# RAVENNA TO AACHEN

J. H. W. G. LIEBESCHUETZ

This book is about the cities that became imperial or royal residences in the age when barbarian kingdoms were being established within what had been the Roman Empire, that is roughly the period from the 5th to the 8th century AD. The book reports what recent archaeological work has found out about this particular group of cities. The number, character and importance of royal residence varied from kingdom to kingdom. Kings might prefer not to reside in cities and spend their reign travelling from villa to villa or town to town, or a combination of the two. A particular *sedes regia* might be no more than the place where the king chose to live from time to time. At the other extreme, if the king had a more or less fixed residence in a particular city, whose functions in relation to the kingdom were comparable to those of Rome or Constantinople in relation to the Empire, a royal residence might approach the condition of a capital. In fact the status and character of its royal residence –or residences– reflected not only the organisation of the kingdom, but its culture, that is its religion, economy, and degree of Romanisation. To understand the character of its royal residences is an important step towards the understanding of the working of a *regnum*.

At the same time the study of *sedes regiae* is also part of urban history. The royal cities were subject to many of same influences as ordinary cities. Since as a rule we know more about the cities where kings chose to live than we do about cities without royal connections it is often helpful to use the development of the royal city to illustrate the development of cities generally in that particular region. But caution is needed, for the royal cities necessarily also reflected the special impact of the presence of a monarch and his court. How precisely and to what extent the condition of a royal residence might differ from that of ordinary cities in the kingdom is a question readers of the book are consistently challenged to ask.

The classical Roman Empire had what no modern state is without: a capital. At Rome were found the residence of the ruler, the offices of the officials who helped to run the Empire, the chamber of the senate, the ancient assembly that conferred legitimacy on the emperor's rule, the temples through which good relations with the gods were maintained, and the monuments and traditions which symbolised *Romanitas*. At the same time Rome had by the standards of the time an enormous population, which cheered, and sometimes jeered the emperor, and in a sense represented the millions of Roman citizens dwelling all over the Empire. A wise emperor would cultivate the good will of the people of Rome. An unpopular emperor would be a very uncomfortable emperor, and in a situation of civil war no contender for the Empire could feel secure unless he had secured control of the city of Rome, and if preferably support of the Romans too.

But already towards the end of the third century the situation was changing. Greatly increased pressure on the frontiers meant that emperors had to spend much time leading armies. Emperors and court and central administration could no longer stay in their monumental offices at Rome: they had to travel wherever a miliary crisis called the emperor. Another change was that there was now normally more than one emperor, with the joint rule of two emperors, one for the East, and one for the West, becoming the norm. Certain cities situated closer to the frontiers than Rome, among them Trier, Sirmium, Thessaloniki, Nicomedia, and Antioch, acquired palaces and came to perform the functions,

more or less temporarily, of an imperial residence. They were in a sense the predecessors of the *sedes regiae* of the successor kingdoms, of places like Verona, Pavia, Toulouse, and Toledo. By far the most important of the imperial residences was of course Byzantium, refounded by Constantine as Constantinople. Meanwhile Rome retained its symbolic status, but its location in central Italy was inconvenient for a ruler who might have to move quickly into Gaul or the Balkans. So Milan became the imperial residence in the later 4th century, and early in the fifth century, when Italy was invaded by Alaric, the emperor Honorius sought refuge in Ravenna, and stayed there.

An aspect of the Empire's adaptation to the crisis of the third century had been the creation of a what by ancient –though not by modern standards– was a centralised and bureaucratic administration, that is an organisation that involved the passing of much paper between centre and circumference of the Empire. This development was not in the long run compatible with a travelling central administration. Even for moderately efficient working the system required a fixed centre. So Constantinople eventually became the capital of the East in as full a sense as Rome had been the capital of the united Empire. The successors of Theodosius I rarely left Constantinople. The imperial office became a civilian one: the emperors now delegated the command of their armies to generals. Constantinople was now in the fullest sense a capital, a city of magnificent public buildings, great public baths, the imperial palace, and closely associated with it the hippodrome and the cathedral of S. Sophia. The city provided a splendid setting for elaborate imperial ceremonial. It was there that the emperor was appointed and crowned, and control of the city was essential to legitimize his reign. The catastrophes of the seventh century damaged Constantinople, but to nothing like the same extent as the other cities of Asia Minor. From the 7th century Constantinople dominated the territories governed from it to a degree that could not be approached by any of the *sedes regiae* of the West, as is shown by Bryan Ward-Perkins in the present volume.

In the West too the command of armies was left to professional generals, and the imperial residences, first Milan and later Ravenna became permanent centres of civil administration.

This development completed the separation of the Western imperial court from the old imperial aristocracy, the senate, and left the Pope beyond challenge the most important figure in the old capital. The collapse of the Empire in the West aborted the development of a Western Constantinople. But rulers of the barbarian successor kingdoms, for instance Theoderic the Ostrogoth, or the catholic kings of Visigothic Hispania after 587, who sought to base their government on surviving Roman administrative structures, or even to recreate something like the Late Roman structure of government, were inevitably forced to make their residence into something like a Late Empire capital.

