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BYZANTINE HISTORY AND CULTURE

# Roman Identity from the Arab Conquests to the Triumph of Orthodoxy

Douglas Whalin

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# New Approaches to Byzantine History and Culture

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# Roman Identity from the Arab Conquests to the Triumph of Orthodoxy

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ISSN 2730-9363

ISSN 2730-9371 (electronic)

New Approaches to Byzantine History and Culture

ISBN 978-3-030-60905-4

ISBN 978-3-030-60906-1 (eBook)

<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-60906-1>

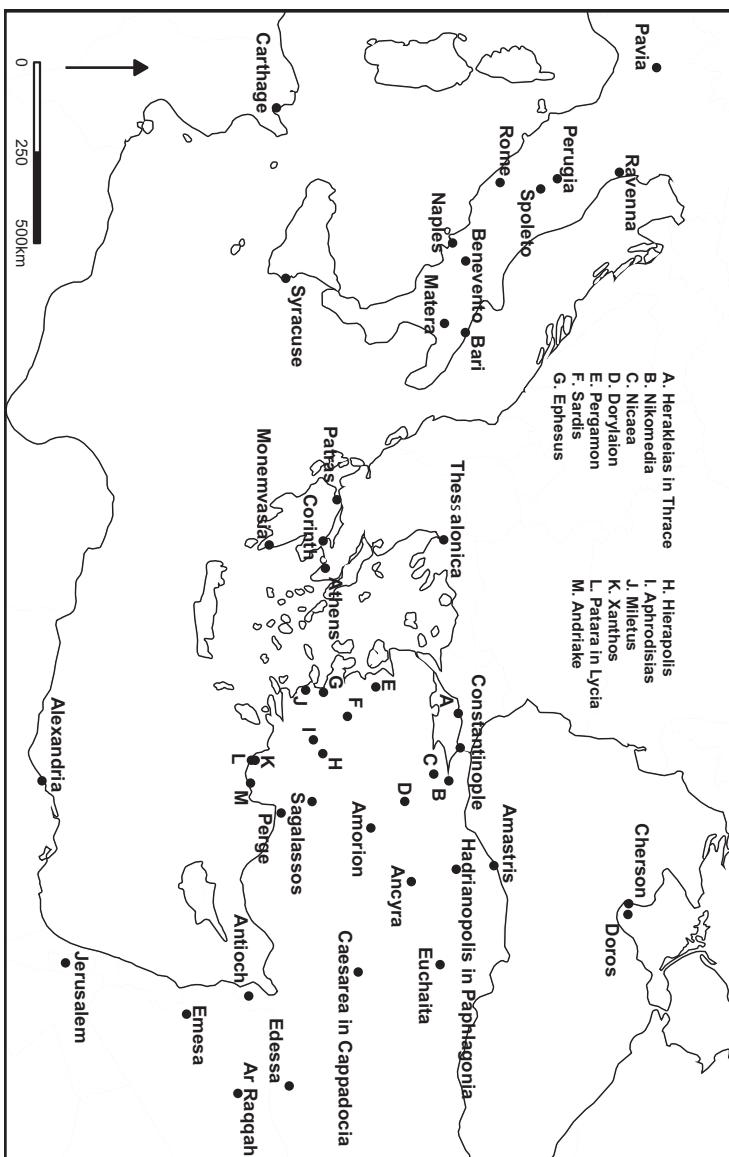
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This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG.

The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland



Principal locations referenced in the text

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Every piece of research is the product of support and collaboration, a one-time PhD thesis perhaps more than most others in the humanities. My deepest gratitude goes to my doctoral supervisor, Prof. Peter Sarris, whose guidance and sagacity have shaped the whole of the undertaking, and to my examiners, Prof. Philip Booth and Prof. Philip Wood, whose feedback and suggestions proved invaluable. Thanks also to my two anonymous reviewers who kindly provided helpful feedback early in the revision process and helped ease the transition from thesis to monograph.

My graduate and early career colleagues from Cambridge provided camaraderie and an invaluable support network throughout this work's development, and my thanks goes to all of you, but I am especially grateful to Dr. Robin Whelan for his quick and thoughtful criticism and feedback on this project at several points over the years, first as a thesis and later as a monograph. I am also thankful to Queens' College, University of Cambridge, for generous research and travel grants which played a key role in shaping my perspective on and approach to this topic during my doctoral studies.

Many thanks to the members of the First Millennium Network (formerly the Washington Area Reading Group in Byzantine and Late Ancient Studies, WARBLs), who kindly read and gave feedback on chapters during the revision process. This process was greatly aided by financial support, and my particular gratitude goes to the directors of the University of Tübingen Center for Advanced Studies "Migration and Mobility in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages." They provided a

stipendiary fellowship to support the revision of the present volume in the winter and spring of 2020, and feedback to the revised chapters I shared with them. Thanks also to my colleagues at the Institute of Christian Oriental Research at the Catholic University of America, who have stepped in to give me a research home during the final phases of revising this volume. All remaining faults are, of course, mine alone.

Last but certainly not least, my love and gratitude go to my family, my parents and grandparents who supported me throughout my education. My love and thankfulness goes especially to my wife, Dr. Bethany Dearlove, who has helped me with this project in innumerable small ways over the years and whose support and confidence inspire me every day.

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## CHAPTER 1

---

# Introduction

Every century of the Roman Empire differed from the preceding and from the succeeding, but the development was continuous; the Empire was still the Roman Empire, and I am not aware that it is usual to give a man a new name when he enters upon a new decade of life. We designate a man as young and old; and so we may speak of the earlier and later ages of a kingdom or an empire. But *Byzantine* is a proper adjective, and is too apparently precise not to be misleading.<sup>1</sup>

Originally published in 1889, in *A History of the Later Roman Empire* the historian J.B. Bury outlined a number of basic problems which still confront scholars working on the Eastern Roman Empire in the early middle ages. The introduction to his volume picks out one of the core problems which this book will explore: how should we understand the balance between change and continuousness of the Romanness of the rulers and inhabitants of the early medieval Roman Empire?

This volume addresses the problem of continuity, or discontinuity, in the period of approximately two centuries following the Arab conquests of the Roman Near East. Emperor Heraclius (610–640) lost the territories twice in his lengthy reign, first to the Persians in the 610s and, after a brief reoccupation in the late 620s, again to Muslim armies in the 630s.

<sup>1</sup> Bury, *A History of the Later Roman Empire from Arcadius to Irene (395–800)*, 1:vi.

However, the reign of Constans II (640–668)—who succeeded his grandfather in 640 after a year of four emperors—began a period of stabilization, and a two-century-long process as Roman society worked through the consequences and implications of the empire’s near-collapse. In her short introduction to the period, *Inventing Byzantine Iconoclasm*, Leslie Brubaker presents a compelling case that the mid-seventh through the mid-ninth century forms a coherent period, as the Roman state, church, and society responded to a reality which no longer matched the thought-world of late antiquity.<sup>2</sup> The struggle over icons—iconomachy—was an important part of this process, but it did not occur in isolation. As in any other period of approximately two hundred years, a lot of things changed, on the level of both formal institutions like the state administration, law, army, and the church and informal institutions such as educational networks, the cults of saints, and patterns of urbanization and habitation.<sup>3</sup>

These changes bring us to a historiographical problem. Are these changes so deep, so transformational, that it becomes appropriate to talk about a historical break? Does this period justify the use of the term ‘Byzantine’? The problem with Byzantine—the term should be treated as though in scare quotes throughout this volume—is twofold, at least when it is used in a general sense. In the first place, its use is entirely anachronistic, which confuses the source material. This is especially problematic for the field of the early medieval Mediterranean, where scholars have to draw on source materials written in many different languages—not just Greek and Latin, but Arabic, Armenian, Coptic, Georgian, Hebrew, Persian, Slavonic, and Syriac are all relevant to the study of this period. Few but the most extraordinarily gifted linguist will be able to read all of these without the aid of a translation, and when translators decide to override the linguistic sign system of their source language to impose their modern understanding of what a label *really means*, most scholars and students will have limited recourse to identify that a choice has even been made. The concept of Byzantium warps our ability to even come to grips with source materials. Second, Byzantium implies both a fundamental break with the past which is essentially Roman, and fundamental homogeneity that deserves to be identified by a different signifier. It primes a reader to overemphasize the changes in certain periods as well as to understate the significance of changes in other periods. Perceptions of both too little and

<sup>2</sup> Brubaker, *Inventing Byzantine Iconoclasm*, esp. 115, 125–6.

<sup>3</sup> Althusser, “Idéologie et Appareils Idéologiques d’État”; Belsey, *Poststructuralism*, 34–35.

too much continuity are problematic, creating anachronistic assumptions into which evidence is read. The title of this volume gives a good idea of the direction of its response to these problems—first by framing the inquiry in terms of Romanness, a concept grounded in the sign systems used in this period, and second by restricting the chronological coverage as far as can be supported by the available sources.

At its heart, Roman identity was an imperial identity and developed alongside the Roman imperial project. We should expect to see this identity evolve and develop alongside the empire.<sup>4</sup> This work contributes to an ongoing discussion about the fate of Romanness and the Roman peoples as the Roman political order retreated across the Mediterranean in late antiquity and the early middle ages.<sup>5</sup> Walter Pohl's recent edited volume on the subject, *Transformations of Romanness*, brings together essays covering a large span of time and the entirety of the Mediterranean, though some regions are significantly better represented than others. The title of his introduction to the volume, 'Early Medieval Romanness: a multiple identity,' gets to the heart of why, unlike the various late antique ethnic groups who have been well-studied,<sup>6</sup> Romanness has been comparatively more difficult to approach.

<sup>4</sup> See especially Hingley, *Globalizing Roman Culture*; Woolf, *Rome: An Empire's Story*; Mattingly, *Imperialism, Power, and Identity*.

<sup>5</sup> Major studies include Cameron, *The Byzantines*; Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium* *The Transformations of Greek Identity and the Reception of the Classical Tradition*; Kaldellis, "From Rome to New Rome, from Empire to Nation-State: Reopening the Question of Byzantium's Roman Identity"; Kaldellis, *Ethnography After Antiquity*; Kaldellis, *The Byzantine Republic*; Mitchell and Greatrex, "Roman Identity in the Sixth Century"; Pohl, "Romanness: A Multiple Identity and Its Changes"; Stouraitis, "Roman Identity in Byzantium"; Stouraitis, "Byzantine Romanness: From Geopolitical to Ethnic Conceptions." For more, see the bibliography.

<sup>6</sup> Key studies on ethnogenesis include Pohl, "Telling the Difference"; Pohl, "Ethnicity, Theory, and Tradition: A Response"; Pohl, "Aux Origines d'une Europe Ethnique: Transformations d'identités Entre Antiquité et Moyen Âge"; Pohl, "Christian and Barbarian Identities in the Early Medieval West: Introduction"; Pohl, "Strategies of Identification: A Methodological Profile." Other important works include Gillett, *On Barbarian Identity*; Brather, "Ethnische Interpretationen in der frühgeschichtlichen Archäologie Geschichte, Grundlagen und Alternativen," esp. 97–117; Goffart, *Barbarian Tides*; Curta, *Neglected Barbarians*. Other helpful theoretical approaches to groups and identities have included Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*; Anderson, *Imagined Communities*; Jenkins, "Rethinking Ethnicity"; Geary, *The Myth of Nations*; Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups*. See further discussion in Chap. 2.

Being Roman was perfectly compatible with maintaining or obtaining more particular civic, ethnic, provincial, linguistic, religious, or cultural identities. ... How ancient texts use the label *Romanus* is therefore inconsistent, in line with the multiplicity of ways to be Roman in the Roman Empire. There is no reasonable way to translate the enormous variation in uses of the term into a clear scholarly concept of who was or was not a ‘Roman.’<sup>7</sup>

It is hard to find close analogies for Romanness as a label and category of identification, not only because of the many different meanings to which the word could point, but also because, by the early medieval period, it had assimilated two critical concepts, which Guy Halsall explores in his contribution to that volume. First, Romans considered the label to operate on a different level from local identity (whether categorized by region or by peoples). The Roman world was itself filled with groups of peoples who could be sorted variously by region or origin, by common language, or by perceived origin.<sup>8</sup> Second, when operating as an ideal in a rhetorical or ideal register, Romanness could be constructed as part of a binary state—a Roman was, by definition, the opposite of a barbarian.<sup>9</sup> Because of these idiosyncrasies, we cannot only look to other groups for comparison. This is one of the reasons why this book approaches the word *Roman* as a signifier, with the goal of describing and understanding its sign system, which will be discussed further in Chap. 2.

This book is a revision of a 2016 PhD thesis and has had the lengthy and sometimes piecemeal development cycle typical of such works. The text has been updated, and in some cases rewritten, throughout the volume, along with two major additions. Section 5.4 *Roman local identities in Italy, Africa, and Dalmatia* provides a survey of the Empire’s western territories, relating the ideas and observations made in this volume to the scholarship of Roman identities in these regions. Section 6.3 *Family, power, and Roman women* reworks and substantively expands material which was removed from the final version of the doctoral thesis, working through the problem of the interaction between Romanness and a subject’s gender—an important problem to be cognizant of given that we are so dependent on elite, male, literary writers for so much of our understanding of this period.

<sup>7</sup> Pohl, “Introduction: Early Medieval Romanness – A Multiple Identity,” 4.

<sup>8</sup> Halsall, “Transformations of Romanness: The Northern Gallic Case,” 43–45.

<sup>9</sup> Halsall, 46–48.

This volume is divided into seven chapters, which approach early medieval Romanness from several different angles. *Chapter 2*. ‘Problems with Early Medieval Romanness’ outlines the core historiographical and methodological difficulties to be encountered. Was there a Roman identity in this period, and did it mean anything? This chapter introduces a set of conceptual tools which can be used to describe the form and function of identities generally, and Romanness specifically. The first part covers the Roman sign system, and the problems created by its overlap with other sign systems—both contemporary ones such as Latin, Greek, or Christian, as well as the anachronistic label of Byzantine. Each term contains an abundance of culturally specific meanings and assumptions. The second part goes into problems with source materials and the historiography of this period and region. Greek-writing Romans constructed their own historical myths and narratives, which are lost when they are made to conform within the historical mythologizing of other cultures. Additionally, our search for Romanness is, in part, a search for difference, which leads to special attention to sources which can be characterized as liminal in various ways. The final section looks for additional strategies for understanding and describing identities. Three broad approaches drawn from sociology inform the structure of the following chapters: institutions, boundaries, and normative assumptions.

*Chapter 3*. ‘Formal and Informal Institutions’ studies the social and cultural structures which at least claimed to exert control over aspects of Romanness. It is necessary to describe the structural and institutional changes which the polity experienced in the early medieval period accurately, so that we neither perceive too much nor too little change. Consequently, the chapter particularly focuses on tracking those institutions’ uninterrupted transmission across these two centuries. Part one focuses on state administration, first through changes in the composition of its office holders, and then through a series of structural reforms which took place over the course of two centuries. The polity was the heart of the Roman people, an institution which linked the entire ‘imagined community’ together across the tyrannies of space and time. The state provided a narrative structure around which memories and myths of the Romans as a coherent people were crafted and shaped. In part two, we turn to the army and its role as a transmitter of Romanness. The army preserved living traditions of the past, which created a sense of camaraderie over both space and time. Part three turns to the systems of education. The *paideia* created a common cultural background for the Roman elite, forming part of

the code with which they communicated to one another. A common educational system grounded the elite across time and space in shared cultural reference points. The fourth part looks at the patterns of horizontal and vertical social relationships which describe the informal institutional relationships of the early medieval Roman world. Together, these form a picture of the major anchors at the core for many of the meanings of Romanness.

Boundaries are explored over the course of the following two chapters. How did individuals articulate their identities as Romans in the presence of non-Romans? Boundaries are integral to the existence of group identity, creating space where differences can be assigned significance. *Chapter 4*. ‘Frontier Saints’ focuses on individual experiences as described principally in hagiographical literature. Case studies of hagiographies originating from the empire’s political edges provide a means of testing the significance of the different institutional and cultural anchors which bound the Roman world together. Part one explores accounts of Romanos the Neomartyr (*circa* 730–1 May 780), a Roman from Paphlagonia who became a captive in Syria, where he was martyred by beheading. Part two focuses on an interrelated collection of eighth-and-early-ninth-century hagiographies relating to the Roman settlements on the southern coast of Crimea. Part three looks at descriptions of the experience of captivity in these and other narratives, and the strategies which groups of Roman prisoners use to cope with that situation. By using social tools from recognizably Roman cultural settings, these holy men worked to negotiate their communities’ survival. When they were successful, they were so because they used patronage and performance as means of increasing group cohesion and fidelity to their identification as Romans

The focus remains on boundaries in *Chapter 5*. ‘Romans, Christians, and Barbarians’, shifting to conceptual creation of boundaries and the act of transgressing them. Part one describes the effect that rhetorically equating Roman with Christian had by implicitly linking heresy and barbarism. The rhetorical equation of heretics with barbarism created and reinforced internal boundaries between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ Romans. This religious dimension to Roman identity shaped the representation of that community and its history at the hands of the pious and zealous individuals who composed the extant accounts. Part two looks at group movements into and around the Rhomania in this period particularly focusing on the historical context and practices for how Roman authorities dealt with such events. The Roman Empire was also able to absorb ‘barbarian’ groups into

its social fabric, albeit without guaranteed success. Part three focuses on accounts of individuals moving into the Roman world. The data for this section over-represents men connected with elite religious hierarchies, but still provides some ideas about the possibility for individual mobility in this period. Part four surveys the Empire's western territories, particularly focusing on contextualizing recent studies of Romanness there with the patterns identified elsewhere throughout this volume. The phenomenon of migration and emigration illuminates issues of how individuals and groups conceived of their identities when crossing frontiers and when frontiers crossed them. All forms of accepting, integrating, and assimilating migrants attest to the vitality and attractiveness of Roman culture and institutions for many in the post-antique world.

*Chapter 6.* ‘Social Identities’ searches for Romanness beyond the narrow literate elite who wrote the surviving sources. Even as we are cognizant that difference was not necessarily perceived as significant, the differences we identify still comprise the potential pool from which actors could draw to understand and articulate how the Roman Self-same related to the Other. Part one looks at two contemporary models which Romans themselves used to describe their society and frame its difference from its neighbours, the first being a taxonomic description contained in a military treatise by Syrianos Magistros while the second is the pervasive metaphor of the household or *oikos*. Part two explores how early medieval society both shaped and was shaped by the physical world which the Roman people inhabited. How did the built environment create an imagined community? We aim to identify patterns which were reproduced across the Roman world, describing the fractal patterns which are found in Roman cities and which could have created a sense of cultural uniformity and cohesion. Part three turns to the way in which gender interacted with Roman cultural identity, particularly focusing on the ways in which society’s core formal and informal institutions were accessible to women. Did legal and social norms shape an experience for women which made them identifiably Roman? At the heart of this discussion is the reign of Empress Eirene (797–802), and the question of how Roman the empire could be when a woman could rule as *imperator* and *basileus*. Exploring archaeological, demographic, and gendered evidence, this chapter shows different ways in which Roman identity was realized in the wider context of society.

The volume concludes with a short *Epilogue*, which seeks to contextualize the work’s findings. The confined chronological focus makes this volume a unique contribution to the discussion on medieval Romanness,

moving beyond only identifying patterns in the *longue durée* but also responding affirmatively to the question of whether concepts such as orthodoxy or citizenship have a continuous history of transmission. To that end, it is hoped that this book will provide a starting point with respect to both material and methodology for tracking the history of the various meanings of Romanness in the medieval Roman Empire.



## CHAPTER 2

---

# Problems with Early Medieval Romanness

This book studies the Romans, and their communal and individual identities as such in the seventh, eighth, and early ninth centuries. The Persian and Muslim conquests of the early seventh century dramatically refashioned the political structures and boundaries of the Eurasian landmass. Half a millennium of relatively stable, if endemically violent, Roman-Persian hegemony was swept aside. In the two decades following Muhammad's death (traditionally dated to AD 632), Islamic armies destroyed the Sassanian Empire and conquered Palestine, Syria, and Egypt from the Eastern Roman Empire—in the process halving the Roman lands (Rhomania). This was far from the end of violence and disruption; the new Caliphate would make three concerted attempts in the following sixty years to finish off the empire and conquer its capital, Constantinople, in the 650s, 670s, and 710s. This tumultuous period saw dramatic and violent realignment of political and cultural frontiers. The political loyalties and social structures which underpinned group identities and affiliations had to be renegotiated in a mercurial and unbalanced situation, mediated through available ideological tools and established cultural expectations.

This chapter sets out to introduce three interrelated problems of group identity drawn from social and anthropological approaches to history: did the Romans form a coherent ‘people’ throughout this period? How was that group described in historical sources? What defined the

limits of that group? In this process, this chapter will also present the principal historical sources and accounts of this critical period of history. The social transformation which accompanied the first two hundred years after the emergence of Islam loom large in the historiographical traditions of later Muslims, eastern (Orthodox) Christians, and (Catholic) western Europeans, each of which construes a different historical ‘myth.’ Historians working in each of these traditions ‘assembled the details of lives and actions past’ into narratives bridging the change and continuity of this era which were intelligible and meaningful to their own audiences.<sup>1</sup>

The first issue is whether the Roman group ‘had a membership which identified itself, and was identified by others, as constituting a category distinguishable from other categories of the same order.’<sup>2</sup> How and why are the Romans conceived of and described as a group in their own words and in the words of others? By exploring use of specific terminology (signifiers) and the various meanings (signified) different terms bore, this chapter will seek to establish the cultural and historical contexts which underpins these terms’ use and significance.

Having established the appropriateness of Romanness as a historical phenomenon to study, the second problem is to describe the nature of the institutional and narrative cores of Roman identity. Any group as large as the Roman peoples must be an ‘imagined’ community, ‘because members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.’<sup>3</sup> How did the Romans of this period locate themselves in relationship to their own past and future? What were the available and viable ideological tools which could fashion a group narrative of change or continuity out of the ‘infinite regress’ of historical facts?<sup>4</sup>

Finally, the significance of an ideological centre is predicated on the existence of boundaries.<sup>5</sup> For the Romans, this boundary was articulated in familiar dichotomization between Roman-self and Barbarian-other. To what degree is there evidence for this model being used by various Roman peoples in the early Islamic period? This simplistic model was complicated

<sup>1</sup> Harkin, “Lévi-Strauss and History,” 43.

<sup>2</sup> Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, 10–11.

<sup>3</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.

<sup>4</sup> Harkin, “Lévi-Strauss and History,” 45, 47–48.

<sup>5</sup> Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, 14.

with the ideological assimilation of Christianity into Roman identity over the course of late antiquity (an approximate periodization for the fourth through early seventh centuries AD). How did this reformulation of self and other impact the ‘performance’ of identity in response to the emergence of new social situations in this period?<sup>6</sup>

As George Steiner noted, a ‘sense of history, with its dates and implicit forward motion, is a very special, arbitrary reading of reality. It is not natural but culturally acquired.’<sup>7</sup> Historiography is both culturally construed by also culturally specific. Even among the military, political, and theological crises of the early middle ages, it will be argued that the Romans maintained not only a distinct cultural identity, but a sense of their historical perspective. Both cultural continuity and relativism are crucial themes to traversing constructions of the Roman community in this time.

## 1 ROMAN SIGNS AND SIGNIFIERS AFTER ANTIQUITY

Group boundaries and identities are created by being articulated, labelled, and described. The language used in these processes does not merely passively describe but actively create cultural differences and similarities. A major obstacle presents itself once we begin looking into group identities in this time and place: names and signifiers do not align across the varied primary source materials, which were written in a number of languages by individuals having many different cultural backgrounds and political loyalties. To compound this issue, modern translators and scholars make choices in interpreting their own ‘real’ meaning behind these names, often informed by their own implicit cultural assumptions of which they might not even be fully cognizant. Early medieval Roman authors, subjects of the emperors who ruled from Constantinople and who principally wrote in Greek, were, by and large, consistent in their names for languages, but in very different ways to that preferred by the historians who now write about them.

At its root, the difficulty is that of semiotics. The basic problem remains that outlined by Ferdinand de Saussure in his seminal 1916 work *Cours de linguistique générale*, namely determining the meaning of a given *sign*, defined by the relationship between a *signifier* (in this case, the sounds and the written representation /rōm/) and the *signified* concepts that it

<sup>6</sup> Barth, 25.

<sup>7</sup> Steiner, “Orpheus with His Myths,” 176.

represents.<sup>8</sup> In this case, the signifier /rōm/ is situated in the play between its meaning in a variety of languages and culturally specific reference points. This volume is particularly concerned with the interplay between sign systems of English, Greek, and Latin, though it should be noted that these are not independent of other languages like French and German. The problematic interrelationship between names and concepts which formed Roman group identity is exemplified in an episode from the *Chronicle of 528 Years* by Theophanes ‘the Confessor’ (*circa* 760–818). This chronicle was undertaken in order to complete a world-chronicle begun by Theophanes’ friend and colleague George Synkellos. George had to abandon his historical project in 810 due to illness—Theophanes eulogises him and his work, a history of the world from creation to the reign of Diocletian, in his own chronicle’s introduction written in 814. Theophanes’ *Chronographia* is one of the most important sources for the history of the Eastern Roman Empire for the seventh, eighth, and early ninth centuries, completely replacing most of his sources for this lengthy period which thereafter ceased to be copied. The event occurs near the end of his chronicle, regarding a diplomatic initiative which he dates to the year 781/782.

In this year Irene sent the *sakellarios* Konstas and the *primicerius* Mamalos to Karoulos, king of the Franks, with a view to betrothing his daughter, called Erythro, to her son, the emperor Constantine. An agreement having been reached and oaths exchanged, they left the eunuch Elissaios, who was a notary, in order to teach Erythro Greek letters and language (τὰ τῶν Γραικῶν γράμματα καὶ τὴν γλῶσσαν) and educate her in the customs of the Roman Empire (τὰ ἡθη τῆς Ρωμαίων βασιλείας).<sup>9</sup>

Throughout his sizable history, Theophanes uses a few different terms seemingly interchangeably, none of which maps very well onto modern expectations. The empire, called variously a *basilea* or a *politea*, can either be that of the *Romans* or of the *Christians*, either of which could be translated to the modern concept of *Byzantines*. We will return to the subject of language, but it is worth noting that while he was a Roman he wrote in

<sup>8</sup> Robey, *Structuralism: An Introduction*, 1–4; Leach, “Structuralism in Social Anthropology”; Harkin, “Lévi-Strauss and History,” 39–58.

<sup>9</sup> Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, AM 6274, pp. 628–29.

*Hellenic* (what is conventionally called Greek), for him and most of his Greek-writing contemporaries, the *Roman* language signified Latin.

Within works written in Greek in this period, a broad latitude of terminology exists when it comes not just to identifying themselves culturally and politically, but to the way that state was described and conceptualized. The signifier /rōm/, of course, derives from the *urbs Roma* (Gk. Ρώμη). In Greek, this proper name happened to be the same signifier as the word for ‘strength’ or ‘might,’ compounding the possible concepts for the name from its earliest introduction to the language.<sup>10</sup> The city of Rome gave its name to the empire, which in turn gave its name to the Roman lands (Ρωμανία), the Roman language (Ρωμαϊκός or Ρωμαϊστή), and any people associated with these signifiers. Note that unlike in English, late antique and early medieval authors rarely or never used ‘Rome’ (Ρώμη) as synecdoche for the empire, such as in the title *Rome and Persia in Late Antiquity: Neighbours and Rivals*.<sup>11</sup> Ρώμη, at least as used in the sixth through ninth centuries, appears to have always referred to *urbs Roma*. A Roman (typically, Ρωμαῖος) was a person identified with either the *urbs* or, more commonly, the empire. Other signifiers existed, however. In the tenth century, the writer of the *De Administrando Imperio* attempted to distinguish between a group labelled the Ρωμᾶνοι, apparently Latin speakers who lived in the cities on the eastern littoral of the Adriatic, who were distinct from the Ρωμαῖοι, or citizens of the empire.<sup>12</sup>

Situations where actors needed to distinguish between different kinds of Romans in this manner, while rare, did happen. In his *De Bello Gothicō*, narrating the Justinianic re-conquest of Italy in the 530s, 540s, and 550s, Procopius of Caesarea (*circa* 500–560) dealt with multiple distinct groups who were, in their own fashions, equally Romans but had differing goals and interests. Procopius accompanied the general Belisarius on many of the campaigns narrated in his books, making portions of the narrative a first-hand account. In a reported speech during the siege of Naples

<sup>10</sup> Liddell, Scott, and Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, sec. ρώμη.

<sup>11</sup> Dignas and Winter, *Rome and Persia in Late Antiquity: Neighbors and Rivals*.

<sup>12</sup> Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando Imperio*, § 29.3–7, 31.10–15, 33.6; pp. 123, 149, 161. It remains unclear whether this Dalmatian Romanness marks a continuous local identity reaching back to late antiquity, or if it represents a later invented memory, in part because documentation from the seventh and eighth centuries is so sparse. The local foundation story found in the *DAI* was recorded independently in Thomas Spalatensis, *Historia Salonitana maior*; Curta, *Southeastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 500–1250*, 16–17; Džino, “Local Knowledge and Wider Contexts.”

(November 536), Belisarius exhorted the inhabitants of the Gothic-occupied city to surrender and spare themselves the evils of being ransacked.

I pray that an ancient city, which has for ages been inhabited by both Christians and Romans (*Χριστιανούς τε καὶ Ρωμαίους*), may not meet with such a fortune, especially at my hands as commander of Roman troops (*Ρωμαίων στρατηγοῦντος*), not least because in my army are a multitude of barbarians (*βάρβαροι πολλοί*) ... [whose fury] I should be unable to control if they should capture the city by act of war.<sup>13</sup>

Procopius leads his readers through a complex of groups and identities. Belisarius, on the one hand, represented the Roman Empire as leader of its army, which has barbarian *foederati* in its ranks with whom he threatens the city. The Neapolitans were likewise Romans, by virtue of their history and culture. However, they owed their current political allegiance to the barbarian Goths who had ruled Italy for the previous half-century, and whose garrison within the city were pointedly not included in the negotiations at that moment. Elsewhere, Procopius mentions other groups of Romans among the Goths and Germans who ‘even at the present day are clearly recognized as belonging to the legions to which they were assigned when they served in ancient times.’<sup>14</sup> In preserving the (military) structures which defined their identities, some Romans maintained their identities in post-Roman political structures: ‘they preserve the dress of the Romans in every particular, even as regards their shoes.’<sup>15</sup> The multiple kinds of Romans in Procopius’ narrative derived their group identities from similar yet distinct sources. Roman identities were supported and shaped by institutions, but continued culturally for a period even in their absence.

In the sources, self-identification as a Roman in a political sense is often indistinguishable from self-identification as an Orthodox Christian in a religious sense. An illustrative example comes from a document called the *Relatio Motionis*, an account of the trial of Maximus the Confessor (*circa*

<sup>13</sup> Procopius Caesariensis, *Opera Omnia*, § V.ix.27.

<sup>14</sup> Procopius Caesariensis, § V.xii.18.

<sup>15</sup> Procopius Caesariensis, § V.xii.19. Discussion of the epigraphic evidence for representations of martial identity in Late Antique Italy, see Barbiera, “Remembering the Warriors: Weapon Burials and Tombstones between Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages in Northern Italy,” 418–23.

580–662) before members of the Constantinopolitan senate, which occurred in 653. The document was written in the form of a dialogue between its hero, Maximus, and the ‘heretical’ state officials who were judging him on the accusation of treason against the Roman Empire. Although contemporary to the event it describes and entirely presented in direct speech, this is a partisan document, written by one of Maximus’ admirers (probably one of his disciples, both of whom were named Anastasius).<sup>16</sup> The dialogue opens with an explicit equation of seemingly different categories of identity: political loyalty and doctrinal belief.

The *sakellarios* said to him with great anger and frenzy: ‘Are you a Christian [Χριστιανὸς εἶ]?’

And [Maximus] said: ‘By the grace of Christ, God of all, I am a Christian.’  
And the *sakellarios* said: ‘That’s not true.’

The servant of God answered: ‘You say I’m not, but God says that I am, and will remain a Christian.’

‘And how,’ he said, ‘if you are a Christian, can you hate the emperor? ... From what you have done it has become clear to everyone that you hate the emperor and his empire. I say this because single-handedly you betrayed Egypt, Alexandria, Pentapolis, Tripolis and Africa to the Saracens.’<sup>17</sup>

The *Relatio Motionis* is a tricky source to use because, while it was written soon after the events it describes, it is fundamentally polemical. The words put in the mouths of Maximus’ senatorial interlocutors likely reinforce the writer’s doctrinal agenda. While we should be on guard for bad-faith distortions of their ideas and arguments, we should also treat them as plausible literary constructions which would not likely have strayed too far from real ideas and events less the document and writer lose credibility. Two competing definitions of *Christian* emerge from the passage. We recognize instantly Maximus’ definition, an identification with a confessional religious community. On the other hand, the *sakellarios* uses a politicized definition, where being Christian is a component of being a good Roman. After all, the ostensible purpose of the trial was to determine Maximus’ role in the empire’s political misfortunes—especially revolts in Africa and Italy which coincided with his visits to those locations—not his personal religion as such. Throughout the dialogue, Maximus defends himself by

<sup>16</sup> Allen and Neil, *Maximus the Confessor and His Companions : Documents from Exile*, 35–36.

<sup>17</sup> Allen and Neil, *Relatio Motionis* §1.8–23; 49.

attempting—unsuccessfully—to prove that his actions were not traitorous to the empire. Both parties are depicted in this document as smoothly moving between these different meanings of the Christian label.

The equation of Christian and Roman appears frequently in historical sources from the seventh century onwards.<sup>18</sup> This is, in part, to do with changes in literary tastes and conventions, and changes in what kinds of people wrote the history which got preserved. Although most of our sources for the history of the Eastern Roman Empire were written by Christians throughout late antiquity, many preserved a sense of narrative distance between themselves as Romans and their Christian religion—notably Procopius, whose authorial distance is so well constructed as to provoke speculation that he was a crypto-pagan.<sup>19</sup> This distance was conventional to the genre of classicizing historical writing, for authors like Procopius, Agathias, and Theophylact Simocatta were heavily influenced by the conventions and styles of Herodotus and Thucydides.<sup>20</sup> However, tastes in genre changed, and classicizing histories fell out of fashion. In their place, a bundle of historical writings from the turn of the ninth century, written overwhelmingly by men of religious vocation, narrate the events of the previous centuries. In these works, the name *Christianoi* comes to replace *Rhomaioi*, particularly (though not exclusively) when relating military activities against infidels.<sup>21</sup>

This is the case in an epistle of Ignatios (*circa* 780–after 845) in his rare mention of current political events. He was ‘deacon and *skevophylax* of the Great Church of Constantinople, at one time metropolitan of Nicaea, and a *grammatikos*;’ he has been identified variously as Ignatios the Deacon, Ignatios the monk, and Ignatios of Nicaea.<sup>22</sup> He was a prolific author who wrote hagiographies, poems, elegies and epistles. His letter collection, sixty-three collated in roughly chronological order dating from his time as

<sup>18</sup> Wood, ‘*We Have No King but Christ*: Christian Political Thought in Greater Syria on the Eve of the Arab Conquest (c.400–585), 201–15, 261–64.

<sup>19</sup> Kaldellis, *Procopius of Caesarea* Tyranny, History, and Philosophy at the End of Antiquity, 166.

<sup>20</sup> Angold and Whitby, “Historiography,” 838–40.

<sup>21</sup> Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, AM 5815; 33 (‘the affairs of the Christian republic’). See also AM 6171; pp. 497–500 (‘the empire of the Christians’), AM 6258; p. 607 (Constantine V as ‘emperor of the Christians’), and AM 6302–4; pp. 667–80 (the reign of Nikephoros, whose reforms hurt ‘Christians,’ but whose disastrous campaign against the Bulgars caused Theophanes to lament ‘May not Christians experience another time the ugly events of that day for which no lamentation is adequate!’).

<sup>22</sup> Mango and Scott, *Theophanes’ Chronicle*, 3. Cyril Mango quoting the *Suidas*.

bishop of Nicaea and after, connect to many notable friends and acquaintances across the spectrum of Roman society. He was a contemporary of Theophanes Confessor and Patriarch Nikephoros, and a pupil of Patriarch Tarasios (r. 784–806). His epistles preserve a perspective on the Eastern Roman Empire's highest political and literary elite in the early ninth century, for he managed to associate himself with notable ecclesiastical and civil contemporaries.<sup>23</sup>

You are no more, Crete and Cyprus, Euboea, Lesbos, Sardinia, and bountiful Sicily, rich in possessions, the very firstfruits, so to speak, of the sea. [They are no more,] not because they are unable to lessen the sorrows that beset you, fill you with joy by their presents, and become a consolation to you, but because they are in danger of not belonging any more to Christians and of being set apart because of our sins, a prey to the enemy, until such time as when ‘he who delivers the poor man from the hand of the stronger and that of the ruler’ shall harken to our lamentations and is swayed by the prayers of His servants.<sup>24</sup>

Even in as fairly ideologically uncharged a situation as a private epistle between friends, where the choice between using the identifier of ‘Roman’ or ‘Christian’ to mean ‘us’ could have minimal consequences, ‘Christian’ was preferred, at least in some situations.

When these phrases were used, and what they signified, are the central issues under examination throughout this work, but are far from the only structurally ambiguous terms. The Roman state was ἡ τε πολιτεία καὶ ἡ βασιλεία<sup>25</sup>—a *republic* and an *empire*. Each word could be used with its full force of meaning, and each term’s meaning appealed to different ideological programs about the nature of the empire and its body politic, as demonstrated recently by Kaldellis in his survey of the period between *circa* 500 and 1204.<sup>26</sup> Given the ideological interrelationship between religion and the emperor, one might expect that *basileia* would be associated with the self-conception as Christians, while the Roman identifier would principally be applied to the *politeia*, but this is not the case. Theophanes’ *Chronographia*, one of the largest contemporary narrative

<sup>23</sup> Mango and Scott, 3–6.

<sup>24</sup> Ignatios the Deacon, *Epistulae*, §37.34–43; 37.

<sup>25</sup> Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, AM 6276; 631.

<sup>26</sup> Kaldellis, *The Byzantine Republic*.

sources for the history of this period does mention ἡ Ῥωμαϊκη πολιτεία<sup>27</sup> and τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν Χριστιανῶν,<sup>28</sup> but also what might otherwise appear to be a portmanteau in τὰ πράγματα τῆς Χριστιανῶν πολιτείας.<sup>29</sup> Conceptualizing their own political community as both a *basileia* and a *politeia* served, at least in part, to distinguish the Romans from other peoples.<sup>30</sup> In the same passage where Theophanes identifies with τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν Χριστιανῶν, he contrasts that to the Σκλαωνῶν ἔθνῶν who oppose them on the battlefield.<sup>31</sup> The distinction between the Christians, united under a political arrangement, and the tribal Sklavenes, is clear.

Other names, which might be casually mistaken for self-identifiers, appear in the works of Roman authors. Historically, *Hellene* (and synonyms such as *Hellenic*) was the term of self-appellation preferred by the classical Greeks in the fifth and fourth centuries BC in reference to their language, their native land, and their common culture.<sup>32</sup> As a geographical epithet, *Hellas* was the name for the southernmost part of the Balkan Peninsula, corresponding to central and southern mainland areas of modern Greece. This term, used relatively vaguely throughout antiquity, gave the name to the theme of the *Hellenikon*. Organized in the eighth century, it was the military protection for territories formerly administered as the provinces of Achaea, Thessalia, and Epirus Vetus.<sup>33</sup>

Classical Hellenic culture had long been an important influence on Roman society.<sup>34</sup> A major component of Hellenic culture was, of course,

<sup>27</sup> Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, AM 6169; 496.

<sup>28</sup> Theophanes Confessor, AM 6171; pp. 497–500.

<sup>29</sup> Theophanes Confessor, AM 5815; pp. 33–34.

<sup>30</sup> However, Roman writers recognized in the Iranian state, at least, a claim of equal socio-political complexity to their own, so that it could be considered a *politeia* (even if they were always barbarians). For example in a direct speech (itself an unusual feature in a chronicle), Theophanes has the Iranian general Aspad-Gusnap [Goundabousan] mention ἡ πολιτεία τῶν Περσῶν. Theophanes Confessor, AM 6118. Even if this passage is just another example of Theophanes uncritically reusing an earlier source, the choice of political terminology by any Greek author is peculiar. Theophanes does not extend this terminology to other powers with whom the Romans had contact, either to the Caliphate which replaced the Sassanians in the east (the Caliphate is called τὴν ἀρχὴν τοῦ ἔθνους in AM 6104) or to the Christian states in the west (τῶν Φράγγων ἔθνους AM 6216).

<sup>31</sup> Theophanes Confessor, AM 6171; pp. 479–500.

<sup>32</sup> Bowersock, *Hellenism in Late Antiquity*, 1–13.

<sup>33</sup> Brubaker, Haldon, and Ousterhout, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era c. 680–850. A History*, 756–57, 763 map 7.

<sup>34</sup> Kaimio, *The Romans and the Greek Language*, 195–207.

its polytheist religion—the classical gods figure prominently in the works of Homer and the Attic playwrights, the very pieces of literature which defined ideal high-register Greek throughout antiquity and the middle ages.<sup>35</sup> For the patristic fathers, inculcated in an educational culture which valued the forms of these pre-Christian literary works even as they rejected their non-Christian content, there was a struggle over the degree to which Hellenic culture could be compatible with the new faith—ultimately settling on a compromise whereby the literature was studied despite its objectionable content.<sup>36</sup> As such, the sign ‘Hellene’ achieved a new prominence in early Christian writing as a term roughly translating to *paganus* in Latin, signifying followers of pre-Christian, polytheist cults, an opposite to anything that can be identified as ‘Christian.’ Over the course of late antiquity, as the Roman elite in the east became increasingly Christian in religious identification, Hellenism’s other signified concepts were largely supplanted by its meaning in religious contexts as a label to be rejected. Nevertheless, all of these signifiers—language, geography, literary, and intellectual culture—were still implied by the signifier Hellene in the early middle ages to some small degree.

An illuminating example of the changed—and charged—meaning which Hellene had gained by this point can be found in a later source, the tenth-century *De Administrando Imperio*, written (or at least commissioned) by Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos (905–959). Constantine cultivated a reputation as a ‘scholar emperor,’ patronizing the copying of new manuscripts and the composition of new works, an element of what some scholars termed the ‘Macedonian Renaissance.’<sup>37</sup> Constantine patronized a great number of ‘new’ works during his reign, including the *De Administrando Imperio* but also the *De Ceremoniis* and the *De Thematibus*, which were assembled from documents and material derived from a variety of original sources. As such, the material is chronologically variegated, interweaving old documents (some dating back to the early seventh century and earlier) with newly composed exposition.

<sup>35</sup> Horrocks, *Greek. A History of the Language and Its Speakers*, 89, 155–56, 220–26.

<sup>36</sup> Fowden, “Polytheist Religion and Philosophy”; Cameron, “Education and Literary Culture.”

<sup>37</sup> Morey, “The ‘Byzantine Renaissance’”; Weitzmann, *Studies in Classical and Byzantine Manuscript Illumination*, 176–223; Magdalino, “The Bath of Leo the Wise and the ‘Macedonian Renaissance’ Revisited”; Ševčenko, “Re-Reading Constantine Porphyrogenitus,” 183–84; Maguire, “Epigrams, Art, and the ‘Macedonian Renaissance.’”

The inhabitants of the city of Maina are not of the race of the aforesaid Slavs, but of the ancient Romans, and even to this day they are called ‘Hellenes’ by the local inhabitants, because in very ancient times they were idolaters and worshippers of images after the fashion of the ancient Hellenes; and they were baptized and became Christians in the reign of the glorious Basil.<sup>38</sup>

Now in context, this anecdote immediately follows a passage discussing how the Slavs entered the Peloponnese, which Constantine places within the theme of Hellas. One might expect that the geographical and historical origins of the epithet ‘Hellene’ would be obvious for individuals living within the region bearing its name, but instead Constantine insisted that the identifier, at least in this context, was derived from the term’s religious meaning instead.

By the early middle ages, Romans had numerous signifiers for themselves, each of which indicated different components of their group’s identity and appealed to different ideological traditions. The name ‘Greek’ (Γραικός) enjoyed a certain degree of currency within Greek-language sources as a name for the language which was a viable alternative to ‘Hellenic.’<sup>39</sup> Compared to ‘Christians’ (Χριστιανοί) or ‘Romans’ (Ρωμαῖοι), ‘Greek’ is very rare as a term of cultural or political self-appellation in the early medieval centuries. Nevertheless, it found favour among many foreign peoples as the preferred term by which to signify the Eastern Roman Empire and its citizens, beginning with Latin speakers and spreading to other cultural traditions from there.<sup>40</sup> For example the term ‘Greek’ to signify the Eastern Roman Empire is used in the so-called proto-Bulgarian inscriptions. These are epigraphic monuments dating to

<sup>38</sup> Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando Imperio*, § 50.71–76; 237.

<sup>39</sup> ‘Greeks’ and ‘Hellenes’ are explicitly equated at least from the fourth century BC, as noted by Aristotle in the *Meteorologica* «ὅκουν γὰρ οἱ Σελλοὶ ἐνταῦθα καὶ οἱ καλούμενοι τότε μὲν Γραικοὶ νῦν δὲ Ἑλληνες.» tr. Lee as ‘There dwelled the Selloi and those who were called Greeks but are now called Hellenes.’ Aristotle, *Meteorologica*, § I.xiv; 532b 2–3. Further discussion of early usage of names, see Bury (1895). The latter term had, by late antiquity, become problematic as a cultural label because of its use to signify ‘pagan’ in patristic Christian literature. Cf. Liddell, Scott, and Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, sec. Ἔλλην.

<sup>40</sup> The origins of the Latin terms *Graecus* and *Graecia* remain obscure, but their use is ubiquitous by the classical period. In the *Etymologies*, written at the turn of the seventh century, Isidore of Seville is aware of the various identifiers for *Graeci*. He equates them with Ionians (IX.ii.28), Thessalians (IX.ii.69), and, attributing their name to an eponymous mythological king-founder ‘Graecus,’ also notes that they call themselves Hellenes (XIV. iv.7–11). Isidore of Seville, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*.

the eighth and ninth century, erected in Balkan territories ruled by the Bulgar Khagans. Although the texts were written in the Greek language and script, they identified the empire as either ‘Greek’ or ‘Christian,’ but oddly enough not ‘Roman.’<sup>41</sup>

Notably absent from the above discussion about group identifiers is the term ‘Byzantines.’ Byzantium, of course, is the ancient name for the city on the European shore of the Bosphorus, which has also been called Istanbul, New Rome, Constantinople, or simply The City throughout its long history. While early medieval Greek authors would sometimes choose to call the city Byzantium and its inhabitants Byzantines,<sup>42</sup> the signifier /byzanti-/ never signifies the empire nor its citizens as a whole the way that /rōm/ did. Byzantines were but one regional population within that empire among many including Athenians and Ephesians, Thracians, Cappadocians, Paphlagonians, and Sicilians, all of whom were Romans and Christians. Since this term plays a crucial role in modern western scholarly nomenclature, it is important to clarify, from the outset, the term’s lack of historical credentials to be used in the manner it is commonly employed today.

### *The Roman Language*

Modern English terminology for the major classical and medieval languages is clear and consistent: Latin and Greek. This convention is shared with other major western European research languages (De: Lateinisch, Greichisch; Fr: Latin, Grec), a consensus reflecting a common attitude towards the place of these languages in their own groups’ historical consciousness. These conventions are entirely different from self-referential terminology within Modern Greek. While sometimes called Γραικικά, the language is more commonly colloquially identified as either Ελληνικά or Ρωμαϊκά.<sup>43</sup> However, ‘Byzantine’ periodization (i.e. considering all of

<sup>41</sup> Beševliev, *Die Protobulgarischen Inschriften*, 95–176. Georgian authors, too, tended to refer to the early medieval Romans and their language using the same term which they used for classical Greeks, this being *berdzeni*. Hewitt, *Georgian a Learner’s Grammar*.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, AM 6237; 585 (Constantine V transferred the inhabitants of Germanikeia ‘to Byzantium, together with many Syrians Syrians—Monophysite heretics, most of whom continued to live in Thrace to this very day.’) Also AM 6293; page 653.

<sup>43</sup> Horrocks, *Greek. A History of the Language and Its Speakers*, 438–70.

Roman history between the fourth and fifteenth centuries as a coherent period) creates a conceptual problem by encouraging conflation of evidence and practice separated by centuries. This is especially the case with the concept of the Roman language. For example Horrocks, when writing about the end of late antiquity and the early middle ages in his introduction to the history of the Greek language, defines ῥωμαϊκά simply as ‘spoken Greek’.<sup>44</sup> Horrocks gives the traditional narrative of the replacement of Latin by Greek in the eastern Mediterranean in the sixth and seventh centuries. Although knowledge of Greek disappeared in the west, its importance as the language of the state’s legal, fiscal, and military apparatuses kept Latin alive in the east through the end of the sixth century. ‘By the end of the sixth century it was already extremely difficult to find anyone who could translate Latin into Greek competently. Thereafter, the growing independence of Byzantium, and the need to devote all available resources to the struggle for survival in the seventh and eighth centuries, guaranteed the final demise of Latin.’<sup>45</sup> Numerous early medieval sources mention the ‘Roman’ language—however, as will become apparent, they rarely, if ever, intended it to mean Greek. What was the Roman language? What impact did it have on contemporaries’ identification as Romans?

Greek had always played an important position as an administrative language in the eastern parts of the Roman Empire, nominally second only to Latin. Kaimio, who published a major study on the use of Greek and Latin in late antiquity, noted that ‘the lack of uniformity in nearly all areas is a dominant feature of the language use in the Roman Empire’.<sup>46</sup> The earliest evidence for this comes from fiscal practices. When the Republic and early Empire annexed cities, the Romans standardized local coinage; in the east, locally minted Roman coins of the first centuries AD contained a mixture of Greek and Latin inscriptions. Even under Diocletian’s centralizing and standardizing efforts, provincial administration across the east was officially conducted in Greek.<sup>47</sup> Extant common legal documents from the third century onwards witness a mixed use of

<sup>44</sup> Horrocks, 211; Koder, “Byzanz, Die Griechen Und Die Romaiosyne – Ein ‘Ethnogenese’ Der ‘Römer?’,” 103.

<sup>45</sup> Horrocks, *Greek. A History of the Language and Its Speakers*, 196–97.

<sup>46</sup> Kaimio, *The Romans and the Greek Language*, 326.

<sup>47</sup> Kaimio, 88–93, 124. Diocletian’s centralization programs did lead to standardized Latin language appearing on the empire’s coinage as local mints were closed in favour of a state monopoly on production, p. 93.

Greek alongside Latin in Syria and Egypt.<sup>48</sup> Although Latin was an important component of both legal education and army administration in the east through at least the beginning of the seventh century, its practical impact beyond these narrow administrative spheres was limited.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, by late antiquity it was normal practice for senatorial decrees, constitutions, edicts, and receipts to be published in Greek.<sup>50</sup>

Although never the dominant administrative language in the eastern Mediterranean, the utilization of Latin declined markedly in later centuries. The systematic eclipse of Latin by Greek for the empire's official functioning fits well with a traditional account of the history of the end of antiquity which sees the reign of Heraclius as a revolutionary moment, when the 'Romans' became 'Byzantines.' Some of the earliest evidence for a shift in the official status of administrative languages comes, again, from the fisc. On coinage, Latin completely dominated inscriptions during the fifth and sixth centuries. This gradually changed beginning in the seventh century, when mixed Greek and Latin texts started appearing on imperial coins and seals.<sup>51</sup> Heraclius introduced the first Greek inscription, *en touto nika*, on copper folles near the end of his reign and began to publicly use the title *basileus* on official documents after 629.<sup>52</sup> A key component in this narrative is that the Heraclians oversaw the complete reorganization of the empire's provinces into highly militarized themes, interpreted as simplifying and streamlining the erstwhile bloated and inefficient bureaucracy which had failed so spectacularly to protect the empire in the first decades of the seventh century. Part of that process of simplification and rationalization therefore must have included systematically replacing Latin, which few people in the eastern empire spoke natively, with Greek in the operation of the state.<sup>53</sup> More immediately, however, the narrative

<sup>48</sup> Kaimio, 122–24.

<sup>49</sup> Kaimio, 153, 155–61, 206, 321.

<sup>50</sup> Kaimio, 67, 75, 143.

<sup>51</sup> Morrisson, *Monnaie et finances à Byzance*, chap. II pp. 257–61.

<sup>52</sup> Grierson, *Byzantine Coins*, 91–92.

<sup>53</sup> Stratos, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century*, vol. 1 pp. 341–49. Stratos furthermore dates the army's Hellenization (which he identifies as the defining moment of the emergence of the 'theme system') to the reign of Constantine IV (668–685), pp. 266–67. Ivan Basić demonstrated that official correspondence with western neighbours was conducted officially in Greek by the eighth century, and official Latin translations prepared in Constantinople only started appearing in the late ninth or early tenth century. Basić, "Imperium and Regnum in Gottschalk's Description of Dalmatia," 182–83.

of Greek emerging as the uniting language of the medieval Roman people and empire has had a long afterlife, influencing scholarship both deeply and subtly.

The idea that the seventh century was a revolutionary moment in history, and that the state systematically changing its language of administration from Latin to Greek as being part of a coherently planned revolution, appears to stem ultimately from the introduction to the *De Thematibus*. Written by Constantine VII Porphyrogenitos in the mid-tenth century, it divides Roman history between an earlier era, when emperors were supposed to take command of the armies directly, and the period after Heraclius, when emperors delegated that responsibility to the *strategoi*.

It appears to me that the name of the themes did not come into existence in the way it is popularly believed. For neither is it something ancient, nor has any one of those who have composed a history memorialised such a name as they are now called. Since the beginning of their existence, some of the *tagmata* and legions have been registered by tribe—for one example, the legion of the forty martyrs, which should be called ‘thundering’,<sup>54</sup> and another of the Marmaritans and another of the Pisidians and a different one of the Thessalians and another named otherwise—and were under a *dux* and *hegemon*, but often even a *praepositus*. And when was this? When the emperors led the people as generals, and placed the yoke of Roman slavery upon those who rebelled, and used to lay siege almost the entire *oikoumene*, when it was disordered and impudent. That is, in the times of Julius Caesar, of the awe-inspiring Augustus, of that notorious Trajan, of Constantine the Great, and of Theodosius and those who after them embraced Christianity and devotion to God. For it was not appropriate, when the emperor was present among the army, to appoint a *strategos*, for units were drawn up under their leaders and *taxisarchs*, and the whole of the affairs of wars were supervised by the emperor’s privy council. And all the people perceived that there was only one emperor. But at that time when the emperors ceased to command as generals, then the *strategoi* [generals] and the *themata* came to be distinguished. And the realm of the Romans is divided into these down unto today. But now, with the Roman Empire reduced in both east and west, and truncated since the reign of Heraclius the Libyan, from that time those who hold power having no power over where and how they will make use of their authority. They divided their realm and the *tagmata* of the soldiers into small parts. They began speaking Greek and discarded the Roman tongue of

<sup>54</sup> ‘Keraunobolos,’ that is, Legio Fulminata. Constantine here alludes to the forty martyrs of Sebaste who died in AD 320.

their forefathers: the *legati*<sup>55</sup> came to be called *chiliarchs*, and *centurions* became *hekatonarchs*, and *cometas* are now *strategoi*. And the very name of the *theme* is in Hellenic and not Roman, named from their local situation.<sup>56</sup>

Constantine identifies three defining features which distinguished the militarized *themata* from the provincial and praetorian prefecture system which preceded it: territorial losses diminished the power of Roman emperors compared with their predecessors of earlier centuries; *themata* replaced provinces as the distinct geographical territories into which the empire is divided; and the language of the military's administration was changed from Latin to Greek. These overt changes in the organization of the Roman military—exemplified through the Hellenization of titles and offices—are thus cast as the definitive explanation for the difference between the larger empire of the sixth century and the smaller empire Constantine VII ruled in the tenth.

Evidence from the intervening centuries of the early middle ages, however, presents a subtly different picture contradicting this narrative. The Romans never had any systematic linguistic policy, at least not since the first annexation of native Greek-speaking polities under the Republic. Throughout late antiquity, parts of the administration of the eastern Mediterranean were carried out in both Greek and Latin: local, provincial administration was conducted in Greek since the time of Diocletian at least, while imperial administration issued bilingual constitutions, edicts, and receipts.<sup>57</sup> The greatest degrees of linguistic standardization occurred in the army. There, the use of a uniform Latin language throughout the empire, even until the end of late antiquity, is documented in inscriptions and papyri from Egypt and Syria—in these, diplomas are universally in Latin, as are rosters, reports, and administrative documents. Receipts and epistles, documents where the army interacted with the public, are attested in both Latin and Greek, however.<sup>58</sup> Although this has obvious ideological implications, it is fundamentally a practical matter. Uniform language, at

<sup>55</sup>The Greek reads ‘Longinus,’ which is a personal name, and is certainly corrupt. Cf. Petrusi (1952), commentary p. 113, note I.25.

<sup>56</sup>Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Thematibus*. prolog. 1–28.

<sup>57</sup>Kaimio, *The Romans and the Greek Language*, 67, 75, 124, 143. On the administrative interaction between Greek and Latin in the early medieval Adriatic, particularly littoral cities which remained subjects of the empire, see Basić, “Imperium and Regnum in Gottschalk’s Description of Dalmatia,” esp. 195–97.

<sup>58</sup>Kaimio, 155–57.

least as far as command and documentation was concerned, united servicemen regardless of native language, promoted unit cohesion, streamlined communications, and fostered a distinctive identity and mentality of soldiers as Romans.<sup>59</sup> Beyond this, knowledge of Latin in the east appears to have been severely curtailed beyond specialist situations where learning it was useful for one's career—particularly in law, for example.<sup>60</sup>

Greek also played a functional role in the new states established over the course of the seventh century in what were formerly Roman territories, namely, the Caliphate and Bulgar Khaganate. Greek continued in use as an administrative language throughout the seventh and into the eighth centuries in Egypt and the Levant.<sup>61</sup> The translation of Greek philosophy into Arabic shaped and influenced the intellectual history not only of the Islamic world but of later medieval western Europe as well.<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, original literary and ‘scientific’ Greek texts were composed in the early Caliphate, including the hymns and sermons of John of Damascus (*circa* 675–749) and the astrological texts of Theophilus of Edessa (695–785)<sup>63</sup>. In the Balkans, the Bulgar khagans conquered the lower Danube basin in the 680s and thereafter engaged in ideological posturing against the neighbouring Romans. This ideological struggle is now evidenced principally through erected monuments, and all which predate the Bulgar conversion to Christianity in the late ninth century were inscribed in Greek. The ‘Madara Rider,’ a mountainside inscription in north-eastern Bulgaria recording events from the turn of the eighth century, and the ‘Presian plates,’ unearthed near Philippi (modern Greece) detailing events in the ninth century, were both written in Greek but commissioned by the Khagans as prestigious records of their accomplishments.<sup>64</sup> Through the ninth century at least, Greek is not exclusively associated with the Romans in either a political or cultural sense, but an important medium for factual, cultural, and ideological discourse across a large geographical area.

<sup>59</sup> Teall, “The Barbarians in Justinian’s Armies,” 296–97, 299–310; Kaimio, *The Romans and the Greek Language*, 155, 161.

<sup>60</sup> Kaimio, *The Romans and the Greek Language*, 206, 321.

<sup>61</sup> Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, AM 6199, 524; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*; Bucking, “On the Training of Documentary Scribes in Roman, Byzantine, and Early Islamic Egypt: A Contextualized Assessment of the Greek Evidence”; Foss, “Egypt under Mu‘āwiya Part I: Flavius Papas and Upper Egypt.”

<sup>62</sup> Goodman, “The Translation of Greek Materials into Arabic.”

<sup>63</sup> Hoyland, *Theophilus of Edessa’s Chronicle*, 6–7.

<sup>64</sup> Beševliev, *Die Protobulgarischen Inschriften*, 95–176.

But just as Greek was not exclusively associated with the Roman state externally, neither was it identified as the Roman language internally. Roman authors, such as Procopius, regularly felt compelled to gloss military technical terms, which were invariably in Latin, as well as occasionally names and epithets. Sometimes, he identifies it as the ‘Latin tongue’.<sup>65</sup> Just as often, though, the language is called that of the Romans: ‘There a strong east wind arose for them, and on the following day it carried the ships to the point of Libya, at the place which the Romans call in their own tongue [τῇ σφετέρᾳ γλώσσῃ καλοῦσι ‘Ρωμαῖοι] “Shoal’s Head,” for its name is “Caputvada.”’<sup>66</sup> The same turn-of-phrase is used for defining Latin terms which he used in his work.<sup>67</sup> Procopius was clearly not concerned with internal consistency on the matter, nor with the prospect of explaining Roman (language) terminology to his Roman (political and cultural) audience. Note that Procopius’ English translator, Dewing, is equally lax about the distinction between the language ‘of the Latins’ or ‘of the Romans.’ For example, at IV.xiii.34 he decided to render Ὅρος Ἀσπίδος τῇ σφετέρᾳ γλώσσῃ καλοῦσι Λατῖνοι τὸν χῶρον as ‘The place is called “Shield Mountain” [Clypea] by the **Romans** in their own tongue.’ On the rare occasion that Procopius mentions Greek, it is called ‘Hellenic,’ not Roman.<sup>68</sup>

Similar terminology and practice are found in the legal corpora issued by Procopius’ contemporary, Emperor Justinian I (527–565). Although his *Institutes* and *Digest* were issued in Latin, the *Novels* were promulgated primarily in Greek. In *Novel* 7, he explains that he has ‘not written this law in our native tongue, but in the common, Greek tongue, so that it might become known to, and easily understood by, all.’<sup>69</sup> These categories are found throughout the *Novels*: *Novel* 13 distinguishes between ‘our tongue’ and Greek; *Novel* 28 identifies a Greek technical term as being given according to the ‘common tongue;’ whereas *Novel* 30 identifies Latin as the ‘Roman tongue’ and *Novel* 140 refers to Latin phrases as being said ‘in the native tongue.’ Although Greek was *de facto* a legal language,

<sup>65</sup> ‘φωνὴ Λατίνων’ as at Procopius Caesariensis, *Opera Omnia*, § V.xv.5, VII.xv.37, II.i.7, etc.

<sup>66</sup> Procopius Caesariensis, § III.xiv.17.

<sup>67</sup> Procopius Caesariensis, § III.iv.7–8, V.xxv.19.

<sup>68</sup> ‘τὸν τε τῶν Χριστιανῶν ιερέα Καθολικὸν καλοῦσι τῇ Ἐλλήνων φωνῇ’. Procopius Caesariensis, § II.xxv.4.

<sup>69</sup> Justinian I, *Codex Iustinianus*, Novel 7. Translation in Miller and Sarris, *The Novels of Justinian*.

Justinian's legislation presents a clear bias against its legitimacy in favour of Latin as the authentic 'Roman' language.

Scattered examples of continuity of this practice exist from the next three centuries. In the *Strategikon*, Latin names and phrases are common. The *Strategikon* is a Greek treatise attributed to the Emperor Maurice (r. 582–602), and a date of composition around the 590s is supported by internal references to several major campaigns of the latter sixth century. While the volume draws on a venerable tradition of military manual-writings in both Latin and Greek, its information has certainly been updated for the conditions of the end of late antiquity—accounting for the Christianization of the army and new foreign enemies (such as Sklavenes, Franks, Turks, and Lombards). The author's self-stated goal is to present clear, easily understood and factual information which can help commanders. As a result, this document generally eschews elevated literary conventions and potentially confusing anachronisms which enter 'classicizing' works. The fact that the *Strategikon* consistently uses the term Ρωμαϊκός to signify 'Latin' indicates the popularity of such usage.<sup>70</sup>

Continuation of this colloquial meaning of the term is evidenced at the turn of the ninth century, too. Theophanes' chronicle likewise identifies Latin and Greek as Ρωμίκα καὶ Ἑλληνικά.<sup>71</sup> On another occasion, he mentions τῶν Γραῖκων γράμματα καὶ τὴν γλῶσσαν, which the context clearly distinguishes from Roman culture.<sup>72</sup> Indeed, the identification of Latin as the Roman language, and not Greek, continues well past the nominal end of this study. Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos includes Latin chants in *De Ceremoniis*, which are identified as Ρωμαϊστι.<sup>73</sup> In the *De Administrando Imperio*, he discusses the peoples who inhabit the world around the empire. Again, the Ρωμαίων διάλεκτος indicates Latin throughout, and not Greek.

Nevertheless, despite the ideological commitment to recognizing that Latin was the 'Roman' language, the seventh and eighth centuries were a period when it fell out of regular use by the empire's military and legal administrations. The change occurred as a process which unfolded over the course of the sixth and seventh centuries, attested in different

<sup>70</sup> Maurice (Ps.), *Strategikon*, §Pr. 29; I.1.5, 8.3; III.11.2; XII B.3.3, 7.4. Trans. in Dennis, *Maurice's Strategikon*.

<sup>71</sup> Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, AM 5816 pp. 35–38.

<sup>72</sup> Theophanes Confessor, AM 6274, pp. 628–29.

<sup>73</sup> Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, *De Ceremoniis*, § I.74.

institutional and social settings at different phases.<sup>74</sup> Although it is possible (or even likely) that a *de facto* shift took place long before this point, evidence points to a formal realignment of the *de jure* languages of the legal and fiscal administration from Latin to Greek by the mid-eighth century. In the legal system, although novels were routinely issued in Greek from as early as the sixth century, the creation of the *Ecloga* and its companion codes under the Isaurians in the eighth century established a comprehensive hellenophone legal framework.<sup>75</sup> Notably this coincides with the appearance of the silver *milareria* coinage issued by Leo III, which replaced established numismatic iconography on the coin's reverse with a novel and relatively lengthy inscription in Greek. The military appears to have retained widespread use of Latin the longest, as Latin commands and technical terminology are still prevalent in the *De Militari Scientia*, an informal redaction of the *Strategikon* likely dating to the middle decades of the seventh century.<sup>76</sup> However, the situation had clearly changed by the time of Syranos Magister, the author of three surviving military treatises on land tactics (*De Re Strategica*, also known as the Περὶ Στρατηγικῆς), on naval tactics (*Naumachia*), and a handbook of martial rhetoric (*Rhetorica Militaris*).<sup>77</sup> The shift to Greek which occurred between the redaction of the *De Militari Scientia* and the composition of the *De Re Strategica* reflected a significant change, a departure from the Latin

<sup>74</sup> Surveying the current state of literature on the subject, Rance noted that, while there are numerous scholarly works on the topic of Latin in the Eastern Empire, there is no up-to-date comprehensive study. For his bibliography, see Rance, "The *De Militari Scientia* or Müller Fragment as a Philological Resource," 64–65, esp. notes 1 and 2.

<sup>75</sup> On the scope and purpose of the *Ecloga* and the Isaurian legal corpus, see Humphreys, *The Laws of the Isaurian Era*, Introduction, esp. 14–16.

<sup>76</sup> The *De Militari Scientia* was edited in Müller, "Ein Griechisches Fragment Über Kriegswesen." In Rance's opinion of the work, "Categorisation remains difficult, but *De Militari Scientia* may be characterised as a reduced and abbreviated 'working copy' of the *Strategicon* with additional jottings, in effect an informal epitome of essential tactical procedures with addenda et corrigenda, produced by and/or for a senior officer to serve as an aide-mémoire. This view is also supported by the location of the sole copy of *De Militari Scientia* immediately after the *Strategicon* in *Mediceo-Laurentianus graecus LV-4*, which has been identified as a volume produced from the library of Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus and thus isolated from the wider tradition and further reproduction." Rance, "The *De Militari Scientia* or Müller Fragment as a Philological Resource," 72.

<sup>77</sup> Although a relationship between the three works has been posited as early as the seventeenth century, the firm attribution of the works to the author's name was only made by Constantine Zuckerman in his 1990 article, Zuckerman, "The Compendium of Syrius Magister," 210–17.

heritage of the Roman army. The linguistic reality in the *De Re Strategica* reflects a point in time after Latin fell out of usage in the military. In this text, all technical military terms are given in Greek rather than Latin, reflecting a time probably in the eighth century after the military administration functionally ceased using even vestigial Latin commands and terminology.<sup>78</sup>

Further signs of a realignment of identification with cultural/linguistic labels are found in *Breviarum*, a work of history authored by Nikephoros (*circa* 758–828) as a young man before he became patriarch of Constantinople (r. 806–815). Most of Nikephoros' writings concern theological topics, but the *Breviarum* and a *Chronographikon Syntomon*

<sup>78</sup> Dating Syranos' works require working with tenuous evidence. In an excellent and detailed overview of the problem, Philip Rance suggests a likely date of composition between the 790s and the 890s, the former date based on the absence of scribal errors arising from misreading majuscule scripts, and the latter based on passages being quoted in other extant works. Rance, “The Date of the Military Compendium of Syrianus Magister (Formerly the Sixth-Century Anonymus Byzantinus),” 707, 736–37. An eighth-century date of composition finds support from the tenth-century *De Ceremoniis*. The work contains an epistle of Constantine VII (913–959) to his son Romanos II (959–963) which forms part of the Appendix to Book I. Rance (p. 706) picked up on a short passage in which Constantine praised the ‘historical books, above all by Polyaenus and Syranos’ (likely the same as our author), but missed another piece of evidence. This epistle gives advice to the younger emperor about the proper management of military expeditions in which the emperor is personally present. Constantine told of his difficult search for authoritative texts on the subject, and offered observations about the authority of the information: “Now this order and ritual for imperial expeditions was observed and put into practice until the time of Michael [III, r. 842–867] the Christ-loving ruler and his uncle Bardas, the most fortunate Caesar [from 862–866], that is to say, this tradition was handed down to them from earlier emperors, namely, Theophilos [r. 829–842] and Michael [II, r. 820–829], the father and grandfather of the said Michael the Christ-loving ruler. Likewise, this tradition, I say, came down to them from the previous emperors. I am speaking of those earlier Isaurians who erred very greatly concerning the orthodox faith.” Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, *De Ceremoniis*, Book I, Appendix A. Trans. Moffatt and Tall, pp. 457–58. Constantine, who highly regarded the works by Syranos, read a military treatise whose information, he believed, originated in the mid-eighth century. Rance points out (pp. 733–4) that our major manuscript witness of Syranos' military treatises (*codex Ambrosianus graecus* 139) likely originates from the court of Constantine VII. It seems likely that any treatise which the emperor mentioned in his epistle would be high-priority for transmission and preservation, and the presence of Syranos' works in it suggest that they could be Constantine's link to the authentic traditions of the eighth-century Isaurian emperors. If this is the case, such a work—effectively formalizing the Hellenization of another branch of the imperial administration—would be in keeping with other projects which have survived from that era.

are historical works credited to him. Although the *Breviarum* has some major flaws, including a lacuna for nearly the entire reign of Constans II (r. 641–668), it is nonetheless one of the most important sources for history from the reign of Phocas through Constantine V—in no small part due to the fame of its author rather than the work’s intrinsic merit.<sup>79</sup> Nikephoros’ use of names in this text is somewhat idiosyncratic. This short history does not have much on language—the sole mention of Latin names is Ἰταλῶν φωνῇ.<sup>80</sup> He never refers to Greek, but ‘Hellene’ is invariably a pejorative term, used in the sense of meaning ‘pagan’.<sup>81</sup> On the other hand, he regularly glosses ‘Christians’ as meaning ‘Romans’ in a cultural and even political sense.<sup>82</sup> Like other Greek-writing authors of this period, Nikephoros displays a high degree of laxity of precision in his terminology.

In spite of the relatively relaxed attitudes adopted by contemporaries with respect to linguistic labels, it is clear that the later medieval and modern colloquial usage of the signifier ‘Roman’ for the Greek language is unprecedented in the early middle ages. Where the ‘Roman tongue’ is mentioned in the sources, it is always Latin which is signified—and this is consistent from Procopius in the sixth century through Constantine VII in the tenth. Even though Greek education and literature were of central importance to Roman elite culture in this time, and the Greek language was increasingly utilized as the *de facto* language of state administration, the signifiers for language and culture remained different.

## 2 SOURCE BIAS AND IDEOLOGY

In the Greek-writing world, there is a dearth of extant narrative historical sources written between the conclusion of the *Chronicon Paschale* in 627 and the turn of the ninth century, with the *Breviarum* of Nikephoros written in the 780s and Theophanes’ *Chronographia* in 810–814.<sup>83</sup> History was of course written during the intervening two centuries—Theophanes and Nikephoros made extensive use of now-lost Greek historical sources

<sup>79</sup> Mango, *Nikephoros’ Breviarum*, 1–7, 18–19.

<sup>80</sup> Patriarch Nikephoros I, *Nikephoros’ Breviarum*, § 49.10 p. 117.

<sup>81</sup> Patriarch Nikephoros I, § 26.7, 80.14 pp. 75, 153.

<sup>82</sup> Patriarch Nikephoros I, § 1.3, 65.16, 85.6 pp. 35, 135, 161.

