

Conclusions

by Stefano Gasparri

The research on the influence of the memory of the Goths and Theoderic on Carolingian rule, particularly in Italy, is just beginning. The first promising results, presented in the volume, on the knowledge of the *Variae* and Theoderic's Edict in the Carolingian and post-Carolingian period are highlighted, as well as the possible developments of comparative research on the *origines gentium* or on the various histories that circulated in the writings of the authors of the Carolingian period. Finally, bearing in mind the role of cultural mediator played by Paul the Deacon, the importance of the Lombard phase in the transmission of the memory of Ostrogothic rule to the Carolingians emerged, through a parallel between the actions of Aistulf and Charlemagne.

Early Middle Ages; Carolingian Italy; Cassiodorus' *Variae*; Late Roman Laws; Ostrogothic Memory; Lombard Heritage.

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Abbreviations:

MGH, Epp. 4 = *Epistolae Karolini aevi* (II), ed. E. Duemmler, Berlin 1895 (Epistolae [in Quart], 4).

MGH, Poetae 2 = *Poetae Latini aevi Carolini* (II), ed. E. Duemmler, Berlin 1884 (MGH, *Poetae Latini medii aevi*, 2).

MGH, SS rer. Germ. 49 = Paul the Deacon, *Historia Romana*, ed. H. Droysen, Berlin 1879 (MGH, *Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum separatim editi*, 49).

MGH, SS rer. Lang. 1 = *Scriptores rerum Langobardicarum et Italicarum saec. VI-IX*, ed. G. Waitz, Hannover 1878 (*Scriptores rerum Langobardicarum et Italicarum*, 1).

MGH, SS rer. Merov. 2 = *Fredegarii et aliorum Chronica. Vitae sanctorum*, ed. B. Krusch, Hannover 1888 (*Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum*, 2).

The idea behind this book is to try to understand whether and to what extent the Ostrogothic experience could have been taken up in the Carolingian period as an exemplary moment on which to compare the present; furthermore, another attempt has been made to grasp elements of continuity and significant survivals between the sixth and ninth centuries (the contributions dedicated to material culture by Flavia Frauzel and Federico Cantini belong to this perspective). In these brief conclusions, I will only be able to focus on a few of the many problems related to the use of the Ostrogothic past in the Carolingian age¹.

Actually, establishing a link between the model of sovereignty offered by the Ostrogothic age – the model of Theoderic – and the Carolingian model, with particular reference to the age of Lothar, is in fact not an easy operation. Did the experience of the Ostrogothic kingdom in the sixth century really exert an influence on the ways in which the Carolingians – and Lothar in particular, king of the *regnum Italiae* – governed Italy three centuries later²? Or, more generally, was the Carolingians' conception of kingship tributary to models traceable to the Ostrogothic experience?

Recently, in an extensive essay on the memory of the Ostrogoths in Carolingian historiography, Mathias Tischler stated that «the Carolingian memory of Ostrogothic culture (...) was an important driving force for the establishment of a new Romanized empire, based on arts, historiography, biography, and philosophy»³. Perhaps Tischler has gone too far in his conclusions, influenced also, probably, by an old but authoritative essay by Heinz Löwe, to which I will return later⁴. It is true, in fact, that the figure of Theoderic is well known in Carolingian culture, as Tischler's extensive analysis of the historiography (and manuscripts) of that period demonstrates, but it still remains largely to be demonstrated that all this represented, as he writes, a driving force in Carolingian imperial construction: which is, after all, precisely the primary objective of the research behind this book.

Actually, evidence of such an awareness is scarce and, indeed, the sources seem to go rather in another direction. As Tischler himself recalls, for ex-

¹ The apparatus of notes is very limited and references to sources and bibliography already cited by the authors of the essays are not normally be made.

² On Lothar's government in *regnum Italiae*, see Jarnut, *Ludwig der Fromme*.

³ Tischler, *Remembering the Ostrogoths*, p. 100.

