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Jorge López Quiroga, Michel Kazanski, Vujadin Ivanišević. Ethnicities, Entangled Identities and Otherness in Late Antique and Early Medieval Europe. Views for an Interdisciplinary Research Agenda. López Quiroga J., Kazanski M., Ivanišević V. (dir.). Entangled Identities and Otherness in Late Antique and Early Medieval Europe. Historical, Archaeological and Bioarchaeological Approaches, BAR, pp.1-10, 2017, 9781407315935. <hal-03939034>

**HAL Id: hal-03939034**

**<https://hal.science/hal-03939034v1>**

Submitted on 14 Jan 2023

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(SERIES ASLAEME)

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Proceedings 5

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BAR International Series 2852

2017

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BAR International Series XXXX

201X

Published in 201X by  
BAR Publishing, Oxford

BAR International Series XXXX

*Entangled Identities and Otherness in Late Antique and Early Medieval Europe*

ISBN 978 1 4083 1593 5

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COVER IMAGE *The so-called Monza diptych (Treasure of the Monza Cathedral), circa 395–400 A. D., showing Stylicho, as Magister Militum, on the right side and his wife Flavia Serena with their son Euquerio on the left side (photograph: J. López Quiroga).*

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Printed in England

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# ETHNICITIES, ENTANGLED IDENTITIES AND OTHERNESS IN LATE ANTIQUE AND EARLY MEDIEVAL EUROPE

## Views for an Interdisciplinary Research Agenda

Jorge LÓPEZ QUIROGA - Michel KAZANSKI - Vujadin IVANIŠEVIĆ

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**Abstract:** Identity and Otherness are consubstantial to relations of power and processes of social inequality and we can, and we must, study the evidence, materiality and spatial patterns of these practices. Social Identity changes in diverse cultural encounters and during periods of major social discontinuity or reorganisation, as occur in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages. It is, in fact, a dialectic of power that can reflect diverse forms of Identity negotiated at different levels from an individual inside a large family group to local, regional or supra-regional communities. In fact, the result is the configuration of ‘overlapping identities’ that are managed at different social levels and in different socio-political contexts. In this sense, we can speak about ‘entangled social identities’. We think that the most suitable way to address such subjects as Ethnicity, Identity and Otherness is through the development of interdisciplinary studies and methodologies.

**Key Words:** Ethnicity – Identity – Otherness – Entanglement – Late Antiquity – Late Antique – Early Medieval

\* \* \*

Written sources undoubtedly reflect the Roman and Greek vision of the barbarian world (Lund 1990; Hall 1997): how Rome struggled and used the Barbarians according to its geopolitical and geostrategic interests (Geary 2002; Pohl 1997, 2005a). Roman writers, while ignoring the internal operating mechanisms and socio-political organisation of the Barbarians, have not hesitated to attribute names, characteristics and manners in a language and a terminology, and even iconography, understandable only in the context of the Roman *interpretatio* (Geary 2002; Pohl 1997, 2000, 2005a).

The image transmitted in the texts about the Barbarians is an accurate reflection of the ideas that Greeks and Romans had about their own world and their environment<sup>1</sup>. The concept of Barbarian appears in works by *Homer* and *Herodotus*, between the eighth and fifth century BC, as the logical result of the natural opposition between Greeks and Barbarians.

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<sup>1</sup> As Antti Lampinen argued in his doctoral thesis, in respect to religious culture and the moral character of the ‘northern barbarians’ the Greco-Roman educated elite employed a set of recurring stock motifs, topoi and stereotypes (Lampinen 2013).

This was completed later with the descriptions of *Aristotle* and also some ethnographic characteristics described by *Posidonius* (Timpe 1986). We have here a paradigmatic example of the opposition between Identity (‘We’, Greeks and Romans) and Otherness (the ‘Other’, the Barbarians).

