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HISTORICAL CONFIRMATION OF PROPHETIC PERIODS

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Historical Confirmation of the Year 538 as the Beginning of the 1,260-Day Prophecy

INTRODUCTION

The prophetic time period of three and one half times, forty-two months, or 1,260 days appears several times in the books Daniel and Revelation (see box). As Seventh-day Adventists, we believe that the papacy is the little-horn power of Daniel 7 and 8; that the 1,260 symbolic days are 1,260 literal years, during which the papacy ruled, first with increasing, and later, with ever diminishing, power. We also believe that the demise of the papacy, in 1798, is compared, in Revelation 13:3, to a “deadly wound” that would heal; and that the “time, times, and half a time” of Daniel 7:25 are linked with the

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| Dan 7:25 | A time and times and half a time |
| Dan 12:7 | A time, times, and half a time |
| Rev 11:2 | Forty-two months |
| Rev 11:3 | One thousand two hundred and sixty days |
| Rev 12:6 | One thousand two hundred and sixty days |
| Rev 12:14 | A time and times and half a time |
| Rev 13:5 | Forty-two months |

same time period in Revelation 12:14 and the 1,260 days of Revelation 12:6 and the forty-two months of Revelation 13:5. Therefore, we believe that the year 1798 serves best as the *terminus ad quem* (ending date) for the three and a half times, or 1,260 prophetic days of Daniel 7:25 and Revelation 12:6.

The time period of Daniel 7:25 is also linked with the 1,290 and 1,335 days of Daniel 12:11, 12. This means we cannot dispense with AD 538 as the *terminus a quo* (beginning date) for the 1,260 days, nor with AD 508 as the *terminus a quo* for the 1,290 and 1,335 days, when the “daily” was taken away and the “abomination of desolation” was set up. Yet, adherence to these dates seems to present a real challenge. What happened in AD 508 and 538 that could support the view that these dates were indicative of the growth of papal power? My strategy will be to go through not only history but also

through the old *canones*,¹ *codices*,² decrees, and writings to shed some light on the importance of the years 508 and 538, which are generally not found in ordinary history books because historians are not interested in the prophetic significance of these dates.

1. A PERIOD OF CHANGE

A methodological remark—The termination of the 1,260 days, in 1798, raises the question about the beginning of this period. By simply deducting 1260 from 1798, we come to the year 538 as the starting point of this time prophecy. So, what exactly happened in 538?

Before we try to answer this question, we need to answer questions raised concerning the method of our investigation: Is it legitimate to start the calculation from the final fulfillment back to the beginning? Shouldn't we know for sure, at first, that 538 is the starting point of the reckoning and then look to 1798 to see that the prophecy has indeed been fulfilled? Thus, people prior to the French Revolution could have used the prophecy to foresee the demise of the papacy in 1798.

As a matter of fact, none of the time prophecies in Daniel and Revelation has ever been fully understood prior to its fulfillment. Time prophecies were not given to predict events at a specific point in time. On the contrary, the method is: listen to the prophecy, be ready to understand, and after its fulfillment you will understand, and then you will know. This hermeneutical approach is recommended, and even predicted, by the biblical authors.

See, for example, Matthew 24:25 and Mark 13:23, but especially John 14:29 where Jesus told His disciples things in advance so that when the foretold things were fulfilled they might believe. Even the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament were completely understood only after their fulfillment (Luke 24:25-27, 44). Also Daniel, who himself did not understand all the details of his own prophecies (Dan 8:26), predicted an increase in understanding during the time of the end (Dan 12:4). Thus we should not be surprised about the fact that Daniel's time prophecies were, at first, not fully understood; they were better understood towards the end of their

¹ Decisions of church counsels, church laws.

² Imperial law collections.

fulfillment.³ In addition we should also not forget: these time prophecies in Daniel and Revelation had been “sealed” (Dan 12:4, 9), which is an additional reason why they could not be fully understood until the time of their fulfillment had come. The history of biblical interpretation testifies to this: the full significance of the 1,260 and 2,300 days was not understood until close to the time of their fulfillment.⁴ Thus, it is not unusual first to identify 1798 as the year of the deadly wound (Rev 13:3ff) and only then to calculate when it all began—in 538. Now, what happened in AD 538 to represent the starting point of the growth of the papacy?

The period in question—The fourth decade of the sixth century AD was a very turbulent period. At the beginning of the century, the countries of Western Europe and Italy were under the rule of Germanic tribes that were of either pagan or Arian⁵ faith—not followers of the bishop of Rome.⁶ Forty years later, the Franks, once the most powerful Germanic people, were converted to the Roman faith, and the Arian tribes were either utterly exterminated (e.g., the Vandals); forced to move away and remain powerless, until they finally became Roman Catholics (e.g., the Visigoths); or rendered powerless and forced to await final destruction (e.g., the Ostrogoths). There was no Arian power left to prevent the bishop of Rome from ruling. The Vandals, Visigoths, and Ostrogoths, the three powers de-

³ For example, one of the first interpreters to date the end of the 1260-day prophecy to the nineteenth century was Drue Cressener, who in 1689 wrote, “The first appearance of the Beast was at *Justinian’s* recovery of the *Western Empire*, from which time to about the year 1800 will be about 1260 years” (*The Judgments of God Upon the Roman Catholic Church* [London: Richard Chiswell, 1689], 309; quoted in LeRoy Edwin Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, 4 vols. [Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1948], 2:596).

⁴ See Froom, 2:765–782 and C. Mervyn Maxwell, *Tell It to the World* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1977), 9–33 and P. Gerard Damsteegt, *Foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1970), 3–56.

⁵ Arians were followers of Arius, presbyter of Alexandria (d. 336), who believed that because Christ is said to have been “begotten” (John 3:16), He must have had a beginning.

⁶ For Isidor, the Roman Catholic bishop of Sevilla, who, about AD 615, wrote a history of the Goths, the ultimate heresy of Arianism was the adoration of “three gods,” as in idolatry, instead of only one God and Lord. See Alexander Heine, ed., *Isidor: Geschichte der Goten, Vandalen und Sueven* (Kettwig: Phaidon, 1990), 19, 20. But what does “Arian” really mean? Isidor defines an Arian as an “enemy against the Catholic faith and against the Trinity” (see Heine, 78). This could mean that the foremost problem of Arianism was the lack of orthodoxy, i.e., a lack of obedience to Rome. “Arianism” became a catch-all brand to identify the enemies of Roman Catholicism. Thus, in the eyes of Roman Catholics, all Arian kingdoms were considered to be enemies of the true faith.

scribed in Daniel 7:8 as being “plucked up,” were removed,⁷ making possible the growth of the little horn. The destruction of Germanic Arianism was accomplished within the short period of approximately thirty years.⁸ What brought about this change? Obviously, the papacy did not free itself. There were two different agents: (1) The Franks under Clovis and his sons, and (2) the Eastern emperors Anastasius, Justin, and Justinian, in Constantinople and the Byzantine generals Belisarius and Narses.

2. THE FRANKS AND AD 508

The Franks converted to Roman Catholicism by the end of the fifth century with the baptism of Clovis, and destroyed the Visigoth kingdom in Aquitaine, by 507 and 508, fighting against it presumably for reasons of faith.⁹ I say “presumably,” for the Arian king of the Burgundians, Gundobad, helped Clovis the Frank in his fight against the Visigoths. In 508, Clovis made Paris his capital and reigned over both church and state. Saint Avitus of Vienne,¹⁰ who greatly influenced the Frankish king, was strenuous in his assertion of the authority of the Apostolic See as the chief bulwark of religious unity and the incipient Christian civilization.

The baptism of Clovis—A problem somewhat discussed among historians nowadays is the exact dating of the baptism of the Frankish king, Clovis. While Gregory of Tours was normally regarded as informative in his ten books of history of the Frankish kingdom, recent scholarship disagrees with him. Gregory dated Clovis’s baptism indirectly to around 498 (or 496, according to a papal letter by the newly elected Pope Anastasius [496–498] to the newly baptized King Clovis,

⁷ For reasons why the author does not favor the Heruli as one of the uprooted powers, see footnote 97 on page 33.

⁸ Compare Daniel 7:25 with 12:11. Revelation 12:6, 14 equates the “time, times and half a time” with “1260 days.” The 1,290 days and the 1,260 days have the same termination point – 1798. Thus, the 1,290 days start in 508, when “the daily . . . is taken away, and the abomination of desolation is set up” (Dan 12:11). Because Daniel’s time prophecies were sealed (Dan 12:4, 9), the connection of the two time periods with the “time, times and half a time” could be understood only toward the end of these periods. Christ’s work in the heavenly sanctuary would be forgotten for more than a millennium, beginning with the abomination of the unholy marriage between religion and politics.

⁹ Heinz Schaidinger, “Frömmigkeitswandel im Mittelalter,” unpublished manuscript (Universität Salzburg: Institut für Geschichte, 1996), 19–21.

