Introduction: Ethnicity, Religion and Empire

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Traditional religions are often community-based and community-oriented, from civic cults and divine origins of lineages and peoples to the flexible forms of cultural adaptation in classical religion. With the emergence of universal religions, the relationship between cult and community, religious and political identity became much more complex. A proselytizing religion tends to transcend other forms of community through defining membership by conversion.[1] But on the other hand, it often attaches itself to definite political realms which it legitimates and helps to integrate. This may create a rather dynamic and sometimes paradoxical relationship between religious identity and particular communities. With the emergence of the Christian Roman Empire in the fourth and the Islamic Caliphate in the seventh century, it might seem for a while that empire was the adequate form of political organization for a universal religion.[2] But the equation between empire and religion remained ephemeral, and the religious dynamic invariably outgrew its imperial framework. In Western Europe, Christian kingdoms predominantly named after peoples developed. We have become so accustomed to seeing the world as a world of nations that we have taken for granted that Europe should have developed that way, as an aggregate of independent peoples. Ethnicity, however, played a very different

[1] Werner Gephart and Hans Waldenfels (eds), *Religion und Identität* (Frankfurt, 1999).

[2] Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford, 1991); Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates: The Islamic Near East from the Sixth to the Eleventh Century* (London, New York, 1986).

role in the many other political cultures that preceded and surrounded medieval Europe, and more comparative research is necessary to understand these differences.[3]

This volume, therefore, raises the question of how ethnic identities, civic and regional communities, religious beliefs and political allegiances interacted in shaping different social worlds. It takes a comparative look at visions and practices of community and at the role of identity and difference in the three post-classical political cultures: the Latin West, Byzantium and the Islamic world, roughly between the fifth and the eleventh centuries. For this period, such questions have never been raised from a comparative point of view. This is all the more surprising as the differences in the development of modern nations between Europe and the Middle East have often been noticed. It is commonplace to say that there was little sense of national community on which states such as Iraq, Lebanon, Syria or Jordan could be established after the fall of the Ottoman Empire. Even the Turkish nation was a controversial issue; for instance, the poet who wrote the text that was used for the Turkish national anthem, Mehmet Akif, was in fact a bitter critic of nationalism and went into exile when the Turkish republic was proclaimed.[4] Obviously, ethnicity and nationality played a different role in Islamic history than they did in the West. The present volume is intended to raise new questions about the early stages of these differing developments.

Comparison between the West and the Islamic world, sometimes also taking the Byzantine commonwealth into account, has become a hot topic in recent years.[5] But in many

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[3] Walter Pohl, 'Aux origines d'une Europe ethnique: Identités en transformation entre antiquité et moyen âge', in *Annales: Histoire, Sciences sociales*, 60, 1 (2005): 183–208.

[4] Bernard Lewis, *The Multiple Identities of the Middle East* (New York, 1998), p. 24.

[5] For a broad socio-economic comparison, see Chris Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean 400–800* (Oxford, New York, 2005); see also Michael Borgolte (ed.), *Das europäische Mittelalter im Spannungsbogen des Vergleichs. Zwanzig internationale Beiträge zu Praxis, Problemen und Perspektiven der historischen Komparatistik*, Europa im Mittelalter. Abhandlungen und Beiträge zur historischen Komparatistik, 1 (Berlin, 2001).

respects we are still at the beginning. Ambitious attempts to write a comparative history of the post-Roman Mediterranean seem to show that it is too early for synthesis.[6] Research in all fields involved could profit enormously from critical comparison. This could also lead to a better awareness of the way in which traditional paradigms, master-narratives and methodological choices still influence our perceptions of the period. For instance, the recently renewed controversies about the 'Fall of Rome' or the 'Transformation of the Roman World' have once again tended to concentrate on the Western Empire, and on the 'barbarian' kingdoms that were founded on its territory.[7] But Rome fell in at least four different ways: the Western transition from empire to kingdoms in the course of the fifth century, the Slavic rupture in the Balkans, the Islamic conquest of the East in the seventh century and the gradual Byzantine transformation of eastern Rome. Differences and similarities in these processes can shed additional light on the reasons why the Roman Empire lost its hegemony in the Mediterranean; and they help to understand how different 'visions of community' developed in these regions.

In the Latin West,[8] the Roman Empire was replaced by a plurality of Christian kingdoms with ethnic appellations: the Franks, the Anglo-Saxons, the Lombards and others. The political landscape of Latin Europe around 1000 CE was already dominated by France, England,

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[6] Judith Herrin, *The Formation of Christendom* (Princeton, 1987); Ernst Pitz, *Die griechisch–römische Ökumene und die drei Kulturen des Mittelalters. Geschichte des mediterranen Weltteils zwischen Atlantik und Indischen Ozean 270–812*, Abhandlungen und Beiträge zur historischen Komparatistik, 3 (Berlin, 2001); Michael Borgolte, *Christen, Juden, Muselmanen. Die Erben der Antike und der Aufstieg des Abendlandes, 300–1400 n. Chr.*, Siedler Geschichte Europas (Munich, 2006).

[7] Peter J. Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire: A New History* (London, Oxford, 2005); Bryan Ward-Perkins, *The Fall of Rome: And the End of Civilization* (Oxford, 2005); Walter A. Goffart, *Barbarian Tides: The Migration Age and the Later Roman Empire* (Philadelphia, 2006); Guy Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West, 376–568* (Cambridge, 2007); Walter Pohl, 'Rome and the barbarians in the fifth century', *Antiquité Tardive*, 16 (2008): 93–101.

[8] For the problem of terminology, see Chapter 23 by Daniel König in this volume.

Scotland, Hungary, Poland, Bohemia, Croatia, Norway, Denmark, and Sweden.[9] Byzantium remained Roman, but in the course of time, orthodox ethnic states arose on its peripheries, most of them in the Slavic lands where the ancient infrastructure had been almost completely abandoned. Around 1000 CE, the Byzantine Empire still comprised a considerable number of different ethnic, regional and even religious identities, as Ralph-Johannes Lilie shows in Chapter 17. It had recovered lost territory in the east and the Balkans, and pushed Bulgaria westward into modern Serbia and Macedonia. Still, more or less orthodox states developed on its peripheries, for instance the Rūs in Kiev, and ethnicity played a role in most of them. In the Islamic world, ethnic affiliations (in the broad sense) existed on several levels, but political power rested mostly on Islamic and dynastic foundations. At the end of the period under consideration here, the power of the caliphs of Baghdad had faded away, and regional dynasties had established themselves, the Umayyads in al-Andalus, the Fatimids in Egypt, the Buyids in Iran, the Hamdanids in northern Syria and others, some of them supported by Ismaili or other Shiite religious movements. Thus, the imperial heritage of the Roman Mediterranean gave way to distinct political cultures.[10] Realms with ethnic appellations covered large parts of Europe, whereas imperial and dynastic polities resting on strong religious foundations continued to dominate the Eastern Mediterranean. Or were these differences not as fundamental as they appear? The answer depends, not least, on our concept of ethnicity.

The role of ethnicity in early medieval Europe, especially in the migration period, was quite thoroughly studied in the last quarter of the twentieth century, not least in Vienna.

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[9] See, for instance, the map in *Putzger Atlas und Chronik zur Weltgeschichte* (Berlin, 2002), p. 74. Of course, the map presents a modern view of the situation; on the other hand, all of the names are attested in contemporary sources, and most of them in official self-identifications (such as titles of rulers).

[10] It has been argued that the West had already entered a proto-national phase: see, for example, Helmut Beumann and Werner Schröder, *Aspekte der Nationenbildung im Mittelalter*, Nationes, 1 (Sigmaringen, 1978); but that presumes a clear break between a 'gentile' period up to the ninth century and the beginning of nationhood (German, French, English) after that.

