Lost cities

The end of the *civitas*-system in Frankish Gaul

Simon T. Loseby

When the Merovingian kings Guntram and Childebert II met at Andelot late in November 587, they were looking to draw a line under the internecine struggles that had bedevilled the *regnum Francorum* since Charibert’s untimely death some twenty years before, and to achieve a settlement both in the present, and for the future. In doing so, they and the *proceres* and *sacerdotes* who formed their negotiating teams dealt primarily in two currencies of power: *civitates* and *leudes*. The majority of the clauses of the treaty that emerged from this summit, as quoted verbatim shortly afterwards by Gregory of Tours, were concerned with the attribution either of cities – sometimes subdivided into fractions – or of warrior aristocrats.1 With regard to the latter, the recurrent political instability of the last two decades had encouraged magnates to switch allegiances between rulers, and those rulers to be only too keen to receive them. The two kings agreed to restrain this burgeoning ‘transfer market’ by binding aristocrats to the oaths of loyalty to one kingdom or another that they had originally taken after the death of Lothar I, and by agreeing that they themselves would no longer tap up, receive, or offer refuge to any of the other’s *leudes*. As far as the allocation of cities was concerned, meanwhile, the fundamental element of the pact was Guntram’s waiving of his prior claim, as the only surviving son of Lothar I, to the entire kingdom in favour of Childebert’s right, and that of his heirs, to his father Sigibert’s share of it, albeit along with a number of interesting but essentially minor adjustments which cannot concern us here. A similar but subsidiary compromise saw Guntram accept that after his death the five cities which his brother Chilperic had formerly bestowed upon his Visigothic wife Galswinth as her *morgengabe* should be inherited by Galswinth’s sister and Childebert’s mother Brunhild, who was herself party to the negotiations at Andelot.2 The twofold emphases of the agreement upon the fixing of aristocratic and civic loyalties were encapsulated immediately

2 Among discussions of the Treaty of Andelot from various perspectives, see Drabek 1970; Ewig 1976a, 146–147; Jussen 2000, chs. 4–6, 11; Kershaw 2011, 125–128.
before Andelot in the kings’ mutual condemnation to death of Guntram Boso, the magnate who had hitherto been especially adept at exploiting the divisions within the ruling house, and upon the more festive occasion of the signing of the treaty by Childebert’s acceptance back into their host kingdom of two prominent magnates, Dynamius and Lupus, and Guntram’s handing over to Brunhild of Cahors, one of the five cities due to her, as if on account. By the following year, however, the ‘pure and simple faith and charity’ the signatories had mutually promised to maintain was again mired in the murky and treacherous waters of Merovingian politics. The kings were once more at odds, accusing each other of contravening either the letter of the treaty, by failing to return aristocrats or make over shares of cities as they had promised, or, more problematically, its spirit, as Guntram reserved the right to make provision – in the form of ‘two or three cities somewhere’ – for a third Merovingian, the infant Lothar II, conspicuous only by his absence from the arrangements agreed upon at Andelot.

The fragmented nature of Merovingian rulership made treaties between kings a recurrent feature of the allocation of power within the Frankish polity from 511 onwards, but in general their contents have to be inferred from unreliable narrators and anecdotal data. Although the pactio concluded at Andelot seems likely to be broadly representative of such concordats, the exceptional nature of its survival makes it difficult to be sure to what extent its preoccupations were shaped by the specific contours of contemporary Merovingian politics as portrayed by Gregory of Tours, in whose Histories the fortunes of individual cities and magnates episodically ebb and flow, held in a shifting and intermittently volatile relationship with rulers whose power-struggles more often assume the character of a game of Risk than one of Diplomacy. Royal concern to curb the political manoeuvrings of the leudes, in exchange for guarantees over their rights to property and freedom of movement across kingdoms, may have been a by-product of the constantly-shifting allegiances encouraged by the febrile intergenerational politics of the preceding twenty years, the consequences of which were still far from being fully played out at the time of Andelot. The meticulous attribution of rights to individual cities, on the other hand, is likely to have been a routine aspect of all such negotiations of royal power, because throughout the sixth century the various Frankish kingdoms were regarded as the sum of their civitates. These city-territories formed units of resource that could be apportioned individually, as in the case of Galswinth’s aforementioned morgengabe, or combined and recombined into regna without any necessary regard for their geographical integrity, as is particularly apparent in the controversial redistribution of Charibert’s cities between his three surviving brothers after 567, arguably the fons et origo of the

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3 Greg. Tur. Franc. 9, 8–11.
troubles that ensued.\footnote{Ewig 1976a, 138–139; its incoherent consequences are mapped in James 1988, 172.} In exploring elsewhere in what ways and why cities had become the organising principles of the Merovingian polity, I located this development towards the end of a distinctive, and broadly late antique, phase of Gallo-Roman urbanism which would have begun as early as the later second century, and extended down as far as the end of the sixth, concluding that by this time the role of the \textit{civitates} in structuring rural territories and royal power was ‘beginning to come under some strain, particularly in the secular sphere’.\footnote{Loseby 2006, with quotation at 96–97; cf. Loseby 1998a, 264–265.} My ultimate intention here is to flesh out that airy assertion by identifying the symptoms of such strain, and striving to elucidate their causes and effects. The emphasis will therefore be upon the changes taking place in Frankish cities up to and within the seventh century from an institutional and administrative rather than a topographical or economic perspective, though those aspects of contemporary urbanism will also be touched upon in what follows. First, this final stage in the history of the ancient \textit{civitas}-system in Gaul will be set in the context of its prior phases; in so doing, I will take the opportunity provided by the framework of this collection of papers to qualify somewhat the integrity of the extended late antique phase identified in my earlier paper. Next, in order to identify what changed around 600, the various ways in which the significance of the \textit{civitates} within the Frankish polity was manifested in the time of Gregory of Tours will be summarised. Finally, it will be shown how the early seventh century does indeed mark a decisive shift in emphasis away from the hybrid city- and magnate-based politics that determined the content of the Treaty of Andelot to a political culture that had finally ceased to be structured and perceived through the \textit{civitas} system, at least in the secular sphere.