For the German leaders this was something new, as Walter Pohl shows in this volume. The kings and chieftains of barbarian *gentes* beyond the borders of the Roman empire had residences, sometimes set within fortifications. Roman historians duly mention their capture and destruction by Roman conquerors, but without thinking them sufficiently important to deserve detailed description, or precise localization. Archaeology has been able to compensate for the lack of written descriptions to only a very limited extent. The dwellings of barbarian kings were not sufficiently outstanding either in terms of solid building materials, or in the richness of their furnishing, to be clearly distinguishable from large farms.

When the barbarian tribes settled inside the Empire, their leaders were faced with the problem of how far they ought to assimilate their own living conditions to those of the villa-owning Romans, not to mention the spectacular residences of high officials of the empire, and of the emperor himself. The leaders of different barbarian groups found different solutions to the problem. How they solved it was not simply a matter of the ruler choosing a congenial life-style. The chosen solution reflected the circumstances of the settlement of the tribe concerned, the relationship between new-comers and Roman population, the degree of assimilation the new-comers felt to be acceptable, and of course the extent to which the barbarian ruler was attempting to govern through Roman institutions. Another relevant factor was the condition of the cities in the area of settlement. This varied from province to province. Moreover it was not static. The cities were changing. The classical city was declining –or if you prefer being

transformed– everywhere, and barbarian settlement was only one of a number of factors making for change. Indeed in Britain the classical city seeems to have collapsed well before the arrival of the barbarians.[1]

In the classical world cities were the carriers of civilization. The founding of cities was the supreme act of euergetism, and rulers since Hellenistic times had been proud to found cities and to give them their own name or that or of a close relative, hoping in this way to be remembered as patrons of everything that was noble and worthwhile. In this volume Javier Arce shows that this ideal was still alive in Late Antiquity. The opportunities for founding cities were various. Defence strategy might call for a new fortress. The emperor might want to honour his birth place, or to pay homage to the saint of a centre of pilgrimage, or to assist the rebuilding of a city destroyed by enemy action, or in an earthquake. Founding of cities was not limited to the East. The Germanic kings of the successor kingdoms too wished to be remembered as founders. Hunericopolis, Theodericopolis and Recopolis were founded respectively by Huneric king of the Vandals, Theoderic king of the Ostrogoths, and Leovigild king of the Visigoths. That the name of each of the three royal cities ends in –polis, reflects the enormous prestige Constantinopolis, the *polis* par excellence, enjoyed even in the West.

But if the city continues to represent an ideal, the concept of what kind of settlement qualifies for the title of city has changed. The late imperial foundations are generally small in area, strongly fortified and dominated by churches and military and/or administrative buildings. They have relatively little space for housing ordinary inhabitants. The changed appearance of cities should not be ascribed to the avarice of their imperial founders, but to the fact that the role of cities has changed.[2] In fact existing cities tend transform themselves into the pattern of the new cities to a greater or lesser degree. This was true in the West even more than in the East, and applies to *sedes regiae* as well as to cities without royal connections. Moreover the type

1. See the chapter of S.T. Loseby.

2. See the remarks of A. Poulter, *Nicopolis ad Istrum, a Roman, Late Roman and Early Byzantine City*, vol. 1, London 1995, p. 45-47.

is found beyond the world of the Christian successor kingdoms: the Visigothic Recopolis by virtue of its location not far from the capital Toledo, and of the prominence of its palace and church resembles Anjar, an Umayyad foundation of 714 in the neighbourhood of Damascus, and also the far more grandiose Madînat al-Zahra, founded by an Umayyad ruler of al-Andalus, outside Cordoba in 936.

Among the cities treated in this volume Rome is unique in that it did not pass under the government of barbarians. Paolo Delogu's survey of recent archaeological work on Roman sites therefore illustrates urban development which has not been shaped by immigrant rulers, though it was of course deeply affected by the breaking down of the Empire, and the setting up of successor states first by Ostrogoths and then by Lombards. In the course of the fifth and sixth century the built-up area of Rome shrank enormously, and so no doubt did the number of its inhabitants. Life in the city gradually became more and more impoverished and simplified. But recent archaeological work has gained a new insight: the decline of the urban structure of Rome was not chaotic, but controlled. Monumental public buildings that had ceased to serve their old purpose were adapted to a new one, if only to serve for burials, or even for the dumping of rubbish. Large areas of the city might become uninhabited, but the main thoroughfares and public spaces were kept open. There was evidently much less demand for craftsmen and works of craftsmanship, but craftsmen and their skill did not disappear altogether. As for long-distance trade, imports of amphorae and fine pottery from Africa and the Greek East were reduced, but they did not cease before the end of the 7th century. The senate is mentioned for the last time in 603,[3] but the disappearance of what was by then little more than the local civic council, did not mean the end of secular administration, but merely its passing into the hands of officials appointed by the Byzantine exarch at Ravenna. The same time saw a new and positive development in the rise of the papacy. By the time of Gregory the Great (590-604),

3. S. J. B. Barnish, "Transformation and survival in the Western senatorial aristocracy, AD 400-700", *Papers of the British School at Rome,* 56 (1988), p. 156-196.

the Pope was the effective ruler and patron of the people of Rome.

