Salvian and the Bacaudae

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I. The Bacaudae

In 289 the Gallic orator Mamertinus, in a panegyric to Diocletian’s junior colleague Maximian, described how, when Maximian first arrived in Gaul, he had had to fight farmers who took on the garb of soldiers, ploughmen who became foot-soldiers and shepherds who fought as cavalrymen. Mamertinus, writing in the elevated language of panegyric, does not use a vulgar term like ‘Bacaudae’, which first appears in fourth-century historical sources. After their appearance under Maximian we hear nothing of Bacaudae for more than a hundred years. Then, in the fifth century, they suddenly appear again.

Unlike the references to third-century Bacaudae, which all relate to a single incident, those from the fifth century are spread over several decades and widely separated locations, from the Alps in the first decade of the century to Spain in the 450s. As well as sources which mention Bacaudae by name, we have a number which do not use the word but have been identified by modern historians as referring to them. All the references to the Bacaudae have one characteristic, however: they are extremely brief. The only generalizations that can be drawn from them with certainty are that those they call Bacaudae were to be found in rural

\[1\] Pan. Lat. X (II), 4, 3
\[2\] Aur. Vict. Caes. 39, 17–20; Eutr. 9, 20, 3; Jerome, Chron. 2303. These, dating from the mid to late fourth century, are not, of course, primary sources in their own right. They all depend on the lost historical work known as the Kaisergeschichte, which itself probably dates from the mid 350s, and certainly no earlier than c. 337 (Burgess 1995).
\[4\] Salvian, gub. 5, 21–26; Chron. Gall. a. 452, 117, 119, 133 and the works cited in n. 3 above.
\[5\] Zos. 6, 5, 2–3; Rut. Nam. 1, 213–216; Anon. Querolus 30 (ed. Jacquemard-Le Saos, p. 19); Merob. Paneg. 2, 8–22, 148–186; Constant. Vita Germani 28, 40; Sidon. carm. 7, 246–248. The Zosimus, Rutilius Namatianus, and Querolus passages relate to Armorica in the first two decades of the fifth century; those from Merobaudes, Sidonius, and the Vita Germani to the 430s and 440s.
areas and were engaged in some form of illegal violence. Those sources which refer to the background of the Bacaudae portray them as rustics: peasants or even slaves (such as the Gallic Chronicle of 452, which uses the word servitia). Others are less specific: they merely depict individuals or groups engaged in violence and use the word ‘Bacaudae’ to refer to them, without defining it. Their rural character is unambiguous: no ancient source ever associates any element of the urban population with the Bacaudae. The aims behind their rebellion are not even hinted at in most of the sources, and some of those which have been held to be most indicative of them by modern historians (such as Rutilius Namatianus) may not refer to the Bacaudae at all. However, those sources which say something about their aims (notably Salvian and the Chronicle of 452) imply that they were hostile to the existing social order.

For the most of the twentieth century, the view that the Bacaudae were peasants rebelling against the social system was accepted more or less without challenge. The best representation of this point of view in Anglophone scholarship can be found in the writings of E. A. Thompson. Thompson argued that the revolt of the Bacaudae was a direct response to the oppression and exploitation of peasants by landowners, and that the Bacaudae had a positive programme to overthrow and replace the established social system. Thompson’s interpretation of the Bacaudae as a phenomenon of class conflict is faithful to their portrayal in many of the sources, but Thompson extended his claims far beyond what these sources actually attest.

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6 Sánchez León 1996a provides a full collection of the sources for the Bacaudae, together with extensive discussion of each text; for his discussion of the general problems relating to the sources, see pp. 19–22.
7 Chron. Gall. a. 452, 117.
8 This is the case with Hydatius’ references to Bacaudae in mid fifth-century Spain, and Zosimus’ reference to Bacaudae plundering Gothic federate troops in the Alps in 407 or 408 (n. 3 above).
9 For a discussion of the vocabulary used by ancient writers to describe the Bacaudae, see Sánchez León 1996b, 43–44. Cf. also Wickham 2005, 530.
10 Noted by Wickham 2005, 530–532.
11 The Bacaudae were, predictably, a major focus of publication by ancient historians in the Soviet bloc: references to a number of such publications can be found in Szádeczky-Kardoss 1968. For similar perspectives in western scholarship, see e.g. Dockés 1980.
13 Most forcefully at Thompson 1952, 18–20.
14 For critiques of Thompson’s viewpoint see Okamura 1988, 288–293; Drinkwater 1984, 369–370; and of Marxist portrayals of the Bacaudae in general, Sánchez Léon 1996b, 70–71.
15 See e.g. Thompson 1952, 17: ‘Bearing in mind how scantly are our authorities for fifth-century history and how reluctant they. are to record the struggles of the oppressed classes,
A wholly different interpretation of the Bacaudae was put forward in 1985 by Raymond Van Dam, who argued that they did not seek to rebel against either the local upper classes or the Roman state, but were the followers of local leaders who found themselves exercising power in times of disruption, insecurity, and the withdrawal of official government structures. Van Dam explained the implications of class-conflict in some of the primary sources as being purely rhetorical: an attempt by the imperial authorities to discredit these local leaders by portraying them as nothing but rebellious peasants or bandits. As for the reason why such discrediting should be necessary, Van Dam argued that in order to exercise power credibly at even a local level, leaders were obliged to adopt ‘the vocabulary of imperial authority’, thus inadvertently appearing to the imperial authorities as usurping emperors who had to be crushed, even though they themselves had no such intention.