For heuristic purposes, and with all due acknowledgement of the extent of local and regional variation, four phases in the history of the Gallic \textit{civitates} might be proposed, as defined principally by structural shifts in the relationship between local (or civic) and central (whether imperial or royal) authorities, but which can also be associated in most cases with significant changes in urban form. The initial phase of expansion need detain us only briefly. It begins in the Augustan era, and consists in the rolling-out across Gaul of a network of cities and dependent territories, Rome’s preferred ideological and functional solution to the perennial problem of exercising power over distance, which involved the devolution of a significant measure of autonomy down to municipal elites, exercised through the institutional framework of the city-council, in exchange for their maintenance of order and supervision of resource extraction at the local level. In competing for civic power and pre-eminence in a context secured by Roman arms and defined by imperial values, the newly-constituted \textit{curiales} of the Three Gauls enthusiastically sought to catch up with their Narbonensian neighbours in becoming Roman. Gradually, through the first century AD and on into the second, they invested lavishly in the monuments and amenities of their cities as vehicles for the asser-
tion and legitimation of their social standing, creating their own versions of canonical classical urban landscapes according to their means. Despite the weight of the historiographical tendency to judge the subsequent evolution of Gallo-Roman urbanism in the light of these developments and find it wanting, this phase should not be regarded as normative. It was, however, doubly and decisively formative – administratively in that it established an urban network of over a hundred cities, and topographically in that it created the basic parameters of the urban environments that future generations of city-dwellers would go on inhabiting for centuries to come. In both respects, the subsequent modification of the massive and inescapable urban legacy of this period would take place only slowly and, for the most part, incrementally, however enthusiastic its architects.

The second phase of Gallo-Roman urbanism, which might be broadly characterised as one of retrenchment, would prove rather more complex and far more protracted. Its initial indicators are material rather than institutional. From around the middle of the second century AD onwards, archaeological evidence from Gallic cities begins to indicate a slowdown in both public and private urban building projects, the first signs of failures to maintain existing monuments, and the start of a slow retreat in the extent of urban settlement, all phenomena which increase over time and can be seen to proliferate through the troubled third century, in this regard, as in others, a period of beschleunigter Wandel. This slow retreat of classical urbanism was then consolidated (but certainly not instigated) by the systematisation of the recent reforms of the administrative machinery of the Roman state under Diocletian and Constantine, which had the overall effect of drawing the exercise and representation of power away from devolved civic institutions towards an imperial bureaucracy that was significantly enhanced in scale and authority. This centralisation was by now culturally feasible, and no doubt administratively desirable, but it meant that the curiales saw their responsibilities increased even as they forfeited much of their influence and status, not to mention a large slice of their budget; in compounding the growing reluctance or inability of local elites to sustain established levels of amenity through their spending, it further undermined already-weakening traditions of urban munificence. The consequences for cities of these empire-wide trends were intensified more specifically in Gaul by the new and regular presence of an imperial court on the Rhine frontier that offered a readily-accessible focus for elite ambition. As standing in the imperial hierarchy came to be a decisive determinant of the fortunes of cities as well as individuals, a handful of favoured centres such as Trier, and to a lesser extent Arles, benefitted from centrally-administered patronage, but the moribund

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8 Woolf 1998, esp. ch. 5. For a sense of the chronology of monumentalisation, see Bedon et al. 1988.
state of fourth-century provincial capitals in Gaul such as Tours or Aix-en-Provence offers a salutary warning against the assumption that such largesse routinely cascaded very much further down the administrative hierarchy.  

This phase of retrenchment starts to be visible in urban landscapes, therefore, from the later second century onwards, and in the social power of civic office-holders from the late third. The disavowal of the urban values of the early imperial period, whether on grounds of a decline in the social capital associated with them, their cost, their cultural redundancy, or more probably a combination thereof, helped to make most late antique Gallic cities less expansive, and their wealthier residents less visible. However, the gradual playing-out of these developments was intercut and greatly complicated by the simultaneous reconfiguration of urban landscapes and leadership in response to contemporary social priorities, even if, crucially, almost all existing cities were maintained. This third phase, which has its roots in the decades either side of 300 but only really takes off in the fifth century, is therefore one of renewal, and it runs in parallel with the inexorable and increasingly severe effects of retrenchment. It can be characterised by three main features, each of which is familiar, and need not be given more than summary consideration here. The first, but least susceptible of these to easy synthesis, is fortification. Between the late third and the fifth centuries, most cities in Gaul either had their existing defences upgraded or, more often, acquired walls de novo which typically enclosed only part – and sometimes a mere fraction – of the urban areas of earlier periods. In an increasingly insecure Gaul, this was obviously a practical measure, for which subsequent generations would have lasting cause to be grateful, and it gave cities an enduring (if not quite exclusive) significance as defensive strongholds for centuries to come. Equally, city-walls now assumed an enhanced symbolic resonance in the conception of urban identity, to the extent that by the end of the sixth century they had completely eclipsed any other category of secular public building in the mind, for example, of Gregory of Tours.

The second element in late antique urban renewal is, of course, Christianisation, a process at once more organic in nature and incremental in impact than fortification, but arguably more consistent in its overall impact upon Gallic cities. The projection of the administrative organisation of the church directly on to that of the existing network of civitates established a new and distinctly urban potentate in the person of the bishop, who would go on to reinvigorate the link between cities and their territories through his exclusive liturgical responsibilities, and to inspire new urban patronage networks and outpourings of monumental and chari-

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13 Here much has changed since the syntheses of Butler 1959 and Johnson 1983 (in particular in regard to issues of chronology); in the absence of a recent overview of comparable scope, see especially Maurin 1992; Heijmans 2006; Dey 2010.
14 Loseby 1998a.
table munificence. 15 From the fourth century onwards, but with far greater intensity from the fifth, every city in Gaul generated a new Christian landscape alongside the old, typically combining a cathedral complex at its heart (within the walls, wherever they existed) with the growing array of funerary basilicas that were variously clustered within and scattered across its suburban, extra-mural cemeteries; these enshrined the tombs of those locally venerated as saints, whose cults, zealously sponsored by bishops, provided new contexts for urban self-legitimation and monumental patronage, and for the formation of distinctive identities proper to individual communities. 16 Churches thus took their place alongside walls in the new rhetoric of urbanism, and Christian writers deftly rationalised the practical and conceptual restructuring of urban space around the two into a coherent whole at once topographically realistic and conceptually symbolic, in which the bishop at the heart of the city, the saints in the suburbs round about, and the walls in between, worked in concert for the protection of their communities from dangers both visible and invisible. 17 In practice, even so, the impact of Christianisation on the conception and experience of urban space ran counter to that of fortification by offsetting its centripetal implications and drawing the sanctified suburbs into the orbit of collective civic practice through regular liturgical observance, breaking down the distinction between urban and suburban, and drawing them together in radically new ways. 18

Finally, as implied in the previous paragraph, this phase of renewal assumed an institutional as well as a topographical and cultural dimension. In Gaul, as elsewhere, the decline in the status of the city-councils as organs of government encouraged the gradual (and, in its early stages, largely invisible) reconstitution of civic leadership around local figures of standing within the imperially-sponsored hierarchies of state and church that now offered real access to social power. 19 These shadowy and self-selecting bodies would prove enduringly resistant to formal or consistent definition, in part by their very nature, but it becomes clear that they generally included the bishop, the new urban patron par excellence, alongside local senators, officials, and other major landowners. In the western empire, this shift in urban power was only at an inchoate stage when it was distorted by the impact of the ‘fall of Rome’. But even as that grander narrative was getting under way, Gallo-Roman urbanism was already set upon two contradictory and, in large measure, endogenous trajectories, each of which were gathering momentum in the fifth century. On the one hand, the long-established markers of urban retrenchment become increasingly visible archaeologically in the prolifera-