The Vandals were the first Germanic people to establish a kingdom within the borders of the Empire. They came as conquerors and could shape their settlement more or less as they pleased, or rather as it pleased Geiseric, their great king. Unfortunately our literary sources for Vandal history are very one-sided, focusing on the Catholic victims of persecution by the Arian government, and only incidentally providing information about wider issues. The overall impression is that the Vandals confiscated a lot of land for themselves and for their Church, and exempted the land that they had taken over from taxation, but otherwise left the Roman administration to function more or less as before. This meant that Carthage, always by far the largest among the very numerous cities of Roman North Africa, became the permanent residence of the king of the Vandals, and remained the administrative centre of the provinces under Vandal control. It will be seen from the chapter of Aïcha Ben Abed and Noël Duval that recent archaeological work has thrown considerable new light on important aspects of the urban fabric of Vandal Carthage. The hippodrome and the aqueducts continued to function, and the city acquired a mint which it had not had before. Excavation has only found a little evidence of damage to the monuments of the city as a result of the Vandal conquest. The inhabited area was not significantly reduced, and a redating of mosaics has led to the conclusion that building, rebuilding and redecorating, of great mansions continued throughout the Vandal period, and not only at Carthage. The onset of serious decay of the churches and domestic structures of the city is difficult to date, but may be as late around 650.

The evidence for the Ostrogothic kingdom of Theoderic (493-526) is very much better than that for the kingdom of the Vandals. The principal reason is that Theoderic happened to employ the highly educated senator Cassiodorus, whose official correspondence was preserved through subsequent centuries as a model of what official writing should be. Theoderic –like Geiseric– decided to maintain the imperial structure of administration, and with it the idea of a fixed centre of government. For this purpose he chose Ravenna, which had, often, but not always, been the seat

of government of the last emperors, and of Odohacer, the first barbarian king of Italy.[4]

As is explained by Sauro Gelichi, Ravenna is almost unique among the cities discussed in this book, in that far from shrinking in the early fifth century, it actually expanded very considerably, in consequence of its having become an imperial residence. Between 425 and 450 the city received a new circuit of walls, about 4.5 km in length, enclosing something like 160 hectares.[5] So while Ravenna was still very much smaller than Rome or Constantinople or even Carthage, it was much larger than any of the cities that became royal residences in the other *regna*.[6] In the first half of the century Ravenna had already acquired a new monumental centre of churches and palaces, but when Theoderic had made Ravenna the seat of his government of Italy (493), he proceeded to embellish it further. He rebuilt and enlarged the palace that had been Odoacer's, which was not only his residence but also housed the central departments of the administration of Italy.[7] He restored old monuments, and built or rebuilt new ones, for instance an aqueduct and two baths. But the needs of the ruler of a successor kingdom were never quite the same as those of a Roman emperor. Theoderic –like all rulers of *regna*– had the double problem of conciliating the old Romans, while at the same time preserving the loyalty of the tribesmen on whom his position depended. There was the additional complication that the Romans were catholics, while most of the Ostrogoths –like the Visigoths and Vandals– were Arians. Theoderic gave complete tolerance to the orthodox, but he built churches for the Arians. The Arian cathedral, St. Anastasia and the *basilica Gothorum* have

4. Maria Cesa, "Il regno di Odoacre: la prima dominazione germanica in Italia", in *Germani in Italia*, Barbara e Pergiuseppe Scardigli (ed.), Rome 1994, p. 307-320.

5. N. Christie & S. Gibson, "The city walls of Ravenna", *Papers of the British School at Rome,* 56 (1988), p. 156-196, convincingly argue that the whole extension of the fortification of the original 33 hectare colony was built in one go c. 425-450.

6. Population of course depends on the density and height of buildings, and on the extent of extramural suburbs as well as of the enclosed area. Nevertheless the size of the walled area limits the range of possible population figures, and comparison of the walled area of cities helps to distinguish between different categories of urbanism.

7. F. W. Deichmann, *Ravenna Hauptstadt des spätantiken Abendlandes* II. 3, Wiesbaden 1989, 40, p. 49-75.

disappeared,[8] but the church of St. Apollinaris Nuovo and the Arian baptistery still bear witness to the high imperial quality of his buildings. Ravenna was not however Theoderic's only residence. From time to time he and his court moved to Verona or Pavia, probably to remain in touch with the Goths settled in the neighbourhood of these towns. In both cities he built palaces and other public works.

