

## THE VISIGOTHS' IMMIGRATIONS AND THEIR STATE IN SOUTH GALE AND SPAIN

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The Goths are a Germanic people that have inhabited Scandinavia and the North of Europe. Due to the poor environment, the severe climate and the political and military struggles the majority of these peoples have been forced to leave their native lands and move to the south and southeastern areas. At the beginning, the Goths had moved to the Eastern coasts of the Baltic Sea. They then started a wide range of immigrations that had lasted for hundreds of years in an attempt to search for an area valid for their settlements. During this long era they kept on moving from one place to another so much that they had been called the wandering peoples. This era is characterized by ambiguity and vagueness owing to the scarcity of documents and manuscripts.

The Goths had been living away from the borders of the Roman Empire that had not allowed any of the Germanic peoples to settle under its power except under certain conditions imposed on them as allies to the Roman Empire.

With time the Goths had settled at the Vistola and continued to immigrate eastward until they finally settled along the Northern coast of the Black Sea. The Visigoths (Western Goths also known also the Tervingi) were one of two main branches of the Goths; they occupied the region extending westward to the Dakia District; an East Germanic tribe (The Ostrogoths or the Greutungi were the other); they inhabited the fertile region north of the Black Sea. Thus, the Danster River had been the dividing line between them both.

Towards the end of the Era of Emperor Alexander Spherios (222–235 AD) it had been clear that there were a strong barbarian war-loving people at the northern coasts of the Black Sea. They managed to trespass the Roman borders and attack several cities until Emperor Phillip had defeated and evacuated them from the Roman lands. However, they returned quickly to wage



several attacks lasting from 248 until 251. Emperor Decius (249–251) had shouldered the responsibility of confronting them and was at first victorious. However, the war ended on a tragic note as the Goths had severely defeated the Roman Army in Dobrudja. Decius and his son Herennius Etruscus had fought with unique courage until they were killed in the battlefield. The Goths continued to pose a permanent threat until Emperor Aurelian (270–275) managed to put an end to their attacks and devastations in 271. The borders of the Roman Empire had been safe and peaceful under Emperor Decidius (284–305) and Emperor Constantine.

During this era of peace and quiet there was a drastic change in the history of the Goths influencing all aspects of their lives when they were converted to Christianity. This owes a lot to the efforts of a young Goth called Ulfilas who adopted Christianity after the Arian Sect and was appointed a bishop of the Christian Goths in 341.

Ulfilas continued to be an Arian Christian missionary among the Goths when he settled with his people in Moesia (now Modern Bulgaria). On the account of his fame as a missionary he continued to be known as the messenger of the Goths to whom the credit goes for translating the Bible into the Goth Language. He was the main reason behind converting the Goths to Christianity on a large scale and he developed a great friendship with Emperor Constantine (337–361). He was renowned as the Second Moses. The friendly relations between the Goths and the Byzantines had changed after the death of Constantine. Differences had been renewed after Valentinian and Valens had taken over the imperial throne.

The Ostrogoths, on the other hand, had been attacked by the Huns and could not fight back. They could not resist so much that they were fiercely defeated. The Huns then moved westward to suppress the Visigoths in 375; the Visigoths then pleaded to Emperor Valens to allow them to cross the Danube and settle within the borders of the Empire so that they would not face the destiny of the Ostrogoths. This was the first peaceful migration of a Germanic people in the Roman lands. All the problems that might be caused by a migrant people had been removed since their settlement was not an easy job as there were many troubles including the scarcity of ammunitions and the chaos and disorder in addition to what these refugees had suffered because of the snobbery of rulers and officials. The Goths began to be angry at the mal-treatment of the Roman authorities.



At this moment the Goths started to pose a real problem for the Imperial Authorities on Roman lands. Moreover, they started to suffer in the sense that the land allocated to them was not sufficient to satisfy their needs. Therefore, when they were starving they had no alternative other than the revolution through which they defeated the Roman forces in the Battle of Adrianople in 378. Emperor Valens was killed in this battle.

