mean from another people: the *genetrix* was *alienigena* herself.

Besides, the ethnic identities of early medieval peoples grew in response to a fundamental change of perspective.[81] In the Roman world, the barbarians represented the other, and their perception was charged with images of difference. Amazons were one element of this diversity. From the fifth century onwards, when more or less Romanised barbarians came to rule parts of the Roman empire, they gradually appropriated for themselves the ethnographic discourse once used to describe and explain their otherness. In the end, for instance, Goths or Hungarians came to be proud of their identification with the apocalyptic peoples of Gog and Magog and of the awe these had once inspired, just as a long time ago wealthy cities of Asia Minor had been proud of their foundation by Amazons. Other peoples, on the contrary, sought their origins in the classical world, in Troy (the Franks) or with the Macedonians (the Saxons). The often very contradictory origin stories are only a symptom of a complex process of inclusion and exclusion, of

self-identification and new prejudice in which the social boundaries of the post-Roman world were redrawn. Gothic, Lombard or Frankish identities were not self-assured and securely rooted in a long and continuous ethnic history, but had to be maintained through a series of dramatic demographic and political changes, and in a culturally dominant late Roman environment.

This crisis of identity also had its consequences for femininity. Perhaps it is no coincidence that, in the course of the troubled fifth century, barbarian women in the west abandoned their age-old style of dress and adopted another one.[82] At the same time, these transformations also provided unusual opportunities for a number of (mostly royal) women to wield considerable power and to influence contemporary perceptions.

Women contributed to the transformations of the early medieval world. But I certainly do not want to argue, in line with seventies-style women's history, that the situation of women in the early Middle Ages was not as bad as we tend to think, and that the strong role of women has simply been obscured by male-dominated history. Female identities, and female participation in the politics of identity, were probably more negotiable and more contradictory than simple models suggest. The reshuffling of social boundaries and of the corresponding discourse of exclusion and inclusion, of identity and otherness, also implied a renegotiation of gender roles (and vice versa). If Goths or Lombards were barbarians, did that mean that they were likely to have Amazons among their ranks? Or if not, who were the new barbarians where Amazons might still be found? Could queens be trusted to hand down the ancient memories of the *gens*? With the support of Christian intellectuals, women such as Theodelinda were pioneers in the shaping of new Christian identities for their peoples. But they did not succeed in establishing a model of powerful and active queens that future generations could safely continue. Many of the queens who had a strong position in the sixth century were soon remembered as bad queens. Female agency remained to some extent an exception, and the consolidation of the Frankish and the Lombard kingdoms in the seventh century seems to have reduced the spaces for it.[83]

In a society in which the warrior-aristocrat became the dominant form of masculinity, femininity had to be redefined in relation to the new ideals of controlled violence. Women warriors and Amazons were just one extreme image involved in this debate about the social limits of violence. Legislation to ensure better protection of women through higher *wergeld* (compensation) and other measures were another part of it. But beyond that, a male-dominated society needed to reaffirm female virtues in symbols and token narratives. Early medieval ethnic identities therefore tended to accommodate both barbarian otherness and female otherness, and project them into the past. The narratives that dealt with these tensions are controversial, and their complexity should not be interpreted away. We should not forget that perhaps the most complex and most controversial text known in the period was also by far the most successful one: the Bible.[84] The efforts to construct a Christian society polarised the field in which both gender and ethnic identities developed. Much has yet to be done to understand how these discourses influenced people's lives and identities. Discourse formations, power structures, self-perpetuating systems, the social construction of reality, all these concepts may be used as models and methodological tools. Dramatic narratives and strong images are traces that are still accessible to us, and they seem to indicate a lost world of strong emotions and contradictions that accompanied individual efforts to adapt to a world in

which identities were not always easily maintained in the face of overwhelming diversity.[85]

NOTES

1 Recent overviews: P.J.Geary, *The Myth of Nations* (Princeton, 2002); W.Pohl, 'Aux origines d'une Europe ethnique', *Annales: Histoire, Sciences Sociales,* forthcoming.

2 R.Wenskus, *Stammesbildung und Verfassung,* 2nd edn (Cologne, 1977); developed further by H.Wolfram, *Die Goten,* 4th edn (Munich, 2000); English edn, *History of the Goths* (Berkeley, 1988).

