Vouillé 507: Historiographical, Hagiographical, and Diplomatic Reconsiderations and *Fortuna*

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So many questions surround Vouillé that 1,500 years later many are still not quite sure what to make of this “decisive battle.”¹ Was it a “famous victory,” as Southey’s fine old poem has it?² Or was it as Robert Graves imagined Marathon for the Persians?³ Something one avoided discussing too much, except to transmit its location with some garbling.⁴ The *NCMH* barely mentions it,⁵ but the sources are worth reexamining, and a new reading of the significance of the battle in the early middle ages may emerge.

This paper will begin with a review of a number of problems that surround Vouillé and a swift tour through some of the textual sources. Second, when Ian Wood and I published our annotated translation of the letters of Avitus of Vienne, we assembled them into meaningful dossiers, some of which were related to correspondents, others to topics.⁶ There was however no dossier on the Battle of Vouillé or on the events of 506–8. As I hope to show, it is worth revisiting some of the letters to see what can be gleaned

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¹ See Bachrach’s essay in this volume.
from them, if one is sensitized to a particular historical problem. The curious
distribution of sources for the war, their nature, and Tendenz, all create a real
Rashomon phenomenon: Clovis was to blame,7 Alaric was to blame, the
Burgundians were to blame,8 Theoderic was to blame,9 the eastern empire was
to blame. The war was about religion;10 it was about money.11 How can one
navigate between these multiple proposed causations and reconcile dissonant
sources? While guilt may prove elusive, there may be more to be said about
causation, both religious and financial.

Historiography

One narrative account of the battle survives in Greg. DLH 2.37, told about 80
years later from the perspective of one who identified with the winning
Franks.12 The one eastern source, Procopius, mistakenly locates the battle at
Carcassonne.13 There are two subsequent early medieval accounts in Fredegar
and in the LHF,14 both of which are (in part) dependent on Gregory. And there
is contemporary epistolography—of which more later.

Gregory’s DLH 2.37 first. The start of the story is embellished with a
Macaulayesque direct speech in which Clovis does not take it kindly that the
Arians held part of Gaul. He marched to Poitiers where Alaric was waiting.
Time is allowed for a pious digression about his army’s respect for Saint Martin
in the territory around Tours and Clovis’s own request for auspices from Martin
for his upcoming campaign with the gens incredula. He receives an oracular
psalmic sors biblica promising victory. A miraculous deer shows him where to
ford the Vienne. When he arrives in Poitiers, a light-signal, pharus, emanating
from the basilica of Hilary also provided encouragement. Near Poitiers an abbot
Maxentius encountered a troop of Visigoths. One tried to kill him, but was
repelled by the holy man, who anointed his arm and restored its power. The
monastery was unharmed. Clovis and Alaric met at the Campus Vogladensis at

7 Cassiodorus and Gregory.
8 Possibly Cassiodorus.
9 Fredegar and Procopius.
10 Avitus and Gregory.
11 Fredegar and Avitus.
12 Fredegar 3.24 covers the battle. LHF 17 is dependent on Gregory with an addition of
super fluvium Clinno to the specification that the battle took place at the Campus
Vogladensis.
14 It has taken from Gregory much of the religious material, such as the injunction not to
pillage the shrine of Saint Martin, the reception of an auditory oracle of good omen, the
miraculous epiphany of a deer. There is a charming joke about the financial negotiations
of Martin with regard to Clovis’s horse!
the 10th milestone outside Poitiers. The Goths turned tail (as usual),\(^{15}\) and Clovis won. He himself killed Alaric. A large contingent from the Auvergne, who had come with Apollinaris, fought with Alaric, and their leaders, who were of the senatorial class, fell. Clovis continued south to Bordeaux and then to Angoulême. When he returned to Tours, he did not neglect to offer gifts to Saint Martin.

The story, as has long been recognized, is heavily worked over to give it a churchy flavor.\(^{16}\) Here the campaign starts as an anti-Arian crusade.\(^{17}\) That this was the case is questionable, given Clovis’s alliance with the Arian Gundobad to dismember the Visigothic kingdom\(^ {18}\)—not to mention the Arian Theoderic’s attempts to make peace. Silence in Gregory’s own anti-Arian hagiography belies any picture of Visigothic Gaul as a serious persecuting society.\(^ {19}\) The king piously asks Martin’s help. Three miracles support him, and three saintly figures, Martin, Hilary, and Maxentius, are involved. A ring-composition brings Clovis back to Tours and to Saint Martin—small surprise, given who was writing the Histories.\(^ {20}\) These are all features readers are meant to see.

But authors also let down their guard. "Qui s’excuse, s’accuse," and emphasis on how Clovis did not loot merely draws attention to the likelihood that he did. One should compare the tale of the Vase of Soissons earlier in his career.\(^ {21}\) The difficulties caused for the Aquitanians are supported by the documentary

\(^{15}\) A feigned retreat, as Bachrach now explains in his essay in this volume.