Roman authors completed and extended this concept and made descriptions of Barbarians, called ‘Germans’ by *Caesar* in his work *Bellum Gallicum*. They gave a first ethno-geographic characterisation and expanded and generalised this concept to all those *gentes* that lived beyond the Rhine. *Caesar* created an ethnic frontier between the Germans and the Celts in an arbitrary manner, according to his political projects. For this, the Roman Empire established and supported the creation of a geographical border, the *limes*, among the Romans (‘We’) and the Barbarians (the ‘Others’). Roman writers elaborated this as an advantageous dominance of Mediterranean men. The Mediterranean (*mare nostrum*), with its moderate climate, differs from the territories to the north and the south, with their varied extreme temperatures (Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 2.80.189-90).

Ethnographers of Antiquity, who transmitted the first descriptions of the Barbarians (the Celts, Germans and Slavs), presented three points of view (Müller 1972, 1980):

a) A clearly ethnocentric vision surrounding the Mediterranean that is characteristic of the construction of the discourses on Otherness.

b) The ‘lifestyle’ of the Barbarians, i.e. its physical appearance and its social, political and military characteristics. This is a typical mechanism for constructing stereotypes that underline the differences between the ‘Other’ and to support Otherness. It should be added that ethnographic groups created by the ancient authors are far from reality. For instance, *Procope* mentions Alans, Gepides, Ruges and Vandals as ‘Gothic people’ (see Kazanski 2009a: 231).

c) A systematisation and structuration of the barbarian world in which each group is ideally located at a specific place. Namely the application of geographic parameters that show spatial patterns constructed from ethnographic, political and socio-economic groups among various barbarian peoples.

The different sources (stories, chronicles, letters, poems, *consularia*, codes and legislative compilations, hagiographic texts, *notitiae*, etc.) (Demandt 1989) inform us in a more or less direct form and through very different perspectives (*Publius Cornelius Tacitus* in his *Germania*, *Isidore* of Seville, in the seventh century, with his book *Historia Gothorum, Wandalorum et Sueborum*) of the image that the Roman intellectual elite had about the barbarian world from a dominant position within a laudatory propaganda for the Empire and their agents (Pohl 1999, 2005a). This viewpoint is made not only as a colonial power, who thought they had achieved the highest level of civilisation never before accomplished by any Empire, but with the firm conviction that this system of civilisation and the Roman worldview could perish at the hands of Barbarians. This negative image, from the Roman writers on the barbarian world, has influenced many excellent specialists on Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages.

This is the same reading that we find in *Hydace*, *Orosius* or *Gregory* of Tours: A catastrophic and apocalyptic vision (taken to the extreme by *Hydace*) on the arrival and installation of the Barbarians inside the Roman Empire. The idea of the Barbarians as wild people is identical to that expressed by *Caesar* and *Tacitus* half a millennium earlier, because they imitate and repeat the same clichés and stereotypes that Romans and Greeks had before concerning the Barbarians. And this picture transmitted by these ancient ethnographers has influenced, and still influences, the current historical and archaeological research. We must not forget that the references to the Barbarians, and the names by which they are designated, are always made in a context of confrontation and/or geopolitical and military alliances and strategies. However, the Roman had considered some *gentes*, such as the Isaurians and the Basques, inhabiting the weakly romanised parts of the Empire, as Barbarians (Goffart 1989, 113).

For the authors of Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages (i.e. the *Getica* of *Jordanes*, *Gregory* of Tours and his *Historiae Francorum*, ‘the Venerable’ *Bede* with his ‘Ecclesiastical History’ about the *gentes Anglorum*, *Paul Deacon* and his *Historia Langobardorum*, *Isidore* of Seville and the *Historiae Gothorum, Wandalorum et Sueborum*), it is important to note that their texts are developed in the context of the so-called ‘barbarian monarchies’ of the post-Roman West. And, consequently, written largely to justify their power and their origins in the new socio-political situation in which they develop (Mckitterick 2004; Christensen 2002; Goffart 1988). These works aim to legitimise the power of elites who make up the Frankish, Ostrogoth, Lombard, Saxon and Gothic Kingdoms. To do this, these authors obviously used many clichés and stereotypes from Greek and Roman ethnographers, not hesitating to build mythical and ancient origins for these new socio-political formations.

