Britons in the Gaul of Sidonius Apollinaris

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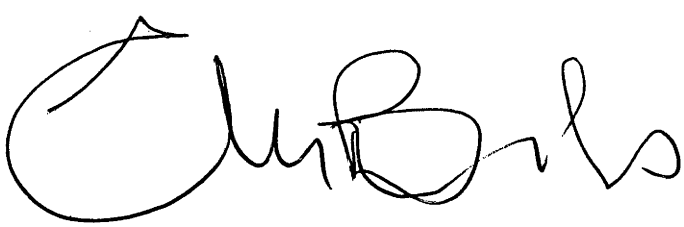
Statement

This is to certify that, where not otherwise acknowledged, this dissertation is entirely my own work. It is the result of research carried out by me while a candidate for the degree of Master of Philosophy, in the Australian National University.



Edwin Melvyn (Bob) Birks

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On a more personal note, I should acknowledge the encouragement of my long-time friend Dr Mark Pallas. But most of all, I am deeply grateful to my wife, Kim, for suffering through the various problems and inconveniences inevitably generated by the presence of an irascible husband trying to complete an apparently endless thesis – and doing so with love. It is to her that this dissertation is dedicated.

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Maps 1, 2 and 3 are adapted from Murray, 2000.

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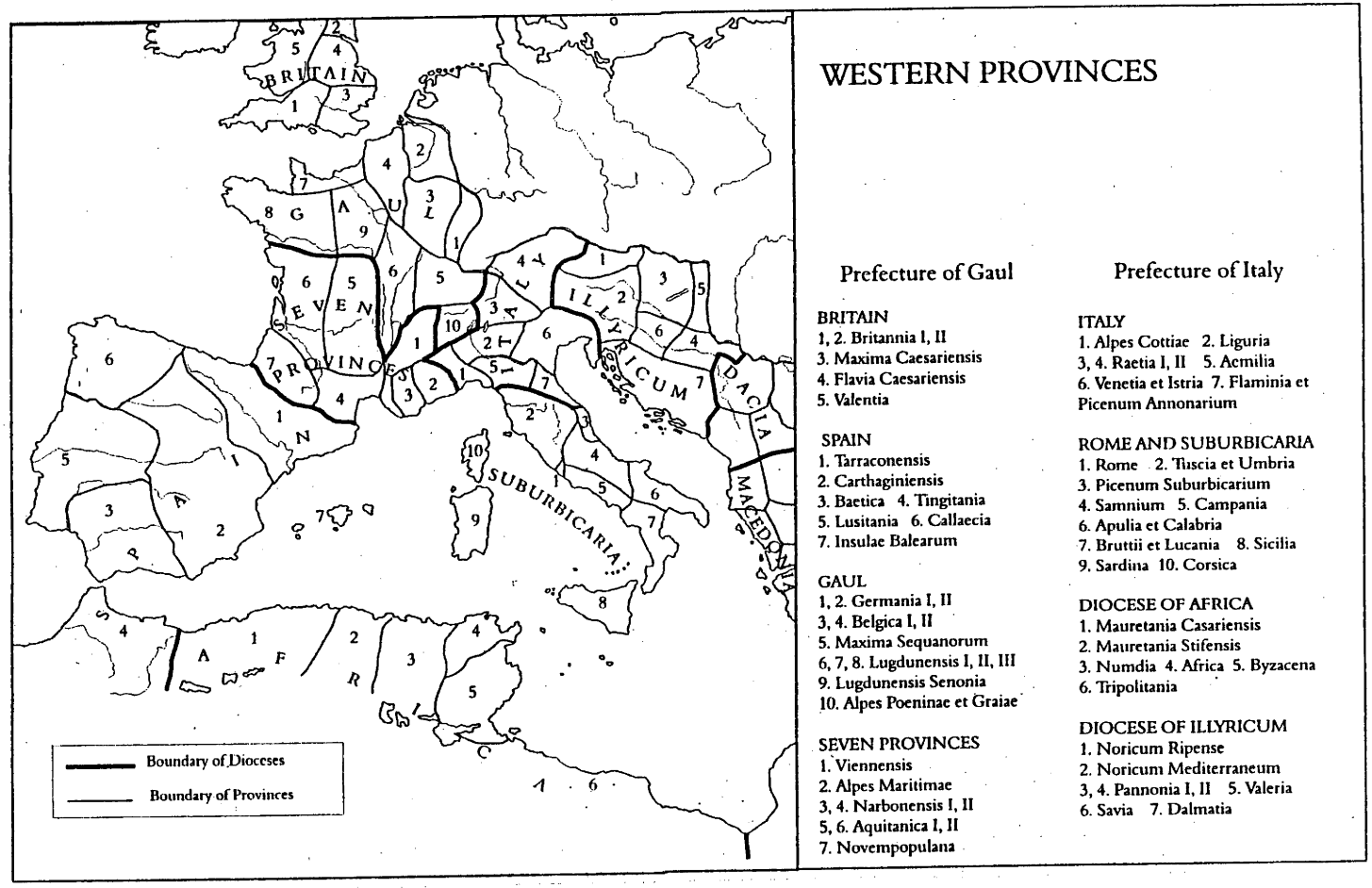


WESTERN PROVINCES

Prefecture of Gaul

BRITAIN
1, 2. Britannia I, II
3. Maxima Caesariensis
4. Flavia Caesariensis
5. Valentia

SPAIN
1. Tarraconensis
2. Carthaginiensis
3. Baetica 4. Tingitania
5. Lusitania 6. Callaecia
7. Insulae Balearum

GAUL
1, 2. Germania I, II
3, 4. Belgica I, II
5. Maxima Sequanorum
6, 7, 8. Lugdunensis I, II, III
9. Lugdunensis Senonia
10. Alpes Poeninae et Graiae

SEVEN PROVINCES
1. Viennensis
2. Alpes Maritimae
3, 4. Narbonensis I, II
5, 6. Aquitanica I, II
7. Novempopulana

Prefecture of Italy

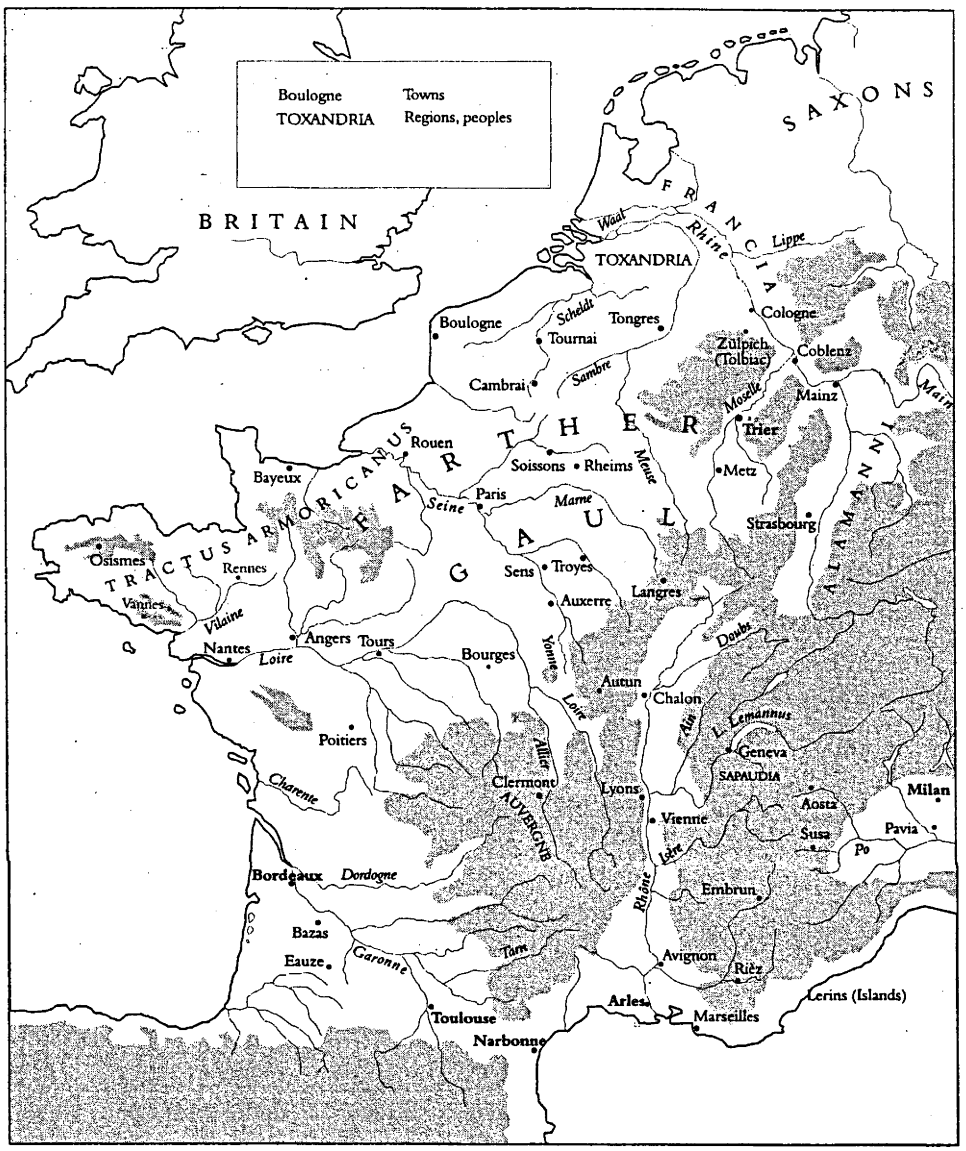
ITALY
1. Alpes Cottiae 2. Liguria
3, 4. Raetia I, II 5. Aemilia
6. Venetia et Istria 7. Flaminia et Picenum Annonarium

ROME AND SUBURBICARIA
1. Rome 2. Tuscia et Umbria
3. Picenum Suburbicarium
4. Samnium 5. Campania
6. Apulia et Calabria
7. Bruttii et Lucania 8. Sicilia
9. Sardina 10. Corsica

DIOCESE OF AFRICA
1. Mauretania Casariensis
2. Mauretania Stifensis
3. Numdia 4. Africa 5. Byzacena
6. Tripolitania

DIOCESE OF ILLYRICUM
1. Noricum Ripense
2. Noricum Mediterraneum
3, 4. Pannonia I, II 5. Valeria
6. Savia 7. Dalmatia

Map 1. Western Roman Empire – Early 5th Century



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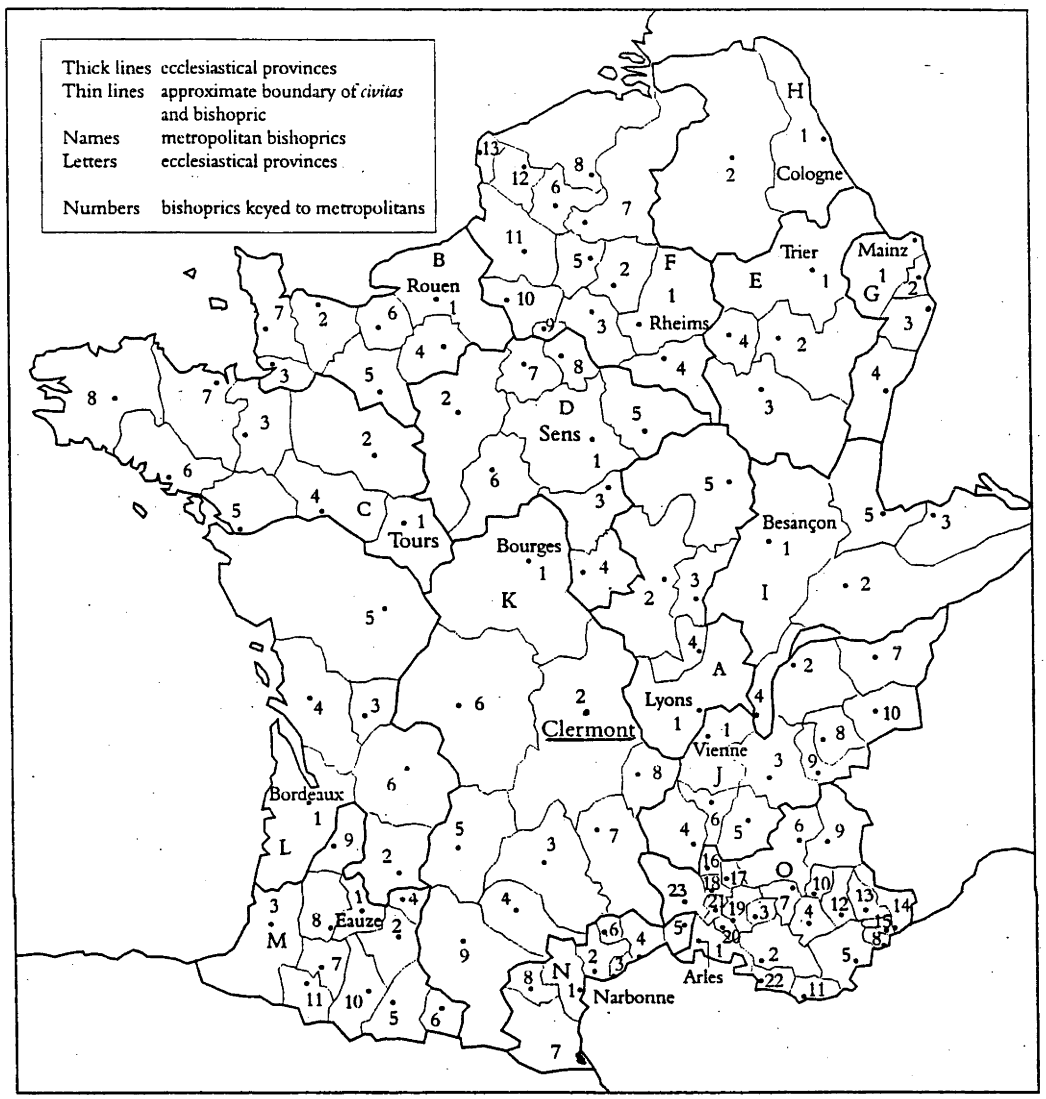
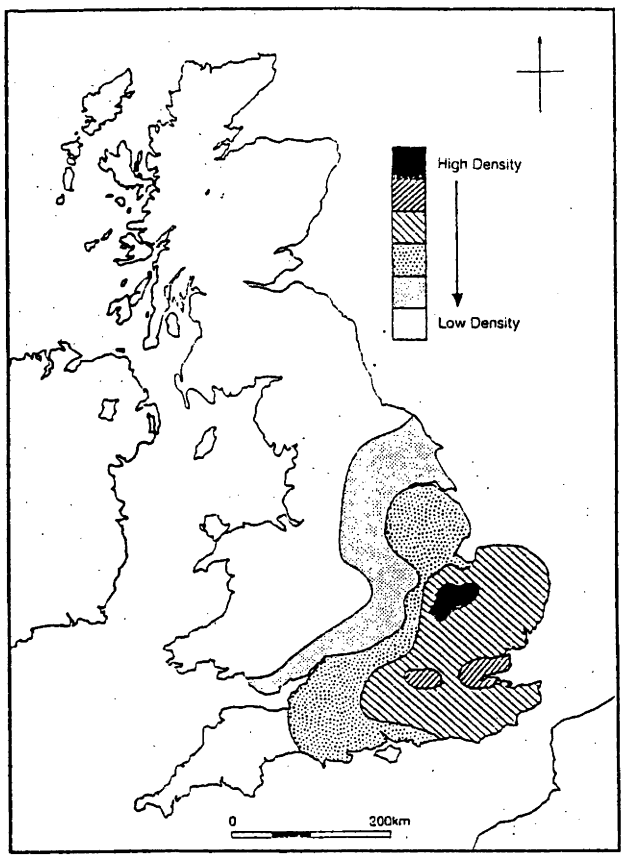


3. Late 5th Century Gaul (Ecclesiastical Provinces)

A Lugdunesis Prima
B Lugdunesis Secunda
C Lugdunesis Tertia
D Lugdunesis Senona
E Belgica Prima
F Belgica Secunda
G Germania Prima
H Germania Secunda
I Maxima Sequanorum
J Viennensis
K Aquitania Prima
L Aquitania Secunda
M Novempopulana
N Narbonensis Prima
O Narbonensis Secunda, Alpes Maritima



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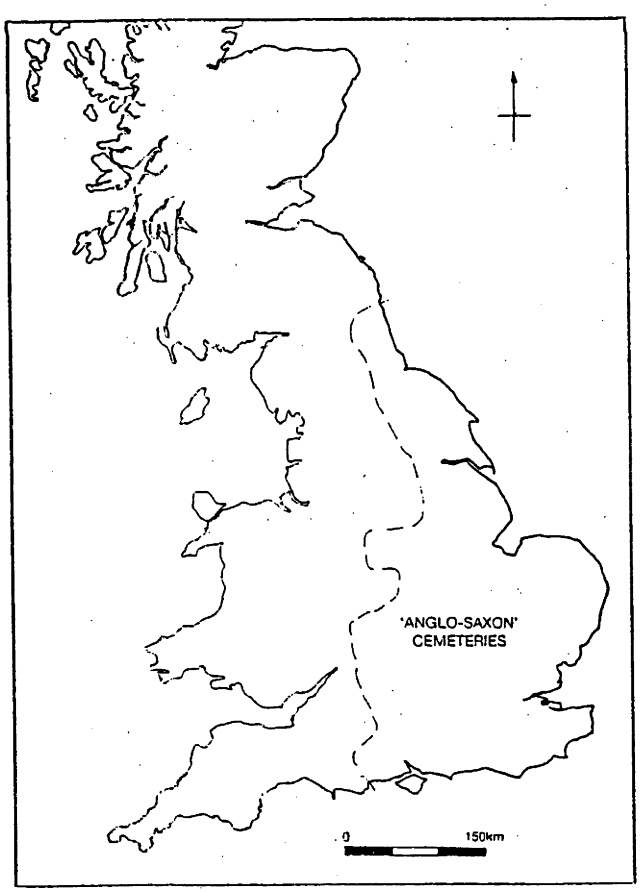

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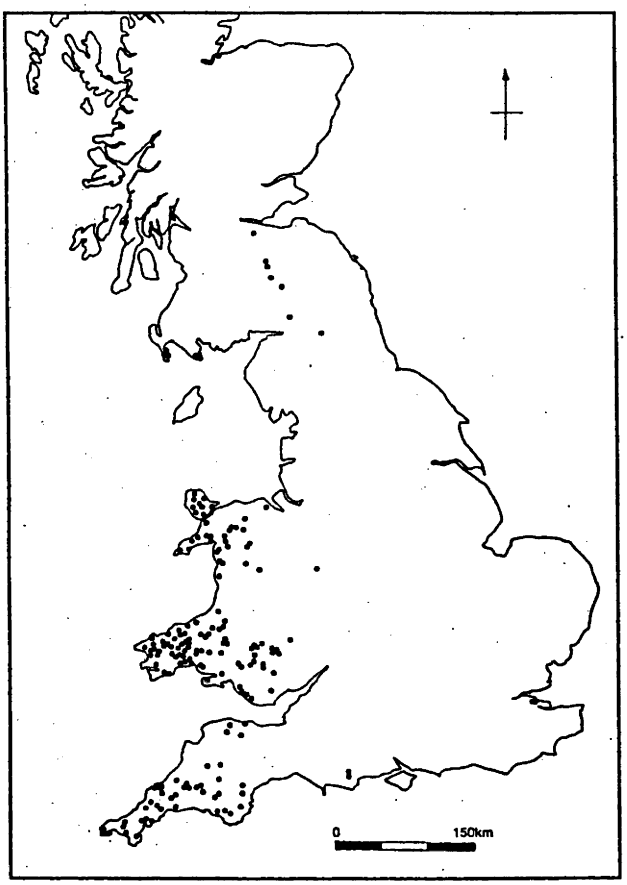

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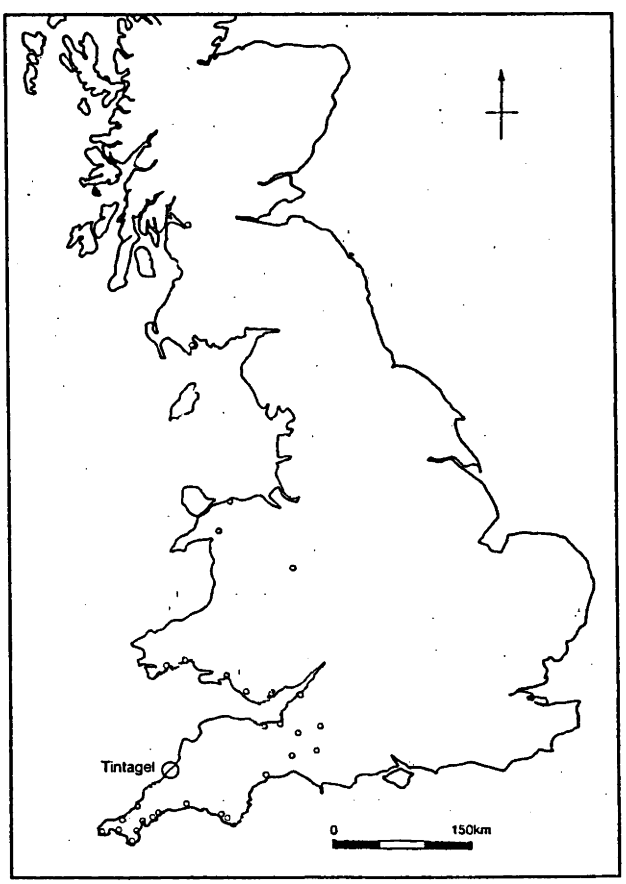

Introductory Matters

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore the nature and context of the intervention in later fifth century Gallic affairs of peoples described by the Gallo-Roman ecclesiastic and litterateur Sidonius Apollinaris, and other late antique authors, as *Britanni* or *Brittones* ('Britons'). In particular, it aims to establish four related propositions, the first being general and the other three more specific:

1. That it is possible to construct a more accurate and detailed picture of the part played in later fifth century Gallic affairs by individuals and groups known as 'Britons' (*Brittones*, *Britanni*) than has previously been rendered.
2. That while, for the *literati* of the late Roman West, 'Briton' (*Britto*, *Britannus*) consistently carried the connotation of Christian *romanitas*, the term was subject to a range of possible meanings – making identification of the precise origins of these individuals and groups impracticable.
3. That the interconnected ecclesiastical networks of the British and Gallic Churches played a significant role in maintaining links between insular and continental 'Britons' and Gallic authorities, both clerical and secular, during the relevant period.
4. That the various associations between these 'Britons' and the clerical author Sidonius Apollinaris, one of our chief sources of information concerning them, were extensive and complex, and important to any understanding of the 'British' intervention in later fifth century Gaul.

The 'Gaul' with which this dissertation deals is the territory then administratively divided into the two late Roman dioceses of *Gallia* to the north, and *Septem Provinciae* to the south. The former comprised the provinces of *Germania I and II, Belgica I and II, Lugdunensis I, II and III, Lugdunesis Senonia, Maxima Sequanorum, and Alpes Poeninae et Graiae*; while the latter contained *Aquitania I and II, Narbonensis I and II, Viennensis, Alpes Maritimae* and *Novempopulana* (see Maps 1 and 2). As we shall see, however, by the mid fifth century control over much of this territory by the central administration at Rome was only notional, and would continue to decline with time.

The nature of the groups of 'Britons' in whom we are interested is a more complex issue, the explication of which constitutes a major strand of this work through to the conclusion. From the outset, though, we will try to heed Nicholas Higham's caution on the precarious nature of ethnic labelling. He has recently observed concerning the present day naming of late antique/ early medieval 'British' populations that:

> 'British' ... can be used of biological descent, use of a particular material culture, style of ornament or burial practice, occupation of a particular space, adherence to a particular historical mythology and/ or religion, or use of a particular language, set of personal names or place names, or a compilation capable of including any one, some, or all of these markers.[1]

Such imprecision in the use of terminology must be recognised and acknowledged. Unavoidably, usage of 'British', 'Britons' and related words in the course of this dissertation will vary with context. However, to help minimise ambiguity the range of meanings applicable to these terms in late antiquity is explored at 1.1 below, together with a more general discussion of matters related to the issue of ethnicity and ethnic labelling.

With respect to the main purpose of this thesis, as set out above, there does not appear to have been a concerted attempt in recent scholarship to cover this same ground in detail. Rather, allusions in modern historical and archaeological works to the intervention of 'British' groups and their leaders in Gaul c. 455-85 have tended to be brief and incidental.[2] In a few instances, authors have focussed particularly on

[1] Higham, 2002a: 29.

[2] Brief references on the subject can be found at: Morris, 1973: 92; Esmonde Cleary, 1989: 174; Elton, 1992: 173; Gillett, 1999: 25; Dark, 2000:25; Higham 2002b: 76; Snyder, 2003: 149-50.

the figure of Riothamus, the sole named military commander of such a group, but usually in an attempt to tie him into an 'Arthurian' construction of British history.[3] Two reasons may be suggested in explanation of this gap in study of the late antique period. The first is that the topic may have suffered from not fitting comfortably into any one specific academic province, and the second that potential investigators have been discouraged by the seeming scarcity of evidence relevant to the subject.

It is not difficult to see how the appearance of 'British' groups on the Continent in later fifth century might fall into the interstices between traditional specialisms – becoming, as it were, a footnote to other matters. Over the past two decades there has been a notable upsurge of academic interest in the late antique period in western Europe (roughly, c.250 to 650 AD), marked by the labours of the many scholars whose works are cited in the course of this dissertation. However, specialist studies of late antique Britain have tended to be somewhat sequestered from the wider field. Even Ken Dark's promisingly titled *Britain and the End of the Roman Empire*, published only four years ago, has comparatively few things to say about specific events beyond insular Britain. [4] Moreover, there is a further disjunction between these 'late antiquarians' and a largely separate body of academics who approach the same period in Britain from an 'Anglo-Saxonist' perspective – one in which Britons most often appear as the ethnic 'Other'.[5] Only a few mavericks like Ian Wood have consistently attempted to bridge these geographic, ethnic and ideological divides.[6]

The study of late antique/ early medieval Brittany forms a separate 'specialism', in which there has been a steady though not particularly intense interest over recent decades among scholars writing in English. The erudite studies of Nora Chadwick, though now somewhat dated in approach, deserve mention.[7] More recent instances may be found in the wide-ranging research projects carried out in this area by Wendy Davies and various colleagues.[8] Also relatively recent is the increased collaboration of English scholars with French historians and archaeologists engaged

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[3] Fleuriot, 1980: 170 ff; Adams, 1993; Ashe, 1995.

[4] Specific scholarly monographs on the end of Roman Britain and the period following include: Simon Esmonde Cleary (1989), Nicholas Higham (1992, 1994), Ken Dark (1993, 2000), Michael Jones (1996) and Chris Snyder (1998).

[5] In this group may be found scholars such as Christopher Scull, Heinrich Härke, John Hines, and Barbara Yorke, examples of whose work are listed in the Bibliography.

[6] For example, Wood, 1987, 1990, 1997.

[7] Most notably, Chadwick, 1955 and 1969.

[8] Davies, 1986; Astill and Davies, 1997; Davies et al., 2000.

in the same area, whose copious research has in the past been published chiefly in francophone journals and monographs.[9] An example is the reporting in both French and English journals of the several seasons of excavation at the site of Le Yaudet, in Ploulec'h, under the joint direction of Barry Cunliffe and Patrick Galliou.[10] Even so, the most extensive and up-to-date French synthesis of the archaeology and history of early medieval Brittany to reach English translation during the past two decades – *The British Settlement of Brittany*, co-authored by Pierre-Roland Giot, Philippe Guigon and Bernard Merignac – barely mentions the particular groups of peregrine *Britanni* with which the present dissertation largely concerns itself.[11]

This brings us to the second reason why the chosen topic may previously have been passed over. It is probable that research has been deterred by the seeming scarcity of apposite references in original historical sources, and of relevant archaeological evidence. However, a thorough and integrative analysis will show that more such material exists than is apparent from a casual survey. A fundamental objective of the present work is to demonstrate the full range and significance of this evidence.

By far the most valuable and extensive of the textual sources available for our analysis are the collected writings of the late Gallo-Roman aristocrat Caius Sollius Modestus Apollinaris Sidonius – more commonly, 'Sidonius Apollinaris' or plain 'Sidonius' – whose life and times are used to frame this dissertation. Sidonius was a scion of the Apollinari, an extended family of senatorial rank prominent among the Gallo-Roman aristocracy of the late Empire. He was born c.430 somewhere in the Lyonnais and raised with a full classical education, which he later delighted in showing off in his various writings.[12] The immediacy of these works render them apposite to any investigation of later fifth century Gaul. More specific to our purpose, it is in three of his letters that Sidonius alludes to certain individuals and groups active in Gaul during this period, with some of whom he had direct personal interaction, and whom he describes as '*Britanni*'.[13] Modern historians are far from consensus on the immediate origins and situation of these people, and label them as 'Britons' or 'Bretons' according to their own personal persuasions. However, the question as to which of the various possible senses of the term Sidonius may in fact

[9] Examples are Galliou, 1983; Guigon, 1994 and 1997.

[10] For instance, Galliou and Cunliffe, 1996; Cunliffe and Galliou, 2000.

[11] Giot et al., 2003: 106, 119.

[12] Sidonius, *Epistulae* IV.i.2-3.

[13] Sidonius, *Epistulae* I.vii, III.ix and IX.ix.

have intended in each instance is a complex one and by no means easy of resolution – as the discussion in following chapters will demonstrate.

As we shall see in Chapter Two, Sidonius' wealth and social position allowed him to pursue a distinguished career, first in the late Roman bureaucracy and latterly as Bishop of *Augustonemetum Avernorum*, modern Clermont. In addition, he became both a noted poet and a prolific correspondent with the notables of his day. He served eminently in the administrations of the three late Western *augusti* Eparchius Avitus (455-56), Flavius Majorianus (457-61) and Anthemius (467-72), and wrote a fulsome panegyric for each of them.[14] These poems are major sources of historical detail for the emperors named, and for the persons and politics associated with their reigns. Much of Sidonius' other poetry also contains material useful to the historian, but it is the nine self-published books of his personal correspondence, hereafter referred to as the *Epistulae*, that provide the most important contribution to an understanding of the social and political transformations taking place in the Roman West during Sidonius' lifetime – though one must here insert a *caveat*.

The concerns and opinions expressed in Sidonius' letters inevitably reflect those of the small, aristocratic and literate coterie with whom he corresponded, and implicit in their collective world-view was a credo that radically divided their circle from the vast majority of the Late Roman population. Sidonius expressed it thus:

> ... the educated are no less superior to the unlettered than men are to beasts.[15]

Accordingly, members of the 'unlettered' servile and peasant classes are rarely seen in Sidonius' writings as individuals whose views and experiences are worth considering, let alone recording. If they appear at all it is usually as a backdrop to the stage on which the 'real' business is being played out, noticed only when their actions speed or impede the agenda of the elite.

An example is Sidonius' account of the severe punishment he had inflicted on some peasant labourers he found inadvertently disturbing the ground near his grandfather's poorly marked grave in the Lyonnais. The incident happened after Sidonius had moved into the Church, and is recounted in a letter to a friend in which

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[14] Respectively, these are Sidonius, *Carmina* VII, V and II.

[15] Sidonius, *Epistulae* IV.xvii.2

the author emphasises his courtesy in sending a full account of the incident to the local bishop (probably Patiens of Lyons) to seek pardon for presuming on the latter's authority. The bishop responded with an enthusiastic approval of his actions.[16] In this way the rituals of polite society were satisfied. On the other hand, it seems never to have impinged on Sidonius' concern that his harsh and hasty treatment of the labourers might be seen as unjust or unchristian. They were merely a bother to be dealt with and brushed aside. Such inherent bias towards an elite viewpoint is too often overlooked in analyses of pre-modern literature – perhaps because, being themselves members of a literate and urbane minority, scholars in the present identify too readily with the *Weltanschaungen* of their earlier counterparts.

In context of the previously noted renaissance in studies of the late antique period, it has been inevitable that Sidonius' career and literary output should also have been the subject of renewed attention. The standard work on this author – at least, in English – was for many decades C.E. Stevens' *Sidonius Apollinaris and his Age* (1933), an erudite work but somewhat dated by advances in scholarship since its first appearance. In 1994 Sidonian scholar Jill Harries published her *Sidonius Apollinaris and the Fall of Rome AD 407-485*, which has to an extent replaced Stevens as the basic English reference on Sidonius' life and works.[17] Over recent decades a number of scholars of the late antique period, most notably Ralph Mathisen, have also authored pieces touching significantly on aspects of Sidonius' interactions with his contemporaries.[18] However, as far as I know, no-one has yet attempted a thorough analysis of the connections between Sidonius and *Britanni* active in the late Western Empire that form an essential concern of the present work.

In her biography, Jill Harries took advantage of two superior Latin editions of the Sidonius' writings not available to Stevens. The first – used as the primary Latin text and translation in this dissertation – is the two volume Loeb edition based on the work of Prof. W.B. Anderson. Volume I, comprising the *Carmina* (Poems) and Books I and II of the *Epistulae*, was first issued in 1936, but the second volume was delayed by Anderson's ill-health and eventual death. It was not until 1965 that Volume II finally appeared, chiefly as the result of collaboration between Prof. W.H. Semple and E.H. Warmington who completed the translation and annotation of the

[16] Sidonius, *Epistulae* III.xii. 1-3.

[17] Harries, 1994; see also her earlier paper, Harries, 1992b.

[18] Mathisen, 1979, 1989, 1993; some other examples are Sivan, 1989; Teitler, 1992; Van Dam, 1985.

text. The most recent Latin edition of Sidonius' complete works is that produced by the Sidonian scholar André Loyen as a basis for his translation of the *Carmina* and *Epistulae* into French.[19] As well as these, the more vernacular English rendering of a number of Sidonius' letters in Alexander Murray's compendium *From Roman to Merovingian Gaul* provides a useful comparison to the florid style of Anderson's versions.[20] The concordance to the *Epistulae* recently produced by Christiansen and colleagues is also an invaluable tool in analysis of the text.[21]

The nine volumes of Sidonius' letters are of a type he describes as: "crammed and loaded with a motley assemblage of topics, times and persons".[22] Individual examples range from formal missives written to great figures of the day down to brief notes to personal friends. Correspondence found in the first two books relates largely to secular concerns from the period before he became Bishop of Clermont in late 469 or 470. Almost all of the letters in the subsequent books relate to the period of his bishopric, extending into the early 480s. Jill Harries has suggested that most of the contents of Books I and II may have been issued separately, perhaps following publication around 469 of Sidonius' *Carmina* containing his panegyrics and other early poetry.[23] If so, this material would have been re-published together with Books III-VII following Sidonius' return to his see at Clermont c.477 after a period of exile (see 5.5 below). Books III, IV, V and VII cover a mixture of ecclesiastical and lay topics, while VI contains letters addressed solely to other bishops. In subsequent years Sidonius separately produced two further volumes of mixed correspondence, Books VIII and IX, the latter probably in or after 481.

Within the confines noted above, Sidonius' arrangement of his correspondence is idiosyncratic – sometimes chronological, sometimes thematic, and often according to no discernible system at all. This causes frequent difficulties when trying to chronologise the bulk of the *Epistulae*. A few letters may be firmly dated from passages relating to external events of a known date but while most of the rest can be set within broader periods, close dating of individual examples often remains conjectural. That the correspondence was edited very carefully for publication is shown in the dedicatory letter to his particular friend Constantius, perhaps a priest of

[19] Loyen, 1960-70.
[20] Murray, 2000: ch. 8.
[21] Christiansen et al., 1997.
[22] Sidonius, *Epistulae* IX.xi.3.
[23] Harries, 1994: 9-10, based on Sidonius, *Epistulae* I.i.

Lyons, which opens the first book. Sidonius writes of his own efforts "to revise and correct the originals" prior to submitting his drafts to Constantius for further "purging ... and polishing".[24] Some letters appear to be pastiches of several pieces or are at least much elaborated.[25] Sidonius also quite obviously excised much subject matter, indeed whole periods of his life, which he may have thought neither judicious nor convenient to be exposing at the time the books were released. As he observed to his friend Leo, an official at the Visigothic court, not long before the publication around 477 of Books I-VII, telling the whole truth in his world and times could be a thankless and dangerous pursuit – even for a bishop.[26]

Yet had Sidonius published the whole corpus of his correspondence unrevised and uncensored, his inner thoughts would still not necessarily have stood revealed to the reader. It is clear from any serious examination of his works that Sidonius was accustomed to write very much with an eye to his audience, slanting his approach according to the effect he wished to evoke. As one might expect of a survivor of numerous changes of regime, the author can often be seen trimming his literary sails to the prevailing socio-political weather. Nonetheless, even after such limitations are taken into account, Sidonius' published letters still constitute by far the most detailed and revealing picture available to us of life and politics among the Gallo-Roman elite in the closing decades of the Western Empire and in the few years following its final collapse.

His references to *Britanni* in the Gaul of his time are almost the only examples contemporary with the matters they address.[27] As a consequence the associated passages tend to be cited whenever the subject of Continental 'Britons' in the later fifth century is raised.[28] However, the contextual background of these passages is rarely explored in any depth – a deficiency the discussion in Chapter Three of this work seeks to remedy. A further issue that has remained largely unexplored by scholars is the complex nature of the personal connections between Sidonius and these people – an aspect that provides one of the two main reasons for choosing Sidonius' career and writings as a framework on which to construct this dissertation.

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[24] Sidonius, *Epistulae* I.i.

[25] As examples, see the editors' notes to *Ep.* IV.xxiv in the Loeb edition, as well as the discussion of *Epistulae* IX.ix at 3.3.1 below.

[26] Sidonius, *Epistulae* IV.xxii.5-6.

[27] These are found at Sidonius, *Epistulae* I.vii.5, III.ix and IX.ix.6.

[28] For instances, see the citations given above in notes 1.and 2. to this section.

The other is the previously noted fact that a survey of the author's life and works provides the best available insight into relevant socio-political developments in Gaul (and, to an extent, in the rest of the Western Roman Empire) during the period under examination. This characteristic is featured, more particularly, in the historical exposition contained in Chapters Two and Five.

Supplementing Sidonius' references to *Britanni* in Gaul are passages from the *Getica* of the Romano-Gothic historian Jordanes and the *Historiae* [*Francorum*] of Gregory, Bishop of Tours. These contribute significant direct references concerning a later fifth century 'British' military *adventus* in Gaul, as well as an amount of other material useful to our purpose. Although written in the later sixth century, and thus a considerable time after the events with which this study is concerned, both works may with due caution be regarded as carriers of valuable information. Their overall nature and contexts, together with those of the specific passages cited, are discussed at length in Chapter Four. In addition to these two works, a considerable amount of useful and relevant data is also adduced from a variety of other historical and archaeological sources in the course of the dissertation.

In the examination of these sources, considerable space is devoted to exploring matters of context and interpretation. While consciously eschewing the worst ambiguities of post-modern analysis, I willingly acknowledge that the quality of information adducible from such sources is mediated by a complex of factors relevant to their interpretation. These include the motives and intents of creators, editors and previous interpreters, as well as the various physical and ideological constraints to which these people were subject. A degree of source deconstruction is therefore not only desirable, but in many cases essential.

Rather than at all times arguing in support of a particular case, I have adopted a more integrative approach to the evidence available. This has aimed first at the careful analysis of data to sort fact from supposition, and secondly at the identification of relationships among seemingly disparate 'bits' of information in order to assemble as coherent a picture of the subject matter as is possible in such a precarious field of enquiry. At some points of the dissertation, the process followed has resulted in the statement of firm conclusions, sometimes counter to the opinions of more established authorities. However, it is often the case that I have not felt justified in venturing more than the assignment of probabilities among several viable historical options.

Direct quotations from original documentary sources are usually given in English translation. However, several major passages are cited in both English and Latin, the modern version being clarified by reference to the original text (as edited). In recognition of my own deficiencies as a Classical scholar, I have utilised the best accessible published English translation of a given text, together with the best available Latin edition where applicable. Spelling and punctuation in these passages remains as given by editors and translators. It should also be noted at this point that although none of the principal works mentioned in the preceding two paragraphs is without problems in transmission, all have sufficiently broad manuscript traditions to allow the production of satisfactory edited texts. Moreover, in no case would known textual variations alter the essential meanings of the main passages cited insofar as these directly concern the British groups in whom we are interested.[29]

Having completed the necessary introductory material we will now move on to the body of the thesis, which proceeds as follows:

- Chapter One provides a basis for consideration of the place of 'Britons' in mid fifth century Gaul by first exploring the nature of ethnic labelling, both more generally and as it relates to the late antique period. To assist in validating Proposition Two of the thesis, discussion then moves to the specific nuances of meaning attached to *Britanni* ('Britons') and associated terms around Sidonius' time. The second part of the Chapter contributes to the establishment of Propositions Three and Four of the thesis through detailing the political separation of the Diocese of Britain from the Roman Empire and how the situation continued to evolved in decades leading up to the period c.455-480. Ongoing links between the former diocese and the Continent are examined, emphasising the web of ecclesiastical connections between Britain and Gaul, and the particular place of Sidonius Apollinaris within this structure.

[29] For commentary on the textual transmission and editing of Sidonius' *Epistulae,* one should consult the respective 'Introductions' to Volumes I (1936) and II (1965) of the Loeb edition, together with textual notes; also notes and comments in the Loyen edition (1960-70). For Jordanes' Getica, see the 'Praefatio' to the Giunta-Grillone edition (1991) together with textual notes; also Bradley (1995 a and b; 1997). For Gregory's Historiae, see the 'Praefatio' (1951) and textual notes (1937/ 42) to the Krusch-Levison edition, also Goffart (1989) and Heinzelman (2001: 192-201).

- Chapter Two employs the writings of Sidonius, supplemented by other sources, to chronicle the unravelling of the social and political fabric in Gaul and the rest of the Western Roman Empire during its closing decades. The chapter also explores the complex environment in which Sidonius negotiated his private life and public career. Discussion centres on the period leading up to the accession of the Western *augustus* Anthemius (467-72), and the political crises evident during his reign, since it is within this framework that the groups identified by Sidonius and other authors as *Britanni* or *Brittones* ('Britons') make their appearance in Gallic affairs. The objective here is to provide a firm context for an examination discussion of the roles played by these 'Britons' and their leaders in the military and political affairs of Gaul during last years of Roman authority and in the period following immediately afterward. At the same time, the particular role of Sidonius Apollinaris in the unfolding of these events is also explored in detail.