Van Dam’s central idea, that the Bacaudae should best be interpreted not as a social revolutionary movement, but as a phenomenon produced by the weakening control of the centre over the periphery, has been accepted and built upon in subsequent research (primarily that of John Drinkwater). In the form in which Van Dam presented it, it was weakened by being attached to some untenable ideas, such as his claim that it was possible for those who exercised power at a local level to drift into becoming a rebel or usurper without intending it, a claim which is wholly at odds with the actual evidence relating to usurpation in late antiquity. Van Dam’s claim that the depiction of the Bacaudae as rebels from the lower classes was merely an expression of propaganda against perceived usurpers also relies excessively on texts such as the panegyric of Mamertinus and does not take account of the fact that many of the authors who are most vocal about the Bacaudae – Salvian, the author of the *Chronicle of 452*, Constantius, Hydatius –
are provincial writers with no known links to court circles, whose work is difficult
to interpret as an expression of imperial propaganda, or even a second-hand re-
fection of it.\textsuperscript{23}

However, purged of these more dubious elements, Van Dam’s observation
that the Bacaudae are associated with the loss of effective power by the imperial
government in peripheral areas, and the consequent devolution of power to local
figures, reflects the wider historical context in fifth-century Gaul and Spain, and
has an obvious plausibility. It has been developed by John Drinkwater,\textsuperscript{24} who has
argued that in both the third and the fifth centuries the disruption caused by bar-
barian invasions and civil war affected parts of Gaul to such an extent that the
structure of Roman administration was effectively destroyed, and the established
upper class would have been largely removed with it, through withdrawal or dis-
position, leading figures lower down the social order (at ‘the highest feasible
level’ as Drinkwater puts it) to gain \textit{de facto} local power.\textsuperscript{25} In some cases, such as
Armorica in the early fifth century, this situation may have lasted for many years,
leading to the situation becoming institutionalized. The reimposition of imperial
control, involving the suppression of independent local leaders and the restoration
of such burdens as taxation, would itself have provoked opposition. In other
words, the Bacaudae drew both on popular support and the leadership of locally
powerful figures, but their conflict with the Roman state was essentially reactive
and defensive: neither an active rebellion against the Roman social system, as
claimed by Thompson, nor a confused situation in which merely exercising local
power made people look like rebels, as argued by Van Dam, but an attempt by the
inhabitants of areas which had become autonomous to resist the reimposition of
imperial rule and its burdens. The 1996 monograph on the Bacaudae by Juan
Carlos Sánchez Léon, largely accepts the framework laid down by Drinkwater,
though continuing to argue in favour of the idea that the Bacaudae wished active-
ly to reject certain elements of Roman society (notably Roman law).\textsuperscript{26}

One element that should be stressed about this picture of the context in which
the Bacaudae appear is that it remains compatible with a strong element of social
conflict. One of the most important features of the Roman administrative and tax-
system was that local elites were heavily implicated in it, and were themselves
major beneficiaries from it. The removal of Roman power-structures from an area
was therefore harmful to the interests of the local landowning elite, from whom it
removed both a substantial source of income and the legal system which protected
their property and their status as members of legally-privileged social groups such

\textsuperscript{23} Van Dam still has some advocates on this point: see e.g. Halsall 2007, 218, 244.
\textsuperscript{24} The key ideas are expressed at Drinkwater 1984, 367–368; Drinkwater 1989, 200; Drink-
\textsuperscript{25} Drinkwater 1989, 200.
\textsuperscript{26} Sánchez Léon 1996b, 73–74, 78–80.
as *curiales* (members of city councils) or *honorati* (former officials). Their interests were served by the rapid restoration of existing social and administrative structures; those whose interests were damaged by such a restoration, to the extent that they were prepared to resist it by force, would precisely be those who were among the losers in the existing social system. While this group need not have been confined to peasants, it is likely to have consisted of social groups well below the existing elite.

The clearest exposition of this feature of late-Roman society, and its relation to the Bacaudae is presented by Chris Wickham. Wickham agrees with Drinkwater and other recent researchers in placing the Bacaudae in the context of weakening control by the state, but argues that the true significance of this was that it facilitated revolt by peasants who would otherwise have been able to evade burdens such as taxation only by more passive means, such as flight or by seeking the protection of patrons. Wickham’s is also the only account which points out the extent to which Salvian, the only ancient author who professes to diagnose the reasons for revolt by the Bacaudae, attributes it directly to the oppressiveness of the Roman tax-system. While it cannot necessarily be extended to the situation of the early fifth century, let alone to the Bacaudae of the 280s, this model seems to me to the one which most clearly fits the situation in the 430s and 440s, the period when Salvian was writing.

II. Salvian

The longest single ancient account of the Bacaudae is to be found in *De gubernatione dei*, the tract on the fate of the Roman empire written in the early to mid 440s by the Gallic priest Salvian. This fact is testimony in itself to the sparseness of the sources, since Salvian’s discussion fills little more than a page of text in a modern printed edition. Furthermore, Salvian mentions the Bacaudae in the course of an argument focussed on other issues, and in which accurately describing their identity was not a priority.

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27 Cf. Wickham 2005, 168: ‘The aristocracies of the empire, both central and local, were too imbricated with the state, from which they derived all their essential distinguishing marks, not to be altered totally when the state changed.’
29 Wickham 2005, 529, 532.
30 Wickham 2005, 532; cf. also 62–64.
32 Salvian’s specific discussion of the Bacaudae occurs at Salvian, *gub.* 5, 21–26, but it forms part of a wider discussion (5, 17–45) of the social consequences of Roman taxation, and can only be understood in this context.
The central argument of *De gubernatione dei* is that the barbarian invasions were a punishment inflicted by God on the Roman people for their sins.\(^{33}\) This claim rests on a number of presuppositions. One is the idea that Christian society had declined from a previous state, in which Christians had striven sincerely to obey all God’s commandments, into the corrupt and sinful society of Salvian’s own time. Salvian makes remarks about this idealized past which show that he placed it in the early Christian period.\(^{34}\) He presents no historical account of how Christian society had changed from one state to another, but merely juxtaposes the present and the past. Salvian also juxtaposes an idealized Roman past with the present, in a manner parallel to that of his treatment of the Christian past.\(^{35}\) As with the church, he uses conventional images of the moral superiority of the early Romans in order to provide a contrast with the corruption he portrays in present day society; once again, he juxtaposes the present state of Roman society with what had existed in the past, without giving any account of how and when it had changed from one state to another.\(^{36}\)

Finally, Salvian’s argumentation in the later books of *De gubernatione dei* rests on a contrast between the corruption of the Romans and the superior morality of the barbarians, especially the Goths and the Vandals. At the time when Salvian wrote, these were the only two barbarian peoples in the West which had adopted Christianity, and they were also the ones which had been most successful in conquering territory from the Romans. Salvian repeatedly uses the barbarians as an ideal to be held against the Romans: they carry out the demands of Christianity in the way that the Romans no longer do.\(^{37}\) I have argued elsewhere that Salvian’s portrayal of the barbarians is determined by his belief that the growth of their power at Roman expense was only explicable by their role as God’s instruments, and that God’s favour proved their worthiness.\(^{38}\) He is, however, very much alive to the more traditional use of the comparison of barbarians and Romans as a piece of provocative rhetoric.

