It would appear that the baptism of Clovis took place at Christmas 508.1 Traditionally the event has been placed twelve years earlier, on the grounds that Gregory of Tours presents the king’s conversion as occurring after a Frankish victory over the Alamans, which some manuscripts of his Histories place in the fifteenth year of the king’s reign.2 Gregory’s account, however, is contradicted by every other reference to what appears to be the same battle, which would seem to have taken place in the year 506—though it has to be admitted that the Alamans almost certainly fought the Franks on more than one occasion;3 indeed, although Clovis is commonly thought to have defeated the Alamans at Zülpich/Tolbiac, which is known to have been the site of an engagement between the two barbarian peoples, this may well have been a different battle altogether; even Gregory does not claim that his hero was at Tolbiac.4 And while the only contemporary source to mention Clovis’s baptism, the letter of Avitus of Vienne, is difficult to date, every indication would seem to suggest that it was written at the end of 508 or the beginning of 509.5 Of course, the letter does not necessarily help date the conversion of the king: conversion and baptism are two very different issues, and often, during Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages, an individual was baptized some while, sometimes even some years, after his or her conversion: Emperor Constantine provides an excellent example. Thus, it is possible that Clovis was converted to Christianity in 506, in the course of his victory over the Alamans,6 and that he was baptized two and a half years later. In the meantime his wife,

2 Gregory of Tours, Decem Libri Historiarum 2.30, ed. B. Krusch and W. Levison, MGH SRM 1.1 (Hannover, 1951).
4 Greg. DLH 2.37 only mentions Sigibert the Lame at the Battle of Tolbiac; the battle in 2.30 is nameless.
6 For the date of the battle Van der Vyver, “L’unique victoire contre les Alamans.”
Chrotechildis, and Bishop Remigius of Reims could have instructed him in the traditions of the Nicene (or “Catholic”) Christian church, as Gregory claims. It is, however, probable that during this time the king dabbled with Arian Christianity, for that appears to be the implication of one of Avitus’s remarks in his letter to Clovis; moreover, the king’s sister, Lenteildis, was Arian, and she only abjured her heresy following his acceptance of Nicene Christianity.

If, however, it would seem that Clovis had not been baptized by 507 and indeed that he was probably toying with Arianism at the time, what is one to make of Gregory’s account of the events leading up to Vouillé? According to the bishop of Tours, Clovis decided to attack the Visigoths because they were Arian; he puts into the king’s mouth the phrase “I take it very badly that these Arians occupy part of Gaul” (Valde molestum fero, quod hi Arriani partem teneant Galliam). For this reason he assembled an army. As his warriors crossed the territory of Tours the king issued an order that no one should take anything other than fodder and water (herbarum alimenta acquamque). However, one warrior seized a peasant’s hay (faenum), arguing that it was no more than grass (herbam). The king personally killed the malefactor and made an offering to the Church of Saint Martin. This story could have been invented by Gregory or by the church of Tours—in certain respects it echoes the anecdote of the vase at Soissons, when Clovis killed another insubordinate Frank who could be seen as defrauding the church. There is, however, an apparently authentic letter addressed by Clovis to his bishops, in which the king explains that he issued an edict in the course of his march toward Poitiers, in which he had protected widows, priests, and all who the church wishes to defend. In other words, Clovis would seem to have presented himself as a protector of Catholics as he marched toward Vouillé in 507. The letter, however, does not prove that the king was already a baptized Catholic: it merely suggests that he wished to present himself as Catholic and, indeed, as a champion of the Catholic Church. One might see this edict, then, as a decisive rupture with the king’s involvement with Arianism. In other words, even if one accepts 508 as the date for the king’s baptism, one can set the edict of 507 alongside Gregory’s narrative and ask

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7 Greg. DLH 2.30–31.
8 Avitus, Epist. 46, ed. R. Peiper, MGH AA 6.2 (Berlin, 1883); Shanzer and Wood, Avitus of Vienne, 363–64.
9 Avitus, Hom. 31; see also Greg. DLH 2.31; Shanzer and Wood, Avitus of Vienne, 364, 368.
10 Greg. DLH 2.37.
11 Greg. DLH 2.37.
12 Greg. DLH 2.27.
13 Chlodowici regis ad episcopos epistola, ed. A. Boretius, A. Boretius, MGH Leges 2.1 (Hannover, 1883), 1.1–2.
whether Clovis’s campaigns in that and the following year were, in effect, a crusade.