- Chapter Three focuses more directly on the main theme of this dissertation, namely the nature and context of a 'British' presence in Gaul during the 460s to 480s, as well as Sidonius' connections to these people. Specifically, the chapter contributes to the establishment of Proposition Four of the thesis by examining the contexts of the contemporary references to *Britanni* found in three of Sidonius' published letters. The first two of these will be seen to refer to a group (or groups) of 'Britons' who were militarily and/ or politically active in central Gaul in the 460s and 470s. The place within Roman society of the intended recipient of the second letter, the (evidently) 'British' war leader and imperial functionary Riothamus, is also discussed in detail. The third of Sidonius' references contributes toward the establishment of Proposition Three of the thesis by providing further insight into interaction between British and Gallic ecclesiastics in the later fifth century, along with the potential diplomatic dimensions of such contacts.

- Chapter Four furthers the intent of Proposition One of the thesis through a detailed examination of the contributions of two later historians to our understanding of the *adventus* in central Gaul c.470 of a military force of 'Britons', and more particularly of its attempt on behalf of the Western Empire to defend the *civitas* of Bourges against invasion by the expansionist Visigothic *regnum* based in south-west Gaul. The two authors are Jordanes and Gregory of Tours. Contextual analyses are provided for the pertinent works of both men, as

well as for the particular passages from their writings brought under examination. The quality and nature of the relevant information adducible from each of these sources is also analysed, and information gained in this and preceding chapters is used to explore the question of the possible origins of the British expedition and of their commander Riotimus/ Riothamus.

- Chapter Five opens with an examination of the dating of the British defeat at Bourges in order to correlate the action with other events taking place in central and eastern Gaul at around the same time. Discussion then focuses on circumstances associated with the contemporaneous and ultimately unsuccessful defence of Roman Clermont against the Visigoths, leading to the city's acquisition by Euric in 475 – as well as what happened afterward. These events are set in context of the later years of Sidonius' career, and within the wider history of the last years of the Western Empire. The role of Sidonius' brother-in-law Ecdicius Avitus in matters is explored, together with the part played by the Burgundian *regnum*. Discussion then returns to Riothamus and his 'British' army and what happened after their defeat at Bourges. The question of the whereabouts and occupation of the war-band at the time of Sidonius' letter to the British leader is revisited, with reference to the role British troops might have played in the final defence of Sidonius' Clermont. The chapter closes with an overview of events leading to the end of the Western Empire and afterward, and how these events impacted on Sidonius Apollinaris and his various associates prior to his death in the early 480s.

- Finally, the Conclusion will briefly review how the various strands of the work have contributed toward fulfilling the stated purposes of the dissertation.

Chapter One

Britons in the world of Sidonius Apollinaris: contextual beginnings

Introduction

This opening chapter provides a basis for consideration of the place of 'Britons' in mid fifth century Gaul by first exploring the nature of ethnic labelling, both more generally and as it relates to the late antique period. To assist in validating Proposition Two of the thesis, discussion then moves to the specific nuances of meaning attached to *Britanni* ('Britons') and associated terms around Sidonius' time. The second part of the Chapter contributes to the establishment of Propositions Three and Four of the thesis through detailing the political and cultural separation of the Diocese of Britain from the Roman Empire during the early fifth century and how that process continued to evolve in the decades leading up to the period c.455-480. Ongoing links between the former diocese and the Continent are examined, emphasising the significance of the web of ecclesiastical connections between Britain and Gaul, and the particular place of Sidonius Apollinaris within that structure.

1.1 'Britain', 'Britons', 'British': meanings in context

1.1.1 The construction and significance of ethnic identity in Late Antiquity

Any attempt to explore what nuances the term *Britanni* might have carried for Sidonius Apollinaris, his peers and his audience leads inevitably into the precarious area of ethnic labelling – more particularly as that field applies to late antique/ early medieval Europe. As a conceptual basis for discussion it will first be useful to establish what constitutes such a thing as an ethnic identity, as well as how such identity may be expressed by individuals and groups, and interpreted or categorised by observers. In view of the ambiguities attending modern debates on the subject, we will begin by specifying the meanings of a few relevant terms as used in this dissertation:[1]

- *Ethnicity*: the sum of social and psychological phenomena associated with the development and maintenance of ethnic identity – especially as expressed in processes mediating the identification of, and transaction among, ethnic groups.
- *Ethnic identity*: that aspect of a person's self-conceptualisation resulting from his/ her identification by self or others with an ethnic group – as separate from (or in opposition to) other groups.
- *Ethnic group* or *ethnie*: a sizeable body of people exhibiting a social complexity beyond a simple kinship group, and whose members set themselves apart according to a coherent sense of self-identity based on perceived common descent and resultant cultural differentiation, or are thus set apart by others.
- *Ethnogenesis*: the process through which the identity of an emerging ethnic group is constructed over time.
- *Ethnic labelling*: the application of names/ labels, by self or others, to groups and individuals on the basis of perceived ethnicity – often according to some prevailing system of classification.

It is central to the 'instrumentalist' approach to ethnicity here employed that personal ethnic identity is not a fixed quality inherited from ancestors and passed on to descendants in a deterministic manner, but rather a conceptual framework constructed in the interaction between the individual and his/ her socio-cultural environment. In other words ethnicity is 'memetic' rather than genetic: a newborn placed for

[1] For an overview of the precarious nature of the term 'ethnicity', see Banks, 1996. The first three definitions given here are very loosely adapted from Jones, 1997: xiii.

adoption will continue to carry the genes of its biological parents but will most often acquire the ethnic ascription of its adoptive kin. Ethnic praxis tends to be subliminally mediated by a set of symbolic representations and habitual behaviours that prevail largely without reference to stated rules.[2] Even so, in reaction to circumstances individuals and groups may consciously modify the expression of their ethnic affiliation, or even switch ethnic identities altogether.[3] It is essential to recognise, however, that the relative importance of ethnic affiliation as a component of self-identity can vary widely from culture to culture, from time to time, and even from class to class within a given society. For example, among the non-literate servile and agrarian peasant majority of the late imperial West – people whom writers like Sidonius Apollinaris largely ignored – physical and social mobility were generally restricted and contacts with the wider world few.[4] The self-identity of these people is far more likely to have been based on a sense of social position and place in locality than on an unambiguous concept of membership in a more extensive ethnie.

Ethnic identity can be expressed only where there is a discrete awareness of groups separate and distinct from one's own – the ethnic 'Other'. Barth has argued that maintenance of a perceptual boundary between 'us' and 'them' is in fact an essential characteristic of group existence and continuity.[5] This margin can be permeable. Individuals may join or leave the group, expression of its cultural tradition may change over time, but as long as a notional divide between group members and the 'Other' endures the ethnie will persist. Such boundaries may be marked by any combination of the various attributes typically associated with ethnicity. Thus identifers such as geographical origin, religion, clothing style or personal ornamentation might be emphasised according to situation.[6] However, one of the most powerful of these ethnic markers is language.

To outsiders, the preferred speaking of particular languages by groups or individuals is a conspicuous and convenient ethnic classifier. At the same time, a group member's deepest bonds are formed amongst family and kin, along with the fundamental stages of identity formation. These processes are almost always negotiated via the individual's birth tongue, which then comes to define the wider

[2] Bentley, 1987.

[3] For examples of this process, see Barth, 1956.

[4] See A.H.M. Jones, 1964: ch. XX.

[5] Barth, 1969.

[6] Renfrew, 1996: 130, supplies a sample list of common ethnic identifiers.

group to which that person 'belongs'. Fluency in this language allows a set of shared understandings, judgments and values denied to outsiders. The loss of such facility does not necessarily mean the extinction of a related ethnic identity but, as Mari Rhydwen has observed, language loss can be devastating to the continuity of a culture, particularly where no written form of the language is available to preserve a picture of the past distinct from living memory:

> [A people] can be erased by killing their way of being, their culture. Central to culture is language. Without language, the stories, laws, and history in which the wisdom and knowledge of a people are embedded disappear. Although people can and do maintain a cultural identity when they no longer speak their former language, it is undeniable that ... undocumented ways of knowing vanish when a language is lost.[7]

Language death has been a perennial phenomenon in human history, albeit one more closely observed in recent times as 'killer' languages such as English have extinguished a multiplicity of indigenous tongues. Of the 6,000+ living languages currently recognised, 25% have less than one thousand speakers, and 8% have less than one hundred. Having evolved over millennia, most of the latter are expected to disappear as spoken languages within the next fifty years.[8] In many of these cases there will be a concomitant extinction of the discrete ethnic identities of the speakers. The interaction between language shift and ethnicity is not reducible to a simple set of deterministic rules. Nonetheless, one useful model is that evolved by Howard Giles and colleagues, which ascribes the survival potential of a given language to its 'ethnolinguistic vitality'.[9] This quality is conceived in the interplay of three sets of factors:

- *Status:* the perceived cultural, political and economic standing of a language and its speakers in relation to competitors.
- *Demographic strength:* speaker numbers; representation in a given population; geographic spread or concentration.
- *Institutional support:* representation of speakers in the existing power structure; a body of literature in the language; agencies of education.

It is evident that in this model the 'vitality' of a language is to a substantial degree determined by the subjective perceptions of its speakers. In pursuit of socio-economic self interest, speakers of languages with low ethnolinguistic vitality will

[7] Rhydwen, 1999: 132.
[8] Crystal, 2000: 13-16.
[9] For instance, Giles and Johnson, 1981, 1987.

display an increased tendency to follow strategies of assimilation leading them to seek fluency in a more 'vital' language – often while losing competency in the tongue handed down from their ancestors. Within as little as two generations, the former language can be lost almost completely.[10] The ethnic culture associated with the former language may also be devalued and, in time, abandoned. In this way an entire ethnic 'group' can be extinguished within a given territory, not through the destruction of its members but through their defection. This process follows particularly on the economic, socio-cultural, or political domination of one ethnic culture by another. Even so, memory of a former ethnie may persist to be reconstructed or reinterpreted by successor groups seeking to link themselves to it either via assumed cultural/ genealogical descent or, conversely, through an emphasis on their own superiority as its conquerors and supplanters.

Defining ethnic identities in the distant past is always problematic, in that we are dependent either on our own analyses of the views expressed in contemporaneous historical sources, or on interpretations attached to artefactual evidence, usually as obtained through archaeological investigation. With regard to the latter, however, if ethnic identity is accepted to be a situational construct it follows that without a clear understanding of the contextual past, present interpretation of symbolic elements mediating such identity can only be tentative. For example, what might be regarded *a priori* as ethnic markers, such as use of a particular style of material culture, may for low-status groups like the agrarian peasantry of the late antique West be matters of simple utility and hence peripheral to their conceptualisations of self. A given artefact found in a given situation may indeed have reflected – or have been intended to assert – ethnic affiliation. Conversely, its use might have been a declaration of actual or desired social status, or simply adventitious.

In practical terms: a good cooking pot was a good cooking pot, no matter what its style or place of manufacture. Its use may have meant the owner ate better, but perhaps nothing more than that. The utilitarian adoption of a language may be seen in similar terms. Groups might thus assume the trappings of an ethnic affiliation without wittingly assuming the associated identity – although such acquisition could well represent a major step on the way towards subsequent affiliation at the point when these 'trappings' become consciously transformed into ethnic markers.[11]

[10] For examples, see Crystal, 2000; also papers in Dorian, 1999, and Nettle and Romaine, 2000.

[11] See 1.1.2 below in reference to the transformation of a 'British' peasantry into an 'English' one.

On the other hand, adoption of aspects of another culture might never translate into changes in ethnic identity. Japanese society did not cease to be 'Japanese' when their elite took up European material and cultural forms in the 19th century.

This more dynamic approach to the archaeology of ethnicity has largely superseded the 'culture history' paradigm, correlating 'archaeological cultures' with historically named peoples. Such cultures were once held to be "recurrent assemblages of associated types" occurring over distinct geographical areas or "culture provinces".[12] The function of the trained specialist was to piece together the bits of the archaeological record in order to reveal them. It was then only a small step to identifying these entities with particular groups of people whose movements could be traced as the archaeological culture in a given location changed, or the boundaries of culture provinces expanded, contracted and/ or interacted with others:

> The archaeologist is then an historian, but an historian of culture. His agents are not concrete individuals, but abstract groups of persons who share a tradition to which each individual contributed. Community of tradition imposes on all members of the society in question a common pattern of behaviour. This must result in the production of standard types which, if they be artefacts, burial rites or remains of repasts, archaeology can identify.
>
> ...
>
> Distributional changes [in the archaeological record] should reflect displacements of population, the expansions, migrations, colonizations or conquests with which literary history is familiar.[13]

Not long after Gordon Childe wrote these words, however, the approach outlined came under sustained criticism on epistemological grounds, which led to its general abandonment as an explanatory model – at least by archaeological theorists. After that the whole question of how ethnicity related to material culture was caught up in the rapid evolution and divergence in the theory of archaeological interpretation marking the past few decades. The twists and turns of that debate are too complex to go into here.[14] Suffice it to say current theoretical orthodoxy would allow that the meanings attached by people to material culture are not fixed but contingent, and therefore fluid over time and space. When pushed, most archaeologists specialising in late antique/ early medieval Europe would now agree with Andrew Tyrell that:

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[12] Childe, 1956: 112.

[13] Childe, 1956: 9-10 and 135.

[14] Siân Jones, 1997, provides a useful overview.

> The traditional culture-history approach identifying changes in material culture (and mainly change in distribution and type of grave goods) during the early medieval period as equivalent to a gene-flow map of the period is probably grossly mistaken in terms of actual events and certainly flawed in its theoretical premise.[15]

It nonetheless remains common practice for archaeologists to endow recovered artefacts with an ethnic attribution – due in part to the sheer convenience of such labelling, but perhaps more to the time lag required for theoretical considerations to have a practical effect at the field level. Unfortunately, such lack of clarity still produces circular reasoning along the lines, 'this is an Anglo-Saxon artefact since it was found in the grave of a man known to be an Anglo-Saxon because his grave contained Anglo-Saxon artefacts.' Similar tautologies have been'invoked in the labelling of so-called 'British' material culture. An example is the largely mistaken tendency to look for signs of the survival of a 'British' population in early medieval England by seeking residual 'Celtic' stylistic influences in the typing of artefacts found in 'Anglo-Saxon' contexts.[16] However, as Guy Halsall has cogently observed:

> It is time to move on from the notions that we can give that we can give unproblematic, monolithic 'Anglo-Saxon' or 'British' identities to material culture ... and explain perceived problems or discrepancies by reference to one people pretending to be another.[17]

Whatever the flaws in the archaeological approaches to ethnic labelling, though, it must also be acknowledged that the relationship between ethnicity and historical discourse is no less problematic. The ideological underpinning of ethnic affiliation lies in a perception of common ancestral descent, and hence of a degree of 'blood' kinship with other members of the ethnie – but whether this perception is factually based is of less importance than the intensity with which it is believed:

> ... continuity and discreteness are ideologies of ethnic groups and not necessarily veritable qualities of such groups. To go even further, it might be argued that the *ideology* of cultural continuity and discreteness is the essential distinguishing characteristic of ethnic groups and their permutations, as opposed to other human collectivities. A century of observation has taught us that, while some ethnic groups may indeed be ancient, others are brand new, and not only the groups but also the cultures or traditions, or "heritages" to which they refer can be of recent vintage. It is not ... important that the memory of the past be true, only that it be strong and convincing.[18]

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[15] Tyrell, 2000: 139.

[16] This, essentially, is the approach found in Laing, 1977.

[17] Halsall, 1999: 141.

[18] Eller, 1999: 15.

Disparate peoples who act together through a variety of circumstances, including ethnic labelling by outsiders, can develop a sense of common ethnic identity. Cultural traditions, customary practices and myths of origin may then be adapted or constructed, often from elements pre-existing among elements of the group membership. Such myths, traditions and practices can be subject to definition and manipulation by social elites in their own advantage: to bolster their own status and to enlist the wider ethnie in support of the elite agenda. Traditions and practices running counter to the 'received' picture will tend to be suppressed. This set of processes has been tagged 'ethnogenesis'.[19] As such societies become literate, or at least develop a literate elite, traditions and legends are in time massaged into written histories, sometimes wrought around the pedigree of a current ruling house.

This kind of historical creation can be observed amongst a number of the ethnies emergent from the social and political roil of the collapse of the Western Roman Empire – an example being the 'Gothic history' of Cassiodorus, on which the *Getica* of Jordanes was said to be based (see 4.2.2 below).[20] The very fact of being committed to writing gave these 'historical' traditions added authority and durability, in turn reinforcing the ethnic cohesion of the groups to which they referred. In reality, there is considerable debate as to what extent the peripatetic barbarian *gens* of the period, are best understood as 'peoples' that featured employable warrior castes, or multi-ethnic armies that transmogrified into 'peoples' within the bounds of the Roman Empire. Precisely this question has been posed of the groups that ultimately evolved into the Visigothic and Ostrogothic *regnae*.[21]

Despite the evidence before them, the *literati* of the late antique West shared the 'primordialist' perspective of earlier classical authors. From Tacitus to Isidore of Seville, the human race was classified into discrete 'peoples' (*populi, gentes, nationes*) notionally distinguished by variations in dress, weaponry and language.[22] In a given present, these *gentes* were normally depicted as fundamental categorisations, based on common descent and persistent over time – constructs that continued into the later medieval period and, problematically, even down to modern

[19] Elite manipulation is canvassed in Smith, 1986: ch. 4. For detailed case studies of ethnogenesis in the near-modern period, see Peel, 1989, and Roosens, 1989: ch.8.

[20] For discussion on the nature of ethnic affiliation and ethnogenesis in the relevant period, see papers in Ausenda (ed.), 1995; Pohl (ed.), 1998; Gillett (ed.), 2002.

[21] For instance, Lieberschuetz, 1992, and Heather, 1996.

[22] Notably, Tacitus' *Germania* and Isidore's *History of the Goths, Vandals and Suevi.*

times. As Patrick Geary has observed, the written word "profoundly influenced the transmission of the past and the control of the present in early medieval Europe".[23]

Sidonius Apollinaris was a man of his times, a reflector of his age rather than an originator. His own employment of ethnic terminology would therefore to a large extent have been drawn from a common conceptual field shared with his peers, past and present. More particularly, these would have been the members of the Gallic elite with whom he was personally acquainted. In order to understand what Sidonius may have had in mind when using the label *Britanni*, we shall now proceed to a survey of what meanings and connotations may have been attached to this and related ethnic terminology by others among the *literati* of the late antique West – including some who were associated in one way or another with Sidonius' circle. We shall also see how such meanings were evolving over time in reaction to events, such as the establishment of a 'Saxon' ethnie in insular Britain.

1.1.2 Late Antique use of *Britanni, Brittones*, and related terminology

During the imperial period, insular Britain was commonly referred to as '*Britannia*',[24] although the term was used in at least two senses. Geographically it named the whole of the island, but in a political context only that part of it governed by the Empire. The original province of *Britannia* at first encompassed all of Roman Britain, but by the end of the fourth century it had been subdivided into four separate provinces, or perhaps five depending on how the evidence is interpreted.[25] Together they comprised the Diocese of the Britains, a division of the Prefecture of the Gauls whose civil government lay in the hands of the appropriate Praetorian Prefect. This situation led to use of the plural form *Britanniae* ['the Britains'] in reference to both geographical and 'Roman' Britain – as in the works of the fourth century historian Ammianus Marcellinus.[26] The same usage was continued by authors in the fifth century, even after the diocese moved beyond the direct control of the Empire. Thus Patrick [*Patricius*], a British-born missionary to Ireland writing somewhere in the middle of that century , employs "*in Brittanniis*" for "in Britain".[27]

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[23] Geary, 1999: 169. See also comments on 'British' vs. 'English' histories in the following section.

[24] As in the personification of a beleaguered Britain in Claudian's *On Stilicho's Consulship* II.247.

[25] These were *Britannia Prima*, *Britannia Secunda*, *Maxima Caesariensis* and *Flavia Caesariensis*, plus *Valentia* if this was not one of the other provinces renamed.

[26] For instance, *Rerum gestarum libri* XXVII.8.

[27] Patricius, *Liber Epistolarum: Confessio*, II.110.

A result of the earlier ambiguity was that the word *Britannus* (pl. *Britanni*), usually translated as 'a Briton', could also be used in more than one sense. It described both a citizen whose home or origin lay within the British diocese and, more generally, any native of insular Britain whether Roman or non-Roman. More commonly, however, members of the tribes dwelling north of the Firth of Forth were collectively labelled *Picti*, while Irish raiders and settlers active in Britain were called *Scot(t)i*. At some point before the early fourth century the word *Brit(t)o* (pl. *Brittones*), a cognate of *Britannus*, had also come into use. The Gallic poet Ausonius of Bordeaux, writing at that time, employed the two terms interchangeably in his verse – as may be seen in an epigram lampooning one Silvius 'the Good', as well as Britons more generally:

> '*Silvius hic Bonus est.*' '*quis Silvius*?' '*iste Britannus.*'
> '*aut Britto hic non est, Silvius aut malus est.*'
>
> This is Silvius 'Good'. Silvius who? He's a Briton.
> Either he's not a Briton, or he's Silvius 'the bad'.[28]

At least one late antique author on the Continent, perhaps lured by *Britanniae* to think in terms of *insulae*, seems to have conflated Ireland (*Scotia, Hibernia*) with 'the Britains'. The cleric Jerome, in his *Adversus Jovianum* written early in the fifth century, tells of meeting representatives of the *Atticotti* in his youth, probably as troops in Roman employ. He describes them as a 'British' people.[29] However, not only do some manuscripts have *Scotti* for *Atticotti* at this point, but Philip Rance has argued persuasively that *Atticotti* represents a latinicisation of the Gaelic term *aithectuatha*, used to denote members of the so called 'lesser' tribes of Ireland.[30] At around the same time, in his *Commentary on Jeremiah*, Jerome accuses the theologian Pelagius of having gluttonously stuffed himself with '*pultibus Scottorum*', Irish porridge. If intended as an ethnic slur, this is not consonant with several other early sources which describe Pelagius as a Briton.[31]

Until c.409, when the British diocese moved beyond the ambit of the Roman *imperium*, the labels *Britannus* and *Britto* seem to have been applied almost solely in reference to geographic origin in the island(s) of Britain. There is no evidence,

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[28] Ausonius *Opera*, XIII. *Epigrammata* 117. The English translation is my own attempt.

[29] The relevant passage is quoted at Koch and Carey, 2000: 49 §62.

[30] Rance, 2001.

[31] Prosper Tiro, *Chronicle*, Year 386 (c.413 AD). For Jerome on Pelagius, see Rees, 1988.

however, that a specific and subsuming 'British' identity existed within Britain itself. In fact, as with the rest of Western empire at the time, the majority of the inhabitants of the lowland, 'de-tribalised' zone of the British diocese would have been hereditary slaves or semi-free *coloni* tied closely to the estates on which they worked. The whole force of Roman law and bureaucracy, together with the power exercised over them directly by landowners, would have been aimed at restricting their social and geographic mobility.[32] As noted previously, it is unlikely these people would have possessed a concept of wider ethnic identity, as distinct from purely local loyalties and/ or their sense of place in the lower levels of the romanising social hierarchy.

Not till the *De Excidio Britonum* ['Concerning the Ruin of the Britons'], written by the cleric Gildas somewhere between the late fifth and mid sixth centuries, do we have clear evidence of a self-referent concept of the *Britanni* as a single people, with a common past and a common destiny – even if a dark one by the cleric's pessimistic reckoning.[33] Gildas is the only author to write from insular Britain during this period whose works have survived, yet his fluency in the rhetorical forms of late classical Latin demonstrate the high quality of romanising education that must still have been available in Britain during his youth. His projected audience among the surviving British elite must also have commanded sufficient Latin to be able to read his work, although they may well have been bi-lingual in a Brythonic dialect.[34]

Gildas' unique polemic text is a 'providential' history of the *gens Britanni*, following Old Testament models to the extent of depicting the *gens* as a new Israel.[35] He identifies this chosen people with inhabitants of the former Roman diocese, even while acknowledging that at the time of his writing they were divided amongst a number of small, sometimes mutually antagonistic, kingdoms.[36] These latter are

[32] For instance, Millett, 1990: 186-211. Neil Faulkner, 2001, also has much to say about negative effects of the rigidly hierarchical class structure in late Roman Britain.

[33] In the absence of firm evidence, scholars are divided on the dating of the *De Excidio*. For example, David Dumville, 1984, supports a more traditional dating around the 540s, while Nicholas Higham, 1994:35-58, prefers c.479-84. Higham, 2002a: 43-46, would discern a subsuming 'British' identity expressed in the earlier writings of Patrick, but in contrast to Gildas the precise population to whom Patrick is referring in any given instance is unclear.

[34] The nature of Gildas' education, and its implications for the Latin culture of post-Roman Britain, are explored in Lapidge, 1984. For linguistic evidence for the maintenance of Latin among the elite in early medieval western Britain, see Schrijver, 2002.

[35] Gildas, *De Excidio* 1.7-13; 26.1.

[36] There is considerable merit in the thesis of Ken Dark, 1993, that the boundaries of several of these western British kingdoms substantially matched those of pre-existing Roman *civitates*.

ruled by 'tyrants', about whose demeanour the cleric is particularly scathing.[37] Significantly, all of their polities identifiable from Gildas' descriptions are situated in the central and southern west of the former diocese, indicating that this area now formed what the cleric saw as the 'British' heartland.

Gildas' *Britanni* are unfailingly characterised as Christians, although he sees them as backsliders to be castigated for their weak and sinful natures. He further warns of their final downfall at the hands of "*Saxones deo hominibusque invisi*" ['the Saxons, hated by God and men'] if they fail to fully repent and return to proper Christian piety.[38] According to Gildas, these S*axones* had their origins as pagan Germanic warriors who had entered Britain after the Romans left and settled themselves in eastern parts of the island under a treaty with local authorities. There is little reason to doubt the author's basic accuracy in this respect. In a single passage Gildas gives his understanding of the nature of this *foedus*, correctly using several late Roman terms associated with the temporary settlement of allies on the territory of their imperial hosts in return for military service.[39]

The ostensible purpose of the arrangement was to protect the interests of certain members of the British elite against Irish and Pictish raiders. Within a short period, Gildas tell us, the Saxon *foederati* tried to extort a higher payment for their services, mutinied when it was not forthcoming, then proceeded to pillage and dispossess their former hosts. In what should be regarded as an *ex post facto* explanation, Gildas goes on to blame them with the destruction and depopulation of the Roman period cities whose ruins would have been so evident in his own day. He also has some of the Britons fleeing to "high hills, steep menacing and fortified", which may preserve a genuine tradition of movement from former urban sites to more easily defended hill-forts – at least in the west of the island.[40] Only after an extended period of conflict were these Saxon raiders said to have been checked by the actions of a local commander, one Ambrosius Aurelianus, scion of a Roman aristocratic family, whose descendants were still to be found among the British elite of Gildas'day.[41]

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[37] His 'Complaint' against five British kings is found at *De Excidio* 27-36.

[38] Gildas, *De Excidio* 23.1.

[39] Gildas, *De Excidio* 23.5, "*hospitibus*", "*annonas*", "*epimenia*", "*foedere*". For an illuminating treatment of Roman *foederati* in the relevant period, see Heather, 1997; also 1.3 below.

[40] Gildas, *De Excidio* 24; 26.2.

[41] Gildas, *De Excidio* 25.3.

The sole piece of evidence that sets these events in a wider chronological context is Gildas' reference to an appeal for assistance sent by British authorities to a Roman leader identified as 'Agitius, thrice consul'.[42] This figure is usually taken to be the Roman generalissimo Aëtius, who was consul in the West for the third time in 446. If genuine the letter should thus date to the period between that year and Aëtius' death in 454. As discussed at 2.1 below, Aëtius was the real power in the Western empire at this time and an appeal to him would have made a good deal more pragmatic sense than applying to the distant and impotent emperor Valentinian III at Rome. Aëtius was campaigning in northern Gaul during several of the specified years, placing him close enough to be contacted, and with an army at hand. However, he would have been fully occupied with continental affairs, including an invasion of Gaul by Atilla's Hunnic confederacy, and unlikely to have contemplated an expedition to Britain no matter how heart-rending the summons. In any event, Gildas laconically notes that the British got no help in return.

Gildas tells us that he was writing during a time of détente following the Saxon rebellion.[43] It is plain, however, that he did so from a Britain now partitioned – some areas under the control of what were probably Germanic military elites and others governed by British leaders like the 'tyrants' noted above. At this point, though, such areas need not have constituted the continuous and discrete territories manifest in the seventh century. As Guy Halsall has pointed out, traditional models are geared too much to a 'moving front' principle that portrays the migration and settlement of peoples, "as a continuous and controlled military front ... moving back and forth according to military and political success and failure."[44] The reality on the ground was seldom so simple or clear cut. It is evident, however, that for Gildas and his fellows the Saxon incomers embodied the quintessential ethnic 'Other'. Where the cleric sees *Britanni* as the indigenous and legitimate inhabitants of the island, representing Latin literacy and romanising Christian civilisation, the usurping *Saxones* are portrayed as foreign, pagan, barbarous and destructive. Ironically, it was probably the shock of Saxon establishment within the former Roman diocese that engendered the concept of a unitary British *gens*.

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[42] Gildas, *De Excidio* 23-24. Gildas places this message before the inception of the Saxon *foedus*, when the main enemies in his account were the Picts and Scots. Given other evidence, it is usually assumed that (if the reference is genuine) Gildas misplaced its context and the appeal was actually for assistance against the Saxon rebels.

[43] Gildas, *De Excidio* 26.2.

[44] Halsall, 2001: 122

Nonetheless, Higham makes a persuasive case that Gildas was reflecting a paradigm of 'Britishness' that had meaning primarily for elite members of the ethnie:

> ... the privileged Latin-speaking classes in control of estates, the Church and the law courts ... [whose] value systems and construction of group identity ... privileged their class and its hold on power across the wider community.[45]

In other words, the kind of people with whom Sidonius and his circle would have been able to do business. Moreover, in Higham's view the agrarian peasantry in Britain got no better shift from this 'British' elite than their counterparts in Gaul received from Sidonius' class:

> ... the peasants, property-less tenants and *coloni* of the sub-Roman lowland estates ... had little opportunity for membership of, or commitment to, Gildas's world picture or group identity, so little cause to retain features of it in a new world conditioned by '(Anglo-) Saxon' military power.[46]

During the initial period of dislocation and conflict attending the Saxon revolt, some of the low status inhabitants dependent on subsistence agriculture would no doubt have suffered badly due to disruption of planting and harvesting, as well as the loss of seed-grain and breeding animals. Nonetheless, once the fighting died down the peasantry probably laboured on much as they had ever done. In 'Saxon' zones, however, they would now have had to deal with an elite who spoke a Germanic dialect rather than Latin. Over time, sheer practicality would have encouraged many of the peasantry to become fluent in, and even to adopt, the new tongue. As already noted, rapid and relatively complete switching to a language of significantly higher ethnolinguistic status over a few generations is a phenomenon commonly observed in the present (although not an inevitable process).[47] At the same time, the first distinctly 'English' dialect may itself have been forged in the need for a *lingua franca* to accommodate these new speakers – "the *koine* learnt by the Britons under English rule" as Thomas Charles-Edwards has put it.[48] As the use of English language came to be seen as an ethnic marker, the low status population would gradually have been transformed into an 'English' peasantry.

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[45] Higham, 2002b: 43.
[46] Higham, 2002a: 34.
[47] See Note 9. above.
[48] Charles-Edwards, 1995: 732 ff.

The effect of such a makeover on their religious affiliation remains a subject of debate. The former view that Christianity was extinguished in the Anglo-Saxon zones has been tempered by suggestions of its quiet survival in some locations, perhaps marked by such indicators as 'eccles' (= *ecclesia* / church) placenames.[49] However, if the evidence from the Continent is any guide, nominal Christian affiliation among the agrarian peasantry of the time may have been easily surrendered. In Italy, where Christian praxis had been much longer established and better enforced than in Britain, clerics of the early fifth century were berating the great land holders for turning a blind eye to the common pagan practices of their tenantry, and even in the middle of the sixth century the churchman Martin of Braga was still finding it necessary to castigate the nominally Christian peasantry of north-west Spain for stubbornly maintaining traditional rites:

> For to burn candles at stones and trees and springs ...
> to observe divinations and auguries and the days of idols ...
> to pour out fruit and wine over a log in the hearth and to put bread in a spring ...
> To mutter spells over herbs and to invoke the names of demons in incantations, what is it but the worship of the devil?
> And you do all these things after ... Baptism.[50]

There is no reason to suppose that the agrarian peasantry of Britain had formed any greater attachment to Christianity than was maintained by elite coercion, sacred or secular. In the 'Saxon' zones this pressure would not only have been removed, but the maintenance of a Christian identity may have resulted in significant social disadvantage. No doubt some of the formerly 'British' grandees in the same areas would also have voluntarily adjusted religious affiliation, along with other ethnic markers, as part of their accommodation to the new power structure and its attendant cultural norms. The Cerdic [= Brythonic Ceredig/ **Caraticos*] who heads up the West Saxon regnal list may be an example of one such successful ex-Britisher.[51]

Taken together, the developments outlined produced a sustained cultural, political and linguistic 'anglicisation' of parts of the former British diocese. By the time the island re-emerges into the historical record in the early seventh century, this process

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[49] For instance, Snyder, 1998: 238-39.

[50] For Italy, see Maximus of Turin *Sermo CVII*, cited at Hillgarth, 1986: 55-7. For Martin of Braga, see *On the castigation of Rustics*, 16. cited at Hillgarth, 1986: 62.

[51] For accommodation to 'Saxon' cultural norms see Scull, 182-83. For Cerdic, see Parsons, 1997.

had spread over much of the area of southern and eastern 'lowland' Britain where Roman towns and elite villa estates had once flourished most strongly (see Maps 4 and 5). This phenomenon is reflected in the archaeological record by the spread of novel settlement patterns, burial customs and material culture with undeniable links to a 'Germanic' zone stretching from northern Gaul to southern Scandinavia.[52] Very few historians or archaeologists would now maintain the 'replacement' hypothesis in which large scale folk migration from the Continent resulted in the death or expulsion of the former Romano-British population. There is presently widespread consensus that the actual Germanic incomers, as opposed to their descendants and ethnic recruits, were normally in the minority within the areas they settled. Disagreement focuses more on the relative size of that minority in given territories.[53]

Across the British Channel, a parallel phenomenon had also been impelling the shift of '*Britanni*' and '*Brittones*' from geographic to ethnic designations. This was the permanent establishment on the Continent of substantial bodies of people identified by these same labels – as distinct from lone individuals like the Tolosanus described as "*Britannus Natione*" in the epitaph on the lid of his sarcophagus, which is now at Arles.[54] The main such group appeared in the west of the Armorican peninsula, modern Brittany. By the early sixth century at latest the inhabitants of this area were speaking a Brythonic dialect identical with that then current in south-west Britain. The modern term for these people is 'Breton' but this is simply the result of a specific one-off vowel shift from *i* to *e* by Latin authors of the early medieval period. The Venerable Bede, writing in the 8th century, employed such usage in his *Historia Ecclesiastica* and while it did not carry into modern English, the French still refer to both insular Britain and Brittany as *Bretagne.*

The consensus of historians ancient and modern is that the presence of these 'Bretons' arose from an extended process of emigration from insular Britain to the Continent during the course of the fifth and sixth centuries.[55] Even Gildas tells of those of his fellow countrymen who "made for lands beyond the sea" in response to

[52] The best comparison of insular 'Anglo-Saxon' and Continental artefact sets remains Böhme, 1986.
[53] Higham, 1992, 1998, and Jones, 1996 argue for 'elite dominance' by a relatively small number of incomers, while Härke, 2003 and Scull, 1995, 1997 support more substantial immigration. G. Elton, 1992:2-4, is one of the few recent treatments to maintain the 'replacement' hypothesis.
[54] See Snyder, 1998: 70.
[55] For instance, Procopius, *History of the Wars* VIII 20.4-10; and Giot et al., 2003.

the initial Saxon depredations.[56] The relationship between these 'British' incomers and the existing Gallo-Roman population of the areas they settled was probably similar to that concurrently taking place in the 'Saxon' areas of insular Britain. Thus the former inhabitants of the Armorican peninsula were evidently subsumed in the social infrastructure of the immigrants, and were in time transformed into *Britanni*, sharing the Breton language, culture and legends of origin.

The precise dating of this settlement process is debatable.[57] It is possible that the medieval historian Geoffrey of Monmouth preserved a shred of genuine tradition in his assertion that the first British occupation of Armorica dated to the time of Magnus Maximus (Geoffrey's "Maximian").[58] This usurper was elevated by his troops in Britain in 383 and crossed to the Continent where he was able to establish himself as Western *augustus* until his defeat and execution by Theodosius in 388. Some of the native British troops who accompanied him might in fact have been redeployed to western Armorica, where a Celtic tongue was almost certainly still spoken by some of the population (see 5.4 below). The same could be true of further contingents of British troops brought to Gaul by Constantine III, who made a similar attempt on the imperial throne some two decades later (see 1.2.1 below). Indeed, Leon Fleuriot has argued – albeit on shaky grounds – that a significant proportion of the Roman troops stationed in Gaul during the late empire may have had had their origins in Britain. If so, it is at least plausible that some who did not return home could have been settled in distinct communities of British veterans, perhaps in northwest Gaul if Fleuriot's interpretation of British-related place name elements can provide any valid indication of such settlement at this early stage.[59]

Certainly, from the sixth century onwards, Gallic Brittany can be shown to have formed a strong common culture area with the south-western seaboard of insular Britain, marked by the sharing of language and nomenclature, as well as cults of particular British saints including Cadoc, Sampson of Dol and Gildas himself.[60] Of particular interest is the mirroring of southern British polities in the territorial structure of early medieval Brittany: Dumnonia to *Domnonée*, and Cornwall to

[56] Gildas, *De Excidio* 25.1.

[57] The early dating scheme given in Giot, Guigon and Merignac, 2003, is possible but not sustained by firm evidence.

[58] Geoffrey of Monmouth, *History of the Kings of Britain*. Book V. 12-16.

[59] Fleuriot, 1980: 42-47; 100-109.

[60] For saints' cults particularly, see Bowen, 1969.

Cornouaille. These 'kingdoms' respectively occupied the northern and southern parts of the western region of the Armorican peninsula, although as with other Breton polities the timing of their origins is unclear. Most of the sources once thought to bear on the subject, such as the Breton royal genealogies and *vitae* of Breton saints much used by Nora Chadwick in her *Early Brittany*,[61] are in fact too late to be reliable. Their claimed 'histories' are later medieval constructions. Unfortunately, such archaeological evidence as has so far been adduced for the region at this period is also of little practical value in chronicling the British settlement. It can be demonstrated that the Armorican peninsula was continuously inhabited during the fifth and sixth centuries, but following the fading of a romanising material culture in the later fourth century there is no clue in the archaeological record as to the ethnic affiliation of the inhabitants. In order to attach ethnic labels to their finds, archaeologists of late antique/ early medieval Brittany are compelled to return to the historical record.[62]

In this respect the first dependable and detailed documentary source is the *Historiae* [*Francorum*] of Gregory, Metropolitan Bishop of Tours from 573 to c.594 (see 4.3.1 below). His seat was capital of the former Roman province of *Lugdunensis III* and Gregory consequently held as suffragans the bishops of sees situated in the Armorican peninsula, an area already known to him as "*Britannia*".[63] These sees included Rennes, Vannes and Corseul, and it was probably from such ecclesiastical connections that Gregory was able to draw the tales of Breton life and politics with which he occasionally spiced his *Historiae*.[64] Gregory's close friend and contemporary in the Gallic church, the poet Venantius Fortunatus, also refers to the *Britanni* of Armorica several times in his own verse.[65]

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[61] Chadwick, 1969.

[62] I am indebted for this insight to a personal communication by Barry Cunliffe in regard to his recent excavations at the late antique site of Le Yaudet in Brittany (see Cunliffe and Galliou, 2000). Heinrich Härke makes the much same point in brief at Härke, 2002: 152, while Astill and Davies, 1997: 91ff, express their frustration on the absence of diagnostic material for the period from their East Brittany survey. Pierre-Roland Giot and his colleagues tiptoe around the matter, but there is an implicit admission of the problem in their summary on Armorican populations in the fourth to seventh centuries (see Giot et al., 2003, 58ff). In respect of the more general connection between the archaeological record and ethnicity, see also 1.1.1 above.

[63] Gregory of Tours, *HF* V.16.

[64] For instance, Gregory of Tours, *Historiae* IV.4.

[65] As an example, see Poem 9.1 line 73, written c.580.

Gregory quite evidently believed the Breton peoples known to him had been settled as a people in Gaul since well before his own time. Given the breadth of his local knowledge, particularly in ecclesiastical matters, he probably had persuasive reasons for doing so. It quite possible, for instance, that Gregory knew of the "*episcopus Britannorum*" Mansuetus (discussed at 1.2.2 and 4.2.4 below) who attended a Church council at Tours as early as 463. He could also have read a pastoral letter dating to the early sixth century promulgated by one of his predecessors in office, Licinius (508-20), in concert with the bishops of Rennes and Angers. The document calls on two itinerant clerics with the Brythonic names of Catihernus and Lovocatus to emend certain practices seen by local standards as irregular, and to "cease from making a circuit of the dwellings in the territories of different cities", assumedly within the bishoprics of the signatories.[66] In any event, Gregory comments:

> ... from the death of King Clovis onwards the Bretons remained under the domination of the Franks and their rulers were called counts not kings.[67]

The claim of an early Frankish domination may have been propaganda, but Gregory must have been aware that Clovis had died c.511. His statement thus indicates he viewed the Breton presence in Gaul as extending back into the later fifth century.

There is also another distinct population of continental Britons of whom we have record. These are the communicants of the extensive "*sedes Britonorum*" ['see of the Britons'] situated in western Galicia, in the north-west corner of Spain. The ecclesiastical province, consisting of 'those churches that are among the Britons' ["*ecclesias que sunt intro Britones*"], was already well established by 572. In that year, a bishop associated with this congregation ["*Britonensis ecclesia episcopus*"] attended the Second Council of Braga, a city located in what is now northern Portugal. He bore the good Brythonic name of 'Ma(h)iloc'.[68] It is well within the bounds of possibility that there were similar expatriate settlement areas of *Britanni* on the Continent that have left no mark in the historical record.

Finally, we should consider the 'militarisation' of ethnicity that occurred in the late imperial and early post-imperial period. An individual might take on the ethnic

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[66] Cited at Mathisen, 2003: 7.3, 214-16.

[67] Gregory of Tours, *Historiae* IV.4

[68] These citations are given at Snyder, 2003: 143; see also Thompson, 1968. For 'Mahiloc' see 4.5 below.

label of Goth, Vandal or Frank by becoming accepted as a warrior in some group operating as part of these composite *gens*. A pre-existing ethnic identity might be held in parallel with the new one, or might in some circumstances be submerged – perhaps to re-surface at a later time. As we shall again have cause to note at 4.4 below, an individual warrior enlisted with a 'British' army fighting on the Continent as Roman *foederati* could thus have been labelled as '*Britannus*' by outsiders regardless of his actual antecedents, or his personal self-identity.