\(^{17}\) One should compare Greg. *DLH* 3. praef.

\(^{18}\) Shanzer and Wood, *Avitus of Vienne*, 368; not to mention the next generation’s willingness to espouse their sister, Clotilde 2, to the Arian Amalaric, with unfortunate results (*DLH* 3.1, 10).

\(^{19}\) Only three of Gregory’s anti-Arian miracles can be localized in Gallic Visigothia: *GM* 12 Miraculous defense of Bazas against “Gausericus” and droplet miracle, but no persecution (this dates to the second decade of the 400 s), *GM* 77 Nîmes and Ara, dux of Theoderic (but it is not narrated as an anti-Arian miracle); *GM* 78 Agde Comes Gomarichus, datable between 506 and 589 in Septimania, so Visigothic; Gomacharius, the grabber of ecclesiastical land, is described as an heretic; the Nicenes as “Romani.” The following all are unlocalized or localized elsewhere: *GM* 23 Springs at Osser; *GM* 24 Heretic brings horse into basilica at Osser; *GM* 25 Spring at Osser, all under Theudegisel in Spain; *GM* 79 Arian and wife (unlocalized); *GM* 80 Arian priest and ring (perhaps Ostrogothic Italy, because of mention of deacon from Ravenna); *GC* 13 (unlocalized); *GM* 81 Martyr beaten in Spain.


\(^{21}\) *DLH* 2.27; See Gregory’s elaborate apologetics in the episode of the Vase of Soissons in *DLH* 2.27: "Eo tempore multae aeclesiae a Chlodovecho exercitu deprraedatae sunt, quia erat ille fanaticis erroribus involutus."
evidence in Clovis’s letter to the Aquitainian bishops. 22 One must not ignore the filling in Gregory’s episcopal sandwich, namely that Romans from Clermont who came with Apollinaris had fought, and many noble senators had fallen with the Visigoths. 23 Why did he mention this? It does not seem to be a detail added in sorrow. 24 Here one can connect a text. One of the dossiers in the Avitus collection concerned Avitus’s main correspondent in the Visigothic kingdom, his cousin Apollinaris. 25 None of these letters can be securely dated, but one, to the very Apollinaris mentioned by Gregory, alludes to his being mustered for war—to Avitus’s horror. 26 “These Romans faced a dilemma: the devil they knew, Alaric II, 27 or one they did not, Clovis. There may have been some question surrounding their loyalty (as there certainly seems to be in Avitus’s letters), and Gregory’s addition is more plausibly defensive than obfuscatory. 28 Being found a traitor is never attractive.

Hagiography

Gregory’s historical narrative can profitably be compared with some hagiography of his friend Venantius Fortunatus: an isolated pericope among the miracles (virtutes) of Hilary of Poitiers:

Quid etiam dignum referam de tam regali mysterio, quod ab ipso est in regem collatum? Denique ipse Chlodoveus, dum contra haereticam gentem pugnaturus armatas acies commovisset, media nocte meruit de basilica beati viri lumen super se venientem adspicere, admonitus, ut festinanter, sed non sine venerabilis loci oratione adversum hostes conflictaturus descenderet. Quod ille diligenter observans et oratione occurrens tanta prosperitate altero pro se pugnatro processit ad bellum, ut intra horam diei tertiam ultra humana vota sortiretur victoriam, ubi multitudo

22 Chlodowici Regis ad episcopos epistula, MGH Leges 2.1 = Capitularia Regum Francorum, ed. A. Boretius (Hannover, 1883), 1–2, cites Clovis’s precepts about not looting, about ecclesiastical captives, lay captives taken in battle, and clerics and laymen taken in pace, bishops’ apostolia and multorum varietates vel falsitates. For the interpretation, see D. R. Shanzer, “Dating the Baptism of Clovis: The Bishop of Vienne vs. the Bishop of Tours,” Early Medieval Europe 7.1 (1998): 47–48.
23 DLH 2.37: Maximus ibi tunc Arvernorum populus, qui cum Apollinare venerat, et primi qui erant ex senatoribus corrurunt.
26 Avitus, Epist. 24: Nam ne vera nuntio vestri discersus accepto in summo metu et trepidatione peependimus; quia nobis diversis suntiis dicesatur vos dominorum quibus vos observatis acciti cunctis pariter evocatos. Note that Greg. DLH 2.37 implies that Amalaric was at Vouillé: de hac pugna . . . Amalaricus in Spaniam fugit.
27 Who had just sponsored a conciliatory council at Agde in 506. See Halfond’s essay in this volume.
cadaverum colles ex se visa sit erexisse. Ecce terribiliter formidanda prodigia et
delectabiliter amplectenda miracula! Parum illi fuit pro solatio regis, signum luminis
ostendere, nisi aperte monita addidisset et vocis. Similis quaedam contigit, Israelitici
populi tempore, hujus causa virtutis. Nam ibi columna ignis populum praecesserat,
hic figura lampadis admonebat. Vellem nosse, quod fuerit tanti ardoris secretum
mysterium, tam manifeste prolatum. Sed quantum ipso inspirante video agnoscere,
non tacebo. Nam contra haereticas acies, sicut olim in corpore, non cessavit spiritu
dimicare: credebat sibi contra Halaricum Arrianum iterum redire Constantium.
Quanta fuit illi semper pro cultu catholicae religionis aviditas; cum in requie posito,
adhuc sollicitudinis non desit ubertas? Nam qui tunc in synodo ad confundendum
verba fidelia protulit, hic in campo arma tractavit victoriae. (Fortunatus,
Liber de virtutibus S. Hilari 7.20–21)