¹⁰ Archbishop of Vienne, in Gaul, who pursued with success the extinction of Arianism among the Burgundians.

the only Catholic king on earth; the other Germanic tribes were Arians and the Byzantine emperor was a heretic).¹¹ Rolf Weiss, among others, proposes a new date for Clovis's baptism – 508.¹² So did André P. van de Vyver¹³ before him, and Danuta Shanzer and Ian Wood after him.¹⁴ Among Seventh-day Adventist expositors, this new date of AD 508 for Clovis's baptism is widely accepted as it coincides well with the interpretation of the 1,290 days of Daniel 12:11.

Yet, this new dating is by no means secure and, in fact, poses some serious problems. The “abomination of desolation,” erected at the beginning of the 1,290 days, i.e., in AD 508 (Dan 12:11), cannot be fulfilled simply by the conversion of Clovis, because to be baptized is not an abomination. Rather, the abomination of desolation consists in the *mixing of worldly and religious powers*. When Clovis fought

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the battles of the Roman Church by destroying the Arian Visigoths in AD 507/508 (according to Gregory of Tours), the abomination was taking shape.

Furthermore, there is no date given for Clovis's baptism. The sources state only that his conversion has to do with the war against

the Germanic tribe of the Alemanni. But which war is meant? The larger war of 496 or the smaller rebellion in 506, 507 or 508? Now, some people would say it was the decisive battle in the rebellion of the Alemanni, in 507 or 508, that brought about Clovis's conversion. But then, why should Clovis fight a “holy war” (as he himself described it according to Gregory of Tours) against the Arian Visigoths, in 507, before his baptism in 508? Before he was converted, he was a stout heathen (according to Gregory and Nicetius the bishop of Trier), or he was at least influenced by Arianism (according to Avitus of Vienne). The experience of Christ as the superior God on the battlefield is said to have brought about his conversion, but this could also be a legend, similar to the legend about

¹¹ See Felix Dahn, *Die Franken* (Essen: Phaidon, n.d.), 55.

¹² Rolf Weiss, *Chlodwigs Taufe: Reims 508* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1971).

¹³ André P. van de Vyver, “La Victoire Contre les Alamans et la Conversion de Clovis [1re partie]” in *Revue belge de Philologie et d’Histoire* 15, no. 3–4, 1936.

¹⁴ Danuta Shanzer and Ian Wood, *Avitus of Vienne. Letters and Selected Prose* (Liverpool: University Press, 2002).

Constantine and the cross. This parallel between Clovis and Constantine is very much stressed by Gregory of Tours. The abomination was complete when Clovis formally shook hands with the Roman Church, in 508, with worship services of victory over the Visigoths and his recognition as a Roman consul by the Byzantine emperor Anastasius – facts not disputed by any historian. So, it hardly makes sense to base our interpretation of prophecy on Clovis’ supposed baptism in 508, which is much disputed by historians.¹⁵

Avitus and Clovis—During the Laurentian schism,¹⁶ archbishop Avitus wrote a letter to supporters of the pope, stating, “Since it is well known that the apostle proclaims that an accusation should not be entertained even against a priest, what license is there for accusations against the leader of the whole church?”¹⁷ He asked Faustus and Symmachus, the two addressees of his letter:

I, as a Christian bishop, beg from you as Roman senators that the status of the church be no less important than that of the republic in your sight. May the power that God granted you be of use to us too! May you love the see of Peter in your own church no less than you love the peak of the world in the city.¹⁸

This letter clearly shows that Avitus claimed great authoritative power for the pope at the beginning of the sixth century (AD 502) — comparable to the power of the Roman emperors. Yet, the pope’s power was still only a theory, backed neither by imperial decrees nor by political reality. For Avitus this issue was not only a question con-

¹⁵ Shanzer and Wood argue for Clovis’s baptism in AD 508, but then they say: “Ultimately, however, the date of Clovis’s baptism is much less significant than is often thought. Clovis had been urged to work with Catholic bishops since the start of his reign, even while a pagan. It is also clear from the collaboration of the Arian Gundobad in the Visigothic campaign of 508 that the king’s supposed anti-Arian crusades were not prompted by religion” (Shanzer and Wood, *Avitus of Vienne: Letters and Selected Prose*, Letter 34, 368). So, the goals of the Church and of Clovis coincided. Clovis’s accomplished works were appreciated by the Church and used for church propaganda. But, I ask, would he have done this before his baptism? So, the date of 508 for Clovis’s baptism might be tempting to some extent; yet, it is not fully convincing.

¹⁶ Laurentius was a rival pope of the Roman Catholic Church, from 498 to 506. He was supported by Emperor Anastasius. With the support of the Gothic King Theodoric the Great, he was installed in the Lateran Palace as pope, starting the Laurentian schism, that lasted four years.

¹⁷ Shanzer and Wood, *Avitus of Vienne: Letters and Selected Prose*, 161.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 162.

cerning the Roman pontiff but also concerning the power of the church as a whole. “If the pope,” he said, “is called into question, the episcopate itself, not just a bishop, will seem to be wavering.”¹⁹

Now, this same Avitus congratulated Clovis on his baptism. The opening of the letter shows that Clovis had been acquainted with Christianity for a long time; he had had to make a choice between Roman Catholicism and Germanic Arianism. Clovis was obviously influenced by Arianism, at first;²⁰ in fact, his sisters Lenticildis and Audofleda had to be converted from Arianism to Roman Catholicism.²¹ This deliberate choice had political reasons, of course. Both the Church and Clovis profited from that choice that was, at the same time, a threat to the other Germanic kingdoms, for it brought the Franks nearer to their Roman Catholic subjects than the Visigoths or Ostrogoths were.²² Avitus put it quite ably, “Divine foresight has found a certain judge for our age [i.e., a judge between the true and the schismatic church]. In making a choice for yourself, you judge on behalf of everyone. Your faith is our victory.”²³ Avitus even calls Clovis’s decision a “miracle” that should lead others not to excuse themselves any longer with arguments about the duty of pagan rulers to stay with the traditions of the ancient clan.²⁴ Avitus strains the argument—while the Frankish kings have been rulers on earth only, Clovis, by his decision, has established heavenly rulership for himself and his offspring. So Greece,²⁵ adds Avitus, is not the only

¹⁹ Ibid. See also <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02161c.htm> ; October 10, 2004. (Si papa urbis vocatur in dubium, episcopatus videbitur, non episcopus, vacillare—Epistle 34; ed. Peiper).

²⁰ Thus argues Danuta Shanzer, “Dating the baptism of Clovis: the bishop of Vienne vs the bishop of Tours,” *Early Medieval Europe* 6 (July 1998), 36, 37. I agree with Shanzer that Gregory of Tours is “suppressing facts” in that case, especially facts in connection with an Arian past of Clovis, possibly as an Arian catechumen. Yet this does not discredit Gregory’s tale altogether, as Shanzer would have it. Patrick Geary even argues that Clovis definitely was of Arian faith before his conversion to Roman Catholicism (*Die Merowinger: Europa vor Karl dem Großen* [München: Beck, 1996], 91). Gregory of Tours could have suppressed such a fact. Geary sees possible dates for Clovis’ baptism in AD 496, 498, or 506.

²¹ This is also the view of Shanzer who refers to Gregor and Avitus in “Dating the baptism of Clovis,” 34. Shanzer argues for a late date of baptism, much *e silentio*, even with textual conjectures within the documents. The question is undecided, but as I have already stated, for the understanding of Bible prophecy, the date of Clovis’s baptism is actually irrelevant.

²² Geary, 92–94.

²³ Danuta Shanzer and Ian Wood, *Avitus of Vienne*, 369. By “our victory” he means the victory of the Roman Catholic Church and the Apostolic See.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ “Greece” is a reference to the Byzantine Empire, which Avitus *thought* was ruled by an orthodox emperor. This, however, was not entirely the case; the emperor, Anastasius, had monophysite tendencies—an irony of history .

country to have an orthodox ruler. To Gaul belongs the same glory now, because Clovis's baptism took place on December 25, obviously "on the birthday of our redeemer," which causes Avitus to make allegorical comparisons between Christ's birth and Clovis's regeneration in baptism.²⁶ Then Avitus, not being personally present at Clovis's baptism, imagines a reenactment of the baptismal scene:

I was turning things over in my mind, and wondering how it would be when a large company of bishops united, striving in the sacred service, would lap the royal limbs in the life-giving waters, when he would bow before the servants of the Lord the head that should be so feared by pagans, when locks grown long beneath a helmet, would put on the helmet of the sacred chrism [consecrated oil], when his spotless limbs, the breastplate removed, would shine as white as his baptismal clothes. Have no fear, O most prosperous of Kings! From now on the very softness of that clothing will cause the hardness of your armour to be all the more effective: whatever good luck has offered you in the past, holiness will now provide.²⁷

Avitus clearly rejoices about the church's conquest of the overcomer, the "head feared by the pagans"²⁸ and assures Clovis that, with Christ, he would win even more battles than in the past, when he won them only through "good luck."