Research on ethnogenesis has shown how complex was the process of ethnic aggregation and the formation of distinct peoples in the early Middle Ages.[11] Herwig Wolfram's contribution, Chapter 6 in this volume, represents this line of research by showing 'how many peoples are in a people'. This approach can surely be of use to scholars studying other parts of the world. Although 'ethnogenesis' is still at the centre of polemic, research has moved on. As national origins have lost much of their political appeal, origin myths do not require the same amount of scholarly attention (or sometimes, fury, as Chris Wickham notices in his Conclusion).[12] Rather, scholarly interest has turned to ongoing ethnic processes that continually transform the composition of ethnic groups, and to the role ethnicity plays in their strategies of identification and distinction. The centuries after the dissolution of the Western Roman Empire saw the emergence of new peoples and of states that were named after them: the kingdoms of the Vandals, Goths, Burgundians, Franks, Lombards, Angles and Saxons. Most of them did not survive in the long run. But ethnic polities, however mixed their populations really were, continued to play an important role in the political landscape. This underlying phenomenon was

[11] Reinhard Wenskus, *Stammesbildung und Verfassung. Das Werden der frühmittelalterlichen gentes* (Cologne, Vienna, [2]1977); Herwig Wolfram, 'Typen der Ethnogenese. Ein Versuch', in Dieter Geuenich (ed.), *Die Franken und die Alemannen bis zur „Schlacht bei Zülpich" (496/97)*, Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde, Ergänzungsband, 19 (Berlin, New York, 1998), pp. 608–27; Walter Pohl, 'Tradition, Ethnogenese und literarische Gestaltung: eine Zwischenbilanz', in Karl Brunner and Brigitte Merta (eds), *Ethnogenese und Überlieferung. Angewandte Methoden der Frühmittelalterforschung*, Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung, 31 (Vienna, 1994), pp. 9–26. For critical views, see Andrew Gillett (ed.), *On Barbarian Identity – Critical Approaches to Ethnogenesis Theory*, Studies in the Early Middle Ages, 4 (Turnhout, 2002), with the response by Walter Pohl, 'Ethnicity, theory and tradition: a response', on pp. 221–40; Pohl, 'Aux origines d'une Europe ethnique', p. 208.

[12] Herwig Wolfram, 'Origo gentis (Goten)', in *Reallexikon der Gemanischen Altertumskunde*, 2. Aufl., 22 (2003): 178–83; Herwig Wolfram, 'Auf der Suche nach den Ursprüngen', in Walter Pohl (ed.), *Die Suche nach den Ursprüngen. Von der Bedeutung des frühen Mittelalters*, Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters, 8 (Vienna, 2004), pp. 11–22.

at the heart of the Wittgenstein Prize project conducted in Vienna between 2005 and 2010.[13] The post-imperial centuries in the West established a new discourse of ethnicity, and models of legitimate rule in the name of a people.

The resources of ethnic identification and distinction created in the early centuries of the Middle Ages remained available throughout European history. Even many early medieval peoples who failed, such as the Vandals, Huns, Goths or Burgundians, accumulated such prestige that others attempted to partake in it by identifying with peoples who had long disappeared: several medieval states adopted the name of the Burgundians, up to the Grand Dukes of the fifteenth century; Hungary appropriated the Huns as ancestors; early modern Sweden the Goths and Vandals (who represent two of the Three Crowns of the Swedish coat of arms); and some Slavic dynasties traced their origins back to the Vandals-Vends.[14] However, the military exploits of a heroic age would hardly have been enough to establish the political role of ethnicity. It is easy to observe that all successful ethnic states were or soon became Christian. This was partly due to the valuable infrastructure offered by the Church, and to the support of the bishops. But there is more to it, and this is a neglected element in the study of European 'visions of community': Christianity also provided a world view that made the *gentes* essential actors in the history of salvation.[15] Thus, the baptism of the Frankish king Clovis around 500 CE came to be regarded as the true foundational act of the French state, and its

[13] For results of the project, see Walter Pohl and Gerda Heydemann (eds), *Strategies of Identification – Early Medieval Perspectives* (Turnhout, forthcoming).

[14] Roland Steinacher, 'Wenden, Slawen, Vandalen. Eine frühmittelalterliche pseudologische Gleichsetzung und ihre Nachwirkungen', in Walter Pohl (ed.), *Die Suche nach den Ursprüngen. Von der Bedeutung des frühen Mittelalters*, Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters, 8 (Vienna, 2004), pp. 329–53; János M. Bák, Jörg Jarnut, Pierre Monnet and Bernd Schneidmüller (eds), *Gebrauch und Missbrauch des Mittelalters, 19.–21. Jahrhundert/Uses and Abuses of the Middle Ages, 19th–21st Century*, MittelalterStudien, 17 (Munich, 2009).

[15] See below.

1500th anniversary was celebrated with pomp and furious debates in 1996.[16] Much more than Islam, Christianity could be understood to support the particularity and importance of ethnically defined groups.[17] Therefore, most medieval rulers' titles contain a double legitimation: *Gratia Dei rex Francorum*, *rex Angliae* or similar.[18] The long-term success of ethnic states, which paved the way for the eventual development of European nations, would not have been possible without the Christian discourse of ethnicity.

Therefore, this volume is not simply entitled 'Ethnicity in East and West' or similar. Two key questions that have emerged from recent research on the role of ethnicity in the post-Roman West are both more general and more specific. First, in what way did supra-regional kingdoms come to be distinguished by ethnic labels? And second, what was the role of Christianity in encouraging the political use of ethnic identities? These two questions point strongly towards comparison with Christian Byzantium and with the Islamic world. What is the role of particular identities within the universal vision proposed by the two religions? And what are the realities on the ground created by the sometimes conflicting, but more often aggregated religious, ethnic and other social identities? Which 'visions of community' inspired political action and legitimated rulership in the three post-classical political cultures?

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[16] Dieter Geuenich (ed.), *Die Franken und die Alemannen bis zur 'Schlacht bei Zülpich' (496/97)* (Beihefte zum RGA, Berlin, New York, 1998), pp. 636–51.

[17] Walter Pohl, 'Disputed identification: the Jews and the use of biblical models in the barbarian kingdoms', in Yitzhak Hen *et al*. (eds), *Barbarians and Jews: Jews and Judaism in the Early Medieval West* (Turnout, forthcoming).

[18] Herwig Wolfram, *Intitulatio I. Lateinische Königs- und Fürstentitel bis zum Ende des 8. Jahrhunderts*, Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung, Ergänzungsband, 21 (Graz, Cologne, Vienna, 1967); Andrew Gillett, 'Was ethnicity politicized in the earliest medieval kingdoms?', in Andrew Gillett (ed.), *On Barbarian Identity – Critical Approaches to Ethnogenesis Theory*, Studies in the Early Middle Ages, 4 (Turnhout, 2002), pp. 85–121.

Comparison between different regions, cultures or periods is an expanding but methodologically sensible field.[19] Sociological models tend to offer sweeping blueprints for comparison, but they often sit poorly with the complexity of historical evidence.[20] Are our categories for historical analysis – such as state, empire, tribe, religion, ethnicity, culture – flexible enough to sustain systematic comparison? Socio-cultural anthropology recently has gone through a revival of methodological and conceptual attention for cross-cultural comparison.[21] One of the problems is that comparison tends to reify the cultures that are being compared, and the boundaries between them. In the case of this book, the common past and the intense communication between the regions under scrutiny does not allow them to be marked off against each other in any wholesale way.[22] In spite of all difficulties, we are even being encouraged to 'compare the incomparable' across academic boundaries.[23] As we go along, more methodological reflection will be needed to assess the results of cross-disciplinary encounters such as the one presented in this volume.

