Roman barbarians in the Burgundian province

The Gibichung rulers of the Rhône valley in the late fifth and early sixth centuries were among the most pro-imperial of the early barbarian leaders. They saw themselves as servants of the emperor, and yet at the same time they acknowledged that they were barbarian.¹ In this they were not unique: even if Cassiodorus tended to avoid describing the Ostrogoths as *barbari*, the *Edictum Theodorici* does so describe them, as indeed did pope Gelasius.² It would also seem that the redactors of the Breviary of Alaric were prepared to use the word to describe the Visigoths.³ Thus, at the end of fifth century and the beginning of the sixth the term *barbarus* could be a straightforward descriptor, with no pejorative overtones. In presenting themselves both as sophisticated imperial agents and as leaders of barbarians Gundobad, Sigismund and their administrators ensured that the conceptual distinction between Roman and barbarian within their territories was a vague one, and indeed they made it difficult to think in terms of a simple dichotomy between those who were civilized and those who were not. In what follows I will make no attempt to define the Romans directly. More often than not they are the authors of our sources, and saw themselves as ‘us’. I will concentrate instead on what our sources have to say about the non-Romans, to attempt to establish the extent to which ethnic difference was a significant issue in the Rhône valley in the late fifth and early sixth centuries:⁴ this, however, does have some implications for understanding Roman self-consciousness in the Gibichung world.

The acknowledgement that the Burgundians were *barbari* lies at the heart of Gibichung legislation – which I assume to have been drafted by Romans rather than barbarians. The *Liber Constitutionum*, to use what seems to have been the original name for what is now commonly known as the *Lex Burgundionum*, speaks of *Romani, Burgundiones, barbari, adversae and homines extraneae gentis*.⁵ The title *Lex Burgundionum* is in fact misleading: the collection is concerned with all the subjects of the Gibichung ruler, and especially with relations between the indigenous population of the valleys of the Rhône and Saône and the barbarian incomers.⁶ The Romans ap-

---

¹ For the Gibichungs as sophisticated Romans, Wood 2004; Wood 2014; Wood 2016. For the Gibichungs as self-proclaimed rulers of barbarians, Wood 2011, 44–45. Although the term ‘Gibichung’ is not to be found in ancient sources, it is clear that the family was aware of descent from Gibich, and the term has the advantage of avoiding the notion of Burgundian ‘ethnicity’.
⁴ For other approaches to ethnicity in the Gibichung kingdom, Amory 1993; Amory 1994; Boyson 1998; Frye 1990; Wood 1990.
⁵ Wood 2016.

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110598384-019
pear remarkably often: Carlo Troya, who was only too aware of the absence of Romans in the earlier Lombard laws (which for him was indicative of their oppression), noted that they are mentioned more than forty times in the Liber Constitutionum.\(^7\) The situation of the Romans indeed is at the heart of some Gibichung legislation. Gregory of Tours states that, following the civil war of 500, Gundobad issued *leges mitiores* to end the unjust treatment of Romans by the Burgundians.\(^8\) One might guess that the earlier failure to address this issue had led Romans to support Gundobad’s brother, Godegisel, in the civil war. Some of these ‘softer’ laws are probably to be found in the Liber Constitutionum, individual clauses of which deal with the improper influence of Burgundians in cases involving Romans.\(^9\) The law-book also contains a number of clauses dealing with problems caused by the settlement of barbarian incomers, which may also have been one of the issues requiring the enactment of *leges mitiores*.\(^10\)

Yet, while the situation of the Romans may have prompted much Gibichung legislation, the non-Romans taken together receive more attention. For the most part the terms *Burgundiones* and *barbari* may be read as synonymous,\(^11\) although it is worth remembering that the Burgundians may not have been particularly numerous, after the disaster they had suffered at the hands of the Huns in the 430s.\(^12\) Nor were they the only non-Romans settled within the Gibichung zone of authority: the Chronicle of 452 talks of the settlement of Alans in Valence.\(^13\) *Barbarus* could no doubt cover more than those regarding themselves as Burgundian, and it was probably intended to.\(^14\) Moreover, the word is often used as a synonym for the people designated by the phrase *populus noster*, which also appears in Gibichung law.\(^15\) Yet *populus noster* certainly did not cover the *externae gentes, advenae, or homines extraneae nationis*,\(^16\) who could also have been defined as *barbari*: these terms might refer to neighbouring peoples like Franks, Alamans and Goths, even if there were some Goths who were accepted as settlers.\(^17\) One might also note the presence of Riotamus’ *Britanni*, who