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15 Scheibelreiter 1983; Beaujard 1996; Gauthier 2000.
18 Hen 1995, ch. 4, for urban sanctoral cycles with Pietri 1983, ch. 6 for the specific example of Tours.
19 For various recent interpretations of the general chronology and character of these changes, see Liebeschuetz 2001, 104–136, Ceccconi 2006 and Laniado 2002.
tion of a familiar litany of late antique urban phenomena: the dereliction or re-use of public buildings and spaces, the partial degradation of the urban infrastructure, the contraction or disaggregation of areas under occupation, the increased resort to recycled or inferior building-materials, the proliferation of smaller and more utilitarian residential units, and so on. 20 On the other, the new drivers of an urbanism centred around security and salvation were simultaneously contributing to the renewal of urban landscapes through the creation of fortified cores, substantial and lavishly-embellished cathedral complexes, and a sanctified suburban sprawl, as dormant traditions of urban monumental patronage were channelled in new directions, demolishing some of the fabric and much of the logic of the monumental urban legacy of earlier periods along the way. 21

These contrasting currents were neither instigated nor significantly interrupted by the ensuing disintegration of the western empire and the eventual fragmentation of political authority in Gaul among various barbarian rulers, but cities were central to the transition, for various reasons. 22 Their fortifications lent them considerable strategic importance in periods of conflict, while their bishops often emerged as pivotal figures in the management of political change, both by virtue of the considerable pastoral and legal responsibilities already vested in them, and in default of other local authorities similarly accredited to represent the interests of their communities; the siege of Clermont in the early 470s can suffice to illustrate both themes. 23 For their part, the new barbarian masters were desperately keen to appropriate existing ideologies of power and representation as far as possible, which meant that they favoured urban settings for display and self-legitimation, and in some cases embarked upon monumental building programmes in time-honoured fashion. 24 It is in the attitudes of the upper echelons of the Gallo-Roman aristocracy that the more revolutionary adjustment can instead be found. In practice, the disappearance of imperial office-holding scarcely levelled out the elaborate hierarchy of ranks ‘through which one was accustomed to tell the high from the low’ quite as efficiently as Sidonius wistfully alleged (Gregory of Tours knew that even if you contrived to give away all your property besides, you could still keep your status intact). 25 Even so, in the absence of sus-

20 The scale and timing of these changes varies from city to city, e.g. from Tours (Galinié et al 2007, 355–361) to Arles (Heijmans 2004, ch. 6), but all cities with significant archaeological data from this period show symptoms of some or all of them by the fifth century.
21 Loseby 2006, 78–83; Guyon 2006. It is this combination of retrenchment and renewal that goes some way to explaining the very different views of fifth-century Metz propounded by Halsall 1996 and Bachrach 2002.
22 Halsall 2007, chs. 7–9; see also the papers by Michael Kulikowski and Christian Witschel in this volume.
24 This is clearest in Visigothic Toulouse (Guyon 2000), but there are signs of it in the Frankish and Burgundian kingdoms besides: McCormick 1989; Dierkens/Périn 2000, 270–277; Bonnet/Reynaud 2000.
25 Sidon. epist. 8, 2, 2: per quas solebat ultimo a quoque summus quisque discerni; Greg. Tur. glor. conf. 108 (of Paulinus of Nola).
tainable alternative sources of political authority and social legitimation outside the courts of barbarian rulers, it certainly had the effect of renewing the interest of the regional senatorial aristocracy in the pursuit of whatever power was still worth having at the level of the civitas. This obliged them to insinuate themselves back into the second-tier milieu of the municipaliter natus whom Sidonius had previously affected to disdain – and indeed, as bishop of Limoges, Ruricius would testily suggest that his dignity transcended that of his city – but it certainly did not entail any substantive return to the urban political culture of earlier centuries, which was already internally fractured beyond repair. In general, instead, the renewed participation of the senatorial class in local politics accelerated the gravitating of civic leadership away from legally-constituted city-councils towards the more informal collectives of socially-superior individuals who, as we have seen, were assuming similar pre-eminence over urban communities in areas that remained firmly within the empire. More specifically, competition for civic power in post-imperial Gaul came inevitably to revolve around the office of bishop, in which much local authority had been vested before imperial collapse, and which now offered the only post-imperial source of public prestige and legitimation that remained if not outside, then at least at one remove from the uncertain sphere of barbarian political control. In this fast-changing context, it is no coincidence either that the job specification for episcopal appointments was adjusted to favour nobilitas over charisma, or that a spurt of major church-building projects were carried out in cities amid all the political confusion of the later fifth century, in some centres perhaps temporarily adjusting the ongoing tension between urban retrenchment and renewal in favour of the latter. But this adaptability of the Gallic aristocracy in the short-term also had far-reaching consequences, for it was the continuity of the episcopal office and the expectations associated with it that would, above all, sustain urban political communities through the ensuing centuries as their elites continued to compete for the post and to engage in urban munificence in support of their claims.

If we fast-forward through the working-out of the various political upheavals of the decades either side of 500 and leave to one side the variations peculiar to particular kingdoms and regions, then on emerging in the period of fully-fledged Frankish domination of much of Roman Gaul from the late 530s onwards, we find ourselves confronted by a network of cities that owes something to each of the phases of expansion, retrenchment, and renewal outlined above, and by a broadly homogeneous framework of relations between civic and central authority across much of Francia. By now, the upper tiers of late Roman secular admi-

