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## Comparative histories: The Vandals, the Sueves and Isidore of Seville<sup>1</sup>

In 589, in the reign of the Visigothic King Reccared, Leander of Seville preached a sermon in celebration of the recent conversion of the Goths from their ancestral Arianism to the Catholicism of their new homeland.<sup>2</sup> The sermon – and the conversion – represented a turning point within the evolution of the Visigothic *regnum*, coming as they did after Leovigild's expansive conquests throughout the region. As might be expected, the theme of unity permeates Leander's sermon. The bishop describes the union of Gothic *gens* and Church in explicitly nuptial terms, celebrates the new universality of the Church beneath Christ's gaze, and repeatedly warns of the perils of heresy and schism – from which the Goths had so recently been saved – as challenges to this happy unity. One member of the audience who will have long remembered its words was the young Isidore, brother of Leander, who had been in the bishop's charge since the deaths of their parents some years earlier.<sup>3</sup> Probably around thirty at the time of the sermon, and very likely present at the site of his brother's greatest triumph, Isidore retained the themes of Hispano-Gothic unity and returned to them almost forty years later when he came to compose his own history of the Gothic realm.

Isidore's historical work proved to be even more significant than his brother's sermon in charting the evolution of the Gothic State within Spain.<sup>4</sup> Like Leander's words from the pulpit, these histories were profoundly shaped by the peculiar political circumstances of the time in which they were written. Uniquely, Isidore's work survives in two strikingly different redactions: one which traces the history of the Goths to 619, the other which extends this down to the middle of Suintila's reign in 624.<sup>5</sup> There is hardly space here to go into the complex arguments surrounding the primacy of the recensions, but in the light of Cristóbal Rodríguez Alonso's excellent edition of the text and more than a century of discussion on the subject, the relationship between the two redactions now seems

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<sup>1</sup> The present article originated in a paper entitled 'Isidore of Seville and the Vandals', given at the International Medieval Congress in Leeds in July 2003. I am grateful to all participants at the session for their comments, and particularly to Walter Pohl and Roland Steinacher. It represents a development of the argument put forward in Andrew Merrills, *History and Geography in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought 64, Cambridge 2005) chapter 3. I would also like to thank Simon Loseby, for invaluable suggestions on the later drafts of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> Leander, *Homilia de triumpho Ecclesiae ob conversionem* (ed. Angel Custodio Vega, *Scriptores Ecclesiastici Hispano-Latini*, El Escorial 1948).

<sup>3</sup> On Isidore's early life (about which little is known), see Jacques Fontaine, *Isidore de Seville et la culture classique dans l'Espagne Wisigothique* (Paris 1959) 5–7; Pierre Cazier, *Isidore de Seville et la Naissance de l'Espagne Catholique* (*Théologie Historique* 96, Paris 1994) 29–42.

<sup>4</sup> The title of Isidore's history is much disputed. On the subject, see Jacques Fontaine, *Chronique d'histoire et de littérature hispaniques (paléochrétiennes et visigotiques) 1972–1976*, in: *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 22 (1976) 402–435, at 428 who advocates the title *De origine Gothorum*. For the sake of simplicity, and to distinguish them from Isidore's etymological *Origines*, the historical works will simply be referred to as 'the histories' here, with distinction drawn between the Long Redaction (LR) and Shorter Redaction (SR).

<sup>5</sup> The standard edition is that of Cristóbal Rodríguez Alonso, *Las Historias de los Godos, Vandalos y Suevos de Isidoro de Sevilla*. Edición Crítica y Traducción (Colección fuentes y estudios de historia Leonesa 13, Leon 1975). Which includes parallel texts of the two redactions, with Castilian translations of each. The Longer Recension is partly translated into English in Kenneth Baxter Wolf, *Conquerors and Chroniclers of Early Medieval Spain* (Translated Texts for Historians 9, Liverpool 1990) 81–110, and fully in Guido Donini/Gordon B. Ford Jr., *Isidore of Seville's History of the Goths, Vandals and Suevi* (Leiden 1970).

reasonably secure.<sup>6</sup> Isidore apparently composed the first, shorter redaction in 619 or 620, and within it offers a relatively straightforward account of the Gothic royal line down to that date. Drawing largely upon the western chronicle tradition, and particularly the texts of Prosper, Maximus of Saragossa, Victor of Tunnana and Hydatius, this redaction would seem to take its place within a long tradition of chronological writing. Isidore's second recension represents a fleshing out of this skeletal framework in celebration of the final victory of Suinthila in Byzantine Baetica in 624. This revision was accomplished through a substantial reworking of the main body of his text and the addition of a number of wholly original passages – among them the famous *Laus Spaniae* which opens the work and a *Recapitulatio* or *Laus Gothorum* which serves as its conclusion.<sup>7</sup>

The annals and chronicles of late Antiquity have been the subject of much illuminating scholarship over the last generation. Where once the processes of continuation, emulation and integration which lie behind such works were regarded as illustrative of the derivative and moribund historical consciousness of the post-Roman West, scholars are increasingly regarding these texts as coherent literary compositions in their own right.<sup>8</sup> The fifth-century chronicles of Prosper and Hydatius, to take the most striking examples, are now to be read as consciously constructed texts, which reflected the historical concerns of their authors. Late antique historians and their audiences no longer sought to make sense of the world through reference to *Roma Aeterna* or to the comfortable moral certainties of Roman *virtus*, but by placing contemporary events within the far wider context of Christian eschatology. Only by representing human experience in its entirety could the tumultuous events of recent history be put into context. For all their debts to consular records and annalistic writing, the chronicles that emerged represented a wholly new historical genre, and one that was uniquely suited to the peculiar demands of the early medieval period.

