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# **Power, the episcopacy and élite culture in the post-Roman Rhône Valley**

Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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## Abstract

This thesis discusses a number of issues related to the relationship between Gallo-Roman aristocrats and political power in Gaul during the fifth and sixth centuries.

The first chapter of the thesis opens with a discussion of classical literary culture and its rôle in defining and maintaining élite status in the later Roman empire while the second discusses epistolary literature specifically and the function of letter-writing in the period when Roman political power was fading and barbarian authority was only beginning to assert itself in Gaul. I show how individuals like Sidonius clung, in a world that was swiftly becoming entirely post-Roman, to a Roman cultural and political identity while others, such as Syagrius, embraced the opportunities afforded by the barbarian *regna*. I also look at the ways in which erstwhile Roman loyalists, such as Lampridius, Leo of Narbonne and even, to some extent, Sidonius himself were able to engage politically with the barbarians.

In my third chapter, I consider the growth of the ecclesiastical aristocracy and examine the ways in which those Gallo-Romans who entered the church redefined their position, creating, in the process, new criteria for the definition and expression of *romanitas* and *nobilitas*. I examine, in particular, the growth of aristocratic asceticism as a means for Roman nobles to gain new relevance and credibility in Gaul without having to enter barbarian service. Asceticism became, effectively, a means by which nobles could telegraph their religious zeal and personal merit to the wider Christian congregation and, by extension, establish their right to lead communities.

I move on, in my fourth chapter, to examine the part played by aristocratic kinship in episcopal elections in fifth and sixth century Gaul. Since the importance of kinship changed over time, as Frankish royal influence grew, this study necessarily catalogues the slow process by which the Gallic episcopate was brought broadly under the control of the Frankish crown and, to some extent, the accompanying diminution of the congregation's part in the choosing of a new bishop.

In the fifth chapter, I argue that Gallic bishops of the period were rarely interested in complex theology – or evangelism – and that modern expectations in this respect are at odds with the extant evidence. In this context, I look particularly at the famous monastery of Lérins, which is usually held to have been a great school of theology and centre of religious thought. Not only was Lérins not a theological centre, in fact very few bishops had any interest in theology, most had little understanding of anything other than the basic characteristics and positions of conventional Catholic doctrine and, accordingly, there were probably few or no real theological centres in contemporary Gaul.

In each of the remaining four chapters, I examine some facet of the life and career of Caesarius of Arles whose career and attitudes not only represent an acute departure from the episcopal aristocrat norm but also actually swept away much of the extant episcopal culture and established the pattern for following bishops. In my sixth chapter, I examine Caesarius' career and discuss how it was possible for someone from a distant city (Chalon) to become bishop of the most important see in Gaul and, in the process, offer a reevaluation of the commonly held interpretation of fifth and sixth century ecclesiastical factionalism. My seventh chapter examines Caesarius' relationship with the barbarian *regna* (particularly the Burgundians and Ostrogoths) and show how his interactions with the secular world were largely connected with his own desires to expand his episcopal authority. The eighth chapter explored the ecclesiastical agenda pursued by Caesarius in his councils during the 520s and the ninth and final chapter discusses rural Christianisation and argues that Caesarius was practically alone amongst contemporary bishops because of his interest in proselytisation. In these two final chapters, we shall see that Caesarius was very concerned with providing his subordinates with all the resources needed to conduct Christianisation at the lowest possible (*i.e.*, parochial) level.

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## Introduction

The nine chapters of this thesis cover a variety of topics concerned broadly with the involvement of Roman aristocrats in the Gallic church during the fifth and early sixth centuries, as Roman imperial power was in retreat and barbarian power beginning to establish itself. However, the ultimate focus is on Caesarius of Arles, his career, his experiences and political manoeuvrings within the barbarian *regna*, his ecclesiastical agenda, his family, his doctrinal thought and the sources of his theological understanding. In the course of events, any research seeking to contribute meaningfully to our understanding of Caesarius must necessarily pay some attention to Lérins, the “nursery of bishops”<sup>1</sup> which he briefly attended, and this thesis is no exception; I will offer a vision of Lérins which contradicts current scholarly orthodoxy and, in particular, a vision of Lérins’ doctrinal and educational influence on Caesarius which is not only unorthodox but, so far as I know, unique in placing Caesarius and the Lérinsian establishment on opposite political sides and in stressing the practical irrelevance of his time at Lérins from the perspective of his episcopal career.

I open this thesis with a discussion of Latin literary culture and its function before and after the barbarian migrations. I do so for two main reasons: first, the sources upon which my research depends – particularly the epistolary literature which has the potential to shed so much light on fifth century Gaul life, politics and thought – are themselves the product of this late antique literary world, a product which cannot and should not be severed from its wider Roman politico-cultural context. Second, I feel I must present the practical political function which literary culture filled for Gallo-Romans because one strand of my research maintains that cultural merit was gradually displaced by ascetic merit as a marker of aristocratic superiority (both over the non-élite population and over other non-ascetic aristocrats)

During the fifth and early sixth centuries, I contend, the political worth of literary culture was steadily diminished. As empire faded, the cultural system that had upheld the imperial élite lost much of their meaning. The aristocratic classes, including some nobles who abandoned their Roman loyalties in favour of the barbarians,<sup>2</sup> generally retained their broad attachment to Latin culture, as evidenced by the sheer quantity of literature they produced, but their cultural products no longer guaranteed them any practical rewards, any advancements or offices, in the political arena. New elements entered Gallo-Roman aristocratic culture, new means of facilitating the retention and expansion of aristocratic power. The retraction of Roman state authority left a vacuum in the cities of Gaul; civic leadership devolved into the hands of

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<sup>1</sup> Montalembert (1896) 1.464

<sup>2</sup> E.g., Syagrius, Leo of Narbonne, Lampridius.

bishops who were now granted a new kind of power, a new degree of influence, over the governance and organisation of their cities. Bishops became, in the absence of the Roman state, the leaders of what remained of Roman Gaul and the rise of their political function was matched by the transition away from a purely cultural means of defining and measuring *nobilitas* and towards means which were more easily comprehended by those outside the socio-cultural bubble of the Roman aristocracy, by which I mean both the non-élite inhabitants of Roman Gaul and also the barbarians.

I dwell on this here, at the very start of the thesis, because I feel strongly that recognising the connexion that existed between asceticism and power and between aristocratic clerics and ascetic centres is key to understanding certain elements of the conduct of episcopal aristocrats in this period. Credibility as a religious leader often derived from the presentation of oneself – or the presentation by hagiographical authors of their subject – as a figure who had undergone ascetic experiences or was, at least, associated with monastic centres renowned for their severe ascetic practices. An ascetic reputation became almost a *sine qua non* for reaching the Gallic episcopate and it was certainly far more important – and, from the perspective of the congregation, more relevant and comprehensible – than, for example, the knowledge of complex doctrinal thought which is too often assumed to have been inculcated at monastic centres like Lérins.

In the period during which Roman power ended, when barbarian *regna* controlled Gaul but before the Frankish kingdom had come to dominate the political and ecclesiastical landscape, when the opinions of congregations still mattered in the choosing of a bishop, the patina of pious credibility which asceticism granted was invaluable in gaining the goodwill of congregants and in convincing them of one's worthiness to receive a position of not only spiritual but also practical civic leadership over the community.

If asceticism an important factor in episcopal politics, kinship must not be overlooked either. Family connexions could be vital to one's chances of acquiring church office and many of the political alliances in this period, which Mathisen groups under the broad title of "factionalism",<sup>3</sup> were probably based on bonds of family, whether by marriage or blood. I hope to demonstrate this with a study, in my fourth chapter, of episcopal elections roughly during the later fifth and first half of the sixth centuries, which will look, in what I hope is a nuanced fashion, at the various types of kinship we find at work.

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<sup>3</sup> Mathisen (1989)

The examination of kinship is particularly relevant to Caesarius of Arles and his tenure, given that he owed his career to his relatives. While Caesarius was, in many very important ways, quite a deviation from the Gallo-Roman aristocratic standards of his time, we shall see that in certain ways – and his relationship to his family was definitely one of them – he remained very much a creature of the late fifth century Roman aristocratic *milieu*. In addition to relying on family relationships for political and career advancement, Caesarius was, as I shall show, very much attuned to the hard facts of contemporary political life; bishop or not, he would happily intrigue with foreign kings and seek to betray his own city – even his own congregation – if it brought him closer to his larger political aims. For all that it is easy to paint Caesarius as a ridiculously unworldly ascetic or as a zealot fixated on rural Christianisation at all costs, he never lost the will to engage coldly in political schemes with figures in the secular world; he never lost, either, his fixation with the advancement of his personal authority and the political subjugation of those he thought his rivals.

We will see that, when, at the second council of Orange, Caesarius finally exorcised the ghost of Pelagius from the Gallic church, that there was, in his actions, little of the compromise that other have seen;<sup>4</sup> rather than theologically-nuanced conciliation, Caesarius, at Orange as elsewhere, acted as an enforcer for the wider norms of the Catholic church and rammed through whatever was needed to bring the Gallic church into line with the rest of the church and the will of apostolic seat. Theological thought played no part in his decisions, at Orange or on much else, because, like so many other holders of the episcopacy in Gaul, Caesarius was neither knowledgeable nor interested in the forensic study of doctrine.

Amongst modern scholars, there are two, more than any others, against whose work I think my research must be measured. The first is Ralph Mathisen and the second William Klingshirn. Mathisen's work, particularly on prosopography, brooks few rivals; his monographs show his great command of the sources together with a peerless awareness of the individuals named therein and his efforts to map out the networks of social interaction between these individuals has, rightly, become enormously influential – indeed, in the study of the fifth century episcopate, I feel that his monographs are very much the fundamental secondary sources. And yet Mathisen is not without his flaws and, to a large extent, my own reading of kinship and my reinterpretation of Mathisen's ideas about factionalism are necessarily a response to what I perceive, rightly or wrongly, as errors in his reading of the period or his interpretation of the evidence. As it pertains to factionalism, I feel strongly that Mathisen places excessive weight on imagined political alliances which form out their

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<sup>4</sup> *E.g.*, Klingshirn (1994a) 142, but he is not unique.

members' common attendance of specific monasteries; in its place, I advance a vision of political factionalism based on family, in the widest sense, and I think that the evidence, though necessarily speculative to a degree, broadly supports my re-reading of factionalism.

Klingshirn, whose 1994 biography of Caesarius was not only the first major study of Caesarius' life and career in a century but, so far I know, the first such work in English,<sup>5</sup> is the scholar who seems, to my eyes, most likely to shape the direction of 'Caesarius studies' over the coming few decades. Although his monograph is quite modest in size, compared to Malnory and Arnold, its value for the student of the period is unquestionable; in any number of ways, it updates, builds upon and improves the older scholarship. But, even so, Klingshirn's focus is quite limited; he is a Catholic scholar who holds a chair at a major Catholic university and it is not necessarily surprising that he focuses on the spiritual side of Caesarius to the exclusion of much else. The political dimension is, if not ignored, then all too often subordinated to the purely religious, to the point where Klingshirn effectively invents elements of Caesarius' spirituality and advances them as fact despite the lack of support from the sources.<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, Klingshirn's religious agenda gives him an attitude towards his subject which, it seems to me, is so positive that it creates an unwillingness to interrogate the Caesarius presented in the sources. His optimistic approach to the *Vita Caesarii* leads to an overly literal and quite uncritical interpretation where Klingshirn sometimes acts more as advocate for Caesarius and the *Vita*.

My research, therefore, endeavours to locate Caesarius within a political rather than purely religious setting. It attempts to read Caesarius less as the spiritual figure he became to the later Catholic church and more as the contemporary civic leader he actually was, as the bishop of an important city whose future hung in the balance during the interminable wars of the early sixth century and as a man whose prime goal, revealed to us by the *Vita*, was to advance his own interests, his own authority, his own position of power. In both his religious agenda and in terms of his reaction to secular political sphere in which he necessarily participated, we will often see the self-interested political programme at work.

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<sup>5</sup> With a neat sense of timing, Klingshirn (1994a) was published exactly a century after the two other great studies of Caesarius by Malnory and Arnold (in French and German respectively).

<sup>6</sup> I shall show below that there are a number of instances where Klingshirn does this, but the best exemplar – because it is the most obvious – is his treatment of Caesarius' time at Lérins which is always vague and indefinite on detail (and on evidence) but which leaves no doubt about the massive impact his time at Lérins had upon him.

I would stress that I sincerely hope that my research complements rather than devalues the contributions of others, especially when those contributions are as titanic as those of Mathisen and Klingshirm.

I should now say a word about broad methodologies, not least because, in some regards, this is also a deviation from current norms. The most important source for my political reading of Caesarius is the *Vita Caesarii*.<sup>7</sup> In reading of this text, I contend that we must see it as a political *apologia*; it constitutes the extended justification offered by Caesarius' allies, by the recipients of his favour and, indeed, by his kinsmen for his career, for his advancement and for, oftentimes deeply controversial and very unpopular, policies. We must avoid the temptation to treat the *Vita Caesarii* as hagiographical fluff but, simultaneously, avoid reading it as literal editorial comment (a trap into which Klingshirm falls). The *Vita* is a political document rehabilitating particularly the early years but, in fact, the whole career of a bishop who changed irrevocably the shape and direction of the church in Gaul and who, in doing so, had ruffled many feathers amongst congregations, clergy, bishops and even barbarian *reges*.

My methodology, therefore, is to read the *Vita* as a work of spin, of propaganda, of political fashioning.<sup>8</sup> Its account is not fabricated but must be filtered carefully and the events it recounts located within a proper political context before it can attain full historical meaning and value. Similarly, I retain an unfashionable impression of the basic usefulness of Gregory of Tours, in the *Vita patrum* and *Historia Francorum* (both of which I use extensively in my chapter on kinship), despite Goffart's seeming debunking of the historical veracity (and worth) of his texts.<sup>9</sup> The current scholarly inclination to see Gregory's accounts as rhetorical constructs – or, rather, as satire – sits very much at odds with the usual characteristics of Latin satire as a genre and particularly late antique satire; it is, moreover, basically unsupported by the sources.<sup>10</sup> Like the *Vita Caesarii*, the works of Gregory are neither rhetorical fabrications nor literal accounts; rather they represent the public face that their authors wanted to put on events (whether to improve their own image or to vilify their enemies).

The source-texts often describe events that had happened within the authors' living memory (something especially true of the *Vita Caesarii*, but Gregory too regularly discusses events of

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<sup>7</sup> *Vita Caesarii episcopi Arelatensis*, MGH SRM 3, ed. B. Krusch (1896)

<sup>8</sup> Leyser (2000) 84ff. is very interesting on elements of the religious "fashioning of Caesarius" but does not go into as much depth – or as much breadth – as I would have liked, hence my efforts in this thesis to explore this idea within the framework of contemporary politics.

<sup>9</sup> Goffart (1988)

<sup>10</sup> Shanzer (2002) 32-33 deals with this topic very handily. What little I have to add to her argument, I discuss below.

his career and lifetime). One should therefore avoid seeing their accounts merely as the version of events which the authors wanted posterity to record; rather, they answered the questions and met the needs of their own day and of a contemporary readership. Necessarily, they contain a large element of verisimilitude, if for no other reason than contemporaries would have seen through outright invention. In dissecting the texts, as Goffart did, with a decidedly modern and anachronistic eye, one loses the sense of their original context; one loses the sense of their original readership, the audience at whom Gregory or Caesarius' biographers aimed. When contextualised, so far as we are able, within their original political framework and read as political or apologetic documents, we discern the contemporary concerns, agendas and disputes which shaped the construction of these sources and the direction of the late and post-Roman church in Gaul.

## Chapter One

### *Latin literary culture and its place in aristocratic society*

I begin with an examination first of the function of classical culture in the western empire before the migration period and then of the changes, more perceived than real, that apparently struck the classical literary product as Roman power receded in the west.

I have chosen to start here for the simple reason that their classical Roman culture was the basis of almost the entirety of Roman aristocratic identity; their culture engendered their sense of themselves not only as Romans separate from the barbarians but as aristocrats separate from the lower classes and as members of the broad body of those who served the Roman state and who were, in turn, protected and rewarded by that state.

Classical cultural was the mechanism by which Roman nobles interacted with one another and it continued to serve that function ever after Roman power in Gaul had begun to decline; even after the final death of the western empire, classical literary culture continued to hold a significant place in the minds of Gallo-Romans and, in the later Frankish regnum, sometimes of barbarians too. The significance of classical culture in this period – and the fact that our literary sources for the period are themselves the product of that culture – makes it, in my mind, a natural starting point.

In this chapter, I first discuss the function of classical culture and education before the fifth century in order to establish what we might call the western Roman norm. I then move on to examine the imagined decline of late Latin literature in order to confirm the continued importance classical culture held for western élites in the migration and post-Roman periods.

#### *(a) The function of classical education in the west before the fifth century: prestige, careers and socio-political interaction*

The most fundamental – and simplest – reason for participation in classical culture is that high Latin was the language of empire;<sup>11</sup> one could not have a political or legal career without a classical education. Careers within the bureaucracy of state were sought after because, in addition to a salary and security, they provided various privileges, such as lower rates of taxation than the general population,<sup>12</sup> as well as potentially advancing one to senatorial

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Nicks (2000) 187

<sup>12</sup> Heather (1998) 206-207

rank.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, a good bureaucratic position provided opportunity for one to function as a patron<sup>14</sup>.

Heather estimates that there were around three thousand “good” civil service posts (guaranteeing senatorial or top equestrian status) in each half of the empire; competition for them was naturally fierce but the tenure in office for superior bureaucratic posts was generally short, maximising the number of people who could hold them and ensuring a steady but controlled influx of fresh blood for the *élite*.<sup>15</sup> (For the civil service as a whole, including not only the “good” jobs but lower ranking ones, Christopher Kelly gives an estimate of around thirty-five thousand<sup>16</sup>.)

