Un-becoming Roman

The end of provincial civilisation in Gaul

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In a paper published in 2001 I referred to ‘the peculiar rarity and lateness of the late antique Gallic warlord’.

My aim here is to explain and extend my thinking in this respect.

The Late Empire saw the appearance of a number of local Gallic leaders. Rutilius Namatianus and Zosimus both suggest the establishment of some sort of local power in northern Gaul from the early fifth century; and in the later fifth century this area produced Riothamus, leader of the Bretons. Furthermore, however one explains it, the late fifth century also saw some sort of regional Roman power being exercised in northern Gaul by men such as Syagrius, Paul and Arbogast. More widely in Gaul, throughout this century, as imperial power weakened and retreated, local leaders of all sorts, from gentry to bandits, took power into their own hands, possibly under the general label of ‘Bagaudae’. So there were, I concede, a number of what may loosely be called Gallic ‘warlords’. But most of these were not what I had in mind when I remarked upon ‘the peculiar rarity and lateness of the late antique Gallic warlord’. None was successful in the sense that none established any long-standing sub-Roman state that was directly founded on Roman imperial and provincial administrative structures and practice. What I have in mind as ‘warlords’ are, rather, local Roman – not barbarian – leaders who, though no longer properly part of the imperial structure and relying for their initial authority on force more than office, nonetheless managed to acquire some Roman title, continued Roman imperial and provincial administrative structures and practices, and so may be seen as local inheritors of Roman power.

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1 Drinkwater 2001, 143.
2 Rut. Nam. 1, 213–216; Zos. 6, 5, 2–3.
4 PLRE 2, 1041f.; 851f.; 128f.
It may be argued that possible examples of these are Aegidius and Syagrius, who may have created a sub-Roman state in the Soissons/Paris basin. But this state is historically obscure. If it ever existed, it was hardly permanent. Roman communities survived only in the gaps between expanding barbarian kingdoms. As these grew larger, the interstices grew smaller and eventually disappeared. Instead of a ‘post-colonial’ Gallo-Roman state there was a Germanic takeover or, as far as one can see, in Brittany a reversion to Celtic type. This is odd in view of the absence of imperial usurpers commanding the whole of Gaul after the fall of Constantine III which, as I have hypothesised elsewhere, should have allowed both barbarian kingdoms and warlords. What I am asking, therefore, I guess, is why were there no Romano-Gallic diadochoi, no Gallic Ambrosius Aurelianus. Bluntly, why did the Gallo-Roman aristocracy fail to put up protracted armed resistance to the invaders? In Mathisen’s key study of the Gallic aristocratic response to the changing conditions of the fifth century the choices are: flight; alternative careers in the Church; immersion in Classical culture; or collaboration with Germa

\[\text{\textit{Germani}}\]\ to the point of treachery. In other words, imperial defeat and Germanic victory are taken for granted, and analysis developed on this basis. Mathisen mentions armed resistance, but only in passing, as sporadic, localised phenomena, before moving on to examine the wider, passive response. I believe that these are valid questions, and have been gratified to find that at least some aspects of them have been touched on by recent commentators, in particular Halsall.

Much of their validity lies in the fact that there were surely sufficient martial skills and spirit in Gaul to resist the, at first relatively few, Germanic incomers. As Halsall says, the standard view of western provincials as ‘usually passive, indeed apathetic, cowardly observers of the movements of armies and the transfers of political power’ must be unfair. In my 2001 article I questioned the notion that the Germanic takeover of the Gallic provinces in the fifth century was explicable in terms of local leaders having gone ‘soft’. I observed that most aristocratic Gallic males preserved and practised martial strength and skills in the complex and dangerous, but ever popular, country-pursuit of hunting. In this they trained both themselves and their dependants for the hardships of war. The best-known practical demonstration of their mastery of such skills is the defence of Clermont by Ecdicius, son of the emperor Avitus and brother-in-law of Sidonius Apollinaris, and his followers in the period 471–474, in the closing days of Ro-

7 Cf. MacGeorge 2002, 73f.
11 Mathisen 1993, 31, 56f.
man rule in the Auvergne. Ward-Perkins, indeed, sees Ecdicius’ actions as one of the earliest manifestations of militarisation of the later Roman aristocracy. Gallo-Roman military ability was also shown soon afterwards by Arborius, Vincentius, Victorius, Calminius and Namatius, and later by Apollinaris, son of Sidonius Apollinaris, who served as officers in Visigothic land and sea forces. As Loseby observes elsewhere in this volume, by the mid-sixth century, local *comites* in the Frankish kingdom recruited Gallic other ranks for service in the royal armies as a matter of course. However, the martial instincts of Gallo-Roman aristocrats had been revealed even earlier by their construction and use of defensible sites. Best known are Dardanus’ ‘Theopolis’ and ‘Burgus’, the fortified villa of Pontius Leontius. To these we may add, for example, bishop Lupus of Troyes ordering the reoccupation of a hill-fort against the Huns in 451; and in this volume Diefenbach notes continuing episcopal control of troops and building of strong-points into the sixth century. As Mathisen remarks, ‘[…] unlike their more timid cousins to the south, the aristocrats of Gaul had always affected something of a military bearing.’ And again to quote Halsall: ‘The common ideas that the Romans needed barbarians for military protection and that the Britons were the only provincials to take up arms are in serious need of revision.’ So, if Wood is right to see the failure of the imperial military as the key to the end of the Roman world, it is reasonable to ask why Gallo-Roman leaders did not copy the Romano-British of the early-fifth century in establishing their own forces, comprising both native dependants and, if they could pay for them, Germanic federates. Returning to Mathisen’s ‘strategies’, was the Gallic choice really just ‘Empire or Barbarians’?