⁴ Löwe, *Von Teoderich dem Großen zum Karl dem Großen*.

ample, the great success of the memory of Boethius with the writers of the Carolingian age – whether or not they had read the entire text of the *Consolatio Philosophiae* – is one of the elements that led to a negative reading on their part of the figure of the Ostrogothic king, tyrant, heretic and persecutor, a reading that dragged with it the equally negative judgement on the entire Ostrogothic age. Thus, what Fiorella Simoni has called the ecclesiastical *damnatio memoriae* of Theoderic and the Ostrogoths, conveyed since the end of the sixth century by sources of Italian origin, such as the *Liber pontificalis* and the *Dialogi* of Gregory the Great, as well as, in Gaul, by Gregory of Tours in the *Liber in Gloria martyrum*, became increasingly prevalent⁵. It is the shadow of Boethius that obscures the entire Ostrogothic monarchy, distorting its historical image. In such a picture, there was no place for what Fabrizio Oppedisano in his introduction has called the «Cassiodorean perspective», i.e. the positive image of the Ostrogothic experience that can be derived from a reading of the *Variae*, that of a peaceful and civilised monarchy, the prosecutor and guardian of Roman society.

Even beyond the Alps, therefore, the image of Theoderic – who absorbed the entire memory of the Ostrogothic monarchy – was viewed by intellectuals predominantly in a negative light. Walahfrid Strabo's poem *De imagine Tetrici* from 829 is the most obvious example of this, with its comparison between Theoderic, a dark and vicious Arian tyrant, and Louis the Pious, a philosopher and Catholic ruler⁶. However, unlike Italy, there were also interesting attempts in the Frankish world, such as that made by Frechulf of Lisieux, to build a link between the origins of the Goths and the Franks, both of whom were considered heirs of the Trojans as opposed to the Romans. In fact, a ground for comparison may be that, addressed by Robert Kasperski in his essay, represented by the texts of identity, in which the intellectuals of the post-Roman kingdoms put in writing the histories through which they tried to construct the ethnic identities of the various *gentes*: in this case Goths, Lombards and Franks. Before Frechulf, in the mid-seventh century, a Frankish author such as the so-called Fredegar had spoken of Theoderic's long rule in Italy, which had passed *cum summa felicitate*: the treasury was rich, the cities and palaces in Ravenna, Verona and Pavia had been restored: «tantae prosperitatis post regnum tenuit, pacem cum gentibus vicinas habens, ut mirum fuisset»⁷.

Despite these examples, the interpretative framework of the Carolingian writers remained fundamentally negative (Fredegar himself recalls the fabulous end of Theoderic swallowed by Etna). For understanding whether it exhausted the full spectrum of the Carolingians' cultural reception of the Os-

⁵ Simoni, *La memoria del regno ostrogoto*, and Tischler, *Remembering the Ostrogoths*, p. 74.

⁶ Walahfrid Strabo, *De imagine Tetrici*.

⁷ *Chronica Fredegarii*, II, 57 (quot. p. 82: « at peace with his neighbours, it was admirable how he then held the kingdom with such great prosperity »).

trogothic age, it is essential to investigate whether there were different channels through which the interpretation, conveyed by the text of the *Variae*, which presented Theoderic as a civil ruler, protector of the literati, restorer of ancient buildings and builder of new ones, impartial arbiter of religious conflicts, could have reached that world. In concrete terms, the question is whether the *Variae* were known at that time, and used especially in legal and administrative texts, well before what is currently known, i.e. from the end of the eleventh century onwards. Some results have already been achieved: Dario Internullo has tried to establish the earliest manuscript tradition of the *Variae*, finding traces of them older than what was known in the notarial documents of Rome and the Latium at the turn of the year 1000; for his part, Marco Cristini has presented the first results of an investigation aimed at finding traces of the *Variae* in different literary texts: Charlemagne's letters to Byzantium, the works of Paschasius Radbertus, the Donation of Constantin. The results achieved are perhaps still minimal, but encouraging, also in light of the fact that we know that a manuscript of the *Variae* in the Carolingian age existed in the monastery of Lorsch: unfortunately, it has been lost, but it confirms the idea of a knowledge of the *Variae* in that period.