3 W.Pohl, 'Tradition, Ethnogenese und literarische Gestaltung: eine Zwischenbilanz', in K.Brunner and B.Merta (eds), *Ethnogenese und Überlieferung* (Vienna, 1994), pp. 9–26; see the criticism of Wenskus in A.Gillett (ed.), *On Barbarian Identity: Critical Approaches to Ethnicity in the Early Middle Ages* (Turnhout, 2002), with the response by W.Pohl, 'Ethnicity, theory and tradition: a response', in *ibid.,* pp. 221–40.

4 *SHA, Aurelianus* 33–4, ed. A.Chastagnol (Paris, 1994), p. 1004.

5 J.H.Blok, *The Early Amazons* (Leiden, 1995), p. vii.

6 Homer, *Iliad* III.181; IV.185. For a recent discussion, K.Dowden, 'The Amazons: development and function', *Führer des Rheinischen Landesmuseums in Bonn* 140 (1997), pp. 97–128; see also W.B.Tyrell, *Amazons: A Study in Athenian Mythmaking* (London, 1984).

7 These civic origin legends were still known in late antiquity: e.g. Jordanes, *Getica* XX.107, ed. T.Mommsen, *MGH AA* V, 1 (Berlin, repr. 1982), pp. 53–138, here p. 85; *Exordia Scythica,* ed. T.Mommsen, *MGH AA* XI (Berlin, 1894), pp. 314–21, here n. 13, p. 315.

8 R.Rolle, 'Oiorpata', *Materialhefte zur Ur- und Frühgeschichte Niedersachsens* 16 (1980), pp. 275–94.

9 The fundamental account is Herodotos, IV.110–17, ed. A.D.Godley (Cambridge, MA, repr. 1982), vol. II, pp. 308–17. Blok, *The Early Amazons;* R.Bichler, 'Herodots Frauenbild und seine Vorstellung über die Sexualsitten der Völker', in R.Rollinger and C.Ulf (eds), *Geschlechterrollen und Frauenbild in der Perspektive antiker Autoren* (Innsbruck, 1999), pp. 13–56.

10 Cf. U.Wenskus, 'Amazonen zwischen Mythos und Ethnographic', in S. Klettenhammer and E.Pöder (eds), *Das Geschlecht, das sich (un)eins ist?* (Innsbruck, 1999), pp. 63–72.

11 Prokopios, *Wars* VIII.3, 5–11, ed. H.B.Dewing, 7 vols. (Cambridge, MA, 1953–54), vol. v, pp. 74–9.

12 Prokopios, *Wars* VIII.3, II, p. 78.

13 Prokopios, *Wars* VIII.3, II, pp. 76–8.

14 Isidore, *Etymologiae* IX.2, 64, ed. W.M.Lindsay, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1911), vol. 1, p. 352.

15 W.Pohl, 'Paulus Diaconus und die "Historia Langobardorum": Text und Tradition', in A.Scharer and G.Scheibelreiter (eds), *Historiographie im frühen Mittelalter* (Vienna, 1994), pp. 375–405; Pohl, 'Paolo Diacono e la costruzione dell'identità longobarda', in P.Chiesa (ed.), *Paolo Diacono—uno scrittore fra tradizione Longobarda e rinnovamento Carolingio* (Udine, 2000), pp. 413–26.

16 Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum* I.15, ed. L.Bethmann and G.Waitz, *MGH SRL* (Hanover, 1878), pp. 12–187, here pp. 54–5.

17 Pohl, 'Paulus Diaconus'.

18 Adam of Bremen, *Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum* IV.20, ed. R. Buchner, *Quellen des 9. und 11. Jahrhunderts zur Geschichte der Hamburgischen Kirche und des Reiches* (Darmstadt, 1961), p. 456.

19 L.Bitel, *Land of Women: Tales of Sex and Gender from Early Ireland* (Ithaca, NY, 1996), pp. 161–4.

20 For instance twice on the Ebstorf map: cf. I.Baumgärtner, 'Biblical, mythical and foreign women: texts and images on medieval world maps', in P.M. Barber and P.D.A.Harvey (eds) *The Hereford and Other Mappaemundi* (London, forthcoming).