How can I do justice to that most royal mystery which was conferred upon the king
by him? Clovis, when he had set in motion his troops to fight against an heretical
people, was fortunate to see in the middle of the night a light coming upon him
from the basilica of the blessed man [Hilary], and was advised to go down swiftly to
fight against the enemy, but not to forget to pray in the sacred place. After he had
observed [this advice] to the letter and gone forward with a prayer, he proceeded to
war with such success, because another was fighting on his behalf, that, by the third
hour of the day, far beyond human prayers, a victory had fallen to his lot, where the
multitude of corpses seemed to heap themselves up of their own accord. Behold
prodigies to be feared terribly and miracles to be embraced with delight! It was little
for him [i.e., Hilary] to show the sign of the light to console the king, had he not,
openly, added the admonitions of a voice too. In the days of the Israelites a similar
situation prompted this miracle. For there a column of fire had gone ahead, and
here the shape of a lamp warned. I would like to know what was the secret mystery
of the great flame that was brought forth so publicly. But—under his inspiration—I
will not be silent about as much as I seem to know. He did not cease to fight in the
spirit against heretical forces, as he had not stopped in the past when he was in the
body. He thought that Alaric the Arian was coming against him again as
Constantius had. How great was his perpetual zeal for the Catholic faith, when even
though he was laid to rest, his deep care was not lacking! For the one who then
brought forth faithful words to confound the enemy in the synod, this one in the
field handled the arms of victory.

Fortunatus does not name the site of the battle, but his base, Poitiers, and the
participation of his local saint, Hilary, guarantee that Vouillé was intended. He
parallels Gregory in seeing it as an antiheretical campaign. He mentions the
light Gregory alluded to, but describes it as a lamp.29 He adds a vocal
admonition to pray at Hilary’s shrine. We hear that Clovis was told to “go
down” (descenderet) to fight (which fits the local topography) and that he won
by the third hour, namely by 9:00 a.m. There must have been massive slaughter.
The hero of the story is not Clovis, however, but Hilary, a dead hand reaching

29 A. Richard’s rationalizing interpretation in “Les Légendes de Saint-Maixent et la victoire
de Clovis en Poitou,” Revue des questions historiques 33 (1883): 615, that it was a signal,
makes sense and is accepted by Bachrach in this volume.
from beyond the grave in competition with Martin and with the human instrument Clovis.30

Every detail can help to improve the composite image of this battle, so some corrections of various aberrant interpretations of the Fortunatus passage. Moorhead saw evidence that “many years later the remains of bodies could still be seen on the battlefield,”31 and Richard thought it evidence of tumulus-burials on the battlefield.32 But both have misinterpreted the Latin. Fortunatus’s ubi multitudo cadaverum colles ex se visa sit erexisse. Ecce terribiliter formidanda prodigia et delectabiliter amplectenda miracula! means “where the multitude of corpses seemed to have heaped themselves up of their own accord. Behold prodigies to be feared terribly and miracles to be embraced with delight!” The masses of bodies that seemed to have heaped themselves up of their own accord are the “fearful prodigies,” and the light portent the “delightful miracle.” So, no more than heaps of dead for rationalizers. Thus far the hagiographically coloured literary sources, in which this battle and its war are regularly presented as religious crusades.

Religion, Victory, and Theology

We need, however, to note the potentially embarrassing question of the relationship of Vouillé’s date to that of Clovis’s baptism.33 I have gone on record in favor of a late date for baptism (508) and am thus disinclined to credulity on this point.34 But even if one does not believe in genuine anti-Arian motivation, one still might ask whether religion was a real pretext of Clovis’s35 rather than a pious fiction of various ecclesiastical writers, endorsed by subsequent French Catholic historians.