Given the administrative and legal nature of Cassiodorus' work, it would seem possible also to find some passages that can be traced back to the *Variae* in the capitularies or in the arena of the king's diplomas, sources which one cannot disregard if one wants to analyse, at the same time, the theory and practice of Carolingian power⁸. Moreover, it is well known that in the capitularies the influence of late Roman legislation is very strong⁹. Thus, a text as clearly Roman in nature as the *Variae* could well have found a place, albeit limited, in the capitularies or in the diplomas of the Carolingians, especially in reference to the *regnum Italiae* of the age of Lothar.

Stefan Esders' essay indirectly supports the hypothesis of a Carolingian use of administrative texts from the Ostrogothic age, and at the same time opens up other scenarios. Esders demonstrates that two abbreviated versions of Roman law circulated in the Carolingian age and in particular in the Italian kingdom in the age of Lothar: the *Epitome Aegidii*, a compilation based on the Breviary of the Visigothic King Alaric II (i.e. the *Lex romana Visigothorum*), and the *Epitome Iuliani*, an abbreviated version of Justinian's *Novellae*. In this context of the persistence of late Roman legal texts, it is striking to note, as reported by Esders, that a famous miscellaneous codex from Verona from the ninth century, now in Leipzig, contains *excerpta* of the *Edictum Theoderici*. Verona was one of the main Carolingian cultural centres in Italy, where the memory of the Ostrogothic king was most vivid, as is also proven by the copy, made in this city at the beginning of the ninth century, of a text such as

⁸ For status quaestionis on the capitularies: Kaschke – Mischke, *Capitularies in the Carolingian Period*; on the diplomas: Screen, *Lothar I. in Italy*.

⁹ Nelson, *Translated Images of Authority*, pp. 89-98.

the *Anonymus Valesianus*, a late Roman historical compilation which also presents (except in its concluding part) a largely positive image of Theoderic's legitimate rule in Italy¹⁰. Other chapters of the Edict are also found in some Italian manuscripts from the ninth century. These citations of Theoderic's Edict partially fill a void, that of the transmission of a text that is now attributed with relative certainty to the Ostrogothic king, and whose absence in the early medieval tradition had even cast doubt on its authenticity, since as it is known, no ancient manuscript of the whole text of the Edict exists.

According to Sean Lafferty, one of the authors who has most recently dealt with the issue, the Edict would reveal to us the real world of Ostrogothic Italy, which can barely be glimpsed behind the «smokescreen» of Roman *civilitas* offered by Cassiodorus¹¹. This judgement, even if not fully shared, nevertheless speaks to us of an important text, and its presence in some ninth-century manuscripts in northern Italy allows us to guess that a copy of Theoderic's Edict circulated in the heart of Carolingian Italy and, in particular, in Verona. The Edict could represent another of the strands linking the Ostrogothic and Carolingian monarchy; however, as Esders writes, the possibility must be considered that it was seen as a mere compendium of late Roman laws. In this case, there would have been no full awareness on the part of its users of the nature and origin of this text.

Administrative and legal practice represents one of the fields that can escape ecclesiastical *damnatio memoriae* and provide us with evidence of a persistence of the Ostrogothic legacy in the Carolingian practice of government. Another field that can escape this conditioning is that of symbols of power. Carlo Ferrari's essay is enlightening: the two equestrian statues he deals with, both attributed to Theoderic and both from Ravenna, even though they certainly did not originally represent the Ostrogothic ruler, do in fact represent powerful symbols of sovereign authority. Ferrari focuses above all on the famous statue known as the *Regisole*, from Pavia, destroyed in the Napoleonic age, putting forward the convincing hypothesis that it was transported from Ravenna to Pavia by Aistulf, as part of an imperial-type programme implemented by that Lombard king in the aftermath of the capture of Ravenna in 751¹². From the perspective of this book, an interesting parallel is thus created between Aistulf's action and that of Charles himself, who brought to Aachen, again from Ravenna, another statue of Theoderic, which he placed in his palace. Indeed, Charles' recognition of Theoderic's

¹⁰ In my opinion, Tischler, *Remembering the Ostrogoths*, pp. 81-82, exaggerates the value, albeit undoubted, of the text of the *Anonymus Valesianus* as a tool in the creation of a new political ideology and in the legitimation of the new Carolingian government in Italy in the age of Charlemagne and Pippin. On the *Anonymus Valesianus*, Goltz, *Barbar – König – Tyrann*, pp. 476-526.