Recruitment of both Gauls and federates would, of course, have required money, and so taxation, which brings us to the next requirement for a successful Gallo-Roman successor state, a strong political and administrative infrastructure. Gaul had such a structure, and its basis was the *civitas*. This had survived from the Iron Age, had been developed by Rome and, despite the disruption of the fifth century, survived into the post-Roman period, being made great use of by the Church and by Germanic kings. As a fundamental element in the Roman fiscal system, *civitas*-authorities had passed tax receipts up the line of imperial administration to the regional Praetorian Prefect, for disbursement by the *comes sacrum*

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17 Below p. 235.
19 Below p. 98.
20 Mathisen 1993, 56f.
largitionum. Now they were free to retain these for themselves.\textsuperscript{23} And, in addition, following fourth century decentralisation of the imperial administration, they would have been in a position to appropriate local state resources in the shape of treasuries, factories, and land. Gauls still clearly identified themselves by their civitas, native or adopted, which, as in the case of Sidonius Apollinaris’s defence of Clermont, will have stiffened martial resolve.\textsuperscript{24} But it must also have encouraged the payment of what was due to the civitas, in cash or kind. All this would, at least in principle, have made independent civitas-actions, political or military, perfectly viable.

I stress ‘civitas’. Some wider ‘Gallic’ identity had been fostered by Rome, ideologically through the definition and separation of ‘Galli’ from the rest, especially from German, and practically, at least in part, through the establishment of centres of the imperial cult at Lyon and Narbonne. Gaul had historical experience of independent action, verging on separatism, within the Roman Empire in the third century, in the shape of Postumus’ ‘Gallic Empire’. In the fourth it had seen legitimate emperors resident in Trier, and been given its own praetorian prefecture. In the early fifth century, the Council of the Seven Provinces was established at Arles. In the late Roman period, indeed, Gallic identity appears to have reached such a state that Gaul won the reputation of being especially troublesome: of having its own interests and desiring its own emperors.\textsuperscript{25} Its particular views and grievances were, of course, most dramatically expressed by Sidonius Apollinaris in the mid-fifth century, in his panegyrics of Avitus, Majorian and Anthemius.\textsuperscript{26} This Mathisen describes as indicating the evolution of a Gallic ‘sense of regional identity’, a ‘Gallic self-consciousness’, which ‘would have tended not only to unify the Gauls but also to separate them all the more from their aristocratic brethren elsewhere in the empire’.\textsuperscript{27} But here one needs to tread very carefully. To the end of the fourth century, ‘Gallic’ troublemaking had been not so much of the Gauls of Gaul, but of the military in Gaul, still based on the Rhine frontier, and was, therefore, at heart still imperial, Roman, troublemaking. In the fifth century, Gauls of Gaul were concerned not to leave the Roman Empire, but to get from it what they wanted of its rewards, albeit on their own terms: office; ac-


\textsuperscript{24} Cf. Loseby in this volume, below p. 232: “The city communities themselves had their identities repeatedly reinforced in moments of collective spiritual, military, or political action…” He also notes that such action sometimes took place as a civitas-, not a royal, initiative. Elsewhere: Harries 1994, 35, 246f.; Sivonen 2006, 66–68; Halsall 2007, 482.

\textsuperscript{25} Mathisen 1993, 17–20, 24–6; cf. Halsall 2007, 19, 34, on imperial regionalism in general, and the breakdown of links between periphery and centre as creating a political vacuum that was filled, not created by barbarians.

\textsuperscript{26} E.g. Sidon. carm. 5, 354–363 (to Majorian, in 458); and below p. 64, n. 41.

\textsuperscript{27} Mathisen 1993, 20; cf. Harries 1994, 89f.
ceptance of equality by Italians; the ability to continue to be closely involved in Gallic, i.e. primarily civitas, affairs; and, above all, continued Roman commitment to the defence of Gaul – as in the age of Aëtius, and which men like Sidonius Apollinaris hoped would be reinstated under Majorian and Anthemius. In short, Gaul was too big, and a strictly Gallic identity too weak, for separate action on a grand scale. In other words, here I am not concerned with the absence of the emergence of a new ‘Gallic Empire’, but with that of independent political and military action by, say, a major civitas and its dependencies, about the size of an early Germanic proto-kingdom.