The appreciation of Isidore's historical writing has naturally benefited from this altered perspective. Where previous scholars, anxious to elucidate the poorly-documented first century of Gothic rule in Spain, expressed their frustration at the paucity of hard historical 'fact' in Isidore's work, current attention has increasingly focused on the literary ambitions of the great polymath in his account of the Gothic past.<sup>9</sup> Viewed alongside the writer's other compositions, the Gothic histories have been read as prescriptive models of Christian kingship, as valedictory accounts of Roman authority and – most commonly and most controversially – as proto-nationalist manifestos for a united Gothic Spain.<sup>10</sup> The histories certainly present a vision of *convivencia* within Hispania, from

<sup>6</sup> Rodríguez Alonso, *Las Historias de los Godos* 24–57 and cf. the review discussion in Fontaine, *Chronique d'histoire* 427–429. The issue is addressed further by Roger Collins, *Isidore, Maximus and the Historia Gothorum*, in: *Historiographie im frühen Mittelalter*, ed. Anton Scharer/Georg Scheibelreiter (VIÖG 32, München 1994) 345–358, and see now the discussion in Merrills, *History and Geography* 179–185.

<sup>7</sup> Isidore, LR Prol., ed. Rodríguez Alonso 170; LR 66–70, ed. Rodríguez Alonso 282–286.

<sup>8</sup> On the chronicle genre compare Robert A. Markus, *Chronicle and theology*, in: *The Inheritance of Historiography*, ed. Christopher Holdsworth/Timothy P. Wiseman (Exeter Studies in History 12, Exeter 1986) 31–43; Concetta Molé, *Prospettive universali e prospettive locali nella storiografia latina del V secolo*, in: *La storiografia ecclesiastica nella tarda antichità. Atti del convegno tenuto in Erice (3–8 XII 1978) Scuola superiore di archeologia a civiltà medievali 3° corso* (Messina 1980) 195–239, and see the excellent overview provided by Steven Muhlberger, *The Fifth-Century Chroniclers. Prosper, Hydatius and the Gallic Chronicler of 452* (Leeds 1990) 2–47. On Isidore's own contributions to the genre, see esp. Paul Merritt Bassett, *The use of history in the Chronicon of Isidore of Seville*, in: *History and Theory* 15 (1976) 278–292, and Marc Reydellet, *Les intentions idéologiques et politiques dans la Chronique d'Isidore de Séville*, in: *Mélanges de l'École Française de Rome* 82 (1970) 363–400.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Edward A. Thompson, *The Goths in Spain* (Oxford 1969) 7: "As a history it is unworthy of the famous savant who wrote it. He could hardly have told us less, except by not writing at all." And the important comments in Bassett, *The use of history* 278–280.

<sup>10</sup> On the histories as prescriptive models for Gothic Kingship: Abilio Barbero de Aguilera, *El pensamiento político Visigodo y las primeras uniones regias en la Europa medieval*, in: *Hispania* 30 (1970) 245–326, at 264–269; Cazier, *Isidore de Seville* 13–27; id., *Les Sentences d'Isidore de Séville et le IV<sup>e</sup> Concile de Tolède*, in: *Los Visigodos, Historia y Civilización. Actas de la Semana Internacional de Estudios Visigóticos* (Murcia 1986) 373–386; Marc Reydellet, *La conception du souverain chez St. Isidore de Seville*, in: *Isidoriana. Colección de trabajos sobre Isidoro de Sevilla*, ed. Manuel C. Díaz y Díaz (Leon 1961) 457–466, and id., *La Royauté dans la littérature Latine de Sidoine Apollinaire à Isidore de Séville* (Bibliothèque des Écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome 243, Roma 1981) 505–596; Jocelyn N. Hillgarth, *Historiography in Visigothic Spain*, in: *La storiografia altomedievale* (Settimane di studio del centro italiano di studi

Reccared's conversion to the triumphant expulsion of the Byzantines. The unity of territory and *gens* under the aegis of the Catholic Church certainly represented a central part of Isidore's historical argument, and did much to shape the inclusion or omission of material within his account. Less substantial, perhaps, than many of the narrative histories which helped to solidify the ideologies of Germanic rule in Ostrogothic and Lombard Italy, in Gaul or in Britain, Isidore's history has nevertheless been interpreted as part of the same process of community construction in Visigothic Spain.

As the survival of the distinct redactions demonstrates, however, Isidore's Gothic history was not simply hatched fully formed, and an appreciation of its gestation can only add to the admiration for the work's complexity. Unusually, the two redactions of the histories show a medieval history in the process of composition – one version a simple framework of the Gothic past, the other a fuller, and incomparably richer, history. Indeed, a close investigation of the additions made to the longer recension suggest that Isidore not only sought to expand and augment his summary of the Gothic past, but to place narrative coherence, rather than chronological structure, at the heart of his work. The addition of the *Laus Spaniae* as a rhetorical frontispiece to the long redaction effectively distances the work from the chronicle tradition upon which it drew.<sup>11</sup> The chapter helps to disguise the chronological format of much of what follows, and essentially establishes the parameters – both spatial and narrative – of the Gothic past. The account is further embellished by the inclusion of a substantial – and atemporal – discussion of Gothic origins, and by digressive accounts of Arianism and of individual episodes in the group's history.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps the most striking feature, which distances the long recension from the tradition of chronicle writing in general, is the presence of a firm conclusion within Isidore's revised work. In contrast to much of what had gone before, including his own original interpretation of Gothic history, the longer redaction ends on a triumphant, climactic note, through the Gothic victory over the Byzantines in Baetica.<sup>13</sup>

Isidore's longer redaction, then, was a narrative history, quite as much as a chronicle.<sup>14</sup> The addition of an introduction and conclusion framed the history of the Goths, and the historian further shaped his work through reference to well-established literary tropes. In composing a 'migration' history, of course, Isidore had considerable precedent upon which to draw. In contrast to other 'national' histories of the period, the Mosaic strain within Isidore's account is not immediately apparent, but the residual traces of Homeric and especially Virgilian motifs are certainly evident.<sup>15</sup> Isidore, moreover, complemented this narrative tradition with his own elaboration. Drawing upon traditional epithalamial imagery and the narrative *topoi* of erotic writing, Isidore further aided the dramatic impact of his account. In part unashamed Visigothic 'epic', in part an eroticized vision of the