26 Van Dam 1985, chs. 6–8; Mathisen 1993.
27 Sidon. epist. 1, 11, 5; Ruric. epist. 2, 33. For the fracturing, see especially Lepelley 1983.
29 For church-building, see, in anticipation of its thematic syntheses, the remarkable Topographie chrétienne series (Gauthier et al. 1986–2007).
30 For a well-documented example of such competition and the promotion of the saints’ cults associated with it at Clermont, see Wood 1983 and 2002.
nistration, the diocese and the province, had almost entirely disappeared, while such larger units as did exist, such as Provence, Septimania, and Burgundy, were of more recent political origin.\(^{31}\) Within the organisation of the church, the Roman provincial structure was perpetuated in the jurisdiction of the metropolitan bishops, but it had been lost from the secular sphere, where it exercised no particular influence over recurrent divisions of territory between rulers; the resulting dislocation between metropolitan and royal authority was one of the factors that would intermittently complicate relations between bishops and kings.\(^{32}\) In striking contrast, however, the network of cities and their dependent territories that had originated in the formative phase of Gallo-Roman urbanism proved remarkably resilient across more than four-fifths of Francia.\(^{33}\) If we compare the Gallic cities listed in the *Notitia Galliarum* of c.400 with those centres documented as having bishops in the later sixth century, then over a hundred survive as the centres of territorial units, with by far the greatest disruptions to the network occurring in the far north-east, where social dislocation was most pronounced, in the Breton peninsula outside direct Frankish control, and, subsequently, among the small fortress-cities of Novempopulana. Across the heartlands of Gaul, however, only four of the 117 cities listed in the *Notitia* appear to have lost their status outright.\(^{34}\) Their persistence represents more than simple inertia, since the network did continue to evolve, but in small-scale and incremental fashion, sometimes through transfers of *civitas*-capital within a territory, or sometimes through the subdivision of existing city-territories to create additional sees; such developments had been characteristic of the Gallic urban network since its inception, and as such tend to confirm its continued responsiveness to local or political imperatives rather than its subjection to any fundamental post-imperial upheavals.\(^{35}\) This core stability of the *civitas*-network is no doubt mainly attributable to its perpetuation within the administrative organisation of the Church. But given that the same institution had proved insufficient to sustain the provincial structure outside its own framework, it seems likely that the reconfiguration of social power at the local level and the recognition by the rulers of the successor-states of the continued (or reconstituted) utility of civic administrative organisation were also significant factors in the widespread survival of the *civitates* as functioning units through the transition from Roman to barbarian rule.

If the Gallic *civitates* had therefore remained largely as they were as territorial units, their internal operation as political communities seems by the mid-sixth

\(^{31}\) Rouche 1997.


\(^{33}\) Loseby 2000; Beaujard/Prévot 2004.

\(^{34}\) Contrast Italy, where the rate of attrition was far higher, though so was the density of the urban network in the first place: Schmiedt 1974, La Rocca 1994.

\(^{35}\) Kaiser 1990 for the new sixth-century sees.
century to have completed its evolution along post-curial lines. A handful of isolated or residual references apart, the ongoing activities of city-councils, or of individuals calling themselves curiales are visible thereafter only in the formulae that survive from several cities in the Loire valley, and in the occasional charter, in each case in connection with the registration of title to land in the municipal archives, a significant but essentially notarial responsibility. The absence of city-councils and curiales from works as rich in city-based anecdote as those of Gregory of Tours is perhaps not altogether as decisive as it might seem at first sight, given his manifest determination to portray bishops like himself as the acknowledged leaders of urban communities, but the recurrent appearances in his writings of a bewildering variety of persons – whether maiores (natu), seniores, honorati, priores, viri magnifici, or mere cives – who appear to exercise influence over urban communities on an informal rather than corporate basis, appears unlikely simply to reflect Gregory’s particular historiographical purposes, since it is entirely consistent with contemporary trends in imperial territories. Quite who these politically-active people were, or precisely what distinctions might have existed between these various categories of persons is, as in the eastern empire, never wholly transparent, and it would be risky in any case to assume that the intriguing variations in the terminology with which Gregory refers to them necessarily reflect subtle gradations of social standing rather than the circumstances, actual or literary, of the situation being described, or the bishop’s giddy pursuit of lexical variety. Generally speaking, even so, they appear to comprise the major local landowners, be they scions of the senatorial class, the wealthier members of the municipal aristocracy, or, in some cases, local Franks, who variously feature alongside the bishop and the leading members of his clergy in Gregory’s urban narratives, and can sometimes be seen deliberating the interests of their city. A great deal more visible in such settings, however, is the activity of one particular public official, the count, who, as the king’s representative in the city, was himself more often than not selected from among that self-same local landed elite.

The prominence in Gregory’s writings of the comes civitatis as the regular mediator of the relationship between kings and their cities epitomises the continuing operation across much of Gaul of the city-territory as a framework for secular

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36 For post-curial government, see the references above, and the synthesis in Wickham 2005, 596–602.
38 E.g. Greg. Tur. Franc. 2, 23; 4, 43; 5, 48; 6, 11; 8, 21; 8, 31; 10, 16; GC 58, 60.
40 Franks: e.g. Greg. Tur. Franc. 8, 31. For both lay and clerical seniores, see e.g. Franc. 5, 48, where Leudast sits in judgement cum senioribus vel laicis vel clericis, though Gregory more often prefers to distinguish between clergy and the seniores, as e.g. in Franc. 10, 16, where a marriage-feast in the Holy Cross nunnery at Poitiers had occurred coram pontifice, clero vel senioribus. Passio Praejecti, 13 offers one later seventh-century indication of the existence of recognised senior clergy in Clermont.
administration, even as it illustrates the obsolescence of the curial mechanisms through which similar obligations to ruling authorities had previously been organised. The stages through which a post that seemingly had its origins in the twilight years of the western empire in the appointment of directly-accountable officials to strategic centres became a widely-adopted feature of the management of relations between central and local power are obscure (and, unusually for this period, lacking in direct eastern Mediterranean parallels). But by the late sixth century such officials are visible in some two dozen cities scattered across Gaul, and since it is generally difficult to spot other local office-holders exercising equivalent responsibilities, they presumably existed in many more. In their earliest manifestations, the holders of this title seem to have operated alongside the old structures of civic government (as was the case, for example, in Visigothic Gaul around 500), but by Gregory’s day such formerly curial tasks as the maintenance of local order, the administration of justice, and the raising of taxes appear to have been absorbed into the competence of the count and his subordinates. Beyond all that, the count was also required to ensure the mobilisation of local levies for the performance of military service. Whatever the specific origins or precise extent of this obligation, it can only be post-imperial. As such, it appears indicative of a conscious attempt among the Frankish rulers to rule through the civitas-system in adapting it to current needs as well as in long-established ways. The inhabitants of the Gallic civitates had long paid together and prayed together; now they fought alongside each other besides, and often, such was the patchwork effect created by the sixth-century royal partitions of the Merovingian kingdom, against the inhabitants of neighbouring cities, on behalf of rival kings, or, sometimes, on their own initiative.