Then Avitus shows a little of his authority over King Clovis: "I would like to add some exhortation . . . Or should I preach humility perhaps? You had long ago paid it to me by your service, even though only now do you owe it to me through your profession of faith."²⁹ This statement is rather bold and shows that the church wanted to exploit the power of the newly converted Frankish king. The letter, as it is delivered to us, ends with an exhortation to Clo-

²⁶ Danuta Shanzer and Ian Wood, *Avitus of Vienne*. 370, 371.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 371, 372.

²⁸ According to Gregory of Tours, the Roman Church is stronger than the most feared pagan king.

²⁹ Shanzer and Wood, *Avitus of Vienne*, 371. Compare this attitude of Avitus to that of bishop Remigius and the submission of Clovis to the Church in the baptismal scene, as told by Gregory of Tours. (See Rudolf Buchner, *Gregor von Tours*, 10 vols. [Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1977], 1: 110, 111). We find many similarities.

vis, that he might build up missions among the pagans to “build up the party of the God who has raised up yours so greatly.”³⁰

As a matter of fact, Clovis started a holy war against the Arian Visigoths, overcame them, and established Paris as his *cathedra regni* (seat of power). From there, he consistently supported the cause of the Apostolic See. While his date of baptism cannot be ascertained with certainty (either AD 498 or 508, or some other date), Clovis’s final victory over the Visigoths, which took several battles, clearly dates from 507/508. His acceptance as king and ally by the Byzantine emperor Anastasius against Clovis’s brother-in-law Theoderic the Great,³¹ king of the Ostrogoths, dates from 508. His occupation of Toulouse and the taking away of the Gothic treasure there,³² his gifts to Martin’s Basilica in Tours, as an acknowledgment of divine help (St. Martin was considered his “helper to victory”) against the Visigoths, as well as his establishing of Paris as his *cathedra regni*, all date from 508.³³ After all this, Clovis strengthened his kingdom through the murder of relatives and further battles,³⁴ as well as through organizing church councils (e.g., Orléans, 511) and through using the church to better administer his lands. After the Gothic war of 507/508, Clovis gave thanks to the Roman Catholic clergy who hailed him as deliverer from the domination of the heretical Arian Visigoths. Clovis gave the clergy much of the heretics’ land and promised his protection to the Roman Church. After 508, however, Clovis and his allies again lost a considerable amount of the conquered land to the Ostrogoth Theoderic. It was Theoderic who, after fighting off the Byzantine fleet’s attacks against the eastern coasts of Italy in 508,³⁵ finally sent his army, under general Ibbá, to support the Visigoths—a little late but still successful.

Yet, it was primarily the Roman Catholic Church that profited from all this. The established union between throne and altar remained, and did not fail, for the next centuries. The clergy described Clovis as “their

³⁰ Ibid., 373.

³¹ Theoderic had married Audofleda, sister of Clovis.

³² Reinhold Kaiser, *Das römische Erbe und das Merowingerreich*. Enzyklopädie deutscher Geschichte, vol. 26 (München: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 1993), 24, 25.

³³ Schaidinger, 20.

³⁴ Murder of related kings and princes committed by Clovis was seen as a minor problem in his days and taken by many as a token of his superb kingship. See Felix Dahn, *Die Franken*, 61–63.

³⁵ This was the Byzantine help for Clovis. Theoderic had to fight different enemies on two fronts.

Lord, the Son of the Catholic Church, Clovis, the glorious king.”³⁶ He also excelled as a legislator, dying a natural death in Paris on November 27, 511.³⁷ Despite his premature death, he left behind a new type of “Germanic kingdom in which relations between conquerors and conquered were of a more cohesive nature than in any other.”³⁸ This cohesion is clearly shown by the fact that, despite repeated divisions among sons and heirs, the Frankish kingdom(s) prevailed as the only one(s) of the Germanic kingdoms of the fifth century.

In assessing his success, we could say with the historians that Clovis created, out of a small principedom, a powerful Germanic-Catholic empire that was sealed with the alliance between throne and altar. This alliance became a special and distinguishing badge of the Franks.³⁹ In this they quite clearly outdid the Ostrogoths. From the time of Clovis on, the Franks considered themselves faithful to the papacy. This was true for the Merovingians, the Carolingians, the Capets, the Plantagenets, the Valois, and the Bourbons⁴⁰—until the time of the French Revolution. Thus, the year 508 was the beginning of the “abomination that makes desolate.”

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3. THE OSTROGOTH THEODERIC, THE FRANK CLOVIS, AND THE BYZANTINE EMPEROR

When the empire of the Huns collapsed after Attila’s death, in AD 453 (within twenty years the Huns ceased to be an independent force, north of the Danube), there was immediate strife among the peoples under the Huns’ dominion: Goths, Gepids, Suevi, Sciri, and Heruli fought for position. After twenty years of fighting, the Pannonian

³⁶ Karlheinz Deschner, *Kriminalgeschichte des Christentums*, vol. 4: Frühmittelalter (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1997), 73, 74.

³⁷ Hermann Schreiber, *Geschichte der Päpste* (Blindlach: Gondrom, 1989), 38; “In this way the Christian kingdom of the Franks became an important support of the papal power against the Germanic Arian people.”

³⁸ Robert Fossier, ed., *The Cambridge Illustrated History of the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: University Press, 1989), 57.

³⁹ Deschner, 4:78.

⁴⁰ Different royal dynasties in the history of France.

Goths⁴¹ decided to move into the Eastern (Byzantine) Roman Empire in 473. In this empire, there were already Goths in Thrace⁴² who were *foederati* (i.e., they had a treaty with Byzantium); one of their leaders was Theoderic Strabo. Through the assassination of an ally of Theoderic, Emperor Leo caused Theoderic to revolt against him in 471.

Also in 471, another Theoderic, son of Theodemer, leader of the Pannonian Goths, from the Amali dynasty, came home from Constantinople, where he had been held hostage,⁴³ and was raised to royal status by his father. The arrival of the Pannonian Goths in the empire caused Leo to move troops toward them, while the *foederati*-revolt was well on its way in 473. To avoid a war on two fronts, a peace treaty was arranged between Leo and Theoderic Strabo, guaranteeing to the latter 2,000 pounds of gold per annum and the title “sole ruler” (*autokrator* – a title normally reserved for the Emperor) of the Goths – with Leo promising “not to receive into his service ‘any Goths who wished to serve him.’”⁴⁴

Leo I died in January 474. He was succeeded by his grandson Leo II, who was only 7 years old. So, Zeno, the father of the boy, a leading Byzantine general, proclaimed himself co-Emperor, in February 474, and became sole ruler when his son died the following November. However, because of a coup against him by Theoderic Strabo and others, he had to flee late in 474. To make a long story short, there were two parties of Goths present in the empire, whose rivalry Zeno used to advantage, winning the day by pitting the Goths against each other.

The death of Theoderic Strabo, in 481, paved the way for the Gothic unification under the Pannonian Theoderic—later called “the Great.” In 482, the Pannonian Theoderic, with strengthened forces, ravaged much of the southwest Balkans. This led to a peace treaty between Zeno and Theoderic. The Pannonian Goths received land in Dacia Ripensis and other areas, and Theoderic himself was appointed senior imperial general and consul for 484.

⁴¹ Pannonia was a Roman province of the Western Roman Empire in what is today parts of Hungary and the Balkan States.

⁴² The Roman province of Thrace occupied the European part of modern Turkey.

⁴³ As a young boy, Theoderic went to Constantinople as a hostage to secure the Ostrogothic compliance with a treaty his father had concluded with Byzantine Emperor Leo.

⁴⁴ Peter Heather, *The Goths* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 157.

This was unheard of—a consul with barbarian background. It shows how desperate the situation was in which Zeno found himself against the Goths. In 484, the last of Theoderic Strabo's blood relatives was murdered, and so the majority of the Thracian Goths went with Theoderic the Great.⁴⁵

By that time the Western Roman Empire no longer existed. While the German chieftain Odoacer and his mercenaries had built up their dominion in Italy,⁴⁶ the Visigoths had conquered southern Gaul and Spain. The Visigothic Kingdom of Euric was the first powerful kingdom on Western Roman soil that remained for any length of time, following the fall of the Roman Empire in 476. The Visigoths played an important role in the downfall of the Western Roman Empire. The second most important kingdom on Roman soil was the Frankish kingdom; the third, the Ostrogothic kingdom; the fourth, the Vandal kingdom. All of them were Christian, but only one of them (the Franks) was Roman Catholic. The other three kingdoms either perished (Vandals and Ostrogoths) or were converted to Roman Catholicism (Visigoths), after being substantially weakened by the Roman Catholic Franks.

Returning to the Pannonian Goths: Theoderic the Great and Zeno did not really trust each other. In 485, Theoderic rebelled against Zeno and attacked Constantinople. In the end, they concluded a new peace treaty in which Zeno gave Italy to Theoderic. This treaty was good for both of them—Zeno got Theoderic out of the Balkans, hoping that the Gothic force would be consumed in Italy; and Theoderic received a place for his people. As early as 479, Theoderic considered intervening in Italy to restore the Western emperor Romulus Augustulus, who had been deposed by the Germanic chieftain Odoacer in 476—thinking that he would be the power behind the restored emperor. The question was,

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 157–165. Theoderic's consulship is mentioned by Jordanis, who speaks also about Zeno's adoption of Theoderic, about his erecting a monument of Theoderic, mounted on a horse in Constantinople, and organizing a triumphal march for his adopted son-at-arms, through the city, etc. See Alexander Heine, ed., *Jordanis: Gotengeschichte* (Essen: Phaidon, Faksimile from 1913), 143.