The Burgundians, a people of mixed confession, provide some interesting documentary parallels.36 And there are certainly signs of Catholic war theology in the letters Avitus wrote his prince Sigismund. Various undated letters allude

30 Gregory in DLH 2.37 also mentions Hilary’s antiheretical polemic, but Fortunatus elides Martin. Fredegar 3.24 adds Hilary’s church to Martin’s as a recipient of Clovis’s largesse in return for their help.
31 J. Moorhead, Theoderic in Italy (Oxford/New York, 1992), 178.
33 Moorhead, Theoderic in Italy, 178–79.
34 Shanzer, “Dating the Baptism of Clovis.” To which I would now add the clear hint, fera gentilium corda, in Cass. Variae 2.40.17 that Theoderic regarded Clovis as a pagan in 506/507.
35 As Kurth, Histoire poétique des mérovingiens, 267, thought.
36 K. Binding, Das burgundisch-romanische Königreich (von 443–532 n. Chr.) (Leipzig, 1868), 197.
to the prince’s conversion to Catholicism and feature good wishes for his success on campaign. They specifically refer to the role of his faith in battle, e.g., *Epist. 45* *fidem vestram telis inserite, provisionem divinam promittendo admonete, auxilia caeli precibus exigite; iaculis vestra vota armate* (“Put your faith in your weapons, give warning by promising divine oversight. Pray for help from heaven, arm your missiles with prayers”). Avitus alluded in a previous sentence to Sigismund’s conversion: *Sed praesumo de maiestate divina hinc respectum mei sensibus vestris tenacius adhaesurum, quo eum vobis amor catholicae legis infudit* (“But I assume that, as a favor from God, from this point on, the thought of me will adhere more tenaciously to your senses, since the love of Catholic law has poured it into you”). But the Latin perfect is ambiguous. Does Avitus’s *quo eum* [sc. *respectum*] *vobis amor catholicae legis infudit* (“by which the love of the Nicene faith has infused regard in you”) mean “has infused” as if they even were comparatively recent or simply “infused,” in which case they could refer to the past? 37 The letter must have as its terminus post quem Sigismund’s conversion, which itself must have occurred by 501/502. 38 *Epistle 45* could thus show Sigismund away on campaign, either shortly after his conversion—in which case it is not related to the war of 507—or in 507/508. But the emphasis on *fides* and its effect on military success may suggest that the enemy may not have been Catholic. 39 This does not leave many alternatives to the Visigoths. 40 *Epistle 91* mentions Sigismund’s Catholicism and enjoins caution in war, but contains no war theology. *Epistle 92*, however, is a strong candidate for 507/508, because it alludes to “joining what is near” and “subduing what is opposed” in a context that includes Catholicism:

Quippe cum quicunque veraciter *catholicorum* nomen usurpant, pervigili prece Deo supplicare nunc debeant, ut vobis vota nostris illibatis atque integra relaturis, et *fideliter vicina coniungat, et feliciter adversa subiciat* sicque in rerum necessitate multiplex ambifariam vobis Christo propugnante contingat et pax, quae cupiet et victoria, quae debetur.

For all who honestly take upon themselves the name of “Catholic” ought now to entreat God with nightlong prayers, that he faithfully join what is near and with a happy outcome overthrow what is hostile on your behalf, when you will convey our prayers to him, untouched and whole, and that thus, in a complicated and difficult situation, with Christ to fight before you, you may gain both the peace you desire and the victory you are owed.

39 See *Epist. 46*: *vestra fides nostra victoria*.
40 Only the Alemanni remain, and the timing and location of their conflicts with the Burgundians are very unclear. The episode of Gebavult in *Vita Lupi* 10, e.g., is suspect. It was interpolated from Eugippius’s *Vita Severini* 19. See B. Krusch, *Vitae Passionesque Sanctorum*, MGH SRM 7, Hannover, 1920, 287.
Binding took the *vicina* as the Franks and the *adversa* as the Visigoths\(^{41}\) and thereby found the only hard evidence for the alleged pact between the Franks and the Burgundians.\(^ {42}\) One might suggest an alternative. Since the Franks and the Burgundians moved separately on the campaign of 507,\(^ {43}\) the *vicina* may refer not to *meeting* or *joining forces with* the Franks, but to *annexation*, be it of the neighboring Nicene Romans or their Visigothic territory. *Adversa* would then refer to the Visigothic forces. The two clauses could be two sides of one action: “faithfully [or in faith] join what is near, and with good outcome overcome what is hostile.” This still leaves the question of what the Burgundians were doing in 507/508, which ones, and where.

In 1996 Philippe Bernard suggested that the phrase *Vestra fides nostra victoria est* in Avitus, *Epist.* 46 (p. 75.7 Peiper), his letter of congratulation to Clovis on the occasion of his baptism, meant more than “your conversion is our [Catholic/episcopal/missionary] victory.”\(^ {44}\) He compared Ambrose’s *De obitu Theodosii* \(^ {45}\) to suggest that Avitus was talking about conversion and a military victory with an echo of the Frigidus behind him.\(^ {46}\) He argued for a direct connection between Ambrose and Avitus.\(^ {47}\) The bishop of Vienne was alluding to Clovis’s “conversion battle” of 496 against the Alemanni and invoking the panegyric theology if imperial victory.