The Frankish world depicted by Gregory of Tours is thus very much a world of cities, not merely as the venues for much of the action which he describes (though this, needless to say, is a distortion that tells us more about the bishop’s field of vision than the whereabouts of the majority of the population), but, more tellingly, as the units through which power was regularly exercised and identity routinely ascribed. Kingdoms were accumulations of civitates, control of which could always potentially be determined on a city-by-city basis, whether by negotiation, as at Andelot, or by force, which could have unfortunate consequences for

41 Claude 1964.
42 Weidemann 1982, i, 63–86, with Murray 1986 for the identification of the grafio as the north-eastern equivalent of the count. For one exception to this pattern, see the Austrasian partes of Provence, where the earlier Ostrogothic administrative structure was retained, and such tasks came under the competence of an official variously titled rector, praefectus, or patricius: Buchner 1933, 15–29.
43 Dumézil 2008.
45 Greg. Tur. Franc. 7, 2, for reciprocal raids by local levies on neighbouring cities, taking advantage of a political vacuum to demonstrate a collective civitas-identity independent of royal command.
the inhabitants of those centres, such as Tours, which lay on the fault-lines between rival regna. The city-communities themselves had their identities repeatedly reinforced in moments of collective spiritual, military, or political action, whether in responding to their bishop’s promotion of the cult of their own special patron, to a call to arms from their count, or to the unwelcome imposition of new taxes. Such situations could inspire resistance as well as obedience, and are often the moments when the new-style civic leaders – the maiores and their ilk – emerge momentarily from obscurity to figure alongside the bishops in Gregory’s urban narratives. It might be pushing the point a little too far to infer that ‘in times of civil war, it was the loyalty of the cities which counted’, though not because civic identity was unimportant, but because no city seems either greatly inclined or seriously capable of mounting any sustained opposition to royal authority.47 But it was certainly at this level that loyalty was consistently demanded, through the oaths that rightful or prospective rulers compelled civic leaders to swear in moments of political crisis or uncertainty.48

The late sixth century might therefore be said to represent the maturation of the phase of urban renewal across much of Gaul, if only in terms of the apparent pervasiveness of the city as a hub of social and political action, and a routine interface between central and local authority. Cities had to some extent regained the administrative pre-eminence and the role as a focus for personal loyalties that they had been assigned in the early imperial period, albeit this time faute de mieux, as a consequence of a prolonged period of political fragmentation that had precluded the perpetuation of existing administrative units more extensive than the civitas or retarded the emergence of new ones. In every other respect bar their locations, nevertheless, the later sixth-century civitates had only residual features in common with their Augustan antecedents, whether in their operation as political communities, or in their built environments. The duoviri who counted in these cities were no longer magistrates at the head of a formally-constituted curial ordo, but the bishop and count, both of whom were in effect royal appointees, for all that their overlapping jurisdictions often found them at loggerheads.49 Urban landscapes will still have featured many of the monuments of earlier centuries, but these were generally in varying stages of decay, as they were put to new purposes, stripped out for building materials, or simply left to the ravages of time.50 We are sometimes allowed a glimpse of the continuous relationship that must have existed between this inescapably monumental legacy and the present inhabitants, as for example when something miraculous occurs to heal those engaged

49 See Lauranson-Rosaz/Jeannin 2001 for a specific example of their joint assumption of a formerly curial function, that of replacing lost acta, James 1983 for one of the main sources of tension between them.
in the work of reclamation or repair, but in general our sources only have eyes for city-walls, now more sporadically maintained and repaired, or for urban churches or monasteries, which continue steadily to accumulate.\textsuperscript{51} The archaeological evidence confirms by its largely impoverished character that this ‘renewed’ urbanism is otherwise very different from the old, and indeed so pared down in scale and conception in some centres that it can reasonably be questioned whether a city such as late sixth-century Tours, as busy and dynamic as Gregory makes it sound, really deserves to be considered urban at all if one takes into consideration its lack of demographic or economic weight.\textsuperscript{52} But then these were not criteria that would have been understood by Gregory or his contemporaries, for whom cities were routinely the places from which power was exercised by bishops or counts, and through which territories were controlled and resources extracted by their rulers.

During the early seventh century, however, this changed quite quickly, as the relationship between centralised authority and city-based power-structures entered a final phase that saw the abandonment of the \textit{civitates} as the organising principles of secular administration. The coincidence between this notional turning-point and the moment at which we cease to see Francia from Gregory of Tours’ city-centric perspective may seem too close for comfort, and it is also the case that the uneven distribution of the different categories of Merovingian source material compounds the problem of comparison between the sixth and seventh centuries more generally, but, even so, the indications of change are cumulatively clear, and can in many ways be seen to represent the logical development of trends already perceptible in the works of the bishop of Tours. Perhaps the clearest example of this is provided by the disavowal by the Merovingian kings of any further attempts to overhaul the land-tax.\textsuperscript{53} Here defeat was effectively sounded by Lothar II, with his promise in 614 to repudiate any new \textit{census} upon request, thereby resigning himself to the impossibility of meaningful fiscal reform even though, as sole ruler, he was arguably in a better position to bring it about than predecessors such as his father, whose characteristically ambitious but ultimately unsuccessful efforts to impose new taxes upon some of his cities had allegedly resulted in a mass exodus of their inhabitants to other kingdoms.\textsuperscript{54} But in truth this concession may represent little more than an acknowledgment of the increasingly incidental and anachronistic character of such exactions in a polity which was no longer maintaining a professional army or extensive salaried bureaucracy that needed to be supported through taxation. The land-tax was clearly proving difficult to collect, in part, it would appear, for logistical reasons deriving from the uneven post-imperial survival or inconsistent upkeep of the machinery of

\textsuperscript{51} Miracles linked with spoliation or repair: e.g. Honoratus, \textit{Vita Hilarii} 20; \textit{Passio Praejecti} 11. For the erratic maintenance of walls through the early Middle Ages, see Bourgeois 2006, 119–123.

\textsuperscript{52} Galinié 1997.

\textsuperscript{53} Kaiser 1979; Goffart 1982.

\textsuperscript{54} \textit{Cap. Merow.} 9, c. 8; for Chilperic’s tax-drive, Greg. Tur. \textit{Franc.} 5, 28; 5, 34, in his hyperbolic register.
assessment from one city-territory to the next, but more fundamentally because of resistance to its very legitimacy from both Franks, who regarded such payments as beneath their dignity, and churchmen, who were wont to portray them as symptomatic of royal greed. As claims to Frankish identity intensified and ecclesiastical institutions accumulated ever more estates, so the extent of the notionally tax-liable land concentrated in the hands of those who either saw themselves as exempt from payment, or were, at best, reluctant to co-operate increased. The kings themselves were, moreover, implicated in this gradual disintegration of the Roman fiscal legacy through their concession of immunities from fiscal and other obligations to favoured individuals, churches, and indeed whole cities, as Gregory was at pains to emphasise in the particularly privileged case of Martin’s Tours. These two trends came together when Lothar II agreed that exemptions from any public charge should apply not merely to specific parcels of land, but to all the properties of those churches and clerics entitled to them. In Gregory’s day the efforts of contemporary rulers to take tax were already appearing more akin in their centrally-directed and precisely-targeted nature to military campaigns than to routine, locally-administered exactions, and all for what were apparently limited returns. Their early seventh-century successors came to realise, we might assume, that such battles were no longer worth fighting; the income to be gained was scarcely worth the resentment generated. Taxation would linger on in residual form for some time to come in certain areas, but the available data suggests that it was increasingly left to the landowners themselves to collect it from their own estates and forward some proportion of it on if required; the collective, city-based framework for taxation in place since the Augustan era, and still in intermittent and fragmentary operation in the late sixth century had finally disintegrated.