In order to demonstrate that the barbarian invasions were a punishment for the Romans’ sins, Salvian devotes most of *De gubernatione dei* to an exposition of these sins. After an introductory section focussed mainly on the issue of divine punishment in the Bible (*De gub.* 1–2), Salvian builds up his argument in an episodic fashion, denouncing a particular sin, portraying it as ubiquitious in the Ro-

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33 Stated directly at e.g. Salvian, *gub.* 4, 54.
34 E.g. Salvian, *gub.* 3, 22.
35 See Salvian, *gub.* 1, 10–12; 6, 50–52, 98–99; 7, 2, as well as the passage in Book 5 under discussion.
37 Salvian’s portrayal of the barbarians is the subject of a large, but now mostly obsolete literature. The best treatment of the general character of his portrayal is Maas 1992; for a discussion going into more detail about his argumentation, see Lambert 2000. References to older literature can be found in these articles and in Badewien 1980, 127–138.
man world, and then moving on to the next one. Hence Book 3 focuses on various everyday (but, Salvian would say, no less serious) sins such as lying and stealing, Book 4 on swearing oaths and various forms of impiety, Book 5 on social injustice, Book 6 on the games and the theatre. As the work progresses, Salvian devotes a steadily greater amount of attention to the contrast between Romans and barbarians, an issue which is left in the background in the early books, but becomes absolutely central from Book 5 onwards, until in Books 7 and 8, his argument is based entirely on direct comparisons between the morality of the Romans and that of the Goths and Vandals. Salvian’s attacks on social oppression and injustice therefore have the same function in the overall structure of *De gubernatione dei* as his denunciations of swearing oaths (4, 71–77) or going to the theatre (6, 10–38): they illustrate the extent of Roman sinfulness. Book 5 is the only book of *De gubernatione dei* which focuses on social injustice, though there are brief discussions of the issue in other books. 39

**III. Salvian’s immediate historical context**

Salvian was writing in the early 440s, in the aftermath of the fall of Carthage to the Vandals, and the defeat by the Goths of the Roman general Litorius, the last datable events mentioned in *De gubernatione dei*, which both occurred in 439 (*De gub. 6, 68–9; 7, 39–45; 7, 94*). His work is therefore roughly contemporary with the Bacaudic revolt (or revolts) in Armorica in the 430s and 440s mentioned in the anonymous *Gallic Chronicle of 452* and in the life of Germanus of Auxerre by Constantius of Lyon. 40 The chronological framework has to be taken from the *Chronicle*, which states that in the twelfth regnal year of Valentinian III (equivalent to A.D. 435) ‘Gallia ulterior’ seceded from unity with the Roman empire under a leader named Tibatto, and that beginning from that territory, almost all the slaves (servitia) of Gaul conspired in a Bacaudic revolt. 41 Two years later it states that the revolt of the Bacaudae (commotio Bacaudarum) had been suppressed, Tibatto captured and the other leaders taken prisoner or killed, and that subsequently, with Gaul now pacified (there had also been wars with the Goths and Burgundians), Aetius had returned to Italy. 42 Later it states, without mentioning the Bacaudae, that the lands of Gallia ulterior had been given by Aetius to the Alans, to divide with the inhabitants, but that when there was resistance

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41 *Chron. Gall. a.* 452, 117: Gallia ulterior Tibattonem principem rebellionis secuta a Romana societate discersit, a quo tracto initio omnia paene Galliarum servitia in Bacaudam conspiraver. The author uses the noun Bacauda to denote the whole revolt rather than an individual rebel.
42 *Chron. Gall. a.* 452, 119, 123.
against them they had expelled the landowners and taken possession by force. Finally, in about 448, it states that Eudoxius, a doctor, described as having ‘wicked but able talents’ had fled to the Huns after taking part in a Bacoaudic rebellion.

These details are filled out to some extent by the life of Bishop Germanus of Auxerre, written by Constantius of Lyon in the 470s. This refers to a revolt in Armorica, which caused Aetius to turn the region over to be ravaged by the Alans, only for Germanus to intervene and dissuade the Alan king from acting. Germanus subsequently travels to Italy to persuade Aetius or the emperor to spare Armorica (a journey which is associated by Constantius with an attempt by Germanus to gain a remission of taxes). Constantius declares that he would have succeeded, except that at the last moment, the ‘fickle and undisciplined people’ renewed their previous rebellion as a result of ‘the perfidy of Tibatto’.

The *Vita Germani* provides no explicit dates in its narrative at all, but from internal evidence the latter events are usually dated to about 448, so are contemporary with the revolt mentioned by the *Chronicle* which involved the doctor, Eudoxius. A further source which is much less circumstantial in its reference to events, but is contemporary, is Merobaudes’ second panegyric to Aetius, delivered in 446, which refers in general terms to a revolt in Armorica which had now been suppressed.

It will be evident that the precise chronology of these events is uncertain, and there are a number of possible inconsistencies in the accounts of different sources. These are issues which are still disputed, and it is not my intention to try to resolve them here. The evidence is substantial enough, however, to show that Salvian was writing in a period during which there were repeated revolts in Armorica or *Gallia ulterior* which the sources attribute to the Bacoaudae. Salvian does not give any information about the events of these revolts or the individuals involved, confining himself to making generalizations about the motives of the Bacoaudae, but the events must form the background to his text: in writing about the Bacoaudae, Salvian is not describing a timeless phenomenon, though his treatment tends to suggest this, but an urgent contemporary event.