Ravenna's status as capital outlasted the fall of the Ostrogothic kingdom. It remained the centre of administration of Italy under the Byzantines. The orthodox now took over the Arian churches, and both money and artistry were invested to finish building projects begun, or at least planned, under the Goths. St Vitale (dedicated 547) and St. Apollinare in Classe (dedicated 549) survive to witness to the scale and quality of Byzantine building –which had parallels in reconquered Carthage. The destruction caused by the war of 'liberation', and the Lombard wars following soon after, meant that Italy was now entering a very difficult period. As the centre of Byzantine rule, Ravenna fared better than most towns, but there is both archaeological and documentary evidence that the city now suffered progressive impoverishment. Houses became smaller and simpler. Surviving *domus* were subdivided. Wood and clay rather than stone or brick were used for new building. Nevertheless most of the great churches were maintained. The process of progressive simplification continued up to the ninth century.

The year 568, which saw the beginning of the Lombards' occupation of large areas of Italy, marked the start of a new epoch for this country. For the Lombards did not simply preserve the Roman administration, as Theoderic had done. One reason was that, Ravenna the Roman centre of government remained outside their control almost to the end. Another was that the Lombards seem to have ceased to collect the Roman land-tax. Without an abundant tax revenue the Lombard kings could not have maintained a Roman type administration, even if they had wanted to– which they probably did not. For the Lombards, like the Franks, represented the second wave of conquerors, or if you

8. DEICHMANN, *Ravenna*, Kommentar II. 2 (1976), p. 303, 326, 326-28 (capitals had Theoderic's monograph).

prefer armed immigrants, for whom it seemed neither desirable, nor even a possible, to preserve the Roman structures in the way Theoderic had preserved them. Lombard kings largely lived on the revenues of their very extensive estates. So Lombard Italy was necessarily much more decentralised than Theoderic's kingdom had been. Even in the north the dukes enjoyed considerable autonomy, while in the south the dukes of Spoleto and Benevento ruled independent territories.

Another important difference was that when the Lombards entered Italy, many of them were still pagans. Though many of the leaders, including most of the kings, were already Christians, some were Catholics while others were Arians. It was only after the death of Grimoald in 671 that the Lombard monarchy became permanently catholic. Previously whether a king supported one sect or the other seems to have been a matter of political tactics rather than religious commitment, and the close cooperation between an 'established Church' and the secular administration, which was a feature of the Late Roman system was slow to come into existence in Lombard Italy. Consequently the establishment by royal patronage of churches and monasteries, which was a conspicuous sign of the cooperation of church and state in other *regna*, began later in Lombard Italy than elsewhere.

The Lombards were less profoundly Romanised than the Goths. This is clearly shown by the fact that the Lombard Laws contain a much higher proportion of Germanic custom than the Edict of Theoderic or the Laws of the Visigoths. Nevertheless the Lombards, or at least their leaders, became used to living in cities; and the government of the dukes as well as of the kings was city-based, though kings also spent some time in their villas on the royal estates at Monza and Corteolona. Yet no city was a capital in the sense that Rome and Constantinople or even Geiseric's Carthage, or Theoderic's Ravenna had been capitals. The Lombard king was the chosen commander of the army, and the government was wherever the king was. Moreover no city had sufficient symbolic importance for its possession to enhance a ruler's legitimacy. If the Lombards had a symbolic centre it was the 'Cemetery of the Doves' at Pavia. It remained up to a king to chose where he would live. The most important royal residences were at Verona and Pavia. There were others at Brescia

and Cividale. King Agilulf (590-616) resided at Milan, but the other kings preferred smaller cities in which the Lombards would not be a minority. Under the last kings Pavia was on the way to becoming a permanent centre of government, though Ratchis and Aistulf (744-56) also made symbolic investments in their home town, Cividale, and Desiderius (757-74) founded the great monastery of St. Salvatore at Brescia.

As can be seen from the chapter and of course also from the published excavations of Gian Pietro Brogiolo, the royal cities of the Lombards were unimpressive by the standards of the Roman, and even of the Ostrogothic past. The kings moved into the Roman or Ostrogothic palaces or mansions. The towns around the residence had small populations, and humble houses, grouped around the large surviving Late Roman churches. Within the Late Roman walls clusters of houses were separated by empty fields and cemeteries. Up to the second half of the seventh century the kings engaged in little new building. After that there was a revival. Kings and nobles founded churches and monasteries in cities, and numerous monasteries in the country side. The church and monastic buildings of St. Salvatore in Brescia from about 750, and somewhat later the church of St. Maria in Valle at Cividale, witness to a remarkably rapid revival of building skills. The urban revival was well on the way before the arrival of the Carolingians in 774.

When the Visigoths were settled in Aquitaine (418) and the Burgundians in what is still today called Burgundy (443), the Roman administration with its basis in the cities –or more accurately the *civitates*[9]– of Gaul, was still functioning in large areas of the old Gallic diocese, and until the last quarter of the fifth century Germanic kings were not involved with the running of it. Moreover the Visigoths, when they were at peace with the empire, and the Burgundians for most of the time, had the status of federates, and as such remained formally at least within the Roman provincial framework.[10] Neither people was therefore in

9. The *civitas*, that it is a large rural territory together with its fortified nuclear centre (the city proper) was still, as it had been for centuries, the natural unit of government of Gaul.