In light of discussion presented above it can be seen that Sidonius, who wrote chiefly in the third quarter of the fifth century, did so at a time when the already imprecise terms '*Britanni*' and '*Brittones*' were undergoing a rapid evolution in their ranges of meaning. It is therefore interesting that in none of the allusions to *Britanni* found in his *Epistulae* did Sidonius go out of his way to make clear the specific sense of the word he intended. Despite the varied subject matter of the three letters in which these references are found, and the variety of correspondents to whom they were written, the author seems to expect his readers to find his allusions self-explanatory. This in itself would suggest that the Gallic *literati* of the time shared a wider mutual understanding concerning peoples ethnically identifiable as 'British' than is sometimes appreciated. To further explore why this might be so, we shall now consider what Sidonius and his fellows may have known about circumstances in insular Britain during the fifth century, and what channels of communication between Britain and Gaul were available to shape their perceptions.

1.2 Sidonius and Post-imperial Britain

1.2.1 The Separation of the British Diocese from the Empire

The British provinces had passed out of direct imperial control some two decades before Sidonius was born. Yet his writings demonstrate a close acquaintance with the events and persons involved in that process, perhaps because his own grand-father played a prominent role among them. For our own historical knowledge of Britain in the early fifth century, we are largely indebted to Olympiodorus of Thebes who composed a near contemporary history of the Roman West covering the years 407-25.[69] The original has not survived, but substantial fragments of it are embedded in the narratives of later authors whose writings are still extant. The most notable of these are the *Ecclesiastical History* of the cleric Salamanes Sozomenos

[69] For the nature and dating of Olympiodorus' work, see Gillett, 1993.

(Sozomen), composed in the mid fifth century, and the *New History* of the Greek historian Zosimus. The latter work was written from Constantinople in the early sixth century and the final section, comprising *Nea Historia* V.27 to VI.13 and covering the years 407-10, is drawn directly from Olympiodorus.[70]

According to Zosimus, the failure of the Roman administration to deal effectively with barbarian incursions in the West caused the soldiery in Britain to raise a series of 'usurper' emperors in 406/ 07. The last of these was the soldier Flavius Claudius Constantinus, known to us as Constantine III. [71] On 31 December 406 bands of raiders drawn from tribes of the Vandals, Alans and Sueves had broken through the Rhine frontier and moved on to pillage northern Gaul.[72] In response, Constantine stripped the British garrisons and crossed to the continent in an attempt to establish his authority there. Along the way he appointed several *magistri militum* of barbarian origin, including Nebiogastes and Edobich – the latter said to be Frankish. A parallel situation existed among the forces of the legitimate Western *augustus*, Honorius. Sarus, the general who initially opposed Constantine in Gaul, is described as a Goth. He was himself serving under the patronage of Stilicho, the half-Vandal generalissimo who dominated Honorius' administration until his execution in Italy during the so-called 'anti-barbarian purge' of August 408.

This 'purge', however, turned out to be only a temporary aberration in an evolving process. The ubiquity of barbarian military leaders and mercenary troops in Roman employ from the late fourth century onwards demonstrates just how dependent the Western Empire had become on their services. The same is true of the Roman use of barbarian groups as autonomous *foederati*. This term is often translated as 'allies', though 'military allies by temporary treaty' might be closer. As Peter Heather has observed, in practice the conditions of this kind of agreement (*foedus*) varied substantially from case to case and from time to time, and was in any event subject to re-negotiation as the balance of power between the parties shifted and leaderships changed.[73] Several of these 'allied' groups, including the peoples known as Visigoths, Burgundians and Alans would at various points during the fifth century

[70] Blockley, 1981: 28.

[71] Zosimus, *Nea Historia* VI.2.1 ff. For a summary of Constantine III's career, see Drinkwater, 1998.

[72] Michael Kulikowski, 2000, has argued that the date should be re-assigned to 31 December 405.

[73] Heather, 1997.

be allocated territory in Gaul on which to settle.[74] Their relationship to local administrations parallels Gildas' depiction of that between the incoming Saxons and the insular British authorities who employed them, noted in the preceding section.

The services of *foederati* were desirable because, in the interest of maintaining *status quo*, the common citizenry of the Western Empire had been largely 'demilitarised' – a process that had its origins in the late Republican period. In fact, as already noted, the condition of most of the late Roman non-servile agrarian population in the West had declined to that of unlearned and unfree *coloni* tied to the estates on which they worked, and thus to the estate owners who were responsible for the collection of their taxes. As such they were untrained for war, being forbidden to take up arms except under specific direction by the imperial administration. Prevailing ideology maintained that this massive docile population should be protected by a professional army paid for by revenues squeezed from the labours of same peasantry. This, essentially, is the idealised model of late Roman state set out by the historian and diplomat Priscus in reply to criticisms of the system placed in the mouth of a former citizen of the Eastern Empire assimilated to Attilla's Hunnic confederacy.[75] Yet the latter's most telling point remained unanswered. When this 'professional' military protection failed, for reasons such as civil war or a lack of funds in the imperial treasury, the bulk of the population was left virtually defenceless. This was one of the key factors in the ability of relatively small bodies of 'barbarian' warriors to wreak such havoc within the borders of the *imperium*, and eventually to dominate the successor states to the Western Empire.

According to Sozomen, there were many 'Britons' serving in Constantine's army, including the best of his *magistri militum*, one Gerontius.[76] This same name was later borne by at least one seventh century king of Dumnonia, a Brythonic-speaking polity controlling the territory represented by modern Devon and Cornwall.[77] It is not implausible that Gerontius himself hailed from that less Romanised part of the diocese – a sort of 'home grown' barbarian as it were. Certainly, he had no qualms

[74] The precise circumstances of this type of settlement, together with the practical and legal ramifications for pre-existing residents, has been the subject of considerable and as yet unresolved debate. For a sample of this see Goffart, 1980; Barnish, 1986; Burns, 1992.

[75] Priscus, *Fr.* 11: 455ff.

[76] For Britons in Constantine's army, see Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History* 7.13 cited at Ireland, 1986: 161. For Gerontius, see Olympiodorus, *Fr.* 17.2 (= Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History* 9,13,1 – 15,3).

[77] This Gerontius was the addressee of a missive from the cleric Aldhelm: *Prose Works*, Letter 4.

about associating with the continental variety. Having been sent by Constantine to take control of Spain, he soon repudiated his latter's cause and launched an unsuccessful attempt to set up his own puppet emperor. In the process he incited the barbarian troops in Gaul to revolt against his former patron. The betrayal not only brought about his own death shortly afterwards, besieged in a house with only a small band of personal retainers still loyal, but also contributed directly to Constantine's defeat and execution at Arles in 411 by agents of Honorius. Constantine's troops, presumably including any *Britanni* who had accompanied him, were assimilated by the victorious administration. The chaos associated with Gerontius' defection allowed successor elements to the groups that had breached the Rhine frontier in 406 to cross the Pyrenees and establish themselves on the Iberian peninsula.[78] It was this migration that some decades later led to the establishment of Geiseric's Vandal *regnum* in Africa, with the disastrous consequences for the Empire noted in the course of Chapter Two.

In 408, having established a temporary ascendancy, Constantine III had appointed his own Praetorian Prefect of the Gauls from among supporters in the Gallic nobility. This was none other than the paternal grandfather of Sidonius, known to us only as "Apollinaris".[79] In addition to the two Gallic dioceses, the Gallic Prefect also governed Spain and Britain. There were only two other officials of equivalent rank in the late imperial West. These were the Prefect of Italy, with additional responsibility for the dioceses of Africa and Illyricum; and the Prefect of Rome who governed the Roman heartland and presided over the Senate – an office Sidonius himself would one day hold. Together these three men constituted the highest authority under the emperor in all aspects of provincial civil administration, including the judicial system. Only military matters lay largely beyond their ambit.[80] Since Constantine temporarily controlled much of the West, the elder Apollinaris should have exercised at least nominal administrative authority over the British diocese, being perhaps the last continentally-based Roman official to do so. Sidonius' knowledge of, and respect for, his grandfather's career are apparent in the epitaph he composed for him. It begins:

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[78] Olympiodorus, *Fr.* 17.1 refers directly to this process, discussed in Drinkwater, 1998: 283 ff. For a somewhat variant approach, see Kulikowski, 2000.

[79] Zosimus, *Nea Historia* VI.4.2.

[80] The office of Praetorian Prefect is discussed in detail in Barnwell, 1992: 54-62.

> Here lies the prefect Apollinaris, received into the bosom of his mourning country after righteous governance of Gaul; a most wise and beneficent worker in the fields of the farm, the state and the forum, and likewise (perilous example for others to follow) a free man under the tyranny of despots.[81]

The "despots" alluded to here are not identified, but Sidonius claims elsewhere that his grandfather had excoriated the usurping leadership, abhorring, "in Constantine his fickleness ... in Gerontius his faithlessness".[82] Family history may thus have provided Sidonius with a reason to maintain an ongoing interest in British affairs. According to Zosimus, the elder Apollinaris was replaced as Gallic prefect in 409, the same year the British diocese rebelled against Constantine's administration.[83]

As well as the problems caused by roving bands of freebooters, the constant need for fresh troops compelled the various 'Roman' factions in the West to employ contingents of barbarian mercenaries against each other. These groups tended to swap sides as the balance of power shifted, as well as to indulge in pillage on their own account. Denuded of its elite field forces by Constantine, the British provinces were especially vulnerable to predation. Zosimus tells us:

> Gerontius won over his soldiers and incited the barbarians in Gaul to revolt against Constantine ... which allowed the barbarians over the Rhine to make unrestricted incursions. They reduced the inhabitants of Britain and some of the Gallic peoples to such straits that they revolted from the Roman Empire, no longer submitted to Roman law, and reverted to their native customs. The Britons, therefore, armed themselves and ran many risks to ensure their own safety and free their cities from the attacking barbarians. The whole of Armorica and other Gallic provinces, in imitation of the Britons freed themselves in the same way, by expelling the Roman magistrates and establishing the government they wanted.
>
> The revolt of the provinces of Britain and Gaul occurred during Constantine's tyranny because the barbarians took advantage of his careless government.[84]

It is unclear whether at this point the *potentes* of the British diocese intended to secede permanently from the Empire, rather than just to escape Constantine's "careless government". These challenges to central authority in Britain and Gaul are

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[81] Sidonius, *Epistulae* III.xii.5.

[82] Sidonius, *Epistulae* V.ix.1, with note 2.

[83] Zosimus, *Nea Historia* VI.13.1.

[84] Zosimus, *Nea Historia* VI.5.2-6.1.

described as resulting primarily from the urgent need of local groups to organise their own defence in the absence of a state capacity to defend them. However, attempts by the citizenry to take up arms without bureaucratic sanction – implying a rejection of the duly constituted Roman administration and, not incidentally, the tax-burden it represented – would axiomatically have been regarded as rebellion against the state. In reality, such situations are known to have arisen a number of times during the fourth and fifth centuries in areas of Gaul, most notably Armorica.[85] Groups of citizens seen thus to be flouting imperial authority were labelled with the grab-bag pejorative *bacaudae* – roughly translatable as 'bandits'.

Although no detailed contemporary sources are available for Britain, some indication of the attitude of local leaders thrown on their own resources elsewhere in the Empire in the early fifth century may be gained from the letters of Sinesius, an aristocrat of Cyrenaica in north-west Africa who like Sidonius became a bishop later in life. At the time he was facing devastating barbarian raids on his estates and the nearby towns with little effective help from the regular military. Consequently, he became an advocate of direct action by the citizenry whether authorised by state officials or not. To his more politically correct brother he wrote:

> You must be joking, to stop us manufacturing arms, when the enemy is out looting and killing crowds of people every day and there isn't a soldier to be seen. Do you mean to say it's illegal for civilians to carry arms, but legal for them to be killed? Does the government object to somebody trying to defend himself? [86]

And to a later correspondent:

> Why don't we stop wasting time, and collect the peasantry and set out after the enemy – for our children's sakes, our wives and our country ...[87]

The situations in Britain and central Gaul at this time cannot have been dissimilar. However, in Gaul central imperial authority was soon re-imposed, particularly south of the Loire, and in following decades Roman *literati* could write of an '*ordo renascendi*' on the Continent: a time of recovery and renewal.[88] The Gallic poet Rutilius Claudius Namatianus tells in his *De Reditu suo* of his kinsman Exuperantius, Praetorian Prefect of Gaul in 424, engaged in forcefully re-establishing the proper social order:

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[85] For instance, *Vita Germani* 28.

[86] Sinesius, Letter 107, cited in Tomlin, 1979: 263.

[87] Sinesius, Letter 127, cited in Tomlin, 1979: 263.

[88] For this perception of *ordo renascendi*, see Matthews: 1975: 307ff.

> ... [he] now teaches the inhabitants of the Armorican regions to love the recovery [*postliminium*] of peace; he re-establishes laws, restores freedom, and prevents them from being slaves to their own servants.[89]

In Britain matters proceeded differently. Despite having rejected the illicit regime of Constantine III, the *potentes* of the British provinces were left to survive on their own resources. In 410 Honorius had been occupied with the pressing problem of defending Italy against Alaric, the rogue Romano-Gothic general who in that year sacked the city of Rome. Writing to the *poleis* of Britain, the emperor opted to legitimise the existing state of affairs in the British diocese by urging the *civitas* leaders "to fend for themselves".[90] In the event, the Roman military never returned to Britain and the diocese drifted beyond the pale of the *imperium*. A vexed question thereafter is how long and in what manner the former diocese may have retained elements of Roman culture and organisation – the cachet of *romanitas*.

Apart from the writings of Gildas and Patrick noted above, no texts produced within the British Isles have survived from the greater part of the fifth and sixth centuries. Later annals and histories once considered suitable sources for the period by historiographers are now regarded as unreliable and misleading. Examples are the various recensions of the Welsh-generated *Historia Brittonum* and *Annales Cambriae*, along with the West Saxon *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. These medieval documents were still used freely by John Morris as late as 1973 to construct his *The Age of Arthur*, intended as a serious scholarly work. However, not only were they written several centuries after the events they purport to recount, but with largely antipathetic agendas on the opposing Welsh and West Saxon sides, related to the separate socio-political contexts in which the texts were produced. Accordingly, while they no doubt incorporate some elements of genuine material, their reconstructions of fifth century British history have been shown to be both fanciful and irreconcilable.[91]

As such deficiencies have become progressively apparent, scholars have turned to readings of the archaeological record in an attempt to provide a more 'objective' picture of fifth century Britain. However, to employ an aphorism of L.S. Klejn,

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[89] Cited at Murray, 2000: 56.

[90] The 'Rescript of Honorius', if Zosimus, *Nea Historia* VI.10.2 has been correctly transmitted.

[91] David Dumville, 1977, sparked a major critical reaction to these later texts. For more recent treatments of the subject, see Dumville, 1985; Barbara Yorke, 1993, 1999; and Sarah Foot, 1996. Nicholas Higham, 2002a, provides the most recent discussion of conflicting British/ Anglo-Saxon ethnic ideologies in the later textual sources (but for an alternative view see Ward-Perkins, 2000).

"Archaeology is not history armed with a spade, but a detective story in which the investigator has arrived at the scene a thousand years late."[92] Modes of practice and interpretation employed in archaeological investigation place substantial limitations on the field's capacity to generate traditional historical narrative – a point made emphatically by Julian Richards in particular reference to early medieval Britain.[93] One need only consider, for example, how little of the historical detail adduced in the course of this dissertation for the roles of particular individuals in specific events could reliably have been reconstructed from archaeologically-generated data alone. Further, not only is such data legitimately susceptible to variant readings but, in tandem with historical discourse, processes of archaeological interpretation are demonstrably contingent on paradigms prevailing within the archaeological community and wider society at any given time.[94]

It is little wonder, then, that in reading much the same sets of archaeological data, recent analysts have arrived at widely divergent conclusions about the nature of Britain in the later fifth century. One end of the spectrum is seen in the work of scholars like Simon Esmonde Cleary, Michael Jones and Neil Faulkner, who argue for a rapid collapse – even rejection – of romanised society and culture following hard on the diocesan revolt. In their view this precedes the mid fifth century establishment of Anglo-Saxon incomers whose presence is to be seen in the spread of novel settlement patterns, burial customs and material culture noted at 1.1.2.[95] Set against this picture are the conclusions of scholars such as Ken Dark and Chris Snyder who propose a substantial continuity of *romanitas* in both social and material culture.[96] Dark in particular argues for a relatively late accession to dominance of the Saxon incomers, and has recently asserted that large areas of central and western Britain remained to all intents and purposes 'Roman' throughout most of the fifth century, with a political framework partly grounded in the late imperial period. If Britain differed at all from other Late Antique western European societies, he argues, " this was often because *more*, not less, of its Roman heritage survived".[97]

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[92] Klejn, 2001: 32.

[93] Richards, 1995: 55-6.

[94] For a more general view of this process, see Jones, 1997. Sam Lucy, 1998: ch.2, cites numerous instances of situational contingency in changing interpretations of late antique/ early medieval Britain. Härke, 1998, provides an interesting view of socio-cultural factors affecting the current debate on 'migrationism', relating directly to interpretations of the Anglo-Saxon *adventus* in Britain.

[95] Esmonde Cleary, 1988, 1995; Jones, 1996; Faulkner, 2001, 2004; also Reece, 1980, Brooks, 1986.

[96] Dark, 1993, 1996, 1998, 2000; Snyder, 1996, 1998, 2003; see also Hennig, 2004.

[97] Dark, 2000: 15.

The majority of historians and archaeologists have taken up their positions somewhere between these two extremes. One such is Nicholas Higham, who has suggested a partial survival of romanising administrative and social structures in lowland Britain long enough to be appropriated by an incoming Anglo-Saxon warrior elite in the second quarter of the fifth century. As noted at 1.1.2 above, he has further postulated the parallel assertion of a newly forged 'British' identity amongst the elite of western Britain characterised by Latin literacy and display of Catholic Christianity.[98] There is no space in this dissertation to rehearse the various conflicting arguments of these scholars in any detail. The most one can conclude at present is that existing archaeological evidence for the first half of the fifth century continues to present an unclear and debatable picture, at least for lowland Britain. However, Higham's views at least possess the virtue of being consonant with such evidence on fifth century Britain as can be adduced from Gildas and Patrick, as well as from a number of other apposite sources originating on the Continent. Several of these latter can be connected to Sidonius Apollinaris or to his circle of literary acquaintances and all of them originated, or were transmitted, in a Church milieu. We will now proceed to an exploration of this 'ecclesiastical connection'.

1.2.2 Sidonius and the ecclesiastical links between Gaul and Britain

Sidonius' roles as diplomat, churchman and correspondent meant that throughout his life he was in contact with some of the most powerful and well-informed men in Gaul. He had aslo been also an intimate of three, albeit brief-reigning, Western *augusti* and served in high offices within their administrations. If he was at all interested in the matter, Sidonius would thus have been well-placed to hear whatever news of recent events in insular Britain may from time to time have filtered back into the *imperium*. His grandfather's connection with the former diocese, coupled with his own encounters with persons described as 'Britons' (explored immediately below and in following chapters), may have provided a motivation for such an interest. By the time Sidonius came to adulthood, however, the most probable conduit for such news – both sacred and secular – would have been the network of ecclesiastical connections between Britain and the Continent that seems to have survived the political rupture of the former diocese from the Empire. Thus, particularly after he took religious orders c.469, Sidonius' major potential source of information on matters British would probably have been via his friends and correspondents among the Gallic clerisy.

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[98] See Higham, 1992, 1994, 1998, 2002a, 2002b.

Abundant historical and archaeological evidence attests that Catholic Christianity had been established for a number of decades in the British diocese by beginning of the fifth century, although surveys on the subject vary in their assessment of the degree to which the religion had spread among the populace and at what social levels this was occurring.[99] Following the diocesan rebellion against Constantine III in 409, the British Church demonstrably continued to function with some degree of success, maintaining ecclesiastical links with the Continent and, more particularly, with representatives of the nearby Gallic Church. In the absence of an overarching civil administration in Britain, this clerical network must have become a major channel of communication for secular as well as for ecclesiastical interaction between Britain and areas on the Continent still governed by the *imperium*. One example of this can be seen in circumstances surrounding a mission to the former British diocese by Germanus, Bishop of Auxerre in central Gaul – an event dated to 429 by the clerical chronicler Prosper Tiro:

> Agricola the Pelagian, son of Bishop Severianus the Pelagian, corrupted the churches in Britain by introducing his own doctrine. On the recommendation of the deacon, Palladius, Pope Celestine sent Germanus ... as his representative, and when the heretics had been cast down, he guided the Britons to the Catholic faith.[100]

Prosper, who was serving at the time as an adviser to the same Pope Celestine named in the foregoing annal, here depicts Germanus as a papal envoy sent to cleanse the British church of heretical Pelagian doctrine.[101] He again alludes to the mission in his polemical tract, *Contra Collatorem* [102], once more asserting Celestine's active role and this time not even troubling to name Bishop Germanus. In addition he notes the Pope's consecration of a bishop to oversee a newly emerging Christian flock in Ireland:

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[99] For example: Frend, 1979; Thomas, 1981; Watts, 1991and 1997; Dark, 1993; Mawer, 1995. Petts, 2003, provides the most recent general survey, and includes in his first chapter a historical recapitulation of how views on the subject have developed. See also comments on Christianity in the 'Saxon' zones at 1.1.2 above.

[100] Prosper Tiro, *Chronicle*, Year 402 (= AD 439).

[101] Pelagius was an expatriate British theologian who had taught the primacy of free will in individual salvation against the rigid predestinarianism espoused by Augustine, Bishop of Hippo. Pelagius' doctrines had finally been condemned by the papacy in 418. For his impact on the Western Church, see Mathisen, 1989: 37ff.

[102] The 'collator' referred to here was John Cassian, Abbot of the monastery of St. Victor at Marseilles, who like other Gallic clerics of the period actively opposed Augustinian doctrines.

> [Celestine] has been ... no less energetic in freeing the British provinces from this same [Pelagian] disease: he removed from that hiding place certain enemies of grace who had occupied the land of their origin; also, having ordained a bishop for the Irish, while he labours to keep the Roman island catholic, he has also made the barbarian island Christian.[103]

Significantly, Prosper seems to see nothing out of the ordinary in continental clerics intervening in the ecclesiastical affairs of Ireland and Britain at this time, nor that they would be sufficiently well informed of conditions there to initiate such actions. Also interesting is his reference to the "British provinces" of a "Roman island" – an evident allusion to the persistence of *romanitas* in the former diocese around 432 when the *Contra Collatorem* was issued. Writing from the papal *curia* at Rome, Prosper would have seen (Roman) Catholic Christianity as an essential element of such *romanitas*. However, suggestions by some that the chronicler's comment indicates a renewed political control of Britain by the *imperium* at this time are not well supported by other evidence.[104]

It was around this same period that the celebrated Saint Patrick (Patricius) was also sent as an evangelist to Ireland by the Church organisation based in insular Britain, though any connection of his mission with that of Prosper's Palladius is unclear. Patrick kept up an ongoing, if not always an amicable, dialogue with his *seniores* in Britain till late in his life. His *Confessio* – written in his mature years in part to justify his actions to his nominal superiors – probably dates to the middle of the fifth century.[105] In it Patrick expresses his wish to travel back to Britain and "even as far as the Gauls" to visit his fellow churchmen there.[106] The bishop also displays a knowledge of affairs in Gaul when remonstrating with notionally Christian British raiders under the command of a king Coroticus. They had captured certain Irish converts, and Patrick cites the example of "the Christian Roman Gauls" who used their wealth to ransom fellow Christians from the Franks rather than sell them into captivity.[107] Later, if far less trustworthy, traditions even place Patrick in Gaul as a pupil of Germanus of Auxerre prior to his Irish mission.[108]

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[103] This passage is cited in Charles-Edwards, 1993: 1. Prosper Tiro, *Chronicle*, Year 402, dates Palladius' Irish mission to 431.

[104] See, for instance, discussion in Jones, M.E., 1996.

[105] For instance, David Howlett's editorial notes and comments in Patricius, *Liber Epistolarum Sancti Patricii Episcopi* (1994) – though see Koch, 1990, for a somewhat earlier dating.

[106] Patricius, *Liber Epistolarum*: *Confessio* III.90.

[107] Patricius, *Liber Epistolarum*: *Epistola ad milites Corotici* 129-33.

[108] Bieler, 1979: 71.

A crucial alternative source for Germanus' own visit to Britain c.429 is provided by the *Vita Germani*, written at some point in the later fifth century by one Constantius. This was most probably the same faithful friend of that name who collaborated with Sidonius on editing the first seven books of his *Epistulae* for publication, and to whom they were subsequently dedicated (see Introduction). Even were this not the case, the author was certainly associated with members of the same tight and influential circle of Gallic *literati* to which Sidonius belonged. [109] The basic purpose of such saintly biographies was the portrayal of moral and spiritual exemplars, with stock themes and miracle tales often being transferred from one saint to another. Caution must therefore exercised in using such *vitae* as historical sources. [110] Nonetheless, while including an amount of formulaic and faith-promoting material, Constantius' *vita* of Germanus is a relatively sober document by the general standards of medieval hagiography. It contains an extended account of the Gallic mission to the former diocese that begins:

> About this time, a deputation from Britain came to tell the bishops of Gaul that the heresy of Pelagius had taken hold of the people over a great part of the country and ought to be brought to the Catholic faith as soon as possible. A large number of bishops gathered in a synod to consider the matter and all turned for help to the two who in everybody's judgment were the leading lights of religion, namely Germanus and Lupus ... because the task seemed laborious, these heroes of piety were all the more willing to undertake it; and the stimulus of their faith brought the synod to a speedy end. [111]

In this telling, the process is triggered by direct appeal to the "bishops of Gaul" by a British deputation, presumably drawn from both lay citizens and clergy. Rather than a papal enterprise, Germanus' mission is here described as being solely the response of a Gallic synod – Constantius' aim being almost certainly to accentuate a close connection between the Gallic and British churches independent of the papacy. The author's partisan sympathies are already revealed in his exclusion of Pope Celestine from the narrative, but later in the same text Constantius uses the occasion of a visit to Arles by Germanus to eulogise the city's bishop, Hilarius, whom he describes as:

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[109] For the date of composition of the *Vita Germani*, see discussion at Gillett, 2003:282-83. Thompson, 1984, identifies the author as Constantius of Lyons, while Gillett, 2003: 117, is considerably more cautious and informative on the subject. For the integrative nature of literary ties in Sidonius' Gaul, see Mathisen, 1981.

[110] This aspect is canvassed in Noble and Head, 1995 : xviii ff.

[111] Constantius, *Vita Germani* 12.

> ... a man bejewelled with every kind of virtue, a flame of faith, a torrent of sacred eloquence, and a tireless worker at the tasks of God. [112]

At that time the Bishops of Arles claimed to be primates of all Gaul, and were accepted as such by many of their fellows. Hilarius, in particular, strongly advocated the relative autonomy of the Gallic church from papal authority, and a synod such as that described above by Constantius would in all probability have come under Hilarius' direction. Further, Hilarius was a leading light of the dominant 'Lerins' faction of the Gallic church, with which Germanus was also associated. This network had grown around a coterie of clerics who had passed through the island monastery of Lerins, founded on the Mediterranean coast of Gaul early in the fifth century. The institution was famed for the piety and learning of its alumni, many of whom went on to receive bishoprics in Gaul. Among these was the Lupus who, Constantius alone tells us, accompanied Germanus to Britain – an eminently plausible pairing since Lupus had just recently been elevated to the see of Troyes adjoining that of Auxerre, and was also Hilarius' brother-in-law.[113] A direct link back to Sidonius Apollinaris is also discernible here, for Lupus survived to become one of his more notable episcopal correspondents (see 2.2.1 below).

A more substantial connection, separately involving the British Church, also existed between Sidonius and the Lerins circle of Germanus' time. This was provided by Faustus, Bishop of Riez in Provence, whose role as Sidonius' friend and spiritual mentor is explored at 2.3 below. Faustus had entered the monastery at Lerins in the 420s, and from c.433 onwards actually served as its abbot. He would thus have been personally acquainted with Lupus, and most likely also with Germanus. The connection is significant because in one of his own letters Sidonius' nephew, Bishop Avitus of Vienne, identifies Faustus as "*ortu Britannum*" ['by origin a Briton'], indicating that he was born either in the former Roman diocese or, perhaps, in a continental British community.[114] Faustus maintained a demonstrable link with at least one other British cleric – a wayfaring monk and priest (or bishop) named Riochatus whom Sidonius hosted at Clermont on Faustus' behalf. The traveller was involved at the time in carrying some of Faustus' writings to another group clearly identified by Sidonius as *Britanni*, though whether that community was clerical or secular, or located in Gaul or insular Britain, is not stated (see 2.3 below).[115]

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[112] *Vita Germani* 23.

[113] For Hilarius and relationships among the Lerins Circle, see Mathisen, 1989: esp. 76ff.

[114] Avitus of Vienne, *Epistulae* 4.1.

[115] In firmly stating Riochatus' destination to be Britain, David Petts, 2003: 48, exceeds the evidence.

The term *Britanni* was the same employed by Constantius in his own references to the Christian people of insular Britain amongst whom Germanus of Auxerre moved in the course of his mission. The author has the Gallic bishop achieving the appropriate ecclesiastical triumphs and working the obligatory quota of miracles, but along with these he includes episodes that seem intended to illuminate secular aspects of the embassy. Germanus is not only described as meeting with representatives of the secular elite, but also as revitalising a dispirited army of *Britanni* by means of revival-style exhortation and baptism, then leading them to the famous 'Hallelujah' victory over a war-band of Saxons laden with loot from their pillaging. Constantius further records a second undated visit to Britain by Germanus in the company of a Bishop Severus, probably of Trier, though this later mission is thought by some to be no more than a phantom doublet of the original.[116] Constantius tells us the envoys quickly succeeded in suppressing the heresy and bringing the principal instigators back to Gaul, "so that [Britain] might be purged of them and they of their errors". What is often missed, however, is the significance of the author's final comment to his audience that, "even now the faith is persisting intact in those parts".[117]

Assuming this statement reflected some genuine understanding on Constantius' part, then it implies he had access to sources of information on ecclesiastical affairs in Britain near current at the time he wrote. Further, it is significant that his approach to ethnic attribution in the island is in close accord with that of Gildas, his near (or perhaps actual) contemporary. For both writers *Britanni* are to be seen as Catholic Christians, albeit prone to be wayward. Moreover, the language and cultural mores of this British elite are so familiar that a Gallo-Roman cleric could move among them with much the same ease as at home. Like Gildas, Constantius also depicts Saxons as foreigners and raiders, the common enemy of Christian civilisation against whom it is appropriate even for a bishop to take up arms (see 1.1.2 above). Given the author's close connection with Sidonius' circle, it is not unlikely that these views were shared by Sidonius as well as by others among the associated Gallic *literati*. Indeed, through his own connections with Faustus and Lupus, Sidonius might conceivably have been one of Constantius' sources of information on matters British.

[116] Thompson, 1984: 55ff.

[117] Constantius, *Vita Germani* 27-28.

Certainly, Sidonius' own depictions of *Britanni* as active participants in the affairs of Latin and Christian Gaul (see Chapter 3 below) are consonant both Constantius and Gildas. Sidonius also agrees with these authors' ethnic stereotyping of Saxons as pagan raiders and enemies to civilised men. His panegyric for Eparchius Avitus, composed c.455/ 56 to celebrate the brief elevation of Sidonius' father-in-law to the imperial throne, makes two references associating Saxons with insular Britain. The first alludes to the initial Roman expedition to the island by Julius Caesar back in 55 BC. Rather than the tribal opponents recounted by Caesar, however, the enemies ranged against him are drawn from late antiquity, namely "the Scot, the Pict and the Saxon".[118] Somewhat later in the poem Sidonius again links Saxons with Britain, seemingly conflating their boats with the coracles of Irish raiders. In his description of the barbarian ferment immediately before Avitus' selection as Petronius Maximus' *magister militum per Gallias* in 455, Sidonius tells his audience:

> The Aremorican region too expected the Saxon pirate, who deems it but sport to furrow the British waters with hides, cleaving the blue sea in a stitched boat.[119]

A source of information on Saxon establishment in Britain potentially available to Sidonius, as well as others among the Gallic *literati* would have been the so-called *Gallic Chronicle of 452*. This set of annals was probably compiled close to the year of its modern title, making the work near synchronous with its latest entries. The document's anonymous author seems to have been a cleric based in southern Gaul, who took a clearly anti-predestinarian position and was evidently a supporter of the 'Lerins' circle. This has led to the suggestion that he may have been closely connected with Sidonius' British mentor, Faustus.[120] Although such a nexus would provide a convenient link to Sidonius, the chronicler's doctrinal position in fact reflects that dominant in the Gallic Church for much of the fifth century.[121] The author could thus have been drawn from a comparatively large population of educated and literate clerics based in southern Gaul at the time. Whatever the case, amongst a series of matched items lamenting the loss or cession of Roman territory to various barbarian groups he includes the following forthright entry, which has been securely dated to 441-42:

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[118] Sidonius, *Carm.* VII. 90.

[119] Sidonius, Carm. VII. 369-71.

[120] For instance, Wood, 1992: 14.

[121] Mathisen, 1989: 122ff.

> The British provinces, which up to this time had endured a variety of disasters and misfortunes, were subjected to the authority [*dicionem*] of the Saxons. [122]

It is a peculiarity of Ken Dark's position on post-Roman Britain that he requires a delay in Anglo-Saxon dominance in 'lowland' areas beyond the commonly accepted mid fifth century dating. He has therefore felt compelled recently to disparage this entry, misleadingly labelling it as a "highly questionable source" and in any case "unclear" in meaning, before hastening away from the matter never to return.[123] However, Ian Wood has argued cogently of the same entry that it has, "more claims to being an original annal ... than much else in the text". In the absence of better evidence, he concludes, the annal should therefore be regarded as genuine, albeit as a statement limited to the author's own knowledge. This, essentially, is the same position taken by Nicholas Higham.[124] It must be said that if there exists a reasonably firm date for a Saxon takeover of administrative authority in at least some significant part of lowland Britain, then this is it.

Some two decades after the writing of Avitus' panegyric, Sidonius is again found discoursing on Saxon piracy along the Atlantic coast of Gaul. In a letter written in the late 470s to a friend and relative, Namatius, then serving as commander to the Atlantic fleet of the Visigothic king Euric, he warns him to be careful when, "roving the winding shores of Ocean to meet the curving sloops of the Saxons". Emphasising both Saxon ferocity and their seamanship, Sidonius continues:

> That enemy surpasses all other enemies in brutality. He attacks unforeseen and when foreseen he slips away ... With the perils of the sea they are not only acquainted – they are familiarly acquainted;[125]

Later in the same letter he makes a noteworthy discursion on the homeland of these particular Saxons, as well as the brutality engendered by their pagan beliefs:

> Moreover, when ready to unfurl their sails for the voyage home from the continent [*de continenti in patriam*] and to lift their gripping anchors from enemy waters, they are accustomed to kill one in ten of their prisoners ... due to superstition ...[126]

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[122] *Gallic Chronicle of 452*, Years 18 and 19 of Theodosius II. For dating of the annal see the recent critical edition of the *Chronicle* included in Richard Burgess, 2001a.

[123] Dark, 2000: 29.

[124] Wood, 1987: 253ff; Higham, 1998: 137-39.

[125] Sidonius, *Ep.* VIII.vi.14.

[126] Sidonius, *Ep.* VIII.vi.15.

Sidonius is apparently affirming here that the *patria* of these Saxon raiders no longer lay on the Continental mainland. He might possibly have been alluding to a putative origin in Scandinavia, sometimes referred to as an island by late antique geographers,[127] but this seems most unlikely. A more plausible explanation is that he understood the Saxons faced by Namatius to be sailing from a home base in the island of Britain. If so, it is significant that Sidonius draws an evident distinction between these pagan *Saxones*, even if now based in lowland Britain, and the people he identifies in his letters as *Britanni*. As we have seen, these latter (or at least the elite members of the ethnie) are characterised in the eyes of Sidonius, and other Gallic authors, by their Christian *romanitas* as well as their presence within the Gallic ecclesiastical sphere.

Further support for such a Gallic connection has come from excavations conducted from 1984 to 1991 at the site of the early medieval monastery complex at Whithorn in Galloway. These have strongly suggested a fifth century foundation for the site together with abundant material evidence of ongoing contact with the Continent, and particularly with Gaul.[128] Moreover, the monastery was itself dedicated at some early stage to the cult of the Gallic saint, Martin of Tours, though this cannot be demonstrated to date back to its foundation. A related category of testimony can be derived from the more than two hundred Class 1 inscribed memorial stones found at numerous sites in western Britain. These include several in the vicinity of Whithorn, though the great majority are in western Wales with a further fifty in Cornwall/ Dumnonia (see Map 6). Their inscriptions are mostly written in Latin, and have been dated from the early fifth century onwards. Most importantly they have been shown to employ Christian funerary formulae used contemporaneously on the Continent.[129] Mark Handley has argued persuasively that these inscriptions represent the British manifestation of a common efflorescence of Christian epigraphy that took place across the late antique West, peaking around the sixth century. In his view they provide firm testimony of the extent to which the Christian elite of western Britain were integrated with the rest of the late antique world through that period.[130]

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[127] For instance, Jordanes, *Getica* I.9

[128] Hill et al., 1997.

[129] For dating of the corpus of inscribed stones see Thomas, 1994, and most recently, Patrick Sims-Williams, 2003.

[130] Handley, 2001.

Additional evidence of this integration has been provided by the ongoing discovery at a number of late antique elite secular and ecclesiastical sites in Western Britain of sherds of amphorae and high quality tableware dated from the late fifth to mid sixth centuries (see Map 7). These wares had demonstrable origins in the eastern Mediterranean and North Africa, and were either shipped directly along Atlantic sea-lanes, or transhipped via southern Gaul. British sites at which such sherds have been found include the monastery at Whithorn, as well as the port of Tintagel in Cornwall and the hill-fort sites of Cadbury Congresbury and South Cadbury in Somerset, re-occupied by local elites in the later fifth century. A few sherds of a south-western Gaulish pottery type of the same period, known in France as *sigillées paléochrétienne grise*, have also been found at several similar sites. The probable contents of the Mediterranean amphorae were wine and olive oil, which would have possessed significance as elite goods in both secular and ecclesiastical romanising contexts – namely feasting, and celebrating the rites of the Catholic Church. Wine might also have arrived from Gaul in wooden barrels that have left no trace.[131]

In concluding this section, we shall return to a particularly apposite witness to contact between British and Gallic churchmen mentioned briefly at 1.1.2 above. On 18 November 461 a cleric named Mansuetus, styling himself "*episcopus Britannorum*", subscribed along with several local bishops to a pastoral letter issued from the metropolitan see of Tours.[132] The occasion is most often referred to as a council, but may have been a somewhat looser gathering of clergy from within the local ecclesiastical province and neighbouring sees to celebrate the 'reception' feast of Martin, patron saint of the city. St Martin's cult was widespread in Gaul at the time and perhaps also in Britain, as the dedication to him of the monastery at Whithorn could indicate. The title "*episcopus Britannorum*" used by Mansuetus is ambiguous. It may mean that he was '*a* bishop of the Britons' then visiting the province but could equally as well be read '*the* Bishop of Britons', perhaps of a community of *Britanni* already in process of settling in Gaul. If the latter, such communicants could have been organised into a single ethnically based see comparable to the Galician *sedes Britonorum* also noted at 1.2.2 above – a scenario consistent with an early establishment of *Britanni* in western Armorica as portrayed by Gregory of Tours a century or so later.

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[131] For a thorough exploration of this trade and the wares concerned, see Wooding, 1996 and Campbell, 1996. Reynolds, 1995, also provides a useful perspective on associated trade in the western Mediterranean in the relevant period.

[132] Cited in Haddan and Stubbs, 1873: 72-73.

Though there is no evidence of any direct contact between this particular 'Bishop of the Britons' and the close circle of secular and ecclesiastical correspondents surrounding Sidonius Apollinaris, we will have cause to again discuss Mansuetus at 4.2.4 below with reference to his potential role in negotiating the entry into the Gallic *civitas* of Bourges of a 'British' military force. As we shall see in the body of the thesis, this war-band was allied to the late Roman state and was said to have been led by a commander with the Brythonic name of 'Riothamus'[alt. 'Riotimus'] – a man who was known to Sidonius and included among his correspondents.

The next chapter uses a survey of Sidonius' career to examine salient events in the disintegration of the Western Roman Empire that lead up to the appearance in central Gaul of this 'British' army.

Chapter Two

Sidonius and the closing decades of the Western Empire

Introduction

The previous chapter dealt with the issue of ethnicity in late antiquity particularly as this related to the inhabitants of insular Britain in the fifth century, and their relationships with the Continent. It closed with an evaluation of pertinent ecclesiastical connections between Britain and Gaul and the place of Sidonius Apollinaris within this network. Chapter Two employs the writings of Sidonius, supplemented by a number of other historical sources, to chronicle the unravelling of the social and political fabric in Gaul and the rest of the Western Roman Empire during its closing decades. The chapter also explores the complex environment in which Sidonius was compelled to negotiate his private life and public career. A special emphasis is placed on the nature of events leading up to the accession of the Western *augustus* Anthemius (467-72), and to salient characteristics of his reign, since it is within this political framework that the groups identified by Sidonius and other authors as *Britanni* or *Brittones* ('Britons') make their appearance in Gallic affairs. The objective here is to contribute to the validation of Propositions One and Four of the thesis by providing a firm context for discussion of the roles – actual and potential – played by these Britons and their leaders in the military and political affairs of Gaul during last years of Roman authority and in the period of transition that followed immediately afterward. At the same time, the particular role of Sidonius Apollinaris in the unfolding of these events is also explored in detail.

1. Sidonius and the Empire to the deposition of Avitus (AD 449-56)

In the year 449, as "a young man just recently emerged from boyhood", Sidonius attended the annual the Council of the Seven Provinces held at Arles, the centre of Roman administration in southern Gaul. He was there to see his father preside as current Praetorian Prefect of the Gauls.[1] The diocesan assembly had been re-established under the emperor Honorius some three decades before, around the time of the Visigothic settlement of Aquitaine. It both represented the interests of the landowning elite of southern Gaul and served as a forum where the latest directives of the imperial bureaucracy could be disseminated. Even within a vitiated *imperium*, his father's appointment to the Praetorian Prefecture serves to show how influential and well-connected Sidonius' branch of the Apollinari was at this time. Within a few years the family's social prominence allowed Sidonius to make a fortunate marriage to Papianilla, daughter of the eminent Gallic aristocrat Eparchius Avitus, himself a former Prefect of Gaul and later to become Western *augustus*.