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sull'alto medioevo 17, Spoleto 1970) 261–311, at 279–285. As an anti-Roman tract, compare Suzanne Teillet, *Des Goths à la Nation Gothique. Les origines de l'idée de nation en Occident du V<sup>e</sup> au VII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris 1984) 461–501; and as a manifesto for Hispano-Gothic 'nationalism', see Zacarias Garcia Villada, *El destino de España en la Historia Universal* (Madrid 1940) 87; José-Luis Romero, *San Isidoro de Sevilla. Su pensamiento históricopolítico y sus relaciones con la Historia Visigoda*, in: *Cuadernos de historia de España* 8 (1947) 5–71; and the important discussion provided by Hillgarth, *Historiography in Visigothic Spain* 298f.; id., *Coins and chronicles: propaganda in sixth-century Spain and the Byzantine background*, in: *Historia* 15 (1966) 483–508, at 500f., with the comments of Teillet, *Des Goths* 1–13.

<sup>11</sup> The literature on the *Laus Spaniae* is immense and constantly growing. See esp. J. Fernández Valverde, *De laude et deploratione Spanie (estructura y fuentes literarias)*, in: *Los Visigodos. Historia y Civilización. Actas de la Semana Internacional de Estudios Visigóticos* (Murcia 1986) 457–462; Jacques Fontaine, *Un manifeste politique et culturel: Le De Laude Spaniae d'Isidore de Séville*, in: *Le discours d'éloge entre Antiquité et Moyen Âge*, ed. Lionel Mary/Michel Sot (Paris 2001) 61–68, and the discussion and bibliography in Merrills, *History and Geography* chapter 3.

<sup>12</sup> Gothic origins are discussed in LR 1–3, ed. Rodríguez Alonso 172–176; for digressions on Arianism within the longer recension, (but not the shorter), see LR 7, 8, 10, 45, 53.

<sup>13</sup> LR 62–5, ed. Rodríguez Alonso 274–280.

<sup>14</sup> On the status of narrative within Chronicle writing, see Hayden White, *The value of narrativity in the representation of reality*, in: *Critical Inquiry* 7 (1980–81) 5–27; Muhlberger, *Fifth-Century Chroniclers* 2–47; Reydellet, *La royauté* 525.

<sup>15</sup> Teillet, *Des Goths* 490.

union of Goths and Spain, the new redaction was a carefully constructed narrative text.<sup>16</sup> Isidore certainly intended to celebrate the new Gothic *regnum* through emphasis upon the martial origins of the Goths and their coming of age through adherence to orthodox Christianity, but the means by which he did this are worthy of closer consideration.

That Isidore shaped his history of the Goths into a coherent narrative is not to be doubted. That his principal ambition for the work was the celebration of the Gothic State and the role of the Church within it is similarly assured. Yet to concentrate exclusively upon the sections of Isidore's history that are concerned with the Goths is to leave a substantial proportion of his composition unread. Present in both the shorter and the longer recensions are two rather peculiar historical appendices. The first of these discusses the fate of the Vandal Kingdom of North Africa, the second that of the Sueves in Gallaecia.<sup>17</sup> As he did in the remainder of the work, Isidore returned to these appendices in his revision of the histories, but their function within the wider rhetorical schema of both recensions remains somewhat obscure. Indeed, within the revised narrative version of the Gothic history, the accounts of the Vandals and Sueves seem actively perverse. By including these tangential afterwords, the historian disrupts the structural coherence of his Gothic history and lessens the impact of the two *encomia* – to Spain and to the Goths – which bracket the main body of his text.

Derived as they are from the chronicles of Hydatius, Prosper, Victor of Tunnuna and John of Biclarum, these appendices would initially seem to reflect Isidore's historical methodology at its least imaginative. The suggestion is sometimes made that Isidore intended these passages to illustrate Gothic triumph over their Germanic neighbours, but the inclusion of such substantial 'mini-histories' seems an unduly heavy-handed way for Isidore to make his point.<sup>18</sup> The Visigothic conquest of the Sueves is almost anticlimactic in the second of Isidore's appendices, and the Gothic *gens* has a still less prominent role in the history of the Hasding Vandals. As the historian makes clear, the Hasdings had little contact with the Goths and established their own kingdom in North Africa substantially before their neighbours fully established themselves in Spain.<sup>19</sup> The primary themes of Isidore's Gothic history were the movement Gothic unity and the triumph over the Byzantine *Romani*; while victories over Germanic opposition were certainly worthy of celebration, it is hard to conclude that this alone would have been sufficient to justify the inclusion of two long appendices.<sup>20</sup> Derivative as they were, and with little obvious relevance to Isidore's Gothic narrative, the Vandal and Suevic histories have generally been swept aside by modern scholars with little more than a cursory footnote. Few commentaries on Isidore's histories include any longer reference to these peculiar additions, and one modern translation of the works omits them entirely.<sup>21</sup>

Yet to regard one part of Isidore's history as a focused composition and the remainder as a poorly-executed afterthought does little justice to the historian or his approach to the past. On even the simplest level, Isidore's presentation of Vandal and Suevic history in isolation necessitated a critical exploitation of his source material, and reflects his exercise of literary selection. Given that Isidore revised and augmented his Gothic history in the light of political events, moreover, it seems reasonable to assume that he regarded his work as a coherent composition. The presence of the Vandal and Suevic histories in each of the two drafts, and Isidore's careful reworking of both, certainly

<sup>16</sup> Fontaine, *Isidore de Seville* 816, terms the histories "une sorte d'épopée wisigothique", and stresses the importance of the *laus Spaniae* in establishing these themes. At 817, n. 2 he also notes the peculiarly Alexandrine eroticism of the text. The erotic motif is also noted (in passing), by José A. Maravall, *El Concepto de España en la Edad Media* (Madrid 1954) 13–14.