10. The king of the Burgundians even had the Roman titles of *magister militum* and *patricius*.

a position to run an administration of the Roman type. After 475/76 the situation had changed. As the *Breviarium* shows, Alaric II (484-507) was attempting to establish a Romano-Gothic kingdom of the same kind as Theoderic was setting up in Italy. But Alaric's attempt was aborted by Clovis and the Franks. So in 4th century Gaul the residences of the Visigothic and Burgundian kings were not mini-Constantinoples, or even mini-Ravennas, but simply the places where the kings chose to live. While the mass of the Goths and Burgundians were settled on land, their kings took up residence in cities, and they followed the example of the Roman emperors of making a single city their principle residence, the king of the Visigoths choosing Toulouse, and the king of the Burgundians Geneva. Later, when Lyon had been incorporated into the Burgundian kingdom (470-74), that city became the principal royal residence, and Geneva the residence of the king's deputy. Occasionally a Burgundian king might reside at Vienne.

In this volume the archaeology of the two principal Burgundian *sedes regiae* has been described by Charles Bonnet and Jean-François Reynaud. Lyon was the provincial capital of Lugdunensis II, and had long been one of the principal cities of Gaul, though in the fifth century it was overshadowed by Arles, the headquarters of the still functioning praetorian prefecture of Gaul, and the meeting place of the assembly of the Seven Provinces. Lyon, had in the past been easily more important than Geneva and indeed than Toulouse, the *sedes regia* of the Visigoths. Both cities surely owed their prominence in their respective barbarian *regna* to the fact that they were conveniently situated in the centre of an area of ethnic settlement. Lyon was still inhabited by members of the Gallo-Roman aristocracy, among them the family of Gregory of Tours, several of whom became bishop. However the city was now in relative decline. The quarter on the hill had been abandoned, and the hill occupied by cemeteries around the burial basilicas of S. S. Maccabees (St. Just) and St. Irene. Housing was now concentrated on the western side of the Sâone, between the churches of St. Paul and St. George, with the episcopal complex of cathedral, baptistery and palace in the centre. There was also an area of dense occupation around the churches of St. Nizier and St. Michael on what had been an island and was

now a peninsula between Sâone and Rhone. The walled area of the Burgundian city was perhaps 21.5 ha, against 65 ha of the classical city.[11] It is significant that most of the imposing Late Antique churches of Lyon were founded before the Burgundian occupation. A new cathedral dates from 469, that is precisely the time of the Burgundian take-over.[12] Lyon was then entering a relatively undistinguished part of its eventful history. When the Merovingians annexed the Burgundian kingdom they did not chose to live there. Lyon became a bishop's city.

Neither Geneva nor Toulouse had been a Roman provincial, capital, but in their different ways both were flourishing when they became royal residences. Geneva had only achieved city status in the course of the fourth century, and was probably still growing. Its walled area of around 5.6 hectares was much smaller than that of either Toulouse or Lyon. But a large suburb grew up around an impressive burial basilica at St. Gervais, and there were several large villas in the neighbourhood , of which the one at Carouge was royal. The Burgundian kings embellished the city with new buildings. As usual in this period new construction was mainly ecclesiastical: one of the two cathedrals was extended, the baptistry rebuilt, a new episcopal palace constructed, and some fine mosaic floors were installed. The Burgundian kings founded at least three new churches, all of considerable size. The royal palace has not yet been discovered.

Toulouse, whose archaeology is described by Jean Guyon, is one of a relatively small number of Gallic cities not to have suffered a reduction in size in Late Antiquity. It retained the walls of the early Empire enclosing something like 90 hectares. Only 2-3% of this has been excavated, but on available evidence the area remained fully built up. This means that it might have had a population somewhere between 9000 an 18000.[13] Its archaeology in some ways reminds of that of towns of the Early Byzantine East: the large houses were subdivided and the roads encroached

11. So C. R. Brühl, *Palatium und Civitas* I, Cologne/Vienna 1975, p. 207, although the existence of a late circuit has not been proved.

12. A second church was added to the cathedral group between the 6th and 8th centuries.

13. According to whether we assume a density of 100 per ha or 200.

upon. The principal temple was abandoned, but the pavement of the forum was maintained throughout the Visigothic period. Toulouse was the residence of the Visigothic kings from 418-508, when it was captured by the Franks. During this time the territory effectively governed by the Gothic king was growing steadily until it comprised most of Gaul and part of Spain. The healthy condition of Toulouse surely reflects the success of its Gothic Kings. Remains of a large Late Antique building have been found which may have been the Visigothic palace. If it was, then it is likely that the Daurade, a remarkable building unfortunately destroyed in the 18th century, which was scarcely 250 meters away, had been the royal chapel. Apart from the palace, monu-mental building at Toulouse, was ecclesiastical. The Visigothic period probably saw work on the cathedral complex, which perhaps consisted of two major churches. The origin of two large extramural burial basilicas, on the sites respectively of the medieval St. Pierre de Cuisines and St. Sernin, also goes back to this period. Archaeology has not, and probably never will be able to establish whether the churches were built for Arian or Catholic worship. But it would certainly be a mistake to assume that monumental catholic churches could not have been built under Arian kings of the Visigoths.