If the first reason for pursuing classical culture was the acquisition of *élite* status, a second, closely related reason was the retention of *élite* status. Instruction in classical literature allowed one’s elevation to the aristocracy but it could also provide the means by which one might continue to be accepted as a member of the aristocratic collective of the *boni*.<sup>17</sup> In Riché’s terms, education was “le privilège de l’aristocratie” designed to prove “que l’on est digne d’appartenir à la bonne société”.<sup>18</sup> Mathisen argues that acceptance by other members of the *élite* would, by itself, convey a veneer of respectability and “antiquity”;<sup>19</sup> naturally, in order to be accepted, an individual would have to demonstrate that he ‘belonged’ to the class, sharing their cultural ideals and aspirations, their elitism and sense of superiority.<sup>20</sup> Mathisen’s argument is sound, but there were additional reasons why an uneducated aristocrat, even if he did not exactly lose aristocratic status, would be sidelined and reduced to irrelevance, reasons that are more practical than the fear of being spurned by one’s fellow *senatores*.

Classical education was not vocational, in the modern sense; it provided no bureaucratic or administrative training but was instead meant to equip students with the tools they would need to be accepted in public life as a member of the *élite* and a *patronus*: the grammarian

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Barnes (1974) and Barnish (1988) 122-123

<sup>14</sup> Barnish, Lee & Whitby (2000) 170-171 on treating “any paid office...as a kind of private property”.

<sup>15</sup> Heather (1994) 184-185; cf. Marcone (1998) 356 on the internal gradations of the senatorial class as a consequence of its expansion.

<sup>16</sup> Kelly (2001) 177

<sup>17</sup> Mathisen (2001b) 102; cf. Ward-Perkins (2005) 151, “Very wealthy Romans...derived status from their costly libraries and their expensive literary education... [T]he display of social superiority could be very subtle”.

<sup>18</sup> Riché (1995) 45

<sup>19</sup> Mathisen (1993) 12, citing Jones (1964) 550; see also Hopkins (1961) on education as the marker of the antique “gentleman”, but cf. Salzman (2002) 69ff. on internal divisions amongst the aristocracy.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Dill (1898) 192; see also Momigliano (1955) 215, “the aristocrats of late antiquity gave a very wide interpretation to the term of family when they could claim illustrious relatives”.

taught the formal language used by Roman élites in their public rôle and the rhetor taught the proper modes of public speech and delivery.<sup>21</sup> Thus equipped, the ancient graduate could participate in all the forms of civic, public and political life: he could deliver speeches in the law courts or in public *fora*, draft letters on behalf of himself or clients, dedicate panegyrics to the emperor and so on, following the conventional Roman *cursus honorum*.<sup>22</sup>

An uneducated noble could do none of these things. He could not represent clients nor protect them from external pressures. Harries argues that, in resolving disputes in late antiquity, the socially inferior were not always completely helpless in the face of more powerful people;<sup>23</sup> nevertheless the main source of protection for the social inferior was a relationship with an influential patron whose intervention could resolve disputes in the inferior's favour. The uneducated aristocrat was thus incapable of upholding his end of the patron-client relationship within the sophisticated social framework of the late Roman *oikoumenê*.

Aristocratic ideology – the élite's own conception of what aristocracy meant – was entirely civil and rooted in its relationship to the state and to the laws and codes constituting the framework for the governance of all public life and resolution of all disputes. This conception of *nobilitas* not only stood in contrast to the more militarised aristocracies that emerged in the post-Roman west,<sup>24</sup> but necessarily excluded from the channels of aristocratic power anyone not fully versed in the rules, traditions and language of Roman civic life. Further, apart from no longer functioning as a *patronus*, the uneducated aristocrat would be ineligible for state offices, thus depriving him of potential influence. He would be unable to communicate with the emperor and the officers of the court in the language and forms dictated by the customs of the élite *Kulturwelt* and would be unable to make use of one of the most important features of late Roman aristocracy, *viz.*, access to the imperial centre.<sup>25</sup> So one sees that, although Mathisen's thesis has much to commend it, the greatest hazard facing an uncultured aristocrat was disconnexion from the mechanisms of state rather than simple exclusion by peers.

For the non-aristocrat, there were other reasons to see education as a path to power. Those who were highly active in late imperial literary spheres – poets and even teachers – were sometimes able to gain prestige and influence through their activities. The classic example of this is Ausonius who acquired extraordinary power as a result of teaching the future emperor

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<sup>21</sup> Kaster (1988) 11-14; Riché (1995) 9-11

<sup>22</sup> Heather (1998) 191-195.

<sup>23</sup> Harries (2001) 68-69

<sup>24</sup> On the post-Roman military aristocracies, cf. Liebeschuetz (2000) 235-236; Humphries (2000) 539-540; Wood (2000) 505; cf. Sid. Ap., *Ep.*, 6.12 on a Roman noble, Calminius, effectively conscripted by the Goths.

<sup>25</sup> Heather (1998) 197ff.; Kelly (1998) 150-152

Gratian (and, if we follow Sivan's thesis, which I do not find persuasive, single-handedly created the Gallic aristocracy in the process<sup>26</sup>). Ausonius' success came late in life, despite never having pursued a political career,<sup>27</sup> and was owed exclusively to his relationship with the imperial centre, a relationship built upon shared participation in classical culture, on the part of Ausonius and his pupil, and the favour with which Gratian viewed his teacher's talents.<sup>28</sup>

Ausonius was not unique in translating intellectual prestige into political influence,<sup>29</sup> although he seems the most dramatic example. In the same vein as Ausonius, panegyrics, delivered on occasions such as an *adventus*, allowed educated men to utilise classical culture to secure imperial approval through formalised declarations of loyalty and praise<sup>30</sup> that could be "as much a hymn as a speech";<sup>31</sup> panegyric proved to be a medium with which the Gallo-Romans were particularly connected.<sup>32</sup> Often putting forth an idealised and distinctly Plinian picture of imperial conduct,<sup>33</sup> panegyrics stressed the existing social system and presented the idealised emperor not merely as monarch but as the peak of the societal pyramid to which the panegyrists themselves belonged<sup>34</sup> and the upholder of social norms; in effect, the emperor was cast as the highest *patronus* in the empire with the panegyrists specifically and the élite generally as his faithful *clientes* needing and deserving favour. Many panegyrists must have been aristocratic, but others were educated non-élite men – often teachers – hoping to impress an emperor or other august visitor. (Nixon takes things too far saying that panegyrists were "nearly all schoolmen, teachers of rhetoric"<sup>35</sup>.)

Educated men possessed a means of gaining approbation from their superiors that was not available to the uncultured. Moreover, while the classic examples of panegyric pertain to emperors (e.g., Sidonius' panegyric for Majorian's *adventus* at Lyons or Claudius Mamertinus' New Year panegyric for Julian), encomiastic oratory was also applied to

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<sup>26</sup> Sivan (1993) *passim*, but esp. 14-20 (on the alleged, but to my eyes unproven, exclusion of Gauls from high office under Constantine and the tetrarchy) and 140ff. (on Ausonius' rôle in opening the door for Gallic aristocrats at the imperial court).

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Ausonius, *Praefatiunculæ* 2.15-18, *nos ad grammaticen studium convertimus et mox rhetorices etiam quod satis attigimus/ nec fora non celebrata mihi set cura docendi cultior et nomen grammatici merui*

<sup>28</sup> Kelly (1998) 152. See also Noy (2000) 23-24 on *scholastici* from around the empire migrating to Rome as part of their career plan; Drinkwater (1989a) 143 on rewards "for catching the imperial eye" and 144 on Ausonius as an *arriviste* lacking the decorum of established aristocrats.

<sup>29</sup> Drinkwater (1989a) 144, esp. n.44

<sup>30</sup> Heather (1998) 200; Stevens (1933) 30-33

<sup>31</sup> Stevens (1933) 31

<sup>32</sup> N. Chadwick (1955) 26-27

<sup>33</sup> Gutzwiller (1942) 100-102

<sup>34</sup> A. Wallace-Hadrill (1982)

<sup>35</sup> Nixon (1990) 3

magistrates and state officials, from whose support one might profit.<sup>36</sup> As Kaster notes, educated men might flock to governors or administrators to present their works in the hope of gaining a grandee's favour; moreover, these officials represented a more easily accessible source of favour than the emperor.<sup>37</sup> Whether the panegyric's subject was an emperor, governor or other official, classical culture offered access to the favours of superiors and that, by itself, proves the value of education for competitive and ambitious late antique élites.

Apart from the self-interested aspect, panegyric allowed communities to make requests for special privileges or exemptions from the governmental apparatus. Communities could correspond with the imperial centre only through the traditional channels: local aristocrats chose one of their own for his rhetorical skill and dispatched him to the relevant administrator, tasking him with gaining official assent to the community's requests.<sup>38</sup> A community which could draw upon educated individuals conversant in classical culture had a major advantage over communities lacking educated patrons. Rhetorical skill and literary training made one a better *patronus*, more capable of assisting one's community and *clientes*, from whose perspective it would have been infinitely preferable for local aristocrats to be well-educated. Since competition for *clientes* was severe, a failure to educate one's sons to would have left them unequipped for the competitiveness of late antique aristocratic life.<sup>39</sup>

Traditional Roman education brought tangible benefits for the holder, benefits which went beyond mere social acceptance by one's élite peers. Education could propel one from a comparatively humble background to the highest offices of the state and the highest aristocratic rank; participation in classical culture could erase one's social background, however low, and allow reinvention as *persona grata* in the eyes of the ruling class. It provided access to the officers and apparatus of state, to their favours and goodwill, allowing an educated man to act as a medium between the imperial centre and his community and *clientes*.

The best way to understand the importance of classical culture is to imagine how an upper class Roman might function without an education. Such a man could have no political career, no office or position of influence;<sup>40</sup> in the later empire, with so much depending on patronage and reciprocity, this alone – the lack of any source of political power with which to promote

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<sup>36</sup> Menander Rhetor provided an excursus on the formats for panegyrics intended for various grades of magistrate. See Russell & Wilson (1981)

<sup>37</sup> Kaster (1988) 123-124; cf. Woolf (1998) 1 on Eumenius' panegyric to the prefect of Lugdenensis I.

<sup>38</sup> Gillett (2003) 25

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Hayward (1999) 130-131, esp. n.34.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Harries (1994) 33 on the helplessness of Sidonius' uncles, Simplicius and Apollinaris, when accused of treason in 474, a defenceless state Harries associates with neither having ever held office.

the interests of friends and allies – would be a critical handicap. Lack of education meant isolation not only from fellow nobles but from the empire's traditional sources of power. The uneducated aristocrat's *clientes* would inevitably desert him for better patrons more capable of assisting and protecting them. Conceivably, even the aristocrat's own property might not be entirely safe from ruthless and influential neighbours; the violent appropriation of land appears to have been a serious problem in late antiquity<sup>41</sup> and it is reasonable to surmise that even a rich man could fall victim to it, if he were politically isolated and unable to call upon friends amongst the local authorities.

For all these reasons, education was an essential, integral part of life for aristocrats and the aspiring classes. Failure to engage with classical culture amounted to the resignation of any claim to aristocratic rank, of any hope of political influence, whether at court or in one's community, and potentially even of maintaining one's patrimony.

#### *(b) Classical culture in fifth century Gaul: the theme of decline*

The fifth and sixth centuries present a paradox. In the traditional view, drawn originally from Gibbon but not without modern adherents, the fifth century west represents a period of political and cultural decline as the Roman state was supplanted by the barbarian *regna* while Roman cultural achievements disappeared and the whole west fell into a dark age.<sup>42</sup> Yet this period saw an abundance of literary activity that compares not unfavourably with the rest of antiquity and, as Wood says, may represent a period of "greater literary production and achievement in the provinces than any that had come before".<sup>43</sup> Mathisen identifies a total of 475 letters from Gaul in the period 420-520, written by 45 individuals,<sup>44</sup> along with large *corpora* of Christian poetry and philosophically-inclined works;<sup>45</sup>

As Wood says, the mediaeval church played a great rôle in ensuring the survival of these texts down to the present;<sup>46</sup> as many extant sources were the products of Christians, often bishops, the church may have seen the preservation of these writings as part of its essential religious-cultural mission while perhaps paying less attention to non-Christian texts. Arguably, the

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<sup>41</sup> *C.Th.* iv.22

<sup>42</sup> Lot (1927) 115, speaks for many: "L'art est en pleine régression. La science est figée. La littérature est insignifiante", and 172ff. on "décadence de la littérature"; D. Williams (1996) is a more recent writer who pushes a vision of decline and fall which is highly derivative of Gibbon, esp. 279; Vance (1999) 110ff. gives an outstanding summary of modern scholarly reactions to the imagined "cultural decadence" of the later empire.

<sup>43</sup> Wood (1992) 9

<sup>44</sup> Mathisen (1981) 95, (2001) 103

<sup>45</sup> Liebeschuetz (2001) 321ff.; Av. Cameron (1998) 702-3

<sup>46</sup> Wood (1992) 9

prevalence of codices in the late antique west, in place of the rolls favoured in earlier centuries, played its part too. Even so, it can be said unambiguously that, whatever the upheavals facing Roman Gaul, the élite remained creative and highly productive in its literary output.

The writers of these texts were aristocrats and landowners and would, at the best of times, have had other responsibilities with regard to their estates and clients; as bishops or bureaucrats, they would have had the burdens of office to bear, legal affairs to oversee and political machinations in which to participate.<sup>47</sup> In fifth century Gaul, they had to manage more than these commonplace demands on their time: they faced barbarian invasion, war and political unrest; in Orientius' words, "All Gaul smoked as a single pyre".<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, Gallic aristocrats still found time to compose poetry and write one elaborate letter after another to wide circles of associates and relatives. In spite of the erosion of the western state and the presence of powerful barbarian confederations in Gaul, in spite of Orientius' bleak picture of life and Salvian's grim representations of élite corruption and a state which was "barely breathing",<sup>49</sup> the importance of the pen to Gallo-Roman noblemen was hardly lessened. Wood describes this paradox in our sources as a choice between "continuity or calamity", between the cataclysmic imagery of Orientius and Salvian, on one hand, and the survival of the traditional aristocracy, its culture and social networks on the other.<sup>50</sup>

I posit that one may explain why we find this degree of continuity in fifth and sixth century Gaul, why traditional aristocratic literary culture continued even as Roman political influence waned; further one may understand the ways in which Roman culture evolved to suit the needs of the élite in a political environment dominated no longer by Rome but by barbarian kings and warrior aristocracies. To do this, I begin by examining the theme of literary decline.

Amongst ancient writers,<sup>51</sup> there seems to have existed a perception that Latin literature underwent a general decline in late antiquity, so that, by the fifth century, Latin writers were less competent than their predecessors and literary styles had deteriorated into faulty imitations of what had gone before.<sup>52</sup> Latin literary culture underwent a "rapid movement of decline"<sup>53</sup> leaving writers and works that were degraded and derivative in an "an age of

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<sup>47</sup> Cf. Marcone (1998) 350ff.

<sup>48</sup> Orientius, *Commonitorium*, 2.184, *uno fumavit Gallia tota rogo*

<sup>49</sup> Van Dam (1992) 327

<sup>50</sup> Wood (1992); cf. Mathisen (1993) 27ff.

<sup>51</sup> e.g., Sid. Ap., *Ep.*, 2.10.1, 5.10.4; Mamertus Claudianus, *Epistula ad Sapaudum*.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Lot (1927) 115, on the weakness and decadence of late Latin literature.

<sup>53</sup> Dill (1898) 438-439

declining taste”.<sup>54</sup> The whole combines to create “a picture of continual cultural decay”.<sup>55</sup> Browning wrote recently that “this elegant society, so conscious of being Roman, was living on an inherited stock of cultural capital which it could not replace”.<sup>56</sup> In an approach that owes much to Gibbon, the decline of imperial power is paralleled by the degeneration of Roman culture with the deterioration of one feeding the other. Williams’ recent monograph speaks of late antiquity’s “decayed literature and philosophy” as one symptom of a wider malaise along with “a Germanised army, a sick economy, a governmental structure not worth keeping and a frontier hardly worth defending”.<sup>57</sup>

Post-Constantinian poetry, to some scholars, reflects the degeneracy that destroyed the empire; in the poetry of Ausonius, one scholar saw the “senile degeneration of literature”<sup>58</sup> while another spoke of the “classicizing emptiness” of poets of the period.<sup>59</sup> These judgments could be dismissed as exceptionally harsh, but they are indicative of a trend in scholarship at least since Gibbon (and perhaps since the humanists of the Renaissance), which has emphasised the classical (*i.e.*, Augustan) aspects of late Latin literature as correct and aesthetically satisfying while dismissing as vulgar corruption those aspects which deviate from precedent or which are unique to late antiquity reflecting, perhaps, the aesthetic values of the period.

To a considerable degree, I find the adjudication of literary and stylistic quality in late antique literature problematic, even awkward. Classical literature was, by its nature, intensely conservative. The language of public life – which includes the language of poetry and letter-writing – constituted an artificial and formal language not subject to regular linguistic change;<sup>60</sup> deviation from the classical norm was evidence of educational failings and revealed dubious social origins.<sup>61</sup> This linguistic and literary conservatism looked to the past for inspiration in terms of language, subject and metre; we see the extremes to which the impulse for classicising and archaising *variatio* can be taken with the fifth century Gallic writer

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<sup>54</sup> Raby (1957) 1.69

<sup>55</sup> Stevens (1933) 80-81

<sup>56</sup> Browning (2000) 875

<sup>57</sup> D. Williams (1996) 279

<sup>58</sup> Rose (1936) 529

<sup>59</sup> Hadas (1952) 382; admittedly, neither Hadas nor Rose is an expert on the works of Ausonius, but the essential point – that prejudice against late Latin is often so widespread that the criticism is almost a knee-jerk response – remains.