43 Ibid., 127.
44 Ibid., 133.
45 *V. Germ.* 28
46 *V. Germ.* 19, 24.
47 *V. Germ.* 40: nisi Tibattonis perfidia mobilem et indisciplinatum populum ad rebellionem pristinam reuocasset.
48 Merobaudes, *Panegyricus Aetii* 2, 8–15. There is also a very brief reference by Sidonius Apollinaris to a revolt in Armorica: *Carmina* 7, 246–248.
49 For an attempted reconstruction, see Wood 2000, 533–534.
IV. Salvian’s attack on the Roman tax-system

By far the greater part of Salvian’s social criticism in Book 5 of De gubernatione dei is directed at the Roman tax-system and its consequences (5, 17–45). Salvian’s account of the Bacaudae (5, 19–26), forms part of this attack, as does his account of rural patronage and the plight of the coloni (5, 38–45). These issues are often discussed in isolation, but it cannot be emphasized too strongly that both are presented by Salvian as consequences of the operation of the tax-system.

Salvian begins by claiming that the tax-system is exploited by those who turn public taxation into their own private gain (5, 17, 25). He names those responsible for collecting taxes: at provincial level, governors and their staff (iudices and iudicibus obsequentes – 5, 17), at city level curiales, and especially the principes, the group of senior members of the curia who were responsible for organizing the collection of taxes in each city (5, 18; cf. also 5, 33). They force the poor and weak to bear the taxes of the rich (5, 28–29). Salvian subsequently adds two more specific claims: that the rich impose additional exactions (munera and indicationes) on the poor in order to pay the expenses of envoys (nuntii, epistolarii) from the imperial government (5, 30–31), and that they prevent the poor from benefitting from remissions of unpaid tax (5, 34–35). Salvian insists again that all the injustices he has described are characteristic of the Romans but alien to the barbarians, as can be proved, he argues, by the fact that ordinary Romans prefer to live under barbarian rule (5, 36–37). Finally, Salvian goes on to claim that those small landowners who are unwilling to abandon their land and possessions have no protection against the depredations of the tax-collectors except to put themselves under the ‘protection’ of a powerful landowner, thus losing both their property and their free status (5, 38–45).

Salvian’s specific claims about the abuses of the tax-system are embedded within lengthy passages of rhetorical development on the themes of the cruelty of those who benefit from the system, variously characterised as tyrants (5, 18), bandits (5, 18; 5, 25–26), wild beasts (5, 18; 5, 25), and murderers (5, 24, 26), and of the weakness and vulnerability of their victims, characterised as widows and orphans (5, 18, 21), sancti – in Salvian’s usage this encompasses anyone who has devoted their life to religion (5, 18), and the poor (5, 21; 5, 28–36; 38–39, 42). By utilising such rhetoric to the utmost, Salvian is able to convey a powerful image of Roman society as bitterly and cruelly divided, in which the strong prey

51 The end of Book 5 (5, 52–61) attacks priests who behave like secular potentes. The beginning of the book (5, 1–14) is a discussion of Gothic and Vandal Arianism, and is not directly relevant to what follows.


53 The general claim that the poor bear the taxes of the rich, and the more specific allegation that the rich ensure that only they and not the poor benefit from remission of taxes had been made briefly by Salvian in the preceding book (4, 30–31).

54 On what Salvian meant when he referred to pauperes, see Grey 2006.
mercilessly on the weak: the opposite of the situation that should exist in this nominally Christian society. In structural terms, this deepens Salvian’s general indictment of the sinfulness of Roman society, and emphasizes its contrast with the united society of the barbarians.

The hyperbole of Salvian’s language is obvious. However, the references to actual officials and their roles in tax-collection which are embedded in his tirade appear to be factually accurate. Within the curial order, he notes the central role of the principales, who are named directly at 5, 18, and are almost certainly alluded to in a subsequent passage (5, 33) in which Salvian imagines an ordinary member of the curia complaining about the pauci potentestes who take all the decisions. The principales were a group of the wealthiest and most senior members of the curia, who had overall supervision of its activities, and especially of the organization of tax-collecting. Salvian’s claims about them reflect their power over the curia as a whole, and is reflected in the legal sources.

Salvian also refers to the exactores (5, 28, 43), who were the officials responsible for pursuing tax arrears, but came to gain greater responsibility for the administration of the whole process of tax-collection. Some evidence demonstrably shows exactores being drawn from the curiales, though the role may also have been taken by officials or ex-officials from the offices of provincial