<sup>83</sup> Mango, *Nikephoros’ Breviarum*, 8–12.

for their information about that period—but none of it survived in its original form. Thus, in a sense, the two centuries following the rise of Islam comprise a ‘dark age’ for historical sources about the Eastern Roman Empire. This historiographical darkness was not an accident but one which was created by later generations. The intervening period was one of profound change and transformation, encompassing the political violence unleashed by the rise of the Caliphate and the Bulgar Khaganate; the theological discord surrounding monoergetism, monotheletism, and iconoclasm; and the decline and recovery of monasteries and some urban sites. The ‘dark ages’ were a historical narrative, satisfying for later writers and their audiences, which explained the relationship between themselves (after the ninth century), their immediate past (the seventh and eighth centuries), their distant past (the sixth century and earlier), and their future.<sup>84</sup>

When studying the Greek sources for the Roman people of the seventh and eighth centuries, one principally encounters an early ninth century retelling of those earlier times. Some authentic contemporary voices can be found, either by close reading of sources or from liminal communities in the Roman world, but they are by far the exception which proves the rule. This reworking was, at least in part, ideologically motivated. These authors subscribed to a particular vision of the Roman community where ‘Orthodoxy,’ as defined by a given writer, became the ultimate test for a person or group’s belonging. This equation of Romans as Orthodox had an inverse formulation as well: heresy was part of barbarism. This particular rhetorical device had a long precedence in Christian Roman literature.

The equivalency of Roman with Orthodox is complicated by the changing fates of competing heterodox confessions in the period covered by this ‘dark age.’ The specific definition of Orthodoxy favoured by Nikephoros and Theophanes was in the minority through much of the seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries. The attitudes of earlier now-lost sources with regard to the contours of the Roman community were at odds with that of

<sup>84</sup> Even more than the label ‘Byzantium,’ the ‘dark age’ label is pejorative and its academic use is increasingly polarizing. Hence, the use of the term in this volume is limited to discussion of a specific quirk of historiography, and always accompanied by scare quotes. A few recent writers have attempted to reframe and revitalize the term, see especially Decker, *The Byzantine Dark Ages*, esp. 1–6.

Theophanes and Nikephoros.<sup>85</sup> The resolution of doctrinal disputes led to a partial censoring of history, which distorted the lens through which we are obliged to peer as we attempt to understand the significance of Roman group-membership. However, this process was neither systematic nor complete; where these narratives bend, we find evidence for many alternative conceptualizations for the boundaries and significance of what it meant to be Roman.

Any attempts to understand the ideological component of the Eastern Roman Imperial Church (the institution headed by the bishop of Constantinople) in the century following the Arab conquests encounters the unavoidable problem that, in the eyes of all extant sources, most of the emperors were heterodox and their policies heretical. Of the sixteen emperors to reign between 610 and 802, at least eight were unrepentant proponents of ‘heresy’ at the time their reign ended. Heraclius (610–641), Constantine III (641), Heraclonas (641), Constans II (641–668), and Phillipicus Bardanes (711–713) all supported monotheletism, a doctrine condemned at the third council of Constantinople in 680–681. Leo III (717–741), probably Artabasdus (741–743), Constantine V (741–775), and Leo IV (775–780) promoted iconoclasm, condemned at the second council of Nicaea in 787. In contrast, the extant historians (Patriarch Nikephoros and the monk Theophanes) dedicated their careers to the opposition of iconoclasm. Consequently, historians and compilers working in later generations promoted narratives which were critical to the point of hostility of the religious ideological programs of these regimes, a critical stance which translated into antipathy towards the character of these emperors and marginalization and obfuscation of their accomplishments on behalf of the Roman Empire. There were two distinct moments when the Orthodox position was redefined and refocused: the first with the defeat of the monothelete doctrine, the second with the end of iconoclasm.

These historical works by Nikephoros and Theophanes offered concise and theologically corrected accounts penned by some of the most illustrious churchmen of their day. Their works spread quickly across linguistic boundaries—a Latin translation of Theophanes’ *Chronographia* was produced by the *Bibliothecarius* Anastasius (*circa* 810–*circa* 878) in Rome, and disseminated

<sup>85</sup> Mango, *Nikephoros’ Breviarum*, 12–18; Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a World Crisis*, 306–9.

into Western Europe, by the end of the ninth century.<sup>86</sup> These works replaced many earlier sources from which they had drawn their information. Major identifiable, but no-longer extant, works utilized in these sources include an ‘eastern source’ and a political account of the ‘anarchy’ (AD 695–717) from a Constantinople perspective.<sup>87</sup> Nikephoros and Theophanes had an enormous impact in shaping our historical understanding of the Roman community during these transformative years, and their vision is certainly one of a Roman world which self-identifies not only as Christians, but as specifically Chalcedonian, dyothelete, and iconodule ‘Orthodox.’

### *Sources from the Spatial and Conceptual Periphery*

Supplementary historical material preserved in Greek overwhelmingly adheres to the same ideological outlook as Nikephoros and Theophanes. Thus the words and works of Maximus the Confessor (d. 662) have come down to us preserved in time, and not those of his leading opponents, the patriarchs of Constantinople Sergios (r. 610–638) or Pyrrhus (r. 638–641, 654). For iconoclasm, one of the most important extant sources for the heterodox position is the *Acta* of the council held at Hieria in 754, a text only preserved in the *Acta* of the subsequent second council of Nicaea, held in 787, which quotes the earlier council only to refute and overturn it.<sup>88</sup> Surviving Greek sources from the period were subjected to a kind of censorship which leaves us with few voices which do not adhere to the official ‘Orthodox’ line as established after 843.

However, a few accounts have endured whose preservation comes from outside the mainstream, Constantinopolitan-centric Roman world. Such works are preserved through fortuitous accident, principally because of geography or language. One such work is the hostile *vita* of Maximus the Confessor, preserved in Syriac. It fits in with other contemporary examples of *ad hominem* attacks against heresiarchs, only differing in its definition of ‘Orthodoxy.’ This contemporary biography was preserved by members of the proto-Maronite Church in Syria.<sup>89</sup> The Chalcedonian churches in Syria had accepted monotheletism in the 630s when the

<sup>86</sup> Mango and Scott, *Theophanes' Chronicle*, xciv–xcvii.

<sup>87</sup> Mango and Scott, lxxii–xcv. See also Hoyland, *Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle*; Wolf, *Conquerors and Chroniclers of Early Medieval Spain*.

<sup>88</sup> Cormack, *Byzantine Art*, 87; Brubaker, Haldon, and Ousterhout, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era c. 680–850. A History*.

<sup>89</sup> Brock (1973), pp. 299ff.

doctrine received the official backing of Heraclius and his administration. Many rejected the Sixth Ecumenical Council in 680–681, thereby preserving some doctrines and documents which were expunged from Greek sources.<sup>90</sup>

The linguistic periphery provides another vector for the preservation of alternative narratives of Roman history. In Armenia, a sometimes-province of the Empire in this period, the historical account attributed to the bishop Sebeos (fl. 650s–670s) presents a detailed picture of the policies and actions, at least as they impact Armenia, of Constans II, an emperor vilified in later Greek sources for his support of monotheletism.<sup>91</sup> Another crucial work, also written in Armenian, is the *History of Caucasian Albania*. Although compiled in the tenth century by Movsēs Dasxuranc’i, it contains unique accounts of the eastern Caucasus in the seventh century, and in particular fills in the details of the remarkable career of Javanshir (r. 637–680), the Christian ruler of the region who successfully played the Sasanid, Roman, and Muslim empires off one another.<sup>92</sup>

In the West, much of Italy and Africa was also still a part of the Roman Empire, a legacy of the Justinianic re-conquest in the 530s, 540s, and 550s. There, the historical narrative for the seventh and eighth centuries is formed principally by the accounts in the *Liber Pontificalis* (*Lives of the Bishops of Rome*). This document gives a short summary of every pontificate, including a brief biography of the individual and a list of any accomplishment while in office. As the work is structured around the office of the bishop of Rome itself, the narratives place heavy emphasis on the roles which the popes played in shaping Orthodoxy and winning theological disputes against the sometimes-heterodox bishops of New Rome.<sup>93</sup>

Even the papacy’s triumphantly Orthodox vision of the Roman community in Italy had its challengers. Foremost was the bishopric of Ravenna, whose see was the seat of the exarch, and thus the centre of imperial political power in the peninsula. Like the bishops of Rome, the lives of the bishops of Ravenna were chronicled in their own *Liber Pontificalis Ecclesiae Ravennatis*.<sup>94</sup> The work’s structure is much the same as the more famous version for the papacy, but its authority was not anonymous. The lives

<sup>90</sup> Rajji (1951). Gribomont (1974). Brock (1985), pp. 35–45.

<sup>91</sup> (Pseudo-) Sebeos, *Historia Armeniae*, tr. Thomson and Howard-Johnston (1999).

<sup>92</sup> Movsēs Dasxuranc’i, *Historia Iberiae*, tr. Dowsett (1961).

<sup>93</sup> *Liber Pontificalis*, tr. Davis (3rd ed. 2010).

<sup>94</sup> Agnellus, *Liber Pontificalis ecclesiae Ravennatis*. Tr. Deliyannis (2004).

were collated and recorded in the ninth century by Andreas Agnellus (fl. 840s). This work gives an alternative narrative for the history of imperial subjects and their Roman community in northern Italy during the mid-seventh to the mid-eighth centuries.<sup>95</sup>

These works tell us about life and communities in liminal spaces at the edge of Roman society, giving valuable insight into the plural nature of the Roman community in the early middle ages. In spite of these sources, the narrative of seventh and eighth centuries from mainstream Greek historiography is largely consistent and ‘Orthodox.’ However inconsistencies occasionally occur, especially within Theophanes’ large opus. When Theophanes drew on information from sources which did not align with his own ideological program, he faced the difficult task of disentangling truth from heretical ideology, a process which he was not always able to do seamlessly. Theophanes relied on pro-iconoclast sources for some of his data, a fact demonstrated in his account of the Muslim siege of Constantinople in 717:

On 1 September of the 1st indiction Christ’s enemy Souleiman sailed up with his fleet and his emirs. He had enormous ships, military transports, and dromones to the number of 1,800. ... Straight away, *the pious emperor* [Leo III] sent against them the fire-bearing ships from the Acropolis and, *with divine help*, set them on fire [and sank them]. ... As a result, the inhabitants of the City took courage, whereas the enemy cowered with fear after experiencing the efficacious action of the liquid fire: for [the Saracens] had intended to beach their ships that evening by the sea walls and set their steering paddles upon the battlements. But *God brought their counsel to naught through the intercession of the all-pure Theotokos.*<sup>96</sup>

Here is a piece of an uncorrected source, containing numerous specific details about the events of the Arab siege—note both the geographical specificity and the details assigned to specific dates. These features point to an original author who knew the layout of Constantinople with first-hand knowledge of the events.<sup>97</sup> Here, in the passage drawn directly from a contemporary witness, we find that Leo, elsewhere in the chronicle reviled

<sup>95</sup> Deliyannis, ‘Introduction’ (2004), pp. 3–13.

<sup>96</sup> Theophanes, *Chronographia*, AM 6209, tr. Mango and Scott (1997), pp. 541–46.

<sup>97</sup> Mango and Scott ‘Commentary’ (1997), p. 547 n. 5.

as impious and an enemy of the faith,<sup>98</sup> is the heroic saviour of New Rome, remembered as both pious and the recipient of the intercession of the Mother of God. It is this earlier author to whom positive judgements about the then-reigning emperor should be ascribed, and which Theophanes, perhaps because he was not reminded about the emperor's identity by name at this particular point in the narrative, failed to 'correct' to adhere to the new ideological program.

Just as historical information had intrinsic value even if it sometimes needed 'correcting,' so too the life of a saint had intrinsic worth.<sup>99</sup> Throughout history, saints were venerated across theological divides.<sup>100</sup> The same is true for the competing heterodoxies of the seventh and eighth century, where saints have been posthumously made to adhere to the correct form of the faith according to the author of their *vita*. As happened with historiography, many hagiographies were rewritten in later ages for the same reasons—to construct more ideologically satisfying accounts of a monastic founder's life and the institution's origins and history. A saint's orthodoxy was a particular concern for monasteries, many of whom had benefitted from patronage from potentially embarrassing sources.

Such is the case of the life of Anthousa of Mantineon, an abbess from Paphlagonia and a contemporary of the heterodox emperor Constantine V. According to her *vita*, she was imprisoned at the emperor's command, and subjected to torture on account of her faithful reverence of the icons.<sup>101</sup> However, she was miraculously reconciled with the imperial family in the following manner:

Then, when the emperor was traveling through the province with his entire army, so as to summon the great [Anthousa] and examine her himself, as a

<sup>98</sup> For example, Theophanes, *Chronographia*, AM 6211, 6217, 6218, tr. Mango and Scott (1997), pp. 551–52, 558–61.

<sup>99</sup> On the holy man's unique authority, see Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity"; Fowden, "The Pagan Holy Man in Late Antique Society"; Brown, "The Saint as Exemplar in Late Antiquity."

<sup>100</sup> For earlier examples, one may look to the North African saints whose *vitae* exist in both Donatist and Catholic traditions. Tilley, *Donatist Martyr Stories*.

<sup>101</sup> This is practically a trope for saints of the iconoclast era, all of whom must prove their Orthodoxy in some way. Others from the first phase of iconoclasm include: George Limnaioites (d. ca. 730), Hypatios and Andrew (d. 730s), Paul of Kaioumas (d. 771–775), Stephen of Sougdaia (fl. 720s), Stephen the Younger (d. 767), and Theophilos Confessor (fl. 720s–730s). C.f. eponymous entries in Kazhdan and Talbot, *Dumbarton Oaks Hagiography Database*.

result of her prayers blindness bound him fast and prevented him from carrying out his designs against her. When queried by the emperor, she said to the empress, who was experiencing a difficult pregnancy and was in mortal danger, that all would be well and she would give birth to one male and one female child. And she foretold the mode and way of life of each [child]. When the empress heard this, she donated numerous villages and offerings to the monasteries under [Anthousa's] direction, and the tyrannical ruler desisted from his attack on her. Thus virtue has the power of taming wild beasts and making enemies of friends.<sup>102</sup>

Here, the author of the *vita* has attempted to reconcile two contradictory facts. In the first case, Anthousa secured significant support for her followers by forging personal bonds with the ruling family—an act for which she appears to have been commemorated, for one of Constantine's daughters, presumably the one whose fortune the abbess had foretold, was given the name Anthousa.<sup>103</sup> Yet however much prestige and piety this connection brought the saint and her monastic community, it nevertheless came from a man who was reviled as a heretic, so any action taken against him was a pious one. Living in a time after the Isaurian dynasty and its iconoclast policies had fallen out of favour and presented with these competing moral imperatives, the author's solution was to obscure, as much as possible, the iconoclastic source of her patronage as well as the fact that her friendship with the imperial family.

While Theophanes and Nikephoros wrote around the turn of the ninth century, their complete dominance within Greek historiography is actually a product of the tenth century. It was only then that the *Breviarum* the *Chronographia* became widely copied and distributed, eclipsed their source material, and achieved foundational status among later historians. Theophanes' *Chronicon* particularly was heavily used either as the starting point for historical narratives by many later authors, such as George the Monk (fl. 840s–860s), Joseph Genesius (tenth century), and John Skylitzes (eleventh century). By the time John Zonaras (twelfth century) set out to compose a new chronicle of the entirety of world history, he has no sources to draw upon but Theophanes for the ‘dark ages.’ Earlier accounts upon which Theophanes and Nikephoros drew ceased to be copied or read. As

<sup>102</sup> Talbot, “Life of St. Anthousa of Mantineon,” 18.

<sup>103</sup> Anonymous, *Synaxarium ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae*, 613–14, 597–600.

a result, effectively no contemporary historical accounts survive in Greek which narrate the Roman response to the rise of Islam and the impact of this challenge on Roman society.<sup>104</sup>

The seventh and eighth centuries were constructed as a ‘dark age’ by later generations who struggled to formulate myths to explain their own history. It was created in the ninth and tenth centuries as a myth about the Romans’ own past as a means of reconciling rupture and continuity. The use of the term ‘dark age’ here thus bears a sense of ironic play, engaging with the pejorative expectations which the term brings when applied to the early medieval Latin west,<sup>105</sup> but is ultimately appropriate in the present context because it is the historiographical narrative surviving Greek primary sources present.

### *Diverse Voices*

This impulse to produce a sterilized, Orthodox myth of the ideal Roman society produced dissonance between the ideologically-pure Christian empire of the chroniclers’ expectations and the necessarily more tolerant realities of Roman rule. Rhetorical constructions of the collective self obscure the true diversity of the Roman people. The imperial citizenry was not only comprised of various Greek-speaking followers of one Christian heterodoxy or another, but of people who belonged to differing religious and ‘ethnic’ communities altogether. Beyond heretics, evidence supports the existence of lingering polytheistic, pre-Christian cults (‘pagans’),<sup>106</sup> alongside Jews and other non-Christian monotheists (such as the Athinganoi and Paulicians).<sup>107</sup> As individuals, these people were citizens of a Roman polity who played a role in the state, if not necessarily within its governing elite, in spite of its explicit support of and identification with Christianity. These peoples present a problem for the authors of our sources, for while they do not adhere to the authors’ own concept of a Roman community which they defined in part by its Christianity, non-Christians were clearly still part of the Roman people in practice.

<sup>104</sup> Angold and Whitby, “Historiography.”

<sup>105</sup> Nelson, “The Dark Ages.”

<sup>106</sup> Sarris, *Empires of Faith: The Fall of Rome to the Rise of Islam, 500–700*, 221.

<sup>107</sup> de Lange, “Hellenism and Hebraism Reconsidered: The Poetics of Cultural Influence and Exchange,” 129–45; Sharf, *Byzantine Jewry*, 71–74, 102, 116–18; Charanis, “Cultural Diversity and the Breakdown of Byzantine Power in Asia Minor.”

Although there are very few references to ‘pagans’ after the sixth century, there is some evidence that pre-Christian cults survived into later centuries. Inside the Aurelian Walls of Rome, one of the seats of Christian authority, at least some non-Christian activity continued into the sixth and even the early seventh centuries. During the siege of the city in AD 537–538, Procopius mentions that ‘some Romans … who had in mind the old belief’ secretly opened the doors of the Temple of Janus in the custom of ‘the Romans in olden times.’<sup>108</sup> Other evidence for continued non-Christian cult activity is recorded in the *Chronicon Venetum et Gradense*, attributed to the chronicler John the Deacon (d. 1009).

Pope Boniface [III (February–November 607)] asked [Emperor Phokas (602–610)] to order that in the old temple called the Pantheon, after the pagan filth was removed, a church should be made to the Holy Virgin Mary and all the martyrs, so that the commemoration of the saints would take place henceforth where not gods but demons were formerly worshipped.<sup>109</sup>

This event is widely remarked upon in Latin historiography, and was commemorated with the erection of a column in the old forum dedicated to Emperor Phokas—significantly, the last monumental addition to that space in antiquity.<sup>110</sup> John the Deacon’s comment that the ‘pagan filth’ required removal indicates that this was not some sanctuary abandoned or retired, but one which was still, in the eyes of its new congregants, being polluted by non-Christian activity right up until it was repurposed.

Although pagan cult activity in the major cities of the Empire no longer receives attention after the early seventh century—suggesting that traditional Greco-Roman religion was not much practised anymore—nonetheless there remained significant and noteworthy communities that followed pre-Christian, polytheistic cults, at least on the edges of the Roman world. The principal examples of this, of course, lie to the north, in the Balkans and the Eurasian steppes. The Slavic ‘invasions’ of the Hellas, whatever the historical reality of their demographic impact on the region aside,<sup>111</sup> brought significant numbers of these non-monotheists into the

<sup>108</sup> Procopius Caesariensis, *Opera Omnia*, V.xxv.18–25.

<sup>109</sup> John the Deacon, *Chronicon Venetum et Gradense*, 8.20–22.

<sup>110</sup> Davis, *The Lives of the Ninth-Century Popes (Liber Pontificalis)*, 61; Bede, *Chronicon Maiora*, 331.

<sup>111</sup> Charanis, “The Chronicle of Monemvasia and the Question of Slavonic Settlements in Greece,” 139–66; Curta, *Southeastern Europe in the Middle Ages*, 500–1250, 70–110.

countryside of the early medieval Roman Balkans. Some of these people, in turn, were subjugated and resettled by the Roman state elsewhere, particularly to Anatolia, at later dates.<sup>112</sup> Wherever they ended up, they were gradually incorporated into Roman society, through collecting taxation, and, eventually, converting them to Christianity in increasing numbers from the late eighth century onwards.

In addition, new non-Christian states arose which presented major challenges to the Roman polity in these centuries. The Avars, a steppe peoples who migrated into the Balkans, became the hegemonic power over Pannonia by the end of the sixth century. They ruled over a heterogeneous population, conquering other steppe peoples, Slavs, and the Romans who did not flee. By the early seventh century, their rule extended from the upper Danube to Thrace.<sup>113</sup> However, the failure of the Avar expeditions to capture the two principal cities of the southern Balkans—Thessalonica and Constantinople—in the early 620s eroded the authority of their khagans over their diverse subjects, allowing the Romans to re-establish control over much of the Balkans in middle decades of the seventh century.<sup>114</sup> The Avars and the Slav peoples of the central Balkans retained their pre-Christian cults until the period of the missions of Ss. Cyril and Methodius, in the mid-ninth century.<sup>115</sup>

Other non-Christian powers continued to have a major impact on the Roman polity throughout the early middle ages. In the eastern Balkans, another steppe peoples, the Bulgars, seized the lower Danube basin and Moesia from the Romans in the 680s. Their khaganate would be a major regional power for the next three centuries, and resisted Christianization for almost two of them, until the conversion of Boris I in AD 864.<sup>116</sup> Still further east lay the steppes themselves, in regular contact with the Roman world via the important trade cities on the Crimean peninsula, which connected swiftly to Constantinople by ship across the Euxine Sea. A Turkic

<sup>112</sup>This happened under Justinian II. This was a continuation of normal Roman frontier management policies with precedents stretching back centuries. Heather, *Empires and Barbarians*, 333–59.

<sup>113</sup>Pohl, *The Avars*; Daim, “Avars and Avar Archaeology: An Introduction.”

<sup>114</sup>Curta, *Southeastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 500–1250*, 90–96; Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century*, 44–48; Haldon, *The Empire That Would Not Die*.

<sup>115</sup>Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century*, 351–53; Betti, *The Making of Christian Moravia*, (858–882).

<sup>116</sup>Florin. Curta, *The Making of the Slavs History and Archaeology of the Lower Danube Region, ca. 500–700*; Curta, *Southeastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 500–1250*, 81–90.

khaganate allied with Heraclius to invade the Caucasus against the Sassanians in the 620s, but their hegemony over the region did not last much past the end of that war. By the 640s and 650s, when the first Arab armies were pushing into the region, the foremost regional powers were the Khazars, who would continue to dominate the region throughout the rest of the seventh, eighth, and well into the ninth centuries.<sup>117</sup>

Some of these non-Christian neighbouring peoples became integrated into the Roman elite. Various Roman emperors made marriage alliances with the steppe khagans to the north: Heraclius sealed his alliance against the Sassanians by marrying one of his daughters to a Turkic khagan in 628;<sup>118</sup> Justinian II secured an alliance during his exile which would allow him to reclaim the throne by marrying a Khazar princess in the early 700s;<sup>119</sup> and Constantine V was married to Tzitzak, baptized ‘Irene,’ another Khazar princess who bore him the future emperor Leo IV.<sup>120</sup> Thomas ‘the Slav’ was already pursuing a promising military career by the turn of the ninth century, and would lead a failed usurpation attempt against Michael III in the early 820s.<sup>121</sup> Clearly people of non-Christian origins could be found not just among the peasantry near the frontiers, but included individuals belonging to the highest levels of Roman society throughout this period.

A similar pattern can be found along the empire’s eastern frontier. Later evidence can be found for the continued presence of practitioners of pre-Christian cults. In the year 779/780, Theophanes tells us that:

In this year Madi, the leader of the Arabs, came to Dabekon with a great armed force and sent his son Aaron against the Roman country, while he himself returned to the Holy City. He sent out Mouchesias surnamed the Zealot and gave him authority to convert the slaves of Christians and to ruin the holy churches. This man came as far as Emesa and announced that *he would not oblige anyone except former infidels to become Muslim, anticipating the Jews and Christians to make themselves known.* Then straight away he

<sup>117</sup> Zuckerman, *La Crimée entre Byzance et le Khaganat Khazar*.

<sup>118</sup> Zuckerman, “La Petite Augusta et Le Turc. Epiphania-Eudocie Sur Les Monnaies d’Héraclius”; Zuckerman, “Au Sujet de La Petite Augusta Sur Les Monnaies d’Héraclius.”

<sup>119</sup> Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century*, 76ff.

<sup>120</sup> Pritsak, “The Khazar Kingdom’s Conversion to Judaism.”

<sup>121</sup> John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History*, 811–1057, 10–15, 30–44.

began torturing them in a godless manner, worse than Lysias and Agrikolaos of olden time, and many of them he destroyed.<sup>122</sup>

Although this story is a relatively straightforward and familiar one of perfidious Muslim persecution of Christians, what is interesting is the means by which the emir drew them out. The ‘infidels’ ( $\tauούς \acute{α}πό \acute{α}πίστων$ ),<sup>123</sup> whom the emir claimed to have come to forcibly convert to Islam, were presented as a coherent group which was separate from and contrasted with Jews, Christians, and Muslims. For this ruse to have been effective, it must have been believable to his intended targets, the city’s Christians. This evidences that communities of pre-Christians still lingered into at least the eighth century in the near east, particularly in liminal areas where state structures were at their weakest.

Jews had long been part of the Roman *oikoumene*, a group whose status fluctuated significantly over the centuries.<sup>124</sup> Although constituting a large and geographically widespread minority, there is a paucity of securely dated indigenous evidence. Historians rely upon voluminous exegetical and liturgical literature and archaeology to balance and give nuance to the external Christian documentation of the Jewish community’s history.<sup>125</sup> A long history of resistance and rebellion characterize the activities of the Jewish community towards the Roman polity, exemplified by the major Jewish revolts in AD 66–73, 115–117, and 132–136 all of which concluded with devastating Roman victories.<sup>126</sup> The centuries of late antiquity witnessed the gradual systematic restriction of Jewish civic, economic, and religious rights. Although recognized legally as a *religio licita* by the Theodosian code, Justinian’s novels increased the restrictions on the community.<sup>127</sup> Justinian’s restrictions in particular provoked violent resistance, such as the Samaritan revolts in AD 529 and 556.<sup>128</sup> By the seventh and eighth centuries, Jews were subjects not only to legal restrictions but state-sponsored persecutions and forcible conversions, particularly under

<sup>122</sup> Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, AM 6272 pp. 624–25.

<sup>123</sup> A term regularly used in Christian polemic to signify ‘pagans.’ Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*,  $\acute{α}πιστία$ , ḡ.

<sup>124</sup> Bowman, “Jews in Byzantium.”

<sup>125</sup> de Lange, “Jews in the Age of Justinian,” 403–7.

<sup>126</sup> de Lange, 402–3.

<sup>127</sup> Theodosius II, *Codex Theodosianus*, 12.1.100, 12.1.158, 12.1.64–65; Justinian I, *Novellae*, 45, 131, 146; Justinian I, *Codex Iustinianus*, 1.2.44, 1.9.10.

<sup>128</sup> de Lange, “Jews in the Age of Justinian,” 408, 410.

Heraclius *circa* 632.<sup>129</sup> Neither pagans nor heretics, Jews (and Samaritans) fell into an intermediate category of infidel monotheists, alongside Muslims, Manichaeans, and Paulicians.

Tensions between the Roman state and its Jewish subjects increased further during the early Islamic periods, although with Palestine lost the number of Jews and Samaritans in Rhomania became far fewer. As the state became increasingly explicitly Christian and Orthodox in its ideology over the course of the seventh and eighth centuries, the loyalties of its citizens who practised minority religions became more suspect. Roman Jews still mostly appear in Greek sources as targets of periodic conversion efforts. As Theophanes records in his entry for Ad 721/722:

In this year the emperor [Leo III] forced the Jews and the Montanists to accept baptism. The Jews, for their part, were baptized against their will and then washed off their baptism; and they partook of holy communion on a full stomach and so defiled the faith. As for the Montanists, they made division among themselves and, after determining a certain day, entered the houses appointed for their false worship and burnt themselves.<sup>130</sup>

Forcible baptism was also carried out under Heraclius as part of a wider movement at that time to reconcile and homogenize the empire's various faith-communities in the aftermath of the disastrous war against Sassanian Iran. Interestingly, Theophanes' account of the affair is ambiguous: the emperor's actions are not praised, while the heathens' defilement of the Christian sacrament is reprehensible but expected. Although giving the impression that Roman Jewish community's existence was troubled and precarious at times, this story and others like it confirm that Jews continued to live as communities within the context of the early medieval Roman state.

Alongside Jews, other monotheist infidels—neither heretical Christians nor pagans—were also Romans in this time. Many of these, too, were citizens of the polity, much to the chagrin of the pious chroniclers who were forced to acknowledge their existence.

<sup>129</sup> de Lange, 420–21; Dagron and Deroche, “Juifs et Chrétiens Dans l’Orient Du VIIe Siècle,” 28–32.

<sup>130</sup> Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, AM 6214 pp. 554–55. See also AM 6120 when Emperor Heraclius while travelling is hosted by a city's most prominent and wealthy citizen—who happens to be a Jew, who was persuaded to convert as a result of the encounter.

In this year Nikephoros extended his designs against the Christians. ... The emperor was an ardent friend of the Manichees (now called Paulicians) and of his close neighbours, the Athinganoi of Phrygia and Lykaonia, and delighted in their prophecies and rites. ... Those *heretics were given leave during his reign to enjoy the rights of citizenship without fear* so that many of the more frivolous kind became corrupted by their illicit doctrines.<sup>131</sup>

Theophanes makes it clear that in an ideal order these groups should not participate in society as equals. The Roman state ought to be an extension of Christian society. However, it is also clear that his ideal Roman community was neither a reality, nor a vision of that community accepted by all even within the empire's elite. An exclusively Christian empire was an ideological construct at odds with the pluralistic nature of Roman society. Despite the historical myth which Theophanes sought to weave, in practice emperors exercised a degree of pragmatism in dealing with their diverse subjects.

Christian ideology played a large role in the rhetorical constructions of the collective Roman 'self,' a trope which had a long precedent in late antiquity. This process of group creation led to the othering of certain minority groups within Roman society. Such perspectives, though dominant in Greek eastern sources, are far from the only way which people perceived and defined the Roman community. In practice, the label 'Roman' was used and negotiated by individuals of diverse languages, faiths, and social statuses.

### 3 OTHER METHODS AND APPROACHES

The issue of identities at the end of antiquity and in the beginning of the middle ages has recently received considerable academic attention. As a result other scholars, too, have perceived problems with the way in which Eastern Roman identities have been treated. However, some approaches and methodologies differ from those used in this volume, in some cases quite significantly. It is thus necessary to briefly survey the existing approaches.

In a 2014 article, Stouraitis categorized three principal approaches in literature on Roman identity in the 'Byzantine' period. This taxonomy,

<sup>131</sup> Theophanes Confessor, AM 6303 pp. 671–75.

while somewhat broad in its approach, nonetheless provides a clear path for present discussion to follow. The first approach situates medieval identity as a particular manifestation of uninterrupted ‘Hellenic’ identity. Supported by scholars such as Charanis and Vryonis, such an approach sees the Eastern Roman Empire as implicitly linking antiquity to the modern nation-state.<sup>132</sup> Such approaches borrow heavily from primordialist traditions of group identity and origins as well as from the Vienna school of ‘ethnogenesis,’ a model used to describe the successful transition of some European ‘barbarians’ from short-lived tribal alliances into nations defined by ‘language, religion, customs, and pigmentation.’<sup>133</sup> The principal problem with that approach is that, at least throughout the first millennium AD, Greek-speakers were but one part of the Roman project, which could and did embrace diverse linguistic and cultural groups within its political system as Romans.<sup>134</sup>

The second and most common approach normatively describes the empire as a multi-ethnic polity. This is the dominant way in which Roman identity is presented in contemporary English, French, and German literature.<sup>135</sup> The principal problem with this approach is that it lacks theoretical framework; scholars who want to leverage the observations to make insights turn to other conceptual tools for the job. The limitations of ethnic discourse for describing the medieval Romans has led some scholars to place greater emphasis on the role of the political nature of Roman identity. This approach has been most vociferously promoted by Kaldellis, who has pioneered an interpretation of ‘Byzantium’ as a pre-modern

<sup>132</sup> C.f. Vakalopoulos, “Byzantinism and Hellenism. Remarks on the Racial Origin and the Intellectual Continuity of the Greek Nation”; Charanis, “The Formation of the Greek People.”

<sup>133</sup> Stouraitis, “Roman Identity in Byzantium,” 207.

<sup>134</sup> When discussing the situation in the ninth-century Balkans, he notes: ‘From the point of view of the Roman ruling élite both the Slavs and the Greeks were Roman subjects and their ethno-cultural categorization was not intended to distinguish the Romans (Greeks) from the non-Romans (Slavs), but rather two collectives with certain cultural differences within the imperial power’s realm, as seen by the political and historiographical discourse of Constantinople.’ Stouraitis, 209.

<sup>135</sup> Cf. esp. Koder, “Byzanz, Die Griechen Und Die Romaiosyne – Ein ‘Ethnogenese’ Der ‘Römer?’,” 103–11; Magdalino, *Tradition and Transformation in Medieval Byzantium*, XIV; Chrysos, “The Roman Political Identity in Late Antiquity and Early Byzantium”; Rapp, “Hellenic Identity, Romanitas, and Christianity in Byzantium.”

nation-state of the Roman peoples.<sup>136</sup> This approach advances beyond either subordinating historical experiences to later myth-making or merely attempting to provide a normative description, although the particular method has limitations—not the least of which is the problematic nature of the concept of ‘nation’ in a pre-modern context.<sup>137</sup> Others have also constructed medieval Roman identity as one principally centred upon the state, such as Ando’s emphasis on state ideology as the principal driving force for unity.<sup>138</sup> Stouraitis criticized this approach, in part, for being too egalitarian in its conceptualization of late antique and early medieval society and deemphasizing the clear structural hierarchies of class and geography.<sup>139</sup>

Stouraitis’ article, while offering corrections and commentaries on the general state of scholarship in the field, has its own problems. The first is a common problem of scope, for he attempts to present a harmonized understanding of identity in the *longue durée*, from the seventh through the twelfth centuries. Such an approach obliterates important changes and developments over time, for example anachronistically construing Greek as the ‘Roman language’ throughout the period.<sup>140</sup> The approach also gives exclusive priority to one particular definition of the Roman community, an ‘ideology of expansion … informed by the Roman imperial office’s historical myth,’<sup>141</sup> and one not limited by the territorial extent of Rhomania. Although this is the dominant discourse on the nature of Romanness encountered in historical sources, it is not the only one. There was considerable diversity in the conceptualization and realization of group identity just in the two centuries or so following the rise of Islam, much less in the other four which Stouraitis examines. In responding to the over-egalitarian models of state-identity, this approach prioritizes the experiences and identities of the Constantinopolitan and

<sup>136</sup> Kaldellis, “Republican Theory and Political Dissidence in Ioannes Lydos”; Kaldellis, *The Byzantine Republic*; Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium The Transformations of Greek Identity and the Reception of the Classical Tradition*; Kaldellis, *Ethnography After Antiquity*; Kaldellis, “From Rome to New Rome, from Empire to Nation-State: Reopening the Question of Byzantium’s Roman Identity.”

<sup>137</sup> Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 53–58; Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 5–6.

<sup>138</sup> Ando, *Imperial Ideology and Provincial Loyalty in the Roman Empire*.

<sup>139</sup> Stouraitis, “Roman Identity in Byzantium,” 180–85.

<sup>140</sup> Stouraitis, 177. On pp. 216–17 he notes the equation of Latin with the “Roman language” in Theophanes’ *Chronographia* and the *De Thematibus*, but as an archaic reference and not standard practice for the time.

<sup>141</sup> Stouraitis, 187.

literary elite to the exclusion of all others, arguing that ‘Romanness was primarily understood and propagated by the Constantinopolitan ruling élite as an identity of allegiance/submission to the Roman political order.’<sup>142</sup> The assertion ignores the ample attestation to the important roles which peripheral members of society played in creating and negotiating identity, which will be explored in Chap. 4.

Like the other approaches to which he responded, Stouraitis’ approach is most limited by modelling identity first and foremost as positive phenomenon, something formulated and defined by its central anchors (be it the state, a language, or ethnicity). As sociological methods have demonstrated, this alone cannot suffice to describe and explain group identity and continuity. Boundaries, where a group becomes negatively defined by what it is not, are of equal consequence. It is not enough to describe the society’s attributes, identity relies on the articulation of difference and the upkeep of boundaries and frontiers, in this case articulated in terms of Romans and barbarians. These limits necessitated both individuals and communities choose to be Romans and perform their identities as such. While these choices and performances were informed by the political and ideological structures organized around the Constantinopolitan literary elite, they were separate from them and equally essential to our understanding of Romanness.

### *Modelling Groups and Boundaries*

The essays edited and introduced by Barth in his 1969 volume argued for the persistence of boundaries as more important for explaining ethnic group continuity than the normative criteria which appears to unite it. In the half-century since, his observations have sparked further criticism, analysis, and refinement. Subsequent developments in modelling societies and group dynamics present different questions and ways of thinking which can be asked in order to advance our understanding of identity in the early medieval Roman world.

Wimmer’s 2013 survey of sociological models for the formation of cultural and ethnic boundaries provides a good starting guide. He viewed Barth as a pioneer who contributed two ‘substantial insights’ to the study of group identities: boundaries are subjectively perceived by the actors rather than objective facts; and boundaries are socially significant despite

<sup>142</sup> Stouraitis, 195–99, quote at 201.

being porous for individuals.<sup>143</sup> However, for Wimmer, Barth's modelling suffers from ascribing 'value difference' to group boundaries. Instead, Wimmer suggests that we should view boundaries in terms of 'social closure,'<sup>144</sup> advancing his own 'theory of cultural negotiation and compromise,' an attempt to move the discussion beyond merely positivistic descriptions of group dynamics and push into analysing how categories of identification are chosen by actors for their everyday 'social closure.'<sup>145</sup> He urges that group formation—or non-formation—ought to be approached as an 'open question' with a wide scope of possible answers, particularly looking to alternative sources of group formation such as educational and professional networks, religious communities, or neighbourhoods.<sup>146</sup> These insights—into the negotiated nature of these social interactions, into the use of categorization and compromise by actors—inform the discussion of Roman identity throughout Chaps. 3, 4, and 5.

Other thinkers have advanced completely different models for ethnic social structures, built around viewing categories in terms of hierarchies instead of boundaries. Wimmer connects and contrasts Barth's relentless focus on boundaries with a 'nesting' model of social identification, as advanced by Moerman and followed up by Okamura, Jenkins, and others.<sup>147</sup> This model views identities as having a 'relational nature,' comprising a 'hierarchy of nested segments.'<sup>148</sup> In the context of the early medieval Roman polity, one could imagine how an individual born in the city of Xanthos might identify first with his or her family, and then with their city, then with their province (Lycia), then with Romanness and Christianness at the largest scale. This model allows for different ways to conceive of the interrelationship between categories and informs Chap. 6. However, the types of data available for the early medieval period prove a limiting factor—most of the categories nested within the concept of being Roman leave even less evidence for how individuals negotiated their use in everyday social situations.

Other theorists have pushed back against what they perceive as major limitations in how their colleagues are able and willing to conceptualize

<sup>143</sup> Wimmer, *Ethnic Boundary Making*, 205.

<sup>144</sup> Wimmer, 23.

<sup>145</sup> Wimmer, 206.

<sup>146</sup> Wimmer, 207.

<sup>147</sup> Moerman, "Ethnic Identification in a Complex Civilization"; Okamura, "Situational Ethnicity"; Jenkins, "Rethinking Ethnicity."

<sup>148</sup> Wimmer, *Ethnic Boundary Making*, 23.

groups and identities. In his 1981 monograph, van den Berghe criticizes his fellow social scientists for their inattention to biological factors in group dynamics and argues extensively for the importance of genetics and kin selection in the process of group-identity formation. He argues that there are, fundamentally, three ‘distinct but interrelated’ levels of human behaviour analysis: genes, ecology, and culture.<sup>149</sup> In the context of the late antique and early medieval Roman *oikoumene*, points about the importance of both ecology and kin selection colour the analysis in Chap. 6. There, we delve into the intersection between ecology and the empire’s human geography, as well as explore the role that the *oikos* played as the basic unit of Roman society.

Alternatively, R. Brubaker has challenged not just the concept but the very existence of a ‘group’ as a useful and meaningful model for understanding society. In his 1992 volume on *Citizenship and Nationhood*, he critiqued the ‘manner of thinking and talking about cultural and political belonging at the level of the nation-state.’<sup>150</sup> He compared two differing strands of nationalist discourse, one embracing a civic (*ius soli*) and the other an ethnic (*ius sanguinis*) idiom. Early medieval Romanness was not the same as modern nationalism, but some similarities are implicit to the discussion of Chap. 3.

In his 2004 monograph, R. Brubaker goes further still to criticize the very concept of ‘groupness.’ He separates categories of practice from categories of analysis. Even though groups are ‘common sense’ social units utilized by participants who perform in and invoke the collective identity, groups do not exist—it is only individuals who share certain characteristics.<sup>151</sup> R. Brubaker proposes that groupism as a concept needs to be challenged and rethought as an underpinning model of social relations. His observations, in turn, lead five key implications to help guide future socio-logical studies: (1) both actors and scholars have bias towards ethnicizing framing and coding dynamics; (2) organizations and institutions are central to understanding conflicts between groups; (3) the interests of those organizations’ leaders and their erstwhile constituents may not align; (4) groupness is ‘variable and contingent;’ (5) inter-group conflict is often promoted and sustained because of intra-group interests.<sup>152</sup> In the end,

<sup>149</sup> Van den Berghe, *The Ethnic Phenomenon*, 5.

<sup>150</sup> Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany*, 162.

<sup>151</sup> Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups*, 8–10.

<sup>152</sup> Brubaker, 18–20.

R. Brubaker argues that while scholars need to be mindful of actors' self-categorization, they need to be sceptical of its straightforwardness as an explanation—an admonition which stands double true in seeking to engage with identities in early medieval Rhomania.

This volume approaches Romanness as a label, and seeks to understand it as a sign system different from our own and specific in time and space. Barth's insights into the importance of boundaries, in part, shapes the structure of its chapters, due in no small part to the fact that the question of continuity remains a paramount unanswered problem for Romanness in the early middle ages. Sociological methodologies provide important alternative vectors of analysis, colouring the direction of the inquiry, and help tie together the diverse source material of the topic at hand.

#### 4 DISCUSSION: SIGNALLING CONTINUITY AND BOUNDARIES

This chapter has introduced a set of conceptual tools which can be used to describe the form and function of group identities generally, and Roman identity specifically. In the process of doing so, it has also established what sources can shed light on the issue. Romanness fulfills the basic sociological definitions needed to study group identity<sup>153</sup> and both Roman and non-Roman sources articulated the existence and significance of the label. Signifiers such as 'Roman,' 'Greek,' and 'Byzantine,' though they may all point to the same signified (concepts), do not form the same signs. Each term contains an abundance of culturally specific meanings and assumptions. These attitudes are pernicious when used by historians because they serve to subordinate the perspectives of the source material to an external western cultural narrative of history. Greek-speaking Romans constructed their own historical myths and narratives, which are lost when they are made to conform within the historical mythologizing of other cultures.

The importance of this point was made clear in the second section, which delved into the ideological conflicts which shaped not just Roman history during the early middle ages but the historical perspectives of later generations who sought to make sense of it. Socio-political conflicts within the institutional heart of the Roman Empire were depicted in the

<sup>153</sup> Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, 13–14.

dominant historical accounts—Nikephoros' *Breviarum* and Theophanes' *Chronographia*—in terms of doctrinal disputes in which ‘orthodoxy’ inevitably triumphed over monothelete and iconoclast ‘heretics’ of the ‘dark ages.’ This narrative engaged with pre-existing dialectics on self and other. Analysis of ‘minority’ sources, however, pointed to the novel and constructed nature of this story. As Barth observed, ‘much of the activity of political innovators is concerned with the codification of idioms: the selection of signals for identity and the assertion of value for these cultural diacritics, and the suppression or denial of relevance for other differences.’<sup>154</sup> The generation active at the turn of the ninth century interpreted and codified a historical myth about the ‘dark ages’ which resonated with audiences in their own time and later. As a result, extant historical accounts about the Romans in the era of early Islam are principally shaped by the realities of elite society in the period between first and second iconoclasm. This insight informs the approaches taken in the following chapters which explore normative accounts of institutional history and identities among the elites and non-elites.

The institutional and ideological cores of the Roman polity and the Imperial Church continuously existed as potential sources of categorization.<sup>155</sup> However, it is only in the presence of boundaries separating self and other that their potential was realized in the form of a socially-useful group identity. In many ways, the articulation of boundaries is more important for identities than the narrative continuity of a group’s centre:

The nature of continuity ... depends on the maintenance of a boundary. The cultural features that signal the boundary may change, and the cultural characteristics of the members may likewise be transformed, indeed, even the organizational form of the group may change—yet the fact of continuing dichotomization between members and outsiders allows us to specify the nature of continuity, and investigate the changing cultural form and content.<sup>156</sup>

Boundaries were still maintained through the conceptual dichotomy between Roman and barbarian, though the markers of each identity shifted considerably as a result of Christianization. This edifice of self and other

<sup>154</sup> Barth, 35.

<sup>155</sup> Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups*, 8–10.

<sup>156</sup> Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, 14.

was completely internalized by the various Roman communities of the Levant, and helps to explain some of the methods they employed to successfully assert their own identities in the early centuries of Muslim rule.

This is particularly important, for it demonstrates that the older model of ‘ethnic’ identities derived from the classical and Christian tradition were dominant in the Roman east long into the seventh, eighth, and even ninth centuries. They were not replaced by newer ‘ethnogenesis’ models of the late antique Germanic kingdoms, models predicated on the mythology of political leaders and migratory groups.<sup>157</sup> ‘Ethnic’ group identities in the east arose out of classical, Roman paradigms, and were centred upon ecclesiastical rather than political institutions. Although they came to reject the Roman identity, these groups never turned against the classical and Christian conceptual foundations which created them.

Beyond ‘ethnogenesis,’ other approaches to medieval Roman identity have their own problems and limitations. One major problem is periodization, for many studies attempt to construct identity across the *longue durée*, a mode of thinking encouraged by the ‘Byzantine’ label and periodization. This exposes scholarship to a few problems when scholars are not excessively vigilant: obliteration of narratives about change and evolution in favour of an artificially homogenized view; observations which may be appropriate to some part of the period but, when applied generally, produce anachronistic implications; and skimming evidence across vastly disparate times from the overabundance of available documentation rather than giving the sources close reads and critical analysis. As a result of the broad chronological scope, the sources draw from literary and Constantinopolitan perspectives to the exclusion of others. This promotes one elite perspective on identity and community as *the* definition of the Roman peoples. This extensive focus on the anchors of the Roman community ignores the important role which boundaries play in giving it significance and definition. It also fails to engage with the fundamental ambiguity of groupness as tool for historical social analysis. By focusing on a narrower period of cultural history—specifically the comparatively poorly sourced centuries following the rise of Islam as a world religion—and utilizing close readings of sources from diverse locations and perspectives, the present study attempts to avoid some of those problems.

<sup>157</sup> Liebeschuetz, *East and West in Late Antiquity*, no. 6 pp. 92, 94–95.



## CHAPTER 3

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# Formal and Informal Institutions

Romans, like any other large group, were too numerous for all members of the community to know each other. Their sense of belonging was created by imagined bonds.<sup>1</sup> The vast majority of Roman citizens were peasant farmers, who never experienced the ceremonial splendour of Constantinople, much less interacted with the emperor personally. These citizens and subjects would have had only indirect interactions with the individuals who shaped the rhetorical definitions of the Roman community and narratives of its history. As discussed in Chap. 2, these intangible bonds knit society together, providing a core around which a narrative mythos could be built which linked a society to its past and future. These anchors provided a common set of cultural reference points by which individuals could be judged, and judge themselves, as belonging to the categorization of ‘Roman.’<sup>2</sup>

The state and the church were at the heart of narratives of historical continuity of the *Rhomaioi* as a people. A particular challenge of this period are the concepts of ‘Byzantium’ or the ‘dark ages,’ as introduced in the previous chapter. Each reads a break in the continuity of the Roman narrative. ‘Byzantium’ construes early medieval Roman history as part of the teleological process which bridges antiquity to the Renaissance in

<sup>1</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.

<sup>2</sup> Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, 14.

western historiography. Even near-contemporary Greek historiography, which dates to the period between first and second iconoclasm (787–815), does not contain neutral descriptions of events, but constructs the ideologically-significant narrative of the ‘dark ages’ in the period following the rise of Islam. Can the ideological impact of these later perspectives be removed from our understanding of the early medieval Roman community? What is the evidence for change and continuity of these important institutional anchors found in contemporary sources?

This chapter explores several centralizing components of Roman society and identification, both formal and informal. Official structures of the state and the Imperial Church are the first and most important. Mythologies of discontinuity in state structures form the heart of the ‘dark ages’ narrative of the mid-seventh through early ninth centuries, in particular the issue of the origins, nature, and chronology of the so-called ‘thematic reforms’. As we shall see, recent scholarship has greatly revised our understanding of the nature and pace of structural reform in this period, isolating ninth-century mythologizing from earlier historical fact. Secondly, the chapter will explore a different institutional core at the heart of elite Roman identity, education. The *paideia* provided a shared cultural experience for the top of Roman society, providing a common set of cultural reference points which bridged the myriad local variations of identity which such a diverse empire contained. Finally, the chapter will turn to the practical networks of patron-client relationships which characterized the personal nature of Roman bureaucratic rule. These formed practical connections which linked centralized institutions of the Roman world with the peripheries, be they spatial, temporal, or social. Together, these features indicate the ‘signals and emblems’ of ‘overt institutionalized behaviour’ which, despite regional variations, indicate the contours of early medieval Romanness.<sup>3</sup>

## 1 THE EARLY MEDIEVAL STATE AND REFORMS

The institution at the heart of Roman identity was the state. Its continuity was the historical narrative around which political identification was built. The centuries following the rise of Islam are a major problem for this: both primary sources and secondary literature construe this period as one of discontinuities. At its axis lies the ‘theme system,’ what is purportedly a

<sup>3</sup> Barth, 12, 14.

totalizing reconstitution of the Roman state and military in response to the shattering losses suffered in the first half of the seventh century. The sources for this narrative derive from the historical accounts of Nikephoros' *Breviarum* (written probably *circa* 780s) and Theophanes' *Chronographia* (composed 810–814). It was a myth which resonated with the zeitgeist of turn of the ninth century and has been repurposed and adapted to suit historical narratives of subsequent generations.

Not long ago, twentieth-century historians of the ‘dark ages’ told a straightforward narrative about the transformation of the rationalized ‘late Roman’ system into a byzantine medieval structure, the ‘theme system.’

The terrible years when the Slav and Avar hordes were pouring over the Balkans, and the Persians were penetrating the eastern provinces of the Empire, saw the beginning of the process of reorganization which was to bring fresh strength to Byzantium. ... Everything suggests that it was during these critical years that a fundamental change took place in the structure of the Byzantine army and administration, which resulted in the organization of the Empire into ‘themes’. ... The organization of the provinces into themes meant a final break with the principles of the administrative system of Diocletian and Constantine.<sup>4</sup>

Three characteristics define the ‘thematic system’:

1. The name *thema* (θέμα) was first applied to administrative contexts in Theophanes’ account of the seventh century.<sup>5</sup>
2. Themes were military administrative units which combined military and civil power into a single hierarchy.<sup>6</sup>
3. Themes were areas where troops were permanently settled and supported in kind directly by local communities.<sup>7</sup>

This picture has become problematized in more recent scholarship. Detailed studies over the last half-century and the systematic re-evaluation

<sup>4</sup> Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*, 95–96. Other historians who have associated the thematic reforms with the seventh century, see esp. Whittow, *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium, 600–1025*, 120ff; Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a World Crisis*, 483–84.

<sup>5</sup> Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*. First attested AM 6113 (AD 620/1), but only regularly used from AM 6161 (AD 668/9) onwards.

<sup>6</sup> Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*, 96.

<sup>7</sup> Ostrogorsky, 97.

done by L. Brubaker and Haldon have provided a better idea of bureaucratic reforms in the early middle ages. In so doing, they challenge the underlying narrative of Roman history told in the principal historical sources. This could only be done by exploiting new information made available from non-traditional sources of historical knowledge.

The post-600 Roman world offers a wide array of evidence for the organization and operation of its civilian bureaucracies: directly evidenced by thousands of seals; canonical and civil law codes; lists of precedence (called *taktika*); and incidentally referenced in chronicles; hagiographies; epistles; and the occasional charter.<sup>8</sup> These show several distinct, major reforms to the imperial administration which were carried out over the course of the early medieval centuries. These were both reactive to changing situations outside the state's ability to control and proactive efforts to mould society to the state's ends.

When attempting to avoid anachronisms, it is incumbent to use contemporary classifications for social structures where possible, such as found in the opening chapters of Syrianos Magistros' *De Re Strategica*. On the one hand, there are the civilian offices. Its author identifies the principal classes of society's civil governance as: holy orders (ecclesiastic and monastic institutions); legal institutions; deliberative assemblies; and fiscal systems.<sup>9</sup> All four of these systems evolved in the early middle ages, but still retained their distinct institutional identities and functions. Separate from all of these is the military.<sup>10</sup> Both organs—the civil state and its military—had a long and illustrious history, and each complemented the other as a cornerstone of Roman society in both theory and practice. Both civil and military administrations supported and reinforced one another, and neither could exist in a meaningful way without the other.<sup>11</sup>

As we shall see, evidence points to multiple stages of reforms occurring throughout the seventh and eighth centuries which gradually altered Roman state institutions over time. Rather than a single revolutionary overthrow of the pre-existing system, many smaller changes gradually

<sup>8</sup> Brubaker, Haldon, and Ousterhout, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era (ca 680–850)*.

<sup>9</sup> Dennis, *Three Byzantine Military Treatise*, *De Re Strategica* §2.1–21, trans. p. 13.

<sup>10</sup> Dennis, *De Re Strategica* §4.7–8, trans. p. 21.

<sup>11</sup> Whittow, *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium, 600–1025*, 113–26; Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century*, 173–253.

evolved from the ‘late Roman’ civil service of the period of Justinian I into the ‘thematic’ administration familiar from the ninth-century onwards.<sup>12</sup>

### *The Post-antique Senate*

Many of the most gradual evolutionary changes happened to the institution of the senate in Constantinople. This institution played a central role in the Romans’ own conception of their state, even into the medieval centuries. The senate played an important ceremonial and ideological role in recognizing and legitimating imperial rule even into the middle of the eleventh century.<sup>13</sup> However, the composition and independence of the senate changed greatly over the course of the late sixth, seventh, and eighth centuries. The Heraclians used the senate and senatorial elite extensively to support their authority. For example, at the beginning of their rebellion, Heraclius and his father claimed consular authority as part of their propaganda campaign to against Phokas in 608–610.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, over time social pressures and an ever-evolving political landscape ultimately destroyed the late antique senatorial class as a distinct group by the time of the later Isaurian emperors.

Within this period, the senate achieved its greatest prominence during the reign of Constans II, where sources credit it as an active partner in the youthful emperor’s administration.<sup>15</sup> Throughout late antiquity, the senate were distinguished by their own hierarchy of ranks (these being, in ascending order, *clarissimus/lamprotatos*, *spectabilis/peribleptos*, and *illustris/megaloprestatos*, the latter graded further by the distinctions of *gloriosus/endoxos* and *gloriosissimus/endoxotatos*). Every senior position in the judicial, fiscal, and military hierarchies was automatically enrolled into one of these.<sup>16</sup> However, over the course of over a century, senatorial ranks

<sup>12</sup> See Haldon, *Byzantine Praetorians*; Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century*, 208–53; Kaegi, “Two Studies in the Continuity of Late Roman and Early Byzantine Military Institutions,” 87–113; Treadgold, *The Byzantine Revival, 780–842*; Treadgold, “The Struggle for Survival (641–780),” 129–50; Ahrweiler, *Byzance et la mer*; Pryor and Jeffreys, *The Age of the Dromōn*.

<sup>13</sup> John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History, 811–1057*, §23.2.1–2, trans. p. 450.

<sup>14</sup> Kaegi, *Heraclius Emperor of Byzantium*, 40–42.

<sup>15</sup> Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, AM 6134, trans. pp. 475–76; Allen and Neil, *Maximus the Confessor and His Companions: Documents from Exile*, Relatio Motionis, §1.7 trans. p. 49.

<sup>16</sup> Haldon, “The Fate of the Late Roman Senatorial Elite.”

disappeared: *clarissimus* early in the seventh century; *illustris* in the first decades of the eighth; *endoxotatos* is last attested in 741, in the prologue to the *Ekloga*.<sup>17</sup> These profound changes to the bureaucratic elite do not appear to have been intentionally instituted, but an effect of the social and economic upheaval which rocked the Roman Empire.

Loss of distinctive senatorial identity resulted from a weakening distinction between the central bureaucratic elite, the traditional arena for ambitious senatorial families, and the provincial ‘middling’ elites. This was, in turn, a product of the disruption of property ownership—estates—and the economic systems which they supported, caused by foreign invasion and conquest. The continuity of ecclesiastical and imperial estates between the sixth and ninth centuries, at least in areas least susceptible to barbarian incursions, is supported from a variety of sources;<sup>18</sup> the continuation of privately held estates, though not directly evidenced, is almost certain.<sup>19</sup> However, many owners of these private estates would have faced difficult choices as the hitherto-united eastern Mediterranean succumbed to invasion and conquest: how best to protect their family and assets? The aristocratic elite who owned estates both within and without Roman frontiers faced major losses of revenue.<sup>20</sup> They could not hope to protect all of their properties with the collapse of unified political order. For elites who remained Roman, their holdings beyond the new frontiers were lost to foreign conquerors, while properties which were still within Rhomania were exposed to pillaging and brigandage. Those whose properties lay principally beyond the new Roman frontiers faced a difficult decision. Many chose to accommodate their new political masters—one may look at the family history of John of Damascus for one version of how this played out.<sup>21</sup> Still others fled to Rhomania, abandoning their familial patrimony and choosing to advance their position within the Roman civil, military, or ecclesiastical administrations.

<sup>17</sup> Leo III and Constantine V, *Ecloga*, Pref. 40f, 103; Brubaker, Haldon, and Ousterhout, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era c. 680–850. A History*, 591–93; Brown, *Gentlemen and Officers*, 133ff.

<sup>18</sup> On property disputes see Ignatios the Deacon, *Epistulae*, §6, 17 trans. pp. 37–39, 57–59. For imperial estates and foundations, see Kaplan, “Maisons Impériales et Fondations Pieuses.”

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Rydén, *The Life of St Philaretos the Merciful Written by His Grandson Niketas*. This hagiography gives evidence for massive elite estates in relatively peaceful Paphlagonia, though it is light on details about the family’s lineage and heritage.

<sup>20</sup> On the mega-estates of late antiquity, see Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle*, 294–99.

<sup>21</sup> Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam*, 7–9. 17ff.

The end of the seventh and beginning of the eighth century saw the emergence of new systems to manage the empire, and a new kind of elite needed to run them. The decline of senatorial ranks around the turn of the century was hastened by the political violence and reprisals unleashed by the fall, return, and final downfall of Justinian II.<sup>22</sup> Whereas in late antiquity there had been parallel titular systems associated with the senate and with the imperial court, over the course of the seventh and eighth centuries they merged into a single hierarchy which was decisively palatine in orientation. The hierarchy was at once highly structured, and very fluid over time,<sup>23</sup> at the turn of the ninth century, ranks in descending order began with the old senatorial titles of *hypatos*, *apo hypaton patrikios*, *apo hypaton*, and *patrikios*, followed by the court-derived titles of *protospatharios*, *spatharios*, *stratelates*, *skribon*, and *balnitor*, and at the bottom more senatorial titles of *apo eparchon*, *kandidatos*, and *silentiarios*.<sup>24</sup> This fusion of elite distinctions into a single hierarchy controlled by the emperor established the imperial court as the empire's only source of socio-political power and prestige.<sup>25</sup>

The eclipse of these ridged class-structured hierarchies coincided with the increased prominence of relational descriptions of society. The *oikos* or household formed the most 'pervasive set of relationship ideals,' providing a language and model which medieval Romans used to describe all manner of social relationships, a phenomenon we will revisit in Chap. 6.<sup>26</sup> Weaker class-bonds for the empire's elites are reflected in the meteoric rise and fall of families who gained and lost the emperor's favour. Writing

<sup>22</sup> Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, AM 6187, 6198, 6203, trans. pp. 514–15, 522–23, 527–30.

<sup>23</sup> Oikonomides, "Les Listes de Préséance Byzantines Des IXe et Xe Siècles," 21–24.

<sup>24</sup> Brubaker, Haldon, and Ousterhout, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era c. 680–850. A History*, 593–94. In practice, *hypatos* was often honorarily bestowed—in eighth-and-ninth-century Venice, it often took precedence above the title of Doge (*dux*). Basić, "Imperium and Regnum in Gottschalk's Description of Dalmatia," 191. See also Borri, "Gli Istriani e i Loro Parenti"; Shepard, "Bunkers, Open Cities and Boats in Byzantine Diplomacy," esp. 19–25.

<sup>25</sup> For classic models of these forms of power-relationships, see Weber, *Economy and Society*, vol. 3 pp. 1006–69; Mann, *The Sources of Social Power. Vol. 1, A History of Power from the Beginning to A.D. 1760*, 167–74; Runciman, *A Treatise on Social Theory*, Volume 2, Substantive social theory: 155–56, 190–97.

<sup>26</sup> Neville, *Authority in Byzantine Provincial Society, 950–1100*, 67.

about the centuries immediately following those focused on in this study, Neville observed the tenuousness of aristocratic wealth and power:

The emperors could elevate their chosen beneficiaries to the highest level of richness through grants of land, salaries, and tax exemptions. The greatest fortunes we know of were created by imperial favour. While imperial service allowed fortunes to be made quickly, such accumulations seem to have been fairly fragile. The emperors seem to have regularly confiscated the property of their very richest citizens, ostensibly to pre-empt treasonous behaviours. These confiscations also gave the emperors the land with which to reward their new supporters.<sup>27</sup>

The declining significance of class-based social hierarchies opened up space where the family, and family identities, gained in importance and relevance. This transformation of elite is reflected, in part, in the dynamic changes which occurred to onomastic practices in this period. Although the classical Roman system of three names finally disappeared from the historical record in the early seventh century, by the end of the eighth century the recognizably medieval system of family surnames begins to appear among the empire's elite.<sup>28</sup>

Indeed, the conversion from separate palatine and senatorial ranks into a unified system suggests that this was a period of disruption in the membership of the elite. Surveying the names of individuals who achieved the senior title of *hypatos*, *apo hypaton*, or *patrikios*, L. Brubaker and Haldon note that, between 600 and Constans' death in 668, all but three of the forty known names are Greek or Latin, indicating a high degree of uniformity—whether natural or adopted—and continuity in the composition of the elite. This changes in next half-century, from 668 to the ascension of Leo III in 717, when almost 20% of the known senior-office holders have non-Greek or Latin names.<sup>29</sup> Interestingly, surviving information shows that most of these ‘foreigners’ gave their sons Greek names, indicating that their families rapidly integrated into the dominant elite culture.<sup>30</sup> The influx of provincial elites into the top of the Roman hierarchy contributed

<sup>27</sup> Neville, 85.

<sup>28</sup> Wickham, *The Inheritance of Rome*, 312–13.

<sup>29</sup> Brubaker, Haldon, and Ousterhout, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era c. 680–850. A History*, 580–85.

<sup>30</sup> Cheynet, “L’Anthroponomie aristocratique à Byzance,” 273; Winkelmann, *Quellenstudien zur herrschenden Klasse von Byzanz im 8. und 9. Jahrhundert*, 158–59, 203–7.

to destabilizing the *status quo*. A new service elite, united by their common cultural background, was thus beginning to emerge by the time Leo III seized power.

This decline of senatorial fortunes undermined the group's principal means of protecting their position within society—wealth—while opening new venues for political advancement for talented individuals of the provincial elites. These 'new elites' came from families who could afford to have their children formally educated and whose wealth, while never comparable to the great late antique senatorial estates, at least remained intact through luck or skilled management.

### *State Institutional Reforms*

Reforms did occur under the Heraclian dynasty, just not the revolution which some later historians wished to find. Change under this dynasty was less profound than implied by Theophanes. Rather, it was a period when existing systems were adapted in response to unprecedented trials. The Persian and Arab conquests were far from the only critical challenge facing the Romans. Economic destabilization and recession coincided with plague, natural disasters, and invasion causing demographic decline in the later sixth and early seventh centuries. Particularly notable changes occurred to the state's fiscal systems and military organization.

Changes in fiscal administration track an adaptive response. Phokas and Heraclius closed most of the eastern mints, centralizing control of the production of coinage in Constantinople. Heraclius' administration attempted to stabilize lower-denomination coinage, introducing *hexagram* in 615 and an aggressive, though short-lived reform of the copper *follis* in both weight and quality in 629/630.<sup>31</sup> The latter reform was aimed at restoring 'normal' fiscal and military administration in a short period of time between the Persian evacuations and the Arab conquests. Heraclius' fiscal reforms did not change the fundamental trend of the post-antique economy, however.

The small-currency copper coinage continued to shrink in size and quality in the reign of his grandson, Constans II. The condition of copper *folles* struck in his reign have been judged by Grierson as 'represent[ing] perhaps the most slovenly work with which any numismatist will ever be

<sup>31</sup> Grierson, *Byzantine Coins*, 103–7.

brought into contact.<sup>32</sup> From the 650s, archaeological records suggest the institution of a new fiscal policy. In the first instance, copper coinage ceased to circulate in significant quantities outside of Constantinople and its immediate hinterlands. Coinciding with the establishment of the armies of the East (*per Orientum* or *Anatolikon*) and of Armenia (*per Armeniam* or *Armeniakon*) in Asia Minor for the second time in half a century, this suggests a possible shift around this time from paying soldiers in cash towards supporting them in kind—still a salary from the state, merely disbursed differently.

Throughout the period of the Heraclian dynasty, the Roman army remained intact and, crucially, salaried. This ensured its effective operation and loyalty to the state, but with new ties to the localities in which it was now stationed and to the peoples among whom its soldiers were now directly economically integrated.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, the responsibility for their pay was still that of the imperial fisc, even if soldiers were expected to supplement it with income from their families' properties. It is easy to overstate the significance of this change, however. Roman armies had long been heterogeneous forces: barbarian *foederati* fought as allies organized into small, specialized auxiliary forces; privately supported *bucellarii* would be considered 'contractors' in the parlance of our times; and *limitanei*, frontier soldier/militias, were supported by the local communities whom they protected and into whom they were integrated.<sup>34</sup>

Throughout late antiquity, *praefectura praetorio* had functioned as the interface between the civil and military bureaucracies. These were civilian-administered regions containing multiple provinces, governed by a prefect/eparch who held responsibility for civil, judicial, and fiscal authority over the region. They continued to fulfil this function through at least the end of the final Persian War—the praetorian prefect of Oriens was last mentioned in a novel issued by Heraclius in 629,<sup>35</sup> and individual eparchs continue to be identified with powerful positions throughout the period. However, during the reign of Constans II, the office of the *kommerkiarioi* became associated with the fiscal administration of major military

<sup>32</sup> Grierson, 111.

<sup>33</sup> Brubaker, Haldon, and Ousterhout, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era c. 680–850. A History*, 723–28.

<sup>34</sup> Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire from the First Century A.D. to the Third*, 130–45; Treadgold, *Byzantium and Its Army*, 284–1081, 60ff.

<sup>35</sup> Zepos and Zepos, *Jus graecoromanum*, vol. I coll. 1 nov. 25, 2; Dölger, *Regesten der Kaiserurkunden des oströmischen Reiches*, no. 199.

campaigns. In the sixth century, all known *kommerkiarioi* had been tasked with limited authority overseeing silk production and taxing trade goods.<sup>36</sup> Their bases of operation, typically situated in the empire's high-traffic ports, were called *apothekai* (warehouses)—a term derived from the Greek verb *tithemi* ('to put, place'), the same etymological root as *thema*. The *kommerkiarioi* assumed the role of fiscal managers endowed, it appears, with broad authority to deal with specific, non-periodic crises.<sup>37</sup> These programs came about because emperors and senior advisors recognized the changed circumstances, particularly the overall decline of state resources and the localization of economic activities. Instituting changes in the management of the empire reasserted central authority in times of crises.

Alongside changes to the ways in which revenue was collected and disbursed on behalf of the army, the other major change which occurred under the Heraclian dynasty was the military's deployment and organization. The late antique army was controlled by three *magistri militum* (supreme commanders): the East (*Anatolikon*), Armenia (*Armeniakon*), and Thrace (*Thrakesion*). Other independent command of import included imperial retinue forces, the *Obsequium* (*Opsikion*), and maritime commands organized in the *Quaestura* (*Karabisianoi*).<sup>38</sup> The loss of the Levant led to the redeployment of the armies to Asia Minor behind new frontiers, a move which coincided with a change in nomenclature for the units, from Latin names to Greek equivalents. These changes can obscure the fundamental continuity of the military's organization. The Roman polity continued to field armies whose backbone was a paid, professional core supported by peasant conscripts, barbarian auxiliaries, and mercenaries. Whether called *Oriens* or *Anatolikon*, this Army of the East was continuously responsible for defending the eastern frontier throughout late antique and early medieval eras. The units had continuous institutional histories with which individuals who belonged to them were able to identify. In turn, these features identified their soldiers with the Roman polity and society as a whole, and gave soldiers a connection to the past and the future.

<sup>36</sup> For origins of the office, see Seeck, *Notitia dignitatum*, xiii.6–9. Discussion in Kent, “The Comes Sacrarum Largitionum.” For sixth-century history, see Oikonomidès, “Silk Trade and Production in Byzantium from the Sixth to the Ninth Century: The Seals of Kommerkiarioi,” 33–53.

<sup>37</sup> Brubaker, Haldon, and Ousterhout, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era c. 680–850. A History*, 682–95.

<sup>38</sup> Brubaker, Haldon, and Ousterhout, 724ff.

The armies were supported by independent civilian administrative apparatuses throughout the seventh and eighth centuries: first the praetorian prefectures, then the *kommerkiarioi-apotheke* system. These bureaucratic reforms proved successful, allowing the Roman state to weather annual Muslim incursions by land and by sea, three major campaigns against Constantinople (*circa* 655/656, 672–674, and 716–718), the loss of the lower Danube basin to the Bulgars (in 680/681), and two decades of political instability (from the overthrow of Justinian II in 695 to the ascension of Leo III in 717). Most of the changes which occurred in the seventh century were unplanned and *ad hoc* reactions to unfolding events. The institutional history of this period points to the fundamental strength of the ‘Late Roman’ systems. The Heraclian dynasty and the empire’s senior leadership kept the polity and its institutions, the central anchors of Roman identity and the Roman community, continuously functioning throughout the crises which ravaged the state over the course of the seventh century.

Although the reign of Leo III is overshadowed by the supposed beginning of iconoclasm,<sup>39</sup> his reign marked the beginning of a new period of significant reform. These went beyond the *ad hoc* responses which characterize the period of the Heraclian dynasty, and were significant alterations to the institutional functions of the Roman state. Besides further changes to the imperial fisc and the military, the Isaurian emperors also undertook the first systematic reformation of the Roman legal system in two centuries.

Monetization of the provinces reached a nadir between *circa* 680 and 720, when low (copper) and mid (silver) denomination coinage were rarely minted and did not circulate far beyond Constantinople and its immediate hinterland. This situation began to reverse when Leo III’s government introduced the silver *miliaresion*. First issued in the 720s, it was of lighter weight and radically different design from the *hexagram*, which had not been minted in significant quantities since the reign of Constantine IV. The coinage is significant for being a major departure from the Latin language which had hitherto dominated displays of state ideology—the reverse on these coins bears a Greek inscription, *IhSYS XRISTYS NICA*.<sup>40</sup> This reintroduction of a currency of middling value—gold coinage had never ceased to be struck and was neither shrunk nor debased throughout

<sup>39</sup> Brubaker, Haldon, and Ousterhout, 151–55; Brubaker, *Inventing Byzantine Iconoclasm*, 22–31.

<sup>40</sup> Grierson, *Byzantine Coins*, 160–61.

the period<sup>41</sup>—presaged the limited remonetization of some provinces from the 750s with copper coinage under Constantine V, and more aggressive efforts by his successors at the turn of the ninth century. It points to growing economic stability in certain parts of the empire where physical security from foreign invasion could be reasonably assured.<sup>42</sup>

The Isaurian coinage reforms, especially the reintroduction of a stable middle-value currency, broadly coincide with the appearance of new titles and the eclipse of others. Appearing in the seals from around the early 730s, the *basilica kommerkia* were fiscal officers whose responsibilities covered multiple provinces; they appear to have been supported by another new set of fiscal officers, the *dioiketai*, who were connected with the fiscal management of specific military commands. These new fiscal administrators appear to have replaced the *ad hoc* authority of the *kommerkiarioi*. As such, they represented a new stage in the growing relationship between each army command and the geographical territories where they were based, a new balance between pressures encouraging localization and the state's need to maintain centralized control and authority.<sup>43</sup> It is clear that organizational practices continue to use the old provincial boundaries and names throughout the eighth century, and the different state bureaucracies—fisc, judiciary, and military—continue to function independently of each other.