---

7 Troya 1841, cclxi.
9 Possible examples are Liber Constitutionum, 22; 28; 31; 38; 7; 54, 1–2; 55; 84, ed. von Salis, 60, 65–67, 70, 88–91, 106–107. See Wood 2016. For the conclusion of the civil war as a context for legislation, see also Poly 2005, 347; Heather 2011, 128.
12 Wood 2016.
15 Wood 2016.
16 Wood 2016.
17 Liber Constitutionum, Constitutio Extravagans, 21, 4, ed. von Salis, 120.
arrived in the Lyon region in around 468,¹ and who might be considered as Romans extraneae nationis. In law, the *populus noster* was unquestionably people subject to Gibiching authority – though it is unclear whether the phrase also covered the Romans of the province. *Barbari* might be either insiders or outsiders: what they were not was Romans.

Yet, if the Gibichungs and their barbarian followers were not Roman, they most certainly saw themselves as members of the Roman Empire. This is clearest in the correspondence written by Avitus of Vienne to the emperor, in the name of Sigismund, where we find that the prince’s family (*prosapia mea*) is the emperor’s servant (*famula vestra*): that his people belongs to the emperor – *vester quidem est populus meus*: that *devotio romana* has always been in the hearts of his forebears, and that in ruling his *gens* he does so as the emperor’s soldier: *cum gentem nostram videamur regere, non alid nos quam milites vestros credimus*. The emperor rules through Sigismund: *patria nostra vester orbis est*.¹⁹ Cassiodorus used similar language to describe the relationship of Theodoric’s realm to the Empire, though perhaps not so fulsome-ly.²⁰

This sense of being part of the Empire infuses almost every aspect of Gibichung rule, at least until the retirement of Sigismund: the views of his brother and successor Godomar are scarcely recorded. We see it in the family’s concern with title. Exactly what is implied by the office of *phylarchos*, held by Gundichar in the second decade of the fifth century is unclear,²¹ but his sons Gundioc and Chilperic both held the titles of *magister militum* and *patricius*, as did Gundioc’s son, Gundobad, and grandson, Sigismund.²² Indeed, it is in the context of the latter’s negotiations for inheritance of his father’s title of *magister militum* that we find the subordination of the Gibichung province to the empire most forcibly stated.²³

A similar sense of belonging to the Byzantine realm is implied by the Burgundian laws and lawcodes. The so-called *Lex Romana Burgundionum*, whose original title would appear to be the *Formae et Expositio Legum*,²⁴ is an edited version of a number of imperial laws, most of which are contained in the *Codex Theodosianus*, although there is also material drawn from the novels of Valentinian III, Majorian, Marcian, Leo and Severus which are not to be found in the Code²⁵ – inclusion of these later laws may well reflect Gundobad’s close association with Ricimer: as the latter’s nephew, as well as protégé and successor he was at the heart of what remained of

---

²² Wood 2003, 251–255.
²³ Avitus, epp. 78, 93, 94, ed. Peiper, 93, 100–102.
²⁴ Wood 2008, 156; Wood 2016.
²⁵ Wood 2016.
imperial government in Italy until his departure from the peninsula in 474. The *Forma et Expositio* would appear to have been compiled on the order of Gundobad, probably shortly after the Burgundian civil war of AD 500 – some of the laws seem to reflect the Gibichung’s re-establishment of authority following the challenge to his rule made by his brother Godegisel in that year. Certainly the collection is the work of men intent on showing that they were still working within the parameters of Roman administration and law.

The other, more famous, Burgundian Code, or more properly *Liber Constitutionum*, was issued by Sigismund in 517, although it was probably based on an earlier compilation, which, like the *Forma et Expositio*, may have been commissioned by Gundobad (and perhaps even, originally, by his uncle Chilperic). Is not so closely tied to previous imperial legislation. It even authorises legal practices which were followed by barbarians. Thus, one finds the phrase *secundum consuetudinem barbarorum praebeat iurisjurandum* – though it should be noted that oath-taking was not exclusively barbarian, and could be found in Roman (and ecclesiastical) law.

