CHAPTER FIVE

THE MILITARY AND THE WORLD OF THOUGHT

The previous investigation was mainly concerned with the significance attributed to warfare and the contemporary characterisation of those who fought in the fifth to seventh centuries, based on the written testimony mostly set up by men of the Church. It has already been mentioned that the sources only provide very limited insight into the contemporary world of thought of those who did not belong to the clergy. The difficulties in studying ideas and ideals that characterised the combatant part of society, in particular, are increased by the fact that those who wrote never intended to provide an accurate picture of reality. For this reason, the following chapter investigates the world of thought of those who fought by focusing on more general perceptions and conceptions related to the world of war, as they can be extracted from both the written and material remains. The study includes male identities related to their participation in military violence, the significance attributed to and the repercussions that emanated from this function, the assessment connected to this activity, the roles attributed to and expected from the different groups of secular males, and the role of the Church in the context of their lives and occupations.

1. Self-Assessment and Presentation

The world of thought of every human being is first of all characterised by his immediate surroundings, the things he takes for granted, and what he identifies himself with. In the middle of all these peripherals stands his own person, his identity that characterises and defines the scope of his points of view. The aim of the following section is to assess possible forms of identity that might have characterised those who fought.

1.1. A new Terminology

Until the late fifth century, the sources allow distinguishing comparatively easily between the part of society which fought and the part which did not by the terminology used to refer to these two groups.
This definite concept of the military derives from the fact that in Roman times, as established above, the state authority maintained a professional army that, at least theoretically, held the monopoly on production and possession of weapons. In the late fifth century, western Europe ceased to be protected by a state-run army, which meant that military bodies were now mainly recruited straight from the local population. The transition from a state-run military to a society where the main military functions were assumed by the male members of the local population is best documented by an early-fifth-century regulation of the *Theodosian Code*. It decreed that third parties occupying tracts of land or fortifications that had been formerly granted to barbarians, in return for safeguarding the Roman frontiers, should either fulfil the same function or transfer the location to other barbarians or veterans. Although this stipulation was addressed to the Vicar of Africa, comparable scenarios are most likely to have been seen in Gaul. After the breakdown of the ancient Roman military structures in the West, soldiers ceased to be centrally organised, trained, and settled as a group in camps primarily set up in the border regions and at some distance from the civil population. More than in Roman times, those who fought lived together with and in conditions reflecting those of the rest of the local population. A comparable evolution is unthinkable without repercussions on contemporary ideas associated with the military, including first and foremost the identity which society attributed to its members.

The terminology used to refer to those who fought strongly suggests that these alterations were accompanied by a transformation of the identity attributed to military men. The term *miles* had been continuously used since early Roman times and until the fall of the western Roman army in the late fifth century to refer to them and clearly distinguished between those who fought and the non-combatant part of society. It is

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1 *Terrarum spatia, quae gentilibus propter munitionemque limites atque fossati antiquorum humana fuerant provisione concessa, quoniam conperimus aliquos retinere, si eorum cupiditate vel desiderio retinentur, circa curam fossati tuitionemque limitis studio vel labore noverint serviendum ut illi, quos huic operi antiquitas deputarat. Alioquin sciant haec spatia vel ad gentiles, si potuerint inveniri, vel certe ad veteranos esse non inmerito transferenda, ut hac provisione servata fossati limitisque nulla in parte timoris esse possit suspicio*. CTh. VII 15.1, pp. 341–2. The continuous occupation of military camps in the fifth century is also confirmed by archaeological evidence; see Böhme (1998), 52–3.

2 See, for example *Ergo immite fremens coniuncto robore miles naturae certare parat*. Merob., Paneg. 2, ll. 164–5, p. 67; Aetius Gaudento comitis a militibus in Galliis occisi filius