<sup>60</sup> Heather (1994) 183

<sup>61</sup> Heather (1994) 193

Fulgentius and his *Expositio sermonum antiquorum*, a glossary of more than sixty archaic and obsolete words, the use of which would allow one to shine as a Latinist.<sup>62</sup>

One of the fundamental problems for the study of classics over the past two centuries is that many scholars have adopted what they perceive to be the tastes of high status Romans and have followed Roman prejudices in emulating a small corpus of authors. Just as élite Romans would have rejected as degraded and deficient any writings not firmly rooted in the models drawn from the classical past – from Vergil, Lucan, Ovid, Horace and the other writers whose works were deemed to form the peak of civilised literary achievement – so classicists have often looked at the differences between late antique and Augustan verse and have construed the differences not in terms of a literary change or evolution but in terms of decay and corruption.<sup>63</sup> Raby spoke positively of Sedulius because his epic “remained more faithful to the past [than contemporary prose], and imitated as closely as possible such a classical model as Virgil”, while Juvencus’ work is described as “a faithful and simple narrative of the Gospel story, clear and unadorned, but thoroughly Virgilian even to the imitation of the great poet’s characteristic archaism”.<sup>64</sup> Avitus is dismissed as “an exponent of the worst excesses of an age of declining taste” for his prose but his epic *De spiritualis historiae gestis* is appreciated for having “kept to the older tradition in...verse”.<sup>65</sup>

Raby’s interpretation of the language of Juvencus as fundamentally Vergilian is broadly correct, but his interpretation of Sedulius overlooks the poet’s non-Vergilian strata<sup>66</sup>; this, however, highlights the very problem I discern: for Raby and others, the appearance that an author is following Vergilian language and stylistics conveys an instant veneer of respectability, authority and competence. The possibility that an author may have deviated from Vergil – or from classical antecedents generally – immediately strips his work of worth and renders it decadent. The only metric which can be applied in gauging the worth of late antique literature is its similarity to a narrow corpus of Golden and Silver age Latin; indeed, the entire concept of Golden and Silver ages of literature – and the inferiority of one to the other – underscores the issue I am describing.

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<sup>62</sup> Cf. Roberts (1989) 58, “...the *grammaticus* of late antiquity particularly relished the opportunity to explain ‘hard words’.”

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Brown (1980) 17 on the view of late antique literature as “having declined through having departed from the ideal of classical antiquity” and (1968) 103 where he characterises Pelagius as a “Late Roman man” for whom “[t]he passing of time...could only bring about decline”.

<sup>64</sup> Raby (1953) 109 on Sedulius, 17 on Juvencus; cf. Roberts (2001) 270ff. on the Vergilian language in the *Vita Sancti Martini* of Venantius.

<sup>65</sup> Raby (1957) 1.69

<sup>66</sup> R. P. H. Green (2006)

A serious danger attends such an attitude. If scholars assume that any piece of literature that fails to duplicate the style and language of classical authors is *ipso facto* flawed and inferior, we necessarily refuse to consider the possibility of understanding (or even of thinking that it is worthwhile to attempt to understand) late antique conceptions of aesthetic worth and artistic taste. If we follow Raby's reading, the only acceptable guiding principles for literary taste are those of the Augustan age. All else is unclassical and, therefore, proof of "declining taste"<sup>67</sup> and of the writer's failure as a poet.

Scholars like Hadas, Rose and Raby, to name just a few, found it difficult to believe that authors would willingly move away from or modify in any way the classical model and the classical literary *Weltanschauung*. Their approach maintains that deviation from the classical pattern cannot be the result of a conscious choice or of natural literary development and, therefore, can be explained only and always as the result of a failure of education, taste or ability on the writer's part. When such scholars, therefore, speak positively of the merits of a late antique poet, they are usually speaking positively of the poet's exposure to classical culture and his ability to synthesise works which are clearly derived from literature learnt by heart in the classroom. However, the notion that deviation from classical Latin is evidence of incompetence insists that Latin literature be placed in an isolation chamber, that it be forbidden from innovating or evolving, that the aesthetic tastes of Roman society must remained fixed, identical to those of the Augustan age, and that any change can only be negative.

This conception gives us a picture a late Roman society where individuals may wish to engage in the traditional literary activities of the Roman élite's *Kulturwelt* but who decreasingly have the ability or training to undertake such activities competently. Moreover, it presents late antique writers and audience<sup>68</sup> as boorish, uncouth and inept, lacking the elevated tastes ascribed to the literary élites of the republic and principate and trying, all the while, to impersonate the cultural and literary customs of those more sophisticated eras. This archetype, however, creates a model of classical culture which is rigid, unchanging and absolutely permanent, denying the possibility or desirability of variation or change in any form. It must, therefore, be rejected. The change in Latin literature in late antiquity – or, as one might say, the progression from Golden and Silver Latin towards forms of literary expression which we may think of as distinctly 'late antique' – was not the result of decay or degradation in the tastes of the élite, but of changes in the conceptualisation of what

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<sup>67</sup> Raby (1957) *loc. cit.*

<sup>68</sup> Rose (1936) 529 comments on the popularity of Ausonius in spite of the "feebleness of most of his writings".

constituted an aesthetically-pleasing piece of literature and in the ways in which educated Romans interpreted classical, particularly Augustan, poetry.<sup>69</sup>

When the educated classes of late antiquity read the classics, they did so “with the eyes of late antiquity”,<sup>70</sup> interpreting them according to the standards of their own day and assuming, as they did so, that the Augustan world and the late antique world were fundamentally the same; they did not distinguish sharply between the various epochs of the empire, as moderns do, and did not recognise that their own aesthetic tastes might differ from those of their Augustan predecessors. The literary conventions and paradigms of late antiquity were, as Roberts argues, heavily influenced by the visual arts generally<sup>71</sup> – Harries describes “the preoccupation with the visual which was a feature of the late antique literary style”<sup>72</sup> – so that poetic practices associated with *ekphrasis* were adopted much more widely within the composition of late Roman literature.<sup>73</sup> Roberts shows that many of the ‘shortcomings’ of late antique poetry – for example, the complaint that it is episodic in nature and therefore lacks the unity of classical poetry – are innovations (some with roots as early as the Hellenistic period), rather than any kind of stylistic degradation.<sup>74</sup> In a similar vein, Nora Chadwick argued, fifty years ago, that Ausonius’ “prosaic themes”, the source of so much criticism, actually recurred in much of Latin literature from the very beginning “till the Roman schools were finally closed”;<sup>75</sup> thus, it is not even an innovation, let alone a sign of decay.

In rejecting the reflexive criticism of late antique literature, we need not abandon our critical faculties; we need not pretend that Venantius has all the craft and power of Pindar or Bacchylides, but the interpretation of any deviation from the classical corpus as a sign of ignorance (*i.e.*, the notion that the existence of new techniques proves that old techniques have been forgotten) or declining taste (*i.e.*, the use of any literary form which does not have a classical precedent or the use of classical models in a new way is taken as proof that writer did not understand classical culture and was unable to duplicate Augustan models) must be rejected.

I am reluctant to compare, for example, Avitus’ *De spiritualis historiae gestis* with Vergil’s *Aeneid*, largely because the talents of Vergil (in Green’s words, “the unchallenged and

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<sup>69</sup> Roberts (1989) 66-70

<sup>70</sup> Roberts (1989) 68

<sup>71</sup> Roberts (1989) 65-118

<sup>72</sup> Harries (1994) 45-46

<sup>73</sup> Roberts (1989) 55-56

<sup>74</sup> Roberts (1989) 56-57

<sup>75</sup> N. Chadwick (1955) 53-53

unapproachable master"<sup>76</sup>) brook few rivals in any period, but I cannot see how Avitus is inept. His technique is different, as are his purposes in writing, and he may lack some of Vergil's finesse and genius, but to cast him as incompetent because of these differences is an unconstructive approach.

When even sixth century authors, such as Venantius, were able to utilise traditional Roman metres and poetic styles effectively, it is unhelpful to criticise them for deviating from forms and techniques favoured in the republican and Augustan periods more than half a millennium earlier. Indeed, the continued production of classicising poetry demonstrates the continued importance which classical culture held in the post-Roman world.

### *(c) Classical culture in post-Roman Gaul: the reality of decline*

We may reject the traditional notion of literary decline as obsolete and outdated, but we still face contemporary voices decrying the state of fifth century literature. Sidonius captures the view best: nothing good is being produced and the current generation cannot match the achievements of the past.<sup>77</sup> Mathisen has approached this issue and, although I do not agree with all his points, his argument is illuminating. He emphasises the difference between qualitative and quantitative decline, arguing that the degeneration of classical literature in the fifth century was not in the *quality* of the work produced but in *quantity* as decreasing numbers received the education necessary for traditional literary activities.<sup>78</sup> He argues further that the theme of qualitative decline, discussed repeatedly by our ancient sources (especially Sidonius), was merely a literary *topos* motivated by modesty or *pudor*.<sup>79</sup> I will discuss the issues raised by Mathisen and, while accepting that the major hurdle facing classical culture in the post-Roman period was a decline in the number of educated individuals, will argue that the aristocratic classes of fifth and sixth century Gaul actually perceived a general decline in both quality and quantity of literature.

The central point Mathisen makes is that nowhere in contemporary literature do we find evidence of the universal decline in quality that the sources bemoan. For all the protestations of decline, no extant author cites another's work as degenerate; indeed, amongst epistolographers, there is a continued shared sense of superiority with the writers perceiving and presenting themselves as members of the élite minority who continue to appreciate and

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<sup>76</sup> R. P. H. Green (1991) xx

<sup>77</sup> Sidonius Apollinaris, *Epistulae* 8.6.3

<sup>78</sup> Mathisen (1988) *passim*, esp. 49, (1993) 105-110

<sup>79</sup> Mathisen (1988) 47, (1993) 105-110; cf. Stevens (1933) 109 on "the extreme modesty" of Sidonius.

participate in classical culture.<sup>80</sup> Furthermore, in terms of numbers of extant works, the fifth century produced an admirable quantity of literature over a comparatively short period.<sup>81</sup>

Nevertheless, Mathisen's argument remains simplistic. It was unusual for ancient writers of any period to engage in the kinds of criticism he expects (although, judging from Ausonius' attacks on Silvius Bonus, motivated by Silvius' criticisms, they sometimes did). The absence in our sources of specific examples of degraded literature or of the names of incompetent writers is not proof that no such literature existed nor that the fears of Sidonius and his fellows about the declining merit of contemporary literature were unfounded. Indeed, Mathisen himself recognises this when he says that aristocrats made real efforts to avoid embarrassing their fellows and that the work of anyone who had been accepted as an aristocratic equal automatically received fulsome praise.<sup>82</sup>

Mathisen answers his own point: our sources provide no examples of degraded literature because to do so would have been impolite to other members of their own class, the "magic circle of the well born or cultivated".<sup>83</sup> It does not prove that there was no real reduction in the quality of contemporary literature. While we cannot dismiss all late Latin literature out of hand, we should accept that something real lay behind our sources' complaints, something which they perceived and which led them to fear for the future of letters.<sup>84</sup> At the root of the complaints of decline lay the deterioration of the education system.

During the course of the fifth century, the educational infrastructure of the empire, patchy at the best of times, degenerated to the point where many (particularly non-élite) individuals would have found it impossible to receive a formal education. This must have affected the quantity of literary works being produced: with fewer people receiving an advanced education, fewer would have taken up the pen to compose. Moreover, with the withering of the civil service in the west, education was no longer a passport to a political career and influence; this became increasingly true as barbarian alternatives supplanted traditional Roman avenues to power and influence. Indeed, while the Visigothic *reges* were generally tolerant of scholars during the first half of the fifth century, by Euric's reign educated Gallo-Romans in Toulouse were confined exclusively to "tâches militaires".<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Mathisen (1988) 48-49, (1993) 12

<sup>81</sup> Wood (1992) 9

<sup>82</sup> Mathisen (1993) 107; cf. N. Chadwick (1955) 55 on Ausonius' "excessive appreciation of the second-rate literary work of his own friends".

<sup>83</sup> Rousseau (1976) 357

<sup>84</sup> Cf. Rousseau (1976) 357 on aristocratic concern for their "common literary heritage".

<sup>85</sup> Riché (1995) 50; cf. Haarhoff (1920) 24 for a contradictory and incorrect view of Euric which sees the Visigothic court as "the last refuge of Roman letters" and Sid. Ap., *Ep.*, 6.12

In pragmatic terms, the classical education had only ever had an extremely limited application. It cannot be said to have prepared an individual for specific tasks. Rather, its great benefit lay in the prestige attached to it, the veneer of social acceptability it provided. The educated man's elevated status was evidenced by his sophisticated language and rhetorical skill and his knowledge of classics. Yet, in the barbarian *regna*, unless one was fortunate enough to serve a monarch who respected the Roman cultural achievement, this prestige ceased to carry any weight.<sup>86</sup> At the very heart of cultural decline is the fact that, in post-Roman Gaul, one did not absolutely require a close involvement with classical culture to gain the favour of the *rex* nor was an uncultured landowner necessarily in danger from his more sophisticated fellows.

Education did not immediately lose its cachet, its ability to provide an air of distinction; it continued to impart a kind of prestige to its possessor, but it was no longer the *sine qua non* for the ambitious. Moreover, the respect which had attached to education in former times was no longer universally given; while Sidonius and his fellows paid great respect to educated men, the barbarian kings and élites did not necessarily do the same. As far as the study of classical letters was concerned, prestige was now very much in the eye of the beholder; the ability to converse in high Latin or to produce classicising literature impressed Sidonius' circle, but might garner little respect from barbarians whose aristocracy constituted a military, rather than civil or cultural, élite and who measured aristocratic merit in ways quite different from the senatorial class.<sup>87</sup> There were certainly barbarians who romanised, to some extent, to judge by the proliferation of Latin inscriptions on barbarian gravestones and on Burgundian belt buckles<sup>88</sup> – and the *Anonymus Valesianus* suggests similar developments were not unknown amongst the Ostrogoths<sup>89</sup> – but the fundamental point is that cultural inclinations and training were no longer absolutely necessary.

Further, the acquisition of an education would have grown ever more difficult as the fifth century progressed and it would not necessarily have been the worthwhile investment that it had been in the fourth century. For the most part, those who continued to participate in literary culture, those who were educated and who composed and disseminated works, came from aristocratic backgrounds. They were individuals with the cash to pay for private tutors

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<sup>86</sup> Cf. Riché (1995) 50-51 on the Burgundian kings who were generally favourably inclined towards Roman culture – and, indeed, to all things Roman.

<sup>87</sup> Heather (1994) 196-197

<sup>88</sup> Deonna (1945) 305-319

<sup>89</sup> *Anonymus Valesianus*, 12, *Romanus miser imitatur Gothum et utilis Gothus imitatur Romanum* ("The wretched Roman imitates the Goth and the rich Goth imitates the Roman"), a quotation attributed to Theoderic; cf. Bierbrauer (1980) 497-513

and a social background which valued literature for its own sake, as a marker of élite status from the days before the *Völkerwanderung* and simply as part of the *mores maiorum* which, even if it had no intrinsic value and offered no opportunity for advancement, nevertheless kept one connected to one's ancestral culture.

For the rest of the population, it is difficult to overstate the extent to which the availability of classical education receded in this period. The state, largely from self-interest (*i.e.*, to provide a pool of candidates for the civil service and to ensure that competent teachers would be available to educate the children of local élites), had funded municipal schools which those aspiring to a civil service career could attend. With the economic decline which accompanied the barbarian invasions and other disturbances of the fifth century, it became more difficult for cities to fund these institutions; moreover, with the withering of the western state, the utility of education would have been thrown into question as advanced training in rhetoric would not necessarily have been any more useful than basic literacy.

Simple literacy and numeracy were of considerable use in the post-Roman period. Caesarius tells us that scribes, presumably with rudimentary skills rather than sophisticated instruction in the classics, were employed by the merchants of Arles at the start of the sixth century ("Merchants who do not know their letters make use of hired scribes"<sup>90</sup>); amongst the barbarians, Goths apparently learnt Latin<sup>91</sup> while the Frankish aristocracy of the sixth and seventh centuries was also generally literate<sup>92</sup> and there are examples of public archives (*gesta municipalia*) in which deeds and legal documents could be lodged.<sup>93</sup> Enough people had access to a basic education to satisfy the requirements of merchants and administrators. Yet, the Latin word *litteratus* and its antonym, *illitteratus*, refer to one's broad state of cultural enlightenment, not merely to literacy *qua* literacy;<sup>94</sup> it is perhaps better translated as 'cultured' than as 'literate'; moreover, as Woolf and Heather say, barbarians were not stereotyped by Romans as illiterates but as inarticulate and irrational, driven by tempers and whims.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Caesarius, *Sermo* 6.8, *Negotiatores qui cum litteras non nouerint requirunt sibi mercenarios litteratos*; cf. Heather (1994) 186

<sup>91</sup> Heather (1996) 257; but Burton (2002) 418 argues that Goths did not learn Latin widely because it was not necessary for the purposes of administration. I prefer Heather's view that "many Goths" knew at least a little Latin, not least because many Goths were themselves not native speakers of the Gothic language.

<sup>92</sup> Wood (1990) 80

<sup>93</sup> Wood (1990) 65

<sup>94</sup> Grundmann (1958) 1-66

<sup>95</sup> Woolf (1994) 84; Heather (1999) 236

Many people in post-Roman Gaul were basically literate while still being *illiteratus* in traditional terms. The outcome of the retraction of classical education was twofold: first, fewer people received an advanced classical education; second, a natural consequence of the first, fewer competent teachers of rhetoric and literature were produced, a fact that led to less-than-qualified candidates being employed to teach.<sup>96</sup> Since the reputations of schools were often based on the prestige and successes of former students, incompetent teachers would produce students not fully versed in their subject and would, in turn, undermine the school's standing and discourage others from studying there.<sup>97</sup> This would have been a particularly troubling phenomenon in Gaul, given the excellent reputation of Gallic schools and *professores*.<sup>98</sup>

Riché, perhaps the most accomplished scholar of late antique and early mediaeval education, has suggested the year 474 as the earliest possible date for the end of municipal schools in Gaul. He bases this on Sidonius who, in a letter to Mamertus Claudianus, apparently mentions the existence of municipal chairs of rhetoric (Riché translates Sidonius' *municipales et cathedrarios oratores* as "rhéteurs municipaux, titulaires d'une chaire"<sup>99</sup>) although their geographical location is not specified. However, Sidonius' evidence sheds less light than Riché's suggests and his proposal of 474 as an absolute point before which municipal schools still existed is misleading.