Literary sources don’t provide us with a direct approach to the study of the barbarian world, because they just show a picture of the idea that Rome had about the Barbarians. This image of the barbarian world, which is reflected in the egocentric and ethnocentric Greco-Roman mirror, does not correspond at all to the reality. This would explain the inaccuracies, changes and visible differences in the texts of Roman authors when they give different names to Barbarians, and when they try to specify their spatial location in the *Barbaricum*. For example, Franks and *Alamanni* are terms that only appear in the third century, because they are geopolitical categories established by Rome to distinguish the Barbarians who live in *Germania Superior* and *Inferior*. Franks and *Alamanni* are terms that contain different meanings, but not with reference to ethnic type (Pohl 1999a, 2000).

The names by which we know the *gentes* that lived in the *Barbaricum* are exclusively a Roman invention. Thus the archaeological sources would work with non-existent and ineffective conceptual categories to explain the barbarian world and its material reality. The question of ethnic identity assigned to objects (especially in respect to the funerary world) has always been a central question of the so-called ‘Barbarian Archaeology’, and based on two characteristic elements inherent to the archaeological research: typology and chronology (Schulze-Dörlam 1986; Tejral 1990, 1997b, 1999, 2011; Shchukin–Kazanski-Sharov 2006; Ebel-Zepezauer 1997; Siegmund 2000; Kazanski 1989; 1991a, 1991b, 1996, 2009; Kazanski-Perin 1997, 2006, 2008, 2009; Sasse 1997, 2000; Ebel-Zepezauer 2000, etc.).

In this way, archaeologists have proposed interpretations of ethnic type for the recognition of:

a) Homogeneous linguistic<sup>2</sup> groups: the Celts (*Hallstatt* and *La Tène* cultures), the ‘Germans’ (*Jastorf* culture), and Slavs (*Prag-Korčák* and *Sukov–Dziedzice* cultures).

b) Ethnic groups (individuals and groups of people): the ‘Germans of the Elbe’, the ‘Slavs’ (between the Elbe and the Oder), the *Suebi* and their variants (*Neckarsueben*, *Donnausueben*, etc.), the Goths and the peoples of Eastern Europe, the Franks, the *Alemanni*, the Vandals, etc.

The identification of peoples (*Volkern*) and tribes (*Stammen*) mentioned by literary sources, through so-called ‘archaeological cultures’ is the result of the ethnic interpretation of the material record from the time of Kossinna (Kossinna 1911, 1912, 1926). Since Gustaf Kossinna, archaeologists have systematically mapped the dispersion of objects as corresponding to different sets of people (called ‘archaeological cultures’) and their settlements from the written sources. Before and during

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<sup>2</sup> For more about the relations between Language and Identity see the contributions to the volume co-edited by Walter Pohl and Bernhard Zeller (Pohl-Zeller eds. 2012).

Nazi times physical anthropologists used physical differences of individuals to reconstruct purported Nordic, western and other 'race-dominated' societies. The constructed racial background was used to identify ethnic groups and migration through the archaeological record.

Currently, archaeologists studying the barbarian world have considerably nuanced the relationship between object and 'archaeological culture' with a specific ethnic group (Kazanski-Perin 2008, 2009; Effros 2003, 2004; Brather 2000, 2002, 2004; Bierbrauer 2008; Theuvs 2009; Quast 2009; López Quiroga 2010, Von Rummel 2010; Hasall 2011) and above all underline the role of the local communities and elites in the changes in the funerary world more than the migratory processes (Halsall 1992, 1995a, 1998, 2000, 2003, 2007; Härke 2007; Hakenbeck 2008, 2011; Vida 2009; Kontny 2010; López Quiroga 2016, i. p. a, b). However, it's still considered that archaeology may reflect the migratory movements attested by the texts or that certain types of female burials can be interpreted from an 'ethnic' viewpoint, but in both cases with nuances (Bierbrauer 2004, 2008; Eger 2005). It is challenging to distinguish a clear-cut ethnic identity of a territory with multiple ethnic and political identities, as the study of Northern Illyricum in the fifth and sixth centuries has shown (Ivanišević-Kazanski 2014: 131-160).