Such matters, as Bernard realized, cannot be proven.\(^ {48}\) It is a question of richer or more topical readings. While one cannot prove that Avitus knew Ambrose (whom he does not use otherwise), for the trope “x = victoria” is fairly

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\(^{41}\) Binding, *Das burgundisch-romanische Königreich*, 195.

\(^{42}\) An exception might be Isidore, *Historia Gothorum* s.a. 507: *Adversus quem Fluduinus Francorum princeps bellum movet, Burgundionibus sibi auxiliantibus*, but the chronology is not clear.

\(^{43}\) There is no evidence of a Burgundian presence at Vouillé. Instead one must use the *Vita Heptadii* 12 to trace their route, which seems to have gone through the Limousin. See Binding, *Das burgundisch-romanische Königreich*, 196. Binding (198) explains their late arrival, arguing that Clovis dragged out the main battle until the Burgundians could take part. He seems to think that they did. Bachrach in his essay in this volume argues that the Burgundians were never intended to fight at Vouillé.


\(^{45}\) *De obitu Theodosii* 8 *Theodosii ergo fides fut vestra victoria: vestra fides filiorum eius fortitudo sit*.

\(^{46}\) Bernard, “*Vestra fides nostra victoria est,*” 49.

\(^{47}\) Ibid., 49.

\(^{48}\) Ibid., 49: “Il semble . . . que le discours d’Avit gagne à être resitué dans le cadre de la ‘théologie de la victoire impériale.’”
common, Avitus can still demonstrably be participating in a discourse about faith and victory on which Ambrose likewise drew.\(^{49}\)

One might advocate a new nuanced version of Bernard’s suggestion with a different referent, not the Alemannic battle, but Vouillé. In this case \textit{vestra fides} refers to Clovis’s new and recent conversion and \textit{nostra victoria} to the joint victory of the Franks and Burgundians in the war of 507/508. This particular theology of victory may have emerged from Catholic Burgundy in the wake of Sigismund’s conversion and been promulgated by Avitus and sold directly to Clovis.

**The Vita Sollemnis Carnoteni**

Into the \textit{fortuna} of Vouillé enters the legend of the problematic \textit{Vita Sollemnis Carnoteni}.\(^{50}\) Sollemnis seems to be an intruder between bishops Flavius and Aventinus at the beginning of the 6th century. Krusch dates his listing to the 11th century, but the \textit{Vita Sollemnis} itself to before Hrabanus Maurus.\(^{51}\) Martin Heinzelmann dates the text to the 8th century on the basis of its language.\(^{52}\) Sollemnis’s historicity is immaterial however for current purposes. The \textit{Vita Sollemnis} is an early medieval text with independent value as a witness to the reception of Clovis’s Visigothic campaign and conversion and baptism. It shows a clear military theology with Clovis beginning his Visigothic campaign under the auspices of Sollemnis at Chartres.\(^{53}\) The \textit{Vita Sollemnis} attempts to connect Clovis with Chartres, but also and far more prominently, to hijack the story of Clovis’s battlefield conversion from Gregory, give it a Constantinian \textit{in hoc signo vinces} flavor emphasizing the cross, marry it to Gregory’s narrative about Vouillé, and recast \textit{Sollemnis} as the saint who presided over the victory against the heretical Visigoths.\(^{54}\) Martin is removed from the picture, and Remigius

\(^{49}\) Compare other Ambrosian texts, e.g., from \textit{De fide}; 1 prol. 15: \textit{Nosti enim fide magis imperatoris quam uirtute militum quaeri solere victoriam}; 2.16.3: \textit{Progredere plane “scuto fidei” saeptus et gladium spiritus habens, progredere ad uictoriam superioribus promissam temporibus et diuinis oraculis profetatam}; 3.15.44: \textit{Quomodo fidem eorum possumus denegare, quorum uictoriam praedicamus?}

\(^{50}\) See Krusch, \textit{Passiones Vitaeque Sanctorum}, 303–21.

\(^{51}\) Ibid., 303.


\(^{53}\) \textit{Vita Sollemnis} 7: \textit{contra Gothorum regem proelium}.

\(^{54}\) I am thus reading the genesis of the \textit{Vita Sollemnis} differently from W. Levison, “Zur Geschichte des Frankenkönigs Chlodowech,” \textit{Bonner Jahrbücher} 103 (1898): 64. He takes the details as historical, but the battle as an earlier battle against the Visigoths, after 499, but before “the” battle, namely Vouillé.
ungraciously accorded second billing.\textsuperscript{55} Most significant is the fact that the “conversion battle” here is not the battle against the Alemanni, but one against the Visigoths that could indeed be Vouillé. Clovis’s faith enabled him to triumph against heresy, not paganism. In the course of time the \textit{fortuna} of Vouillé, as in some way connected with Clovis’s baptism, began to be reflected in different places, such as Nicetius of Trier’s letter to Chlodosuintha\textsuperscript{56} and eventually in the \textit{Vita Sollemnis}. The conjunction of Vouillé and baptism could bolster the argument for a late baptism.\textsuperscript{57}

