

Frankish ἀρμοσταί in Lucca? Reading Agathias *Hist.* 1.18.5

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THE FIRST BOOK of Agathias' *Historiae* describes the fighting between Justinian's troops, led by Narses, and the Goths after the death of their last king, Theia. In spite of an agreement which should have put an end to the war, a few Gothic strongholds refused to surrender, and so Narses besieged first Cumae and then Lucca, while at the same time facing a Franco-Alamannic incursion.¹ Obviously, the besieged Goths hoped to take advantage of the foray and convince the Franco-Alamanni to help them to break the siege. Agathias at 1.12.1–2 reports that the people of Lucca had come to terms with Narses and sworn that if reinforcements did not reach them within thirty days they would open the gates. They expected that the Franks would come quickly, but they never arrived. However, the people of Lucca refused to surrender. After other attempts to achieve a peaceful capitulation failed, Narses decided to take the city by storm. At this point, the citizens expressed their desire to give up, but (1.18.5):

οἱ τῶν Φράγγων ἀρμοσταί, οἳ δὴ ἐτύγγανον ἔνδον ἐπὶ φρουρᾷ τοῦ ἄστεος ἐγκαταστάντες, ἐνέκειντο παροτρύνοντες πολεμεῖν καὶ τοῖς ὅπλοις διωθεῖσθαι τὴν πολιορκίαν.

¹ On the siege of Lucca see C. Pizzi, "L'assedio dei Bizantini a Lucca del 552 d.C.," *BGG* 7 (1953) 105–114; Av. Cameron, *Agathias* (Oxford 1970) 143–144 (chronology); M. E. Bratchel, *Medieval Lucca and the Evolution of the Renaissance State* (Oxford 2008) 5. According to M. Ites, "Zur Bewertung des Agathias," *BZ* 26 (1926) 273–285, at 281, Agathias was not well informed on the siege of Lucca; but the historian seems to know quite well the events which led to the fall of the city.

the Frankish *harmosts* who were keeping guard inside the city put pressure on the inhabitants urging them to fight and repel the besiegers by force of arms.²

The reader is faced with two difficulties when examining this passage. The first is the translation of ἀρμοσταί, a *hapax* in Agathias' *Historiae* which has been the subject of discussion since the sixteenth century. Persona, Agathias' first translator, rendered it as *legati*,³ but Vulcanius wrote "ἀρμοσταί. moderatores vel correctores rectius eos vocandos censui, quam, ut Persona, legatos,"⁴ following the meaning of the word in e.g. Thuc. 8.5.2 or Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.28. Other conjectures have been put forward by Coste and Veh ("Befehlshaber"),⁵ Maraval ("chefs"),⁶ and Ortega Villaro ("generales"),⁷ whereas Frendo prefers a different interpretation ("garrison"), which had already been suggested by Veh, who wrote about "fränkische Besatzungstruppen" in his commentary (p.1210), and which was later accepted by Maraval, who likewise mentioned a "garnison franque" in his note to 1.18.5. The translation of ἀρμοσταί is problematic, since the usual meaning of the word (*Suda* α3979: οἱ ἀπὸ βασιλέως στελλόμενοι εἰς ἔθνη ... ἀρμοσταί οὖν οἱ ὑπὸ Λακεδαιμονίων εἰς τὰς ὑπηκόους πόλεις ἄρχοντες ἐκπεμπόμενοι, "those dispatched by a king to provinces ... The *harmosts* were those men sent by the Spartans in order to rule their subject cities") is difficult to reconcile with Agathias' passage, as Lucca was occupied by the Goths, who were not subject to the Franks. Of course, they were

² Transl. J. D. Frendo (Berlin/New York 1975) 26 (slightly modified).

³ *Agathius De Bello Gotthorum et aliis peregrinis historiis* (Rome 1516).

⁴ *Agathiae historici et poetae eximii, De imperio et rebus gestis Iustiniani imperatoris libri quinque* (Leiden 1594), 2 of the *notae* (reprinted in Niebuhr's Bonn edition [1828] 338).

⁵ D. Coste, *Prokop, Gothenkrieg nebst Auszügen aus Agathias* (Leipzig 1885) 346; O. Veh, *Prokop, Gotenkriege* (Munich 1966) 1157. See also E. Honigmann, "Luca," *RE* 13 (1927) 1535–1540, at 1539: "fränkische Offiziere."

⁶ P. Maraval, *Agathias, Histoires. Guerres et malheurs du temps sous Justinien* (Paris 2007) 65.

⁷ B. Ortega Villaro, *Agathias, Historias* (Madrid 2008) 120.

expecting Frankish reinforcements, but it is unlikely that a few Frankish ἄρμουςταί would have been able to give orders to the Gothic garrison and the people of Lucca, unless they brought with them a strong detachment, hence the conjecture that there were “fränkische Besatzungstruppen” in Lucca, although Agathias does not mention them and the meaning of ἄρμουςταί is quite different.