<sup>17</sup> LR 71–84, 85–92, ed. Rodríguez Alonso 288–308, 310–320.

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Wolf, *Conquerors and Chroniclers* 21; Rodríguez Alonso, *Las Historias de los Godos* 20.

<sup>19</sup> LR 74, ed. Rodríguez Alonso 294.

<sup>20</sup> Isidore describes Gothic victories over the Siling Vandals at LR 22 and 68, ed. Rodríguez Alonso 206, 284 and the Sueves at LR 31, 33, 39, ed. Rodríguez Alonso 220, 224, 236. Note also the brief mention of the Hasding (African) Vandals at LR 38, ed. Rodríguez Alonso 234.

<sup>21</sup> Wolf, *Conquerors and Chroniclers*, simply omits the Vandal and Suevic histories from his account. Note, however, the editions and Castilian translations of the texts provided by José Luis Romero, *La Historia de los Vandalos y Suevos de San Isidoro de Sevilla*, in: *Cuadernos de Historia España* 1–2 (1944) 289–297, made with the intention of bringing the texts to a wider (Argentinian) audience.

suggest that their inclusion within this programme was not accidental, however unclear their function may at first seem.

The histories of the Vandals and Sueves were primarily intended to present the Goths in a better light. Yet this was accomplished, not merely through explicit reference to Gothic victories over the *gentes*, but by the simple juxtaposition of the differing fortunes of the groups. Like the Goths, the Vandals and Sueves traced their history back to the prehistoric North, and all had settled for varying periods of time in Spain. The Goths and the Vandals further shared the dubious distinction of having sacked Rome during the fifth century, and had their greatest political challenges in Justinian's campaigning in the mid-sixth.<sup>22</sup> Yet where the Goths had successively shrugged off their heretical faith and the military attentions of Byzantium, to leave themselves in a position of unprecedented strength, their neighbours had not. Both the Vandal and Suevic Kingdoms proved to be short-lived, the former having been destroyed in a matter of weeks by Belisarius' campaign, where the latter were absorbed within Leovigild's expansion.<sup>23</sup> It was to emphasize these similarities and contrasts that Isidore included the histories of all three *gentes* within his work. In effect, Isidore provides three parallel Germanic histories; the first is a triumphant Gothic narrative, the second and third are accounts of the tragic, truncated histories of the Vandals and Sueves.

In the first of his two redactions, Isidore largely illustrated this point – that his chosen *gens* had succeeded where others had failed – by juxtaposition alone. By drawing together scattered references to the *gentes* in the chronicle tradition, he created bald narrative outlines of the groups' histories, and left the causes behind these contrasting fates unexplored. In the longer recension, however, the principal themes of the work are amply fleshed out by judicious additions of the author's own. The Gothic history, in particular, is thickened through reference to the group's prehistory, to the institutions of the realm and to its conversion from Arianism. It was by making additions of this kind that Isidore revealed his own historical interests most clearly and it is here that the contrasts between his account of the Goths and the passages devoted to the Vandals and Sueves might most fruitfully be drawn out. Each of these areas offers considerable scope for the detailed investigation of a much-neglected composition, but it is the intention of the current essay to examine just one aspect of Isidore's presentation of the past. What I will look at here is the structural importance of geographical imagery within the three histories. It is within this that the contrasts between them – and the function of the appendices as a sidelight upon the Gothic history – is most apparent.

## GEOGRAPHICAL IMAGERY

Geographical order was central to Isidore's understanding and presentation of the Gothic past, as the *Laus Spaniae* and the repeated allusions to Spain over the course of the work demonstrate. As has been noted, migration narratives were nothing new within late antique historiography, but Isidore formulated his in an entirely original way. Jordanes had already described the earliest Gothic origins in his fantastic Scandinavian narrative, and Cassiodorus may well have anticipated these emphases in his lost *Historia Gothorum*.<sup>24</sup> Paul the Deacon, moreover, was later to present the origins of the Lombards in similar terms.<sup>25</sup> In so doing, these writers employed a linear narrative structure in which temporal and spatial elements reinforced a sense of historical progression. Where Isidore differed from these authors – at least in the longer recension of his work – was in geographical em-

<sup>22</sup> Sacks of Rome: LR 15–18, SR/LR 77, ed. Rodríguez Alonso 192–200, 298–300; conflict with Justinian: SR/LR 47, 83f., ed. Rodríguez Alonso 248–250, 306–308.

<sup>23</sup> SR/LR 83–4, 92, ed. Rodríguez Alonso 306–308, 320.

<sup>24</sup> Jordanes, *Getica* I, 4–V, 38 (ed. Theodor Mommsen, MGH AA 5, 1, Berlin 1882, repr. München 1982) 54–64. The background to the composition of the *Getica* has, of course, been the subject of considerable recent dispute. Compare esp. Herwig Wolfram, *History of the Goths* (Berkeley 1990) *passim* and Walter Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History* (Princeton 1988) 20–111. On the opening geography, and its significance within the text as a whole, see also Merrills, *History and Geography* chapter 2.

<sup>25</sup> Paulus Diaconus, *Historia Langobardorum* I, 1–6 (ed. Ludwig Bethmann/Georg Waitz, MGH SS rer. Langob., Hannover 1878) 7–187, at 7–10.

phasis. Where Jordanes and Paul opened their accounts in the frozen wastes of northern prehistory, and traced their subjects' passage across land and time towards the Mediterranean and its shared past, Isidore presented his conclusion at the outset of his work. The longer recension of the Gothic history opens, not with the fabricated origins of the *gens* in the distant north, but rather with the triumphant consummation of their final union with Spain.