Meanwhile, the proliferation of immunities did not disappear with taxation. By the time that examples of such grants begin to survive in number, from the mid-seventh century onwards, if only in favour of ecclesiastical recipients, it was rather their emphasis that had changed. Kings were still looking to use immunities as convenient mechanisms for bestowing favour upon those institutions or individuals whose spiritual and political services, past or prospective, deserved recognition – indeed, they seem increasingly to have become routine instruments of policy – but the focus of such gifts had shifted from the fiscal to the judicial sphere. Any reference to immunity from fixed taxation in such documents dis-

55 Logistics: e.g. Greg. Tur. Franc. 9, 30; 10, 7. Frankish resistance: e.g. Franc. 3, 36; 7, 15. For perceptions of the morality of taxation in general, Lot 1928, 83–107, though not all bishops were necessarily as hostile as Gregory to taxation in principle, as the efforts of Maroveus of Poitiers in Hist. 9, 30 merely to secure a more up-to-date assessment show.
57 Cap. Merow. 8, c. 11; Goffart 1982, 17–19.
58 Devroey 2003, 242, for the simile, Lot 1928, 85–86, for the returns.
60 Amid a vast bibliography, see Murray 1994, Fouracre 1995, and Rosenwein 1999, ch. 4.
appeared, to be superseded by an emphasis on the exclusion of the count and his subordinates from the exercise of jurisdiction within privileged lands, conceeding the provision and profits of justice to the recipient instead. The social capital that accrued to rulers through such arrangements may have been every bit as valuable to them as the actual capital that they were giving away, but these developments meant that the role of the *comes civitatis* came to be doubly circumscribed, firstly by the creeping privatisation of royal prerogatives, and secondly by the hollowing out of his jurisdiction through the proliferation of the immunities granted to leading landowners, superseding a territorial framework of social organisation with one structured around lordship. More speculatively, the shortage in seventh-century sources of further references to city-levies of the type which can be seen in Gregory of Tours’ narrative to have been regularly called out to march upon neighbouring *civitates* might be thought to imply that the innovation that had seen military obligations organised on the basis of the city-territory had also been abandoned, perhaps in favour of more selective troop-mobilisations, and certainly in conjunction with the superimposition of the broader conceptions of kingdom-wide identity discussed below, so further dissolving the link between the *comes* and the *civitas*.

The count of the city had always been a relatively minor official, but in the sixth century the utility of the *civitas* as a unit of secular administration had made it necessary, if not quite to invent him, then to expand his role as the linchpin of the relationship between royal and central power, in succession to the obsolete curial-system. But in the course of the seventh century both the integrity and administrative content of his jurisdiction was substantially eroded, allowing the title ultimately to float free of territorial definition, and severing any necessary connection between secular office-holding and the *civitas*-network. Nor would the *pagi* that emerge ever more ubiquitously from the later seventh century onwards as dominant spatial conceptions in succession to the *civitates* equate neatly in future with the *comitatus* that came to define the personal competence of the counts.

While the retreat of the secular administrative mechanisms that had made the *civitas* an operational framework of collective action combined with the rise of immunities to dissolve the integrity of city-territories from within, their significance as defining units of personal and collective identity was at the same time coming under pressure from without, as the *Reichsteil* of the sixth century, conceived around a king and his *sedes*, mutated rapidly into the *Teilreiche* of the seventh, the *tria regna* of Austrasia, Neustria and Burgundy that could exist with or without a king, and, as such, became established as the standard frames of

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61 The only seventh-century examples of such levies known to me appear in Fredegar 4, 73 and 4, 87, vastly outnumbered by references to armies described by more extensive territorial frames of reference. The general sketchiness of our understanding of Merovingian military obligations is effectively brought out by the summary of divergent scholarly opinions provided in Goffart 2008, 178 n. 39.

62 Claude 1964, 59–79.

63 Innes 2000, 118–121.
reference for the representation of political authority. This transformation is well-known, but it is worth dwelling for a moment on the speed with which it took place, if only to counter the convenient but misleadingly teleological tendency to describe the later sixth-century kingdoms in the same terms, notwithstanding the very limited presence of such conceptions in the works of Gregory of Tours and the volatile and unpredictable nature of the contemporary political situation, the effect of which can be to obscure the significance of the changes that took place around 600. Within the space of two generations after the death of Childebert II, the Merovingians and their magnates arrived, by a mixture of accident and design, at a mutually-acceptable distribution of power – and, crucially, of access thereto – that transcended the level of the civitas, and depended upon the maintenance of stable, and, for the most part, territorially-coherent regna, the consolidation of which was cemented by a lengthy period of internal peace. While he was relying on Gregory of Tours, the chronicler known as Fredegar retained something of his framing of political action, but in picking up where the bishop’s narrative left off (or so he imagined), he routinely identified Frankish kings, magnates, armies, and territories alike in terms of the tria regna, reverting to a city-based frame of reference only when defining the temporary subkingdom of Charibert II in Aquitaine, where power was still divided and continued to be conceived on the basis of the civitates. His practice can serve to epitomise the decisive affirmation of regional political identities in later Merovingian sources more generally, culminating in the succinct summary of the origin of Lothar II’s sole rule offered, with the benefit of hindsight, by the author of the Liber Historiae Francorum: “the Burgundians and the Austrasians made peace with the rest of the Franks [his word for Neustrians], and raised up King Lothar to the kingship over all three kingdoms”.

The phrasing from an early eighth-century perspective of this précis of the events of 613 might well have perplexed Gregory of Tours, but the potential for

64 Cardot 1987, 123–138. Ewig 1976b remains the classic account of the seventh-century Teilreiche, although the assumption of an ongoing conflict of interest between kings and aristocracy that underpins it has been superseded, as for example in Fouracre 2005.

65 Gregory uses Burgundy seven times to refer to the Frankish kingdom or its people (Franc. 2, 33; 4, 16; 4, 42; 5, 13; 8, 30; glor. mart 83; Mart. 1, 36), Austrasia three times (Franc. 5, 14; 5, 18; Mart. 4, 29 [as Austria]), Neustria not at all. Gregory’s Francia is not a synonym for Neustria (as in some later sources), but for Austrasia (Franc. 4, 14; 4, 16; GC 40; and perhaps Mart. 1, 26); its more generic use in the text of Andelot in Franc. 9, 20 is not Gregory’s own.

66 Fredegar 3, 29; 3, 55; 3, 80, for examples of his retention of Gregory’s usage both in describing divisions of the kingdom and for military action, and 3, 82f. for his sustained adherence to Gregory’s spatial terminology. Fredegar 4, 57 for Charibert’s subkingdom, comprising five cities (which he calls pagi), and an otherwise undefined area between them and the Pyrenes in what was formerly Novempopulana; cf. Fredegar, Cont. 46. For the perpetuation of the idea of the tria regna and the affirmation of their independent political identity under Childeric II in the 670s, see Vita Balthidis 5, Passio Leudegarii 7.