\section*{Diplomatic Letters}

From a pragmatic perspective, that of the school of history that works from speculation about “what I would have done, if I had been there,”\textsuperscript{58} the causes of the war of 507 might seem clear. It was an expansionist campaign by the Franks, eager to gain control of the southern provinces of Gaul, for reasons of power and access to the Mediterranean.\textsuperscript{59} Clovis was feeling his oats and a safe eastern front after a major Alemannic victory in 496 or 506.\textsuperscript{60}

But this is not how the ancient documentary sources present matters. In Italy Cassiodorus was close to one focus of the ellipse of the political crisis, writing diplomatic letters for Theoderic to Clovis, Gundobad, Alaric, and the kings of the Warni, Heruli, and Thuringians.\textsuperscript{61} His letters tell a different tale. Alaric is reassured that the quarrel is not about territory invaded,\textsuperscript{62} nor about the killing of kinsmen (major \textit{casus belli}, presumably). In 506 it was still “a small dispute about words,”\textsuperscript{63} something that could easily be surmounted, if one

\textsuperscript{55} \textit{Vita Sollemnis} 9 Sollemnis, baptizes Clovis \textit{adiuncto sibi sancto Remedio!}
\textsuperscript{56} \textit{Epist. Austras.} 8.18 with, however, some garbling for the war with Gundobad antedated the baptism according to advocates of the later date. D. Geuenich, \textit{Geschichte der Alamannen} (Stuttgart/Berlin/Köln, 1997), 81, points out the pride of place of Vouillé, not the conversion battle against the Alamanni.
\textsuperscript{57} Becher, \textit{Chlodwig I}, 276, now does the math and concludes that Sollemnis’s episcopacy could not have fallen later than 499 (if the numbers in the \textit{Vita Sollemnis}) are correct. He sees support instead for an earlier baptism.
\textsuperscript{60} The clear implication of Cass. \textit{Variae} 2.41. See Claude, “Clovis,” 418, on the significance of the conquest of the Alamanni for the Franks.
\textsuperscript{61} On the politics, see H. Wolfram, \textit{History of the Goths}, new ed. (Berkeley, 1988), 190.
\textsuperscript{62} \textit{Non graviter urit occupata provincia}.
\textsuperscript{63} \textit{Variae} 3.1.3: \textit{adhue de verbis parva contentio est}. Perhaps alternatively, “There is so far little dispute about words.”
avoided recourse to arms. It was a *lis*, or legal disagreement. Theoderic implies that the solution may lie in *iustitia*. For Clovis it could be presented as arising *causis mediocribus* (“from trivial causes”). For Gundobad the matter was a *causa*, a matter under dispute. The letter to the kings of the Warni etc. reveals that the *causa* was one that could be settled by recourse to the *leges gentium*. If one considers these multiple insights into the issue, what kind of issue could it have been?

**Third and Fourth Parties?**

And who wanted it to happen? In the letters to Alaric and to Clovis appear covert allusions to third parties. These opinions are usually ascribed to, for example, the Byzantines or the Burgundians, but could also be even narrower references to specific individuals, whose identities we can no longer recover. In *Variae* 3.1 to Alaric we see: “Lest you seem to suffer at the suggestion of those who evilly rejoice in others’ battles.” And in *Variae* 3.4.4 someone’s *aliena malignitas* was sowing *scandala* for Clovis. Some third party, it is suggested, was using Alaric as a cat’s-paw. It is difficult to imagine the Byzantines in direct contact with Alaric II, but the Burgundians could plausibly have egged him on to attack Clovis. And, in the case of Clovis, who is the one who wishes to send another headlong into disaster, who, it is certain, was not advising in good faith? This could indeed be the Byzantine emperor, Anastasius, but it could also be the Burgundians, whom Theoderic at the time did not know would join the Franks. And then *Variae* 3.4.2 *multi qui vos metuunt de vestra concertatione laetentur.* Who are those afraid of the Franks who would like them to fight with the Visigoths? These could be the Burgundians, since Theoderic was unaware of their alliance with Clovis. But perhaps also the Alamanni, who would eventually

