

Preface

by Fabrizio Oppedisano

In 488, the Germanic tribes gathered around Theoderic the Great abandoned the inhospitable Pannonian lands and set out towards Italy. Following in the footsteps of Alaric and Attila, tens of thousands of individuals crossed the Alpine border and prepared for a clash with Odoacer. The war, which was uncertain despite the field victories achieved by the Goths, was resolved after three years, and then only thanks to a stratagem: declaring that he accepted peace and shared command, Theoderic was welcomed in Ravenna, and here, during a banquet, he treacherously killed his enemy. Now master of Italy, the Gothic king launched the ambitious project of a society in which the best qualities of the peoples composing it would serve the common good, beyond secular barriers and prejudices. The Gothic soldiers would defend with arms the values of *civilitas Romana*, while the functioning of the state would be entrusted to the political and administrative culture of the Italian ruling classes. With the necessary precautions taken not to offend the feelings of his men, Theoderic did everything to preserve the Roman profile of Italy: the institutional and administrative system, the political careers, the distribution of wealth, the circulation of goods, and the role of the ruling classes still retained, even in the sixth century, the forms typical of the late antique state. At the same time, the official communication, the outward manifestations of power, as well as the care of public monuments, had the function of making visible the continuity between the Gothic kings and the Roman emperors. The message of Theoderic was intended for both Italy and the outside world: to his subjects, he was to communicate his own willingness to act with the virtues typical of the *princeps civilis*; to the other monarchies, an ethical

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and political primacy of the Gothic kingdom in Western Europe; to the empire, a position of autonomy of the Amal king in his relationship with the *basileus*. During the 520s, a series of events, interconnected in various ways, showed the first signs of weakness of this great system: the death of Eutharic (Theoderic's son-in-law designated to succeed him to the throne), the crisis of relations with the neighbouring kingdoms of the Vandals and Burgundians, and the Emperor Justin's anti-Arian and anti-Gothic policies all generated strong turbulence. In Italy, relations with the senate and the Church spiralled into a climate of distrust and suspicion, which passed the point of no return when the regime condemned the Pope, John I, and the senators Albinus, Symmachus and Boethius for high treason. At that moment, the compromise between monarchy and senate, and between Arianism and Catholicism, on which Theoderic had built his Italy, was shattered, and the image of the king began to lose the luminous contours of the civil prince to take on the grim features of the tyrant. Over time, the Gothic monarchs proved increasingly incapable of interpreting the role devised by Theoderic in their relations with the empire, and were unable to contain the increased aggression of Justin and Justinian: although the conflict entrusted to Belisarius was not intended to annihilate the Goths and to bring Italy back under the control of the Roman emperor, its developments went in precisely that direction. The Gothic war was long and lacerating, and the absorption of the peninsula among the provinces of the Byzantine oecumene determined, in many ways, the end of Roman Italy.

What remained of this world in Italian society in the centuries to come? What was Theoderic's legacy to medieval political culture? How was that past reworked and recounted, and how did it interact with the present, especially at the decisive moment of the Frankish conquest of Italy? These are the historical questions around which this book was originated. The contributions that compose it have been conceived in order to grasp and interpret the elements of survival, the ruptures and the revivals of the Roman-Gothic society in the medieval period, and in particular in the Carolingian age. To this end, we have privileged a variety of viewpoints and disciplinary skills. The first, introductory, essay is dedicated to problems of an ideological order connected to the relationship between Ostrogoths and Franks (Fabrizio Oppedisano); the second focuses on the reception of Roman law and Ostrogothic legislation in the years of Lothar I (Stefan Esders); the third on the construction of the ethnic identities of the Ostrogoths and Lombards (Robert Kasperski); the fourth on the problem of the equestrian statue known as "Regisole", and the revival of the Theoderician model from the time of the Lombards to that of the Franks (Carlo Ferrari). This is followed by a section consisting of three essays dedicated to the two great authors of the Ostrogothic age, Boethius (Danuta Shanzer) and Cassiodorus (Marco Cristini and Dario Internullo). Finally, the last two essays reflect on the continuous presence of the Goths in early medieval epigraphy (Flavia Frauze), and on the evolution of the centres of public power between the Ostrogothic and Carolingian periods (Federico

Cantini). The conclusions (Stefano Gasparri) enhance some of the book's key themes and provide an overview of them. The authors discussed these issues at a conference held in Pisa, at the Scuola Normale Superiore, on 25 and 26 November 2021.

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