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55 On Salvian’s paternalistic conception of social relations see Lambert 1999, 121–126.
56 The fundamental account of the assessment and collection of taxes in the later Roman empire remains Jones 1964, 448–469, 727–731. See also Delmaire 1989; Laniado 2002, 103–129; and for a discussion specific to Salvian’s evidence, Lepelley 1983, 148–154. On the social consequences of Roman taxation, see Wickham 2005, 57–72, 527–529.
57 On the principales, see Jones 1964, 730–731 (“a kind of executive committee of the council, which tended to usurp its functions”), 757, 774; Lepelley 1983, 144 (“Ils jouaient un rôle essentiel dans l’établissement de l’assiette de l’impôt dans la cité, donc dans la répartition du fardeau fiscal entre les contribuables”); Laniado 2002, 201–211.
58 The supervisory role of the principales in tax-collection is stated by CTh 8, 15, 5, 3, probably of 365 (officiales atque municipes, qui actiones quascumque susceperint [...] insuper principales, a quibus distributionum omnium forma procedit). Other significant laws defining the role and privileges of principales include CTh 7, 6, 1 (365); 9, 35, 2 (376), 6 (399); 12, 1, 171 (412).
59 CTh 11, 16, 4 (328) refers to one of the issues about which Salvian complains, principales corruptly allotting the burden of munera to their own benefit. Other abuses by principales appear in CTh 12, 1, 79 (375); 12, 3, 2 (423); 13, 11, 10 (399) – this list is not exhaustive.
60 Major items of legislation regarding the duties (and abuses) of exactores are CTh 10, 17, 3 (392); 11, 1, 3 (336); 11, 1, 14 (372/374); 11, 7, 4 (327); 11, 7, 16 (401); 11, 7, 20 (412); 11, 26, 2 (400); 12, 6, 20 (386), 22 (386).
61 On exactores see Lepelley 1983, 144: “Si sa fonction spécifique était d’exiger le paiement des arrières d’impôt, il acquit rapidement une compétence plus large et devint le responsable municipal des affaires fiscales”; Delmaire 1989, 63: “tous les textes qui parlent avec précision de l’activité des exactores montrent qu’ils interviennent après la levée et après le collecteur, pour réclamer (exigere) les arriérés et les impayés.”
62 As in the municipal album of Timagad, where two senior decurions are listed as exactores (Lepelley 1983, 144); also CTh 12, 6, 22 (386), which refers specifically to exactores being drawn from the curia.
governors.\textsuperscript{63} The \textit{exactor}'s task of pursuing arrears in taxation self-evidently gave him particular scope for illicitly extracting wealth.\textsuperscript{64} The fact that the job was seen as a desirable one is attested by the fact that emperors had to legislate to limit the time it could be held,\textsuperscript{65} and (repeatedly) to prohibit imperial officials such as \textit{agentes in rebus} and the staff of palatine ministries from undertaking it.\textsuperscript{66} While Salvian therefore directs some general rhetorical fire at the \textit{curia} as a whole, his more specific claims identify the specific individuals who held the greatest power in the system and had the greatest capacity to manipulate it.\textsuperscript{67}

The last set of officials singled out by Salvian for condemnation are the \textit{iu-dices}, or provincial governors (5, 17, 24–25).\textsuperscript{68} Governors had a general supervisory role in the collection of taxes and it must be this which Salvian primarily has in mind, given the context in which he refers to them. It is worth noting his complaint about the oppressive behaviour not merely of \textit{iudices} but of \textit{iudicibus obsequentes} (5, 17), in light of the suggestion by Delmaire that the staffs of governors’ offices were directly involved in the exaction of tax arrears.\textsuperscript{69} However, the role of governors as judges is probably not absent from his mind, given the near ubiquity of complaints of judicial corruption in late-antique literature.\textsuperscript{70}

Salvian’s rhetoric in passages such as his attack on taxation and the role of \textit{curiales} in tax-collection has often been dismissed as hyperbole, and this is evidently true to an extent.\textsuperscript{71} But it should be noted that the terms in which he refers to abuses in the tax system are common not merely to much literature of the time, but to many of the laws themselves.\textsuperscript{72} Even language that appears merely to be rhetorical may have a more specific meaning: for example, when Salvian talks about ‘those who make public taxation into private gain and fiscal debts into private profits’ (5, 17, 25), his language appears unspecific.\textsuperscript{73} However, it closely parallels the language of a law which condemns a particular abuse: the practice of tax-collectors or \textit{exactores} lending poorer tax payers money to pay their taxes; a

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\item[63] Argued by Delmaire 1989, 63–64.
\item[64] One of the powers specifically granted to \textit{exactores} was to sell the land of fiscal debtors: \textit{CTh} 11, 7, 4 (327).
\item[65] \textit{CTh} 12, 6, 22 (386); Lepelley 1983, 151.
\item[66] E.g. \textit{CTh} 8, 8, 6 (395); 11, 7, 16 (401), 17 (408); 12, 10, 1 (373).
\item[67] Lepelley 1983, 151–152, 154.
\item[68] On governors in general, see Jones 1964, 374–401.
\item[69] Delmaire 1989, 63–64.
\item[70] On corrupt governors see Jones 1964, 399–401, 479. For a survey of the kinds of accusations of judicial malpractice and corruption made in the period, see Harries 1999, 153–171.
\item[71] See e.g. Badewien 1980, 103, condemning Salvian’s ‘indiscriminate’ attack on \textit{curiales}.
\item[72] In addition to the examples above, see \textit{CTh} 8, 11: an entire title of the Theodosian Code relating to the levying of illicit charges for the expenses of envoys and messengers (Salvian, \textit{gub.} 5, 30–31).
\item[73] \[\ldots\] \textit{quibus exactio publica peculiaris est praeda, qui fiscali debiti titulos faciunt quaestus esse privatos} (5, 17); \textit{qui actionis publicae nomen in quaestus proprii emolumenta verterunt et indictiones tributarias praedas suas esse fecerunt} (5, 25).
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\end{footnotesize}
public debt then literally became a private debt, on which the lender could exact interest, and which was not cancelled out even if there was a remission of taxes.\footnote{CTh 11, 28, 10 (415): \textit{Indulgentiam [...] nonnulli visi sunt in suum compendium rapinam-que convertere, ut fient privata debita, quae fuerant publica.} The indulgentia was a remission of outstanding taxes.}

What should be emphasized in Salvian’s attack, as regards the Bacaudae, is his insistence throughout that it is the oppressiveness and violence associated with the tax-system which have driven them to revolt, not, for example, the general treatment of tenants by landowners. It was the interaction between taxation and private power which drove people to revolt or to flee.\footnote{Cf. Wickham 2005, 64: “One does not have to believe Salvian as an accurate reporter to be struck by the fact that, for him, as for other writers, taxation defined and framed rural oppression. Contrast medieval societies, where such oppression was overwhelmingly seen as the work of unjust lords, not state officials, until well into the fourteenth century.”}

V. Salvian’s account of the Bacaudae

Salvian’s attack on the fiscal system contains not merely an account of its evils, however, but of how its victims responded to it, a theme which he introduces at an early stage in the discussion:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Inter haec uastantur pauperes, uidiau gemun tum, orphani procu lanc tur, in tantum ut multi eorum et non obscurs natalibus editi et liberaliter instituti ad hostes fugiant, ne persecutionis publicae adflictione moriantur, quaerentes scilicet apud barbaros Romanam humanitatem, quia apud Romanos barbarum inhumanitatem ferre non possunt.}
\end{quote}

Among all this the poor are laid waste, widows groan, orphans are trampled down, to such an extent that many of them, including those who are not of obscure birth and have had a liberal education, flee to the enemy, so that they should not die through the affliction of public persecution. They seek Roman humanity among the barbarians because they cannot bear barbaric inhumanity among the Romans.