So what prevented this? As in most things, explanation boils down to consideration of ‘attitude’ and ‘opportunity’. As far as ‘attitude’ is concerned, it seems clear that by the fifth century most leading Gauls, constrained by a long-ingrained ‘imperial habit’, would not, as already observed, have desired a break from Rome. Previously, the Gauls’ relationship with the Empire had been uneven. They had embraced it to the later first century; had kept it (or had been kept by it) at arm’s-length to the later third century; had, thanks to a local imperial presence at Trier, begun to warm to it again from the later third century; and had, with the emergence of a new, imperially-minded, Gallic aristocracy, begun fully to embrace it from the later fourth century. By the early fifth century, despite the problems of the age and the imperial retreat from the north, they were fully integrated, espousing imperial ambitions and craving imperial office – as long, that is, in an attitude that went back to their third-century re-awakening, these did not take them too far from their Gallic interests and responsibilities. This ‘Gallic attitude’ to the Roman Empire has been much studied, most recently by Sivonen, who emphasises Gallic integration into Roman aristocratic – basically old Republican – customs and values to such an extent that he prefers to speak not of ‘Gallic aristocrats’ but rather of ‘Roman aristocrats living in Gaul’, who adopted no ‘specific Gallic attitude towards the Empire’. Again, one has to be careful. As Wood has pointed out, and as is touched upon by Sivonen, this interpretation is derived from the writings of a coterie of authors, so the extent to which it is generalisable is open to question. The same writers acknowledged the fact that there were members of their social circle who were much less keen on imperial office. And even some of those who were keen may have wanted Roman office for selfish, practical ends – wealth, power, self-protection – not feelings of traditional Roman duty.

28 For a negative, precisely because it was so Gaul-centred, assessment of Aëtius’ policy, see Delaplace, above p. 35.
29 As Sivonen 2006, 16f., 68, 76, 78, 103f.
30 See Witschel, below p. 155, for the extraordinary size of many Gallic civitates (in the original sense of the word, as territoria, not just civitas-capitals). For ‘proto-’ see below p. 68 on the fluid nature of Germanic kingship and kingdoms at this time.
33 Wood 1992, 10; Sivonen 2006, 64.
or Republican pride. However, the people we know about seem to have been among the major ‘movers and shakers’ of late imperial Romano-Gallic politics. If they had wished to pursue a different policy vis-à-vis the Empire, they would have done so. But they did not: local power was apparently simply unthinkable – no substitute for imperial. As Halsall says, ‘There were enormous brakes, cultural and socio-economic as well as political, upon the abandonment of Romanness’; and, ‘[…] it was not easy to respond to the Empire’s political decay simply by setting out to rule independently. The Empire was so deeply ingrained into ideas of all aspects of social and political action that simple ‘rejection’ of Rome was not an option.’

Rutilius Namatianus was unshakeable in his belief in Rome’s power, and in his conviction that she would defeat her enemies.

This brings us to opportunity, and the observation that, even if there had been a significant desire for a breakaway state, pragmatically there was never really a right time for its creation. When might this have occurred? Under Constantine III, from 407? But Constantine was set on controlling Italy, and through this the whole of the western Empire, and perhaps beyond. Under his successor, Jovinus, from 411? As a local leader, Jovinus looked promising, but he was ephemeral, no match for Athaulf’s Goths. Under Avitus, from 455? But Avitus, like Constantine III, was set on gaining Italy to restore the west: Gaul would save the Empire, not just itself. Immediately after Avitus, in the awkward interregnum from October 456 to the accession of Majorian in April 457? But, despite some feeling of alienation from Italy and unrest in Gaul, this moment too was lost, as most Gallic aristocrats showed themselves willing to follow Majorian on the old terms. After the fall of Majorian in 461? The situation now, for the first time, becomes really promising, since we have the non-cooperation of Aegidius. But the Gallic aristocrats living in residual imperial territories remained steadfastly loyal to the Empire, and, as far as can be seen, Aegidius nursed fundamentally imperial, not Gallic, ambitions. This leaves only the period of the end-game, from the late-460s to the mid-470s, as rising barbarian power and increasing imperial weakness, accelerated by the failure of the great Vandal campaign of 468, will have made it ever more evident that there was nothing to be hoped for from Rome. This was, after all, the time of the ‘conspiracies’ – probably better, realistic attempts to come to terms with barbarian leaders – of Arvandus (condemned in

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35 Halsall 2007, 470, 368.
36 Rut. Nam. 1, 141–154; Sivonen 2006, 33f.
38 Cf. Delaplace, above p. 27.
39 Sidon. carm. 7, 585–598; Sivonen 2006, 75f.
41 Sidon. carm. 2 (panegyric on Anthemius).
469) and Seronatus (in the early 470s). It was also that of the brave exploits of Ecdicius in the defence of Clermont. Could Ecdicius, as a Gallic Ambrose, have created a Gallo-Roman successor-state? As Wood says, ‘Ecdicius showed what a man with military experience and a private following could manage in central Gaul’, and in a famous but obscure passage of a letter concerning the crimes of Seronatus, Sidonius Apollinaris even hints that Ecdicius might become some sort of local leader. But in 474, just before the surrender of the Auvergne, Ecdicius abandoned Clermont to serve as *magister militum* under Julius Nepos, first in Gaul but then, in line with the imperial mind-set of his class, in Italy.