The Isaurian dynasty was also a period of major legal reform, for Leo III and Constantine V promulgated the first systematic update to the state's legal codes since the sixth century.<sup>44</sup> The *Ecloga*, issued in 741 (along with subsidiary documents, the *Nomos Mosaikos*, *Nomos Rhodion Nautikos*, and *Nomos Georgikos*), continued the Justinianic legal precedent, with some significant updates.<sup>45</sup> In contrast to the evidence for the functioning of the Roman fiscal system, where we have an abundance of evidence for its operation from seals and coins but limited insight into its theoretical organization, the judicial system is well-represented in

<sup>41</sup> Lopez, “The Dollar of the Middle Ages.”

<sup>42</sup> Brubaker, Haldon, and Ousterhout, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era c. 680–850. A History*, 695–705.

<sup>43</sup> Brubaker, Haldon, and Ousterhout, 729–39.

<sup>44</sup> The end of the seventh century was, on the other hand, a period of great development in religious law. For impact and ideological significance see Humphreys, *Law, Power, and Imperial Ideology in the Iconoclast Era c. 680–850*, 31–65.

<sup>45</sup> Dölger, “Ist der Nomos Georgikos ein Gesetz des Kaisers Justinians II?,” 39ff; Lemerle, *Byzantine Humanism*, 34–36.

theory, but with little evidence into the degree to which ideologically pure documents reflected lived reality.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, as sources for attitudes and assumptions, they offer insight into the intersection of state and society.

Throughout the seventh and eighth centuries, the Roman judiciary functioned as a bureaucracy distinct from both the fisc and the army as it had for the past millennium. While the emperor was the fountainhead of the law itself and judge of ultimate appeal, the top judicial offices exercised oversight as civilian governors of the empire's provinces.<sup>47</sup> Pre-eminent ranks among the judiciary were individuals holding the senatorial titles of *hypatoi* (consuls), *anthypatoi* (proconsuls), and *eparchoi* (prefects). Judges of these ranks were active in Constantinople, and appear regularly in documentations of elite disputes.<sup>48</sup> The Isaurian laws, however, do not appear to have been written with these palatine officials in mind, but instead for an audience of junior provincial judicial magistrates. As such, they provide insight into the bottom of the judicial hierarchy. These provincial judges shed light on the dynamic intersection between state and society at the village level, particularly to their practical impact of strengthening local and provincial jurisprudence in the eighth century.<sup>49</sup>

The reforms of Leo III and Constantine V are important for demonstrating the functioning of the post-antique Roman imperial apparatus, marking an important evolution away from the 'crisis management' arrangements instituted under Constans II—characterized by simplifying the state's administration and instituting flexible *ad hoc* responses to specific events—and towards normalization. Re-monetizing the provincial economies, though a process which would proceed at different paces in different places, served to reassert the empire's economic unity in at least a limited fashion after centuries of unrestrained localizing pressures.

<sup>46</sup> Whittow, *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium, 600–1025*, 115–20.

<sup>47</sup> Brubaker, Haldon, and Ousterhout, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era c. 680–850. A History*, 676–79.

<sup>48</sup> *Anthypatoi* and *eparchoi* are still identified as quite senior ranks in the mid-ninth century *Taktikon Uspenskij*. Cf. Oikonomidès, "Les Listes de Préséance Byzantines Des IXe et Xe Siècles," 46–63. While *hypatoi* had by then fallen in the palatine lists, their judicial activities decisions are recorded in the seventh-century trial of Maximus the Confessor and early-ninth-century epistles of Ignatios, bishop of Nicaea. Cf. Ignatios the Deacon, *Epistulae*, §6, trans. p. 37.

<sup>49</sup> Humphreys, *Law, Power, and Imperial Ideology in the Iconoclast Era c. 680–850*, 68–70, 187, 224–25.

Likewise judicial reforms served to reassert central authority over the whole of the empire, right down to the village level, unifying the Roman experience by strengthening central authority. Military reforms reorganized the number of commands (*strateiai*) and reshaped the geographical areas from which they drew manpower and over which they were expected to protect. However, the bureaucracy under the Isaurian emperors was still one which clearly delimited different fields of authority between the civilian provincial administration and the military commanders who protected them.

Until the turn of the ninth century, then, the diagnostic traits of the *theme* system were not fully realized. Many administrative changes occurred under the Heraclian and Isaurian emperors, but it is only after the turn of the ninth century that the thematic system was properly realized. The word ‘theme’ itself is one of the best insights into the historical context of the early ninth-century reforms. Derived from the verb *tithemi* (whose meanings include to put, place, or set down), it has a fairly long history of usage in classical Greek before this point. The *Lexicon* of Hesychius of Alexandria, a grammarian of the fifth century, lists a number of synonyms for the word ‘theme.’<sup>50</sup> One potential interpretation of the word construes a ‘theme’ as a communal property or space and the contract which organized it.<sup>51</sup> This definition points to its later usage in a ninth-century military context: the ‘theme system’ involved the settlement of soldiers in rural communities which were thenceforth directly responsible for their support. The term referred to the community assets dedicated to this purpose, the classes of soldiers which this system supported, and the areas where these contracts were used.<sup>52</sup> The revolutionary impact of this system derived not from the fact that soldiers were supported in kind: *limitanei* were supported in this manner by the sixth century at the latest, and much of the regular army received payment in kind rather than cash by the end of the seventh century. The system’s

<sup>50</sup> Θέμα·ξις, τόπος, στάσις, μνῆμα. Hesychius Alexandrinus, *Hesychii Alexandrini Lexicon*, Theta, no. 224.

<sup>51</sup> Liddell, Scott, and Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, Θέμα. See also entries in Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*.

<sup>52</sup> Koder, “Byzanz, Die Griechen Und Die Romaiosyne – Ein ‘Ethnogenese’ Der ‘Römer?’” Contra Howard-Johnston, “Thema,” who argues that the term was borrowed from the Avars in the seventh century. As there is etymological precedence for the term in appropriate contexts in Greek, however, a complicated argument for the term’s foreign origin seems unnecessary.

novelty lay in shifting the responsibility for military upkeep from the imperial fisc to specific local communities. Thematic troops differed from professionals because their maintenance was the responsibility of the local community among whom they lived rather than the state's fisc at large.

Before overthrowing Empress Eirene on 31 October 802, Nikephoros had been the logothete of the *genikon*, the most senior fiscal official in the empire. Given his background, it is not surprising that he would institute a systematic reform of both the collection and distribution of revenues by the state. The evidence and historical development of the reforms are constructed in detail by L. Brubaker and Haldon.<sup>53</sup> Unlike the administrative developments that occurred under Constans II and Constantine V, of which we have only the incomplete picture provided by evidence from sigilology and numismatics, we are told about the reforms carried out under Nikephoros I by a contemporary, the chronicler Theophanes Confessor.<sup>54</sup>

This chronology of the reforms is supported by the records of seals. Most importantly, in the first decades of the ninth century the office of the *basilica kommerkia* disappears from the records, and the new office of the *protonotarioi* appears.<sup>55</sup> The *protonotarioi* first appear in documents and seals around this time—Ignatios' epistles addressed to several individuals of this ranks are some of the earliest firmly datable witnesses to the office.<sup>56</sup> *Protonotarioi* were tasked with the authority to oversee these new military/fiscal arrangements. As such, while they were civilians and fiscal officers, they were organized into the empire's human geography not through the old provinces but through the military commands—now not simply *strateiai* ('commands'), but *themata* ('lands where soldiers are communally settled'). Further signs of the significance of this reform are confirmed by the evolution of the role of the *strategos*, or general who commanded one of the empire's principal armies. The early ninth century was the first time in which some *strategoi* simultaneously held the title of *anthypatos*, a hitherto-exclusively civilian title, signifying governor and chief judicial magistrate over a province. Changes in titles signalled a

<sup>53</sup> Brubaker, Haldon, and Ousterhout, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era c. 680–850. A History*, 713–16.

<sup>54</sup> The 'list of vexations' is found in: Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, AM 6302, trans. pp. 667–69.

<sup>55</sup> Brubaker, Haldon, and Ousterhout, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era c. 680–850. A History*, 713–16.

<sup>56</sup> Ignatios the Deacon, *Epistulae*, §7, 39, 53 trans. pp. 39–41, 109–11, 133–35.

realignment of responsibilities, and consolidation of these formerly distinct roles.<sup>57</sup>

Thus, the theme system, as realized under Nikephoros and his immediate successors in the early ninth century, comprised four principal characteristics:

1. Specific territories were assigned communal obligations to support and equip soldiers.
2. In lands where these arrangements were instituted (*themata*), fiscal and judicial administration were incorporated into the military bureaucracy.
3. Army officers were responsible for keeping military registers and assessing the tax obligations of soldiers' families.
4. The *strategos* became not only a general but a governor as well.<sup>58</sup>

It is clear, then, that the thematic system is the end-product of a series of administrative evolutions accruing over the course of two centuries rather than a single, decisive revolution happening under the early Heraclian emperors.

Institutions are situated at the centre of identity, and, for the Romans, none is more important than the state itself. The Roman polity was the central reference point around which its peoples constructed narratives relating to the past and the future. The idea of a totalizing 'thematic reform,' integral to the construction of the 'dark age' narrative, has given way to a picture of sequential changes. Clearly the civil institutions of the Roman state had a greater degree of continuity than the 'dark age' myth credited them. The early medieval centuries were not a radical break with the past, but emerge as a period of evolutionary change. Theophanes' ninth-century perspective, while satisfying for later medieval readers as a means of explaining the transformations which they perceived in their recent past as separating them from the earlier past, is misleading. It is important to recognize and describe the inherent biases which ninth-century authors imparted in their analysis of contemporary and earlier societies. By doing so, underlying assumptions can be exposed and a more

<sup>57</sup> Brubaker, Haldon, and Ousterhout, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era c. 680–850. A History*, 713.

<sup>58</sup> Brubaker, Haldon, and Ousterhout, 752–53.

accurate account of the interplay between continuity and change of the Roman polity, which is at the core of Roman social identity, can be built.

## 2 THE ARMY AND IDENTITY

In some ways, Rhomania was an army supported by an empire. Whether organized under the late antique *praefectura praetorio* or in a ninth-century *thema*, the Romans took pride in the fact that their professional army distinguished them from their neighbours—as is made explicitly clear by the authors of the military manuals which provided a guide for the organization of the Roman armies throughout the early middle ages.<sup>59</sup> ‘The science of strategy,’ commented Syrianos Magistros in the *De Re Strategica*, ‘is really the most important branch of the entire science of government.’<sup>60</sup> Throughout the early middle ages, the Romans fielded a professional force (comprised of soldiers enlisted voluntarily, by conscription, and by inheritance) which was organized according to merit, and commanded by men who were appointed to office based on merit rather than inheriting their positions.<sup>61</sup> The army was a key institutional component to the Roman construction of Self.

As individuals, soldiers enjoyed not only an elevated status but certain social and economic privileges. A defining characteristic of the profession was that they received a salary, though not necessarily exclusively in coin. Evidence from the *Ecloga* suggests that, in the eighth century, this salary was enough to support the soldier and his family as the principal revenue source for his household.<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, the *oikos* of a soldier was entitled to a reduced tax burden, ensuring that his family and dependants benefited. The quantity of support was not only enough to equip himself, but—at least for some scouts and cavalrymen—enough to provision his mounts and support a servant to function as a groomsman.<sup>63</sup> The *Strategikon* emphasizes the responsibility of commanding officers to secure provisions and appropriate equipment for men under his command according to

<sup>59</sup> Maurice (Ps.), *Strategikon*, §XI. Trans. Dennis, *Maurice’s Strategikon*.

<sup>60</sup> Dennis, *Three Byzantine Military Treatise*, *De Re Strategica*, §4.6–8; pp. 19–21.

<sup>61</sup> Whittow, *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium, 600–1025*, 113–23; Teall, “The Barbarians in Justinian’s Armies,” 296–97.

<sup>62</sup> Leo III and Constantine V, *Ecloga*, XVI.1–2. Trans. Humphreys, *The Laws of the Isaurian Era*.

<sup>63</sup> Maurice (Ps.), *Strategikon*, §I.2.62–74. Trans. Dennis, *Maurice’s Strategikon*. Dennis, *Three Byzantine Military Treatise*, *De Re Strategica*, §7; p. 25.

each one's rank and pay, while the *strategos* ought to keep a supply of spare equipment for his forces.<sup>64</sup> However, one should not imagine a uniformly equipped and standardized force such as a modern standing army. While arms were plentiful—enough so that servants were expected to defend themselves and the baggage—armour was not. The front ranks of a file should expect to be equipped in chainmail or breastplate with greaves and helmet, but soldiers fighting in the middle or back of the files would often have only quilted cloth armour.<sup>65</sup> Taken together though, the combination of reliable salary (with occasional war-time bonus from spoils) and centrally organized provisioning gave the Roman soldier a greater degree of financial stability than that which was enjoyed by many of his fellow citizens.

The army was a community which consisted of more than just active soldiers. The core unit of organization was the *tagma*, or battalion, units of nominally 200–400 men in strength, though many in practice may have been much larger. Each *tagma* included a variety of individuals delegated to support roles. The *Strategikon* recommends that each *tagma* detail eight to ten men as ‘medics’ (δηποτάτοι), two as ‘scouts’ or ‘spies’ (κατασκόποι, σκουλκατόροι), and like number of ‘surveyors’ (μηνσόροι) who should secure quartering sites for the army on the march. Command and control structures require trumpeters and heralds to relay information across the army.<sup>66</sup> The presence of servants, especially to help out with the labour-intensive cavalry units, has already been noted, but they were far from the only ‘civilian’ presence within the army. Some soldiers had their wives and children with them, especially while situated in long-term quarters.<sup>67</sup> Camps and barracks were not just home to soldiers, though, but were their own little mobile Roman communities—the additional labour was necessary to support the men and animals who protected the empire’s

<sup>64</sup> Maurice (Ps.), *Strategikon*, §I.2.83–85, VIII.1.16–18 (no. 3). Trans. Dennis, *Maurice’s Strategikon*. Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century*, 223ff.

<sup>65</sup> Maurice (Ps.), *Strategikon*, §§II.8, VII B.9, X.1.12–21, XII B.16.52–55. Trans. Dennis, *Maurice’s Strategikon*. Dennis, *Three Byzantine Military Treatise*, De Re Strategica, §16; pp. 53–57.

<sup>66</sup> Maurice (Ps.), *Strategikon*, §§II.9–19. Trans. Dennis, *Maurice’s Strategikon*. See also: Dennis, *Three Byzantine Military Treatise*, De Re Strategica, §14; pp. 45–47.

<sup>67</sup> Maurice (Ps.), *Strategikon*, §§V.I.7–10. Trans. Dennis, *Maurice’s Strategikon*. Dennis, *Three Byzantine Military Treatise*, De Re Strategica, §7 and 9; pp. 25, 29–31. There seems to be evidence for this as a historical practice in the context of the seventh-century Mardaite campaigns in Syria, for which see Hollingsworth, “Mardaites.”

frontiers. These additional individuals extended the impact of the army on the wider Roman community. The army was more than simply the number of men who actually carried spears, encompassing the dependants of a soldier's *oikos* who relied on his salary and, at least in some circumstances, shared in his experience of military life.<sup>68</sup>

Soldiers themselves came from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds—any ‘nation’ (γένος, φυλάς, ἔθνος) who were part of the Roman Empire could be found among its soldiers, a diversity which provided both challenge and opportunity to commanders. It was expected that soldiers of diverse backgrounds would be present among any command. For example, when attempting a night-attack, Romans should spread confusion in the opposing camp by calling out in the enemy’s own language.<sup>69</sup> This also gave the Romans a pool of skilled individuals from whom they could draw to work as spies and scouts, although caution needed to be taken in selecting men for such service.

Spies must never be of the same race as the enemy nor have suffered any serious harm at our hands. The wives, children, parents, brothers, or sisters of the spies should reside among us, so that love for family will keep them from remaining permanently with the enemy or from getting involved in any plots against their own people. They must, of course, be men of natural intelligence, well acquainted with the customs of the enemy to whom they are assigned, fluent in their language, and experienced travellers in their country. After arriving in hostile territory, they must not have any contact with prisoners of war, not only because it might arouse suspicion but also to avoid being recognized.<sup>70</sup>

This passage displays a remarkable awareness of issues of group identity, and the complicated intersection of language, family, ‘tribe,’ and allegiance to the Roman polity. A commander also needed to guard against the potential for divided loyalties among his men, and work vigorously to ferret out spies, whether Roman or foreign.<sup>71</sup> Soldiers should never be brought to fight against their own race (όμογενής), but ‘should be sent

<sup>68</sup> MacMullen, *Soldier and Civilian in the Later Roman Empire*; Kaegi, *Byzantine Military Unrest*; Haldon, “Military Service, Military Lands, and the Status of Soldiers: Current Problems and Interpretations.”

<sup>69</sup> Dennis, *Three Byzantine Military Treatise*, De Re Strategica, §39; pp. 117–19.

<sup>70</sup> Dennis, De Re Strategica, §42.29–36; pp. 123–25.

<sup>71</sup> «Εἴτε Ρωμαῖοι δοκοῦσιν εἶναι εἴτε ἀλλογενεῖς» Maurice (Ps.), *Strategikon*, §IX.5.114; similarly at §XI.4.156–61. Trans. Dennis, *Maurice’s Strategikon*.

away long before and should not be brought into battle against their own people.’<sup>72</sup>

The two principal languages of the Roman military were Latin (invariably called Ὀρῳδίστι) and Greek (Ἐλληνιστί). Both the *De Re Strategica* and the *Strategikon*, the two manuals roughly contemporary to—and certainly read during—this period, were written in Greek. That said, a substrate of Latin permeates the *Strategikon*: military names (particularly ranks and units) are an admixture of Latin and Greek and commands are given in Latin, though transliterated with the Greek alphabet and explained in Greek.<sup>73</sup> This substratum is effectively absent from the *De Re Strategica*, which is entirely in Greek.<sup>74</sup> According to the *Strategikon*, the herald attached to each *tagma* should speak Latin, Greek, and Persian (Ὀρῳδίστι, Ἐλληνιστί, Περσιστί), the language of the empire’s principal opponents at the time of the work’s composition, if possible.<sup>75</sup> When the *tagma* was first assembled, its commander needed to read aloud to them, in both Latin and Greek (Ὀρῳδίστι καὶ Ἐλληνιστί) the ‘mandates,’ a list of military regulations, crimes, and punishments.<sup>76</sup> Ritual communal experiences, like drilling together or assembling on parade to be addressed by the commanding officer, reinforced the men’s comradery and loyalty and strengthened their sense of identity both as soldiers and as Romans. Latin had, for the previous millennium, provided a unifying linguistic space for all soldiers regardless of native tongue. The shift to Greek which occurred between the composition of the *Strategikon* and the *De Re Strategica* reflected a significant change, a departure from the Latin heritage of the Roman army.

A soldier’s experience—especially for the infantry who formed the majority of the armed forces—was defined by his file, a unit of between eight and eighteen men who trained, fought, and marched together, and shared communal resources like tent, entrenching tools, and a pack animal.<sup>77</sup> An individual’s identity as a soldier, however, was bound principally

<sup>72</sup> Maurice (Ps.), *Strategikon*, §VII A.6.10–11; similarly at §VII A.15. Trans. Dennis, *Maurice’s Strategikon*.

<sup>73</sup> Maurice (Ps.), *Strategikon*, §I.3, III.2–5. XII B.14–16, 24. Trans. Dennis, *Maurice’s Strategikon*.

<sup>74</sup> Note particularly the titles of officers and technical terminology: Dennis, *Three Byzantine Military Treatise*, *De Re Strategica*, §15 and 31; pp. 47–53, 95–97.

<sup>75</sup> Maurice (Ps.), *Strategikon*, §XII B.7.3–4. Trans. Dennis, *Maurice’s Strategikon*.

<sup>76</sup> Maurice (Ps.), *Strategikon*, §I.8.2–3. Trans. Dennis, *Maurice’s Strategikon*.

<sup>77</sup> Maurice (Ps.), *Strategikon*, §XII B. Trans. Dennis, *Maurice’s Strategikon*.

to his *tagma*. Communal activities created group solidarity, a way of encouraging *esprit de corps*. In the *Strategikon*, many of these activities were centred upon an explicitly Christian schedule. ‘Whether the *bandon* or *tagma* is in service with the rest of the army or is camping someplace by itself, the Trisagion must be sung, and the other customary practices observed, early in the morning before any other duty and again in the evening after supper and the dismissal.’<sup>78</sup> Its author, (Pseudo) Maurice, admonishes against using these as battle-cries, a custom which he indicates as being somewhat common: he believed the practice to be dangerous on account of its propensity to disrupt discipline and organization.<sup>79</sup> However, prayers and hymns in both Latin and Greek were integral to soldiers’ daily lives, creating a regularized pattern of life which built and reinforced order and discipline for the professional Roman army. Even in the military Christian ritual performance was an important tool for establishing and reinforcing the contours of the Roman community.

Other signals attuned soldiers to their comrades and unit. The commander (*comes*) of each *tagma* had his own unique banner. The banner of the *comes* was used to identify the *tagma* in camp, on the march, and in battle. This banner allowed soldiers to quickly identify their comrades if they straggled or became lost in the confusion of a large battle.<sup>80</sup> Soldier’s identities and loyalties, then, were bound up in imagery associated with their commanding officer; his loyalties, the tactical manuals make abundantly clear, are to the Roman state (τῇ τῶν Ὄρμων πολιτείᾳ). This point deserves some further development. The perspective on the relationship between soldier, society, and state contained in these two treatises is unique, and important to consider because it is at odds with that presented in other types of contemporary documents. The most striking disconnect is the authors’ attitudes towards religion. Neither the *Strategikon* nor the three works by Syrianos Magistros are about Christianity, but the writes address a world which is culturally Christian. These texts show the cultural resonance of certain aspects of Christian practice, such as the attention paid to the cult of Mary in the prologue to the *Strategikon*:

<sup>78</sup> Maurice (Ps.), *Strategikon*, §VII B.17.4–7; similarly at XII B.22.35. Trans. Dennis, *Maurice’s Strategikon*.

<sup>79</sup> Against the ‘Nobiscum?’ Maurice (Ps.), *Strategikon*, §II.17.2–5. Trans. Dennis, *Maurice’s Strategikon*. The author found the practice acceptable as troops marched up to battle, §VII B.16.10.

<sup>80</sup> Maurice (Ps.), *Strategikon*, §II.20. Trans. Dennis, *Maurice’s Strategikon*.

If what we have written should be deficient, the Holy Trinity will put it in order, turn it to our advantage, and provide guidance for those who may read it. May this come about through the intercession of our Lady, the immaculate, ever-virgin Mother of God, Mary, and of all the saints, for blessed is our God for never-ending ages of ages, Amen.<sup>81</sup>

Elsewhere in the text we see hints at the personal salvific importance of faith for soldiers, confirmed by (Pseudo) Maurice's first maxim, 'before getting into danger, the general should worship God. When he does get into danger, then, he can with confidence pray to God as a friend.'<sup>82</sup>

Likewise, Syrianos Magistros' description of the ideal taxonomic ordering and functioning of Roman society at the start of the *De Re Strategica* establishes the importance of ecclesiastic institutions to it:

Holy orders have been established for the worship of God, the first and universal cause, by whom and through whom all things came into being and are governed in the ways of goodness known to him alone.<sup>83</sup> ... As far as the qualifications expected of the priests are concerned, it is clear that they ought to be experienced in the laws of God and be of excellent character. Their assistants must also be pure and should carry out the duties imposed on them by the bishops and priests in a meek and dignified manner. Such matters, however, lie outside our competence and belong rather to the Apostles and those who observe their way of life.<sup>84</sup>

Syrianos imagines a speech exhorting Roman soldiers to frame the experience of battle in terms of Christian martyrdom in the *Rhetorica Militaris*, saying 'Christ was wounded in the side for us, will we not patiently endure blows for him? Our Lord died for us, will we no die for our Lord?'<sup>85</sup> Christianity is certainly a part of the world which these treatises describe, but not necessarily a part of the literary tradition in which they self-consciously situate themselves. Both authors, (Pseudo) Maurice and Syrianos Magistros, claim to write in a simple and direct style, but there are certain assumptions behind these claims.<sup>86</sup> Both cite historical exemplars for some of their points, drawing from well-known battles in classical

<sup>81</sup> Maurice (Ps.), *Strategikon*, §Pr.3–9. Trans. Dennis, *Maurice's Strategikon*.

<sup>82</sup> Maurice (Ps.), *Strategikon*, §VIII.2.2–4. Trans. Dennis, *Maurice's Strategikon*.

<sup>83</sup> Dennis, *Three Byzantine Military Treatise*, *De Re Strategica*, §II.3–5; p. 13.

<sup>84</sup> Dennis, *De Re Strategica*, §III.9–13; p. 15.

<sup>85</sup> Syrianos Magistros, *Rhetorica Militaris*, §10.1 p. 49 lines 1–4.

<sup>86</sup> C.f. Maurice (Ps.), *Strategikon*, §Pr.15–16. Trans. Dennis, *Maurice's Strategikon*.

Greek and Roman history. Absent, though, is any mention of biblical history—an attitude towards that past which would appear out-of-synch with that expounded upon by contemporary and near-contemporary chroniclers.<sup>87</sup> Although both writers made occasional reference to the ‘pagan’ literary corpus—especially Homer<sup>88</sup>—biblical references are only found in the *Rhetorical Militaris*. These early medieval military treatises adapted the established conventions of the military-handbook genre for the Christian cultural landscape they inhabited, but Christianity in these texts is relatively incidental. The world which they depict is based on fundamentally civic social relationships. (Pseudo) Maurice and Syrianos Magistros held different views about their own society than those which are most frequently encountered in contemporary Greek literature.

This observation helps to situate these writers’ views about the state and the emperor. Neither author gives much attention to the emperor.<sup>89</sup> The individual and the office elicit little interest from the authors, and no ideological engagement, a point which can be underscored by the absence of the word for empire (*ἡ βασιλεία*) in either the *Strategikon* or the *De Re Strategica*. This contrasts with the ‘state’ (or ‘republic,’ *ἡ πολιτεία*), a concept referenced, in a variety of forms, six times in the *Strategikon* and seventeen times in the *De Re Strategica*. With the emperor conspicuously absent, the social taxonomy in the *De Re Strategica* is headed by ‘advisors’ (or perhaps ‘senators,’ *οἱ συμβούλοι*), who come before judges. The *Strategikon*, while less categorical, is nevertheless explicit in its author’s views on political theory. A general may promise to his soldiers ‘rewards from the emperor, and recompense for loyal service to the state,’<sup>90</sup> drawing a clear distinction between the ‘state,’ to which Roman soldiers owed their allegiance, and the individual who headed the enterprise.

What exactly did the ‘state’ signify to these authors and their audiences? According to the *Strategikon*, both Rhomania and Persia are distinct for being ‘states,’ a feature which differentiates them from the monarchies (*ώς μοναρχούμενα*) which rule other peoples: ‘these nations have a monarchical form of government, and their rulers subject them to cruel punishments for their mistakes. Governed not by love but by fear, they steadfastly

<sup>87</sup> Eusebius, Malalas, or George Synkellos. Angold and Whitby, “Historiography,” 840–43.

<sup>88</sup> Maurice (Ps.), *Strategikon*, §VIII.2267–70. Trans. Dennis, *Maurice’s Strategikon*. Dennis, *Three Byzantine Military Treatise*, *De Re Strategica*, §III.23–26; p. 15.

<sup>89</sup> Maurice (Ps.), *Strategikon*, §IV.3.29, VII.4.5. Trans. Dennis, *Maurice’s Strategikon*. Dennis, *Three Byzantine Military Treatise*, *De Re Strategica*, § III.104, VI.17; pp. 19, 23.

<sup>90</sup> Maurice (Ps.), *Strategikon*, §VII.4.5–6. Trans. Dennis, *Maurice’s Strategikon*.

bear labours and hardships.<sup>91</sup> These attitudes clearly articulate a classicizing conceptualization of the shape of the Roman state and attitudes towards their fellow citizens. These treatises demonstrate an enduring civic conceptualization of the Roman community current in the state's most important expense, its military, and among the pool of citizens who formed its corps of officers.

The Romans' own emphasis on the importance of their army can lead historians to over-emphasize its presence and impact on society. The manifest impact of bureaucracies which collected taxes and dispensed the law is not matched in documentary sources by the impact of the protective bureaucracy, the army. Despite Nicaea being the headquarters of the Opsikion *strateia*, Ignatios never addresses anyone identified as a senior commander, and makes no more than passing reference to the army or its officers during his time as bishop of the city. This contrasts with his major connections to very senior individuals among the ecclesiastical,<sup>92</sup> judicial,<sup>93</sup> and fiscal elites.<sup>94</sup> Indeed, the only place he appears to interact with individuals connected with the army are the property disputes he engages in on behalf of the bishopric of Nicaea against various *proto-notarioi*, administrators introduced under Nikephoros I who were responsible for fiscal management of the new themes.<sup>95</sup> Such an omission would seem at odds with the generally accepted image of a highly integrated militarized state which characterizes descriptions of the empire after Heraclius as explored above in Sect. 1.

Pride in the accomplishments and competence of the Roman military as exemplary of Roman identity can be found echoed in a variety of other works of literature. Sometimes soldiers were depicted as stalwart exemplars of the Roman Christian virtue, as seen in the *42 Martyrs of Amorion*

<sup>91</sup> Maurice (Ps.), *Strategikon*, §XI.2.12–14. Trans. Dennis, *Maurice's Strategikon*.

<sup>92</sup> Ignatios the Deacon, *Epistulae*, §52, 54 and 55 were sent to Patriarch Methodios; §9, 18, 19, 20 and 49 to the metropolitan bishops of Nikomedia, Gangra and Caria. Trans. Mango and Eftymiadis, *The Correspondence of Ignatios, the Deacon*.

<sup>93</sup> Ignatios the Deacon, *Epistulae*, §6 to hypatos Constantine. Trans. Mango and Eftymiadis, *The Correspondence of Ignatios, the Deacon*.

<sup>94</sup> Ignatios the Deacon, *Epistulae*, §21–24 to Democharis, the logothete of the genikon, most senior fiscal official in the empire. Trans. Mango and Eftymiadis, *The Correspondence of Ignatios, the Deacon*.

<sup>95</sup> Ignatios the Deacon, *Epistulae*, §7, 39, 53. Trans. Mango and Eftymiadis, *The Correspondence of Ignatios, the Deacon*, 39–41, 109–11, 133–35. Brubaker, Haldon, and Ousterhout, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era c. 680–850. A History*, 749–53.

and Theophanes' account of the Bulgarian martyrs, other times as religiously unprincipled, such as in Theophanes' account of the siege of Nicaea (726).<sup>96</sup> Among the lowliest salary-earning employee of the imperial government, common *stratiotai* reflect the bottom stratum of the middling class. Furthermore, as the largest group in the government's employ, collectively they were the main point of contact which the masses had with the state's representatives. They represented a large body of individuals, tens of thousands, but one dwarfed in absolute numbers by the millions whom they guarded.<sup>97</sup> Units had their own unique institutional continuity and identity which was at once intensely fraternal, patriotic, and yet still distinct from that imperial identity to which soldiers owed their ultimate loyalty.<sup>98</sup> Continuous regimental traditions linked units from the tenth century with the fourth,<sup>99</sup> creating a brotherhood-in-arms which reinforced other components of Roman identity linking an individual's present with both the past and the future.

The Roman army, as seen through the evidence of military manuals, provides a different realization of Roman institutional identity. Relatively 'popular' at least when compared to other state and ecclesiastic institutions, it shows the importance of ritual over ideology or the elite's learned cultural vocabulary for giving a group of men a sense of belonging. In contrast to the thought-world inhabited by the writers of chronicles and hagiographies, this is a world where ritual and tradition were defining features for the performance of Roman identity rather than ideological purity.

### 3 SYSTEMS OF EDUCATION

Group identity extends beyond the simple existence of systems and labels, requiring presentation and active performance. 'Ascription is not conditional on the control of any specific assets, but rests on criteria of origin and commitment; whereas performance in the status, the adequate acting out of the roles required to realize the identity, in many systems does require such assets.'<sup>100</sup> The Roman polity formed the core referential point

<sup>96</sup> Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, AM 6218. Trans. Mango and Scott, *Theophanes' Chronicle*, 559–61.

<sup>97</sup> Charanis, *Studies on the Demography of the Byzantine Empire*, pt. XIV.

<sup>98</sup> MacMullen, "The Legion as Society."

<sup>99</sup> Whittow, *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium, 600–1025*, 113.

<sup>100</sup> Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, 28.

for the ascription of Roman identity, but its performance required the mastery of other systems and normative expectations as well. For the elite of Roman society, no system was more important to their representation of Roman identity than education and the networks which supported it.

The governing elite of Roman society performed their identities through a language and a culture which they gained from a specific form of education, the *paideia*. This system had its roots in classical Greece. Although Christianization impacted the content of the shared culture, at its core were a set of classical texts which had formed the basic curriculum of an aspiring Roman's education since the final century BC.<sup>101</sup> Throughout the first millennium, the Roman Empire comprised a vast territory of diverse peoples. A common education provided the elite, whatever their native land and language, with a 'common culture that was held to be the distinguishing mark of the diffused governing class of the empire, shared alike by the notables of each region and by the personnel of the imperial government.'<sup>102</sup> These networks were abundantly evidenced in the fourth and fifth centuries, from sources such as the epistles of Libanius, a teacher from Antioch who maintained and left a record of an extensive network with his pupils.<sup>103</sup> By the early middle ages, the religious dangers of 'Hellenism' were largely neutered, and elite culture successfully integrated both 'pagan' and Christian influences.<sup>104</sup>

Evidence for educational systems and networks is scarcer for the early middle ages than for late antiquity. Throughout these centuries, 'there is no sign of a profound change in secular education [the primary *propaideia* and secondary *paideia*], no indication of the existence of church education.'<sup>105</sup> Although *paideia* clearly continued to shape the development of new generations of elite culture, the availability of higher studies declined in this time. Historical references to teachers became rarer; traditional centres fell into decline, no longer attracting or supporting bodies of eminent scholars; and the fewer teachers who were active in this period

<sup>101</sup> Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity*, 118–26.

<sup>102</sup> Brown, 36.

<sup>103</sup> C.f. Cameron, "Education and Literary Culture"; Criboire, *Gymnastics of the Mind Greek Education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt*; Criboire, *The School of Libanius in Late Antique Antioch*; Lançon, "Militia Philosophorum : Le Rôle Des Lettrés Dans l'entourage Des Empereurs Romains Du IVe Siècle"; McLynn, "Gregory's Governors: Paideia and Patronage in Cappadocia."

<sup>104</sup> Browning, "Education in the Roman Empire"; Schwartz, *Paideia and Cult*.

<sup>105</sup> Lemerle, *Byzantine Humanism*, 116.

were more difficult to find, indicating that networks shrank or outright collapsed.<sup>106</sup> Yet despite this apparent decline, the ninth century witnessed a robustly reinvigorated intellectual life under figures like Leo the Mathematician (d. after 869) and Photios (*circa* 810–893), demonstrating that ‘though it had been underground for some time and hidden from our sight, the stream [of learning] had never dried up.’<sup>107</sup>

This section explores three facets of education as it pertains to identity. First, it explores education as a system central to the performance of Roman identity. Although not providing a narrative like the polity, educational systems gave a diverse elite a common set of cultural reference points by which they could establish whether an individual belonged to the self-group or other. Second, the enduring cultural legacy of Greek education in formerly Roman territories complicated the simple self-other binary. The cultural status of *paideia* was independent of Roman society, even as it was integral to its elite. The final part attempts to establish the pervasiveness of educational performance within the early medieval Roman world. Literacy functions as a metric for checking whether an individual possesses a rudimentary education and played a role in Romanness beyond the narrow elite. *Paideia* was a system at the core of elite Roman identity, the means of learning a set of common cultural reference points which gave significance to an individual’s relationship to the rest of the Roman group whether they be separated by space or by time.

The centrality of *paideia* to the performance of elite Roman identity is reflected in many literary works of this period. Foremost among these works are the epistles of Ignatios (d. after 845). They provide a diverse insight into the community and social structures of the Roman elites at this influential moment in history.<sup>108</sup> As such, his perspective can be used as a touchstone for the zeitgeist of his generation. In many of his epistles, Ignatios makes reference in one way or another to education. In most cases this is done only in the most general of terms, such as in epistle 33 where he rebukes a certain Joseph, abbot of Antidion, for neglecting the spiritual education and well-being of Ignatios’ unnamed ‘spiritual son.’ However, in one earlier instance Ignatios makes some passing comments on the nature of what, exactly, might be meant by ‘education.’ In epistle

<sup>106</sup> Lemerle, 84–107.

<sup>107</sup> Lemerle, 120.

<sup>108</sup> Mango and Scott, *Theophanes’ Chronicle*, 18–24.

18, he addressed bishop Constantine of Gangra, in part giving his colleague news about a mutual acquaintance:

As for your Theophilos, who is now also mine, since you have placed him in my hands, he is every day irrigated to overflowing by your holy admonitions toward improvement, and having in the meantime acquired a grounding in grammatical practice, is devoting himself, with God's help, to higher pursuits. May you, by mentioning him in your prayers and crying out loudly to God, be his guide toward the better things that lie in store for him.<sup>109</sup>

There can be no doubt that the pupil's primary educational ends were religious, but the only component mentioned, grammar, was as old and as central a component in Greek education as one can find. Indeed, education appears again and again as one of the most important defining features of the Roman Empire's elite.

Although *paideia* was a structure, involving a network of instructors and pupils as well as generally similar curricula across the *oikoumene*, it was not an institution like the state or the church. Although the state depended upon a steady stream of educated individuals to run it, it exerted relatively little influence which could be compared with modern states' educational policies. In the fifth and sixth centuries, some emperors—particularly Theodosius II and Justinian I—passed laws to formalize a system of schools for certain parts of the imperial bureaucracy, particularly the judiciary.<sup>110</sup> However, none of these survived the economic, religious, social, and political upheavals of the late sixth and early seventh centuries. Throughout the iconoclast era, systems and networks supporting educational training beyond the *paideia* effectively disappear. In practice this meant that anyone whose job might typically have required post-*paideia* study (jurists learning the law, e.g.) had to do without.<sup>111</sup>

Even by the turn of the seventh century, acquiring a complete education could be a difficult matter in terms of availability. The Armenian author Ananias of Shirak (*circa* 600–650) left a prodigious catalogue of works on mathematics, astrology, and geography. Although he wrote in Armenian, he educated himself with a traditional *paideia* in Rhomania from Roman tutors. In one of his epistles, he tells of the difficulties which

<sup>109</sup> Ignatios the Deacon, *Epistulae*, §18, trans. pp. 61–63.

<sup>110</sup> Lemere, *Byzantine Humanism*, 63–64; Wilson, *Scholars of Byzantium*, 28–60.

<sup>111</sup> Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century*, 427–35; Mullett, “Writing in Early Medieval Byzantium.”

one of his teachers, Tychicus of Byzantium (fl. 640s), encountered over the course of his career.

Tychicus told me that when he was a young man in Trebizond he had been in the court of John the Warrior, and he served in the Roman army in Armenia ... but he had been wounded in battle against the Persians and fled to Antioch. ... He said, "When I was recovered, I went off to the city of Jerusalem and thence to Alexandria, and thence to Rome; where I stayed for some time, and then returned to Constantinople. And I found a teacher in Athens the city of philosophy, a famous man, with whom I spent not a few years in study. And having perfected myself in philosophy I returned to this place, and began to teach as a doctor. But after a few years my own teacher died; and as of his pupils could be found no one equal, by the command of the emperor and of the princes, they sent an invitation that I should go and occupy his chair." But he declined, saying: I am vowed to the heavenly king not to depart from this place. And after that they came to him to learn from all over the earth, because of his exceeding knowledge.<sup>112</sup>

While there were places in which teachers tended to congregate for historical or political reasons, educational networks existed independently of any institutional oversight. Teachers got their work based on reputations.<sup>113</sup> While this system, if it can even be called that, is much harder to trace than those which are connected to institutions like the church or state, it also meant that educational networks could continue to function independently in the absence of them. While Ananias and Tychicus had the luxury to afford to travel far from their homes in search of the finest instructors and libraries to which money could give them access, most families looking to educate their children would have been far more at the mercy of whoever chanced to work near them at that time.<sup>114</sup>

In contrast to the general disruption which impacted across society in the century or so following the Persian and Muslim conquests, education, at least at the primary and secondary level, proved to be a surprisingly stable practice. Schooling was always a private affair, available to children of families with sufficient means to make the investment. Although there are some instances where multiple instructors would collaborate to create

<sup>112</sup> Ananias of Shirak, "Autobiographie d'Anania Shirakac'i." Trans. Conybeare, "Ananias of Shirak (A.D. 600–650), Autobiography."

<sup>113</sup> Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity*, 35–47; Cribiore, *The School of Libanius in Late Antique Antioch*, 42–82.

<sup>114</sup> Cribiore, *The School of Libanius in Late Antique Antioch*, 83–110; Watts, *City and School in Late Antique Athens and Alexandria*, 1–23.

some sort of collegial structure, generally Roman schools consisted of a single instructor and his pupils.<sup>115</sup> The experience was not broken down into classes or grades, but into two phases. Primary education, called the *propaideia*, lasted about four years beginning at the age of eight or thereabouts. Conducted under the tutorship of a *grammatistes*, students learned the alphabet and the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic.<sup>116</sup> The *paideia* properly only refers to secondary schooling, taught under the guiding supervision of a *grammatikos*. The course of study lasted at least four years, usually beginning when the students were twelve to fourteen years of age. Like in the contemporary Latin west, the curriculum centred upon the *trivium* (grammar, philosophy, rhetoric) and the *quadrivium* (arithmetic, astronomy, geometry, music). While students and teachers used handbooks to study the theory and forms of these topics, the literary subjects of the *trivium* were learned principally through the study and emulation of a literary canon.<sup>117</sup>

For many, especially those who were bound for a monastic life, a primary education was all that was necessary. Romanos the Neomartyr (ca. 730–1 May 780) was called to an ascetic life as a youth, so he joined a monastery dedicated to the Holy Apostles situated on lake ‘Tomantion’ in the region of Mantineon, Paphlagonia, known from other sources as the dual-monastery which had been founded by the abbess Anthousa.

Therefore, in this famous and illustrious monastery, the blessed Romanos was made a monk from childhood, and learned all the psalms of David and all the monastic rites. He was zealous reading spiritual books, and cleansed his intellect in those waters of the life-restoring Holy Spirit.<sup>118</sup>

In this monastery, he received at least a rudimentary education which allowed him to read scripture and, according to his hagiographer, a minimum of theology. Although this was not an advanced education similar to the *paideia* which Ignatios and his equals would receive, it nevertheless bound the young monk to the cultural and literary inheritance of Christian Romanness.

As attested in Romanos’ life, during the *propaideia* the core text used to teach basic literacy was, most often, the Psalter.<sup>119</sup> If the student moved into

<sup>115</sup> Markopoulos, “De la structure de l’école byzantine.”

<sup>116</sup> Kalogeris, “Byzantine Childhood Education,” 124–36.

<sup>117</sup> Markopoulos, “Education”; Robins, “The Byzantine Grammarians,” 41–86.

<sup>118</sup> Stephen of Damascus, “Vita Romani,” §2, 410.12–14. Trans. by the author.

<sup>119</sup> Hunger, *Schreiben und Lesen in Byzanz*, 76–77.

the *paideia*, he (or, rarely, she)<sup>120</sup> was expected to study a larger body of material. The central texts for teaching literacy, as they had been for over a thousand years in the Greek-speaking world, were Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.<sup>121</sup> Other texts were drawn from the literary canon of classical, 'pagan' authors, as well as the works of the patristic fathers. The exact curriculum could vary by local availability and individual interest, but typically included plays of Aeschylus, Aristophanes, Euripides, and Sophocles, and works from Aelian, Aeschines, Demosthenes, Gregory of Nazianzos, Hesiod, Lucian, Philostratos, Pindar, Plato, Theocritos, and Xenophon.<sup>122</sup> 'Classical education' as it exists in the modern west owes much of its shape to the curriculum of the Greek *paideia* and is, in many ways, intended to imitate it. These sources formed a common set of cultural reference points which the Roman elite used to establish their participation in a shared system whose legacy linked them not only with their educated contemporaries but through time with all who understood the cultural signs learned from these works.

Homer's central position as the ultimate cultural reference point is underscored not only by his presence in very Christian works but in very technical 'secular' works as well. One example may be found in the *Strategikon*, the military manual attributed to the emperor Maurice (hence its author is identified as (Pseudo) Maurice throughout this volume). The document is well-organized and readable, and its author states in his introduction to what he calls his 'elementary handbook':

We have resolved, therefore, to do some writing on the subject [of strategy], as best we can, succinctly and simply, drawing in part on ancient authors and in part on our limited experience of active duty, with an eye more to practical utility than to fine words.<sup>123</sup>

Throughout the work, (Pseudo) Maurice does indeed avoid 'fine words' and complex cultural references. For example, although Christian religious practices are regularly mentioned as being part of soldiers' routines, quotes from the Bible are conspicuously absent. The author references important historical campaigns for the purpose of illustrating his points,

<sup>120</sup> For limited evidence of girls receiving formal education in late antiquity: Harris, *Ancient Literacy*, 309–10. See also Stevenson, *Women Latin Poets*, 59–64.

<sup>121</sup> Morgan, *Literate Education in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds*, 308–9.

<sup>122</sup> Lemerle, *Byzantine Humanism*, 100–2, 132; Cribiore, *Gymnastics of the Mind Greek Education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt*, 132–47.

<sup>123</sup> Maurice (Ps.), *Strategikon*, Pr. 15–18.

but does not intersperse gobbets from classical historians. However, he uses a few ‘secular proverbs’ of unknown provenance, pointing to a populist approach and the use of an idiomatic register.<sup>124</sup> He also quotes *Iliad* 11, expecting his audience to recognize it by attribution simply to ‘the poet.’<sup>125</sup> The attitude is that, for an audience of literate Romans, phrases from Homer’s works were integral to their cultural vocabulary.

Education was principally an elite phenomenon, and wealthy Roman families invested in their daughters, if not necessarily as much as their sons. Some girls from noble families were tutored at home by their mothers or other family members, but others attended schooling for at least the *pro-paideia*. Although they, too, would have learned by reading Homer, readings for girls drew more heavily on the Bible and Psalter than the ‘Pagan’ classics read by their brothers.<sup>126</sup> Because Roman women had the legal right to own land and manage the household in the event of their husband’s death, a certain minimum literacy was effectively necessary for women at the top of society throughout the early medieval centuries. Although literate elite culture was principally an urban phenomenon, it certainly was not exclusively such. Some of the best-documented women of this period, the empresses Eirene, Maria of Amnia, and Theodora all grew up in provincial aristocratic households—Eirene from Hellas, the other two from Paphlagonia—before marrying into the imperial family. After becoming widows, Eirene and Theodora stepped into the traditional Roman role as the guardian for underage sons, drawing on the same training to manage the empire that would have prepared other noble women to manage an aristocratic *oikos*.

Nuns were also more likely to be literate than the rest of society as a whole, not only because nuns tended to come from wealthier families, but also because monasteries taught women who were illiterate upon entry to be able to read.<sup>127</sup> Surviving women writers from this period are all connected to monasteries. Sergia, who was abbess of the Monastery of St. Olympias in Constantinople during the Avar and Persian siege of 626, wrote the *Narration*, a first-person account of the saint’s miracles in that time.<sup>128</sup> Three women hymnographers are known from the ninth century,

<sup>124</sup> Maurice (Ps.), VII B.12.2–6, VIII 1.86–87 (no. 26), VIII 2.225–27 (no. 79).

<sup>125</sup> Maurice (Ps.), VIII 2.242–45 (no. 82).

<sup>126</sup> Brown, “Psalmody and Socrates: Female Literacy in Byzantine Society,” 65–67.

<sup>127</sup> Brown, 63. Also 66 where Brown discusses the case of the mother of Theodore Stoudites, who he described as a self-taught orphan who memorized the Psalter.

<sup>128</sup> Clark, “Sergia’s Narration.”

all aristocratic Constantinopolitan nuns, Theodosia, Thekla, and Kassia.<sup>129</sup> Only one poem, an encomiastic kanon in praise of Mary the Theotokos, survives attributed to Thekla, but its composition and contents reveals a widely read and well-trained mind which must have received formal schooling in some form in order to produce a technically complex and intertextual piece of literature.<sup>130</sup> To the most famous of the three, St. Kassia (born between 800 and 810, died between 845 and 867), is attributed a corpus of liturgical poetry as well as a collection of gnomic verses. Whether or not later stories about her being the runner-up in Theophilos' bride show were factually true,<sup>131</sup> they do tell us about the admirability and desirability of her erudition and literary accomplishments.

Just as education played a role in preparing women from the provincial elites to join the imperial household, so too the social benefits bestowed by an education helped individuals cross boundaries, both social and political. The most detailed biographical sketch about an outsider leveraging his *pai-deia* and entering the Roman elite comes from turn-of-the-eighth-century Italy. A significant character in Agnellus' *Liber Pontificalis Ravennsis* is his great-great-grandfather, Ioannicis ‘the most wise, [who] set forth all the antiphons which we sing now on the Sundays of the cross or of the holy apostles or martyrs or confessors and virgins, not only in Latin speech but also in Greek words, since he was a great orator in both tongues.’<sup>132</sup> Agnellus claims that his illustrious ancestor was martyred on the order of Justinian II very shortly before his own downfall and death, which would place Ioannicis’ death around 711. At the time of his death, he had a living, adult son by the name of George, ‘wise in speech, provident in council, true in words and very fine in all graces,’<sup>133</sup> who provided civic leadership for Ravenna in opposition to the policies of Justinian II. This would indicate that, by the time of his death, Ioannicis was at least middle-aged and head of his household. Ioannicis’ story reads like a hagiography, covering his career, accomplishments, passion, martyrdom, and at least one miracle.<sup>134</sup>

<sup>129</sup> Catafygiotu-Topping, “Women Hymnographers in Byzantium.”

<sup>130</sup> Catafygiotu-Topping, “Thekla the Nun,” 366.

<sup>131</sup> Kazhdan, “Kassia”; Rochow, *Studien zu der Person, den Werken und dem Nachleben der Dichterin Kassia*.

<sup>132</sup> Agnellus of Ravenna, *Liber pontificalis*, 146. Trans. Deliyannis, *The Book of Pontiffs of the Church of Ravenna*, 270–71.

<sup>133</sup> Agnellus of Ravenna, *Liber pontificalis*, 140. Trans. Deliyannis, *The Book of Pontiffs of the Church of Ravenna*, 263.

<sup>134</sup> Deliyannis, *The Book of Pontiffs of the Church of Ravenna*, 34–35.

Although Agnellus' narrative adheres to certain conventions of the genre, its core is the historical story of the life and death of an educated civil servant whose education provided him access to power and wealth.

Although far removed in time, Agnellus' vignettes about his ancestor shed some light on the benefits which a *paideia* brought and the proverbial doors which it opened.

In the time [of bishop Theodore, 677–691], it happened that the notary of the exarch died, for whom the exarch grieved, not only for his death, but moreover because he did not have a similar wise man in the palace who could compose imperial letters or complete other written charters which were necessary. However, when he indicated his sadness to his attendants, they said to him, ‘There is here a youth, one Ioannicis by name, most skilled in writing, learned in scriptures, faithful in wisdom, wise in council, truthful in word, cautious in speech and full of all knowledge, sprung from noblest blood. If at once you will order him to come and stand before your sight, he will please you, he has been instructed in Greek and Latin letters.’ Uplifted at having heard this speech, he ordered him to come. And [Ioannicis] stood before him. … And the exarch ordered a letter to be brought which had come to him from the emperor, written in Greek, and said to him, ‘Read it.’ But he rose from lying at [the exarch’s] feet, and frowned, and said, ‘Do you order, my lord, that I read it in Greek, as it is written, or with Latin words?’ since he used Greek as well as he used Latin, and held Latin as Greek. Then the admiring exarch, together with the leaders of the assembly of the people, ordered a charter to be brought written in Latin letters, and ordered him saying, ‘Take this charter in your hand and read it in Greek words.’ Taking it, he read the whole thing in Greek. Then the exarch was pleased at the knowledge of this Johannicis.<sup>135</sup>

A simple test to check the merit of a candidate for a prestigious secretarial position. The detail of the scene is interesting, but possibly reflects more Agnellus' own interests and experiences some 130 years later rather than, necessarily, an authentic account of entry into the service of the imperial bureaucracy as a junior functionary at the turn of the seventh century. Ioannicis' knowledge of scriptures and ability to compose Greek in a manner considered artful enough to be paid for his services shows that a *paideia* of some sort could still be found as a product of locally available teaching networks. The passage further suggests that this was probably not normal training among the local elite even in Ravenna, capital of the exarchate.

<sup>135</sup> Agnellus of Ravenna, *Liber pontificalis*, 120. Trans. Deliyannis, *The Book of Pontiffs of the Church of Ravenna*, 239–40.

His literary accomplishment was enough to earn him rewards and the attention of prestigious patrons.

After three years [in the exarch's service], the emperor in Constantinople ordered a letter to be written to the exarch saying thus: 'Send to me that man who produces such compositions and poems which you have sent to me.' [The exarch,] burdened by necessity as if by oaken beams, sent him to Constantinople. And when the emperor had looked at him, he did not [at first] believe in [Ioannicis'] knowledge. After a few days, [Ioannicis'] learning shone forth, and [the emperor] placed him among the leading men. ... Now in the time [of Bishop Damian, 692–708] the said Ioannicis returned from Constantinople to Ravenna, and his wisdom was famed in all Italy.<sup>136</sup>

A move from a provincial court to the capital of the empire was a major advancement for a bureaucrat's career. Ioannicis might have been in the imperial employ, but he was not in the same class as Ignatios who was bishop of Nicaea about a century later. He numbered among the middling provincial administrators, subordinate to the exarch who would have been more Ignatios' equal. Nevertheless, this transfer occurred because of Ioannicis' literary accomplishments, not his family connections or personal wealth, demonstrating practically the 'relative openness in Byzantine society to social mobility.'<sup>137</sup>

Education was one important and prestigious mechanism by which individuals could seek social advancement, creating an intellectual space open to all who learned its idioms. The effect of the common curriculum is shown in Ignatios' correspondence, for they are replete with literary references and allusions. Of the approximately 300 identifiable references made in Ignatios' epistles, half (148 by its editor's count) are biblical. This is hardly surprising considering that, first, he was a bishop, monk, and deacon over the course of his career, and second the majority of correspondence are with other religious figures. Indeed, Ignatios appears to have conscientiously adjusted the literary embellishments which he chose to use depending upon the station of his recipient. Contacts less accomplished in their education (and typically lower in social rank) received letters with only minimal literary flair, with references only drawn from

<sup>136</sup> Agnellus of Ravenna, *Liber pontificalis*, 120, 125. Trans. Deliyannis, *The Book of Pontiffs of the Church of Ravenna*, 240, 247–48.

<sup>137</sup> Neville, *Authority in Byzantine Provincial Society, 950–1100*, 78.

scripture.<sup>138</sup> However, to those whom he considered worthy of his finest efforts, Ignatios was able to display the full range of his erudition. The second largest body of references found in his epistles, accounting for another quarter of the total, come from Homer (sixty-eight from either the *Iliad* or *Odyssey*); the epic poet's central place in the *paideia* ensured that familiarity with his works was shared by all educated Romans. The remainder of his references come principally from either collection of proverbs, directly from classical sources (Aeschylus, Aesop, Aristotle, Euripides, Hesiod, Hippocrates, Plato, and Xenophon), or patristic authors (Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, and John Chrysostom). Ignatios' epistles attest to the stability of content in the *paideia* across time and space. The list of authors whom he referenced must implicitly be those whom he expected his correspondents to have read.

Although the political boundaries of the Roman world retreated from the Levant and Egypt abruptly in the first half of the seventh century, its cultural legacy remained long after. Formerly Roman families continued to educate their sons in a Christian *paideia* because it was a good investment in the family's future within their new situation. The fact that individuals who were not natively Romans by ascription could become one through performance of their status as holders of an elite *paideia* obscured the absoluteness of the Roman-barbarian dichotomy and reduced the barriers for individuals wishing to cross it.<sup>139</sup> As a result, elsewhere in the *oikoumene* where the *paideia* was still available, it provided a route for integration of emigrants into the Roman elite.

In the letters of Ignatios, the lands beyond the empire's frontiers appear to his ninth-century eyes as an undifferentiated sea of barbarism, without language or culture. When his pupil Constantine returned to Rhomania, released from imprisonment, Ignatios imagined his friend as a captive in a foreign land, forced to 'pretend to be dumb before a dreadful barbarian speech'.<sup>140</sup> Foreign lands were full of the other, where the language and culture which defined Roman civilization was not to be expected. Yet just as Ignatios found 'barbarism' at home amongst heretics,<sup>141</sup> so too was *paideia*, hallmark of the performance of elite Roman identity, widely

<sup>138</sup> Mango and Efthymiadis, *The Correspondence of Ignatios, the Deacon*, 237–42.

<sup>139</sup> Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, 9, 36.

<sup>140</sup> Ignatios the Deacon, *Epistulae*, §57 pp. 139–41.

<sup>141</sup> Ignatios the Deacon, §30.20 p. 87.

found beyond the empire's frontiers. Foreign-born holy men like bishop Andrew of Crete (d. 740) and Stephen of Chenolakkos (early c8) achieved high rank among the empire's elite, a crossing of cultural boundaries accomplished, in part, by leveraging their education. Their successful migration points to a larger Roman cultural community which continued to flourish even without the continued presence of the state. Roman culture had a robust after-life across the *oikoumene* long after the political pretensions of a Roman world order ceased to exist.

Greek-speaking, Christian Roman society had very deep roots across the near east, extending back directly to Alexander the Great and his Hellenistic successors a thousand years earlier. Although some individuals in the post-Arab conquest period utilized the *paideia* which they acquired in order to migrate permanently to Rhomania, most did not. They acquired their education and joined a literary-based cultural elite for their own ends. Through the end of the seventh century at least, that same mandarin-like bureaucracy which ran the Roman Empire was, to a certain extent, left in place to administer the lands of the newly established Caliphate.<sup>142</sup> Even after, membership in literary elite provided avenues for advancement for Christians outside the Roman Empire.

Ananias, who was not a native Roman, wrote one of the most detailed descriptions of the process of finding worthy instructors. His search for a *grammatikos* from whom he could learn maths and natural philosophy is one of the few contemporary accounts of the difficulties faced by students seeking a teacher in the absence of institutional school structures:

I was very wanting in the art of counting, and I reflected that no discourse is in keeping with wisdom in the absence of number, which I regarded as the mother of all philosophies. And among the Armenians I found no man who was learned in this science, nor in their land did I find any books of science. So I set out to go to Rhomania, and I came to Theodoupolis, and I found there a reasonable man, learned in the writings of the church who was named Eliazar. He told me that there was a certain man who was a mathematician in the region of fourth Armenia, Christodotus his name. And I went and spent with him a space of six months. And I saw that he had not the whole science, but only a smattering of it; so I went on thence to Constantinople; and those of my acquaintance who were there met me and said to me: Why have you embarked upon such a long and toilsome journey; when the teacher Tychicus of Byzantium is near to us on the coast of Pontus,

<sup>142</sup> Sarris, *Empires of Faith : The Fall of Rome to the Rise of Islam, 500–700*, 298–99.

which is called Trebizond. ... And the teacher Tychicus unto whom I went loved me as his son and schooled me in all his thoughts. And the lord gave me grace, and I learned fully the art of mathematics, so that the pupils in the royal court were envious of me. And I lived with him eight years, and read and learned many writings which were not translated into our tongue [Armenian]. For he had an enormous library, secret books and open, ecclesiastical and profane, scientific and historical, medical and chronological.<sup>143</sup>

His search led him across the length of Anatolia before he found a patron who could guide his study. It shows the difficulty faced by an outsider in navigating a patronage network, in this case that of educators—both of his teachers were discovered by means of their reputation, and Ananias' first lead, Christodotus, proved to be unequal to the task.

Men in important posts, like Ignatios' bishopric of Nicaea, were expected to reference Homer, Aristophanes, and Plato alongside the Bible, Basil of Caesarea, and John Chrysostom in their written communications. This formed the performative language of a leader in Roman society. An advanced education set the literary elite apart from lower classes like administrators, merchants, or monks who, while they might be literate, could not participate in the cultural dialogue. Performing one's identification with the Roman elite required possession of a set of common cultural reference points. Although these markers underwent a certain degree of change over time, the most dramatic being the incorporation of biblical and Christian elements after the fourth century, it was a process of accretion. This bound the Roman elite chronologically to its past and future generations, for the same literary references which resonated in the fifth century continued to do so in the tenth. Like the historical narrative of the community's continuity framed around the state, this anchored an important aspect of Romanness and gave cohesion to elite culture.

### *Literacy and Romanness*

Even beyond the elite, the written word played an important part in the performance of Roman identity. The Roman polity, operating through the judiciary, fisc, military, and to a certain degree the Church, utilized the

<sup>143</sup> Ananias of Shirak, “Autobiographie d’Anania Shirakac’i.” Trans. Conybeare, “Ananias of Shirak (A.D. 600–650), Autobiography.”

written word to propagate records and bind the periphery of the empire to its central institutions. This periphery was not only geographical but social, too. Beyond simply understanding what education comprised and how it served to advance families and careers in the early medieval Roman world, how far into society and to what degree did education permeate?

With the disappearance of a distinct senatorial elite over the course of the early medieval centuries, the avenues of advancement into the new service elite further opened up opportunities for families who belonged to what had previously been a lower, provincial stratum of society. Consequently, educational accomplishments were how individuals achieved top positions in the empire.<sup>144</sup> Evidence for literacy—both for its prevalence and for social attitudes and expectations around it—provides insights into the composition of the elite and the permeable social boundaries which separated it from the non-elite.

Literacy rates in the classical and early medieval worlds are impossible to know and extremely difficult to estimate.<sup>145</sup> Further complication arises from trying to establish what qualities were necessary to be considered as ‘literate’: recognizing Homeric allusions? the ability to write a statement with correct orthography? the ability to sign one’s name? Each definition reframes the discussion of elite/non-elite boundaries, in effect further blurring the distinction.<sup>146</sup> Regardless of the definition, literacy rates were certainly far from universal, even among the generally literate Roman social elites. Studies of literacy and illiteracy in late antiquity point to two major characteristics. First, not all education achieved the high standards of the *paideia*. There was a gap between the literary elite who possessed a rarefied education and those, often who became prominent in sources due to their military talent, who achieved but the barest standards of literacy.<sup>147</sup> Second, even among the governing classes of Roman society, literacy was not universal. Evidence from the late third century points to low-level yet persistent illiteracy among the empire’s provincial elites.<sup>148</sup>

<sup>144</sup> Browning, “Literacy in the Byzantine World”; Kazhdan, “Literacy”; Jeffreys, “Literacy.”

<sup>145</sup> Harris, *Ancient Literacy*, 3–24.

<sup>146</sup> Pathagean, “Discours Écrit, Discours Parlé”; Oikonomidès, “Mt. Athos: Levels of Literacy,” 68–72; Mullett, “Writing in Early Medieval Byzantium”; Holmes, “Written Culture in Byzantium and beyond: Contexts, Contents and Interpretations”; Kazhdan, “Literacy.”

<sup>147</sup> Harris, *Ancient Literacy*, 285–322.

<sup>148</sup> Kaster, *Guardians of Language the Grammarians and Society in Late Antiquity*, 37–39.

Evidence from the early middle ages confirms that while literacy was considered the norm among the empire's social elites, illiteracy could still be regularly found. One of the principal bodies of source material for the expected functioning of Roman society were the new legal codes promulgated in the eighth century by the Isaurian emperors. Literacy was everywhere in the law codes. Its writers presupposed a highly, though far from universally, literate social world. The Isaurian legal codes were practical manuals, intended for an audience of provincial administrators and judges who would rely upon them to make informed legal decisions, and absent heavy overlays of theory or ideology. Where the text alludes to the literary corpus, references are often to the Bible, an accessible and blunt ideological device.<sup>149</sup>

Much of the *Nomos Rhodion Nautikos*, for example, deals with contract and liability disputes arising from maritime trade. The world it envisions was one where written documentation abounds—written contracts,<sup>150</sup> written receipts,<sup>151</sup> and written testimonies<sup>152</sup> were all part of the legal landscape. None of these documents, of course, requires literacy on the part of either party involved in the litigation—professional scribes drafted many of such documents. Nevertheless, the benefit of the ability to read any contract one may enter upon was obvious, as was the asymmetry of knowledge, and therefore power, if one party could not. The code was explicit that written agreements were the ideal manner of arranging business agreements, but also recognized that verbal agreements and contracts had legal merit as well.<sup>153</sup> The world of early medieval financial transactions, then, was one which the benefits of a primary education would be a sound investment for many families.

Literacy was thus an expected attribute of the middling ranks of society. Such a class, situated below the governing elite but above the peasantry, is not the projection of a modern bourgeois identity onto the past. Rather, this group was envisioned as a coherent socio-economic class in the

<sup>149</sup> Humphreys, *Law, Power, and Imperial Ideology in the Iconoclast Era c. 680–850*, 196–99.

<sup>150</sup> Leo III and Constantine V, *Nomos Rhodion Nautikos*, §II.18, III.17, III.20, III.22–24, III.32, III.39. Trans. Humphreys, *The Laws of the Isaurian Era*.

<sup>151</sup> Leo III and Constantine V, *Nomos Rhodion Nautikos*, §III.12, III.14. Trans. Humphreys, *The Laws of the Isaurian Era*.

<sup>152</sup> Leo III and Constantine V, *Nomos Rhodion Nautikos*, §III.14. Trans. Humphreys, *The Laws of the Isaurian Era*.

<sup>153</sup> Leo III and Constantine V, *Nomos Rhodion Nautikos*, §III.21. Trans. Humphreys, *The Laws of the Isaurian Era*.

chapters on statecraft in the eighth-century *De Re Strategica*. They included skilled artisans, practitioners of commerce, and wholesalers; these groups were ranked below those tasked with public responsibilities but above the serving and unproductive classes.<sup>154</sup> Although these classes form a non-elite stratum in this taxonomy of social hierarchies, the practical barriers between them and their social superiors prove, on examination, quite thin. Broad albeit shallow social access to literacy, and thus the possession of some sort of education, formed a cornerstone for both the middling classes and the elite of Roman society.

The legal codes are not the only sources evidencing literacy among the middling classes of society; such may be found in military manuals (*taktika*). Literacy permeated the military administration, an absolute necessity for officers and commanders. Commanders regularly issued and received instructions in the form of written orders.<sup>155</sup> The *comes* in charge of each *tagma* had the further responsibility to read aloud the ‘mandates’ (μονδάτα) to his men when first assembled under his command.<sup>156</sup> Papyri from earlier periods supports the evidence from contemporary tactical treatises that bureaucratic paperwork was found at all levels of the military’s administration.<sup>157</sup> Even among common soldiers, a minimal level of literacy was a prerequisite for certain duties, such as for surveyors and heralds, for example. In Chapter 46, the *De Re Strategica* recommends having men practice rapidly firing their arrows while moving, and instructs that ‘upon the arrows should be written (γεγράφθωσαν) the names of the archers.’<sup>158</sup>

To a certain degree, widespread participation in literary culture—if not directly for widespread literacy itself—finds support in other bodies of evidence, particularly epigraphic. Funerary epigraphy preserved the memory of individuals and families from a broad spectrum of Roman society. Examples vary in quality and provenance from elaborate and well-executed elite memorials engraved under professional commission, to the misspelled and crudely hewn epitaphs made by the hands of grieving individuals who could not afford such luxury. The practice was widespread up and down

<sup>154</sup> Dennis, *Three Byzantine Military Treatise*, *De Re Strategica*, §2.22–32 trans. p. 13.

<sup>155</sup> Maurice (Ps.), *Strategikon*, §III.6. Trans. Dennis, *Maurice’s Strategikon*.

<sup>156</sup> Maurice (Ps.), *Strategikon*, §I.6, 7. Trans. Dennis, *Maurice’s Strategikon*.

<sup>157</sup> Isaac, “The Army in the Late Roman East,” 137ff; Cotton, Cockle, and Millar, “The Papyrology of the Roman near East: A Survey,” 214–35. For an earlier exemplar see: Speidel and Seider, “A Latin Papyrus with a Recruit’s Request for Service in the Auxiliary Cohorts.”

<sup>158</sup> Dennis, *Three Byzantine Military Treatise*, *De Re Strategica*, §46.8–9 133.

the social spectrum. Some of the most informative texts are those erected for soldiers, erected on their behalf by comrades or families.<sup>159</sup> Although inscriptions of all sorts became less common in the early medieval centuries than they had been in late antiquity, private inscriptions—like funerary memorials—mark the cultural continuity of the provincial elites.<sup>160</sup> Epitaphs such as that of bishop Andreas of Athens and *curator* Sisinnios of Tzurulon are rare examples containing dating formulae in their inscriptions—the former October 693,<sup>161</sup> the latter December 813.<sup>162</sup> Private epitaphs like these underscore not just the continuity of a performative written culture, but a continuous interest in memorializing the community's past.

The new meritocratic elite represented a levelling of distinctions within the governing classes of the empire, emerging as it did out of the gradual disappearance of a distinct senatorial aristocracy in the seventh and early eighth centuries. In this system, education was an important component for advancing both an individual's career and their family's fortunes. It opened up access to shared elite culture and to state offices. The relative prevalence of literacy—itself an imperfect metric to gauge participation in education—indicates an ill-defined lower boundary to the elite. At points where state bureaucracies intersected with the rest of society (particularly the judiciary and the military), evidence shows that literacy was a useful trait for the middling classes of skilled artisans, merchants, and soldiers. A combination of factors, including the disintegration of senatorial estates, the international nature of Greek *paideia*, and the relative prevalence of literacy within Roman society, evidence the permeability of the Roman elite for individuals and families. ‘Boundaries persist despite the flow of

<sup>159</sup> Speidel, “The Roman Army”; Salway, “Late Antiquity”; Sironen, *The Late Roman and Early Byzantine Inscriptions of Athens and Attica an Edition with Appendices on Scripts, Sepulchral Formulae, and Occupations*, 384–400; Yasin, “Funerary Monuments and Collective Identity”; Hope, “Trophies and Tombstones: Commemorating the Roman Soldier.”

<sup>160</sup> Roueché, *Aphrodisias in Late Antiquity*, 21–22. The lack of inscriptions dated to the early middle ages represents something of a self-fulfilling prophecy. Consensus has emerged that funerary epigraphy ceased in *circa* 600, so any new undated inscriptions must predate 600. The circular logic means that few inscriptions which do not contain a full and unambiguous dating formula are attributed to the period after the Persian and Arab conquests.

<sup>161</sup> Orlando, *Les Graffiti Du Parthénon*, 21–22 no. 34.

<sup>162</sup> Ševčenko, “Inscription Commemorating Sisinnios, ‘Curator’ of Tzurulon (AD 813),” 36–37.

personnel across them,<sup>163</sup> and the institutional and cultural anchors at the core of Roman identity remain strong.

#### 4 NETWORKS OF HORIZONTAL AND VERTICAL SOCIAL RELATIONS

Networks—groups of relationships formed from personal and professional connections—constituted the social structures which defined the contours of the Roman world and bound it together. Formal, institutionally derived and transmitted relationships characterize the intersections which can be observed between elite and the rest of society.<sup>164</sup> Although formal social relations tended to be structured hierarchically, personal bonds of family and friendship allowed individuals to more freely navigate the social landscape. These ranged from the profound and insightful to the frivolous and casual, all contributing to the strength and robustness of the interpersonal connections in their different ways.

The epistolary collection of Ignatios provides a unique perspective into the practical functioning of Roman social networks at this time. His communications span a varied career which connected him with a broad slice of society. Although the chronology of his career is difficult to date, it is clear that at different times he served as a mid-level functionary within the chancellery of the Patriarch of Constantinople, as the metropolitan bishop of Nicaea, and was at some point forced to ‘retire’ as a monk attached to a series of monasteries. While his career was thoroughly ecclesiastic, his contacts came from a broad section of the social hierarchy, and his epistles cover a wide range of concerns as befits the various roles he fulfilled over the course of his career.

A certain Nikephoros, deacon and *chartophylax*, received almost half of Ignatios’ extant epistles—which, together with the one extant letter sent from Nikephoros to Ignatios, ‘forms the most intimate record of a

<sup>163</sup> Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, 9.

<sup>164</sup> The balance of significance between formal and informal networks appears to have shifted with respect to proximity to the imperial core. Institutional relationships (ecclesiastic, administrative, fiscal, diplomatic, and even honorary) clearly played a major role in maintaining the empire’s integrity in regions which can be classified as either peripheral or culturally heterogeneous, such as the Adriatic basin. Basicí, “Imperium and Regnum in Gottschalk’s Description of Dalmatia,” 186–95. See also the survey of the evidence from the Crimea in Chap. 4 and for Italy and other western territories in Chap. 5, below.

friendship in ninth-century [Rhomania].<sup>165</sup> Their bonds of friendship were reinforced through the exchange of notes and gifts, and contributed to the development of both men's careers. After all, as *chartophylax* and deacon, Nikephoros belonged to the same class of well-educated civil and ecclesiastical servant to which Ignatios, and the majority of his correspondents, also belonged. They critiqued each other's work (epistles 36, 60) and collaborated over their theological dissention (presumably against iconoclasm, epistles 27, 30, 40). This friendship was maintained through physical interactions. Epistles were personally delivered by the hands of servants belonging to one or the others' household (epistles 61–63). Letters were frequently accompanied by small gifts or loans of personal items (epistles 14, 50, 53–54). These relationships were not hierarchical but broadly equal, a kind of fraternal connection.<sup>166</sup>

#### To Nikephoros, deacon and *chartophylax*

With ears pricked up, as the saying goes, and eyes wide open, I was uncommonly anxious to hear your voice and behold a letter from your hand. Having been disappointed in this, I have become dumb, closed my eyes, and imposed silence on my tongue. If you but speak and write, I shall hear and see and arm my tongue for speech. Pray for me, most learned father.<sup>167</sup>

This plea, probably dating to the mid-840s, is typical of the familiar epistle which Ignatios sent to Nikephoros. Little information is exchanged, its value lay not in the content but in the act of exchanging itself. While the great majority of extant epistles communicate some sort of significant message, maintaining and reinforcing relationships was as important for the links of the networks of the Roman world as the exchange of information.