Indeed in one clause (45) of the Code Gundobad laments that oath-taking was not taken sufficiently seriously by many among *populus noster*, and as a result he allows trial by combat as an alternative. This form of dispute settlement might be barbarian in origin, though the law does not claim it to be so, and it could just as well have originated in military practice.

As it has come down to us the *prima constitutio* of the *Liber Constitutionum* is signed by a collection of the king’s *comites*, all of them with Germanic names. Yet it is clear that Sigismund’s administration boasted Roman as well as Burgundian *comites*: why the names of the Romans among them are not appended to the law is a mystery, especially given the emphasis in the Code on relations between Romans and non-Romans – and indeed many of the clauses are clearly intended for all under Gibichung rule. Perhaps we should envisage promulgation in more than one gathering, only one of which is documented. Moreover the Code itself, for all its non-classical features, is still heavily dependent on earlier imperial legislation. Even the features that are non-classical may largely derive from Roman provincial law rather than from anything that can be called ‘Germanic custom’. Roman provincial law, indeed, like Ernst Levy’s Vulgar Law, has to be reconstructed in part from the ‘barbarian codes’. Sigismund, like Gundobad, seems to have been attempting

---

30 Wood 1986, 17.
32 *Liber Constitutionum, prima constitutio*, ed. von Salis, 34.
34 Wood 1996a, 9.
to continue to legislate, within Roman tradition, as a Roman official, and more especially as a would-be *magister militum*.

As Mark Handley has pointed out, the Burgundian rulers also marked their attachment to the Empire in their use of consular dating. Whether they were quite as distinctive in so doing as he claims is questionable: the data on which his statistics were based included forged documents, and letters which originated in the papal curia. Nevertheless the image of the government of the Rhône valley striving to present itself as acting within the imperial tradition is certainly one that tallies with the other evidence.

Thus it would seem that the Gibichungs saw themselves as late Roman officials, and above all as *patricii* and *magistri militum*; true, their Emperor had his base in the East, but they were still his servants and were trying to act as far as possible within the parameters laid down during centuries of Roman rule. Not everyone wished them to be seen in this way. In the *Variae* Theodoric addresses Gundobad as *rex Burgundionum*, a title which scarcely ever appears in sources from the Rhône valley, where, when we find the term *rex*, it is almost always without the ethnic descriptor. There is no acknowledgement in the *Variae* of the Burgundian’s Roman office: rather the Gibichung is presented as belonging to Theodoric’s family of kings. Writing just before the outbreak of war between Clovis and Alaric, and desperate to prevent hostilities, the Ostrogoth describes Gundobad as his brother, while Alaric is described as a son (and not just of Euric): equally, the Amal and the Gibichung are elders (*senes*), curbing the rashness of the *juvenes*, Alaric and Clovis. It is only too easy to be fooled by this into forgetting that all four of these rulers effectively belonged to the same generation: strictly speaking Theodoric and Gundobad might both have been senior because of the Roman offices they held, but they were not superior in any other way, nor were they very much older. In what purport to be slightly earlier letters Theodoric, or rather Cassiodorus, is more dismissive of Gundobad and his people. In a letter, sent to Boethius, commissioning the construction of a water-clock that had been requested by Gundobad, Cassiodorus, in Theodoric’s name, is derogatory about the culture of the Burgundian and his people: they have heard of the existence of such clocks, and will be astonished to see one. A related letter, addressed directly to Gundobad, is a little more accurate. Yet although he acknowledges that the Burgundian had spent time in Italy, Cassiodorus, in Theodoric’s name, identifies Gundobad’s followers as uncouth: they have only recently been induced to set