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64 *Variae* 3.1.3: *litem vestram.*
65 *Variae* 3.1.2.
66 *Variae* 3.4.2.
67 *Cass. Epist.* 3.2 to Gundobad: *quatenus causa*, *quaie inter eos vertitur, amicis mediis rationabiliter abscidatur.*
68 *Variae* 3.3.2: *leges gentium quaeerat.*
69 *Ne videamini illorum inmissione laborare, qui maligne gaudent alieno certamine.* S. J. B. Barnish, *The Variae of Magnus Aurelius Cassiodorus Senator . . . Being Documents of the Kingdom of the Ostrogoths in Italy*, TTH 12 (Liverpool, 1992), 45: “lest you should be harassed by the incitements of those who maliciously rejoice in another’s war.” See *TLL* s.v. *immissio* 466.42: *i.q. temptatio, instigatio, suggestio.*
70 *Ut nullatenus inter vos scandala seminet aliena malignitas.* According to G. Kurth, *Clovis* (Tours, 1896), 421, it is the Byzantine emperor.
71 *Variae* 3.4.5: *is qui vult alterum in praeceptes casus mittere, eum certum est fideliter non manere?*
fall under Frankish dominion in 537. 72 Byzantium had no reason to fear Clovis. These letters clearly show that rumors and allegations were rife. And unless they constitute a deliberately deceptive attempt to minimize the issues, the causa might have been resolvable.

A Financial Explanation

One might divine what such a resolvable causa could have been, by combining the testimony of the Variae with a few other sources. Junghans and Binding drew attention to Alaric’s financial difficulties, using two sources: First, the Vita Aviti Eremitae, which mentions Alaric’s attempts to muster soldiers and to melt silver together into a giant mass, 73 and, second, Avitus’s Epist. 87, which refers to Alaric’s very recent debased mixture of gold that he ordered the official mints to produce. 74 There is a third and neglected item, albeit from a problematic source, namely one of “Fredegar’s” interpolations in his chronicle. 75

In Fredegar 2.58 appears a curious story about a disagreement between Alaric and Clovis concerning alleged treachery by the Goths on the occasion of a

72 They were defeated in 496/506 and fled to northern Italy. See Ennodius, Pan. 15 (72): Quid quod a te Alamanniae generalitas intra Italiae terminos sine detrimento Romanae possessionis inclusa est? cui evenit habere regem, postquam meruit perdisse. Also Variae 2.41: si cum reliquis confligis. The debate continues about whether Clovis had “a” decisive Alammanic victory in 496 or in 506 or whether there were multiple engagements against multiple kings and any number of unsung battles against unnamed rulers. Geuenich, Geschichte der Alamannen 85–86, argues for decentralization, multiple battles, and multiple kings—and hence no explicit politics and the absence of correspondence to named individuals in the Variae.

73 W. Junghans, Die Geschichte der fränkischen Könige Childerich und Chlodovech kritisch untersucht (Göttingen, 1857), 82; Binding, Das burgundisch-romanische Königreich, 193, citing AASS Jun. 3: Ea tempestate Alaricus, Christiani nominis publicus inimicus, regnum Gothorum obtinuit: qui tyrannica crudelis animi rabie, et feralis sævitiæ atrociate, adepti regni potentia in superbiam elatus, & quia brachio sua fortitudinis undequaque affines vincere est solitus; spei animatus majoris fiducia, oppugnandi silicet gratia regnum adire dispositum Franciam; quod sua pertinacia votum ut firmius roborari videat assensu suorum totius regni, [argentii] ponderosa massa per exactores in unum corpus conflatur: & quisque ex militari Ordine viribus potens, donativum Regis volens nolens recepturus, per praecores urgete sententia invitat.


75 Disappointingly not discussed by J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, The Long-Haired Kings and Other Studies in Frankish History (New York, 1962), 84–87, culminating in “He was no fool—and no fabricator, having no need to be one.”
diplomatic summit. Theoderic was chosen as mediator, and, since he wanted the Visigoths and Franks to be at odds, he allegedly set a condition they would not be able to fulfill. They were to cover a mounted Frankish envoy, presumably Paternus, the protagonist of the episode, and his upright spear with gold and deliver the payment to Clovis. Alaric aimed to fool Clovis’s ambassador Paternus by showing him that he did not have the resources in his treasury. Paternus seized one solidus and claimed it as a pledge for his master. Then the war started. As we hear later, Clovis seized all the Visigothic treasure from Toulouse. And even Procopius (who seems to have garbled the location) mentions Alaric II’s legendary hoard and its capture by the Franks. Thus a variety of independent sources converge in explicit allusions to financial problems. Fredegar, odd as he is, has quite a few details that sound circumstantial and resonate with more respectable sources.