Sidonius' letter possibly shows that, in some places, vestiges of the state *may* have survived but, even so, it is not clear that Sidonius is using this terminology in a technical sense nor that the grand-sounding "rhéteurs municipaux, titulaires d'une chaire" are being discussed in a complimentary way. In fact, when we look at the letter as a whole, we see that Sidonius is attacking these "provincial or academic orators",<sup>100</sup> criticising their abilities and remarking that they "waste their time in extremely unliterary types of literature".<sup>101</sup> The exact status of these "rhéteurs municipaux" is not clear; as Marrou suggested, they may have been tutors in the service of a noble family rather than genuine professors;<sup>102</sup> but, even if they held actual chairs of rhetoric, the quality of their work, to judge from Sidonius' scorn, was less impressive than Ausonius' Burdigalan *professores*.

<sup>96</sup> E.g., *De quodam Romano qui magister voluit esse*. Ennodius, *Carm.* 2.96

<sup>97</sup> Kaster (1988) 92; Nixon (1990) 22 discusses Eumenius' panegyric to the governor of Lugdunensis praising his old school and calling for government support in restoring it.

<sup>98</sup> Al. Cameron (1984) 54; cf. Harries (1994) 39 who notes the benefits for a city with a "reputation for scholarship".

<sup>99</sup> Riché (1995) 35 citing Sidonius Apollinaris, *Ep.* 4.3.10

<sup>100</sup> Anderson's translation in the Loeb edition, p.79; I wonder if *cathedrarios* is being used ironically.

<sup>101</sup> *illiteratissimis litteris vacant*. Sid. Ap., *loc. cit.*; cf. Pliny, *Ep.*, 1.10.9 *scribo plurimas sed illiteratissimas litteras*.

<sup>102</sup> Marrou (1956) 344

Even if Riché is correct in assuming the existence of functioning municipal schools with competent *professores* somewhere in Aquitaine in 474, it is nevertheless clear that such schools and teachers were not widespread by the late fifth century. At the same time, it is not unreasonable to think that some traditional cultural institutions, such as schools, might have survived in some form in the south of Gaul, where Roman political power lingered and the aristocracy was able to maintain a semblance of its pre-barbarian existence;<sup>103</sup> but, even so, the possible mention of a single school of unspecified location should not fool us into thinking that municipal schools, if they still existed, were in anything other than their final throes nor should we imagine that the staff of this school were educated to the same degree as Ausonius had been when he taught in the same region – perhaps the same city – a century and a half earlier. In actual fact, Sidonius states unambiguously that they were not.

The reduction in the number of people receiving an education must have fostered a sense of insecurity on the part of the Gallo-Roman élite. At the same time as their social, economic and political positions were being threatened, the position of their sophisticated culture (in both its literary and oral aspects<sup>104</sup>) was also being undermined. This pervasive sense of insecurity fed the contemporary notion of literary decline. Authors such as Sidonius saw a sharp falling off in numbers of people attending the Gallic schools and, indeed, a decline in the number of functioning schools. Graduates of the remaining schools must, in many cases, have failed to meet the standards of the likes of Sidonius, which is hardly surprising since the teachers themselves were often inadequate.

Educational decline was interpreted as part of a wider degeneration of élite culture. As late as the sixth century, absolute illiteracy was comparatively rare amongst powerful and wealthy men,<sup>105</sup> but, nevertheless, the Latin of Gregory of Tours is inelegant when compared to that of earlier times.<sup>106</sup> In parts of southern Gaul, something closer to traditional Roman education

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<sup>103</sup> Browning (2000) 874-875

<sup>104</sup> Av. Cameron (1998) 704

<sup>105</sup> Harris (1989) 312-313

<sup>106</sup> Liebeschuetz (2001) 334, but esp. Goffart (1988); I am conscious of, but completely unconvinced by, the current consensus that his inelegance is a satirical affectation. I see issues with Gregory's Latinity that cannot be explained merely by appealing to the idea that he was pretending for satirical effect. Goffart (1988) 197-203 stresses the vision of Gregory as a satirist whose apparent simplicity, both of speech and morality, act as a foil for the immorality he describes; however, such arguments fail because they lack any real grounding in or understanding of the Roman satirical *genre* and its conventions – points which Shanzer (2002) 32-33 picks up admirably. If one were to call the simplistic prose works of Gregory satirical, one would be using a purely modern – not ancient – definition of satire. The hallmark of late antique satire was complex language set in formalised verse, so the imagined satirical elements in Gregory's works are probably the result of an excessively subjective

might have survived: Desiderius of Vienne, according to Sisebut's *Vita Desiderii episcopi Viennensis*, was "educated to the utmost extent in grammar" (*plenissime grammatica edocatus*)<sup>107</sup> and was later criticised by Gregory the Great for teaching grammar in Vienne when no other teachers were available.<sup>108</sup> Desiderius of Cahors, further west, was said by his biographer to have received a complete education from his parents in Albi and, in fact, three letters by his mother, Herchenfreda, written in what Riché uncharitably calls "un latin relativement correct", are still extant.<sup>109</sup>

If we are to take a general lesson from these examples, it is that the decline in student numbers perceived by Sidonius and others was not amongst members of their own class. An aristocrat, if no grammarians were available, could teach his (or, as in Herchenfreda's case, her) own children. The real decline in students must have been amongst lower class individuals who, in an earlier age, might have risen to become part of the *élite*. This must have caused a decrease in the (already limited) pattern of social mobility in the migration and post-migration period. With the disappearance of schools, there was no longer a formal process by which individuals could rise to higher status. The failure to absorb new blood – the absence of any system for the absorption of new members of the *élite* – must have added to the aristocratic sense of isolation – indeed, Rousseau characterises Gallo-Roman letter-writers in terms of their "timid isolation".<sup>110</sup>

Moreover, any lower class individuals who somehow acquired high status against this background would probably have had a hard time gaining social acceptance from those whose families had risen under the *ancien régime*. The older system, whereby one followed a career in the imperial bureaucracy, created a mechanism for the assimilation of newcomers – the newcomer first received an education which inculcated the mindset and ethical values of the *élite* and then devoted himself to serving the state. With the bureaucracy gone and education in decline, it would be hard for newcomers to gain acceptance from the established senatorial aristocracy; they would remain forever *parvenus*, outside the recognised *élite*, and might even have become rivals to the established aristocracy. At the same time, the aristocratic ideal of *nobilitas* was already under threat from the competing standards of militarised barbarian *élites*.

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reading. Moreover, in seeing the text simply as a set of satirical fables, Goffart divorces it from the highly politicised context in which it was composed and first read.

<sup>107</sup> *MGH SRM* 3.630

<sup>108</sup> Riché (1995) 156; for Gregory's letter, *Greg. Mag., Ep.* 11.34

<sup>109</sup> Riché (1995) 159; cf. *Vita Sancti Desiderii MGH SRM* 4.564

<sup>110</sup> Cf. Rousseau (1976) 357 citing N. Chadwick (1955) 296, 303

The senatorial aristocracy, our major source for fifth century Gaul, felt themselves threatened in almost every sphere – politically, with the death of the western state and the rise of barbarian polities; socially, as new barbarian élites emerged with new criteria for measuring the worth of aristocrats; culturally, as the education and literature they valued and which were central to their cultural and social self-identification became less relevant, less useful and, finally, less available; as Rousseau has it, there was “a feeling that [their] heritage was under threat”.<sup>111</sup> It is unsurprising that sources, steeped not only in classical learning, with its concepts of declining ages (whether in Hesiod’s *Erga kai Hêmerai* or in Ovid), but also in apocalyptic Christian teleology, should believe that their society – and the wider world – was decaying and would, eventually, come to a final end.<sup>112</sup> This was an age in which the Gallo-Roman aristocracy fell into a depressed state.<sup>113</sup> Conceivably, it was this climate of insecurity that inspired Avitus’ description of Egypt after the Israelite exodus, a description replete with the kinds of images we find in other fifth century Gallic writers:

*Rura vacant, coeptis desistunt oppida muris:  
non solitum consurgit opus, non cultor in agris  
exercet validos adtrito dente ligones.  
torpidus exactor siluit nulloque tumultu  
fervida consuetos repetunt suspendia census.*<sup>114</sup>

We can say that the fifth century saw a serious cultural decline. We must not fall into the trap of dismissing late antique literature as degraded simply because it differed from that of the Augustan age, but cannot ignore that decline was a major preoccupation of our sources for the period. Mathisen is right to say that Sidonius’ own protestations of inadequacy are mere *pudor*, mere false modesty, from an individual who fully expects his work to be praised by its recipients,<sup>115</sup> but this does not mean that the *leitmotif* of decline, which appears time and again in our sources, can be dismissed as a literary device on every single occasion.

Decline is emphasised because it was real and occupied the minds of an élite who saw, in the disappearance of their culture and of the educational system which inculcated the aesthetic

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<sup>111</sup> Rousseau (1976) 357

<sup>112</sup> Frend (1969) 4

<sup>113</sup> Harries (1992) 304; Mathisen (1988) 46-47

<sup>114</sup> Avitus, *De spiritualis historiae gestis*, 477-481: “The fields are empty, the towns abandon their unfinished walls:/ accustomed work does not arise, no countryman works his strong hoe with its battered blade./ The sluggish overseer is silent and there is no noise/ as violent punishments draw the familiar quotas.” (cf. *Aen.* 4.86-89); scenes of economic distress are a common topos in fifth century writers, cf. Rutilius Namatianus, *De reditu suo*, 1.27; Sid. Ap., *Ep.* 8.9.2; Paulinus of Pella, *Eucharisticon*, 285-290; *Carmen de providentia Dei*, passim.

<sup>115</sup> Mathisen (1993) 106 citing Sid. Ap., *Ep.*, 8.3.6; cf. Wood (1990) 72 on the “protestations of incompetence” from Gregory of Tours and Jonas of Bobbio.

and ethical ideals of their class, the end of their way of life and of their Roman civilisation. Education ceased to offer tangible rewards during the course of the fifth century; the outlay required to educate one's children remained considerable – perhaps greater than in previous ages because of the difficulty of finding competent teachers – but there was little chance of a return on the investment. As fewer non-élite individuals received an education, fewer people could opt for a career as a grammarian or a rhetor and those who did were generally less qualified, having received a less extensive and less sophisticated schooling than previous generations.

It is an interesting paradox – even an irony – that the fifth century provides us with more literary evidence than any other period of Gallic history but was also the time when the number of people equipped to participate in literary culture had entered into a terminal regression, a time when élite culture was being closed off to the general population in a way that it had not been before. As the numbers of participants in classical culture fell and as the quality of the available education declined, inevitably men emerged who thought themselves educated but whose literary efforts were poor. It is surely these individuals whom Sidonius has in mind when he decries the defective writings of the current age. Increasingly the only guaranteed source of an advanced education was the individual's parents, making education not merely the marker of the élite but their exclusive preserve; and, where the parents were unable to pass an education on to their issue (as in the case of Gregory of Tours), the individual would remain basically uneducated in the nuances of classical culture.

### *Conclusion*

The pragmatic function of involvement in classical culture is reasonably easy to discern and understand in the period before the barbarian invasions. Literary education, though non-vocational, brought one within the sphere of the Roman élite; it allowed one to rise, even from comparatively humble origins, and be accepted into the class of people who administered the empire and for whose advantage, in practical terms, the post-Diocletianic empire existed.

Less obvious, I think, are the reasons for the Gallo-Roman aristocracy's continued fascination with classical culture in the fifth century. In the purest sense, by the last quarter of the century, classical education could no longer guarantee influence; Roman nobles might still find ways to acquire political power, but this would largely have been within the church or through relationships with barbarian kings, neither of which, strictly speaking, required a formal education in Vergilian poetics or forensic oratory.

It is this, the decreasing ability of formal literary education to offer careers or advancement, that must account for the fall in the number and quality of individuals involved in cultural endeavours in the fifth and sixth centuries. While the ancestral culture possessed a significance for those whose ancestors had been immersed in it for generations or even centuries, it decreasingly had the power to attract new blood; fewer students coming through the classical schools necessarily meant fewer potential teachers in the future with a probable attendant reduction in the quality of new *professores*. This phenomenon of fewer students with a lower standard of education is what led sources like Sidonius to complain of literary decline.

Mathisen is entirely correct to argue that literary decline cannot and should not be assumed. The tendency to read the sources uncritically combined with the prejudices of past classicists who saw any difference from the Augustan model in terms of its inferiority has, as Mathisen says, led to simplistic assumptions that of decline. And, certainly as far as Sidonius and his correspondents are concerned, evidence of that decline is largely absent. At the same time, the fixation on decline that we find in the sources demands explanation and we find that explanation, as I said, not with the established aristocracy who still constituted a cultural élite but with the aspiring classes who, had the empire survived, might have hoped to become Sidonius' peers.

## Chapter Two

### *Literature and letters in barbarian Gaul*

The grave insecurity of the fifth century meant that Gallo-Roman élites could no longer be certain that they constituted a ruling political class. The barbarian *reges*, decreasingly fearful of the military power wielded by a dying Roman state, presented new sources of power and influence. In contrast to the Roman state, where the élites had maintained sophisticated cultural and political systems for the pursuit of imperial favour, there existed no arrangements to unite the barbarian *reges* with indigenous élites. While aristocrats could lobby for and benefit from the favour of barbarian rulers, the methods for doing so were not formalised and there was no understanding, tacit or explicit, that the interests of Gallo-Roman élites and those of Germanic kings and aristocracies were the same.<sup>116</sup> Against this changed background, it became important for Gallo-Romans both to preserve links with aristocratic friends elsewhere in Gaul and to preserve some semblance of class unity.

In this chapter, I discuss Mathisen's contention that literature and literary activities formed a central part of maintaining Gallo-Roman aristocratic identity, that (as Mathisen put it) while literature in the fourth century was a way to become an aristocrat, in the fifth century it was the way to remain one,<sup>117</sup> with particular reference to Sidonius Apollinaris. My argument is that the evidence of writers such as Sidonius and Ruricius, upon whom Mathisen rests much of his case, represents one strand of thought in the post-Roman political environment and perhaps not the dominant aristocratic *Weltanschauung*. I also contend that the fixation on literary culture seen in many of the sources – what one could call the Gallo-Roman retreat to the libraries – might not represent an attempt to establish aristocratic unity but could, rather, be part of the wider withdrawal from the secular world on the part of certain senatorial aristocrats and a recognition that the influence of the Roman empire's civil urban aristocracy had passed because the politico-cultural mechanisms which supported them had been destroyed.

#### *Unity and superiority: the function of fifth century Gallic epistolary literature*

I begin with epistolography, as letters were the glue that bound the Gallic élite together. The wealth of extant letters from the fifth century provides testimony to the importance which

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<sup>116</sup> Avitus, *Ep.*, 45 mentions a plan to write a panegyric for the Burgundian king after he returned from his war against the Franks – a very interesting use of traditional Roman culture in a barbarian *regnum*, albeit a barbarian *regnum* with aspirations to be seen as part of the empire.

<sup>117</sup> Mathisen (2001b) 102; cf. Sid. *Ap.*, *Ep.*, 8.2.2

aristocrats attached to the maintenance of links with one another, links which “depended on a common literary heritage”.<sup>118</sup> Roman epistolography was certainly not exclusive either to Gaul or to late antiquity, but it forms a genre which the Gallo-Romans, by virtue of their prolificacy, made their own.<sup>119</sup> It was important for aristocrats, an extremely small group numerically, to maintain links with others of their class elsewhere in Gaul in this time of great anxiety.<sup>120</sup> As a result, we find that Gallic letters of this period were not always primarily about communicating important information but were often intended only to keep channels open for future interaction. Wood summarises things well when he says “At first sight, they [the letters of Sidonius] are not promising materials; they contain little factual information, tending rather to be concerned with the process of greeting and with professions of friendship” and then goes on to show that the same is true of other writers of the period (citing specifically Avitus and Ruricius).<sup>121</sup> Formulaic written statements on subjects like friendship, duty and separation or even simple requests for a letter’s recipient to write back with greater frequency<sup>122</sup> fulfilled a pragmatic function: they preserved not only the theoretical bonds of class solidarity<sup>123</sup> but the practical alliance of *amicitia*, even over great distances and periods, ensuring that one could call upon correspondents for favours and support.<sup>124</sup> Formulaic letters maintained the avenues of communication with friends and allies so that, when problems arose, they could be called upon for aid.

On the shifting political sands of post-Roman Gaul, it is easy to see why the canny noble would want to retain as many allies as possible. During his exile from Clermont after 474, Sidonius relied on friends’ letters to keep him informed of developments at home<sup>125</sup> and wrote to discuss the state of the treaty being negotiated with the Visigoths by his friend Basilius of Aix;<sup>126</sup> without these correspondents, he would have been deprived of valuable information. Moreover, when attempting to make his peace with the Gothic king, it was to another correspondent, Lampridius, that Sidonius turned.<sup>127</sup> During his imprisonment, his captors

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<sup>118</sup> Rousseau (1976) 357

<sup>119</sup> N. Chadwick (1955) 14

<sup>120</sup> Wood (1990) 70

<sup>121</sup> Wood (1993) 30-31; but cf. Rousseau (1976) 356; in fact, both scholars are, to a certain extent, correct although Wood’s contentions are a little more pessimistic than necessary.