The second difficulty is the contradiction between what Agathias has written shortly before, namely that the Franks never reached Lucca, and the sudden appearance of Franks inside the city. This inconsistency has been noted by both Veh⁸ and Maraval.⁹ Veh argues that Frankish reinforcements arrived in the city before the final assault of Narses’ troops, a solution which has been accepted—more or less implicitly—also by Frenodo and Maraval in order to explain the word ἄρμουςταί; but such an explanation is unlikely. First, there is no evidence that the Franco-Alamanni crossed the Apennines before the fall of Lucca.¹⁰ Moreover, the city was already besieged, so the Franks would have had to fight their way through the besieging troops, an action which Agathias would doubtless have mentioned.

⁸ Veh 1210: “Die plötzliche Erwähnung fränkischer Befehlshaber in Luca läßt die inzwischen erfolgte, in Agathias’ etwas unklarem Berichte nicht erwähnte Ankunft fränkischer Besatzungstruppen vermuten.”

⁹ Maraval 278 n.74: “La présence d’une garnison franque à Lucques n’avait pas encore été relevée par Agathias, mais elle ne s’accorde pas avec ce qu’il a dit en 12.2.” See also Bratchel, *Medieval Lucca* 5: “Agathias’ account of the siege perhaps points to the occupation of Lucca by a Frankish garrison.” The difficulty goes unnoticed in Frenodo’s translation and in that of Ortega Villaro. A presence of Frankish troops in Lucca is accepted by, among others, D. Boin, “Lucca (Roman Luca),” in O. Nicholson (ed.), *The Oxford Dictionary of Late Antiquity* (Oxford 2018) 924–925; D. Brodka, *Narses. Politik, Krieg und Historiographie* (Berlin 2018) 169–170.

¹⁰ It is true that the hasty withdrawal of the Roman troops located near Parma had exposed Narses to a direct enemy attack (Agath. 1.17.2), but there is no clue that the Franco-Alamanni did march towards Lucca, whereas 1.17.4 reports that a group of Franks was roaming about the plains (ἀνὰ τὰ τῆδε πεδία) of the Po Valley in search of plunder. For an army not familiar with the region, it would have been both pointless and dangerous to cross the Apennines in autumn.

Even if they managed to get into the town without a struggle—a quite implausible possibility—Agathias would have explained their presence in the city nevertheless, in order to avoid a glaring contradiction in his narrative.

A possible solution to overcome these difficulties is to suppose that *Hist.* 1.18.5 requires emendation. The Franks are mentioned shortly before (1.17.4, ἀπόμοιρα γὰρ τῶν Φράγγων) using the genitive case in connection with a name (ἀπόμοιρα) which could sound similar to ἀρμυσταί. Perhaps a scribe erroneously wrote οἱ τῶν Φράγγων ἀρμυσταί instead of οἱ τῶν Γότθων ἀρμυσταί while he still had in mind the previous genitive τῶν Φράγγων. This reconstruction finds confirmation in Agnellus of Ravenna 79, who reports that Narses *venit Luccam, expulit inde Gothos* (“came to Lucca and expelled from there the Goths”). Agnellus does not mention Frankish warriors in Lucca: according to him, the city was occupied only by the Goths, who were defeated by Narses. It is true that at first sight the use of the verb τυγχάνω could suggest that the persons qualified as ἀρμυσταί—whatever the exact meaning of the term—were inside the city merely by chance. However, Agathias often uses τυγχάνω and in most cases it means simply “to be,” not “happen to be.”¹¹

The use of ἀρμυσταί by Agathias, as noted, has puzzled translators, since it occurs only here in the *Historiae* and its exact meaning is uncertain. If the historian had intended to refer to the leaders of a group of Frankish warriors, he could have defined them as ἡγεμόνες, a term which is quite common in the *Historiae*.¹² At first sight, it is difficult to understand why he borrowed from his classical models the word ἀρμυσταί, especially as he had a much more easily understandable and appropriate

¹¹ See for instance the first eight occurrences of ἐτύχωνον: Agath. praef. 7, 18; 1.1.1, 6; 1.3.1; 1.5.1; 1.10.6; 1.12.1.

¹² E.g. 1.21.4: two thousand Franks were sent by their leaders (ὑπὸ τῶν σφετέρων ἡγεμόνων) to pillage the countryside of Ariminum. The word is used by Agathias for both the kings of the Goths (e.g. 1.1.1, 1.4.1) or Franks (e.g. 1.2.5–7, 1.3.1) and for the leaders of groups of barbarians (e.g. 1.11.3, 1.14.3–5, 1.22.7, 5.11.6, 5.20.2).

alternative. However, if we accept—for the sake of argument—that the text refers to Gothic and not Frankish “harmosts,” it becomes easier to explain the archaizing term. In fact, Agathias had to find a word to describe the leaders of the Gothic garrison of Lucca. They were not mere ἡγεμόνες, since they also ruled over the Roman population, possibly as *comites civitatum* / *comites Gothorum*.¹³ For this reason, Agathias chose a term which Thucydides and Xenophon had used for the men sent by the Spartans to rule over their subject towns—a word which should be translated as “governors,” not “commanders” or “garrison.”¹⁴ This term allowed him to portray Justinian’s reconquest of Italy in a very positive light by alluding to the struggle between Athens and Sparta.