Most importantly for our topic, we have to reflect on the categories of identity and ethnicity. Theoretical questions of ethnicity and of its uses are raised in several contributions to this volume, among them the essays by two social anthropologists working on Asia (Andre

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[19] Represented in Germany not least by the Institut für vergleichende Geschichte Europas im Mittelalter and its series of publications: Borgolte, *Das europäische Mittelalter im Spannungsbogen des Vergleichs*; Michael Borgolte, Juliane Schiel, Bernd Schneidmüller and Annette Seitz (eds), *Mittelalter im Labor. Die Mediävistik testet Wege zu einer transkulturellen Europawissenschaft*, Europa im Mittelalter, Abhandlungen und Beiträge zur historischen Komparatistik, 10 (Berlin, 2008).

[20] Even some of the most successful attempts at model-building have problems integrating Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages: for instance, Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (London, 1986); Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power*, vol. 1: *A History of Power from the Beginning to A.D. 1760* (Cambridge, 1986).

[21] *Anthropology, by Comparison*, ed. Andre Gingrich and R.G. Fox (London, New York, 2002).

[22] See, for instance, Michael McCormick, *The Origins of the European Economy: Communications and Commerce c.700–c.900* (Cambridge, 2001).

[23] Marcel Detienne, *Comparing the Incomparable* (Stanford, 2008).

Gingrich, Guntram Hazod, Chapters 1 and 2 respectively), by Bas ter Haar Romeny (Chapter 11), and in Chris Wickham's Conclusion; I would like to add a few observations here. What is ethnicity?[24] It is probably safe to say that the Bedouin tribes of Arabia or the barbarian peoples of the West were ethnic groups. It is already more problematic in the case of the umbrella terms. 'Arab' clearly represented a self-designation in the early Middle Ages, but it may not always have been understood in an ethnic sense; when and where it was used in the Middle Ages needs more detailed investigation.[25] 'Germanic' was hardly used for self-identification in antiquity, although modern scholarship has long maintained that, and was not used for contemporary ascription between ca. 400 and 750.[26] 'Roman' is even more difficult to assess. A number of recent studies have discussed its significance in antiquity;[27] similar assessments are lacking for the early Middle Ages, when 'Roman' had several different meanings. Classical Roman-ness was maintained with considerable efforts; if Evagrios presents the late sixth-century bishop Gregory of Theopolis as addressing a Byzantine army as 'Men, Romans in action and in appellation', this refers to a performative identity following an ancient classical tradition.[28]

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[24] For a more extensive discussion, see Walter Pohl, 'Introduction. Strategies of identification: a methodological profile', in Walter Pohl and Gerda Heydemann (eds), *Strategies of Identification* (Turnhout, forthcoming).

[25] See Chapter 4 by Jan Retsö in this volume; and the rather different view from Robert Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs: From the Bronze Age to the Coming of Islam* (London, New York, 2001), pp. 229–47. I would like to thank Patricia Crone, Princeton, for advice on this point.

[26] Walter Pohl, 'Der Germanenbegriff vom 3. bis 8. Jahrhundert – Identifikationen und Abgrenzungen', in Heinrich Beck, Dieter Geuenich, Heiko Steuer and Dietrich Hakelberg (eds), *Zur Geschichte der Gleichung „germanisch – deutsch"*, Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde, Ergänzungsband, 34 (Berlin, New York, 2004), pp. 163–83; Jörg Jarnut, 'Germanisch. Plädoyer für die Abschaffung eines obsoleten Zentralbegriffes der Frühmittelalterforschung', in Walter Pohl (ed.), *Die Suche nach den Ursprüngen. Von der Bedeutung des frühen Mittelalters*, Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters, 8 (Vienna, 2004), pp. 107–13.

[27] David J. Mattingly, *Imperialism, Power, and Identity: Experiencing the Roman Empire* (Princeton, 2010).

[28] Evagrius, *Historia ecclesiastica*, ed. Joseph Bidez and Leon Parmentier, *The Ecclesiastical History of Evagrius with the Scholia* (Amsterdam, 1964), p. 231; see Chapter 14 by Hartmut Leppin in this volume.

'Roman' might be also used for the inhabitants of the city of Rome or for the Latin-speaking population of the western kingdoms or, of course, for the *Rhomaioi*, the mostly Greek-speaking citizens of the empire. In some contexts, it might acquire a more or less ethnic note; since Late Antiquity, the 'Romans' could be seen as one *gens* among others. The identity of the eastern Romans was even more contradictory: they were the descendants of the ancient 'Hellenes', a term that was hardly used for self-identification since it had come to be understood as a synonym for 'pagans'; speakers of Latin and other languages called them 'Greeks', whereas they might be designated 'Ionians' (*al-yūnāniyīn*) by Arabs and later by the Turks.[29] We call them 'Byzantines', a term used only for the inhabitants of Constantinople in the period. Iranian identity may seem more straightforward, but, as Richard Payne reminds us in Chapter 12, in the Sasanian realm the Iranian identity of the *ēr* was constituted 'by ethics and sacred history, not race'. Ērānšahr was essentially an elite concept, perhaps not too different in that respect from the Arab/Islamic Empire that followed.

Several other social identities could contain more or less salient ethnic elements, for instance the Prophet's kin, the civic identities of the inhabitants of Tours, Naples or Damascus, the local identities at Karka and Arbela,[30] or the provincial identities of Egypt or Aquitaine. And what about the allegiances of the people (*ahl*) of Syria and the people of Iraq in the Umayyad period[31] or the 'micro-Christendoms'[32] in Egypt and Syria under Byzantine and then Muslim

[29] See Clemens Gantner, 'The Label "Greeks" in the papal diplomatic Repertoire in the eighth century', in Walter Pohl and Gerda Heydemann (eds), *Strategies of Identification* (Turnhout, forthcoming). See also Chapters 22 and 23 by Clemens Gantner and Daniel König, respectively, in this volume. Nowadays, the Turkish name for Greece is still 'Yunanistan'.

[30] See Chapter 12 by Richard Payne in this volume.

[31] Hugh Kennedy, *The Armies of the Caliphs: Military and Society in the Early Islamic State* (London, New York, 2001), p. 9: 'The struggle at Siffin was essentially between the people (ahl) of Syria and the people of Iraq'; see also below, and Chapter 18 by John Haldon and Hugh Kennedy in this volume.

rule? The Jewish communities in the West were variously seen as religious or ethnic groups, or, as Wolfram Drews puts it in Chapter 21, a *gens* defined by religious books. And what kind of communities were the *populus Christianus* and the Muslim *umma* altogether?[33] Visions of community were manifold in our period, and ethnicity could play rather different roles in them.

Chris Wickham, in his Conclusion, points out that rather than asking 'is this a real ethnic identity or not?', the question should be what elements of ethnic identity a social group stresses, and how it does so. What we get in the sources are traces of the use of ethnicity as a defining element of a group, or rather, of a number of distinctive groups (as Andre Gingrich stresses in Chapter 1, ethnic groups never come alone, for ethnicity is a relational category). This means that the incidence (or 'salience') of ethnicity can vary considerably under different circumstances, even in the same social field. We will not always be able to reconstruct the relative importance of ethnicity in a given social landscape. But where we have sources voicing visions and perceptions of community, or accounts that help to trace the agency of groups, we can get quite good clues about the role of ethnic identifications.

Sociological models and 'ideal types' may surely be useful to ease comparison (as Chris Wickham underlines in his Conclusion). But the historian's task also is to historicize our categories. The point is not only that ethnicity and religion have occupied different places in the social fabric in the regions under comparison here. The problem is that their very significance may have varied, according to circumstances. 'Religion' involved a rather different set of social practices and discourses in classical Rome, in medieval Christendom, in the early Islamic world

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[32] See Chapter 11 by Bas ter Haar Romey in this volume. For the term 'micro-Christendom' (used mainly for the British Isles), see Peter R.L. Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity A.D. 200–1000* (Oxford, Cambridge, Mass., ^{2}2003).