<sup>122</sup> Mathisen (1989) 116

<sup>123</sup> The *multa vincula caritatis* of Sid. Ap., Ep., 3.1.1

<sup>124</sup> Cf. Frend (1969) 8 on Paulinus of Nola and his “unending quest for friendship” and Fabre (1949) *passim*; for a recent, and excellent, treatment of Paulinus’ letters, see Mratschek (2002) 183-394; cf. also Matthews (1974) for a treatment of Symmachus and his friendships.

<sup>125</sup> Sid. Ap., Ep., 3.4

<sup>126</sup> Sid. Ap., Ep., 7.6.10

<sup>127</sup> Sid. Ap., Ep., 8.9

curtailed his correspondence, presumably to stop any plots which he, a bishop with sympathetic allies in many parts of Gaul, might hatch.<sup>128</sup>

In addition, being a numerically small class to begin with, Gallic aristocrats were often interrelated and letters provided a means of maintaining not only the political links of aristocratic *amicitia* but the blood-based ties of kinship with relatives living in distant places.<sup>129</sup> (In this connexion, Mathisen's idea that mutual literary interests were as much a form of kinship as blood ties should not be taken too seriously, as it overlooks the fact that many correspondents already had ties of blood or marriage with each other.<sup>130</sup>)

To declare that high status individuals in fifth century Gaul wrote letters in order to maintain contact with friends and relatives is not only non-contentious but constitutes a statement of the obvious. Somewhat more controversial is Mathisen's belief that literature in general became the sole marker of nobility in barbarian Gaul, that Gallo-Roman aristocrats, as a body, measured themselves and everyone else in terms of their ability to participate in literary undertakings, which constituted the "lowest common denominator" of the Gallo-Roman aristocracy (surely echoing Brown's contention that late antiquity was a period marked by strong ambition and rivalry – *philotimia* – amongst the empire's ruling classes which had to be played out in terms which were equally accessible to all members of the peer group<sup>131</sup>).<sup>132</sup>

I argue that the relationship between the retention of aristocratic status in the post-Roman period and participation in cultural activities is not as strong as Mathisen suggests and that, while Romans such as Sidonius and Ruricius were eager to emphasise their cultural superiority to the barbarians by participating in traditional cultural activities,<sup>133</sup> their highly cultivated and self-conscious identification of *romanitas* and *nobilitas* with exclusively cultural endeavours, to the exclusion of all else, represented a withdrawal from the wider political *milieu* and a surrender of any aspirations to genuine aristocratic authority in the secular sphere in post-Roman Gaul. Mratschek's words, when she speaks of Paulinus of Nola's "retreat from the world and search for a better experience of life",<sup>134</sup> are just as true of Sidonius; in both cases, individuals deal with change by retreating from it, whether to an

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<sup>128</sup> Sid. Ap., *Ep.*, 9.3.1-2; Avitus, *Ep.*, 45

<sup>129</sup> Mathisen (1993) 116-118, (1981) 96, 106; Wood (1981) 14

<sup>130</sup> Mathisen (1981) 107; (1989) 110-111 (cf. Sid. *Ep.*, 5.21.1); I discuss extended bonds of kinship at length later in the thesis.

<sup>131</sup> Brown (1978) 35; cf. Salzman (2002) 71-72

<sup>132</sup> Mathisen (1993) 110, (2001b) 103

<sup>133</sup> Harries (2000) 46-47

<sup>134</sup> Mratschek (2002) 42, "Rückzugs von der Welt auf der Suche nach einer besseren Lebenswirklichkeit"

ascetic centre or to an artificial cultural setting, and, in effect, denying that the external reality is important.

Mathisen argues that, while literary endeavours in the fourth century allowed one to become an aristocrat (as in the case of Ausonius, for example), by the fifth century they were the way that one could remain an aristocrat.<sup>135</sup> Only participation in classical culture could make one part of the “select few”, the cultivated élite, who possessed the education befitting a Roman aristocrat and who could participate in classical literary culture.<sup>136</sup> The sources certainly appear to support this view: Ruricius describes Hesperius, the rhetor who educated his sons, as the provider of *nobilitas*<sup>137</sup> while Sidonius tells us, in words dripping with conceit at his own superiority,<sup>138</sup> that “now, with those marks of honour having been lost, by which the highest was accustomed to be distinguished from the ignoble, to know one’s letters will henceforth be the sole indication of nobility”.<sup>139</sup> Harries takes a comparable view, arguing that Gallo-Romans such as Sidonius adapted “what they meant by Roman cultural identity”,<sup>140</sup> in effect creating a new élite ideal of cultural excellence which would become the new standard for the measurement of aristocratic status; this echoes both Mathisen’s thesis<sup>141</sup> and Markus’ contention that literary culture, as “the treasured possession of a Christian élite in an increasingly barbarian world”,<sup>142</sup> formed a means of maintaining traditional aristocratic *romanitas* in a period when Roman power was no more.

But the words of Sidonius cannot be taken as literal statements of fact. The idea that “letters will henceforth be the sole indication of nobility” represents a single strand of aristocratic thought and, while it is the strand most obvious in our sources (who, obviously, were wholly devoted to writing), it is not clear that this aristocratic retreat to the library (or, as the case may be, to the episcopal throne) was the only – or even the dominant – strategy amongst the Gallic aristocracy as a whole.

Literary culture could serve as a meaningful marker of élite status was valid only while the Roman state existed, with an administrative and social framework which made political

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<sup>135</sup> Mathisen (2001b) 102

<sup>136</sup> Mathisen (1993) 107-108

<sup>137</sup> Ruricius, *Ep.*, 1.3.5-6, *te elicitorem et formatorem lapillorum nobilium, te rimatorem auri, te repertorem aquae latentis elegi* (“I have picked you to draw forth and shape my noble jewels, you the assayer of gold, you the discoverer of hidden waters...”).

<sup>138</sup> Cf. Stevens (1933) 85-86

<sup>139</sup> Sid. *Ap., Ep.*, 8.2.2, *nam iam remotis gradibus dignitatum, per quas solebat ultimo a quoque summus quisque discerni, solum erit posthac nobilitatis indicium literas nosse.*

<sup>140</sup> Harries (2000) 47

<sup>141</sup> Cf. Mathisen (1993) 89 on the re-evaluation of the criteria for aristocratic status in Gaul.

<sup>142</sup> Markus (1983) V. 15

power accessible only to those who had been fully instructed in high culture. This system guaranteed that only the cultured could have access to the socio-economic fruits that came from controlling the empire;<sup>143</sup> in effect, a man who was eminent in the cultural sphere had the potential to become powerful in the political while the uncultured man did not. But, during the course of the fifth century, the steady erosion and final death of Roman authority in the west caused the traditional aristocratic socio-cultural structure lost its principal buttress without which it necessarily collapsed.

Sidonius himself may not have been well-placed to comprehend the scale of the transformation that was going on around him;<sup>144</sup> he may not have seen 'the big picture' and, based on personal experience, may have believed that links between the traditional structure of socio-cultural élitism and access to networks of political authority and secular power still existed. Moreover, even if he realised that Roman power was in full retreat, it was not something that he, the consummate Roman patriot, could articulate in disseminated texts until after the fall of Clermont in 474.

In his reaction to the political realignment of his friend Syagrius, we see Sidonius' belief that Roman power remained and was accessible to those who had acquired the appropriate cultural key. In writing to Syagrius, a Roman lawyer who had learnt the Burgundian language and become "a new Solon of the Burgundians in dispensing laws",<sup>145</sup> Sidonius opens the letters by saying "you are descended from the line of a poet, to whom I have no doubt that literary erudition would have given statues, had the robes of state not done so".<sup>146</sup> In using the phrase *procul dubio statuas dederant litterae*, Sidonius was reminding Syagrius – and other readers – of his own statue, set up in the Ulpian library at Rome as a reward for his panegyric to Avitus.<sup>147</sup> In effect, Sidonius declares that Roman honours were still available to men who excelled in the literary arts and that there is no need for the ambitious to go to the extremes of serving barbarians and learning barbarian languages in order to succeed politically. But, in saying this, Sidonius was wrong. His "everlasting statue inscribed with all [his] titles" was a reward not for "literary virtuosity"<sup>148</sup> but for being the son-in-law of the emperor Avitus and

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<sup>143</sup> Cf. Woolf (1992)

<sup>144</sup> Cf. Muhlberger (1992) 28

<sup>145</sup> Sid. Ap., Ep., 5.5.3, *novus Burgundionum Solon in legibus disserendis*

<sup>146</sup> Sid. Ap., Ep., 5.5.1, *cum sis igitur e semine poetae, cui procul dubio statuas dederant litterae, si trabeae non dedissent...*

<sup>147</sup> Sid. Ap., Carm., 8.8, Ep., 9.16.3.25-28, *Cum meis poni statuam perennem/ Nerva Traianus titulis videret,/ inter auctores utriusque fixam/ bybliothecae.*

<sup>148</sup> Harries (1994) 31

the reward was given by a senate that sat “under the eye of the emperor and his body-guard”<sup>149</sup>.

If Sidonius was conscious that this honour was granted for reasons other than the ostensible, he could never articulate it; the myth of his own cultural merit was too important to him, meshing with what Ward-Perkins calls “a centuries-old, deeply-ingrained certainty that [Roman] ways were immeasurably superior to those of the barbarians”.<sup>150</sup> While Gothic involvement in Avitus’ imperial ascension not be hidden by Sidonius – or, at least, not completely – Sidonius tried to ensure that Theoderic and the Goths and their participation in Roman politics were seen in ways that were respectable and in keeping with Roman aristocratic decorum. Ever the propagandist,<sup>151</sup> his panegyric to Avitus constructed a narrative which romanised the barbarians while simultaneously downplaying Visigothic sovereignty and relocating Avitus within the sphere of the Roman military. In this panegyric, Avitus becomes the conquering hero before whom the empire’s enemies fall back in fear.<sup>152</sup> The relationship between Avitus and the Goths is inverted so that the Goths become a warlike horde on the verge of assailing Roman Gaul until they heard the “name of the approaching Avitus”<sup>153</sup> at which point they decide to behave themselves.<sup>154</sup> To provide a suitable patina of military respectability, credit for some of Aëtius’ deeds is given to Avitus who is transformed into a Roman soldier.<sup>155</sup>

Avitus’ Gothic allies cease to be allies, in any reasonable sense of the word, and are transformed instead into loyal sepoys who know their place; Avitus has merely to give the command and the Goths drop their weapons;<sup>156</sup> desirous of war but terrified of Avitus, they take the knee before the new emperor and proclaim that they will now fight for him as auxiliaries.<sup>157</sup> The Gothic king himself is reinvented as a rational and educated Roman<sup>158</sup> who

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<sup>149</sup> Stevens (1933) 35

<sup>150</sup> Ward-Perkins (2005) 79; cf. Prudentius, *Contra Symmachum*, 2.816-817 (CSEL 61.276, ed. J. Bergmann), *Sed tantum distant Romana et Barbara quantum/ quadrupes abiuncta est bipedi vel muta loquenti*. (“Between the Roman and the barbarian there are the same differences as lie between the quadruped and the biped, between the mute and one who can speak.”)

<sup>151</sup> Heather (2006) 377

<sup>152</sup> See esp. Sid. Ap., *Carm.* 7.360-430

<sup>153</sup> Sid. Ap., *Carm.* 7.415, ...*nomen venientis Aviti...*; cf. 7.360-368

<sup>154</sup> Cf. Sid. Ap., *Carm.* 7.403ff on the Gothic elders’ fears that Avitus might not want peace with them.

<sup>155</sup> Heather (2006) 377-378

<sup>156</sup> Sid. Ap., *Carm.* 7.427, *adhuc mandasti, et ponimus arma*.

<sup>157</sup> Sid. Ap., *Carm.* 7.428-430

<sup>158</sup> See Heather (1999) 246-248; in Ostrogothic Italy, at least one barbarian king found it helpful to present himself as a Roman emperor: *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, 10.6850, *gloriosissimus adque inclutus rex, victor et triumphator semper Aug., bono rei publicae natus, custos libertatis et propagator Romani nominis, domitor gentium*. (“The most glorious and renowned king, victor and triumphator, the eternal Augustus, born for the good of the commonwealth, guardian of liberty and propagator of the

shamefacedly begs the all-powerful Avitus for his pardon<sup>159</sup> and speaks approvingly of Vergil's edificatory value.<sup>160</sup> The quasi-Roman Theoderic becomes more Roman than the Romans and is moved to defend Rome upon hearing of the death Petronius Maximus' and the Vandal sack of Rome ("Rumour touched Getic ears of the exile of the Fathers, the sufferings of the pleb, the slaughter of the emperor and the empire held captive"<sup>161</sup>).

This is not the only place in Sidonius' corpus where Theoderic's Roman character is glorified – in a letter to Agricola, Sidonius provides an extended paean on the merits of the Gothic king, praising, amongst other things, the dinner table where "you may see Greek elegance, Gallic abundance and Italian vigour, public decorum, private conscientiousness and royal restraint".<sup>162</sup> No barbarian he, Theoderic is the very model of Roman sobriety and propriety.

The bellicosity of the Goths, which is a recurrent theme of the panegyric and is apparently being kept in check only through Gothic fear of Avitus, is placed at a remove from Theoderic – it is not Theoderic who is hostile to Rome; rather it is the nature of the Goths to seek war and it is an undifferentiated and anonymous Goth, not the Gothic king, who is beating his pruning shears into a sword in preparation for war against Rome.<sup>163</sup>

As Theoderic becomes more respectable (by which one necessarily means more Roman), so political relations with him become more acceptable provided the hierarchical arrangement is clear: Theoderic is subordinate to – or, at best, a subsidiary ally of – Avitus. They do not meet as equals and Avitus cannot be construed as anything other than the superior of the Gothic *rex*. The distance between Avitus and Theoderic – and the conception that no Roman could ever serve a barbarian – is stated quite early in the poem when Sidonius describes the cordial relations which Avitus enjoyed with Theoderic I;<sup>164</sup> the elder Theoderic had wished for Avitus to come and serve him at the Gothic court but Avitus "scorned the idea of being a friend more than a Roman".<sup>165</sup> His rejection of the Theoderic's suggestion is not just an act of patriotism but constitutes the only appropriate Roman response to any such invitation from a barbarian potentate; it was, moreover, a response which made the Gothic king respect Avitus all the

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Roman name, queller of nations."); cf. Barnish, Lee and Whitby (2000) 167 on the Ostrogothic kingdom as "an imitation of the empire".

<sup>159</sup> Sid. Ap., *Carm.* 7.434

<sup>160</sup> Sid. Ap., *Carm.* 7.495-798

<sup>161</sup> Sid. Ap., *Carm.* 7.450-451, *exsilium patrum, plebis mala, principe caeso, captivum imperium ad Geticas rumor tulit aures.*

<sup>162</sup> Sid. Ap., *Ep.*, 1.2.6, *videas ibi elegantiam Graecam abundantiam Gallicanam celeritatem Italiam, publicam pompam privatam diligentiam regiam disciplinam.*

<sup>163</sup> Sid. Ap., *Carm.* 7.411

<sup>164</sup> Sid. Ap., *Carm.* 7.214ff.

<sup>165</sup> Sid. Ap., *Carm.* 7.224-225, *sed spernis amicum/ plus quam Romanum gerere.*

more and an act of which Syagrius was incapable, one which underlines explicitly Sidonius' view of the impossibility of any Roman serving a barbarian while retaining his Roman identity and loyalties.

This continuing myth of Rome – of his father-in-law's position, of the existence of Roman authority, of the elevated status of the cultured few – was the central theme of almost all of Sidonius' works and so we cannot be surprised at the arguments he applies when writing to Syagrius. The rejection of a Roman career – indeed, of *romanitas* – by Syagrius, a man whose pedigree was as impressive as Sidonius' own, would have been a savage blow to Sidonius' efforts at maintaining his myth. The idea that a fellow *nobilis* was willing to learn the “graceless and incomprehensible jabbering” of a barbarian language<sup>166</sup> must have struck Sidonius as ridiculous, for Latin was the empire's language of power.

Moreover, it was widely believed that language shaped future loyalties – something we see in the case of Cyprianus, the Gothic-speaking Roman who acted as the Ostrogothic *comes sacrarium largitionum* and whose children were also instructed in the Gothic language which was taken as a mark of their future political loyalties.<sup>167</sup> It is unsurprising that, as Burton says, Latin-speaking élites should find it “traumatic” to learn barbarian languages;<sup>168</sup> implicit in learning a barbarian language is a rejection of Roman supremacy and conceivably of *romanitas* itself. As Harries puts it, “The new Solon, and many other Roman careerists like him, who chose the service of Germanic kings rather than that of Rome, could ‘barbarise’ the culture Sidonius held dear”.<sup>169</sup>

Sidonius evokes Syagrius' grandfather, a consul and poet, who would certainly have expected to attain political office (represented in the letter by the *trabeae*, the purpled toga of a senior magistrate and a tangible link between Syagrius' family and the Roman state and authority) as a consequence of his literary merit. Syagrius probably felt that he had no outlet for his ambition other than to serve the Burgundian *rex*. Mathisen contends that Syagrius had no official position but was merely “reorienting his legal practice in response to the needs of the

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<sup>166</sup> Flobert (2002) 420

<sup>167</sup> Cassiodorus, *Variae*, 8.26.7, *Pueri stirpis Romanae nostra lingua loquuntur, eximie indicantes exhibere se nobis futuram fidem, quorum iam videntur affectasse sermonem*. (“The boys, though of Roman stock, speak our language, showing the future loyalty they will hold towards us, whose speech they are seen to have adopted already.”) Cf. Procopius, *De bellis Gothicis*, 2.14–17 on Gothic fears that a Roman education would harm the prince Atalaric.