This litany of missed opportunities is, indeed, in part the concrete manifestation of the ‘imperial habit’. It also reflects the consequence of the transformation of what had once been a great imperial strength into a debilitating weakness. Political centripetalism, which had held the Empire together in the worst times of the third-century ‘Crisis’, now undermined the position of the West. But behind this there were other situations and forces. There was no event that suddenly forced people to take sides. Things happened slowly, and in a complex and confusing fashion. The rump western Empire, commanding Italy, remained strong; and when it received help from the East it was still a superpower. Roman emperors interfered in Gallic affairs to the very end. Contemporaries could not know the future. Seeing the Empire’s residual strength, they might well imagine that its current weakness was only temporary, and that it would eventually strike back and re-establish its power. Down to the 470s there was a run of major players – Constantius III, Aëtius, Ricimer – who, whatever their particular failings, managed to hold things together. A brilliant successor might yet be able to do more. In particular, if Rome managed to recover Africa (which, as Justinian was to show, was not an impossibility), Italy would be safe and resources would be available for a return to the traditional policy of defending the peninsula from over the Alps, and a return of serious imperial attention to Gaul. As Halsall says, ‘Different outcomes to some of the high-level political events of the fifth century could have changed many of the details or even reaffirmed the fourth-

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45 Wood 2000, 507 (Harries 1994, 229, is rather more negative about Ecdicius).
46 Sidon. *epist* 2, 1, 4; Mathisen 1993, 89.
47 MacGeorge 2002, 275f.
48 Drinkwater 1989, 152: ‘it was the maintenance of this Empire, not the establishment of a strong Gaul, that diverted and wasted [Gallic] strength for most of the fifth century.’ Cf. Drinkwater 2005, 62f.
50 As Harries 1994, 142, 148, 225 suggests, even the appointment of Anthemius, a renowned soldier, with an adult heir and strong eastern military backing, was more than mere gesture politics.
51 Cf. MacGeorge 2002, 268: Ricimer concentrated on Italy.
century supremacy of Romanness. And, less positively, if people believed that Rome might return, they would avoid putting themselves in a position where they could be subject to harsh punishment for showing disloyalty. Again to quote Halsall, ‘The Empire came close several times to restoring its authority in the West and, when on the offensive, it showed remarkably little tolerance for those who, it felt, had usurped its authority.’ So why not stay with it, and its offices and rewards, as did both Avitus and Sidonius Apollinaris, i.e. why not practise ‘pragmatism’? This had wide implications. Acceptance of office and rewards brought with it obedience: if you recognised imperial authority but your civitas was then effectively handed over to a Germanic king by your emperor, you stayed ceded, and did not argue the toss by making a unilateral declaration of independence. And even before this stage you accepted imperial compromising of your position. The Empire relatively quickly accepted the Visigoths as part of the landscape. There was no thought of removing them, as there was no thought of removing any barbarians except the Huns. A vigorous barbarian kingdom in Aquitania or even, as Delaplace argues in this volume, a powerful allied ‘Visigothic Army On the Garonne’, strengthened by the long reigns of Theoderic I and II and Euric, totally distorted Gallo-Roman politics, since policy-makers grew used to taking into account the views of Toulouse. In practical terms this put an end to the history of the ‘old’ Roman Gaul, created by the establishment of the imperial frontier on the Rhine. And the stronger the Visigoths became, the more their neighbours would feel that they needed imperial, not just local, resources, to counter their influence. In short, the process will have sapped local political initiative.

‘Attitude’ and ‘opportunity’ are not exclusive categories, and other forces will also have been at work, of which I note two. First, where might an autonomous Gallo-Roman state have been based? By the fifth century, to continue the Roman tradition there was no absolute need for the old Rome. The Empire was by now sufficiently Romanised for the City of Rome to be dispensable, which explains the rise of Constantinople. So was another ‘new Rome’ possible in Gaul? Perhaps yes: in 402, Honorius may have considered a move to Lyon. But more likely no: though old Rome was dispensable, it was relatively close to Gaul and, though probably little visited, was much revered there. It would have been very difficult for Gauls to make the break. And, even if they had, where might they have gone instead? Of the cities that had seen resident emperors, Trier, Rheims and Paris were too far to the troubled north and so soon effectively out of the running; and by the mid-fifth century, Lyon was too close to the Burgundians, and Vienne was

52 Halsall 2007, 482.
53 Halsall 2007, 368f.
54 Kulikowski, below p. 84: no later than the 430s/440s.
55 Mathisen 1993, 56.
56 Delaplace, above p. 38.
57 Respectively: 418–451; 453–466; 466–484.
58 Drinkwater 1998, 274.
too close to Lyon. This left Arles, exposed to attack from Italy, and Africa.\textsuperscript{60} Of the rest, Clermont was a possibility, but this was threatened by Visigoths and Burgundians; and the choice of a \textit{civitas} other than one of the traditional imperial residencies may well have generated local rivalries. Second, and which would perhaps repay closer attention, is the Church. In this respect I am not thinking of Christian criticism of Roman values and behaviour, or even of the establishment of a higher loyalty, beyond the state, dealt with below. Rather, I have in mind more immediate local considerations. For example, overt Church backing of a Romano-Gallic Christian state might have vexed neighbouring Germanic rulers, and so compromised Christians and Church influence in their realms. In addition, in a successful Romano-Gallic Christian state, an able and influential court-bishop might well have provoked papal jealousy and, as was already happening, papal alliance with Germanic kings.\textsuperscript{61} Overall, the situation was hardly propitious for the emergence of a breakaway state.

Those who are familiar with the period will know most of the material presented so far, if not the arguments I derive from it. However, for the remainder of this paper I will pursue two related aspects of ‘attitude’ and ‘opportunity’ that have received less attention. These move discussion from ‘warlords’ to ‘the end of Roman provincial civilisation in Gaul’ of my title, and are, I believe, of particular relevance to the topic of this volume.