Regardless of the peaceful era that followed, the main problem for the Goths was to look for a suitable place to settle on. As for their Arian belief, it was the reason behind the malice and hatred against them particularly after it had been forbidden in the Constantinople Council in 381. These problems controlled the relationship between the Goths and the Roman Empire particularly after the Visigoths were united under their King Alaric who started to handle the problem of a native land. When he failed to attain a suitable place in the Balkan Peninsula, he moved to Italy and entered Rome in 410.

It was natural for the people to be terrified by the fall of their Eternal City; they thus believed that the fall of Rome is a bad omen for the end of the whole world and all its civilizations. It is not easy to imagine the impression made by the fall of Rome on the contemporaries who considered it an episode that had never been experienced by the Empire. Saint Jerome (340–414) had denounced such a deed in his seclusion in Bethlehem saying “All humanity is included in her ruins” a sentiment with which pagan and Christian alike could agree. Saint Augustine (354–430) had been involved in his seclusion in defense of Christianity and the attacks against it as responsible for the fall of Rome and then wrote the greatest medieval religious work which is *The City of God*.

Anyway, plundering and theft had continued in the then vulnerable city. On the third day Alaric had set out overloaded with the bounty and booty as well as several hostages chief among whom is Galla Placidia, daughter of Emperor Theodosius I (379–395). However, he discovered that Italy, with its limited and scarce food resources, cannot bear the residence of the Visigoths. It is on this account that he decides to settle with his people in North Africa. However, he died before carrying out his plans. Then Ataulf (410–415) took over at a very critical and difficult time since he was not able to stay in Italy due to the hatred of the Roman people for the destruction and devastation the Visigoths had caused to Italy. Similarly, he could not carry out Alaric's project



for moving to North Africa by sea owing to the high cost required for this. Therefore, he moved with his people to the South of Gale and the Northeastern part of Spain.

Ataulf then took a very vital step when he convinced Galla Placidia, the closest heiress of the Imperial throne, to accept his marriage proposal. In Barcelona, she delivered a baby boy who was called Theodosius after his grandfather. Ataulf had fathered a child with an extremely good claim to be heir apparent to the western Empire. However, the death of the child in 414 had put an end to these hopes and ambitions.

With the settlement of the Visigoths in the South of Gale and the Northeastern part of Spain the political aspects of their state began to be clear. But they had to take part in the then conflict of dominance in Europe between the Romans and the Huns. They had also to determine a foreign policy to protect their interests particularly with the establishment of the state of the Franks in Gale.

When the Visigoths began to enter Spain, the Iberian Peninsula was teaming with multi-ethnic groups such as the Allans, the Suevi, the Vandals, the Gebedis, and the Basks that crossed the Gale at the beginning of the fifth century in order to settle in the Peninsula. Add to these the aborigines from the Hispanics, the Romans and the Jews. The conflict among these ethnicities had led to the devastation of several Spanish towns. This was accompanied by a great discrepancy in religions and dogmas. Paganism was still dominant, the Jews had their Ghettos, and Christianity was adopted by the Germanic peoples after the Arian belief. However, the aborigines had adopted Catholicism. Therefore, the Visigoths had to deal with all these complicated matters and at the same time work with their own political systems and rules chief among which was the election of the ruler. This rule of election was a permanent conflict among the Visigoth Aristocrats.

Under this democratic system the unique and rapidly growing role of the Council of Toledo became responsible for the religious, political and legal affairs at the same time. At the level of relations between the Visigoths and contemporary powers, the relation between the Visigoths and the Franks was very prominent particularly at the early period that ended in the firing of the Visigoths out of Gale. Nevertheless, the relation between the Visigoths and the Successors of Clovis was oscillating between friendliness and antagonism.

As for the Byzantine State, it tried to dedicate the Visigoths and commit them to implement its policy in the Iberian Peninsula. Yet, the situation had been reversed particularly after the Visigoths had dominated the majority of the Peninsula. Thus, Byzantine had waited to seize the chance to come back again. Hence, Emperor Justinian had manipulated the civil war in Spain to restore some of the centers in the southeastern part of Spain.

Towards the end of the Visigoth Kingdom it began to suffer from disintegration and decline and the quick succession of kings until the Arab Conquest had begun in 711 to let the curtain fall over the end of the Visigoth Kingdom.



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