35 Wood 2016.
36 Handley 2000.
37 Wood 2016.
38 Cassiodorus, *Variae*, 1, 46; 3, 2, ed. Mommsen, 42, 79.
42 Cassiodorus, *Variae*, 1, 46, ed. Mommsen, 42.
aside their tribal way of life. All this is somewhat ironic, coming from a ruler whose people had entered the Roman Empire half a century later than the Burgundians, and whose ruling dynasty had a very much less lengthy association with any imperial government. Cassiodorus can scarcely have addressed such an inaccurate and demeaning a description to Gundobad and his followers in the middle of the first decade of the sixth century. At that point in time Theodoric was keen to have the Gibichung’s support, and he was scarcely likely to gratuitously offend a needed ally. So inaccurate is the portrayal of Gundobad and the Burgundians in Variae 146 that one can only surmise that the letter was edited for a Constantinopolitan readership in the early 550s, with a view to making the Ostrogoths look more civilized than other peoples.43

We may get a truer impression of early sixth-century Italian views of Gundobad and his people in the writings of Ennodius. In his panegyric on Theodoric peace with the Burgundians is taken seriously, but is not much discussed.44 More attention is paid to them in the Vita Epifani, where the saint is sent to negotiate the return of captives following a raid on Italy. The raiders are certainly identified as Burgundian, though their prisoners are not categorised, except as men on whom the productivity of Italy depended.45 Gundobad himself is seen as ruling over people who are described as Burgundiones nostri (an interesting echo of the vocabulary of the laws of the Liber Constitutionum, with their repetition of the phrase populus noster).46 The king, however, is not defined ethnically: rather he is rex probatissimus and venerandus rex,47 and his early official career in Liguria is at least acknowledged.48 This is surely the image that really was pedalled in diplomatic circles in the last decade of the fifth and the first decade of the sixth century.

Yet while we may suspect the image of Gundobad and his Burgundians presented in the Variae, Cassiodorus’ writings, like those of Ennodius, do raise the question of how the Gibichungs and their people, the populus noster, were perceived by others, including the Gallo-Romans of the Rhône valley. Our major source for the period of Gundobad and Sigismund’s rule, Avitus of Vienne, makes no comment on the Burgundians in general: indeed the word Burgundio never appears in the whole of his surviving œuvre, although at least one of the bishop’s correspondents bore a Germanic name.49 When he does use the word gens the reference would appear to be to all Gundobad’s subjects.50 Even barbarus is rare,51 though the word is used adjec-

43 For a reading of the Variae which sees them as being edited for a Constantinopolitan audience around 550, Bjornlie 2012.
44 Ennodius, Panegyric, 54, ed. Vogel, 209.
48 Ennodius, Vita Epifani, 162, ed. Vogel, 104.
49 Avitus, ep. 55; 80–81 (to Ansemundus); see also ep. 85 (to Ruclo), ed. Peiper, 83–85, 93–95.
50 Avitus, ep. 5, ed. Peiper, 32–33.
tively to indicate a lack of feeling.\textsuperscript{52} Barbarismus has exclusively literary connotations for Avitus, and refers to a reported criticism of the bishop, for mis-stressing a word in the course of a sermon.\textsuperscript{53} If we turn from supposedly Germanic subjects to their rulers, the title rex appears in letter-headings, but we cannot be sure that they are Avitan.\textsuperscript{54} In the content of the letters the word is only used of the emperor, who is described as rex orientis.\textsuperscript{55} elsewhere Avitus states that Anastasius rules over a regnum.\textsuperscript{56} By contrast (in a nice reversal of what conventional wisdom might expect) the Gibichungs are described as Caesars, in comments addressed to the vir illustre Heraclius,\textsuperscript{57} and to Sigismund.\textsuperscript{58} On both occasions a Biblical allusion (to Matthew 22.21) is involved, yet this should not lead us to deny the significance of the use of the Roman term. As we have seen, a sequence of Gibichungs held the patriciate and the office of magister militum, and one might note that Sidonius had already described a Gibichung as a tetarch.\textsuperscript{59} The use of this term can scarcely be technical: it surely means no more that that Chilperic was the regional authority. Yet, it was possible to talk of Burgundians as if they were Roman rulers. In the letters addressed to the emperor in Sigismund’s name, as we have seen, the language is that of Roman military service.\textsuperscript{60}