This shift in geographical emphasis has a profound effect upon the definition of the Gothic *gens* within Isidore's work. Jordanes' Goths are migrants, in perpetual movement away from their Scandinavian home. By contrast, Isidore's *gens* is temporarily inconvenienced by its separation from Spain, but it is this final settlement, rather than the journey towards it, which defines the group. This narrative strain of inevitable union, delayed only by circumstance, bears obvious comparison to the erotic themes within the Ancient novelistic tradition. The story of two protagonists, irresistibly drawn towards each other, plainly appealed to Isidore and the historian underscored the erotic themes of his narrative through extensive reference to epithaliamal imagery within the introductory and concluding sections of his work.

As I have argued elsewhere, nuptial imagery saturates the *Laus Spaniae*, in its emphasis, its language, and the classical allusions that colour the passage.<sup>26</sup> In an image of matrimonial harmony that recalls Leander's sermon on the Gothic conversion, the martial, penetrating Goths are cast as the male side of this symbolic union, and the physically bounteous, accommodating Hispania the female:

... now it is the most flourishing people of the Goths, who in their turn, after many victories all over the world, have eagerly seized you and loved you: they enjoy you up to the present time amidst royal emblems and great wealth, secure in the good fortune of empire.<sup>27</sup>

While the *Laus Spaniae* stands alone as a fine example of a late antique epithalamium, its meaning becomes more apparent when viewed in the wider context of the history. As its common title implies, Isidore's opening apostrophe to Hispania is largely concerned with the delights of the region, and closely follows the paradigm of bridal celebration within late Roman rhetorical handbooks. When viewed in similar terms, the *Laus Gothorum*, with which Isidore closes his work, appears as nothing less than an encomium in praise of a husband, with valour and martial worth taking pride of place.

Isidore leaves his audience in little doubt that the union between the Goths and Spain will eventually be consummated, and it is this expectation which drives his narrative. Yet the narrative conventions of the Greek novels remind us that the path of true love rarely ran smooth in the literature of late Antiquity, and similar dramatic devices are employed within Isidore's work.<sup>28</sup> Just as Daphnis and Chloe follow their separate and tortuous paths to eventual union, or Theagenes and Chariclea endure extended separation in Heliodorus' *Aethiopika*, it is literary convention of this sort that allows Isidore to present the prolonged migration of the Goths across Europe as a manifestation of an underlying bond between his protagonists. Given the unusual nature of his *dramatis personae* – one a *gens*, the other a series of provinces – this attraction is depicted through geographical language, rather than through the more familiar vocabulary of love, but the dramatic tension, sense of divine intervention and ultimate confidence in a successful resolution are essentially analogous to the narrative conventions of the novelistic tradition.<sup>29</sup>

The first of these potential obstacles is encountered shortly after Alaric's sack of Rome, when the *gens* temporarily turns its back on Western Europe and heads south. Conspicuously, the passage is substantially elaborated in the longer recension:

<sup>26</sup> Merrills, *History and Geography* 205–226.

<sup>27</sup> LR prol, ed. Rodríguez Alonso 168–70: ... *denuo tamen Gothorum florentissima gens post multiplices in orbe uictorias certatim rapit et amauit, fruiturque hactenus inter regias infulas et opes largas imperii felicitate securas.*

<sup>28</sup> On the narrative conventions of the Ancient Greek novels, see esp. Thomas Hägg, *The Novel in Antiquity* (Oxford/Berkeley 1983); Brian P. Reardon, *The Greek Novel*, in: *Phoenix* 23 (1969) 291–309.

<sup>29</sup> On the importance of travel and migration narrative to ancient Greek historiography – an approach with important implications for the understanding of post-classical texts – see now François Hartog, *Memories of Odysseus. Frontier Tales from Ancient Greece* (Edinburgh 2001).

From there, boarding ships, they decided to cross over to Sicily, which is separated from Italy by a narrow strait. Risking the hostile sea, they lost much of their army.<sup>30</sup>

The significance of this failed migration is more apparent some four chapters later, when the Gothic King Wallia attempts his own crossing, this time from Hispania itself:

Ending the war in Spain, Wallia planned to cross over to Africa with the naval forces he had equipped. But battered by a serious storm in the straits of the sea of Cadiz and mindful of the shipwreck that occurred during Alaric's reign, he decided to avoid the dangers of navigation and return to Gaul.<sup>31</sup>

Storms and shipwrecks were a common motif of divine disapproval within early Christian writing, and it seems clear that Isidore intended each of these passages to be read in this sense. The link between Wallia's failed crossing to Africa and Alaric's attempted invasion of Sicily is explicitly emphasized; the Goths were clearly to be discouraged from deviating from their Spanish inheritance.

This theme recurs even more clearly, however, after the final settlement of the Goths within Hispania. Following a successful defence of the region against the Franks, the Goths once more attempt to exercise their authority south of the Straits of Gibraltar. Isidore's language here implies that Wallia's campaign was intended to consolidate existing Gothic holdings within Mauretania.<sup>32</sup> The historian makes no other reference to such a bridgehead, however, and seems anxious to assure his audience that the Goths were not fated to extend their *imperium* across the sea:

After this fortunate victory, the Goths undertook an ill-advised campaign across the Straits of Gades. They crossed the straits to do battle with the soldiers who had assaulted the city of Ceuta (*Septem Oppidum*) and had expelled the Goths. The Goths attacked the fortress with great power. But on the following Sunday they put down their arms so as not to defile the sacred day with fighting. Seizing this opportunity, the opposing forces made a surprise attack and laid low the invading army, which was trapped between land and sea so that not a single man escaped death in this massacre.<sup>33</sup>

There are a number of curious aspects of this passage, not the least of which is the unambiguous description of the Goths being destroyed as a direct result of their admirable piety. While the Goths were Arian at the time of the disaster, the heresy is never directly mentioned within this passage. Instead, its omission ensures that it is the geographical implications of the passage that come into focus. It was not the heretical belief of the Goths that led to failure in Ceuta, but rather their attempted subversion of the spatial order and of divine will, as already expressed in the disaster that had befallen the Goths in their earlier attempts to deny their geographical inheritance.