[33] Denise K. Buell, *'Why this New Race': Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity* (New York, 2005); Judith M. Lieu, *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World* (Oxford, 2004); Aaron P. Johnson, *Ethnicity and Argument in Eusebius' Praeparatio Evangelica* (Oxford, 2006); Bernard Lewis, *The Political Language of Islam* (Chicago, 1988).

and, of course, in the modern age. Less obviously, but critically, the concept and discourse of ethnicity also depend on its historical setting. For instance, ethnicity in an age of national states is almost inescapably caught up with the identity politics of minority groups and post-colonial societies; in most cases, national and ethnic identities are seen as opposites that make it hard to describe the 'Ethnic Origins of Nations' in these terms.[34] For medieval historians, therefore, 'ethnicity' becomes more productive if we go beyond the ideal type and employ it as a matrix in which to accommodate historical change. Thus, the term can help to register both the changing meanings and variety of phenomena that we can class as 'ethnic', and the relative salience of ethnic bonds in a given historical context.

The theory of identity and ethnicity cannot be discussed here at length.[35] The usual features that constitute the 'ideal type' – common origin, language, territory, a common history, a sense of solidarity, customs and law, costume and habitus, symbolic objects – in short, culture – are valuable as a checklist. But hardly ever do all of them apply to a given ethnic group. In each case, what we can use is an 'à la carte' selection of some of these distinctive features that serve as symbolic markers of ethnic identity. In each case, some other criteria do not apply. Goths always lived in more than one territory (and also regarded different countries as their ancestral homeland – Scandinavia, Scythia, the Vistula region and even Britain). Franks, Goths, Lombards and Bulgarians over time changed their language without changing their identity. The same applied to religion, costume and many customs in the early medieval kingdoms. The Franks had at least two different law codes, Salian and Ripuarian law, with no recognizable ethnic division at their bases. Not all Lombard men had long beards, not all Frankish warriors

[34] Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*; see also Anthony D. Smith, *The Nation in History: Historiographical Debates about Ethnicity and Nationalism* (Hanover, 2000); Thomas H. Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Anthropological Perspectives* (London, 1993).

[35] See Pohl, 'Introduction. Strategies of identification'.

used the battle axe that Isidore calls *francisca* – the examples are many.[36] And, regrettably, origin myths, *origines gentium*, are not attested for all early medieval peoples.

Moreover, most of these criteria are also valid for many of the groups listed above, for the identity of cities and territories, of religious sects and military units, of political communities and dynastic retinues. Only one element seems to be specific to ethnicity: whatever distinctive features serve as 'boundary markers', they are perceived as expressions of an innermost self, an ingrained common nature. Most social identities have a decisive point of reference outside the group: the city, the land, the state, the army, the ruler, a religious creed. Symbolic strategies of identification attach themselves to these figures that represent the common denominator, the defining feature of the community. In ethnicity, by contrast, the principle of distinction and the symbolic essence of the community are thought to lie in the human group itself. Its symbolism builds on kinship, blood, origin and fate. To put it bluntly: ethnic groups are secondary social groupings (that is, not created by any personal bond) that are believed to be primary (that is, constituted through kinship). It is obvious that this heightened sense of community can hardly bear the weight of promise that it implies. Therefore, ethnicity hardly ever occurs in its pure form; it has to attach itself to other, more tangible forms of community – a homeland, state, army or religion.

One methodological consequence is that ethnicity can rarely be studied on its own. All historical identities and communities are aggregates of several forms of identification that overlap to different degrees, and that are subject to change. The modern nation has established more systematic and stable composites of ethnic, territorial, political and sometimes also religious identities (but has not achieved an even near-complete overlap either). Different allegiances may, of course, clash. All these identities and their conjunctions have to be produced

[36] Walter Pohl, 'Telling the difference: signs of ethnic identity', in Walter Pohl and Helmut Reimitz (eds), *Strategies of Distinction: The Construction of the Ethnic Communities, 300–800*, The Transformation of the Roman World, 2 (Leiden, Boston, Cologne, 1998), pp. 17–69; Walter Pohl, *Die Völkerwanderung. Eroberung und Integration* (Stuttgart, Berlin, Cologne, 2002).

and negotiated through serial identifications. Individuals (or small groups) identify themselves with a group; the (in-)group represents itself in common symbols and rituals or political acts; and the out-group perceives and acknowledges the existence and characteristics of this group. These three levels of identification (we could add modern scholarship as a fourth level) are essential for ethnic (and other social) identities; and they require relatively regular communication to function. Our historical sources are traces of this communication; therefore, they usually do not simply reflect identities that are 'out there', they are part of the process of their creation.

In the study of ethnicity, recent scholarship on the Islamic and Western worlds seems to have taken different trajectories: Whereas 'tribe' is a key concept in Islamic studies, much debated but hardly dispensable,[37] it has largely been abandoned for the *gentes* in the West. In the 1960s, Reinhard Wenskus still spoke of 'Stammesbildung', the formation of tribes, but like the term 'Stamm' itself, this label was soon more or less abandoned in German-speaking scholarship.[38] Uses in English are more varied (sometimes, *gens* is still anachronistically being translated as 'nation' or 'race'); but it makes most sense to regard Goths or Franks as 'peoples'. This is in part due to the ideological overtones of the term 'tribe', which has often been used to suggest a notion of primitivity, an archaic stage of human society. Accordingly, 'tribe' may also evoke a sense of teleology, derived from the tribes of Israel. In German historiography, the German people had long been seen as constituted through its tribes – Saxons, Franks, Suebians,

[37] Patricia Crone, 'The tribe and the state', in J.A. Hall (ed.), *States in History* (Oxford, 1986); reprinted with revisions in Patricia Crone, *From Arabian Tribes to Islamic Empire: Army, State and Society in the Near East c. 600–850* (Aldershot, 2008); Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs*, pp. 113–34; Hosham Dawod (ed.), *Tribus et pouvoirs an terre d'Islam* (Paris, 2004), with the contribution by Maurice Godelier, 'À propos des concepts de tribu, ethnie et état', pp. 287–304; see also Walter Pohl, 'Archaeology of identity: introduction', in Walter Pohl and Mathias Mehofer (eds), *Archaeology of Identity – Archäologie der Identität*, Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters, 17 (Vienna, 2010), pp. 9–24.

[38] Wenskus, *Stammesbildung und Verfassung*.

Bavarians and others. This model allowed historians to establish the continuity between the ancient and the modern Germans, and to bridge a gap in the early Middle Ages in which neither *Germani* nor *die Deutschen* had been used as a collective term. The scholarly use of '*germanische Stämme*', Germanic tribes, is therefore best avoided. But of course, there is hardly a modern term denoting ethnicity that is without overtones. Many social anthropologists avoid the concept of tribe for a different reason, because they regard it as a colonial category, through which Europeans in Africa or the Americas have classified native populations. But, as Andre Gingrich shows in Chapter 1, in many parts of Asia tribal structures can hardly have been invented by outside observers.[39]

Tribal systems may thus exist in some societies and not in others, and their significance may vary. Tribes, according to Patricia Crone's definition, are societies 'which create all or most of their social roles by ascribing social importance to biological characteristics, in other words, societies ordered with reference to kinship, sex and age'.[40] This goes beyond the notion of common descent that is a defining feature of ethnicity. An ethnic group may very well regard itself as united by ties of blood without specifying who is related to whom in what way. Tribal systems tend to be constructed much more thoroughly according to genealogical principles, in which families, clans, lineages, subtribes, tribes and groups of tribes are related to each other in a complicated web of kinship. This also determines solidarities in cases of conflict: at least ideally, you have to support the closer relative against the more distant one. Tribal organization thus provides a simple and efficient logic to channel and escalate conflict by following patterns of kinship and gradually involving additional groups, regardless of their interest in what the original cause of the dispute may have been. This logic of dispute is usually defined as blood feud, but may need a more complex explanation.[41]

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[39] See also Godelier, 'À propos des concepts de tribu'.