Almost everything Avitus has to say about his political masters is positive: Gundobad in particular is portrayed as a philosopher and theologian – and although the image (like that in the Vita Epifani) is clearly meant to be flattering, we have every reason to believe that the Gibichung was both learned and theologically competent.\textsuperscript{61} On the other hand Avitus is critical of Gundobad’s brothers and, perhaps, his uncle. One of them (and unfortunately there appears to be a lacuna in the text of the letter in question at a crucial point) had behaved wickedly and endangered the gens and the regio.\textsuperscript{62} We may guess that the allusion is to Godegisel, who joined Clovis in the war of 500;\textsuperscript{63} the identification is all the stronger because a later hagiographical text suggests that Avitus’ sister, Fuscina, was raped and possibly killed during Godegi-
sel’s occupation of Vienne⁶⁴ — and the narrative of the vita is compatible with various hints in the bishop’s letters and with his poem in praise of virginity, the *De consolatoria castitatis laude*.⁶⁵ In the bishop of Vienne’s sermons there is an opaque reference to an unnamed enemy responsible for destroying a church,⁶⁶ which might also refer to Godegisel’s forces, but might just refer to Ostrogoths or Alamans. In other words, while Avitus does imply a dislike of some Burgundians, his hostility was directed towards a particular group, and that group was not ethnically defined. Moreover, we know from Marius of Avenches and Gregory of Tours that Godegisel had Roman supporters.⁶⁷ Faction, rather than ethnicity, was what counted.

In Gregory’s presentation set down later in the sixth century the Burgundians are an identifiable unit, all the more so because they were Arian.⁶⁸ Certainly Avitus did argue about doctrine with Gundobad, who in name at least was Arian, and the bishop appealed to the ruler, apparently in public, to reveal himself as a Catholic.⁶⁹ But there is no sense in Avitus’ work that the Burgundians as a group were, or even could be, categorised as Arian — scarcely surprisingly, given that he does not appear to acknowledge their existence as a people. Certainly there was a faction, closely associated with Gundobad, which was powerful enough to prevent him from abandoning Arianism.⁷⁰ Those involved may, however, have been drawn from a number of ethnic groups: Gundobad, in all probability, inherited the following of his mentor Ricimer, who unquestionably was Arian.⁷¹ By contrast, other members of the royal family, including Gundobad’s wife Caretina, and, shortly after 500, Sigismund, were Catholic, as was Chrotechildis, and probably her parents:⁷² indeed there is a case for thinking that Gibichungs in the generation before Gundobad were all Catholic — this, at least is what the Byzantine historian Socrates says.⁷³ In fact, although Avitus has a great deal to say about Arianism, as well as Eutychianism and Nestorianism (neither of them well understood),⁷⁴ in addition to commenting in passing on Donatism,⁷⁵ religion is never linked to a particular ethnic group: there are heretics, but they are never

---

⁶⁶ Avitus, hom. 19, ed. Peiper, 130 – 133.
⁶⁹ Perrt/Audin 1957.
⁷¹ Mathisen 2009a.
⁷⁵ Avitus, ep. 26, ed. Peiper, 57.
presented as Germanic, Gothic or Burgundian – and some of them are clearly Greek or Roman.

If we look to texts almost contemporary with Avitus’s writings for further indications of the categorisation of the followers of the Gibichungs, in the earliest version of the *Vita Abbatum Acaunensium* (arguably written in the 520s) we meet Hymnemodus, *natione barbarus*, the first abbot of Agaune. He is the only individual in the text to be identified with any ‘ethnic descriptor’: neither of the kings who appear in the work are identified as Burgundian or barbarian: nor are any of the Romans who feature in the *vita* identified ethnically. Hymnemodus abandoned court life to become a hermit. It later becomes apparent that the court he abandoned was that of Gundobad, but there is no indication of a conflict between the Catholic barbarian courtier and the Arian king, although the author does later comment on Sigismund’s abandonment of heresy, prior to his foundation of the monastery at Agaune. Why Hymnemodus alone should be identified as a barbarian is something of a mystery, unless his strange name, which appears to be a reworking of the Germanic Immmod to imply an aptitude for liturgical performance, was thought curious. One can only note that the description of the holy man as a barbarian can be set alongside the use of the term in the *Liber Constitutionum* of the same date.