When Isidore turns to the Gothic entry into Hispania, by contrast, his language is vivid and sexual. He describes how the Gothic gens "seized" (*rapit*), "loved" (*amauit*) and "enjoyed" (*fruitur*) Hispania, how the *gens* "entered" (*ingeditur*) the peninsula, "laying open" (*patefactis*) the territory beyond the Pyrenees.<sup>34</sup> The Goths, therefore, are drawn inexorably towards their climactic union with Spain. Combining geographical and erotic themes, Isidore essentially transforms the migration narrative into a romance and thereby consummates the profound relationship between his two protagonists.

<sup>30</sup> LR 18, ed. Rodríguez Alonso 200: *Inde conscensis nauibus cum ad Siciliam exiguo ab Italia fretu diuisam transire dispo-nerent, infesto mari periclitati multum exercitum perdiderunt*. On the significance of the additions to the shorter recension in this passage, see Rodríguez Alonso, *Las Historias de los Godos* 34.

<sup>31</sup> SR/LR 22, ed. Rodríguez Alonso 206–208: *Confecto igitur Wallia bello Spaniae, dum instructa nauali acie Africam transire moliretur in fretu Gaditani maris ui grauissima tempestatis effractus, memor etiam illius sub Alarico naufragii omisso nauigationis periculo Gallias repetit...*

<sup>32</sup> Thompson, *The Goths in Spain* 15.

<sup>33</sup> LR 42, ed. Rodríguez Alonso 242: *Post tam felicitis successum uictoriae trans fretum inconsulte Gothi gesserunt. Denique dum aduersus milites, qui Septem oppidum pulsus Gothis inuaderant, oceani freta transissent eundemque castrum magna ui certaminis expugnarent, adueniente die dominico deposuerunt arma, ne diem sacrum proelio funestarent. Hac igitur occasione reperta milites repentino incursu adgressum exercitum mari undique terraque conclusum adeo prostrauerunt, ut ne unus quidem superesset, qui tantae cladis excidium praeteriret.*

<sup>34</sup> The sexual language in Isidore's account of the Gothic 'entry' into Spain is striking: LR Prol. 31, 66, ed. Rodríguez Alonso 170, 220, 282.

## VANDAL AND SUEVIC GEOGRAPHY

Isidore's histories of the Vandals and Sueves are taken more directly from the chronicle tradition than is his account of the Goths, and consequently are less directly shaped by the historian's own rhetoric. The sexualized imagery that permeates the Gothic history is far less prominent in the appendices, as is the strongly linear element within the narrative as a whole. Yet this structural disparity remains important to the comprehension of Isidore's historical project, and it seems likely that he was fully aware of this contrast. Where the revision of his history allowed the writer to smooth over the uncomfortable lacunae in his account of the Gothic past, and lend a greater narrative coherence to his work, Isidore made only superficial changes to his descriptions of the Vandals and Sueves. By assembling his patchwork appendices from the disparate source material provided by the chroniclers, and leaving their rough edges unfinished, Isidore created images of the Vandalic and Suevic past that were most marked by their episodic and violent nature. When juxtaposed with the more polished presentation of the Goths, the contrasts between the different fates of the *gentes* are thrown into particularly sharp relief.

Isidore's deference to the chronicles need not imply a thoughtlessness within his composition of the Vandal and Suevic histories. Drawing upon a variety of different sources, and adding elements of his own where appropriate, the historian was able to cast further light upon the dominant themes of his Gothic history. His passing reference to the earliest appearance of the two peoples, for example, immediately contrasts with the innovative structure employed in the introduction to his Gothic history. Deprived of the scriptural heritage of the Goths, the Vandals and Sueves emerge rather suddenly on the European stage, poised on the banks of the Rhine:

In the year 444, two years before the invasion of the city of Rome, the nations of the Alani, the Suevi and the Vandals, having been provoked by Stilicho, crossed the Rhine, invaded Gaul, crushed the Franks, and with a direct onset reached the Pyrenees.

The contrasts with Gothic prehistory are manifold and are certainly deliberate. Isidore immediately highlights the primacy of the Goths by dating the history of their neighbours, not with respect to consular dates, but relative to the Gothic sack of Rome. From the outset, therefore, the destructive migrations of the Vandals and Sueves are placed under the shadow of their cousins' triumphant conquest of the City.

Of particular importance in Isidore's presentation of the Vandals and Sueves is the suggestion that the destructive swathe that they cut through Europe is essentially directionless, in contrast to the guided migration of the Goths. As has been noted, the prominence of the *Laus Spaniae* at the opening of Isidore's work is crucial in the establishment of the bond between the Goths and Spain. The monogamous nature of this relationship is emphasized by the absence of any comparable passage at the opening of the Vandal and Suevic histories. From their first appearance, the *gentes* are associated with their Germanic homeland, rather than with their future settlement. Consequently, the histories that follow are presented as a movement away from this point of origin, rather than an inexorable movement towards a predestined homeland, as is so clearly the case with Isidore's Goths.

The depiction of the violent passage of the groups through Gaul only intensifies this sense of directionless history. Where the Goths delay the gratification of their union with the peninsula after a long migration through the continent, and pass happily into receptive Spain, the Vandals and Sueves burst prematurely – and ineffectually – against the barrier of the Pyrenees:

At the barrier of these mountains, they were driven back from Spain by Didymus and Verianus, two most noble and powerful Roman brothers, and they wandered for three years through the surrounding provinces of Gaul.<sup>35</sup>

Significantly, the Vandals and Sueves are not the only groups to encounter resistance at the mountainous frontier of Spain, and elsewhere the Franks are put to the sword in the region's passes.