67 Lib. hist. Franc. 40; Ewig 1976c.
such political integration was already present in his day, when neither the fragmented structure nor the geographical scale of the Merovingian polity precluded regular connections between the royal courts and the cities on the periphery of their realms, as is evident, for example, in the late sixth-century history of Marseille and the routine implication of its leading magnates, Bishop Theodore and the *patricius* Dynamius, in the political intrigues of the 580s.\(^{68}\) What was changing was the frame of reference in which such aristocratic manoeuvring took place, which now became politically but not geographically circumscribed, as elites pursued power and legitimation within their respective *regna* rather than exploiting differences between kings to frit between them, as they had in the run-up to Andelot. Indeed, some of the most prominent seventh-century magnates, such as Desiderius of Cahors and his peers, grew up within this framework through their formation at the royal court; after distinguished administrative careers, they might eventually return to their home *civitates* as bishops, but they never forgot the shared, kingdom-wide identity that tied them to their fellow-alumni.\(^{69}\) The outcome was a species of consensus politics built around the regular participation of the aristocracy in the business of the court, where their rivalries were played out before their peers under the ultimate authority of the king, as outlined in the narrative sources and epitomised in surviving *placita*, with their extensive witness-lists and formulaic assertions of collective royal and aristocratic judgement: *proinde nos taliter una cum nostris proceribus constetit decrevisse.*\(^{70}\)

This centralisation of political practice around the courts coincided, as we have seen, with the delegation of royal rights at the local level directly to lay or ecclesiastical landholders, whose interests might be scattered through a number of *civitates*. The relationship between local and central authority – or between the *pagus* and the palace, as the formularies had it – was by now mediated predominantly through personal rather than territorial relationships. The seventh-century polity came to be integrated not by the cities and their associated remnants of the ancient administrative infrastructure, but by the aristocracy itself. It had come, finally, to be based upon their land- and office-holding, and not upon a city-based bureaucratic framework that had outlived its usefulness.

At much the same time, and in a further symptom of their diminished significance, the cities finally lost any privileged connection with the representation as well as the exercise of secular power, as Frankish kings began to base themselves primarily upon their rural estates. The late sixth-century Merovingians had retained some sense of the symbolic resonance of urban settings – seemingly strongest, as usual, in the aspirational Childebert, with his persistent designs upon

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69 Desiderius, *epist.* 1, 11. Some of the distinguished witnesses in 654 to *ChLA* XIII, 558 in favour of St-Denis seem similarly to be early-career courtiers, but would end up on opposite sides in the faction-fighting of the mid-670s.
70 Fouracre 1986, Fouracre 1998. Marculf 1, 37 gives the formula regularly reproduced in extant *placita*.
Paris and his plans for urban public entertainments — but, again from the pivotal reign of Lothar II, they decisively shifted the focus of their activities to rural palaces round about. Clichy was certainly not far from Paris, as Fredegar helpfully points out, but in terms of political culture it was a world away from the conventional urban framing of dynastic power that contemporary Visigothic and Lombard rulers were simultaneously making considerable efforts to reaffirm. Dagobert I consolidated his father’s preference for Clichy, and while he and subsequent rulers would still occasionally grace urban stages, in particular for their occasional forays into Burgundy, the disassociation between cities and royal residence would become sufficiently complete within Francia for Charlemagne to opt to dignify Aachen, with its tempting baths, rather than establishing himself in one of the existing civitas-capitals. In shifting the emphasis of their activities to the countryside, the Frankish kings were probably adopting the existing practice of secular magnates, who appear predominantly to have been rurally-based, again in conspicuous contrast to their urban Italian counterparts. Precise evidence for their whereabouts is nevertheless somewhat vague by comparison, not least because the dispersed nature of their holdings probably encouraged itineration; surviving wills show how their extensive property portfolios continued to include town-houses and other urban holdings alongside rural estates. In the absence of much evidence for elite investment in elaborate rural residences, meanwhile, the clearest indication of a shift in the focus of their investment and self-legitimation from the cities out into the countryside again occurs in the seventh century with the explosion of monastic foundations on rural estates, as the aristocracy embraced a vehicle for displaying their piety that did not require them to yield up control over the lands that were the basis of their family power.

This ruralisation of royal and aristocratic power may have diminished the pre-eminence of the civitates, but it could scarcely spell the end of the cities as centres for the local exercise of power and patronage, since one powerful component of the magnate community, the episcopate, remained resolutely urban. The bishops were, moreover, the foremost beneficiaries of the royal delegation of local powers and, with the eclipse of the count, assumed ever-greater responsibility for the administration of their cities, including the upkeep of the city-walls and the provi-

71 Greg. Tur. Franc. 4, 22; 5, 1; 5, 17; 6, 27.
72 Barbier 1990, esp. 261–269.
73 Fredegar 4, 53; Velázquez/Ripoll 2000; Brogiolo 2000.
74 Burgundy: e.g. Fredegar 4, 58; 4, 90; Passio Leudegarii 9; Fredegar, Cont. 48. Aachen: Nelson 2001; Wickham 2009, 78–80.
75 Wickham 2005, 605–608, though in pursuit of the clear contrast with Italy, this risks pinning the Frankish aristocracy down beyond what the fragmentary evidence permits, and more decisively than is necessary.
76 E.g. Bertram, Test. 24, 25, 30, 36, 71. Alongside the evidence for urban elite residences assembled in Claude 1997, 331–333, see e.g. Pardessus 2. no. 406 for inlustri viri acknowledged as resident in Reims in 686.
sion of public services. 78 The overarching extent of their prerogatives, and the zeal with which they might be exercised, is most obvious in the corpus of material associated with Bishop Desiderius of Cahors, but it is incidentally reflected in seventh-century Frankish hagiography in general, which confirms by its allusions to the deadly rivalries swirling around episcopal office that it had lost nothing of its attraction. 79 With power went danger, as bishops continued to be obliged simultaneously to negotiate the pitfalls of central and local politics; it was only when the centripetal pull upon aristocratic competition exerted by the royal courts temporarily weakened in the early eighth century that episcopal office could sometimes emerge within the interstices of centralised authority as an effective basis for the exercise of a measure of local autonomy. 80 In the interim, nevertheless, the spiritual jurisdiction of the bishop over his civitas had been coming under pressures similar to those which had undermined the count, especially once any existing weakening of his properly territorial prerogatives in the face of proprietary interests (potentially including those of his fellow-bishops) began to be exacerbated by the seventh-century proliferation of aristocratic monastic foundations, since these were frequently backed by concessions of immunity granted by rulers supportive of the desire of their founders to free their religious investments from episcopal control. 81 This Klosterpolitik certainly extended the permeation of personal lordship based on landholding further into the spiritual sphere, although the resulting ‘deteriorialisation’ of episcopal authority would prove neither so thorough nor so decisive as that which vitiated the jurisdiction of the counts. 82 But it did mean that while the bishop remained a city-based focus of considerable social power, the coherence of the civitas as a community of worship under his direction was partially undermined by the growing numbers of churches and monasteries, both urban and rural, that aspired to some measure of independence from his authority; this was a trend that the Carolingians would strive, not altogether successfully, to reverse. 83