Another text that was composed at almost exactly the same time (and, indeed, which probably inspired the *Vita Abbatum Acaunensium*), the *Vita Patrum Iurensium*, complicates the picture somewhat – although it too never uses the word Burgundian. Here the author certainly was prepared to talk about Gibichungs (another term, of course, which is not used here or indeed in any other source of the period) as threatening the Roman state. In a passage that is not easy to follow we hear that a (clearly unscrupulous) Roman denounced the holy Lupicinus, who had once foretold the arrival of the barbarians:

> Are you not that imposter who has been in our midst a long time, the one who about ten years ago arrogantly denigrated the honour of being a Roman citizen when you proclaimed to this region and to our fathers that ruin was imminent? [Nonne ... *tu es ille dudum noster, qui ante hos decem circiter annos, cum civilitate Romani apicis arrogans derogares, regioni huic ac patribus iam iamque imminere interitum testabaris*]?

Lupicinus pointed to Chilperic, who was present, affirming that purple had indeed given way to animal skins: that is that barbarian authority had taken over from Roman. The passage is curiously ambivalent: the man denouncing Lupicinus is ob-

---

76 For the date, Theurillat 1954, 32–42.
77 *Vita Abbatum Acaunensium absque epitaphiis*, 1, ed. Krusch, 330.
79 For the date and the relationship between the *Vita Patrum Iurensium* and Agaune, see Martine 1968, 53–57.
viously a crook, but the saint uses the image of the fur-clad barbarian, which seems to indicate that there had been a decline in the civilised representation of authority. Moreover, the theme of barbarian take-over recurs elsewhere in the *Vita Patrum Iur­ensium*. In the section concerned with the life of Lupicinus *Æ*gidius is seen as favour­ing barbarians, while Agrippinus, whose wisdom is recognised, is not. One might note, however, that these two individuals appear in other sources, which suggest that they could by no means be described as pro- and anti-barbarian: *Æ*gidius, who was associated with Majorian, emerged as an opponent of Ricimer, and established a ‘Roman’ enclave in the Soissons region, after the fall of the emperor: Agrippinus, by contrast, appears to have become a client of Ricimer. From what can be re­constructed of their careers, it would seem that the author of the *Vita Patrum Iuren­sium* reduced a complex situation to a picture of black-and-white positions: indeed their rivalry belongs to a world of Gallo-Roman factionalism, in which attitudes towards the presence of barbarians was only one (and not always the major) factor. When we turn to the *Life of Eugendus*, the third part of the *Vita Patrum Iurensium*, there is again an emphasis on the establishment of *barbaria*. This vocabulary would seem to imply hostility towards the barbarian incomers. Yet, despite this, Chil­peric himself is described in glowing terms (he is a *vir singularis ingenii et praecipuae bonitatis*): so too, Agrippinus is *vir inlustris [...] sagacitate praeditus singulari*. The author thus sees a major shift in authority, and one that he apparently disliked, but at the same time he could admire individual leaders in the new political establishment.

The date of composition of the *Lives of the Fathers of Jura* would seem to have been around 520, shortly after foundation of the monastery of Agaune by Sigis­mund. How we should read the ambivalence of the author is unclear – not least because there are a number of complicating factors, over and above the problem of understanding the relative positions of *Æ*gidius and Agrippinus. In addition, the author of the *Vita Patrum Iurensium* was in contact with members of the community that had already been in existence at Agaune, and which was disrupted by Sigismund – indeed the text is surely to be understood in the context of the new foundation: moreover, Chil­peric, the virtuous barbarian of the *vita*, may well have been at odds with Sigismund’s father Gundobad, after the latter’s return from

---

84 *Vita Patrum Iurensium*, 128, ed. Martine, 376–379.
88 See *Vita Patrum Iurensium*, praefatio 2, 3, ed. Martine, 238–241, on the presence of John and Ar­mentarius at Agaune.
Italy. It may be that praise for Chilperic, who at the same time is presented as a barbarian, might imply some hostility to other members of the Gibichung family: both to Gundobad, who took over his position, and to Sigismund, of whose intentions at Agaune the author would seem to have disapproved. The tone of the *Vita Patrum Iurensium* is, thus, difficult to assess. Moreover, the narrative looks back a generation, so that the confrontation between Lupicinus and the anonymous Roman ought to take us to 470 or thereabouts.