Networks caused Roman society to be bound into a coherent whole. These networks were built from a variety of sources, including institutions like the state and church as well as personal relationships of friendship or family. They linked peripheries, be they social, economic, or geographical, to the central structures of the Roman world through both formal relationships and informal friendships.

<sup>165</sup> Mango and Efthymiadis, *The Correspondence of Ignatios, the Deacon*, 22.

<sup>166</sup> Mullett, "Byzantium: A Friendly Society?", 18–24.

<sup>167</sup> Ignatios the Deacon, *Epistulae*, §48 p. 127.

### *Formal and Informal Relationships*

The recipients of Ignatios' epistles may be broadly divided according to the nature of the relationship between the communicants into professional and personal connections. Distinguishing between these two groups is useful for describing the interpersonal relationships found in the sources. The dividing line between these groups was not absolute. Bonds of amicability arose between men linked through their vocations, while the right friends could be relied upon to assist in the advancement of one's career. Formal networks arose from professional and spiritual interpersonal links which created and were created by institutions. The literate, educated class that ran the empire was not terribly large in absolute numbers, but it was certainly large enough that not everyone was personally acquainted. Formal networks provided a vital link between provincial elites and the patronage and resources originating from Constantinople. Through the polity and the Church the whole of Roman society was hierarchically linked from the emperor and patriarch down to the lowliest barbarian slave.<sup>168</sup> Institutional connections provided individuals with a set of rules for their relationship, sets of behavioural norms to which both parties expected the other to adhere.<sup>169</sup>

Roman rule was characterized by its highly personal nature of governance compared with modern norms and expectations. Relationships did not spontaneously and inevitably appear as a result of institutional connections, but rather had to be intentionally forged between the individual incumbents of given offices. As Ignatios demonstrates, while formal networks fostered the creation of personal links, they required effort from both parties to function successfully.

To the bishop of Noumerika

Many circumstances have been urging me to gain full knowledge concerning your Reverence and showing me that you are not behaving and directing yourself in accordance with the sacred canons and following in any way the apostolic path: I mean the fact that I have been appointed to the highest rank of the Mother and Queen of all the Churches. Yet I see that you have set little store by these things. For, had you investigated and studied the aforesaid, you would not have forgotten who it is that presides and

<sup>168</sup> Prinzing, "Patronage and Retinues," 661–64.

<sup>169</sup> Leach, "Structuralism in Social Anthropology," 45–46.

who had lower place; who is the head and who ranks with the feet. When you were informed of my presence, you ought to have bestirred yourself and visited me or else received me: in this you would have done nothing extraordinary—on the contrary, you would have won both God's and my approval. Indeed, I was desirous of your presence not for the sake of giving or receiving anything, but, to quote the Apostle,<sup>170</sup> I sought you and not yours—to enjoy your company, to converse of those matters that are beneficial to the Church, and to receive with due care what has fallen behind. Since, however, this has not happened, you alone can know what excuse you wish to use when you are questioned on this score. Surely, if you wish to draw the yoke of the priesthood that had been laid upon you; if you have chosen to cut the furrow of the Church and reap therefrom a rich reward, you should recognize your shepherd when he calls you; you should bend an obedient ear and not ignore words productive of benefit; you should not prolong your absence, but consent to approach me with your presence; lest by rebellion against the reins and straying from the appointed bounds, you draw upon yourself the penalty of the Church. Farewell and give a speedy issue to what I have written so that we may celebrate this event spiritually and sweep from our minds the obstacles that have intervened.<sup>171</sup>

The bishopric of Noumerika was suffragan to the metropolitan bishopric of Nicaea, Ignatios' subordinate according to ecclesiastical structures. Ignatios had no personal relationship with his subordinate at this point, the hierarchical nature of their respective posts provided a space for performing their identities as bishops and a framework from which they could begin. Ignatios clearly enumerates the *expected* behaviour—as a subordinate, the bishop of Noumerika was anticipated to attend upon his newly appointed superior, either by travelling in person or at least extending an invitation of hospitality. Ignatios' epistle rebukes the bishop for his failure in his performance of his social obligations. By failing to perform these duties in a timescale which Ignatios deemed appropriate, the bishop exposed himself to rebuke and censure on both a personal and a professional level.

As metropolitan bishop of Nicaea and leader of the regional ecclesiastical bureaucracy, Ignatios interacted with civil bureaucracies in discharging his responsibilities. At least a tenth of his epistles deal with issues of taxation in one way or another, showing the continuous functioning of the

<sup>170</sup> 2 Corinthians 12.14.

<sup>171</sup> Ignatios the Deacon, *Epistulae*, §11 p. 49.

state apparatus in utilizing this means of tracking and extracting wealth.<sup>172</sup> However, Ignatios has much to say with respect to the discharge of justice and its impact on his and his clients' lives. In one case, where he attempts to intervene in a property dispute on behalf of a widow, he threatens his interlocutor, the bishop of Caria, to bring the affair before a judge if they cannot settle the affair themselves:

Let her administer, decide, and remain with her children in possession of the goods bequeathed to her by her legitimate husband. Let us not on this account deliver ourselves to appear before a judge; nor should we need to be set right by external tribunals, when it is possible, by keeping silent, to be untouched by any blot of reproach. ... Do not be eager to do anything beyond the advice I have given you so that you may rid me of much annoyance and yourself of continual disturbance.<sup>173</sup>

Ignatios' veiled threats only make sense in a context in which a functioning legal system existed which could judge the merits of a property dispute. Furthermore, the context supports the idea that such justice functioned as a formal system to which Roman citizens, even a woman of a non-elite class, had recourse when soft-power networks of patronage and friendship failed to produce a result.

Although as bishop Ignatios wielded a sizable amount of power on behalf of his diocese, there were clearly limits. He had authority to dispense justice according to canon law; epistle 16 concerns the punishment and rehabilitation of a murderer who has 'sought refuge with the Church' and 'delivered himself in submission to the canonical sentence and just penance.'<sup>174</sup> However, canon law had its limits and existed in parallel with civil law, two independent sources of authority and justice. In at least one dispute, Ignatios had to appeal to a *hypatos* named Constantine to judge and enforce civil law:

The curator of the *xenodochos* of Pylai has insinuated himself (on what pretext I cannot say) into the holy monasteries that are placed under the bishop [of Nicomedia]'s personal jurisdiction and had removed from them a certain sum of gold. ... This act contravenes both civil and religious order. ... May your righteous Prudence, fired as it is by divine zeal, forbid this unholy

<sup>172</sup> Ignatios the Deacon, §1–3, 7, 8, 10, 17 pp. 29–33, 39–45, 47, 57–59.

<sup>173</sup> Ignatios the Deacon, §19.21–25, 30–33 65.

<sup>174</sup> Ignatios the Deacon, §16.7–11 55.

exaction from the monasteries wherein the Deity is piously and unceasingly worshiped.<sup>175</sup>

In this case, personal networks had failed to resolve the dispute, and Ignatios turned to the state bureaucracy as the ultimate guarantor of social contracts. Although the dispute concerned the appropriation of funds, Ignatios did not address his request to the *logothetes* in charge of the exchequer (to whom he certainly did address disputes of a more strictly fiscal nature), but to a consul and member of the senate, one of the highest authorities in the interpretation and enforcement of civil law.<sup>176</sup> There were many avenues to power, different ones appropriate to different situations.

Personal and familial networks were informal, but important to the elite's conceptualization of its place in the world. The *oikos* (household) was the fundamental unit of social organization in the Roman society. It was another set of hierarchical relationships, as the head of the household served as the family's principal intersection with wider society, while everyone else was in some way their dependent. Although the head of an *oikos* was usually male, women could fill the role, too. An *oikos* included more than a nuclear family, incorporating extended relations as well as the servants and slaves who were likewise its dependants.<sup>177</sup> No epistle addressed to a family member exists in Ignatios' collection, but familial relationships are nonetheless present, both of literal kinship and in the broader sense of individuals belonging to the same *oikos*. Numerous servants are mentioned in the content of the letters, and actually facilitated the exchange thereof.

For example, Ignatios' communicants' families and servants, and their respective health, are periodically discussed (epistle 24, 38). Although Ignatios does not give a complete picture of his family life and background, he does provide hints. He makes passing mention of his parents in a few places (epistles 42, 63). At one point Ignatios calls himself ὥρφανός (epistle 62); while the epistle was certainly written late in the author's life, the fact that his biological mother and father are only ever obliquely mentioned indicates that he might not have had many surviving near relatives.

<sup>175</sup> Ignatios the Deacon, §6.8–24 pp. 37–39.

<sup>176</sup> On the evolution of the title *hypatos*, see Brubaker, Haldon, and Ousterhout, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era c. 680–850. A History*, 591–98.

<sup>177</sup> Magdalino, "The Byzantine Aristocratic Oikos"; Neville, *Authority in Byzantine Provincial Society, 950–1100*.

for most of his adult life. However the most well-defined familial relationship to emerge is that between Ignatios and his brother (epistle 53, 54, 62).

I had a brother once whom I truly loved as if he were my father by virtue of the degree of precedence in Christ and the well-ordered quality of his divine utterances. For he had studied the Holy Scriptures from his infancy like Timothy who was watchful in all things (to quote Paul) and was considered revered and honourable by all men. Having been ordained as one holy, he served as the minister and eager attendant of pontiffs of heavenly virtue. He was gentle, kindly in spirit, humble, well-disposed gracious, friendly, hospitable, open to supplication, and adorned in all respects with every good advantage. I am filled with dizziness if I am to declare what has happened to him: for if I say at the outset that death has seized him I shall raise a mournful cry, lament plaintively, and elicit from my heart tears filled with pity.<sup>178</sup>

Although unnamed, Ignatios calls him not only ἀδελφός but γνήσιος, indicating that the brotherhood was not just spiritual but biological as well. Together, he and his brother formed an *oikos* even after being orphaned. Their *oikos* functioned as an economic unit, attested by the lengths Ignatios was willing to go to in order to secure possession of his inheritance from his brother in epistles 53 and 54. Ignatios' epistles help demonstrate the malleability of the *oikos* in its realization. A household did not require biological father-mother-child relationship to fulfil its social purpose. An *oikos* protected dependent members, be they women, children, elderly, or slaves, and was an important framework for the performance of an individual's identity within a group context. Patron-client relationships were hierarchical in nature. The epistles which were written during Ignatios' tenure as bishop of Nicaea concern the business of his diocese in some manner or another. All either address someone in a well-defined hierarchical relationship with Ignatios, or address a peer who can intercede with someone with whom Ignatios did not have a personal relationship.

Because hierarchies came in a variety of systems, they were interdependent in the performance of identity. State and religious structures are situated alongside spiritual, educational, intellectual, familial, age, and gender hierarchies. Relationships incorporated many dimensions of social

<sup>178</sup> Ignatios the Deacon, *Epistulae*, §62 pp. 149–55.

connections, which could either reinforce or negate one another. One vignette from Ignatios' epistles will help illustrate the practical ways in which personal networks linked the top and bottom of social hierarchies. Epistle 21 is addressed to the *logothete* of the Genikon Democharis, the second most senior fiscal minister for the empire at the time, who ultimately supervised the collection of taxes.<sup>179</sup> The epistle tells the story of a group of sailors who were contracted by the imperial fisc with transporting grain to Constantinople. 'Because of hunger, [they] removed from it a small quantity of wheat and made up the difference with barley, but were detected' and punished by flogging and tonsure, and ordered to pay a hefty fine.<sup>180</sup> The men request Ignatios' intercession and protection, to have the fine commuted.

These sailors were not from Nicaea nor the lands administratively subject to that metropolitanate, but from Androte, an otherwise-unattested island in the Euxine Sea. Why did they go to him for protection? Ignatios mentioned that he visited the island at some point in the past, and was personally familiar with the conditions there. From his epistles, it is clear that while Ignatios did not travel much, he was not from Constantinople originally.<sup>181</sup> Given his credit as author of the *Life of St. George of Amastris*,<sup>182</sup> he was familiar with and in some way linked to the Pontic coastal region, a major grain-exporting region at that time.<sup>183</sup> If Ignatios was originally from this area, these sailors may have had some sort of personal connection to his family. When their actions brought them into conflict with the imperial bureaucracy, they required a powerful patron who could intercede on their behalf and quickly. Ignatios, as metropolitan bishop of Nicaea, was both close enough to Constantinople that they could travel and make their appeal in a short period of time, but was also politically linked to high enough circles that he could resolve the situation to their benefit.

Sources present us with vertical relationships of patronage which linked elite Roman society not just to itself but with the rest of the empire's subjects. This arrangement, fundamental to the organization of Roman

<sup>179</sup> Mango and Efthymiadis, *The Correspondence of Ignatios, the Deacon*, 179; Brubaker, Haldon, and Ousterhout, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era c. 680–850. A History*, 667.

<sup>180</sup> Ignatios the Deacon, *Epistulae*, §21 pp. 69–71.

<sup>181</sup> Mango and Efthymiadis, *The Correspondence of Ignatios, the Deacon*, 23.

<sup>182</sup> Ševčenko, "Hagiography of the Iconoclast Period," 123 note 71; Efthymiadis, "On the Hagiographical Work of Ignatius the Deacon."

<sup>183</sup> Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando Imperio*, §53.533–35 p. 287.

society, distributed patronage in all its many guises from the centre in Constantinople to the periphery of the empire, and in return the periphery supported the centre with loyalty and service. Friendship, family, and institutions formed the frameworks around which networks formed. These relationships both reinforced and subverted the hierarchical structures of Roman society. They provided the interpersonal anchors which bound the periphery to the centre and allowed for the transmission of concepts of Romanness.

### *The Intersection of Elites and Non-elites*

The most historically visible means by which the central authorities connected with the rest of society were through the formal institutions of the Roman polity which supported detailed record-keeping. The fisc, judiciary, and military played important roles in imparting the will of the Roman elite to the rest of society. The administration and bureaucracy did not exist in isolation, but as part of the polity's complex ideological matrix which engaged with both elite and non-elite strata.

One example of the complex interaction between institutions, ideology, and society is the *hexagram*, a silver coin introduced as part of Heraclius' efforts to stabilize the empire's fiscal situation. Issued for some sixty-five years between 615 and 680, it was the first silver currency regularly minted and circulated by the Romans in centuries. Although it clearly fulfilled a fiscal function, responding to the collapse of the middle-denomination copper coinage, the inscription on its reverse, *Deus adiuta Romanis* (God aid the Romans!) is interesting for the present discussion on 'popular' identity. Modern commentators have associated this Christian prayer with Heraclius' development of an ideological program of holy war, and connected the desperate-sounding prayer both with the dismal state of the war against Persia and the silver's purported source as church property donated, according to the *Chronicon Paschale*, in the extreme crisis.<sup>184</sup> Less obvious, though, is the fact that the phrase appears to have enjoyed a wide circulation in military culture. The phrase appears in the *Strategikon* of Maurice, written several decades before the coin's first minting. The manual offers a general prohibition against the use of battle-cries, as they can unsettle discipline and control when it is needed most. However,

<sup>184</sup> Grierson, *Byzantine Coinage*, 102ff.

when closing with the enemy, a sort of ‘ready-check’ was recommended and recognized to be a useful practice:

When ranks have been properly closed, and the line is about one bowshot from the enemy, and the fighting is just about to begin, the command is given: ‘PARATI’ [‘Ready’]. Right after this another officer shouts: ‘ADIUTA’ [‘Help us’]. In unison everyone responds loudly and clearly, ‘DEUS’ [‘O God’].<sup>185</sup>

The inscriptions on this silver coin, then, are clearly military in origin and reference. Although both of these sources, coins and military manual, originate from the elite of Roman society, be it political or literary, their independence lends an air of authenticity. *Hexagrams* then, encapsulate an intersection between the Roman fisc, Christian ideology, and ‘popular’ military practices which fostered and reinforced group solidarity and identity.

Its martial inscription supports the notion that the *hexagram* was primarily used to pay military expenses, particularly soldiers’ salaries. Their circulation is attested at least in the *Miracula* of St. Artemios, a hagiographical collection of miracle stories from the early and mid-seventh century, completed before the death of Emperor Constans II in 668.<sup>186</sup> Miracle 18 explicitly references a payment made with a *hexagram*, demonstrating that the coins did circulate as legal tender to some degree.<sup>187</sup> However, this is the sole literary reference describing the currency’s everyday circulation, despite being minted in large quantities for over six decades.<sup>188</sup> Discoveries of hoards over the last couple of centuries shed further light onto the *hexagram*’s possible function and circulation. Since the 1850s, a number of hoards containing these silver coins have been discovered from Siberia, the trans-Danubian Balkans, and the Caucasus. However, there is a complete absence of hoards from territories comprising early medieval Rhomania—none appear to have circulated in Africa, while finds in the southern Balkans and Asia Minor are

<sup>185</sup> Maurice (Ps.), *Strategikon*, §XII B.16.39–42. Transl. Dennis, *Maurice’s Strategikon*.

<sup>186</sup> Crisafulli, Nesbitt, and Haldon, *The Miracles of St. Artemios*, 6.

<sup>187</sup> Crisafulli, Nesbitt, and Haldon, no. 18 pp. 116–18; Yannopoulos, *L’hexagramme*, 102. On value and use, see Morrisson, *Monnaie et finances à Byzance*, no. III esp. pp. 253–55.

<sup>188</sup> Yannopoulos, *L’hexagramme*, 102.

few and scattered.<sup>189</sup> The most likely explanation for this unusual distribution pattern would be if these *hexagrammata* paid for the services of the barbarian mercenaries and *foederati* whose services are attested in the literary sources for the reigns of Heraclius and his successors.<sup>190</sup> Thus the circulation and distribution of the silver *hexagram* provides circumstantial support for the notion that these coins were minted for explicitly military purposes.

In a broader sense, the fisc permeated everyday life through the ubiquity of coinage—what a recent exhibition at Dumbarton Oaks termed ‘propaganda in the pocket’.<sup>191</sup> Several trends caused the availability and quality of coinage to fluctuate significantly in this period, at least with respect to middle and low-denomination silver and copper currency.<sup>192</sup> Gold currency on the other hand, the foundation of the fiscal system of taxation and state salaries, remained high in metallic purity, quality, and quantity, indicating the robustness of the state apparatus despite fluctuations in other metrics of economic health. Currency issued in all three metals contained imperial portraiture and inscriptions identifying the emperors and often denoting the coin’s value, place of issue, and, at least until the reign of Justinian II, the date of issue. Older currency continued to circulate alongside newly minted issues, meaning that handfuls of circulating coins literally recorded the empire’s recent history, connecting reigning emperors with their predecessors. Notably, coinage provided a platform where emperors could attempt to shape the boundaries of Roman identity: it is on the silver coinage of Michael I (811–813) that the title *basileus Rhomaion* first appeared in an official capacity.<sup>193</sup> The empire’s stable fiscal system and the enforced ubiquity of coinage as the means by which salaries were paid and taxes were raised supported the important role which these symbolic and practical tokens could play linking wider

<sup>189</sup> Yannopoulos, 102–7; Somogyi, “New Remarks on the Flow of Byzantine Coins,” 115–23.

<sup>190</sup> Yannopoulos, *L'hexagramme*, 108. Péter Somogyi connects some hoards in the western Balkans with diplomatic manoeuvres, particularly buying cooperation with the Avars against Bulgar expansion in the third quarter of the seventh century. Somogyi, “New Remarks on the Flow of Byzantine Coins,” 126–28, 141–45.

<sup>191</sup> Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, “Discovering Byzantine Lives.”

<sup>192</sup> These included the closing of eastern mints outside Constantinople, the introduction of two new types of silver (the *hexagram* and *milaresion*), and the establishment of *thematic* troops supported directly by local communities instead of through state taxation. Grierson, *Byzantine Coins*, 84–92, 150–56.

<sup>193</sup> Grierson, 155.

society with state and a state-centric conceptualization of the present and past.<sup>194</sup>

The Isaurian legal reforms also brought into focus the roles and functions of the junior provincial elite, at least those involved in the administration of justice. The first group identified in the *Ecloga* are the *dikastai* ('judges'), judicial magistrates closely connected to the provincial governors, and primarily responsible for conducting investigations and determining witness integrity.<sup>195</sup> The second but more prominent rank addressed in the *Ecloga* are the *akroatai* ('hearers'). These magistrates enjoyed broad responsibilities for judging and arbitrating both civil and criminal cases, but below the provincial administration. Probably connected with what remained of civic administration, the code assumes that it is these men who will adjudicate a wide variety of rural cases and grievances on behalf of the state. They appear to have been peripatetic, travelling out from their urban bases into the countryside, possibly in the company of tax collectors, bringing Roman jurisprudence to the masses of peasant citizens. They are explicitly associated with hearing land disputes in the villages (*Nomos Georgios* 7); assessing and enforcing taxes (*Nomos Georgios* 18–19); and even judging criminal cases (*Ecloga* 17.41 and 47).<sup>196</sup> These *akroatai* country judges represent one of the major intersections between state and society, the individuals by which the empire's ideological commitment to legalism were realized on a popular scale. The Isaurian legal codes thus give insight into the persons fulfilling these lowliest roles of the imperial bureaucracy. The relative insignificance of the office of the *akrotai* is supported by their absence in either of the ninth-century lists of palatine ranks, the *Taktika Uspenskij* and the *Kletorologion* of Philotheos.<sup>197</sup> Despite the position's obscurity, the individuals who fulfilled these roles were expected to exercise authority independently.

One impact of the various Isaurian legal, military, and administrative reforms was to officially remove one of the outstanding though ideologically significant barriers to effective administration, the Latin language.

<sup>194</sup> Hendy, *Studies in the Byzantine Monetary Economy, c.300–1450.*, 417–20; Grierson, *Byzantine Coins*, 84–92, 150–56.

<sup>195</sup> Leo III and Constantine V, *Ecloga*, 14. Transl. Humphreys, *The Laws of the Isaurian Era*.

<sup>196</sup> Humphreys, *Law, Power, and Imperial Ideology in the Iconoclast Era c. 680–850*, 188ff; Lemerle, *Byzantine Humanism*, 40–41, 65; Lefort, "The Rural Economy, Seventh-Twelfth Centuries."

<sup>197</sup> Oikonomidès, "Les Listes de Préséance Byzantines Des IXe et Xe Siècles," 46–63; Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, *De Ceremoniis*, vol. 2 pp. 702–89.

Indeed, the one trait which may tentatively be identified as a component of all of the Isaurian-era reforms is the recognition of Greek as the *de facto* language of the empire's administration. The limited evidence points to an overhaul in all three major branches of the imperial bureaucracy: for the fisc in the form of new inscriptions on the currency; for the judiciary by providing official summaries of what was principally Justinianic law; and for the army in the abandonment of Latin titles and technical terminology attested in the *De Re Strategica*.

Indeed, military manuals provide a number of further insights into the various ways in which representatives of the state intersected with the civilian population at large. Time and again, both (Pseudo) Maurice and Syrianos Magistros warned of the dangers which close contact with even a friendly civilian population presented. Spies and scouts blended in easily among non-combatants, especially seemingly-friendly refugees appealing for sanctuary; the surest way to avoid prying eyes was to avoid all eyes.<sup>198</sup> Discipline and security, both physical security and security of information, are mutually reinforcing; controlling access to a camp is as important in friendly country as it is in hostile.<sup>199</sup> Men can and will betray their fellow-countrymen; a general must be guarded and not presume a man's loyalties, for 'even some Romans have given in to the times, forget their own people, and prefer to gain the good will of the enemy.'<sup>200</sup> With statements such as these reflecting a sensible wariness and separation of the Roman army from the people, there is little wonder at the seemingly low impact its command structures appear to have had on civilian provincial administration.

These sensible precautions, however, belie the symbiotic interrelationship between the Roman army, civil administration, and citizenry. Certainly, these relationships continued from previous eras and into later centuries, but had their own unique characteristics in this period which was distinct from any other. The 'mandates' of Book I of the *Strategikon* present, in clear terms, an equivalence between a soldier's comrades-in-arms and the taxpaying civilian population.

<sup>198</sup> Dennis, *Three Byzantine Military Treatise*, *De Re Strategica* §XLI pp. 121; Maurice (Ps.), *Strategikon*, §I.9.60–63; VIII.1.126–28. Transl. Dennis, *Maurice's Strategikon*.

<sup>199</sup> Maurice (Ps.), *Strategikon*, §VIII.1.86–87. Trans. Dennis, *Maurice's Strategikon*.

<sup>200</sup> Maurice (Ps.), *Strategikon*, §XI.4.131–40. Trans. Dennis, *Maurice's Strategikon*. Similar concern for traitors deserting to or aiding barbarians is found in Leo III and Constantine V, "Nomos Stratiotikos," §22–25, 35–36. Trans. Humphreys, *The Laws of the Isaurian Era*.

If anyone causes injury to a taxpayer (*συντελεστής*) and refuses to make compensation, he shall repay double the amount of the damage. ... Anyone who injures a soldier (*στρατιώτης*) shall compensate him by paying back twice the amount; and he shall pay a like sum if he causes injury to a taxpayer. If, in winter quarters, or in camp, or on the march, either an officer or a soldier shall cause injury to a taxpayer without making proper restitution, he shall pay him back twice the amount.<sup>201</sup>

Shortly thereafter, (Pseudo) Maurice offers additional clarification and suggestions for how to avoid this type of situation:

Cultivated fields must be spared, and troops should not march through them, and they should cause no damage to taxpayers. But if it is absolutely necessary to pass through the fields, orders should be given for the commanding officers of each *moira* and *meros* to remain until the *tagmas* under his command have passed through. He should turn over the fields in good condition to the next unit and then leave the area. In turn each commanding officer after him is to perform the same duty, and in this way the good order of the general and the security of the farmer will be maintained.<sup>202</sup>

The attitude of the author is clear. A soldier's duty to protect the taxpayer was a component part of his obligations to the state and his fellow soldier.<sup>203</sup> Identities could be slippery—a man's religion, language, or nation (*ἔθνος*, *φῦλον*, *συγγενῆς*) were less reliable guarantors of loyalty than his economic and political activity.

That political loyalty was expected to extend in both directions. In his chapters about building a city and defending it against sieges, Syriano Magistros assumed an active population of citizens (*πολῖται*) would aid the defenders, protecting their own homes and properties.<sup>204</sup> It is also worth noting the interrelationship not just between the fisc and the army—the empire's largest expense by far—but the army and other elements of the state bureaucracy. The *Strategikon*'s 'mandates' take for granted the effective functioning of non-military state apparatuses which

<sup>201</sup> Maurice (Ps.), *Strategikon*, §I.6.36–37, I.7.5–9. Trans. Dennis, *Maurice's Strategikon*.

<sup>202</sup> Maurice (Ps.), *Strategikon*, §I.9.47–54. Trans. Dennis, *Maurice's Strategikon*.

<sup>203</sup> These principals were, in condensed form, given legal weight in Leo III and Constantine V, "Nomos Stratiotikos," §§8–10, 16. Trans. Humphreys, *The Laws of the Isaurian Era*.

<sup>204</sup> Dennis, *Three Byzantine Military Treatise*, De Re Strategica, §XIII.22, 24, 30, 97, 106 pp. 37–43.

are necessary for the carriage of justice. Precept four states, ‘if anyone presumes to stay beyond the time of his furlough, he shall be dismissed from the army and as a civilian (*ώς πογωνός*) handed over to the civil authorities (*τοῖς πολιτικοῖς ἄρχουσι*).’<sup>205</sup>

Roman identity was anchored by state institutions which permeated and impacted society at all levels. As societal tools, these institutions provided an important point of unity and identity in binding together such a large ‘imagined community’ across time and space. Such systems not only bound Romans together as Romans—Independent of their origins or other localizing factors—they served to distinguish them from the other. The functioning of distinctively Roman power structures illuminates one set of mechanisms which created and reinforced that thought-world. However, these institutions were not totalizing. The elite which ruled Roman society was small and relatively closely interconnected, and individuals used their professional offices to advance their private interests. As a result, personal connections of friendship and family fostered a web of relationships which made the elite accessible to peripheral members of society.

## 5 DISCUSSION: SECURING GROUP IDENTITIES FROM THE CENTRE

This chapter asked whether the core institutions, systems, and practices which anchored Roman identities operated with uninterrupted continuity through the early medieval period. The evidence supports a clear and unambiguous affirmative answer. The polity was the heart of the Roman people, an institution which linked the entire ‘imagined community’ together across the tyrannies of space and time. The state provided a narrative structure around which memories and myths of the Romans as a coherent people were crafted and shaped. The ‘dark ages’ were perceived and mythically constructed as a sort of narrative break in the Roman project by the turn-of-the-ninth-century historians and chroniclers whose perspective replaced earlier accounts of the period. They created a new narrative about the history of the Roman polity and people which satisfied their audiences’ sense of historical connectedness and disruption. As such, it has been necessary to describe the structural and institutional changes which the polity experienced in those centuries accurately. This has confirmed the constructed nature of the ‘dark age’ myth as a reflection of the

<sup>205</sup> Maurice (Ps.), *Strategikon*, §I.6.16–18. Trans. Dennis, *Maurice’s Strategikon*.

cultural zeitgeist of the period between first and second iconoclasm, when past ideological narratives about state and society were actively contested.

Loyalty to and participation in the polity provided the core around which a narrative could be built relating the present to the past and the future, but education was the performative space in which elite Romans could act out their communal identities collaboratively. The Greek *paideia* provided a common set of cultural idioms shared by much of the elite. Its texts provided a set of cultural reference points which were just as, if not more, significant hallmarks of elite Roman status as sacred Christian texts. Even among the non-elite within Roman society, education and literacy were worthwhile investments for families to make in their children, appearing in extant sources to be relatively widespread. Although Roman political hegemony over the eastern Mediterranean collapsed in the early middle ages, the cultural legacy endured a very long time among the Christian communities of the Caliphate. The shared cultural language provided by the *paideia* eased the passage of outsiders into Roman society on the elite level. Because the elite defined the performance of their identity through *paideia*, a skill which ‘could be learnt,’ it fostered a meritocratic permeability without destabilizing ‘the boundary maintenance of the group.’<sup>206</sup>

Formal institutional networks like the state bureaucracies and church, and cultural systems such as education and the family unit (*oikos*) were organized hierarchically. This fundamental ‘vertical’ organization of social relationships contrasts with the ‘horizontal’ nature of private relationships of friendship and collegiality. These informal connections reinforced the personal nature of power in Roman society despite the formality of institutional relationships. Individuals of all social ranks used both formal, institutional rules and informal contacts in performing their roles as citizens of the Roman polity.

Together, these anchors formed the ‘raw materials’ of early medieval Roman identity. The polity, *paideia*, and social hierarchies provided a conceptual core of cultural reference points to which individuals referred in the performance of their identity as Romans. However, it is important that we view group formation and cohesion as an ‘open question’ of potential, and be mindful that there exist ‘other modalities of group formation’ around class, region, or profession.<sup>207</sup> The closing chapters of Theophanes’ chronicle provide examples of both realization and failure of Roman

<sup>206</sup> Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, 36.

<sup>207</sup> Wimmer, *Ethnic Boundary Making*, 207.

groupness to crystallize in his narrative. On the one hand, the imperial ambitions of Charlemagne prompted Theophanes to emphasize that the Roman name belonged to his empire and people, identifying Charles as the king of the Franks.<sup>208</sup> On the other hand, the Bulgar War of 811–813 also triggered heightened groupist rhetoric, but he construed the self-other dichotomy not as Roman-barbarian but as Christian-pagan.<sup>209</sup> Although the strong historical equivalences between Roman and Orthodox Christian have shown that these concepts were heavily interrelated by this point in time, it is a reminder that question of identity formation had many possible answers. Groupness typically requires boundaries to trigger crystallization; where and how this happens is the topic of the next chapter.

We also looked at the institution of the Roman army as an institution central to the propagation of Roman identity among the non-elite. The army had a large impact on society, far beyond the simple count of numbers of men who served, including their servants and families and the communities who supported them. Despite changes to the structure and organization of the army, individual units had lengthy histories through which the men serving in them were situated historically. Just as political history provided a myth-narrative explaining the state in terms of change and continuity, the army could fulfil the same function for the men who served in it. Furthermore, the authors of the early medieval military manuals, the *Strategikon* and the *De Re Strategica*, had very different ideological views on the Roman state and society than that widely encountered in other sources. Their views conceived of the state as a civic institution, and placed ideological emphasis on the polity. In their accounts, religion was not an important ideological component for defining proper Roman thought but a set of performances which reinforced communal cohesion through ritual. If it was not already clear from the other sections of this chapter, this is confirmation that there existed many diverse ways which Romans could conceive of and act out their identities in the early middle ages.

<sup>208</sup> Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, AM 6274, 6281, 6289, 6293, 6304 pp. 628, 638, 649, 653, 678.

<sup>209</sup> Theophanes Confessor, AM 6303–5 pp. 671–86.



## CHAPTER 4

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# Frontier Saints

The previous chapter established the fundamental continuity of the state institutions and organizations which anchored early medieval Romanness. This perspective fundamentally begins at the centre of society and looks outwards. However, identities are less useful the closer to the centre an individual is situated—the in-group only becomes a useful point of reference when it is in the presence of outsiders, when the self meets the other. To that end, this chapter marks a shift in focus to exploring sources which view the central anchors and institutions of the Roman world from its periphery. Such experiences cannot be found among Constantinople-centric Greek literature, such as the works by Patriarch Nikephoros, Theophanes the Confessor, and Ignatios the Deacon.<sup>1</sup> When the frontiers intruded upon Ignatios' life, they did so at a distance, such as a passing reference to contemporary military affairs in Epistle 37:

<sup>1</sup> Evidence from Ignatios' correspondence indicates that he never travelled very far from Constantinople and the littoral of the northern Aegean, Marmara, and southern Euxine seas. Ignatios the Deacon, *Epistulae*, 23. This fact informed and shaped his perspective on group identity. For example, in all of his epistles Ignatios never once uses the word 'Roman.' But this is not to say that he was anything but a Roman. Ignatios completely internalized the norms which defined Roman identity to the point where it was unproblematic, cultural assumptions that could be taken as given.

You are no more rich in possessions, O Crete and Cyprus, Euboea, Lesbos, Sardinia, and bountiful Sicily, the very first-fruits, so to speak, of the sea. ... [They are no more] because they are in danger of not belonging any more to Christians and of being set apart because of our sins, a prey to the enemy.<sup>2</sup>

There can be no doubt as to the identity of the ‘Christians’ and the enemy to whom he referred—the former was specifically *his empire*, the latter the Muslims whose raids on the large islands of the Mediterranean intensified in Ignatios’ own lifetime. The seventh, eighth, and early ninth centuries saw significant output of preserved literature from the frontier zones which can shed light on the practical significance and use of identities. The most productive areas from which to draw evidence for the contours of identity are from its edges, where self meets other. It is there, across boundaries which can be territorial as well as social, that the ‘socially relevant factors diagnostic for [group] membership’ can be articulated and identified.<sup>3</sup> There, the potential categorization became socially relevant to the actors, crystallizing group consciousness as Romans.<sup>4</sup> Examples from the liminal areas of the Roman world present the clearest picture for what made a Roman and for the choices individuals and communities faced in negotiating their identities. The structure of Roman society and networks of patronage helped to define the roles in which individuals could participate in it. At its boundaries, the network overlapped with and competed against other networks. Identity becomes most relevant in situations where it is useful distinguishing factor.

Political frontiers of the Roman Empire were very different affairs to those of modern states. Whereas modern states have clear and precise borders at least in theory, along the Roman frontiers state control weakened and overlapped with competing systems.<sup>5</sup> Frontiers, like other forms of

<sup>2</sup> Ignatios the Deacon, 104–5.

<sup>3</sup> Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, 15.

<sup>4</sup> Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups*, 8–10.

<sup>5</sup> There is a lot of literature which productively conceptualizes and explores the Roman frontiers in late antiquity and into the early middle ages, approaching them both as physical spaces and as conceptual zones ripe for meaningful cross-cultural interaction and exchange. A by-no-means-exhaustive reading list on the topic includes: Dodgeon and Lieu, *The Roman Eastern Frontier and the Persian Wars (AD 226–363)*; Greatrex and Lieu, *The Roman Eastern Frontier and the Persian Wars. Pt. 2, AD 363–630*; Visy, “Towns, Vici and Villae: Late Roman Military Society on the Frontiers of the Province Valeria”; Holmes, “Byzantium’s Eastern Frontier in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries”; Graham, *News and Frontier Consciousness in the Late Roman Empire*; Sterk, “Mission from Below”; Breeze, Jones, and

barriers, ‘persist despite the flow of personnel across them.’<sup>6</sup> The limits of state control of its borders, both in terms of controlling its subjects and protecting them against foreign threat, was limited even during the sixth century when the empire’s martial strength was at a peak, as is made clear in a passage from Procopius’ *Secret History (Anecdota)*:

These barbarians [Huns or Goths] used to plunder the country and enslave the Romans living there like enemies, and in this manner these pretended friends and allies of the Romans returned home with their plunder and a number of prisoners. And often some of the farmers of that region, motivated by the loss of their children and women, who had been reduced to slavery, gathered in a body, attacked the retreating foe, and succeeded in slaying many of them and in capturing their horses together with all their plunder.<sup>7</sup>

The barbarian/Roman dichotomy remains clear, even when the Romans here were acting of their own initiative independently of institutional legitimization. That their actions were unsanctioned is made clear in this instance, for Justinian dispatched agents who compelled them to return the barbarians’ horses. Given the weakness of state institutions, peasants arming themselves to protect their homes differed from brigands only as far as state officials trusted the group’s intentions.

This chapter explores individual performances of Roman identity along the empire’s vast and varied boundaries. First we will examine an episode out of the life of Romanos the Neomartyr († 780) where the saint defended himself from charges of being a spy by claiming Roman citizenship. Next, we will turn to a few lives from the Crimean frontier, where the Bishops Stephen of Sougdaia († 750) and John of Gothia (*circa* 795) played key roles as guardians of their Roman flocks in close proximity to the nomadic steppe powers. We then turn to a number of narratives, from these and other hagiographical sources, about how Romans captured in war maintained and defended their communal strength and identity in the face of potential violence, uncertainty, and pressure to apostatize. Finally, we will step back and take a brief look at how these experiences and definitions of

Oltean, *Understanding Roman Frontiers*; Collins, Symonds, and Weber, *Roman Military Architecture on the Frontiers*; Eger, *The Islamic-Byzantine Frontier*.

<sup>6</sup> Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, 9.

<sup>7</sup> Procopius, *Procopius*, transl. by H.B. Dewing, Loeb classical library (London: New York: WH Heinemann ; The Macmillan co, 1914), vol. VI ch. xxi pp. 252–53.

communal identity in practice compare with that found in the study of other late antique and early medieval societies. This chapter's focus on the hagiographical accounts of individual experiences in the context of the frontiers complements the focus of the following chapter on group experiences and the nature of the Roman-Barbarian duality.

## 1 THE TRIAL OF ROMANOS THE NEOMARTYR

Romanos the Neomartyr (*circa* 730–1 May 780) was born in Galatia and was a monk at the monastery at Maineineon, in Paphlagonia, for most of his life. Situated next to a lake, this was a double-monastery, having one complex for women on an island and another for men on the shore. These two separate communities shared a single governance, and were founded together by the abbess named Anthousa. Anthousa's life and miracles were the subject of their own hagiographical tradition, now extant only in truncated synaxarion entries.<sup>8</sup> Anthousa's own hagiography is discussed elsewhere in this volume, but this example of hagiographical intertextuality suggests that her reputation and cult were established prior to that of Romanos, and that highlighting his connection to her would reinforce his credentials as a saint—a common practice in hagiography. Romanos' *vita* makes it clear that he received special attention from the blessed abbess, claiming that Anthousa 'loved St. Romanos with her soul, for God had previously told her what deeds he was to accomplish.'<sup>9</sup> Authorship of Romanos' hagiography is attributed to Stephen of Damascus, also known as Stephen Manṣūr, monk at the monastery of Mar Saba, author of other hagiographical texts, and nephew of John of Damascus—the scion of a well-connected, Greek-speaking, Christian family flourishing in the eighth-century Caliphate.<sup>10</sup> The text survives only in Georgian.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> For text see: Talbot, "Life of St. Anthousa of Mantineon."

<sup>9</sup> Shoemaker, *Three Christian Martyrdoms from Early Islamic Palestine*, 156–57.

<sup>10</sup> Shoemaker, xxxi–xxxii.

<sup>11</sup> Shoemaker, xxxvii; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*, 366–67. The manuscript tradition of Romanos' hagiography is small but fertile. His hagiography was originally written in Greek by Stephen of Damascus who was also credited with a few other late ninth-century hagiographies. It was translated into Arabic and thence into Georgian, which is the only version to survive; this was last edited in 1910. Beside this, his cult is only mentioned in a few, single-line entries in Palestinian synaxaria. Garrite, *Le calendrier palestino-géorgien du Sinaiticus 34 (Xe siècle) / Saint Catherine (Monastery Mount Sinai), Manuscript Georgian no.*

It was Anthousa who set events in motion which would ultimately lead to Romanos' martyrdom. At the age of forty, Romanos departed for the east in the company of an unnamed monastic elder.<sup>12</sup> During this mission, they were captured by Saracen raiders in *circa* 771. His captors identified him as a valuable hostage, and sent him to Baghdad, where he was interned with other high-ranking Roman prisoners. He spent the following decade in as a prisoner of war in Baghdad, where much of his hagiography is set. Whilst in exile, he gathered followers among other monks who were being held in the same place, establishing himself as a teacher and leader. His 'Babylonian captivity' lasted nine years, until his martyrdom on 1 May 780.

Romanos' position as a famous teacher and monk attracted to him not just six loyal disciples, but less dependable characters as well. One particular enemy, a monk by the name of Jacob, turned against his spiritual brethren, setting off a chain of events which tested Romanos' commitment to his religious and political identities.

Having appeared dressed in the clothing of a servant of God (though in truth he was a servant of the Devil), Jacob frequently visited the holy Romanos, just like any other faithful servant of God. This student of the Devil later learned about a certain man from Emessa, whose name was also Romanos and who had gone to *saberdznetad* [საბერძნეთად] and returned from there. He, being a miserable and foolish man, convinced himself that this was our Romanos. He thus sought to turn the soul of Amīr al-Mu'minīn al-Mahdi to his purposes. Finding an (appropriate) way, he obtained an audience with him and spoke with a feigned zeal: 'May God protect you, O commander of the faithful! In your jurisdiction there is a spy, who has visited *saberdznetad* [საბერძნეთად] and returned from it. This man brought back reports of your secrets to the *berdzenta* [ბერძენთა]. Moreover, I name him to be Romanos, an Emessen by birth.'<sup>13</sup>

<sup>34</sup>, 64. The *vita*, fortunately, is quite lengthy—the Latin translation of 1911 extends some eighteen pages, whilst Shoemaker's 2016 Georgian-English parallel text covers forty-eight printed pages. On the historical ties between Georgia and Rhomania, and the importance of Georgian sources for the history of Eastern Christianity generally, see Toumanoff, "Medieval Georgian Historical Literature, 7th–15th Centuries"; Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque*, 171.

<sup>12</sup> Shoemaker, *Three Christian Martyrdoms from Early Islamic Palestine*, 156–57.

<sup>13</sup> Stephen of Damascus, "Vita Romani," §18, 420.19–29. Ed. and trans. Shoemaker, *Three Christian Martyrdoms from Early Islamic Palestine*, 178–81. This translation from the Life of St. Romanos is by the author.

We will set aside the problem of how to translate the name for the *berdzeni* [በደንዘኒ] people and the *saberdzneti* [ሮስበደንዘኒ] land where they lived, for the moment. That his captors deemed this accusation credible signals a few things. First, although a prisoner-of-war, Romanos was not held so securely that his captors could be certain of his every movement; this may even have been a general condition for foreign elite prisoners. Second, monks could serve as scouts and operatives. Third, the frontier was a porous place which civilians crossed for a variety of reasons—for business, to take up a job or vocation on the other side, or for family or personal purposes. That this Galatian-born Romanos could be accused of being from Emesa hints at how little differentiated the Taurus frontier had become over the previous century-and-a-half of its existence. There remained a broad similarity of cultural practices and identity among the Christian elites both within and without Rhomania which allowed for eased migration, an insight which will be explored in greater detail in the following chapter.

Interestingly the accusation of being a spy appears to have had particular resonance at this particular moment in time. In the early years of Abbasid rule, there was considerable concern over surviving Umayyad partisans hiding among the population, and the new regime attempted to root them out. In one instance, a monk named Zo'ara, hoping to enrich himself, denounced his fellow monks of concealing the wealth of the Hišām and Marwān families. ‘Évidement, la réponse de l'autorité est de publier un édit général « de saisir les supérieurs des couvents et des églises, et de recenser les biens des couvents, des égles et des temples ». <sup>14</sup> Jacob was not the only Christian attempting to take advantage of the turbulent politics of his age.

Whether because they were plausible or appropriately played into pre-existing fears, Jacob's accusations were sufficiently credible that they convinced some Saracen officials to treat the affair seriously.

On the third day, Amīr al-Mu'minīn Mahdī al-Mahdi remembered the holy man and ordered that he be brought before him. And they brought that man before him. Therefore he asked of him whether what was said

<sup>14</sup> Fiey, *Chrétiens syriaques sous les Abbassides surtout à Bagdad (749–1258)*, 15. The event is found in Dionysius of Tel-Mahrē, *Chronique de Denys de Tell-Mahré. Quatrième partie*, 96–97.

about him was true. The holy Romanos responded to him and said: ‘I am a *berdzeni* [ბერძენი] man. I have never dwelt in Emessa, nor ever seen Syria except when I was led out of my homeland as a captive. A spy, you say? I’ve never been one.’<sup>15</sup>

Here is a coherent statement of Roman identity even if distorted by having passed through multiple translations to reach English. Romanos represents his identity in terms of origin and loyalty. He stated his Roman identity rather than, perhaps, a Christian identity because it was relevant and important on the Saracen side of the frontier.

To resolve this situation, guards brought in Jacob, his accuser, to confront him. Romanos restates his innocence—and identity—even more firmly.

With a clever eye, Amīr al-Mu’mīnīn al-Mahdi considered the saint. He pressed him with boastful words, so that he might admit to being the spy. The servant of Christ responded and said, ‘I’ve said it once already: I am a *berdzeni* [ბერძენი], and at no time have I ever been a spy. Amīr Al-Mahdi responded to him and said, ‘You lie, enemy of God, enemy of the Saracens, betrayer of my authority. I have men available who would testify to having watched you in Syria.’ The holy man responded boldly, resolved in his spirit, and said, ‘Not if you should assemble the entirety of your kingdom would you be able to prove any of these charges against me. If there is anyone who says such things

<sup>15</sup> Stephen of Damascus, “Vita Romani,” §19, 420.34–421.15. Ed. and trans. Shoemaker, *Three Christian Martyrdoms from Early Islamic Palestine*, 180–81. Shoemaker makes a curious translation choice which further highlights the disconnect between the expectations of modern translators and the past cultural context of the works being translated. For the passage მე კაცი დერძენი ვარ და არაოდეს მკვდრ ვყოდიუვარ ემერეს შანა და არვა ასურასტანი მიხილავს თვინიერ ოდეს ტყუედ მოვჰყვანდა ქუეყანით ჩემით [emphasis mine], Shoemaker translates as ‘I am a Greek [*sic*] man, but [და] I have never dwelled in Emesa. And [და] I have not looked upon Syria except when I was led forth a captive from my homeland.’ და is a coordinating conjunction in Georgian—it means ‘and,’ whereas მაგრამ is the Georgian contrasting conjunction which means ‘but.’ Shoemaker mis-translates the first და (‘and I never dwelt in Emesa’) instead correcting it with the contrasting conjunction, becoming ‘but I never dwelt in Emesa.’ Romanos’ defence relies, in part, on the understanding that being a *berdzeni* is incompatible with being a native of Emesa. As we will see below, this passage only makes sense as a legal defence if *berdzeni*, in this text, is not just some general term for Greek-speaking Christians, of which there were still many native to the early Abbasid Caliphate, but specifically Roman. The unnecessary emendation in the English translation likely arises, at least in part, because of the modern conflation of the categories of Roman, Byzantine, and Greek with reference to the medieval peoples and languages discussed in Chap. 2.

falsely, he is the enemy of the truth.' Then Amīr al-Mahdi was enraged with fury, and flew into a passion because of Romanos' boldness.<sup>16</sup>

Romanos was successful in defending his innocence, and the argument hinged on his identity as a Roman. Romanos was ultimately able to convince his captors of his innocence with respect to the charges of espionage. Although Constantinople was the centre of the institutions which anchored Roman identity and gave it cohesion as an imagined community, it was in liminal situations to which we must look to find identity used as a practical tool of social differentiation.

It is incumbent to take a bit of time to consider what this passage can and cannot tell us. The confrontation between Romanos and the Caliph al-Mahdi (r. 775–785) as depicted here debated a fundamentally legal question: was Romanos a subject of the Caliphate or a Roman citizen? The author, Stephen of Damascus, was writing a hagiography—a spiritually-realistic account of events—and not a legal dossier. Both author and anticipated audience were interested in Romanos' holiness and spiritual accomplishments first, the historicity of events surrounding his life second. Even if the account had originally used strict terminology, it has been transmitted and translated over the centuries via Arabic into Georgian and English. Returning to the problem of the *berdzeni* [ბერძენი]: Georgian does not distinguish between Ancient Greeks, Romans, and medieval ‘Byzantines.’ The people who lived in the lands around the Aegean were *berdzeni* [ბერძენი], and their lands were thus called *saberdzneti* [საბერძნეთი].<sup>17</sup> Even in the Georgian version of the *vita* which has come down to us Romanos’ defence lies in his identification as a *berdzeni* and not a Syrian. We know that, over a century after the Arabic conquest of the Middle East, there were still a large number of Greek-speaking subjects of the early Abbasid caliphate—both John of Damascus († 749) and Theophilus of Edessa (695–785) were important contemporaries.

<sup>16</sup> Stephen of Damascus, “Vita Romani,” §21, 422.2–13. Ed. and trans. Shoemaker, *Three Christian Martyrdoms from Early Islamic Palestine*, 182–85.

<sup>17</sup> Folk etymology has connected *berdzeni* [ბერძენი] to the Georgian word for wise, *brdzeni* [ბერძენი], attempting to explain it as a reference to classical Greek philosophy, thus projecting on Georgian a view of Hellas as some land of philosophy. However, Xint’ ibiže coherently demonstrated that the etymological root for *berdzeni* [ბერძენი] comes from name Πελαγοι (Pelagians), a name for the pre-classical, proto-Greek peoples of the Aegean basin. Xint’ ibiže, *The Designations of the Georgians and Their Etymology*, 104–5.

Throughout this vignette, Romanos' identity as a *berdzeni* is not about 'Greek' language or ethnicity, but was clearly a claim to the rights and protections of Roman citizenship. Notably, in both Peeters' Latin translation and Shoemaker's English translation, *berdzeni* δῆρδεβο[δῆρδεβο] was consistently translated as *graecus* and Greek, respectively.<sup>18</sup> Whilst this is one way the term can be translated, it is a misleading one which occludes the nature of what Romanos and his interlocutors are debating. Ultimately their choice to translate the term as 'Greek' rather than as 'Roman' has more to do with the assumptions and biases of twentieth- and twenty-first-century scholarship than with medieval understandings of the contours of group identity.

This section provides some support for the argument that Roman identity continued to be meaningfully framed in terms of citizenship.<sup>19</sup> In particular, Romanos' defence against the accusation of espionage is predicated on the understanding that 'Roman' connoted specific political loyalties and was not understood generally as an ethnic or linguistic category. In the text, the dialogue between Romanos and Caliph al-Mahdi relies on a working understood that being a Roman was incompatible with being a Greek-speaking Christian subject of the caliph. The text's author, Stephen of Damascus, clearly assumed that this distinction would have made sense to the characters and would be understood by his intended audience. Whether or not the encounters described in this text actually happened, these conceptual categories form part of the background cultural assumptions which are part of the realistic setting used by the hagiographer to reinforce the authenticity of his work's spiritual claims.

## 2 THE NORTHERN FRONTIER IN THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

Although the eastern frontier with the Caliphate receives the most attention in both contemporary and modern historiography, it was far from the only contested boundary of the Roman world. Three hagiographical traditions shed light upon the Eastern Empire's far northern frontiers during the late seventh and eighth centuries. These are Bishop Stephen

<sup>18</sup> Stephen of Damascus, "Vita Romani."

<sup>19</sup> Kaldellis, *The Byzantine Republic*.

of Sougdaia (*circa* 680–750), Bishop John of Gothia († *circa* 795), and Bishop George of Amastris († *circa* 805), who were subjects of cult and hagiographical traditions which commemorated their lives. Their *vitae* create a picture of the interconnected social webs which bound Roman society together. These bishops worked in a region where the Mediterranean and steppe worlds intersected, a liminal space whose inhabitants participated in both worlds. This section first details the geographical and historical situation of this unique area before delving into the biographical specifics from the lives of these bishops. Together these *vitae* sketch an image of elite life in the Crimea, the Eastern Empire's isolated northern frontier and 'listening post' on the fringe of the steppe world. These brief biographies show how Roman identity was performed in liminal situations. These saints served in Roman institutions and defended the integrity of Rhomania. Each man's travels demonstrate the interconnectedness between systems. The frontiers were a space where competing systems became available, where choices of identity and loyalty mattered.

The Crimean peninsula on the north coast of the Euxine (Black) Sea is over 10,000 square miles in area and is nearly an island, only connected to the mainland through the narrow peninsula at the landmass's northwest corner. The northern two-thirds of the peninsula are a prairie, geographically a continuation of the Eurasian steppes. Paleobotanical pollen analyses have shown that large areas of the peninsula were forested in the Classical and Hellenistic periods, but that the area, particularly the steppe regions in the north, had been deforested by late antiquity.<sup>20</sup> To the south, the Crimean Mountains form a protective wall between the steppes to the north and a thin southern coastal strip parallel to the range. Averaging five to eight miles wide, this strip of land has a climate more akin to that found elsewhere around the Mediterranean world than with the closer steppe. Few passes cut through the mountains, which even today are comparatively sparsely inhabited, channelling traffic between steppe and coast along a limited number of tracks. It is this long, thin stretch of coast and the mountains overlooking it which formed the Roman frontier in the early medieval period.

<sup>20</sup>Hannestad, "Timber as a Trade Resource of the Black Sea," 88–92.

The Crimean littoral was an important part of Mediterranean history. The grain production of the colonies around the Bosphorus (on the peninsula's eastern corner) helped feed the citizens of Athens during the Peloponnesian War.<sup>21</sup> Following the Mithridatic Wars, it became a Roman client-state.<sup>22</sup> The peninsula was well-integrated into the economy of the Euxine basin, and thereby with trade networks across the Roman Mediterranean. Out of the basin came foodstuffs, wood, slaves, and coarse pottery which once carried wine, oil, and fish products.<sup>23</sup> Comparative stability and prosperity came to an end in the third-century AD with the arrival of the Goths in *circa* the 260s and 270s: burn layers in many settlements in the regions (particularly the peninsulas on either side of the Bosphorus) attest to the Goths' impact on the region.<sup>24</sup> Signs of a modest economic and social expansion in the sixth century are found in the re-introduction of Roman garrisons and a series of imperially sponsored building projects under Justinian.<sup>25</sup> By this period, most of this region's inhabitants were identified as 'Goths.' The identity was largely independent of language, for these Goths were generally Hellenized, and like other long-established communities they retained a distinct and unique regional identity.<sup>26</sup> Although the eastern areas were devastated by nomads in the 570s and 580s, the area recovered in the seventh century, and Roman rule endured.

The emergence of the Khazar Khaganate as the dominant power in the western steppes from the 660s changed both the habitation patterns in the Crimea and the geopolitics of the Euxine Sea. Their arrival is attested in the city of Bosphorus, where a large fire (dated by coin finds) destroyed most of the city sometime in the late seventh century.<sup>27</sup> The area of the straight, along with the flat steppe of the northern two-thirds of the

<sup>21</sup> Moreno, *Feeding the Democracy*; Braund, "Black Sea Grain for Athens? From Herodotus to Demosthenes."

<sup>22</sup> Fornasier and Böttger, *Das Bosporanische Reich*.

<sup>23</sup> Lund, "The Circulation of Ceramic Fine Wares and Transport Amphorae from the Black Sea Region in the Mediterranean, c. 400 BC–AD 200."

<sup>24</sup> Sazanov, "L'Habitat rural de la rive occidentale du Bosphore Cimmérien aux IIIe–VIe siècle de notre ère."

<sup>25</sup> Procopius Caesariensis, *Opera Omnia*, vol. VII book III ch. vii pp. 214–19.

<sup>26</sup> Vasiliev, *The Goths in the Crimea*.

<sup>27</sup> Aibabin, "Early Khazar archaeological monuments in Crimea and to the north of the Black Sea"; Curta, *Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages (500–1300)*, 128–51.

Crimean peninsula, came under Khazar rule by the beginning of the eighth century; only the mountains and southern coastal strip, protected by a landscape unsuitable for steppe armies, remained under Constantinople's lose control by the middle of the eighth century. Despite this, Constantinopolitan chroniclers paid relatively little attention to the comings and goings of steppe powers, often anachronistically referring to them by the classicizing name 'Scythians.' When the Crimean area appears in the history of this period, it is most often as a destination to which powerful people were sent in exile, most famously Pope Martin in 655 and Emperor Justinian II from 695 to 705.<sup>28</sup>

Roman rule in the Crimea was strategically important for control of the Euxine Sea. The Euxine was Constantinople's back-door, an avenue which could permit waterborne invaders to descend on the city with little forewarning. Concern for its strategic importance is clear in the *De Administrando Imperio*, which begins by surveying the Pechenegs, Rus, and Khazars, particularly noting the amphibious means by which these groups can reach Rhomania.<sup>29</sup> Weather permitting, Cherson was as little as five days away from Constantinople via ship, but weeks or months overland.<sup>30</sup> Whoever controlled the shipping routes had the advantage in terms of speed of communication and freedom of movement. The Euxine's strategic importance to Constantinople is amply demonstrated in later history, as it was the avenue by which Rus made multiple attacks on Constantinople in 860, 907, and 941. The Crimea was a critical strategic outpost which guarded against Persian and Arab strength in the Caucasus, Turkic, and Khazar strength on the steppes, and Bulgar strength in the eastern Balkans. As economic link between Mediterranean and steppe worlds and strategic asset, Crimea was an important frontier region in the centuries following the Arab conquests. Multiple wars were fought for control over Armenia and the Caucasus over the course of the seventh and eighth centuries, in a multi-lateral struggle pitting local

<sup>28</sup>Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, sec. AM 6160, 6169, 6187 pp. 490–91, 495–97, 514–15.

<sup>29</sup>Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando Imperio*, bk. IX pp. 62–63.

<sup>30</sup>Scheid and Meeks, "ORBIS: The Stanford Geospatial Network Model of the Roman World."

Christians, Romans, Arabs, and Khazars against one another.<sup>31</sup> Crimea was an extension of that frontier zone.

There are several themes and points of comparison in the *vita*e of Stephen of Sagoudia and John of Gothia. Both were born into privileged provincial families, and early on benefitted by receiving thorough educations—the necessary precursor to participation in elite Roman culture. Both men had disciples and provided guidance and leadership for a cohort who would go on to form the nucleus of their cults as saints. Both were part of multiple social networks which interconnected the Roman world—ecclesiastic, monastic, educational, the imperial court, and the military. All of these groups and institutions played important roles in defining Roman allegiances. Both men physically bridged the frontier periphery with the imperial centre, serving as intermediaries betwixt provincials and Constantinopolitan elites.

The earliest *vita* to shed light on this frontier region is that of Stephen, who was bishop of Sougdaia in the first half of the eighth century.<sup>32</sup> Stephen was born to a provincial family in Moribasos, in Cappadocia, in AD 680 or soon thereafter. He received a *paideia* as a youth, indicating

<sup>31</sup> Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century*, 63–73; Sarris, *Empires of Faith: The Fall of Rome to the Rise of Islam*, 500–700, 286, 293–96; Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a World Crisis*, 474ff; Curta, *Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages (500–1300)*, 179–213.

<sup>32</sup> Stephen's cult found adherents across multiple Christian communities who inhabited the northern Euxine basin, producing a lively and long-lived literary tradition in Greek, Slavonic, and Armenian. The evidence for the life of Stephen of Sougdaia is very late, far removed in time from the eighth-century context in which the historical individual lived. There are three distinct accounts of Stephen's life in Armenian, Greek, and Slavonic. An unpublished Russian ‘commemoration’ of his life and cult also exists, attested in multiple fifteenth- and sixteenth-century manuscripts. At least partially a translation from Greek, it attests to his cult's continued vitality well into the early modern period. Ivanov, “The Slavonic Life of Saint Stefan of Surozh,” 114–15. Whilst interrelated and all drawing inspiration from multiple sources, the original Greek *vita* is now lost. A short, later Greek *vita* is found in a single eleventh-century manuscript. The extant Greek *vita* contains historical anachronisms, something which makes it ‘look like a late and unreliable text.’ Ivanov, 112 Greek text and translation at 164–67. A much-longer Slavonic *vita* has been preserved in a single, sixteenth-century manuscript. Unfortunately, it liberally borrows from a life of John of Damascus for John's biographical information, making its historical value suspect. Finally, there is an Armenian *vita* and a summary in an Armenian *synaxarion* entry. Bozoyan, “La vie Arménienne de saint Étienne de Sougdaia”; Bibliothèque nationale (France). Manuscript. Arménien 180, *Le Synaxaire arménien de Ter Israel*, 865–76. Bozoyan's edition is based on two manuscripts and corrections from Stephen's entry in the Armenian *synaxarion*, which is found in over 400 manuscripts, as edited by Bayan.

that his parents belonged to the privileged elite of provincial society. The Greek *vita* gives him a top-rate education.

This child of pious and god-loving parents was given by them to study sacred literature. ... By the time he was eighteen years of age, he had been taught and learned well the sacred and secular literature exceptionally well, including grammar and poetry, astronomy and geometry, and all the ordinary things.<sup>33</sup>

His family prepared him well for entry into the social elite through either the state or the church.<sup>34</sup> After his parents died, Stephen left Cappadocia and spent at least a portion of his young adulthood in Athens, where he continued his education, before becoming a monk.<sup>35</sup>

Whilst living as a monk, Stephen was promoted to the bishopric of Sougdaia (Surozh, Crimea) by the patronage of Patriarch Germanos in the late 710s.<sup>36</sup> His elevation to the bishopric is paralleled by his selection of a successor who, like him, was a monk before being co-opted into the ecclesiastical hierarchy. These stories, contained in both the Armenian and Slavonic *vitae*, play into long-established hagiographical tropes about the worthy yet humble individual called away from their spiritual retreats by

<sup>33</sup> V. *Stephani Songdaia* § 1.2–8. Vasilievsky, Жития свв. Георгия Амастридского и Стефана Сурожского [*Lives of Ss. George of Amastris and Stephen of Songdaia*], chap. 1 p. 4. Translations of this text are by the author, with special thanks to Philip Booth for his assistance.

<sup>34</sup> The Armenian and Slavonic *vitae* agree that his parents sent him to study ‘sacred literature,’ suggesting that, although it clearly adheres to common hagiographical tropes, the account of Stephen’s education comes from the original hagiographical account. Ivanov, “The Slavonic Life of Saint Stefan of Surozh,” 118–19.

<sup>35</sup> The trip to Athens, complete with disputations with ‘philosophers’ there, appears only in the Greek *vita*. Vasilievsky, Жития свв. Георгия Амастридского и Стефана Сурожского [*Lives of Ss. George of Amastris and Stephen of Songdaia*], chap. 1 pp. 4–5.

<sup>36</sup> According to the Armenian *vita*, Stephen was bishop for 35 years before dying at the age of 70. Germanos’ promotion to patriarch in 715 provides a *terminus post quem* for the start of Stephen’s tenure as bishop. Furthermore, given that the ‘iconoclast’ council in Hieria in 754 is not mentioned in any of his hagiography, this event is effectively a *terminus ante quem* for Stephen’s death. Either attending or eschewing the council would have made for good iconodule propaganda, so the fact that the council is *not* mentioned in the *vita* suggests that Stephen died before it convened. Simple maths then places his birth in the early 680s, and situates his death in the early years of the 750s. Bozoyan, “La vie Arménienne de saint Étienne de Sougdaia,” secs. 203–7.

the demands of this world.<sup>37</sup> After finding his replacement, Stephen died in Sougdaia, still leading his flock, on 15 December in the early 750s.

All *vitae* strive to confer impeccable anti-iconoclast credentials on Stephen. According to his *vita*, Stephen spent time in Constantinople debating the practice of icon veneration with Emperor Leo III himself.<sup>38</sup> Stephen lost the debate and was imprisoned, but was allowed to return to his flock by the intervention of Eirene, another individual who linked Constantinople to the Crimean frontier as the wife of Constantine V and daughter of a Khazar Khagan.<sup>39</sup> Despite the distance of his province from the imperial centre, Stephen's time in Constantinople ingratiated him into the highest circles of the Roman elite. The Slavonic *vita* claims that his release coincided with the birth of a son to Constantine and Eirene; the obvious candidate for this event is the birth of the future Leo IV, an event noted in Theophanes as happening on 25 January 750.<sup>40</sup> This event provides another window into the intricate social world in which Stephen operated, showing the complicated patronage networks which bound the Crimea, the steppe world, and the imperial court together. These are all themes which recur in other contemporary hagiographical traditions.

Stephen's *vitae* introduce several important themes for the Crimea specifically, and frontier identities generally. He was a well-travelled individual, who built up a variety of personal and professional connections over the course of his career, including philosophers, patriarchs, and the imperial family. All of these connections could be used to advance the interests

<sup>37</sup> Ivanov, “The Slavonic Life of Saint Stefan of Surozh,” sec. 29.924–65; Bozoyan, “La vie Arménienne de saint Étienne de Sougdaia,” secs. 170–94.

<sup>38</sup> If it were Leo who imprisoned Stephen, this would imply a period of incarceration lasting over a decade. As seen with contemporary bishops like Patriarch Pyrrhus, Pope Martin, and John of Gothia, the office of bishop was refilled after quite shorter periods of *de facto* vacancy.

<sup>39</sup> A version of the disputation and his rescue from further imprisonment is contained in all three versions of his life. The Greek *vita* merely names her Eirene. The Slavonic and Armenian lives clarify that this Eirene was the wife of Constantine V and daughter of the Khazar Khagan (also known as Tzitzak or Eirene of Khazaria), and *not* Eirene of Athens (surnamed Sarantapechaina), his daughter-in-law and future empress (reigned 797–802). Vasilievsky, Жития свв. Георгия Амастридского и Стефана Сурожского [*Lives of Sts. George of Amastrius and Stephen of Surozh*], sec. 3 p. 27; Bozoyan, “La vie Arménienne de saint Étienne de Sougdaia,” secs. 134–45; Ivanov, “The Slavonic Life of Saint Stefan of Surozh,” sec. 28.903–23.

<sup>40</sup> Ivanov, “The Slavonic Life of Saint Stefan of Surozh,” sec. 28.910–18; Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, sec. AM 6241 pp. 588–89. Note that Leo's birth is given as Indiction 3, which fell in 750/751, but does not align with the *anno mundi* date under which Theophanes has placed the notice, which instead coincides with AD748/749.

of the frontier community with which he was charged. Norms of elite culture, particularly the common *paideia* education which all were expected to receive as youths, applied to the provinces as much as to Constantinople. Constantinople and the imperial establishment loom large over the affairs of the frontier, though the influence flowed in both directions. Careers in the Crimea were advanced by gaining favour with the imperial court, as happened to Stephen's predecessor. Although just as much a part of the Roman polity as any official in Constantinople, Stephen's connections, particularly the cult which emerged after his death, linked him to non-Roman networks, too.

The life and career of another Crimean bishop, John of Gothia, is attested in a brief *synaxarion* entry and a short *vita*, both in Greek.<sup>41</sup> His life is an exemplar for how elite Romans performed their identities to create and protect their communities along society's volatile borders. John's parents were named Leo and Photeine, a distinctly Hellenized female name which already implies his belonging to the dominant Greek-speaking culture of Roman society. His paternal grandfather was a *bandophoros*, a junior military officer in the Armeniakon *strateia*, who had originally come from Polemonion, a city on the northeast Anatolian coast. This situates them among the provincial elite, a group whose access to wealth and education opened up opportunities for careers in imperial and ecclesiastical service. John's family ensured that he received some sort of formal *paideia*, a fact emphasized in both the *vita* and the *synaxarion* entry.<sup>42</sup> Birth into a notable family and a proper education provided John the requisite background and social tools for entry into the Roman elite. It is unclear whether the family moved to Parthenitae, the city of his birth on the Crimean coast, in his parents' or grandparents' generation.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Anonymous, *Synaxarium ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae*, sec. 26 Junii: Joannes, Gothiae Episcopus. The full-length *vita* is known through at least three manuscripts, two held in the Vatican and one on Mt Athos.

<sup>42</sup> The *vita* stresses Photeine's pious dedication of her son to a religious career, whilst the *synaxarion* entry merely notes that: Καὶ τῇ ἀσκήσει ἐξ ἀπαλῶν ὄνύχων παιδευθείς, γέγονε Χριστοῦ καταγώγιον | Educated in his training from childhood, he became a follower of Christ. Anonymous, sec. 26 Junii: Joannes, Gothiae Episcopus p. 185.

<sup>43</sup> In at least one manuscript and in the *Acta Sanctorum*, John's grandfather is called κανδοφόρος, which would seem to indicate a position in the ecclesiastical hierarchy instead of the military. Marie-France Auzépy, "La Vie de Jean de Gothie (BHG 891)," 70 nn. 5, 79–80.

Besides his religious vocation, there are no details about his life prior to election as bishop of Gothia. The elevation came about as a direct result of the ‘iconoclast’ council held in Hieria in 754. At the Council, John’s predecessor at Gothia caught the emperor’s attention and was promoted to a new bishopric, Thracian Herakleias, vacating the see of Gothia. His move demonstrated the major advantages which individuals could acquire by successfully ingratiating themselves with the imperial court. John was elected to fill the vacancy, but before taking office he went on a pilgrimage to the holy land. Whilst returning from Palestine, he was consecrated as bishop not in Constantinople but in Caucasian Iberia. Previous scholars have attempted to link this event with an anti-iconoclast policy on the new bishop’s part, arguing that the saint wished to be consecrated by the Chalcedonian *katholikos* in Mzkheta (Mtskheta, Georgia).<sup>44</sup> However this ignores the pragmatic component of the decision by exclusively focusing on symbolism. In the mid-eighth century, a journey by sea from Crimea to Palestine would have taken almost as long as an overland route. An overland route would not only have opened up the possibility of visiting more holy sites, but avoided the risks associated with travelling the length of the maritime warzone—risks which not only included weather but the real threat of capture by piracy. Different institutional centres pulled on the frontier, in this case competing ecclesiastical hierarchies. John’s choices to consistently align his bishopric with the Roman state and Imperial Church were meaningful choices given the availability of alternative power centres and social narratives.

John’s disciples helped manage his network of connections and formed the nucleus of followers from which his cult grew post-mortem. These included junior clergy affiliated with the bishopric, civilian clients owing to his role as civic patron of the city of Doros, and monks. John founded a monastic complex in Parthenitae, the city of his birth, the ruins of which have been identified and excavated corroborating the literary tradition.<sup>45</sup> Despite the influence which the monastery had on his memory, it is clear from the hagiographies that he played an important role in leading all three communities. John leveraged contacts from across the *oikoumene* to further his career and bring the benefits of a functioning elite social network to his clients. His travels brought him into personal contact with individuals among the Christian elites in the holy land, Georgia, and

<sup>44</sup> Vasiliev, *The Goths in the Crimea*, 90.

<sup>45</sup> Vasiliev, 93–95.

Rhomania. Like Ignatios, it is clear that John nurtured and improved these connections through the exchange of epistles, creating a body of correspondence which bore fruit for his own career trajectory:

After the death of the emperors Constantine [V] and Leo [IV], when Eirene and her son had ascended the throne, and [John] sent the same tome [containing anti-iconoclast statements from the Jerusalem synod] to Paul, the most-holy who was then patriarch. Receiving a letter from the Augusta Eirene, John came to the imperial city having spoken freely to all about the restoration of the holy icons in the holy and catholic church before returning home.<sup>46</sup>

John successfully used the contents of his previous communications with Jerusalem to introduce himself to the attention of Patriarch Paul and Empress Eirene sometime in the early 780s. This introduction, in turn, secured him the imperial right to the freedom of speech ( $\pi\alpha\rho\rho\eta\sigma\alpha$ ) to preach in favour of icon veneration. Thus, John used his personal and professional network to secure patronage from the patriarch and even the empress herself, a pinnacle accomplishment.