⁴⁶ Odoacer, whose background is not certain, organized a coup in 476 and deposed the last Roman emperor on the Western throne, Romulus Augustulus. There was no need for an emperor in the West any longer. The imperial ensigns were sent to Constantinople.

Would Theoderic hold authority in Italy, in his own right, or only as Zeno's deputy?⁴⁷

The rise of the Ostrogoths—Theoderic the Great defeated Odoacar and was proclaimed “king.” This was more than had been agreed upon between the Byzantine emperor Zeno and Theoderic. Therefore, the latter sent a delegation to Zeno in 491 seeking approval for his kingship.⁴⁸ Shortly thereafter, Zeno died and Anastasius succeeded him. So, Theoderic sent another delegation; he now wanted recognition from Anastasius. In 498, Anastasius granted recognition to Theoderic—thus making Theoderic the *de facto* emperor of the West, who stood on the same level as he himself, although this was not explicitly stated.⁴⁹ Anastasius presented Theoderic with royal vestments and palace ornaments—those sent by Odoacer to Constantinople after he had deposed Romulus Augustulus (Odoacar thought that one emperor would be enough—i.e., that the emperor of Constantinople would be enough for the whole Roman Empire and would be far enough away from Italy).

While Theoderic was trying to build up his pan-Germanic alliance, the Frankish king Clovis was building up his own independent kingdom. Clovis's waging war against the Visigoths, in 507, provoked his kingly relative Theoderic (who had married Clovis's sister) to intervene on behalf of the Visigoths and prevent their ultimate demise. But he was somewhat delayed by Byzantine raids on the Italian east coast.⁵⁰ After all this, in 508, Theoderic wrote a letter to Anastasius the Byzantine Emperor:

⁴⁷ Jordanis puts it this way: Theoderic asks Zeno to guarantee him a favor and Zeno allows Theoderic to conquer Italy and to overthrow Odoacer. See Heine, ed., *Jordanis: Gotengeschichte*, 143, 144.

⁴⁸ Jordanis says that Zeno himself wanted Theoderic to be king of Italy. See Heine, ed., *Jordanis: Gotengeschichte*, 145.

⁴⁹ Heather, 220. See the primary source Anonymus Valesius XII/57 and 64: “Emperor Zeno died in Constantinople, and Anastasius was made emperor. Theoderic had sent Faustus Niger with a delegation to Zeno. As soon as Zeno's death was known, (but) before the delegation had returned, the Goths confirmed Theoderic as king soon after he had entered Ravenna and killed Odoacer, without waiting for the order from the new emperor. . . . After Theoderic, through the delegation of Festus, had made peace with Emperor Anastasius concerning the usurped kingship, Anastasius sent him all the symbols of rulership that Odoacer had sent to Constantinople.” Quoted in Ingemar König, *Aus der Zeit Theoderichs des Großen. Einleitung, Text, Übersetzung und Kommentar einer anonymen Quelle* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1997), 79, 83.

⁵⁰ See pages 11 and 17. See also Isidor of Sevilla in Heine, *Isidor: Geschichte der Goten, Vandalen und Sueven*, 36.

You [Anastasius] are the fairest ornament of all realms; you are the healthful defence of the whole world, to which all other rulers rightfully look up with reverence. . . . Our royalty is an imitation of yours, modelled on your good purpose, a copy of the only Empire.⁵¹

This sounds quite deferential, but it is a political scheme. In those days it was politically correct to be “Roman”—to be superior. Even the Christians had imbibed this truth:

The Roman Empire was the particular agent of Divine power for perfecting humanity. Thus Eusebius of Caesarea argued that it was no accident that Christ should have been born in the reign of Augustus. It was part of the Divine Plan that the founders of Christianity and the Roman Empire had co-existed. More generally, Christian Emperors abrogated [sic] for themselves the role of Christ’s vice-regent on earth.⁵²

So, to be “Roman” meant to be all that. It was through God’s help that Theoderic could govern the Romans with equity. Through the years of his being a hostage at the Byzantine court, Theoderic was well acquainted with the imperial cult of the sacred ruler. So, Theoderic and the Catholic Church lived in a tolerant symbiosis: the bishops hailed Theoderic, and the Arian king supported the bishops.⁵³ Yet Theoderic was not as deferential as mere lip-service suggests, for he goes on in his letter to Anastasius:

Our royalty is an imitation of yours, modelled on your good purpose a copy of the only Empire; and in so far as we follow you do we excel all other nations. . . . We think you will not suffer that any discord should remain between two

⁵¹ *Jordanis: Variac* 1.1–2. Quoted in Heather, 221.

⁵² Heather, 222, 223.

⁵³ “The official minutes of a Roman synod of March 499 have survived and make fascinating reading. At its opening, the assembled churchmen jumped to their feet and shouted, ‘Hear us Christ. Long live Theoderic.’ They repeated it 30 times. Such repeated acclamations were a standard part of imperial ceremonial, but the churchmen made not the slightest mention of the eastern Emperor.” Heather, 225. This does not necessarily mean that the pope was content with such a state of things.

Republics, which are declared to have ever formed one body under their ancient princes, and which ought not to be joined by a mere sentiment of love, but actively to aid one another with all their powers. Let there be always one will, one purpose in the Roman Kingdom.⁵⁴

The Ostrogothic kingdom was the most Roman of all the Germanic successor states on Roman soil. So, why would Anastasius make common cause with Clovis against the Visigoths? While Clovis and the Franks attacked the Visigoths in 507 and 508, Anastasius and the Byzantines attacked the eastern coast of Italy to prevent Theoderic from helping the Visigoths against the Franks—a scheme that delayed Theoderic’s help and almost worked.

This is the historical background to a letter written by a furious Ostrogothic king Theoderic to the Byzantine emperor, in which he demanded, “First, there should be peace, not conflict, between the two Roman states. Secondly, since Ostrogothic Italy is the only legitimately Roman state in the west (‘in so far as we follow you do we excel all other nations’), Anastasius should not be concocting alliances with others.”⁵⁵ And in regard to “Divine help,” Theoderic’s Roman-ness was part of God’s plans, just as the Roman-ness of Constantinople had its own legitimacy. “Beneath the surface deference, Theoderic claimed virtual parity of status with the Eastern Empire.”⁵⁶

Another ally of the Franks was Gundobad, king of the Arian Burgundians. To him Theoderic sent gifts (a sundial and a water—objects of the Graeco-Roman civilization) and a letter stating:

Under your [Gundobad’s] rule, let Burgundy learn to scrutinize devices of the highest ingenuity, and to praise the inventions of the ancients. Through you it lays aside its tribal way of life. . . . Let it [the clock] fix the hours with precision. The order of life (*ordo vitae*) becomes confused if this separation is not truly known. Indeed, it is the habit of beasts to feel the hours by their bellies’ hunger, and to be unsure of something obviously granted for human purposes.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Jordanis, *Variae* I.2-5. Quoted by Heather, 229.

⁵⁵ Heather, 229.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Jordanis, *Variae* I.46. Quoted in Heather, 230.

Theoderic saw himself as the administrator of the Roman heritage in the West. He exerted hegemony over the Vandals and added new territories to his kingdom. After the Visigothic disaster of Vouillé in 507 (in which Clovis defeated the Visigoths), Theoderic waited for about a year before moving against Clovis. In 508, he struck, ending the sieges of Arles and Carcassonne by Clovis' forces and so was celebrated as the Visigoths' deliverer from the Franks. This means there were two winners in 508: Clovis, who had expanded his territory deeply into Visigothic territory and had gained much of Aquitaine; and Theoderic, who now reigned not only over Italy, but also over Visigothic Gaul and Spain (as their deliverer), as well as over Dalmatia, Savia and additional territories left by Odoacer. About a third of the Western Roman Empire was united under the hand of the Ostrogothic King, who also asserted hegemony over the Vandals—something the Eastern Roman Emperor in Constantinople could not prevent. Now we can understand why the Byzantine emperor sought the Frankish alliance and why Theoderic, who modeled even his own palaces after the Byzantine patterns he knew so well, thought his Kingdom to be on a par with the Eastern Roman Empire. His was now a pan-Gothic kingdom. Yet, he did not style himself “emperor,” though sometimes he was called “semper Augustus” by some enthusiastic followers.⁵⁸ In this context, it is very interesting that in 508 Emperor Anastasius sent the tokens of consulship and rulership also to Clovis the Frank. Did Anastasius mean by this gesture to designate the Frankish king as a rival to the Ostrogothic king? This action of Anastasius signaled that Theoderic was not the only victor.⁵⁹ After all, despite his good standing with the Roman Church, Theoderic knew that his own church was different. Arianism was called *lex Gothorum* (Gothic law) in those days. “The Goths’ particular Christianity acted as a defining force.”⁶⁰

Yet, after Theoderic survived 508 and the Byzantine-Frankish al-

⁵⁸ Heather, 235.