[40] Crone, 'The tribe and the state', pp. 72f.

[41] Many early medieval conflicts have been labelled too easily as blood feuds: see Ian Wood, 'The bloodfeud of the Franks: a historiographical legend', *Early Medieval Europe*, 14 (2006): 489–504.

Thus, perhaps the concept of tribe may help to understand some differences in the role of ethnicity in Europe and in the Islamic world. The sources seem to convey a rather different image of the shape and size of the respective groups in the East and in the West. The rich ethnic terminology in Arabic reflects a whole hierarchy of tribal affiliations, *ṭabaqāt*, from the people of the Arabs, within which there was an opposition between the inclusive tribal groupings of Yaman and Qais, to single tribes, subtribes and clans.[42] Even though in the texts these terms are not always used according to their exact level of significance, the tribal language is available. Quite to the contrary, the Latin word '*gens*', even more than the Greek *ethnos*, can cover the whole range from a family to the Franks or even, in Late Antiquity, the Romans; it is interesting to see that *gens* was also taken over into Arabic as a loanword (*jins*, pl. *ajnās*).[43] Other semantic options (such as *tribus*, *genus*) are rarely used to distinguish between different levels of affiliation. Arabic sources contain ample material on tribal genealogies (for instance in the work of Ibn al-Kalbī), and the early caliphs seem to have encouraged their written distribution. In the West, the closest we get to these are the genealogies of the Anglo-Saxon royal families and, of course, the early Irish sources. But they came from a world of small- to medium-sized kingdoms in constant competition with each other, quite unlike the large-scale kingdoms of Goths, Franks or Lombards on the continent. There, we have a small number of genealogies of different dynasties, a long one (seventeen generations) for the Gothic Amals and a very brief one (four generations) for the Merovingian king Clovis,[44] but they could not serve to relate the families among each other or with overarching tribal units. Nor do substantial subdivisions among barbarian peoples become visible in our sources. Scholars have hypothesized a dual structure among the Franks on the basis of the two distinctive law codes, the Lex Salica and the Lex Ribuaria. But apart from the fact that the name of the law book is not Lex Saliorum as would be

[42] Eva Orthmann, *Stamm und Macht. Die arabischen Stämme im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert der Hiğra* (Wiesbaden, 2002), pp. 256–66.

[43] See Chapter 9 by Michael Morony in this volume.

[44] Wolfram, 'Auf der Suche nach den Ursprüngen'.

normal if Salians was an ethnonym, in none of the bloody civil wars in the Merovingian kingdoms did Salians and Ripuarians as such ever clash.[45] Very occasionally, we get casual information that *gentes* regarded themselves as related (for instance the Goths and the Gepids, or the Saxons of Britain and the continental Saxons).[46] There is also a brief genealogy, the so-called 'Frankish table of nations', which derives some of the major peoples of the sixth century from three ancestors whose names resemble the three Germanic ancestors already mentioned in Tacitus.[47] Remarkably, the Romans are listed here as relatives of the Franks. Many early medieval authors also attempted to attach contemporary peoples to the genealogy of the sons of Noah.[48] But none of this resembles the elaborate and ever-changing Arab tribal genealogies.

Arabic literature presents and often idealizes the archaic world of the Bedouin tribes, with their severe logic of tribal obligations. Ibn Khaldūn, in his fourteenth-century introduction to his *History*, the so-called *Muqaddimah*, even offers a complex theory of tribal groupings.[49] According to him, true group feelings only result from blood relations. At the same time, he is aware that most pedigrees are imaginary, because in reality most groups of people are mixed. Only in the desert, where no one else would have desired to live, have lineages been kept pure, which accounts for their superiority. Ibn Khaldūn knew that tribal affiliations were constantly

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[45] Matthias Springer, 'Gab es ein Volk der Salier?', in Dieter Geuenich, Wolfgang Haubrichs and Jörg Jarnut (eds), *Nomen et gens. Zur historischen Aussagekraft frühmittelalterlicher Personennamen*, Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde, Ergänzungsband, 16 (Berlin, New York, 1997), pp. 58–83.

[46] Herwig Wolfram, *Die Goten. Von den Anfängen bis zur Mitte des sechsten Jahrhunderts. Entwurf einer historischen Ethnographie* (Munich, [5]2009), p. 37; Beda, *Historia Ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, V.9, ed. J.E. King (Cambridge, Mass., London, 1930), vol. 2, p. 235.

[47] Walter A. Goffart, 'The supposedly 'Frankish' table of nations: an edition and study', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, 17 (1983): 98–130.

[48] Arno Borst, *Der Turmbau von Babel. Geschichte der Meinungen über Ursprung und Vielfalt der Sprachen und Völker 1–4* (Stuttgart, 1957–63).

[49] Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, c. 2, trans. Franz Rosenthal, ed. and abridged N.J. Dawood (Princeton, 1967), pp. 97–108.

modified to fit the expectations of the present. But although the tribal system had been fragmented by the dispersed settlement in the conquered countries, it could still serve as a frame of reference to mobilize support or express dissent. Such a tribal logic can be traced in some of the internal conflicts in the early Islamic period, where support could be mobilized along traditional genealogical lines.[50]

It is striking that a similar tribal logic is virtually absent in conflict narratives and other sources about the *gentes* in the West. We know a lot about the conflicts between and within these kingdoms, and there is little trace of tribal motivation in the narratives. As many conflicts arose between members of the same ethnic group (many of whom served in Roman armies) as between different tribes. A number of violent struggles are also attested between members of the same family, for instance the Merovingian dynasty. Characteristically, Gregory of Tours pictures King Clovis as a cynic who uses the language of kinship just to kill off all the potential rivals in his family:

> And having killed many other kings and his nearest relatives, of whom he was jealous lest they take the kingdom from him, he extended his rule over all the Gauls. However he gathered his people together at one time, it is said, and spoke of the kinsmen whom he had himself destroyed. 'Woe to me, who have remained as a stranger among foreigners, and have none of my kinsmen to give me aid if adversity comes.' But he said this not because of grief at their death but by way of a ruse, if perchance he should be able to find someone still to kill.[51]

The language of kinship solidarity is used here, but only to underline that the creation of the Frankish kingdom took the opposite direction. Thus, a clear pattern of 'tribal' allegiances and enmities could hardly form. Stable tribal systems often prevent the rise of supra-regional powers because the most powerful tribes soon have to face opposition from a broad alliance of those

[50] Orthmann, *Stamm und Macht*.

[51] Gregory of Tours, *Histories* II,42, trans. Ernest Brehaut (New York, 1916).

threatened by their expansion.[52] If such a system existed among the northern barbarians in the earlier imperial age, it had obviously collapsed in the early migration period. Post-Roman Europe can hardly be called a tribal society.

Another interesting point of comparison is the relationship of ethnic and military identities. In Late Antiquity, barbarian armies on Roman territory seem to have relied increasingly on their ethnic identities as an element of cohesion in a potentially hostile environment; it has sometimes been asked whether the Goths were 'nation or army', but this need not necessarily be seen as an alternative.[53] The armies of Alaric I or of Theoderic the Ostrogoth essentially stayed together even in times of crisis, whereas the armies following Roman usurpers or generals disbanded after defeat. Procopius, in his account of the Gothic war in the mid-sixth century, has King Totila voice this observation. In his speech before the battle at the Busta Gallorum, Totila denies the coherence, and the Roman-ness, of the Byzantine army:

> The vast number of the enemy is worthy only to be despised, seeing that they present a collection of men from the greatest possible number of nations (*ex ethnōn xyneilegmenōn hoti malista pleistōn*). For an alliance which is patched together from many sources gives no firm assurance of either loyalty (*pistis*) or power (*dynamis*), but being split up in origin (*schizomenē tois genesi*), it is naturally divided likewise in purpose.[54]

Roman identity, according to what may well be Procopius' own critique, had stopped inspiring a sense of solidarity in Roman armies, who were mostly composed of barbarian mercenaries.