The first response to fiscal oppression, therefore, is simple flight to territory outside the control of the Romans (the most obvious candidate for such territory in Salvian’s southern Gallic milieu being the Visigothic kingdom in Aquitaine). This point is reiterated by Salvian throughout his attack (the most notable passages being 5, 21–24 and 5, 36–37) and is used as one of the key items in his depiction of the sickness in Roman society. But after a brief discussion of the willingness of escaping Romans to put up with such cultural differences among the barbarians as different standards of personal hygiene (5, 21), Salvian introduces a new element:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Itaque passim uel ad Gothos uel ad Bacaudas uel ad alios ubique dominantes barbaros migrant, et commigrasse non paenitet; malunt enim sub specie captiuitatis}
\end{quote}
uiuere liberi quam sub specie libertatis esse captiui. Itaque nomen ciuium Romano-
rum, aliquando non solum magno aestimatum sed magno emptum, nunc ultro repudi-
atur ac fugitur, nec uile tantum sed etiam abominabile paene habetur. 5, 23: Et quod
esse maius testimonium Romanae iniquitatis potest quam quod plerique, et honesti et
nobles et quibus Romanus status summo et splendori esse debuit et honori, ad hoc
tamen Romanae iniquitatis crudelitate compulsi sunt ut nolint esse Romani?

5, 22: So on all sides they migrate to the Goths, or the Bacaudae, or the other every-
where-dominant barbarians, and do not regret migrating; for they prefer to live free
under the appearance of captivity than to be captives under the appearance of liberty.
Thus the name of Roman citizen, once not only greatly valued but dearly bought, is
now willingly repudiated and abandoned, and is considered not only worthless but
even loathsome. 5, 23: And what greater testimony of Roman iniquity could there be
than that very many people, both honourable and noble, and for whom Roman status
should be the highest splendour and honour, are forced by the cruelty of Roman ini-
quity that they should be unwilling to be Roman?

The Bacaudae are therefore introduced as merely one facet of the wider phenom-
enon of flight to territories outside Roman control. Salvian introduces them in a
way that seems to imply that they were an actual barbarian gens, like the Goths.76
This has been interpreted as a sign of carelessness or confusion.77 However, I
believe it is a deliberate rhetorical choice by Salvian. By making the Bacaudae
and the Goths comparable entities, it stresses that migrating to them brings the
same benefits, but also the same loss: of citizenship and status as a Roman. The
issue of Romans being driven out of their own state is one of the key items of
Salvian’s indictment, and the parallel drawn here helps to establish that. Salvian
enlarges on this point in the next stage of his argument:

5, 23: Et hinc est quod etiam hi qui ad barbaros non confugiunt, barbari tamen esse
coguntur: scilicet ut est pars magna Hispanorum et non minima Gallorum, omnes
denique quos per uniuersum Romanum orbem fecit Romana iniquitas iam non esse
Romanos. 5, 24: De Bacaudis nunc mihi sermo est, qui per malos iudices et cruentos
spoliati, afflictii, necati, postquam ius Romanae libertatis amiserant, etiam honorem
Romani nominis perdiderunt. Et imputatur his infelicitas sua, imputamus his nomen
calamitatis suae, imputamus nomen quod ipsi fecimus. Vocamus rebelles, uocamus
perditos, quos esse compulimus criminosos.

5, 23: And so it happens that even those who do not flee to the barbarians are forced
to be barbarians: as it is with a great part of the Spanish and not the smallest part of
the Gauls: all those indeed through the whole Roman world whom Roman iniquity

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76 Of the three medieval manuscripts of *De gubernatione dei* (there are a number of late-
medieval apographs which have no significance for establishing the text) two have
*Bacaudas* in this sentence, and the third has *Abagaudas*, an obvious scribal error for
*Bacaudas* or *Bagaudas*. There is no reason to believe that Salvian originally wrote the
name of another barbarian *gens* here.

77 Drinkwater 1992, 209.
has caused not to be Roman. 5, 24: It’s about the Bacaudae that I am speaking now, who were despoiled, broken and murdered by bad and cruel judges, and after they had lost the right of Roman liberty, lost even the honour of the Roman name. And their own misery is blamed on them, we blame them for the name of their calamity, we blame them for the name which we ourselves made. We call them rebels, we call them depraved, those whom we compelled to be criminal.

Here Salvian defines the Bacaudae more closely: they are people who have not fled to the barbarians, but in some sense have been forced to become barbarians themselves. (What Salvian means by this will be discussed below.) Finally Salvian enlarges on the provocations that drove the Bacaudae to revolt:

5, 25: For by what other things were the Bacaudae made except by our iniquities, except by the corrupt acts of governors, except by the proscriptions and rapine of those who have turned the name of public taxation into the spoils of private profit, and have made fiscal tax-assessments into their own booty […]. 5, 26: And thus it has been brought about that the people strangled and killed through the robberies of the governors began to be like barbarians, because they were not being permitted to be Romans. They tolerated being what they were not, because they were not permitted to be what they had been; they were forced at length to defend their life, because they saw that they had already completely lost their liberty.

Salvian goes on to state that all the lower classes (he uses the quasi-legal term humiliores) would wish to become Bacaudae, and do not do so only because they are too weak (5, 26). With this, he ends his direct discussion of the Bacaudae. As noted above, he continues with his denunciation of the tax-system (5, 29–35), before ending his argument with a climactic restatement of his claim that the tax-system has driven most Roman citizens to prefer to live under barbarian rule (5, 37–38), concluding with the political point that the Romans should not be surprised that they cannot conquer the Goths, if ordinary Roman people prefer to live under Gothic rule (5, 37).