The history of royal residences in Visigothic Spain, or rather Hipania –for modern Portugal is included in the area under examination– is the history of the evolution of a true Visigothic capital, an evolution that has been traced by Gisela Ripoll. The first time a Visigothic king was in a position to chose a residence in Hispania, his choice fell on Barcelona. It was there that Athaulfus was murdered in 415. Why Barcelona? At that time the Visigoths had been starved out of Gaul by a blockade imposed on them by the *magister militum* Constantius.[14] The Visigoths remained interested in Gaul. So naturally they did not move too far away. Barcelona with an area of only 12 ha. was not the largest city in the frontier area. That was Tarraco (Tarragona), the centre of the Roman provincial administration. But it is likely that Athaulfus, like the kings of the Lombards deliberately, avoided

14. On whom see the excellent W. LÜTKENHAUS, *Constantius III, Studien zu seiner Tätigkeit und Stellung im Westreiche 411-421*, Bonn 1998.

the Roman centre, with its Roman administrators and landowners, preferring a smaller city which they could more easily dominate. The very powerful fortifications of Barcelona are likely to have added to its attractions. Athaulfus' choice of Barcelona at the expense of Tarraco began a long term trend. In Late Antiquity the population of Tarraco was withdrawing into the derelict monumental area in the upper town. Barcelona although much smaller to start with, did not show any comparable decline.

Moreover it would appear that Athaulfus followed the precedent of the usurper Maximus, who during his brief reign 409-11, had resided at Barcelona– at least that is where he established his mint. Maximus made agreements with the Vandals and Suebi which had the lasting result of establishing a Suebian kingdom in the north west of the Hispanic peninsula. As is described by Pablo C. Díaz, the Suebian kingdom was on the way to developing a royal city of its own in the shape of Bracara, but the process was aborted when the kingdom was annexed by the Visigoths in 585.

Athaulfus' stay in Barcelona was merely an episode. But subsequent Visigothic kings quite regularly intervened in Hispania, and from c. 475 Euric began the process of systematically bringing the country under Visigothic control –except for Suebian Gallicia. Toulouse remained the royal residence of the Visigothic kings from the time of their settlement in Aquitaine until 507. In that year Clovis the Frank defeated Alaric II at Vouillé, and expelled the Visigoths from most of Gaul, including Toulouse, leaving them only the so-called Septimania, a thin strip of land between the Rhone Delta and the Bay of Biscay. Henceforth Visigothic energy was concentrated on Hispania. The principal area of Gothic settlement seems to have been situated between Toledo and Palencia. Of the kings, Gesalic (507-11) and Amalaric (511-31) appear to have made Barcelona their main residence. The precedent of Athaulfus, and the fact that the city was conveniently situated between the two Gothic areas of settlement in Castille and in Septimania are likely to have been strongly in its favour. However in relation to Hispania the position of Barcelona was marginal. Above all it was a long way from the Roman cities of Baetica and Lusitania, notably Cordoba, Seville and Merida. Theudis (531-48) may have started his reign at Barcelona, but

he probably[15] issued his law on the costs of litigants in 546 at Toledo.

So Barcelona lost its royal connections, but it remained an important regional centre. Moreover very interesting archaeological work, outlined in this book by Cristina Godoy and Josep Maria Gurt has recently provided a lot of new information about the city's development in the Visigothic period. With a walled area of 12 hectares Barcelona was actually larger than Toledo, which became the royal city, though it was much smaller than the southern cites of Merida, Corduba and Seville. But the area and population of Barcelona can probably be considered typical for a principal centre in the north, though excavation at more sites, for instance at Saragossa, is needed to make sure of this. Archaeology has shown that Roman Barcelona was intact right through the fourth century, a century which also saw the building of the cathedral, and of a large episcopal complex in the north of the city. In the 6th and 7th century the appearance of the city was transformed by the subdivision large Roman houses, and the building of masses of small and simple houses serviced by a new network of streets, but still within the grid of the old Roman *insulae*. The drains became blocked and were replaced by cesspits. The episcopal complex, the archaeology of which is summarised by Charles Bonnet and Julia Beltrán, continued to grow until it occupied four *insulae*. It now included a double cathedral, a baptistery, and a bishop's palace. Barcelona was the centre of a financial district, and the bishops of the area, meeting at Barcelona, were customarily asked to give their approval to the taxes the king proposed to levy from their cities. Meanwhile the economic relationship between Barcelona and its hinterland was changing. It seems that cattle raising was gaining ground at the expense of arable farming, and that a new road system, which by-passed the city, came into being to assist the seasonal movement of cattle. This system converged on El Port, to the south of Barcelona and Montjuic. The latter became a significant harbour.