The question is not how ethnic identities can be derived from archaeological data, but if it is really possible to establish a direct relationship between *ethnos* (as an ethnographic concept) and *culture* (as a concept derived from the spatial homogeneity of a determinate type of object from the archaeological record) from a strict methodological point of view (Brather 2004: 159-160). Archaeology aims to document: the cultural and ethnic continuity over time, the movements of individuals belonging to specific cultures and ethnic groups (migration), the identity of 'foreign' individuals (ethnic minorities) in a specific cultural and ethnic context, and even to describe societies as ethnically homogeneous and heterogeneous (according to the Ethnogenesis paradigm). Identity in Late Antiquity was a complex construction that was constantly in flux. It cannot be interpreted by the means of modernising the past. However, archaeology and linguistics work with completely different concepts regarding the barbarian world, which is an obvious methodological problem when we are trying to implement a true interdisciplinary approach between them (Brather 2004, 165).

From the 1960s, and with the application of concepts and methods of Anthropology, Sociology, Ethnology and from a historical perspective, the concept of Ethnogenesis (*Stammesbildung*) emerged as an explanatory paradigm of the barbarian world (Wenskus 1961; Wolfram 1975a, 1975b, 1976, 1977). Based on the idea of the maintenance of the so-called 'tradition core' (*Traditionskern*) by a small elite at the top of

heterogeneous groups of Barbarians, philologists, linguists and historians employ prosopography, onomastics and anthroponomy to approach the study of the barbarian elites mentioned in written sources through a lineage that would maintain the *Traditionskern* and the ethnic identity as a social and cultural indicator (Jarnut 2008).

According to the German historian Reinhard Wenskus, among the Barbarians a small group conserve the 'kernel of traditions' (*Traditionskerne*), supported by mythical traditions and lifestyles, which he called 'constitution' (*Verfassung*) (Wenskus 1961, 64-76; *contra*: Kulikowski 2002; Gillet 2002). These groups manage to link larger factions of individuals and to infuse in them a specific ethnic identity. In other words, people whose identity was determined by the belief in a mythic common origin were in fact multi-ethnic groups. Obviously, this multi-ethnicity is not so clearly shown in the texts of Roman authors. However, this explanation offers a different picture of the *gentes* that compose the barbarian world. Today it is no longer possible to speak about mass movements of peoples with an ethnically closed character that move constantly throughout the Roman Empire.

In the context of the so-called *Germanischer Altertumskunde*, the 'Vienna School' (Wolfram 1975a, 1975b, 1976, 1977, 1990, 2005a) and the 'German School' (Claude 1971, 1978, 1980; Geuenich-Haubrich-Jarnut eds, 1977; Castritius 1985) along with scholars in the Iberian Peninsula (García Moreno 1974, 1994, 1999, 1998, 2007, 2009), have developed this type of philological research based on the paradigm of Ethnogenesis. In this approach, the protagonists of the various Ethnogenesis would be a very small minority of lineages considered noble or aristocratic who maintain the ethnic traditions (*Stammenstraditionen*) of a people and the institution of kingship. Obviously, it is a vision that offers an elitist interpretation about barbarian societies without the social aspects of them (Brather 2004, 157). Certainly, the ethnic content (theoretically implicit in Anthroponomy and Onomastics)<sup>3</sup> in terms of the exercise of political power by an elite in the territorial domain is otherwise a modern reading that forms part of the construction of the current historical discourse on barbarian societies. In this sense, there is a strong need for the construction of nationalist myths that content, support and justify the political context in which these discourses appear (Haubrichs 2008). It is an elitist view of past societies through our present, which does not reflect the reality (the filter of Roman *interpretatio* would always be present) (Rübekeil 2008), but simply reproduces the contemporary state of the

<sup>3</sup> It is extremely new and suggested by the recent research of the geographer Pablo Mateos (in fact his doctoral dissertation) about "Names, Ethnicity and Populations. Tracing Identity in Space". In his book Mateos argues that combinations of forenames and surnames can be used to predict the ethnicity of an individual, and that the distribution of names in a country maps that of its ethnic communities. Obviously, Mateos does not suggest that name determines ethnicity or vice versa, but rather that both are correlated (Mateos 2014).

historiographical debate based on theoretical conceptual categories. Walter Pohl distinguishes two “conflicting modes” of interpretation: “One school has brought together an impressive stock of ethnographic and mythological parallels to prove the basic authenticity of the material in these histories even where it is legendary. Others have argued for the more or less fictional character of these texts” (Pohl 2000a: 9-10).