<sup>35</sup> LR 71, ed. Rodríguez Alonso 288: ... cuius obice per Didymum et Verianum Romanos nobilissimos ac potentissimos fratres ab Spania tribus annis repulsi per circumiantes Galliae provincias uagabantur.



Through each of these references, Isidore accentuates the ease with which his Gothic protagonists entered Hispania and underlines more firmly their rightful inheritance of the peninsula.<sup>36</sup>

Eventually, however, the Vandals and Sueves work their way beyond the mountains, and penetrate Hispania. Extensive quotation from Hydatius' almost apocalyptic account of the scouring of the Spains provides the most obvious way in which Isidore distinguishes between this occupation and the consensual settlement of the Goths, but it is not the only strategy that he employs. Of comparable importance is writer's interest in the sub-division of the peninsula between the warring groups:

... finally, through God's mercy, the barbarians were moved to make peace and divided Spain's provinces by lot for their occupation. The Vandals and Suevi took Galicia. The Alani obtained the provinces of Lusitania and Cartagena, and the Vandals called Silingians received Baetica.

[Gunderic] broke the peace treaty and besieged the nation of the Suevi in the Erbasian Mountains; he then abandoned the siege of the Suevi and plundered the Balearic Islands of the province of Tarraconensis. Then, after overthrowing Cartagena, he crossed to Baetica with all the Vandals and destroyed Seville, which he plundered after causing slaughter.<sup>37</sup>

The significance of these passages is only apparent when the absence of any comparable account in Isidore's Gothic history is considered.

The historian never discusses the practical basis for the Gothic settlement within Hispania in detail, nor are any territorial limitations placed upon the group. Their occupation is not justified by treaty, but by the implicit bond between region and *gens* that runs throughout the *Historia*. It is only in comparison with the more traditional settlement patterns of their Germanic neighbours, however, that the true impact of this theme is felt. The Vandals and Sueves adhered to, and then infringed, mundane treaties that they had brokered themselves; the consent of Hispania herself within this arrangement is never discussed.

Where the Goths three times found themselves unable to cross into Africa, the Vandal migration to the southern continent is marked by its simplicity:

From the coast of the province of Baetica he left Spain with all the Vandals and their families and crossed the Strait of Oceanus to Mauretania and Africa. Valentinian the Younger, the Emperor of the West, was unable to oppose him and sent peace terms and gave him, as if to a peace-loving man, the part of Africa which the Vandals had occupied, after accepting from Geiseric on oath the terms that the king would not invade any further territory.<sup>38</sup>

Of particular interest here is the peculiarly legal language employed by Isidore. The Vandals were, of course, settled by *foedus*, and received a second treaty following the sack of Carthage.<sup>39</sup> Yet Isidore's emphasis upon the legal delimitation of Vandal settlement and the nature of their claim to the territory remains significant. Again, the mundane settlement of one Germanic *gens* contrasts with the happy symbiosis of the Goths in Hispania.

Isidore's account of the Goths was marked as much by geographical order as by erotic imagery, however. Indeed, it was their inability to extend their power beyond Hispania underscores the valid-

<sup>36</sup> Pyrenees as obstacle: LR 41 – a passage with obvious parallels to the subsequent defeat of the Goths at Ceuta in LR 42, ed. Rodríguez Alonso 238–240 and 242.

<sup>37</sup> LR 73, ed. Rodríguez Alonso 290–292: *...tandem barbari pacem ineundam deo miserante conuersi sorte in possessionem sibi eius prouincias diuidunt. Galliciam enim Wandali et Sueui occupant, Alani Lusitaniam et Carthaginensem prouincias, Wandali autem cognomine Silingi Baeticam sortiuntur ... Qui dum rupto foedere pacis Sueuorum gentem in Erbasis montibus obsideret, relicta obsidione Sueuorum, Balearicas Tarraconensis prouinciae insulas depraedatur.*

<sup>38</sup> LR 74, ed. Rodríguez Alonso 294: *Hic de Baeticae prouinciae litore cum Wandalis omnibus eorumque familiis ad Mauritaniam et Africam relictis Spaniis transfretauit. Cui Valentinianus iunior Occidentalis imperator non ualens obsistere pacem mittit et partem Africae, quam Wandali possederant, tanquam pacifico dedit condicionibus ab eo sacramenti acceptis, ne quid ultra inuaderet.*

<sup>39</sup> On the Vandal invasion and settlement, see Christian Courtois, *Les Vandales et l'Afrique* (Paris 1955) 153–175; Yves Moderan, *L'établissement territorial des Vandales en Afrique*, in: *Antiquité Tardive* 10 (2002) 87–122 and Andreas Schwarz, *The settlement of the Vandals in North Africa*, in: *Vandals, Romans and Berbers: New Perspectives on Late Antique North Africa*, ed. Andrew Merrills (London 2004) 49–58.

ity of the Gothic claim to the peninsula. Within his Vandal history, by contrast, Isidore seems at pains to dismiss such notions of spatial order entirely. Almost immediately after their arrival in Africa, the Vandals break out from their proper geographical mould – a point that Isidore makes particularly clear through his ironic report:

But he, about whose friendship there was already no doubt, violated the obligation of his oath, occupied Carthage under a false pretence of peace, and brought all its property under his own jurisdiction after plaguing the citizens with various kinds of torture. He then ravaged Sicily, besieged Palermo, introduced the Arian pestilence through the whole of Africa ...<sup>40</sup>

The point is driven further home in the following entry:

When Geiseric found this out, not satisfied with ravaging Africa alone, he set sail with his ships and entered Rome...<sup>41</sup>

It is also within this context of spatial order that the account of African episcopal exiles needs to be understood:

Filled with the Arian madness, [Thrasamund] persecuted the Catholics, closed the churches and sent 120 bishops from the whole of Africa into exile in Sardinia.<sup>42</sup>

To the student of Vandal history, or of the Western Chronicles, little of this will be new. The Vandals do seem to have broken an imperial treaty prior to their capture of Carthage, they did expand into the Western Mediterranean and sacked Rome, and they did exile a number of clerics to Sardinia. Yet Isidore's emphasis upon spatial disorder within such a short account of Vandal history remains significant, particularly when viewed against the Gothic history that it follows.