The successors of Theudis were much preoccupied with affairs of the South, where the Byzantine had landed and were

15. On this problem see Gisela Ripoll.

reestablishing an imperial province. At the same time the Visigothic kings tried to assert their power over the cities of the south, and to win the support, or at least to overcome the resistance of the Roman landowners living in and around these cities. So Agila (549-55) resided at Merida, and Athanagild (555-68) spent much time at Seville. But he died at Toledo, and this was significant for the city's future status. For as a result of a development discussed in a chapter written jointly by Isabel Velázquez and Gisela Ripoll the city did ultimately become something very much like the capital of Visigothic Hispania. When Athanagild died his kingdom was in disorder. Visigothic control of much of Hispania had always been superficial at best, but now it faced disintegration. Cordoba had been in revolt since 550, and the Byzantines had occupied a broad strip of territory along the south-east coast. Disintegration was prevented by two brothers who succeeded to the throne in 568, Liuva I (568-72) and Leovigild (568-86). The former resided at Narbonne in Septimania. Leovigild spent much of his time campaigning to restore the unity of the disrupted kingdom, but if there was a place which could be described as his principal residence it was Toledo. Leovigild was succeeded by his son Reccared (586-601),[16] who summoned the famous Third Council of Toledo at which the conversion of the Visigothic monarchy to Catholicism was proclaimed. In the acts of this council Toledo is described as the 'royal city', and this is what it remained until the end of the Visigothic kingdom (716).

Among the reasons for Toledo being chosen, and indeed remaining, the royal city its geographical position was probably paramount. Not only is Toledo situated in the very centre of Hispania, but it also lies within easy reach not only of the cities of the South, which had recently caused so much trouble, but also close to the area where, judging by cemetery finds, the bulk of the Visigoths had been settled. Toledo was certainly not chosen because of the size of its population, its 'urbanism', or the degree of its Romanization. For in none of these respects could it compare with the great southern cities, Cordoba, Seville and Merida, exemplified in the present volume by Merida.

16. Only one other Visigothic king of Spain was so succeeded.

As is explained by Pedro Mateos, there has recently been much archaeological work at Merida. The Roman city covered something like 160 ha and had many monumental buildings. In Late Antiquity it was an important centre of administration, being the headquarters of the vicar of the Spanish diocese. Only a small fraction of the area of the Roman city has been excavated, but the archaeological evidence, such as it is, suggests that the city was densely populated to the end of the fourth century and beyond. In the fifth century the city suffered very widespread destruction, probably as a result of being sacked by the Suebi, but, what is significant is that the city was rebuilt. Moreover it was rebuilt in a way that has been remarked at Toulouse, and seems to have been characteristic of the urbanism of later Late Antiquity wherever classical cities continued to have large populations: the large mansions of Roman times (*domus*) were subdivided for multiple occupation, and the communal areas of streets and public places were invaded by housing. The *Vitas sanctorum patrum Emeretensium* give a vivid picture of the active urban life of the city in the later 6th century, above all of the importance of its catholic bishop, and the building of churches and hospitals at the bishop's instigation. Merida had an episcopal complex, the famous extra-mural basilica of St. Eulalia whose building history has been revealed by archaeology, and a number of other churches and monasteries both within the walls and without. But the wealth of the Church said to have been the richest in Spain, must be seen in proportion: the bulk of it was derived from a single senatorial inheritance.[17]

In spite of its flourishing condition Merida was never seriously considered as a royal residence. Only Agila (549-55) spent any time there, and for him it was a refuge after he had been defeated by the Cordobans in 549, and a base from which to continue the war. Subsequently Athanagild rebelled and established himself at Seville. The war between the two rivals may have had some elements of a war between the *civitates* of Seville and Merida. But as we have seen Athanagild died in Toledo, and subsequently Visigothic kings chose neither Merida, nor Seville as their residence for any length of time. Their relatively large

17. *VSPE* 2. 18; 5. 3.

populations, which presumably included also powerful Roman landowners, might well have been considered a disadvantage. It is at this point that we feel the lack of literary texts which could inform us about the secular inhabitants and their activities and attitudes at Merida and the two other great cities of the south. The social structure of these places remains obscure. It is however clear that they remained very important. Cordoba became the capital of Arab al Andalus. Seville was its second largest city. Merida lost its regional role to Badajoz (fortified 875).

But in Visigothic Hispania, as organised by Leovigild and Reccared, it was Toledo which became the seat of royal power. In comparison with the other *regna*, the Visigothic monarchy was remarkably centralised. This was particularly marked in two areas: law and ecclesiastical administration, and both were governed from Toledo. The king was the supreme source of justice, and it was he who issued the successive editions of the single code of law valid for the kingdom the *liber iudiciorum*. The king was elected but he could only be elected in the place where the previous monarch had died, or at Toledo. In 672 Wamba was chosen king by magnates and people at the villa of Gertici about 120 miles from Toledo, but he insisted on returning to Toledo, to be crowned and anointed there, by the metropolitan, in the palace church of the Apostles Peter and Paul.[18] As for the government of the Church, the king in consultation with the metropolitan of Toledo appointed all bishops. The close cooperation of Church and monarchy culminated in the national synods of the Spanish church, which were attended also by the king and his principal advisers, and which apart from making rules for the Church, also had some of the functions of a secular parliament. These synods normally met at Toledo.