<sup>168</sup> Burton (2002) 417

<sup>169</sup> Harries (2000) 51

time”<sup>170</sup> but others rightly posit an official position at the Burgundian court: “In this connexion [as it relates to Syagrius’ knowledge of Burgundian], it is significant that the early German codes of law were composed in Latin”;<sup>171</sup> Heather notes that barbarians “all produced written legal texts through direct or indirect contact with Roman example”;<sup>172</sup> Barnwell goes even suggests that Syagrius may have been involved in writing the Burgundian *Liber constitutionum*.<sup>173</sup> All three characterisations recognise the central rôle played by Romans like Syagrius in the development of legal systems in the *regna* and in the dissemination of Roman legal concepts, models and ideals.<sup>174</sup> Syagrius may well have been a “Solon of the Burgundians” in a very real, un-ironic and politically productive sense, for it was the clear-cut usefulness of his legal training that brought him power and honours, not his education in Vergilian poetics. Similarly, had Sidonius’ father-in-law not been selected as a convenient Gothic puppet-ruler, it is unlikely that his poetry would have received a hearing from the senate, let alone a statue.

One can scarcely emphasise enough that, in the barbarian *regna* of Gaul, literary education by itself could deliver little to advance one’s position. The new barbarian polities offered no career opportunities that came close to matching those of the empire.<sup>175</sup> The retraction of the civil service during the fifth century led, obviously, to a sharp reduction in the number of administrative positions available and this was particularly true in the case of lower- and middle-ranking posts<sup>176</sup> (although, as Barnwell notes, we have little unambiguous information on the subordinate officials who attended senior administrators in the empire<sup>177</sup>). Little of the old Roman civil service survived in the barbarian west and that little only at the local level, “the *civitas* level”.<sup>178</sup> Some political and bureaucratic offices survived,<sup>179</sup> in name at least, either in the *regna* or in the rump western Roman state, but such posts were few in number and these few dozen positions could never compensate for the loss of thousands of jobs in the imperial bureaucracy; further, some of these offices seem to have been largely ceremonial, granting the holder little real power and no chance of advancement. There was nothing to

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<sup>170</sup> Mathisen (1993) 124. Cf. Stroheker (1948) 98 for a Roman, Secundinus, who may have served as Chilperic’s official court poet (cf. Gregorius Turonensis, *Historia Francorum* 3.33, *erat* [Secundinus] *autem...sapiens et rhetoricis imbutus literis*.)

<sup>171</sup> Bury (1923) 344

<sup>172</sup> Heather (2000b) 444

<sup>173</sup> Barnwell (1992) 85

<sup>174</sup> Cf. Wood (1990) 67 and Matthews (2000) 35

<sup>175</sup> In Italy, matters were rather different: cf. Barnish, Lee & Whitby (2000) 166-167

<sup>176</sup> Matthews (1975) 347; cf. Wightman (1985) 305-306

<sup>177</sup> Barnwell (1992) 56-57

<sup>178</sup> J. M. Wallace-Hadrill (1967) 73; cf. Jones (1964) 261, “The Roman fiscal machinery was still working at the end of the sixth century, though by this time it was somewhat out of gear owing to prolonged neglect”; see also Lewis (2000) on the survival of the *civitas* as the basis for identity in the post-Roman world.

<sup>179</sup> Ward-Perkins (2005) 68-70

match the power and promotions that a fourth century Roman might have expected to receive during a bureaucratic career and, as the elder Wallace-Hadrill said, the thrust of such a career would usually be strictly confined to the local area, whether a *civitas*, at the lowest level, or a *regnum* at the highest;<sup>180</sup> even entire barbarian *regna*, some of which were smaller than a single imperial province, look exceedingly parochial in comparison to an empire that, at its height, stretched from the Scottish borders to Kurdistan.

For examples of offices which carried little actual power, one need only look at Sidonius' tenure as urban prefect or Arvandus who, as praetorian prefect of Gaul (first under Severus and then under Anthemius), was executed for plotting to deliver Roman land into barbarian hands.<sup>181</sup> For examples of offices which may have carried some power but which were extremely few and far between, one has the cases of Parthenius – a relative of Sidonius, grandson of Ruricius and friend of Arator<sup>182</sup> – who was *magister officiorum* in the Frankish kingdom and was later lynched in Trier,<sup>183</sup> or even the singular case of Secundinus, the *Hofdichter* whose position with Chilperic may have depended on more than merely his ability to compose poetry<sup>184</sup>.

Following on from Wallace-Hadrill's remarks about *civitas* administration, it is true that the "workhorse of royal government on the ground"<sup>185</sup> in barbarian Gaul was the *comes civitatis* (an office which Barnwell, for reasons I do not entirely understand, thinks was a barbarian innovation whose existence cannot be attested in the empire before the fall of Romulus Augustulus<sup>186</sup>), but there were only 122 *civitates* or city districts in the whole of Roman Gaul and that number may have fallen further during the rise of the barbarian *regna*. The *comes civitatis* could enjoy considerable influence in his locale,<sup>187</sup> though perhaps less than the resident bishop,<sup>188</sup> but the small number of posts and the high number of aspirants would have

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<sup>180</sup> J. M. Wallace-Hadrill (1967) 73

<sup>181</sup> Sid. Ap., Ep., 1.7; Barnwell (1992) 74 argues that Arvandus could have seen the Visigoths and Burgundian *reges* as Roman magistrates and thought it was better to surrender territory to their control than to "allow it to be ruled by the 'Greek' emperor". His argument is not convincing in any respect; Teitler (1992) 309-317 is correct in deeming Arvandus' actions treasonous, in execution and intent.

<sup>182</sup> Arator, *Epistula ad Parthenium*

<sup>183</sup> PLRE 2.833-834; Greg. Tur., *Hist. Franc.*, 3.36

<sup>184</sup> Note that, when his position as a favourite of the *rex* was challenged, Secundinus wasted no time in turning to Germanic methods of 'self-help' by killing his rival, Asteriolus. See Greg. Tur., *Hist. Franc.*, 3.33

<sup>185</sup> Heather (2000b) 445

<sup>186</sup> Barnwell (1992) 35; unless one rejects evidence of Sidonius' letter to Attalus Gregorius<sup>186</sup>, who was *comes* of Autun in 466, Barnwell seems to be mistaken.

<sup>187</sup> Barnwell (1992) 110

<sup>188</sup> Geary (1988) 131-132; Harries (1978) 27 says that the mediaeval church saw the *Notitia Galliarum* and its list of *civitates* as lists of bishoprics, thus highlighting the connexion between the old Roman administrative system and the emerging system of dioceses; on the relationship between bishop and *comes*, cf. Rousseau (1976) 362 for the idea that the two were "in some sense on one level".

made the job unattainable for most. Moreover, as time passed, certain families effectively monopolised the offices of *comites civitatum* so that the transmission of the office became as practically hereditary.<sup>189</sup>

A king could, if he wished, appoint anyone he pleased to an office. For example, Eunius Mummolus, having been sent by his father to Guntram to seek a renewal of the father's appointment as *comes* of Auxerre, bribed the king, with his father's own gifts and was himself appointed *comes* in his father's place.<sup>190</sup> Even so, the office was treated as heritable in some cases, apparently with royal approval. Some families used the post of *comes* as a springboard to the perhaps more lucrative bishop's throne; Geary goes so far as to say that the episcopacy represents "the normal crowning of the *cursus honorum* which followed the position of count" and Barnwell notes that many known *comites* later appear "acting in other capacities";<sup>191</sup> Hall records that many bishops were drawn from secular life, perhaps because of personal talents but perhaps because of family connexions.<sup>192</sup> This monopolisation of the small number of available posts by a few dynasties shut out the majority of the Gallo-Roman aristocracy; even members of illustrious families would have found themselves with no means of acquiring office or influence; in all likelihood, unless one's father had held the office before oneself or one had somehow acquired great favour from the king, it was probably not realistic for an aristocrat to *expect* to gain such an office

Thus, while participation in cultural life could be important for one's own sense of identity and one's ability to think of oneself as a civilised man, a *nobilis* and an heir to the Roman cultural heritage, it meant very little in practical terms and could no longer deliver either offices or access to the channels and networks of power. For Sidonius' circle, to whom this kind of self-identification was important and for whom a central part of their conception of themselves and their place in the world was their identity as cultured men steeped in *romanitas*, literary skill still brought prestige;<sup>193</sup> Sidonius' friends obviously felt him to be an illustrious man whose writings elevated him still further – and Sidonius felt the same way about his literary *amici*. Yet we cannot ignore the fact that, however much these self-segregating and self-congratulating groups of poets and epistolographers may have felt themselves to be *nobiles* and *virii illustres*, their literary endeavours could not be translated into political power. Even when Sidonius wished to court Euric's favour, his adulatory poem

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<sup>189</sup> Heinzlmann (2001) 18

<sup>190</sup> Greg. Tur., *Hist. Franc.*, 4.42

<sup>191</sup> Geary (1988) 130; Barnwell (1992) 109

<sup>192</sup> Hall (2000) 739

<sup>193</sup> Cf. Heather (1999) 243

(casting Euric as “a substitute emperor”<sup>194</sup>) needed to be transmitted through Lampridius rather than directly to the king.

An individual like Sidonius may have been *nobilis*, if that word means a civilised man conversant in the proper forms of Roman culture but he was no longer a member of Gaul’s *ruling* class. Education gave Sidonius cultural distinction but no way of translating that into authority or personal power in barbarian Gaul. This must have been a hard thing for Sidonius to comprehend; indeed, it is conceivable that Sidonius never understood the extent to which his position as a Gallo-Roman aristocrat changed so during the course of his lifetime, that the political career he entered upon “full of hope and optimism”<sup>195</sup> during his father-in-law’s brief reign could never reach its proper fruition and that Rome’s power had passed.

Perhaps we see the effects of changing political realities on Sidonius when we consider his own descriptions of his conduct. Sidonius was born to a class that possessed all the reins of power in the empire but, in his own lifetime, his power – and that of other members of his family and class – was stripped away; he had been appointed urban prefect by Anthemius in 470, but that carried little political weight and must have been scant consolation during his imprisonment by the Visigoths. It is hardly surprising, then, that he revels in what little power he still has: he behaves like an unconscionable snob towards a *novus homo*,<sup>196</sup> he beats gravediggers for an insignificant offence and, indeed, beats them himself rather than reporting their ‘crime’ because he knows the local bishop would say that he was being too harsh,<sup>197</sup> he heaps scorn on Burgundians for their accents and for styling their hair with butter.<sup>198</sup> Stevens’ characterisation of Sidonius as a man who was not “superior to the conventions of his time”, an aristocratic snob who “displayed...disdain and intolerance for those beneath him”,<sup>199</sup> is accurate and perhaps a symptom of Sidonius’ lack of meaningful political authority.

While not wishing to snipe at Sidonius himself, the point must be made that the evidence of his circle is not unambiguous enough to support Mathisen’s thesis. Sidonius is not the voice of post-Roman Gaul’s ruling class; he is, rather, the voice of those who *had* ruled but had been displaced by soldier-kings and warrior aristocracies of the *Stämme* and by those Gallo-Romans who were willing to adapt and to join the Germanic aristocracies.

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<sup>194</sup> Harries (1994) 241

<sup>195</sup> Stevens (1933) 29

<sup>196</sup> Sid. Ap., Ep., 1.11.6

<sup>197</sup> Sid. Ap., Ep., 9.12.1-3

<sup>198</sup> Sid. Ap., Carm. 12.6

<sup>199</sup> Stevens (1933) 86-87

Roman *senatores* like Sidonius separated themselves from the newcomers, placing themselves and the barbarians into absolutely distinct ethnic and cultural categories with an explicitly-expressed superiority lying squarely with the Romans<sup>200</sup> and the barbarians being cast as utterly alien to Roman ideals.<sup>201</sup> But both the distinction and the sense of superiority it engendered were artificial and represent a reaction to their lack of political power. Indeed, Harries has drawn the comparison between fifth century Gaul and Greece and Rome in the late republic, “in which political superiority lay (or was coming to lie) with one party and (alleged) cultural superiority with the other”<sup>202</sup> and one might also compare it to the ‘crisis’ of Greek culture during the Second Sophistic. Cultured men refused to interact with a political environment dominated by people they saw as the uncivilised and irrational speakers of uncouth languages. Instead, they devoted themselves to the preservation of an imagined cultural ideal and to the vain hope that a resurgent Rome would yet arise and that they might assume their rightful place as the rulers of a universal empire.

The exclusive literary and epistolary circles which Mathisen sees as vehicles for aristocratic unity have more in common with cowboys circling their wagons. Instead of forging a cohesive aristocratic identity, the literary circles strove to create a space which no barbarian or barbarising parvenu could penetrate and which rising barbarian power would never overcome (though, indeed, it is the fear that neglect was eroding this cultural space that led to the constant *leitmotif* of decline). It was an act of desperation meant to exclude barbarians and reinforce elite notions of superiority even as their monopoly on power was coming to an end.<sup>203</sup> Effectively, and more or less self-consciously, they turned their former elite culture into an *elitist subculture* – an inbred and inwardly-focused classics fandom which measured its superiority precisely by the widespread incomprehension of and indifference to its cultural practices and products.

The creation of these literary circles was an act of desperation and a recognition that the traditional markers of aristocratic power – wealth, land, clients, offices, influence – were no longer available to all the old noble families, that, in effect, the secular world no longer provided a level playing field on which all members of the peer group could compete.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> Harries (2000) 47

<sup>201</sup> Heather (2000) 440

<sup>202</sup> Harries (2000) 49

<sup>203</sup> Mathisen (1988) 50

<sup>204</sup> Cf. Brown (1978) 35; see also Brown (1961) 85-86 on the fifth and sixth century eastern empire, where patronage and power came to rest with “the wrong people... the military to the exclusion of the traditional leaders of society, the urban landowners”.

Throughout the decades following the barbarian settlements in Gaul, more and more land, the basis of all economic life and ultimate source of all personal wealth and government revenues,<sup>205</sup> came to be concentrated in the hands of Germanic incomers.<sup>206</sup> This was not always as the result of violence – when the Visigoths were settled in Aquitaine, they were given grants of land; the Burgundians, likewise, were given land “to be divided with the existing inhabitants”<sup>207</sup> – but violence probably represented a real danger to aristocratic Roman landowners who were used to a system in which they themselves could use extralegal violence to acquire the land of others.<sup>208</sup> Paulinus of Pella was one such victim, his property being ravaged repeatedly because, as he lamented, he was not protected by a barbarian guest (“for we know that some of the Goths worked with the greatest humanity to benefit their hosts by their protection”<sup>209</sup>); finally his land was simply taken from him and dispersed but, later, one of the Goths who had acquired part of his old estate sent him an unexpected payment.<sup>210</sup> Most Goths were probably less punctilious in caring for those they had dispossessed and cases like those of Paulinus were probably common in parts of Gaul.<sup>211</sup> From the sixth century, Gregory of Tours tells us of a Goth who threatened to take a mill by force if the monks who owned it would not sell it to him.<sup>212</sup>

Moreover, even in the Burgundian *regnum*, where the modest numbers of the barbarians, their unique conceptualisation of themselves as part of the Roman empire and their alliance with the region’s senatorial families made the violent appropriation of land far less likely than in the Gothic or Frankish realms, there was nevertheless a gradual drifting of land out of Roman hands. Patterns of land ownership were changing drastically; the emerging class of barbarian landowners constituted not only an economic rival to the traditional nobility but actually existed, in the examples I have given, at the expense of established Gallo-Roman landowners. As barbarian landowners gained wealth and land – and, by extension, followers and clients who could be armed and mobilised<sup>213</sup> – so the Gallo-Romans were diminished and, as their

<sup>205</sup> Cf. Wickham (1984) 12-13; cf. Burns (1984) 125-126 on the importance of land-acquisition to the Ostrogoths in Italy

<sup>206</sup> Ward-Perkins (2005) 63-64; cf. Burns (1984) 125

<sup>207</sup> *Chron.* 452 s.a. 443 [= Burgess (2001a) 80], *Sapaudia Burgundionum reliquiis datur cum indigenis diuidenda*

<sup>208</sup> See *Codex Theodosianus* iv.22 for laws *unde vi* (on the seizure of property by violence) and Salvian, *De gubernatione Dei*, 5.38-45

<sup>209</sup> Paul. Pell., *Euch.*, 289-290, *nam quodam scimus summa humanitate Gothorum/ hospitibus studuisse suis prodesse tuendis*; I think that Paulinus’ comment that the *hospes* had a physical, not theoretical, presence in one’s home does much to undermine Goffart (1980) *passim*.

<sup>210</sup> Paul. Pell., *Euch.*, 575-581

<sup>211</sup> See Ennodius, *Epistulae*, 2.22, 2.33, 3.20, 6.5, 8.13 for complaints about the illegal acquisition of Roman-owned land in Italy.

<sup>212</sup> Greg. Tur., *Vita Patrum*, 18.2

<sup>213</sup> T. S. Burns (1984) 130; cf. Arce (1997) 28

property was reduced, their political sway and their claim to constitute a ruling class also ebbed.

This is not to say that Romans lost all their land and that the only landowners left in Gaul were barbarians, but clearly a new body of landowners had come into being and they were not merely the *novi homines* and parvenus so despised by Sidonius; they were actually barbarians, untouched by Roman culture and speaking uncouth languages, with a mindset that was as far from the Roman ideal as it was possible to be. Little wonder that aristocrats like Sidonius should try to create a means of excluding the barbarians and reinforcing their own notions of superiority.<sup>214</sup>

Clearly, the strategy, epitomised by Sidonius, of retreating from the secular world and building up an idealised form of *romanitas* based on aristocratic culture and breeding was not employed by the entire aristocracy. If, as Mathisen says, the key aim of Gallo-Roman aristocrats in the period was the preservation of unity and class solidarity, the strategy failed in many important ways. A considerable number of Gallo-Romans appear in our sources who would have met Sidonius' definition of *nobilitas* but who pursued careers within the barbarian system.<sup>215</sup> While there are a number of examples of individuals, like Lampradius and Leo of Narbonne, who, though literate and cultured (and, above all, non-militarised), worked for the barbarians, my preferred fifth century exemplar of this type of individual remains Syagrius, a man praised by Sidonius for learning, eloquence and pedigree<sup>216</sup> but who pursued a legal career at the Burgundian court.