Close social and familial and connections may already have existed between the two families,[2] but it was this connubial alliance that largely determined the subsequent direction of Sidonius' career. Marriage into the clan Aviti also brought Sidonius material advantages, not least of which was the title to what became his favourite residence at *Avitacum*, located in the Auvergne not far from modern Clermont. His loving description of this villa and its surrounds remains one of our best indications of the luxurious lifestyle that could still be enjoyed by the Romanised elite in southern Gaul in the mid fifth century – an Arcadian sanctuary, removed from the struggles and cares of the wider world.[3] During the whole of Sidonius' life to this point, the reigning Western *augustus* had been Valentinian III who had notionally succeeded as a child when his uncle, Honorius, died in 423. Until 437, however, Valentinian's mother Placidia had ruled in her son's name, and before the end of her regency real political power had passed into the hands of the canny generalissimo, Flavius Aëtius.[4] It was not until 454 that Valentinian was able to break from the latter's control by personally assassinating him during an imperial audience. The

[1] Sidonius, *Epistulae* VIII.vi.5.

[2] As discussed by Jill Harries, 1994: 31-35.

[3] Sidonius, *Epistulae* II.ii.3ff.

[4] Officially Aëtius was styled *magister utriusque militae* (Master of Infantry and Cavalry) and *patricius* (Patrician). For a thorough discussion of the nature of these two offices, see Barnwell, 1992: 41-47.

probable trigger for this act was the recent engagement (doubtless under pressure) of Aëtius' son, Gaudentius, to one of Valentinian's daughters – with all that it implied for the generalissimo's dynastic ambitions.[5]

As a young man Aëtius had spent time as a hostage first with the Visigothic leader Alaric, and later among the Huns. In this way he had acquired a valuable working knowledge of the leading 'barbarian' groups that had entered Western Roman territory during the previous few decades. By an astute combination of diplomacy and coercion, Aëtius had then demonstrated a remarkable ability to mobilise warriors from these groups in the service of the Roman administration, or at least whatever faction of it he was supporting at a given time. Early in his career he often used Hunnic troops as auxiliaries, and in the mid 430s had connived with certain of their tribes to dismember a powerful Burgundian polity on the Rhine. Years later, when Attila's Hunnic confederacy was the chief enemy, Aëtius had drafted a counter-force of 'Roman' and federate troops, chiefly Visigoths, which he led to a pivotal victory against Attila near Çhâlons in 451.[6] Nonetheless, little had been done during the 430s to prevent a progressive Vandal takeover of the rich North African provinces after the *gens* had crossed there from Spain in 429. Their conquest stripped the West of essential tax revenues and placed restrictions on the supply of grain to the urban heartland of Rome.[7] The Vandals rapidly acquired a maritime capability and were soon disputing Roman dominion in the western Mediterranean.

Even after Aëtius' murder, his influence persisted in the form of his onetime confederates, many of whom continued to be major players in the politics of the Western Empire over the next two decades. It was said to be former retainers of his who in 455 revenged Aëtius' death by killing Valentinian III, though sources disagree on the precise assassins.[8] Later that same year the Vandal king, Geiseric, landed a fleet of raiders near Rome and attacked the city. There was little organised resistance and during the ensuing chaos the newly elevated *augustus*, Petronius

[5] One of the alternate versions of the entry corresponding to AD 454 (Year 427) in Prosper Tiro's, *Chronicle* strongly supports this view: "And so while Aëtius more vehemently sought agreements and more passionately pressed the case of his son, he was cruelly put to the sword ...".

[6] Jordanes, *Getica* 191-216.

[7] Jordanes, *Getica* 167-69.

[8] Gregory of Tours, *Historiae,* II.8; Jordanes, *Romana* 334.

Maximus, was murdered by persons unknown.[9] Maximus was himself alleged by John of Antioch to have connived at the murders both of Aëtius' and of Valentinian III.[10] In a swift coup following the latter's death, Maximus had seized the throne along with the hand of Valentinian's widow, Licinia Eudoxia, daughter to the former emperor Theodosius II. Nonetheless, during his brief reign Maximus was never recognised by the Eastern court at Constantinople, where the real power and wealth of the Empire now lay. It was left to Sidonius in one of his letters to pen a cautionary epitaph to Maximus' usurpation, warning his readers on the ephemeral nature of worldly power.[11]

In contrast to the relatively restrained actions of Alaric's Goths back in 410, Geiseric's Vandals systematically plundered Rome for two weeks, carrying off anything of value they could find. The Imperial Palace was sacked, churches were looted, citizens enslaved.[12] A number of the nobility were also taken as hostages including the twice-widowed Eudoxia. The lady was later rumoured to have secretly invited Geiseric to Italy in order to rid herself of Maximus.[13] Also taken were her two daughters Eudocia and Placidia. Geiseric quickly betrothed Eudocia to his own son, Huneric who was later to take the Vandal throne (477-84). She remained in Africa, becoming the mother of Hilderic who became king in 523. Placidia was probably already married, or at least affianced, to the prominent Roman senator Anicius Olybrius who had missed the sack of Rome by being safely absent at Constantinople. In 462 she was returned to that city along with her mother. Never one to overlook an opportunity, Geiseric afterward threw his aggressive support behind his newly acquired relative Olybrius as a candidate for western *augustus* (see 2.3 and 5.3 below). Another useful hostage taken in 455 was Aëtius' son Gaudentius, over whom Geiseric subsequently feigned guardianship.[14]

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[9] In his panegyric for Eparchius Avitus, written shortly afterward, Sidonius seems to accuse an otherwise unknown Burgundian of being ultimately responsible: "... the Burgundian [*Burgundio*] with his traitorous leadership extorted from thee [Rome] the panic fury that led to an emperor's slaughter" (*Carm.* VII. 442-43).
However, *Burgundio* might be intended as a personification of the Burgundian *gens*, toward whom Sidonius seems to have developed an early and active dislike.

[10] John of Antioch, *Fr.*201ff = Priscus, *Fr.* 30.

[11] Sidonius, *Epistulae* II.xiii.

[12] Prosper Tiro, *Chronicle* 428.

[13] Priscus, *Fr.* 30.

[14] For Geiseric's various machinations, see Priscus, *Fr.* 38. For the dating of the return of Eudoxia and Placidia, see Hydatius, *Chronicle* 211.

As it happened, the next Imperial pretender in the West was Sidonius' own father-in-law, Eparchius Avitus. He too had served with Aëtius and is credited in his panegyric, albeit composed by Sidonius, with having personally mobilised Visigothic support against Atilla (*Carmina* VII: 333-54). The Visigoths had been settled as *foederati* in south-western Gaul, particularly along the Garonne Valley, since c.418. They had subsequently pursued a more or less independent policy under their own rulers [*reges*], acting as Roman allies when the empire was strong and seeking their own advantage when it was weaker.[15] In following decades the Visigothic kingship evolved from rule over a people [*gens*] to *de facto* administrative rule over territory in Gaul and Spain. The result was the formation of a true Gothic *regnum*, notionally under the suzerainty of the Roman *imperium* but in fact steadily being alienated from it. This pervasive and insidious process, often aided by the actions of Roman 'collaborators', later became a subject of ongoing complaint by Sidonius (see 2.3 below). As with several other of the Germanic tribes within the empire, the Goths professed an 'Arian' form of Christianity.[16] Arian doctrines had long been anathematised by the mainstream Catholic Church, but Roman allies of the Goths were prepared to excuse their heresies when convenient. Sidonius himself did so quite specifically during his early career as Avitus' propagandist.[17]

Avitus had recently come out of retirement to serve as *magister militum* in Gaul under the ill-fated Petronius Maximus and, Sidonius tells us, was on embassy at the Visigothic capital of Toulouse when news of the latter's death reached him. Encouraged by Gothic support, he laid claim to the Western throne and was briefly recognised at Rome during 455-56.[18] Again, the court at Constantinople withheld its imprimatur. Around this time Sidonius appears to have served in a diplomatic role, and it was probably in that capacity he penned an idealised portrait of the Visigothic king Theoderic II (453-66) at his court, in which he recounts judiciously losing to the king at dice as a preliminary to requesting favours. Sidonius' plausive depiction of the Gothic *regnum* in this letter, as well as in Avitus' panegyric, are best understood as propaganda.[19] Sidonius was undoubtedly attempting to validate his

[15] The standard view on this process is given in Wolfram, 1988: ch.5.

[16] Based in the doctrines of the priest Arius (c.250-336), which subordinated the Son to the Father in the Christian godhead.

[17] See Sidonius, *Epistulae* I.ii.4.

[18] Sidonius, *Carmina* VII: 500*ff.*

[19] Sidonius, *Epistulae* I.ii and *Carmina* XXIII, 69-72.

father-in-law's claim to the *imperium*, underpinned as it was largely by Gothic power. Despite such efforts, the true weakness of Avitus' position became all too quickly apparent. Lacking a secure power base outside Gaul, he was not able to protect Italy from constant Vandal raids, let alone avenge the sack of Rome as Sidonius had promised in Avitus' panegyric.[20] Under Vandal pressure the sea-borne grain supply to the city was choked off, and famine followed.

At this point two serving generals rebelled against Avitus' administration. These were Fl. Ricimer, then *magister militum* in Sicily, and Fl. Julius Valorous Majorianus, Count of the *domestici*, an elite company of guards belonging to the imperial palace and household. According to Sidonius, both had previously held high office under Aëtius.[21] The Gothic armies, on whose military support Avitus had relied, failed to come to his rescue, being out of the way campaigning in northern Spain. Ostensibly this was on Avitus' behalf against the Sueves, Germanic raiders who had entered Galicia during the troubles of the early fifth century, but Hydatius tells us the Goths were also plundering the local citizenry on their own account.[22] Without their support Avitus was defeated and deposed by Ricimer's forces at *Placentia* (Piacenza) in late 456. Some later authorities claim he was then made bishop of that city, dying shortly afterwards.[23]

2. Patriciate of Ricimer to the accession of Anthemius (AD 457-67)

Ricimer's mother was a daughter of Wallia, Visigothic ruler from 415 to 418, who had campaigned on the Empire's behalf against the Vandals in Spain, and negotiated the Gothic settlement in Aquitaine. Ricimer's father was said to be an unnamed Suebian noble, but his bloodline must have been well regarded in the Germanic kingdoms since a sister of Ricimer was apparently wed to Gundioc of the Gibichungs, ruling house of the Burgundian federates settled in *Sapaudia*.[24]

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[20] Sidonius, *Carmina* VII.585ff.

[21] Sidonius, *Carm.* V.198ff.

[22] Hydatius, *Chronicle* 165ff.

[23] For Avitus' ordination, see Jordanes, *Getica* 240 and Gregory of Tours, *Historiae* II.11. Whether or not this actually occurred is open to question, but two decades later Julius Nepos, the last legitimate Western emperor, would dispose of his predecessor in just this manner following his deposition (see 5.3 below).

[24] For Ricimer's ancestry, see Sidonius, *Carmina* II. 360-65; Jordanes, *Getica* 173. For his relationship to the Gibichungs, we have Priscus' (*Fr.* 65) identification of Gundioc's son, Gundobad, as Ricimer's nephew.

Precisely how Ricimer came to serve the Roman state is not known, although Lacam attempts to construct a putative career for him before he appears directly in the sources as a *comes* serving under Avitus.[25] Not surprisingly, Ricimer commanded strong support among the mixed Germanic soldiery in Italy, but was himself unlikely ever to be an acceptable candidate for *augustus*. He settled instead for the roles of generalissimo and kingmaker, accepting the same titles of *patricius* and *magister utriusque militae* formerly held by Aëtius.[26]

It was thus Majorian who in 457 became the new Western *augustus*. As a true Roman aristocrat he was acceptable not only to the Roman Senate but also to the Eastern *augustus* Leo I, who had just acceded at Constantinople following the death of Marcian. Sidonius seems initially to have joined others of the Gallic nobility in a brief period of opposition to the new regime, but despite Majorian's recent part in the deposition of his father-in-law, Sidonius seems to have successfully reconciled himself with the new *augustus* around the time of the latter's elevation.[27] It is unlikely to be coincidental that after this point there is no further mention of Eparchius Avitus by name in any of Sidonius' published correspondence, another example of his careful self-editing. Shortly after regaining imperial favour, Sidonius composed a suitably obsequious panegyric for Majorian – a piece notable for its inclusion of a pseudo-historical dialogue in which Aëtius' "barbarian" wife is made to laud Majorian's noble qualities while seeking to convince her husband to assassinate him as a dangerous rival. The august and honourable Aëtius, of course, refuses. Whether this claim of rivalry had any basis in fact is not known.[28]

Majorian was a forceful ruler who during his short reign tried to make effective use of the economic and military resources still available to him in the West. For a period between 458 and 461 Sidonius seems to have served Majorian's administration in an unspecified government post. In a description of an intimate gathering of Gallic dignitaries with the emperor that occurred at Arles in 461, Sidonius records himself being addressed by the title *comes*.[29] Earlier that year Majorian had assembled a sizeable army in Spain, composed largely of barbarian

[25] Lacam, 1986: chs III-V.

[26] For this see the various references given at Jones, A.H.M. et al., 1980: 943, 'Fl. Ricimer: Comes et MVM et Patricius'.

[27] Part of this process provides subject matter for Sidonius' poem, *Carmina* IV.

[28] Sidonius, *Carmina* V.126-293.

[29] Sidonius, *Epistulae* I.xi.3 and 13.

mercenaries from the Danube region. These troops were intended to join a fleet of 300 ships collected at the Spanish city of Cartagena, the intent being to ferry them across the Mediterranean to pursue recovery of the African provinces and their attendant tax revenues from the Vandal *regnum*.[30] In the event, a Vandal naval strike on Cartagena captured most of the invasion fleet, a reverse that compelled Majorian to make a humiliating peace formally confirming Geiseric's territorial acquisitions. It was probably as a direct result of this defeat that on Majorian's return to Italy – following the aforementioned encounter with Sidonius at Arles – Ricimer forced the *augustus* to abdicate and then had him executed.[31] Sidonius' correspondence would seem to indicate that at this point the author discretely withdrew himself from overt participation in imperial politics and administration, retiring *pro tem* to his estates in the Auvergne to enjoy a life of aristocratic leisure.

Ricimer wasted no time in elevating his own puppet *augustus*, Libius Severus, to the imperial throne. This was done without the concurrence of the Eastern court, and precipitated yet a further bout of civil conflict in the Gallic provinces. Aegidius, another of Aëtius' former generals, had been serving under Majorian as *comes et magister utriusque militae per Gallias*. He refused to accept Severus' authority and withdrew to the Loire with a sizeable part of the remaining Gallic field army. For several years he held parts of northern and central Gaul under his own fiat, though apparently governing in the name of Rome.[32] Ricimer must have regarded Aegidius as having sufficient *gravitas* to be a genuine threat to his own power base, because his apparent response was to buy military support for Severus' administration from the Gothic and Burgundian *regna* by offering them both opportunities for territorial expansion. Hydatius, whose *Chronicle* demonstrates a consistently high regard for Aegidius' personal qualities, records the following under the year 462:

> Agrippinus, a Gallic *comes* and citizen, and enemy of the distinguished *comes* Aegidius, betrayed [*tradidit* = 'handed over'] Narbona to Theodoric in order to win the assistance of the Goths.[33]

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[30] This is the picture given by Sidonius, *Carm.* V. 470-83. Priscus (*Fr.* 36) adds that Geiseric took the projected campaign seriously, trying to stall the attack through negotiations while activating a 'scorched earth' policy in the territory through which Majorian's armies would have to march to reach the Vandal heartland.

[31] Hydatius, *Chronicle* 205.

[32] Gregory of Tours, *Historiae* II.11; Priscus, *Fr.* 39.

[33] Hydatius, *Chronicle* 212

This Agrippinus may have been displaced from the office of *magister militum* by Aegidius during Majorian's reign and then restored to it under Ricimer's direction after Majorian's death. In handing over Narbonne he was very probably acting on behalf of his patron, and the Gothic 'assistance' so acquired was aimed against Aegidius.[34] If so, the price paid for Theodoric's backing was a heavy one. Surrendering this city was tantamount to handing over control of N*arbonensis I*, the rich province of which it was capital. Now the Visigoths not only commanded an outlet on the Mediterranean, but also dominated the Empire's land route into Spain.

The Burgundians' reward was similar. Following their decisive defeat on the Rhine around 437 by Aëtius' Hunnic allies, Burgundian remnants had been allowed to settle as *foederati* in *Sapaudia* to the south of Lake Geneva.[35] Over the next decade they rebuilt their strength under the Gibichung dynasty, and during Avitus' reign the Burgundian *reges* Gundioc and Chilperic I are recorded as having accompanied the Visigothic king Theoderic II on campaign against the Sueves in Galicia, nominally on behalf of Rome. Around the year 456 the tribe is said to have occupied "*partem Galliae*", dividing the land with its Roman owners.[36] Assuming the accuracy of this entry, the division referred to was most likely accomplished through surrendering control of portions of Roman estates to Burgundian 'guests' [*hospes*] in accord with a formal *foedus*. The extent to which the Burgundian enclave expanded along the upper Rhone/ Saône corridor at this time is unclear. As with the Visigoths, however, what began as an exercise in 'hospitality' seems quickly to have developed into an actual assumption of political control over territory.

During the short period of Gallic opposition to Majorian's ascendancy, Burgundian troops seem to have garrisoned Sidonius' home city of Lyons. It was perhaps during this period that Sidonius wrote a short satirical poem proclaiming his chagrin at having ten of the giant tribesmen quartered on his household, thus being forced:

> ... to endure German speech, praising oft with wry face the song of the gluttonous Burgundian who spreads rancid butter on his hair ... a reek of garlic and foul onions discharged upon you at early morn from ten breakfasts ...[37]

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[34] For this, see comment and references given at Jones, A.H.M. et al., 1980: 38, 'Agrippinus'.

[35] For a discussion of these events, see Wood, 2003, 246-47.

[36] For the Spanish campaign, see Jordanes, *Getica* 231; Hydatius, *Chronicle* 166. For the expansion of settlement, see Marius of Avenches, *Chronicle,* ad a. 456.2.

[37] Sidonius, *Carmina* XII. The whole Lyons episode is explored in Mathisen, 1979.

On establishing his authority in the region, Majorian had apparently expelled the Burgundians from the Lyonnais. Now Ricimer allowed them to return, ostensibly as *foederati* protecting the Gallo-Roman population there. This provided *de facto* legitimation for Burgundian domination of the wealthy province of *Lugdunensis I*, which over the following decade was all but absorbed into the evolving Burgundian *regnum*. The gubernatorial situation within this polity was complex, however, with several *reges* drawn from the Gibichung dynasty often presiding concurrently over separate areas within the Burgundian realm. At the same time, the Gibichungs were infiltrating the Roman military hierarchy. In a letter to Bishop Leontius of Arles concerning an ecclesiastical dispute, dated 10 October 463, Pope Hilarius writes of "the report of my son, the illustrious master of soldiers [*magister militum*] Gundioc ...".[38] Whether Ricimer's brother-in-law had gained the office of *magister militum per Gallias* or some more limited command is not clear. However, others of the Gibichungs would quickly follow in his footsteps, and their familial connection with Ricimer would become an increasingly important factor in determining how the Burgundian *foedus* with Rome was to be expressed over the following decade.

In the meantime, Aegidius appears to have allied himself with elements of the Frankish peoples settled on notionally imperial territory south of the Rhine. This transmigration had been in process at least since the reign of the emperor Maximian at the end of the third century, when groups of people described as *Franci* had been settled as dependent *laeti* on 'deserted' land in northern Gaul.[39] No doubt there had been large scale intermixing with the local Gallic population. However, warrior males from these and related peoples across the Rhine had provided a major source of recruitment to the Western Roman army in the fourth century. Not unlike the Goths and Burgundians, the very development of a 'Frankish' ethnic identity was intimately connected to their complex relationship with the *imperium*. According to a tradition recorded by Gregory of Tours some of the Franks had accepted Aegidius as king – even perhaps as a legitimate if local Roman emperor.[40] Certainly, he appears to have attempted to treat with other polities as if on an equal footing. Hydatius records his envoys crossing the Mediterranean on embassy to Geiseric.[41] He seems also to have been able to deploy sufficient military force to confine the

[38] Cited in Mathisen, 1989: 212.

[39] See line 21 of *Panegyric* VIII in Nixon and Rogers, 1994.

[40] Gregory of Tours, *Historiae* II.12. Fanning, 1992, canvasses the imperial aspect in some detail.

[41] Hydatius, *Chronicle* 220.

Gothic armies south of the Loire – even if they, in turn, were able to occupy his attention to an extent that prevented him from intervening in Italy.[42] It must have come as a substantial relief to Ricimer when Aegidius was suddenly assassinated, late in 464 or in 465, either in an ambush or by poison.[43] Although he was succeeded by his son Syagrius, who based himself at the city of Soissons in northern Gaul, the latter never seems to have been able to command the same authority nor deploy the same resources as his father.[44]

When Severus also died in 465, Ricimer proceeded to rule Italy alone. He was thus, for a time, the sole (quasi) legitimate civil power in what was left of the imperial West. Although he served nominally under the direction of Leo I at Constantinople, it was not until 467 that Ricimer was persuaded to acknowledge Leo's candidate for the office of Western *augustus*. This was the 'Greek' general and senatorial aristocrat Anthemius. Under constant pressure from Vandal raids on Italy, Ricimer could hardly afford to continue risking the displeasure of the Eastern court by directly refusing to comply with its wishes. Moreover, Anthemius and Leo were not above offering inducements to 'sweeten' the deal, the most valuable of which was the promise of marriage to Alypia, Anthemius' daughter.[45] At a time when lineage and familial connection were of prime importance, such a match would have linked Ricimer not only to a current Western *augustus* of impeccable Roman descent but also, through Alypia's mother, to the family of the former Eastern emperor Marcian. As Sidonius himself hinted broadly in his later panegyric for Anthemius, a vigorous male-child of such a marriage should have been a prime future candidate for the imperial throne.[46]

3. Anthemius, and Sidonius' Prefecture of Rome (AD 467-69)

Anthemius had been born in Constantinople c.420 and had made a fortunate marriage with Aelia Marcia Euphemia, only daughter of the Eastern *augustus* Marcian (450-57). Shortly following the nuptials, Anthemius was favoured by

[42] Priscus, *Fr.* 39.

[43] Hydatius, *Chronicle* 224.

[44] Gregory of Tours, *Historiae* II.18 and 27. The view given here is more or less the conventional one, but for an alternative interpretation of the relationship between Aegidius, Syagrius and the Salian Franks, see Halsall, 2001.

[45] Ennodius, *Vita Epiphanii,* 66.

[46] Sidonius, *Carmina* II. 193-97; 481-2.

being created *magister utriusque militae* and *patricius* – albeit his own father had held similar rank. Marcian had also nominated Anthemius to the consulate for 455, duly held alongside the Western *augustus* Valentinian III.[47] These honours suggests that Marcian had been grooming his son-in-law as successor to the Eastern throne but on the former's death in 457 Anthemius was passed over in favour of Leo, a considerably less distinguished candidate. Leo's preferment was no doubt due to the patronage of Aspar, the powerful barbarian *magister militum* and *patricius* in the East.[48] Like Ricimer, Aspar was probably attempting to establish a less eminent *augustus* whom he could dominate. If so, he was badly mistaken: Leo (later nicknamed *Makellos* 'the Butcher') gradually consolidated his own authority until in 471 he was able to have Aspar and his sons executed for treason.[49]

Sidonius takes pains to assure us that until Anthemius' nomination to the Western throne the general had continued to serve loyally in a military capacity under Leo, notably in defeating a band of Ostrogoths in Illyricum and later subduing an army of Huns who were raiding Dacia.[50] Nonetheless, with the acquiescence of Ricimer, Anthemius arrived in Italy in the April of 467:

> ... dispatched according to God's plan from Constantinople by *Augustus* Leo along with Marcellinus, other picked men as *comites*, and a well-equipped army of vast proportions.[51]

The Marcellinus mentioned here was yet another former colleague of Aëtius, and had apparently served the Western empire in recent times under Majorian. As with Aegidius, he appears to have been in personal feud with Ricimer since the time of Majorian's murder and Ricimer's concurrent suborning of troops under Marcellinus' control in Sicily. Prior to joining Anthemius, Marcellinus had been operating as a quasi-independent warlord from a base in Dalmatia. At one point, Priscus tells us, it had looked as if might invade Italy on his own account but he was apparently convinced once again to serve the interests of the Empire, though perhaps as Leo's agent.[52] It is likely that a goodly number of the troops arriving with Anthemius were

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[47] The honours and offices of Anthemius and his father are cited at points in Anthemius' panegyric: Sidonius, *Carmina* II.

[48] *Suda* A 3803 = Priscus, *Fr.* 19.

[49] Priscus, *Fr.* 61; Jordanes, *Getica* 239.

[50] Sidonius, *Carmina* II: 223-87.

[51] Hydatius, *Chronicle* 230.

[52] Priscus, *Fr.* 38, 39, 53.

in fact drawn from Marcellinus' personal following. What inducements the latter may have been offered are unclear but he seems to have received offices and titles making him nominally equal in authority to Ricimer, whom Marcellinus perhaps hoped to replace. In any case, he was almost certainly intended by the new administration to provide a military counterpoise to Ricimer's faction.[53]

Sidonius' published writings are silent about his own political activities between 461 and 467, though several of his letters recounting a life of aristocratic *otium* most likely belong to these years.[54] Late in 467, however, he suddenly re-emerges onto the political stage. His letters place him arriving in Rome as senior member of a deputation from the Auvergne seeking to petition Anthemius.[55] Sidonius nowhere makes clear the subject of their representations, but the Auvergne was now coming under pressure from rogue bureaucrats who were enriching themselves while helping extend Visigothic influence at the expense of the imperial administration.[56] A case in point is the Seronatus who held a high but unspecified office in the imperial bureaucracy of the Seven Provinces, and concerning whom Sidonius complained to his brother-in-law Ecdicius Avitus:

> ... each day he crowds the woods with fugitives, the farms [*villas*] with barbarian occupants [*hospitibus*], the altars with accused persons, the prisons with priests; he brags to the Goths and insults the Romans ... tramples on the laws of Theodosius and issues laws of Theodoric, searching out ancient offences and brand-new taxes.[57]

Sidonius' complaint about Seronatus filling villas with *hospes* suggests that the latter was unilaterally extending the permitted area of Gothic settlement and illegally dispossessing Gallo-Roman landowners – one example of his betrayal of the laws of the *imperium* (i.e. the Theodosian Code) while substituting those of Theodoric II, assumedly still the Visigothic king when this letter was written.

Sidonius' deputation to Rome may thus have been seeking imprimatur for action against Seronatus and his ilk. If so, their plea seems eventually to have borne fruit. Seronatus' arrest, which led to his conviction and execution, is cited by Sidonius in a

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[53] For all this see the various references and comments at Jones, A.H.M. et al., 1980: 708-709, 'Marcellinus 6'.

[54] Jill Harries, 1994: ch. 5, provides a discussion Sidonius' probable pursuits during this period.

[55] Sidonius, *Epistulae* I.ix.5.

[56] These 'un-Roman activities' are canvassed in Teitler, 1992.

[57] Sidonius, *Epistulae* II.i.3.

letter of 475 as one of the services rendered to the Roman state by the loyal citizens of the Auvergne.[58] In any event, it is quite possible an added impetus to Sidonius' mission was given by the sudden change of Visigothic rulers that also occurred in 467.[59] According to Hydatius, Theoderic had been murdered by his brother Euric who thereupon acceded to the throne.[60] Jordanes claims it was Euric's ambition from the outset to establish an expanded Visigothic polity independent of even notional Roman control, but this is probably an *ex post facto* view of the situation. As Andrew Gillett has observed, there is no firm evidence that Euric's accession initially brought about any great change in Roman/ Visigoth relations.[61]

By chance or design, Sidonius arrived in Rome just after the wedding of Alypia and Ricimer had been solemnised, and the whole city was still in celebration. At the time Sidonius recorded high hopes for the consequent alliance, perhaps anticipating it might allow more imperial resources to be devoted to the security of Gaul. Describing the progress of his mission, he reported to a colleague:

> Up till now, I have not presented myself at the bustling doors of the Emperor and his courtiers, for I arrived here at the moment of the marriage of Ricimer the patrician, whose union with the daughter of the immortal Augustus is a hopeful guarantee of the safety of the state.[62]

As events were to demonstrate, this optimism was ill-founded. Despite his newly acquired familial connection with Anthemius, Ricimer had evidently grown used to the exercise of near absolute power in Italy and subsequent actions show him as intent on maintaining that position. The relationship between the new emperor and his son-in-law was from the outset a precarious one, and for the next few years the Western Empire would again suffer the destabilising effects of rival *principes* vying with each other to gain the upper hand in administration of the state.

Needing an introduction at court, Sidonius sought patronage under the eminent senator Caecina Basileus who eased his way into Anthemius' circle and arranged for

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[58] Sidonius, *Epistulae* VII. vii.2.

[59] Here accepting the dating for Euric's accession argued by Andrew Gillett, 1999.

[60] Hydatius, *Chronicle* 231.

[61] For Jordanes view of Euric's policies, see *Getica*, 235 ff. The actual political situation immediately following Euric's accession is canvassed at Gillett, 1999: 21ff.

[62] Sidonius, *Epistulae* I.v.10.

him to deliver a panegyric for the new *augustus* on 1 January 468.[63] As well as lauding Anthemius in his verse, Sidonius managed also to serve up side dishes of flattery for Ricimer. It should not be forgotten that this same man had been prime mover in the deposition and subsequent death of Sidonius' own father-in-law. Nevertheless, in the panegyric Sidonius voices a resounding vote of approval for the alliance marked by the royal marriage:

> Add also a private compact to our public one: let a parent who is Emperor be blessed by having his daughter wedded to Ricimer. Both shine with the lustre of high rank; in her ye have a royal lady, in him I [Rome] have a man of royal blood. ... Survey the nuptials of olden time, and no union such as this event can offer itself to thy view.[64]

Sidonius' appearance before the new *augustus* bore immediate fruit, at least as regards his own advancement. Anthemius promptly appointed Sidonius as Praetorian Prefect of Rome. This powerful and highly prestigious office, which came with a large staff and a wide range of administrative duties, marked the apogee of Sidonius' secular career. He modestly claims the honour came to him as a reward for his poetic efforts.[65] Anthemius, however, may have had other and more practical considerations in mind. It would hardly have escaped the imperial court that favouring an eminent Gallic aristocrat might prove useful in rallying support for Anthemius' administration in southern Gaul, containing as it did some of the few remaining tracts of Western territory outside Italy still loyal to the *imperium*. Such a gesture might have been perceived as particularly useful by Anthemius since it appears that for the time being he was prepared to offer the loyal citizens of Gaul little else. During the first two years of his reign the new emperor's attentions were focused firmly on events in the Mediterranean sphere, and it was there that that the remaining military resources of the Western Empire were chiefly to be employed.

In establishing Anthemius at Rome, Leo had been following his own complex agenda. Apart from the likely benefit of removing a potential rival, he was also seeking a solution to the Vandal problem. Their fleets had recently begun to raid Greece and other points in the territory of the Eastern Empire, and the Vandal ruler Geiseric is reported to have spurned diplomatic solutions that did not include the elevation of his kinsman-by-marriage Anicius Olybrius to the Western throne.

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[63] This was *Carmina* II, his third written for a reigning emperor.

[64] Sidonius, *Carmina* II. 483-88. For praise of Ricimer, see *Carmina* II.352-82.

[65] Sidonius, *Epistulae* I.ix.6.

According to Priscus, Geiseric was also demanding a share in the property of the deceased Aëtius and Valentinian III, which he claimed as father-in-law to Valentinian's daughter and guardian of Aëtius' son, both captured at Rome in the sack of 455.[66] Leo's response was the preparation of a wide-ranging offensive aimed at ending Vandal power in the Mediterranean once and for all. The sixth century Byzantine historian Procopius expresses no doubt over Anthemius' purpose in Leo's scheme of things:

> [Leo] appointed and sent Anthemius as emperor of the west, a man of the senate of great wealth and high birth, in order that he might assist him in the Vandalic war.[67]

Anthemius' appointed task in the projected campaign was to marshal the remaining economic and military power of the Western Empire in support of this Eastern crusade, which left the Western *augustus* with little resource to devote to lesser matters such as the defence of Sidonius' Gaul.

Leo's massive and extraordinarily costly expedition involved marshalling a huge fleet of troop transports and warships to neutralise Vandal naval capacity and to allow a direct attack on the African mainland. These forces were buttressed by an army marching overland towards Carthage from Byzantine Egypt. The campaign was to be assisted by the capture of Vandal bases in Sardinia and Sicily by Western troops commanded by the *comes* Marcellinus, the former Dalmatian warlord who had accompanied Anthemius to Rome. As with Majorian's recent ill-fated expedition, the aim was to destroy the Vandals as a military force and to bring the African diocese back under full imperial control. Revenge for the humiliation to imperial pride caused by the Vandal sacking of Rome in 455 no doubt provided a further motive. The launching of this vast campaign in 468 must have seemed like a renaissance of the Empire in its glory. Even in Galicia detailed news of it came rapidly to the clerical chronicler Hydatius.[68] Indeed, so great was the force gathered it must have seemed to its principals that Leo's design could hardly fail. Yet fail it did, and in spectacular fashion.

Had the campaign succeeded, the subsequent history of the Empire (and hence of Europe and the Mediterranean world) might have been wholly different. With the

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[66] Priscus, *Fr.* 38, 39.
[67] Procopius, *History of the Wars* 6.9
[68] Hydatius, *Chronicle* 241.

Vandal menace quashed and the tax revenues of Africa flowing once more into imperial coffers, Anthemius might have had the opportunity and resource to re-establish Roman power in Spain and Gaul, perhaps even in Britain. But this was not to be. After a hopeful start Leo's main naval expedition ended in total disaster, with the loss of most of the fleet and the deaths of thousands of troops. The debacle was due in no small measure to the extraordinarily inept and most probably corrupt leadership of Leo's brother-in-law, Basiliscus.[69] Subsequent gossip was that he accepted a substantial bribe from Geiseric to delay the attack, a decision that allowed the Vandals time to bring up the fire-ships with which they were able to scatter and destroy the Byzantine fleet, together with the army that it was transporting.[70] Without support, the Byzantine troops marching overland along the North African coast, and who had already successfully engaged Vandal forces, were compelled to turn back towards Egypt.

As a consequence, the African provinces remained firmly under Vandal control, while the Eastern Empire was temporarily bankrupted. Even worse must have been the huge blow to Roman morale. In the following few years of fiscal and military weakness, Constantinople would be occupied with internal problems, and more wary of intervening in Western affairs. Marcellinus *comes*, commander of the Western forces, seems to have carried off his part of the campaign with distinction but did not live to return victorious to Rome. Procopius tells us he was murdered in Sicily by "one of his fellow officers".[71] This incident may have resulted from some purely personal dispute, but its convenience to Ricimer makes his involvement suspect. The death would have removed one of Anthemius' main counters to Ricimer's military power in Italy, especially if some significant part of Marcellinus' troops were loyal to his person (or to his paymasters) rather than to the *imperium*. Ricimer was no stranger to Sicily and, as noted above, seems to have demonstrated a prior ability to purchase the allegiance of troops commanded by Marcellinus in that location. The net outcome of Leo's Vandal campaign was therefore to seriously weaken the imperial cause, particularly in the West, and to render the emperor Anthemius' already shaky position yet more precarious. It was a situation in which one could readily imagine Anthemius seeking for new alliances, independent of Ricimer, that might serve to prop up his administration.

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[69] The *Suda* (B 163 = Priscus, *Fr.* 43) describes Basiliscus as "slow-witted and easily taken in".

[70] John Malalas, *Chronicle* 14:44; Priscus, *Fr.* 53.

[71] Procopius, *History of the Wars* 5.25.

Sidonius must have served as Prefect of Rome throughout the whole of the Vandal campaign, but his published correspondence tells us little about the political situation nor his own governmental activities during that period. A single letter comments on an aspect of the tight situation in the City, voicing his concerns over the restricted food supply. He writes of his worries that, "the general famine may be put down to my luckless management", then goes on to record his relief when he hears that five ships containing grain and honey had just made port from *Brundisium*.[72] Sidonius also does not record at what point he laid down – or perhaps was dismissed from – the office of City Prefect. The normal term of appointment was for a year, but the same man could serve successive terms. Thus we cannot be sure whether he may still have been in office at the point during 469 when he became embroiled in the affair that perhaps precipitated his final retirement from (purely) secular politics. This was the senatorial trial for treason of Arvandus, a fellow Gaul and an old friend who had until recently been serving as the Gallic Prefect, the same high office previously held by Sidonius' father and grandfather as well as by his father-in-law, Eparchius Avitus.

According to Sidonius' own account, Arvandus stood accused of treasonous correspondence with the Visigothic king, Euric, in which he supported the extinguishing of imperial authority in Gaul (see 3.1.1 below). It was in connection with this act of treachery that Arvandus had also urged Euric to attack certain "*Britanni*" said to be situated at the time somewhere in central Gaul beyond the river Loire.[73] Despite Sidonius' virtual certainty of Arvandus' guilt, his loyalties were divided between his perception of *amicitia* – the binding ties of aristocratic friendship – and the duty he felt was owed to the state. In the event, he was able to fully satisfy neither of these. The Arvandus episode and its links to the matter of a British military force operating in Gaul are fully explored in the course of Chapter Three and will not be further canvassed here. However, it was almost certainly as a result of his part in the Arvandus affair that Sidonius quit Rome and made his way back to Gaul.

[72] Sidonius, *Epistulae* I.x.2.

[73] Sidonius, *Epistulae* I.vii.5

4. Sidonius' ordination as Bishop of Clermont (c. AD 470)

At this point there is another significant lacuna in Sidonius' published correspondence. When the strand of his life can once more be traced, the secular aristocrat had undergone a pivotal career shift. At some time before the end of 470, Sidonius had taken holy orders and been elevated to the bishopric of *Augustonemetum Avernorum*, the small walled city that was precursor to modern Clermont.[74] It was situated within the northern slopes of the Massif Central, surrounded by hills on all sides except to the east where a plain opened towards the valley of the river *Elaris* (Allier). The city itself was the *civitas* capital of the tribe *Averni* and hence cultural centre of the Auvergne, their ancient territory. The ruins of *Gergovia,* the tribal *oppidum* in pre-Roman times, lay nearby. In the imperial scheme of things Clermont then constituted the westernmost city in the province of *Aquitania I*, with its provincial capital at the city of *Avaricum Biturigum*, modern Bourges, some 150 km to the northwest. If Sidonius' correspondence is any guide, however, the Clermont of his day had closer social and economic ties to Sidonius' homeland in the Lyonnais, to which it was directly linked by a major highway.

Sidonius remained reticent on the whole matter of his ordination, and we possess no other direct sources of information that might enlighten us. Among the few clues that can be gleaned from Sidonius' own correspondence are his several hints that he took up the ecclesiastical burden before he was prepared, or perhaps even willing, to do so. For example, in one letter dating evidently from the early period of his episcopacy, he describes himself as:

> ... one on whose totally unworthy shoulders has been thrust the burden of such a high calling; and in my wretched plight, compelled to teach before learning, and presuming to preach goodness before doing it ...[75]

How much of this is simply 'due modesty' is impossible to say. Sidonius nowhere explains what he means by the bishopric being "thrust" upon him, but if the allusion is intended to be taken literally two possibilities suggest themselves. The first is that so gravely had his entanglement in the Arvandus affair compromised him at the imperial court that he was either formally compelled to remove himself from secular life by entering the Church, or did so of his own accord to place himself as far as

[74] Sidonius, *Epistulae* III.i

[75] Sidonius, *Epistulae* V.iii.3.

possible beyond the purview of civil authority. Alternatively, or in addition to these reasons, on Sidonius' return to the environs of Clermont he may have been co-opted to the episcopacy by a local populace who viewed him as an optimal candidate. Despite long-standing opposition from the papacy, the Gallic Church continued its own tradition of elevating both monks and laymen to the episcopacy in addition to the members of the regular clergy favoured by the bishops of Rome.[76]

Indeed, Sidonius' situation may have been not dissimilar to that of Germanus of Auxerre some decades prior, as depicted in the saint's *vita*. As already noted, this work was written by one Constantius, most likely the close friend and literary collaborator to whom Sidonius dedicated the first seven books of his *Epistulae* (see 'Introductory' and 1.2.2 above). It is even possible the author may to some extent have modelled his description of Germanus' elevation to the bishopric of Auxerre on Sidonius' own experiences. As Constantius tells it, Germanus had literally been shanghaied from public office to bishopric by the people of his see:

> ... all the clerics and the entire nobility, the plebs both urban and rustic, were united in one opinion: the united voice all demanded Germanus as bishop. War was declared on the state official, whom it was easy to subdue, because he was assaulted even by those who supported him. He assumed the pontificate unwilling, compelled, appointed; and suddenly he was changed in all regards.[77]

Willing or no, Sidonius' own role transformation would have been less radical than it might seem. That he took his ecclesiastical responsibilities seriously is hardly to be doubted, but accession to the bishopric would have allowed Sidonius to maintain his elite status and lifestyle while still exercising a substantial degree of secular power and patronage. His marriage and property arrangements would have remained virtually unchanged. Bishops had played a variety of significant roles within the Roman governmental structure since the time of Constantine I, one key duty being the distribution of state welfare to the needy. Their political skills and high status, also meant that prominent bishops were called upon to serve as diplomatic envoys for the imperial administration.[78] A further important function was the hearing of secular law cases via the *episcopalis audentia* or bishop's court, as well as acting less formally as arbitrators and/ or conciliator in private and civil

[76] For this, see Mathisen, 1989:85-86

[77] Cited in Mathisen, 2003, 5.9:165.

[78] Gillett, 2003: ch. 4, provides several studies on bishops acting in the role of envoys.

disputes. This is why Constantius highlights "knowledge of law" as one of Germanus' eminent qualifications for the episcopacy. Earlier in his career Germanus had served as an *advocatus*, a legal specialist, in "the tribunals of the prefecture" – assumedly of Gaul.[79] Like him, bishops sometimes had to intercede for members of their flock arraigned before the same tribunals.