Salvian then goes on to deal with coloni and rural patrocinium (5, 38–45). It is impossible to discuss this passage in detail within the scope of the present article, but two points should be made: first that Salvian also attributes the phenomenon of rural patrocinium to the tax-system (people seek the protection of powerful patrons in an attempt to escape from the demands of the tax-collectors); secondly, that the passage continues to develop the theme that people are being stripped of
their status as Roman citizens: those who leave and become Bacaudae are turned into quasi barbari; those who stay and become coloni are turned into quasi slaves (5, 45).78

Salvian’s discussion of the Bacaudae focuses rhetorically on one point, which he emphasizes again and again: the scandal that Roman citizens have been forced out of the Roman state and turned into aliens.79 Nonetheless, certain factual claims come through in his argument: one of the most interesting is that while he repeatedly stresses the poverty of those who flee, he makes reference to those who were well-born and educated (5, 21), and were et honesti et nobiles (5, 23). The latter phrase cannot possibly refer to people of a social position lower than the curial class; Salvian is often guilty of hyperbole as a writer, but it is unlikely that he would have invented a point like this outright. He clearly knew or believed that those who fled from Roman-controlled territory included not merely peasant smallholders, but larger-scale, even curial, property owners who were unable to defend their own possessions against more powerful and predatory figures.80

This should not be overemphasized as a key to the composition of the Bacaudae.81 Salvian’s language does not necessarily imply that such people were typical of those fleeing to the barbarians and the Bacaudae, and he might have given the phenomenon undue emphasis in order to strike a stronger chord with his (presumably well-born and educated) audience. It should be contrasted with the language of the Chronicle of 452, which refers to Tibatto’s supporters as servitia. This is almost certainly a contemptuous reference to the lower classes in general, rather than specifically to slaves, but shows what the chronicler considered to be the social composition of the Bacaudae.82 But it can be taken as evidence that flight from Roman-controlled territory included members of the existing property classes who had been impoverished or expropriated.

When Salvian refers in general terms to escaping to the barbarians or the Bacaudae, in a Gallic context, he must be referring to the Gothic kingdom in Aquitaine (he refers explicitly to the Goths in the passage: 5, 22), and to the areas of north-western Gaul with which the Bacaudae are associated in other sources. Throughout his account, Salvian portrays joining the Bacaudae and fleeing to barbarian territory as being parallel responses to oppression. While he begins by referring to the Bacaudae as if they were a barbarian gens (5, 22), he then writes of them as those who have not fled to barbarian territory, but are forced to be barbarians, and that they form “a great part of the Spanish and not the smallest

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78 On Salvian’s description of the plight of coloni, see Krause 1987; Grey 2006; Goffart 2009.
79 See especially Salvian’s language in the passages quoted above from Salvian, gub. 5, 22–24.
80 For legislation discussing this kind of downward social mobility, see Nov. Maj. 7, 1 (458).
81 Cf. the remarks of Van Dam 1985, 43; Drinkwater 1992, 212–214.
82 Note that Salvian’s rhetorical stress on citizenship would be impossible if the Bacaudae had been regarded as consisting, or largely consisting, of slaves.
part of the Gauls” (5, 23). They have therefore not moved to what was recognized as barbarian territory, but had still become non-Romans, and by migrating to the places where they lived one could escape from the factors which made life intolerable under Roman rule. This implies that people were migrating to relatively well-defined areas, comparable to the territories occupied by the barbarians (though of course, not given the same kind of official recognition). These would presumably be the areas which were outside the control of the imperial regime as a consequence of the revolt(s) in Armorica described in the Chronicle of 452 and the Vitae Germani.

VI. Salvian’s use of the Bacaudae

Salvian’s purpose was not, of course, to pass on information about the Bacaudae, but to use the Bacaudae as support for his arguments about Roman sin and divine justice. The way he presents the Bacaudae is shaped by his own presuppositions, and by what he believed would influence his audience.

The most striking thing in these passages is the overwhelming stress on the issue of Roman identity. The first thing that this enables Salvian to do is to embark on an exercise in sustained irony by describing the process by which Romans escape oppression by Romans through taking refuge with barbarians (5, 21–23, 28, 37). At a literary level, this plays on the traditional classical image of the barbarian in order to highlight the inversion of values that actually exists among the Romans. 83 This is most obvious in the wordplay of the passage in which he considers the phenomenon of Romans fleeing to barbarian territory, and draws an antithesis between apud barbaros Romanam humanitatem and apud Romanos barbaram inhumanitatem (5, 21). Salvian is here indulging in a very traditional classical style of contrasting barbarians and Romans as a form of social criticism, even evoking the clichéd, image of the barbarians’ foul-smelling clothes. 84

However, the negative characteristics of the barbarians are morally neutral, unlike those of the principales, exactores, iudices and other Roman potentes. In their way of life the traditional differences between Romans and barbarians remain, but their moral qualities have been reversed. Hence Salvian’s antithesis between humanitas and inhumanitas. It is this which traditional ideology held to be the essential distinction between Romans and barbarians, yet in real life they have become transposed. The moral order has been turned upside down.

It is in relation to the Bacaudae, however, that Salvian’s stress on identity becomes most interesting. As we have seen, the heart of his argument about the Bacaudae is that Romans have been forced no longer to be Romans. They have been deprived of their identity, and, as Bacaudae, turned into something like a gens, equivalent to a barbarian group such as the Goths (5, 22). But what is most

83 Lambert 1999, 126.
84 Corporum atque induuiarum barbararum foetore dissentiant (5, 21).
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notable in Salvian’s language is the intense significance he attaches to Roman identity as a particular status, with rights attaching to it, something that has slightly different connotations than the moral criticism implied by his antithesis of *humanitas* and *inhumanitas*.