Sidonius' letter to Syagrius has often been interpreted in a positive way – Heather is the latest scholar to see Sidonius “praising” Syagrius<sup>217</sup> – but I construe the letter as conveying dissatisfaction – and a warning – in response to Syagrius' conduct. The letter opens, as I have already discussed, with Sidonius' description of the many bonds which tie him to Roman culture and the Roman state. His line has provided a consul of Rome and is renowned for its poetic accomplishment, so Syagrius takes an equal share in Roman cultural achievement and in the authority of state and empire. Nor, Sidonius says, have the family's aptitude for cultural

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<sup>214</sup> Mathisen (1988) 50

<sup>215</sup> Van Dam (1992) 330 has a synopsis of the two basic strategies (withdrawal from secular life or engagement with the new political realities).

<sup>216</sup> Sid. Ap., Ep., 5.5.1-2; cf. Geary (1985) 103 on the Syagrii.

<sup>217</sup> Heather (2006) 420; cf. Lupoi (2000) 81 on the “harmonious coexistence” between “Roman intellectuals and the sovereign” exemplified by Syagrius. Dr. P. Hayward of Lancaster University also argued in favour of the positive view – specifically that Sidonius was congratulating a friend on political success – after a recent conference paper. While I disagree with his interpretation, I am grateful for his criticisms.

endeavours diminished a whit; Syagrius is cast as simply the latest iteration of his ancestor, the poet-consul, steeped in Roman power and Latin culture. How amazing, then, that someone of such erudition and breeding should learn a barbarian language.

To emphasise yet further the degree to which Syagrius has been immersed in the culture of Rome, Sidonius, in the letter's second paragraph, recalls the classical schoolroom where Syagrius "declaimed eloquently and forcefully before the oratory teacher".<sup>218</sup> The intent is to remind Syagrius of the price he has already paid to attain classical culture. Like the narrator of Juvenal's satire, Syagrius has suffered beneath the schoolmaster's *ferulae*<sup>219</sup> – in Sidonius' world, literary culture is not merely – or even primarily – a matter of enjoyment; it is the badge of *romanitas* and must be purchased with pain and sweat.

Their shared Roman educational experience serves as a marker of shared élite identity and as a reminder of what Syagrius may be giving up should he leave the Roman sphere entirely: not merely Latin culture but his Roman friends and their shared civilisation. The reference to Cicero as "the varicose man from Arpinum" – a reference to the belief that Cicero must have been varicose because he spent so much time on his feet declaiming – underlines this by deploying a shibboleth that would, obviously, be comprehensible only to those who were versed in classical literature and familiar with the figures who produced that literature. The reference reminds Syagrius of the exclusivity of the group to which he belongs; Sidonius asks why Syagrius, having already invested so much to become a cultured Roman and to share in the élite's cultural identity, should wish to give it up. The ironic contrast of the *euphonia* of barbarian speech with Vergil's poetry similarly poses the unspoken question: why should – or, perhaps, how could – any Roman noble prefer the former to the latter? The use of the Greek word *euphonia* is significant implying, as it does, the layers of ancient Mediterranean tradition and refinement which lie below the surface of *romanitas* and which Syagrius is, necessarily, abandoning.

The first paragraph laid out Syagrius' Roman credentials while the second begins the process of contrasting Roman civilisation with Burgundian barbarity, of appropriate conduct with inappropriate, of civilisation with barbarism. In the third, subtle contrasts and nuanced reminders of shared culture and identity turn into a sharp warning of exactly what will happen to the Roman who barbarises.

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<sup>218</sup> Sid. Ap., Ep., 5.5.2, ...*et saepenumero acriter eloquenterque declamasse coram oratore satis habeo compertum*.

<sup>219</sup> Juvenal, *Saturae*, 1.15

Sidonius emphasises the alien nature of Syagrius' path, of the language he has learnt and of the people with whom he now associates. He jokes about the paradox of a barbarian committing a barbarism in his own language – the joke lies in the fact that 'barbarism' is the usual term for a mispronunciation in Latin, no small thing in a society where such a slip might reveal questionable social origins and education.<sup>220</sup> The vision of Burgundians terrified of mispronouncing their own language, choosing every word with all the care of a Roman orator, fearful of what their choice of vocabulary might imply about themselves, is something akin to a chimp's tea party – it forms a caricature and parody of the normal (*i.e.*, civilised, Roman and aristocratic) social *milieu* with the usual rôles filled by completely inappropriate people.<sup>221</sup>

The whole scenario is something for Sidonius and his friends to laugh at. The phrase Sidonius uses – *mihi ceterisque* – implies that Sidonius wishes to present himself as the spokesman for his and Syagrius' class, that he wants to be understood as the voice of Syagrius' Roman peers in expressing disapproval and condescension because Syagrius has stepped outside the boundaries of his class and culture.

The contradiction between classicism and barbarism continues in the rest of the letter but is more clearly stated and couched with references to classical literature familiar both to the letter's author and its recipient (and, indeed, to anyone else reading it). Syagrius becomes *novus Burgundionum Solon* contrasting the great lawgiver of classical Athens with a band of unwashed barbarians who style their hair with rancid butter.<sup>222</sup> Moreover, for any classically-educated individual, there is an implicit contrast of the new Solon amongst the Burgundians with the old Solon who spent time with the barbarian kings Croesus and Cyrus; where the old Solon was an improving influence on barbarians, the new Solon deals with people incapable and unworthy of being civilised.

The reference to the *novus Burgundionum Solon* is followed and balanced by the patronising comment that Syagrius was "a new Amphion in stringing lyres, albeit three-stringed ones". Frye asserts that this section of the letter constitutes a literal statement and that Syagrius tuned lyres but, clearly, its meaning is entirely metaphorical with the lyre representing cultural achievement.<sup>223</sup> Since a three-stringed cithara would be a very simple instrument, the metaphor draws attention to the paradox Syagrius poses; he is an educated man, descended

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<sup>220</sup> Heather (1994) 193

<sup>221</sup> See Halsall (2002b) 90, 96-99 on this kind of incongruity.

<sup>222</sup> Sid. Ap., *Carm.* 12.6-7

<sup>223</sup> Frye (1990) 203

from poets, steeped in Roman culture, but now he is in the midst of people who can never appreciate him. A Solon amongst barbarians who cannot appreciate his wisdom, an Amphion with a lyre that does not function properly, Syagrius becomes equal parts pearl before swine and fish out of water. The threat of cultural exile is implicit.

In making such a threat – in highlighting the danger of being cut off from his cultural touchstone – Sidonius evokes that other great Roman literary exile, Ovid, another fish out of water and pearl before swine exiled to the edge of the empire. Sidonius and Syagrius, and any other educated Roman, would have been perfectly familiar with Ovid and could not have read Sidonius' letter about a Roman noble living amongst the barbarians without recalling the *Tristia* and the *Epistulae ex Ponto*. The thrust of Sidonius' reference is to recall the unhappiness that must attend any Roman sophisticate when cut off from the most fundamental sources of and criteria for cultural achievement; in Ovid's case, his touchstone was Rome itself but for Syagrius it is – or ought to be – his Gallo-Roman peers.

The final section of the letter contains the prescriptive measures which Syagrius must take in order to be reintegrated into the Roman élite along with another veiled warning of the exile that must follow should he continue his involvement with barbarians. Ironical superlatives make Syagrius *facetissimus* and *elegantissimus* and underline the danger that attends a failure to immerse oneself in Roman culture – no matter how refined Syagrius may be, his Latinity will falter through lack of use – and this recalls Ovid's complaint that life in a barbarian culture would damage his Latin.<sup>224</sup>

Syagrius' exclusion will be twofold: he will be a fish out of water amongst barbarians, a civilised and civilising force amongst people unworthy of civilisation, never accepted by them, always excluded, because his *romanitas* will set him apart (or, rather, above) and prevent his ever becoming a barbarian. He will also be rejected by his Roman peers, sent into exile like Ovid, unable to exercise his cultural faculties; he will be excluded from the only place he truly belongs, the cultural space in which *romanitas* flourishes.

However, if he cleaves to Roman culture, his contact with the Burgundians and knowledge of their language will allow him to laugh at their barbarity. Sidonius extends an olive branch by stressing that it is not too late to return to the Roman fold: instead of using his grasp of

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<sup>224</sup> Sid. Ap., Ep. 5.5.4, *restat hoc unum, vir facetissime, ut nihilo segnius, vel cum vacabit, aliquid lectioni operae impendas custodiasque hoc, prout es elegantissimus, temperamentum, ut ista tibi lingua teneatur, ne ridearis, illa exerceatur, ut rideas*; cf. Ovid, *Tristia*, 3.14.45-50, esp., *Crede mihi, timeo ne sint inmixta Latinis/ inque meis scriptis Pontica uerba legas*.

Burgundian to further his career, he must turn it into a kind of parlour trick, something that will give him insight into the worthlessness of barbarians and furnish him with comical anecdotes (such as Sidonius' about the rancid butter and bad breath of Burgundians<sup>225</sup>). If Syagrius restates his Roman identity and the explicit superiority of Romans over barbarians, he can count himself amongst Sidonius' imagined aristocratic collective. Should he fail to do so, the only outcome will be social exclusion and the attendant Ovid-esque misery. Never, at any point, does Sidonius consider that Syagrius could barbarise effectively, that he could be embraced by the barbarians, that he could be successful there.

The desire to draw Syagrius back reveals the fear that 'barbarising' Gallo-Romans could damage Roman culture. Syagrius' successful engagement with barbarian networks of power was a threat to those who sought to escape barbarian domination by retreating into a Latin *Kulturwelt*. While Sidonius and his fellows saw culture as the only sphere in which they could claim still to be absolutely dominant (a dominance that was safe for them and the Germanic rulers alike, precisely because it was now wholly unconnected and, indeed, irrelevant to the new politics), men like Syagrius demonstrated that political supremacy in Gaul not only rested with the barbarians but that this power was still available to Romans who would compromise.

Sidonius himself, despite his devotion to Roman aristocratic values,<sup>226</sup> was not above seeking support from barbarians when necessary (leading to the unhelpful descriptions of him as a man "capable of any sacrifice of principle to expediency"<sup>227</sup> and who was "very adept at playing both sides of the fence"<sup>228</sup>). But when Sidonius turned to barbarians for help, as I demonstrated above, he was careful to minimise any barbarian aspect. The exception is during his imprisonment which, obviously, was something out of the ordinary following a very unusual set of political circumstances – in effect, it was only with the surrender of Clermont and his imprisonment that Sidonius' belief in Rome's eventual return died.

When Sidonius beseeched barbarisers like Leo and Lampridius to intervene with the king on his behalf, there was no sudden change of heart, no recognition that engagement with barbarians was legitimate. Sidonius did not embrace the Goths of his own volition and, unlike Syagrius, he certainly did not choose the barbarian sphere over the Roman. Having resisted the Goths to the limit of his ability, Sidonius was not only defeated but left adrift, a patriotic

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<sup>225</sup> Sid. Ap., *Carm.*, 12

<sup>226</sup> Harries (2000) 51

<sup>227</sup> Harries (1992) 300

<sup>228</sup> Mathisen (1993) 70; cf. Rousseau (1976) 372 on Sidonius' "adaptability"

Roman in a *regnum* which saw him as an enemy.<sup>229</sup> Faced with imprisonment and then exile, Sidonius no longer had the luxury of choice; he could no longer indulge his dislike for and suspicion of Rome's barbarian rivals. If we are to call Sidonius' conduct in the years following the fall of Clermont 'barbarism', we must take account of the extremes of circumstance through which Sidonius – and Lampridius – lived.

### Conclusion

Sidonius' attitudes, though dominating extant sources, were not shared by all Gallo-Romans. One should not go as far as Barnwell, who claimed that Gallo-Romans embraced the retreat of empire because "of the desire of the ruling classes of Gaul to be free from centrally-imposed officials and constraints",<sup>230</sup> to recognise that Gallo-Romans like Syagrius were conscious of the changing political environment and that, whatever their feelings about it, they nevertheless engaged with the new political frameworks and tapped into new conduits of power, patronage and authority.<sup>231</sup> These Gallo-Romans accepted, in a way that Sidonius would not, that in order to remain a genuine *ruling* class, they would have to compromise and adapt.

They recognised that secular power derived not from abstracted cultural notions but from the political rulership of the land. They gravitated to the *reges* and sought and received favours and appointments from them. Sidonius represents the opposite perspective; he never abandoned his faith in a Roman *risorgimento* and never abandoned the Roman idea that cultural excellence ought to bestow privilege. As such aristocrats retreated from the secular world, they developed other criteria for aristocratic identity; but this cultural élite did not constitute a secular political élite. Their own attitudes denied them access to new channels of power. They removed many of the traditional markers of aristocratic seniority (*e.g.*, titles, estates, clients and wealth) and attempted to replace them with markers derived from perceived cultural merit, but such cultural markers bestowed no practical benefits on their holders; they were, in a political sense, meaningless.

Yet classical learning was not abandoned in the post-Roman west. Although, by the time Gregory of Tours was born, there could have been few living in Gaul who could remember a Roman civil service or the careers that it had offered, to possess such an education was important to certain families (including Gregory's). The only purpose this education served

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<sup>229</sup> On Sidonius' "confused mental condition" after the fall of Clermont, see Harries (1994) 174

<sup>230</sup> Barnwell (1992) 62; cf. Drinkwater (1989a) 138 on the local focus of late antique Gallic élites.

<sup>231</sup> Mathisen (1993) is essentially an extended – and generally excellent – study of the Gallo-Roman aristocracy's growing consciousness of a politically changing Gaul.

was as a part of the *mores maiorum*. Classical education was preserved as a family tradition<sup>232</sup> and became something that was associated with ecclesiastical aristocrats, a marker of an implied superiority which perhaps added a veneer of antiquity;<sup>233</sup> its absence, however, did not preclude an individual from considering himself an aristocrat nor from rising to high rank within the church so that, in some ways, within a generation of Sidonius' death, classical culture was no longer a useful indicator of status even amongst clerical aristocrats.

There were aristocrats, educated themselves, who did not educate their children very heavily, who perhaps felt that ancestral custom was not worth pursuing; we see their shadow in Cassiodorus' complaint that students abandon their studies as soon as they return to their homes in the countryside.<sup>234</sup> Classical culture became a luxury item for a small number of ultra-aristocratic families – indeed, a number that decreased generation on generation – but, being a luxury, it could be dispensed with when necessary. The grandchildren of Sidonius' cultured correspondents might easily have become *illiterati* without suffering for it, without losing aristocratic status and without seeing any damage to their ecclesiastical ambitions.

Things were even more pronounced for the purely secular nobility. Wood tells us that Merovingian Gaul was a “bureaucratic society”<sup>235</sup> and Liebeschuetz that “administration and jurisdiction...even in Merovingian Gaul, required a significant amount of lay literacy”<sup>236</sup> and certainly complete illiteracy was rare for sixth century magnates,<sup>237</sup> but it is also true that these literate nobles were, by Sidonius' measure, *illiterati*. Uncultured as they were, all secular political power in the realm had come to rest with them.

In church and state alike, classical culture's relevance declined into nothingness.

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<sup>232</sup> Mathisen (1993) 116ff.

<sup>233</sup> Although not all aristocrats necessarily *needed* a veneer. Cf. Mratschek (2002) 114 for an illustration of the family tree of Paulinus of Nola, extending from the Antonines down almost to the eighth century.

<sup>234</sup> Cassiodorus, *Variae* 8.31.6-7, *Quid prodest tantos viros latere litteris defaecatos? Pueri liberalium scholarum conventum quaerunt, et mox foro potuerint esse digni, statim incipiunt agresti habitatione nesciri: proficiunt, ut dediscant: erudiuntur, ut neglegant et cum agros diligunt, se amare non norunt... Foedum ergo nimis est nobili filios in desolationibus educare.* (“What good is it to hide men who have been so purified by letters? Boys seek an assembly of the liberal arts, but as soon as they will have been able to be worthy of the forum, they immediately become unknown to their rural habitation: they profit, so they may forget: they are educated, so that they may become indifferent and when they return to the fields, they do not know how to love themselves. It is an exceedingly foul thing, therefore, to a noble for his sons to be educated in the countryside.”)

<sup>235</sup> Wood (1990) 63; cf. Marrou (1956) 337

<sup>236</sup> Liebeschuetz (2000) 233

<sup>237</sup> Harris (1989) 312-313; Wood (1990) 80

## Chapter Three

### *The ecclesiastical aristocracy and new approaches to the acquisition of power*

In the previous chapter, I argued that the aristocratic strategy of ‘retreating to the library’ (*i.e.*, of using classical culture as the defining criterion for membership of the Gallo-Roman nobility) amounted, in practical terms, to the abandonment of all aspirations to secular power which, in the post-Roman west, had become the preserve of the barbarians. An alternative source of power embraced by aristocrats like Sidonius lay in the church, an idea often pressed by modern scholars, and one which I will discuss in this chapter.<sup>238</sup> In this chapter, I will examine elements of traditionalism and innovation amongst ecclesiastical aristocrats and then, through a close reading of a letter of Sidonius, will demonstrate the differences which emerged between secular and ecclesiastical aristocrats during the transition from Roman to barbarian Gaul. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of the function of asceticism in establishing aristocratic credibility and authority within the church and Christian communities.