In Book 2, Agathias equates the Franks with the Persians of Darius and—implicitly—Narses’ troops with the Athenians (2.10.1–3); Athens is considered as a positive model also at the beginning of Book 4 (4.1.8). On the other hand, we know that the term ἄρμοσται in the sixth century was associated with the Spartans from a novel of Justinian issued in 535 (*Nov.* 28.2) which extended his programme of provincial reform to the Pontic provinces and placed them under a single governor: ὁ γε ἄρμοστής ἀρχαῖός τις ἄρχων ἦν ἐκ Λακεδαιμόνος ἐπὶ τὸ ὑπήκοον στελλόμενος, “a harmost was a magistrate sent from ancient Sparta to govern a subject territory.”¹⁵ Agathias was an advocate and he doubtless knew the imperial legislation quite well. The association between the word ἄρμοσται, the Spartans, and the

¹³ See K. Tabata, “I *comites Gothorum* e l’amministrazione municipale in epoca ostrogota,” in J. M. Carrié et al. (eds.), “*Humana sapit.*” *Études d’Antiquité Tardive offertes à Lellia Cracco Ruggini* (Turnhout 2002) 67–78, and *Città dell’Italia nel VI secolo d.C.* (Rome 2009) 71–95, as well as the detailed commentary to Cassiod. *Var.* 7.3 by G. A. Cecconi, in A. Giardina et al., *Flavio Magno Aurelio Cassiodoro Senatore, Varie III* (Rome 2015) 187–196.

¹⁴ Cf. *Iust. Nov.* 28.2, quoted below.

¹⁵ Transl. D. J. D. Miller and P. Sarris, *The Novels of Justinian I* (Cambridge 2018) 307. This paragraph contains the only occurrences of ἄρμοστής in the whole corpus of Justinian’s *Novels*, since ἦτοι ἄρμοστοῦ of *Nov.* 102.1 is almost certainly a later gloss.

Goths suited both his classicizing ideals and Justinian's ideology.¹⁶ A comparison between the Franks and the Spartans would have been meaningless, for the previous rulers of Italy had been the Goths, not the people of Theudebald, who are portrayed as similar to the Persians of Darius in *Hist.* 2.10.1–3.

Agathias' allusion to the Spartans has pointed historiographical implications, since he has previously stated that Procopius' *Gothic War* (which he is continuing) relates ὅπως Σικελία τε καὶ Ῥώμη καὶ Ἰταλία τοὺς ἐπήλυδας ἀποβαλοῦσα βαρβάρους πάλιν ἤθεσι πατρίοις μετεκοσμεῖτο, "how Sicily, Rome, and Italy cast off the yoke of foreign domination and were restored to their ancient way of life" (*Hist.* praef. 30). By comparing Gothic governors with Spartan harmosts, Agathias again implicitly equated the East Roman Empire with Athens and thus justified the long and bitter war carried out by Justinian in order to conquer—in his opinion to free—the whole of Italy.¹⁷

In conclusion, Agath. *Hist.* 1.18.5 οἱ τῶν Φράγγων ἀρμοσταί is likely to be corrupt. Of course, we cannot entirely rule out the possibility that the mistake—a slip of the pen—could have been Agathias', and not a later scribe's, especially as the manuscript tradition does not offer different readings and the *Historiae* is possibly unfinished, as the author promises to cover events later on that he in fact never relates (see 4.22.9 and 5.25.5). Yet, it seems unlikely that Agathias would not have spotted and corrected such a glaring mistake in an ideologically important passage like this, which draws an elaborate comparison between Justinian's troops and the Athenians on the one side and between the Goths and the Spartans on the other. Therefore, οἱ

¹⁶ On Agathias and his classical models see Av. Cameron, "Herodotus and Thucydides in Agathias," *BZ* 57 (1964) 33–52, esp. 52: his language is "a sort of hybrid 'Attic' style crammed with imitations of the ancients." See further Cameron, *Agathias* 65–88.

¹⁷ Comparisons between Justinian's times and the classical past were by no means unusual, see G. Greatrex, "Procopius and the Past in Sixth-Century Constantinople," *RBP* 96 (2018) 969–993.

τῶν Φράγγων ἄρμοσταί should be considered as a scribal mistake and emended to οἱ τῶν Γότθων ἄρμοσταί.¹⁸

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