The Barbarians were not conscious of being Barbarians; they also lacked a sense of belonging to a specific group. Ethnic identity was not a preoccupation for all Barbarians outside of a small elite encouraged and stimulated by Rome. Our image of the Barbarians is that which Rome has left us. A portrait full of topics, clichés and stereotypes built under an egocentric and imperialist vision of the world, the result of a persistent dynamic of conquest and expansion of the Roman Empire. The sources available for historians, archaeologists, epigraphists, and philologists are the result of the creation of Greco-Roman civilisation, a ‘barbarian world’ absolutely unreal and mythical. The combination, actually unfortunately more theoretical than realistic, of different types of sources (with the help of other disciplines such as Genetics and Palaeoanthropology) could perhaps permit a more convincing approach to the Barbarians. Nevertheless our image is always conditioned and influenced by the Greco-Roman filter, because it determines the reading and interpretation of the barbarian world from the Renaissance to our present day.

The association between cultural areas, where there is a homogeneous ‘material culture’ archaeologically defined, and the ‘migration’ of the Barbarians, as Roman writers described them, confronts a fundamental problem: the creation, and we can even say the invention of the barbarian world by the Roman political and military genius. Archaeologists seek to relate the distribution of a series of objects (normally found in a funerary context) with the image proportionate to texts which gives a misleading result: the collision of two different disciplines and methodologies, especially difficult to reconcile both with regard to questions of Ethnicity, Identity and Otherness.

Walter Pohl emphasises as well: “To understand, in their context, the picture proportioned by the texts it is more important to describe the post-Roman kingdoms of the fifth to eighth centuries as political and cultural specific spaces. What does ethnic identity mean in the post-Roman Europe?” (Pohl 2005b). Pohl rightly points out that in the construction processes of socio-political identities factors such as the Christian faith and church organisation<sup>4</sup> must be taken into account. Christianity in Late Antiquity multiplied the ethnographic meaning

<sup>4</sup> Including, of course, monasticism and the different markers of identity perceptible through monastic rules (tonsure, liturgy, solitude, confession, etc.). See the interesting and suggestive study of Yaniv Fox about Columbanian monasticism, Frankish elites and the construction of monastic and familial identities in Merovingian Gaul: Fox 2014: 221-293.

characterised from the Eusebian notions of a Roman Empire identified by the Christian religion and the Barbarians distinguished as heretics to the Augustine ideals of a *civitas dei* (Markus 1970: 35-61). Ethnic identities as a principle of social distinction, resource of political loyalties and narrative horizon of History, emerged in the fifth century in the Western Roman Empire. The sustainable success of ethnic discourse in the period of Late Antiquity is because the leaders of post-Roman barbarian kingdoms used them to their advantage in order to define their identity. These myths of origins (*origines gentium*), constructed by the early medieval authors<sup>5</sup>, contributed fundamentally to the construction of identities (Pohl 2005b). For example, as also emphasised by Walter Pohl “The *Origines gentium* are practically unusable as a source for reconstructing the early history of the Goths and Lombards, but through this text can be studied the construction of identities in the kingdoms of the Middle Ages” (Pohl 2005b).