21 Justin, *Epitome of the Philippic History of Pompeius Trogus* II.4, 6, trans. J.C. Yardley (Atlanta, GA, 1994), p. 29.

22 Justin, *Epitome* II.4, p. 29; Orosius, *Historiae* I.15–16, ed. A.Lippold, *Le storie contro i pagani* (Milan, 1976), pp. 76–9.

23 E.g. Jordanes, *Getica* v.44, p. 65; the *Exordio Scythica,* pp. 314–21, a text added to some manuscripts of Isidore of Seville; and the enigmatic eighth-century *Cosmography of Aethicus Ister,* c. 6, ed. O.Prinz, MGH Quellen zur Geistesgeschichte 14 (Munich, 1993), pp. 178–81.

24 Jordanes, *Getica* VII.49–52, pp. 67–8; VIII.56–8, p. 69. A connection between Getae-Goths and Amazons had also been established by Claudian, ed. M. Platnauer, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA, 1922): *In Eutropium* I, vv.240–2, vol. I, p. 156; *De Raptu Proserpinae* II, v. 62, p. 322. Sidonius Apollinaris, *Carmina,* ed. C.Luetjohann, *MGH AA* VIII (Berlin, 1887), IX, vv. 94–100, p. 220; XIII, vv. 11–13, p. 231; XV, vv. 141–3, p. 237, on the other hand, places them in lists of animals and fantastic creatures inspired by the Herakles myth.

25 Jordanes, *Getica* v.44, p. 65.

26 H.Wolfram, 'Origo gentis', in *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde* 22 (2003), pp. 174–8.

27 Jordanes, *Getica* IX.58, p. 70. See P.J.Geary, 'Cur in feminas tamdiu perseverat?', in W.Pohl (ed.), *Die Suche nach den Ursprüngen* (forthcoming).

28 W.Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History* (Princeton, 1988), p. 383, makes Lamissio 'Paul's own creation'. See, however, W.Pohl, 'Origo gentis (Langobarden)', in *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde* 22 (2003), pp. 183–8.

29 Fredegar, *Chronicon* II.4, ed. B.Krusch, MGH *SRM* II (Hanover, 1888), p. 45. This is inserted into the *Chronicle* of Jerome. Fredegar's compilation places Amazonia in the vicinity of Armenia and Media: Fredegar, *Chronicon* I.5, p. 21.

30 Cosmas of Prague, *Chronica Boemorum* 1.4, ed. B.Bretholz, MGH *SRG* n.s. II (Hanover, repr. 1980), pp. 10–12. See Wolfram, 'Origo gentis'.

31 This can easily be checked using the excellent index of the sourcebook edited by H.W.Goetz and K.W.Welwei, *Altes Germanien, 2* vols. (Darmstadt, 1995).

32 E.g. Plutarch, *Marius* 19, 9; 27, 2, vol. I, p. 248; Caesar, *De Bello Gallico* I, 51, 3, vol. I, p. 300; Tacitus, *Germania,* 8, vol. I, p. 132; Tacitus, *Historiae* 4,18, vol. II, p. 190 (all ed. Goetz and Welwei, *Altes Germanien); Orosius, *Historiae* 6, 21, 17, ed. Lippold, p. 228; W.Pohl, *Die Germanen* (Munich, 2000), p. 76.

33 Ammianus Marcellinus XV.12, I, ed. J.C.Rolfe, 3 vols. (Cambridge, MA, 1950–52), vol. I, p. 194.

34 Wolfram, *Goten,* pp. 394–5.

35 Nikephoros, *Breviarium Historicum* 13, ed. C.Mango (Washington, DC, 1990), p. 60.

36 *Chronicon Paschale* a. 626, trans. M. and M.Whitby (Liverpool, 1989), p. 180.

37 R.Gilchrist, *Gender and Archaelogy* (London, 1999), p. 67–71; Sarmatians: Rolle, 'Oiorpata'.

38 Z.Čilinskà, 'Die awarenzeitlichen Frauengräber mit Pferdebestattung in der Slowakei', in *A Wosinsky Mór Múzeum Evkönyve* 15 (Szekszárd, 1990), pp. 135–46; W.Pohl, *Die Awaren* (Munich, 1988), p. 306.