The first aspect may be categorised as ‘constitutional’. If a sub-Roman Gallic state had come into being, what would have been the title of its leader? Burned deep into the Roman – and probably, given the long history of \textit{civitas}-government, into the Gallic – political psyche was the close association of executive power with legitimate office, not brute control of people and resources. Someone who set himself up as a local leader, without Roman office or title, would be seen as illegitimate, no more than a ‘brigand’.\textsuperscript{62} True Romans would have been uncomfortable in supporting such a man. As cronies of a bandit-chief, a man without the imperial diadem or the purple,\textsuperscript{63} they were themselves bandits. As outlaws, they would have no lawful access to local imperial resources, and be unable to deal with conventional Roman communities. On the other hand, as the Roman people under arms, they had a right to name an \textit{imperator};\textsuperscript{64} and in fact the sole recourse for an individual leading such an enterprise, and one that was much resorted to over the centuries, was to have his backers salute him as \textit{imperator} and \textit{Augustus}. However, the traditional expectations and ambitions of the imperial political nation, now intensified by Christian monotheism, and the con-

\textsuperscript{60} Cf. Harries 1993, 137; Wood 2000, 518.
\textsuperscript{61} Harries 1993, 135–138.
\textsuperscript{62} Sivonen 2006, 27, 45, 62f., touches on these points, but fails to develop them.
\textsuperscript{64} Pabst 1997, 54–66.
viction that rival rulers could not all be God’s vicegerents, put huge pressure on a local leader to make for the centre of power, which in the later Roman West meant moving into Italy. In the meantime, the sitting incumbent, anticipating such a move, would have condemned him as a ‘tyrant’, and be preparing to destroy him. Emperors never tolerated outsiders, even when these (e.g., from the late third to the early fifth centuries, Carausius, Magnentius, Vetranio, Magnus Maximus, Constantine III) might have helped share the burdens of office. The result was civil war. If the challenger won, he would become responsible for the whole of the Empire. He could not use his victory simply to confirm his breakaway state: the Empire was not for partitioning. It was never allowed to break up into smaller, self-governing ‘mini-empires’, which in the West was probably its best means of long-term survival.

Apart from imperator and Augustus, the only titles that allowed legitimate local action were, as in the case of Aegidius, that of free-lance magister militum, or, as in the case of Syagrius, that of rex. But the former led nowhere, and the latter had its own problems. There was, of course, already the ancient Roman prejudice against kingship; and in the contemporary context the title of rex was demeaning because it put a Roman on the same level as a Germanic king, which was not particularly high. As Halsall and others have commented, in this period Germanic kingship and Germanic kingdoms were evolving under Roman influence. By the end of the sixth century these institutions had become accepted centres of power, breaking Rome’s monopoly. In the fifth century, however, they were still in flux: ‘there were more kings than there were kingdoms’. At this date, indeed, as in the days of Crocus, rex probably retained connotations of ‘princeling’ or ‘mercenary captain’, which helps explain Germanic regard for, and Roman provincial obedience to, supplementary imperial office. A Gallo-Roman ‘king’ would have been severely lacking in political clout. And, to return to my previous point, any emperor faced by a local Roman leader must always have feared that he would ultimately declare himself imperator and make a bid for the

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65 Fowden 1993, 88: ‘one god, one empire, one emperor.’ Fowden elsewhere (106) notices that the doctrine of the Trinity permitted some voluntary sharing of imperial power, particularly among family-members. But this could hardly have been extended to a multiplicity of autonomous rulers.

66 PLRE 2, 12; cf. MacGeorge 2002, 93f., 108, on Aegidius’ fighting still in the name of Rome. Fanning 1992, observes that, since it had long been possible to call Roman emperors ‘kings’, some – in particular, Gregory of Tours – who describe them as ‘kings’ may have regarded Aegidius and Syagrius as emperors. However, at 296f. he concedes, ‘It would be extremely rash to suggest that Aegidius and Syagrius were in fact Roman emperors.’


68 Kulikowski, below p. 80.

69 Drinkwater 2009, 190; cf. Harries 1994, 137, 224; Delaplace, above p. 27, 34; Kulikowski, below p. 86. For a much earlier precedent, cf. also Hartmann 2008, 354ff.: in 263, Odenae-thus was both corrector totius Orientis and dux Romanorum and rex and rex regum.
Empire as a whole. No emperor could tolerate a potential usurper, and must always seek to break him, if necessary, as in the case of Aegidius, by getting barbarian reges to do the job for him. But here an emperor faced another danger: that, as in the cases of Attalus and Avitus, a Germanic king might himself turn a local Roman leader into an imperial usurper in order to exploit his authority. Overall, Roman emperors could not have treated local Roman leaders in the same way that they handled Germanic federates, and so could not have included them in any formal partitioning of the provinces. And even a Roman rex who found imperial favour would have been subordinate to the emperor and to his whims and fancies: though Syagrius may have put himself under Zeno, Zeno appears to have favoured Odovacer.