### Developing an Interdisciplinary Research Agenda

To overcome the dichotomy between texts and archaeology, with the improvement of different historiographical discourses and methodological approaches, we must start from the beginning with a real dialogue between historians and archaeologists with the support of specialists in other fields such as Sciences. For this it is necessary to create the foundations of a true interdisciplinary approach taking into account the following aspects, which could constitute a small step towards developing a possible interdisciplinary research agenda:

a) A *constructive criticism* of attitudes, conceptual and methodological positions of historians and archaeologists around Ethnicity, Identity and Otherness and the limits and possibilities of the archaeological record and written sources to study these issues. The treatment of these questions in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages raises more conceptual, methodological and, above all, ideological problems than for other periods in which one speaks unambiguously of identities (without the shadow of the ethnic paradigm) and their relation with materiality and issues such as migration, colonisation and hybridisation. In proto-history or in classical archaeology, for example, the influence of long-term material and social dynamics in the formulation and establishing of people’s identities is frequently spoken about (Knapp-Dommelen 2010: 10-11). Material culture can not only reflect social identities but can also play an important role in its creation and transformation (Hales-Hodos 2009).

Any individual, at any time in History, faces questions of individual and collective identity and this does not mean that ethnicity constitutes a unique and central concern in

<sup>5</sup> About the construction of the myth origins by early medieval authors the different contributions to the volume co-edited by Richard Corradini, Rob Meens, Christina Pössel and Philip Shaw are fundamental (Corradini *et al.* 2006).

everyday life. What is certain is that Identity is not only a theoretical issue and its evidence is reflected not only through the written sources. We must try to analyse and interpret, without out-dated ideological preconceptions, the connections between Identity and materiality during Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages. In this sense, Archaeology should be determined when different types of identities are likely to be proclaimed as distinguishing features, and what kinds of materials might be employed as media for such Identity statements. For instance, the connection between gender and Identity brings us another completely different perspective in respect to mortuary customs and their connection with the use of dress and ethnic Identity (Halsall 1996; Hadley ed. 1999; 2004; Effros 2004; Arnold 2007). Certainly, dress has an important meaning in ancient societies and constitutes a privileged field through which individuals negotiate their identity and overall the only way in which certain social constructs could be communicated, especially gender, status and Ethnicity<sup>6</sup>. The funerary world, and particularly mortuary practices, during Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, is not immune to such social constructions which are the result of a complex process of negotiated identities.

b) An *open dialogue* with specialists in disciplines such as Geography, Ethnography, Comparative Sociology, Philology, Social, Physical and Forensic Anthropology<sup>7</sup>, Evolutionary and Molecular Biology through the use of their conceptual categories and methodological approaches. Disciplines such as Sociology, Social and Forensic Anthropology (through Paleopathology) or Molecular Biology (through aDNA<sup>8</sup> and Isotope Analysis) could help so much to define and understand Ethnicity and Identity from another's point of view<sup>9</sup>. Also, the propositions and current methodological debates and approaches in other disciplines distinct from History and Archaeology could help us, for example, to speak (but always without ideological preconceptions) about social inequality and the transition from 'egalitarian societies' to leadership and elite constructions. In this sense, the recent model proposed by Powers and Lehmann regarding the transition from egalitarianism to leadership in Neolithic societies is very stimulating and sheds a different light to the transition from the Roman Empire to the construction of *Regna* and their elites in Late Antiquity and Early Medieval Europe (Powers-Lehmann 2014).

c) A different approach to the *funerary world*, which was often in the past a misleading indicator of Ethnicity and

Identity. In this sense, it would be to undertake a comprehensive methodology of the *study of rites and burial customs in the long term* (Late Antiquity and Middle Ages) to analyse the changes in the types and modes of burial (Lăzărescu 2008; Cosma 2009). To study the rites and burial customs effectively an authentic archaeology of rites and burial through a specific attention to funerary deposits and corpse taphonomy is necessary, as we have also found in proto-historical archaeology. From an archaeological point of view it is only possible to study funerary *actions*, but not strictly rites because these derive from the interaction between actions and thoughts. We speak about the so-called *Archaeotanatology*, the 'Archaeology of the Dead' (Duday 2009). It is therefore essential to analyse, following the methodological approaches of forensic medicine and anthropology, the modes of preservation of organic elements after burial, before burial, and the objects deposited and handled in connection with the funeral rite.