⁵⁹ As shown by Kaiser, 25: “On his return from the war against the Goths in the West, messengers of the Emperor Anastasius presented Clovis in Tours with the title of Honorary Consul and its insignia, the purple tunic, robe, and diadem, the symbols of royal honor that Theoderic the Great had received in 498 as *ornamenta palatii* (ornaments for the palace), i.e., *vestis regia* (royal vestments). These symbols of royal honor indicated recognition of Clovis’ kingdom by the Byzantine emperor . . . a legitimization of the rule of the Franks and an expression of the Frankish-Byzantine coalition against Theoderic.”

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 245.

liance, considerable rapprochement occurred between Anastasius and Theoderic. The Emperor Anastasius began courting the pope, for he wanted his assistance in the Acacian schism,⁶¹ but the pope deferred to Theoderic. So, Anastasius had to be reconciled with the Ostrogoths. From the year 516, “there survives a startling letter from Anastasius, which explicitly refers to the ‘two [Roman] republics’ and paired Theoderic (called a ‘most glorious’ and ‘lofty’ king) with the pope: the one enjoying secular authority, the other religious.”⁶² This letter was written to the Roman Senate. So, in 516, Anastasius admitted virtually everything Theoderic had claimed in his letter of 508. Theoderic was a God-ordained Roman ruler on par with the pope.

Anastasius died in 518. His follower, Justin I, also desperately wanted a rapprochement with the pope. So, he tried to be very conciliatory with Theoderic. In 520, Justin called Theoderic “pre-eminent king,” in a letter to Pope Hormisdas, which he sent with people who had to discuss with the pope the things that “pertain to the perfect unity of the churches.”⁶³ Marcellinus Comes, a Byzantine chronicler, in his chronicle of 518, written at the beginning of the reign of Justin I, refers to Anastasius’ attack against the Italian coast in 508 as a “piratical attack”⁶⁴ of Romans against fellow Romans⁶⁵—in obvious disapproval of the former coalition between Clovis and Anastasius.

Theoderic wanted to leave the whole pan-Gothic kingdom (Visigothic and Ostrogothic) as one entity to one heir—and for lack of an heir of his own he married off his daughter Amalasantha to the Visigoth Eutharic. And Justin, as successor to Anastasius, did even more than he needed to do: he made Eutharic co-consul in 519, giving him the senior position and adopting him as son-at-arms (as Zeno had once done with Theoderic), thus showing his recognition of Theoderic’s choice of heir.

⁶¹ A schism between the Eastern Church and Rome during the Monophysite controversy (whether Christ had one or two natures). The schism was the result of the high-handed excommunication of Acacius, the patriarch of Constantinople by Pope Felix III of Rome.

⁶² Kaiser, 252. Compare Otto Günther, ed., *Epistulae Imperatorum Pontificum aliorum Avellana quae dicitur Collectio*, vol. 2, *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*, vol. 35 (Vienna: Tempsky 1898), 507. (no 113.3.)

⁶³ Günther, vol. 2. 658 (no 199.1 and 199.2.)

⁶⁴ This is the Byzantine fleet’s attack to support Clovis (see pages 11 and 17).

⁶⁵ Marcellini V. C. Comitis Chronicon. Ad Annum 508. Theodor Mommsen, ed., *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Auctores Antiquissimi*, vol. 11, *Chronica Minora*. Vol. II. (Berlin: Weidmann 1894), 97.

The collapse of the Ostrogothic kingdom—In the final years of Theoderic everything collapsed. In 522, the Burgundian king Sigismund executed Sergeric, his heir and the son of Theoderic's daughter Ostrogotha, who had just died. The Vandal king Thrasamund, in order to win his conquered Catholic subjects over to the Arian view,⁶⁶ had participated in religious discourses to prove the strength of Arianism *versus* Roman Catholicism. After Thrasamund's death, the new Vandal king, Hilderic, who came from a different family, took Theoderic's daughter Amalafriada captive. She was Thrasamund's widow, who had gone to the Vandal kingdom as a guarantee of peace and Gothic hegemony. She died in a Vandal prison. Sigismund, as well as Hilderic, immediately sought diplomatic relations with Constantinople. Hilderic wanted reconciliation with the Roman Church in order to undermine the Ostrogothic hegemony. He also wanted to make the indigenous North-African Catholic Church somewhat more independent from Rome. For the Vandal Arians, reconciliation with Rome was next to high treason and one of the reasons for Hilderic's downfall in 530.⁶⁷ About the same time, in 522 or 523, Eutharic (son-in-law of Theoderic), the heir to the Gothic super-kingdom, died. Though his son Athalaric was only a child, Theoderic chose him to be his successor. At that time, the Byzantines began persecuting Arian Christians. This was seen by Theoderic as a personal attack against him and he reacted by executing two Roman senators.

When little Athalaric was chosen to succeed Theoderic, Emperor Justin did not adopt him as son-at-arms, as he had done with Eutharic. This led to a complaint by the court of "Athalaricus Rex" (the letter was written in his name) to Justin after Theoderic's death.⁶⁸ Theoderic, before he died, threw Pope John I into prison (where he died), because the pope had not helped him in Constan-

⁶⁶ Helmut Castritius, *Die Vandalen* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer 2007), 130. On Vandal persecution of Roman Catholicism in North Africa see also Heine, Isidor: *Geschichte der Goten, Vandalen und Sueven*. 65-71.

⁶⁷ Castritius, 134, 135. Hilderic fell victim to a revolt led by his cousin Gelimer, an Arian who incited the people to rise in rebellion in the name of religion.

⁶⁸ Cassiodori Senatoris *Variae* in Theodor Mommsen, ed., *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Auctores Antiquissimi*, vol. 12 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1894/1961), 231, 232. "You have honored our ancestor [grandfather] by parading him through your city high on a chariot, and you have decorated my creator (father) with palm branches in Italy. Desiring to join forces he was made a son who was similar to you in years. You will give the growing young man the name which you bestowed on those who were older."

tinople to persuade Emperor Justin to allow those Arians who had been forced to become Roman Catholics to return to their Arian faith.⁶⁹ The succeeding popes continued to defer to the Gothic kings, even after Theoderic's death.

Although the Goths did not always deal harshly with the popes, they dominated them.⁷⁰ Theoderic died in 526, and the kingdom began to wither away. One could say "it was due to a biological accident";⁷¹ nobody could foresee the deaths of the Vandal king Thrasamund and of Ostrogotha, the Amali wife of the Burgundian king Sigismund. Those deaths, as has been said, were immediately exploited by Hilderic and Sigismund as an opportunity to leave their alliance with Theoderic in order to approach Constantinople. "The role of the Eastern Empire in stirring up trouble for Theoderic is thus of extreme importance, since, in addition to encouraging the Vandals and Burgundians, the empire was also making an issue out of religious difference at exactly the same time."⁷² This meant renewed Eastern Roman hostility towards Theoderic's kingdom and the Arian religion. It was as vexing as it was sudden. However,

the eastern Empire had never acquiesced willingly in Theoderic's pretensions. Conflict had preceded Theoderic's departure for Italy, and six years of negotiations (492-497/8) were required before Anastasius accepted the new order which the Goth had erected in Italy. Likewise, the rapprochement after 508, and particularly the formal recognition of Eutharic, were the products of the eastern Empire's overriding desire for reconciliation with the Pope. There is not the slightest reason to suppose that the eastern Empire welcomed the creation of Theoderic's Gothic super-state cum western-Empire-revived.⁷³

Eutharic's death posed a serious problem to Theoderic: the old king, more than seventy years old, was about to die, and the heir apparent was

⁶⁹ König, 92, 93.

⁷⁰ See Frank M. Ausbüttel, *Theoderich der Große* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2003), 92-107.

⁷¹ Heather, 252.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 253.

only a little child. To the surrounding kingdoms, this situation meant that the Gothic kingdom itself was weak and about to perish. So, respect waned away and problems multiplied. Theudis, in Spain, the most important Visigoth leader, made himself independent from king Theoderic. He did not rebel openly but refused a summons to Ravenna. After Theoderic's death, the Ostrogothic hegemony was thrown off by the Visigoths. Italy remained with Athalaric, Spain went to Amalaric (son of Theoderic's daughter Theodegotha, who had married the Visigoth king Alaric II). Theudis must have supported Amalaric's elevation and, after 531, succeeded him as king. The Visigothic kingdom never again came under Ostrogothic dominion.

The Byzantines divide and destroy the Arian kingdoms—

During this time of political upheaval in the Ostrogothic kingdom, the Byzantines did not there interfere with arms and armies. They used less direct methods: *divide et impera!* (divide and rule). By separating the Burgundians and Vandals from the Ostrogoths, the Byzantines were successfully weakening the latter. By refusing to recognize Theoderic's choice of a successor (Athalaric), they brought about the separation of Spain and Italy. Eutharic's death was a perfect opportunity for the Byzantines to renew their underlying hostilities toward the Ostrogoths.