39 See also G.Halsall, 'Material culture, sex, gender and transgression in sixth-century Gaul', in L.Bevan (ed.), *Indecent Exposure: Sexuality, Society and the Archaeological Record* (Glasgow, 2001), n. 10.

40 Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum,* ed. J.Olrik and H. Raeder, vol. I, 2nd edn (Copenhagen, 1931), p. 192; J.Jesch, *Women in the Viking Age* (Woodbridge, 1991), p. 176.

41 Usually, this passage has been read as just another proof that fighting women were common among the Vikings: see, for instance, Gilchrist, *Gender and Archaeology,* p. 69.

42 *Leges Langobardorum,* Edictus Rothari 278, ed. F.Bluhme, *MGH Leges* IV (Stuttgart, repr. 1964), p. 67.

43 *Leges Langobardorum,* Edictus Rothari 378, ed. Bluhme, p. 88. Cf. R.Balzaretti, "These are things that men do, not women": the social regulation of female violence in Lombard Italy', in G.Halsall (ed.), *Violence and Society in the Early Medieval West* (Woodbridge, 1998), pp. 175–92.

44 *Liber Constitutionum* 92,2, trans. F.Drew (Philadelphia, 1976), p. 82. For female violence and the Salic law, N.Gradowicz-Pancer, 'De-gendering female violence: Merovingian female honour as an exchange of violence', *EME* 11, 1 (2002), pp. 1–18, here pp. 17–18.

45 In general, see Halsall (ed.), *Violence and Society,* C.Dauphin and A.Farge (eds) *De la violence et des femmes* (Paris, 1997).

46 Homer, *Iliad* III.181; VI.185.

47 Blok, *The Early Amazons,* pp. 195–6.

48 For the attraction of dead women for male writers, see E.Bronfman, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (Manchester, 1992).

49 Rolle, 'Oiorpata'; Wenskus, 'Amazonen', p. 66.

50 *SHA, Commodus Antoninus* II, 9, ed. Chastagnol, p. 234.

51 Claudian, *Fescennia de nuptiis Honorii Augusti,* vv. 30–7, ed. Platnauer, vol. II, p. 231.

52 Isidore, *Etymologiae* 9, 2, 64, ed. Lindsay, vol. I, p. 352: 'id est sine mamma'.

53 See also W.Müller-Funk, 'Von den Differenzen von Differenzen', in Müller-Funk (ed.), *Macht, Geschlechter, Differenz* (Vienna, 1994), pp. 152–73.

54 Cf. M.E.Wiesner-Hanks, *Gender in History* (Oxford, 2001), p. 159. Eunuchs: M. Kuefler, *The Manly Eunuch* (Chicago, 2001), esp. pp. 245–82; S.F. Tougher, 'Byzantine eunuchs: an overview', in James (ed.), *Women, Men and Eunuchs,* pp. 168–84; and Tougher, chapter 4 [in L.Brubaker and J.M.H.Smith (eds), *Gender in the Early Medieval World* (Cambridge, 2004)]. For a theoretical approach to non-binary gender, see J.Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London, 1990), esp. pp. 16–25; Butler, *Bodies that Matter* (London: 1993). It is no coincidence that Greek ethnography and medical literature also made much of Scythian eunuchs (e.g. Herodotus I.105; IV.67): owing to the climate, men were less male and women less female, see U.Wenskus, 'Geschlechterrollen und Verwandtes in der pseudohippokratischen Schrift *Über die Umwelt*', in Rollinger and Ulf (eds), *Geschlechterrollen,* pp. 173–86, here pp. 180–1.

55 Claudian, *In Eutropium* I, vv. 497–9, ed. Platnauer, vol. I, p. 175.

56 Fredegar, *Chronicon* 11.62, ed. Krusch, pp. 85–7; the emperor Justinian is supposed to have married the second sister. Belisarios' Amazon wife then helped him to subdue the Vandal kingdom.

57 James (ed.), *Women, Men and Eunuchs,* p. xii.

58 J.Nelson, 'Queens as Jezebels: Brunhild and Balthild in Merovingian history', in D.Baker (ed.), *Medieval Women* (Oxford, 1978), pp. 31–77 (reprinted in Nelson, *Politics and Ritual in Early Medieval Europe* (London, 1986), pp. 1–48); P. Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers,* 2nd edn (London, 1998). For Theodora, see Leslie Brubaker, chapter 5 [in Brubaker and Smith (eds), *Gender in the Early Medieval World*].