One can readily appreciate, therefore, why Sidonius' wide experience in public office would have been valued by his congregation. The fabric of Roman government in central Gaul was fast deteriorating, with civil administration becoming localised and ad hoc. Of necessity the episcopate was drafted to fill part of this gap, leading to the rise in Gaul of what Ralph Mathisen has termed an 'ecclesiastical aristocracy'.[80] These men were usually recruited from among the local nobility and supported by prominent local laymen. A number of them, as with Sidonius and Germanus before him, possessed prior experience in the fields of government and jurisprudence. Indeed, with the decline in opportunity to hold civil office, the Church now provided one of the few acceptable refuges left to loyal Gallo-Romans of this class, other than emigration to another part of the empire. In the end it may be that in accepting ordination as bishop, Sidonius was himself simply following the counsel shared with his brother-in-law Ecdicius Avitus:

> If the state is powerless to render aid, if, as rumour says, the emperor Anthemius is without resource, our nobility is determined to follow your lead, and give up their country, or their hair [that is, assume the clerical tonsure].[81]

5. Visigothic challenge in Gaul and imperial response (AD 470-71)

Sidonius' earlier bleak assessment of imperial impotence in Gaul proved apposite. Back at Rome the ongoing power struggle between Anthemius and Ricimer had broken into open warfare. According to John of Antioch, the immediate cause of dispute was Anthemius' execution of Ricimer's close friend, the *patricius* Romanus, ostensibly for the crime of "sorcery".[82] However, Cassiodorus later claimed that Romanus had designs on the throne ("*affectans imperium*"), and it may be that Ricimer was already plotting to replace Anthemius with a more pliant protégé.[83]

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[79] Cited in Mathisen, 2003, 5.9:165.

[80] The process is discussed in detail at Mathisen, 1993: ch. 9.

[81] Sidonius, *Epistulae* II.i.4.

[82] John of Antioch, *Fr.* 207 = Priscus, *Fr.* 62.

[83] Cassiodorus, *Chronicle* 1289.

Whatever the case, the initial period of open conflict was temporarily patched over through the patient diplomacy of Epiphanius, Bishop of Pavia. In that saint's *vita* the episode is notable for the ethnic slurs employed by the various parties, no doubt providing a genuine indication of attitudes then prevailing. For instance, Ricimer's ancestry is denigrated via the Roman epithet 'skin-clad Goth', while Anthemius himself is styled as "*Graeculus*" – 'Greek runt'.[84] How Alypia, bartered daughter of Anthemius and wife to Ricimer, felt about all this we are never told.

The rapprochement brokered by Epiphanius may, however, have been facilitated by the appearance of a threat mutual to both combatants. At some point around the years 470/ 71 the Visigothic king, Euric, altered his policy toward the Roman state, exchanging the slow infiltration of the Aquitaine for an aggressive campaign of military expansion.[85] His new-found belligerence was no doubt related to a general perception of Roman weakness following the collapse of Leo's Vandal expedition, but the immediate trigger was more likely to have been the further dilution of Roman resources caused by the civil war in which Anthemius and Ricimer were presently engaged. Their decision to suspend hostilities with each other may thus have been an acknowledgement of the need to counter the danger to their common interests presented by Euric and the forces of the Visigothic *regnum*.

Yet even if all the remaining resources of the Western *imperium* had been brought in to play, the ability of Rome to respond to this new challenge in Gaul would necessarily have been limited. Vandal raids on Italy continued, and a flush of gold coinage issued early in Anthemius' administration – the last such in the West – shows participation in Leo's failed campaign must have been extravagantly expensive for a polity whose tax base was shrinking almost daily as tract after tract of territory passed beyond its control. There cannot have been much to spare in the imperial treasury for equipping an expedition of Italian-based troops to send north, let alone hiring the kind of large scale barbarian mercenary army that Majorian had been able to assemble in Spain just ten years before. In fact it is difficult to adduce evidence for any sizeable mobile force of regular imperial troops active in the Seven Provinces at this time (as distinct from static contingents of *limitanei*). The only forces approaching that status seem to have been those of the Burgundian *foederati*, who by now occupied the rich lands of the Rhone corridor at least as far south as the Lyonnais.

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[84] Ennodius, *Vita Epiphanii* 54 and 67.

[85] For a discussion of the dating of Euric's campaign and related events, see 5.1 below.

This state of affairs was due largely to the successful assimilation of the remnant imperial military administration in Gaul by the Gibichung *reges*, which had taken place over the previous decade. As we have seen, by 463 Gundioc already appears to have held the office of *magister militum* (plausibly, *per Gallias*). That appointment would have been made by the puppet emperor Libius Severus – no doubt acting *vice* Ricimer, the Burgundian king's brother-in-law. Assuming Gundioc continued in office during the interregnum following Severus' death in 465, he would still have held the same rank when Anthemius arrived two years later. A Chilperic, either Gundioc's son or his brother (both being of that name), is referred to in the *Vita patrum Iurensium* as being *magister militum* and *patricius* at Geneva in the early 470s .[86] Finally, Gundioc's son Gundobad – who of all the Gibichungs evidenced the closest working relationship with his generalissimo uncle – seems also to have held the rank of *magister militum* when in 472 he intervened at Rome on Ricimer's behalf against Anthemius (see 5.3 below).

This cosy relationship between the Gibichungs and Ricimer must have rendered the Burgundian alliance problematic for Anthemius. Whenever the rival *principes* of the Roman state came into conflict, the Gibichungs sided firmly with their kinsman. Thus Anthemius would never have been able to depend on Burgundian support further than Ricimer was prepared to countenance it, and there was the constant risk that such military assistance could suddenly be withdrawn and arrayed against the emperor's own faction. These factors almost certainly led Anthemius' party at Rome to seek alternative military options in Gaul that were less subject to Ricimer's influence. In any case, the Burgundian *reges* showed no particular enthusiasm for risking offensive measures against the Goths. With an eye to their own limited military strength, they had previously been careful to maintain guardedly friendly relations with their Visigothic counterparts – to the point of campaigning with Theoderic II in Spain during the reign of Avitus some fifteen years previously. When Euric ultimately repudiated the Visigothic *foedus* with Rome, the Gibichungs must therefore have been caught in a something of a dilemma.

They evidently wished to retain their own *foedus* with the Empire. According to Sidonius' nephew, Bishop Avitus of Vienne, the Gibichung kings continued to solicit imperial offices from the Byzantine court well into the next century.[87]

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[86] Cited in Wood, 2003: 251.

[87] The ongoing Gibichung hunger for imperial titles is discussed by Ian Wood at 2003: 254-57.

At the same time they could hardly have relished the prospect of a major military confrontation with a neighbouring superpower, particularly when Euric did not presently appear anxious to attack Burgundian territory. The resultant standoff seems to have found the Gibichungs undertaking little more than the policing of areas immediately contiguous with their own borders. There is no unambiguous record during this period of a Burgundian army ever taking the field directly against the Goths. As we shall see, however, the *regnum* does seem to have been prepared to provide moral and logistical support to other military forces willing to do so – particularly where they were prepared to interpose themselves between Burgundian territory and the expanding Visigothic realm.

Subsequent events demonstrate that Anthemius' enervated administration was unable to find an effective solution to the task of confronting Euric in Gaul. Though there is evidence for an attempt at a co-ordinated response, in the final analysis the imperial reaction to the Gothic challenge was piecemeal and patchwork. Setting aside any direct action that might have been taken by the Burgundian *regnum*, available historical sources allow us to construct the outlines of three significant military campaigns undertaken by various parties against the Goths in Gaul at about this time – all, at least notionally, on Anthemius' behalf. Plausible links can be established among these actions. Taken together, they might be seen as elements of a wider strategic plan by Anthemius to maintain imperial authority in the south-eastern quarter of Gaul through forces more directly linked to his own faction than were the Burgundians. If such was intended, however, the scheme miscarried badly. Sooner or later each of these campaigns ended in defeat, and within a few years Gaul had moved largely beyond control of the Roman administration – a harbinger of the final dissolution of the Western Empire that was to follow shortly afterward. Since the precise chronological relationship of these three actions is debatable, they will be considered geographically, moving from south to north.

The only direct response from Rome to Euric's aggression is attested by a single annal in the so-called *Gallic Chronicle of 511*, an anonymous work probably compiled near Arles early in the sixth century. In his recent critical review of the Latin text, Richard Burgess dates the entry to 470/ 71.[88] Alexander Murray's translation of Mommsen's text reads:

[88] See Burgess, 2001b.

> Anthemiolus was sent by his father Emperor Anthemius to Arles along with Thorisarius, Everdingus, and Hermanius, count of the stables. Euric crossed the Rhone to meet them, killed the commanders, and laid everything waste.[89]

Presumably, this expedition was sent from Italy to reinforce Arles – keystone of Roman rule in the south of Gaul – with the intent of bolstering the lower Rhone corridor against an anticipated Gothic invasion from the direction of Narbonne. If successful, this stratagem could have anchored a *de facto* frontier between the Rhone delta and the Lyonnais, then garrisoned by Burgundian *foederati*. Anthemius perhaps hoped to protect the rich lands of Provence to the east, and to block easy land access into the Italian peninsula. The importance placed on this expedition is demonstrated by the fact that it was commanded by one of Anthemius' own sons. In the situation then current, he may have been one of the few persons in whom the *augustus* felt he could place an unqualified trust. Anthemiolus was supported by three officers of high rank, two of whose names suggest a 'barbarian' origin. Such a leadership suggests an army of mixed ethnic composition, not necessarily boding well for its stability and effectiveness as a fighting force. Whatever the case, the Goths crossed the Rhone first and comprehensively defeated this 'Roman' army in the field before it could reach the relative safety of its stated destination at Arles. Anthemiolus and his generals were killed in the fighting. Immediately thereafter, while the Gothic army pillaged the countryside unopposed, Roman control in the Provence and lower Rhone valley would have shrunk to the few larger cities whose fortifications were strong enough to keep them inviolate – at least for the time being.

Further to the north and west, the Auvergne was also suffering the effects of Euric's expansionism. A Gothic army numbered in the "several thousands" attacked and besieged Sidonius' see of Clermont, most probably during the summer campaigning season of 471.[90] The city was not particularly well situated for defence, neither was it very large. Archaeological investigation has shown that the walls of the late Roman *civitas* enclosed only some three hectares, indicating a permanent intramural population of less than 1000 inhabitants. This was only one seventh the size of Bourges and Lyons, and one thirtieth the size of Toulouse, then the largest Gallic city and capital of the Visigothic *regnum*.[91] The nature of suburban Clermont during

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[89] See *Gallic Chronicle of 511*, 13th year of Leo I.

[90] Sidonius, *Epistulae* III.iii.3

[91] For defence, see Stevens, 1933: 143-45. For comparative statistics on Gallic cities, see Liebeschuetz, 2001: 84-85.

Sidonius' bishopric is unknown, though it cannot have been extensive. Nonetheless, Sidonius' descriptions of the city under siege indicate that fortifications may have extended beyond its walls. In one letter the bishop refers to "palisades of rotting stakes" additional to "our hideously charred walls".[92] In any case, the number of people crowded into the defended area during this period must have been increased by refugees from the surrounding countryside. Despite its apparent weakness, however, Clermont not only beat off the initial Gothic assault but continued to defy Euric during several more years of intermittent siege.

Three notable factors made Clermont different from most of the other cities of *Aquitania I*, which appear to have passed into Euric's hands with little attempt at opposition. First was the determination of Sidonius himself that his episcopal seat would not fall to the Goths. While dissent surfaced from time to time, the bishop clearly provided effective civic and ecclesiastical leadership during this and subsequent Gothic attacks that kept the defenders of Clermont to their task. The second factor was the city's proximity to the *de facto* borders of the Burgundian *regnum*, lying only a few tens of kilometres to the east away along the highway to Lyons. For the time being the Gibichungs seem to have found it in their interests to bolster the Avernian resistance, preserving a slice of 'Roman' territory as a buffer between the Goths and themselves.

Even Sidonius, who showed little love for the Burgundians, was moved to refer to them during this period as "our protectors", if only ironically.[93] Nonetheless, *contra* Stevens, there is no evidence that Burgundian troops ever actually garrisoned Clermont.[94] They appear instead to have played a supporting role in the final element in staving off the Goths: the *civitas*' acquisition of an effective military guardian in the form of Ecdicius Avitus, Sidonius' brother-in-law. He was able to raise an irregular army and, with the approval of Anthemius, lead it successfully against the invaders. In this he may well have had the assistance of elements of the forces involved in the third of Anthemius' Gallic campaigns – the attempted defence of the *civitas* of Bourges (see 5.2-5.4 below).

[92] Sidonius, *Epistulae* VII.i.1.
[93] Sidonius, *Epistulae* III.iv.1.
[94] Stevens, 1933: 145.

A detailed consideration of this last military action will also be deferred to following chapters. Its nature is central to the purpose of this dissertation in that it involves the *adventus* in central Gaul of a federate war-band composed of troops described as *Britanni/ Brittones* and commanded by one Riothamus, the only 'British' military leader of the later fifth century to manifest a clear historical attestation. This sudden irruption represents the first recorded entry of Britons into Gallic military and political affairs since the usurpation of the imperial throne by Constantine III in 407. Further, the character of this British force and the nature of its leadership, together with the antecedents, course and consequences of the associated campaign in Gaul, may be reconstructed only from a detailed consideration of passages drawn from a handful of historical sources. The most important of these are found in Sidonius' *Epistulae*, followed by references in the *Getica* of Jordanes and the *Historiae* of Gregory of Tours. It is with these three sources, their specific authorial contexts and the relevant information that can be safely derived from them, that the following two chapters primarily concern themselves.

Chapter Three

A British intervention in mid fifth Century Gaul: evidence from the letters of Sidonius Apollinaris

Introduction

The previous chapter explored relevant elements of the socio-political milieu in the Roman West during the mid fifth century, together with the place of Sidonius Apollinaris in the scheme of things. In the present chapter we return more directly to the nature of the 'British' presence in Gaul during the 460s to 480s. More specifically, this chapter contributes to the establishment of Proposition Four of the thesis by examining the contexts of the three contemporary references to Britons found in Sidonius' published letters. The first two citations dealt with here, *Epistulae* I.vii.5 and III.ix, refer to a group (or groups) of Britons who were militarily and/ or politically active in central Gaul in the 460s and 470s. Discussion focuses particularly on Sidonius' correspondent, the evidently British leader Riothamus whose actions, under the name variant 'Riotimus', are also chronicled in the *Getica* of the Gothic historian Jordanes, a matter canvassed in Chapter Four. The third reference to *Britanni* in Sidonius' correspondence, *Epistulae* IX.ix.6 contributes toward the establishment of Proposition Three of the thesis by providing further insight into interaction between British and Gallic ecclesiastics – most notably Sidonius himself – in the later fifth century, along with the potential diplomatic dimensions of such contacts.

3.1 The letter of Arvandus to Euric (Sidonius, *Epistulae* I.vii.5)

This first of Sidonius' letters to be examined is significant for the fact that it contains the report of a clandestine diplomatic message providing the earliest reference to *Britanni* being present in numbers in Gaul during the later fifth century.

3.1.1 Background

The message was written, probably before 469, by Arvandus who was then serving as Praetorian Prefect of Gaul. It was intended to be conveyed to the Visigothic king, Euric but was evidently either intercepted, or a copy of the original somehow fell into the hands of Roman loyalists. Details of the letter were related by Sidonius in his own correspondence with one Vincentius.[1] Unless this mutual friend of Arvandus and Sidonius may be identified with the functionary of that name who later served as a *magister militum* under Euric, he is otherwise unknown.[2] However, the importance of the subject matter to Sidonius' reputation, together with its possible release to a wider readership soon after being written, suggest Sidonius had reason to place particular importance on his own letter's contents as published.[3] The wording would therefore have been very carefully chosen and, despite the apparent candour of its opening, as likely to conceal as to reveal. The letter begins with a confession:

> I am distressed by the fall of Arvandus and do not conceal my distress ... I have shown myself this man's friend even more than his easy going and unstable character justified, as is proved by the disfavour which has lately flared up against me on this account; for I have been too heedless and have scorched myself in its flame. But such steadfastness in friendship [*amicitia*] was a duty which I owed to myself.[4]

Sidonius then proceeds with a detailed record of Arvandus' arraignment and trial in Rome on charges of treason arising out of his recent second term as Praetorian Prefect of Gaul, together with selected information on Sidonius' own part in the affair. As noted previously, we cannot tell from his account whether at this point Sidonius still held the office of City Prefect, but if so the matter should have caused him acute embarrassment. Sidonius would have held wide-ranging responsibilities and powers for the running of the City and other matters of imperial administration.

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[1] Sidonius, *Ep.* I.vii.

[2] Jones, A.H.M. et al., 1980: 1168, 'Vincentius 3'.

[3] See Harries, 1994: 159-66; Teitler, 1992.

[4] Sidonius, *Ep.* I.vii.1-2.

These included judicial affairs, with a particular brief for dealing with "traitors, over mighty subjects and the supporters of the same".[5] He served also as President of the Senate and would thus have headed the tribunal of senators before which Arvandus was to be arraigned.[6] Further, the Prefect of Rome judged 'in place of the emperor' and his decisions could not be appealed. Given the conflicting loyalties to which he readily admits, Sidonius should have been glad to avoid this unpleasant duty even, perhaps, at the cost of his imperial commission. Hagith Sivan, on the other hand, has argued that Sidonius' involvement in this affair not only went deeper than he was prepared to acknowledge but that his primary purpose in coming to Rome in 467 (see 2.3 above) was in fact to counter the Gallic Council's complaints against Arvandus.[7] While this alternative interpretation of events cannot wholly be discounted, there seems little in Sidonius' correspondence or elsewhere to give it direct support.

The case against Arvandus was being pressed by three delegates from the Council of the Seven Provinces, with all of whom Sidonius was well acquainted. The critical charge was that of treason, a capital offence, brought on the strength of the intercepted letter. For the sake of *amicitia*, and at some risk to himself, Sidonius relates that he had given his friend prior warning of the nature of the evidence to be used against him. Despite this, Arvandus is described as confidently admitting – even insisting – before the Senate that the correspondence was genuine. If this was so, his reasons are entirely opaque. The suggestion of C.E. Stevens that Arvandus' overconfidence was due to his being under Ricimer's protection is plausible, but unsupported by evidence.[8] In any event, the inevitable results of Arvandus' admission were a guilty verdict and consequent sentence of death from Anthemius. At the point of his writing to Vincentius, Sidonius declares that he had left Rome and did not know whether the sentence had been carried out or, as he hoped, commuted to a lesser penalty. The only mention of this affair by another author, Flavius Cassiodorus, suggests that Arvandus may indeed have escaped execution (see 3.1.3 below).

[5] Barnwell, 1992: 54ff.
[6] Sidonius, *Ep.* IX.xvi.3.
[7] Sivan, 1989.
[8] Stevens, 1933: 106-107.

3.1.2 The Text: *Epistulae* I. vii. 5 (Text and translation: Anderson, 1936)

qui inter quetera quae sibi provinciales agenda mandaverant interceptas litteras deferabant, quas Arvandi scriba correptus dominum dictasse profitebatur. haec ad regem Gothorum charta videbatur emitti, pacem cum Graeco imperatore dissuadens, Britannos supra Ligerim sitos impugnari oportere demonstrans, cum Burgundionibus iure gentium Gallias dividi debere confirmans, et in hunc ferme modum plurima insana, quae iram regi feroci, placido verecundiam inferrent. hanc epistulam laesae maiestatis crimini ardere iurisconsulti interpretabantur.

Amongst other pleas which the provincials had instructed them to urge, they were bringing against him an intercepted letter which Arvandus's secretary (who had been arrested) admitted to have been written at his master's dictation. It appeared to be a message addressed to the king of the Goths, dissuading him from peace with the 'Greek Emperor', insisting that the Britanni settled north of the Liger [Loire] should be attacked, and declaring that the Gallic provinces ought according to the law of nations to be divided with the Burgundians, and a great deal more in the same mad vein, fitted to rouse a warlike king to fury and a peaceful one to shame. The opinion of the lawyers was that this letter was red-hot treason.

3.1.3 Discussion

It is not possible to say whether the snide reference to "the Greek Emperor" is a direct quote from Arvandus' letter or a reflection of Sidonius' own current opinion. The ambiguity is perhaps intentional. However, the subject of the jibe must be Anthemius whose homeland, as we have seen, lay in the Eastern Empire and where Greek rather than Latin was the *lingua franca* (compare "*Graeculus*" above). Arvandus' letter could therefore have been written no earlier than Anthemius' accession in April 467 and no later than the author's trial in 469. The "king of the Goths" with whom Arvandus corresponded would therefore almost certainly have been Euric, who also acceded to the throne in 467. If correctly reported by Sidonius, Arvandus was treasonously urging Gothic opposition to the current administration at Rome. He was either urging Euric to repudiate the Gothic *foedus* with Anthemius, or trying to dissuade him from renewing it. Such agreements were often concluded for a limited period of time and subject to renewal following a succession of leadership on either side.[9]

Arvandus was instead proposing a division of territory between the Visigothic and Burgundian *regna* – by the "law of nations" ["*iure gentium*"], as Sidonius puts it.

[9] See, for instance, Heather, 1997.

The precise meaning of this phrase is obscure but it seems to be used in the near contemporary Gallic comedy *Querolus* in the sense of 'anything goes'.[10] This appears to be an editorial comment by Sidonius on what was, from his point of view, the outrageously extra-legal nature of Arvandus' proposition. Sidonius' acidulous remarks about the actions of the Gallo-Roman official Seronatus may be compared (see 2.3 above). In the world of *Realpolitik*, however, the Goths and Burgundians had between them already established effective control over large parts of southern Gaul, and would at the time have seemed logical successors to the Empire. In fact, the recruitment of prominent and diplomatically skilled Gallo-Romans to the service of both these states was already well underway. Like many others of the Gallic elite, Arvandus might have been doing no more than adapting himself to what he saw as the coming order of things, as Sidonius himself would do in time.[11]

On the other hand, the Praetorian Prefect's motives may have been more sinister. While Sidonius fails to elucidate his friend's motivation for his treasonous behaviour, a later source may shed some light on the matter. More than half a century after the event, Flavius Cassiodorus, functionary at the Italian court of the Ostrogothic king Theodoric, chronicled under the year c.469 that Arvandus was exiled after plotting to seize the throne: "*Arabundus imperium temptans iussu Anthemii exilio deportatur*".[12] Cassiodorus could have been misinterpreting his sources, but if not then Sidonius was indeed being highly selective in his account of this affair – perhaps for reasons of his own safety. It is possible that Arvandus was actually offering Euric a significantly expanded share of Gaul in return for Visigothic support in some plot of his own against Anthemius. Sidonius may himself have been an accessory to this supreme act of treason, if only after the fact. His previously expressed pro-Gothic sympathies would certainly have not have helped his case if suspicion of collusion with the accused had fallen upon him.

The surprise inclusion in Arvandus' letter, as reported by Sidonius, is his mention of a group identified as "*Britannos*" and his insistence that these people ought to be attacked. (The phrase "*impugnari oportere*" would seem almost to bear a connotation of strategic necessity.) The reference is in itself highly significant. After a six decade hiatus this represents the first recorded mention of a group

[10] The relevant passage of *Querolus* is cited at Murray, 2000: 173.

[11] Mathisen, 1993, explores this process in detail.

[12] Cassiodorus, *Chronicle* 1287, dated to c.469.

described as Britons entering into the military/ political equation in Gaul since the British-based usurpation of the imperial throne by Constantine III outlined at 1.2.1 above. Whether Arvandus is referring to a mobile military force or to a settled population is unclear from Sidonius' account, but he seems to be asserting that these particular 'Britons' were present in Gaul in sufficient numbers and/ or represented sufficient military clout to make them a threat to Visigothic expansion – and perhaps to his own ambitions. It should be remembered that as Praetorian Prefect, Arvandus was eminently well placed to receive intelligence on such matters, and would most likely have been privy to any arrangements that might have been negotiated between these *Britanni* and representatives of the *imperium* – as would Sidonius himself in his capacity as Prefect of Rome.

W.B. Anderson renders "*Britannos supra Ligerim sitos*" as "Britanni settled north of the Liger", but his translation is probably coloured by an assumption that the reference is to Britons settled in the Armorican peninsula, modern Brittany, lying immediately northwest of the Loire estuary. As noted at 1.1.2 above, this region is known to have been inhabited from the later fifth century onwards by a people known to outsiders as *Britanni* or *Brittones*, and it is certainly plausible that Arvandus was referring to areas of 'British' settlement already in existence in that region. However, while "*supra*" may mean 'above' or 'on the upper side of', it can also mean 'beyond' without connotation of direction. At the same time, "*sitos*" may more simply be translated as 'situated', whether temporarily or longer term. The phrase could thus be rendered more neutrally as 'Britons [presently] situated beyond the Loire'. Assuming this broader context, the *Britanni* to whom the text refers may have been located anywhere from the Atlantic coast to the borders of Burgundia.

It is interesting that Sidonius' report of Arvandus' letter is silent about other players in the power game in central Gaul such as the Soissons-based 'Roman' warlord Syagrius, and the Frankish groups from whom he and his father had drawn military support. As we have seen at 2.2 above, until the death of Aegidius a few years previously, he and his allies had been actively engaging the Goths in the Loire valley, apparently confining them south of the river. However, the omission may be due once again to Sidonius' selective reporting. It seems to have been part of his editorial policy never to mention the Aegidian/ Syagrian faction in any of his published writings despite the substantial probability of his acquaintanceship with Aegidius during Majorian's reign. This gap is notably conspicuous because among Sidonius' correspondents was Principius, Bishop

of Soissons, who must have been compelled to deal regularly with Syagrius.[13] Jill Harries' suggestion that Sidonius' self-censorship was still at this point due to his earlier pro-Gothic sympathies does not seem particularly likely.[14] However, any number of further matters could have been subsumed in the "great deal more in the same mad vein" said to be contained in Arvandus' letter. One thing of which we can be reasonably confident in this carefully worded epistle, is that Sidonius' inclusion of Arvandus' remarks about *Britanni* was in all probability deliberate.

Assuming the letter was in fact first published around 470, a plausible reason for this may be that the presence of a British military force in the vicinity of the Loire valley was still then very much a current factor in the political equation. Two later sources report a military force of 'Britons' operating in central Gaul in the vicinity of the city of Bourges at somewhere very near this time. As discussed in the course of the next chapter, these references are found in the *Getica* of the Romano-Gothic historian Jordanes and in the *Historiae* of Bishop Gregory of Tours. Further, Jordanes names the commander of this force as being one "Riotimus", a British 'king' specifically allied to Anthemius.[15] It can readily be appreciated why the existence of such a force might have caused Arvandus enough concern for him to urge Euric to attack it. Jordanes' Riotimus is almost certainly to be identified with the 'Riothamus' who was both a correspondent of Sidonius and also the military leader of a war band containing persons identified as *Britanni*. It was to this person that Sidonius addressed the second of his letters to be examined in this chapter.

3.2 Sidonius' letter to Riothamus (*Epistulae* III.ix)

3.2.1 Background

This letter was written by Sidonius, most probably between 471 and 475, to the military commander Riothamus in an attempt to settle a dispute over ownership of certain slaves. As discussed at 4.5 below, 'Riothamus' has the hallmarks of a genuine Brythonic name. Sidonius makes clear at the outset that he writes relying on both his high social station and his episcopal office ("rank and cloth"). Over a century earlier, the emperor Constantine I had formalised the existing role of Christian bishops as arbitrators and conciliators in disputes affecting their own congregations by placing

[13] Sidonius, *Epistulae* VIII.xiv and IX.vii.
[14] Harries, 1994: 247-48.
[15] Jordanes, *Getica* XLV. 237.

the bishop's court (*episcopalis audentia*) within the imperial legal structure. There it evolved over time into an imperially sanctioned system of justice that ran parallel to the secular courts. The relationship between the two systems was often fraught with ambiguities. Nevertheless, cases were often referred from one system to the other. The less powerful and wealthy section of the populace preferred the *episcopalis audentia* because it was more accessible, less expensive and (most importantly) likely to be less subject to corruption than the secular system. Even in areas outside their jurisdictions, bishops often played the role of patron and advocate for their clients and parishioners when referring cases to other authorities to be dealt with. In Sidonius' time this would usually have been either directly to another bishop or, less commonly, via a bishop to a secular authority within that bishop's see.[16]

Several of Sidonius' epistles deal with such judicial matters, but one of the clearest examples is his referral of a case to the aged Bishop Lupus of Troyes. This was the same Lupus who, according to Constantius, accompanied Germanus of Auxerre on his ecclesiastical mission to Britain c.429 (see 1.3.2 above). The letter concerns a complex suit concerning the disputed status of a slave purchased by one of Sidonius' own agents. After setting out the facts of the case as he saw them, Sidonius continues:

> If you will deign to meet the parties face to face [*inter coritam positos*], you with your personal prestige and the advantage of your actual presence will have no difficulty worming from them the whole story ...[17]

He then expresses confidence that the venerable Lupus will be able to render a judgment in the matter to the satisfaction of all parties, and closes with the usual pleasantries.

Some historians have dismissed the letter to Riothamus as a simple 'complaint'.[18] However, closer examination shows that the epistle in fact constitutes a legal referral similar in form to the one addressed to Lupus, and differing mainly in that the case concerned is being put directly into the hands of a military/ political agency rather than an ecclesiastical one. This fact alone tells us much about the status of the recipient of the referral *vis-à-vis* the Roman administration. Sidonius places this letter in Book III, in close proximity to other letters dealing with matters attending the siege

[16] The role of bishops in late imperial legal system is discussed in Garnsey and Humfress, 2001: Ch.4, especially 74-80.
[17] Sidonius, *Epistulae* VI.iv.2.
[18] For instance, Snyder, 2003: 149.

of Clermont by the Visigoths.[19] Assuming, as seems most likely, that this letter is linked in theme it would thus date from somewhere after the first irruption of the Goths near Clermont around 471, with the cession of the Auvergne to Euric in 475 providing a *terminus post quem.* Certainly, no such federate war band as that evidently commanded by Riothamus would have been able operate in *Aquitania* after the Gothic takeover. During the period specified it is unlikely that the very proper Sidonius would have been willing to make such a referral unless he was able to regard Riothamus as possessing a suitable rank and authority under the laws of the *imperium* to deal with the case. Riothamus should therefore be seen as acting at the time in at least a quasi-official capacity within the Roman administrative machinery.[20]

3.2.2 The Text: *Epistulae* III.ix (Text and translation: Anderson, 1965)

Servatur nostri consuetudo sermonis; namque miscemus cum salutatione querimoniam, non omnino huic rei studentes, ut stilus noster sit officiosus in titulis,asper in paginis, sed quod ea semper eveniunt de quibus loci mei aut ordinis hominem constat inconciliari, si loquatur, peccare, si taceat. Sed et ipsi sarcinam vestri pudoris inspicimus, cuius haec semper verecundia fuit, ut pro culpis erubesceretis alienis. Gerulus epistularum humilis obscurus despicabilisque etiam usque ad damnum innocentis ignaviae mancipia sua Britannis clam sollicitantibus abducta deplorat. incertum mihi est an sit certa causatio; sed si inter coram positos aequanimiter obiecta discingitis, arbitror hunc laboriosum posse probare quod obicit, si tamen argutos armatos tumultuosos, virtuto numero contubernio contumaces poterit ex aequo et bono solus inermis, abiectus rusticus, peregrinus pauper audiri. Vale.

Here is a letter in my usual style, for I combine complaint with greeting, not with an express intention of making my pen respectful in its superscription but harsh in the letter itself, but because things are always happening about which it is obviously impossible for a man of my rank and cloth to speak without incurring unpleasantness, or to be silent without incurring guilt. However I am a direct witness of the conscientiousness which weighs on you so heavily, and which has always been of such delicacy as to make you blush for the wrongdoing of others. The bearer of this letter, who is humble and obscure, and so unassertive that he might even be tasked with harmless indolence, complains that his slaves have been enticed away from him by the underhand persuasions of certain Bretons. I do not know whether his complaint is just: but if you bring the opponents face to face and impartially unravel their contentions, I fancy that this poor fellow is likely to make good his plaint, that is, if amid a crowd of noisy, armed, and disorderly men who are emboldened at once by their courage, their number, and their comradeship, there is any possibility for a solitary unarmed man, a humble rustic, a stranger of small means, to gain a fair and equitable hearing. Farewell.

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[19] These include Sidonius, *Epistulae* III.ii, iii, iv and vii.

[20] *Contra* Harries, 1994: 210 n.14.

3.2.3 Discussion

Sidonius is here referring a case to Riothamus for his judgment. His letter introduces the bearer, evidently one of Sidonius' flock, as the plaintiff in the matter. He appears to be a man of sufficient means to own several slaves, but is rather patronisingly described as "*abiectus rusticus*" and "*pauper*". Evidently the plaintiff was several points below Sidonius on the social scale , probably a smallholder from the environs of Clermont. This man has come to his bishop complaining that certain 'Britons' have enticed away some of his slaves. That is, he claims that his possessions have been purloined and he is seeking compensation or restitution. It should be remembered that we have only the plaintiff's word on this. The slaves may in fact have been acquired by these Britons through some legitimate agreement or transaction. The smallholder would be neither the first nor last such litigant to come to court crying, "I wuz robbed". In alluding to the disputed slaves, Sidonius carefully uses the neutral term "*mancipia*" with its connotation of legal property, but given his other choice of wording one could imagine a situation in which these particular chattels went willingly. They might perhaps have been young females who saw life as a soldier's doxy more fulfilling than drudging on a small farm.

Sidonius writes he is uncertain that the man can establish his case but, employing much the same formula as in his letter to Lupus of Troyes, Sidonius asks that Riothamus bring the opponents "*inter coritam positos*" ["face to face"] where he can use his personal authority to "impartially unravel their contentions". The bishop seems thus to have held some hope, however small, of an outcome favourable to his client. As already noted, Sidonius is unlikely to have referred the plaintiff to Riothamus unless he accepted the commander as having the requisite stature and authority to decide the case. In addressing his correspondent, the bishop uses the familiar dose of flattery customarily reserved for social equals – or at least for those whom he found it politically necessary to acknowledge as such. He unambiguously invokes a prior personal acquaintance with Riothamus: "I am a direct witness of the conscientiousness which weighs on you so heavily ... ". Moreover, we may surmise from the very fact of Sidonius' communication in writing that his correspondent must either have been capable of reading good Latin or was at the very least furnished with a secretary able to do so – a further indication of Riothamus' status.

Sidonius seems to feel obliged to support the smallholder's case but unwilling to push the issue too hard, perhaps to avoid the risk of giving offence. Indeed, the

bishop spends the first third of his short letter apologising for having to raise the matter. This may go some way toward explaining Sidonius' easy deprecation of his own client. Yet the doubts expressed about the man's chances of gaining a "fair and equitable hearing" do appear less than tactful. It may be that Sidonius was gently attempting to shame Riothamus into a more even-handed approach, or perhaps signalling that he understood the practical difficulties faced by the British leader in dealing with the case at all. In any event, the context here is obviously military. Sidonius envisions the confrontation of the parties taking place amidst "a crowd of noisy, armed, and disorderly men who are emboldened at once by their courage, their number, and their comradeship" – in other words, a typical war-band of the period. However, since the bishop could hardly have been hoping to apply legal process amongst bandits or enemy raiders, this company must have been allied to the Roman cause. Whatever the outcome of the process, Sidonius seems to hold no fears for his client's personal safety. His reasons for passing on the case to his correspondent were probably simple and pragmatic. Riothamus evidently held authority over the particular *Britanni* involved in this matter and, in the circumstances of the time, only he would have possessed the power necessary to make and enforce a judgment against them.

The letter tells us, then, that at the time of its writing Riothamus was probably recognised as holding an elite status within what was left of the Roman administrative system. He was responsible for, and thus probably in command of, a sizeable military force that contained Britons. He was also directly known to Sidonius, who may have expected him to be able to read the epistle personally. Finally, several factors might lead us to believe that Riothamus was not far away from Clermont at the time the letter was written. In the first place, Britons under his command should recently have been operating for some while within the sphere of Sidonius' interest for the offence to have been committed in the manner it was. As noted above, the disputed appropriation looks to have been based on a period of acquaintance rather than the result of an unconsidered act of pillage,[21] and there is a strong intimation that the plaintiff would be able to identify those accused. Secondly, the small-holder who was Sidonius' client would have been unlikely to command the resources to undertake a journey that kept him long away from his holding, nor to protect himself while travelling in such uncertain times.

[21] *Contra* Stevens, 1933: 138-39.

Lastly, if Riothamus was physically located outside Sidonius' ecclesiastical jurisdiction, we might have expected Sidonius to extend the courtesy of referring the case via the appropriate local bishop, as we know he did in other instances. The recommendation to Lupus has already been discussed, but grouped with it in Book VI of the *Epistulae* are similar referrals to the bishops Pragmatius and Leontius of Arles.[22] There are several more examples. Ian Wood has argued that at the time Sidonius wrote his letter, Riothamus and his followers were enjoying a rowdy retirement in the Lyonnais.[23] This scenario will be disputed on other grounds (see 5.4 below), but we know that Sidonius was personally acquainted with Patiens, Bishop of Lyons, and held him in deep respect.[24] It is unlikely that Sidonius would wittingly have trespassed on this particular bishop's prerogatives, particularly when there seems to have been little difficulty in ongoing communications between Lyons and Clermont. The indication is therefore that Riothamus was not within Patiens' sphere of authority when Sidonius referred his client to the British leader.

This question of Riothamus' location and activities at the time he received Sidonius' letter will again be taken up at 5.4 below. In the meantime, we shall proceed to an examination of the third of Sidonius' epistles to make reference to *Britanni.* In Sidonius' own arrangement of his correspondence, this appears as the second published letter to his long-time friend and mentor Faustus, Bishop of Riez. Although this epistle seems at first to have no direct connection with the previous two, the discussion below will show that it has a close bearing on the question of contact and communication between British groups and local Gallic authorities, both ecclesiastical and secular.

3.3 The Letter to Faustus (Sidonius, *Epistulae* IX.ix. 6)

3.3.1 Background

We have seen at 1.4 above that Faustus was identified in a letter of Sidonius' nephew, Avitus of Vienne, as being 'by origin a Briton'. This very probably means he was born in insular Britain but since Faustus' life before he arrived at the monastery of Lerins in the 420s is obscure, we cannot tell for certain. We do know that at Lerins he became a protégé of Abbot Maximus, and when the latter left the monastery in 433 to become Bishop of *Reiensium* (Riez) in *Narbonensis II*, Faustus

[22] These are *Epistulae* VI.ii and VI.iii respectively

[23] Wood, 1987: 26, and in 'Discussion' to Dumville, 1995: 208.

[24] See the various references given at n.2 to Sidonius, *Epistulae* IV.xxv in the Loeb edition.

stepped into his shoes as abbot. He held this position with distinction for several decades before again succeeding Maximus at some point around 460, this time at the see of Riez.[25] Faustus was influential in the theological controversies of the day, notably as defender of a moderate position on questions of free will and grace against the doctrinal extremes of both Pelagius and Augustine.

Sidonius' laudatory poem 'Eucharistion ad Faustum Episcopum', published shortly before Sidonius himself took orders, shows the depth of his regard for Faustus, claimed as his spiritual patron and mentor. Several lines also demonstrate he was fully aware of the bishop's earlier connections to distinguished figures among the Lerins circle:

> ... how many eminences that flat island [Lerins] hath sent soaring to the skies ... young Lupus ... Honoratus their founder ... Maximus over whose city and monks thou [Faustus], twice his successor, wert set as bishop and abbot; and thou dost also acclaim in praises the coming of Eucherius and the return of Hilarius.[26]

Nonetheless, despite the affection and respect expressed in this poem, relations between the two men are known to have cooled in Sidonius' later years. In the first place, Sidonius had become embroiled in a dispute between Faustus and another correspondent, Mamertus Claudianus, a priest of Vienne and brother to the bishop of that city. During the late 460s, an 'anonymous' letter promoting the doctrine of the corporeality of the soul had been circulated amongst Gallic clerics, and Claudianus published a refutation. In this work, *De statu anime*, he roundly denounced both the doctrine, and the person of the letter's author whom he must have known was in fact Faustus. Claudianus' arguments were complex and erudite, and he had the temerity to cite Eucherius, another doyen of Lerins, in support of his position. Unfortunately, the author also wrote a dedicatory preface to Sidonius, who had apparently encouraged him to publish the work. A missive from Claudianus complaining that his "own special friend" had not acknowledged his dedication is the sole example of a letter from a correspondent placed by Sidonius amongst his own.[27] Sidonius' belated reply is a fulsome praise of Claudianus' efforts, and Faustus could hardly have helped being miffed by this public display of support of an opponent.[28]

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[25] The dating here follows Mathisen, 1989.

[26] Sidonius, *Carmina* XVI: 109-115; see also *Epistula* IX.iii.4.

[27] Sidonius, *Epistulae* IV.ii.

[28] Sidonius, *Epistulae* IV.iii. For this imbroglio, see Mathisen 1989: 235-241; Brittain, 2001.

Any existing rift between the two men would have been widened by the fact that Faustus was one of four southern Gallic bishops selected in 475 by the last legitimate Western emperor, Julius Nepos, to negotiate terms to end the war between Rome and the Visigothic *regnum*. As noted at 5.5 below, the resultant surrender of the Auvergne led directly to Sidonius' own exile and imprisonment. That Sidonius considered this act a gross betrayal of himself and his city is clear from a sample of his complaints to another of the four bishops, Graecus of Marseille:

> Our freedom has been bartered for the security of others ... Is this our due reward for enduring want and fire and sword and pestilence ... ? We pray that you and your colleagues may feel ashamed of this fruitless and unseemly treaty ... the barbarous expedient which in your cowardice you recommended.[29]

The "fruitless" nature of the agreement was in fact demonstrated the following year when the Goths swallowed up the last strip of Provençal territory left to the *imperium* by the treaty. Ironically, not long thereafter Faustus himself was banished from his own see by Euric. However, while Sidonius was back at Clermont by the end of 477, Faustus was not able to return to Riez until after Euric's death c.484.[30]

Sidonius indicates a voluminous correspondence between himself and Faustus, but only includes two examples in his *Epistulae*. Both are to be found in Book IX, the very last to be published. Notwithstanding Jill Harries' somewhat strained re-interpretation of its context, the first of these almost certainly belongs to Sidonius' own period of exile under Euric.[31] Sidonius writes specifically to propose that the two men "renounce our rather too busy pens, putting off for a little our diligent exchange of letters, and concerning ourselves rather with silence".[32] He gives several cogent reasons for this, but prominent among them is his own lamentable situation, for which (though it remains unspoken) both are aware Faustus shares responsibility:

> Besides this, my mind itself is wounded and prostrated by personal troubles on every side; for I have been driven from my own soil ... and in my banishment from it I am broken by diverse tortures at every turn, since I suffer here the distresses of an alien, and in my own town the losses of an outlaw. This being so, a request for a more or less elegant reply must at this time be unseasonable ...[33]

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[29] Sidonius, *Epistulae* VII.vii.2-4.