But while the Frankish army could be presented as being Catholic (even if the majority of the warriors were still pagan), how should one understand the Burgundian army as it collaborated in the campaigns of 507–8? Most scholars, following Gregory of Tours, see the kingdom of the Burgundians under Gundobad as being Arian. Could an Arian army of Burgundians have been allies of the Frankish in a Catholic crusade against the Arian Visigoths?

We need to begin by asking whether Burgundians really were present at Vouillé. Although Gundobad had been a tributary of Clovis since 501, as Gregory himself tells us, the bishop of Tours only mentions Franks when talking of the forces opposing Alaric. Given that the Burgundians certainly were involved in campaigns within Visigothic territory in the months following Vouillé, we might guess that they joined forces with the Franks only following the Visigothic defeat—the idea that they initially held back might be supported by a passage in Ennodius’s panegyric on the Ostrogothic king Theodoric. In Isidore of Seville’s *Gothic History*, by contrast, one finds that the Visigoths were faced with an army that included Burgundians. Which author should we believe? Gregory was closer to the events in question than Isidore, but at the same time it is clear that he schematized the conflict in order to present it as one between two kings, a Catholic and a heretic.

We know that the situation was a good deal more complex that this representation. Fortunately the letters of Cassiodorus reveal that a number of rulers other than Clovis and Alaric had involved themselves in the run-up to Vouillé and were interested in its outcome. Theodoric had sent ambassadors to Clovis, Alaric, Gundobad, and the kings of the Thuringians and Warni, to attempt to prevent the war. Further, according to Procopius, Alaric was awaiting the arrival of an Ostrogothic army at Poitiers, at the time of the fateful battle. Although Theodoric might have been intervening in the war as an

15 Greg. *DLH* 2.32.
17 For the military activity that followed Vouillé, see Favrod, *Histoire politique du royaume burgonde*, 386–99.
Arian, the fact that his chief propagandist was the Catholic Cassiodorus makes this problematic.

Isidore’s account might be supported by the evidence of a number of letters of Avitus of Vienne. Two of them, written to Sigismund, by this time a Catholic, unlike his father Gundobad, have been dated to the Vouillé campaign. Unfortunately the majority of Avitus’s letters are not well dated, and the date ascribed to these two is not above question, though the argument that one of the letters was written at the time of the Vouillé campaign is compelling. There is also a letter of Avitus, written to Bishop Victorius of Grenoble, which might allude to treasure taken from Arian churches during the campaign of 507, though Avitus is perhaps best understood as criticizing the actions of Clovis’s bishops at Orléans at this juncture. And there is certainly nothing to suggest that this sheds any light on the presence or otherwise of Burgundians at Vouillé.

One might add an episode the *Vita Eptadii*, in which Sigismund liberates 3,000 prisoners who had been taken prisoner at *Idunum* by a Roman force operating in the name of the Burgundian king. Unfortunately, the value of the *Vita Eptadii* is questionable. According to Bruno Krusch, the *Vita* is a forgery of the Carolingian period. Justin Favrod, following Duchesne and Heinzelmann, has challenged the German editor’s argument, and it is clear that some of Krusch’s arguments will not stand up to scrutiny, although, in my opinion, the value of the *Vita Eptadii* remains questionable. In any case, it does not help to solve the question of whether Sigismund and his troops actually were present at Vouillé. Perhaps more interesting and important, the author of the *Vita* describes the army of Sigismund as Roman. It may well be that the Gibichung forces, which had developed out of a federate army set up before the end of the western empire and which was probably composed of various military elements, contained a significant number of Romans. We might list among possible Romans fighting for the Burgundians at this juncture Aredius/Arigius, the

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24 Avitus, *Epist. 92*.
27 *Vita Eptadii* 12, ed. B. Krusch, MGH SRM 3 (Hannover, 1896); Favrod, *Histoire politique du royaume burgonde*, 396.
counsellor of Gundobad in Gregory’s narrative, as well as being a correspondent of Avitus. At the same time, it is possible that “Roman” in the context of the Vita Eptadii should also be understood as meaning “Catholic.”

Ultimately, one cannot be sure whether Sigismund and a Burgundian army were present at Vouillé. Certainly, Gregory’s account is not enough for us to state categorically that he was not. What is certain is that the Burgundians were allies of the Franks against the Visigoths in the months following Vouillé, for armies of Clovis and Gundobad joined to besiege Toulouse. Even more interesting is the presence of the Burgundian king Gundobad at the attack on Narbonne in 508. The Ostrogothic king Theodoric would launch a campaign of reprisals against both the Franks and the Burgundians for their aggression against the Visigoths, but it was the Burgundian kingdom that suffered most.