If we turn to this earlier generation the relations between Roman and Burgundian would seem, not surprisingly, to have been rather different from those that we see in the writings of Avitus and in the *Vita Abbatum Acaunensium*. We find something of the ambivalence of the author of the *Vita Patrum Iurensium* in two, unfortunately dateless, homilies in the Eusebius Gallicanus collection – most of which would seem to have originated in the South-East of Gaul. In one, perhaps written by Faustus of Riez, we find again a barbarian acting more like a Roman:

> Behold, the whole earth trembles at the raging of the most powerful gens: however a man who might be thought of as a barbarian comes to you as a Roman in spirit, and shut in on every side the barbarity of the Romans does not know either to flee to prayers, by which it may humiliate the stronger, nor has it held back the attack, but faintheartedness intolerant of the yoke refuses the peace offered by the superior to the rebels. [Ecce omnis terrae ad potentissimae gentis fremitum contremiscit; et tamen romano ad te animo uenit qui barbarus putabatur, et ex omni parte conclusa romana barbaries, nec ad preces confugere nouit quibus humiliet fortiorem, congressionem non sustinuit, ingestam a superiore pacem recusat impatiens iugi rebellis ignauia.]

We might appear to be on less ambiguous ground when we turn to Sidonius Apollinaris: after all, his denunciation of the Burgundians billeted on him, smelling of garlic and rancid butter, and singing songs, is unquestionably hostile, if intentionally comic. Yet, in a later letter we find him advising Burgundio, surely a man of Burgundian stock, on his literary style. Sidonius’ views inevitably varied according to the situation at the time of writing: we hear of a Burgundian who killed Petronius Maximus, and of Burgundians invading Belgica in the time of the emperor Avitus, and then of their being brought under control. In Majorian’s day Sidonius also found it politic to present the Burgundians as a subdued group. He would

---

89 The fate of Chilperic is unclear, indeed there is no firm evidence for what happened in the Rhône valley between Gundobad’s return from Italy in 474 and the mission of Epiphanius to the Burgundian court twenty years later.
92 Sidonius, carm. XII, ed. Loyen, vol. 1, 103–104; Mathisen 1993, 43.
later present them as subordinate to Euric.\textsuperscript{97} As the barbarians established control in Gaul Sidonius noted the emasculation of the Romans,\textsuperscript{98} and registered the dangers presented by the new powers, not least for those communicating across boundaries.\textsuperscript{99} He was fearful of accusations levelled against relatives and friends before barbarian rulers, yet he felt able to appeal to Chilperic.\textsuperscript{100} Indeed Sidonius, the great upholder of \textit{romanitas}, came to understand that it was necessary to cooperate with barbarians, as did others of his acquaintance. Above all there was Arvandus, who had apparently advised Euric not to make peace with the emperor Anthemius, but rather to attack his British allies, and to divide Gaul with the Burgundians.\textsuperscript{101} Sidonius also knew (like the author of the \textit{Vita Patrum Iurensium} and at least one of the homilists preserved in the Eusebius Gallicanus collection) that barbarians could behave like Romans and vice versa.\textsuperscript{102} Indeed, when he encouraged his friend Secundinus to continue writing satire, it was against the subjects of tyrants, and not the tyrants themselves: \textit{nam tua scripta vitiis proficientibus tyrannopolitarum locupletabunt}.\textsuperscript{103} In the early 470s he noted how well the current Burgundian leadership worked together with the secular and religious aristocracy of the region. Chilperic, the wise Gibichung of the \textit{Vita Patrum Iurensium}, was on excellent terms with bishop Patiens of Lyon, admiring the bishop’s feasts, so Sidonius claimed, while the barbarian’s wife admired his fasts.\textsuperscript{104} In his more political comments the Roman letter-writer is more ambiguous: he refers to Chilperic as \textit{tetrarcha noster}, although it is unclear whether the phrase is intended as a jibe or not.\textsuperscript{105} On the other hand, he clearly sympathised with the Gibichung’s opposition to the policies of Julius Nepos.\textsuperscript{106} For Sidonius in the mid-470s Chilperic’s authority, as \textit{magister militum} or even \textit{tetrarcha}, was Roman in a way that Euric’s was not – though it was with the Gibichung that Arvandus thought Euric should divide Gaul. It is perhaps worth noting a further complication. In c. 468, when Arvandus was inciting Euric to join the Burgundians against Anthemius, the western emperor still had the backing of Ricimer and his protégé Gundobad, Chilperic’s nephew. Although both uncle and nephew would later oppose Julius Nepos, we may have here an indication that previously the affiliations of the two Gibichungs had differed.