59 *Origo gentis Langobardorum* I, ed. G.Waitz, *MGH SRL,* p. 2; Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum* I, 7–10, ed. Waitz, pp. 52–3; W.Pohl, *Werkstätte der Erinnerung* (Vienna and Munich, 2001), pp. 117–22; Pohl, 'Origo gentis (Langobarden)'.

60 Isidore, *Etymologiae* IX.2, 95, ed. Lindsay, vol. I, p. 356.

61 The relationship between outward signs and ethnicity in the early Middle Ages is less well attested than ethnographic theory assumes: W.Pohl, Telling the difference—signs of ethnic identity', in W.Pohl and H.Reimitz (eds), *Strategies of Distinction* (Leiden, 1998), pp. 17–69. For an introduction to problems of ethnicity, see Geary, *The Myth of Nations.*

62 Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum* I.15, ed. Waitz, pp. 54–5.

63 K.Hauck, 'Lebensnormen und Kultmythen in Germanischen Stammes- und Herrschergenealogien', *Saeculum* 6 (1955), pp. 186–223; but see Pohl, 'Origo gentis (Langobarden)'.

64 P.J.Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance: Memory and Oblivion in the first Millennium* (Princeton, 1994); J.Fentress and C.Wickham, *Social Memory* (Oxford, 1992); Pohl, 'Paolo Diacono'; Pohl, 'History in fragments. Montecassino's politics of memory', EME 10, 3 (2001), pp. 343–74.

65 Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum* IV.40, ed. Waitz, p. 133. There is no direct evidence of this commission; but Secundus baptised Theodelinda's son Adaloald and wrote to Pope Gregory on her initiative.

66 Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum* IV.22, ed. Waitz, p. 124.

67 L.Brubaker, 'Memories of Helena: patterns in imperial female matronage in the fourth and fifth centuries', in James (ed.), *Women, Men and Eunuchs,* pp. 52–75; J.L.Nelson, 'Perceptions du pouvoir chez les historiennes du haut moyen âge', in M.Rouche (ed.), *Les Femmes au moyen âge* (Paris, 1990), pp. 77–85 and Nelson, chapter 10 [in Brubaker and Smith (eds), *Gender in the Early Medieval World*].

68 Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum* III.35, ed. Waitz, p. 113. For Theodelinda, see R.Balzaretti, 'Theodelinda, most glorious queen: gender and power in Lombard Italy', *Medieval History Journal* 2, 2 (1999), pp. 183–207; P. Skinner, *Women in Medieval Italian Society 500–1200* (Harlow, 2001), p. 56.

69 Fredegar, *Chronicon* IV.51, ed. Krusch, pp. 145–6: 'Gundepergam reginam, parentem Francorum'. Cf. Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum* IV.47, ed. Waitz, p. 136.

70 This explains how the origin legend came to be included in the *Chronicle* of Fredegar: *Chronicon* III.65, p. 110. See Pohl, 'Paolo Diacono'.

71 *Edictus Rothari,* Prologue, pp. 1–3.

72 *Origo gentis Langobadorum* I, p. 2: 'Ipsi cum matre sua nomine Gambara principatum tenebant super Winniles.'

73 Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum* IV.41, p. 133.

74 Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum* I.3, p. 49: 'Horum erat ducum mater nomine Gambara.'

75 W.Haubrichs, 'Amalgamierung und Identität—Langobardische Personennamen in Mythos und Herrschaft', in W.Pohl and P.Erhart (eds), *Die Langobarden—Herrschaft und Identität* (forthcoming); N.Francovich Onesti, *Vestigia longobarde in Italia,* 2nd edn (Rome, 2000), p. 170.

76 Tacitus, *Historiae* IV.61; IV.65, ed. Goetz and Welwei, vol. II, pp. 220 and 224. See R.Bruder, *Die Germanische Frau im Lichte der Runeninschriften und der antiken Historiographie* (Berlin, 1974); Pohl, *Germanen,* p. 76.