Yet, their positive relations did not end immediately. In 532 and 533, the Ostrogoths provided important support for the Byzantine invasion of the Vandal kingdom by Belisarius. This was the doing of Amalasuētha (Athalaric's mother), for she wanted Byzantine help in the struggles for her son's succession to the Ostrogothic throne.⁷⁴ Although she had several of her opponents murdered, dissension still arose over Athalaric's education. Was it Ostrogothic enough or too Roman? Then, in October 534, Athalaric died. Amalasuētha was imprisoned by her relative Theodahad, whom she had raised to the throne shortly before, and who later, in April 535, had her murdered in her bath.⁷⁵ The death of Amalasuētha caused Justinian, who had succeeded Justin as the Eastern Emperor in 527, finally to use military force.⁷⁶ He dispatched

⁷⁴ Jordanis mentions that Amalasuētha addresses herself to the Eastern Emperor Justinian for her and her son's protection. Heine, *Jordanis: Gotengeschichte*. 149.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 149f.

⁷⁶ According to Jordanis (*Ibid.*, 151), Justinian took Theodahad's murder of Amalasuētha as a pretext to start the war. See also Pedro de Palol and Gisela Ripoll, *Die Goten-Geschichte und Kunst in Westeuropa* (Augsburg: Weltbildverlag, 1999), 66: "*casus belli*."

Belisarius with a fleet to Sicily, and another army to Gothic Dalmatia. He had acted as the Gothic queen mother's (Amalasuentha's) protector in her final years, and, in the winter of 534/535, he had even tried to persuade Theodahad to relinquish his sovereignty over Italy to Constantinople. Justinian wanted to weaken the Ostrogothic dominion and to strengthen the pope.

With the defeat of the Visigoths in 507/508, and Belisarius' defeat of the Vandals in 534, the Ostrogoths were the only ones left to prevent papal hegemony in the west. Very soon, in 535, Belisarius turned against the Ostrogoths. He took Sicily but did not yet attack Italy. The Byzantine campaign was also successful in Dalmatia. Justinian's diplomatic offensive continued, and King Theodahad was almost ready to surrender. But suddenly, at Easter in 536, news arrived of a Gothic victory over the Byzantines in Dalmatia in a war that had otherwise been disastrous for the Goths. Could the Goths yet possibly win? Could the course of the war be reversed? In the end, neither Justinian nor Theodahad was willing to retreat, and the war between the Goths and Constantinople continued.⁷⁷ It ended with the total destruction of the Ostrogoths by the middle of the sixth century.

The great era of the Ostrogoths in Italy was the era of Theoderic the Great. When he died, the kingdom began to crumble. The ancient Roman principle "*divide et impera*" was applied by the Eastern emperors to the Germanic peoples, in general, and to the Ostrogoths in particular. Finally, none of them remained—except the Frankish kingdom, which portrayed itself as helper and protector of the papal church. Theoderic, who had never given in to the pope, was an able ruler who received formal praise even from servants of the Roman church, such as the "*Panegyricus dictus clementissimo regi Theoderico*" ("a song of praise for the most merciful King Theoderic")⁷⁸ by the future bishop Ennodius. Ennodius wrote about Theoderic in a clearly glorifying manner: "regum maxime" ("the greatest of all kings"), "security of the state," "pious" and "courageous," "invincible," whose deeds were done so quickly that

⁷⁷ The story is told according to Heather, *The Goths*, 254–263.

⁷⁸ Written in the spring of A.D. 507. Christian Rohr, *Der Theoderich-Panegyricus des Ennodius*, Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Studien und Texte, vol. 12 (Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung 1995), 5. We should not forget that in 508 the Eastern emperor Anastasius supported Clovis by harassing Theoderic with his attacks on the Adriatic coast.

they could not be told, greater than Alexander the Great of old (whose eulogies might even be forgeries), for Alexander did not know the correct faith as did Theoderic.⁷⁹ According to Ennodius, Theoderic was the Savior of ancient Rome, a bringer of peace and security unheard of for half a century, when he was victorious over Odoacer.⁸⁰ Ennodius praised Theoderic for his humility in that he [Theoderic] knows himself to be only the instrument of God's power and will, even more to be lauded than the Eastern Emperor, who takes the title "Alamannicus"⁸¹ that would much better fit the Gothic king. Finally Ennodius sees Theoderic surrounded by purple—which is the color of the emperors! The whole panegyric (formal praise) shows that Ennodius thought Theoderic worthier to be praised than Anastasius the emperor.⁸² This charismatic leader of the Italian kingdom could win the people's enthusiasm and was seen as the maker of Roman continuity,⁸³ but he was not liked very much by the Eastern emperors nor by the popes. After Theoderic's death it took Justinian only about a decade to utterly destroy the Ostrogothic kingdom—and thus to uproot the last of the three horns in the prophecy of Daniel 7.

The three horns that were uprooted, according to Daniel 7:8, were (1) The Visigoths who were defeated by Clovis in a "holy war" (498, 507/508) and later in the sixth century converted to Roman Catholicism); (2) the Vandals who were crushed in 534 by the Byzantines, who wanted to eliminate the "Arians"; and (3) the Ostrogoths, who by the middle of the sixth century were overpowered by the Byzantines, in part, because of the Gothic refusal to renounce Arianism.

⁷⁹ Magnus Felix Ennodius, *Panegyricus dictus regi Theoderici*, in Rohr, 196–263 passim.

⁸⁰ Even Isidor of Sevilla admits that Theoderic returned to Rome part of her ancient dignity, for he rebuilt the city wall and was honoured by the Senate with a golden monument. Heine, *Isidor: Geschichte der Goten, Vandalen und Sueven*, 38.

⁸¹ "He who defeated the Alemanni." The Romans had the custom of taking on the names of the defeated people.

⁸² Magnus Felix Ennodius, *Panegyricus dictus regi Theoderici*, in Rohr, 196–263.

⁸³ In his *Edictum Theoderici Regis*, from about AD 500, Theoderic also issues laws on things connected with the church: on those that die without a testament (26), about slaves that hide in a church (70), on the originators of sedition (107), on those who sacrifice according to pagan rites (108), on those that take church-people as hostages and are robbers of church-goods (125), on those that deal with church-money (126), and even a Sunday law concerning those violating Sundays by sitting in court—they were to be regarded as guilty of sacrilege (154).

4. THE BYZANTINES AND 538

Thus far, we have seen how the Arian kingdoms were overthrown by the Roman Catholic powers within approximately four decades, in the first half of the sixth century. This helps us to understand the overall historical meaning of the prophecy of Daniel 7, but we have not yet explained why the year 538 was in any way special. To do this, we will take a careful look at Emperor Justinian I and his ambitions to strengthen the papacy and the orthodox faith. Following it, we will return to the political developments of the time, observing them from the Byzantine angle in order to understand what happened in 538. Religion and politics were closely intertwined in that year.

Justinian's religiosity—Justinian had religious, as well as political reasons, to oppose the Arians of Germanic origin (Vandals and Ostrogoths) who were still powerful in the late 520s. The Byzantine emperor was adamant in his reverence for the Papal See. From 527 on he showed his respect for the papacy in several writings: in his codices (collection of imperial laws) and novellae (new orders). These writings were gathered and are now part of the so called *Corpus Iuris Civilis*, a collection of ancient Roman law, edited by Justinian and complemented by later emperors.

The *Corpus Iuris Civilis* was the legal foundation of the Middle Ages, as well as the basis of European law, until the time of the French Revolution. It is a collection of laws that often have to do with religion. It is organized in *Institutiones*, *Codex Iustinianus*, and *Novellae*. One section of the *Codex Iustinianus* is entitled *De summa trinitate et ut nemo de ea publice contendere audeat* (i. e. "About the highest Trinity and that nobody dare to fight her publicly"). Most entries from Justinian's times in the *Codex* deal with the heretics Eutychus and Nestorius, who had a different understanding of Christ's nature. So, Justinian's laws had a lot to do with religion. In the *Trinitate* section, we find a letter by Pope John II dating from March 25, 534. Pope John II writes to Justinian, his "most Illustrious and Merciful Son Justinian," who is the "Most Christian of Emperors."⁸⁴ Why? Because Justinian preserved reverence for the See of Rome and subjected all things to its authority and gave it unity. In

⁸⁴ "The Code of Justinian," book 1, title 1.4 in S. P. Scott, *The Civil Law*, 17 vols. (Union, NJ: The Law-book Exchange, LTD, 2001), 12:10.

this letter, Pope John II claims that Peter was the founder of the See of Rome. Therefore, “this See is indeed the head of all churches, as the rules of the Fathers and the decrees of Emperors assert, and the words of your most reverend piety testify.”⁸⁵ And because Justinian is of the same opinion as the Church Fathers and the princes, this is the foundation of prosperous times for the church. The pope lauds the emperor for his orthodoxy and thanks him for having publicly made known his stand against the heretics. Then the pope quotes Justinian’s epistle, which he calls “edictum” and which dates from June 6, 533. In this “edictum,” Justinian points out his orthodoxy by “giving honour to the Apostolic See” and the pope, and states:

We have always had the greatest desire to preserve the unity of your Apostolic See, and the condition of the Holy Churches of God, as they exist at the present time, that they may remain without disturbance or opposition. Therefore, We have exerted Ourselves to unite all the priests of the East and subject them to the See of Your Holiness. . . . For we do not suffer anything which has reference to the state of the Church . . . to be discussed without being brought to the notice of Your Holiness, because you are the head of all the Holy Churches, for We shall exert Ourselves in every way, to increase the honor and authority of your See.⁸⁶

Then Justinian writes about the heretics (especially Nestorius) and how all the churches stay with the right, orthodox faith that has been proclaimed by the Roman See. The text is in the form of a creed. Justinian says that all the priests who are in accordance with Rome teach thus, and he asks the pope for letters to the Patriarch of Constantinople – who also delights in following the Roman See – to clarify the situation and to give orders. Finally, Justinian asks the pope, whose authority is constantly growing, to pray for him and

⁸⁵ Ibid., 12:11. The title “head of all the churches” was much sought after. About seventy years later the Patriarch of Constantinople aspired to that title and used it. In AD 607, Pope Bonifacius III asked the Emperor Fokas to reserve again that title for the Church of Rome, which he did. Fokas thus confirmed a custom that had already been in use in the days of Justinian. Described by Paulus Diaconus, historian of the Langobards. See Alexander Heine, ed., *Geschichte der Langobarden: Paulus Diaconus und die Geschichtsschreiber der Langobarde* (Phaidon: Essen, 1992). Book 4:36. 154.

⁸⁶ Scott, 12:11, 12.

provide him the divine providence. The pope, after quoting this “edictum” from 533, goes on in his letter, from 534, and hurries to confirm everything that Justinian had said in this “edictum” because of the authority and the teaching of the Apostolic See.⁸⁷

We can see that Justinian was busy strengthening the pope’s authority by ever mentioning and endorsing it. But obviously, the pope’s authority was stronger in the East than in the West, for all the priests of the Eastern world subjected themselves to the Holy See, but Rome was still in barbarian hands. Even if those barbarians meant to transform themselves into Romans, they still had the wrong religion—they were Arian Christians, which meant that they were not necessarily interested in the pope’s authority. Thus, there is a tradition of papal power and supremacy by 533, which was referred to in imperial decrees, but in Rome the reality was quite different.

Justinian’s war against the Ostrogoths up to AD 538—After making peace with Persia, in 533, Justinian planned to eliminate the Ostrogoths and the Vandals. He wanted to recreate the Roman Empire in the western sphere of the Mediterranean. So, he instructed his generals Belisarius and Narses to start their campaigns against the Vandals and Ostrogoths in 534. The Vandals were eradicated that same year. This war was justified by the fact that the Vandals were pirates. The war against the Ostrogoths could not be justified in the same way, for they were allies of the Byzantine Empire. But, as already mentioned, Amalasuetha, daughter of Theoderic and “friend” to the Byzantine court, was killed in Ravenna in the course of a power struggle. This murder was taken as the pretext and *casus belli* (reason for war) for the Byzantine invasion of Sicily in 535.⁸⁸ Belisarius conquered Sicily to deprive the Ostrogoths of bread. In the summer of 536, he laid siege to Naples, carrying the war onto Italian territory. By November, the city fell, which led to the removal and murder of king Theodahad in November/December 536. Leading Goths were dissatisfied with Theodahad, for he had not done anything to help Naples; he seems to have hoped for a diplomatic solution. The problem was that Theodahad was a philosopher, not a general.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ausbüttel, 154, 155. See also Pedro de Palos and Gisela Ripoll, *Die Goten. Geschichte und Kunst in Westeuropa* (Augsburg: Weltbild Verlag 1999), 66, and Jordanis, in his *Gothic History*, 60 in Heine, *Jordanis: Gotengeschichte*, 151.

⁸⁹ de Palos and Ripoll, *Die Goten*, 66.

After Theodahad's death, the Goths elected Wittigis as their leader, who married Amalasuetha's daughter Matasuetha to vindicate himself as an "Amali" ruler in the line of Theoderic, not by blood or dynasty but by his deeds. He tried to soothe Justinian by stating that his marriage to Matasuetha and Theodahad's death removed Justinian's reason for war, because the murder of Amalasuetha was now avenged.⁹⁰ Nevertheless, Belisarius' forces moved into Rome in December 536. After some battles, Wittigis started the siege of Rome in February/March 537. Mutual bloodshed dominated that year, only interrupted for a three-month truce in December 537, during which Roman reinforcements arrived at Rome. The other event of the year was a Gothic expedition to Dalmatia and the siege of Salona, but the Ostrogoths failed to capture the city.

Thus 537 was a year of Gothic failures. Yet, the Romans and Belisarius were still confined to the city of Rome through the Gothic siege. So, Belisarius tried a new strategy; he sent his cavalry north to Picenum, an area densely populated with Gothic settlements, to threaten the wives and children of those besieging him in Rome. And it worked: by March 538, Wittigis lifted the siege and withdrew from Rome to go north to destroy the Byzantine raiding force, which had installed itself at Rimini.⁹¹ Belisarius profited from the occasion and attacked the withdrawing and exhausted Gothic forces at the Milvian bridge (where Constantine had defeated Maxentius in 312), thus causing several hundred casualties among the Goths.⁹²

Thus, in March 538 Rome was finally free from barbarian rule and power—for the first time since 476. This fact cannot be overstated. It seems that the prophecy of Daniel 7:25 takes the uprooting of the last of the three horns as the *terminus a quo* (beginning date) for the growth of the little horn. Clearly, AD 538 was the decisive year in this process.

The final overthrow of the Ostrogoths after AD 538—True, the Ostrogoths continue their war, but they were beaten again and again.⁹³ The year 538 is the turning point in the Gothic-Byzantine war: before 538, the Byzantines are the invaders and the Ostrogoths

⁹⁰ Cassiodori Senatoris *Variae*. Mommsen, vol. 12, 318ff. *Variae* 10.31; 10.32; 10.33.

⁹¹ Heather, 264.

⁹² John Julius Norwich, *Byzanz: Der Aufstieg des Oströmischen Reiches* (Düsseldorf: Econ, 1998), 256, 257.

⁹³ Heine, *Jordanis: Gotengeschichte*. 151-167. Jordanis wrote in AD 551.

the defenders. After 538, the Ostrogoths felt like invaders, having lost their home bases. They continued to fight a massive war until 553; yet, this was a war without hope. By 540, Wittigis was finally overthrown, and even the desperate efforts of Totila, in the 540s, and of his successors Teia and others, in the 550s, to change history, availed nothing.

The Goths had to cede parts of their territories to the Franks, but they wanted to keep the northern part of Italy; they even recaptured Rome in 547, but they could not hold it. A formal peace treaty was agreed to in 551, but Justinian planned to utterly destroy the Goths. In 551, the Gothic fleet perished off Ancona; in April 552, Narses moved into Italy and after several years of campaigning subdued the Appennin-peninsula. Eastern Venetia, Verona, and Brescia were the last Gothic

*The three uprooted
horns were the
Visigoths, the Vandals,
and the Ostrogoths*

strongholds in the 550s. By 561, any Gothic resistance to the Byzantine reconquest of Italy was broken.⁹⁴

Even Jordanis, the historian of the Goths, referred to the Byzantines as the “victorious and triumphant Justinian and his consul Belisarius, both called ‘Vandalicus’, ‘Africanus,’ or ‘Geticus’.”⁹⁵ From that time on, the

term “Goths” meant only “Visigoths,” referring to the Goths in Spain, who became Roman Catholics just a few decades later. In this, they were led by Reccared in 587, who was followed by the rank and file of the Visigoths, in 589, at the Third Council of Toledo. At this meeting, the conversion of the Visigoths to Catholicism was recorded in a formal document. This event represented the end of Arianism among the Visigoths, in spite of a few Arian revolts that came to nothing.⁹⁶ When the Moors came to the Iberian Peninsula in 751, they found a Visigothic and thoroughly Roman Catholic kingdom.

In summary, the three horns mentioned in Daniel 7, which were uprooted to enable the little horn power to grow and become great,

⁹⁴ Heather, 266-271.

⁹⁵ Names given to the victors over the Vandals and the Ostrogoths. Those victories were obviously very important to Byzantium. See Heine, *Jordanis: Gotengeschichte*. 154.

⁹⁶ Compare Isidor's description of the conversion of the Visigoths to Roman Catholicism in Heine, ed.: Isidor: *Geschichte der Goten, Vandalen und Sueven*. 42-48.

were well nigh annihilated and made powerless in the first half of the 6th century AD. These were the *Visigoths*, defeated by the Franks, who were allied with the Byzantines in 507 and 508; the *Vándals*, who were crushed by the Byzantines in 534, and the *Ostrogoths*, who were overcome by the Byzantines from 536 to 553 or 561.⁹⁷ A special year in this development was AD 538, because, in that year, the balance of power changed and the Ostrogoths began to lose ground. Rome was free from barbarian rule for the first time since Odoacer. The papacy was the great victor in all this. The Byzantines would eventually lose Italy again, but the popes increased in power through the coming centuries, until they reached the peak of their power during the time of the Crusades.