¹¹ Lafferty, *Law and Society in the Age of Theoderic the Great*.

¹² Gasparri, *Il potere del re*, pp. 122-123, and Harrison, *Political Rethoric and Political Ideology*.

value as the legitimate ruler of a large part of the Roman West, and therefore as a precedent of his own government, is reinforced by the parallel between Aachen and the capital of the Lombard kingdom, which he conquered in 774. In both places, the image of Theoderic stood as the image of sovereignty: heir of Rome but also, and this is important, heir of the Lombard monarchy, which had its capital in Pavia. In this way, Tischler's idea that Charlemagne's reception of the legacy of Theoderic and the Ostrogoths was functional to solving the problem of the integration of post-Lombard Italy within the empire also gains strength. It is no coincidence that the statue arrived in Aachen in April 801, on Charles' return from the expedition to Italy in which he received the imperial title and then reorganised the kingdom a quarter of a century after the military conquest¹³.

Many years ago, in an essay Heinz Löwe wrote that Charles had several equestrian statues at his disposal, and therefore the fact that he chose one depicting – so it was believed – Theoderic, would show how important the figure of the Ostrogothic king was for the imperial idea of the Carolingians¹⁴. It is true, however, as Andreas Goltz has written more realistically than Löwe, that the Carolingian sources – again due to the oft-quoted ecclesiastical mediation – do not allow us to fully understand what influence the figure of Theoderic had on the construction of Charlemagne's imperial ideology¹⁵. But the Ostrogothic king certainly constituted an important model for the new emperor, to the point of pushing him to challenge even the hostility of part of the court, linked to the negative tradition of the heretical king: a hostility that only came out into the open after Charlemagne's death with the poem by Walahfrid Strabo, a man linked to Louis the Pious' court circles, who thus also gave voice to an opposition to the old court group linked to the figure of Charlemagne.

We do not know what the fate of the statue was, after this stance, once the hostility of men like Walahfrid came to dominate the court, an attitude which, we can assume, was shared at the highest imperial level. It should be stressed that this same group of courtiers and intellectuals had previously reacted by spreading a veil of silence over the entire operation, which is only known to us thanks to the account of Agnellus of Ravenna. This is a proof of the heavy ecclesiastical conditioning of the written sources at our disposal, which forces us to make the most – with all the risks involved – of every shred of information available. An indirect indication of the interest aroused by the figure of Theoderic might be given by the fact that, immediately after the coronation of Charles and his passage through Ravenna, from where he took away the statue of the Ostrogothic king, a prominent figure of the imperial circle such as Alcuin wrote to Angilbert, abbot of Saint-Riquier, to have a copy of Jordanes

¹³ Tischler, *Remembering the Ostrogoths*, pp. 65-66. For an overall assessment of Charlemagne's action in Italy in 801, Gasparri, *The Dawn of Carolingian Italy*.

¹⁴ Cited above, note 4.

¹⁵ Goltz, *Barbar – König – Tyrann*, pp. 600-604.

sent to him: clear evidence that the image of Theoderic had somehow been conjured up at the coronation, taking on, at the end, the material features of the king's statue¹⁶.

The history of the two statues, reconstructed by Carlo Ferrari, highlights an important issue. If we want to investigate the possible link between the Ostrogothic and Carolingian monarchies, since we are in an Italic sphere, we cannot skip the intermediate link, represented by the Lombard monarchy. Aistulf, with his imperial programme, that of a sovereign over two peoples, the Lombards and the Romans, ruler of Rome, a city on which he imposed a tribute, may have been a precedent for Charles on a par with Theoderic, since both kings were linked to both Ravenna and Pavia.