[30] Mathisen, 1999: 87ff.

[31] See Harries, 1994: 174-76.

[32] Sidonius, *Epistulae* IX.iii.1.

[33] Sidonius, *Epistulae* IX.iii.3.

Assuming this letter is correctly dated after the surrender of Clermont, it is difficult to interpret these words as other than accusatory, and it is reasonable to infer that Sidonius' reticence was due to a cooling in the relationship on his part.

The second of Sidonius' published letters to Faustus gives the appearance that it follows chronologically on the first, marking a resumption of their interrupted correspondence at some time after Sidonius' return to Clermont in 477. However, a closer reading of the text shows certain problems with this rendering, and raises significant questions as to dating. The letter appears to be composed in three imperfectly related sections. Unless it can be read as a joke between close friends, the first of these is perceptibly cool in tone, almost a snub. It opens, "My saintly friend, you have complained that we have long maintained a mutual silence ... ". Sidonius then briefly replies to Faustus' request for communication by pointing out that Faustus had failed to read his previous letter. He adds that he himself has nothing important to say and concludes, "Having expressed my greeting, I thereupon say 'Farewell'. Pray for me." [34] There follows what seems a contrived link to a much longer passage concerning the visit to Clermont of the clerical traveller, Riochatus. [35] It is with this second section that we are primarily interested. Finally, the letter as published concludes with an extended paean of praise for Faustus and his works which appears out of character with the opening.[36] The letter thus reads rather as if it were a pastiche of several elements, perhaps written at different times and assembled to do duty in this last of Sidonius' collections.

The Riochatus episode unfolds as follows. This cleric arrives at Clermont, probably with an entourage, and remains a guest of Sidonius for over two months waiting for safer travelling conditions. When he finally leaves, however, it transpires he has kept hidden certain of Faustus' writings he has been carrying on the latter's behalf. Sidonius discovers this "insult" (for which he proposes Faustus to be actively or passively responsible) and sets out after the visitor. Having caught up with him, Sidonius ransacks his former guest's baggage and restrains him long enough to have his clerks copy excerpts from the documents. Sidonius queries the motives for Faustus' instructions to Riochatus, but provides no real answer concerning them. He celebrates the foiling of Faustus' alleged plot as a victory over "my master", yet the

[34] Sidonius, *Epistulae* IX.ix.1-2.
[35] Sidonius, *Epistulae* IX.ix.3-8.
[36] Sidonius, *Epistulae* IX.ix.9-16

whole episode is written in an ostensibly humorous style so it is difficult for the reader to tell to what extent Sidonius might simply be jesting. The brief passage given below, however, does contain important information on the status of Riochatus, and about the intended recipients of the writings he kept concealed.

3.3.2 The Text: *Epistulae* IX.ix.6 (Text and translation: Anderson, 1965)

> *Inquis. Ecce iam pando, vel quid indagasse me gaudeam vel quid te celasse succenseam. Legi volumina tua, quae Riochatus antistes ac monachus atque istius mundi bis peregrinus Britannis tuis pro te reportat ...*
>
> Listen; I now reveal what I am so glad to have discovered , or so angry that you have concealed from me. I have read those works of yours which Riochatus, the priest and monk, and so twice over a pilgrim and stranger in this world, is duly carrying to your dear Britons on behalf of you ...

3.3.3 Discussion

Riochatus ['lord of battle'] is a genuine Brythonic name, directly paralleling the contemporary instance of Riothamus (see 4.5 below). Moreover, Sidonius recounts that this Riochatus was conveying Faustus' writings to "*Britannis tuis*" ["your ... Britons"]. It is therefore highly probable that the cleric was himself a Briton. The verb '*reportare*' ("reportat") means literally 'to carry back', with the added sense of bringing back the spoils of a conflict, suggesting the visitor had originally set out from amongst the same *Britanni* towards whom he was travelling. He would thus have been passing through Clermont on the home leg of his journey. Riochatus is described as "*bis peregrinus*" ["twice ... a pilgrim"], which in the translated passage is made to refer to the traveller's dual status of priest and monk. But this overlooks the elegant play on words that was a hallmark of Sidonius' literary style. He would hardly have missed the older sense of *peregrinus* as 'foreigner'. It is therefore likely that Sidonius' intention here was also to allude both to Riochatus' extended journey and to his 'foreign' status as a Briton, perhaps with an origin in insular Britain. It should be said at this point, however, that the attachment of both Faustus and Riochatus to the line of the British leader Vortigern in medieval Welsh sources are best viewed as examples of retro-inclusion in fictionalised genealogies – although it does demonstrate an awareness of these two figures by the later British Church, and of some form of connection between them.[37]

[37]Nora Chadwick, 1954: 254ff explores the relevant sources, but treats them as representations of fact.

The timing of this episode might have provided some idea of Riochatus' final destination, but the complex nature of the letter as published makes the dating of its various elements difficult. Ostensibly, the message was written after 476, which would be consonant both with its chilly opening and with the potential ill-feeling expressed, if jocularly, in the Riochatus episode. Yet the only reference to a contemporary political situation appears to indicate an earlier period. Sidonius writes that Riochatus was waiting at Clermont "until the storm of angry nations, which had surged up in an awful whirlwind on every side, should expend its fury".[38] This description would best fit the period 471-75 when Sidonius' Clermont was under intermittent siege by the Goths – with Burgundian, British and partisan forces also in the vicinity. Conversely, in the years after 476 the area south of the Loire and west of the Burgundian *regnum* was firmly under Euric's control and enjoying something of a *pax gothica*. Travel onward from Clermont anywhere except, perhaps, east into Burgundia should thus have been comparatively easy.

As discussed in the analysis of Sidonius' letter to Riothamus, and at 5.4 below, there were most probably 'Britons' in the vicinity of Clermont for some period during the years 471-75 and among these could have been the "*Britannis tuis*" to whom Sidonius was referring. However, if Riochatus' destination lay elsewhere we can gain some idea of where it may have been by extrapolating the cleric's line of travel. Assuming Riochatus arrived in Clermont before 478, then he had almost certainly journeyed via Faustus' see at Riez, over 400 kilometres to the southeast. Continuing in roughly the same direction would have led him into the lower Loire valley and thence into western Armorica. A destination on the continent would then have indicated at least one British community operating in central or northwest Gaul at this time – most likely in the region that would later become Brittany. However, his 'pilgrimage' might also have taken Riochatus as far as *Britannia insula*, which would be consonant with the ongoing communication between church hierarchies, and probably of secular elites, in Britain and Gaul discussed at 1.2.2.

Sidonius calls Riochatus "*monachus*", which unambiguously means 'monk'. However, the title "*antistes*" ['high priest'], here translated as "priest", is more often used by Sidonius in the sense of 'bishop'.[39] Monastic bishops were a notable characteristic of the later British and Irish churches but neither were they uncommon

[38] Sidonius, *Epistulae* IX.ix.7.

[39] See n.1 to Sidonius, *Epistulae* VII.xiii in the Loeb edition

in Gaul during the fifth century. Faustus himself is a case in point. We have already met one such 'British' bishop travelling in the Gaul of this period in the person of Mansuetus, the "*episcopus Britannorum*" who was in attendance at Tours in 463 (see 1.2.2 above; also 4.4 below). Although Sidonius tells us Riochatus was carrying certain writings to a community of Britons on Faustus' behalf, he nowhere states this was the primary reason for Riochatus' journey. Clerics, particularly bishops, were often employed in late antiquity in the role of diplomatic envoys.

Again, Faustus himself provides a contemporary example, along with the three other bishops who negotiated with Euric on behalf of the emperor Julius Nepos. Epiphanius, the bishop who attempted to conciliate the dispute between Anthemius and Ricimer, is another (see 2.5 above).[40] Riochatus may also have been travelling in such a role, perhaps providing a conduit between Gallic representatives of the imperial administration and British groups or polities, either on the continent or in insular Britain. In this he would have found invaluable the good will of a fellow Briton and influential churchman such as Faustus. His choice of Clermont as a refuge may have been mediated not only by Faustus' recommendation, but also by Sidonius' own direct contacts with British groups.

Finally, it is necessary to canvass yet another possible scenario. Had Riochatus in fact arrived at Clermont in 478 or later, then it would have been during Faustus' spell of banishment from Riez. The bishop's whereabouts over this period are incompletely known (though, significantly, there is no indication of Faustus having spent any of it with Sidonius). Riochatus might thus have been arriving at Clermont from almost any direction. However, a clue to his possible starting point at this later time is given in one of Faustus' letters.[41] This was written c.485 to one Ruricius, an Aquitanian who had become Bishop of Limoges in 484, and who was also a friend and correspondent of Sidonius.[42] In his letter Faustus thanks Ruricius for having provided "a homeland for us amid our wandering". Assumedly this hospitality was extended at Ruricius' family estates, which seem to have lain in the Dordogne region.[43] To extend a speculation: if Riochatus had been travelling from that part of

[40] Andrew Gillett, 2003: ch.4, discusses the ambassadorial role of clerics as portrayed in the *vitae* of fifth and sixth century bishops in the West, including those of Germanus and Epiphanius.

[41] The full text of the letter, under the title "*Gratia ad vos*" is given at Mathisen, 1999: 104

[42] Sidonius, *Epistulae* IV.xvi, V.xv, VIII.x. Sidonius also wrote an Epithalamium, *Carmina* X, on the occasion of Ruricius' marriage.

[43] Mathisen, 1999: 20.

Aquitaine , he would have been heading in a north-easterly direction which suggests a final destination within the Burgundian *regnum*. As noted at 5.5 below, Riothamus and what was left of his band could have been serving in Burgundia at the time, and thus might have constituted the community of *Britanni* to whom Sidonius refers. Since relations between Goths and Burgundians were still decidedly uneasy after 477, such a scenario would at least have the virtue of validating Riochatus' long wait in Clermont – perhaps to avoid a period of trouble at the border.

The character of Riothamus and his war-band, together with their place in the complex politics of central Gaul in the 460s and 470s, will be further explored in the following chapter. The main sources to be examined there are the *Getica* of the Romano-Gothic historian Jordanes, and the *Historiae* of Gregory, Bishop of Tours.

Chapter Four

A British military intervention in mid fifth Century Gaul: evidence from Jordanes and Gregory of Tours

Introduction

Chapter Three evaluated the significance of each of the three references to *Britanni* in the writings of Sidonius Apollinaris. The present chapter furthers the intent of Proposition One of the thesis through a detailed examination of the contributions of two later authors to our understanding of the *adventus* in central Gaul of a military force of 'Britons', together with the role played by the British leader Riothamus/ Riotimus. These two are the historians Jordanes and Gregory of Tours. Contextual analyses are provided for the pertinent works of both men, as well as for the particular passages from their writings brought under examination. The quality and nature of the relevant information adducible from each of these sources is also analysed, and information gained in this and preceding chapters is used to explore the question of the possible origins of the British expedition. This is followed by a brief discussion on the attributes of the name – or, as some would have it, title – borne by the British leader Riotimus/ Riothamus.

The chapter begins with an examination of whether, in relation their references to Britons, Jordanes and Gregory can be shown to display any dependence on Sidonius, or connection one to the other.

4.1 The question of source dependence

Besides the writings of Sidonius, brief passages from two other late antique sources also give information on a 'British' presence in Gaul in the 460s/ 470s – notably, concerning the defeat of a British military force in the region of Berry by an army of Euric's Goths. These two sources are the *De origine actibusque Getarum* of the Gothic historian Jordanes, commonly known as the *Getica*, and the *Historiae* [*Francorum*] of Bishop Gregory of Tours. However, since both works were written later than those of Sidonius, it is first necessary to examine the actual extent to which each provides genuinely independent testimony on the matter. That is, could these subsequent authors simply have borrowed their information on fifth century Britons from the preceding works of Sidonius? Could Jordanes, the earlier of the two, in turn have influenced the more recent writer, Gregory? If so, is there evidence that such borrowings actually occurred?

Among the elite *literati* of late antique Gaul there existed a mutual cottage industry in the reproduction and transmission of each other's works.[1] An example is Sidonius' copying of the writings of Faustus of Riez noted at 3.3.1 above. This same process is further described in operation when a set of the works by Sidonius' correspondent Remigius, Bishop of Rheims, became available at Clermont:

> I and all the others here who have literary tastes were eager to read the books, as well we might be, and we set ourselves to transcribe the whole, besides memorising a great many passages.[2]

We know from Sidonius' own evidence that during his lifetime, editions of his collected letters were circulating among his friends and correspondents in this way.[3] Shortly after Sidonius' death a letter of Bishop Ruricius of Limoges shows that he was involved with Sidonius' son, Apollinaris, in preparing further editions of some of Sidonius' works.[4] In following decades similar projects were likely to have been undertaken by others. Certainly, Sidonius' literary reputation continued to spread widely in Gaul during the fifth century – and perhaps elsewhere in the West. One of Sidonius' correspondents was Graecus, Bishop of Marseille, a city where Sidonius'

[1] The cultural background to this phenomenon is discussed by Ralph Mathisen, 1993: ch.10.

[2] Sidonius, *Ep.* IX. vii, 1-2.

[3] For instance, Sidonius, *Epp.* VII.xviii; VIII.i and VIII.xvi.

[4] The full text of the letter is given at Mathisen, 1999: 183-85.

own agents did business.[5] Marseille was then, as now, a cosmopolitan port that carried a high volume of trade from across the Mediterranean region. Around 495 Gennadius, a priest of that city, published his *De viris inlustribus* ['Concerning Famous Men'] in which an entry on Sidonius is included. It reads in part:

> He was a man of piercing intellect, fully cultivated in matters both religious and secular; he wrote a noteworthy volume of letters to diverse individuals, composed in diverse meters and prose, in which he demonstrated his literary ability.[6]

Despite the extent of Sidonius' reputation, there is no indication that Jordanes, writing in the middle of the sixth century, probably at Constantinople, had access to Sidonius' works or even knew of them. Sidonius is not referred to by name in any of Jordanes' writings, and neither his prose nor poetry seems to have been used by the later author as a source. Certainly, Jordanes' specific account of the Visigothic defeat of a British army in the vicinity of Bourges cannot have its origin in any of Sidonius' known works, where the episode simply does not appear. There is insufficient evidence to tell whether Cassiodorus, whose 'Gothic History' Jordanes ostensibly abridged, was aware of Sidonius' writings – though one can observe that he was acquainted with the work of at least one other Gallic writer of the same period. His *Chronicle* (519) utilised the earlier work of the cleric Prosper Tiro, via the intermediary *Cursus Paschalis* of a fellow Aquitanian, Victorius.[7]

Gregory of Tours, on the other hand, was demonstrably familiar with Sidonius' life and writings. He tells us that he himself authored a book about the masses composed by Sidonius, and also recounts several anecdotes drawn from the latter's activities while Bishop of Clermont.[8] Given Gregory's own upbringing in the same city (see 4.3.1 below) this seems hardly surprising, but he evidently expected his readers to be equally well acquainted. At one point Gregory describes Ferreolus, Bishop of Uzès, as having composed several volumes of letters, "... in the style of Sidonius, one might say".[9] Further, Gregory appears to have had a copy of at least some sections of Sidonius' *Epistulae* to hand as he wrote. He quotes directly from Sidonius, *Ep.* II.i,[10] and while outlining the alleged outrages of the Visigothic king

[5] Sidonius, *Ep.* VI.viii.

[6] The full entry is given at Mathisen, 2003: 6.

[7] Noted in Bagnall, 1987: 49-50.

[8] Gregory of Tours, *Historiae*, II. 21-23.

[9] Gregory of Tours, *Historiae*, VI.7.

[10] Gregory of Tours, *Historiae*, IV.12, where he affectionately refers to Sidonius as "Sollius noster".

Euric against the Catholics of southern Gaul writes, "We still possess a letter by the noble Sidonius written to Bishop Basilus about this in which he gives full details."[11]

It would appear that in the later sixth century Sidonius' writings were relatively familiar fare in Gaul, at least among the literate clergy. It would thus certainly have been possible for Gregory to have lifted information on Britons from Sidonius' works. However, there is no indication in the *Historiae* that he actually did so. Gregory's sole reference to Britons in the relevant period contains geographically specific information found neither in Sidonius' *Epistulae* nor in his *Carmina*, and is embedded in a sequence of military and political events also unreported by the author. Further, Gregory's version is in substantial agreement with Jordanes over the major detail not found in Sidonius: the fact of the defeat of a British force in the vicinity of Bourges. However, while Gregory published his *Historiae* some four decades after Jordanes wrote the *Getica*, his writings show no evidence he was familiar with the Gothic historian. Nor does Gregory anywhere refer to the writings of Cassiodorus. Rather, the details of the British defeat given at *Historiae*, II.18, seem to have been drawn from a lost Gallic chronicle, the so-called *Annales Andacavenses* (see 4.3.2 below).

It seems reasonable, then, to conclude that Gregory's account is not dependent on that of Jordanes and, at least with reference to Britons in Gaul in the 470s, that both later historians can be held to stand free of Sidonius. The three writers can therefore reliably be cited as independent testimony in this area and, where their accounts coincide or supplement each other, these may be regarded as mutually corroborative.

4.2 The *De origine actibusque Getarum* of Jordanes: XLV. 237-38

4.2.1 The Author

Jordanes may have regarded himself as of Gothic descent.[12] His grandfather had been secretary to one Candac, described as the leader of a group of Alans settled shortly after the death of Atilla (453) in "Scythia Minor and lower Moesia" by permission of the Eastern empire. Based on that information, Jordanes should already have been an old man in the mid sixth century when he wrote the two works for which he is known. Jordanes tells us that he himself, "although an unlearned

[11] Gregory of Tours, *Historiae*, II. 25. The letter cited is Sidonius, *Ep.* VII.vi.

[12] Jordanes, *Getica,* LX.316, though the text is debatable.

man before my conversion", was formerly secretary to Candac's nephew, a "Master of the Soldiery ... descended from the stock of the Amali".[13] The degree of Jordanes' learning is indeed an issue. To the extent that manuscripts have faithfully preserved his written style, his Latin often appears vulgar, convoluted, and clumsy in construction.[14] The *conversio* to which the author refers is uncertain. It may have been from paganism to Christianity, or from the Arian variety of Christianity favoured by the Goths to Nicene Catholicism. He could also have been referring to ordination to clerical office or, more generally, a movement from worldly life into the quasi-monastic *otium* favoured by some of the scholarly elite at this time.[15]

Besides his *De origine actibusque Getarum*, commonly known as the *Getica*, Jordanes also wrote a universal Roman chronicle, the *Romana*, dedicated to a certain Virgilius. This dedication, along with several traditional references to the author as an *episcopus*, has led some historians to identify him with the Jordanes, Bishop of Crotona in Bruttium (southern Italy), who accompanied Pope Vergilius to a forced sojourn in Constantinople from 547 to 554.[16] Whatever the case, Jordanes tells us that to write the *Getica* he delayed completion of the *Romana*, a work that can reliably be dated on internal evidence to the year 551.[17] Jordanes was thus writing some eight decades after the events he describes in the extract discussed below.

4.2.2 Source Background and Reliability

Jordanes intended the *Getica* as a paraphrase of a twelve volume history of the Goths written some two decades before by Flavius Magnus Aurelius Cassiodorus, senator of Rome and functionary at the court of Theodoric the Amal. Theodoric was the first ruler of a new Ostrogothic kingdom in Italy, having been invited by the Eastern emperor Zeno to lead his mixed army of followers there in 488 to oust the barbarian usurper Odovacar (for whom, see 5.5 below). In reality, the genesis of a specifically Ostrogothic ethnic identity seems to have lain in the group's coalescence around a series of military leaders – amongst whom the Amal house was indeed prominent – and in its complex ongoing relationship with the Roman Empire.[18]

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[13] For the biographical details cited, see Jordanes, *Getica*, L. 266

[14] Mierow, 1915: 16-18, criticises Jordanes' vulgar usage. However, Bradley, 1995a, suggests at least some of the problems with the text may be due to copyists' errors.

[15] For *conversio* as entry to quasi-monastic lifestyle, I am indebted to a suggestion by Andrew Gillett.

[16] In support of this position see Mierow, 1915: 5-10; for the contrary, see Goffart, 1988: 44-46.

[17] Jordanes, *Getica*, Preface.1; Mierow, 1915: 12-13.

[18] Details of this process are still in debate. For an extensive recent treatment, see Heather, 1996.

Nonetheless, Theodoric was still notionally under the suzerainty of Constantinople and needed Roman bureaucrats to run the machineries of state that governed the Italian population. Cassiodorus was therefore commissioned to construct a Roman-style 'history' for the Gothic people (and in particular for the ruling Amals) that demonstrated their respective glory and antiquity while at the same time taking due account of Roman sensibilities. In short, he was employed as an early medieval 'spin doctor'. The purposes and constraints of his work are made clear in Theodoric's recommendation of the new history to the still-functioning Roman Senate (as reported, and probably drafted, by Cassiodorus himself):

> [Cassiodorus] extended his labours even to the ancient cradle of our house, learning from his reading what the hoary recollections of our elders scarcely preserved. From the lurking places of antiquity he led out the kings of the Goths, long hidden in oblivion. He restored the Amals, along with the honour of their family, clearly proving me to be of royal stock to the seventeenth generation. From Gothic origins he made a Roman history ... In consequence, as you have ever been thought noble because of your ancestors, so you shall be ruled by an ancient line of kings.[19]

Between this work and Jordanes' epitome of it much had changed, however. By the 550s Justinian's generals were in the final stages of the campaign to oust the Ostrogoths and return Italy to the control of a renascent Eastern Empire. Thus, although Jordanes preserved the gist of the original author's imaginative early history of the Gothic race, he was no longer under the same necessary obligation to promote the Amal cause. Further, Jordanes excused himself from slavish reproduction of the original by telling his readers that he did not actually have a copy of Cassiodorus' history to hand while he was writing:

> ... my utterance is too slight to fill so magnificent a trumpet of speech as his. But worse than every other burden is the fact that I have no access to his books that I may follow his thought. Still – and let me lie not – I have in times past read the books a second time [*relegere*] by his steward's loan for a three day reading. The words I recall not, but the sense and the deeds related I think I retain entire. To this I have added fitting matters from some Greek and Latin histories. I have also put in an introduction and conclusion, and have inserted many things of my own authorship.[20]

Jordanes' confessions would hardly inspire confidence in the faithfulness and accuracy of his abridgement. However, the form of this colophon can be shown to

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[19] Cassiodorus, *Variae*, IX. 25. 4-6.

[20] Jordanes, *Getica*, Preface. 2-3.

have been plagiarised from an earlier work. It is probable that in outlining his own inadequacies and his work's shortcomings, Jordanes was exercising a 'courtesy' not uncommon amongst late antique writers.[21] By his own account Jordanes would have had adequate opportunity to extract significant amounts of original material from Cassiodorus' opus. If the *Getica*'s author can be identified as that Jordanes who was Bishop of Crotona, this process could easily have taken place at Constantinople. It is known that Cassiodorus spent a substantial period of time there during the 540s and early 550s after concluding his civil career at the Ostrogothic court.[22] However, the extent to which Jordanes was actually reliant on Cassiodorus for the text of the *Getica*, and hence the degree to which he may or may not have imposed his own purpose and structure on the material, has been much debated. While earlier scholars such as Mommsen tended to postulate a close dependence on the original – including a wholesale reproduction of Cassiodorus' sources – more recent analyses have emphasised Jordanes' autonomy, resulting in a composition which reflected his specific personal intentions as well as his own limitations as a historian.[23]

Certainly, the *Getica* is not without its defects as a history. Not only is the whole narrative coloured by Gothic triumphalism, but fact is frequently subordinated to literary purpose, leading to elision, distortion and displacement of events. Of the section of the text with which we are concerned, Andrew Gillett has observed:

> Indications of the length of reign of the last few Roman emperors in the West are ... sometimes misleading and faulty. The details are not used as chronological markers, but are included to impress the reader with the great 'chopping and changing' in Roman authority which permitted the regardful Euric to encroach upon Roman territory in Gaul.[24]

An example of the author's manipulation of facts is his celebration of Ricimer, an honorary Goth deserving of a good press. Jordanes describes him as, "an excellent man and almost the only one in Italy at that time fit to command the army". This perhaps explains why Jordanes fails to canvass Ricimer's deposition and execution of Majorian, who is instead said to have died in battle against a band of Alans, themselves subsequently defeated by Ricimer.[25] The latter's earlier ousting of

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[21] Goffart, 1988: 58-60.

[22] O'Donnell, 1979: ch.5.

[23] For instance, Mierow, 1915: 14-15; Croke, 1987; Goffart, 1988: 58-62; Bradley, 1993.

[24] Gillett, 2000: 10.

[25] For all this, see Jordanes, *Getica*, XLV. 236.

Eparchius Avitus, who reigned under Visigothic patronage, is also omitted. In fact, Avitus' entire reign is cut down to a mere "few days" sandwiched into the narrative as an after-thought to a discussion of the career of his son, Ecdicius, and displaced forward by several years to immediately precede that of Olybrius.[26]

Notwithstanding the flaws in Jordanes' historical technique, he at least does not seem given to outright invention. It may thus be assumed that he extracted basic details of the 'Riotimus' episode found in *Getica*, XLV. 237-38, from a genuine documentary source, though what that was and how much he may have embroidered upon it is open to question. There is no mention of Riotimus and his Britons in any of the extant and readily identifiable works known to have been consulted by Jordanes,[27] while among the non-extant sources claimed by the author only the "chronicler of the Gothic race", Ablabius, might be a credible candidate. However, the three references definitely attributed to the latter deal with events long past and/ or lost in myth rather than with recent history.[28] It must therefore be regarded as at least plausible that the Riotimus passage had its origins with Cassiodorus, and if so the credibility of the information would be commensurately enhanced. Although Cassiodorus' portrayal of Gothic origins may have bordered on mythology, his grasp of recent events in the Roman West should have been more acute.

From the turn of the century until c. 538, Cassiodorus served the Amal court in a variety of offices bequeathed from the days of the *imperium*, including Quaestor, Master of the Offices, and Praetorian Prefect. During this long career he should have been in an optimal position to access a range of documentary sources both imperial and post-imperial. Moreover, through his family's long history of service at court, Cassiodorus had the advantage of personal contact with informants who were well versed in the power politics of the West during the previous century. His grandfather had been tribune and *notarius* under Valentinian III as well as a friend of the generalissimo Aëtius, with whose son he had undertaken an embassy to Attila. Cassiodorus' father had also served in an array of high offices, first under Odovacar then under his successor Theodoric.[29] If only for its potential origin in Cassiodorus' history, Jordanes' account of a British *adventus* in Gaul merits close consideration.

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[26] Jordanes, *Getica*, XLV 240; see also 5.2 below.

[27] For Jordanes' known sources, see Mierow, 1915: 19-37.

[28] Jordanes, *Getica*, IV. 28.

[29] For all this, see Cassiodorus, *Variae* I. 4.

4.2.3 The Text: Jordanes, *Getica* XLV. 237-38

(Latin: Giunta-Grillone, 1991; English: Mierow, 1915)

> *Euricus ergo Vesegotharum rex, crebram mutationem Romanorum principum cernens, Gallias suo iure nisus est occupare. quod comperiens Anthemius imperator Brittonum solacia postulavit, quorum rex Riotimus, cum duodecim milibus veniens in Biturigas civitatem, oceano e navibus egressus susceptus est. ad quos rex Vesegotharum Euricus, innumerum ductans advenit exercitum, diuque pugnans Riotimum, Brittonum regem, antequam Romani in eius societate coniungerentur, effugavit. qui ampla parte exercitus amissa, cum quibus potuit fugiens, ad Burgundionum gentem vicinam, Romanisque in eo tempore foederatam, advenit. Euricus vero rex Vesegotharum, Arvernam Galliae civitatem occupavit, Anthemio principe iam defuncto ...*
>
> Now Eurich, king of the Visigoths, perceived the frequent changes of Roman Emperors and strove to hold Gaul by his own right. The Emperor Anthemius heard of it and asked the Brittones for aid. Their king Riotimus came with twelve thousand men into the state of the Bituriges by the way of Ocean, and was received as he disembarked from his ships. Eurich , king of the Visigoths, came against them with an innumerable army and after a long fight he routed Riotimus, king of the Brittones, before the Romans could join him. So when he had lost a great part of his army, he fled with all the men he could gather together, and came to the Burgundians, a neighbouring tribe then allied to the Romans. But Euric, king of the Visigoths, seized the Gallic city of the Averna; for the Emperor Anthemius was now dead.

4.2.4 Discussion

This passage is highly significant in that it gives, or at least purports to give, detailed information on a British military force deployed in central Gaul and coming into conflict with Gothic invaders. Were it not for legitimate doubts about Jordanes' overall reliability as a historian, this particular piece of text would constitute the most valuable and informative of all our sources on this British *adventus*. In accord with his usual practice in the *Getica* Jordanes fails to date the events described. However, he clearly has the episode beginning at some point during the reign of Anthemius – that is, between April 467 and July 472 – and signals the conclusion of this particular chain of events with the surrender of Clermont ("*Arvernam ... civitatem*") to Euric in 475.[30] His choice of that *civitas* is interesting. As we have seen at 3.2 above, Sidonius' epistle to Riothamus connects the British commander directly with Clermont, so it is perhaps not entirely accidental that Jordanes here provides an additional link. His particular interest in Visigothic action around the city is demonstrated in that after a short digression he signals an addendum to the

[30] A more precise chronology for the British action at Bourges is discussed at 5.1 below.

previous narrative thread by referring a second time to Euric's seizure of Clermont. The author then backtracks with a brief account of the local campaign of resistance in the Auvergne, preceding the capture of the city.[31] As discussed a little later in this section and at 5.2-5.4 below, this campaign was led by Sidonius' brother-in-law Ecdicius Avitus, with whom Riothamus/ Riotimus may well have been allied.

At least Jordanes' sequential narrative in the passage above is relatively clear. In response to Euric's aggression, Anthemius calls on some unspecified British polity whose response is to despatch a large army led by a "*rex Riotimus*". It would be unsafe to conclude that the use of "*rex*" demonstrates Riotimus was actually the ruler of a *gens* or a national state comparable to the situation of Euric or Gundioc. Yet some historians have fallen into this error, even the usually unimpeachable David Dumville.[32] It is true that *rex* frequently takes such a sense in late antique texts. However, the insular Celtic cognate *ri*, which Jordanes or his source might have glossed as *rex*, typically describes a sub-king or chieftain. In early medieval Irish society, for example, a *rí* was the leader of a *tuath*, a tribal division of some two to three thousand persons.[33] Moreover, given Jordanes' tendency to embellish the facts, we have no guarantee that he had any clear idea of Riotimus' real station. It would therefore be unwise to ascribe a more definite rank to Riotimus than that of a high status military leader. Mierow translates "*solacia postulavit*" as "asked for ... aid", but the verb *postulare* is commonly used in the sense of 'to require' or 'to demand', and in context *solacia* might better be translated as 'succour'. Such a construction reads rather as if Jordanes intended to portray Anthemius invoking urgent assistance from these *Britonnes* under some form of *foedus*, though there is no hint as to what the British leaders might have expected to gain, or already have gained, in return for their services. In any case, there is an implied history of contact between the British and the *imperium* prior to events recounted in the passage.

Jordanes has the British force debouch in "*Biturigas civitatem*". In late Roman usage the *civitas* of a tribe usually referred to that people's capital city as well as its dependent territory.[34] The Gallic tribe *Bituriges* in fact had two divisions, the *Cubi* and the *Vivisci*. The home territory of the latter lay in the vicinity of *Burdigala*

[31] Jordanes, *Getica* XLV.240; see also 5.2 below.
[32] Dumville, 1995: 181.
[33] Woolf, 2000: 96.
[34] Murray, 2000: 666.

(Bordeaux), which had come to be part of the nascent Visigothic *regnum* following the settlement of 418. The territory of the *Cubi* (modern Berry) was situated at the geographic centre of Gaul, within the huge arc of the river Loire as it sweeps around from north to west (see Map 1). Their *civitas* capital was at *Avaricum Biturigum*, modern Bourges on the river Cher some 150 kilometres nor-nor-west of Clermont. By the common practice of late antiquity, this city had come to be known solely by its tribal designation. Thus Gregory of Tours gives Bourges both as "*Bituricas civitatem*" and "*Bituricas urbem*", and in the passage quoted at 4.3.3 below simply as "*Bituricas*". In this he follows the earlier usage of Sidonius who, in a sermon to the citizens of Bourges on the occasion of his selection of their new bishop, referred to the assembled congregation as "*Bituriges*" and to their city as "*Biturigas*".[35]

Even though Bourges lay at the northern end of *Aquitania I*, a province extending much of the way to the Mediterranean, the city served as the provincial capital and was also the seat of a large Metropolitan bishopric that might also be regarded as coeval with Jordanes' "*Biturigas civitatem*". Accepting the influence wielded in Gaul by the Catholic episcopate, this fact alone would have been sufficient to make control of the city a desirable political goal for the Visigothic king – as well as a cogent reason for the defence of the *civitas* by the Empire. However, Sidonius later commented that it was Euric's desire to extend the boundaries of the Visigothic *regnum* to the Loire, noting as a consequence that the Goths despised the Roman loyalists of the Auvergne for obstructing their ambition. This being so, Euric's policy would in any case have required the conquest of Berry.[36]

Given Jordanes' claim of prior contact between imperial officials and the British group(s) that sponsored Riotimus' expedition, it would be useful at this point to enquire whether there is any witness to such communication between authorities at Bourges and such groups, whether on the Continent or in insular Britain. As it happens, one piece of potential evidence does present itself. At 1.2.2 above we noted the presence at Tours in 461 of a Mansuetus, styled 'Bishop of the Britons', on the occasion of a feast dedicated to St. Martin. Although situated in different ecclesiastical provinces, the bishopric of Bourges actually adjoined that of Tours, and the two cities were nearer to each other than either was to Sidonius' Clermont (see Map 3). It is therefore small surprise that Leo, Metropolitan of Bourges, was in

[35] Gregory of Tours, *Historiae*, I.31 and II.18 respectively; Sidonius, *Ep.* VII.ix.23.
[36] Sidonius, *Ep.* VII.i.1.

attendance at same the gathering.[37] He and Mansuetus, along with several other bishops, jointly subscribed to a pastoral letter issued on the occasion. It is highly unlikely that the two men did not meet. Indeed, both may have been Tours for an extended period. Eight years previously, Leo is known to have travelled to Angers even further to the west on the occasion of the consecration of one Thalassius as bishop of that city. Also present were several other bishops whose sees are not recorded, but some of which probably lay within the Armorican peninsula and could therefore have counted ethnic Britons among their flocks.[38]

The political and diplomatic functions carried out by the episcopacy at this time have already been canvassed (for instance, 2.4 and 3.3.3 above). As Metropolitan of his province, Leo of Bourges played an influential role as a churchman and would also have been a logical choice to represent the civil authorities of his *civitas*. Mansuetus may have been equally active in representing the ecclesiastical and secular interests of his own British constituency, whether this lay in insular Britain or, at least as likely, on the Continent. While there is no proof that the two clerics were ever directly involved in negotiations between British groups and the Roman administration in respect of military assistance, their meeting shows that the opportunity was assuredly present. Moreover, channels could have been established, or perhaps reinforced, facilitating such contact at some later point. It would have been Bishop Eulodius (462-69) or his successor Simplicius, whose episcopal election to the see of Bourges was facilitated by Sidonius Apollinaris himself (see 5.1.2 below), who finally oversaw the advent of Riotimus and his men in Berry.

Whatever the case, there is little doubt that a 'British' military force of some description did arrive in Berry, though its size as specified by Jordanes passes belief. He or his sources must be guilty of inflating the size of the contingent, perhaps in order to puff Euric's subsequent victory over it. At this period in the history of Gaul 12,000 troops would have represented a huge military force, arguably comparable to the entire (regular) Roman military complement in Britain at the end of the fourth century. John Drinkwater has estimated the field army brought from Britain to Gaul in 407 by Constantine III at less than 6,000 men,[39] and Constantine could command vastly greater resources than would have been available to Riotimus in the late 460s.

[37] Traditionally, Leo was Metropolitan of Bourges from 453 to 461.
[38] Haddan and Stubbs, 1873: 72-73; Giot et al., 2003: 110-11.
[39] Drinkwater, 1998: 275.

By that time the logistics involved in provisioning and quartering so large an army would have overwhelmed the resources of a crumbling provincial bureaucracy, even if local tax revenues were diverted to their support. The only other potential assistance available from an 'imperial' source was via the Burgundian *regnum*, which cannot have been unaware of the British presence. As with the concurrent campaigns of Ecdicius Avitus mentioned below, it may reasonably be inferred that the Gibichungs would have viewed Riotimus as an ally, and his defence of Berry as being in their own interest – a supposition in keeping with the fact that, according to Jordanes, the defeated British were allowed to retreat into Burgundia after their ouster by the Goths.

In any event, the army commanded by Riotimus must have been of a size sufficient to attempt a defence against Euric's forces. Assuming that at some point the contingent was intended to garrison Bourges itself, then we may have at least some indication of what was required. Bernard Bachrach has estimated that around two and a half thousand fighting men would have been needed to man the 2.9 km. late antique circuit wall of the city if it came under attack – with the besieging army needing at least a four to one advantage to stand a reasonable chance of success.[40] However, contingents of British troops may have been stationed at more than one location in Berry. Gregory of Tours' *Historiae* reports British casualties at the town of Déols, 60 km. southwest of the provincial capital (4.3 below). A safe downward estimate for an effective federate military force would therefore be in the region of some two thousand troops, though the army could have been significantly larger.

Sidonius tells us there was a small Arian, and perhaps pro-Gothic, faction at Bourges (see 5.1.2 below). We have no other information as to how gladly an occupation by British troops may have been received the rest of the citizens, even had they arrived under an imperial *foedus*. The land-owning elite may have feared for the maintenance of their wealth and position under Visigothic rule, but there seems no particular reason to suppose that by c.470 the ordinary citizens of Berry felt any particular loyalty to a distant and ineffective 'Greek' Emperor whose priorities plainly lay within the Mediterranean sphere. The quartering and maintenance of a military contingent of any significant size would have been costly, and Sidonius' letter to Riothamus may bear witness that British *foederati* were no less likely than any other troops of the time to indulge themselves at local expense (see 3.2 above).

[40] Bachrach, 1999: 283-84.

Beyond these several inconveniences, the presence of federate troops in their *civitas* may have meant nothing more to the people of Berry than their likely exposure to the horrors of war and pillage by the Visigoths, whose relatively peaceful takeover of the rest of *Aquitania I* they would have witnessed, and whose eventual victory they may have come to see as inevitable. As events were to demonstrate, such an assessment would have been close to the mark. Riotimus' federates may therefore have received no more support from the locals than could be extorted through force of arms – which might help explain their inability to hold the territory they were set to defend.

At some point not long after establishing themselves in Berry, Jordanes tells us that the British were assailed by an "innumerable army" of Gothic troops. These are described as being led by Euric himself. If so, it would be an indication of the importance placed by Euric on this particular campaign. There followed an extended period of fighting ("*diuque pugnans*") which resulted in Riotimus' defeat. We are told this happened "*antequam Romani in eius societate coniungerentur*", which may simply be a roundabout way of saying 'before the Romans could arrive', but might also be understood in the sense of 'before arrangements could be made to join with the Romans'. Assuming this reference is significant, the nature of the 'Roman' forces Jordanes is referring to here remains something of a puzzle. They were clearly distinct from the federate troops of the Burgundian *regnum* mentioned in the same passage and, if the local attitude came anywhere close to that suggested above, there would have been scant practical assistance from any citizen militia. Moreover, the defeat in Provence of the army led out of Italy by Anthemiolus demonstrates that the central imperial administration was virtually powerless to intervene directly in central Gaul at this time (see 1.5 above).

It may be that an anti-Gothic alliance was contemplated with some of the independent 'Roman' warlords known to have operated contemporaneously north of the Loire. One such was Syagrius, son and successor to the former *magister militum per Gallias*, Aegidius. Following the death of his father a few years previously, Syagrius had continued to operate from a base at Soissons, acting as a local ruler to the Romano-Gallic population with the support of Frankish troops (see 2.2 above). A similar military leader was the *comes* Paulus, apparently based at Angers and perhaps allied to Syagrius. His contemporary military successes against the Goths at this time is recorded by Gregory of Tours, who tells us he used 'Roman and Frankish' troops (see 4.2.4 below). A further possible candidate might be the romanised Frank, Arbogastes, governor of Trier, whose mastery of Latin style was so effusively praised in a letter from Sidonius.[41]

[41] Sidonius, *Ep.* IV.xvii.

A qualitatively different option for a 'Roman' force associable with Riotimus is the private army assembled in the Auvergne by Ecdicius Avitus, brother-in-law to Sidonius Apollinaris. From c.471 onwards Ecdicius waged a successful irregular campaign in opposition to Visigothic attacks on the *civitas* of Clermont, the early part of which was probably concurrent with the British action at Bourges. That there was close contact between the two regions is demonstrated in that Sidonius is himself known to have made an ecclesiastical visit to Bourges around this period at the request of its citizens, most likely not long before the Gothic attack on the city. As already noted, the bishop's epistle to Riothamus also establishes a distinct connection between Sidonius, Clermont and the British. It is therefore unlikely that Riothamus and Ecdicius were ignorant of each other's anti-Gothic activities. The Burgundian *regnum*, which may have been providing support to both parties, could also have supplied a secure channel of communications between the two. All of these matters are further explored at 5.2-5.4 below.

In any event, Jordanes tells us that when the main Gothic attack came, the British force bore it unaided. He goes on to say that having sustained very heavy casualties ["*ampla parte exercitus amissa*"], Riotimus gathered the remainder of his forces and retreated into territory controlled by the Burgundians, correctly described here as being Roman *foederati*. Given the ubiquitous pro-Gothic slant of Jordanes' narrative, however, one might suspect the British defeat was not quite as devastating as the author makes out. After all, Jordanes' treats the fall of Sidonius' Clermont to Euric in 475 as a triumph of Gothic arms, whereas the city was in fact ceded by treaty (see 5.5 below). Had Riotimus been able to hold his troops together, a withdrawal from the environs of Bourges into territory within the Burgundian sphere would not have been too difficult to accomplish. If it can be assumed that at the time the effective boundary of Burgundian territory to the east of Berry lay more or less along the line of the rivers Loire and Allier, then a successful retreat would have required the traverse of no more than 50 to 60 kilometres of good Roman road.