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[52] The foundation of the Tibetan Empire under the dynasty of the Pargyel seems to be an example to the contrary: see Chapter 2 by Guntram Hazod in this volume.

[53] Wolf Liebeschuetz, 'Alaric's Goths: nation or army?', in John F. Drinkwater and Hugh Elton (eds), *Fifth-Century Gaul: A Crisis of Identity?* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 75–83, at 83; Michael Kulikowski, 'Nation vs. army: a necessary contrast?', in Andrew Gillett (ed.), *On Barbarian Identity – Critical Approaches to Ethnogenesis Theory*, Studies in the Early Middle Ages, 4 (Turnhout, 2002), pp. 69–84, esp. 82–3.

[54] Procopius, *Wars* 4.30.17–18; Walter Pohl, 'Pistis' e potere: Coesione etnica negli eserciti barbarici nel periodo delle migrazioni', in Carlo Ebanista and Marcello Rotili (eds), *Archeologia e storia delle migrazioni: Europa, Italia, Mediterraneo fra tarda età romana e alto medioevo* (forthcoming).

Gradually, the Western empire was replaced by the kingdoms of the Goths, Vandals, Burgundians and Franks. Stefan Esders has shown that the Roman military oath became fundamental for the oaths of allegiance in the post-imperial kingdoms, not only within the barbarian army, but between the king and his subjects in general.[55]

It is interesting to compare these examples of military-ethnic identity with those of the early Islamic armies, analysed in this volume by John Haldon and Hugh Kennedy (Chapter 18). While Abbasid armies, from the ninth century onwards, consisted of different ethnic groups (first and foremost, Turks), in earlier periods the regional identities of the armies were stressed.[56] Here, ethnicity rather seems to have been regarded as a potentially centrifugal factor. A telling example is the conflict between the Syrian and the Iraqi army in the Umayyad period, in which regional-military identities undercut older tribal loyalties within the overarching framework of an ethno-religious identity (Arab/Islamic). In the speeches before the battle of Siffin in 657, as rendered by al-Ṭabarī, 'the appeal is to regional identities, the people of Syria (*ahl al-shām)* against the people of Iraq (*ahl al-ʿirāq*)'. The leader of the Iraqi army, Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, even deliberately pitted the tribal units in his army against their counterparts on the Syrian side. This example also demonstrates the importance of economic interests in strategies of identification; membership in these armies entailed financial privileges, albeit to different degrees, and the revenues came from the region. The tribes, on the other hand, had been dispersed, so that tribal allegiances in the new settlement areas had only naked ethnicity to recommend them. The Islamic conquerors had based their rule on the previously existent regions, such as Iran, Syria, Egypt and Ifriqiya. Still, as Hugh Kennedy stresses, these identifications regarded only the Arab Muslim as part of the population and, in practice, the military. Thus, they never consistently became demarcations for independent Islamic states;

[55] See Chapter 19 by Stefan Esders in this volume, with further bibliography; and Stefan Esders, *Sacramentum fidelitatis: Treueid, Militärwesen und Formierung mittelalterlicher Staatlichkeit* (forthcoming).

[56] Kennedy, *The Armies of the Caliphs*, pp. 118f.; see also Chapter 9 by Michael Morony in this volume.

'regional identities and loyalties could acquire social and cultural, but rarely political importanc,,' as Bernard Lewis remarks.[57]

Territorial identities, which seem to be common to all three political cultures, hardly offered sufficient basis for stable large-scale polities. As John Haldon and Hugh Kennedy argue in Chapter 18, around the same time as in the Umayyad Caliphate, regional-military identities developed in the Byzantine sphere of power in the themata, if on a smaller scale. None of them, however, became the basis of a relatively stable autonomous polity, not even in the remote exarchate of Ravenna. The Isaurians of the fifth century remained an isolated case of an ethno-military identity that developed within the Byzantine system, and it was more ephemeral than often thought, as Mischa Meier argues in Chapter 16. In the West, none of the Roman provinces was directly transformed into a post-imperial regnum. That does not mean that they did not have potential for identification. Many provinces had in fact been established on the basis of ethnic identities or even kingdoms, and they retained an ethnic potential throughout the Roman period, as Fritz Mitthoff shows in Chapter 3. And even though the Visigothic kingdom coincided more or less with Hispania and the Frankish kingdom with Gaul, the ethnic designation prevailed. Even after the kingdom of the Lombards in Italy had been subdued by Charlemagne in 774, its identification as *regnum Italiae* was slow to appear; quite to the contrary, Charlemagne was the first ruler to issue royal diplomas using the title *rex Langobardorum*, instead of *Flavius rex* as the Lombard kings did.[58] Britannia was a special case, as Catherine McKenna shows in Chapter 8. Even though large parts of the island came to be ruled by Anglo-Saxon invaders and in time were known as England, the British population in Wales continued to identify with Britain at large, rather than with their Welsh homeland, well into the high Middle Ages; Welsh regional identity remained weak.

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[57] Bernard Lewis, *The Multiple Identities of the Middle East* (New York, 1998), p. 6.

[58] Walter Pohl, 'Gens ipsa peribit: kingdom and identity after the end of Lombard rule', in Stefano Gasparri (ed.), *774 – ipotesi su una transizione* (Turnhout, 2008), pp. 67–78.

'Visions of community' certainly became attached to empires both in the Christian and in the Islamic sphere. The Christian 'Rhetoric of Empire' in the late Roman Empire is a striking example.[59] This conjunction of Christian ideas and imperial ideology was so successful that it dominated the Byzantine Empire to the end, and inspired the grandiose if often dysfunctional construction of the renewed Roman Empire of the Carolingians and the Ottonians in the West. This model did not identify religious authority with political power, but only brought them in close conjunction. This created a tension that made itself felt throughout the history of the Latin West, most dramatically in the Investiture Controversy between the emperor and the pope in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Attempts to bridge the distance between the empire and the *ecclesia*, for instance in the Carolingian Empire in the first decades of the ninth century, regularly created expectations that a ruler could hardly fulfil, at least in the long run.[60] In the West, as in Byzantium, an (if only notionally[61]) religiously homogeneous community had both secular and ecclesiastical leaders, both of whom derived their authority from God. The Islamic Caliphate, on the other hand, was conceived as a combination of worldly power and religious authority, but made no attempt to enforce religious unity throughout its realm. It seems that this followed the Sasanian model rather than a late Roman one. Michael Morony, in Chapter 9, argues that there was a fundamental difference in the development of legal systems in the Latin West and in the Islamic world in the early Middle Ages: in both, territorial law gave way to the

[59] Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of Christian Discourse* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford, 1991).

[60] Mayke de Jong, *The Penitential State: Authority and Atonement in the Age of Louis the Pious, 814–840* (Cambridge, 2009); Mayke de Jong, 'Ecclesia and the early medieval polity', in Stuart Airlie, Helmut Reimitz and Walter Pohl (eds), *Staat im frühen Mittelalter*, Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters, 11 (Vienna, 2006), pp. 113–32; and see the contributions by Steffen Patzold and Stefan Esders in this volume (Chapters 20 and 19 respectively).