77 Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum* I.15, p. 55; K.Malone, 'Agelmund and Lamicho', *American Journal of Philology* 47 (1926), pp. 319–46; and Hauck, 'Lebensnormen und Kultmythen', with far-fetched Nordic interpretations; for a critique, see Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History,* pp. 363–6; and Pohl, 'Origo gentis (Langobarden)'.

78 Nelson, 'Queens as Jezebels'.

79 Wolfram, *Goten,* pp. 307–8; however, after Thrasamund's death, Amalafrida and her Goths were killed.

80 See Bonnie Effros, chapter 9 [in Brubaker and Smith (eds), *Gender in the Early Medieval World*], and Pohl, 'Telling the difference'; G.Halsall, 'Social identities and social relationships in early Merovingian Gaul', in I.N.Wood (ed.), *Franks and Alamanni in the Merovingian Period* (Woodbridge, 1999), pp. 141–75.

81 For an overview, see W.Pohl, *Die Völkerwanderung: Eroberung und Integration* (Stuttgart, 2002).

82 Pohl, Telling the difference', pp. 49 ff. and see further Mary Harlow, chapter 3 [in Brubaker and Smith (eds), *Gender in the Early Medieval World*].

83 Although queens continued to have an influential position; see J.L.Nelson, *Rulers and Ruling Families in Medieval Europe* (Aldershot, 1999), studies XI-XV; R.Le Jan, *Femmes, pouvoir et société dans le haut moyen âge* (Paris, 2001), pp. 21–107; N.Pancer, *Sans peur et sans vergogne: de l'honneur et des femmes aux premiers temps mérovingiens* (Paris, 2001), pp. 145–66. Gradowicz-Pancer, 'Degendering female violence', maintains that Merovingian queens could act violently on the bases of codes of honour shared between men and women. I. N.Wood, 'Fredegar's fables', in Scheibelreiter and Scharer (eds), *Historiographie im frühen Mittelalter,* pp. 359–66, reads Fredegar's *Chronicle* as a statement against the political influence of Merovingian queens.

84 On the question of biblical models, see Geary, 'Cur tamdiu in feminas perseverat', and Mayke de Jong, chapter 14 [in Brubaker and Smith (eds), *Gender in the Early Medieval World*].

85 This chapter owes much to discussions with Herwig Wolfram and Patrick Geary who are currently working on similar topics. I am also very grateful to Barbara Rosenwein for help and suggestions.

8
GRAVE GOODS AND THE RITUAL EXPRESSION OF IDENTITY

Bonnie Effros

In recent years Bonnie Effros, professor of history at the State University of New York at Binghamton, has published three books and numerous articles exploring both the contributions which archaeology can make to our understanding of the Merovingian period and also the strengths and weaknesses of archaeological method. Perhaps no historian is more at home with archaeological evidence than Effros, and some of her sharpest criticisms have struck at historians who have made incautious or inappropriate use of archaeological findings. In this chapter from her book Merovingian Mortuary Archaeology (2003) *Effros demonstrates both her acute sensitivity to methodological issues and her keen sense of historical realities. Effros is also alert to issues of gender. In reading this selection, the reader should be particularly concerned to think about what we actually can learn from archaeology about questions of ethnicity, identity, migration, gender, status, etc.*

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Many of the analytical shortcomings of mortuary studies have stemmed from the intrinsically interdisciplinary nature of the evidence. Because scholars have had to utilize materials from fields other than their own to support their findings, they have not always been aware of the limitations of the sources. Just as art historians and archaeologists have often linked their finds confidently to particular historical events or individuals, historians have frequently used what they have trusted to be straightforward archaeological examples as a means of visualizing human interactions documented in the written sources. The discussion below of some of the most common pitfalls of the collaborative use of historical descriptions and archaeological evidence will illustrate some of the consequences of borrowing uncritically across disciplines in the study of Merovingian mortuary practices. Following a general outline of the central features of the deposition of grave goods, a critique of some of the best-documented archaeological sites in early medieval Gaul will highlight not only the diversity of cemeterial practice but also the controversies associated with the interpretation of grave goods.

Early medieval grave artifacts thought to have belonged to royalty have long attracted the attention of specialists in the disciplines of early medieval history, art history, and archaeology. Not only have rich finds linked to historical figures generated great interest among academics and curators, but they have also stirred the curiosity of a more general