The second aspect leads from the first, and may be classed as ‘ideological’. A Roman rex and his subjects would also be weak, and so despicable, creatures because they would be outside the framework of Roman history. What did it mean to be Roman? Romanitas surely amounted to more than membership of a state that happened to have a Roman background and character. To be truly Roman one had to be a citizen of the Roman state, the manifest destiny of which was perpetual hegemony of the known world, with the power, as Virgil put it, ‘to establish peace, give pardon to the conquered, and bring the mighty low’. Virgil’s Aeneid was the foundation myth of the Augustan Empire, as the story of Romulus and Remus was that of the Republic. It marked ‘the end of history’ as the Roman Empire at last, as divinely ordained, came into the charge of the Julio-Claudian dynasty. By a deft sleight of hand, the inheritance and destiny envisaged for the house of Caesar and Augustus was appropriated by subsequent dynasties, and became the birth-right of every educated Roman, including late Roman Gauls. As far as these are concerned, their belief in Rome’s eternal triumph is even more significant than the ‘imperial habit’ or ‘pragmatism’ discussed so far. The integrated late Roman Gauls we know best – Ausonius, Rutilius Namatianus, Sidonius Apollinaris – fully identified themselves with it. For them, the holding of Roman office was more than just a matter of noblesse oblige, or the price of ambition. Rather, such office made them part of a living legend, that ran from oldest antiquity and would last for ever. The huge power of the Virgilian, pagan, myth is vividly illustrated in this volume, in Bruzzone’s analysis of Sidonius Apollinaris’ panegyrics to Avitus, Majorian and Anthemius. Here, direct allusions to the Aeneid, in particular (in the context of the Vandal threat) to the tragedy of Dido of Carthage, are used to articulate pressing contemporary political and military concerns, and to put the best possible ‘spin’ on the characters and policies of

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70  MacGeorge 2002, 115f.
72  Thus contra Sivonen 2006, 64, 78 (though cf. 80: office-holding emphasised one’s Roman identity).
current leaders. In this belief-structure, local, Gallic, ‘native’, history was simply forgotten. For educated Gauls, the exempla maiorum, both good and bad, were those of the great Greeks and Romans of old, especially Romans of the Republic. Though such beliefs may seem hackneyed and derivative to us, they were sincerely held by Gallo-Roman aristocrats because they explained their world, that of the Roman Empire, and justified their privileged position within it. These convictions were, therefore, enormously resistant to alteration or abandonment, and indeed they necessitated significant denials of reality.

As Guyon, Loseby and Witschel indicate in this volume, one denial concerned the built environment. From perhaps as early as the late-second century, Gallo-Roman cities became less imposing in size and appearance as the rich increasingly resorted to their country villas to practise and demonstrate their paideia, as poorer urban dwellers reverted to older forms of living and, finally, as new curtain-walls cropped the old urban centres. However, the upper-classes continued to vaunt their home-cities as the political, religious and cultural hubs of their lives. This is apparent in Ausonius’ descriptions of his beloved Bordeaux. In these, those who know what they are looking for may dimly discern the reduced, fortified late-Roman city; but the uninitiated will see a place comparable to first-century Rome. Another sort of everyday denial, examined by von Rummel here, concerns dress. Fashion changed. Male dress and armament were very different from those of the Republic and the Early Empire, but fairly uniform across the political nation. However, upper-class Gallo-Romans, viscerally opposed to Germanic integration, were quick to categorise a man’s costume as ‘Roman’ or ‘barbarian’ depending on his ethnic background, not his style of dress. As with everything else, they saw the world as they wanted to see it, not as it was.

This could not last. Flat denial was no way of coping with change. Belief in Rome’s divinely ordained superiority was like an electrical battery: it had to be recharged regularly by victories over foreign enemies. From the later fourth century, the Empire suffered ever-more frequent defeats by outsiders. The battery began to run down. Romans would soon have to face their real destiny. But this was not all. From the fourth century, the Virgilian destiny was significantly challenged from within, as the result of Constantine’s conversion to Christianity. To some extent, the Virgilian, pagan, destiny of Rome could be replaced by a new, Christian destiny. In the spirit of Christ’s ‘render unto Caesar’ and St. Paul’s ‘let

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73 Bruzzone, below p. 360–368.
76 Cf. Sivonen 42, 45, 56, 104 (“[…] these ideals accounted for the success of the Roman Empire and gave the Romans – at least in their own minds – a good reason for their empire”).
77 Witschel, below p. 177.
78 Auson. ordo urb. nob. 20; epist. 6 [4: Green], 19–28; Sivan 1993, 38–44.
every soul be subject unto the higher powers’, the Church had never opposed the Empire as such; and from no later than the early third century, some Christians had openly appreciated this Empire as the providential vessel for the reception of Christ and the instrument for broadcasting His teaching. To those who believed in such providence, the conversion of Constantine will have seemed both the proof and the culmination of the intimate relationship between God and the Roman Empire. However, unlike Virgilian prophecy, divine providence did not guarantee that the interests of Church and state would continue to be identical. Christianity had other perspectives and priorities which soon manifested themselves, and caused tension between it and its new partner. Constantine I himself, in claiming to be ‘bishop of those outside’, quickly demonstrated that he saw the implications of the fact that Empire and Christianity were not coterminous. Closer to home, the repertoire and modes of expression of Classical culture were anyway bound to cause strain; and in the fourth century there arose a strong Christian ascetic movement, diverting Romans of both sexes and every age and class from their traditional aspirations and activities. Three contributors to this volume show how Romans and Christians moved apart in Gaul in the decades around 400. Vielberg points up the vast difference between pagan and Christian conceptions of the underworld and, more specific but equally significant, the likely embarrassment caused by Ausonius’ irreverent depiction of even a pagan god undergoing extreme torture, in his Cupido cruciatus. Diefenbach considers the new, Christian, interpretation of merita, based on asceticism and giving deserving aristocrats honor in the next world, i.e. in a heavenly patria wholly different from the traditional earthly community of their ancestors. And Brugisser presents Eucherius of Lyon arguing that in certain circumstances it was legitimate for Roman soldiers, by appealing to a higher allegiance, to God, to ignore the orders of their emperor. Elsewhere, in similar vein, Matthews has recently shown how the grand funerary commemorations of both pagan and Christian aristocrats in fourth-century Rome reflect a common cultural ground, subsequently destroyed by ascetic hard-liners such as Jerome. Likewise, Traina has drawn attention to how, in the same period, John Cassian bitterly lamented the way in which thoughts of the ‘trifling fables’ of his Classical education were interfering with his prayers.