[61] See Chapter 17 by Ralph-Johannes Lilie in this volume for the role of Muslims and heretics in Byzantium.

personality of the law; but in the West, the legal distinction was ethnic (Frankish, Lombard, Bavarian, Burgundian law), whereas in the East, it was religious.[62]

It is interesting to compare the complex tension between universal religion and universal empire in Christian and Islamic empires with an example from the Buddhist world. In Chapter 2, Guntram Hazod argues that the development of a Tibetan empire in the seventh century CE was due to the common interest of clan groups in establishing control over the Silk Road, whereas the adoption of Buddhism, a religion not yet shared by all, caused its decline. Still, Buddhism also inspired a sense of Tibetan unity in spite of political diversity. As in many cases of ethnic identification, an outside denomination came to stick here, as the name 'Tibet' seems to be derived from the Arab 'tubbut', which designated one of its tribal components. Whether Christianity was in fact an element that reinforced (at least temporarily) Roman rule after Constantine had endorsed it, or whether it contributed to eroding it (as Edward Gibbon believed in the late eighteenth century), is still a matter of controversial discussion.[63]

The relevance of religious identities for the political system, and their relationship with ethnicity, is perhaps the most interesting field of comparison. Initially, both the Christian

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[62] The personality of the law in fact took a while to develop in the post-Roman kingdoms in the West; while the distinction between Roman and 'barbarian' (Burgundian, Visigothic) law was already established in the fifth and sixth centuries, the full variety of different 'ethnic' law codes within the Frankish realm was only established as an option in the Carolingian Empire, in the late eighth and ninth century. See Brigitte Pohl-Resl, 'Legal practice and ethnic identity in Lombard Italy', in Walter Pohl and Helmut Reimitz (eds), *Strategies of Distinction: The Construction of Ethnic Communities, 300–800*, The Transformation of the Roman World, 2 (Leiden, New York, Cologne, 1998), pp. 205–19; cf. Patrick Wormald, *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the 12th Century 1: Legislation and its Limits* (Oxford, 1999).

[63] Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (London, 1779–88); cf. Rosamond McKitterick and R. Quinault (eds), *Edward Gibbon and Empire* (Cambridge, 1997); for an interesting recent argument (mothers stop teaching Roman civic values to their children and promote Christian spiritual values instead), see Kate Cooper, 'Gender and the fall of Rome', in P. Rousseau, *Blackwell's Companion to Late Antiquity* (Oxford, forthcoming).

populus and the Islamic *umma* had been recruited individually and from people of different ethnic or tribal origin. Conversion really meant turning from an old identity to a radically new one. Paul's epistle to the Colossians (3: 11) emphatically states that among the Christians 'there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all and in all'. It is a community that embraces all those who want to join. Peter (1 Pet. 2: 9–10) told the early Christians: 'But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of His own … You once were not a people, but now you are God's people.'[64] In Late Antiquity, things became complicated because for a time it would seem that Christendom was almost co-extensive with the Roman Empire, at least in the West. Augustine and other Christian intellectuals had to try hard to steer clear of too close an identification with the Christian Empire. Yet, imperial and Christian identities remained closely linked in Byzantium.

But eventually, the barbarian peoples were also baptized. The Gospel of Matthew ends with Christ's exhortation to the eleven pupils: '*Euntes ergo docete omnes gentes*' (Mt 28: 19). Consequently, the approach to their conversion tended to focus on peoples. When the Frankish king Clovis was baptized around 500 CE, thousands of Franks were also converted.[65] Soon, Peter's phrase that I have just quoted, 'You are a chosen people', was used to flatter converted peoples, Franks, Angles or the Irish.[66] The pressure for collective conversion was especially strong in the Carolingian Empire, for instance in the Saxon mission. To become a subject of the Franks meant becoming Christian, there was no way past that. But more often, Christianization

[64] 1 Peter 2: 9–10: *Vos autem genus electum, regale sacerdotium, gens sancta, populus adquisitionis … qui aliquando non populus, nunc autem populus Dei*.

[65] Gregory of Tours, *Histories* II,31 speaks of 3,000 of Clovis' army who were baptized with him; Fredegar, *Chronicae* 3,21 has 'ethnicized' this into 6,000 Franks. See Helmut Reimitz, *The Historiography of the Future* (forthcoming).

[66] This will be argued in a forthcoming article by Walter Pohl and Gerda Heydemann.

went parallel to the establishment or the reinforcement of an independent state, as in the case of Bohemia, Poland, Hungary or Bulgaria.[67]

Islamic conversion took a different course. Al-Ṭabarī repeatedly quotes Islamic conquerors giving the defeated three options: 'You may enter our religion, in which case you will enjoy what we enjoy, and you will bear the obligations we bear'; alternatively, they could pay the poll-tax or continue their resistance.[68] This is, of course, well known. It must have had an effect on the identities of conquered peoples whose communities gradually eroded through conversion to Islam. On the other hand, it obviously strengthened the sense of community of those who resisted.[69] In the Carolingian period, on the contrary, the converted also had to pay tithes, which may help to explain why revolt often followed conversion, from the Saxons in the eighth to the Bulgarians in the ninth and the Hungarians and Poles in the eleventh century.[70]

Ethnic and religious identities could interact in different ways when they became politically salient. Three contributions in this volume offer important new perspectives on Frankish community-building between religious, ethnic and political identities. In Chapter 7 Helmut Reimitz gives a careful reassessment of the many meanings of Frankishness in Merovingian historiography. Whereas Gregory of Tours, in the sixth century CE, linked the fortunes of the Frankish realm to the sacred topography of Gallic saints and to the moral authority of its bishops, both the seventh-century *Fredegar Chronicle* and the eighth-century *Liber Historiae Francorum* established Frankish identity as the key to successful rulership. Frankishness could mean different things, but it had become a principal resource for political

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[67] Nora Berend (ed.), *Christianization and the Rise of Christian Monarchy: Scandinavia, Central Europe and Rus' c. 900–1200* (Cambridge, 2007).

[68] *The History of al-Tabari*, vol. XI (Year 12), trans. Khalid Yahya Blankinship (Albany, NY, 1993), p. 31.

[69] See Chapter 11 by Bas ter Haar Romeny in this volume.

[70] Walter Pohl, 'Das sanfte Joch Christi: Zum Christentum als gestaltende Kraft im Mitteleuropa des Frühmittelalters', in Günther Hödl and Johannes Grabmayer (eds), *Karantanien und der Alpen-Adria-Raum im Frühmittelalter* (Vienna, Cologne, Weimar, 1993), pp. 259–80.

identification.[71] Stefan Esders traces the development of the oath of allegiance and its Carolingian uses in Chapter 19. Already in the formulary of Marculf, the oath had to be given by Franks, Romans and all other subjects; this inclusive character was reinforced by the Carolingians. 'By exacting general oaths of fidelity, the Frankish kings developed political identity within their kingdom largely along three lines: the legitimacy of the ruling dynasty,[72] Christianity and religious orthodoxy, and the creation of new political identities.'[73] *Fides* and *devotio*, late-Roman terms for military and political loyalty, were at the same time key words for Christian faith. *Gens* and *ecclesia*, as Steffen Patzold argues in Chapter 20, present alternative, but inseparable ways of framing the inclusive community of the *regnum*.[74] The ethnic 'vision of community' was mainly propagated in narrative sources, while ecclesiastical unity was primarily a topic of normative and exhortative texts. Whereas there could only be one Church, the *regnum*, and consequently also the *gens Francorum*, could be divided. Both, however, ultimately depended on good counsel and on consent. The Carolingian elites went to great lengths to exploit the integrative potential of all available strategies of identification. Frankishness was a driving force in the phase of expansion, which by its very success transcended its ethnic matrix. Still, in the long run, while the Franks took over the late Latin

[71] See also Helmut Reimitz, 'Die Konkurrenz der Ursprünge in der fränksichen Historiographie', in Walter Pohl (ed.), *Die Suche nach den Ursprüngen. Von der Bedeutung des frühen Mittelalters*, Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters, 8 (Vienna, 2004), pp. 191–210; Helmut Reimitz, 'Omnes Franci: identifications and identities of the early medieval Franks', in Ildar H. Garipzanov, Patrick J. Geary and Przemysław Urbańczyk (eds), *Franks, Northmen, and Slavs: Identities and State Formation in Early Medieval Europe* (Turnhout, 2008), pp. 51–70.