In closing it should be observed that Jordanes' depiction of Riotimus as an elite British war leader in Roman employ is fully in keeping with the picture previously adduced for Sidonius' correspondent Riothamus at 3.2 above. He too appears to have commanded a federate war-band containing British soldiers, and to have held a high status within the late Roman social and administrative hierarchies. What may have become of Riotimus and his followers after their retreat from the *civitas* of Bourges into Burgundia will be explored at 5.4 below.

4.3 The *Historiae [Francorum]* of Gregory of Tours (II. 18)

4.3.1 The Author

Georgius Florentius Gregorius was born in 538 and was, by his own description, a prime example of the later Gallo-Roman 'ecclesiastical aristocracy'. He sprang from a noble and wealthy extended family, which over the past century had provided numerous bishops as well as secular office holders under the Gothic, Burgundian and Frankish *regna*, and which had probable connections back to the *Aviti* and *Apollinari* of Sidonius' time.[42] Gregory's father died while he was still a child and until 551 he lived with his uncle Gallus, then Bishop of Clermont (and thus ecclesiastical heir to Sidonius Apollinaris). In 573 Gregory replaced his cousin Eufronius in the Metropolitan bishopric of Tours, centre of the cult of St Martin, which he held until his death in 594. He claimed in the *Historiae* that all but five of the previous bishops of the city had been "blood relations of my family".[43]

Gregory was a prolific writer, particularly of hagiography, but his best-known work in modern times is the (presently titled) *Historiae* [*Francorum*], composed in ten books and completed around 593.[44] Not surprisingly, the *Historiae* concentrates particularly on events occurring in central Gaul along the Auvergne/ Touraine axis which constituted Gregory's 'home' country. Although composed from an ecclesiastical viewpoint, in which constant divine intervention in human affairs is an accepted fact, the work contains much meticulously recounted secular history. This narrative is drawn largely from the twists and turns of Merovingian politics during Gregory's own lifetime. Books I to III, however, provide a sketch of world and Frankish history up to that point.

4.3.2 Background and Source Reliability

Book II of the *Historiae* covers the period from the death of St Martin in 397 to the death of Clovis in 511. The passage below outlines a series of military and political events along the Loire valley in the 460s to 470s, grouped around the death of the Roman generalissimo Aegidius. Gregory is writing over a century after the occurrences he is here recounting, but his information seems to have been drawn from local sources to which his rank and position should have given him optimal

[42] Heinzelmann, 2001: 10-22.
[43] Gregory of Tours, *Historiae*, V. 49.
[44] Gregory of Tours, *Historiae*, X.31.

access. In fact, the two short chapters at *Historiae* II.18 and 19 are noticeably dissimilar from Gregory's usual discursive style. They read more like extracts from a separate chronicle, albeit one from which the dating scheme has been removed: "In the ninth month of this [unspecified] year there was an earthquake".[45]

As a result, scholars have long posited a lost work as the source for these two chapters – the *Annales Andecavenses* or *Annals of Angers*, so called because that city figures prominently in events.[46] Such a chronicle would have been compiled locally, and probably at a date substantially closer to the events outlined, thus enhancing the passage's reliability as a source for central and northern Gaul in the 460s and 470s. However, it would be unsafe to assume from the annalistic structure that the events here listed by Gregory occurred in consecutive years. The period spanned by the chapters is some two and a half decades and, as with other early medieval chronicles, several years at a time may have passed without entries. Gregory could also have exercised significant editorial discretion.

4.3.3 The Text (Gregory, *Historia Francorum* II. 18)

(Latin: Krusch/ Levison edition, 1931; English: Murray, 2000: 190)

Igitur Childericus Aureilianis pugnas egit, Adovacrius vero cum Saxonibus Andecavo venit. Magna tunc lues populum devastavit Mortuus est autem Egidius et reliquit filium Syagrium nomine. Quo defuncto, Adovacrius de Andecavo vel aliis locis obsedes accepit. Britanni de Bituricas47 a Gothis expulsi sunt, multis apud Dolensim vicum peremptis. Paulus vero comes cum Romanis ac Francis Gothis bella intulit et praedas egit. Veniente vero Adovacrio Andecavus, Childericus rex sequenti die advenit, interemtoque Paulo comite, civitatem obtinuit. Magnum ea die incendio domus aeclesia concremata est.

Then Childeric fought at Orleans.
Odoacer came with his Saxons to Angers. This was the time when a great epidemic ravaged the population.
Aegidius died leaving a son called Syagrius. After his death Odoacer took hostages from Angers and other places.
The Britons were driven out of Bourges by the Goths and many of them were killed at Bourg-de-Déols.
Count Paul led Romans and Franks in a campaign against the Goths and carried off plunder.
Odoacer came to Angers. The next day King Childeric arrived and took the city after Count Paul had been killed.

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[45] Gregory of Tours, *Historiae*, II.19.

[46] For instance, Wood, 1992: 13; Murray, 2000: 189.

[47] Alternatively, '*Biturigas*': Krusch edition, Facs I, 1937, textual note 18s, p.65.

4.3.4 Discussion

Gregory writes in the Preface to Book II of the *Historiae* that it was his intention to recount the happenings of the period covered by this section of his work "in the muddled and confused order in which these events occurred". As in the passage above, however, he fails at most points to provide the reader with a firm chronology. The initial entry in this series of annals has nonetheless been dated to 463. In that year there occurred the last recorded clash between Aegidius' forces and those of the Visigoths, which took place "between the Loire and Loiret near Orleans".[48] Both Marius of Avenches and Hydatius agree that Frederic, brother to the Visigothic king Theoderic II (and also to Euric, who took the throne in 467) was killed in this battle. It has been argued that the entry, "Childeric fought at Orleans", refers to the same conflict – the assumption being that the Frankish leader was at that point acting in concert with Aegidius.[49] In this particular encounter, however, it is likely that the Goths were serving as nominal agents of the puppet emperor Libius Severus, having been paid for their troubles by Ricimer's cession of Narbonne via his client, the Gallic *comes* Agrippinus (see 2.2 above).

As we have seen, the death of Aegidius occurred c.465. Following this watershed, the passage chronicles a series of clashes in central Gaul among several ethno-political factions variously labelled by Gregory or his source as Britons, Goths, Romans, Franks and Saxons. Hydatius confirms that after Aegidius' demise and the consequent removal of his protection, "the Goths soon invaded the territory that he had been guarding in the name of Rome."[50] Even at the height of later successes, the Loire seems to have formed the northern border of the Visigothic *regnum*, so this might indicate that Aegidius' desired sphere of influence extended south of the river. Given a continuing tendency during the fifth and following centuries to respect the integrity of former Roman provinces as political units, he may have been seeking to maintain an ascendancy in both *Lugdunensis II* and *Lugdunensis IV*, taking in the whole Loire valley as far as the provincial boundaries. Gregory also records an undated tradition consonant with this picture, placing Aegidius on campaign in the vicinity of *Castrum Cainonense* (Chinon) some 40 km. southwest of Tours.[51]

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[48] Marius of Avenches, *Chronicle* a.463, supported by Hydatius, *Chronicle* 214.

[49] For instance, Daly, 1994: 627.

[50] Hydatius, *Chronicle,* 224.

[51] Gregory of Tours, *Glory of the Confessors*, 22.

Gregory does not make it easy to tell enemy from ally here, but he is definite that at some point following Aegidius' death certain "*Britanni*" were driven out of Bourges by Gothic forces and that a number were also killed at the small town of "*Dolensim vicum*" (Déols) presumably by the Goths in the same campaign. While the context does not make it entirely clear whether either or both of the groups of *Britanni* constituted military forces, the passage deals specifically with armed conflict and all the other groups mentioned are certainly military in nature. Moreover, though Gregory's description of these events constitutes his first mention of *Britanni* in the *Historiae*, he supplies no further information as to the nature and duration of their occupation of the area. Déols is now a suburb of Chateauroux, some 60 km southwest of Bourges. At the time it lay on a minor road at some distance from its junction with the main highway approaching Bourges from the southwest – the route most likely to have been used by a Visigothic army seeking to approach that city. However, unless a British contingent was driven back from the highway towards Déols, it is difficult to see any strategic significance in this particular location.

Concurrent with or shortly after the British defeat, we are told that a certain Paulus *comes* led 'Roman' and Frankish troops in a successful attack on Gothic forces, or on territory occupied by them, taking plunder in the process. This 'Count Paul' has been regarded as an independent Roman warlord operating in the vicinity of Angers, perhaps a product of the disintegrating polity left behind by Aegidius.[52] It is not implausible, though, that he was still acting under the nominal authority of Syagrius, who ruled from Soissons until removed in 486 as a result of a sweeping campaign by Clovis I, successor to his father Childeric as leader of the Salian Franks.[53]

In his reference to Britons being expelled from Bourges, there seems little doubt that Gregory is reporting elements of the same set of events covered by Jordanes at *Getica* XLV. 237-38 (see 4.2 above), but from a different perspective. Jordanes' narrative concerns itself mainly with the rapidly evolving Visigothic relationship with a failing Roman *imperium*, while Gregory's account concentrates on the environs of the Loire valley, reporting the Briton/ Goth conflict as a significant local event embedded in a wider struggle among several groups for control of that area.

[52] For instance, Harries, 1994: 223-24.

[53] Gregory of Tours, *Historiae*, II.27.

4.4 The Question of Origins

Having canvassed all of the documentary sources that bear on the appearance of a 'British' military force in Berry, we are now in a position to review what firm evidence these sources may supply us concerning the geographic origins of Riothamus and his war band.

Of the three separate allusions to 'Britons' in Gaul found in Sidonius' correspondence, only his description of Arvandus' letter to King Euric, discussed at 3.1 above, gives any hint of immediate origins. According to Sidonius' account, the *Britanni* whom Arvandus was urging Euric to attack were said to be "*supra Ligerim sitos*", that is, 'situated beyond the Loire'.[54] The relationship between these people and Riotimus' expedition as described by Jordanes cannot definitely be resolved. However, it stretches the bounds of coincidence that two wholly unconnected groups of Britons inimical to Gothic cause should appear in central Gaul at around the same time. A more reasonable inference is that Arvandus was alluding either to the same British force found shortly thereafter defending Berry or to some parent group from which it may have been derived, at least in part. In the latter case, the most likely candidate would have been a population of Britons settled, or in process of settling, in the Armorican peninsula (see 3.1.3 and 1.2.2 above).

As noted in the previous section, Gregory fails to supply any information on the origins of the *Britanni* whose expulsion from Bourges he outlines at *Historiae* II.18. This may be due in part to the nature of the particular text, probably imported wholesale from a pre-existing set of annals. However, the settled presence of *Britanni* in western Armorica – a region he knew only as *Britannia* – formed a stock element in Gregory's world picture (see 1.1.2 above). He may therefore have found the existence of a 'British' army in the near vicinity a century earlier so wholly unremarkable as to require no comment, viewing the allusion to *Britanni* in his source as referring to members of the same Gaul-based *gens* with which he was so familiar. That these fifth century Britons should have been involved in a major military engagement in Berry would hardly have surprised him. His own narrative shows the claimed Frankish domination of Brittany in the sixth century was more a matter of assertion than reality. The Gallic Britons of his own day are depicted as an independent and aggressive people able to mount raids along the Loire valley, and quite capable of defeating the Frankish armies sent to punish them.[55]

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[54] Sidonius, *Epistulae* I.vii.5.

[55] Gregory of Tours, *Historiae*, V.29, 31; IX. 18 ; X.9.

In contrast to his familiarity with the Britons of Armorica, Gregory shows little knowledge of ecclesiastical or secular affairs in insular Britain either in the past or in his own day. Indeed, the *Historiae* provides us with no evidence that the bishop's knowledge extended further than the 'English' kingdom of Kent just across the English Channel, and even that seems minimal. In a discourse on the career of the Frankish king Charibert I, Gregory makes offhand reference to an unnamed daughter by the king's first wife who "married a man from Kent and went to live there".[56] This was in fact Bertha, wedded to King Aethelberg of Kent, and it was her adherence to Roman Christianity that would shortly open the way for Augustine of Canterbury's successful embassy from Pope Gregory the Great to the Kentish court in 597. Incidentally, that mission led in turn to the foundation of a separate 'English' Church with more direct ties to Rome than its equivalent in western Britain. The consequent rivalry between these two ethnically-based Churches would be a major factor in the construction, by later clerical partisans, of the variant histories of fifth century Britain discussed at 1.2.1 above.[57]

Whether the Gothic historian Jordanes, had any better contemporary knowledge of insular Britain than Gregory is impossible to say, but he does begin the *Getica* with a geography assembled, he tells us, from ancient sources including Livy, Strabo and Cornelius. Included is a long and climatically accurate description of "the island of Britain ... situated in the bosom of Ocean".[58] The fact that Jordanes has his *Brittones* arriving at Bourges following a sea voyage ("*oceano e navibus*") indicates he most probably believed Riotimus' expedition to have come from insular Britain.[59] Jordanes may indeed have been drawing on some authoritative source for this notion, but it would be reckless just to assume his accuracy as some historians have done.[60] As we have already seen, the author was capable of egregious errors of fact, and in this case it is easy to understand how a misconception could have arisen. It may well be that on noting Riotimus and his men described as 'Britons' in his sources, Jordanes simply leapt to the conclusion that their homeland lay somewhere in the former Roman diocese of *Britannia(e)*. His geographies would have told him that a sea crossing was necessary to get them to Gaul, and he may then have thrown in the extra details about "Ocean" and "ships" to add colour to his narrative.

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[56] Gregory of Tours, *Historiae*, IV. 26.

[57] See Higham, 2002a; 2002b.

[58] Jordanes, *Getica* II, 10-15

[59] Jordanes, *Getica* XLV. 237

[60] Once again, David Dumville, 1995: 181and 208, is culpable. So is Ian Wood, 1987: 261.

Jordanes' accuracy in this respect might be doubted on other grounds. The discrete and comparatively rapid movement of a large body of men from insular Britain to Gaul would at this time have presented considerable logistical problems, especially since their initial maritime destination could have been as distant as the Loire estuary. As noted at 1.1.2 above, organised sub-Roman polities were very probably in existence in western Britain by the 460s but although local sea-trading and fishing must have continued, there is no direct evidence that these states maintained an organised naval capacity in any way comparable to that of the former Roman diocese.[61] Moreover, the few insular vessels of the period for which evidence can be inferred were relatively small, carrying at most 40 to 50 men including their crews.[62] It is unlikely that trading vessels from farther afield would have been involved, and the only late 'Roman' fleet known to have been operating on the Atlantic sea coast of Gaul at the time was in fact controlled by the Visigothic *regnum* (see 1.2.2 above).

At the same time, there is no indication of any single insular British polity – or confederation of them – commanding a military surplus so substantial as to be able to spare some thousands of fighting men for a jaunt to the Continent. This should especially have been the case during the chaotic period when Saxon incomers were establishing themselves in lowland Britain and, if we accept the dating given by the *Gallic Chronicle of 452*, that process was already well underway by c.442 (see 1.2.2 above). It has, however, been suggested that Riotimus' expedition was intimately connected with the actual settlement process that created Britanny – an element, albeit an important one, in a full scale folk migration carried out over an extended period during the fifth century.[63] Riothamus' response to the imperial summons to Bourges, as described by Jordanes, might then be seen as 'payment' for land granted to British *foederati* in western Armorica.

Certainly, a base in Brittany would have the virtue of ameliorating some of the more urgent logistical problems inherent in bringing a substantial military force into the vicinity of Bourges. For even if we were to allow that a sizeable insular British army could have reached Gaul intact within a reasonable space of time, it would still have faced the task of traversing several hundred of kilometres of debatable territory

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[61] *Contra* Bachrach, 1993: 136, a reference by the military historian Vegétius to reconnaissance ships operating out of Britain almost certainly refers only to the late Roman period of that diocese.

[62] Haywood, 1991: 45-60 and 61-70.

[63] For instance, Fahy, 1964/65.

to reach its final destination in Berry, while maintaining itself in the field. This is unless Jordanes' report of the British arriving at Bourges in ships can be interpreted to mean they were somehow ferried up the river Loire for a significant distance. That option, however, would have required a large fleet of craft suitable for navigating the river, invoking yet more questions as to how such resources could have been brought into play in the politically fragmented Gaul of the day.

The brief review given above shows that, based on the textual sources available to us, it would be unsafe to make dogmatic assertions about a discrete geographical origin for Riothamus' expedition, and that such attempts should be viewed as strictly conjectural. Nonetheless, there remains one further option to canvass. We must acknowledge the possibility that the men of Riothamus' band may not have had a single place of origin nor, despite their labelling as 'Britons', have formed an entirely ethnically homogenous group. It has already been noted that in the warfare of the late Western Empire, armies of mixed composition tended to coalesce around high-profile military leaders whose attraction was their success in battle – thus providing donatives and booty to their followers (see 1.2.1 above). A reverse could lead to the disintegration of a less successful force, often followed by its absorption into the ranks of former enemies. An example is the career of Constantine III's rogue British general Gerontius, most of whose troops deserted him at Arles in 411 to join with the opposing army of the 'legitimate' *augustus*, Honorius[64].

A federate 'British' army employed in Berry by the failing Western *imperium* might more closely have followed the above model, in which case its composition and structure may have been somewhat more fluid than in the traditional picture. The core of such a force could have comprised an elite group of self-identifying Britons, including Riothamus and his officers, who may well have come from insular Britain – perhaps concomitant on the territorial displacement of the native elite resulting from Saxon domination and/ or settlement. It is likely these men would have consciously asserted a romanising Christian image of *Britanni* as set out at 1.1.2 and 1.2.2 above – the more so if they saw themselves as 'loyal exiles', thus being more highly motivated to project this type of defining identity. As noted at 3.1 above, there is little doubt that Riothamus, as portrayed in Sidonius' letter to him, would have closely fitted such an image.

[64] Olympiodorus, *Fr.* 17.2.

Surrounding the high status core of the army would have been the sergeants and specialists, followed by the 'ranks' of professional fighting men. These latter could have been enlisted in a variety of situations. Some may have come originally from insular Britain, others from groups already on the Continent that manifested some form of 'British' identity – including peoples settled in western Armorica. Yet other troops may have been recruited from among the Romano-Gallic population, particularly as ranks inevitably became depleted by war, sickness and desertion. However, even these latter could have been labelled as *Britanni* by outsiders, if only because they were fighting with an army whose commanders conspicuously displayed that particular ethnic allegiance. Finally, on the periphery, would have come the usual rotating quota of low status hangers-on that any military group of the period might have picked up in its travels: the traders and panderers, cooks and comfort women. It might thus have been a more multi-layered, less homogenous body of 'Britons' that were found following Riothamus into the *civitas* of Bourges to combat the (assuredly heterogenous) forces of Euric and the Visigothic *regnum*.

4.5 Riothamus: name or title?

As we have seen, 'Riothamus' and 'Riotimus' are close variants of the same name and we are well justified in identifying Sidonius' correspondent with the Riotimus mentioned in Jordanes' *Getica*. This undeniably historical figure, a high status military leader of Britons in the later fifth century, has exercised a certain fascination for those wishing to weave a 'history' of sub-Roman Britain out of the disparate elements available. As a result, rather more effort has in the past been employed trying to fit Riothamus/ Riotimus into some sort of 'Arthurian' scheme of late antique British and Gallic history than in examining the genuine context in which he appears. Most of these efforts have been long on assumption and notably short on hard evidence.

In his *Origines de la Bretagne* , for instance, the linguist and historian Leon Fleuriot identified Riothamus with the Ambrosius Aurelianus said by Gildas to have led a British military revival against the Saxon incomers (see 1.2.2 above), and whose name became subsumed in the various manifestations of the Arthurian mythos.[65] Given the uncertain chronology of Gildas' *De Excidio*, it is not impossible the two men were indeed contemporaries. However, Fleuriot argues that 'Riothamus' was

[65] Fleuriot, 1980: 170 ff.

not a name at all but a title meaning 'High King' applied to Ambrosius, alleged to have ruled a realm stretching from insular Britain into western Gaul. This concept has been followed by Arthurian enthusiast Geoffrey Ashe, although he prefers to identify Riothamus as a prototype of Arthur – a relationship also emphasised by J.duQ. Adams.[66] How much credence should be given to such a premise?

In the first place, both Sidonius and Jordanes appear to use Riothamus/ Riotimus solely as a personal name. In fact if a title was intended then Jordanes' reference to a "*rex Riotimus*" would clearly be a tautology.[67] Secondly, there seems no other persuasive reason to believe that 'Riothamus' (alt. 'Riotimus') is not simply the latinicised form of a genuine insular Celtic name. Versions of the same name – 'Riatham' and 'Riathan' – do appear in medieval Breton genealogies, although this could simply be an instance of retro-inclusion of a famous personage drawn from an existing written source.[68] It is not entirely impossible that Riothamus could represent a local Gallic name with an origin in the Gaulish language. However, this is most unlikely. As any reading of Sidonius' *Epistulae* demonstrates, the late Gallo-Roman upper and middle classes had long since abandoned Gaulish nomenclature for Roman – although, as noted at 5.4 below, some still clung to a Celtic speech. Among the insular British, the conventions for naming seem to have been rather different.

The best witness we have to nomenclature amongst urbanised Romano-Britons from the second to fourth centuries are the names inscribed on leaden 'curse' tablets deposited over centuries in the spring of the baths/ temple complex at *Aquae Sulis* (modern Bath). By the end of the second century this city was already a major religious centre in what was becoming one of the most heavily 'Romanised' area of Britain. The tablets were recovered by excavation when the spring was drained in 1978. Of around 150 legible personal names inscribed on the tablets, slightly less than half are demonstrably 'Roman', the remainder being of Celtic derivation. Further, the ratio does not change significantly with time. Tablets dated to the second and third centuries by the use of Old Roman Cursive script show a ratio of 26 'Roman' to 30 'Celtic' names; while tablets dated to the late third and fourth centuries by New Roman Cursive show a name ratio of 24 'Roman' to 22 'Celtic'.[69]

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[66] Ashe, 1986, 1995; Adams, 1993.

[67] Jordanes, *Getica* XLV, 237.

[68] For instance, Kerheve, 1992: 539.

[69] Tomlin, 1988: 95-98.

This evidence points to names of Celtic derivation having remained popular among Britons (at least in the southwest) throughout the Roman period. The same situation seems to have continued even after the Roman withdrawal. Much the same mixture of Roman and Celtic names are to be found on the corpus of Class 1 inscribed memorial stones from western Britain, dated from the fifth century onwards. As noted at 1.2.2 above, Mark Handley has argued persuasively that these inscriptions represent the British manifestation of an efflorescence of Christian epigraphy that took place across the late antique West, peaking around the sixth century. Moreover, the overwhelming majority of this type of inscription can be shown to represent either churchmen or other members of the elite classes.[70]

In Brythonic, 'Riothamus' might have been rendered something like **Ri(g)otamos*, the (*g*) being lost through lenition. As often the case in insular Celtic names of the period, there is a compound of two elements. The first, *ri(g)*, is one of the most common in the body of Celtic nomenclature – perhaps most familiar as the terminal *rix* in Iron Age Gaulish names.[71] As an initial element *ri(g)* is attested during both the Roman and post-Roman periods in Britain. In a list of Romano-British citizens from one of the Bath 'curse' tablets (in this case a dedication to Mercury) dated to the third century, we find "... *et familiam Riovassum*" – 'Riovassus and family'.[72] Inscribed on the *Men Scryfa* from Cornwall, a Class 1 memorial stone dated to the fifth or sixth centuries, is the name "*Rialobranus*".[73] As a noun element *ri(g)* loosely translates as 'king', the Germanic *reiks* (*ric*) and the Latin *rex/ regis* being cognates. As noted at 4.2.4 above, however, the term carries several related senses, notably that of sub-king or chieftain. *Ri(g)* may also be used as an adjectival determinative, deriving from an Old Celtic preform **rigakos* meaning 'kingly' or 'royal'.[74]

The second name element *tamos* is simply an intensifier, indicating the superlative. Thus 'Riothamus', inasmuch as personal names possess meaning in the same sense as ordinary language, could be rendered either 'most kingly' or 'great king/ overking'. Celtic scholar Charles Thomas-Edwards has suggested the former to be the more likely.[75] While there is no doubt that the element *ri(g)* invoked the concept

[70] Handley, 2003: 35ff.
[71] Ellis Evans, 1967: 243ff.
[72] Tomlin, 1988: 180-81.
[73] CISP-MADR/1.
[74] For the etymology of *ri(g)* see various related entries in McBain, 1982.
[75] Personal communication.

of royalty, its inclusion in a personal name had no more necessary connection with the political function of that person in late antiquity than do than the modern names 'Rex' and 'Roy'. An example is the British cleric Riochatus discussed at 3.3 above. He was not only a contemporary of Riothamus, but was even to be found in same area of Gaul. The common *catos* element in his name means 'battle' or '(armed) host'. The same logic that renders Riothamus as 'High King' would transform the inoffensive Riochatus into 'Battle King' or 'Chieftain of the War-band', a status rather at odds with his known professions as priest (or bishop) and monk. To extend the process *ad absurdum*, the Riovassus mentioned above on the Bath curse tablet might be compelled to the office of 'king of clients'.

Finally, two other elements that closely parallel *ri(g)* in meaning are also commonly found in Brythonic nomenclature of the late antique and early medieval periods. These are *ti(g)ernus* and *ma(g)lo*. Their frequency of use helps demonstrate the extent to which the motif of 'lordship' was popularly associated with elite personal names at the time, without necessarily indicating a specific title. *Ti(g)ernus* has the meaning 'lord' or 'master', most probably derived from **tegos* 'house' in the sense of 'master of the house'.[76] An example is the early medieval Breton honorific *machtiern* ['pledge (?) lord'] – the title for the local magistrate found in each Breton *plebs*.[77] Nevertheless, as a name element *ti(g)ernus* is no more inevitably connected with political rulership than is *ri(g)*. As noted at 1.2.2 above, one of the earliest attestable 'Bretons' is the itinerant priest Catihernus [Catigern], a name signifying much the same as 'Riochatus'. The element *Ma(g)lo* takes the meaning 'prince' and appears as both an initial and terminal element in names inscribed on post-Roman Class 1 memorial stones from western Britain. Examples are 'Maglicunas', and 'Brohcmail son of Eliseg' from the famous Pillar of Eliseg.[78] While both these have a secular context, we have previously noted the sixth century bishop 'Ma(h)iloc' overseeing a Christian British community in Galicia (see 1.1.2 above).

From this brief analysis we may conclude that regardless of literal meaning 'Riothamus' should be treated as a personal name rather than a title. Consequently, the more radical attempts to subsume this genuine historical figure into the shadowy world of the Arthurian mythos are misplaced, and best avoided.[79]

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[76] MacBain, 1982.

[77] Davies, 1986: 67.

[78] For Maglicunas, see CISP NEVRN/1 /1; for Brohcmail, see CISP LTYSL/1/1.

[79] A general conclusion supported by both Oliver Padel, 1995, and Nicholas Higham, 2002a: 76.

Having said that, in the next (and concluding) chapter of the dissertation we shall be compelled to venture some speculations of our own in an attempt to trace the movements of Riotimus and his war-band through Burgundian territory after their retreat from the *civitas* of Bourges – perhaps to re-emerge as allies to the cause of Sidonius and his brother-in-law, Ecdicius, in the Auvergne. Hopefully, however, that particular set of conjectures will be seen to have a somewhat better foundation. The chapter begins with an analysis of the evidence available for more precisely setting the Britanno-Gothic conflict in Berry in chronological context.

Chapter Five

The end of Roman Clermont: a British role?

Introduction

The previous chapter canvassed the *adventus* of a military force of *Brittones* in the civitas of Bourges, together with an exploration of its purpose and origins and its defeat by Euric's Visigoths. Chapter Five opens with an examination of the dating of this action in order to correlate the action with other events taking place in central and eastern Gaul at around the same time. Discussion then focuses on circumstances surrounding the contemporaneous and ultimately unsuccessful defence of Roman Clermont against the Goths, leading to the city's acquisition by Euric in 475 – as well as what happened afterward. These events are set in context of the later years of Sidonius' career, and within the wider history of the last years of the Western Empire. The role of Sidonius' brother-in-law Ecdicius Avitus in matters is explored, together with the part played by the Burgundian *regnum*. Discussion then returns to Riothamus and his 'British' army and what happened after their defeat at Bourges. The question of the whereabouts and occupation of the war-band at the time of Sidonius' letter to the British leader is revisited, with particular reference to the role British troops may have played in the final defence of Sidonius' Clermont. The chapter closes with an overview of events leading to the end of the Western Empire and afterward, and how these impacted on Sidonius Apollinaris and his various associates prior to his death in the early 480s.

5.1 Dating the Conflict at Bourges

As we have seen in the previous chapter, chronology is a weak point of both Jordanes' and Gregory's narratives. Neither author provides a firm date for the Briton/ Goth conflict in Berry. From Jordanes we can place the engagement somewhere between 467 and 475 while Gregory serves only to supply a *terminus ante quem* of c.465. Nonetheless, there has been something of an consensus amongst historians in fixing the action at Bourges to the year 469. The problem with this dating is that it places the beginning of Euric's campaign of aggression in Gaul rather earlier than much of the available evidence would indicate. It also place Riotimus' campaign some two years prior to those initiated by Anthemiolus and Ecdicius c.471, with which a degree of correlation is suggested at several points in this dissertation.[1] As we shall see, however, the grounds for dating the fall of Bourges to 469 are not only rubbery but demonstrably unsafe.

5.1.1 The Contribution of John of Antioch

In her biographical work on Sidonius Apollinaris, Jill Harries dates the Gothic attack on Berry to 469 without ever giving her reasons for doing so.[2] However, it is probable that in this matter, as at several other points in her work, she is following the lead of the earlier Sidonian scholar C.E. Stevens.[3] That author in turn gives as his authority on the matter the German scholar Ludwig Schmidt, who based his dating on an interpretation of a fragmentary passage from John of Antioch.[4] However, Schmidt's analysis can be shown to be flawed. The text in question lists a short series of near contemporary events sourced ultimately in the writings of the historian Priscus of Panium.[5] The passage opens, "The emperor's son-in-law Zeno, who was then consul, sent men to eject Indiacus from the hill called Papirius ... ". Zeno held the Eastern consulate three times – the years 469, 475 and 479 – but only the first of these was prior to the death in 474 of his father-in-law, Leo I.[6] Following this Zeno himself acceded to the imperial throne, albeit after some difficulties. Assuming Priscus' accuracy, Schmidt's dating of the opening event of

[1] For instance, at 2.5 above.

[2] Harries, 1994: 222.

[3] Stevens, 1933: 112, esp. n.1.

[4] Stevens cites the first edition of Schmidt's ***Die Ostgermanen***, 1910. Identical reasoning is given in the more widely available second edition of the work at Schmidt, 1941: 489.

[5] John of Antioch, *Fr.* 206, 2 = Priscus, *Fr.* 57-59.

[6] Jones, A.H.M. et al., 1980: 1244, 'Zeno 1'.

the series to 469 may thus be accepted. There seems no reason, however, to admit a further assumption that the subsequent events listed can all be dated to the same year. In fact the evidence of the text itself would seem to the contrary. A little later in the passage we read:

> At that time the Gothic people who were living in Galatia in the West and who were of old named after Alaric, began hostilities, as also did the horde of barbarians in Pannonia who had earlier been ruled by Valamir and after his death by Theodemir.[7]

It is to be assumed that the "hostilities" attributed to these two groups concerned assaults on imperial territory (although if this were not the case, attempts at close dating of events in this passage would be neither meaningful nor useful to our purpose). According to Jordanes, Theodemir's Goths were at peace with both Rome and Constantinople from the time of his accession in the mid 460s until Theodemir's attack on Illyricum around 473.[8] It should therefore be the latter action to which John refers. The phrase, "Gothic people ... in Galatia", almost certainly alludes to the Visigoths of Gaul, since Priscus uses a similar form of words in an earlier specific reference to that group.[9] Nonetheless, it can readily be seen that if John of Antioch here intended a close temporal correlation between the actions of the 'eastern' and 'western' Goths then the "hostilities" begun by the latter group should refer to events taking place at some point in the early 470s rather than in 469.[10]

In this respect there exists a further complicating factor. Jordanes tells us that yet another Gothic war band left Pannonia under Theodemir's brother Vidimer intending to attack the Western Empire concurrently with Theodemir's assault on Illyricum.[11] This expedition arrived in Italy during the reign of the emperor Glycerius (March 473 to June 474) and Vidimer died soon after, perhaps in battle. Glycerius then bribed the Gothic leader's son and successor, also named Vidimer, to move on to Gaul where the band was finally absorbed into the Visigothic *regnum*. It is plausible that the actions of this third group could have become conflated in John of Antioch's narrative with those of Euric's Goths, thereby rendering unsafe any firm conclusion as to who did what, and when. However, even if the "hostilities"

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[7] = Priscus *Fr.* 59.

[8] Jordanes, *Getica* LVI 285-88; see also Jones, A.H.M. et al., 1980: 1068, 'Theodemer 1'.

[9] Priscus, *Fr.* 36.

[10] Andrew Gillett, 1999: 25 n.25 pursues similar reasoning and was valuable in clarifying and confirming my own thoughts on these matters.

[11] Jordanes, *Getica* LVI 283-84.

begun by Goths in the West does refer specifically to Euric's campaign in central Gaul, we still cannot know what act may have been regarded as having constituted the opening of such hostilities, nor how long a period may have intervened between that and the conflict at Bourges. In short, *contra* Schmidt and later adherents, John of Antioch may not tell us anything firm about the date of the expulsion of Riothamus' Britons from Berry, and if he does it is that the incident probably occurred somewhere in the early 470s.

5.1.2 The Contribution of Sidonius Apollinaris

One of Sidonius' letters [12] concerning an episcopal election at Bourges has been held to provide an early *terminus post quem* for the conflict in Berry.[13] This is based on a form of words that appears to place the *civitas* under Gothic control at the time of writing. Yet again, the conclusion is unsafe. In fact, the epistle more probably establishes a *terminus ante quem* for the action at Bourges – although it should be acknowledged that the letter is not itself susceptible to precise dating. Sidonius' allusion to himself as a "novice", and in an associated context as a "beginner", most likely indicates a period early in his bishopric.[14] However, even taken together these references do not justify a definite assignment of this letter to 470 (his probable year of ordination) as has been averred by both Stevens and Harries.[15]

The addressee is one Agroecius, Bishop of Sens and thus provincial Metropolitan of *Lugdunensis Senonia*. His jurisdiction adjoined the northern boundary of *Aquitania I* and lay mostly 'beyond the Loire' in territory which until recently must have been under the control of the Roman warlord Aegidius, and was perhaps still within the sphere of his son Syagrius. Sidonius was writing from the city of Bourges itself, to which he had travelled on the invitation of its citizens to facilitate the selection of a new bishop for their see:

> I have arrived at Bourges, being called upon by a decree of the people: the reason for their appeal was the tottering condition of the church which having lost its supreme pontiff, has, so to speak, sounded a bugle note to the ranks of both professions [i.e. clergy and laity] to begin canvassing for the new office.[16]

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[12] Sidonius, *Ep.* VII.v.

[13] For instance, Stevens, 1933: 141; Gillett, 1999: 26 n.86.

[14] Sidonius, *Ep.* VII.ix.7.

[15] Stevens, 1933: 127-29; Harries, 1993: 183.

[16] Sidonius, *Ep.* VII.v.1.

He had found the population split into numerous factions in support of a plethora of candidates, many of whom he deemed wholly unsuitable. Substantial bribes were on offer, showing the lengths to which some hopefuls would go to obtain the power and prestige attending the office. Nonetheless, because the special status held by the Bishop of Bourges as provincial Metropolitan, there was a particularly pressing need to find a fit candidate. A continued vacancy would have weakened the structure of the Catholic Church in the area at a time when its clergy felt threatened by the Arian 'heresy' to which the Gothic *regnum* had long subscribed. Whereas Sidonius had earlier been prepared to overlook the Arian allegiance of Euric's elder brother Theoderic II – as long as he was an ally of Sidonius' own political faction – he was not at this point about to forgive same shortcoming in Euric himself.

Sidonius' trenchant views on this subject can be seen in his later epistle to Bishop Basileus of Aix bewailing the damage wrought by Euric in vacating many of the Aquitanian bishoprics then under his control and leaving their Catholic parishioners, "desolate by the deaths of their bishops, sunk in gloomy despair at the disruption of their faith".[17] This letter has frequently been invoked by commentators to demonstrate Euric's rabid anti-Catholicism – beginning with Gregory of Tours some century or so after its writing.[18] However, Sidonius' basic motive in writing to Basileus was to paint Euric's administration of Aquitaine as blackly as possible in order to forestall the rumoured cession of his own see at Clermont to the Gothic *regnum* (see 5.5 below). In reality, Visigothic intervention in ecclesiastical politics of Gaul had begun well before Euric's reign.[19] The Gothic king's actions at the time were probably due at least as much to his apprehension of the Catholic bishops' secular influence being used against him during his conflict with the Empire, as for the sectarian motives attributed to him by Sidonius.

In the letter to Agroecius, Sidonius pleads for him to come to Bourges, confessing his own inadequacy for the task of selecting a new bishop unaided. He also notes a necessity in the present "unquiet situation" for the confirming presence of a Metropolitan bishop to accomplish the regular ordination of a new prelate the ecclesiastical province:

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[17] Sidonius, *Ep.* VII. vi.7.

[18] Gregory of Tours, *Historiae*, II 25; see also comments at Jones, A.H.M. et al., 1980: 428, 'Euricus'.

[19] See Mathisen, 1989: 206 ff.

> So I beg that your longed-for arrival may arm me with your companionship and sustain me with your help in this duty of mine, in which, as a novice, I am diffident and embarrassed. And although you are the ruler of Senonia, do not in this unquiet situation refrain from setting right the purposes of the Aquitanians, for it matters little that our province is geographically separated from yours, since in the sphere of religion our cause is united. Moreover, of all the cities of Aquitanica Prima the wars have left only the capital of the Averni [Clermont] on the side of the Romans; hence in appointing a prelate for the aforementioned country, we are weak in the number of provincial colleagues unless we are confirmed by the consent of the metropolitans.[20]

It is this identification of Clermont as the only Aquitanian city left "on the side of the Romans" that has led many historians to believe Bourges was already in Gothic hands when the letter to Agroecius was written. However, such an interpretation raises a raft of difficulties – as the Loeb editors of the *Epistulae* have noted.[21]

Sidonius' very purpose in making this statement is to explain to Agroecius the absence of his "provincial colleagues" – that is, other bishops from *Aquitania I.* The implication is that either the exigencies of war have hindered their presence, or Euric has blocked their attendance in order to interfere with the ordination of a new Metropolitan. However, if Bourges was then under Euric's domination, he could have achieved such an aim by main force, as he would demonstrate with many other Aquitanian bishoprics. On the other hand, if he wished to manipulate the selection process at Bourges then he may have wanted bishops already under his control to be present. Sidonius, loyal partisan of the Empire, could certainly have been excluded from the process. Yet in the event, the Bishop of Clermont is not only able to make his way into the city at the behest of its citizens from territory hostile to the Goths, but then proceeds to play the major role in selecting the ultimately successful candidate, the *vir spectabilis* Simplicius. All this without a hint of interference from the Visigothic king. Further, Sidonius seems to anticipate no obstacle to Agroecius' attendance at Bourges, yet the latter's see also lay outside Euric's realm and within the recent (and possibly current) influence of another polity inimical to the Gothic *regnum.* A later letter confirms that a Metropolitan bishop, presumably Agroecius, was in fact present at Simplicius' elevation.[22] Meanwhile, throughout this whole process, a small Arian faction in the city remains compliant.[23]

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[20] Sidonius, *Ep.* VII.v.2-3.

[21] See n.2 to Sidonius, *Ep.* VII.v.

[22] Sidonius, *Ep.* VII.ix.6.

[23] Sidonius, *Ep.* VII.viii.3.

A plausible solution is that at the time of Simplicius' elevation Bourges was still free of the Visigothic *regnum*. Sidonius' apparent comment to the contrary is readily explicable when taken in context. His prime concern here was the convocation at Bourges of clerics with the collective ecclesiastical authority necessary to ordain a new Metropolitan. His comment about Clermont was actually in explanation of his own attendance. That is, Sidonius was able to was able to travel to Berry precisely because the Visigoths did not then control his see. Nor did they yet control that of Bourges, but since this fact was understood by both parties in the exchange, it did not need to be stated explicitly. The net effect of the letter is therefore to identify Clermont as the only Aquitanian city *other* than Bourges itself that still remained beyond Gothic control at the time. Viewed from such a perspective, the successful conclusion of the episcopal election actually serves to provide a firm *terminus ante quem* for Euric's attack on the city.

That Bourges was still 'Roman' at this point may well have been due to the presence in the *civitas* of the British *foederati* under Riothamus, discussed in the previous chapter. Indeed, it is here that Sidonius may have made his first acquaintance with the British leader, beginning the relationship later cited in *Ep.* III.ix (see 3.2 above). It is most probable that Sidonius' mission to Bourges took place before the first Gothic siege of Clermont in the summer of 471, after which travel in the Auvergne became more difficult and dangerous. However, there were times during the years of intermittent warfare leading up to 475 when Sidonius was able to journey to various cities in Burgundia, even as far as Vienne.[24] Thus a later excursion to Bourges via Burgundian territory cannot be ruled out, and a *terminus post quem* for Euric's capture of Berry must therefore be sought elsewhere.

In this respect, two other letters of Sidonius are apposite. The first is the *Epistulae* VII.vi to Basileus of Aix mentioned several times above and datable by internal cues to early 475. During a diatribe against Euric, Sidonius remarks that along with a number of other Aquitanian bishops the Gothic king had banished one Simplicius from his see. Contrary to note 5 to this epistle in the Loeb edition, there is general acceptance by present historians that it was Simplicius of Bourges to whom Sidonius was referring.[25] His city would therefore have come under Euric's control at some point prior the writing of this missive. The second and probably earlier letter is

[24] Sidonius, *Ep.* V.vi.1.