The split between Roman and Christian identity became a canyon as chronic civil strife and barbarian insubordination cruelly exposed the systemic weaknesses of the Empire in the West, and finally exhausted the battery of Roman superiority. Pagans claimed that it was the abandonment of the old gods that had led to

79 Matthew 22, 21; Romans 13, 1; cf. Tert. apol. 30, 4–5.
80 Orig. Cels. 2, 30; Eus. HE 9, 8, 15–9, 1. Fowden 1993, 89.
81 Fowden 1993, 91.
82 Vielberg, below p. 348–349.
83 Diefenbach, below p. 130–131.
84 Brugisser, below p. 389.
85 Matthews 2009.
86 Cassian. conf. 14, 12; Traina 2009, 72.
disaster. This goaded Christians into rebutting the charge, often in radically new terms. Thus, as Lambert shows in this volume, Salvian presents the barbarian invasions as God’s punishment of wicked Romans. Salvian destroys the comfort of Virgilian prophecy by arguing that Roman mischance is the result of the Christian God’s direct involvement in world affairs. His interpretation turns the world upside down: barbarians are morally Roman and Romans are morally barbaric.  

It is a total subversion of traditional Roman certainty that the City’s success lay in its, first pagan then Christian, pious maintenance of the *pax deorum*. Most famously, of course, such consideration led Augustine to discover a loyalty that completely transcended Rome: not to the material and historical, but to the spiritual and eternal city, the *civitas Dei*. In the East, the state was protected by strategic advantage and continuing economic and fiscal strength, and was bound up with the Church through the rise of Caesaropapism, in which the ‘one emperor’ could make contact with the ‘One God’ through a ‘holy intermediary’. In the West, however, strategic vulnerability with fiscal weakness, political instability, and military defeat continued to invalidate the notion of Rome’s divine destiny as the eternal hegemonic power; and the bishop of Rome interposed himself ever more between the emperor and the ear of God. By the middle of the fifth century, a generation or so after Augustine, Prosper of Aquitaine was still placing hope in the providential mission of the Empire, but even he had to concede its division and the failing strength of Rome in the West. The contraction of imperial frontiers and the rise of the papacy maintained and accelerated western divergence. To be a Christian in Gaul one did not have to be – indeed, eventually one could no longer be – a loyal citizen of the Empire.

This takes us to a final, crucial, question: whether an individual or community in the West could remain ‘Roman’ outside the Empire. Greg Woolf, in his rightly influential *Becoming Roman. The Origins of Provincial Civilization in Gaul*, asks if a viable Roman cultural unity could exist without Roman political unity. With regard to the Republic and Early Empire, he answers no; but for the Late Empire he is much more positive:

> At some point in the fifth century AD Roman cultural identity became finally dissociated from any particular political membership, and the ethnic ‘Roman’ came to refer to a people scattered throughout a series of barbarian kingdoms, rarely in positions of power but maintaining, for a time, separate legal and educational systems, and distinguished by their own language, religion (now Catholic Christianity) and literature.  

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87 Lambert, below p. 260.
88 Fowden 1993, 14, 89, 173.
89 Ps. Prosp. *vocat. gent.* 2, 16; Traina 2009, 42f.
90 Woolf 1998, 249.
This view is widespread; it is, for example, supported by Halsall. But I am sure that it is mistaken – hence the title of my paper, which reverses that of Woolf’s book.