[72] Matthias Becher, *Eid und Herrschaft. Untersuchungen zum Herrschaftsethos Karls des Großen* (Sigmaringen, 1993), pp. 120–27.

[73] Patrick Geary, 'Die Bedeutung von Religion und Bekehrung im frühen Mittelalter', in Dieter Geuenich (ed.), *Die Franken und Alemannen bis zur „Schlacht bei Zülpich" (496/497)*, Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde, Ergänzungsband, 19 (Berlin, 1998), pp. 438–50, at 443–8.

[74] See also de Jong, 'Ecclesia and the early medieval polity'.

language of their subjects, these began to adhere to the identity of their rulers, to become 'the French'.

In the early Islamic period, Arab and Islamic identities tended to converge, so that non-Arab converts enjoyed lower status and prestige. But this amalgam of Arabic and Islamic identities could also create problems. When Khālid b. al-Walīd conquered the former Lakhmid fortresses around al-Hirah, he was said (according to al-Ṭabarī based on al-Sari) to have discussed with the inhabitants whether they were Arabs, until he was convinced by their language that they were.[75] It did make a difference, but Islam was certainly more important. 'May you perish,' Khālid said to the Arabs of al-Hirah who refused to convert. 'Disbelief is a desert that makes one lose its way. It is the foolish (one) among the Arabs who follows it.'

Some of the differences between East and West may be explained by the course of events. The post-Roman kingdoms in the West were formed by ethnically identified armies, most of them with their families and following, who had already spent at least a generation on Roman territory. They converted to the Christian religion of the Romans, and distinguished themselves from the provincial Roman majority over whom they ruled by their ethnic affiliation. The Islamic conquerors, on the other hand, may have been proud of their Arab identity, but what provided the stimulus for expansion and the main cohesive factor of their realm was Islam; at least initially, it distinguished them from conquered populations. Much more than western barbarians, they came as invaders who seized power in a spectacular series of victories over both neighbouring empires. The result, therefore, was a unified Islamic realm in which political power transcended the tribal structure at its foundation. It is hardly conceivable that Iraq could have become a kingdom of the tribe of Bakr, al-Jazira a kingdom of the Qais or Egypt a kingdom of the 'Akk. On the other hand, it is difficult even to imagine that Bishop Wulfila, the 'apostle of the Goths' in the fourth century, could have become a prophet and forged a tribal coalition so powerful that these 'Wulfilites' would have extended their power

[75] *The History of al-Tabari*, vol. 11 (Year 12), p. 31.

over much of the Roman Empire as the Muslims did, while Gothic identity receded to the power struggles between informal networks in the army of the prophet Wulfila.

But at a second glance, things are not so easy, and this volume offers differentiation rather than a coherent picture of distinctions between the West, Byzantium and the Islamic world. It is not that ethnicity did not matter in the East and was all-pervasive in the West. Both worlds were dominated by strong religious identities that were supposed to have precedence over any ethnic ties. God was not the God of one people alone; everyone was called to follow him. Political power was believed to be derived from God through Christ or Muhammad. Within that frame, ethnic loyalties might play important political roles. But even when Turks, Persians and Kurds began to rule over Islamic lands, they hardly did so in the name of their ethnic communities. And Islam did not encourage them to do so in the same way as Christianity did in the West.

The tremendous success of the Islamic conquests may have been due to setting the inherent rivalries of tribal societies on a course of expansion, and to linking their ambitions to a powerful overarching religious and political framework. What room did this system leave for shaping particular concerns and identities? How flexible was it in dealing with religious and ethnic differences and in accommodating them within an empire ruled by the ‘commander of the faithful’? But the Islamic expansion came to a halt; within more closely circumscribed limits, the Byzantines resisted. How did Byzantium adapt to the crisis of Roman-ness, and how did it deal with alternative identifications asserting themselves on its peripheries? The orthodox Oikoumene remained centred on the empire, but ethnically denominated states rose in its periphery, Bulgars, Serbs and others. Even more than in the West, it seems that these states went through a very difficult process of identity formation. The neighbouring empire(s) created tensions that were not easy to withstand, both in the case of Bulgaria, which repeatedly succumbed to Byzantine influence, and in the case of Armenia, which became very fragmented

politically under the competing influences of Byzantium and the caliphate.[76] What was the place of ethnic polities within the universal horizon of the Christian church, and how did that differ between East and West?

In the last resort, all three post-Roman political cultures succeeded in establishing a certain sense of community that united them, regardless of their many internal conflicts. This global identity relied, not least, on the image of the foreigner, the religious and ethnic 'Other', the Saracen or the infidel. 'Visions of community' often entail visions of otherness, as a number of contributions in this volume show. Some of these perceptions could be surprisingly wholesale, as in the case of the label '*majūs*' used for the Vikings in al-Andalus, which was ultimately derived from the Persian 'magi' and their Zoroastrian religion.[77] The classification of human groups, such as the Saracens, was determined by a few key texts, and surprisingly, the coming of Islam did not alter the picture decisively.[78] But even the worst negative stereotypes (boiling unborn babies in the womb and then eating them, and similar horrors) were not used exclusively for 'apocalyptic' enemies; they could also serve to denounce supposed pagan practices in Christian towns.[79] For a while between the seventh and eleventh centuries, dog-headed and other monstrous races were not necessarily considered to be distant creatures, but they could be thought to populate neighbouring areas of missionary activity in the Baltic region.[80] Stereotypes allowed for a wholesale defamation of others on a rhetorical level, while in a pragmatic way, people of different origin could be accepted or even integrated.[81] 'Border

[76] See Chapter 13 by Lynn Jones in this volume; and cf. Chapter 15 by George Hatke (Ethiopia and its confused narratives of Christianization).

[77] See Chapter 24 by Ann Christys in this volume.

[78] See Chapter 28 by John Tolan in this volume.

[79] See Chapter 26 by Wolfram Brandes in this volume.

[80] See Chapter 29 by Ian Wood in this volume.

[81] For the Byzantine world, see Chapters 27 and 17 by Alexander Beihammer and Ralph-Johannes Lilie, respectively, in this volume.

mentalities' could be very different from the clean distinctions offered in some of the surviving texts. This may be considered as another instance of the difference between lived experience and theories of identification that our texts offer. On the other hand, texts were not simply derived from realities on the ground, or intended to mask them with a good dose of rhetoric, they could also contribute to shaping them. Both lived experience and erudite 'visions of community' relied on current discourse, and both were driven by similar internal tensions. Christian 'visions of identity', for instance, had to allow for conversion, for a change of identities, and if handled in a realistic way, this required a space for otherness. On the other hand, the very drive to conversion could also serve to increase the pressure to transform diversity to unity. This is one element of early medieval identities that has come to play a very unpleasant role in the world of today: both ethnic/national and religious visions of community can be used for strategies of exclusion, repression and forced unification. Some of these mechanisms go back to the period under study in this volume. Research on ethnicity in the early Middle Ages acquires an important function here. Neither the West nor the Islamic world have ever been monolithic blocs or consistent cultures that inescapably had to clash. If we uncover the complex mechanisms in which their identities were formed, we may be able to contribute to a better understanding of the delicate balances that have nourished their respective 'visions of community.'