But the position of Toledo was in a sense abstract and symbolic. Toledo was a small city. Its walled area only covered something like five hectares. Its population cannot have amounted to more than a few thousand. It housed the court and royal council, but not large numbers of officials, nor the units of a standing army. In fact the centralisation of government was in

18. JULIAN OF TOLEDO, *Hist. Wamb.* 2-3.

many ways an ideal rather than a reality. Very few of the kings died a natural death. The kings commanded the army in war, but the assembly of the army depended on the great landowners spread over the vast spaces of Hispania, and it was these people who exercised local power.

The battle of Vouillé in 507 had resulted in the expulsion of the Visigoths from most of Gaul, and the gradual establishment of the Visigothic monarchy in Hispania. The same battle enabled Clovis to establish the Frankish monarchy in Gaul. Our evidence for Visigothic Hispania is much less full than for Merovingian Gaul. This makes it difficult to compare the Visigothic and Frankish systems in detail, interesting though it would be to establish why in the long term the Frankish system was so much more successful. Like the other successor kingdoms the Frankish monarchy relied on cities to collect its taxes and to conscript armies and to maintain local law and order. As in the other kingdoms, the Roman land-tax became progressively less important. Like the Visigothic kings of Hispania, the Merovingian kings stationed a royal representative, the *comes civitatis*, in each city, and relied in various ways on the cooperation of the city's bishop. What made the Gallo/Frankish cities important was not so much their urbanism, as the fact that they were the centres of large territories, the ancient *civitates* of Gaul. But, as is demonstrated by Alain Dierkens and Patrick Périn, the Merovingian kings did not attempt to concentrate the administration and ceremony of their kingdom in a single permanent capital in the way the Visigothic kings concentrated their government at Toledo. The kings maintained contact with their kingdom by travelling and visiting different regions in turn, sometimes residing in cities, perhaps when possible in the former praetorium of the Roman governor, sometimes in a royal villa or in a monastery in the country. The kings had their favourite residences, among them Reims, Soissons, Chalons sur Saône, Metz, and Cologne, and above all Paris, which even then had closer ties with royal family than any other city. Nevertheless court was essentially a peripatetic institution. It remained peripatetic under the Carolingians, even though Charlemagne in the 790s built up Aachen in to something like a northern Ravenna. In fact the tendency was for the kings to spend less time in cities. The Carolingians differed

from the Merovingians, and indeed form the Lombard kings, in residing more often than not in villas on royal estates rather than in urban residences.[19]

Ostrogoths, Visigoths, Burgundians, Lombards and Merovingian Franks to a greater or lesser extent, based the administration of their kingdom on the Roman cities in their territory. The association of cities and administration represented continuity with Roman practice, and its success depended both on the Romanization of the barbarians and on the health of the cities. Among these barbarians the Anglo Saxons were the odd men out. For not only had they had less previous contact with the Roman world than the other peoples that set up kingdoms within the Empire, but they also settled in a territory where classical city organisation was already moribund. That last statement is of course controversial. But in this volume S.T. Loseby strongly argues that for practical purposes classical urbanism faded out in Britain soon after 400, that is the old Roman cities were no longer seen to offer a distinct style of life, and at the same time ceased to provide the core of a functioning territorial organisation.[40] So the history of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms shows how Germanic settlers established a system of administration without the advantage –if it was an advantage– of an existing urban network. Its history is that of the creation of a new urban network out of such diverse elements as the administrative centres of royal estates, churches of the peculiar Anglo-Saxon status of 'minster', growing *emporia*, and burghs, that is localities fortified against the Danes. In the developing system some fortified sites of what had been Roman cities once more became prominent, because they had become the seats of bishops. In Britain, as indeed in all the *regna*, ecclesiastical administration was established in fixed centres before royal administration, and the urban location of bishops and archbishops set an example for kings to follow. At the same time the religious ritual associated with monarchy, above all coronation and burial, would tend to link royal power with particular cities. But the establishment of capitals in the

19. For the logistics of the journeys, and maps of the itineraries, of Merovingian and Carolingian rulers and early German emperors see Carl-Richard BRÜHL, *Fodrum, Cristum, Servitium Regis*, 2 vols, Cologne/ Graz 1968.

full sense was a slow process. It was only in the 10th century that the kings of Wessex and England came to reside regularly at Winchester. London was acquiring a predominant position among English towns in population and trade and political organisation. But it only became the permanent centre of the government of the kingdom after the Norman conquest.

*University of Nottingham*