For Gallo-Roman aristocrats of the fifth century, the present and the future were not in line with what they had been led to expect from the past. What was desperately needed is what I term a ‘realignment of expectation’. Such a realignment had occurred in the late-first century B.C., with the second ‘foundation-myth’. This myth had become an integral part of Roman paideia, generating the, to us lumbering and embarrassing, patriotic versifications of writers such as Ausonius and, as we have seen, Sidonius Apollinaris, but giving Roman identity and confidence an enormous strength. Other realignments followed; the Roman Empire could not have survived without them. The most important were, without doubt, the conversion of Constantine I and the foundation of what became literally a ‘New Rome’ in Constantinople. But nothing outstripped the Augustan ‘ideology of victory’, and its success prevented another when it was required – one that might have allowed Romans to live in a world where the Roman Empire was no longer all-powerful, in a separate state that was Roman but had no pretensions of a special destiny. For a Roman, to live in a regnum Romanorum outside the main body of the Empire or in a Germanic kingdom could mean only the painful surrender of an ancient identity. As Lambert also observes in this volume, Salvian, describing people forced to flee the rapacity of imperial officials, makes the point that these lose their Romanness not only if they choose to flee to barbarians but also if they choose to flee to communities of former subjects of the Empire living within its nominal frontiers, the Bagaudae. Salvian believes that it is impossible to be Roman outside the Empire. As ever, one has to be careful with a tendentious source. Salvian has an axe to grind, and in his desire to show a world turned upside down he also argues that those who stay within the Empire as coloni, helpless dependants of the rich, are equally deprived of their birthright. However, what he says about refugees is in line with the established legal concept of postliminium, and suggests that the Romans themselves never believed that one could be truly Roman when compelled to live outside Roman borders.

To abandon the notion of perpetual hegemony, to be no longer part of the great enterprise, i.e. to be a citizen of something that was less than the Empire, was indeed to lose one’s essential Romanness. It may be argued that Romans living under barbarian kings might, for a while, have continued to believe in the Roman myth, because such kings were still at least nominally subordinate to the eastern emperor, and the Empire might still return to take control of their lands. But even these would eventually have to accept the realities of the new world.

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91 Halsall 2007, 482: “[…] people were able to separate the political aspects of imperial Roman identity from the cultural.”

92 I owe this idea to the work of my student, Ahamed Osman, on the application of Bourdieu’s concept of habitus to Roman history.

93 See now Bowersock 2009.

94 Lee 2007, 37.
What is the significance of Woolf’s ‘cultural identity […] finally dissociated from any particular political membership’? The second letter of Book 8 of Sidonius’ collection, to Johannes, contains the sentiment: ‘with the removal of the ranks of office, the only means by which the best men can be distinguished from their inferiors, hereafter the only mark of nobility, will be knowledge of letters’. Harries calls it ‘the most significant single remark made by any contemporary western author on the end of Roman rule’.\[95\] It appears, indeed, to be the earliest, and clearest, contemporary expression of ‘cultural identity […] finally dissociated from any particular political membership’. However, its early date requires that it be treated with caution. Sidonius and the other Gallo-Roman aristocrats of his generation had been subjects of Rome. They had lived in another, imperial, world, and had held high office there. But this world had vanished; as Sidonius puts it in the same place, the current ruling power is unconquerable, but it is no longer Roman.\[96\] So they turned to learning for escape.\[97\] In short, they were not forging a new cultural identity, but retreating into an old one. Later generations, with no direct memory of the Empire, were able to use the Classical heritage in a wholly different way, which did not distance them from their own societies.

Does speaking and writing in the Queen’s English in modern India make one culturally British? Did speaking and writing in good Latin in sixth-century Gaul make one culturally Roman? Along with Sidonius, much has been made of Gregory of Tours as a Roman living long after the disappearance of the Empire in the West; and in this volume Mathisen pushes the survival of Romanitas two generations later in arguing for Desiderius of Cahors to be recognised as ‘the last of the Romans’.\[98\] But elsewhere Müller shows that the acutely self-aware literary letter-writing tradition – the product and advertisement of the Classical paideia that distinguished Roman from barbarian – which permits such a claim was being rejected as early as the lifetime of its greatest Gallo-Roman exponent, Sidonius Apollinarius. In addition, what we know of Desiderius’ literary interests and activities suggest that these were very much a court-phenomenon, the artefact of a relatively small and precisely self-conscious coterie of self-professed intellectuals, self-referencing themselves in terms of the past. It is no wonder that they had no successors. And, ideologically, Gregory and Desiderius were hardly ‘Roman’. In Gregory we see someone who is clearly a product of the Gallo-Roman cultural legacy, but who is totally integrated into Merovingian society and politics, and looking not backwards, into history, but forwards, to the Christian Day of Judgement. He is, indeed, profoundly uninterested in the Roman imperial past, displaying no curiosity in, or nostalgia for, the passing of the western Empire. Desiderius, a long-time intimate of king Dagobert, was even more of a Merovingian

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95 Sidon. epist. 8, 2, 2: nam iam remotis gradibus dignitatum, per quas solebat ultimo a quoque summus quisque discerni, solum erit posthac nobilitatis indicium litteras nosse, trans. Harries; Harries 1994, 16.

96 Sidon. epist. 8, 2, 2: iam sinu in medio sic gentis invictae, quod tamen alienae.


98 Mathisen, below p. 455, 464.
courtier than Gregory, in a world where, as Mathisen notes, there was no indication of any basic divide, cultural or social, between Romans and barbarians. 99 Unlike Sidonius, both men had Roman veneers, but no essential Romanness.

One could not be truly Roman outside the Roman Empire. My contention is, therefore, that authentic Roman ‘provincial civilisation in Gaul’ ended relatively early, in the late fifth and early sixth century, as the last generation of imperial subjects died off. This is crucial for ‘Gaul in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages’. If new polities and identities were to emerge, the old had to make way for them – and the sooner and more complete the disappearance of the old, the more successful would be the growth of the new. Authentic Roman identity was strong but brittle. It quickly shattered and was soon cleared away, ready for the appearance of wholly different outlooks and identities.

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