In trying to understand the alliance between the Franks and the Burgundians, it is necessary to remember that the religious situation in the Burgundian kingdom was extremely complicated under Gundobad. The king himself was Arian, as Gregory of Tours stated. But one can also say that such a statement obscures the reality of the king’s religious position and that Gregory also gives a false impression when he presents the kingdom as a whole as being essentially heretical. It is true that the bishop of Tours states that Gundobad wanted to convert to Catholicism, but that he was afraid of his followers, who were Arian. And certainly there are allusions in Avitus’s works that suggest that the king did indeed support the Catholic Church, while at the same time not wishing to declare publicly for Catholicism. In other words, the image given by the bishop of Tours, of a king too much under the thumb of his military following, could be true, but at the same time one should not insist on the Arianism of the kingdom.

Certainly there were plenty of Catholics among the Burgundians, even among the royal family. Indeed no female member of the family is known to have been Arian. One thinks immediately of Chrotechildis; but it is probable

30 Greg. DLH 2.32; Avitus, Epist. 50. Although the names Aredius and Arigius seem different, orthography in this period is such that they may refer to the same person; Shanzer and Wood, Avitus of Vienne, 326–27.
31 Chronicle of 511 §§689–90, ed. T. Mommsen, Chronica Minora 1, MGH AA 9 (Berlin, 1892); Isidore, Historia Gothorum, 36–37. See also Procop. Bell. 5.12.41–44, where he seems to have confused Toulouse and Carcassonne.
32 Isidore, Historia Gothorum 37; Chronicle of 511 §690 says that the town in question was Barcelona.
33 Favrod, Histoire politique du royaume burgonde, 400–406.
34 Greg. DLH 2.34.
that her mother, whose name is unknown, and her father Chilperic, who may well be mentioned in a letter of Sidonius (Ep. 6.12.3), were Catholics. Gundobad’s wife, Caretena, would seem to have been a Catholic: she may have been a Gallo-Roman, as her name does not seem to be Germanic. And by 507 Sigismund, the son of Gundobad and Caretena, had already converted to Catholicism. His conversion would seem to have taken place in the course of a visit to Rome in 501/502. The proof of this comes in a letter of Avitus to the pope. Unfortunately the dating of the letter is open to question, but it is clear that the conversion of Sigismund took place before that of Clovis. Moreover, within this letter, which is in certain respects a piece of official correspondence, Avitus could say that the prince was the first king who was not ashamed to convert to the right religious affiliation, and this he could say in a kingdom that was ruled over by an Arian king. One finds the same situation in the famous letter addressed by Avitus to Clovis after the latter’s baptism. There the bishop praises the Frankish king for his decisions and his actions, including the liberation of a people who are surely to be identified with the Aquitainian Catholics, liberated from the yoke of the Arian Visigoths. King Gundobad must have been extremely tolerant: himself an Arian, he allowed pro-Catholic sentiments to be expressed even in official or semiofficial correspondence sent by high-ranking figures in his kingdom.

There is here an enigma: the king allowed the conversion of his son; he also permitted the bishop of Vienne to write letters praising both Sigismund and Clovis for their adoption of Catholicism; but at the same time—according to Gregory—he did not wish to alienate his Arian followers, and thus himself remained Arian. If this were the case, it is hard to see how Gundobad could have joined an anti-Arian crusade.

One should perhaps ask who these Arian followers were. As we have seen, not all Burgundians were Arian; indeed Gundobad and the young Sigismund apart, it is hard to find Burgundians who unquestionably belonged to the sect. Among nonroyal Burgundians, we certainly know of some Catholics: for instance Hymnemodus, who would leave the court to become a monk and finally abbot of Agaune. It is worth remembering that there was a mid-5th-century tradition that the Burgundian people were actually converted to

38 Avitus, Epist. 8; Shanzer and Wood, Avitus of Vienne, 220–24.
40 Vita abbatum Acaunensium sine epitaphii 1–8, ed. B. Krusch, MGH SRM 7 (Hannover, 1920).
Catholicism. Given that all our clear references to Burgundian Arianism relate to Gundobad and to Sigismund while he was still young, we perhaps need to think not of the Burgundians as being predominantly Arian, but of Gundobad and his followers as the Arian core of the kingdom. It may be that we should see the king as having espoused Arianism, not because of his paternal family tradition, but because of his association in Italy with the Arian Ricimer. And we should perhaps ask whether his Arian followers were not actually the bodyguard he had inherited from Ricimer who was a relative, perhaps only by marriage, as well as his mentor and his predecessor.