[25] For instance, Harries, 1994: 174; Mathisen, 1989: 271.

more direct. Writing to Mamertus, Bishop of Vienne, at a time clearly predating the cession of the Auvergne to the Gothic *regnum* in 475, Sidonius begins by giving his perspective on the current political situation:

> There is a rumour that the Goths have moved their camp into Roman soil; we luckless Avernians are always the gateway to such incursions, for we kindle all our enemies' hatred in a special degree; the reason is, that their failure so far to make the channel of the Loire the boundary of their territories between the Atlantic and the Rhone is due, with Christ's help, solely to the barrier which we interpose. As for the surrounding country, its whole length and breadth has long since been swallowed up by the insatiate aggression of that threatening power.[26]

Later in this same letter Sidonius makes reference to Rogations being practised at Clermont. These were exhortatory public prayers and rituals instituted by Mamertus at his own see, but imitated at Clermont only after the initial period of Gothic siege in 471 – the aim being to bolster the morale of the city's defenders.[27] The rumour of the Visigoths having "moved their camp into Roman soil" is difficult to tie to a specific event. However, it may refer either to news of the defeat of Anthemiolus c.471, which could have taken some time to reach Sidonius, or to a later and unsuccessful attempt by one of Euric's generals to invade Italy, dated to 472/ 73 by the *Gallic Chronicle of 511*.[28] Given these factors, the likely date range of the letter to Mamertus would be 472 to 474. However, Sidonius unequivocally states that at the time of his writing the rest of Aquitania had "long since" been occupied by the Visigoths, leaving his own *civitas* as the sole Roman enclave west of the Loire. Bourges must therefore have fallen to Euric some appreciable time before this letter was despatched, implying that Riothamus' attempted defence of Berry culminated no later than 473. Thus, although no single firm date can be adduced, we may be justified in concluding that the clash between Briton and Goth at Bourges most probably occurred at some point in the period 471/ 473.

As has previously been suggested, the British expedition in Berry would therefore have coincided with the campaign being waged in the Auvergne by Sidonius' brother-in-law, Ecdicius Avitus. Since the two actions may well have been directly associated, discussion will now proceed to a consideration of that conflict and of Ecdicius' more general role in Gallic and imperial affairs.

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[26] Sidonius, *Ep.* VII.i.1.

[27] See also Sidonius, *Ep.* V.xiv.

[28] Burgess, 2001b: 99.

5.2 Ecdicius Avitus and the defence of the Auvergne (AD 471-74)

As noted at 2.1 above, Sidonius' father-in-law, Eparchius Avitus, had been deposed as western *augustus* in 456 by Ricimer and Majorian. His fall from power and subsequent death do not, however, seem to have materially impaired the fortunes of his son and heir, Ecdicius Avitus. All the indications are that in later decades Ecdicius was able to draw a substantial income from a number of estates, primarily in the Lyonnais but also in the Auvergne and probably elsewhere. As a senior member of one of the great senatorial families of southern Gaul, as well as the son of a former *augustus*, he must have enjoyed substantial local prestige along with this wealth. He appears to have taken his high social position seriously, dutifully fulfilling a role as regional *patronus*. While noting his military prowess, Gregory of Tours remembers Ecdicius principally via the story of his moral example in the gathering of several thousand starving peasants to his estates in Burgundia. There he kept them fed during an extended period of famine and then arranged for their transport home.[29] Gregory identifies this as the same famine to which Sidonius refers in a letter extolling the practical charity extended by Bishop Patiens of Lyons to a number of regions, including the Auvergne.[30] That letter is probably to be dated on internal cues to the period 471/ 74.

According to Sidonius, Ecdicius had been born and raised in the vicinity of Clermont, perhaps on the estate at Avitacum which had come into Sidonius' possession as a result of his marriage to Ecdicius' sister, Papianilla. In later times, Ecdicius had been an occasional but welcome visitor to Avitacum and apparently still kept a residence at Clermont.[31] Nonetheless, he seems to have based himself elsewhere – most probably in the Lyonnais. Sidonius wrote on more than one occasion, trying to persuade him to return to the Auvergne and take the lead in dealing with the serious problems being experienced by its citizens as a consequence of the collapse of imperial authority. An example is the previously noted depredations of the rogue bureaucrat Seronatus, datable to the late 460s (see 2. 3 above). Assuming Sidonius was indeed speaking for a sizeable faction of the local elite, and not just employing flattery to bolster his case, Ecdicius' prestige amongst the Avernian citizenry is made abundantly clear:

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[29] Gregory of Tours, *Historiae* II.24.

[30] Sidonius, *Ep.* VI.xii

[31] Sidonius, *Ep.* II.ii.15; *Ep.* III.iii.5.

> Be quick then and clear away your impediments and break off whatever is detaining you. Your countrymen in the last throes of the struggle for liberty are waiting for you. Every counsel of hope or of despair we are prepared to risk with you in our midst, with you as our leader.[32]

It seems to have taken Euric's invasion of the Auvergne to convince Ecdicius to respond. A Gothic army of "several thousands" was already besieging Clermont when he chose to return to the city in spectacular fashion. Accompanied by a small company of eighteen mounted warriors, he broke through the enemy lines, throwing the Goths into a panic as he came. A letter written by Sidonius not long after the event, recalls Ecdicius' triumphal entry to Clermont:

> Some [citizens] kissed away the dust which covered you, others caught the bridle that was thick with the blood and foam; some turned back the pommels of the horses saddles, which were bathed in sweat, others, when you wished to free your head from the skull piece of the helmet, unclasped the bands of pliant steel; some entangled themselves in disentangling the fastenings of your greaves; some counted the dents on the edges of swords blunted with slaughter; others by forcing in their envious fingers measured the holes made by blade and point amid the rings of the cuirasses.[33]

Significant in this vignette is the evident military professionalism displayed by Ecdicius' company. These were seasoned veterans, fully equipped for combat. Moreover, Ecdicius' subsequent actions demonstrate this assault was not just a single flamboyant gesture. Sidonius goes on to tell how his brother-in-law quickly recruited a sizeable private army. This military force was said to be financed largely from his own means, but the bishop also makes mention of unspecified contributions "from outside, furnished by great men".[34] These may have been other great landholders or possibly supporters of Anthemius' faction at Rome. Whatever the case, Ecdicius is next described as leading his irregular force in a series of successful 'hit and run' attacks against the Goths:

> ... you punished the enemy's pillagings and put a stop to his promiscuous forays, which had formerly been quite unchecked ... by frequent surprises you annihilated phalanxes of cavalry, without suffering the loss of more than two or three of your men ... you inflicted so much damage upon the opposing side by your unexpected attacks that they designed a ... ruse to disguise the numbers of the slain ...[35]

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[32] Sidonius, *Ep.* II.i.4.
[33] Sidonius, *Ep.* III.iii.5.
[34] Sidonius, *Ep.* III.iii.7.
[35] Sidonius, *Ep.* III.iii.7.

Even allowing for Sidonius' customary hyperbole, it is difficult to view the actions described as other than a full-blown military campaign. Its success is demonstrable in that Clermont not only withstood the initial Gothic offensive in the Auvergne but continued to do so for the several subsequent years during which the city came under intermittent attack. This was despite the confusion and weakness of serial imperial administrations mired in an almost constant round of civil conflict. Sidonius is clear that in his view the credit for this success belonged to Ecdicius.[36] When Clermont finally did succumb to Euric in 475, it was as a result of timid imperial diplomacy and not by force of arms (see 5.5 below).

It is clear that Ecdicius' troops constituted a considerably more professional force than the scratch citizen militia manning the walls of Clermont when he arrived. They could hardly have been just the collection of 'rural peasants' that some have suggested.[37] It is true that the practice of re-militarising the peasantry under independent command of the *possessores* on whose estates they lived had been promoted by the *imperium* at least since the 440s. A 'new law' of Valentinian III, promulgated in response to Vandal raids on Italy at that time, states that landholders were to take steps to ensure their estates were vigorously defended by the local tenantry when circumstances required.[38] There is little evidence, however, that such scratch forces were particularly effective, and Ecdicius would have had little time to train recruits raw from the fields. It is hard to believe that the military successes depicted by Sidonius would have been possible unless Ecdicius' army contained at least a substantial core of veterans capable of executing complex tactics in the field and, more importantly, of holding together in the heat of battle. The mounted company that accompanied Ecdicius to Clermont would have been composed of such men, but they alone could hardly have been sufficient to the task. This leaves significant questions as to how Ecdicius was able to raise an effective force at short notice and from what source he obtained his troops – points to which we return a little further on in this chapter.

From the later perspective of Jordanes' account of Euric's Gallic war, Ecdicius appears as the pre-eminent military figure on the Roman side of the conflict. He is titled "*Romanorum dux*" and described as directing a stubborn and ongoing defence

[36] Sidonius, *Ep.* III.iii.3.

[37] For instance, MacGeorge, 2002: 156.

[38] *Nov. Val.* 9.1 in *The Theodosian Code and Novels.*

of the Auvergne against Gothic forces right up until its negotiated surrender by the emperor Julius Nepos.[39] Nevertheless, Ecdicius' actual situation during the years 471-75, as revealed in several of Sidonius' letters, was rather more complex. For one thing Ecdicius was evidently away from the Auvergne for extended periods during this time, although his absences may have fallen outside the summer campaigning season when the Gothic threat was at its most intense. The epistle from Sidonius to Ecdicius cited above was in fact a plea for his brother-in-law to withdraw his "duteous attendance" from "the dangerous intimacy of princes" and return to Clermont.[40] The indication is that at the time, Ecdicius was either cooling his heels at the court of one of the Burgundian *reges* or, if Jordanes was right about his later appointment as *magister militum*, perhaps in the entourage of the current Emperor (see 5.5 below). Moreover, if at an early point in the conflict Ecdicius was considered a *dux*, then it was on a purely unofficial basis. Another letter dating to the autumn of 474 informs us that at least up to the point of writing Ecdicius had fought as a *privatus*, a private citizen without formal military rank, though it is made equally clear that he did so with Anthemius' knowledge and approval.

Sidonius wrote from Lyons to tell his wife that the imperial Quaestor, Licinianus, had crossed the Alps from Italy bearing news of her brother's elevation to the rank of *patricius*. This honour was bestowed by the new emperor Julius Nepos, who had by that time effectively succeeded Anthemius as *augustus* (see 5.3 below). Sidonius goes on to comment:

> It is a very quick promotion, if you consider his age, very slow if you consider his deserts; for he has long been making payment for his advancement to this dignity not on the gold-scales but in the battlefield, and as a freelance soldier [privatus] he has enriched the Treasury not with money but with the spoils of war. But Julius Nepos, an Emperor supreme alike in arms and in goodness, has shown a high sense of duty in fulfilling with a promptitude ... the pledge with which his predecessor Anthemius bound himself to reward your brother's exertions; what the other repeatedly promised he has actually brought to pass.[41]

Thus, Sidonius tells us, Anthemius was not only aware of Ecdicius' efforts against the Goths in the Auvergne but had repeatedly undertaken to give them public recognition through the bestowal of formal rank. That he failed to carry out his

[39] Jordanes, *Getica*, XLV. 240
[40] Sidonius, *Ep.* III.iii.9.
[41] Sidonius, *Ep.* V.xvi.1-2.

promise during what was left of his reign may have been due to the murky politics of détente in force at Rome at the time. To keep the fragile peace with his son-in-law, Anthemius would have had to avoid actions that might have unduly antagonised him. Ricimer would hardly have been pleased with the preferment of the son of a former emperor whose deposition and disposal he himself had personally engineered. With both a potential power base in Gaul and a good reason to seek revenge, Ecdicius would almost certainly have been regarded by the generalissimo as a potential threat to his own person and position. On the other hand, once the détente between Ricimer and Anthemius collapsed, the emperor would have been faced with more urgent problems than the bestowal of office on a provincial leader, no matter how deserving he may have been.

5.3 The Burgundian Ascendancy (AD 472-74)

A complicating factor in the political situation at this time is the equivocal role played by the Burgundian *reges*. As imperial *foederati* they should have been natural allies to the Avernian cause and, since much of the landed wealth funding Ecdicius' anti-Gothic campaign must have been situated in territory under Burgundian control, it is unlikely he could have proceeded without at least their tacit approval. Further, the Burgundian *regnum* was the agency most capable of providing a channel for communication and co-ordination both among pro-imperial forces operating in *Aquitania I*, and between those forces and the imperial court Yet, perhaps because of former experiences under Burgundian 'protection' (see 2.2 above), Sidonius remained distinctly unenthusiastic about their guardianship. He was prepared to travel in Burgundia and do business at the courts of Gibichung *reges* when the occasion demanded, but his true feelings were revealed in private comments to several of his correspondents. In a letter to Magnus Felix, a relative and former Praetorian Prefect of Gaul, he wrote:

> ... the armed bands of the tribes that surround us are terrifying our town, which they regard as a sort of barrier restricting their frontiers. So we are in the midst of two rival peoples and are become the pitiable prey of both; suspected by the Burgundians, and next neighbours of the Goths, we are spared neither the fury of our invaders nor the malignity of our protectors.[42]

[42] Sidonius, *Ep.* III.iv.1

Much the same point is made from a more personal perspective in a letter to Auspicius, Bishop of Toul in northern Gaul. Citing the current "tempest of battling kingdoms", Sidonius explained that the main obstacle to his visiting the other was " the fear now of danger from his [Visigothic] neighbours, now of enmity from his [Burgundian] patrons".[43] It is true, though, that at the time these two letters were written, the federate relationship between the Burgundians and the *imperium* was fast evolving into a more complex and precarious association.

Early in 472, and despite the threat posed by Euric, the conflict between Anthemius and Ricimer had once again broken into open warfare. John of Antioch tells of months of civil strife within the urban area of Rome, during which:

> The authorities and the populace of Rome fought on Anthemius' side while Ricimer was supported by a force of his own barbarians ... Anthemius resided in the palace while Ricimer blockaded the area by the Tiber and afflicted those inside with hunger. As a result a pitched battle was fought, and many of Anthemius' party were slain.[44]

Among Ricimer's allies at this time was his nephew Gundobad, summoned from Gaul where according to John Malalas he was then serving as one of the Burgundian *magistri militum*.[45] It is unlikely Gundobad would have seen this act as a betrayal of his people's *foedus*, since in his eyes his uncle Ricimer would have been at least as valid a leader of the Roman state as the 'Greek runt' who just happened to be *augustus*. According a later history by Paul 'the Deacon', Anthemius also attempted to summon allies from southern Gaul in the form of forces commanded by one Bilimer, an otherwise unknown military official given the title *rector Galliarum* [Governor of Gaul]. Paul says he was defeated and killed in the vicinity of Rome in 472.[46] If so, it would have been only shortly thereafter that the resistance of Anthemius' faction collapsed altogether. Several sources state that it was Gundobad himself who in July 472 murdered Anthemius, despite the emperor's having taken refuge in a church.[47]

Before that happened, Ricimer had already raised the senator Anicius Olybrius to the imperial throne. As noted at 2.1 above, Olybrius was husband to the daughter of the

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[43] Sidonius, *Ep.* VII.xi.1.

[44] John of Antioch *Fr.* 209,1 = Priscus *Fr.* 64.

[45] John Malalas, *Chronicle* 14.374-75.

[46] Paul the Deacon, *Historia Romana* 15.4.

[47] John of Antioch, *Fr.*209.1 = Priscus, *Fr.* 64; John Malalas, *Chronicle* 14.45.

former Western *augustus* Valentinian III, and thus connected by marriage to the Vandal king Geiseric who had long advocated his candidacy as Western *augustus*. A brief anecdote, for which John Malalas is the sole source, may shed some light on the murky politics of the time. According to Malalas, the Eastern *augustus* Leo I had sent Olybrius, whose Vandal connections he deeply mistrusted, on embassy to Rome. He also sent a secret written message to Anthemius requesting him to execute Olybrius, which was intercepted by Ricimer's agents. Unfortunately, the same letter urged Anthemius to rid himself permanently of Ricimer – as, Leo emphasised, he himself had successfully done with the Eastern generalissimo Aspar. This action was recommended so the Western *augustus* could rule, "as one who gives orders rather than takes them". After first sharing the message with Olybrius, Ricimer moved to open war against his father-in-law.[48] It should be said, though, that since Malalas goes on to claim Olybrius died before Ricimer, who subsequently chose Majorian then Julius Nepos as replacements on the throne, his accuracy as a historian of this period is less than uniformly trustworthy.

Whether the elevation of Olybrius also signalled a rapprochement between the Vandal *regnum* and Rome is impossible to tell. Ricimer died unexpectedly only one month after Anthemius, and Olybrius survived him just long enough to appoint Gundobad as *patricius*.[49] There was a several month interregnum during which Gundobad must have been the *de facto* ruler of the West, then in early 473 he appointed as his own puppet *augustus* the current *comes domesticorum*, Glycerius.[50] That act represented the zenith of Burgundian influence within the rapidly crumbling Western Empire. Majorian also had been serving as *comes domesticorum* when elevated to the throne in 456 (see 2.1 above), but unlike that occasion the Eastern court found the choice of Glycerius entirely unacceptable. At some point before his death in January 474, Leo I appointed his own candidate, Julius Nepos as Western *augustus*. Nepos was married to the niece of Zeno, who was (effectively) Leo's successor at Constantinople following the latter's death. Nepos also held the office of *magister militum* in Dalmatia – a position inherited from his uncle Marcellinus, the same warlord who had accompanied Anthemius to Rome in 467 and had subsequently been assassinated in Sicily (see 2.3 above).

[48] John Malalas, *Chronicle* 14.45.

[49] *Fasti Vindobonensis Priores s.a.* 472.

[50] John of Antioch, *Fr.* 209,2 = Priscus, *Fr.* 65.

It is not known how actively the Burgundians backed Glycerius' administration, but he was not entirely powerless. During his brief reign an attack on Italy by one of Euric's generals was defeated, and Vidimer's Gothic incursion from the east was deflected into Gaul (see 5.1 above). However, when in June 474 an expedition led by Julius Nepos landed in Italy, Glycerius was said to have surrendered without resistance. He was forcibly created Bishop of Salona and packed off to Dalmatia where Nepos' agents could keep an eye on him.[51] The whereabouts of Gundobad during these events is something of a mystery. Assumedly, he was not in Italy when Nepos arrived. It has been suggested that his father Gundioc died around this time, and Gundobad had hastened north to secure his share of the royal inheritance.[52] By 474 rule of the Burgundian *regnum* was apparently being shared amongst at least three of Gundioc's sons: Gundobad, Godegisel and Chilperic.[53]

While the Burgundian *regnum* remained notionally in *foedus* with the Roman state, the Gibichungs refused to recognise the deposition of their own emperor Glycerius, and denied Nepos their support. There is no indication, though, that they were about to abandon their suzerainty over Clermont. The resulting confusion of loyalties is illustrated in a letter Sidonius wrote on a delicate political matter to his uncle Apollinaris, a resident of Burgundia, in the Autumn of 474. In it he proffers his good offices to intercede with "that most victorious leader Chilperic, the master of the Soldiers [*magistro militum*]", then ruling from the Lyonnais. The ostentatious flattery here was probably a precaution against the message's interception. Sidonius' mediation was needed because of the circulation of a "poisonous tale" alleging Apollinaris' involvement in a plot to transfer the town of Vaison from the Burgundian sphere to that of the "*novi principis*", presumably Julius Nepos.[54] The fact that Vaison lay only some 75km north of Arles shows how far down the Rhone valley Burgundian rule now extended. As noted above, however, when shortly thereafter Sidonius learned Nepos had redeemed Anthemius' promises to recognise Ecdicius for his feats in arms against the Goths, the bishop is found lauding him as, "an Emperor supreme alike in arms and in goodness".[55]

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[51] Priscus, *Fr.* 65; Jordanes, *Romana* 338-39.

[52] Jones, A.H.M. et al., 1980: 524, 'Gundobadus I'.

[53] Gregory of Tours, *Historiae* II 29,32.

[54] Sidonius, *Ep.* V.vi.

[55] Sidonius, *Ep.* V.xvi.2.

5.4 Riothamus and his men after Bourges (AD c.471-74)

It is in the context of the confused political situation prevailing in south-eastern Gaul during the period 472-75 that we return to a consideration of what became of Riothamus and his troops after their withdrawal into Burgundian territory. As noted at 4.4 above, late antique mercenary armies tended to disintegrate following a significant military reverse. Following Riothamus' defeat at Bourges it might therefore be expected that many surviving troops would have gone their own way – returning as best they could to their homeland(s), taking service elsewhere, or trying their hands at that traditional refuge of the out-of-work soldier, brigandage.

For those who stayed with their leader, however, it is unlikely they were allowed to pass on to rowdy retirement on some estate in the Lyonnais as envisaged by Ian Wood. His later depiction of Riothamus' troops as beyond Burgundian control at Lyons and causing "absolute mayhem with the locals" seems equally improbable.[56] Within the borders of the Burgundian *regnum*, the status of Riothamus' contingent would no longer have been simply that of fellow allies of the Empire, but of guests under sufferance. The power of the Gibichung *reges* on their own turf was then unchallenged. Moreover, through their conjoint offices as imperial *magistri militum*, the *reges* constituted the official military arm of the Empire. They would have recognised the dangers of allowing an organised body of warriors to remain unemployed for any length of time within their territory, and taken swift action to deal with the problem. Riothamus' remaining band would either have been escorted to the nearest convenient border or, more likely, redeployed in imperial/ Burgundian service to a more useful purpose and location matched to their talents. These actions would no doubt have been backed by the threat of main force if necessary.

A logical choice for the redisposition of Riothamus' band would have been to return it to *Aquitania I.* That way the original *foedus* could have been maintained, and the provision of a buffer between Gothic and Burgundian territory continued. As it happens, the only part of *Aquitania* not yet over-run by Euric was Sidonius' Auvergne. At 4.2.4 above, it was suggested that Riothamus and Ecdicius may well have been known to each other, at least by reputation, at the time of the British defeat at Bourges. It is even possible that joint action against the Goths was then being contemplated. The re-appearance of Riothamus and his band as federate

[56] Wood, 1987: 261; Wood's comments in the 'Discussion' addended to Dumville, 1995: 208.

troops on the Avernian border with Burgundia would in such case have caused little consternation at Clermont. Further, if the British defeat in Berry occurred around 471, such a scenario might provide an answer to the puzzling question of how Ecdicius was able to assemble his highly effective 'irregular' army so quickly. He could have seconded some of the newly arrived British veterans, or for that matter employed the war-band wholesale. Even if Riothamus had arrived later in the piece, his men would still have been able to train and support forces already recruited.

The ability of at least some of Riothamus' men to speak a Celtic tongue could have been another factor potentially enhancing their ability to serve effectively in the Auvergne. Sidonius reveals by an offhand remark in one of his letters that Gaulish was still widely used in the region at the time. Amongst the triumphs the bishop attributes to his brother-in-law, Ecdicius, is his assisting of the leading families of Clermont to shed 'the scales of Celtic speech' ["*sermonis Celtici squamam*"] by teaching them Latin poetry and oratorical style.[57] If members of the local elite were at this point still using a Gaulish dialect alongside their Latin, then for the general populace Gaulish could well have been their language of choice. Many of the rural peasantry may have spoken Latin poorly, if at all.

Gaulish and Insular Brythonic are thought to have been closely related in the earlier Roman period.[58] Even by the late fifth century, it is likely that the Celtic dialects spoken by Riothamus' men and by the locals would have shared a range of common features. If these were not enough for mutual intelligibility, speakers of Brythonic should still have been able to pick up the local *patois* fairly quickly. There is also inscriptional evidence that Gaulish was spoken in western Armorica into the later imperial period, and it may well have survived to the end of the fifth century.[59] Thus, if the origin of a number of the 'British' band lay on the Continent rather than insular Britain, they may have encountered spoken Gaulish previously and the process of linguistic acclimation would already have been far advanced. Whatever the case, a facility with the local dialect may help explain why the Britons who were said to have enticed away the slaves of Sidonius' client seem to have had little problem with communication (see 3.2.3 above).

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[57] Sidonius, *Ep.* III.iii.2.

[58] Koch, 1992.

[59] For inscriptional evidence, see CISP PLMGT/1. For late survival of Gaulish, see Ellis Evans, 1990. Francois Falc'hun (for instance, 1981) maintained that the Breton language – or at least the Vannetais dialect of it – was basically Gaulish, though his theory was tendentious and has few supporters.

This brings our discussion once more to the context of *Epistulae* III.ix, Sidonius' letter to Riothamus. At 3.2 above it was suggested this epistle most likely dated from the period of Avernian resistance to Gothic invasion (471-75). It was further argued that the letter placed certain Britons on a military footing within the sphere of Sidonius' episcopal authority, and that Riothamus had administrative responsibility for these men. The letter was shown to be essentially the referral of a legal case for the addressee's decision, indicating Riothamus was then serving as at least a *de facto* functionary of the imperial bureaucracy, probably from a base not too far from Clermont. He was personally known to Sidonius, and his attendant social status and secular authority compelled the bishop to treat him with a suitable deference. While the construction of events offered so far in this section is broadly speculative, one cannot deny that it fits neatly with the situation of Riothamus and his men as given in Sidonius' letter to the British commander. We therefore propose this scenario be allowed to stand pending a better rendering of the data.

There is other evidence that Brythonic speakers were present around Clermont in the late fifth and/ or early sixth centuries. In his *Glory of the Martyrs*, Gregory of Tours makes the earliest extant references to a settlement that became the modern town of Thiers, situated not far east of Clermont on a hillside above the valley of the river Dore. At one point he names the site as "*Thigernum castrum*", and a little later as "*Tigernensi castello*" placed "*in huius urbis Arvernae territurio*".[60] In the 470s, the settlement would have been situated just within the borders of *Aquitania I,* on a minor road running parallel to the main Roman highway to Lyons. A fragmentary mosaic dated to the sixth century survives within the Church of Saint-Genes de Thiers, but archaeological evidence for any substantial occupation through most of the Roman period is lacking.[61] The place-name 'Thigernum' is almost certainly derived from the Celtic element *tigern**, usually glossed as 'lord' and common in late antique British and Irish nomenclature (see 4.5 above). Gaulish was still spoken in the Auvergne in the later fifth century, and it is true there is evidence for a *tigern** cognate existing in that language. However, there is no attestation of earlier use of the element in Gallic nomenclature.[62] Only in early medieval Brittany do we find *tigern** commonly used as a component of personal and place names. In the rest of France, Tigernum/ Thiers is the sole (surviving) exception.[63]

[60] Gregory of Tours, *Glory of the Martyrs* 51 and 66 respectively.
[61] Stern, 1964.
[62] Ellis Edwards, 1967; Whatmough, 1970; Billy, 1993, 1995.
[63] Gough-Cooper, 2003.

To extend our speculation on (very) thin evidence: Gregory uses '*castrum*' as a general descriptor for a small, and perhaps fortified, settlement. However, his alternative usage of '*castellum*' to describe Thiers may indicate that it had in fact recently functioned as a military garrison or stronghold. We thus have a settlement, quite possibly a military outpost securing the route between Clermont and the (Burgundian) Lyonnais, and plausibly named *de novo* in the late fifth century by Brythonic speakers. A credible rendering of *Thigernum castrum* is 'the Lord's fort', and *Tigernensi castello* might indicate something like 'the fort of the Lord's men'. If Riothamus and his retinue were indeed stationed in the vicinity of Clermont, it would be hard to imagine a better name for the military base of a commander whose cognomen could, as we have seen, be taken to mean 'Great Lord'.

5.5 The end of the Western Empire and afterward (AD 475-85)

Clermont was still holding out against the Goths when in 475 four bishops from sees in the Provence were empowered by the emperor Julius Nepos to carry through negotiations for the terms of a comprehensive treaty with Euric in Gaul. These bishops were Leontius of Arles, Graecus of Marseille, Basilius of Aix, and Sidonius' mentor, Faustus of Riez. With the Burgundian *regnum* offside, Nepos had apparently decided that defence of the Auvergne was more trouble than it was worth. His orientation towards Constantinople and the Mediterranean world probably made that decision all the easier. In return for a guarantee to a strip of Gallic territory east of the Rhone valley (including, not incidentally, the sees of at least three of the four bishops) Nepos agreed formally to surrender Clermont along with all else that Euric had already seized in Gaul.[64] Sidonius protested vehemently, but to no avail.[65] The Goths marched into Clermont and Sidonius was immediately exiled to house arrest in the fortress of *Livia* near Carcassonne in south-central Gaul.

Jordanes treats Euric's takeover in the Auvergne as a purely military victory:

> ... Ecdicius strove for a long time with the Visigoths but had not the power to prevail. So he left the country [*patria*] and, what was more important, the city of Averna to the enemy and betook himself to safer regions. When the emperor Nepos heard of this, he ordered Ecdicius to leave Gaul and come to him, appointing Orestes in his stead as Master of the Soldiers [*magistro militum*].[66]

[64] Mathisen, 1989: 268-71.
[65] Sidonius, *Ep.* VII.vii.
[66] Jordanes, *Getica* XLV. 240.

The latter part of this statement may be just another of Jordanes' blunders, though it has been taken seriously by a number of modern historians.[67] It is not implausible that along with his elevation to the rank of *patricius*, or shortly thereafter, Ecdicius was given the formal title of *magister militum* for his own theatre of conflict. This is made more likely by the fact that Nepos was not on speaking terms with the Gibichung *reges*, who had previously constituted the supreme imperial military leadership in south-eastern Gaul. Jordanes' statement implies, however, that Ecdicius' military success had caused Nepos to elevate him briefly to the position of military supremo for the Western Empire – the same office previously held by Ricimer and Gundobad, and which would shortly be taken up by Orestes.[68] This is not particularly likely to have been so, but if it were then his dismissal so soon after being appointed may have been the result a negative reaction to Nepos' decision to surrender the Auvergne. The capitulation would certainly have raised practical problems for Ecdicius, including the loss of family estates and the physical threat to his sister Papianilla, and to Sidonius. It may be that Ecdicius refused point blank to countenance the betrayal of the *civitas* he had fought so hard to defend. On the other hand, with peace in the offing, Nepos might simply have found this intractable enemy of the Goths a political liability he was willing to dispense with.

If the presumption that Riothamus and his war-band had recently been active around Clermont is correct, then they too would have been caught up in the deracination resulting from the Gothic takeover. From this point, however, all options become purely notional. Some of the British troops could have retreated once more into Burgundia, perhaps following Ecdicius. There they may have been taken into the service of one or another of the Gibichung *reges*, or encouraged to pass on speedily to further destinations. Some might even have been able to return home to their *patria*, wherever that may have been. Others could have made their peace with the Goths and been allowed to settle in the Auvergne, where some would doubtless have established liaisons with local women. Indeed, one clue in Gregory of Tours' *Historiae* suggests this might have been so.

One of the cleric's moral anecdotes concerns the feckless Palladius, Count of Javols (a city just south of the Auvergne) around 560.[69] This man attacked his local bishop

[67] For instance, Harries, 1994: 238.

[68] See Jones, A.H.M. et al., 1980: 384, 'Ecdicius 3'.

[69] Gregory of Tours, *Historiae* VI.39.

and, being dismissed from his post, returned to the family home at Clermont and committed suicide. His name might indicate a connection with the family Palladii, one of the local clans whose "illustrious stock" had included the wife of Bishop Simplicius of Bourges.[70] If so, this would probably have been via Palladius' mother who bore the good Roman name of Caesaria. Gregory tells us, however, that the cognomen of Palladius' father and predecessor as *comes* was "Britanus". This name can only be an ethnonym similar to the "Britto" who, Gregory also tells us, was a retainer of Count Waroch of Brittany at around the same period.[71] It is not implausible that this Britanus could have been a descendant of one of Riothamus' Britons who had married into a leading family of Clermont and stayed on.

Back at the fortress of *Livia*, Sidonius was compelled to endure many months of captivity, though not in particularly harsh circumstances. He tells us he had his own living quarters and though "sick with anxieties", his worst complaint concerned the din raised nightly by two old Gothic women near the skylights of his bedroom. He describes them as "the most quarrelsome, drunken, vomiting creatures the world will ever see".[72] Sidonius was eventually freed by the intercession his friend and correspondent, Leo of Narbonne, a Gallo-Roman functionary at Euric's court.[73] He then made his way to Bordeaux in an effort to petition the Visigothic king, but it was not until some time in 477 that he received permission to return to his see. Significantly, this came after his writing a species of mini-panegyric for Euric, which may have been held to signal his acquiescence to the new regime.[74]

In the meanwhile, the Western Empire had fizzled to its ignominious conclusion. Shortly after he signed the treaty with Euric, Julius Nepos had been driven out of Italy by the rebellion of his new generalissimo, Orestes. He fled to Dalmatia in August 475, where he maintained a government-in-exile until his murder in 480. Demonstrating the futility of the surrender of Clermont by the imperial court, Euric used Nepos' deposition as an excuse to seize the rest of Provence. In October of 475 Orestes placed his young son Romulus Augustulus on the throne, but within a year the mixed barbarian troops who formed the imperial military mutinied when their demand for one third of all land in Italy was refused. Orestes was beheaded,

[70] Sidonius, *Ep.* VII.ix. 240.
[71] Gregory of Tours, *Glory of the Martyrs* 60.
[72] Sidonius, *Ep.* VIII.iii.2.
[73] Sidonius, *Ep.* VIII.iii.1.
[74] Sidonius, *Ep.* VIII.ix.5.

Romulus deposed, and the coup leader Odovacar (who four years earlier had stood with Ricimer against Anthemius) decided to dispense with the bother of puppet emperors. In late 476 he declared himself 'King of Italy' and sent the imperial regalia back to the Eastern court. Although it was not appreciated at the time, the Western Empire – at least as a polity separate to Constantinople – was at an end.[75]

Sidonius himself outlasted the *imperium* by a number of years. He claims at *Epistulae* IX.xii.2 that "*tres olympiadas*" (3x4 = 12 years) had passed since his ordination. If this is to be taken literally, then Sidonius was able to continue his work as Bishop of Clermont into the 480s. Gregory of Tours provides a *terminus post quem* of sorts to Sidonius' term by telling us that his successor in the bishopric died in office in 490.[76] Ironically, after the turmoil of war and dislocation had died down, Sidonius' latest letters appear to show his closing years under Visigothic rule as a productive time of relative peace and personal contentment.

Of Riothamus and his men there is no other clue, though their fame may well have outlived them. In his *History of the Kings of Britain*, written in the twelfth century, Geoffrey of Monmouth awards his King Arthur a large-scale military campaign in Gaul against the Roman Empire. The expedition is set in the reign of the Emperor Leo I (457-74) and it terminates in Burgundy when Arthur is called back to Britain.[77] There may be echoes here of Constantine III, and the earlier usurpation of Magnus Maximus, both of whom led armies out of Britain to campaign on the Continent. However, given the coincidence of detail, it seems likely that Geoffrey's inspiration for this part of his Arthuriad can be found in the very real campaigns fought by Riothamus and his Britons in the Gaul of Sidonius Apollinaris.

Perhaps the association would not have displeased them.

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[75] For all this see Procopius, *History of the Wars* 5.1, together with Malchus, *Fr.* 14.

[76] Gregory of Tours, *Historiae* II.21.

[77] Geoffrey of Monmouth, *History of the Kings of Britain*, XI.1.

Conclusion

As was stated at the outset, the prime purpose of this dissertation has been to explore the nature and context of the intervention in later fifth century Gallic affairs of peoples described by Sidonius Apollinaris and other late antique authors as *Britanni* or *Brittones* ('Britons'). I have tried throughout to pursue this end in a clear and logical manner and to state my conclusions as they were drawn. In this closing section it is not therefore my intent to burden the reader with an endless re-statement of what has been accomplished, but to briefly review how the various strands of the work have contributed toward establishing the four thesis propositions set out at the beginning. Nonetheless, since Proposition One is more general, and relies to an extent on the validation of the other three, we shall deal first with these latter.

Proposition Two claimed: 'That while, for the *literati* of the late Roman West, 'Briton' (*Britto*, *Britannus*) consistently carried the connotation of Christian *romanitas*, the term was subject to a range of possible meanings – making identification of the precise origins of these individuals and groups impracticable.'

I demonstrated in Chapter One that the term 'Briton' was indeed subject to a range of possible meanings, encompassing both geographic and ethnic derivations, and that as a people *Britanni/ Brittones* could be viewed in a similar ethnogenetic context to other *gens* that were emerging in western Europe at around the same time. It was also noted that terminology was evolving to include categories of 'Britons' now permanently

located on the Continent. For authors such as Gildas, Prosper, Constantius of Lyons and Sidonius, we saw that *Britanni* connoted a people who were Roman and Christian, often set in contrast to an uncivilised and pagan 'Saxon' ethnic identity that was establishing itself in insular Britain during the fifth century. In the discussion at sections 3.2 and 3.3 it was further evident how closely elite individuals identifiable as *Britanni* operating in Gaul, such Riothamus, Faustus and Riochatus, fit this romanising and Christian image. Nonetheless, examination of evidence as to the precise geographical origins of these same persons proved inconclusive.

Proposition Three claimed: 'That the interconnected ecclesiastical networks of the British and Gallic Churches played a significant role in maintaining links between insular and continental 'Britons' and Gallic authorities, both clerical and secular, during the relevant period.'

This matter was specifically canvassed at 1.2.2, where we saw that in the first half of the fifth century deputations from Britain could arrive in Gaul seeking assistance from the Gallic Church, and that Gallic bishops such as Germanus of Auxerre and Lupus of Troyes could freely travel to the former Roman diocese in response. It was also noted that clerics, particularly bishops, often took on a more secular role as envoys and that Germanus was credited in his *vita* with military as well as ecclesiastical successes during his British mission. Passing, as it were, in the other direction, the presence of the *episcopus Brittonorum* Mansuetus at a Church council at Tours in 463 was discussed at 4.2.4 in context of a potential link between British groups and the *civitas* of Bourges prior to the employment there of a federate force described by the sixth century historians Jordanes and Gregory of Tours as 'Britons'.

As Bishop of Clermont, Sidonius Apollinaris maintained contacts with at least with two other churchmen of British origin, Faustus and Riochatus. These were discussed at 1.2.2 and again at 3.3, where it was noted that at the time Sidonius hosted Riochatus at Clermont he was carrying certain of Faustus' religious writings to yet a further group of Britons who were also known to Sidonius, though their nature and location remained unspecified. Moreover, prior to his accession to the bishopric of Riez, Faustus had presided for several decades over the island monastery of Lerins. This gave him direct links to the two Gallic bishops who had undertaken the mission to insular Britain c.429 – Germanus of Auxerre and Lupus of Troyes, the latter also

a known correspondent of Sidonius. Lastly, at 3.2 we saw that as Bishop of his see, Sidonius was directly involved in referring a secular legal case concerning certain Britons to the federate British military leader Riothamus for his adjudication.

Proposition Four claimed: 'That the various associations between these 'Britons' and the clerical author Sidonius Apollinaris, one of our chief sources of information concerning them, were extensive and complex, and important to any understanding of the 'British' intervention in later fifth century Gaul.'

At 1.2.1 we saw that Sidonius' grandfather, Apollinaris, had served as Gallic Prefect to the usurper Constantine III, who was perhaps the last continental bureaucrat to oversee the British Diocese. Further, Sidonius was demonstrably familiar with his grandfather's life and times, including the role played in events by Constantine's British *magister militum*, Gerontius. He thus had 'family' reasons for maintaining an interest in matters pertaining to Britain and Britons. We have already noted that Sidonius' close friend and spiritual mentor Faustus was a Briton, and kept in touch with other *Britanni*, in one case through the agency of the British cleric Riochatus. Constantius, the biographer of Germanus of Auxerre who wrote our only account of that saint's British mission, was also a member of Sidonius' circle. Indeed, he was most likely the same close friend who had helped Sidonius edit the several volumes of his *Epistulae* for publication, and to whom they were dedicated (see 1.2.2).

Sidonius' matter-of-fact reference to substantial group of *Britanni* operating in Gaul somewhere 'beyond the Loire' in his account of Arvandus' treasonous letter to Euric (see 3.1) again shows his familiarity with such peoples. However, the bishop's legal referral to Riothamus, mentioned above, demonstrates his direct contact with a leader of a British group in a secular context. At 5.1.2 it was seen that Sidonius had close links with the *civitas* of Bourges at around the same time that it was being defended from Visigothic attack by a federate British army commanded by Riothamus. Similarly, we noted at 5.4 the very real possibility that elements of the same British force were later involved in the defence of Sidonius' see of Clermont, and that some of these might have stayed on in the vicinity over the longer term. Overall we can see that Sidonius was intimately connected both with individual Britons and with the events surrounding Riothamus' expedition. His *Epistulae* are an indispensable source of information on these matters.

Having reviewed the three specific propositions, we now return to Proposition One, and the broad claim: 'That it is possible to construct a more accurate and detailed picture of the part played in later fifth century Gallic affairs by individuals and groups known as 'Britons' (*Brittones*, *Britanni*) than has previously been rendered.'

We have already reviewed much material contributing to the validation of Propositions Two, Three and Four, and hence, more broadly, to the substantiation Proposition One. However, in addition to what has already been discussed, we may further note that the exposition at Chapters Two and Five has served to place the appearance c.470 of Riothamus' federate British army in defence of the *civitas* of Bourges in the proper historical perspective of the concluding years of the Western *imperium*. In Chapter Four examination of the information provided by Jordanes and Gregory of Tours allowed the construction of as clear and detailed a picture as possible of what may actually have occurred at and around Bourges in the course of that campaign. As well, we were able to explore what might safely be said concerning the origin, nature and motivations of this 'British' force. At 5.1 the correct dating of the Gothic attack on Bourges was examined in detail. We were further able at 5.4 to venture a series of conjectures about the movements and activities of Riothamus and his men following their retreat into Burgundia – specifically with reference to their potential role, in concert with Ecdicius Avitus, in the final defence of Sidonius' Clermont against the Visigoths.

In the introductory section of this work it was seen that there had been little previous attempt to elucidate in detail the parts played in the society and politics of later fifth century Gaul by individuals and groups known as 'Britons' (*Brittones*, *Britanni*). The present work, on the other hand, has carried through a sustained analysis on the subject, canvassing all available sources of evidence in their proper contexts, and endeavouring to sort fact from supposition – even where such supposition has been accepted as fact by past authorities. The dissertation has therefore demonstrated that it has indeed been possible to construct a more accurate and detailed picture of the chosen topic than had previously been rendered. In sum, it is therefore justifiable to conclude that this work has done what it set out to do. That is, the dissertation has accomplished its stated purposes.

Having said that, I cheerfully acknowledge there is no last word on the subject. Time will undoubtedly bring forth new and relevant information, and provide better analyses of existing data. Unless some hidden hoard of documents comes to light – against all expectation – there may be no great progress to be garnered from new historical sources at any time soon, but we may assuredly look forward to further clarification of the archaeological and ethnological record for fifth century Britain and Brittany. For example, work only recently begun on the investigation of population movements through stable isotope analysis of dental material should help elucidate the relationship between actual physical migration from northwest Europe to insular Britain in that period and the accompanying construction of 'Anglo-Saxon' and 'British' identities.[1] A similar situation should in time apply for population movements from western Britain to the Armorican peninsula. Wider investigation of Y Chromosome and mtDNA evidence in both modern and early medieval populations, presently being conducted, should also contribute significantly toward the same ends.[2]

No doubt in another couple of decades we shall be able to look back at today's conclusions and shake our collective heads at their inadequacies. But then, that is the way of true scholarship.

May it ever be so.

FINIS

[1] See Budd et al., 2004

[2] For instance, Capelli et al., 2003.

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