In this sense, it is indispensable to differentiate the types of funerary deposits between individual burials and funerary complexes; and among multiple (bodies that have been deposited simultaneously, as evidence of massacres, plagues, floods, etc.) or collective (corpses that have been deposited at different times with funeral structures frequently reopening) burials. Also, a crucial distinction must be made between primary and secondary burials. To arrive at this division we need to distinguish: firstly, between the primary (corpse) or secondary (loose bones) character of the deposit, that is the human remains; secondly, if the burial is proper (primary or secondary), because in secondary burials it is necessary to demonstrate the manipulation of dry bones to distinguish the first and subsequent burials as is frequently observed in the case of reductions (Duday 2009). In Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages the presence of different types of funerary deposits is usual. Obviously, the significance of the deposits (habitually utilised as parameters of Ethnicity or Identity) derives from their typology and function, but also from their location, inside or outside the tomb, in relation to the corpse. It will be very interesting to study the precise place of each object (ceramic, glass, metal, etc.) in respect to the corpse and their frequency in a determined position. While wondering about the position of certain objects, seemingly out of their original place. For example, the situation of the brooches or fibulae is normally found on top shoulder or at breast height. But sometimes (and we could also say with a relative frequency) their position is different on the body of the corpse. This could be due to the processes during the decomposition of the body, when elements of grave furniture and dress may be displaced, like anatomical structures. In consequence to reconstruct the exact situation of the funerary deposits it is crucial to take into consideration the changes in the volume of the corpse during its decomposition (Duday 2009). We have also to be very conscious of the possibilities of grave robbery

<sup>6</sup> See the recent work of Mireille M. Lee about Body, Dress and Identity in Ancient Greece: Lee 2015.

<sup>7</sup> Vid. *infra*: Luis Ríos Frutos.

<sup>8</sup> Criticals overviews about the limits and possibilities of aDNA analysis: Lidén-Götherström 1999; Hills 2009. We can see a very recent example of the DNA possibilities for studying migratory movements in the Early Middle Ages and its reflection in the current population applied to the Italian region of Piedmont in: Vai-Ghirrotto-Pilli-Tassi-Lari-Rizzi *et al.* 2015.

<sup>9</sup> Vid. *infra*: Jorge López Quiroga.

that could imply erroneous conclusions on the funerary deposits and burial customs.

In this volume various authors, from different points of view, write about the use, sense, significance and limits of three concepts regarding the study of 'barbarian societies': **Identity**: understood as individual or collective identity expressed in the texts or through different material elements, and particularly in the funerary world<sup>10</sup>; **Otherness**: used as the quality or fact of being different of other, also as an individual or collective countenance of uniqueness<sup>11</sup>; and above all **Entangled Social Identities**<sup>12</sup>: in the sense of a plurality of identities that are continually negotiated both in an individual or collective way inside a restricted social community or in regard to other socio-political entities dominant or dominated<sup>13</sup>.

Evidently, Otherness and Identity are two inseparable sides of the same coin: "the 'Other' only exists relative to the Self, and vice versa" (Staszak 2008). In this sense, we can see in the two concepts a 'positive' and a 'negative' significance and point of view. Otherness in Human Geography is the result of a discursive process by which a dominant in-group ('Us', the 'Self') constructed one or many dominant Out-groups ('Them', 'Other') by stigmatising a difference (real or imagined) presented as a negation of Identity and thus a motive for potential discrimination (Staszak 2008). For example, biological sex is difference and gender<sup>14</sup> Otherness. The asymmetry in power relationships is central in the construction of Otherness, and this is fundamental for the study of the 'barbarian societies' and their accommodation/integration/exclusion in the different regional post-Roman societies in Late Antiquity and Early Medieval Europe<sup>15</sup>. Identity and Otherness are based on a binary logic that works in the West from Greek times with the first constructions about 'Us' (the Greek-speakers) and the 'Others' (the Barbarians, the non Greek-speakers).

Also extremely interesting for our subject are the territorial constructions found in the creation and negotiation of diverse forms of Identity and Otherness. Indeed, territorial constructions are created less to separate pre-existing communities that to confer geographical identities on one another, creating an 'in-

group' and an 'out-group' on both sides of a border: As the Romans and the Barbarians on both sides of the *limes* under the rule of the Roman Empire; or the Barbarians and the post-Roman regional communities in the frame of the complex processes of construction and competition between the new socio-political entities in the West, after the fall of the political superstructure created by the Roman Empire (Revell 2009). The frontier regions were also important *foci* of communal identity especially for the *gentes barbarae* recruited in the Roman army.