In concluding, it would be as well variously to qualify the significance of those changes that we have seen to cluster around the early seventh century. First, many – perhaps most – of the ancient civitas-capitals retained a pre-eminent role as the centres around which local society revolved, just as the royal courts did for the operation of the regna as a whole. Despite a levelling-down of the settlement hierarchy that meant they were facing increased competition for this pre-eminence from other categories of central place, the cities would retain a range of

78 Durliat 1996, effectively countering the argument of Prinz 1974 that bishops had usurped these rights.
79 Durliat 1979. For rivalries, see e.g. Passio Leudegarii 2, Passio Praejecti 12–14.
80 Fouracre 1990 for the interaction of royal and local politics, with Fouracre 2003 on the sometimes fatal consequences for bishops; for episcopal independence, Kaiser 1981.
81 Ewig 1976d.
82 For the process of ‘deterriorialisation’ over the longer-term see Lauwers and Ripart 2007, though they see it as having a significant impact from an earlier date than is argued here.
83 Mazel 2009.
functions that more specialised rural monasteries, emergent emporia, and royal palaces, let alone aristocratic estate-centres, would prove unable to match. They too were beginning to benefit from the economic upturn of the later Merovingian period, not least by virtue of their nodal locations in transport- and communications-networks, which facilitated the roles as regular market-centres and providers of specialist services to their hinterlands that still generally differentiated them archaeologically from other categories of settlement. Even in the absence of a permanently resident aristocracy, the cities remained privileged theatres of public action, as shown by the charter evidence that begins to emerge in the eighth century for the role of centres such as Mainz in structuring regional social and economic networks. It was in the cities, above all, that the politics of land were formally played out, in the purchases, sales, exchanges, and bequests documented in charters and given due witness by local elites, who no doubt periodically stayed in their town-houses for precisely such purposes. It was also in the cities that competition between these elites for local status was still intensely pursued in rivalries over episcopal office or in familiar and by now substantially Christianised patterns of patronage. The spread of monasticism to the countryside in no way precluded parallel investment by elites in urban churches and monasteries, driven by the same pursuit of present legitimation and future salvation, and exemplified by foundations such as the communities for women implanted by Eligius and Ebroin within, respectively, the walls of Paris and Soissons, or by the substantial legacies to existing urban religious institutions that feature prominently in seventh-century wills. The accumulation by the end of the Merovingian period of dozens of such establishments in cities from which suitably comprehensive documentation survives – such as Metz, Le Mans, Clermont, or Auxerre – should not be rather dismissively regarded as evidence for the ‘clericalisation’ of the city to the exclusion of other, supposedly more properly urban functions, but rather as manifestations of the continued importance of cities as stages for competitive aristocratic munificence. To judge from later seventh-century urban-centred texts such as the Passio Leudegarii or Passio Praejecti, such competition had changed little in either its dynamics or its intensity since the days of Gregory of Tours, and, in Clermont at least, it was still being pursued by scions of the same elite families, whose posthumous translations might draw in a crowd like an

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84 Verhulst 2000. For model studies of changing regional settlement hierarchies in the Midi over the longer-term, see Schneider 2007, Schneider 2008.

85 For the textual evidence, see Claude 1985, esp. 45–56 for markets. For urban archaeologica
dical indications of later Merovingian economic revival, see Henning 2007, with Lebecq 1996, Lebecq 2000 for rather different perspectives on both the chronology of these developments and the place of the monasteries within them.


87 Eligius: Jonas, Vita Columbani 2, 10, Vita Eligii 1, 17; Ebroin: Pardessus 2, no. 355 (he also had a house in the city). ChLA 14, 594 is one such will, favouring a mixture of urban and rural churches in and around Paris.
assembled army, or, more suggestively, that one might expect to see on a market-
day.88

Secondly, the impact upon the built environment of cities of the changes ta-
taking place in the early seventh century was negligible by comparison with the
material transformations that had accompanied each of the three preceding phases
of Gallo-Roman urbanism. Since the civitates no longer carried any distinct mon-
umental identity as organs of secular administration, their loss of importance
within the operation of the Merovingian polity did not in itself have any funda-
mental topographical consequences. Instead, long since liberated from the con-
ventions and formal layouts of classical urbanism, but still bound by the possibili-
ties and problems presented by its massive monumental legacy, urban landscapes
continued slowly to evolve around the structuring elements of their walls and
churches. In this regard, the tension between the breaking down of the distinction
between urban and suburban encouraged by the spread of extra-mural religious
establishments, and its constant perpetuation by the city-walls was tending to
resolve itself in favour of the former. The specific outcomes in each case were
determined primarily by local topographical circumstances but, in general, the
field of action for urban communities grew more extensive – particularly when
substantial monastic communities developed upon their fringes – even as occupa-
tion within that expanded space became more discontinuous and incoherent, and
parts of it were given over to cultivation. These loose and polyfocal urban land-
scapes were very different from their Roman predecessors, but owed their origins
to the working out of trends that had been set in train in late Antiquity, not to
developments within the Merovingian period; they would be modified only by
developments that lie beyond the scope of this paper, such as renewed impera-
tives to fortification and the emergence of distinct urban lordships.

Finally, the eclipse of the civitas as an operational framework of administra-
tion in the early seventh century derived in part from its essential fragility. The
cities offered a ready-made framework for the extraction of resources to which
the rulers of post-imperial Gaul had defaulted in the absence of viable alternative
solutions to the perennial problem of exercising power over distance, and which
they used as the basis of their kingdoms through the sixth century, seeking to
sustain it through the agency of the comes civitatis, and even to expand it into the
novel sphere of military service. But this reliance on an essentially bureaucratic
framework of government was a sticking-plaster solution that came to prove in-
creasingly obsolete and anachronistic because it lacked the requisite machinery
and the social legitimacy to operate effectively. By achieving one of the aims of
their immediate predecessors at Andelot, the binding of leading aristocrats more
securely into their regna, the rulers of the early seventh-century Merovingian
polity were able to move to a system of rule based firmly on personal relations

88 Wood 1983; Vita Boniti 40, re the occasion of the translation of the saint’s remains: *tanta
erat populi cum clericis multitudo, ut exercitum coadunatum aut nundinas crederes cele-
brari.*
and the politics of land that could finally leave the mediation of their power through the *civitates* behind.

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