In this context, an author like Paul the Deacon, who was close to Charlemagne for a long time, certainly played a decisive role. Paul had shown in the *Historia Langobardorum* how Ostrogothic and Lombard memories were closely intertwined in a place like Monza, where both the Ostrogothic king and the Lombard queen Theodelinda had built palaces, and he had also emphasised the fact that Alboin, once the long siege was over and he had finally entered Pavia, had settled «in the palace that King Theoderic had once built», where the people of the city flocked, in a sort of explicit recognition by the citizens of Pavia that this was the seat of legitimate sovereign power¹⁷. Finally, in the *Historia Romana* Paul had given ample space to both the builder king and the persecutor Arian king¹⁸.

There are patterns of stories that are repeated without necessarily being linked together, as Danuta Shanzer shows us. She examines the story of Boethius and the obscure story of the usurpation of Silvanus narrated by Ammianus Marcellinus, and then – with a leap forward in time – another conspiracy, that of Bernard in 817-818, where, in the sources, a comparison emerges, explained by the growing popularity of Boethius, between the latter's fate and that of the Bishop Theodulf of Orléans, condemned to exile from the court for unclear reasons¹⁹. However, in the case of Paul the Deacon, who had proposed to his Carolingian readers – in the *Historia Romana* and the *Historia Langobardorum* respectively – the story of Amalasuintha and Athalaric (taking it from Jordanes) on the one hand and that of Theodelinda and

¹⁶ Tischler, *Remembering the Ostrogoths*, p. 82. In the same year 801, in a letter sent to Charlemagne shortly after the imperial election, Alcuin quoted Boethius' definition of the ideal state: «felicia esse regna, si philosophi, id est amatores sapientiae, regnarent, vel reges philosophiae studerent»: Alcuin, *Epistolae*, 229 (p. 373).

¹⁷ Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum*, II, 27.

¹⁸ Paul the Deacon, *Historia Romana*, XV, 11-XVI, 10.

¹⁹ According to the traditional hypothesis, Theodulf was condemned because he was alleged to have conspired with Bernard, but Shanzer puts forward the interesting hypothesis that he was condemned for the opposite reason, namely for being among those who induced Louis to impose the severe punishment of blinding on his nephew, which led to his death and then drove the emperor himself to the great penance of Attigny in 822.

Adaloald on the other, things may have been somewhat different, a direct link may have existed. In both cases, they were in fact two mother-son couples, one Ostrogothic and the other Lombard, both of whom failed in their experiment in government and were destined to disperse their inheritance²⁰.

Paul the Deacon, when he made himself the medium of Ostrogothic history themes in the Carolingian milieu, clearly presented them within a fabric of narratives in which the Lombards were present. However, is difficult to sustain beyond a certain limit that the Lombard monarchy in turn wanted to insert itself into the Ostrogothic tradition. The only clue in this sense was the choice of Pavia as capital, whose nature as Theoderic's seat Paul himself underscores, as we have seen. However, that Liutprand saw in Theoderic a fore-runner is an assertion by Barnish, taken up by Tischler, without any basis in the sources; and Desiderius's alleged claim of descent from Theoderic is only the worthless assertion contained in a twelfth century German chronicle²¹. The importance of the Lombard phase does not lie in these vague hypotheses, without corroboration in the sources, but in the fact that the Carolingians built their power in Italy – whose conquest constituted the indispensable platform for Charlemagne's imperial project – on the Lombard monarchy. The fact that this continuity is not explicitly claimed lies solely in the classic *damnatio memoriae* of the Lombard period practised by Carolingian (and papal) sources, which is in addition to the similar one suffered by the figure of Theoderic. From this point of view, the story of the two statues of Pavia and Aachen has served admirably to alert us to what existed beneath the surface of the dominant narrative, and how important the Lombard phase could be. At the same time, however, it was precisely the impossibility of explicitly linking to the Lombard inheritance that may have prompted Charlemagne (and his successors) to look for a legitimising element of their rule in Italy further back, to the Ostrogothic age. All this comforts us in our search for further elements of connection between the Ostrogothic legacy and the reality of Carolingian rule in Italy.

²⁰ Paul the Deacon, *Historia Romana*, XVI, 11-12; *Historia Langobardorum*, IV, 41.

²¹ Barnish, *Transformation and Survival in the Western Senatorial Aristocracy*, p. 152; Tischler, *Remembering the Ostrogoths*, p. 80.

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