This process works on different scales in regard to Identity and Otherness constructions: from an individual or little familial (restricted or large) groups (as we see frequently in the funerary world) through gangs (groups of socio-political and military elites) to new 'national' (*regna, gentes*) imagined communities (Swabian, Vandal, Visigoth, Frankish, Burgundian or Lombard kingdoms). Certainly, Geography is an effective producer of Otherness, as well as physical anthropology, history and archaeology, which provide us discursive constructions of Identity and Otherness. Identity and Otherness, obviously, are consubstantial to relations of power and processes of social inequality and we can, and we must, study the evidence, materiality and spatial patterns of these practices. Certainly, for the elites (at different social levels) "space was a valuable asset in the struggle to maintain and reproduce lordship" and "spaces had different social values, and space reproduced and projected these differences in social value" (Hansson 2006: 197). Social Identity changes in diverse cultural encounters and during periods of major social discontinuity or reorganisation, as occurs in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages.

This dynamic of constant negotiation of identities between elites (dominant or dominated) and among local communities with local elites or supra-regional powers reminds us of the theoretical work of Immanuel Wallerstein based on the World System Analysis. In this sense, the reflections of Thomas Hall are very stimulating, because he proposes that all forms of identification "occur within a world systemic context, and are part and parcel of the dialectic between social local groups in the complex relations of production and exchange with the overall system" (Hall 2014). It is, in fact, a dialectic of power that can reflect diverse forms of Identity negotiated at different levels from an individual inside a large family group to local, regional or supra-regional communities. In fact, the result is the configuration of 'overlapping identities' that are managed at different social levels and in different socio-political contexts: entangled social identities.

We don't want to, and won't, say much more in this preliminary text about Ethnicity, especially considering that the editors of this volume, and the authors of this paper, may have different views on this issue. In any case, nobody believes today, or has for quite some time, in the existence of biologically definite monolithic ethnic

<sup>10</sup> Specifically about 'ethnic identity' see the contributions of Michel Kazanski, Anna Mastykova and Patrick Perin. Ethnicity as a 'situational construct' can be seen in the papers of Jörg Kleemann and Dawn Hadley.

<sup>11</sup> As we can appreciate in the texts of Michel Rouche, Bruno Dumézil and Sebastian Brather.

<sup>12</sup> The term 'Entangled' is taken from Ian Hodder (Hodder 2012). See also *infra*: Jorge López Quiroga.

<sup>13</sup> *Vid. infra* the texts of Jörg Kleemann, Annamaria Paziienza, Florin Curta, Tivadar Vida, Dawn Hadley and Jorge López Quiroga.

<sup>14</sup> A complete and recent synthesis on gender studies in medieval Europe in: Bennett-Karras 2013.

<sup>15</sup> The image and the relation with the 'other' (and with the 'foreigner') are crucial in the construction of early medieval power relationships, see in this sense: Gantner 2014.

identities. Nevertheless, and here we have left the discussion open, it is excessively negativistic and reductionist to see Ethnicity or Identity only as a 'state of mind' (Halsall 2011: 25). Of course, Ethnic Identity is situational, constructed, shifting, nested, negotiated and always fluent. But in the same way that relations of power and social inequality leave indubitable material traces, why could not Ethnic Identity, as a result of power relations, geopolitical and socio-political strategies, have left visible traces<sup>16</sup>? We think that the most suitable way to address these subjects is through the development of interdisciplinary studies and methodologies, but not in the framework of a 'nihilistic revisionist wave', or a 'contra-revisionist scholastic' reaction. The following studies, which make up this volume, should be, and we think they are, a step in the right direction.

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<sup>16</sup> As has been argued by Bonni Effros in respect to to the regulation of mortuary customs by the Carolingian dynasty. These regulations visible in the funerary world can be interpreted as a result of the Christianity process or as a political act against the Anglo-Saxons (Effros 1997).

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