In around 787, the Crimean Khazars attacked Doros, which guarded one of the principal passes through the mountains to the rich settled coastal strip. As bishop, John was one of the city's leaders, alongside an unnamed lord (*kyrios*). The Khazars succeeded when some of the city's inhabitants betrayed the defenders. As a leader of the city and local notable, John, along with some of his disciples, was incarcerated in Phoulon, a town in Khazar-controlled Crimea.<sup>47</sup> This political struggle demonstrates that John was well-connected within the secular provincial elite; John had led the resistance in coordination with the *kyrios* of Gothia, and their imprisonment shows that John's clients were at least rounded up along

<sup>46</sup> V. *Ioannis Gothiae*, §3.28–33. Vasilievsky, *Жития свв. Георгия Амастридского и Стефана Сурожского* [*Lives of Ss. George of Amastri and Stephen of Sougdaia*], sec. 3.28–33 p. 27.

<sup>47</sup> Vasilievsky, sec. 9 p. 32. Whatever the political ramifications of the Khazar capture of Doros, it is worth a brief digression to note that this does not mean that the whole of the southern Crimea fell under their rule *circa* 787. Indeed, although John was deposed, his successor as bishop of the Goths, Niketas, established himself swiftly and sufficiently securely that he was able to attend the final sessions of the ecumenical council in person, indicating that the occupation of Gothia was of very short duration. The *vita* does not indicate that the *kyrios* of Gothia fell into the Khagan's hands alongside John. Instead of a 'Khazar conquest,' evidence points to this having been a raid.

with local hostages. As we shall see in the next section, in time John escaped into exile in the Pontos, where he died soon thereafter.<sup>48</sup>

Several themes emerge from John's *vita* confirming trends of Roman group identification found elsewhere, and also point to their significance in his liminal world. Despite being bishop 'of the Goths,' John clearly came from a Hellenized family of elite status within the Roman context. He travelled extensively, shedding light on the practical intersection of political loyalty and networks of patronage which he used to advance the causes and careers of his clients. Details from the *vita* of John of Gothia indicate that he made numerous connections across the Roman world over the course of his career. John lived at a confluence of different networks. By his family he was connected to the provincial military aristocracy; as bishop, he participated in ecclesiastic networks which spanned the Mediterranean and Eurasian worlds; finally, as a patron and teacher, his connections to the monastic world led to his veneration as a holy man and eventual memorialization through hagiography.

Another of John's important connection was Bishop George of Amastris, who returned John's body to the monastery which John had founded. George had his own client network which would go on to develop his memory into a small holy man cult which never achieved much popularity. Like John, George's career united church and monastery—he spent time as both a hermit and coenobite before being appointed bishop against his will. He bridged the world of the provincial elite and the centres of power. He had connections to the highest circles in Constantinople, for he foretold the future-emperor Nikephoros' rise to the imperial throne (r. 802–811). He led Amastris when an Arab raid threatened his city.<sup>49</sup> George's *vita* attests an interaction between two emerging cults, a horizontal connection between members of society's provincial ecclesiastic elite. By being associated with John's older and thereby more established cult, George's new cult derived legitimacy and authority. George conducted John's funeral, which culminated in a procession bearing John's body down to Amastris' harbour for repatriation and burial in the monastery in Parthenitae which John had founded and where his cult grew over the following centuries.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Vasilievsky, sec. 9 pp. 32–33.

<sup>49</sup> Vasilievsky, *Русско-Византийские Исследования [Russian-Byzantine Studies]*, 2:1–73; Kazhdan and Talbot, *Dumbarton Oaks Hagiography Database*, 43–44.

<sup>50</sup> Vasiliev, *The Goths in the Crimea*, 91–95.

As bishops, John, Stephen, and George of Amastris, like Ignatios, were not just spiritual leaders but central figures for all aspects of their community. Family connections and education stand out as important to these bishops' early life. These men were not merely literate, but were educated in the tradition inherited from the classical *paideia*.<sup>51</sup> These *vitae* confirm that educational networks functioned across the Roman Empire throughout the early middle ages, and they continued to provide the necessary tools for turning a provincial boy into a Roman man. These frontier leaders sat at the confluence of multiple social structures. Besides the ecclesiastical hierarchy, they were linked to networks of monastic communities, to teachers who passed on classical learning to new generations, to local militias and the professional armies, and to civilian governors and civil servants who helped run the provinces. These networks linked the social elite of the Roman world, instilling individuals with a collective identity and an institutional link to the empire's past. They provided a vital link between capital, province, and back again, a vertical link between the centre and the periphery. Furthermore, although less evidenced than in the epistolary collection of Ignatios, horizontal connections were also present—John turned to George as a colleague who could give him and his disciples' refuge in a time of need. Like the Khazar princesses who were brought to Constantinople as wives for the emperors Justinian II and Constantine V, these frontier bishops bridged the Constantinople-centric hierarchies of the Roman Empire and other, non-Roman networks of patronage and power. The frontier was an area where loyalties and identities mattered. These men played a role in strengthening social cohesion, acting as agents of the state on behalf of their dependents and communities.

### 3 CAPTIVITY, COMMUNITIES, AND THE FRONTIER

The precarious nature of frontier life meant that, for many Romans, captivity and enslavement at the hands of barbarians was a real threat, as seen in the excerpt from Procopius quoted at the beginning of this chapter. For the masses of society, already poorly documented, falling captive to barbarians, brigands, or pirates often led to enslavement and effective

<sup>51</sup> Direct evidence for networks of educators and philosophers is extremely scarce between *circa* 600 and 850, but research on the topic has emphasized the continuous nature of the ninth-century evidence with its late antique antecedents, suggesting that the network did not suffer a complete breakdown during these centuries. Lemerle, *Byzantine Humanism*, 81–120.

disappearance from the historical record. The elite fared differently. As prisoners or as hostages given during negotiations, elites were valuable resources who could be ransomed. They were kept where their movement could be monitored and controlled by the foreign power, often in groups which naturally formed expatriate communities. These communities, thrown together *ad hoc*, demonstrate the crucial importance of the social cohesion which performance of Roman identity could bestow. Especially important actions included maintenance of Christian ritual activity, agreement on an ideologically informed community vision and narrative around which they could coalesce, and (re)establishment of clear social hierarchies and chains of patronage.

War did not stop the flow of communication within the elite networks of the *oikoumene*, it merely added another component of danger to the missions of those individuals who carried it out. Ignatios never personally went anywhere near a frontier; the war against the Caliphate was a distant fact, safely removed from his own existence. However, this remote conflict did impact his immediate social network. The ability of events to reach individuals from a distance through this elite network is made clear in epistle 57, written to Constantine, one of Ignatios' pupils who had been held as a captive for a time by the Arabs.

What do you think my feelings were, dearest of children, when you endured, a captive, that bitter and harsh deportation among foreign and alien men? ... What misfortunes had Constantine met? Had he been slaughtered by a murderous dagger? Had he fallen to the wearisome slavery of an evil-minded master? Had he been bound under some threat with everlasting chains, as misfortune had it? Had he the courage to withstand a grim and terrible gaze, indeed to move his eyes about or even open them? Does he pretend to be dumb before a dreadful barbaric tongue? In brief, I went over the cruelty of your oppressors and your most harsh, merciless, and inhuman treatment. ... The fact that you have been saved, that you have been freed against all expectation from alien violence and have returned to your ancestral home that is dear to God and to me, has caused me no small consolation.<sup>52</sup>

Ignatios presents a list of dangers and trials which any captive Roman could face: martyrdom, slavery, apostasy, and attacks against his linguistic and cultural identity. With such existential pressures being placed on life and identity, captives had to construct tools to resist and reassert their

<sup>52</sup> Ignatios the Deacon, *Epistulae*, sec. 57 pp. 139–41.

identities. Most often, these took the form of reproducing familiar communities to continue their own cultural practices under constraints upon their freedom. Examples exist of instances where these actions both succeeded and failed. The latter were cautionary tales about what happened when individuals compromised their integrity and identity in these situations.

Gruesome fates, whilst not common, did occasionally occur. Some examples, reported in great detail, generated significant impact on popular imaginations. When captured in 638, the Roman garrison of Gaza were ordered to convert and, when they did not, were slain.<sup>53</sup> Another hagiography tells of sixty Roman pilgrims *en route* to Jerusalem who were martyred for refusing to convert to Islam in 724.<sup>54</sup> On 26 July 811, Emperor Nikephoros led an army to a disastrous defeat against the Bulgars. The grisly fate and massacre of the Christian prisoners was reported in hagiographical terms in Theophanes' *Chronographia*.<sup>55</sup> Also, when Amorion was sacked in AD 838, forty-two of the city's leading officials and military commanders were held by the Saracens awaiting ransom. When the deal fell through and the prisoners refused to apostatize, they were martyred in Samarra on 6 March 845.<sup>56</sup> Individual Christians were also martyred when they denied Islam after having supposedly converted, as happened to a certain Cyrus *circa* 769,<sup>57</sup> and Elias of Heliopolis/Damascus *circa* 779.<sup>58</sup> Although representing the exception to the usual treatment of prisoners-of-war, such stories were celebrated in liturgies and circulated widely within Christian communities who lived in close contact with the caliphate. All of them carried an explicit message: the proper and honourable

<sup>53</sup> Delehaye, "Passio sanctorum sexaginta martyrum"; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*, 347–51.

<sup>54</sup> Halkin, *Bibliotheca hagiographica graeca*, sec. Passio martyrum Hierosolymitanus vol. 2 p. 101 nos. 1217–18; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*, 360–63.

<sup>55</sup> Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, sec. AM 6303–5 pp. 671–86.

<sup>56</sup> The passion of the 42 Martyrs of Amorion exists in at least eight different versions the earliest of which was written within a year or two of the events described. See Skylitzes' account for a historical narrative of the events surrounding their capture and execution. Kotzabassi, "Τὸ Μαρτύριο Τῶν Μβ Μαρτύρων Τοῦ Ἀμορίου. Ἀγιολογικά Καὶ Ὑμνολογικά Κείμενα"; John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History, 811–1057*, chap. 23 pp. 75–80; Kazhdan and Talbot, *Dumbarton Oaks Hagiography Database*, 41–42.

<sup>57</sup> Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*, 376–78.

<sup>58</sup> Hoyland, 363–65; McGrath, "Elias of Heliopolis: The Life of an Eighth-Century Syrian Saint"; Auzépy, "De la Palestine à Constantinople (VIIIe–IXe siècles)."

course of action was to face death and seek eternal life rather than forsake the faith-community in which one had been raised.

Many captives were soldiers and civilians who fell into enemy hands as a result of sieges and battles lost. Given the general absence of official documentation, captives are mostly known through notices in chronicles and other historical sources. These occasionally mention prisoners being taken in battles or exchanged between the competing states.<sup>59</sup> Patoura has studied these groups in the tenth century, and it seems reasonable that the main conclusions from this period will largely apply to the less-well-documented earlier period. Prisoners formed expatriate communities, fostering an exchange of art, religion, and culture between Rhomania and its neighbours, all whilst continuing to assert their separate identities through using the Greek language and other acts of nonconformity with the dominant culture of their captors. Without a modern state's ability to police and control these people's lives in any but the crudest fashion, these long-term captive populations had not just the potential for but a reputation as a source of spies and espionage information.<sup>60</sup>

Evidence for the existence and activities of prisoner communities in the seventh and eighth centuries comes largely from hagiographical sources, which are largely silent concerning the experiences which military and civilian populations typically endured. Consequently, the experiences found in the hagiographical *vitae* differ from those typical for other captives in fundamental ways. Most of these holy men became captive alone and often whilst travelling, not as part of an organized group nor whilst defending their homes. To a certain degree, they were outsiders in the context of the social groups of their fellow-prisoners. Without structured ties of family, civic society, or military comradery they were destabilizing free agents in a potentially volatile social situation. Conflicts, conflict resolution, and the possibility for martyrdom are central to the stories of captured saints.

These themes are introduced in a few brief vignettes in the life of John of Gothia. During John of Gothia's pilgrimage which he undertook before accepting ordination as bishop, he made personal and professional connections with the patriarchate of Jerusalem. Over his career, he maintained

<sup>59</sup> Roman prisoners taken prisoner by hostile powers in raids: Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, sec. AM 6142, 6187, 6205, 6230, 6232, 6251, 6264; prisoner exchange: 6261 pp. 479, 514, 533, 570–71, 573, 596, 616; and 613.

<sup>60</sup> Patoura, *Oι αἰχμάλωτοι ως παράγοντες ἐπικοινωνίας καὶ πληροφόρησης (4ος–10ος αι.)*.

this relationship through the exchange of documents, an exchange which required one or more of his servants or disciples to personally make the journey on the bishop's behalf. For one of these journeys, a disciple named Longinus the Deacon brought a statement of John's orthodox faith to a synod convened by the Patriarch of Jerusalem.<sup>61</sup> On his way back, Longinus became the witness to John's first miraculous intervention as a saint.

Whilst returning from the holy city of Jerusalem, John's disciple Longinus was seized by the Saracens and raised upon a cross. Crying out the prayer of the holy man, the father appeared before his eyes. Immediately, the *protontarius* of the emir, paying 500 *miliaresia*, brought him down and freed him. And when he had again been captured by some others and placed in chains, upon appealing to the holy man and begging to be saved, both of the chains fell from his feet and he was saved.<sup>62</sup>

Twice captured, Longinus selected one from the broader available set of cultural tools to resist pressures from his abductors, in this case his relationship with his spiritual father, John. The *vita* credits his acts of piety as the cause of his rescue, which in mundane terms happened either through the payment of ransom or the failure of his iron fetters.

John himself also became a prisoner in a foreign land alongside many of his students. When the seat of his bishopric was captured in a Khazar raid in *circa* 787, John and his disciples were led away as prisoners-of-war. They were held in Phoulon, a settlement in Khazar territory. John himself managed to escape the Khazars, ultimately fleeing across the Euxine and finding refuge in Amastris. However, in his escape, he left some of his followers behind.

After John fled to Rhomania, his disciples who were still imprisoned and guarded by the Khazars after they had been captured and come before the Khagan and were sentenced by him to be punished. However, through the

<sup>61</sup> Γράφει οὗ διὰ Λογγίνου τοῦ Διακόνου αὐτοῦ τῷ Πατριάρχῃ Ἱεροσαλύμων ποιῆσαι σύνοδον, καὶ ἀποσταλῦναι ὅρον πίστεως πρὸς αὐτόν. Vasilievsky, Жития свв. Георгия Амасприодского и Стефана Сурожского [Lives of Ss. George of Amastris and Stephen of Sougdaia], sec. 2 pp. 26–27.

<sup>62</sup> V. *Ioannis Gothiae*, §6.78–84. Vasilievsky, sec. 7 p. 30.

prayers of the saint [John], they were freed in good health, for the Khagan said that ‘these ones do not carry the blame.’<sup>63</sup>

John and his disciples were singled-out for imprisonment, being high-status individuals within the local community whom the Khazars could ransom back. The group maintained cohesion through John, who was both temporal patron and spiritual focus of this nascent cult. As bishop, John was the most valuable of all the individuals; when he escaped to Rhomania far from the Khazar frontier, the potential value of his disciples vanished leading to their release. Through Christian practices this small group of prisoners maintained their communal integrity in adverse situations and emerged strengthened.

The almost-martyrdom of Longinus the Deacon finds parallels with the story of his near-contemporary, St. Romanos the Neomartyr, whom we encountered previously in this chapter. Romanos’ time as a prisoner in Baghdad presents a unique story about a struggle within the community of Roman prisoners-of-war. A microcosm of Roman society, containing monks, soldiers, and civilians,<sup>64</sup> like any other frontier group it required both unity of resolve and of leadership to survive in the presence of existential threats. The pressures placed on Roman captives to apostatize were real, and any weakness would break their religious unity as Christians. Identification with Christian faith and rituals were pillars of Romanness, but its ideological landscape was, in the eighth century, open for debate. The dispute over icon veneration created internal fractures in the Christian Roman community, opening a venue of competition between state and religious institutions to serve as the unifying anchor for group affiliation. A struggle for leadership within a small community in Baghdad between imperial and monastic factions paralleled broader social struggles under the Isaurian emperors.

The monks were a well-organized group, benefitting from the clear leadership of Romanos, disciplined by their vows, and depicted in the hagiography as being motivated by a common sense of grievance against the reigning emperors. The *vita* contains brief back-stories for all of Romanos’ disciples, and each, in his own way, had been driven out of his

<sup>63</sup> *V. Ioannis Gothiae*, §6.85–8. Vasilievsky, sec. 7 p. 31.

<sup>64</sup> Stephen of Damascus, “Vita Romani,” §14, 418.18. Ed. and trans. Shoemaker, *Three Christian Martyrdoms from Early Islamic Palestine*, 172–75.

home monastery by ‘iconoclast’ purges before winding up in Arab captivity.<sup>65</sup> Even Romanos, although not directly a victim of any purge, enjoyed anti-iconoclast credentials reflected from his patroness, Anthousa, whose *vita* tells of her sufferings inflicted by imperial officers for her love of icons.<sup>66</sup> The spiritual legitimacy of the monks to be leaders of the community was represented in Romanos’ *vita* as resting upon their opposition to the doctrinal policies of the Imperial Church at that time, and to the will of the reigning emperors.

This left open a competing route to validity of leadership of the community of prisoners by anyone who could claim to be a legitimate representative of imperial interests. As it happened, amongst the representatives of the army and bureaucracy also held in the same prisoner-of-war compound, one individual quickly rose to a position of leadership. Called George (or Gregory, the names are easily confused in Arabic without their vowels), the historical reality of Romanos’ nemesis is difficult to determine.<sup>67</sup> George must have been captured in the course of one of several Arab incursions into Rhomania in the early 770s. Devastating raids are indeed recorded in Theophanes in several entries in the late 760s and 770s,<sup>68</sup> and al-Tabari even describes the surprise and capture of a small Roman garrison in AH 153 (AD 770) in a raid which also sacked Laodikeia Combusta in Pisidia.<sup>69</sup> However, no George or Gregory appears among the Roman commanders mentioned in this time, if he even was a historical individual and if his name was indeed translated correctly across four languages.

Conflict arose between the (anti-icon) ‘civic’ leadership, whose careers required and rewarded their loyalty to the incumbent church and state establishment, and the (pro-icon) monastics. Each group sought to unify and imprint their leadership on this exiled Roman community, seeking to create and legitimate an organization which could claim to act on behalf of the group’s interests.

<sup>65</sup> Stephen of Damascus, “Vita Romani,” §6.25–35; 8.3–7. Ed. and trans. Shoemaker, *Three Christian Martyrdoms from Early Islamic Palestine*, 158–59, 162–63.

<sup>66</sup> Talbot, “Life of St. Anthousa of Mantineon,” secs. 3, 4.

<sup>67</sup> Winkelmann et al., *Prosopographie der mittelbyzantinischen Zeit*, sec. Georgios 2186, Datensatz 2220.

<sup>68</sup> Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, sec. AM 6279 pp. 635–36.

<sup>69</sup> Williams, *History of Al-Tabari*, Volume 27, 220.

[George] aroused all the Romans who were in that place against the fathers, saying to them: ‘These monks are the enemies of our emperor,’ and named them icon-lovers and idolaters. This was the same that that impious emperor Constantine had named them. He persuaded all of the common people and ignorant men to hold the fathers in contempt as idolaters; they were denounced and censured.<sup>70</sup>

The *vita* is explicit that these prisoners are a community of Romans, and that George’s party sought to establish themselves as the principal patrons of that community by assuming for themselves the mantle of state representatives. The act of anathematizing the heterodox monks reinforced group cohesion by delimiting good Romans from bad.

Ritual denunciations gave way to more direct action, and heightened rhetoric soon led to confrontations among the prisoners. Without formal, institutional mechanisms present to ameliorate the growing tension within the group, violence erupted within the community as its members struggled to establish ideological cohesion. Romanos’ *vita*, whose bias in favour of its hero should come as no surprise, claims that George was the first to strike.

[The Devil] convinced lord George and all the Romans who were in prison—for indeed there were many there, soldiers and civilians—that that they ought to slay the holy fathers. .... Thereafter they sharpened their tongues against them in anger and frenzy, declaring: ‘Just like idolaters, these cultists carry the image of the saviour and of the saints in procession.’ Because of this, they calamitously prepared to fight against the servants of Christ, being urged on by lord George.<sup>71</sup>

Although the hagiographer, Stephen of Damascus, saw pernicious diabolical influences at play, we may note the functioning of group dynamics. The diverse community of prisoners were effectively united as Romans, an important component of which was their othering of the holy man as a heretic. Resorting to violence shifted the community’s unity from simple ideological cohesion into a more visceral performance and experience.

<sup>70</sup> Stephen of Damascus, “*Vita Romani*,” §12, 416.33–417.3. Ed. and trans. Shoemaker, *Three Christian Martyrdoms from Early Islamic Palestine*, 170–71.

<sup>71</sup> Stephen of Damascus, “*Vita Romani*,” §14, 418.17–25. Ed. and trans. Shoemaker, *Three Christian Martyrdoms from Early Islamic Palestine*, 174–75.

The ensuing conflict however drew in the participation of other groups, both neighbouring Christians who dwelt in the compound and the Saracens who ran it. Although their intervention did not change the fundamental outcome of the intra-communal conflict, it nevertheless demonstrates the contours of inter-communal boundaries.

And when a certain Saracen youth saw [the corrupted Romans] equipping themselves for slaying the father in his tent, he cried out in a great voice and summoned his friends. Then immediately those corrupted ones attacked the monks. But [the Saracens], together with the multitude of Syrian and Frankish Christians, armed with only staves against stones and other projectiles, rescued the holy fathers from their enemies' hands. ... Thereafter the Saracens desired to bring evil against the corrupted Romans, but the jailor who was in charge, although not being a Christian himself, settled the turmoil.<sup>72</sup>

The struggle for leadership of the Roman exile community spilled across the ghetto, involving other Christians, Muslims, and the warden who resolved the conflict. The holy man's presence increased group cohesion, though in quite the opposite way which has been observed elsewhere. Romanos served as the anti-Roman exemplar, a role he was successfully cast in by the lord George who successfully united the Roman community of exiles in Baghdad under his leadership and vision of that community's place in the world.

In the end, the Roman community benefitted, and both factions could claim victory in their own manner. George installed himself as *de facto* leader of this endangered community, and instilled it with a clear sense of unity behind a pro-imperial, pro-iconoclast ideology. He reinforced and reiterated loyalties to the central institutions of the Roman world by turning the monks into pariahs. This made the community stronger, and the *vita* offers no indication that this group were ever successfully pulled apart from pressures by their Arab captors. In many ways, this story exemplified many of the ways which R. Brubaker identified as critical for the formation of groupness. 'Being' Roman was merely one potential category. It crystallized as a group as a result of violence which was precipitated by a nascent organization purporting to speak on the group's behalf. Finally,

<sup>72</sup> Stephen of Damascus, "Vita Romani," §15, 418.31–419.8. Ed. and trans. Shoemaker, *Three Christian Martyrdoms from Early Islamic Palestine*, 174–77.

although the violence was framed and coded as inter-ethnic, it arose from conflicting intra-Roman interests.<sup>73</sup>

The crystallization of Roman groupness under George's leadership contrasts with the failed groupness of other Romans encountered at the end of Romanos' *vita*. Some apostates encountered near the end of Romanos' life show exactly what could happen if a frontier community failed to find such strength. Romanos' *vita* underlined the existential necessity of communal unity. Individuals had every reason to be flexible with their loyalties, but to permit this was a death-blow to a community's integrity. Indeed, the story of Romanos' martyrdom offered a clear lesson in the dangers that arose when local authority was undermined, and the whole community compromised, by the selfish interest of an individual.

Caliph al-Mahdi personally oversaw a campaign against the Roman frontier in 780,<sup>74</sup> bringing his court, and therefore Romanos, with him to ar-Raqqah. This set in motion a series of events which ultimately led to Romanos' martyrdom.

In this time, certain captives were brought from Rhomania. And when they were brought into the presence of al-Mahdi, in anxiety of torture and death, those miserable ones renounced the true life, and they gave up the Christian faith and enslaved themselves to the Saracen religion. But when these miserable apostates beheld Romanos praying to God, they pitied themselves and penitence seized them. After this day the night before Sunday came, and the holy Romanos remained awake, upright and sleepless, performing his prayers and canticles before God. These Roman apostates assembled nearby. They regarded him with envy and pitied themselves, who had deserted the eternal good and exchanged everlasting life for this brief and transient life. But when the first light showed, they addressed him with tears and, having confessed their sins, asked of him about what works needed to be done, and how they ought conduct themselves. Then the holy man reproached their faithless minds which had deserted the true faith.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>73</sup> Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups*, 11–20.

<sup>74</sup> Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, sec. AM 6273, 6274 pp. 626–29.

<sup>75</sup> Stephen of Damascus, “Vita Romani,” §22, 422.32–423.11. Ed. and trans. Shoemaker, *Three Christian Martyrdoms from Early Islamic Palestine*, 184–87.

This passage is a clear witness to the importance of performance, in this case specifically ritual, to group cohesion and identification. A monk publicly performing his devotions made for a powerful exemplar for rectitude of identity performance, against which these apostates' actions measured poorly. As had happened to the Baghdad prisoner-of-war community in which Romanos had originally been held, this new set of prisoners faced pressure to convert. Lacking the unity of purpose and resilience of the Baghdad group, these new prisoners chose to apostatize in order to spare themselves torture or even death.

The new converts were still held with other prisoners-of-war, among whom naturally Romanos was also detained. Romanos was a living exemplar of the behaviour these men knew would have been expected of them—to endure in their loyalty to their homeland and native faith. Although his mere presence was enough to prompt second thoughts among the apostates, he soon issued direct appeals for their repentance.

After he encouraged those ones, and they were strengthened, and he taught them what needed to be done according to the greater good of their spirits, he said, ‘Although you have stumbled and have surrendered to your deepest, innermost impiety, and moreover chosen this most short and miserable life instead of that permanent one, nevertheless you can be reconciled to God’s life, if you make your repentance and let them dwell in your souls; because he is goodness and loving of mankind. He will have mercy upon you if you confess him boldly in this way; he does not wish the death of a sinner,<sup>76</sup> but that he might be reformed and that he might do penance.’ These things and others of this sort the blessed man taught these sinners.<sup>77</sup>

Although the rhetorical content of Romanos’ speech was theological, it was a reminder of the norms and expectations with which these men had been acculturated. He appealed to shared cultural reference points, particularly the Bible, and reconnected these men to Roman systems by establishing himself as a spiritual patron and teacher.

<sup>76</sup> Ezekiel 18:23.

<sup>77</sup> Stephen of Damascus, “Vita Romani,” §22, 423.11–20. Ed. and trans. Shoemaker, *Three Christian Martyrdoms from Early Islamic Palestine*, 186–87.

Of course, encouraging newly converted Muslims to return to their old religion was not something a caliph would tolerate—apostasy from Islam was punishable by death according to sharia law. The monk had already received unfavourable attention, first from his disruptive struggle for the leadership amongst the prisoners-of-war and second from the accusations of espionage. Called before the caliph, Romanos was tortured for leading these new converts astray and for holding out against conversion. Refusing to renounce his faith and identity, Romanos was taken to the banks of the Euphrates and beheaded in the morning of 1 May, 780. His final words were an emphatic statement of the holy man’s identity.

By the grace of God I was born a Christian, I am a Christian and I shall die as a Christian. This is my will.<sup>78</sup>

The events of Romanos’ final passion were intensely spiritual for him and those who preserved his memory and cult. As an individual, Romanos was a Galatian, a monk, a Roman, and, to the last, a Christian. Each of these identities was important for different reasons at different times. And whilst elsewhere in this volume we have encountered each of these identities in isolation, Romanos’ *vita* not only confirms that they were combined in a single individual, but demonstrates one version of how that was done.

In Romanos’ *vita* and in other stories about Roman prisoners-of-war, we are confronted by frontier communities with much in similarity to that which we previously found in John of Gothia’s Crimea. They shared bonds of language, personal and institutional loyalty, and religious practice which served as central reference points and anchors for the identity of their group. They also faced constant pressures which were aimed at breaking their core identity. Communities needed more than common ground, they required leadership. Romanos’ story served as a valuable counter-example to John’s, for the inter-communal violence showed what could happen when neither secular nor religious leadership could claim an undisputed right to lead a group. Both successes and failures of group cohesion in these border situations point to the importance of identity performance under difficult situations and how actors make those

<sup>78</sup> Stephen of Damascus, “Vita Romani,” §24, 424.34–425.2. Ed. and trans. Shoemaker, *Three Christian Martyrdoms from Early Islamic Palestine*, 190–91.

choices.<sup>79</sup> Social structures served as the common points of reference for the Roman community, but those structures were the most important to identify precisely in places where carrying them out became a choice rather than an obligation.

#### 4 DISCUSSION: IDENTITIES AND BOUNDARIES

This chapter explored how Roman identities were articulated and utilized in practice, by people living in or travelling across the empire's frontier regions. Most of the evidence in this chapter was drawn from hagiographical accounts, and focused on the individuals who were the protagonists of these literary accounts. The chapter started with the accusation and trial of Romanos the Neomartyr for being a spy, and found that his defence relied, in part, on a widespread understanding that there was a meaningful distinction between being a Roman citizen and happening to be a Greek-speaking Christian. The second part of the chapter introduced the Crimean frontier. This is the setting for the *vitae* of Stephen of Sougdaia and John of Gothia, which shed light on the delicate balance authorities along the frontiers had to make between the often-distant and sometimes-unresponsive official apparatuses of state and church and the realities of local politics. Finally, we returned to the life of Romanos for his death, seeing how an individual exemplar could play a role both in life and in death for the articulation and perpetuation of communal groupness.

Boundaries were integral to the existence of group identity, creating space where differences were articulated and assigned significance. When we look to the wider academic context of the field, we can find a number of parallel experiences and examples. The frontiers which we have found have been, as A.A. Eger expected them to be, neither uninhabited wilderness nor precise lines of demarcation but were instead 'complex zones that were defined both by their inhabitants and by their character as peripheral lands in relation to their central ruling bodies, which fluctuated over time.'<sup>80</sup> We certainly have accounts of raids and other military action, but the frontiers of early medieval *Rhomania* are a space where spies, merchants, diplomats, and private individuals pass, and other communities, some led by monks or bishops, make their home. It is an intensely relevant space to the exploration of Romanness. The transgressive nature of these

<sup>79</sup> Wimmer, *Ethnic Boundary Making*, 216.

<sup>80</sup> Eger, *The Islamic-Byzantine Frontier*, 10.

frontiers complicates our attempting to delineate who was, and who was not, Roman. In turn, by focusing on the frontiers we are able to partially counteract the inevitable problem when relying on written sources ‘in that it is much easier for us to hear the voices of the elite than of the governed.’<sup>81</sup>

Boundaries exist where the self encounters the other, which for the present circumstances were presented in terms of where Romans met barbarians. Political boundaries are spaces where we expect to find the intersection of Romans with barbarians. This chapter has explored hagiographical accounts focusing on the ways in which individuals and small groups of followers navigated different types of boundaries. Case studies of hagiographies originating from liminal Roman spaces provide a means of testing the significance of the different institutional and cultural anchors which bound the Roman *oikoumene* together. The empire’s frontiers were political in nature, and did not necessarily align with ecumenical or educational boundaries—we have encountered evidence that these institutions eased the passage across state and military boundaries for some. The interplay between boundaries and non-boundaries allowed for a great degree of local empowerment in articulating their allegiances and where they fit in the world. By using social tools from recognizably Roman cultural settings, these holy men worked to negotiate their communities’ survival. When they were successful, they were so because they used patronage and performance as means of increasing group cohesion and fidelity to their identification as Romans.

<sup>81</sup> Cameron, *The Byzantines*, 17.



## CHAPTER 5

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# Romans, Christians, and Barbarians

The social utility of the Roman label, like any other identifier, was less useful the closer to the centre an individual was situated—the in-group only became a useful point of reference when it was in the presence of outsiders. Although the individuals who controlled the official institutions in Constantinople sought to exert proactive control over Romanness, the Roman signifier itself had limited use for people who lived there and in other core regions of Rhomania. The most productive areas from which to draw evidence for the contours of identity are from its edges, where self met other. It was there, across boundaries territorial as well as social, that the ‘socially relevant factors diagnostic for [group] membership’ were articulated and identified.<sup>1</sup> There, the potential categorization became socially relevant to the actors, crystallizing group consciousness as Romans.<sup>2</sup> In examples from the liminal areas of the Roman world the clearest picture emerges for what made a Roman, and the choices individuals and communities faced in negotiating their identities. The structure of Roman society and networks of patronage helped to define the roles in which individuals could participate in it. Near boundaries, those networks overlapped with and competed against other networks. Identity became most relevant in situations where it is useful distinguishing factor.

<sup>1</sup> Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, 15.

<sup>2</sup> Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups*, 8–10.

Romaness operated on multiple levels of meaning, and the composite nature of the Roman signifier was characterized by fluidity and flexibility. ‘Being Roman might mean something different for different people at the same place and time,’<sup>3</sup> an inherent ambiguity which ensured its historical resilience and presents a challenge to understanding and categorizing it. Romaness operated on any or multiple of these layers at any given moment—it could be a political, religious, cultural, linguistic, educational, legal, or administrative identity alone or in any combination.<sup>4</sup> The process whereby individuals articulated and negotiated these layers in practice allowed scope for emphasizing sameness or establishing difference, depending on the rhetorical goals of the moment. This fluidity allowed different meanings to interfere with one another, sometimes ‘across’ layers. As Guy Halsall noted, ‘Especially important—and perhaps confusing for the issue—is the fact that the concept of ‘Roman’ functioned at a structural as well as a taxonomic level and that these two levels could sometimes be run together.’<sup>5</sup> This chapter focuses on several types of interference between identity layers, and the creative play which it enabled. This composite sign system functioned as a conceptual toolbox, a collection of meanings upon which individuals across the early medieval Mediterranean could draw as need. However, the specific way this played out varied significantly by time and space, having to fit the purpose of a writer as well as being reasonably expected to be accepted by his audience. Use of these tools entailed the possibility of misunderstanding and miscommunication, and we should be cognizant of the potential that such an outcome was not just a possibility but an intended outcome.

This chapter approaches several types of identity boundaries where Romaness was expressed in sources from the seventh through ninth centuries. First is the matter of internal othering, articulating religious dissent in terms of Roman group identification. Equating heretics with barbarians was a common rhetorical trope used by many religious communities within the Roman world, which served to define proper and improper behaviour for the in-group. Second, the chapter explores the experiences

<sup>3</sup> Pohl, “Introduction: Early Medieval Romaness – a Multiple Identity,” 8.

<sup>4</sup> Miles, *Constructing Identities in Late Antiquity*; Mitchell and Greatrex, “Roman Identity in the Sixth Century”; Geary, *The Myth of Nations*, 63–73; Conant, *Staying Roman*.

<sup>5</sup> Halsall, “Transformations of Romaness: The Northern Gallic Case,” 47.

of individuals and communities who lived in close proximity to the polity's military frontiers. These individuals served as the bulwarks of the Roman world against the barbarian other, and the manners in which they articulated their distinctiveness and performed their social roles shed light upon the relevance of different attributes of Roman group identification. We then turn to experiences of people who moved both as individuals and as groups, generally in the context of the Balkans and Anatolia. The chapter finishes by further examining some of the problems specific to regions of the central Mediterranean, many of which were still part of the Empire in this period. Their ability to successfully integrate into all levels of society points to how Romanness served as both a tool for inclusion and exclusion depending on the needs of the moment.

## 1 HERESY AND BARBARISM

When a good Roman was defined as being a good Christian, then the opposite of a good Christian—a heretic—must be the opposite of a good Roman—a barbarian. The equation of Roman with Christian was a well-established literary trope by the seventh century. This equivalency combined with the opposition of Roman with barbarian to create a unique conceptual tool that had the potential to undermine the Romanness of anyone who could be represented as not sufficiently or correctly Christian. This was a rhetorical trick which appealed in only select circumstances, largely restricted to writers and audiences who were concerned with historical doctrinal purity. These sources were mainly hagiographies and chronicles which, as it turns out, we are particularly reliant on for this period. Furthermore, the interplay of meanings within the Roman sign system was particularly disruptive because for large periods of time the doctrine of the Imperial Church—the ecclesiastic institution subordinate to the patriarch of Constantinople and represented synecdochally by him and the emperor—was heretical by the standards of later generations. As such, the conceptual equivalency of heresy with barbarism played a role in shaping the representation of persons, institutions, and events in surviving early medieval sources.

Christianity emerged and evolved as a thoroughly Roman phenomenon, the contours of its doctrines, practices, and institutions shaped by the social context of the Roman Mediterranean in the early first millennium

AD.<sup>6</sup> Over the centuries of late antiquity, Christianity transformed from a Roman religion into a marker of Romanness itself.<sup>7</sup> By the time of the final Persian War and the Arab conquests in the first half of the seventh century, this equation of Romanness and Christianity—or more precisely, ‘orthodoxy’—had found its place in the toolbox of potential meanings for the Roman sign system. The interaction between this tool, which functioned on a conceptual symbolic level, and other elements of Roman identity created some unique possibilities for understanding—and misunderstanding—which were not present in most political or cultural sign systems. A major reason for this was that, on a conceptual level at least, a Roman had an opposite: the barbarian. As Roman and Christian were synonymous, a Christian could also be defined as the opposite of a barbarian, and in turn anyone who was not a Christian—or, more precisely, the right kind of Christian—was, implicitly, barbarous. This elision of meanings did more than create the possibility to confuse communication and understanding, it enabled bad-faith negotiations of identity, intentional misrepresentation of fact for polemical purpose.

The dichotomy between Roman and barbarian was one of the ways in which Romanness functioned on a structural level, a fundamental claim about the nature of civilization itself. Although this aspect operated symbolically, it still had the potential to interfere with taxonomic expressions of identity. This is one of the unique aspects of the Roman sign system, which made it unlike group labels such as Goth, Egyptian, or Cappadocian. To put it another way, ‘the opposite of *barbarus* is *Romanus*; the opposite of, say, *Francus* is not.’<sup>8</sup> The interaction of these concepts meant that incorrect faith undermined Romanness. Criticism of doctrinal policy implicitly challenged the entire constellation of a person’s Romanness. By the standards of later generations, the institutional Imperial Church was heterodox under monotheletism and iconoclasm, which undermined the Romanness of the Imperial Church and the emperors who were responsible for it. Monotheletism was the official doctrine for about half a century—from 636 to 681, and then again under Patriarch John VI from 711 until 713—while iconomachy lasted approximately eighty-six years—from

<sup>6</sup>Key overviews on the Roman context of early Christianity include: MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire*; Rousseau, *The Early Christian Centuries*; Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*.

<sup>7</sup>Hen, “Compelling and Intense: The Christian Transformation of Romanness.”

<sup>8</sup>Halsall, “Transformations of Romanness: The Northern Gallic Case,” 47.

*circa* 730 until 787, and then again from 814 until 843.<sup>9</sup> In the two centuries from the promulgation of the *Ekthesis* in 636 until the Triumph of Orthodoxy in 843, the official doctrine of the Imperial Church was ultimately deemed heretical by posterity for 134 of them. These later generations selectively transmitted an account of this period, and modern readers need to be aware that these sources were intentionally cultivated. For example, there are no surviving contemporary Greek accounts which are hostile to Empress Eirene, the iconodule champion. Iconoclast-sympathizing sources do survive and are full of antipathy for her feminine duplicity and anarchy, but these voices are preserved in only a few northern Frankish annals whose writers were ambivalent towards the second council of Nicaea in 787.<sup>10</sup> Eirene made many enemies at home, and their complete silence is the product of selective preservation produced by the consensus of later generations. For the majority of the two centuries following the Islamic conquests, the Roman emperors were doctrinally barbarous, a historical fact which colours surviving narrative accounts.

Many of the major themes used by the elite to identify themselves are exposed in the polemics which they constructed to differentiate themselves from what they believed they were not. There are numerous examples of leaders of ‘heretical’ factions being de-legitimized through accusations of being un-Roman. Constructing orthodoxy as Roman identity, and heterodoxy as barbarity, is a trope well-worn during late antiquity.<sup>11</sup> This trope continued to be popular and relevant in the early medieval period. Such positions are transparently *ad hominem* attacks—their purpose was to discredit the opposing confessional movement by discrediting its leadership. Early medieval examples follow a well-established tradition of labelling ‘heresies’ after an individual—usually constructed as either its founder or its leader. The implication of all of these labels is that the sect’s followers venerate its founder rather than the true god, Christ (hence, Christians). These are appellations given to a group by its intellectual enemies as a means of scoring rhetorical points. Thus Late Antique Christianity battled Montanists, Origenists, Arians, Pelagians, Donatistists, Apollinarists, Nestorians, Eutychians, Mandaens, Manicheans,

<sup>9</sup>On the date of the *Ekthesis*, see Jankowiak, “The Invention of Dyothletism,” 337; Booth, *Crisis of Empire*, 239–41.

<sup>10</sup>Neil, “Regarding Women on the Throne: Representations of Empress Eirene,” esp. 119–24.

<sup>11</sup>Kitchen, “Contemporary Perceptions of the Roman Empire in the Later Fifth and Sixth Centuries,” 144–53.

Mahometans, and Jacobites, all named for their erstwhile founder or leader. This played into another key trope of heresiology discourse, the claim to always have been orthodox.<sup>12</sup> On the one hand, this idea encouraged rhetorical associations between historically unrelated groups and phenomena, which encourages systemic bias in works by heresiology-minded writers. On the other, it laid the groundwork for a revisionist attitude towards the debates of the past, which results in later generations selectively pruning sources and voices which did not fit the narratives they wished to believe.

The major heterodox confrontation of the seventh century was between monothelete and dyothelete factions of the Chalcedonian confession. The victorious dyothelete faction faced some difficulties in painting its opponents completely black—after all, the monothelete creed was promulgated by Emperor Heraclius (r. 610–641), a man who, as defeater of the Persians and restorer of the True Cross, had a positive historical reputation as a defender of Christianity. Instead, censure was shifted to Patriarch Sergios of Constantinople (r. 610–638). Theophanes attributes suspect family connections to Sergios, but only in the context of his decision to accept and promulgate monotheletism.

The emperor was disconcerted by this novel language and wrote to Sergios, bishop of Constantinople; he also called in Kyros, bishop of Phasis, whom he questioned and found him agreeing with Sergios on the one will and the one energy. For Sergios, being himself of Syrian origin, the son of Jacobite parents, confessed and propounded in writing one natural will and one energy in Christ.<sup>13</sup>

Although being from Syria was not enough to bring Sergios' Roman identity and loyalty into question, his heretical family certainly was. Furthermore, his ancestry was directly linked to his fall into heresy.

Opposition to the language of the ecumenical union coalesced around the patriarchs of Jerusalem and Rome.<sup>14</sup> Among the individuals who bridged these two centres was Maximus the Confessor, an individual encountered previously in this work. Unique among heresiarchs,

<sup>12</sup> Schadler, *John of Damascus and Islam*, 36–39, 56–63.

<sup>13</sup> Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, AM 6121. Trans. Mango and Scott, *Theophanes' Chronicle*, 460–62.

<sup>14</sup> On the critical role of the John IV, bishop of Rome 640–642, in creating the dyothelete movement, see Booth, *Crisis of Empire*, 259–62.

opposing accounts of his origins are preserved, from the perspective of both his enemies and his supporters. The hostile ‘hagiography,’ is contemporary, written by a Syrian Melkite bishop, George of Resh’aina.

This Maximus was from the village of Hesfin, for it was there that this bitter tare was born, his father being a Samaritan from Sychar, while his mother was a Persian, the slave-girl of a certain Jew named Zadok from the town of Tiberias. Now the father of this Maximus used to go and sell his work in Tiberias—he was a maker of linen, and he sold luxurious goods—and when he was in Tiberias, next door to the house of Sadok, he committed adultery with the Persian slave-girl, for she was very pretty. ... When his relations and fellow Samaritans saw what he had done they were in great consternation, and they all met together and told him: ‘either allow us to burn this pregnant woman in order to remove the disgrace from us and our people, or we will expel you from our community.’ But he was unwilling to consent to them in this, saying: ‘Although I agree to do what you want, I shall not carry it out today.’ They, however, were plotting to kill him, and the girl with him, secretly; but when he learnt of their plot against him, he made his escape by night, taking her with him. He arrived at the above-mentioned village of Hesfin and entered it, going to the house of a priest called Martyrios. He stayed with him for two years, and he and his wife were secretly baptized by him.<sup>15</sup>

The dramatic narrative of his origins continues with Maximus’ upbringing, culminating with the tragic deaths of Maximus’ parents and siblings. Despite his subsequent Christian upbringing and education, Maximus’ origins are thoroughly un-Christian, and only tenuously Roman. By claiming that Maximus’ parents were adulterers and social outcasts, the narrative serves to undermine the monk’s legitimacy as leader of the opposing confessional community, therefore (*ad hominem*) invalidating the whole dyothelite position.

Among his supporters, Maximus’ cult took a long time to form. It was only decades after his death that he was rehabilitated, and not until the tenth century—some three hundred years after his death—before a friendly *vita* was composed.<sup>16</sup> It is worth contrasting, then, the opening preamble to the Greek *vita*, separated from its subject by a significant gulf or time, to that of George’s:

<sup>15</sup> George of Resh’aina, *Vita Maximi*, § 1–2. Edited and transl. Brock, “An Early Syriac Life of Maximus the Confessor.”

<sup>16</sup> Allen and Neil, *Maximus the Confessor and His Companions: Documents from Exile*, 5–7, 23–24.

I am not to be blamed for all omissions, because nobody else before us, at least as far as we ourselves know, has applied himself to the whole story of the man, seeing the undertaking as difficult indeed and hard to achieve. Lest we seem, however, to shun totally so great a subject of discussion, at least, because it is not possible for us to achieve it all, we abandon the whole endeavour (which indeed I consider pointless) and a reason for accusations, it is plainly necessary for me to offer the present account, although I know that it is most humble, and although it falls very short of the facts. So in this way we might both fulfil our duty, and pay what we owe you, who inevitably receive this account of that man above everything else. But if the account mentions in passing any other events, this is not wholly outside the scope of the account, not unsuitable for those times that then brought about a great insult against the truth, as you are aware; but the matters pertaining to the holy man need to be narrated from the beginning, as far as possible, up to the present.<sup>17</sup>

The *vita*'s author had works written by Maximus and his disciples available, but little to go on for establishing their relative chronology or to fill in the gaps in Maximus' biography—and indeed, the *vita* got the relative chronology of his sources wrong.<sup>18</sup> Absent better information, the author had to fall back on well-established tropes within the genre to reconstruct that life which his hero should have had. This contrasts starkly with the hostile Syriac *vita*, which takes pains to cite evidence and witnesses for its story.<sup>19</sup>

The ideal childhood which the friendly Greek *vita* gave the confessor is illustrative as a construct for how a saint, who at the height of his career was certainly a major player in the theological disputes of his day, should have been born and raised.

So, then, the fatherland of the holy confessor Maximus was the first of cities, the great Constantinople, which with reason is called the New Rome. His parents, noble by descent, were second to few in secular distinction. Their piety was their hallmark, and both their inclination towards and familiarity with virtue, so that they could claim their splendour from there rather than from their lineage. Indeed they brought this blessed one to the light and introduced him to holy baptism of the flesh in his tender youth, so that he

<sup>17</sup> Anonymous, “Vita Maximi [Gr.],” § 1.

<sup>18</sup> Bronwen Neil and Pauline Allen, *The Life of Maximus the Confessor, Recension 3*, 22–26.

<sup>19</sup> George of Resh'aina, *V. Maximi*, §5. Transl. Brock, “An Early Syriac Life of Maximus the Confessor.”

might receive purification from infancy. They allowed him to practise none of those pursuits which are a delight to boys, nor to busy his mind with these trivialities and childishness, in order that his well-formed and delicate nature would not be attracted to laxity and softness of morals. ... When he went to teachers, pursuing every kind of education, as was natural, why is it necessary to say what knowledge he acquired in a short time? He practised most diligently grammatical skills and the rest of the educational curriculum, and achieved the highest level of rhetoric and the art of speaking, and listened to philosophy so diligently he let nobody come near him, even to a small degree. For, using his cleverness with matching zeal, he had sufficient ability in every kind of learning, and with abundance.<sup>20</sup>

Maximus' early life is imagined as belonging to the Constantinopolitan nobility, placing him geographically and socially in spaces the pious author and his anticipated audience most associated with Orthodoxy. Maximus' youth was imagined filled with spiritual and educational programs appropriate to a man of his reputation and stature. Not having accurate historical information, the hagiographer certainly drew upon the more famous *vita* of Theodore the Stoudite (759–826) as a model for the early years of Maximus' life.<sup>21</sup> Syria, a land famed as the source of heresy, was apparently not an appealing place to imagine the origins of this Orthodox saint.

The account is revealing as an ideal for how a saint should have been brought up, playing into widely circulating hagiographical tropes which idealized saints' childhoods as much as their adult careers.<sup>22</sup> The content conforms to hagiographical tropes: a noble family, pious parents, an excellent education in which he excelled in all secular and patristic accomplishments, and zealousness for learning. By placing his origins among the elite of Constantinople and attributing to him total mastery over the *paideia*, its author gave Maximus the most unimpeachable Roman identity possible. Ironically, this *vita* reimagined Constantinople from Maximus' place of exile into his homeland. The whole account, however, reflects the attitudes and expectations of a tenth-century Constantinopolitan monk rather than seventh-century biography, as its author made clear in his opening.

<sup>20</sup> Anonymous, "Vita Maximi [Gr.]," § 2–3.

<sup>21</sup> Lackner, "Zu Quellen Und Datierung Der Maximosvita (BHG 1234)"; Bronwen Neil and Pauline Allen, *The Life of Maximus the Confessor, Recension 3*, 23–24.

<sup>22</sup> Caseau, "Childhood in Byzantine Saints' Lives"; Arianzzi, "Approaches to Byzantine Adolescence."

Both versions of Maximus' early life are effectively tropes, and each weaves historical fact into what is principally a polemical construction.

In the various accounts surrounding the leadership of the monothelete and dyothelete confessions, competing visions for the leaders have been preserved. For Sergios, the criticism amounts to little more than to ascribe to him heretical parents, and to let the association bring his piety into doubt. Maximus, on the other hand, is subject of much greater contention. Despite the word 'Roman' not appearing in either account, in that of his enemies he is the least Roman man possible, in that of his devotees, the most. His authenticity is framed in terms of dichotomies encountered throughout this volume: educated/illiterate; noble/impoverished; legitimate/bastard; virile/effeminate; Constantinopolitan (Greek)/ethnic (Sarmatian, Syrian or Persian); insider/outsider. These identities are a complex interaction between geography, kin, morality, and social status not just of the individual but of his family group. Although full-blown comparative biographical accounts are rare, these general patterns hold for descriptions of later heresiarchs.

Other documents from the dyothelete movement more explicitly frame their cause in terms of identification with and ownership of the Roman label. The *Relatio Motionis* is an account of the first trial of Maximus in 655, written by one of his followers shortly after the events it describes.<sup>23</sup> The document represents events in the form of a dialogue between Maximus, with whom the writer expects his audience to sympathize, and the hostile imperial officials whom Maximus and the writer regard as heretics. This necessitates a degree of caution on our part as readers. Like a hagiography, the *Relatio Motionis* uses historical events to tell a story with spiritual truth. On the one hand, the views and opinions of the monothelete interlocutors are being represented by a dyothelete writer to an imagined dyothelete audience. To a certain extent, this is literature, and the imperial officials are puppets for the writer to project his understanding of his opponents onto, so we should not assume a good-faith representation of their rhetorical positions. On the other hand, the writer claims to be representing recent public events—a claim which at least implicitly placed some limitations on intentionally and excessively distorting the specifics of the instance.

<sup>23</sup> Allen and Neil argue that the trial occurred sometime in 655, and that the document must have been written before 8 September 656. Allen and Neil, *Maximus the Confessor and His Companions: Documents from Exile*, 37–38.

They said to him: ‘And what will you be in a position to do, should the Romans be united with the Byzantines [τῶν Ἀριστίοις]? Look, after all, the *apocrisiarii* came from Rome yesterday, and they will communicate with the patriarch tomorrow, Sunday. And it will become clear to everyone that it was you who turned the Romans away. Doubtless with you removed from here, they will agree with those who are present.’<sup>24</sup>

And Maximus replied: ‘Those who have come will not prejudice the See of Rome in any way [τῷ θρόνῳ Ἀριστία], even if they do communicate, because they have not brought a letter to the patriarch. And I will never be convinced that the Romans will be united with those present, unless they confess that our Lord and God by nature and wills and works our salvation according to each [nature] from which he is, and in which he is, as well as which he is.’<sup>25</sup>

The conversation seems to struggle to find clear ways to label the camps who are divided over the question of the number of Christ’s wills. The writer places these difficulties into the mouths of the interrogators, who are the ones in this dialogue to identify themselves as a different group from the Romans. This depicts Maximus, and by extension dyothelete partisans generally, in a neutral position to control the discourse over these labels. In the above passage, the ideological camps are labelled according to the leading patriarchal bishopric which supports their side—Constantinopolitans (archaically called Byzantines) for the monotheletes and Romans for the dyotheletes. Not only do the dyotheletes get to claim to be the *real* Romans, but the dialogue makes a point of putting this rhetorical game into the mouth of their opponents, legitimating it. This play with labels continues throughout the work, always on the theme that Maximus (and the dyothelete cause) is the more authentically Roman.

And when everyone had stopped speaking the *sakellarios* said to him: ‘Why do you love the Romans and hate the Greeks? [ἀγαπᾷς τὸν Ἀριστίον, καὶ τὸν Γραικούν μισεῖς;]

<sup>24</sup> n.b. In their translation, Allen and Neil constantly render τοῖς ἐνταῦθα as ‘the Byzantines.’ While this clears up the mildly ambiguous reliance on pronouns, it also subtly distorts the group composition and use of labels for identification. For that reason, I have chosen a more literal rendering in this translation.

<sup>25</sup> Allen and Neil, *Maximus the Confessor and His Companions: Documents from Exile*, Relatio Motionis § 7; pp. 63–65.

Maximus replied: ‘We have a commandment not to hate anybody. I love the Romans because we share the same faith, whereas I love the Greeks because we share the same language.’<sup>26</sup>

Again, Maximus claims affiliation with the Roman label using a meaning derived from identification with the city through the doctrinal affiliation which he attributes to its bishop. This passage is particularly interesting because it demonstrates how slippery these overlapping sign systems were in practice. Whereas the *sakellarios* is depicted as using τοὺς Γραικοὺς as a synonym for τοῖς Βυζαντίοις in the previous passage, Maximus’ response instead chooses to respond to a different meaning for the words. He still restricts the Roman signifier to a doctrinal meaning, but Greek is instead reinterpreted as signifying language. The implicit point was that only Maximus got to be identified with the *real* Romans, and consequently his interviewers were somehow barbarous. It seems unlikely that any real individual or source supporting the monothelete faction would have articulated such a view, and likely that such wordplay would irritate officials at a real trial if Maximus or his companions had actually tried it. In other words, this seems to be a literary rhetorical device intended for internal consumption among dyothelete sympathizers. In this text, the easy slippage between meanings was not innocent, it was a negotiation made in bad faith.

Why is this text particularly fixated on these labels, and why this awkward presentation? Halsall has written about the social negotiations of identities as a form of a wager. He described how there is an element of risk when a subject claims a label, because beyond the risk of misunderstanding or misrepresentation there is the chance that the claim is rejected.<sup>27</sup> The writer of the *Relatio Motionis* faces this problem—he desired to rhetorically claim the exclusive right to the label of Roman to his doctrinal faction, which produced a logical inconsistency by implying that the senators, emperor, and Rhomania itself are fundamentally not Roman. It would stretch the credulity of the text for Maximus to make this wager, to lay exclusive claim to the label of Roman, and not to be rejected by his interviewers. The writer solved this by instead inserting this claim into his interlocutors’ mouths. The imperial officials cannot object to the notion that Maximus represents a truer, more authentic Romanness if that claim

<sup>26</sup> Allen and Neil, sec. *Relatio Motionis* § 11; pp. 69–71.

<sup>27</sup> Halsall, “From Group to Subject (and Back Again).”

is conceded through their voice first. The only reason that the writer would need to stack the metaphorical deck in such a manner is if he fears that his claims about identity could have been misunderstood or rejected, and that the loss of this wager would have meaningful negative repercussions, such as loss of status, honour, and credibility. How better to imply that your powerful and well-connected opponents are heretical, and thus barbarous, than to make them recognize that yours is the only authentic Romanness? It seems that claiming Romanness in an exclusory manner was a rhetorical tool used by the followers and admirers of Maximus the Confessor among whom this text was initially intended to circulate.

This could be the context for another unusual claim to Romanness concerning the Syrian Manṣūr family, a prominent Christian clan who played a leading role in political and ecclesiastic administrations under the late Roman, Umayyad, and early Abbasid rule. Its most illustrious member was the theologian and poet John of Damascus (*circa* 675–749), but this problem of Romanness concerns earlier generations.<sup>28</sup> John's grandfather, Manṣūr ibn Sarjūn, was the Roman governor of Damascus who surrendered the city to the Arabs in September 635, an act of treachery in memory of which he was reviled in Christian Arabic and Syriac sources. The tenth-century *Annales* of Eutychios of Alexandria claim that 'As for Manṣūr, due to the evil he had done, and what he had brought upon the Romans to the point of their being killed, all the patriarchs and bishops in the world anathematized him.'<sup>29</sup> In other words, his betrayal of his Roman loyalties forfeited his right to be a Christian—and his sin tainted the clan even down to the end of the ninth century.<sup>30</sup> How did it come about, then, that John's father, the son of the man despised for his perfidy against the Roman army and state, was remembered by posterity as Sarjūn ibn Manṣūr al-Rūmī ('the Roman')?

Insight into Sarjūn's Romanness comes from a passage in the Syriac *Chronicle* of Michael the Syrian, who belonged to the miaphysite (so-called Jacobite) church. He credited Sarjūn with a leading role in promoting the 'heresy of Maximus,' that is dyotheletism, in the Near East. Describing how the heterodoxy spread in Syria, Michael postulates that

<sup>28</sup> Schadler, *John of Damascus and Islam*, 1–19; Griffith, "The Manṣūr Family and Saint John of Damascus," 29–32. In Sect. 1 in Chap. 2 we also met John's nephew Stephen who authored the life of Romanos the Neomartyr.

<sup>29</sup> Eutychios, *Annales*, ed. Breydy, CSCO 471, 137–38. Trans. Griffith, "The Manṣūr Family and Saint John of Damascus," 30.

<sup>30</sup> Griffith, 32.

'probably because of their esteem for the Roman Empire, those who allowed themselves to be perverted by this opinion and accepted it were mainly the townspeople and their bishops, and the chiefs. One of them was Sarjūn, son of Manṣūr, who greatly oppressed the faithful who were in Damascus and Emessa ... and led many of us to his heresy.'<sup>31</sup> It appears that Michael picked up on a particular association between dyotheletism and Romanness, possibly offering an explanation for Sarjūn's nickname al-Rūmī. His explanation makes sense in the context of the eleventh century when he was writing, treating al-Rūm as synonymous with the Eastern Roman Empire. However, Michael's assumption seems rather problematic on account of Manṣūr's reputation and legacy. Why would Sarjūn be remembered in association with Rhomania, when later generations were stigmatized by the memory of Manṣūr's disloyalty?<sup>32</sup> It seems more likely that the nickname al-Rūmī pointed to a different meaning of Romanness.

As a sympathizer with Maximus' doctrines, Sarjūn would likely have been part of the literary network among whom documents like the *Relatio Motionis* were intended to circulate. His influential position with the movement meant that he would have likely been aware of the dyothelete rhetorical tactics used elsewhere, including claiming superior Romanness through identification with the bishop of Rome. At least some Syriac-speaking Christians regarded the Roman label positively throughout the seventh century—for example, the Roman Emperor is a positive eschatological figure in the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*, which originated in precisely that cultural milieu.<sup>33</sup> Thus it is possible that Sarjūn's Romanness was the same Romanness claimed by Maximus the Confessor, a rhetorical tool used by dyotheletes to buttress their faction's legitimacy by using a specific, narrow definition of this very broad term. It must have been conceptually challenging to make an accusation of heresy—and implicitly barbarism—stick to the political leaders of Rhomania. It was a wager about identity claims which would not likely have been successful. If this reading of the limited evidence is correct, then claiming superior Romanness through identification with the bishop and thus city of Rome—thereby

<sup>31</sup> Michael the Syrian, *Chronique de Michel le Syrien*, vol. 2, chap. XX, trans. p. 492.

<sup>32</sup> Sidney Griffith found two patriarchs of Jerusalem, Sergios who was a contemporary of al-Wāthiq (842–847), and Elias who lived in the reign of al-Mu'tamid (870–892). In Eutychios' *Annales*, both are remembered as from the family of "Manṣūr, who had helped the Muslims to open up Damascus and was cursed in all the corners of the world." Trans. in Griffith, "The Mansūr Family and Saint John of Damascus," 32.

<sup>33</sup> Garstad, *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius; an Alexandrian World Chronicle*, vii–xiv.

implying that the heterodox position was less Roman and thus barbarous—appears to have been a rhetorical ploy specific to dyothelete partisans in the second half of the seventh century. That it could be adapted to work in Constantinople as well as in Syria indicates that this potential confusion of meanings was integral to the Roman sign system itself as it was understood broadly in the *oikoumene*.

Within Rhomania at least, the dispute concerning the number of wills in Christ de-escalated in the decades following the sixth ecumenical council, held in Constantinople under Constantine IV (680–681). Dyotheletism became the dominant branch of Chalcedonian Christianity. Except for a brief period of restoration to control of the Imperial Church under Philippikos in 711–713, only select Syrian churches continued to adhere to monotheletism thereafter. However, a new divide within the Chalcedonian (now, after the sixth council, Constantinopolitan) confession emerged at some point in the second quarter of the eighth century over the place of icons in Christian worship. Eventually, proponents of icon veneration ('iconodules') would emerge as the dominant position, which means that it is only of their opponents ('iconoclasts') about whom we have preserved *ad hominem* character assassinations.

In iconodule narratives, the leading instigators of the iconoclast faction are emperors and their advisors, a marked contrast to the bishop-centric leadership attributed to the monotheletes. The first emperor to move against icon-veneration was Leo III. In Greek historiography, Leo's origins are typically given as being from Isauria—such is the tradition from both contemporary<sup>34</sup> as well as later accounts.<sup>35</sup> Although a marginal territory—mountainous, sparsely populated and exposed to the frontier—Isauria, the area of southern Anatolia immediately north of the island of Cyprus, was unquestionably part of Rhomania, even if the inhabitants were sometimes viewed as 'internal barbarians.'<sup>36</sup> After all, a line of fifth-century emperors had come from there, some of whom were still

<sup>34</sup> Anonymous, "Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai," § 1. Trans. Cameron and Herrin, *Constantinople in the Early Eighth Century*, 57–59.

<sup>35</sup> Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, AM 6209. Trans. Mango and Scott, *Theophanes' Chronicle*, 541–46.

<sup>36</sup> On Isauria and the phenomenon of "internal barbarians," see Elton, "Fravitta and Barbarian Career Opportunities in Constantinople"; Woods, "Arbazacius, Fravitta, and the Government of Isauria CAA D. 396–404"; Lenski, "Assimilation and Revolt in the Territory of Isauria, from the 1st Century BC to the 6th Century AD"; Hoff and Townsend, *Rough Cilicia: New Historical and Archaeological Approaches*.

remembered positively centuries later. However, when he translated Theophanes' chronicle into Latin in the late ninth century, Anastasius Bibliothecarius inserted a different homeland for the emperor, naming him *genere Syrus*. In their commentary, Mango and Scott express bemusement at the change. They dismiss the possibility that it could have arisen from a confused conflation with the emperor's predecessor, Leontios (695–698),<sup>37</sup> arguing that, as in the case of Patriarch Sergios a century before, being called 'Syrian' carried a certain pejorative sense, one linked to heterodoxy, the Syriac (rather than Greek) language, and therefore liminal (if not limited) Romanness.

Like his father, Constantine V received his own share of unflattering anecdotal biography—the most famous episode being during his baptism, when he was supposed to have defecated in the font, justifying the chronicler's convention of nicknaming him *korpronymos* ('shit-named').<sup>38</sup> However, as he was certainly porphyrogenetos, there was little which his doctrinal enemies could do to criticize him for his origins. The only ethnonymic appellation which Constantine receives is that of being 'Jewish-minded':

In the City, while the people and the patriarch were performing a litany in the church of the Holy Apostles, some impious members of the foul heresy of the God-hated Constantine prised up the door of the imperial mausoleum (no one was paying any attention because the throng was so thick) and made it open suddenly with some kind of noise as if by a divine miracle. They then rushed in and fell before the deceiver's tomb, calling on him and not on God, crying out, 'Arise and help the State that is perishing!' They spread the rumour that Constantine had arisen on his horse and was setting out to fight the Bulgarians—he who dwells in Hell in the company of demons! The City prefect arrested those men and at first they lied, pretending that the doors of the mausoleum had opened automatically by God's will. But when they had been brought before the prefect's tribunal and failed to produce witnesses, they admitted the stratagem of the wrenching before any torture had been applied to them. The prefect had them suitably 'wrenched' and condemned them to be paraded in public and to cry aloud the reason for their punishment. Thus had the Devil, inventor of evil, trained the soldiers to lay blame not on their own sins, but on the orthodox faith that has been handed down by our fathers and on the monastic rule, the

<sup>37</sup> Mango and Scott, *Theophanes' Chronicle*, 547 note 1.

<sup>38</sup> Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, AM 6211. Trans. Mango and Scott, *Theophanes' Chronicle*, 551–52.

school of godly philosophy. Most of those who uttered such blasphemies were Christians only in semblance, but in truth were Paulicians who, unable to make manifest their own loathsome doctrines, seduced the ignorant by this device, extolling the Jewish-minded Constantine as a prophet and a victor and embracing his impiety so as to subvert the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>39</sup>

This event, recorded in 812/813 near the conclusion of the chronicle, presaged the return of iconoclasts to power under Leo V ‘the Armenian.’

Indeed, the main criticisms which iconodule historians were able to level at the iconoclast heresiarchs—besides the emperors, also including Leo’s close aide and advisor the patrician Beser—were that their modes of thinking were un-Christian and un-Roman. Leo and particularly Beser are several times accused of being ignorant and uneducated—attacking their right to participate in elite society. At different points in Theophanes’ narrative, the leading iconoclasts were accused of being ‘imbued with Arab doctrine,’ ‘Arab-minded,’ and ‘Saracen-minded.’<sup>40</sup> Interesting to note, the exact same rhetoric was applied to their doctrinal opponents, particularly John of Damascus who himself was labelled ‘Saracen-minded’ in eighth-century Constantinopolitan sources.<sup>41</sup> That the same label could be used by both sides of the icon debate indicates the trope-like nature of this tactic of name-calling.

In all three cases, these men *were* born as Romans in the political and cultural meanings of the term, and were integrated into the formal and informal institutional networks which governed and defined Roman society. It was the unique complexities of the Roman sign system which allowed them to be rhetorically reconstrued as the barbarous Other in these polemical historical narratives. Although they cannot be reassigned homelands, everything about their personalities can be reassigned, transforming them into ignorants, foreigners—specifically easterners—and infidels. This is character assassination played to the theme of an educated, Constantinopolitan, and ‘orthodox’ elite. Rhetorically, these iconoclast heresiarchs were stripped of those traits which made them Romans. They form a counter-point to the group of foreign-born individuals who

<sup>39</sup> Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, AM 6305. Trans. Mango and Scott, *Theophanes’ Chronicle*, 681–86.

<sup>40</sup> Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, AM 6215, 6218, 6233, 6305. Trans. Mango and Scott, *Theophanes’ Chronicle*, 555, 559–61, 575, 681–86.

<sup>41</sup> Griffith, “The Manṣūr Family and Saint John of Damascus,” 35.

integrated themselves as exemplars of Roman society. Being Roman amounted to more than an accident of birth, but was a collection of traits and allegiances which defined a person, ones which could be gained, denied, or rejected.

## 2 GROUP MIGRATIONS IN THE BALKANS AND ANATOLIA

By the early middle ages, the Eastern Roman Empire had developed many tools for coping with the movement, resettlement, and assimilation of barbarian groups. Although not guaranteed for success, the state systematically manipulated identities, communities, and loyalties to reinforce Roman group cohesion and solidarity. Groups of foreigners continued to migrate into the Rhomania in this period. This section explores how these precedents informed the policies of the Roman state on the one hand, and the identities of its often anonymous subjects on the other. Whether called bands, tribes, or nations, groups migrations are a different historical phenomenon to the individual migrations. Documented individual migrants, whether recorded in hagiographies or ‘secular’ sources, belong to the economic and social elite. Mass migrations have two defining characteristics: groups are sufficiently large that their members are anonymous to one another, and surviving sources (in other words, the elite’s perspective) label them with a collective identifier.

Assimilationist ideology marked a point of continuity with a very long Roman tradition of transforming the other into the self. In the classical and late antique periods, Roman culture attracted, absorbed, and assimilated individuals and groups of foreigners—‘barbarians’—with relative ease. This process had roots in the rapid expansions of the Roman polity in the final centuries BC. Many peoples had the Roman frontier cross them, which initialized a process of assimilation of the local elite. Romanization presented provincials with opportunities to participate in the Roman state, in exchange for which the state received their taxes, loyalty, and recognition of legitimacy.<sup>42</sup> The promulgation *constitutio antoniniana*, when Emperor Caracalla (197–217) gave all free subjects citizenship, marked the end of this phase of Romanization. However, the effects of this edict can easily be overstated. By AD 212, the process of co-opting the provincial elites had been ongoing for centuries in most

<sup>42</sup> Woolf, *Becoming Roman*, 7–23.

parts of the Empire.<sup>43</sup> Although it endowed all the empire's non-slave population with a single legal and social identity, the third-century empire was still extremely large. New citizens would have had less contact with non-Romans than had those who were citizens before 212. As identities are most significant in the context of the other, the utility of the appellation 'Roman' declined immediately following Caracalla's Edict.

Roman frontier policy saw the regular resettlement and assimilation of barbarian tribal groups throughout the classical, late antique, and medieval periods. From the first century AD, any territories which would finance their own conquest were a part of the Roman world, and had to be defended. Foreign groups were admitted into Rhomania on the Roman government's terms, following one of two basic patterns. If allowed in peacefully, the 'tribe' was distributed in families and medium-sized groups as additions to the nominally free peasantry, while young men were enrolled in the army together in new, homogenous 'ethnic' units.<sup>44</sup> If, instead, the barbarians had been subjugated and captured in a war, their group was broken apart and they were dispersed across the world as agricultural slaves and servants. Those who were drafted were distributed into existing units where needed. The purpose was to break group cohesion as swiftly and efficiently as possible, which contributed to smooth and rapid assimilation.<sup>45</sup> Foreign or domestic warfare, plague, and attractive economic opportunities elsewhere negatively impacted the state's ability to extract resources and mobilize subjects for defence. While the infusion of new peoples also helped to alleviate periodic manpower shortages, it could also have unintended consequences as well. For example, resettlement and population exchanges contributed to the spread of new religions in late antiquity.<sup>46</sup>

Of course, barbarians could also enter and settle in Roman territory against the state's wishes. These 'invasions,' particularly those which broke the Western Empire in the fifth century, are the ones which have a larger impact on popular imagination both contemporaneously and ever since.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>43</sup> MacMullen, "Rural Romanization."

<sup>44</sup> Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, 158–59.

<sup>45</sup> Heather, 159–62.

<sup>46</sup> Sterk, "Mission from Below."

<sup>47</sup> The bibliography on the topic is extensive, but a basic survey includes: Goffart, *Barbarians and Romans, A.D. 418–584*, chap. 1; Shaw, "Eaters of Flesh, Drinkers of Milk": The Ancient Mediterranean Ideology of the Pastoral Nomad"; Pohl, "Telling the Difference"; MacGeorge, *Late Roman Warlords*, pt. III; Bryan Ward-Perkins, *The Fall of Rome and the*

During the early middle ages, the Eastern Empire's ability to successfully dictate the terms of admission greatly eroded from what they had been in the fourth and even the fifth centuries. As a result, we encounter a number of migrations which entered Roman territory and settled it forcibly. Although none produced the catastrophic systematic collapse as did the fifth-century invasions of Western Europe, they certainly posed great challenges to the continuity and integrity of Roman state and society.

The most dramatic 'barbarian invasions' to occur in the period were the conquests of Syria, Palestine, and Egypt first by the Persians in the 610s and then by the Muslims in the 630s and 640s. Although these reduced the Empire's territory by more than half, they were not the only major barbarian incursions and migrations to occur in the period. In 568, during the reign of Justin II, the Lombards migrated into northern and central Italy, seizing control of vast swaths of the peninsula over the following decades. Despite vigorous campaigns in the early 660s under the personal leadership of Emperor Constans II, the Romans would never dislodge the Lombards from central Italy nor bring them under their control.<sup>48</sup> The Avars and Sklavenes tested Rome's defences of the Balkan frontier from the 580s, but they were held in check for the time. However, the pressing need for soldiers to defend against Persia by the 620s led to unrestrained Sklavene settlement south of the Danube and Avar incursions all the way to the walls of Thessalonica and Constantinople.<sup>49</sup> Although the Avar khaganate lost much territory after their defeats in the 620s and the Romans maintained authority over the peninsula's littoral cities, the Sklavenes who settled in the countryside were not to be dislodged. The process of romanizing the Sklavene settlers would last centuries.<sup>50</sup> Two further major invasions occurred in the closing decades of the seventh century: the Bulgars settled south of the Danube after defeating an imperial army in 680/681, compromising Constantinople's Thracian hinterland; and the Arab

*End of Civilization*, pt. I; Goffart, *Barbarian Tides*, chaps. 5–7; Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West*, 376–568, chaps. 5–8; Heather, *Empires and Barbarians*, 12–26, 233–59; Maas, "Barbarians in Late Antiquity. Problems and Approaches."