In purely geographical terms, the history of the Sueves is the least coherent section of Isidore's history. Heavily reliant upon the histories of Hydatius and John of Biclarum, and rigidly structured around the reigns of the Suevoic kings, Isidore's account largely reads as a history of internecine warfare, punctuated by innumerable campaigns into neighbouring territory. In some senses, this arrangement parallels the description of the earliest stages of Gothic history, before Leovigild's expansion within Hispania, and Reccared's seminal conversion of the *gens*. Crucially, however, the Sueves are deprived such a Damascene moment in their own history, and Isidore's account is largely limited to incessant warfare and broken treaties:

Then [Remismund] crossed into Lusitania and destroyed Coimbra after deceiving it by a semblance of peace. Lisbon too was seized by him when Lusidius, one of its citizens who was in authority there, surrendered it.<sup>43</sup>

The Goths feature quite prominently in Isidore's history of the Sueves, variously allying with the group and helping them with their plunders. The contrast between the groups remains marked, however, not least through the sense of progression and aggrandizement which is so notably lacking from the account of the ill-fated *gens*. Like the Vandals, the Sueves are deprived of a strictly delineated stage upon which their drama would take place. The result is a chaotic historical narrative, and one which makes the Gothic rise to prominence within Hispania seem all the more inexorably by contrast.

In effect, the whole of Isidore's Gothic history, particularly in its longer version, is a spatially ordered narrative. Within it, the Goths are bound for success in Hispania, from the initial presentation of the region as the predestined homeland of the group, through the prolonged courtship of

<sup>40</sup> LR 75, ed. Rodríguez Alonso 294–296: *Ille autem, de cuius amicitia iam nihil ambigebatur uiolata sacramenti religione Carthaginem dolo pacis inuadit omnesque opes eius excruciatas diuersos tormentorum genere ciuibus in ius proprium uertit. Deinde Siciliam depraedatur, Panormum obsidet, Arrianam pestilentiam per totam Africam intromittit...*

<sup>41</sup> SR/LR 77, ed. Rodríguez Alonso 298: *Quo comperto Gesericus non contentus solis Africae uastationibus nauibus aduectus Romam ingreditur...*

<sup>42</sup> SR/LR 81, ed. Rodríguez Alonso 302–304: *Iste Arriana insania plenus catholicos insectatur, ecclesias claudit, Sardiniam exilio ex omni Africana ecclesia CXX episcopos mittit.*

<sup>43</sup> LR 90, ed. Rodríguez Alonso 316–318: *Inde ad Lusitaniam transit, Conimbriam pace deceptam diripit. Olisipona quoque ab eo occupatur ciue suo qui illic praerat tradente Lusidio.*

territory and *gens*, to the eventual consummation of the union through settlement and triumph over rival suitors. It is only by settling down in Spain that the *regnum* can develop, and only then that the group can turn to Catholicism and salvation. Effective as this dramatic structure might have been in isolation, its impact is accentuated through juxtaposition with the anticlimactic histories of the Vandals and Sueves. The Vandals subvert natural order through the expulsion of the African bishops. They break the *foedus* that determined their territorial limitations, and expand avariciously into the islands of the Western Mediterranean. The Sueves, similarly, embark upon a series of conflicts with their neighbours, which do little to consolidate their *regnum* and lend only suffering to the peninsula in which they live. Unlike the Goths, neither group has a predestined homeland. Where one history is a model of increasing spatial order, therefore, the others are examples only of confusion and incoherence. Where one *regnum* succeeded through its harmony of people and place, the others, of course, failed.

### CONCLUSIONS

The early medieval chronicle tradition is increasingly read with a far greater sensitivity than has previously been the case. Increasingly, chroniclers' re-interpretations of others' compositions are no longer regarded as unthinking re-treads, but as coherent historiographical compositions with their own implications for societies' understandings of their own past. In Isidore's case, these observations seem particularly pertinent. Isidore returned to his short history of the Goths in response to recent political events, and in so doing developed its political meaning, its literary depth, and its narrative coherence. Crucially, the peculiar appendices which Isidore added to his account of the Gothic past were not superfluous to this narrative strategy, and must be considered as a fully functioning element of the work in which they appeared. In this light, Isidore's decision to include substantial passages devoted to the history of Vandal Africa and Suevic Gallaecia is particularly worthy of note. Of little direct relevance to his audience in seventh-century Spain, the Vandal and Suevic narratives nevertheless provided cautionary antitypes to bring out the dominant themes of Gothic success.

The genesis of this schema was present in the shorter redaction of Isidore's history, which included brief accounts of Vandal and Suevic history alongside his account of the Gothic past. Yet it was within the longer redaction of the work that the literary potential of this device was most fully realised. The account of palpable Vandal and Suevic failure naturally accentuated Gothic success as it appears in Isidore's history, not least because the challenges faced by the groups were so similar. Yet the manifold parallels between the histories refute the suggestion that Isidore intended them simply to be read as divergent narratives. It was by juxtaposing triumphant and disastrous histories of the *gentes* that the historian emphasized the importance of conversion, territorial consolidation, and religious humility in the development of the Gothic kingdom. For a Gothic audience in 624, looking back on its own past from the giddy heights of military triumph, the inexorable growth of the State in Spain might have seemed a straightforward enough process. By including a cautionary account of Vandal failure, Isidore sought to illustrate both the divine will, and the sheer hard work upon which this success had been built.