Sidonius’ acceptance of the presence of barbarian rulers is less surprising than the image of him as the great defender of \textit{romanitas} might suggest. He was, after

\textsuperscript{97} Sidonius, ep. VIII, 9, 5, l. 34, ed. Loyen, vol. 3, 106.
\textsuperscript{99} Sidonius, epp. III, 4, 1; IX, 3, 2; IX, 5, 1; IX, 9, 6, ed. Loyen, vol. 2, 90, vol. 3, 134–135, 140, 149.
\textsuperscript{104} Sidonius, ep. VI, 12, 3, ed. Loyen, vol. 3, 26–27.
all, the son-in-law of Avitus, whose imperial reign had depended on Visigothic support. Moreover, he belonged to the senatorial aristocracy of Lyon which, to the fury of Majorian, welcomed the Burgundians into the middle Rhône valley. Perhaps the most surprising detail which points towards Sidonius' own collaboration with barbarian leaders is to be found in his epitaph, where we learn that *leges barbarico dedit furori*. This statement is all the more remarkable given the letter to his friend Syagrius, where he calls him a *novus Burgundionum Solon in legibus disserendis*, and notes his role as *arbiter* and *disceptator* in their *negotiismutuis*. There may well be a touch of irony in the comparison between Syagrius and the ancient Greek law-giver, but if there is, it must be read against the fact that Sidonius himself was also involved in legislating for barbarians. Unfortunately the epitaph gives no indication of when this took place, or even whether it was in his years in Lyon, when he would have been advising a Gibichung, or later, when he was bishop of Clermont, when it would have been Euric to whom he gave legal advice.

Yet if we cannot be sure of whether Sidonius gave laws to the Burgundians or to the Visigoths, we can, I think, see in his writings the ambiguity we find in the *Vita Patrum Iurensium*. The barbarians could be uncouth, but they could also be more noble than the Romans – an opinion, of course, that was even more forcefully expressed by Salvian – and, in any case, one had to work with them. In Sidonius' day individuals approved or disapproved of barbarians, and for some ethnic categorisation was an issue, especially in moments of crisis, but there was no blanket hostility. A generation later, by the time that Avitus was bishop, it was possible to ignore the distinction between Roman and barbarian – not that everyone yet did. It was even possible to use the word *barbarus* as a simple descriptor, without any pejorative sense, as we find in the *Liber Constitutionum* and in the *Vita Abbatum Acaunnium*. Not that this was universal: Gelasius and Cassiodorus had a clear sense that barbarians were different, and inferior – an opinion that was at least recognised, if not approved, by the author of the *Vita Patrum Iurensium*. In Gaul, however, the position taken by the two Italians would increasingly have been outdated: Gregory of Tours scarcely worried about the distinction between Romans and Franks, and half of his comments on barbarians come in the single chapter dealing with the adventures of his relative Attalus. Venantius Fortunatus, another Italian, could still see himself as an Orpheus among the barbarians, but this was surely a minority view (and may have been a joke). On the other hand, by the early seventh century, while any mean-

---

107 Mathisen 1993, 83.
108 Harries 1994, 85–86.
ingful distinction between Roman and Frank was vanishing, the word ‘barbarus’ did come, once again, to have pejorative force – being applied to those outside the Merovingian kingdom.\textsuperscript{114} Classification, in other words, was constantly shifting. The evidence for the two generations, of Sidonius and of Avitus, seems to suggest that one change in attitude, and certainly not the last, took place in the late fifth century – no doubt it was facilitated by the role played by the Gibichungs, and indeed by contemporary barbarian leaders, who insisted on presenting themselves as agents of the Roman Empire, and not as barbarian conquerors. For Avitus and for the author of the \textit{Vita Abbatum Acaunensium} it seems not have have mattered that Gundobad and Sigismund were Burgundians: more important was the fact that they and their followers were shoring up what was left of the Roman state.

\textsuperscript{114} Wood 2011, 48–49.