<sup>48</sup> Christie, *The Lombards*.

<sup>49</sup> Curta, *Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages (500–1300)*, 58.

<sup>50</sup> Charanis, "The Chronicle of Monemvasia and the Question of Slavonic Settlements in Greece"; Setton, "The Bulgars in the Balkans and the Occupation of Corinth in the Seventh Century"; Florin. Curta, *The Making of the Slavs History and Archaeology of the Lower Danube Region, ca. 500–700*.

subjugation of North Africa in 695–698 destroyed the empire's hold on the western Mediterranean.

In spite of the territorial losses, the early medieval Roman state continued to receive and settle groups of foreigners in its territories on terms favourable to the polity. Several incidents stand out in extant records. Theophanes, in his entry for the year AD 687/688, informs us of Justinian's success in forcibly transplanting Sklavene settlers to Anatolia:

In this year, Justinian made an expedition against Sklavinia and Bulgaria. He pushed back for the time being the Bulgars who had come out to oppose him and, having advanced as far as Thessalonica, took a multitude of Sklavenes, some by war, while others went over to him. He made them cross by way of Abydos and settled them in the area of Opsikion.<sup>51</sup>

In his *Breviarum*, Nikephoros clarifies: 'Having pushed on as far as the city of Thessalonica, [Justinian] captured many of the Sklavene tribes that were there—some by war, others by treaty (τὰ μὲν πολέμῳ τὰ δὲ ὅμολογίᾳ).'<sup>52</sup> Theophanes and Nikephoros use very similar language for these notices. Both versions suggest that the groups settled in Rhomania included both prisoners and willing migrants. They all appear to have been settled together, instead of being dispersed according to established practice when dealing with conquered enemies. The event was also commemorated by an inscription in Thessalonica, which also corroborated Theophanes' dating of the event.<sup>53</sup>

This influx brought new peasantry to work the lands and soldiers to serve in the armies. Justinian treated the Sklavenes as *foederati* and not as subjugated tribes. He enrolled them into military service, a decision which produced disastrous consequences.

In the year 692, Justinian made a levy among the Sklavenes he had transplanted and raised an army of 30,000, whom he armed and named 'the Chosen People'.<sup>54</sup> He appointed Neboulos to be their leader. Being confident in them, he wrote to the Arabs that he would not abide by the

<sup>51</sup> Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, AM 6180. Trans. Mango and Scott, *Theophanes' Chronicle*, 508.

<sup>52</sup> Patriarch Nikephoros I, *Nikephoros' Breviarum*, §38. Ed. and trans. Mango, *Nikephoros' Breviarum*, 93–95.

<sup>53</sup> Spieser, "Les Inscriptions Byzantines de Thessalonique."

<sup>54</sup> Deuteronomy 14:2. The term used in Theophanes, Nikephoros, and the Septuagint is περιούσιος λαός.

written peace treaty. So, taking along the Chosen People and all the cavalry *themata*, he advanced to Sebastopolis, which is by the sea. ... [The Arabs] rushed against the Romans under the leadership of Mouamed and joined battle. At first the Arabs were defeated. Mouamed, however, won over the commander of the Sklavenes who were fighting on the Roman side by sending him a pouch full of gold pieces and, after deceiving him with many promises, persuaded him to join their side together with 20,000 Slavs; and in this way he caused the Romans to flee. Thereupon Justinian killed the rest of them, together with their wives and children, at a rocky place called Leukete near the gulf of Nicomedia.<sup>55</sup>

The story of treacherous allies and the reprisals which the Romans visited upon their community shows what could happen with *foederati* who were insufficiently Romanized. The information about the purging of the Sklavene civilians finds archaeological confirmation. There are a body of at least half a dozen seals for George, *kommerkarios* and proconsul (*apo hypaton*), who was responsible for the ἀνδράποδα—prisoners-of-war. Although George's seals are also found for other years in the early 690s, all of the seals which mention the ἀνδράποδα are firmly dated to 694/695.<sup>56</sup> These seals appear to attest to the systematic destruction of the remaining Sklavene communities by the Roman state, enslaving and dispersing them as a conquered peoples.

Hendy argued that the seals reflect the logistical efforts to equip the Sklavene conscripts, necessitating that the battle be re-dated to 695.<sup>57</sup> However, Theophanes' date of 692 is corroborated by independent sources.<sup>58</sup> Instead, the sigils appear to preserve the record of a great slave-auction, for which George was the imperial officer charged with managing the operation. Furthermore, the seals are geographically distributed around Asia Minor—in the provinces of Asia, Bithynia, the two Cappadocias, Caria, Lycia, and Phrygia Salutaris.<sup>59</sup> This would be in keeping with established norms for settling subjugated populations. The people were dispersed in such a manner as to undo their group cohesion.

<sup>55</sup> Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, AM 6184. Trans. Mango and Scott, *Theophanes' Chronicle*, 511.

<sup>56</sup> Hendy, *Studies in the Byzantine Monetary Economy, c.300–1450.*, 631–34.

<sup>57</sup> Hendy, 630.

<sup>58</sup> Hoyland, *Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle*, 185–87, esp. note 493.

<sup>59</sup> Oikonomidès, “Silk Trade and Production in Byzantium from the Sixth to the Ninth Century: The Seals of Kommerkarioi,” 51–53.

Although Justinian received censure from chroniclers for how he conducted this campaign, events indicate that the Romans exercised reasonable caution, negotiated the terms and conditions of settlement from a position of strength, and reserved the ability to respond dynamically when the situation turned in unanticipated directions.

While typically groups of outsiders who were settled in Rhomania were ‘barbarians,’ this was a period when groups of Romans who could not reconcile themselves to foreign rule were ‘repatriated’ and settled within the now-diminished Empire’s territories. The situation was in many ways comparable with that which Procopius described Belisarius’ armies encountering in Africa and Italy in the 530s and 540s. Both locals and the imperial army could reasonably identify themselves as ‘Romans,’ leaving great scope for negotiation, realignment, and confusion of loyalties. This mass-movement of people was qualitatively different from other resettlement programs. Such people were already Romans and Christians. However, the logistics surrounding the movement and integration of large groups of people, and the state’s need to fill manpower shortages, indicate that the phenomena were, to a certain degree, analogous.

The *Miracles of St. Demetrios* record the settlement of a group near Thessalonica in *circa* 680.<sup>60</sup> Called Sermesianoi due to their origins near the city of Sirmium, the group was a heterogenous collection of Roman captives (and their descendants), Bulgars, and Avars. The group left their homes in Pannonia and marched south, defeating the forces which the Avar Khagan sent to pursue them. After crossing the Danube, they settled in northern Macedonia, from whence their leaders petitioned for—and received—recognition and offices from the emperor. But when one of the leaders of the group, an *archon* named Kuver, was exposed plotting to seize Thessalonica and establish himself as an independent khagan, the Sermesianoi were broken up as a group and a portion resettled to Thrace.<sup>61</sup> On the other hand, another of the *archons* who led the group out of Pannonia, a man who spoke Greek, Slavonic, Bulgarian, and Latin and who bore a Greek name of Mauros, established his family in imperial service. A preserved seal of Mauros bears the titles *patrikios* and *archon* of the Sermesianoi Bulgars, while Theophanes mentions that a *patrikios* Mauros, who may have been the *archon*’s son, co-commanded an expedition to

<sup>60</sup>John I, Archbishop of Thessalonica, “Miracula Sancti Demetrii,” § 2.5. Ed. and transl. Lemerle, *Les plus Anciens Recueils Des Miracles de Saint Démétrius*, 1:223–30.

<sup>61</sup>Pohl, *The Avars*, 331–33.

Crimea in 710/711.<sup>62</sup> Stakes were high, and loyalty could secure a family's power, prestige, and wealth, but the imperial administration had to remain vigilant against the possibility that even this semi-Roman group could form the support base for a revolt.

One of the best-documented groups of Romans repatriated to the polity were the Mardaites (from the Syriac *ܡܪܕܝܬܐ*—*mrdwt'*, meaning 'rebels'). They appear as a distinct people in historical references from the seventh and eighth centuries, based originally in the Taurus Mountains where they allied with and fought both the Romans and Arabs at different times. They allied with the Romans during Mu'awiya's attempt to capture Constantinople.<sup>63</sup> Taking advantage of the Caliphate's overextension, they led a Christian uprising and seized control of the mountain range separating the Lebanon coastal strip from the Syrian interior in the final-quarter of the eighth century.

In the year 676/677, the Mardaites entered the Lebanon range and made themselves masters from the Black Mountain as far as the Holy City and captured the peaks of Lebanon. Many slaves, captives, and natives took refuge with them, so that in a short time they grew to many thousands.<sup>64</sup>

Further details and clarification are found in the version of the event recorded by Agapius of Mabbug, a tenth-century chronicler.

The Romans boarded ships and set off in them on the sea until they came to the coast of Tyre and Sidon. Then they disembarked and seized Mount Lebanon and took refuge in it. People called them rebels. Having seized Mount Lebanon, they spread from the Mountain of Galilee to the Black Mountain. This was because Constantine (IV) had planted them to distract the Arabs from raiding.<sup>65</sup>

The rebellion enjoyed widespread local support, especially among the lowest classes who stood the least to lose from the overthrow of the new

<sup>62</sup> Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, AM 6203. Trans. Mango and Scott, *Theophanes' Chronicle*, 527–30. See also Pohl, *The Avars*, 518 note 298.

<sup>63</sup> Hollingsworth, "Mardaites"; Howard-Johnston, "The Mardaites"; Cvetković, "The Settlement of the Mardaites and Their Military-Administrative Position in the Themata of the West: A Chronology."

<sup>64</sup> Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, AM 6169. Trans. Mango and Scott, *Theophanes' Chronicle*, 495–96.

<sup>65</sup> Hoyland, *Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle*, 169–70.

order. Both accounts drew from a common (though now-lost) near eastern source.<sup>66</sup> The ‘rebels’ comprised a core of Roman soldiers backed by a widespread localized support-network throughout the Syrian highlands. They successfully challenged Arab control of the area for over a decade, maintaining local loyalties to the now-distant Roman Empire. The military’s presence re-established institutional anchors to the Roman world in this area, and its success demonstrated the deep loyalties to and identification with being Roman among the masses of society.

Despite their success, the Mardaites were fundamentally a tool used by the Roman state for specific ends. Those ends could, of course, change in relative priority over time.

In the year 685/686, Abimelech sent emissaries to Justinian to ratify the peace, and it was concluded on these terms: that the emperor should remove the host of the Mardaites from the Lebanon and prevent their incursions; that Abimelech would give to the Romans every day 1000 gold pieces, a horse, and a slave. ... The emperor sent orders to receive the Mardaites, 12,000 of them, thereby injuring the Roman state: for all the cities along the border that are now inhabited by Arabs, from Mopsuestia to the Fourth Armenia, were then weak and uninhabited because of the assaults of the Mardaites. Since these have been repressed, the Roman country has been suffering terrible ills at the hands of the Arabs until this day.<sup>67</sup>

Again, Agapius’ account, though originating from a common source, preserves different details.

‘Abd al-Malik wrote asking him (Justinian) for a peace treaty. He (Justinian) agreed on the condition that the truce would be for ten years; that Justinian would remove the Romans who were in Mount Lebanon and return them to the land of the Romans; that ‘Abd al-Malik would pay to Justinian every day 1000 gold coins, a horse and a slave in compensation for the Romans removal of those in Mount Lebanon. ... Justinian removed the Romans who were in Mount Lebanon, whose number had reached 12,000, besides women and children.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>66</sup> Hoyland, 7–19.

<sup>67</sup> Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, AM 6178. Trans. Mango and Scott, *Theophanes’ Chronicle*, 506–7.

<sup>68</sup> Hoyland, *Theophilus of Edessa’s Chronicle*, 170.

The ‘rebels’ had clearly grown to be of a significant size. Agapius’ version of the narrative clarifies that the number 12,000 estimated only the fighting male population, to which their dependent families and slaves would have doubled or more than total number. The Mardaite episode represents not just another population transfer, but the repatriation of an allied ‘tribe’ from frontier periphery to other parts of the empire. As was customary when trustworthy *foederati* were resettled, they were allowed to keep their communities and identities intact. Such is evidenced by the fact that units of ‘Mardaites’ participated in the defence of Constantinople in 717, over thirty years and a full generation after they were resettled.<sup>69</sup> This was a frontier community which, after a period in the early and mid-seventh century of being on the edge of the Roman community, was successfully reintegrated into the polity, becoming once again by the early eighth century one kind of Roman among many others.

It is worth taking a short digression here, to note that there is other evidence for widespread popular identification with the Roman Empire in Syria in this period. Indeed, some of the most coherent ideological visions of the Roman community come from sources closely linked to these liminal spaces. The idea of the Roman polity’s special place in the divine plan for the world—not just as a chosen people, but as a universal intuition—resonated with people long after the Arab invasions. The most compelling vision of a unified, Roman *oikoumene* comes from the final decade of the seventh century, and is contained within the *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius. Despite its attribution to a fourth-century martyr, Methodius of Olympus (d. 311), internal evidence dates the composition of the document to between 685 and 692. It offered an appealingly optimistic Christian vision of the past and the future, one which resonated with readers across the *oikoumene*. It was composed in Syriac, originating within the Christian community which lived in the newly established Caliphate. The work had an immediate impact on Christian literature—already by 694 it was referenced in other Syriac works.<sup>70</sup> The text is extremely pro-Roman, suggesting a Melkite origin, although other internal evidence points to the possibility that the original author was a Miaphysite. In either case, the text appealed across denominational boundaries to Christians of many confessions and languages. The

<sup>69</sup> Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, AM 6209. Trans. Mango and Scott, *Theophanes’ Chronicle*, 541–46.

<sup>70</sup> Reinink, “Der Edessenische ‘Pseudo-Methodius.’”

document was translated into Greek and from thence into Latin in a remarkably short space of time—the earliest extant Latin manuscript appears within thirty-five years, before 727.<sup>71</sup> The *Apocalypse* was wildly popular, indicating that its contents and attitudes struck a chord with readers across the Christian world.

One of the most striking components of the *Apocalypse*, though, is that the Roman Empire itself figures as one of the central actors in its vision. It was not just as some relic of the past, but the mechanism by which Christians would be redeemed from the forces of Islam.

But [the sons of Ishmael] will surely come out once again and lay waste the land and prevail over the inhabited world. ... And there will not be a nation or kingdom under the heaven that will be able to fight them until the completion of seven weeks of years. And after these things they will be defeated by the empire of the Romans and subjected to it. For that empire will be exalted over all the kingdoms of the heathen nations and it will not be wiped out by any one of them unto eternity.<sup>72</sup> ... Which then is the one ‘out of the midst’ if not the empire of the Romans? For all rule and authority of this world are rendered null and void apart from her. For war is also made upon her and she is not overcome, and all the nations which set themselves against her will be destroyed by her and she will prevail, until the last hour will arrive. ... For where is, or will there be, a kingdom or another power that excels her?<sup>73</sup>

For Christians living in marginalized social roles following the unexpected successes of Islam in the seventh century, the ideal of the Roman Empire as a universal Christian polity on earth continued to excite loyalty and interest beyond the empire’s now-reduced political limits. Here, Roman power was an eternal constant, a name synonymous with the triumph of civilization and Christianity. The belief in the spiritual aspect of Roman authority manifested itself long after reality no longer supported this belief.

Returning to the experience of the Mardaites, the mass resettlement of them and their families in 685/686 was but the best documented incident among many carried out by both Romans and Arabs in the early medieval

<sup>71</sup> Garstad, *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius; an Alexandrian World Chronicle*, vii–xiv.

<sup>72</sup> Pseudo-Methodius, “Apocalypse,” §5.8–9. Ed. and trans. Garstad, *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius; an Alexandrian World Chronicle*, 17, 91–93.

<sup>73</sup> Pseudo-Methodius, “Apocalypse,” §10.2–4. Ed. and trans. Garstad, *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius; an Alexandrian World Chronicle*, 35–37, 107–9.

period. The Romans resettled Cypriots 691,<sup>74</sup> depopulated Samosata and transferred its population in 700,<sup>75</sup> and settled Armenians in Melitene and the province of Fourth Armenia in AD 712.<sup>76</sup> Renewed Saracen military successes, leading to the invasion and siege of Constantinople in 717, put an end to this for a time, but population transfers resumed in later decades. In 744/745, Constantine V transferred miaphysite Syrians to Constantinople, whose distinct community Theophanes noted still existed seventy years later.<sup>77</sup> A decade later, Constantine resettled more Syrians and Armenians from Theodosiopolis and Melitene, along with inhabitants from Hellas and the Aegean Islands, to Thrace.<sup>78</sup> All of these populations either were or had once been Roman. These actions were not exclusively Roman, but also policy tools used by the Arabs. For example, in 741/742 Caliph Hisham compelled Cypriots to resettle in Syria,<sup>79</sup> and in 769/770 Caliph al-Mansur resettled the residents of Germanikeia to Palestine.<sup>80</sup> Transporting populations away from the frontier also removed potentially disloyal populations from easy access to foreign support, in some cases even replacing them with settlers (such as the Armenians) who, likewise cut-off from previous networks, could have been expected to display dependable loyalty to the empire, a bulwark against foreign encroachments. From the perspective of either the Empire or the Caliphate, resettlement served both to remove populations from exposed and indefensible places on the border where they were difficult to either protect or control, and to put them where they would be of greater service to the state.

The mass-movement of peoples put considerable strain on the bonds of group cohesion which held the Roman world together. Integrating

<sup>74</sup> Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, AM 6183. Trans. Mango and Scott, *Theophanes' Chronicle*, 509–10.

<sup>75</sup> Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, AM 6192. Trans. Mango and Scott, *Theophanes' Chronicle*, 518.

<sup>76</sup> Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, AM 6204. Trans. Mango and Scott, *Theophanes' Chronicle*, 531–32.

<sup>77</sup> Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, AM 6237. Trans. Mango and Scott, *Theophanes' Chronicle*, 584.

<sup>78</sup> Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, AM 6247. Trans. Mango and Scott, *Theophanes' Chronicle*, 593–94.

<sup>79</sup> Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, AM 6234. Trans. Mango and Scott, *Theophanes' Chronicle*, 576–78.

<sup>80</sup> Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, AM 6262. Trans. Mango and Scott, *Theophanes' Chronicle*, 614.

barbarians into the Roman world had a great deal of precedent in earlier history, both of successes and failures. In these situations, systematically degrading the old tribal bonds by dispersal and integration into the rest of Roman society was a successful formula for turning the other into the self. This, of course, could only be accomplished when the empire acted from a position of strength. When tribal bonds endured, the new subjects could and did cause problems by reasserting their group's integrity as an institutional order. Resettling already-Romanized populations was a related but distinct phenomenon which was common in this time. Although already integrated into the symbolic Roman thought-world and loyal to the polity, they were nevertheless peoples uprooted from their homes and deposited into new contexts. While we can imagine and empathize with their experiences, surviving source materials, written by and for the Constantinopolitan elite, wrote about these groups in terms of their potential for utility and disruption to Roman society. As minorities settling into new environments, non-elite migrants had the potential to introduce new cultural practices and so increase local heterogeneity. Authorities feared the potential unravelling of communal integrity where minorities assembled without sufficient supervision.

### 3 INDIVIDUAL EMIGRATION IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

For individuals and families of sufficient means, emigrating to the empire to join its elites, secular or ecclesiastic, was a viable and desirable career choice. As Teall observed concerning the sixth century,

The expansion of the frontiers, the chance to make one's fortune in successful warfare, obviously enticed a host of individuals brilliant in their talents and diverse in their origins to seek service with the emperor [Justinian]. The Armenian, the Slav, the Gepid, the Bulgar—all found a warm welcome at Constantinople.<sup>81</sup>

Numerous individuals found their way into the empire through their own means. As in previous centuries, some, attracted by wealth, prestige, and opportunity, came in order to serve the state. Participation in religious

<sup>81</sup> Teall, "The Barbarians in Justinian's Armies," 299.

institutions—be it ecclesiastical or monastic—was one of the best-documented routes for their emigration into Rhomania.

One account of migration occurring in the 650s can only be labelled patriotically (or perhaps secularly) motivated. In the words of Theophanes:

In this year (AD 653/654), Mauias commanded that a great naval armament should be made with a view to his fleet's sailing against Constantinople. The entire preparation was being made at Tripolis in Phoenicia. On seeing this, two Christ-loving brothers, the sons of a trumpeter, who lived at Tripolis, were fired with a divine zeal and rushed to the city prison, where there was a multitude of Roman captives. They broke down the gates and, after liberating the captives, rushed to the emir of the city, whom they slew together with his suite and, having burnt all the equipment, sailed off to the Roman state.<sup>82</sup>

The brief account attributes to these ‘sons of the trumpeter’ two motives for their actions. First is their ‘divine zeal,’ a motivation which appears only in Theophanes’ version of the event.<sup>83</sup> However, for all the Christian rhetoric Theophanes attempts to bestow upon the story, these men’s actions are distinctly political: they attacked the prison; freed the Romans held captive there; sacked the Saracen garrison of the city; and escaped to Rhomania, where they were received as heroes.

Despite losses to the defectors, the Muslims were still able to launch a naval offensive against the empire. According to this tradition, Emperor Constans II personally led the Roman forces, bolstered with at least some of the Phoenician patriots. The opposing fleets met near the city of Phoinix, Lycia in 654 or 655:

When the two sides engaged, the Romans were defeated and the sea was dyed with Roman blood. The emperor then put his robes on another man; and the aforesaid trumpeter’s son leapt into the imperial ship and, snatching the emperor away, transferred him to another ship, thus saving him unexpectedly. This courageous man then stationed himself bravely on the imperial ship and killed many of the enemy before giving up his life on behalf of the emperor. The enemy surrounded him and held him in their midst,

<sup>82</sup> Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, AM 6146. Trans. Mango and Scott, *Theophanes’ Chronicle*, 481–82.

<sup>83</sup> The religious overtones are missing from the accounts of Agapius, Michael the Syran, and the *Chronicle of 1234*. See Hoyland, *Theophilus of Edessa’s Chronicle*, 141–44.

thinking he was the emperor; and, after he had slain many of them, they killed him, too, as the man who was wearing the imperial robes.<sup>84</sup>

The little story ends with what amounts to a civic martyrdom, dying while heroically saving the emperor from a grisly fate. The story of the trumpeter's sons is archetypical of 'patriots.' These were men who, despite living in what had come to be ruled by the Caliphate, remembered their or their ancestors' loyalties to Rome. The most ardent among these left their homes and travelled west, where they found work in the imperial service—among whom should also be mentioned Kallinikos of Heliopolis, the individual credited with the manufacture of 'Greek fire,' whose emigration from his homeland in Syria is mentioned in AD 672/673.<sup>85</sup> Unfortunately, due to the nature of sources extant from this time, few names—and even fewer deeds—are recorded. Very little non-hagiographical biography remains extant from this time. However, the few whose loyalties happened to have been remembered are indicative of a larger social phenomenon, of men now individually forgotten whose work and service went so far in strengthening and preserving the Roman state and its peoples through the centuries following the Arab conquests.

In the final decades of the seventh and whole of the eighth centuries, several hagiographies of individuals born to prominent Christian families in the Caliphate emigrated to Rhomania. The nature of surviving source materials means that the role of the church in enabling mobility is particularly well-documented. This skews the evidence not just towards the social elite, but towards a small and likely unrepresentative set of experiences within that elite. Holy men either brought along or established a network of clients, who in turn recorded and perpetuated the saint's cult after their death, which increased the likelihood that the details of life would be preserved. Andrew of Crete (*circa* 660–740), Stephen of Chenolakkos (*florent* early eighth century), and Theophylaktos of Nikomedea (*circa* 765–840) were all either ecclesiastics or monks, were all born in the Caliphate and emigrated to Rhomania. There they worked, died, and were remembered. As is the case with historical material drawn from hagiographies, biographical elements are present, as evidence for the holy man's

<sup>84</sup> Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, AM 6146. Trans. Mango and Scott, *Theophanes' Chronicle*, 481–82.

<sup>85</sup> Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, AM 6165. Trans. Mango and Scott, *Theophanes' Chronicle*, 493–94.

sanctity. These were men from a community of elites interconnected across the *oikoumene*. Travel of all kinds, and emigration specifically, was much more challenging in the early medieval period than it had been in centuries earlier. We should view these lives as part of a wider phenomenon of sustained if low-level travel and trade across the early medieval Mediterranean world.<sup>86</sup> Although they started their lives in the Caliphate, they accessed career advancements in Rhomania by virtue of their wealth, education, and connections.

Andrew, bishop of Crete, was an important figure in ecclesiastical affairs in the early eighth century.<sup>87</sup> Andrew was a composer of religious poetry, whose songs are among the largest bodies of literary artistic production in Greek from the period. Furthermore, as a powerful ecclesiastic figure, he is mentioned several times in the *Chronography* of Theophanes.<sup>88</sup> The tenth-century *Synaxarion* of Constantinople summarizes his life and principal achievements.

Also on the same day [4 June], we remember the blessed father Andrew of Jerusalem, archbishop of Crete. The father amongst the saints Andrew was from the city of Damascus, the offspring of pious parents. After he had devoted himself to study, and trained to the utmost in all general education, both divine and pagan, and succeeded in every virtue in respect to God, he was appointed a cleric of the holy city by Theodoros the blessed patriarch.<sup>89</sup> After the holy ecumenical council was convened in Constantinople, a group and he himself were sent to manage the throne of the patriarch in his stead. There he became a deacon at the church of Constantinople. And after this [he became] a priest and bishop of Crete, by the decree of God and of the entire holy synod, and by the laying-on-of-hands of the patriarch. He bequeathed to the church very many writings and encomia to God and to the Mother of God, and festal sermons on the saints, and he made it resplendent with hymns and chants. And having guided his flock well and in a

<sup>86</sup> McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy*, 174–210, 270–77.

<sup>87</sup> Kazhdan and Talbot, *Dumbarton Oaks Hagiography Database*, 19–20. Although two metaphrases of his life survive, they are even late in date than his entry in the Constantinople *Synaxarion*.

<sup>88</sup> Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, AM 6204. Trans. Mango and Scott, *Theophanes' Chronicle*, 504–5, 531–32.

<sup>89</sup> Not actually patriarch, but *topotetres* of Jerusalem in 674–686.

manner pleasing to God, after this, while on an island, he passed over to the Lord in peace.<sup>90</sup>

His birth in Damascus must have happened sometime in the third quarter of the seventh century. His parents, elsewhere named George and Gregoria, were part of the city's Greek-speaking Christian elite as Andrew's thorough *paideia* in both Christian and pagan authors attests. This education opened up many opportunities for Andrew. Andrew's career brought him into contact with many portions of the wider Roman world. Andrew came to Constantinople in 685 as a member of a three-man delegation bearing the receipt of the Jerusalem Church of the acts of the third council in Constantinople. However, instead of returning to Palestine with his companions, he elected to remain. His education, skills, and connections led him to become a deacon in Hagia Sophia before being appointed archbishop of Gortyna in Crete.<sup>91</sup> He died in Miletene on 4 July, Indiction 8 (740).<sup>92</sup> Andrew fully participated in the elite Christian and Roman cultural complex. In addition to this evidence for the powerful connections and patronage networks he enjoyed which spanned the eastern Mediterranean, collections of his literary output attest to that elite's cultural vitality. His works are principally sermons and hymns, the latter of which, as a genre, eclipsed other poetic literature in this period. He was not a passive consumer of this elite culture, but skilled in its performance which in turn brought him opportunities, promotions, and acceptance into the Roman elite.

The *Synaxarion of Constantinople* also contains a brief biography for Stephen of Chenolakkos, a monk living in the first half of the eighth century who is unattested anywhere else. Although not the holder of an office of either the state or the church, Stephen clearly moved within the same circles as the other individuals discussed in this section.

Also on this day (14 January), we remember our holy father Stephen, the founder of the monastery of Chenolakkos. He was a nobleman from the

<sup>90</sup> Anonymous, *Synaxarium ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae*, mensis Junii dies 4 §2. Trans. by the author.

<sup>91</sup> The promotion happened before 710 when he supported the brief reintroduction of monothelitism under Emperor Philippikos. Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, AM 6204. Trans. Mango and Scott, *Theophanes' Chronicle*, 531–32.

<sup>92</sup> Auzépy, "La Carrière d'André de Crète."

men of the east ( $\tauῶν ἀφ' ἡλίου ἀνατολῶν$ ), like the great Job.<sup>93</sup> From his youth, he was ardent for the ascetic life and, and he visited the monasteries of the holy fathers in the region of the Jordan and the desert, those of the holy Euthymios and Sabas and Theodosios, and learnt the manner of life of each [saint]. Later he arrived at Constantinople during the reign of Leo the Isaurian. He happened to be a guest of the most holy Patriarch Germanos, and he remained with him for a time and became a useful counsellor for him in what had to be done. There he established the Monastery of Chenolakkos. There he assembled a multitude of monks, whom he reared in the education of the Lord ( $παιδείᾳ Κυρίου$ ) and in the prohibitions, and he brought them into the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.<sup>94</sup> And when he had spent his life well, and tested by proofs the attainment which comes thence—and after certain people had seen, when he was about to depart this life, his soul being sent forth in glory because of its purity, and related this to many people—he passed from transient things to the dwelling-places above.<sup>95</sup>

Stephen's brief *vita* provides insight into the significance of monastic institutions as powerbases in the early medieval Roman world. It only contains generalized hints at his origins from an important family, and not a word on the reasoning for his migration to Constantinople. The phrase  $\tauῶν ἀφ' ἡλίου ἀνατολῶν$  is an idiomatic expression found in the *Synaxarion* for someone who was born beyond Rhomania's eastern frontier. Its meaning is confirmed by Stephen's early career in the monasteries of Palestine and Jordan. He must have been a contemporary of Andrew of Crete and John of Damascus, for he was already a man of some standing when he arrived in Constantinople sometime between Leo's ascension in 717 and Germanos' dismissal in 730. That he received the patronage of Patriarch Germanos, and founded, in turn, a monastery named Chenolakkos, stand as witness to his personal and professional resources and connections. This notice re-emphasizes the role and importance of education played in creating and perpetuating the elite. Although we are not told of Stephen's own education, his own role as teacher was an important legacy of his leadership and patronage of his monastic community.

Bishop Theophylaktos of Nikomedea (*circa* 765–840) was a part of the same elite society to which the other bishops, holy men, and

<sup>93</sup>Job 1:3.

<sup>94</sup>Ephesians 4:13.

<sup>95</sup>Anonymous, *Synaxarium ecclesiae Constantinopolitanæ*, mensis Januarii dies 14 §2. Trans. by the author.

chroniclers who created extant source material all belonged. However, he is particularly distinguished by his roots. While information about family background has rarely been preserved for many individuals from this period, Theophylaktos' hagiographer tells us of his non-native-born origins. His cult is preserved in a few late hagiographies,<sup>96</sup> as well as in the tenth-century *Synaxarion of Constantinople*, which gives the earliest summary of the man's life and career.

We remember the blessed Theophylaktos the confessor, bishop of Nikomedia. He is known as a man of the east ( $\tauῶν ἀφ' ἡλίου ἀνατολῶν$ ). He came to Constantinople and assisted the most holy Tarasios while he still held the office of *protasekretis*. When, by divine decree, the latter was elevated to the patriarchate, he cut off [tonsured] Theophylaktos and his kinsman Michael [of Synada]. He established a monastery in the temple at the entrance to the Euxine Sea. Then Michael was appointed the metropolitan in Synada, and Theophylactos for Nikomedia. When Tarasios died, Leo (V) the Armenian was ruling, having exiled Michael from the empire. Then, the impious moved against the holy and sacred icons, and the great Nikephoros succeeded Tarasios. And presently, they summoned the chosen from among the head priests: Aimilainos of Kyzikos, Euthumios of Sardis, Joseph of Thessalonica, Eudoxios of Amorion, and Theophylaktos of Nikomedia. He attended upon the impious and apostate emperor, and though they mixed many remedies for him from the holy scriptures, they were unable to persuade him, and he was incurable and remained the same. And the others remained in silence after this. Only the blessed Theophylaktos said to him, 'I know that you have been disregarding of the forbearance and of the patience of God. And a terrible destruction will come upon you, and the catastrophe similarly to a hurricane and you will not find safe harbouring.' With his heart being full of all these things he voted against these foreign doctrines, the holy Nikephoros [being exiled] on the island of Thasos, and Michael in Eudokiada and the others elsewhere. And Theophylaktos was exiled to the island Strobilos, there enduring injustices from the time for thirty years until he departed for the lord. After some time, when the heresy had been stopped by the slaying of the tyrant and orthodoxy again showed out brightly, in the time of the most pious Augusta Theodora and the most holy patriarch Methodios, the honoured body of our holy father Theophylaktos was brought back from abroad and was restored in Nikomedia in the same church which he had founded.<sup>97</sup>

<sup>96</sup> Edited with French translation in Halkin, *Hagiologie byzantine*.

<sup>97</sup> Anonymous, *Synaxarium ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae*, mensis Martii, dies 8 §1. Trans. by the author.

Again, ‘far to the east of the Anatolians’ appears as an idiomatic expression in the *Synaxarion*, indicating individuals born in otherwise unspecified locations beyond the empire’s eastern frontier. His migration to Constantinople took place no later than 784, before Tarasios’ elevation to patriarch. However, the meteoric rise of his career upon reaching the city indicates something of Theophylaktos’ origins and background. He must have enjoyed the benefits available to a scion of an elite family residing east of the current Roman imperial frontiers which could afford to give a son the education and connections prerequisite for a career in the empire’s governing elite. This is the same Greek-speaking Christian elite which included John of Damascus (d. 749) and Theophilus of Edessa (d. 785). His non-native origins served as no barrier to his career prospects. Not only did he hold the bishopric of Nikomedia, but he served as that city’s patron, founding a church where, in time, his relics and cult would be located.

The bishopric of Nikomedia was, in this time, subordinate to the metropolitan bishop of Nicaea, and Theophylaktos’ term in office was approximately contemporary to that of Ignatios. A tenuous but possible direct link between these individuals is Ignatios’ sixth epistle. In it, he requested an intervention from the consul Constantine into a dispute over the administration of a monastery. This letter was sent in response to the request of an unnamed bishop of Nikomedia, who had apparently brought the dispute to Ignatios’ attention in the first place. Although we may never know whether these two individuals had direct contact with one another, it is clear that the offices they held linked the foreign-born Theophylaktos with the governing, literary elite of the Roman Empire.

This establishes the importance of emigrants up to Ignatios’ own generation, when the iconodule consensus of history emerged in its extant shape. However, these *vita*e only hint at the full scope of the continuing attraction of emigrants willingly coming to Constantinople and entering the service of the Christian Roman Empire. If anything the number of individual migrants for whom we have record leaving the Caliphate for the Empire rose in the ninth century. Others who were approximate contemporaries with Ignatios include Michael Synkellos (761–846), who was born into an Arab family in Jerusalem,<sup>98</sup> and the ‘Graptoi’ brothers

<sup>98</sup> Kazhdan and Talbot, *Dumbarton Oaks Hagiography Database*, ‘Michael Synkellos,’ BHG 1296–97F.

Theodore (775–842) and Theophanes (778–845), born in Damascus.<sup>99</sup> To this group may be also added Antony the Younger (*circa* 780s–860s), who in the context of surviving sources stands out as remarkable for having migrated for non-religious purposes.<sup>100</sup>

Antony was born in Palestine. When he came to Constantinople is unclear, however, we know that he served as a senior officer in the *thema* Kibyrrhaiotai in the early 820s, participating in the campaigns against Thomas the Slav. His migration must have occurred sufficiently earlier for him to attract the patronage necessary to gain such an important post. The primary reason that we know about him, unlike others who may have had similar careers is that, in later life, Anthony retired to the life of a monk, living in several monasteries in Constantinople and Bithynia at which he built a network of spiritual patronage that would form the core of his saintly cult.<sup>101</sup>

Exploring the political frontier of the Roman world has been constrained by the nature of the extant source material. Despite the prevalence of detailed information about the lives of religious men in the border regions, the world was filled with individuals of diverse careers, interests, and goals: military and civic representatives of the state; merchants and traders; slaves and servants; wives and daughters; sailors, herders, craftsmen, and other itinerant kinds of labourers. All passed without historical comment, but certainly not without making their impact on the world. This group of emigrants—nearly all of whom were holy men—demonstrate the robust social network of elite Roman identity. These emigrants demonstrate how ‘human population is not constrained by boundar[ies],’ while identity ‘can be learnt’ without destabilizing the existence and relevance of the boundaries which define it.<sup>102</sup> These sources indicate that birthplace may have been less a key component of identity among the empire’s elite and more a matter of trivia, which would also be true of those born within the empire. Roman identity was not simply a birth-right so much as a confluence of culture, education, and loyalty. To be Roman was to perform a choice, one which appealed to many non-native-born individuals of talent, ambition, and piety. Their offices within Roman

<sup>99</sup> Cunningham, *The Life of Michael the Synkellos*.

<sup>100</sup> Kazhdan and Talbot, *Dumbarton Oaks Hagiography Database*, ‘Antony the Younger,’ BHG 142–3A.

<sup>101</sup> Papadopoulos-Kerameus, “Βίος Καὶ Πολιτεία Τοῦ Ὁσίου Ἀντωνίου Τοῦ Νέου.”

<sup>102</sup> Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, 36.

state, church, monastic, and educational institutions formed a common space in which their identities could be acted out, regardless of whence they or their family happened to come.

#### 4 ROMAN LOCAL IDENTITIES IN ITALY, AFRICA, AND DALMATIA

In this period, Italy had perhaps the greatest potential for competition over claims to Romanness. The primary focus of this study has been on the articulation and significance of identities derived from or in other ways connected to the imperial institutions of the Eastern Roman Empire (named the *res publica Romanorum* in Latin in this period), but of course there is another sort of Romanness available which belongs to the residents of the city of Rome (*urbs Roma*). If the political story of Italy in the seventh through ninth centuries is about the growing separateness from the Empire, then the story of Roman identity in this context is one of an escalating competition over which signified could claim legitimacy over the Roman signifier. The following section surveys recent literature on the phenomenon of Romanness in the empire's western peripheral territories. Its purpose is to provide context for the sources, events, and ideas explored throughout the rest of the volume. As we shall see, while specific issues with Roman identity were often local, these discourses were not isolated from one another. Each new potential meaning of Romanness was additive, and contemporaries displayed a surprising awareness of developments across the *oikoumene*.

The Empire's hold over the central Mediterranean was reasserted in the reign of Justinian I, when Africa and Sardinia (533–534), Sicily (535), Dalmatia (536), and peninsular Italy (536–554) were brought under Constantinople's direct administrative control by force of arms. The devastation created by the protracted war in Italy left the peninsula exposed to a new set of invaders—the Lombards—who entered Italy in the late 560s and swiftly established a kingdom politically centred on Pavia which dominated the Po Valley in the north and the duchies of Benevento and Spoleto in the central and southern Apennines. Southern Italy and the islands remained under imperial control. So, too, did the cities of Naples, Rome, Perugia, and Ravenna, even as the peninsula's hinterlands were now largely under the control of a patchwork of Lombard kings and dukes. Despite notable campaigns in the 570s under Justin II and again in

the 660s under Constans II, the Empire proved unable to recover regions lost to the Lombards. The status quo endured for nearly two centuries, and it left a permanent legacy in two of the regional names of northern Italy—Lombardia and Romagna, the latter derived from Rhomania (*Romania* in Latin), designating territories belonging to the *res publica Romanorum*.<sup>103</sup>

The political map of the central Mediterranean began to radically change after 695 with the loss of Carthage to an Arab army, marking the end of the Exarchate of Africa, and opening the way to the Visigothic kingdom of Spain which did not long survive it. In Italy, major change came in 751, when Ravenna fell to the northern Lombard kingdom, ending the Italian Exarchate in its turn. While Apulia, Calabria, and Sicily remained part of the Empire reorganized under thematic administrative structures, the city of Rome charted an independent course under its increasingly political bishops. A major turning-point was the episcopate of Stephen II (752–757), whose alliance with the Frankish King Pepin helped secure the bishop's political independence, rule over the former territories of the Exarchate, and laid the groundwork for future political cooperation.<sup>104</sup> The political realignment of central Italy in the middle decades of the eighth century away from Constantinople would have profound and long-term consequences on the discourse of Romanness.

Of the multiple meanings signified by the Roman label, a meaning of 'resident of or belonging to the city of Rome' had long been a potential alternative to 'citizen of or belonging to the Roman Empire'.<sup>105</sup> Each meaning had the potential to interact with the other, and writers could choose whether to be precise in distinguishing between the two. For example, M. Shane Bjornlie's study of Ammianus Marcellinus shows that even in the fourth century this writer found it necessary to articulate the difference between the Romanness of the city and of the empire—although

<sup>103</sup> Vespiagnani, *La România italiana dall'esarcato al patrimonium*. On the administrative history of this phase of Roman rule in Italy, see Brown, *Gentlemen and Officers*.

<sup>104</sup> Covered, with an obvious focus on the relationship between Roman bishops and the Pippinid Frankish dynasty, in an excellent recent work, Nelson, *King and Emperor*, esp. chapters 2, 3, and 4. See also Costambeys, *Power and Patronage in Early Medieval Italy*, esp. 261–87; Noble, "Paradoxes and Possibilities in the Sources for Roman Society in the Early Middle Ages"; Delogu, "The Papacy, Rome and the Wider World in the Seventh and Eighth Centuries," 214–16.

<sup>105</sup> On the layering of meanings for the early medieval city of Rome, see Maskarinec, *City of Saints*; Andrews, "Rome and Romanitas: Aspects of Transition," 1–5.

both were obviously Roman in their own way, the former was but a subset of Romans within a larger Roman context.<sup>106</sup> Returning to the seventh century, the account of the trial of Maximus Confessor (*Relatio Motionis*), written by one of his admirers, shows the potential for rhetorical wordplay which could become transgressive. In particular, chapter 7 of Allen and Neil's edition and translation allows Maximus—a Greek speaker who, in real life, was likely born in Syria—to claim an authentic Romanness over his interviewers—high-ranking members of the senate and holders of imperial offices. All of the men were, obviously, imperial-Romans; Maximus was on trial for treason against the emperor and empire, after all. However, in this case, the document presents Maximus as *more* Roman than anyone else present because he claimed identification with the doctrinal views ascribed to the bishop of that city.<sup>107</sup> Even whilst the city of Rome was still part of the empire, its signification had the potential to compete with, and potentially expel, other meanings of the shared Roman signifier. But the social potential of a distinct city-Roman signified independent of the empire-Roman signified was limited whilst the city remained part of the Italian exarchate of the *res publica Romanorum*. The fall of the exarchate created the necessary preconditions for a rhetorical realignment.

The origin of this novel concept of Romanness can be traced through the literary sources of the Roman bishopric, but its implications reached the far corners of European Christendom. In a study of the *Liber Pontificalis*, McKitterick pointed to an intentional depiction of the history of the liturgy as a means of reshaping city-Roman identity using public rituals to reinforce the bishops' political agendas and anchor the meaning of Romanness in a specific historical and institutional context. ‘Because Roman liturgy extended far beyond the Alps and across the Mediterranean, North and Irish seas, many newly converted peoples participated in this very distinctive kind of Romanness, for which the *Liber Pontificalis* similarly widely disseminated, provided both historical context and rationale.’<sup>108</sup> Partnership with the Frankish rulers contributed to the spread of these sources and thus this idea. Indeed, revival of the imperial title in the west was directly enabled by this

<sup>106</sup> Bjornlie, “Romans, Barbarians and Provincials in the *Res Gestae* of Ammianus Marcellinus,” 76–77.

<sup>107</sup> Allen and Neil, *Maximus the Confessor and His Companions: Documents from Exile*. See further discussion above in Sect. 1.

<sup>108</sup> McKitterick, “‘Romanness’ and Rome in the Early Middle Ages,” 155.

city-Roman re-signification project. Charles was coronated in 800 *in* the city of Rome *by* the bishop of Rome. Charles' claim to *imperium* was predicated on the interplay between competing significations of the word 'Roman.' On the one hand, it was clearly intended to be confused with the Romanness of the Eastern Empire, and implicitly repudiate it. After all, the supposed anarchy of a woman emperor, Irene (797–802), provided part of the political justification, and the initially hostile reaction to this new western emperor indicates that this was understood in Constantinople to be a threatening and hostile political action. On the other hand, documents from Charles' own court adopted language differentiating the *imperium Romanum* from the *imperium Romanorum*, thereby acknowledging that his Romanness derived from a different source than that of the emperors in Constantinople.<sup>109</sup>

Some of the long-term effects of the interference between the city's Romanness and the empire's Romanness have been found in sources concerning identities in western regions which remained part of the Eastern Empire. The residents of southern Italy especially had to deal with competing Roman authorities, traditions, and significations.<sup>110</sup> The region was politically divided between Lombard duchies, imperial *themes*, and semi-autonomous local authorities ruled over cities and countryside. The political reach of Frankish rule southwards following the annexation of the Lombard kingdom and Charles' coronation as emperor meant that southern Italy was now within reach of two Roman Empires, one politically dominated by Franks and the other by Greeks. Here, areas where Latin was predominantly spoken and written directly bordered those where Greek prevailed. And although much of the region was politically tied to Constantinople, the whole of the region was ecclesiastically subordinate to the patriarchate of the city of Rome. In so many contexts, the signifier Roman could point to multiple contradictory and even competitive meanings. This resulted in 'the lexical weakness of Italo-Greek "Romanness" bound, in the end, to the polysemy of the word "Roman." This word signified too much to be suitably used.'<sup>111</sup> Furthermore, none of the different Roman authorities were principally based in the region. As a result,

<sup>109</sup> Delogu, "The Post-Imperial Romanness of the Romans," 159–61; Classen, *Karl der Grosse, das Papsttum und Byzanz*.

<sup>110</sup> Peters-Custot, "L'identité Des Grecs de l'Italie Méridionale Byzantine."

<sup>111</sup> Peters-Custot, "Between Rome and Constantinople: The Romanness of Byzantine Southern Italy," 237.

there was no consistent institutional pressure exerted on its inhabitants to use, much less prioritize, any one meaning of Romanness over the others.

A large number of Greek hagiographies from southern Italy have survived dating to the later ninth through early eleventh centuries. Four hagiographies provide counterpoints to the saints who migrated from the east in previous centuries. Elias ‘the Younger’ of Enna (d. 903) was born into a noble Sicilian family named Rachites. Briefly enslaved in North Africa, subsequent travels took him to Jerusalem and throughout the Balkans. He founded a monastery (in Saline, Calabria), interacted with local imperial civil and military officials, that was reportedly summoned by Leo VI to Constantinople shortly before his death in Thessalonica.<sup>112</sup> Elias Speleotes (d. 960) came from a wealthy family and worked as a calligrapher. He spent time in Calabria, Sicily, Rome, and the Peloponnese, including at the monastery founded by Elias of Enna.<sup>113</sup> Phantinos the Younger (d. *circa* 974) entered the same monastery at a young age, before moving north, into Lucania, where he founded three monasteries, one of which was for women. Phantinos’ disciples included Neilos ‘the Younger’ of Rossano (d. 1004), famed as a hymnographer and founder of monasteries in his own right. Late in life, Phantinos reportedly travelled extensively around the Peloponnese and Greece before ending his days in Thessalonica where he met Athanasios the Athonite (d. 1003), founder of the Great Lavra.<sup>114</sup> Elias of Enna, Elias of Speleotes, and Phantinos came from Greek-speaking southern Italian communities and navigated between the Romanness of the bishop of Rome, the Eastern Empire, and, after the mid-tenth century, the Ottonian emperors. While such hagiographies are indicative of some trends which likely were true of this earlier era as well, these saints all lived under the Macedonian dynasty, and of course lived in a different society facing different economic, security, and religious challenges—not the least of which being the Arab conquest of Sicily in the ninth century which exposed southern Italy to their frequently mentioned raids. As we have seen in comparable hagiographies previously, however, their lives point to

<sup>112</sup> Howe, “Elias the Younger”; Kazhdan and Talbot, *Dumbarton Oaks Hagiography Database*, 36. His *vita* is edited and translated by Taibbi, *Vita Di Sant’Elia Il Giovane*.

<sup>113</sup> Howe, “Elias Speleotes”; Kazhdan and Talbot, *Dumbarton Oaks Hagiography Database*, 35–36. A parallel edition of Greek and Latin versions of his life was edited by Strazzeri, “Una Traduzione Dal Greco Ad Uso Dei Normanni.”

<sup>114</sup> Howe, “Phantinos the Younger”; Howe, “Neilos of Rossano”; Kazhdan and Talbot, *Dumbarton Oaks Hagiography Database*, 85–86. The life was edited, with an Italian translation, by Follieri, *La Vita Di San Fantino Il Giovane*.

the power of familial, educational, literary, monastic, and ecclesiastic networks to enable social mobility, as well as the power of these networks to smooth physical mobility. This provided access into Roman elite circles, a potential for participation in and identification with the empire's Romanness which some took like their eastern counterparts in earlier centuries. Bearing in mind the limitations of drawing too-sweeping conclusions from hagiographic traditions, some parallels emerge in the potential pull of a shared cultural background between Syria, southern Italy, and Constantinople.

If the evidence from southern Italy overwhelmingly comes from a later date, at least a vital picture of the potential for common social and cultural traditions to enable movement and assimilation emerges from studies of these sources. Other areas have far less to work with. Evidence from North Africa is very limited after the seventh, but earlier centuries were relatively well-documented, and consequently have been the focus of several studies. North Africa was a vast region, a narrow band of rich farmland and prosperous cities hugging the Mediterranean coast from Cyrenaica in the east to Mauritania in the west. While the Sahara extends relatively close to the coast in Libya, west of there the snow-capped peaks of the Atlas Mountains formed a natural environmental barrier which both protected the climate along the coast and limited the reach of Roman patterns of urban settlement. By late antiquity, North Africa had long been an integral part of the Roman world, and the major coastal cities and settlements were home to a large population of Roman citizens whose lives and experiences would have resembled other Romans. The legacy of the coastal cities' Punic past shaped a distinct local culture, however, and studies have pointed to the continued usage of Punic, attested in inscriptions and references in Latin literature, at least until the lifetime of St. Augustine (354–430). However social patterns changed as one moved inland, where surviving records point to the integration of Roman and Berber elites. Berbers is a modern name which encompasses several historical sub-groups and tribes. Called Afri in earlier Latin sources, the most prominent group in the period of the Vandals and the Exarchate were the Mauri.<sup>115</sup> Like European barbarians, the Berbers in Africa had a long history of interaction and accommodation with the

<sup>115</sup> Rouighi, *Inventing the Berbers*, Introduction, esp. 18–20.

Roman state, especially its army.<sup>116</sup> Even the process of Christianization followed a distinct path in North Africa, which in the fourth century was dominated by the Donatist schism, a sustained crisis over episcopal legitimacy originating in the Diocletian's persecutions.<sup>117</sup>

The fifth century saw the establishment of the Vandal kingdom and its promotion of an anti-Nicene church of Homoian confession (pejoratively and anachronistically called ‘Arians’), while the sixth century brought Belisarius’ army and the kingdom’s reabsorption into the Roman Empire. Group identities in North Africa from the fifth through seventh centuries have been the focus of major recent studies by Conant and Whelan, whose works explored the problem with a political and religious focus respectively. Conant tracks a situation which in many ways is similar to southern Italy, where ‘Roman’ can, among other meanings, point to an indigenous cultural tradition, religious adherence to the Nicene doctrine, or political loyalty to the emperor in Constantinople—as well as, of course, the patriarch of Rome, to which the Nicene African Church was always subordinate.<sup>118</sup> Whelan’s study problematizes the use of association of ‘Roman’ with a specific religious confession, highlighting how its use by some authors, such as Victor of Vita (writing in the late fifth century) employed the label as a means of articulating and reinforcing conceptual boundaries between ‘Roman Catholics’ and ‘Vandal Arians.’ Looking beyond the rhetoric reveals a world that did not neatly divide into ecclesiastic structures by language, culture, or political allegiance.<sup>119</sup> As seen elsewhere, the Roman signifier pointed in many directions, sometimes contradictory, often idealistic, but heavily coloured by the shape of the local history of the region. The Roman/Christian—Barbarian/Heretic division in Africa drew on existing ideas about those identifiers, and in turn contributed to the context in which that rhetorical device was reused by monotheletes and dyotheletes in the seventh century, and by partisans on either side of the icon debates of the eighth and ninth centuries. Uses of these tropes were specific, but each specific use contributed to the trope’s cultural currency and significance across the Mediterranean.

<sup>116</sup> Steinacher, “When Not in Rome, Still Do as the Romans Do? Africa from 146 BCE to the 7th Century,” 447–48; Fentress, “Romanizing the Berbers.”

<sup>117</sup> Tilley, *Donatist Martyr Stories*; Whelan, “African Controversy”; Miles, *The Donatist Schism*; Hoover, *The Donatist Church in an Apocalyptic Age*.

<sup>118</sup> Conant, *Staying Roman*, esp. chs. 3 and 4.

<sup>119</sup> Whelan, *Being Christian in Vandal Africa the Politics of Orthodoxy in the Post-Imperial West*.

While these studies point to the similarities between Africa and elsewhere in the Eastern Roman Empire, there is vanishingly little local material to track the history of the Exarchate in Africa or Sardinia in the seventh century or after its fall in the eighth, never mind negotiations of Roman identity. Africa was the base for the successful usurpation by Heraclius in 608–610, as well as the unsuccessful usurpation attempt by the Exarch Gregory in 647, and of course Constans II moved the empire's administrative centre to Syracuse in the 660s, all of which points to the strategic military and economic importance of the central Mediterranean. Although Africa resisted Arab encroachments for fifty years following the fall of Egypt with the Roman army and Berber forces even coordinating in the defence, the fall of Carthage in 695 marked the second, and this time final, end of Roman rule in Africa—and probably in Sardinia too, though the exact chronology of the end of Roman rule on the island is less well-documented. The Latin-speaking, multicultural, and predominantly Christian indigenous population clear in fifth century sources continued into the early centuries under the Caliphate, while ecclesiastic institutions and the Latin language both survived in Africa until at least the eleventh century.<sup>120</sup> Yet unlike in Syria or Egypt, a significant indigenous Christian institution and community did not survive into the modern era. Both Syrian and African churches drew on the same set of tools for cultural boundary maintenance to adapt to life under Muslim rule. This suggests that the better-documented activities of eighth-and-ninth-century Syrian Christians, and their methods for articulating a new relationship to outside Roman institutions as well as to their own Roman heritage, should be viewed as a likely model for their comparatively poorly documented African contemporaries.

Like Africa and Italy, Dalmatia was a region with a significant Latin-speaking local population which remained closely politically intertwined with the Eastern Empire throughout this period. In late antiquity, Dalmatia referred to a region extending from the peninsula of Istria in the north to the Bay of Kotor (also known as the Boka Kotorska gulf) in the south, and from the Adriatic littoral reaching inland to the river Sava. The Dinaric

<sup>120</sup>Savage, *A Gateway to Hell, a Gateway to Paradise*; Handley, “Disputing the End of African Christianity”; Conant, “Europe and the African Cult of Saints, circa 350–900,” esp. 45–46; Conant, *Staying Roman*, 362–70; Steinacher, *Die Vandalen*, 328–31; Steinacher, “When Not in Rome, Still Do as the Romans Do? Africa from 146 BCE to the 7th Century,” 456.

Alps rise directly out of the sea and form a series of parallel ridgelines as one heads inland separating the Adriatic coast from the Pannonian basin, the latter of which is dominated by the Danube which flows eastwards to ultimately empty into the Euxine (or Black) Sea. This geography creates a shoreline full of islands and inlets, with few of the broad coastal plains which characterize many other Mediterranean regions, with limited access inland via a very few passes. The interior highlands became disconnected from the Roman world after the sixth century, its culture changed by the arrival of Slav migrants and the establishment of the Avar khaganate which exercised political hegemony over the Pannonian basin and surrounding regions from the sixth through ninth centuries.<sup>121</sup> Life in the cities of coastal Dalmatia, on the other hand, was characterized by continuity with their Late Antique past.<sup>122</sup> Sparse surviving evidence suggests their inhabitants remained linked with wider social, political, and ecclesiastic networks. For example, Basić demonstrated how an eighth-century fragmentary funerary inscription belonging to the sarcophagus of one Paul from Tragourion (Trogir)—the only known surviving epigraphy from early medieval Dalmatia—attests to the reach and influence of Roman legal culture even into the Latin-speaking communities in the empire's periphery.<sup>123</sup> It appears that the empire and the Roman signifier remained relevant in the local culture, although the circumstances and history remain opaque.

The major challenge to writing a history of the early medieval Dalmatian Romans is that the few surviving literary sources are significantly removed by either time or space. We encountered the broad ethnographic survey of the region in the *De Administrando Imperio* back in Chap. 2. Dating to

<sup>121</sup> On the arrival of Slavs (Sklavenes) into the Balkans generally, and especially the emergence of a distinct Croat group into the historical and archaeological record, see: Curta, *Southeastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 500–1250*, 96–110; Džino, *Becoming Slav, Becoming Croat*; Borri, “White Croatia and the Arrival of the Croats”; Džino, “Post-Roman Dalmatia: Collapse and Regeneration of a Complex Social System”; Džino, “From Byzantium to the West”; Ančić, “Migration or Transformation: The Roots of the Early Medieval Croatian Polity”; Bilogrivić, “Carolingian Weapons and the Problem of Croat Migration and Ethnogenesis”; Pohl, *The Avars*, 117–62; Curta, *Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages (500–1300)*, 65–69.

<sup>122</sup> Evidence for the economy is limited, but Neven Budak has shown that the circulation of coinage and goods increased from the ninth century. Budak, “One More Renaissance? Dalmatia and the Revival of the European Economy.”

<sup>123</sup> Basić, “The Sarcophagus with Sanction-Formula from Trogir (Aspects of the Byzantine Diplomatic Tradition in Early Medieval Epigraphy of the Adriatic).”

the middle of the tenth century, its writer distinguishes the Latin-speaking Dalmatians as Ῥωμαῖοι/*Rhomanoi*, a slight distinction from the typical Greek signifier for a Roman, Ῥωμαῖοι/*Rhomaoi*.<sup>124</sup> A second major literary source is the *Historia Veneticorum*, an eleventh century chronicle. Its writer, one John the Deacon, refers to ‘Roman’ inhabitants of Dalmatia, but only once—elsewhere calling the inhabitants of the region Dalmatians or Slavs.<sup>125</sup> Finally, an earlier account of the region is contained in the *Royal Frankish Annals*, which was written before 840. Its writer was principally interested in the Carolingian Duchy of Dalmatia, and it categorizes the local inhabitants as either Dalmatians or Slavs—the only Romans in this account being imperial authorities from Constantinople mentioned in AD 817.<sup>126</sup> All three sources appear to represent local distinctions at least partially on linguistic ground—Dalmatian Romans spoke Latin. This points to the likelihood of continuity of a local Roman cultural identity throughout the proceeding period, although that certainly cannot be taken for granted.<sup>127</sup> The Dalmatians drew in the same toolkit of tropes and concepts available to Romans across the *oikoumene*, which makes comparisons not only possible but potentially useful for filling in these documentary gaps.<sup>128</sup> In the case of the Adriatic littoral, it might be useful to look at the eighth-century Crimean frontier for possible parallel social and cultural strategies. We should perhaps see the Dalmatians’ occasional engagement with Italian and Constantinopolitan institutional powers as a parallel to John of Gothia’s pilgrimages which built personal and institutional links between his home bishopric in Crimea with the ecclesiastic structures in Constantinople, Georgia, and Palestine. As in the Crimea, the leaders of Dalmatia’s cities had to balance their institutional ties and identification with a wider Roman world against the ever-present potential

<sup>124</sup> Džino, *Becoming Slav, Becoming Croat*, 155–61; Borri, “Gli Istriani e i Loro Parenti”; Borri, “White Croatia and the Arrival of the Croats,” 227–28; Borri, “Dalmatian Romans and Their Adriatic Friends,” 242–45.

<sup>125</sup> John the Deacon, *Historia Veneticorum*, § 4.48. See further: Berto, *The Political and Social Vocabulary of John the Deacon’s “Istoria Veneticorum”*, esp. ch. 6.

<sup>126</sup> On the dispute of AD 817 between the Frankish Duke and imperial representatives, see Džino, *Becoming Slav, Becoming Croat*, 193–94; Ančić, “The Treaty of Aachen: How Many Empires?,” 32–33.

<sup>127</sup> Borri, “Dalmatian Romans and Their Adriatic Friends,” 249–52.

<sup>128</sup> On the further history of the divergence of various Roman-originated identities in central Europe, see especially Pohl, “Walchen, Römer Und „Romanen“ – Einleitung,” 20–22; Wolfram, “Die Frühmittelalterliche Romania Im Donau- Und Ostalpenraum”; Hartl, “Walchen, Vlachs and Welsh: A Germanic Ethnonym and Its Many Uses,” esp. 399–400.

volatility of local power arrangements. They adopted strategies of local resilience and autonomy and built far-ranging networks which bridged local borders and the Christian world.

An overview of Romanness in the territories of the western Exarchates highlights many of the patterns which have been found elsewhere, and the importance of viewing local developments within the wider context of a shared cultural inheritance. Source materials answer different questions than we were able to ask of voices from the eastern periphery, but have at least been indicative of how the tools of group distinction were adapted to fit the needs of time and place. The rhetorical categories equating Roman with Christian and barbarian with heretic were available, and clearly used, as much in the Balkans, Italy, and Africa as in Anatolia, Syria, and Crimea. At the same time, these tools which were broadly available were applied in practice to distinctive local situations. Because ecclesiastic institutions were subordinate to the patriarch in Rome, the Roman signifier had an extra signification in all of these western territories which, while available, was not as prevalent elsewhere in the Mediterranean world. In addition, excepting hellenophone areas of southern Italy, the local populations in these regions principally spoke Latin and lived lives still structured by built environments and cultural institutions directly inherited from the Late Antique past. While the interaction between this broader set of socio-cultural norms and the rest of the Roman sign system is the primary focus of the next chapter, it is worth noting here that there is clear evidence that this type of Romanness continued to be socially meaningful in at least some areas in the west.

## 5 DISCUSSION: IDENTITIES AND BOUNDARIES

In the words of Lévi-Strauss, ‘The existence of an outside group, which is considered inferior by the in-group, provides a necessary foil to established norms and values, and to the development of a specific cultural ethos.’<sup>129</sup> Boundaries are integral to our examination of group identity, for it is in liminal spaces where difference will be articulated and significance assigned. Boundaries exist where the self encountered the other, where Roman met barbarian, an encounter which occurs as much in the literary imagination as on the ground. This chapter has explored several types of

<sup>129</sup> Lévi-Strauss, *Race and History*, 224–25.

boundaries which defined and reinforced the performance of being Roman in the early middle ages.

The rhetorical equation of heretics with barbarism created and reinforced internal boundaries between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ Romans. This equivalency was appealing to a limited subset of society interested in constructing identity around doctrinal questions. However, this view is prevalent in surviving sources for this period. This religious dimension to Roman identity shaped the representation of that community and its history at the hands of the pious and zealous who filtered their representations of the past through their own view of orthodoxy. Yet while heterodox communities were marginalized politically in certain ways, they were in other ways quite thoroughly integrated into the social elite. The creation of rhetorical boundaries between orthodox-self and heretical-other and the association of those with the Roman-barbarian dichotomy proved to be an attractive tool by which to create policies for promoting a more unified society. It also served as a template by which later generations could construct a historical narrative and, by imposing it upon their version of the past, make sense of previous decades and centuries in a context satisfying for themselves and their audiences. This confirms the need for caution and scepticism in the use of later materials in attempting to study the historical realities of the early middle ages.

Finally, the phenomenon of migration and movement has illuminated issues of how individuals and groups conceived of their identities when crossing frontiers and when frontiers crossed them. With the Persian and the Arab conquests, millions of people became subjects to barbarian powers in very short periods of time. For those whom the border crossed, the situation was still more complicated by the endurance of the Roman polity behind new frontiers, meaning that by moving they could reaffirm that part of their heritage. For the individuals and families who did, the integration process was sometimes difficult—the Empire was always heterogeneous, and they might differ significantly with the locals with respect to language and customs. However, their partisan devotion to the state ensured their long-term success. The Roman Empire was also able to absorb barbarian tribes into its social fabric, albeit with less guaranteed success. The multitude of potential meanings within the Roman sign system allowed for highly localized expressions of identity. This adaptability proved to be a systematic strength underpinning the historical survival of Romanness even in the absence of formal state and ecclesiastic institutions.

and a complication to our study and understanding of it. When movement could be of individuals, groups, or institutional boundaries, all forms of accepting, integrating, and assimilating populations attest to the vitality and attractiveness of Roman culture and institutions for many in the post-antique *oikoumene*.



## CHAPTER 6

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# Social Identities

The sign system of early medieval Romanness was large, often contradictory, and defies any attempt to articulate clear parallels. This chapter takes a very broad approach to identity, looking for the implicit cultural assumptions and informal systems which underpinned and distinguished Romanness.<sup>1</sup> Was Roman identity only a literary construction belonging to elite men? Does the epochal history in elite narrative align with lived experiences? Did early medieval society experience and perceive a fundamental break with the past that would justify modern historical narratives? As has been noted before, meanings accumulated over time, and people of the early middle ages inherited a lot of them before adding more of their own. This chapter explores informal structures of early medieval Roman society, in a search for points of commonality, elements of the self-same which could be used to articulate its difference from the Other. This search comes with many caveats beyond the usual cautions about the limitations of surviving source materials and the inherent problems of trying to recover the lived experiences of non-elites. In searching for broad patterns, we should anticipate large variations of those experiences. We

<sup>1</sup> In effect, looking for elements of early medieval society which functioned comparatively to Louis Althusser's "Ideological State Apparatuses," which in a modern context includes systems like religion, family, political systems, unions, media, sport, arts, and education. Althusser, "Idéologie et Appareils Idéologiques d'État"; Belsey, *Poststructuralism*, 34–35.

can recognize that ‘the difference within cultures, languages [and] subjects undermines … all attempts to bring societies and groups into line with a single identity’<sup>2</sup> even as we looked for available commonalities which would do just that. Indeed, as we have seen throughout this volume, one of the strengths of Romanness was its situational flexibility, a label which could create difference or sameness depending on the situation and goals of the communicants.

Differences are the ‘raw materials’ of group formation, the bargaining chips with which identities were wagered; difference or sameness had to be claimed and accepted.<sup>3</sup> The ambiguities of difference are the source for some of the risk inherent to making a wager. Differences had to be noted and perceived as such to be used as an identity marker. The simple existence of difference was not necessarily socially significant. Likewise, the magnitude of difference does not necessarily correlate with significance—group formation can coalesce around objectively minor variations, whereas groups can and will incorporate a high degree of diversity within their fold. Likewise, these are historically dynamic processes in which use is fluid—differences can be created or suppressed depending on situation. We have no hope of tracking the actual wagers which defined the lived experience for vast majority in medieval Rhomania who did not belong to the small, wealthy, powerful, educated, and literate elite. However, we can identify the ‘raw materials’ of difference upon which people could draw. This is an imperfect approach, for there remains the possibility that some differences too subtle for us to spot were nonetheless found to be significant by historical actors. We lack specificity for life outside a restricted elite, so we rarely catch glimpses of what they *did* use. This chapter looks for some of the things which they *could* use though. The focus, then, is on potential markers of Romanness, the similarities and variations which knit together and distinguished the inhabitants of Rhomania from their early medieval neighbours.

Section 1 begins by looking at two different ways early medieval Romans described their own society. The eighth- or early ninth-century military handbook, the *De Re Strategica* by Syrianos Magistros, described contemporary society as an idealized taxonomic structure. It conceived of

<sup>2</sup> Belsey, *Poststructuralism*, 90.

<sup>3</sup> As Catherine Belsey puts it, ‘Difference, neither a signifier nor a signified, is nevertheless the only origin of meaning.’ Belsey, 84. On the wager of identity, see Halsall, “From Group to Subject (and Back Again).”

Roman society as a hierarchy of public titles, ranks, and profession, in which everyone from senator down to beggar played a part in the well-ordered polity. This view resembles the rigid hierarchies necessitated by the army, the proper operation of which was after all the principal focus of the text. Syrianos depicted his social world as both shaped by its historical precedents as well as distinctive from other contemporary societies, even those which shared a historical origin. A contrasting view of social order is found in the prevalent use of the *oikos* (or household) as a metaphor for all manner of social relations. It was a social model which not only incorporated women but gave them authority and autonomy under specific circumstances. The *oikos* was also an alternative to ethnicity as a way of expressing kinship-based relationships, which probably contributed to its popularity in a polity as diverse as Rhomania. In sharp contrast with Syrianos Magistros' class-based descriptions of social order, the flexible relationships described through the metaphor of the *oikos* shed light on the dynamism of early medieval Roman society.

Section 2 sketches life and identity for society as a whole—particularly targeting non-elite lives and experiences—and the way in which it intersected with the physical world. Common patterns form potential raw materials for the articulation of collective sameness and difference, whether or not records survive of individuals identifying with them in practice.<sup>4</sup> From the perspective of demographics, early medieval Rhomania was a world where life could be short and cheap. Slavery and servitude were integral parts of this world; the elite was one which included, and sympathized with, slave owners. For most Roman citizens, whose livelihoods depended on agricultural production, life was shaped by the physical spaces and infrastructure inherited from earlier generations. As elsewhere around the Mediterranean, Roman communities experienced demographic decline which presented systemic challenges and personal opportunities for survivors. Patterns of urban settlement differed across the empire, but broadly speaking the denizens of the empire's cities largely chose to continue dwelling in the same geographical locations as their ancestors, sites which resonated with heritage. When they invested in infrastructure—in the form of new walls for many provincial cities or the restoration of Constantinople's aqueducts under the Isaurians—they reused the material from derelict

<sup>4</sup> Group formation is merely one potential outcome of open-ended historical processes. Wimmer, *Ethnic Boundary Making*, 207. Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups*, 14.

monuments of the site's past. At Athens, Ephesus, Ancyra, and dozens of other places, early medieval populations literally wrapped their homes in their cultural inheritance. These communities made a choice to continue inhabiting the same space as their ancestors, repurposing the space for the ongoing performance of their lives as their inheritors and descendants. Human geography presents a story of historical continuity mediated through necessary adaptations made in response to new challenges.

Finally, Sect. 3 turns to the place of women in Roman society and the social construction of gendered relationships more broadly, through three vectors: the law, hagiographies, and the lives of the aristocracy. Gender is a historical phenomenon integral to Roman society and identity, and we can borrow Joan Scott's classic definition of it as 'a constituent element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and [a] primary way of signifying relationships of power.'<sup>5</sup> As seen elsewhere in this volume, Romanness was often articulated in explicitly gendered terms. This section explores the space between gendered constructions of power and identifying labels on the one hand, and the gendered experiences of specific individuals—in this case, specifically focusing on Roman women—on the other. Early medieval understanding of the relationship between biological sex and socially constructed gender differed from modern notions, most strikingly by the recognized social presence of eunuchs who were effectively treated as a third gender.<sup>6</sup> The reign of Empress Irene lies at the heart of this section, and the open question of whether and how her sex can be reconciled with the inherently gendered nature of Romanness, power, and the imperial office itself. Was her reign compatible with Romanness, or a sign of discontinuity? The laws of the Isaurian era provided a guide for the role of women within a structurally misogynist society, and in a few documentary sources we find evidence for the ways individual women used their rights as Romans to act within that society.

<sup>5</sup> Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," 1067. On changes to women's social roles in the period of late antiquity, see Cooper, *The Virgin and the Bride*. For an overview contextualizing this period within the medieval millennium, see James, "The Role of Women"; Macrides, "Families and Kinship."

<sup>6</sup> See especially Ringrose, *The Perfect Servant*; Tougher, *The Eunuch in Byzantine History and Society*; Tougher, "Bearding Byzantium: Masculinity, Eunuchs and the Byzantine Life Course."

Hagiographies, on the other hand, shed light on a different social context. The emergence of new hagiographical tropes in this period indicates the historical nature of gendered identity. The last part concludes with a look at the lives of aristocratic women—including regents and empresses—as a means of exploring the relationship between power in this society and the identity of the individual who exercised it.

## 1 SOCIETY AS IMAGINED BY CONTEMPORARIES

Is it possible to know anything about group identification among the masses of Roman society? Did the lower classes identify with the Roman state or with Roman society? Were there other forms of group identification which were specific to the lower classes which were of greater practical significance in most people's lives?<sup>7</sup> Two social models specific to this society in this period show how people thought through these questions. The first, described in a contemporary source, presents a taxonomic view of Roman society and its operation. The second, the metaphor of the household (*oikos*), is a pervasive theme in early medieval literature but which is only explicitly described through modern studies. Each social model reflects the conceptual tools of self-categorization circulating in Roman society in this period. But first, a brief analytical description of life in early medieval Rhomania will help contextualize the contemporary social models.