History and the mingling of Church and State—At this time, a few remarks about the unholy alliance between Church and State are in order. To view history from this angle involves the repetition of some historical facts so that they can be observed in this special context. The papacy was involved in all these events. Justinian's decrees, laws, and military attacks had the elevation of papal power as their goal. Even historians with no special religious interest agree with this.⁹⁸ Justinian's own legislature saw to it that the papal power increased spiritually and politically. In his *novella*, he decreed that the priest is the keeper of the soul and the emperor the provider of public welfare (nov. 6).

Nevertheless, the emperor still had a responsibility for the faith and church discipline; he controlled the church; he exterminated the heretics (nov. 132). This fact we call "cesaropapism," a concept that was valid during the Middle Ages, especially in the eastern Mediterranean. The western Mediterranean and Northern Europe would ultimately know a different state of affairs; there the popes

⁹⁷ I do not favour the Heruli as one of the three uprooted powers for the following reasons: (1) It was not the tribe of the Heruli that was destroyed by Theoderic's murder of Odoacer. Odoacer was partly of Herulian descent, true; yet, his soldiers were mercenaries coming from many tribes. There was no such thing as a "Herulian kingdom". (2) The fight between Theoderic and Odoacer had nothing to do with the Roman pontiff. The papacy did not gain anything out of the change of rulership from Odoacer to Theoderic.

⁹⁸ Hermann Schreiber: *Geschichte der Päpste*, 37: "This fact is unique in the history of the world, and, if we needed proof for the mission of the papacy, it could be the following: even a series of unimportant popes were able to defend the papacy and the primacy of the Roman See against Belisarius and the Langobards, as well as against the Arians and other heretics!"

fought the emperors, a thing quite unthinkable in Constantinople. Yet, it was the same Justinian who prepared this elevation of the papacy above the worldly rulers, through his decree that the bishop of ancient Rome be the first of all priests (the Roman pontiff), while the bishop of new Rome (the patriarch of Constantinople) should come next in authority. This clearly meant that the Roman pontiff was to rule over all Christendom (nov. 131).⁹⁹ Why did Justinian not make the patriarch of Constantinople the head of Christendom? It is obvious that a rival nearby is more to be feared than a spiritual ruler far away in Rome. On the other hand, there was no powerful temporal leader in Rome after the ruin of the Ostrogoths. Why should not the pope naturally become a temporal (= political) leader of his realm too? That would be the natural course of affairs, which was decreed by Justinian several years later through the Pragmatic Sanction in 554, giving the pope temporal power also in the West.

In 538, Theudebert, king of the Franks, asked Pope Vigilius (537-555) about the discipline of penance, indicating the continuing connection between the two powers, since the time of Clovis. Theudebert was called “*magnus, religiosus, christianus princeps*” (“great spiritual Christian prince”) by the Roman Catholic Church.¹⁰⁰ In 539, he was also responsible for the defeat of the Ostrogoths, whom he first pretended to help with his army but, in the end, fought against them and overcame them. The Ostrogoths met enemies wherever they went. No wonder the church was satisfied with Theudebert and his Franks. In Italy, the church was helped by both the Byzantine and the Frankish armies. Theudebert, in fact, fought also the Byzantines, for he didn’t want anyone to win the war; he just wanted to enrich himself (“*divide et impera*”). The principle victor in all of this was, again, the church in Italy, particularly the pope.

At the beginning of the siege of Rome by the Ostrogoths, Silverius (536-537) was pope in Rome.¹⁰¹ Actually, Vigilius should have been pope after the death of Pope Agapet I (535-536) in Constantinople. Theodora, the empress, would have liked Vigilius, the papal representative in Constantinople, on the papal throne to help Anthimus, the dethroned patriarch of Constantinople, back

⁹⁹ Bernhard Schimmelpennig, *Das Papsttum* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1988), 61, 62.

¹⁰⁰ Deschner, 4: 96.

¹⁰¹ The following description of the years 537 and 538 are according to Deschner, 2:426-430 and 446-450.

to power. Anthimus had been declared a monophysite heretic by Agapet, who should have intervened with the emperor on behalf of the Ostrogoths. But Agapet was more interested in theological disputation than in helping the heretical Arians. Suddenly, Agapet died, presumably through Theodora's intrigues, possibly even with the help of Vigilius. But before Vigilius could be made pope, the Ostrogothic king Theodahad had already invested Silverius, son of the former pope Hormisdas. In December 536, Silverius invited Belisarius and his army of five thousand into the city, and the small garrison of the Ostrogoths had to flee. Belisarius was welcomed as deliverer from the heretics. But in the spring of 537, Vittiges came back with an army of about one hundred thousand, to lay siege to the city of Rome. Belisarius did not fully trust Silverius, who was suspected of changing sides because of the large Ostrogothic army. Silverius was taken captive, and Vigilius, who had bribed Belisarius with 200 pieces of gold, was elected pope on March 22, 537. Silverius was sent to Constantinople, but Justinian, who did not at all agree with the procedure, sent him back. In the end, he was taken captive by Vigilius and murdered on December 2, 537.

During 537, the Ostrogoths, under Vittiges, attacked Rome without ceasing, but they were unable to capture it. Belisarius' troops, part of them Huns, were well-trained and could not be overcome. A second army from Constantinople entered Italy and attacked the villages of the Ostrogoths, where there were only women and children, the men being at the siege of Rome. Finally, the siege was lifted and the city was free—free from Arian domination for the first time since AD 476. Now the pope was able to rule according to the decrees of Justinian, without Ostrogothic, or any other Arian, hindrance.

In 538, Justinian's vision of a Roman Empire, restored to the Roman church without the rulership of Arian Germanic tribes, became more of a possible reality. History is a process, and times do not change abruptly. Yet, if we wanted to fix a date for the transition from an Ostrogothic to a Roman Catholic society in Italy, 538 would be the appropriate year. Through the withdrawal of the Ostrogoths, the pope could move into action along the lines of Justinian's *novellae* and become a spiritual and temporal ruler in the western part of the Roman Empire. The Franks would be his natural allies—and remain so until the French Revolution.

5. SUMMARY

1. If we want to understand Daniel's prophecy about "time, times, and half a time" (Dan 7:25), we have to go to the book of Revelation and understand that the expression "time, times and half a time" means "1,260 days." By the year-day-principle 1,260 *days*, in fact, stand for 1,260 *years*.
2. The papacy is the fulfillment of the little-horn-power. The end of the 1,260 years was reached, in 1798, when the capture and imprisonment of the pope, through the armies of the French Revolution, brought the unholy alliance between Church and State to an end. Therefore, AD 538 is the starting point for the time span of 1,260 years.
3. In 538, the destruction of the third horn reached a decisive climax; for the first time since 476, Rome was free from Arian rule and the pope could act as described in the imperial decrees: as head of all churches. From then on, this "little horn" power would steadily grow. There were some setbacks now and then in history, but the papal power grew constantly for centuries.
4. In 508, the partnership of throne and altar, the "abomination that makes desolate," began. Clovis fought for the church, and the church served Clovis. Between 508 and 538, decisive blows against the opposition of papal supremacy were achieved, and the political powers symbolized by the three horns were uprooted, allowing the little horn to grow and flourish. The three horns uprooted were the Visigoths, the Vandals, and the Ostrogoths.
5. In 1798, the very power responsible for the union between throne and altar (Franks/France) also ended it and ushered in a new epoch. Justinian's law, which dominated throughout the Middle Ages, was replaced by the Napoleonic Code, the foundation of the legal bodies of modern times. This change also announced the end of the medieval Catholic supremacy.

Appendix

| The Byzantine Emperors from 457 to 610 AD | | The Popes from AD 440 to 604 | |
|--|---------|---|---------------|
| Leo I | 457-474 | Leon I, “the Great” | 440-461 |
| Leo II | 474 | Hilarius | 461-468 |
| Zeno | 474-491 | Simplicius | 468-483 |
| Anastasios I | 491-518 | Felix III. | 483-492 |
| Justin I | 518-527 | Gelasius I | 492-496 |
| Justinian | 527-565 | Anastasius II | 496-498 |
| Justin II | 565-578 | Symmachus | 498-514 |
| Tiberios II | 578-582 | (Laurentius, rival pope | 498, 501-506) |
| Masurikios | 582-602 | Hormisdas | 514-523 |
| Phokas | 602-610 | John I | 523-526 |
| | | Felix IV | 526-530 |
| | | Bonifatius II | 530-532 |
| | | (Dioscurus, rival pope | 530) |
| | | John II | 533-535 |
| | | Agapet I | 535-536 |
| | | Silverius | 536-537 |
| | | Vigilius | 537-555 |
| | | Pelaguis II | 579-590 |
| | | Gregory I, “the Great” | 590-604 |



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