But to return to the causes of the war between Alaric and Clovis: in a letter to his brother Apollinaris of Valence, Avitus speaks of the adulteration of gold coin by the Visigothic king and claims that the adulteration presaged disaster. It is possible to think that the disaster was the defeat of Vouillé and that the cause of hostilities had involved some payment of tribute in substandard coin. This idea might find some echo in Fredegar’s later account of the outbreak of the war, which involves an attempt by the Visigoths to cheat on a payment. While the tale told by Fredegar is clearly legendary, it may contain a kernel of truth. Such an explanation of the origins of the war sorts better with the comments of Cassiodorus than does the religious explanation given by Gregory. According to the Italian, the causes of the war were insignificant, even if Clovis was justified in feeling aggrieved. If we follow the implications of Avitus’s letters, it would seem that the causes of the war were economic and that the representation of the war as a crusade was only a Frankish representation, even if it was already formulated at the time of the march to Vouillé and was intended as propaganda against the Catholic Gallo-Romans in Alaric’s kingdom.

It is certainly possible that there was tension between Catholics and Arians in Alaric’s kingdom. One can find evidence in numerous of the episodes in the Life of Caesarius of Arles, where he is accused of treason by his opponents. One can also cite the persecutions of Volusianus and Verus, both bishops of

41 Orosius, Historia adversum paganos, 7.32, 13; 41, 8, ed. C. Zangemeister, CSEL 5 (Vienna, 1882); Socrates, Historia Ecclesiastica 7.30 §379; PG 67.805–7.
43 Avitus, Epist. 87; Shanzer and Wood, Avitus of Vienne, 251–57.
44 Fredegar, 2.58, ed. B. Krusch, MGH SRM 2 (Hannover, 1888). See Shanzer’s essay in this volume.
45 Cass. Variae 3.4.
46 E.g., Vita Caesarii 1.21, ed. B. Krusch, MGH SRM 3; W. Klingshirn, Caesarius of Arles: The Making of a Christian Community in Late Antique Gaul (Cambridge, 1994), 93–94.
Tours—and, of course, it may be significant that there is evidence for such tension in that particular city: it may suggest a very local context for Clovis’s concessions to the Church of Saint Martin, and it may also help explain Gregory’s take on events. There are plenty of other anecdotes relating to conflict between Arians and Catholics in the hagiographical works of Gregory. But one should note that these conflicts are not only those of Gallo-Roman Catholics against Arian Visigoths. In *Glory of the Martyrs*, Gregory recalls that a new church dedicated to Felix at Narbonne obscured the view from the royal palace: Alaric consulted his minister Leo, who ordered that the roof of the church should be lowered, and as a result miraculously lost his sight. Here it was a Catholic Gallo-Roman who irritated the saint—and one might add that he may have had legal grounds for his actions.

But there are also indications of a rapprochement between Alaric and the Catholic Church, beginning at the very latest in 506, the year before the Battle of Vouillé. Above all there is the evidence of the Council of Agde, held by order of the king and presided over by Caesarius of Arles, who had recently been rehabilitated and restored to his see after a period of exile. The council began with prayers for the king and kingdom and even for its expansion. Thus, Alaric’s Catholic bishops, a mere year before the Battle of Vouillé, prayed for the expansion of his Arian kingdom. At the end of the council there was a decision to hold another ecclesiastical gathering a year later. The intention was to hold it at Toulouse and to ensure that the Spanish bishops were present. That it did not take place is probably a reflection of Clovis’s invasion.

At about the same time that the bishops were meeting at Agde, another gathering was taking place at Aire-sur-l’Adour, where the Roman Law of the Visigoths, the *Breviarium Alarici*, was issued. One can debate whether this compilation was a concession made by the king or whether it illustrates

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49 Unfortunately *Codex Theodosianus* 4.24 *De aedificis privatis et publicis* does not survive, but for an indication of the issues it might have addressed, see *Lex Romana Burgundionum* 17, 6, ed. L. R. de Salis, MGH Leges 2.1 (Hannover, 1892).
cooperation between the king and the Gallo-Romans.\textsuperscript{55} In either case, it illustrates a moment of rapprochement.