It is difficult to build an accurate summary of millions of poor and poorly documented lives from the distant past. Attempts to use medieval documents to estimate populations in the Balkans and Anatolia for the sixth and seventh centuries run afoul of modern myths of nationalist origins.<sup>8</sup> Estimates for the demography of the medieval Roman peoples vary, with the picture complicated by cyclic growth and decline of urban and rural populations and economic activities. Absent studies specifically on early medieval demography, estimates made for other periods, before and

<sup>7</sup> Recent work has sought to re-establish crowds, particularly the urban masses, as historical actors, and provide theoretical framework for tracking historical changes, most notably Grey, *Constructing Communities in the Late Roman Countryside*; Magalhães de Oliveira, “Late Antiquity: The Age of Crowds?”

<sup>8</sup> Charanis, “The Chronicle of Monemvasia and the Question of Slavonic Settlements in Greece”; Charanis, “Ethnic Changes in the Byzantine Empire in the Seventh Century”; Lemerle, “La Chronique improprement dite de Monemvasie”; Olajos, “Contribution à La Chronologie Des Premières Installations Des Slaves Dans l'empire Byzantine.”

after, indicate plausible numbers. At its geographical and demographic peak under Justinian I (527–565), the empire's total population was between 21 and 30 million.<sup>9</sup> The course of the seventh century saw the empire lose two-thirds of its territory, including Syria, Egypt, Libya, and much of Italy and the Balkans. By the time of the siege of Constantinople in 717–718, the last time the new Muslim caliphate would seriously threaten the empire's existence, the total population was probably below 10 million.<sup>10</sup> While Constantinople had been the world's largest city under Justinian I (527–565) with an estimated population of over half a million residents, it likely had barely a tenth of that population by the turn of the eighth century.<sup>11</sup>

Lifespan for most of the empire's population was low, typical of pre-modern societies. In better-documented fourteenth-century Macedonia, at the age of five women were estimated to average 47.5 years' life expectancy, men slightly longer.<sup>12</sup> Of course, this is not to say that individuals did not have lengthy and productive lives. As seen in previous chapters, hagiographies record that individual holy men had very long lives. Bishop George of Amastrius lived to the age of seventy, and Andrew of Crete reached approximately eighty years of age. The *Strategikon*, written around the turn of the seventh century and read, copied, and studied extensively for centuries after, divides common soldiers between those older and younger than forty, and assumes a mixture of both ages in each squadron (eight to sixteen men).<sup>13</sup>

Rural peasantry made up the great majority of the empire's populace, either taxpaying small-holders or tenants working lands belonging to great estates.<sup>14</sup> Their economic condition was fragile, for their livelihood was susceptible to drought, flooding, storms, pestilence, earthquakes, fire, barbarian raids—the various misfortunes which fate and Mediterranean ecology will inevitably inflict given a long enough span of time. Urban

<sup>9</sup> Russell, "Late Antique and Medieval Population"; Laiou and Morrisson, *The Byzantine Economy*, 16–17. Recent scholarship has argued that the demographic impacts of the Justinianic Plague have likely been exaggerated, see Mordechai and Eisenberg, "Rejecting Catastrophe," 34–37.

<sup>10</sup> Treadgold, *A History of the Byzantine State and Society*, 236ff.

<sup>11</sup> Wickham, *The Inheritance of Rome*, 260.

<sup>12</sup> Laiou, *Peasant Society in the Late Byzantine Empire*, 276–79, 295.

<sup>13</sup> Maurice (Ps.), *Strategikon*, §I.2.28–30, II.7.1–4. Trans. Dennis, *Maurice's Strategikon*.

<sup>14</sup> Laiou and Morrisson, *The Byzantine Economy*, 32; Whittow, *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium, 600–1025*, 55–56.

inhabitants were less vulnerable, protected economically by their types of work and physically by the walls which surrounded their lives. Servitude and slavery were realities for men and women at the very bottom of society. Slaves were mentioned as shepherds and accounted among the property of the Paphlagonian holdings of the family of St. Philaretos the Merciful (702–792).<sup>15</sup> Still, many servants would have been attached to smaller *oikoi*. Some soldiers were paid an allowance to support a servant, ‘either slave or free,’ while on campaign. For cavalry, servants were needed at the rate of one servant for every three or four mounts.<sup>16</sup> Although some slaves and servants were fully acculturated to Roman society, a great quantity were not. Sklavenes were so commonly found as slaves that popular etymology made their name synonymous with that condition in the ‘Roman tongue’ (Latin).<sup>17</sup> Despite the sheer necessity of their labour to the functioning of the economy and the maintenance of elite lifestyles, these men and women were outsiders to Roman society.

There are a few contemporary schemes for the social order of Roman society. The most comprehensive is found in the *De Re Strategica* by Syrianos Magistros, which established the classes of the empire (τὰ τῆς πολιτείας μέρη) and their responsibilities towards society. Although not strictly ordered as a hierarchy, it is clear that there were vertical relationships between and horizontal relationship among the different classes of citizens. The elite comprised priests and state officials, while the bottom was populated by dependants (the infirm, the insane, the old, and the young, ‘gifts of God’ who deserve philanthropy),<sup>18</sup> and the servant class who ‘hire out their services’ in the performance of physically demanding labour.<sup>19</sup> Above them are the professionals or artisans (τό τεχνικόν), the great majority of the body of the citizenry, identified as ‘writers, public speakers, physicians, farmers, and those in like professions.’<sup>20</sup> They were distinct from three kinds of professions which are of notable interest to the state. The first were the

<sup>15</sup> Edited and translated in Rydén, *The Life of St Philaretos the Merciful Written by His Grandson Niketas*. See also Auzépy, “De Philarète, de sa famille, et de certains monastères de Constantinople”; Nesbitt, “The Life of St. Philaretos (702–792) and Its Significance for Byzantine Agriculture.”

<sup>16</sup> Maurice (Ps.), *Strategikon*, §I.2.62–74, I.5.16–24. Trans. Dennis, *Maurice’s Strategikon*.

<sup>17</sup> Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando Imperio*, §32.12; p. 153.

<sup>18</sup> Dennis, *Three Byzantine Military Treatise*, *De Re Strategica*, §I.14–16, 2. 34–36, 3.88–93; pp. 11–19.

<sup>19</sup> Dennis, *De Re Strategica*, §I.13–14; pp. 11–12.

<sup>20</sup> Dennis, *De Re Strategica*, §I.4, 2.20–24; pp. 11–13.

craftsmen (*τό ύλικόν*), smiths, carpenters, and ‘various people [who] furnish us with iron, naphtha, or whatever we need in exchange for gold or silver.’<sup>21</sup> The second were the merchants (*τό ἐμπορικόν*), ‘dealers in grain, wine and meat,’ who provided for everyone else what they lacked, but must be regulated lest they ‘defraud their customers by mixing in goods of poorer quality, or make an inordinate profit,’ or ‘charge excessive prices.’<sup>22</sup> Finally, there were the theatrical profession (*τό θυμελικόν*), which included ‘charioteers, musicians, actors and the like.’ Although now this class of citizen only existed within the Roman Empire, many other peoples used to have them, too.<sup>23</sup> Women, it appears, receive no special consideration as such. They were, perhaps, implicitly reckoned members of a domestic mirror of *τό τεχνικόν*, part of the great mass of Roman citizenry who supported society through their economic activity, be it seen or unseen.<sup>24</sup> The list combined political and economic status, and gives a contemporary taxonomic model of the relationships within Roman society.

Given that Syrianos is identified by title *μάγιστρος*, and that the texts imagine a readership belonging to senior military officers, it seems clear that the writer imagined himself as belonging to the social elite.<sup>25</sup> Can we get a clearer idea about the social contours of society’s literate elite? Syrianos embellished his works with occasional literary reference which situates his works in a shared intellectual context framed by the content of the *paideia*. He safely assumes an audience who will understand and appreciate both classical and biblical allusion.<sup>26</sup> We might get some idea of the horizontal sympathies of this class from passages in Procopius—who, although living at an earlier date, was likewise a military writer identifying with the state elite and an author who left behind a similar taxonomy of the entirety of Roman

<sup>21</sup> Dennis, *De Re Strategica*, §1.11–12, 2.28–32, 3.81–87; pp. 11–19.

<sup>22</sup> Dennis, *De Re Strategica*, §1.11, 2.25–27, 3.76–80; pp. 11–19.

<sup>23</sup> Dennis, *De Re Strategica*, §3.101–7; pp. 15–19.

<sup>24</sup> For more, see Kazhdan, “Women at Home.”

<sup>25</sup> The rank of *μάγιστρος* appears high in the list of precedence of the ninth-century *Taktikoon Uspenskij*, below *Caesar*, *Nobilissimus*, *Kouropalatēs*, and the *Zostē patrikia*, but above *Rector* and *Synkellos*. Oikonomidès, “Les Listes de Préséance Byzantines Des IXe et Xe Siècles,” 46–47. As for whether Syrianos had any practical experience of military command, opinions vary greatly. Dain, “Les Stratégistes Byzantins,” 343. More ambivalently: Dennis, *Three Byzantine Military Treatise*, 3; Pryor and Jeffreys, *The Age of the Dromōn*, 179–80.

<sup>26</sup> In his edition of *Rhetorica Militaris*, Eramo found explicit references to classical and biblical traditions, referencing Homer, Demosthenes, and Alexander the Great as well as Moses, Jesus and Paul. Eramo, *Discorsi di guerra Siriano*, 239–42.

society.<sup>27</sup> Presenting the egregious policies of Justinian and Theodora as harmful to society as a whole, Procopius nonetheless expressed his particular sympathy for, and expected his audience to sympathize with, the economic inconvenience of the most powerful individuals in society.

Many moneylenders were forced through sheer compulsion to restore to their debtors their contracts without having received back any part of their loan, and many persons not at all willing set their slaves free.<sup>28</sup>

Elite society in Syrianos' day likely still empathized with loan-sharks and slavers. Notably, the social world envisaged by both Procopius and Syrianos focused principally (although certainly not exclusively) on urban professions and social roles, a mark of continuity from the late antique into the early medieval period in spite of the apparent dramatic decline in populations and wealth. Cities remained at the heart of how the Roman elite saw themselves in their world.

In contrast to the martial-like structures of society imagined in the *De Re Strategica*, in the *Naumachia* Syrianos Magistros touched on a different motif for structuring society. He imagined what a commander could say to exhort would-be deserters to remain at their stations. Syrianos reasoned that a deserter betrayed God, faith, and his fellow believers, but he also betrayed his own wife, children, parents, and brothers.<sup>29</sup> In other words, on the one hand a deserter sins with respect to his duties as a citizen of a Christian Roman Empire, but he also dishonours and discredits his own kin, his household or *oikos*.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Procopius lists the following groups as being aggrieved by Justinians's rapacious policies: senators, the prosperous, soldiers, farmers, orators, merchants, ship-owners and sailors, artisans and tradesmen, actors, the poor and the handicapped, and priests. The information is not presented in terms of their vertical relationships to one another, but with respect to the common horizontal link as the entirety of Roman society. Procopius Caesariensis, *Opera Omnia*, Anecdota xxvi.16–18.

<sup>28</sup> Procopius Caesariensis, Anecdota vii.33.

<sup>29</sup> Syrianos Magistros, "Naumachia," 17.4–7. Trans. Pryor and Jeffreys, *The Age of the Dromōn*, 469.

<sup>30</sup> Identity functioned on multiple levels, and of course kin and kinship networks played a role in group formation for Romans as with other peoples. Making the connection between kin and tribe more explicit, van den Berghe argued that 'ethnicity is an extension of kinship and that the sentiments articulated with it are of the same nature as those encountered between kin, albeit typically weaker and more diluted.' Van den Berghe, *The Ethnic Phenomenon*, 239.

The heart of early medieval Roman social order was the family, which was conceived in terms of the *oikos*.<sup>31</sup> It provided a metaphor and conceptual framework for society on both the micro and macro scale. As a practical institution, the *oikos* rather than the individual formed the basic economic and social unit of Roman society. This unit was more than merely a modern nuclear-family household, comprising multiple generations of a bloodline as well as dependent servants, free and unfree.<sup>32</sup> As an economic unit, the *oikos* proved sustainable in supporting its members, for ‘leaving aside shortages and famines due to war or bad weather and other calamities, apparently the average peasant household produced enough for its subsistence, and more.’<sup>33</sup> The leaders of these households—typically but not invariably male—functioned as the primary social and economic representative of their dependants into the elite-dominated structures of bureaucracy and patronage on which the Roman world ran. Furthermore, the *oikos* served as one of the primary social models by which the Romans themselves described all manner of relationships and power structures. Neville summarized the ubiquity and utility of kinship-derived language as follows:

The relationships within the *oikos* formed a fundamental Christian metaphor for the relationships between God and creation. *Oikos* was an economic metaphor for the relationships between a landlord and those on his estates. It was a political metaphor for the relationships between the emperor and other rulers, and a monastic metaphor for the relationships between spiritual fathers or mother and monastic brothers or sisters. The relationships within the *oikos* were used to describe the relationships between teachers and students. The terminology of the *oikos* was of course also the standard language for describing relationships between the head of an actual household and its members: parents, children, siblings, familiars, servants, tenants, and slaves. Metaphorical or literal *oikos* could be allied or connected through various

<sup>31</sup> The *oikos* (or *domus* in Latin) was an important point of cultural continuity with the ancient world. Kate Cooper observed that “The *domus*, along with its aspects of family and dynasty, was the primary unit of cultural identity, political significance, and economic production.” Cooper, *The Virgin and the Bride*, 14.

<sup>32</sup> Sigalos, “Housing People in Medieval Greece.” For survey of earlier evidence, see: Ellis, “Shedding Light on Late Roman Housing.” For later evidence, see: Laiou, *Peasant Society in the Late Byzantine Empire*; Magdalino, “The Byzantine Aristocratic Oikos.”

<sup>33</sup> Laiou and Morrisson, *The Byzantine Economy*, 17.

ties of kinship, friendship, or geographic proximity. Houses could also form hierarchical associations through ties such as economic dependence.<sup>34</sup>

The early medieval *oikos* provided the language and framework by which all manner of relationships could be and were described. In its basic iteration, the household comprised a few generations of closely related family and their dependents, free and unfree. However, biological kin networks—what might be called familial clans—provided horizontal social links for society, which we see in action particularly among the better-documented elite. The *oikos* proved to be a flexible concept which could be applied to all manner of social relationships, particularly through the concept of spiritual kinship.

Familial language permeated early Christianity—the unity of the Trinity, after all, is expressed through kin relations of Father and Son. The Church was a bride, leaders were fathers or mothers, congregants and members of religious orders were brothers and sisters.<sup>35</sup> Some of these concepts are over-represented in surviving source materials because of the nature of their literary genres and authorial backgrounds. Works written by Maximus Confessor, Theodore Stoudites, Theophanes Confessor, and Ignatios the Deacon are fundamental to understanding this period. All were monks at one point or another in their lives which placed them into spiritual families as fathers and brothers. However, Christian notions of spiritual kinship permeated society in fundamental ways by this period which can be clearly seen in the law codes of the Isaurian era, specifically in the *Ekloga* which provided a concise digest of private laws concerning marriage, inheritance, property, and contracts.<sup>36</sup> The code was particularly interested in defining and regulating relationships which were perceived as incestuous, but the concepts of kinship found in these regulations blurred the distinction between biological and spiritual relationships.

Marriage is forbidden between those brought together in holy and salvation-bringing baptism, that is between a godfather and his god-daughter or her

<sup>34</sup> Neville, *Authority in Byzantine Provincial Society, 950–1100*, 67.

<sup>35</sup> Burrus, “Begotten, Not Made”; Rapp, *Brother-Making in Late Antiquity and Byzantium* *Monks, Laymen, and Christian Ritual*, esp. ch. 1.

<sup>36</sup> Humphreys, *The Laws of the Isaurian Era*, 13–18.

mother, or likewise between his son and his god-daughter or her mother; and also between those known to be related to one another by blood.<sup>37</sup>

That the state and civil apparatus had become interested in regulating these spiritual relationships demonstrates how deeply ingrained these concepts had become in early medieval Roman society. Indeed, Roman law had always been concerned with the private business of elite families—marriage, adoption, disinheritance, etc.—as part of its purpose of regulating the ownership and transfer of property. Blurred distinctions between biological and spiritual kinship point to the role these concepts played as rhetorical tools promoting narratives of social cohesion. Kinship and the *oikos* were specifically Roman concepts which had the potential to perform a similar social function to narratives about ethnicity and descent in other societies.

The head of the household, the *oikodespotes*, functioned as the legal and social representative for the whole group. As the gender of the noun implies, the *oikodespotes* was typically the father, but not invariably. Women could and did have public social roles as the heads of their *oikoi* as widows. Although rare, women could become actors within the typically male-dominated public spheres of society.<sup>38</sup> As a model for social interaction, the *oikos* presents the modern audience with a tessellated vision of society which can sometimes contrast sharply with categorizations built around class or ethnicity. Similar to the concept of ‘nesting’ identities advanced by Moerman and subsequent sociologists,<sup>39</sup> early medieval Roman social identities can be viewed as a fractal pattern repeating around the *oikos*. Peasant households attached themselves as *paroikoi* to landed elites, who in turn proclaimed themselves the *douloi* (slaves) to both God and the emperor.<sup>40</sup>

In this household role as wife and mother women fulfilled the most important social job in the eyes of the dominant male society, as guardians of a family’s sexual honour and producers of new generations of Roman

<sup>37</sup> Leo III and Constantine V, *Ecloga*, 2.2. Trans. Humphreys, *The Laws of the Isaurian Era*, 46.

<sup>38</sup> Neville, *Authority in Byzantine Provincial Society, 950–1100*, 70.

<sup>39</sup> Moerman, “Ethnic Identification in a Complex Civilization”; Okamura, “Situational Ethnicity”; Jenkins, “Rethinking Ethnicity.”

<sup>40</sup> Neville, *Authority in Byzantine Provincial Society, 950–1100*, 74–75, 85–93.

male citizens.<sup>41</sup> After all, in the most famous piece of medieval historical fiction loosely set in this era, the *Romance of Digenes Akrites*, the epic poem's hero, although of two (*di-*) ethnicities (*genes*) with an Arab Christian convert as a father, was a Roman because of his mother.<sup>42</sup> Although the text's forms are of a much later date, such is still indicative of social attitudes towards the role of women as wives and mothers in bearing and raising new generations of Romans. After all, the use of a household as a social model implied a certain degree of dynamic change of individuals within an ostensibly stable system. Households reinvent themselves with every generation: sons inherit or found new families; daughters move to a different clan to become the *despoina*; masters die and manumit their slaves; adults age and become dependent on younger generations for their support. From the peasantry to the imperial family, husbands and fathers could die unexpectedly, leaving their widows to manage the household until the children came of age. Describing relationships of approximate-equals as brother- or sisterhoods implied a certain degree of rivalry in addition to reciprocal support and obligation.

When compared with the attempt to present a modern analytical description of society, the contemporary taxonomic and household models are revealed to be partial, in both senses of the word. They present views of society which are both incomplete and biased, and as readers we need to be vigilant of the biases and distortions which they inevitably produced. However, these were the tools with which members of this society perceived and judged their relationship to it. Their conceptual framework forms the background for our exploration in the following section of the expression of social order and identity through the built environment.

<sup>41</sup> In a way, the one public non-religious role which women could play, that of prostitute, is also grounded in the paradigm of domestic expectations. Procopius' vicious character attacks on Theodora's time as a courtesan displays a consistent fascination with her destruction of bastards through abortions and the 'disappearance' of her adult son. This representation of her reproductive history is framed as the inverse of proper Roman domesticity, where a wife was expected to bear legitimate children for a husband. Procopius *Caesariensis, Opera Omnia, Anecdota*, ix.19; xvii.16, 17, 21–23.

<sup>42</sup> Jeffreys, "Literacy."

## 2 GEOGRAPHY AND IDENTITY IN RHOMANIA

The manner in which Roman society mapped itself onto the physical world had as much to do with cultural forces as with concerns for the lay of the land or access to resources. As L. Brubaker and Haldon noted,

It is important to bear in mind that the space within which human populations construct their habitations is itself in many respects also a social construct, and that perceptions of space, distance, and time as features which determine how people perceive their landscape and situate their settlements change according to other shifts in perception and beliefs about the world, as well as according to direct economic or political/ideological stimuli. Shifts in the hierarchy of settlement and in the relationships between settlements in the world of seventh- to ninth-century [Rhomania] thus also reflect broader perceptual changes, and this is an aspect that perhaps deserves greater attention from historians and archaeologists.<sup>43</sup>

The goal of this section is twofold. First, to explore how the physical patterns of life in Rhomania reflected and shaped the experience of people who lived there. In particular, patterns of public structures created physical spaces where communal performances relevant to people's experiences of a specifically Roman identity were enacted. Second, the changes to human geography in the early middle ages occurred in the context of local communities' sustained commitment to maintaining their heritage. Choosing to continue inhabiting the same physical spaces, and repurposing their monuments for use as communal spaces, reflect later generations' identification with their own cultural legacy. This is evidence for provincial and non-elite 'popular' sense of historical evolutionary continuity, in direct contrast to the myth of radical historical break found in our analysis of ninth-century 'orthodox' elite literature.

This section builds on existing archaeological surveys of the early middle ages, in particular works by Foss and the recent nuanced reinterpretations by Niewöhner.<sup>44</sup> The sites explored here have been principally selected from among their examples, notable for being well-documented in both the literary and archaeological records for the seventh, eighth, and early ninth centuries. After all, any 'group spread over a territory with

<sup>43</sup> Brubaker, Haldon, and Ousterhout, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era c. 680–850. A History*, 532.

<sup>44</sup> See especially: Foss, "Late Antique and Byzantine Ankara"; Niewöhner, "Archäologie Und Die 'Dunkeln Jahrhunderte' Im Byzantinischen Anatolien."

varying ecological circumstances will exhibit regional diversities of overt institutionalized behaviour which do not reflect differences in cultural orientation.<sup>45</sup> The advantage of a survey approach is that it seeks to minimize the noise in the data from ecology, instead seeking patterns which are indicative of the experience of the whole.

There are practical limitations on what sites can be covered. Denizens of several regions excavated troglodytic habitations from the rock, constructing private and public spaces different from those found in constructed villages, towns, and cities. Unlike built-settlements, where stratigraphy helps date different phases, rock-cut spaces do not tend to require the same periodic reconstruction. These included not only the numerous and world-renowned sites in Cappadocia, but also cities such as Aizanoi in Phrygia and Matera in Apulia, which had some early medieval activity attested through literary or sigilographic sources.<sup>46</sup> Especially in rock-cut sites which have been continuously inhabited for millennia, there is little archaeologically which can be used to identify period-specific use of space and thus performance of Roman identity at this time. Heterogeneous forms of settlement serve as a reminder that cities, towns, villages, and the countryside existed as a ‘continuum of settlement,’ and not simply as distinct classes of human space.<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, evidence for this survey, the outline of patterns and trends of a specifically Roman geography emerges. This section begins by exploring some of the pressures which applied to settlements throughout the Roman world before turning to three broadly defined geographical areas. In each, different kinds of contributing factors shaped the variety of responses which Romans gave to the challenges of keeping their communities alive through the early middle ages.

<sup>45</sup> Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, 12.

<sup>46</sup> J. Eric Cooper and Michael J. Decker, *Life and Society in Byzantine Cappadocia*, 21–26, 31–42.

<sup>47</sup> Whittow, “Recent Research on the Late-Antique City in Asia Minor: The Second Half of the 6th Century Revisited,” 151.

### *Demography and Patterns of Life*

Even with its much-reduced territory, the Eastern Roman Empire of the early medieval period still comprised vast, disparate territories. The variations of Roman experience which distinguished these regions experienced a transformation of human landscapes. In particular, the destruction of late antique public spaces was a widespread phenomenon reflecting changing civic organization and priorities and not necessarily caused by any particular crisis such as foreign invasion or plague.<sup>48</sup> Each example variates on this theme, but taken in aggregate they support a narrative of evolutionary change, where Roman communities constructed new Roman experiences quite literally out of and atop the old. Urban landscapes express physically a relationship between living people and a site's legacy. This gives insight into the space where slaves, peasants, and middling-class Romans performed their identities as citizens and subjects of the Roman Empire.

Romans themselves observed differences of human habitation patterns within and around their empire, and adapted actions and policies accordingly. A short, contemporary ethnography found in Book XI of the *Strategikon* provides insight into the nuance with which Romans could view the barbarian other. It records a commander's view of how to handle the empire's neighbouring peoples (*οἱ ἔθνοι*), singling out the Persians, the steppe nomads, the 'blond' races of the west, and the Sklavene. In particular, the author observes the unique settlement geography of the Sklavene tribes.<sup>49</sup> A sometimes-anachronistic nomenclature and stereotyped treatment of foreigners belies a remarkably dynamic understanding of the differences between places and peoples, and the impact of both society and ecology on the evolution of inhabited spaces over time.

Late antique Eastern Roman cities shared a specific set of easily recognizable public structures. These included basilica-plan churches; bath complexes laid out with three rooms (*frigidarium*, *tepidarium*, and *caldarium*) and a gymnasium; hippodrome, stadium and theatre; odeon and bouleuterion; agora or forum; colonnaded central thoroughfare; public water infrastructure including aqueducts and cisterns; and city walls protecting most or

<sup>48</sup> Cameron, *The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity AD 395–600*, 160–62.

<sup>49</sup> Maurice (Ps.), *Strategikon*, §XI.4. Trans. Dennis, *Maurice's Strategikon*.

all of the urban core. These patterns of Roman lifestyle were repeated across the empire.<sup>50</sup> These massive public infrastructure improvements supported shared patterns of life while allowing for local and regional variations across an otherwise vast and diverse empire.<sup>51</sup> Changes in religious culture, technology, climate, demographics, and political stability all impacted the size and shape of settlements and the experience of people living in and near them. The decline of the curial classes and the establishment of Christianity as the state-sponsored cult in the fourth century led to the repurposing of public structures as some of the first large churches of the empire. Thus new religious traditions were integrated into existing social and physical urban fabric. Similar changes also occurred at different times—urbanism in Africa, Italy, and Western Europe began to ‘decline’ in the fifth century, a similar process to what occurred in the Balkans, Anatolia, and the Levant in the sixth, seventh, and eighth centuries.<sup>52</sup>

Natural disasters also shaped the contours of human geography across the Mediterranean in this period. The Justinianic Plague which initially struck in AD 541 coincided with the first archaeological signs of urban decline. Outbreaks recurred periodically every half-decade or so until 750, after which point urban populations recovered and expanded at an increasing pace.<sup>53</sup> Population declined by as much as 30%, and the contraction in turn impacted both land use and regional ecology.<sup>54</sup> Fewer people meant that the intensity of land-use fell, and from the late sixth century onwards marginal lands were left fallow and allowed to fall out of economic

<sup>50</sup> Foss, “Archaeology and the ‘Twenty Cities’ of Byzantine Asia”; Kennedy, “From Polis to Madina: Urban Change in Late Antique and Early Islamic Syria”; Barnish, “The Transformation of Classical Cities and the Pirenne Debate”; Whittow, “Ruling the Late Roman and Early Byzantine City: A Continuous History”; Ward-Perkins, “The Cities”; Lavan, “The Late-Antique City: A Bibliographic Essay”; Liebeschuetz, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman City*, pt. I.

<sup>51</sup> Foss and Magdalino, *Rome and Byzantium*, 55–71.

<sup>52</sup> Foss and Magdalino, 71; Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West*, 376–568, 320–70.

<sup>53</sup> Rosen, *Justinian’s Flea*. See also the recent estimate of demographic changes based on archaeological evidence compiled in Cassis et al., “Evaluating Archaeological Evidence for Demographics, Abandonment, and Recovery in Late Antique and Byzantine Anatolia,” 393–95; Neil Roberts et al., “Not the End of the World? Post-Classical Decline and Recovery in Rural Anatolia,” 317–20.

<sup>54</sup> Laiou and Morrisson, *The Byzantine Economy*, 38–42.

exploitation.<sup>55</sup> In Pisidia, the ‘survivors of plague, earthquake and Arab invasions abandoned intensive farming [particularly olive culture and bovine husbandry], and survived by growing cereals and raising goat and sheep herds.’<sup>56</sup> The reduction in population and land use undermined the state’s system of taxation, which was fundamentally underpinned by agricultural production.<sup>57</sup> The diminished revenue stream in turn limited the state’s options for investing that money, contributing to the fiscal troubles which plagued the Roman government beginning at the latest during the reign of Maurice (582–602).

The military dangers posed by Persian and Arab attack against Anatolian cities in the seventh and eighth centuries prompted large-scale, sustained reinvestment in defensive infrastructure. ‘The new situation can be compared to what the Balkans, the Near East, and North Africa were facing two centuries earlier, and the same kind of defences were built.’<sup>58</sup> The exact form that building efforts took reflected the nature of local threats. In central Anatolia, where cities could expect ample warning of the approach of an enemy force, late antique city walls were maintained and significantly reinforced by new citadels, such as found at Amorion, Ancyra, and Euchaita. Along the southern Mediterranean and western Aegean coasts on the other hand, where raiders were able to descend rapidly and without warning, circuit walls were shortened, protecting the most defensible part of the settlements.<sup>59</sup> The new fortifications were mostly built into pre-existing urban sites, recommitting local communities to the geography which had defined their group for generations. Between *circa* AD 550 and 800, the shape of urban life evolved, continuing from previous physical and cultural traditions but changing to adapt to new situations.<sup>60</sup>

The early middle ages was a period of evolutionary change. The very monumentality of the early medieval cities connected the denizens with their city’s illustrious past. Archaeological excavations have shown how,

<sup>55</sup> Stathakopoulos, “Reconstructing the Climate of the Byzantine World: State of the Question and Case Studies.”

<sup>56</sup> Waelkens et al., “The Late Antique to Early Byzantine City in Southwest Anatolia,” 246.

<sup>57</sup> Eger, *The Islamic-Byzantine Frontier*, 248.

<sup>58</sup> Niewöhner, “Archäologie Und Die ‘Dunkeln Jahrhunderte’ Im Byzantinischen Anatolien,” 142.

<sup>59</sup> Niewöhner, 142–44; Niewöhner, “Byzantinische Stadtmauern in Anatolien. Vom Statussymbol Zum Bollwerk Gegen Die Araber,” 256–58.

<sup>60</sup> Foss and Magdalino, *Rome and Byzantium*, 94–96.

across Rhomania, people engaged with existing physical infrastructure. In a study of the new defensive structures built in the sixth and seventh centuries, Niewöhner noted how early medieval structures engaged in an architectural dialogue with the existing built environment.

The early [medieval] double-gate tower systems were, perhaps, influenced by Hellenistic models, which still impressively displayed the former abundance of power of the local city. ... Individuals apparently identified with these local historical monuments, because Side's gate appears on imperial coins of the city. In late antiquity/early [medieval] period, Hellenistic double-gate tower installations in Side, Ephesus and Sagalassos were renovated and served again as the main gates of the regenerated city walls. It was only natural to imitate this gate shape even when fully *ex novo* ring-walls were built. In this manner, they linked their own time to the essence of the Anatolian cities' Hellenistic zenith.<sup>61</sup>

Old urban monuments were not vain decorations, but sources of local pride and identification. That early medieval Romans chose to perpetuate the human geography inherited from late antiquity reflects an ideological commitment to an idea of what it meant to be Roman. This Roman identity, in turn, was reflected by local adaption and re-appropriation of the monumental past—such as these Hellenistic gatehouses, or the bath building at Sagalassos which was ‘repaired and transformed with a sense of monumentality’<sup>62</sup>—within built-environments.

Anatolian archaeology does show a period of sharp break in the historical record, though, a period when many communities underwent a disassociation between their experiences and the past, but it was half a millennium later. The Seljuk conquests in the late eleventh century initiated a multi-century long period where ancient hilltop sites, inhabited continuously for thousands of years, were abandoned, their Christian populations resettled often only a few miles away on less-defensible ground where they could be more easily controlled by their new Muslim masters.<sup>63</sup> In the second millennium, Xanthos and Patara in Lycia, Perge, and Myra in Pamphylia,

<sup>61</sup> Niewöhner, “Byzantinische Stadtmauern in Anatolien. Vom Statussymbol Zum Bollwerk Gegen Die Araber,” 259. Trans. by the author.

<sup>62</sup> Waelkens et al., “The Late Antique to Early Byzantine City in Southwest Anatolia,” 242.

<sup>63</sup> Seljuk-era human geography is described in Özcan, “The Anatolian Seljuk City Analysis on Early Turkish Urban Models in Anatolia,” 282–85.

Sagalassos in Pisidia, Aphrodisias in Caria, and Dorylaion in Phrygia all display similar patterns of change.<sup>64</sup> Roman cities built around and atop hilltops continuously inhabited since the Hittite period were abandoned and their populations removed to less-defensible nearby locations when conquered by the Turkish sultanates in the first half of the second millennium.

Nothing about geography predetermines that people must congregate where they did; choosing to reinvest in ancient sites was a socially charged and significant act reaffirming the relationship of contemporaries with a site's history. The Romans of the early middle ages, faced with economic malaise and an uncertain security situation, chose to continue their cities rather than abandon them. The fabric of these sites came to be altered dramatically. The civil monuments of late antiquity were neglected, ultimately falling into disrepair and ruin, but this was not the whole story of the sites. Rather than just decline, the cities of this era also played host to a series of massive reconstruction projects, beginning with the walls. These new fortifications wrapped the sites in historically and culturally significant skins; the Romans reused their own heritage to protect their future, laying the groundwork for future expansion. As we shall see, the protection of the urban cores created conditions which supported new developments, especially in ecclesiastic architecture but also in other major infrastructure investments, during this period.

### *Maintaining and Reinventing Built Space*

Like other sign systems generally and identities particularly, Romanness did not only refer to other labels or ideas, but implicated a range of symbols, experiences, and assumptions of which literature was only a small part.<sup>65</sup> The regional surveys of the empire's frontiers in past chapters looked for moments of differentiation, but the focus in this section is on the commonalities which shaped and defined life within the core lands of Rhomania. The built environment was shaped by social decisions just as it shaped social patterns and individual lives. Exploring the built environment allows us to ask, what were some of the implicit cultural experiences and assumptions which early medieval Romans might expect to

<sup>64</sup> Waelkens, "Rise and Fall of Sagalassos," 34; Waelkens et al., "The Late Antique to Early Byzantine City in Southwest Anatolia," 244; Niewöhner, "Byzantinische Stadtmauern in Anatolien. Vom Statussymbol Zum Bollwerk Gegen Die Araber," 144.

<sup>65</sup> Belsey, *Poststructuralism*, 12.

share with one another and differentiate them from others? This survey will progress in approximately a clockwise manner through the core Roman territories, beginning around the sea of Marmara, advancing eastwards into the central Anatolian plateau before descending to follow the southern coast, then continuing westwards across the Aegean into Hellas, which we will then follow north and west to end where we began. The goal is not to be comprehensive, but rather gain an indicative overall perspective.

Built spaces both reflect and create cultural differences. Even cultures which diverged from a common source evolve in different directions which become more pronounced over time. In late antiquity, cities across the Mediterranean had similar infrastructure and building styles—for example basilica churches, porticoed streets, gymnasia, baths, indoor spaces to host local governance and musical performances—supporting Roman civic traditions which they held in common.<sup>66</sup> As political and cultural uniformity disintegrated, the physical appearance of these cities began diverging, too. Just as early medieval elites differed in what aspects of late antique culture they preserved, adapted, or abandoned, this process played out across early medieval physical space, too. We cannot recapture unwritten and implicit understandings with which non-elite peoples wagered and negotiated identities, but archaeological remains suggest what differences could have been used in this process.

The Roman heartland in the early middle ages formed an arc reaching from the northern Aegean, across the Marmara basin and through Bithynia, Paphlagonia, and the Euxine coast in northern Asia Minor. Although state-level violence certainly shaped the patterns of life in this region (threats included civil wars; Avars, Sklavenes, and Bulgars in the Balkans; Persians and Saracens in Anatolia), it was not the endemic raids and brigandage which prevailed closer to the frontiers. This relative stability supported the steadiest patterns of human geography, where late antique cityscapes were the least altered. Constantinople, Thessalonica, and Nicaea all endured multiple major sieges in the seventh and eighth centuries. Other sites, such as Paphlagonian cities of Hadrianopolis and nearby Theodoroupolis/Saphrampolis, remained unfortified, protected by distance and local geography from barbarian attack, and demonstrating

<sup>66</sup>On historical evolution of these patterns, see Kennedy, “The Identity of Roman Gerasa”; Evangelidis, “Agoras and Fora,” 352–53; Osland, “Abuse or Reuse?” On space and identity more broadly see also Gupta and Ferguson, “Beyond ‘Culture,’” esp. 18–20.

the relative security of the region. Throughout the heartland, late antique street plans and public agorae continued in use, demonstrating the maintenance of strong civil authority and interest in maintaining the public geography of the cities. Aqueducts, baths, and water-storage systems continued to function, be repaired when derelict, and be used for their intended purposes. Examples include the baths of Zeuxippus in Constantinople which were in use through at least the second decade of the eighth century, indicating maintenance of population densities and cultural practices.<sup>67</sup> Large, basilica-plan churches established in earlier centuries were also maintained and sometimes rebuilt in the period, indicating sustained demand for use of their large spaces. The Isaurian emperors carried out other major public construction projects in Constantinople, including the ‘iconoclast’ rebuilding of Hagia Eirene and restoration work on the city’s aqueduct system in the 760s.<sup>68</sup> Similar investments were made in the Hagios Demetrios cathedral in Thessalonica and the Hagia Sophia cathedral in Nicaea.

Across the heartland, circuit walls, built to protect both urban and suburban areas, were defended, actively maintained, and repaired. Constantinople (Fig. 6.1) was home to the most ambitious fortification project of its day, protected by the outer Long or Anastasian Walls and the iconic Theodosian Walls, which enclosed not only the urban core but also much of the surrounding suburban countryside where the city’s vital water-storage cisterns were located.<sup>69</sup> The Theodosian Walls were sufficient to defend against sieges from the European, landward side, but relied upon Roman naval supremacy to complete the perimeter, as was done successfully during the joint Avar-Persian siege in the summer of 626.<sup>70</sup> The Roman’s loss of uncontested naval supremacy necessitated a major change to the city’s fabric. The Sea Walls were added around the peninsula

<sup>67</sup> Site of a failed miracle during the sixth ecumenical council, when the monothelete monk Polychronios tried unsuccessfully to resurrect a corpse. Schwartz, *Acta conciliorum oecumenicorum*, 2.2.2.674.12–678.16. Trans. Price and Gaddis, *The Acts of the Council of Chalcedon*. Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, AM 6205. Trans. Mango and Scott, *Theophanes’ Chronicle*, 533.

<sup>68</sup> Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, AM 6258. Trans. Mango and Scott, *Theophanes’ Chronicle*, 607–8.

<sup>69</sup> Foss and Winfield, *Byzantine Fortifications*, 41–78; Bayliss and Crow, “The Fortifications and Water Supply Systems of Constantinople”; Bono, Crow, and Bayliss, “The Water Supply of Constantinople: Archaeology and Hydrogeology of an Early Medieval City.”

<sup>70</sup> Anonymous, *Chronicon paschale*, 726. Trans. Whitby and Whitby, *Chronicon Paschale* 284–628 AD, 181.



**Fig. 6.1** Constantinople, Thrace. Left: obelisk of Theodosius (foreground) and obelisk of Constantine VII (distance), marking the spina of the hippodrome. Top: Theodosian Walls, which protect the city's European side. Bottom: aqueduct of Valens, substantially restored in the eighth century. Right: Hagia Eirene, substantially restored in the eighth century. (Images taken by the author in 2012)

in the seventh century, and a massive chain was slung across the mouth of the Golden Horn in the first half of the eighth century.<sup>71</sup> Of course, Constantinople was somewhat a special case. Public works invested into Constantinople reflect a political commitment to maintaining the social and ceremonial geography of the city. These presented a physical correlation to the ideology implicit in the tenth-century *Book of Ceremonies*, that identity in the present was derived from explicit references to social heritage.<sup>72</sup> The shape of the urban environment in Constantinople was inextricable from the Roman past and its imperial and ecclesiastical ideologies. Nevertheless, the patterns of urban development there find parallels in the other cities throughout the Roman world, showing that others were not neglected in its favour.

Elsewhere in the heartland, massive public works projects similar to those carried out in Constantinople also received imperial patronage. The most notable example of this is Nicaea (Fig. 6.2). Situated eighty miles from Constantinople astride the primary road east, the city was the meeting place for the first ecumenical council and administrative centre of the

<sup>71</sup> Foss and Winfield, *Byzantine Fortifications*, 53–55, 70; van Millingen, *Byzantine Constantinople The Walls of the City and Adjoining Historical Sites*, 164–77.

<sup>72</sup> Featherstone, “Der Große Palast von Konstantinopel: Tradition Oder Erfundung.”



**Fig. 6.2** Nicaea, Bithynia. Top: Roman theatre; Hagia Sophia, converted into a mosque; interior of Hagia Sophia; ruins of bath complex near the eastern Lefke gate; section of north wall restored in the eighth century. Bottom: aqueduct and Lefke gate; detail of spolia decorating tower near the northern Istanbul gate. (Images taken by the author in 2013)

Opsikion *strateia*. As such, it was a major target first for Persian and later Arab armies campaigning against Constantinople. Damaged by Saracen siege of 727 and earthquakes, the Isaurian dynasty funded a major renovation of the city's walls. Just over three miles in circuit, height was added to compensate for the increased ground level, and new towers were built to strengthen the defensive coverage.<sup>73</sup> Inscriptions proclaiming this imperial euergetism have been found around the city. These served not only to remind and reinforce the political and ideological loyalty of the city's residents to the ruling dynasty, but to Roman political institutions themselves.<sup>74</sup> Like with Constantinople, the public spaces of Nicaea reflected a continuing commitment to maintaining the entirety of a site as an urban environment in an identifiably Roman context.

By the time in which Ignatios was serving as bishop of Nicaea in the early ninth century, there were clear signs of population recovery and growth. Ignatios addressed the following to a tax collector on behalf of his subordinate, the bishop of the city of Taion.

The bishopric of Taion had for many years lost the title of bishopric and therewith the property deeds appertaining to her. ... Poverty encompasses her episcopal see because of the removal of her property deeds. ... Be master

<sup>73</sup> Foss and Winfield, *Byzantine Fortifications*, 81–82.

<sup>74</sup> Mango, “The Meeting Place of the First Ecumenical Council and the Church of the Holy Fathers at Nicaea,” 29–30.

of yourself and do not choose to withhold from the Church what is due to her from her former property, lest, by withholding it for a long time, you meet with an inexorable sentence at the infallible Tribunal yonder.<sup>75</sup>

Ignatios' epistle shows some effects of changing urban and rural landscapes in the empire's heartland. Taion was a minor city; its earlier incarnation, when it was named Tottaium, is attested sporadically during late antiquity, but it disappeared over the course of the sixth century.<sup>76</sup> The settlement's revival, and the official recognition of this fact with the restoration of its bishopric, appears to have occurred near the turn of the ninth century. During Ignatios' tenure as metropolitan, the legal situation of the bishopric was still in dispute. Taion is attested in episcopal lists and in the occasional seal through at least the eleventh century.<sup>77</sup> This epistle points to the issues of change and continuity in the physical world. Social identities shaped and were shaped by physical landscape which early medieval Romans inhabited.

In this recovery, it was the Church and its sacred geography which proved to be inspiration, guide, and shaper of the contours of an ever-evolving social geography. The military, the primary arm of the state in the frontier provinces, provided the impetus, organization, and social cohesion to keep the Romans extant as a peoples. However, it was their religious identity which provided that body with a purpose and meaning. Although other components of their cultural heritage still contributed to the Roman expression of group identity, pressure forced these aspects into the background. Populations certainly decreased as a result of war, pestilence, and changes in availability of foodstuffs, they remained sufficiently large to necessitate and support the old infrastructure. Despite periodic violence, this region bears witness to comparatively stable populations and the successful efforts of the polity to define and defend specific uses of human geography. Where it was possible, people continued to perform the habits and configurations of life which had been handed down to them from generations past.

As one travels east and south from Constantinople, the regions of inland Anatolia and its southern coast, while firmly part of early medieval

<sup>75</sup> Ignatios the Deacon, *Epistulae*, §17. Trans. Mango and Efthymiadis, *The Correspondence of Ignatios, the Deacon*, 57–59.

<sup>76</sup> Mango and Scott, *Theophanes' Chronicle*, 171.

<sup>77</sup> Laurent, *Le corpus des sceaux de l'Empire byzantin*, vol. 5, pt. number 398.

Rhomania, were comparatively exposed to raids and invasion. Persian and Arab armies attacked Asia Minor's inland cities and western coast—areas including Cappadocia, Galatia, Phrygia, Pisidia, and Lydia—early in the seventh century while *en route* to Constantinople. This precipitated urban changes in these areas beginning in the 610s and 620s which continued throughout the next century. The geography of the region, and the nature of Roman control, shaped the evolution of Roman cities. Because of the strategic depth of the Roman frontiers, invading armies were ‘shadowed by [Roman forces, who] designed an early warning system to notify towns prior to any attack. Thus, the towns seem to have felt confident that they would be able to either defend the full extent of their ancient circuits or do without any town walls at all.<sup>78</sup> The coastal regions, on the other hand, faced much less predictable threats. Muslim naval raiders (*razzia*) ‘left the towns close to the shore with no time to gather troops and men along the walls.’<sup>79</sup> Consequently, coastal cities shortened their circuit walls, which typically protected half or less of the old urban core. All cases reflect continuous community commitments to their local geographical heritage shaped by various necessities.

Ancyra (Fig. 6.3), situated in Galatia in central Anatolia, had been occupied since at least the second millennium BC. The security and prosperity of late antiquity allowed the city to fill in the valley around its central acropolis with the usual trappings of contemporary Roman civilization: theatre, baths, an Augusteum, and monuments such as a column dedicated to Emperor Julian (361–363) on the occasion of his passing through the city. These everyday structures which gave shape and definition to Roman life across the empire were here protected by a circuit wall encompassing the entire site. The early medieval period saw both continued inhabitation of the lower town—the church of St. Clemens was built probably in the latter seventh or early eighth century.<sup>80</sup> In addition, Constans II made a major infrastructure investment in the form of a new *kastron* built atop the acropolis which would henceforth anchor the city’s defences.<sup>81</sup> It served as military headquarters and probably as a site of refuge for the civilian inhabitants of the lower city. Although present

<sup>78</sup> Niewöhner, “Archäologie Und Die ‘Dunkeln Jahrhunderte’ Im Byzantinischen Anatolien,” 142.

<sup>79</sup> Niewöhner, 142.

<sup>80</sup> Niewöhner, 128 note 75.

<sup>81</sup> Belke, *Galatien Und Lykaonien*, 126–30; Foss, “Late Antique and Byzantine Ankara,” 74–80; Foss and Winfield, *Byzantine Fortifications*, 133–35.



**Fig. 6.3** Ancyra, Galatia. Top: walls of the temple precinct of Augustus and Rome, incorporated into the late antique circuit defences; Roman theatre and acropolis with seventh-century *kastron*; city-facing walls of the *kastron*; spolia used to face the *kastron* walls; outer walls of the *kastron*. Bottom: monumental bath complex; Julian's column. (Images taken by the author in 2013)

occupation makes it impossible to tell for certain, the evidence is suggestive of continuous habitation of the site throughout this period.<sup>82</sup> Ancyra's seventh-century walls show not only an impressive scale of resources and manpower, but of craftsmanship and dedication. The renewed walls of both city and *kastron* which faced settled areas and the main approaches were decorated 'entirely of spoils, the ruins of the ancient city, arranged carefully and often with a remarkable elegance.'<sup>83</sup> The inhabitants of Ancyra literally wrapped their settlement in decorative reminders of the city's past, physically using their cultural heritage to protect their future. Similar patterns were repeated across the empire.<sup>84</sup>

Both coastal and inland sites in Lycia, the southernmost promontory of western Anatolia, show the effects of the demographic, economic, and ecological pressures which became acute around the middle of the sixth century. These cities had the same late antique trappings as those elsewhere, and some, such as Andriake, Patara (Fig. 6.4), and Perge, had been extremely wealthy owing to their positions as ports along the

<sup>82</sup> Niewöhner, "Archäologie Und Die 'Dunkeln Jahrhunderte' Im Byzantinischen Anatolien," 142–43.

<sup>83</sup> Foss and Winfield, *Byzantine Fortifications*, 134.

<sup>84</sup> Foss and Winfield, 135–36.



**Fig. 6.4** Patara, Lycia. Top: necropolis (left hill) situated along the via leading to Xanthos, with triumphal Arch of Modestus (centre); view across the silted-in harbour of the granary. Middle: late antique circuit walls; central bath complex; northern bath house with medieval shops in the foreground; view of the theatre from atop the reconstructed bouleterion; main colonnaded via proceeding from the harbour. Bottom: tenth-century chapel built into the late antique basilica; seventh-century kastron (left hill) with southern bath house in middle distance. (Images taken by the author in 2013)

Alexandria-to-Constantinople grain route.<sup>85</sup> Besides the usual public buildings including circuit walls, theatres, stadions, and water systems, Patara hosted three massive public bath complexes and Perge had not one but two large basilica-plan churches, ostentatiously demonstrating the wealth of their civic patrons.<sup>86</sup> However, even before the arrival of endemic violence beginning in the second half of the seventh century, there were signs of significant population decline. Earthquakes were a constant threat to buildings there, as is still the case, periodically toppling structures which, if still in demand, had to be rebuilt.<sup>87</sup> In the Christianized sanctuary-city of Letoon, located a couple of miles downstream from the larger city of Xanthos in Lycia (Fig. 6.5), earthquakes toppled public stoas in

<sup>85</sup> Waelkens et al., “The Late Antique to Early Byzantine City in Southwest Anatolia,” 206–7.

<sup>86</sup> Harris and Harris, “A New Way to Draw Archaeological Remains.”

<sup>87</sup> Procopius Caesariensis, *Opera Omnia*, De Aedificia II.xiv.6; VII.xxix.4, 5, 17; VIII. xxv.16–18, 23. Anecdota xviii.41–42.



**Fig. 6.5** Xanthos, Lycia. Top: seventh-century kastron walls; main via through the city. Bottom: kastron walls (detail), note particularly the use of spolia; theatre, showing the location of the kastron atop its hill; upper agora (foreground) with ancient acropolis (behind); late antique basilica church, the baptistery of which was repurposed as a church in circa the tenth century. (Images taken by the author in 2013)

*circa* the 570s, which were never restored.<sup>88</sup> An earthquake in the mid to late seventh century disrupted local aquifers around Sagalassos and undermined its status as the principal urban centre of its region.<sup>89</sup> A trend towards abandonment of and encroachment upon public spaces associated with the ‘classical’ city is found elsewhere in these frontier cities as other types of social and political pressures mounted.<sup>90</sup> Economic, demographic, and climactic pressure limited communities’ options when they were required to respond to disasters and reflected, at least on the local level, a social disengagement from the norms of urban architecture which had been a standardized and unifying feature throughout the empire.

Southwest Anatolia was a major source for the timber for the empire’s fleet, adding a strategic component to Arab attacks on the region’s coastal cities. While the smallest sites, like Letoon, were abandoned, larger cities experienced a military-driven building boom. Across the region, the older circuit walls, dating to the late antique or even classical era, were reinforced and shortened. Depending on local geography, new *kastra* were

<sup>88</sup> Le Roy, “Le Développement Monumental Du Létōon de Xanthos”; Davesne, “The Area around the Porticos of the Letoon in Xanthus.”

<sup>89</sup> Waelkens et al., “The Late Antique to Early Byzantine City in Southwest Anatolia,” 244–47.

<sup>90</sup> Waelkens et al., 205–6.

also added, either built atop an acropolis within the city as happened at Xanthos, or on a more defensible site no more than a few *stades* from the old city centre as happened at Arykanda. They often incorporated older structures, such as the theatre in Aphrodisias, Patras, and Xanthos, or the platform of the Augoustaeum at Sagalassos. This practice indicates that these structures were no longer relevant for fulfilling their original function.<sup>91</sup>

With defences contracted and the complete sites no longer protected, the late antique public infrastructure was often repurposed. Many monumental bath complexes proved too large in their original states for the reduced communities' needs. Most were abandoned, too large, too exposed, and too expensive to operate. Many were quarried for their marble for the production of lime, necessary for the continued redevelopment of cities in the early middle ages. Some, such as the northern bath at Patara, had shops built into them, destroying their public nature. Others, such as the larger complex at Arykanda, were rebuilt as smaller baths within the old structures, taking advantage of the water infrastructure. In Sagalassos (Fig. 6.6), part of the bath complex was converted in the early sixth century into a public latrine, which 'demonstrates a continuing concern for urban sanitation and evidence ... that public infrastructure was still well maintained in large part.'<sup>92</sup>

Some large basilica churches and cult sites also fell into ruin in this period, not having large enough populations to justify their repair and restoration—such appears to have been the fate of the twin basilica churches in Perge. However, many of these sites continued to be used, and in some cases new, smaller churches were constructed *within* the ruins of the late antique basilica churches, as happened at Xanthos, Patara, and Hierapolis. Elsewhere, new churches were built in more central locations as late antique basilica sites were ignored. At both Hierapolis and Perge, new churches were built adjacent to and partially atop the cities' main *via*, demonstrating both the breakdown of clear demarcation of the old public spaces for their original intended use, and the continued significance of those public spaces to the people living there.<sup>93</sup>

<sup>91</sup> Foss, "The Lycian Coast in the Byzantine Age," 9–14; Niewöhner, "Archäologie Und Die "Dunkeln Jahrhunderte" Im Byzantinischen Anatolien," 141, 143–44.

<sup>92</sup> Waelkens et al., "The Late Antique to Early Byzantine City in Southwest Anatolia," 242.

<sup>93</sup> On the breakdown of public space generally, see Lavan, "The Political Topography of Th Late Antique City: Activity Spaces in Practice," 332.



**Fig. 6.6** Sagalassos, Pisidia. Top: processional via into city, with Augousteion in middleground, atop which are the ruins of the seventh-century kastron; medieval church built within the temple of Delphi; lower agora, with nymphaeum; tholos in the middle agora; theatre with bath complex in distance. Middle: late antique circuit walls; extramural basilica church built within the stadium; odeon. Bottom: upper agora, with upper nymphaeum in the centre and the site of the bouleterion, converted into a church in late antiquity, to the left of it. (Images taken by the author in 2013)

Three of Sagalassos churches typify ways in which public spaces could be reused under changing cultural paradigms.<sup>94</sup> The first church, a tripartite basilica, was created by repurposing the courtyard of the city's former bouleterion, adjacent to the city's upper agora.<sup>95</sup> The reuse of civic spaces, made available by the decline of local governance over the course of late antiquity, is also reflected in the conversions of the odeon at Selge in Pisidia and the civic basilicae in Aphrodisias and Kremma in Pisidia into churches.<sup>96</sup> A later extramural transept-basilica was built in the old stadion at Sagalassos, much like St. Peter's in Rome was built atop the former

<sup>94</sup> Kraufheimer, “The Constantinian Basilica,” 130–40.

<sup>95</sup> Waelkens et al., “The Late Antique to Early Byzantine City in Southwest Anatolia,” 224.

<sup>96</sup> Stinson, “The Civil Basilica of Aphrodisias,” 1–10; Waelkens et al., “The Late Antique to Early Byzantine City in Southwest Anatolia,” 224.

Circus of Nero.<sup>97</sup> This reflected a changing use of outdoor gaming and performance spaces, seen elsewhere by late antique modifications to the stadia and theatres of Aphrodisias, Xanthos, Patara, Ancyra, and Perge. However, this large church, situated several stades from the Sagalassos city core, was neglected by medieval residents, who built a third church within the old monumental temple of Apollo, situated centrally near the *kas-tron*.<sup>98</sup> Other communities similarly remodelled and rededicated the temple of Aphrodite at Aphrodisias, the temple of Zeus Kesbelios at Selge in Pisidia, the Parthenon at Athens, and the Pantheon in Rome. These conversions, carried out between the sixth and eighth centuries, signalled not just the extinction of local, pre-Christian cults, but a continued engagement by communities with their own pagan monumental past. It is at this comparatively late date that ‘Christian monuments came to dominate the monumental centre … [where] the privileged topographical position of these sanctuaries within the cities, together with their large size, provided important gathering places for the Christian congregation.’<sup>99</sup>

While most urban sites continued to house communities throughout these centuries, in some locations, often as a result of economic and military pressures, smaller and more exposed settlements (such as Letoon in Lycia and Hadrianopolis in Paphlagonia) were abandoned. Some populations turned to pastoralism as a means of creating more-portable wealth, which could be moved out of harm’s way.<sup>100</sup> Christian pastoralists and nomads formed a poorly documented but vital component of frontier society. Their interactions with non-Christians, be it the Sklavene tribes in the Balkans or nomadic Saracens in Asia, represent an area where identity boundaries could be established and negotiated through conflict and accommodation. They served a vital economic role, raising the sheep whose wool and meat were among the most viable exports from the Empire’s upland interior.<sup>101</sup>

The cities of the Mediterranean and Aegean coasts included ancient sites like Athens and Ephesus and new colonies like Monemvasia (Fig. 6.7). They were more secure than those of Asia Minor’s south, yet not as stable

<sup>97</sup> Waelkens et al., “The Late Antique to Early Byzantine City in Southwest Anatolia,” 241.

<sup>98</sup> Waelkens et al., 241–42.

<sup>99</sup> Waelkens et al., 241.

<sup>100</sup> Waelkens et al., 240, 243.

<sup>101</sup> Eger, *The Islamic-Byzantine Frontier*, 257–63.



**Fig. 6.7** Monemvasia, Hellas. The city was established around the turn of the seventh century on a new, more defensible location. Top: view from the mainland, including modern causeway to the right; view of the entrance to the upper town from the lower. Bottom: remains of the citadel, with the mainland Peloponnese in the distance. (Images taken by the author in 2010)

as the northern cities around the imperial heartland. Many of the same demographic pressures applied to this region as elsewhere, but in addition its residents were occasionally resettled elsewhere to bolster populations. Justinian II removed and resettled Sklavene tribes from the Balkans to Asia Minor in the late 680s and early 690s,<sup>102</sup> while Constantine V drew labour from throughout the Aegean basin for his systematic restoration of Constantinople's aqueducts and infrastructure in the 760s.<sup>103</sup> As elsewhere, many old settlement sites continued to function as population centres, where local populations choosing to update the physical spaces rather than relocate.

<sup>102</sup> Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, AM 6180, 6184. Trans. Mango and Scott, *Theophanes' Chronicle*, 508, 511.

<sup>103</sup> Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, AM 6258. Trans. Mango and Scott, *Theophanes' Chronicle*, 607–8.

Most of these cities had circuit walls built in the classical or late antique period. In Asia Minor, these defences were not completely abandoned, but new walls were added shortening their length and re-fortifying smaller urban cores.<sup>104</sup> At sites such as Miletus, Ephesus, Pergamum, and Sardis, new city walls left large areas of the late antique cityscape abandoned, outside the new fortifications.<sup>105</sup> The new walls at Miletus, built during the middle of the seventh century, incorporated some of the ancient city walls but also added new walls to make the enclosed territory smaller, its perimeter more manageable.<sup>106</sup> New walls were beautified by incorporating complete monuments and *spolia* from derelict structures—a practice which led past generations of archaeologists at Ephesus to tear them down and ‘reassemble’ the earlier structures.<sup>107</sup> As seen in the Lycian cities, theatres were utilized as natural fortresses, again attesting that they had fallen out of their original use.<sup>108</sup> Additionally, the extramural pilgrimage site of the church of St. John at Ephesus was fortified with its own *kastron* walls. Here, too, the result reflected a considered effort by a local community to recycle its heritage in response to new situations. Although this shows a decline of the urban populations to the point that the old walls were indefensible, other public spaces were maintained successfully. Unlike the frontier cities of Patara and Hierapolis whose pavements became rutted messes and which were overbuilt with new structures, the pavement of Ephesus remain without wheel-ruts, signs that public order continued to be enforced. The massive late antique basilica churches, such as St. Mary and St. John in Ephesus, continued in use throughout the early medieval period, showing that there remained sufficient local population to support them and justify repairs and upkeep.

Across the Aegean, a different type of frontier influenced the shape of urban settlement in Hellas. Migrating Sklavene tribes were present in many rural areas, while the cities remained Roman.<sup>109</sup> As a result, low-level endemic conflict limited imperial reach throughout the period to the area’s urban centres and their immediate hinterland. These cities had to be

<sup>104</sup> Niewöhner, “Archäologie Und Die ‘Dunkeln Jahrhunderte’ Im Byzantinischen Anatolien,” 144–45.

<sup>105</sup> Foss and Winfield, *Byzantine Fortifications*, 135–36.

<sup>106</sup> Niewöhner, “The Riddle of the Market Gate.”

<sup>107</sup> Foss, “Archaeology and the ‘Twenty Cities’ of Byzantine Asia,” 472–75.

<sup>108</sup> A pattern seen elsewhere, for example Caesarea where the theatre also became part of its *kastron* walls. Retzleff, “Near Eastern Theatres in Late Antiquity,” 127.

<sup>109</sup> Curta, *Southeastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 500–1250*, 96–110.

protected against this type of tribal violence, and not against the well-organized sieges which threatened the cities of the Anatolian frontiers or, occasionally, the larger cities of the Roman heartland further north. As a result, cities centred upon defensible acropoleis, such as Athens, Corinth, and Patras, saw their urban cores retreat behind new *kastron*-like walls. Other populations, whose original settlements were indefensible, founded new colonies, such as the island-city of Monemvasia. As elsewhere, the monumental past was, where possible, recycled, such as the Parthenon in Athens which was converted into the city's principal church, dedicated to Mary.<sup>110</sup> Although there was at times considerable disruption to the human geography of the southern Balkans, where possible populations continued to draw significance from the landscapes shaped by past generations of Romans.

Roman cities, repositories of wealth accumulated over the relatively pacific centuries of late antiquity, were priority targets for foreign invaders. With limited manpower and monetary resources, communities were faced with difficult choices: what was necessary to be protected, what could be abandoned? Their responses shed light on their society's priorities and the collective behaviours which were necessary components in the group's self-propagation and identity. Some public spaces—baths, theatres, and bouleteria, for example—were pillaged for their materials. Their fabric became the walls which gave protection and definition to the settlements' new incarnation, recycling the monuments of classical 'secular' public spaces to define the new contours of the cities. On the other hand, Christianized public spaces (i.e. churches, monasteries, or pilgrimage sites) fared better. Churches were among the last buildings on a site to be abandoned, while new churches were among the first signs of urban recovery and re-expansion in the later eighth and ninth centuries.<sup>111</sup> When and where choices had to be made, populations across the Roman Empire prioritized preserving religious geography over other forms of public space usage.

The life of Roman cities underwent a tremendous transformation between AD 550 and 850 which remoulded the lives of their denizens in profound ways. Archaeology and literature evidence systemic change to political society and the economy. These implications are significant in

<sup>110</sup> Kaldellis, *The Christian Parthenon*.

<sup>111</sup> Niewöhner, "Bronze Age Hüyüks, Iron Age Hill Top Forts, Roman Poleis, and Byzantine Pilgrimage in Germia and Its Vicinity."

their own right, but can only tell an indirect story about Romanness.<sup>112</sup> Just as the remarkable variability of modern cities reflects the combined effects of environment, history, and culture, we find the same influences shaping the cities of Rhomania. They shared a common cultural origin with other regions of the Mediterranean, grounded in late antique Roman urbanism, but their subsequent divergent political and social history played a role in shaping their fabric. These environments were inhabited by all of society, not just the small literary elite, and so provide some of the ‘raw materials’ on which all inhabitants of Rhomania could draw upon to establish their participation in the Roman group and differentiation from the barbarous other. Evidence gathered from major archaeological sites across the Roman world shows patterns which inform the discussion about what it meant to be a Roman in this time across a great variety of space. Across Anatolia and the southern Balkans, communities retained their geographical location and recycled the architectural fabric of the monumental late antique past: life patterns evolved from past precedent.<sup>113</sup> In other parts of the empire—in the Crimea, Africa, Italy, and the islands—some pressures were the same, some different. In each area, the responses were unique to the local situation, but in all cases adhered to an evolutionary pattern. Communities rarely ‘collapsed,’ but actively navigated the challenges posed by plague, famine, climactic changes, earthquakes, brigandage, and war. The responses of local communities to these challenges drew strength and meaning from their heritage.

### 3 FAMILY, POWER, AND ROMAN WOMEN

On Saturday morning, 15 August [797, friends of Eirene] confined [the emperor, Constantine VI] to the *Porphyra*, where he had been born. About the 9th hour they blinded him in a cruel and grievous manner with a view to making him die at the behest of his mother and her advisers. The sun was darkened for seventeen days and did not emit its rays so that ships lost course and drifted about. Everyone acknowledged that the sun withheld its rays

<sup>112</sup> Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century*, 93–99.

<sup>113</sup> For detailed look at Cappadocia and the Isaurian frontier, see J. Eric Cooper and Michael J. Decker, *Life and Society in Byzantine Cappadocia*, 18–23; Eger, *The Islamic-Byzantine Frontier*, 252–53.

because the emperor had been blinded. In this manner his mother Eirene acceded to power.<sup>114</sup>

In such terms Theophanes Confessor, a contemporary writing about fifteen years after these events, recorded the ascension of Eirene of Athens as emperor of the Romans. Although powerful imperial women had previously acted as regents, Eirene's five-year reign marked the first time a woman directly held the office of emperor in her own name with no apparent intention of ceding power to a husband or son. Her reign casts a long shadow over the period, and indeed over this book's central questions. Was her reign anomalous or discontinuous with Roman constitutional order? Even more fundamentally, as a woman from a provincial family who usurped the throne from her own legitimate son, how 'Roman' was Eirene? We will return to Eirene, but first we need to build up some context for her life, in order to paint a picture of whether and how Romanness mattered to women who inhabited Rhomania.

It is clear, from even a cursory familiarity with the early medieval period, that a person's gender played a major role in how they lived their lives. Whether it be with respect to a person's place in their household, their economic occupation and status, their relationship to Christianity, or their rights and obligations as enshrined in Roman law, the potential avenues of a life were heavily restricted based on whether a person was a man, a woman, or a eunuch. Eunuchs were an important part of elite society in this period, some holding key positions within the imperial household and leading offices both secular and religious, but there were never very many of these castrated individuals.<sup>115</sup> Women, on the other hand, comprised around half of society, but existence alone is not identity. A woman's place in society—her social identity—was determined not by actions but by how her actions were given meaning through social interaction.<sup>116</sup> When it comes to the relationship between Romanness and the female gender, there are two interrelated questions driving this study. First, how did the fact of being a Roman affect a woman's life? Second, how did the fact of being a woman affect a Roman's life? For the first question, we can look

<sup>114</sup> Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, AM 6289. Trans. Mango and Scott, *Theophanes' Chronicle*, 648–49.

<sup>115</sup> On eunuchs in the early medieval Roman world, see Ringrose, *The Perfect Servant*; Tougher, *The Eunuch in Byzantine History and Society*; Ringrose, "The Byzantine Body," 371–75; Tougher, "Bearding Byzantium: Masculinity, Eunuchs and the Byzantine Life Course."

<sup>116</sup> Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," 1067.

to Roman law, both in its formulation and its practical exercise, to see women's Romanness in action. We will then turn to some specific lives—and historical specifics mean the empire's elite families—to explore some of the life trajectories which were socially acceptable for at least some women as Romans.

Neither Syrianos Magistros' social taxonomy nor in the similar list of groups found in Procopius' work explicitly mentioned women or uniquely women's professions.<sup>117</sup> These were models of public roles in the context of the Roman polity, and women were not supposed to be part of the public sphere of Roman society. In theory, they belonged entirely to a domestic order hidden from the public world of state, educational, and religious institutions.<sup>118</sup> Procopius described the ideals looked for in a Roman wife as 'in the highest degree both well-born and blessed with a nature sheltered from the public eye, a woman who had not been unpractised in modesty, and had dwelt with chastity, and was not only surpassingly beautiful but also still a maiden and, as the expression runs, erect of breast.'<sup>119</sup> In other words women's behaviours should be subordinate, virtuously chaste, and most importantly kept at home.<sup>120</sup> In practice, women occasionally emerge from extant sources as actors within nominally masculine social spaces, though their performance of public Roman roles were principally shaped by their domestic positions.

Ideologically, women's place in society was clearly defined, and in most ways it was inferior to that of men.<sup>121</sup> 'It is fair to say that Byzantine society

<sup>117</sup>The possible exception would be the one profession Syrianos thought was unique to Roman society, entertainers, which might *implicitly* include prostitutes Procopius Caesariensis, *Opera Omnia*, xxvi.16–18; Dennis, *Three Byzantine Military Treatise*, De Re Strategica, §1.14–16, 2. 34–36, 3.88–93. Procopius did mention harlots as an aggrieved party to Justinian and Theodora's abuse, just not among his summary. Procopius Caesariensis, *Opera Omnia*, Anecdota, xvii.5–6.

<sup>118</sup>Kazhdan, "Women at Home."

<sup>119</sup>Procopius Caesariensis, *Opera Omnia*, Anecdota, x.2.

<sup>120</sup>In her study of Roman women in late antiquity, Kate Cooper reminds us that the modern notion of a strict delineation between public and private lives is not universal, "the notion of a 'private' sphere divested of 'public' significance would have seemed impossible (and undesirable) to the ancient mind." Cooper, *The Virgin and the Bride*, 14. See also Cooper, "Closely Watched Households."

<sup>121</sup>The place of women in late antique and medieval Roman society has received considerable attention in recent scholarship. Prominent works on holy women include Brock and Harvey, *Holy Women of the Syrian Orient*; Talbot, *Holy Women of Byzantium: Ten Stints' Lives in English Translation*; Talbot, *Women and Religious Life in Byzantium*. Important studies

was misogynist and patriarchal, in our terms, for the prevailing ideology towards women regarded them as inferior beings to men, weak, untrustworthy, and ranked with children, the mentally deranged, and slaves as unfit to give public testimony. ... Men and male behaviour was the norm; women's roles were conditioned by this.<sup>122</sup> The great majority of Roman women fulfilled the vital yet historically silent social roles of wives, mothers, guardians of their family's sexual purity, and pillars of the stability and continuity of their *oikos*.<sup>123</sup> Outside the household, the Christian literary trope of Eve and Mary defined two contradictory views on women. Despite a familiar list of misogynist appellations the story of Eve implied (weak, duplicitous, sinful, seductress), the *theotokos* validated women as spiritual beings equal to men in the eyes of God. As both a virgin and a mother, Mary could act as the spiritual model for women at any stage in their life. Asceticism and emulation of the Mother of God was thus a viable alternative life path to the otherwise socially defined norm of marriage, motherhood, and widowhood.<sup>124</sup> Of course, the Roman women whose lives are recounted among the saints are overwhelmingly mothers, wives, or daughters of the empire's elite families. For Romans of any gender, class and family wealth played a large role in determining what social paths were available.

### *Women in Law*

This work has explored how the Roman signifier could point to numerous sometimes contradictory meanings, but one of the most stable of them was its legal aspect. Romanness was a legal status, enshrined in law, and early medieval Roman law gave women certain rights (alongside numerous restrictions) as Romans. These rights were restricted and did not apply to all who lived in Rhomania—slaves living in the empire were not legally Romans, and some areas had a mixed free population, some of whom were Romans, others not. That such differences mattered in practice is attested, for example, in a surviving testament from tenth- or eleventh-century Calabria. In this time and place, Romans and Lombards lived together working under theoretically separate legal systems. A testament, preserved in the archives of

on their place in civil society include Holum, *Theodosian Empresses*; Beaucamp, *Le statut de la femme à Byzance (4e–7e siècle)*; Garland, *Byzantine Empresses*; Connor, *Women of Byzantium*.

<sup>122</sup> James, "The Role of Women," 644.

<sup>123</sup> James, 644–45.

<sup>124</sup> Galatariotou, "Holy Women and Witches: Aspects of Byzantine Concepts of Gender."

the Church of St. Nicholas of Bari, was written by a woman in order to free her slave as was her right according to Roman law, with the result that he should be ‘free and a Roman citizen (πολίτης Ῥωμαίων).’<sup>125</sup> Her rights as a Roman differed from her neighbour’s rights under Lombard law, and she was capable of and interested in exercising them.<sup>126</sup> So what did it mean for a woman in the early medieval period to legally be classified as a Roman?

Thanks to the recodification of the civil law under the Isaurian emperors, a relatively clear picture of the laws governing everyday Roman life survives. These codes—the *Ekloga*, *Soldier’s Law*, *Farmer’s Law*, *Rhodian Sea Law*, and the *Mosaic Law*—updated, condensed, and translated the sixth-century *Corpus Iuris Civilis*. Changes were sometimes practical, such as the use of Greek instead of Latin, and sometimes ideologically charged.<sup>127</sup> As in the late antique law codes, the application of Roman law depended greatly on status: age, wealth, titles, freedom or enslavement, mental fitness, reputation, marital history, and, of course, gender. To choose but one demonstrative example of this, we can look at statute 17.29 of the *Ekloga*, which proscribes what should happen if a man has sex with a virgin with her consent but without the consent of her family.<sup>128</sup> Ideally, they should be married, but if one of the parties is unwilling then the man receives punishment according to his status:

If the seducer is wealthy he shall give one pound of gold to the corrupted girl; but if he has less means then he shall give her half of his property. But if he is utterly destitute and without means, then he shall be beaten, have his head shaved and then be exiled.<sup>129</sup>

The punishments are calibrated according to the man’s economic situation, where the wealthiest must pay a modest fine but the poorest will receive corporal punishment before being expelled from Rhomania. Given

<sup>125</sup> Peters-Custot, “Between Rome and Constantinople: The Romanness of Byzantine Southern Italy,” 237 and note 29.