The author of the work in question was never called Fredegar, and how many authors are reflected in the compilation ascribed to him and what their dates were is much debated. Suffice it to say, it does not matter whether the relevant section predates 613, or whether it was part of the compilation of the unitary author advocated by Goffart. Regardless of Fredegar’s own terminus ante quem, the style of the Theoderician pericope suggests an earlier and happier period for Latinity than the 7th century. Its nature and position are such as to make clear that it was extracted from some sort of pre-7th-century

77 Greg. DLH 2.37; Fredegar 3.24: Thensaurus Alarici a Tholoso auferens.
78 Procop. BG 1.12.69 locates the hoard at Carcassonne rather than Toulouse, but is clearly talking about the Visigothic royal treasury, comprising fabulous items from Alaric’s siege of Rome and from the Temple at Jerusalem.
79 I thus disagree with Junghans, Die Geschichte der fränkischen Könige, 80: “Ueber den eigentlichen Anlass zum Kriege erfahren wir also auch hier nicht Näheres.”
80 E.g., the envoy on the balcony. As we know from Augustine, Epist. 13* Divjak visitors might sleep on them.
81 E.g., the iudicium/arbitration to which the two submit, the role of Theoderic as the deciding judge, the fuss about protocol that recalls the neutral safe territory at Amboise.
82 See Krusch, Fredegarii et Aliorum Chronica, xi; and R. Collins, Die Fredegar-Chroniken, MGH ST (Hannover, 2007), 8–15, 25–38.
83 Collins, Die Fredegar-Chroniken, 16–25.
84 Per Krusch, Fredegarii et Aliorum Chronica, 3, discussed by Collins, Die Fredegar-Chroniken, 9.
86 It appears in Fredegar 2.58, not in 3.24 where one would expect to find it. Paternus, however, Clovis’s legate, is mentioned in 3.24. G. Kurth, “L’Histoire de Clovis d’après Frédégaire,” Revue des questions historiques 47 n.s. 3 (1890): 94, notes Fredegar’s emphasis on Alaric’s fraud and culpability.
Gesta of Theoderic. The story is regularly criticized as “sagenhaft” or “légende barbare.” Only Kurth explains more clearly what he means, but the very details he cites, e.g., touching of the beard to become filius per arma, seem to be elements that might speak for authenticity rather than for epic or fairy tale.

Even though Theoderic characterizes the Visigoths in Variae 3.1.1 as soft after a long peace, there is evidence of conflict with the Franks in the years prior to Vouillé, e.g., the capture of Bordeaux in 498 and the foedus secured at Amboise in 502. Fredegar (2.58) too mentions multa prilia. But longa pace mollescere is compatible with both four to five years of peace as well as with a history of defensive conflict. And, as Wilhelm Levison pointed out over one hundred years ago, Cassiodorus mentions only the Visigothic conflict with Attila, not their whole 5th-century military history. Thus Fredegar’s narrative (cleaned up for fantasy elements) could fit in as one of these conflicts prior to 507. And the tale of diplomacy and protocol nicely parallels Gregory on the ceremony of Amboise. The same event in two versions? Or an episode subsequent to Amboise?

Thus no contemporary simply accuses Clovis of being a rogue king eager to expand his territory, and none explicitly treats the campaign of 507 as an anti-Arian crusade for Clovis. Contemporary propaganda for faith and arms, however, comes from the Burgundian side and can later be seen in the Vita Sollemnis. One might suggest that Clovis was empowered by it too, and that Vouillé, not the victory against the Alamanni, became his real Constantinian moment. If one reads Avitus’s Vestra fides nostra victoria as meaning “your [polite plural] faith is our [Frankish and Burgundian] victory,” one can combine some contemporary evidence with what would eventually become a full-fledged

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87 Rightly noted by Krusch, Fredegarii et Aliorum Chronica, 200. Not however the Gesta Theoderici printed by Krusch in MGH SRM 2.202–10, which supposedly cannot antedate the 12th century.
90 Theoderic adopted the king of the Heruli as his filius per arma in Variae 4.2; Eutharic became filius per arma to Justin, even though the two were close in age. See Variae 8.1: Desiderio quoque concordiae factus est per arma filius, qui annis uobis paene uidebatur aequaeus. “Märchen” is the word used by Krusch, Fredegarii et Aliorum Chronica, 7.
92 James, Franks, 86.
94 A reasonable suggestion of Junghans, Die Geschichte der fränkischen Könige, 80.
narrative in which Clovis’s conversion and baptism were linked to what I would suggest is Vouillé in the *Vita Sollemnis*. The Ostrogothic evidence clearly points to some sort of case (*causa*) or incident, which Theoderic took it upon himself to resolve. The Byzantine evidence shows Theoderic “in control,” playing the false ally to his northern clients, allied first to the Franks and then to the Visigoths.95 It is thus an evil twin 96 of the role Theoderic saw himself in—till the Burgundians derailed his plans. The later Frankish evidence presents the conflict as a pious crusade, except for the rogue Fredegar, who may be closer to what it was actually all “about”: not faith alone, but face—and finance.97

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95 Procop. *BG* 1.12.

96 As in the narrative in Fredegar, where Theoderic wishes to set Alaric and Clovis at odds. Junghans, *Die Geschichte der fränkischen Könige*, 79, noted the contrast between the *Variae* and Theoderic’s role in Fredegar.

97 One might guess captive exchange, tribute, or hostages. For the latter see *Variae* 3.4: *quibus obсидibus habeatur fides, si non credatur affectibus?*


Kurth, G. Clovis. Tours, 1896.