One should also note the presence of Catholics in Alaric’s army at Vouillé.\textsuperscript{56} Even Gregory of Tours acknowledges that Apollinaris, son of Sidonius, was there.\textsuperscript{57} More specific information can be found in the letters of Avitus. There are four letters from Avitus to Apollinaris, who would seem to have been his first cousin. Two of the letters reveal that Apollinaris had been suspected of treason by Alaric, but that the Auvergnat aristocrat had regained the confidence of the king before the Vouillé campaign.\textsuperscript{58} During the period of uncertainty when Apollinaris was under suspicion, Avitus neither received a letter from his cousin nor wrote to him, because it was too dangerous. After Apollinaris’s return to favor, Avitus sent him a letter of advice, as well as a copy of his verse epic based on the first books of the Bible.\textsuperscript{59} There is also one further letter of Avitus to Apollinaris, written in the aftermath of Vouillé. The bishop of Vienne reveals that his cousin had served in the army (surely that of the Visigothic king) and that he had returned safe and sound to his family, much to the bishop’s delight.\textsuperscript{60} Assuming that the letter is correctly dated, Avitus’s silence on the outcome of the battle might be taken to suggest that the Burgundians were not present, though the silences in the correspondence may reflect political caution as much as the reality of the situation. In this group of letters, there is no reference to religion: the emphasis is above all on the anxiety caused by the suspicion of treason and on Avitus’s relief in knowing that his cousin and family were unharmed.

What should one conclude from all this information? First, it is clear that the Vouillé campaign boasted no simple division of Catholic versus heretic and that religion was not a major factor in the cause of the war. At the same time it appears that Clovis decided, as he marched toward Poitiers, that it would be useful to present himself as a champion of Catholicism, even though he had not yet been baptized. It was a dangerous game to play, because Clovis presumably hoped for an alliance with the Burgundians, whose king was not Catholic, even if he was personally inclined that way; moreover, Gundobad was inevitably concerned about the commitment of his army, of which a significant and influential element was apparently Arian.

If Clovis was hoping that his open support for the Catholic Church would win over the Aquitainian aristocracy, he seems to have been overly optimistic.

\textsuperscript{55} On the Breviarium see ibid.
\textsuperscript{56} Favrod, Histoire politique du royaume burgonde, 397n157, citing the Vita Aviti eremita alongside Greg. DLH 2.37.n
\textsuperscript{57} Greg. DLH DLH 2.37.
\textsuperscript{58} Avitus, Epist. 51 – 52.
\textsuperscript{59} Avitus, Epist. 51; idem, De spiritalis historiae gestis.
\textsuperscript{60} Avitus, Epist. 24; Shanzer and Wood, Avitus of Vienne, 337 – 38.
Apollinaris, for instance, remained loyal to his Visigothic master, even though he had been suspected of disloyalty some months earlier. One can see all these contradictory elements as a problem; or one can say that major events of the early Middle Ages could be as complex as those of our own days. Even at the moment at which they were occurring, individuals interpreted or presented their actions as it suited them and in the light that they thought most favorable.

Perhaps more important are the implications of dating Clovis’s conversion so late in the reign. What this would seem to suggest is that Clovis recreated the Frankish nation in the years from 506 to 511. This was not solely a matter of the Visigothic campaign and the baptism of the king: there was also the gift of the “consulship” by Emperor Anastasius. It is possible that Avitus saw this too as being in some way associated with Clovis’s baptism, but there is a problem in determining the correct reading a phrase in the bishop’s letter to the king, which might support such a theory.61 In addition, there is the issue of the meaning of Procopius’s observation that the Arborychi, that is the Armoricans, came to an accord with the Frankish king, because both parties subscribed to the same religion.62 In Procopius’s eyes, both Clovis and the Armoricans were Catholic at this point. And there is also the matter of the suppression of the other Frankish kingdoms, which would seem to have continued to exist until after Clovis’s conversion.63 And finally there was the council of largely Aquitanian bishops held under the Merovingian king’s aegis at Orléans in 511.64 In the space of five years Clovis had transformed the Frankish people into a Catholic nation. The process had begun at the very beginning of the campaign against Alaric, and it continued after the king’s death. Clovis’s apparent attempt to present the Visigothic war as a crusade as he marched toward Poitiers was only a preliminary element in this process. Gregory of Tours’s narrative is in many respects its culmination. For the bishop the war was nothing other than the conflict between a Catholic and an Arian king. The reality was very different.

Bibliography


61 Avitus, Epist. 46; Shanzer and Wood, Avitus of Vienne, 365.
63 Greg, DLH 2.40–42. The crucial chronological indicator, which suggests that Gregory has placed the events in the right period of Clovis’s reign, comes in 2.41, which can only have taken place after the king’s conversion.
64 See Halfond’s essay in this volume.