<sup>126</sup> Standing out among the so-called barbarian law codes, ‘Lombard law seems most categorical in denying women control over property.’ Nelson and Rio, “Women and Laws in Early Medieval Europe,” 111.

<sup>127</sup> The most unusual of the changes was the introduction of the *Mosaic Law*, which selectively assembles Old Testament laws intended to demonstrate their relationship to Roman law. Humphreys, *The Laws of the Isaurian Era*, 29–31.

<sup>128</sup> On *raptus*, see Karlin-Hayter, “Further Notes on Byzantine Marriage,” esp. 136–44.

<sup>129</sup> Leo III and Constantine V, *Ecloga*, 17.29. Trans. Humphreys, *The Laws of the Isaurian Era*, 74.

this, it will come as no surprise that the rights, obligations, and freedoms which a woman might enjoy under Roman law varied significantly, for her status was not defined by her gender alone.

As this example indicates, the recodification of Roman law under the Isaurian dynasty generally—and the *Ekloga* especially—were very concerned with regulating marriage and sexual propriety. Although betrothals could be arranged as young as the age of seven, marriage could not happen until both partners legally consented as adults, for boys at age fifteen and for girls at age thirteen.<sup>130</sup> A Roman woman could inherit and own property, and her dowry remained legally separate from her husband's property—for example, if he died in debt, her property was protected from his creditors.<sup>131</sup> The laws assume that an unmarried adult woman would be a member of her childhood *oikos*, but once she married she came under her husband's legal authority. The only legal space for independent action occurred if she bore children and became widowed. The primary legal restrictions on widows concerned what happened if they remarried. A woman who remarried must surrender guardianship (specifically meaning the management of the property and inheritance) of the children from her first marriage. A ban on remarrying within the first twelve months following her spouse's death likely arose out of a concern for preserving the legitimacy for both any posthumous child as much as for any children produced by the new marriage.<sup>132</sup> However, so long as she did not remarry, a widow became the head of her family. This status endowed her with legal responsibility to: manage her own and her deceased husband's property (which she is expected to inventory upon his death); to raise and educate her children; and to arrange their marriages. Her children could take control of their father's property only if she remarried—a similar restriction was placed on widowers, who likewise were only expected to surrender a deceased wife's property to his adult children if he had remarried.<sup>133</sup>

<sup>130</sup> Leo III and Constantine V, *Ecloga*, 1.1; 2.1. Trans. Humphreys, *The Laws of the Isaurian Era*, 45–46.

<sup>131</sup> Leo III and Constantine V, *Ecloga*, 3.2. Trans. Humphreys, *The Laws of the Isaurian Era*, 52.

<sup>132</sup> Leo III and Constantine V, *Ecloga*, 2.8.1; 2.8.2. Trans. Humphreys, *The Laws of the Isaurian Era*, 50.

<sup>133</sup> Leo III and Constantine V, *Ecloga*, 2.5.1; 2.5.2. Trans. Humphreys, *The Laws of the Isaurian Era*, 47–48.

The laws of the Isaurians, just as the laws of earlier generations of Romans, were not only sexist but fundamentally classist in their conception of justice. That is not to say, however, that they were not influenced by the Christian ideals of the fundamental equality of all men and women before God, although the implications were not necessarily humane. One of the areas where these eighth century laws innovate is in the punishment of sexual relations between men and their female slaves. While the penalties for women having sex with their slaves were, and always had been, extremely harsh—both were to be put to death—attitudes towards men had been historically lax. Throughout antiquity, masters exercised full control over the bodies of their slaves, including for sex, and any children produced legally inherited their mother's status.<sup>134</sup> The early medieval codes introduced consequences for men having sex with their female slaves: the *Ekloga* required that she shall be seized from him and sold off, the proceeds going to the imperial treasury; Eirene's second novel further stipulated that no slave girl could ever become a legitimate spouse, particularly for ‘the pre-eminent and those holding a dignity’.<sup>135</sup> The different legal outcomes were brought more into line not by lessening the horrific punishment for women but by introducing a new punishment for men. The possibility of a woman engaging in improper sexual activity threatened the integrity and legitimacy of the *oikos*.

Legal codes, of course, are limited in what they can tell us about society. These are fundamentally aspirational literature, which outline how society should work, not necessarily how it did work. Laws reflect a society, with emphasis on perceived flaws, and present solutions to situations where things are no longer working normally.<sup>136</sup> In this case, the fixation on sexual propriety could give the misleading impression that infidelity and incest were rampant. The eighth-century corpus is particularly ideologically charged, between the Isaurian's desire to associate their rule with the Old Testament kings and Eirene's appropriation of the law codes to solidify her hold on imperial power.<sup>137</sup> While laws provided a rhetorically charged framework for society as an ideal, for practical application we need

<sup>134</sup> Stuard, “Ancillary Evidence for the Decline of Medieval Slavery,” 7–11; Harper, *From Shame to Sin*.

<sup>135</sup> Leo III and Constantine V, *Ecloga*, 17.21. Trans. Humphreys, *The Laws of the Isaurian Era*, 72 note 153, 97, 168. Eirene's second novel was likely a targeted political attack against specific individuals, particularly the descendants of Constantine V. Humphreys, 31–33.

<sup>136</sup> Nelson and Rio, “Women and Laws in Early Medieval Europe,” 113–14.

<sup>137</sup> Humphreys, *The Laws of the Isaurian Era*, 13–33.

to look for documentary evidence. Unfortunately, when it comes to legal documents, this period does not have the rich Egyptian papyri record of late antiquity, nor the surviving archives of the second millennium. With few surviving legal documents in this period, we can turn to other documentary literature to get an idea of how the ideas in these codes were translated into practice.

Two epistolary collections survive from the early ninth century, that of Theodore Stoudites and Ignatios of Nicaea. These confirm that, indeed, the legal statuses conferred by law found use in practice. Using epistolography comes with some caveats, however. Surviving examples broadly fall into three categories: official, private, and literary exercises. Epistles were influenced by the ideals of rhetoric, and closely related to similar genres, particularly dialogues, homilies, and sermons.<sup>138</sup> While Ignatios' and Theodore's letters were likely based on real communication between individuals, the compositions are still works of literature which engaged in stylistic and referential games which typified literary production of the early medieval Roman elite. Their particular collections were likely based on the author's personal archives, which were then edited, copied, and distributed after their death, adding another potential moment for further literary intervention into the corpus.<sup>139</sup> Theodore's letters tend to be more literary and deal with spiritual rather than worldly concerns, but even there we can find tenuous evidence that law shaped lived experiences. Anna the nun, the recipient of Theodore Stoudite's Epistle 42 which dates to *circa* 810, had a child who still lived with her. The care of her child interfered with her religious duties.<sup>140</sup> This was an unusual situation, but it appears to be in keeping with the requirement in the *Ekloga* that a widow or widower who did not remarry may not abandon their children.<sup>141</sup> Although Theodore's text provides only hints and clues, Anna seems to have been seeking advice for how to fulfil competing obligations as an ascetic and as a mother. Most of Theodore's letters are like that, rather more concerned with spiritual than social matters, although they

<sup>138</sup> Jeffreys and Kazhdan, "Epistolography."

<sup>139</sup> This, at least, is the story found in the *vita* of Theodore Stoudites. Fatouros, "Prolegmonena," 41.

<sup>140</sup> Theodore Stoudites, *Epistulae*, 1992, §42, pp. 122–24. Discussion and summary Fatouros, "Prolegmonena," 187\*–188\*.

<sup>141</sup> Leo III and Constantine V, *Ecloga*, 2.5.3. Trans. Humphreys, *The Laws of the Isaurian Era*, 49.

will help fill out our picture of the social networks linking the empire's elite families and office holders, to whom we will turn in a little bit.

While Ignatios of Nicaea's epistolary collection is only about one-twelfth the length of that of Theodore Stoudites, the former's work offers more insight into everyday society. Unlike Theodore, who corresponded with numerous named women, no extant epistle by Ignatios is addressed to a woman, and of the few women mentioned in their contents, none are named, only identified by biographical labels. Of course, the names of four out of his twenty-four correspondents are also never given, so this is hardly unique. Twice as bishop Ignatios interceded on behalf of unnamed widows in property disputes. In order to distinguish them, we will identify them as the *oikodespoina* and the petitioner. Both turned to Ignatios for assistance in carrying out their legal authority as heads of their households.

Epistle 19 concerns the case of a dispute about an estate agreement between competing family claimants—a situation explicitly imagined in the eighth-century legal codes. Ignatios intervened in the case on behalf of the *oikodespoina*, and he wrote to Bishop Nikephoros of Caria on her behalf. He extoled his fellow bishop that he pursue the just course of action, ‘leave to the mistress of the house ( $\tauῇ οἰκουρῷ καὶ δεσποίνῃ$ ) to arrange her affairs as she may wish. Let her administer, decide, and remain with her children in possession of the goods bequeathed to her by her legitimate husband.’<sup>142</sup> Asserting his episcopal role as patron and protector, Ignatios recognized the *oikodespoina* as head of her household following her spouse's death, and called on his colleague to do the same. The law was clear that she had the authority to act as head of her *oikos*, including its dependants. This epistle depicts the *oikodespoina*'s place as a participant in the patronage networks of Roman society, an independent actor who has the power and ability to negotiate on behalf of her dependents and manage her family's affairs. This epistle lends documentary support that the autonomy which the law codes granted to widows was exercised in practice, demonstrating that, at least in certain circumstances, women's rights as Romans enabled them to act as independent agents within the constraints of the hierachal nature of early medieval social networks.

A second, similar case occurred in Epistle 23. Among a series of letters dispatched to Democharis, *logothete* of the Genikon, one accompanied a

<sup>142</sup> Ignatios the Deacon, *Epistulae*, §19. Trans. Mango and Efthymiadis, *The Correspondence of Ignatios, the Deacon*, 65.

petition (which itself was not preserved) to which Ignatios appended a short explanation of his involvement in the affair:

If, then none of your actions is revocable, deceitful, and without issue, may this neglected widow receive assurance along with me. She took no account of female pusillanimity and came to me with the same document in her hands. Noting that it has received no fulfilment and pitying her profound grief, I have sent it to you once again. And if it is the same document concerning which I have made my supplication, let it not be overlooked, know well that I shall come to you for a third time.<sup>143</sup>

Although we are missing the other documents to contextualize this case, it appears that Ignatios had brought this dispute to Democharis previously, but while the *logothete* had made a verbal agreement to sort out the affair on behalf of this petitioner, no action had been forthcoming. Given that the petition was addressed to the *logothete* of the Genikon, an important office in the management of the imperial finances, the dispute was, again, likely about property and the payment of taxes.<sup>144</sup> This epistle sought to remind Democharis to resolve the affair with a mixture of shaming, exhortation, and threats. What sets this episode apart is the active role which the petitioner played in managing her affairs. She had the petition drafted at her own initiative and personally brought it to Ignatios when seeking his advocacy, which Ignatios regarded as an unusually forthright action worthy of praise. Like the *oikodespoina*, the petitioner acted as the legal representative of her household in defence of its financial interests.

Ignatios' clients enjoyed certain legal rights and protections as widows, rights which they were interested in and capable of exercising and defending. The *oikodespoina* and the petitioner entered male-dominated public spaces as heads of their *oikoi* following the deaths of their husbands who would otherwise have fulfilled the role of *oikodespotes*. They became possessor and administrator of their own and their family's property, a right which Roman law and custom extended to its female subjects throughout its existence.<sup>145</sup> As the mother, the *oikodespoina* functioned as patron and

<sup>143</sup> Ignatios the Deacon, *Epistulae*, §23. Trans. Mango and Efthymiadis, *The Correspondence of Ignatios, the Deacon*, 73–75.

<sup>144</sup> Kazhdan, “Genikon.”

<sup>145</sup> Beaucamp, “La Situation Juridique de La Femme à Byzance”; Laiou, “Observations on the Life and Ideology of Byzantine Women.” Neville, *Authority in Byzantine Provincial Society, 950–1100*, 70–73.

guardian over children of either gender—Ignatios referred to them collectively in the masculine plural. The same legal logic suggests that the petitioner must have been a mother with dependent children as well, even though Ignatios makes no mention of them. Both women engaged as legal actors in these disputes over property, rights which were specific to them as Romans, and were not universally shared across the early medieval Mediterranean. Even if these rights were likely to be recognized as distinctively Roman only in limited circumstances, for example in frontier regions where people following different cultural and legal systems might frequently mingle, these differences nevertheless form part of the larger picture of potential ‘raw materials’ which were available for articulating and defining group membership and differences which we have been looking for throughout this chapter. These legal rights are significant because they provide positive evidence that gender shaped the available routes for participation in the processes of Roman identification.

Although these were only two individual cases, they help fill in a picture about the implication of Roman legal identity. After all, the legal rights to own and manage property under certain circumstances empowered economic activity. These same rights to own and, sometimes, manage their own property meant that, for women who lived in urban environments, some could be found working in a variety of trades.<sup>146</sup> Even at the base of the socioeconomic ladder, subsistence economic realities for many of the empire’s rural peasantry meant that female members of a household had practical jobs to do in the economic life of their rustic *oikoi*.<sup>147</sup> Even as we recognize the limitations of women’s agency as Romans, we should also be cognizant of the limits faced by the men in their lives. Yes, female was subordinate to male, but individuals were defined by many other conditions which affected that relationship. Children were subordinate to their parents, laymen to clerics, slaves to free citizens, while free citizens in turn were subordinate to the aristocracy. The misogyny of early medieval Roman society—including its laws—was only part of the more fundamental vertical ordering according to hierachal relations. This was reflected in the ways in which people thought about their society, be it in the taxonomy of Syrianos Magistros, the law codes of the Isaurian emperors, or the pervasive model of society as an *oikos*, which all envisaged a world where

<sup>146</sup> Laiou, “Women in Byzantine Society.”

<sup>147</sup> Bryer, “The Means of Agricultural Production: Muscle and Tools.”

inequality and difference, not equality and class solidarity, were the default filter for defining social relations.

### *Women in Hagiographies*

Syrianos' taxonomy provides a useful comparison for thinking about the utility of the law as a historical source. Just as Syrianos had a blind spot ignoring women categorically, the legal codes have a limited imagination when it comes to women's roles outside the traditional *oikos*. While certain statutes protected monks and nuns (particularly the sexual purity of the latter group),<sup>148</sup> the civil law did not explicitly deal with the autonomy that asceticism allowed individuals to act outside of familial norms. Christianity—and particularly ascetic Christianity—provided an alternative to the domestic life for at least some women. Hagiographies provide details about a few remarkable, and thus overwhelmingly elite, individuals whose lives were not necessarily representative of society as a whole. Spiritual life provided an alternative set of social roles and functions to the domestic sphere in which most Roman women performed their lives. Several pious early medieval women developed cult followings and had their hagiographies recorded for posterity. Hagiographies are, of course, literature first and historical sources only incidentally, and rely heavily on established tropes which both defined and fulfilled an audience's expectations about how sanctity should be performed and conceived. However, if the literary nature of these accounts cautions against the credibility of any specific detail, their role as idealized templates signals trends in attitudes and expectations. Most of this part focuses on a single unusual woman saint, but it worth quickly contextualizing her life among contemporary female saints. In particular, the eighth century saw the emergence of new types of female saints, coenobitic nuns and housewives (usually widowed, though not always).<sup>149</sup>

The emergence of the pious housewife literary model builds on the centrality of the *oikos* to early medieval social structures, but it certainly was not the only model for female sanctity being used in this time. A surprisingly large number of hagiographies of these pious housewives survive,

<sup>148</sup> Leo III and Constantine V, *Ecloga*, 17.23, 17.24. Trans. Humphreys, *The Laws of the Isaurian Era*, 72–73.

<sup>149</sup> Talbot, *Holy Women of Byzantium: Ten Stints' Lives in English Translation*, xii–xiii.

including: Athanasia of Aegina, Mary the Younger of Bizye, Theodora of Thessalonica, Theokleto, and Thomais of Lesbos.<sup>150</sup> On the other hand, many of the lives of the coenobitic nuns present their lives as a rejection of the norms of marriage and family. Theodora of Kaisaris was an eighth-century nun who successfully avoided being married against her will.<sup>151</sup> Other hagiographies drew on long-established literary tropes. The *vita* of Theoktiste of Lesbos represented a continuation of the tradition of the gender-bending hermit, living in perfect isolation on a deserted island. The life of Anna/Euphemianos combines tropes as widow and a transvestite monk who hides her/himself in a monastery full of men.<sup>152</sup> That the *vitae* of Anna/Euphemianos and Theoktiste draw on an older literary tradition casts into sharp relief how others do not. The social construction of holiness for early medieval Roman women differed from their ancestors. Unlike the martyrs of the first four centuries or the transvestite desert hermits of the fifth and sixth centuries, sanctity in the early medieval period was linked with the performance of domestic roles as wife and mother.

The life of one holy woman stands apart from these patterns, that of Anthousa of Mantineon (died 27 July, after 771). Anthousa was abbess of Mantineon, a monastic community in Paphlagonia.<sup>153</sup> Although accounts of her life certainly drew upon hagiographical tropes, her life overall does not neatly fit into any well-defined pattern. She never married and bore no children, she did not remove herself from society to live as a hermit, and she was

<sup>150</sup> Kazhdan and Talbot, *Dumbarton Oaks Hagiography Database*, Athanasia of Aegina, 25; Mary the Younger, pp. 67–68; Theodora of Thessalonike, 96–98; Theokleto, pages 103; Thomaïs of Lesbos, pp. 108–9; Halkin, *Bibliotheca hagiographica graeca*, 180–180b; 1164; 1737–41; 2454–57; Talbot, *Holy Women of Byzantium: Ten Stints' Lives in English Translation*, 159–237; 291–322; Delehaye, *Acta Sanctorum, Synaxarium Ecclesiae Constantinopoleos*, 914.3–34.

<sup>151</sup> Kazhdan and Talbot, *Dumbarton Oaks Hagiography Database*, Theodora of Kaisaris, p. 96; Halkin, *Bibliotheca hagiographica graeca*, 2424m; Delehaye, *Acta Sanctorum, Synaxarium Ecclesiae Constantinopoleos*, 354–56. Also worth mentioning the brief life of Theodosia of Constantinople. If she existed—and that's by no means clear—she was a nun martyred by iconoclasts in the eighth century. Kazhdan and Talbot, *Dumbarton Oaks Hagiography Database*, Theodosia of Constantinople, p. 102; Halkin, *Bibliotheca hagiographica graeca*, 1773y–74; Talbot, *Byzantine Defenders of Images: Eight Saints' Lives in English Translation*, 5–7.

<sup>152</sup> Kazhdan and Talbot, *Dumbarton Oaks Hagiography Database*, Theoktiste of Lesbos, pp. 104–5; Anna-Euphemianos, 21–22; Halkin, *Bibliotheca hagiographica graeca*, 1723–26b; 2027; Talbot, *Holy Women of Byzantium: Ten Stints' Lives in English Translation*, xiii note 19; 95–116.

<sup>153</sup> Mango, “St. Anthousa of Mantineon and the Family of Constantine V.”

not martyred. Nevertheless, her life was uniquely Roman, enabled by both the advantages and the rights bestowed on her by her social status. Her story is told across three closely connected hagiographies: her own synaxarion entry, and those of two of her spiritual children, saints Anthousa Porphyrogenita (d. 808/809) and Romanos the Neomartyr (d. 780). This assemblage of hagiographical networks demonstrates how women played prominent roles in the personal connections which bound peripheral groups to the political and social centres of the mid-eighth century Roman Empire.

Most of what we know about Anthousa comes from a relatively lengthy summary of her cult from the tenth-century *Synaxarion of Constantinople*. Her early life reads, in part:

She lived during the reign of Constantine Korpronymos, and was born of pious parents, Strategios and Febronia. She yearned for purity almost from the time she was in her mother's arms. ... In those days a certain monk and priest named Sisinnios resided in the region of Mantineon and pursued every kind of virtue; and the blessed woman was incited to emulate and imitate him. She was moulded and disciplined by him, and ... mastered other higher virtues, which brought her close to God. ... She received the tonsure and was bidden by that miracle-working old man to dwell on a small island in the lake near the village of Perkile. ... Once when she approached the great Sisinnios, she entreated him to build a church to the mother of the Mother of God. After giving her much advice and instruction for a while, and most clearly revealing the future, he dismissed her, predicting the time of his own death. After about thirty nuns joined the holy woman and the chapel was built and the events foretold by the old man hastened toward fulfilment, the marvellous and divine Sisinnios departed this life. ... And many men who were pricked by the goads of repentance and had formerly gone to the holy Sisinnios, now went to the great Anthousa, to be instructed and moulded by her.<sup>154</sup>

The nature of a synaxarion entry was to summarize a saint's life, and the process of creating a paraphrase means that some of the story's original context was lost. Close reading allows some extrapolation, however. Her family could afford one of their daughters the luxury and liberty of a spiritual life and could support her through a *propaideia*.<sup>155</sup> Her father's name, Strategios, implies a family history of military service, in line with

<sup>154</sup> Trans. Talbot, "Life of St. Anthousa of Mantineon," 13–19; Delehaye, *Acta Sanctorum, Synaxarium Ecclesiae Constantinopoleos*, 848–52.

<sup>155</sup> Lemerle, *Byzantine Humanism*; Caseau, "Childhood in Byzantine Saints' Lives."

belonging to the provincial elite. Later in the hagiography, a nephew is attested, from which we can deduce the existence of adult siblings who successfully married and reproduced. She clearly belonged to a wider family network, even if record of it is patchy.

Anthousa's vocation prompted her to become a disciple of Sisinnios, an otherwise-unattested monk and priest—not a lone hermit, but a man embedded into ecclesiastic hierarchies. His students included both men and women—or perhaps boys and girls, since coeducation seems to have been typical during at least the *propaideia*.<sup>156</sup> His teaching and mentoring is described through a few different verbs: he moulded (*τυποῦται*) and disciplined (*κανονίζεται*) her, instilling her with skills and values which she imitated and learned thoroughly (*ἐκμανθάνει*).<sup>157</sup> The result appears to have been an intentional training program, from childhood, with the goal of preparing her for coenobitic life. This attests to a surprising amount of latitude for a gifted and motivated woman of sufficient social rank to pursue a life of her own choosing, indicating the types of advantages we might expect were available for women belonging to elite families.

After becoming tonsured, the relationship between Anthousa and Sisinnios changed as she departed to establish her own monastery, although their ties remained vertical between mentor and former student. Interestingly, when he died, Anthousa became his successor as spiritual leader above and in preference to Sissinios' male disciples. 'Many men who were pricked by the goads of repentance and had formerly gone to the holy Sissinios, now went to the great Anthousa, to be instructed and moulded by her (*ὑπ' αὐτῆς παιδαγωγούμενοι τε καὶ τυπούμενοι*).'<sup>158</sup> They were absorbed into a parallel monastic community subject to her personal management. Her leadership is described as that of a teacher, which placed her in a position as instructor, patron, and leader over both men and women in her religious community. The implicit logic of the situation appears to be that the monastic community functioned as a spiritual *oikos*. As founder, Sissinios, acted as an *oikodespotes*, but despite the presence of men in the community upon his death Anthousa succeeded as *oikodespoina*, a sort of spiritual widow taking leadership over her spiritual

<sup>156</sup> Brown, "Psalmody and Socrates: Female Literacy in Byzantine Society," 60–62.

<sup>157</sup> Καὶ πρῶτον μὲν ὑπ' αὐτοῦ τυποῦται καὶ κανονίζεται καὶ εἰς κλίβανον εἰς τέλος ἐκκαέντα πρὸς αὐτοῦ κελευσθεῖσα εἰσελθεῖν, ἀβλαβής ἐκεῖθεν ἐξέρχεται καὶ ἐτέρας ἀρετὰς ὑψηλοτέρας καὶ θεῷ ἐγγιζούσας ἐκμανθάνει.

<sup>158</sup> Trans. Talbot, "Life of St. Anthousa of Mantineon," 17.

children of any gender. This double monastery, a single institutional unit which housed monks and nuns in separate living spaces, was unusual. At Mantineon, women dwelt on an island while men lived in a separate complex situated on the mainland, but they were under a unified administration. Although double coenobitic communities were relatively common in areas of Western Europe, Anthousa's foundation is one of a very few known in the Eastern Empire.<sup>159</sup> The survival of a *vita* for this institution's founder helped the community to continue its existence in the generation following Anthousa's death. Memory of her exploits provided a pious narrative around which to form a cult following, and therefore justification for the double-house.

The rest of Anthousa's *vita* clarifies details concerning the operation of her monastic community and provides vignettes depicting her miraculous activities. Of these, the one of greatest interests is an account of her relationship with the emperor Constantine V.

[Anthousa was tortured on the order of the emperor,] but since she remained untouched through the grace of God, she was sent into exile. When the emperor was traveling through that province with his entire army, so as to summon the great woman and examine her himself, as a result of her prayers blindness bound him fast and prevented him from carrying out his designs against her. When queried by the emperor, she said to the empress (who was experiencing a difficult pregnancy and was in mortal danger) that all would be well and she would give birth to one male and one female child. And she foretold the mode and way of life of each one. When the empress heard this, she donated numerous villages and offerings to the monasteries under [Anthousa's] direction, and the tyrannical ruler desisted from his attack on her.<sup>160</sup>

<sup>159</sup> Although unusual, the leadership of a woman over both male and female communities was apparently not unique, for it is also attested in the leadership of Irene-Eulogia Choumnaina over the monastery of the Philanthropaos Soter in fourteenth-century Constantinople. Talbot, *Holy Women of Byzantium: Ten Saints' Lives in English Translation*, 14. Such institutions were officially discouraged, notably at the second council at Nicaea in 787. Ruggieri, "Anthusa Di Mantineon Ed Il Canone XX Del Concilio Di Nicea (Anno 787)"; Ruggieri, *Byzantine Religious Architecture (582–867)*, 173–75. The canon in question reads, in part, "We decree that from henceforth, no double monastery shall be erected; because this has become an offence and cause of complaint to many. ... The double monasteries which are already in existence shall observe the rule of our holy father Basil." Lamberz, *Concilium universale Nicaenum secundum*, canon XX. Trans. Schaff and Wace, *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*.

<sup>160</sup> Talbot, "Life of St. Anthousa of Mantineon," 15.

Again, this account is clearly a paraphrase of a longer story. For example, Constantine's blindness is left unresolved—presumably she performed another miracle to remove it? Anthousa forged a personal connection to the emperor and empress through performing a miracle, prophesizing the safe conclusion to the pregnancy. The result of this interaction was that, in return, the imperial family became patrons of her monastery, making a financially generous donation to the institution.

The *vita* implies that a significant, long-term relationship developed between Anthousa and the Isaurian dynasty, and the survival of another hagiography strongly supports this conclusion.<sup>161</sup> The daughter of Constantine V, Anthousa Porphyrogenita (*circa* 757–12 April 808 or 809) was likely the twin girl whose safe birth the abbess miraculously predicted. The younger Anthousa is the subject of her own brief *synaxarion* entry.<sup>162</sup> Being born into the imperial family of course set a woman's life apart from even that of the senatorial aristocracy, for they had an inescapable potential to play a role in legitimating successions. Daughter, sister, and aunt to three different emperors, she survived the waning years of the Isaurian dynasty, the rise and fall of Empress Irene. She chose not to marry, rejecting the traditional Roman role of wife or mother in favour of spiritual service, a choice befitting her namesake. Her *vita* presents her as the personal friend of Empress Irene and Patriarch Tarasios, bestowing a legitimating influence and at least the appearance of stability on their anti-iconoclast reforms. She appears to have remained at court through Irene's reign, but, following the example of her namesake, retired to a Constantinopolitan monastery for the final years of her life.

Another individual linked the elder Anthousa to Caliph al-Mahdi (775–785) through Romanos the Neomartyr, who began his career as one of the monks in Mantineon.<sup>163</sup> Romanos's full hagiography survives in a Georgian translation. It culminates with the saint's interview with the Caliph and his martyrdom at the latter's command on 1 May 780. Although his hagiographer only knew a little about Romanos' life before his arrival in Syria, he highlights the saint's early life in the Mantineon

<sup>161</sup> Mango, "St. Anthousa of Mantineon and the Family of Constantine V"; Bosch, "Ein Beitrag Zum Kaisertum Der Eirene."

<sup>162</sup> Delehaye, *Acta Sanctorum, Synaxarium Ecclesiae Constantinopoleos*, 613–14. Trans. Constas, "Life of St. Anthousa, Daughter of Constantine V."

<sup>163</sup> Winkelmann et al., *Prosopographie der mittelbyzantinischen Zeit*, Romanos 6417, Datensatz 6540.

monastery. Its abbess, Anthousa, was given a key role in validating Romanos' sanctity and cult.

This blessed soul [Anthousa] loved the holy Romanos. Because it had been foretold to her to what great things this man would be called, she used to strongly recommend to him that, for the sake of the interior man, Christ, he should despise the exterior, corruptible, man. When it was forty years after [Romanos] was born, the blessed teacher sent this holy man to accompany as servant for a certain old man who was pious and bestowed with all graces. She sent them into certain regions on account of the business of the monastery. To which region, since they bore service and obedience, they set out for the purpose of selling and buying whatever was needed for those most perfect souls.<sup>164</sup>

Romanos' hagiographer might not have known many details about his subject's early life, but he certainly was familiar with Anthousa's cult. Anthousa has another miraculous vision, this time that Romanos was destined to be martyred by the sword, and so set his fate in motion by charging him with a responsibility to depart the safety of the monastery. When the abbess is mentioned in the *vita* (and she is singled-out by name), she is honoured as a teacher. It seems that the writer, Stephen of Damascus, knew Anthousa's reputation as not just leader but spiritual teacher of both men and women. Her presence in his *vita* linked Romanos' cult to hers, appropriating some of her legitimacy for this new saint. This spiritual network was made possible by her position as his patron and mentor.

Coming from multiple interrelated hagiographies, it is difficult to establish firm facts about the historical life of Anthousa of Mantineon. Yet however unreliable hagiography may be with details, its literary nature can tell us a lot about the writer and audience's shared thought world, and what they expected in stories about sanctity. In other words, the same tropes which make it difficult to extract historical fact shed light on historical attitudes. Her *vita* referenced hagiographical tropes, just not the tropes typically found in other women's hagiographies at the time such as the pious housewife or even the gender-bending desert hermit. Her first miracle involved entering a heated oven and emerging unscathed, which parallels a miracle attributed to a monk named George the Cappadocian in

<sup>164</sup> Stephen of Damascus, "Vita Romani," §4, 411.18–412.2. Ed. Shoemaker, *Three Christian Martyrdoms from Early Islamic Palestine*. Trans. by the author.

*The Spiritual Meadow* by John of Moschos.<sup>165</sup> Much of the content of her formative education resembles the *Life of John Chrysostom*: both John and Anthousa went to live in mountains and caves [Hebrews 11:38]; both were ‘moulded’ (*τυποῦται*) by the tutelage of a teacher whose pious life they imitated; and after their initial training both retreated to isolated places—John to another cave, Anthousa to an island.<sup>166</sup> Her hagiography is still strongly intertextual, but its reference points reflect her social status as the leader of an institution which represented itself as the beneficiary of imperial patronage. Like the widows who gained a certain degree of legal and social autonomy, Anthousa’s social status allowed her hagiography to depict her life and actions using tropes which were otherwise traditionally linked with men.

Sanctity provided a different social role for a Roman woman, one where she was not primarily defined by her kin relation to a man, be it as a daughter, wife, mother, or widow, but through her spiritual sisterhood. The continued production of female hagiographies according to long-established tropes (particularly involving cross-dressing and the desert hermit) serves to remind us that this was a culture with a deep past, where meanings and traditions accumulated over time. Yet among these hagiographers we find the importance of the *oikos* as a filter through which early medieval society saw itself, particularly in the emergence of new hagiographical tropes in this period. Contextualizing Anthousa’s life, it is worth reiterating that her *vita* was somewhat unusual for its time. In contrast, the pious housewife was an original subgenre when it first appeared in the eighth century, indicating social shifts of what it could mean to be a Roman woman. Like the contemporary recodification of the laws, this may, perhaps, reflect a society internalizing Christianity’s message of spiritual egalitarianism. In this case, it made a woman’s performance of her duties within the *oikos* more compatible with sanctity, dispensing with the necessity of an extraordinary life such as a martyr, hermit, or transvestite.

### *Nobles and Empresses*

The life of Anthousa of Mantineon brings the issue of social class into focus. Her role as abbess points to one of the ways in which social rank at times outweighed the constraints imposed by gender. A free woman stood

<sup>165</sup> Talbot, *Holy Women of Byzantium: Ten Saints’ Lives in English Translation*, 16 note 16.

<sup>166</sup> Palladius of Aspuna, *Dialogus de vita Joannis Chrysostomi*, 28.14–29.4. Trans. Palladius of Aspuna, *The Dialogue of Palladius Concerning the Life of Chrysostom*.

above a male slave, a mother was as responsible for her male as for her female children, and the holder of the imperial office was the head of the Roman state regardless of sex. Or to take another example, all things being equal a man was more likely to be literate than a woman, but access to education was deeply unequal—and women born into noble families were far more likely to have been taught to read, either formally or informally, than a male peasant.<sup>167</sup> It is generally the case that our best surviving documentation focuses on the Roman elites, and this trend is even more pronounced when it comes to biographical information about women. Other studies have built up biographical narratives for many of these individual women; it is not the purpose of this section to offer another review of their lives.<sup>168</sup> This section contextualizes recent scholarship on the women of the Roman elite and the gendered construction of their social power within the context of Romanness as a cultural marker. At the heart of this discussion is the reign of the Empress Eirene. How should we make sense of a woman directly ruling the Roman Empire? Was her reign understood as a systemic aberration, or within the bounds of the normal function of the Roman state and society? What does that tell us about the interrelationship between gender and the exercise of power for the early medieval Romans?

Unlike Pulcheria who reigned alone for a few months in 453 or Zoë (d. 1050) and Theodora (d. 1056) who directly held the emperorship in the eleventh century, Eirene was not born into the imperial family but married into it. This has two major implications for approaching her life comparatively. First, imperial princesses played potential roles as legitimating influences during successions—indeed, the *vita* of Anthousa Porphyrogenita depicts her as helping legitimate Eirene’s reign and iconophile policies. Similarly, Eirene’s granddaughter, Euphrosyne (d. after 836) was removed from her monastery in the early 820s to marry Michael II after the death of his first wife, providing him with a familial link to the Isaurian dynasty and lending legitimacy to his rule.<sup>169</sup> Second, by birth Eirene belonged to the provincial aristocracy, a

<sup>167</sup> Brown, “Psalmody and Socrates: Female Literacy in Byzantine Society,” esp. 89–91.

<sup>168</sup> Key studies include: Lilie and Rochow, *Byzanz Unter Eirene Und Konstantin VI. (780–802)*; James, *Empresses and Power in Early Byzantium*; Herrin, *Women in Purple*; Garland, *Byzantine Empresses*; Herrin, *Unrivalled Influence Women and Empire in Byzantium*; Zhekova, *The Byzantine Empress on Coins and Seals*.

<sup>169</sup> Herrin, *Women in Purple*, 130–84, esp. 154–58, 170–73. Her position evolved after her husband’s death, when Euphrosyne acted as the guardian in arranging the marriage of Theodora to her step-son Theophilus (reigned 829–842). Because Theophilus was a teen-

family named Sarandapechos. Her childhood in Athens, belonging to a wealthy aristocratic kin group, would have been more comparable to the early life of Anthousa of Mantineon than to the early life of Anthousa Porphyrogenita. Although information about them is limited, the family's fortunes certainly rose as a direct result of her marriage and career, gaining titles and further marital links.<sup>170</sup>

Indeed, it is remarkable that accounts of the iconomachy period remember so many aristocratic women who gained power and influence through their marriages rather than by birth. Theophano was a member of the Sarandapechos clan, one of Eirene's kinswoman and wife of Emperor Staurakios, son of Nikephoros who had usurped the throne from Eirene. Theophanes depicts Theophano as holding *de facto* control of the empire during her husband's brief reign in 811, due to the debilitating injury which he had received at the disastrous Battle of Pliska against the Bulgarians, and who reportedly hoped to usurp the throne for herself directly, in the model of Eirene.<sup>171</sup> Theodora, whom Euphrosyne has helped chose as wife for her step-son Theophilus (reigned 829–842), grew up in a village called Ebissa in Paphlagonia. Her father had been a mid-ranking officer either in the Armeniakon or in Paphlagonia itself, indicating that the family was wealthy, if not necessarily extravagantly so.<sup>172</sup> She is of course best remembered from her time as widow and regent for her son Michael III (842–867), in which time she oversaw the restoration of icon veneration (the Triumph of Orthodoxy) in 843. There are some obvious parallels between Theodora and Eirene, including their provincial backgrounds, legal roles as guardians for underage emperors, and their policy of championing icons as part of the consolidation of their authority and legitimacy.<sup>173</sup> Although very little specific information survives about either Theodora's or the Sarandapechos' family from before their imperial

ager at the time of his succession, Euphrosyne briefly acted as co-ruler and as the *oikodespoina* when it came to making plans for her ward's marriage. Garland, *Byzantine Empresses*, 96–98.

<sup>170</sup> Herrin, *Women in Purple*, 55–56.

<sup>171</sup> Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, AM 6303. Trans. Mango and Scott, *Theophanes' Chronicle*, 674–75. She supposedly became Staurakios' consort via a bride show in 807, although she obviously provided a legitimating link of continuity with the past. Herrin, *Women in Purple*, 134, 149–50; Garland, *Byzantine Empresses*, 90, 94.

<sup>172</sup> Garland, *Byzantine Empresses*, 187–90.

<sup>173</sup> John Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*. Trans. John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History*, 811–1057, 53–99, 111, 126.

marriages, we do have a good idea of what the lives of women from similar noble families were like.

In previous chapters we tracked the loss of a clear differentiation between senatorial and provincial elites. Yet as some of the specific forms of late antique nobility and aristocracy eroded during this period, the markers of elite status—titles, wealth, and education—certainly did not. Another imperial wife, Maria of Amnia (d. after 823), helps fill in our understanding about the wealth of the early medieval Roman aristocracy.<sup>174</sup> She was the first wife of Constantine VI and the mother of Euphrosyne, but more crucially she was the granddaughter of Philaretos ‘the Merciful,’ a major landowner in Paphlagonia whose possessions are described in a hagiography. Although her marriage certainly advanced the family’s position further—her sisters reportedly secured marriage alliances with a *patrikios* and a Lombard king—some picture of her family’s original wealth is preserved in her grandfather’s hagiography. As a hagiography, this work of literature tells a spiritually uplifting story rather than soberly documenting history, but some details are suggestive. Philaretos held multiple estates in Paphlagonia, Pontos, and Galatia, and the description his family home notes that it was remarkable for its size, prominence, and age, indicative of inherited wealth and status aside from whatever he added to it in his own lifetime.<sup>175</sup> The fortune of an imperial marriage helped bring their particular families into the surviving historical record, but it is clear that Eirene, Maria, and Theodora belonged to a broader group of nobility, and other women similar to them filled out the ranks of the Roman nobility.

A great deal of wealth and property was held by the comparatively few families and clans, the same clans who overwhelmingly held the civil, military, and ecclesiastic offices which, at least in part, defined elite Romanness. Some of the most historically visible activity of this elite arose from its educational attainments, namely its literary output. The production and circulation of literature was a conceptual space which, while very masculine, certainly had female participation. Surviving literature was overwhelmingly written by and about men and addressed to men, but not all of it. While we saw that Roman legal codes addressed and were used by women, we have two surviving laws written by a woman, Eirene, who

<sup>174</sup> Herrin, *Women in Purple*, 130–60; Garland, *Byzantine Empresses*, 80–85, 95–96.

<sup>175</sup> Rydén, *The Life of St Philaretos the Merciful Written by His Grandson Niketas*, 26–28; Kazhdan and Sherry, “The Tale of a Happy Fool.”

notably was the first reigning emperor to issue novels in a century and a half.<sup>176</sup> The ninth century was notable for producing three female hymnographers whose works have survived. Kassia, of course, is the most famous of them, famed not just for her poetry but for her role in the historical annals as runner-up to Theodora to become the wife of Emperor Theophilos.<sup>177</sup> Less is known of the other two, Thekla and Theodosia, though they, like Kassia, likely also belonged to relatively small world of well-educated Constantinopolitan nuns from aristocratic homes.<sup>178</sup> These women's literary contributions helped shape the liturgical practices for Greek-speaking Orthodox Christians for centuries to come.

A clearer picture of the world of the literary elite emerges from the epistles of Theodore Stoudites. Among the five hundred and sixty-four complete and partial letters included in the modern edition by Fatouros, more than a tenth are addressed to women. Theodore's only letter to Eirene, Epistle 7, was an encomium written during the final years of her sole reign, and is similar to other letters in this collection addressing reigning emperors and patriarchs.<sup>179</sup> Letters to other *Augustae* were written after their retirements. Epistles 227 and 309 were written to Maria of Amnia in the second half of the 810s, which contain reference to other letters in their mutual correspondence which have not survived.<sup>180</sup> Likewise Epistle 538, dated to the first half of the 820s, was addressed to Theodosia, widow of Leo V.<sup>181</sup> The vast majority of Theodore's surviving letters addressed to female recipients are similarly either isolated or preserve a couple of exchanges, signalling at least the breadth of his contacts.

However, there were a handful of recipients with whom Theodore had an extensive correspondence, leaving a deeper record of the development of their relationships over time. Four were addressed to an abbess Anna, who also happened to be a relation, perhaps a cousin, on his maternal side.

<sup>176</sup> Humphreys, *The Laws of the Isaurian Era*, 31–33.

<sup>177</sup> Catafygiotu-Topping, “Women Hymnographers in Byzantium”; Kazhdan, “Kassia”; Panagopoulos, “Kassia.”

<sup>178</sup> Catafygiotu-Topping, “Thekla the Nun”; Catafygiotu-Topping, “Theodosia: Melodos and Monastria.”

<sup>179</sup> Theodore Stoudites, *Epistulae*, 1992, §7 pp. 24–27; Fatouros, “Prolegmonena,” 149\*–150\* note 36 for studies of the text.

<sup>180</sup> Theodore Stoudites, *Epistulae*, 1992, §227, 309 pp. 360–61, 452–53; Fatouros, “Prolegmonena,” 291\*, 338\*–339\*.

<sup>181</sup> Theodore Stoudites, *Epistulae*, 1992, §538, pp. 811–13; Fatouros, “Prolegmonena,” 477\*–478\*.

Of these, only the recipient's name survives of Epistle 46, while Epistle 316 specifies that it was sent in response to a letter which he had received from her, indicating that there was more to their correspondence which was not preserved.<sup>182</sup> Ten letters are addressed to Euphrosyne, nun, and later abbess of the Kloubion monastery in Constantinople, from which some of her biography can be reconstructed. In Epistle 458, written in consolation for the death of her mother Eirene who was the previous abbess at the monastery, we learn that Euphrosyne was descended from Armenian nobility, and that her father had been *patrikios* and *strategos*. Euphrosyne made for an interesting correspondent not only because of her desire for guidance and consolation, but as a literary participant. Theodore expected abbesses of the Kloubion to act as an instructor for the nuns (*οὐτοὶ γὰρ διδάσκαλοι καὶ ἔτεροι*), and transmit his encouragements to the community, involving Euphrosyne in the transmission and performance of his literature.<sup>183</sup> Finally, a series of eight letters document a fifteen-year exchange with a *patrikia* Eirene. They imperfectly document her family's fortunes through the 810s and early 820s, but their relationship is of particular interest here because their exchange began while her husband was still alive, and thus she was part of his *oikos*. Even though she was not its head, the *patrikia* Eirene corresponded on behalf of her family, a woman who engaged in contemporary spiritual literature on her own authority.<sup>184</sup> A complete picture has not survived—there are gaps in Theodore's archive, and none of his correspondents' messages have been preserved—but what has is enough to show that women were part of the elite literary landscape as both readers and contributors. Even with a frustrating lack of surviving female voices, early medieval Greek literary culture seems less and less like an exclusively male social scene under review.

<sup>182</sup> Theodore Stoudites, *Epistulae*, 1992, §46, 54, 85, 316, pp. 129, 159–60, 206, 459–60; Fatouros, "Prolegmonena," 199\* esp. note 191, 221\*, 342\*.

<sup>183</sup> Theodore Stoudites, *Epistulae*, 1992, §62, 458, 460, 465, 472, 482, 506, 510, 530, pp. 173–74, 651–53, 655–57, 666–67, 678–79, 705–7, 749–51, 757–58, 792–94; Fatouros, "Prolegmonena," 205\* esp. note 213, 423\*, 424\*, 428\*–429\*, 433\*, 440\*–441\*, 457\*, 459\*, 470\*–471\*. Martindale, *PBE I*, Euphrosyne 4 <http://www.pbe.kcl.ac.uk/person/p2524>.

<sup>184</sup> Theodore Stoudites, *Epistulae*, 1992, §55, 77, 87, 156, 372, 412, 508, 526, pp. 160–61, 198–99, 207–9, 276–77, 503–4, 575–76, 754–55, 784–85; Fatouros, "Prolegmonena," 199\* eps. note 194, 216\*–217\*, 221\*–222\*, 255\*, 366\*–367\*, 394\*–395\*, 458\*, 468\*–469\*. Martindale, *PBE I*, Eirene 10 <http://www.pbe.kcl.ac.uk/person/p2318>. For more on her wider kin network in Theodore's letters, see Petros 129 <http://www.pbe.kcl.ac.uk/person/p6389>.

A gap emerges between the rhetoric of power, indeed of Romanness itself, and its practice. Not only is the language and exercise of power gendered, even the Roman sign system was interlaced with explicit association with the masculine, barbarism with the feminine. In her analysis of the canons of the Council in Trullo of AD 692, Judith Herrin noted ‘how frequently women were associated with Jews and heretics and with disorderly and improper behaviour, as ecclesiastical authorities perceived it.’<sup>185</sup> This was a society highly concerned with the physical individual, where deformities—especially effeminacy in men—were seen to reflect moral and character defects.<sup>186</sup> On the other hand, in practice individual women fully participated in elite intellectual and spiritual life, wielding power through the very systems of the Roman state and society which systematically disadvantaged women as a collective. The imperial title sat at the pinnacle of the Roman state, an office with the power to define Romanness through the exercise of the law. The imperial office also exemplified Romanness, and this included bodily perfection, for disfigurement or mutilation were disqualifications.<sup>187</sup> This issue of bodily perfection is perhaps why, although some eunuchs became powerful advisors and guardians of the imperial family, no eunuch ruled directly.<sup>188</sup> This tension between gendered rhetoric and gender in practice underlies our return to the reign of the Empress Eirene.

In her role as regent and guardian for her son Constantine VI from 780–790, Eirene followed a number of other women who had wielded significant political power over the Roman Empire. Pulcheria and Ariadne in

<sup>185</sup> Herrin, *Unrivalled Influence Women and Empire in Byzantium*, 115, see also 127–28.

<sup>186</sup> The fear of appearing womanly drove cosmetic surgery, for surviving medical treatises contain instruction for the reduction of male mammary glands, which were regarded as ‘an unsightly deformity.’ Ringrose, “The Byzantine Body,” 365.

<sup>187</sup> Ringrose, 368. Justinian II is the exception who proves the rule. When overthrown in 695, he was publicly mutilated in the hippodrome, having his nose and tongue cut before being exiled, which should have disqualified him from power. His physical unsuitability to rule might have played a role in shaping the historical narrative of his second reign. Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, AM 6187. Trans. Mango and Scott, *Theophanes’ Chronicle*, 515.

<sup>188</sup> Judith Herrin notes that modern scholars often associate eunuchs with women, probably projecting their own assumptions about women being unable to manage without some sort of male guidance (an attitude which ironically ignores the fact that the early medieval Romans did not consider eunuchs to be men anyway). This, of course, ignores the fact that eunuchs were powerful and influential during the reigns of male emperors as well. Herrin, *Unrivalled Influence Women and Empire in Byzantium*, 196–97.

the fifth century, Sophia in the sixth, and Martina in the seventh had all exercised imperial authority with varying degrees of success, establishing precedence for women as legitimators of the transfer of imperium or as guardians acting on behalf of underage or infirm men.<sup>189</sup> However, Eirene's sole rule from 797 to 802 was not only unprecedented but unparalleled in Roman history. While she was not the only empress to rule by herself, the dynamic was very different from the reigns of Pulcheria three and a half centuries before or Zoë and Theodora some two and a half centuries later. Through marriages, adoptions, and ruling in their own name, Pulcheria and the Macedonian princesses provided legitimating links to long dynastic histories.<sup>190</sup> Eirene was not the daughter of a previous ruler, and the establishment of her authority came through overthrowing and blinding the last ruler of the Isaurian dynasty, her own son, his mutilation ensuring that he could never be used to challenge her. In other words, Eirene's authority was not hereditary but legal. Her legitimacy was based on her actions—and particularly her support for iconodule policies—rather than blood.

More importantly, Eirene's authority was represented as legitimate in the surviving sources. Neil analysed surviving sources from the early ninth century, and concluded that Eirene was broadly accepted as the legitimate empress in Greek as well as the Latin sources connected with the bishop of Rome. Interestingly, only a few Frankish annals regarded Eirene with hostility, branding her a usurper false emperor, her reign a period of anarchy which ended the line of imperial succession. Why this excessive hostility from a small, interrelated group of sources so far from the Mediterranean? Neil argues that these annals did not reflect diplomatic reality but doctrinal—this was not hostility produced by Franks contesting the Romanness of Greeks, but the hostility of iconoclasts for the champion of the iconodules. She summarizes her findings by noting that ‘there seems to have been little resistance to the fact of [Eirene's] gender in [Constantinople] or Rome, allowing for the absence of iconoclast sources which would doubtless have offered a more critical portrayal.’<sup>191</sup> Charles' coronation as emperor on Christmas day 800 was neither intended, nor perceived, as a challenge to the Romanness of Eirene or her successors. The only western

<sup>189</sup> Garland, *Byzantine Empresses*, 40–72; Herrin, *Unrivalled Influence Women and Empire in Byzantium*, 195.

<sup>190</sup> Garland, *Byzantine Empresses*, 136–67.

<sup>191</sup> Neil, “Regarding Women on the Throne: Representations of Empress Eirene,” 125. Neil further notes that the doctrinal divide for Eirene's support helps explain why, for example, Theophanes only contains a ‘mild rebuke’ for way in which she seized power.

condemnation of her rule was on account of the religious disagreement over the veneration of icons, not because of her gender. Eirene's contemporaries regarded her as legitimate, we must too.<sup>192</sup>

In the abstract, gender played an important role in defining the Roman sign system—non-Romans particularly being defined by feminine stereotypes such as weakness, irrationality, and duplicity. It is necessary that we recognize and describe the systemic misogyny of Roman society and its institutions. After all, the taxonomic description of eighth-century Rhomania by Syrianos Magistros had no explicit place for women. However, this survey points to the importance of distinguishing idealized systems and their representation in literature from the lived individual experiences. Ignatios' unnamed petitioner, Abbess Anthousa of Mantineon and the *patrikia* Eirene all found their way into the historical record as women acting independently within early medieval society, and while they faced constraints because of their gender the difference of their experiences far stronger correlated with differences of wealth and status. These women were as integral to the fabric of Roman society as the men around them. Our ever-expanding collection of meanings for Romanness needs to incorporate not just the idea that a woman could be the head of her household, but the fact that Eirene, who had no dynastic claim to the position, was accepted as the legitimate head of the Roman state for five years. Eirene's legitimacy depended on something more than her gender-defined place in the public social order, more than her kin network, more than her place within an *oikos*. It suggests that the nature of power and authority in early medieval Roman society was inherently gendered independent of the individual who wielded it.

<sup>192</sup> Neil, esp 121–27. On the perception of Eirene in Frankish diplomacy, see also Ančić, “The Treaty of Aachen: How Many Empires?” Contrast with ‘established’ narratives, see esp. Garland, *Byzantine Empresses*, 87–94; Herrin, *Unrivalled Influence Women and Empire in Byzantium*, 202–4. This analysis highlights how unsatisfactory current constitutional models for the early medieval Roman state are. Antony Kaldellis’ work on the underlying republicanism of state systems presents a welcome correction to the worn-out trope of the theocratic empire, but more remains to be done. Kaldellis, *The Byzantine Republic*.

#### 4 DISCUSSION: THE ‘RAW MATERIAL’ FOR ROMAN GROUP FORMATION

This chapter contributed three major insights to the nature and function of identity in early medieval Rhomania. First, it shows that the process of transmission extended beyond the formal systems explored in previous chapters. Second, the language of kinship played a role in building inclusive identities and narratives, but it differed from the language of ethno-genesis used by other early medieval peoples. Finally, it demonstrated the importance of recognizing and describing the gendered construction of power, the gendered implications of the Roman sign system, and the systemically misogynist nature of early medieval social structures, formal and informal. It is important to temper our expectations about the importance of these ‘raw materials’ of collective identity—difference is necessary for articulating the separation of the Self-same from the Other, but difference is not necessarily perceived as socially relevant.

The first takeaway is that transmission remains an important concept for understanding the informal systems of early medieval society. More than simple continuity, transmission was a process of accepting the past, building on it, and passing that legacy on to the future. Syrianos Magistros depicted his social world as both shaped by its historical precedents as well as distinctive from other contemporary societies, even those which shared a historical origin. Human geography drove this point home. The empire’s cities physically linked the experiences of the early medieval communities to their Roman past—and the future. The many meanings of early medieval Romanness included an implicit understanding about the shared experience of the patterns of life shaped by the built environment and the tessellated repetition of buildings and spaces across its diverse locals. Part of transmission of course involved adaptation and reinterpretation. This is the context for which a surprising trend toward egalitarianism emerged across different sections of the chapter. Roman law systematically favoured men, but the codes of the Isaurian era introduced new restrictions on male behaviour, punishing men for transgressions which previously had only been targeted at women of the equivalent social class. That is not to say that men were treated the same as women, only that the difference decreased, at least on paper. Spiritual equalization can more explicitly be found in the hagiographical literary tradition. The early medieval period saw a trope about female sanctity emerge in the form of the pious

housewife. The idea of domestic sanctity contrasted markedly with earlier literary tropes about martyrdoms and ascetic rigour, introducing a degree of attainability and compatibility with societal norms and expectations. Rhomania was still fundamentally and structurally hierarchical, so these changes need to be viewed in the context of society worked through the ramifications of Christian spiritual equality before God. These changes are important not only for establishing that Roman identities were available and relevant for women, but that these, like other components of the complex and ever-growing sign system of Romanness, underwent historical change.

The *oikos* was a social model which provided contextualization for both vertical and horizontal social relationships based around the biological language of kinship. This was made all the more powerful by the assimilation of the notion of Christian spiritual kinship. We saw the effect of this in the relationships documented in the epistles of Theodore Stoudites with a pair of nuns, Eirene and Euphrosyne, who were biological mother and daughter respectively. Although they belonged to a monastery in Constantinople and Theodore hailed these two women as ἀδελφαὶ σταυροφόροι, he also noted that Eirene was Armenian by descent and had entered elite Roman society through marriage to a *strategos* and *patrikios*.<sup>193</sup> We also saw the importance of familial clans, such as the Sarandaapechos' family from Athens and the family of Philaretos the Merciful from Amnia, Paphlagonia, as networks for promoting loyalties and interests. The idea of the Roman family, both as a biological and a spiritual construction, provided a culturally specific tool for establishing relationships and links over a multi-ethnic empire. The *oikos* social model functioned as an alternative to ethnicity, building narratives about social cohesion described in terms of blood relations and kin networks rather than perceived common descent. Perhaps this was a necessity which arose out the very concept of Romanness itself. After all, Romanness was compatible with distinct ethnic identities, for these operated on different levels of identification.<sup>194</sup>

Both Romanness and the articulation of power relationship relied upon gendered sign systems. Romans were virile, strong, consistent, and decisive, whilst the Other was effeminate, untrustworthy, and weak. However, it is important to distinguish the function of gender as a constituent component of sign systems with the activities of specific gendered

<sup>193</sup> Theodore Stoudites, *Epistulae*, 1992, §62.24, biographical information in 465.

<sup>194</sup> Pohl, "Introduction: Early Medieval Romanness – a Multiple Identity," 4.

individuals—particularly among the elite. The small but identifiable participation of women to elite literary circles, as the authors of poetry and contributors to epistolary dialogues, requires a reappraisal of this space. Literature was a masculine activity, but the gendered nature of the activity did not stop eunuchs—who were viewed as a third gender—or women from participating in it. This observation helps contextualize the reign of Empress Eirene (797–802). Many historians have noted the seeming incongruity of Eirene’s gendered representation—whilst she was the *basilissa* on the coinage and hailed as such in literature such as Theodore Stoudites’ encomiastic letter, some documentary sources instead give her a masculine title as *basileus* or *imperator*.<sup>195</sup> The key lies in the fact that ‘gender is implicit in the conception and construction of power itself.’<sup>196</sup> The imperial office was gendered regardless of the sex of its holder. A woman emperor was not a contradiction, but rather the only culturally appropriate way to express her legitimate authority.

This chapter emphasized the essential alterity of early medieval Romanness from the basic assumptions, concepts, and practices of Eurocentric modernism.<sup>197</sup> As historians, we need to see ourselves as social beings, too, whose opinions have been shaped by our own societies which have very different—if superficially related—sign systems and cultural assumptions. This is clear with respect to gender, which is today still integral to the language of power. However, modern definitions of power and gender are culturally produced influenced by concepts of feminism, a culturally ridged understanding of gender as a binary, and historical changes such as women’s suffrage. Our concept of gender differs from the early medieval world of our sources. Other modern concepts and assumptions about identity formation, categorization, and historical narratives which frame a ‘Byzantine’ millennium as both internally coherent and fundamentally distinct from a ‘Roman’ past challenge our ability to understand the past on its own terms. These problems temper our findings and the implications drawn from them.

<sup>195</sup> Whittow, *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium, 600–1025*, 305; Garland, *Byzantine Empresses*, 87–88; Herrin, *Unrivalled Influence Women and Empire in Byzantium*, 201–4. Neil picks up on this language in the account of the second council of Nicaea in 787 in the *Liber Pontificalis*, where twice she and her son are collectively named ‘emperors.’ Neil, “Regarding Women on the Throne: Representations of Empress Eirene,” 118–19.

<sup>196</sup> Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” 1069.

<sup>197</sup> Belsey, *Poststructuralism*, 9–10.



## CHAPTER 7

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### Epilogue

Halfway around the planet, the end of the ninth century AD was the start of a period of growth and expansion for the Ancestral Puebloans who inhabited the Colorado Plateau and northern Rio Grande basin in what is now the American Southwest. Although they did not leave behind a written history, archaeologists and anthropologists have reconstructed a sophisticated understanding of the history of their material culture.<sup>1</sup> In need of a name to label the people who inhabited these long-abandoned sites, early scientific reports adopted the label used by the site's modern neighbours, the Navajo people, which was Anglicized as 'Anasazi'. Consequently, Anasazi was used throughout the twentieth century in both technical and popular literature, being used in the Smithsonian's monumental reference series the *Handbook of North American Indians* and providing the name for Utah's Anasazi State Park.<sup>2</sup> Despite a century of established conventional usage, though, the use of the term faced growing resistance and criticism which grew significantly in the 1990s as political changes caused regional tribes and reservations to become more involved with archaeological preservation. There are a number of objections to the term, but the principal problem with Anasazi is that it is an exonym, and a pejorative one at that: '*anaasází*' in Navajo translates as

<sup>1</sup> Brooks, "The Southwest," esp. 218–23.

<sup>2</sup> Plog, "Prehistory: Western Anasazi"; Cordell, "Prehistory: Eastern Anasazi."

something like ‘ancestral enemies’ or ‘alien ancestors’.<sup>3</sup> Calls for change were slow to overcome the weight of convention, and even into the first decade of the twenty-first century some authors still used the term, albeit feeling obliged to dedicate space to defend and justify the choice, often in hopes of attempting to limit and control the possible meanings of the signifier.<sup>4</sup> We can track the change in volumes by Linda Cordell—two edited volumes were still comfortable with the term in the mid-2000s, but the 2012 Third Edition of *Archaeology in the Southwest* systemically replaces ‘Anasazi’ with ‘Ancestral Puebloan’.<sup>5</sup> The word Anasazi has not disappeared, and will haunt bibliographies for decades to come, but the conscientious efforts involving scholars and indigenous activists has decisively shifted scholarly and public use of the word out of the mainstream.

Although this is a simplified account of a robust field of debate and glosses over the many different cultural actors who have stakes in it, there are some fairly striking parallels with the enduring convention of applying the signifier Byzantium to early medieval Rhomania. Published the same year as the first part of what is now Mesa Verde National Park came under formal government protection, J.B. Bury’s *A History of the Later Roman Empire* expresses a familiar conscientious approach to the use of names. ‘No “Byzantine Empire” ever began to exist; the Roman Empire did not come to an end until 1453. ... I have avoided speaking of a Byzantine, a Greek, or a Greco-Roman Empire, and have carefully restricted myself to the only correct appellations.’<sup>6</sup> What words we use to identify the dead matter, as it colours both our engagement with sources from the past and our own cultural self-perception. Although only the former problem has been a focus of this volume, the example of the Ancestral Puebloans serves as reminder that the latter issue applies here, too.

The word Byzantine—when used generally as a replacement name for the Roman state and people in the medieval period—is a western projection, a product of millennia of geopolitical and cultural competition with other cultural inheritors of the classical world. The word’s anachronism always adds unnecessary interference into the already challenging study of

<sup>3</sup> Walters and Rogers, “Anasazi and ‘Anaasází.”

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Johnson, “Narrative Remains,” 491 note 15.

<sup>5</sup> Cordell and Fowler, *Southwest Archaeology in the Twentieth Century*; Cordell and Gumerman, *Dynamics of Southwest Prehistory*; Cordell and McBrinn, *Archaeology of the Southwest*. My thanks to the archaeologist Mr J. Scott Wood for help finding the relevant literature.

<sup>6</sup> Bury, *A History of the Later Roman Empire from Arcadius to Irene (395–800)*, 1:v–vi.

medieval Rhomania. Many authors note this, but then avoid engaging with the implications of choosing to uphold the terminology anyway.<sup>7</sup> Averil Cameron is worth singling out not only because she offers a definition of a Byzantine, but because that definition rather interestingly intersects with this volume's focus.

Who is a Byzantine? Should the category also include the many individuals and groups of Byzantine culture, upbringing and education who were not actually living within the empire's borders at any given time? An obvious example is provided by the theologian John of Damascus (d. c.750). Though he is generally regarded as one of the most important of all Byzantine theologians he was born and brought up in Damascus under the Umayyads and spent his life as a monk of the Mar Saba monastery near Jerusalem, never setting foot in Byzantine territory. His many works of theology, all written in Greek, do not seem to have been available in Constantinople during his lifetime even though he was well-known by reputation. John's connections within the culture of the Umayyad Caliphate thus pose sharp questions of hybridity, but it would be perverse to deny him a place within a study of Byzantium.<sup>8</sup>

Cameron is unequivocally right that the Romans and the Christians now living under the Caliphate shared a common cultural inheritance—we saw examples of how this encouraged not just communication between elites, but eased mobility for individuals who crossed political divides. But John is a particularly interesting choice (as we saw in Chap. 5 Part 1) because of his familial legacy of Romanness—his father, Sarjūn, was nicknamed al-Rūmī potentially as a means of identification with the dyothelete reformist movement. Sarjūn's Romanness was not some sort of ancestral Roman identity, but a historically specific alignment of concepts and meanings specific to the Roman sign system in this time and place. John himself was never identified with Romanness one way or another, but had he been, it seems more likely that he would have been remembered like later family members who became patriarchs of Jerusalem in the late ninth century—as being tainted by his grandfather, Manṣūr, who was remembered for his betrayal of his office and the Roman army in the surrender of Damascus in 635. However useful it is to think about the gradual

<sup>7</sup> Examples include: Wickham, *The Inheritance of Rome*, 256–57; Brubaker, *Inventing Byzantine Iconoclasm*, 2.

<sup>8</sup> Cameron, *The Byzantines*, 17.

divergence of a common cultural background, Cameron's Byzantines are not a historical category.

The ahistorical use of the Byzantine label does not only create categories which were not perceived or articulated by historical actors, but hides the historical usage of the word to indicate specific affiliation with Constantinople. As Joan Scott observed in a different context, 'Those who would codify the meaning of words fight a losing battle, for words, like the ideas and things they are meant to signify, have a history.'<sup>9</sup> When it comes to Byzantine, a writer cannot abolish the word's sign system in our own culture, nor codify away the prevalent idiomatic meanings as arcane, superstitious, or unnecessarily complex bureaucracy. A writer's only agency is to choose which names to use, and follow John Haldon's example in abandoning the term in his more recent work.<sup>10</sup> The other major reason to abandon the term's use in writing and teaching is that it imposes a teleological framework through which we approach historical sources. This volume has shown that Romanness was a historically dynamic processes affecting many different parties and social strata. In order to make this case, we restricted or excluded evidence drawn from outside this period as much as possible, especially concerning later developments. We should not confuse evidence from vastly separated periods—doing so masks the specific contexts in which different generations of Romans were living and writing. As a historiographical methodology, the *longue durée* has its place, but it has been over-used for the medieval Roman Empire.

There is no doubt that the conflicts of the early seventh century represented an existential threat to the Roman polity, and thus represented an unprecedented challenge to the project of imperial identification. Voices from that period clearly perceived that the Roman state had suffered major losses. Defeat and humiliation at the hands of heretics and barbarians undermined rhetorical claims that the Empire had divine sanction and that the Romans were God's chosen people. This contributed to the changes in the construction and conception of Romanness which occurred over the following centuries. 'In situations where identities are threatened ... social actors may need to reconstruct and redefine their identity to deal with this new situation,' circumstances in which 'new forms of political

<sup>9</sup> Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," 1053.

<sup>10</sup> Haldon, *The Empire That Would Not Die*. Contrast with his earlier narrative history, Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century*.

agency are likely to arise.<sup>11</sup> The following centuries were a period in which Roman society as a whole struggled to deal with the repercussions of these changes, and differing voices survive in our sources which give some idea of the scope and tenor of their debates. This period saw competition over the power to rhetorically define the Roman community among the elite, as well as challenges to that authority rising up from the bottom. As a new consensus began to take shape—or was imposed—in the ninth century, the dominant ideology differed from that of earlier centuries, but bore an evolutionary rather than revolutionary relationship to it.

Identity is a complex issue to begin with, and Roman identity in the period following the Islamic conquests particularly so for a number of reasons. One is the role which the historical events of the seventh, eighth, and early ninth centuries played in myth-making. The Romans who lived in this time fulfil distinct roles in different historiographical traditions. Later generations of Roman authors reconstructed the past as a ‘dark age’ separating Heraclius’ victories in the 620s and the Triumph of Orthodoxy and end of official iconoclasm in 843. In western culture, the centuries-long ‘crisis’ in the Eastern Roman Empire plays an ideologically charged role in the construction of a totalizing Byzantine break with the Roman past. Neither narrative approaches the experiences of the men and women who lived through this period objectively, but subordinates their experiences to the need to create satisfying myths. Accurate study of group identity in this period requires identifying these biases and seeking out sources and approaches which test them. A second problem is that ‘Roman,’ although a massive category comprising millions of individuals, was not exactly analogous to any modern group-categorization. Sociological models point to the importance of two types of social spaces where identities are defined: central institutions, structures, organizations, and practices which form anchors to which identities point;<sup>12</sup> and the various man-made and natural boundaries, whose persistence and maintenance despite change is the very ‘nature of continuity’ of group identities.<sup>13</sup> These insights inform the structure of the chapters which followed.

Chapter 2 exposed some deficiencies in previous approaches to early medieval Roman identity and ways to improve upon them. Although we drew on theoretical models borrowed from the study of ethnicity and

<sup>11</sup> Howarth, *Poststructuralism and After*, 251.

<sup>12</sup> Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups*, 11–18.

<sup>13</sup> Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, 14.

nationalism, the Romans were not exactly either a ‘tribe’ or a ‘nation’ as commonly understood in modern historiographical conventions. Attempting to re-appropriate these terms in order to make them fit, as Kaldellis has opted to do, is not necessary to make sense of the evidence and adds unnecessary complexity.<sup>14</sup> Instead, this volume aimed to treat Roman identity as an ‘open question,’ to use R. Brubaker’s terminology, answered by individuals strategically utilizing the ‘raw materials’ of culture. Like other categories, being ‘Roman’ was but one of many possible identities available to the people of the early middle ages. Roman identity was shaped by many factors both recorded and forgotten including intra-group interests, organizations and authority figures, boundaries, and narratives about the past.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, works which approach the issue of identity in terms of history’s *longue durée*, as the approaches of both Kaldellis and Stouraitis exemplify, can obliterate the nuance of evolutionary changes, such as the process by which Greek came to replace Latin as the ‘Roman’ language.<sup>16</sup> The shift of priority away from attempting to positively describe Roman identity and towards approaching it as a function of community boundary maintenance points to the underlying rectitude of Kaldellis’ view that it was, in a fundamental way, a ‘popular’ identity, and not one solely belonging to a narrowly circumscribed literate elite.

Chapter 3 explored the principal anchors at the heart of the Roman group. The polity stood at the absolute centre of the Roman world, providing the historical reference point by which Romans situated themselves in their present to both the past and the future. However, historiographical discourse from both primary sources and secondary literature narrate structural changes in terms of a ‘thematic revolution,’ a radical break with the late antique past. A close reading of the polity’s institutional changes in this period reveals a far more nuanced picture of evolutionary change, where new approaches derived from older systems. Although the state provided the institutional reference points of the Roman polity, the act of performing Roman identity well required possession of a set of cultural reference points, particularly those acquired through the classical *paideia*. For the elite, from families who could afford to invest in education for

<sup>14</sup> Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium The Transformations of Greek Identity and the Reception of the Classical Tradition*, 42–45.

<sup>15</sup> Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups*, 14–20.

<sup>16</sup> Stouraitis, “Roman Identity in Byzantium.”

their younger generations, the classical and Christian texts of the *paideia* provided a common symbolic language. This created a (literary) space for the performance of identity, facilitating a conceptual unity to the imagined Roman community. These ideological links were supported by personal, familial, and spiritual structures which organized the Roman world into a series of hierarchical relationships. These interpersonal connections reinforced and defined the contours of the Roman group, promoting cohesion and helping to define the traits which could be used to identify participation in the ‘in-group.’

Just as anchors provided a positive definition of a group, the various boundaries covered in Chaps. 4 and 5 provided a negative definition, clarifying what Romans were in terms of what they were *not*. Even if ‘the elements of a present culture [did] not spring from the particular set that constituted the group’s culture at a previous time, ... continuous organisational existence’ arises from ‘boundaries (criteria of membership) that despite modifications have marked off a continuing unit.<sup>17</sup> Romans inherited from the classical past a clear discourse on the subject, for their other were ‘barbarians.’ The impact of this encompassing view of self and other becomes clear when the Roman-self became equated with Christian orthodoxy, leading to a confluence of barbarian-other with heresy and disbelief. The process of othering groups who otherwise participated in Roman civil society advanced a certain ideological program which sought to impose a specific religious interpretation of what constituted ‘good’ group beliefs and practices. On the other hand, the empire’s political and military frontiers formed a different sort of boundary. The communities which existed in proximity to the empire’s borders utilized social anchors in order to maintain group cohesion as Romans, demonstrating their efficacy. The changing frontiers of the seventh century resulted in many Romans finding themselves integrated into new state systems. These groups did not immediately forsake the centuries of heritage which Roman citizenship and identity had brought. When individuals and groups migrated, practices inherited from a shared late antique past allowed them to assimilate into mainstream Roman society. Although porous with respect to individuals, the continuous maintenance of boundaries between Romans and barbarians signalled the group’s unbroken cultural legacy.

<sup>17</sup> Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, 36.

Finally, Chap. 6 grappled with some of the normative issues raised over the course of exploring identity in the period. Even at its smallest extent throughout the whole of the first millennium, the Roman peoples, ‘spread over a territory with varying ecological circumstances [and exhibited] regional diversities of overt institutionalized behaviour which do not reflect differences in cultural orientation.’<sup>18</sup> Looking for contemporary ways in which the Romans understood their own society, we contrasted the ridged hierarchy of roles envisaged by the *De Re Strategica* with the fractal pattern created by using the *oikos* as a metaphor for all manner of relationships. We found a strikingly dynamic social order with a range of tools through which individuals could articulate and act on their sense of belonging. Military manuals from the period reflect a more civic ideology behind their performance of being Roman in contrast with the religiously intolerant rhetoric found in more mainstream sources. Alternative visions of the Roman community continued to be articulated as relevant for audiences of the early middle ages. We also explored the intersection between Romanness and gendered identity as one of the ‘raw materials’ of group difference. In particular, we were interested in contextualizing the reign of Empress Irene (797–802). Her reign, clearly viewed as legitimate by her contemporaries, must be understood in terms of a continuous and evolving Roman state and society. As historians, we have to be diligent to separate our own socially-constructed notions of power and gender from the equally socially-constructed, but different, definitions used by early medieval Roman people.

At its heart, this volume has attempted to strike a new balance in its representation of change versus continuity in the rhetorical construction of Roman identity in the early medieval period. As evidenced through analysis of the origins of historical myths, present discourse tends to over-emphasize radical change, in the process obliterating the debt which new forms of identity owed to older traditions. By moving the paradigm away from revolution and towards evolution, we arrive at a better understanding of group dynamics in the early middle ages, situating them in their own historical paradigms and not subordinating their experiences to the myth-making processes of later generations.

<sup>18</sup> Barth, 12.

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