This is the significance of another political term employed by Salvian in this passage, *libertas*. He defines life under the barbarians as *libertas* in the guise of captivity, while life under the Romans is slavery in the guise of freedom (5, 22). The Bacaudae seceded because they had already lost the *ius Romanae libertatis*, the right of Roman freedom (5, 24). In another inversion of the moral order, the freedom which ought to be synonymous with Roman status is lost by those who remain Roman: under the oppression of the *potentes* they are reduced to a state indistinguishable from slavery or captivity by the enemy (5, 26); those who are too weak to join the Bacaudae are reduced as *coloni* to a condition close to literal slavery (5, 38–45). The free – Romans in the Roman empire – are reduced to slavery; the only way in which they can achieve freedom is voluntarily to live under barbarian rule, or else to join the Bacaudae and endure being deemed rebels and *quasi barbari* (5, 24, 26).

The emotional weight with which Salvian invests these traditional Roman political concepts is considerable. He emphasizes the fact that those who flee Roman territory or become Bacaudae lose the honour of the Roman name, *honorem Romani nominis* (5, 24), the name of Roman citizens, *nomen ciuium Romanorum* (5, 22). It is this which he chooses to highlight rather than any more practical losses that people experienced through such emigration. A particularly noticeable element of Salvian’s rhetoric is his stress on citizenship. It is unusual to find citizen status being given such rhetorical emphasis at this period. The precise function and social role of Roman citizenship in the fifth century is an issue which remains in some obscurity. Since the *Constitutio Antoniniana* of 212, almost all free inhabitants of the empire had been Roman citizens.85 Many studies of Roman citizenship simply stop at this point, on the basis that the status was no longer significant.86 The traditional view of the situation after 212 is that citizen status as such became insignificant by comparison with other legally defined status-groups within Roman society.87 In fact, closer scrutiny of late-Roman law and society suggests that even if gaining or losing Roman citizenship no longer had the vital importance that it had under the Republic or early empire, it was by no means without practical significance even in Salvian’s day.88

It is clear that for Salvian the moral implication of being a Roman citizen are much more important that any practical issues relating to citizenship. References

86 Cf. Garnsey 2004, 140: “For some modern observers, it was all over for Roman citizenship after Caracalla’s edict.”
87 See e.g. Liebeschuetz 1998, especially 136–138.
88 See especially Garnsey 2004; Mathisen 2006; on more specialised issues Demougeot 1981; Mathisen 2009; and on religious and cultural factors, Inglebert 2002.
to citizenship in the political rhetoric of the fourth and fifth centuries use it primarily as a sign of Roman identity in contrast to the barbarians. For Salvian it is useful precisely because it crystallized the boundary between Romans and barbarians, and thereby emphasized the scandal that the nature of the boundary was being reversed. Furthermore, the status of citizen implied that each individual, however humble, had a certain stature and dignity within society; it is in this sense that it is tied directly to the concept of libertas. It is this aspect of the idea of citizenship which has the greatest emotional force for Salvian, because of the way in which it is affronted by the powerful, who strip their fellow-citizens of this stature and treat them as little more than prey.

There is a final nuance to Salvian’s references to Roman citizenship. His reference to citizenship as something that was once greatly valued and dearly bought (5, 22) shows that he is looking backwards in this passage to earlier periods of Roman history in which citizen status was something desirable in itself. Though it is not directly expressed, behind Salvian’s language in this passage is an idealised vision of the Roman past, in which all citizens were free, and Romans did not prey on each other as they do in the society from which the Bacaudae are driven out. Salvian’s language when writing about the Bacaudae, the terms in which he conceptualised and wrote about what they had lost, therefore reflect his implicit view of Roman history as a story of a decline from a just and virtuous past. This is expressed elsewhere in De gubernatione dei, but never with the emotional force that it has here. The knowledge of Roman history shown by Salvian in his works is limited, and is confined almost entirely to standard exempla from the Roman republic which were commonplace in literary education. In this, he is typical of late-antique Latin writers in general, both Christian and secular. But Salvian shows here, in the use he makes of this idealized and apparently insubstantial image of the past, how powerful it could still be as a source of moral and social criticism.

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90 “Libertas primarily denotes the status of a ‘liber’, i.e. a person who is not a slave, and comprises both the negation of the limitations imposed by slavery and the assertion of the advantages deriving from freedom” (Wirszubski 1950, 1).
91 Salvian is not entirely alone in pursuing this theme, which can be found even in laws: see especially Nov. Val. 1, 3, 2 (450). Another important instance is Augustine, Ep. 10*, on the seizure of poor people in Africa by slave traders (note especially Ep. 10*, 5: pro libertate Romana [...] quis resistit?); see Lepelley 1992, 946.
92 Salvian, gub. 1, 10–12; 6, 50–52, 98–99; 7, 2.
94 On this tendency in secular literature, see Nixon 1990.
VII. Conclusion

All Salvian’s arguments and statements about the Bacaudae, flight to the barbarians, and the horrors of the late Roman tax system, are made in order to support his claims about the corruption and cruelty of the Roman ruling class, and furthermore to support the contrast which he wants to make between barbarians and Romans, between those who love one another and those who prey upon and persecute one another. Salvian’s ideal is not an egalitarian society, but one in which the possessors of wealth and power care for those they have power over in a paternal fashion. The rhetoric of poverty is an extremely powerful one for a Christian writer, and it is one which Salvian uses to the full here, though in the process it becomes clear that for him the poor include marginal and downwardly-mobile members of the propertied class. His stress on the loss of Roman identity serves his overall rhetorical purpose by giving the strongest possible impression of a society which is morally disordered and divided against itself. But Salvian’s argument also conveys profound nostalgia for an imagined past in which Roman status was something to be coveted and to be a citizen was to be free and secure. However little practical significance citizen status had in the day-to-day life of fifth-century Gaul, the concept of Roman citizenship was one that for Salvian at least, retained immense emotional and rhetorical power.

As for the Bacaudae, while it is always prudent to remember that Salvian is using them for his own rhetorical ends, and that his account cannot be taken as a straightforward account of reality, close examination of his claims makes clear that he at least believed that they were responding not to the general oppression of the poor and landless by the propertied, but to the very specific nexus between state power and private self-interest represented by the Roman tax-system, a nexus from which escape had become possible through the political fragmentation of Gaul and the weakening of the effective power of the Roman government which went with it.

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96 Cf. Wickham 2005, 8–9, 64.
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