#### *(a) Traditionalism and innovation in creating a Roman ecclesiastical aristocracy*

Ecclesiastical careers were probably considerably less traumatic for people like Sidonius because, unlike careers in the barbarian *regna*, they required no major change in aristocratic self-perception. One could become a bishop without needing to compromise one’s aristocratic ideology or the ancestral culture that defined one’s Roman identity. By entering the service of a king, one implicitly recognised that Roman power was gone, but serving the church involved nothing of the kind. Moreover, a bishop’s authority over his congregation was very great, as he controlled the local interpretation of doctrine and modes of worship and had at his disposal the potential to exclude any member of his congregation from the wider Christian community;<sup>239</sup> through the *episcopalis audientia*, he even had legal jurisdiction in settling certain disputes;<sup>240</sup> the bishop’s position as a judge and leader was so established that the Old

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<sup>238</sup> See especially Mathisen (1984), (1993); Van Dam (1985); Prinz (1973); cf. Wood (1981) 5, Dill (1898) 215-216, Heinzelmann (1992) 243; cf. Stevens (1933) 130

<sup>239</sup> Liebeschuetz (2001) 139; Lane Fox (1986) 498-506; cf. Beard, North & Price (2000) 1.304-305

<sup>240</sup> Harries (1999) 191-211; Liebeschuetz (2001) 139-140; Lenski (2001) 84ff.; Stancliffe (1983) 265-266. See also Durliat (1997), where it is argued that, in addition to judicial authority, western bishops had very specific administrative duties relating to raising and spending municipal tax revenues, and Liebeschuetz (1997) 137, esp. n.9, 150-151 for a very convincing deconstruction of Durliat’s interpretation of the available evidence.

High German word for cathedral (*tuom*) may have been derived from the verb *dōm* (= *iudicare*) via *tuomo* (= *iudex*) and *tuom* (= *sententia*).<sup>241</sup>

In the most extreme instance, we find that a bishop (admittedly an exceptional one) could even chastise a recalcitrant emperor because the holy man's greater penetration of the divine *secretum* theoretically invested him with an authority superior to anything earthly or secular.<sup>242</sup> This abstracted spiritual authority was augmented by the bishop's control over his diocese's property and finances which potentially placed at his disposal considerable sums of money and quantities of land.<sup>243</sup>

The episcopal throne brought wealth to those who wanted it.<sup>244</sup> The wealth and power of the episcopacy in the sixth century attracted individuals (such as the grandfather of Gregory of Tours) from successful secular careers; Geary sees the bishop's throne as the natural culmination of a successful aristocratic *cursus honorum*.<sup>245</sup> Frend, speaking of the late fourth century, described how "The Bishop of a large See was now a great officer of State";<sup>246</sup> one can imagine how attractive the *cathedra* must have been in the fifth century, when other offices of state were rarer and more difficult to obtain than before, or the sixth century, when even the meagre vestiges of the Roman bureaucracy had disappeared. Indeed, Heinzelmann argues that Gallic aristocrats saw the church as a political powerbase from which to counter the influence of Italy and the imperial centre.<sup>247</sup> Against this background, we see the emergence of Gaudemet's "épiscopat monarchique".<sup>248</sup>

The extent to which sees could be monopolised by a comparatively small number of aristocratic families is immense;<sup>249</sup> Heinzelmann has shown that, of the 179 Gallic bishops whose social class can be ascertained, only eight were not members of the traditional aristocracy<sup>250</sup> and, while we cannot declare as absolute fact that the Gallic episcopacy

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<sup>241</sup> D. H. Green (1998) 337-338 argues that OHG *tuom* (cathedral) is actually a corruption of the Latin *domus episcopalis* but I remain unconvinced.

<sup>242</sup> Bowersock (1986) 305; cf. Wood (2000) 511 on the social leadership exercised by Gallic bishops.

<sup>243</sup> See Sid. Ap., *Ep*, 4.25.2 on a candidate in an episcopal election at Bourges offering to let his partisans plunder church lands; Harries (1994) 219 on the wealth of the church at Arles. The control of church wealth was a matter discussed at several ecclesiastical councils which I deal with later in the thesis.

<sup>244</sup> Geary (1988) 126; Stancliffe (1983) 265-266

<sup>245</sup> Geary (1988) 129-130

<sup>246</sup> Frend (1998) 238; Heinzelmann (1992) 245-246 on the political power of southern Gallic bishops.

<sup>247</sup> Heinzelmann (1992) 243-244

<sup>248</sup> Gaudemet (1958) 322-368

<sup>249</sup> Harries (1994) 182 is more conservative, and not necessarily wrong, when she says "a blood relationship with the predecessor" was "perhaps" one factor in selecting a new bishop (other factors being "the state of affairs in the city [and] the qualifications and character of the person selected").

<sup>250</sup> Heinzelmann (1975) 75-90

followed the model which Heinzlmann suggests,<sup>251</sup> it does seem likely, especially taking into account the careers and family backgrounds of some of our most famous sources of the period. An example is provided by Gregory of Tours whose family provided – or, at least, was connected to – thirteen of the previous eighteen bishops of Tours,<sup>252</sup> whose uncle, who cared for him after his father's death, was bishop of Clermont and whose mother's grandfather, for whom he was named, was bishop of Langres.<sup>253</sup> Caesarius of Arles is comparable although less extreme; he succeeded his *propinquus* Aeonius as bishop of Arles, although his biographers attempted to convince posterity that Caesarius was ignorant of his relationship,<sup>254</sup> and seems to have brought a number of *concives* and *consanguinei* with him from Chalon to Arles.<sup>255</sup> Rusticus of Narbonne “identifies himself as the son and nephew of bishops and...employs a system of dating based on his own years in the episcopal office”<sup>256</sup> – truly an *épiscopat monarchique*!

Since fifth century bishops often had considerable influence over the selection of their successor, it would not have been difficult for an individual bishop to ensure that a kinsman followed him to the throne; Geary cites the example of Felix of Nantes who used his position as bishop to advance the material and political interests of his own family,<sup>257</sup> but there are others – and I discuss some of them at length below. As Mathisen compellingly argues, the bishop's “control over the sacred and religious life of the community” was “of inestimable value” in establishing the bishop as a patron – arguably the major patron – in his see.<sup>258</sup> The dynasticism of the episcopacy was a development which, although novel in certain specific aspects, harked back to the “small groupings of traditional families” who had come to control the religious and political life of their communities from the late second century until the fourth.<sup>259</sup> It is practically tautological to speak of an aristocratic bishop in post-Roman Gaul;

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<sup>251</sup> Heinzlmann arrives at his total of 179 aristocrats after looking at a total of more than 700 named bishops, for more than three hundred of whom the only certain information is their name.. It is hypothetically possible – though not likely – that these aristocratic bishops were a statistical anomaly and that most of the other bishops, for whom we have no information, were not aristocrats. Harries (1994) 181-182 argues that Eucherius of Lyons may not have been noble because he is never described in any text as *nobilis*; his parents are called *parentes splendidissimi* but, she says, this need not imply aristocratic rank. The balance of probability favours Eucherius coming from an aristocratic background.

<sup>252</sup> I discuss this in some detail below while examining the rôle of kinship in the fifth and sixth century episcopate.

<sup>253</sup> Cf. Mathisen (1984) 83-95; see also Heinzlmann (2001) 11ff.

<sup>254</sup> *Vita Caesarii*, 1.10; cf. Klingshirm (1994a) 72

<sup>255</sup> *Vita Caes.* 1.29

<sup>256</sup> Heinzlmann (1992) 250

<sup>257</sup> Geary (1988) 124-125

<sup>258</sup> Mathisen (1993) 91-93 (quotations are from 91); cf. Frend (1969) 6 on the bishop as the counterpart of both the pagan *patronus* and of the city's *pontifex*.

<sup>259</sup> Brown (1978) 23

the aristocracy and the episcopacy, to use Geary's description, "formed an inseparable institution".<sup>260</sup>

In Sidonius' account of an episcopal election at Bourges, we find some telling remarks on the relationship between aristocracy and episcopacy: "Various partisans from among the townsmen received the pontifical council, not without those private interests which always overturn the public good; and which our triumvirate of competitors encouraged, one of whom constantly grumbled about the ancient privilege of his birthright although destitute with respect to the quality of his morals".<sup>261</sup> That this claimant did not win the episcopal election is less important than the fact that he saw the throne as his by right of birth – and I will discuss this at length in a later chapter. Similarly, when recommending Simplicius (who actually won the election at Bourges) to his friend, Perpetuus of Tours, Sidonius emphasises aristocratic pedigree: "If reverence must be given to lineage...his ancestors presided over either episcopal thrones or courts of law. His illustrious family, in whichever calling, has flourished either as bishops or as prefects; thus, the custom of his ancestors has always been to pronounce the law, whether divine or human";<sup>262</sup> his was "a family used to laying down the law"<sup>263</sup> and it is hard to read these without immediately being reminded of Venantius Fortunatus' later epitaph for a bishop of Périgueux, "To whom the order of bishops flowed from either parent;/ the priestly pinnacle came to the heir".<sup>264</sup>

There is, in our sources, a direct connexion between social status, kinship and episcopal claims, between one's relationship to other bishops and one's eligibility for a see; this connexion remained a constant in Gallic ecclesiastical politics throughout both the fifth and sixth centuries and worried some churchmen who feared that concern for the aristocrat's *honorum dignitas* was leading to the wicked ascending *cathedrae* ahead of the righteous.<sup>265</sup>

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<sup>260</sup> Geary (1988) 123

<sup>261</sup> Sid. Ap., Ep. 4.25.1-2, *exceperunt concilium pontificale variae voluntates oppidanorum, nec non et illa quae bonum publicum semper evertunt studia privata; quae quidam triumviratus accenderat competitorum, quorum hic antiquam natalium praerogativam reliqua destitutus morum dote ructabat.*

<sup>262</sup> Sid. Ap., Ep. 7.9.17, *Si natalibus servanda reverentia est... parentes ipsius aut cathedris aut tribunalibus praesederunt. inlustri in utraque conversatione prosapia aut episcopis floruit aut praefectis: ita semper huiusce maioribus aut humanum aut divinum dictare ius usui fuit.*

<sup>263</sup> Rousseau (1976) 358

<sup>264</sup> Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina* 4.8.7-8, *Ordo sacerdotum cui fluxit utroque parente/ Venit ad heredem pontificalis apex*

<sup>265</sup> Rousseau (1976) 358 citing Eucherius and Salvian. Eucherius, of course, was himself an aristocrat whose two sons followed him to the episcopate.

On entering the church, aristocratic bishops often brought certain of their prejudices with them;<sup>266</sup> the ancient Graeco-Roman ideology of the aristocratic *boni* and the *optimates*<sup>267</sup> – the concept that morality and intellectual worth were class-based attributes<sup>268</sup> – was carried over into the church where it merged or was made to fuse with Christian theological concepts of the righteous and the wicked (the *boni* and the *mali*). Faustus of Riez puts it in these terms, playing on the various meanings of *bonum* as noun and adjective: “You will be a righteous man (*bonus*), who has possessions (*bona*). Riches are a good thing, gold is a good thing and silver is a good thing too; estates are good and possessions are good. All things of this kind are good”.<sup>269</sup> Mathisen characterises the situation well when he says that, “This ‘us’ versus ‘them’ mentality contributed even more to the sense of superiority that Gallo-Roman aristocrats wished to engender among themselves, and helped isolate them from what they considered to be non-elite persons or groups”.<sup>270</sup> Explicit was the view that a bishop was not merely socially superior to his congregants but was their moral and spiritual better, not by virtue of ecclesiastical rank, but through his noble birth.

Although there is no reason to doubt that aristocratic bishops had a genuine Christian faith and tried to comport themselves in accordance with their religious beliefs and position of spiritual leadership, we do find the complaint in Pomerius’ *De vita contemplativa* that some bishops spent more time on “leisured study” than on more onerous duties;<sup>271</sup> when one considers how much time many of our episcopal sources spent on literary activities (both poetic and epistolographic), Pomerius’ complaint is easy to believe. This raises questions about the ways in which cultured ecclesiastical aristocrats of the period understood and recognised their pastoral duties. Some bishops had considerations other than fulfilling the needs of church and community. But this is no great surprise; the episcopacy, in many instances, was a means of granting a veneer of spiritual validation to traditional Roman ideas about aristocratic superiority.

Certain Gallo-Roman aristocrats saw and used the church as a means of reacquiring the power they had enjoyed, as the traditional leaders of their communities, under the empire and which

<sup>266</sup> Cf. Bartlett (2001) 214-215; also Stevens (1933) 86-87 on the intolerance and disdain which Sidonius seems to have felt for social inferiors

<sup>267</sup> Mathisen (1993) 10-13

<sup>268</sup> Cf. Brown (1981) 13-18 for a critique of the ways in which this same attitude has been allowed to shape the modern view of late antique religion.

<sup>269</sup> Faustus Rhegiensis, *Sermo* 5, *esto bonus, qui habes bona. bonae sunt divitiae, bonum est aurum, bonum est et argentum, bonae familiae, bonae possessiones. omnia ista bona sunt...*

<sup>270</sup> Mathisen (1993) 13; Salzman (2002) 69-70 stresses social distinctions between older and newer aristocrat families which, if one were to accept the argument, would undermine Mathisen’s point that all aristocrats were united by certain common threads and formed a cohesive social union.

<sup>271</sup> Pomerius, *De vita contemplativa* 3.28

had been taken from them by the decline of imperial authority. These ecclesiastical aristocrats could not have formed a majority of the Gallo-Roman élite, but they are, predictably, the loudest voices of the period because they are responsible for the source texts preserved down by the mediaeval church. These ecclesiastical nobles effectively opted out of the secular world, where power proceeded from the hands of barbarian kings, and created a new bailiwick for themselves in the church; here and, arguably, only here could they preserve their ancestral standards of and criteria for defining *nobilitas* and *romanitas* while simultaneously acquiring and utilising real political power within their communities.

One can scarcely go too far in emphasising how much the ecclesiastical aristocrats were acting as traditionalists rather than innovators in developing their approach to classical culture. Paradoxically, the ecclesiastical aristocrats were trying to find and create *new* criteria to define and maintain their *old* status, seeing the church and episcopacy as means of preserving ancestral ideologies; they perceived the ecclesiastical nobleman as a continuation of the old Roman civil aristocracy, not as something novel and certainly not as something which contradicted older aristocratic models. Indeed, to their eyes, it was surely the barbarised Roman noblemen – whether those who abandoned his ancestors' culture entirely or those who, like Syagrius and Lampridius, remained culturally Roman while serving a non-Roman potentate – who represented the true (and unacceptable) innovation and the real parting from Roman tradition.<sup>272</sup>

It is with this in mind that I find myself disagreeing with Mathisen's interpretation of Sidonius' letter to Tonantius Ferreolus.<sup>273</sup> Where Mathisen interprets the letter as an attempt by Sidonius to make a kind of declaration that this sentiment (*viz.*, "that ecclesiastics were every bit as much a part of the aristocracy as purely secular aristocrats"<sup>274</sup>) is the opinion of all *boni*, I think that the letter should be read in a different way.

<sup>272</sup> Cf. Heather (1999) 251-252 on the increased militarisation of the Roman population, "a subject awaiting a comprehensive treatment".

<sup>273</sup> Mathisen (1993) 90, citing. Sid. Ap., Ep., 7.12.4, *absque conflictatione praestantior secundum bonorum sententiam computatur honorato maximo minimus religiosus* (my translation: "and therefore, without a doubt, the lowest priest is valued more than the greatest magnate in the judgment of good men"; Mathisen's translation: "Without a doubt, in the opinion of all good men, the least ecclesiastic ranks higher than the greatest secular official").

<sup>274</sup> Mathisen, *loc. cit.*; but see Wes (1992) 258, who argues exactly the opposite. Citing Salvian (*De gubernatione Dei*, 4.32-3), Wes argues that a *nobilis* who joined the church lost his status and was treated with contempt. While Salvian is probably overstating things (cf., *De gub. Dei*, 4.7 *si quis ex nobilibus ad deum coeperit, statim honorem nobilitatis amittit*, "if anyone from the nobility turns to God, he at once dismisses the honour of nobility" – wishful thinking on Salvian's part), it seems likely that some secular aristocrats would have rightly seen themselves, by virtue of their relationship with barbarian kings, as the true power in the land and may have looked down on those who abandoned 'the real world' and sought careers within the church; cf. Bartlett (2001) on Italian aristocratic rejection of church careers.

The content of the letter is clear enough: Sidonius is trying to mollify Ferreolus and assure him no insult was implied by his being seated amongst the bishops at a festival rather than amongst the secular aristocrats (in which connexion it is key to recognise that Ferreolus almost certainly was not a priest at any time during his life). Sidonius recounts his correspondent's impressive secular career – he was praetorian prefect of Gaul three times<sup>275</sup> – and thanks him for saving Arles in 452/3 from the depredations of the Visigothic king Thorismund, the *Rhodani hospes* or “guest of the Rhône”,<sup>276</sup> because Ferreolus won him over by giving him a banquet. He finally says that a man of such parts deserves to be seated with the *perfecti Christi* rather than to the *praefecti Valentiniani*.<sup>277</sup>

Mathisen takes this all literally rather than as the placatory effort Sidonius clearly intended. If it was genuinely the opinion of all good men (*boni*, i.e., all noblemen) that the lowest priest was more worthy of esteem than the greatest magnate, Sidonius would not need to convince Ferreolus of the fact. This letter is not, as Mathisen contends, a demonstration of the beliefs of the *boni* as a whole or of the ecclesiastical aristocrat's membership of the secular nobility. Instead, it shows unambiguously that Ferreolus, as a layman, took offence at being seated amongst and associated with priests and saw it as an insult (and, indeed, it is possible that it was intended as such). So offensive was this association with clerics that Sidonius had to try to assuage his correspondent's resentment, hence the comparison of Ferreolus to the “perfect of Christ”.

Sidonius' comments are not literal and this letter shows us both Sidonius' own fears about his place in the aristocratic collective and the general prejudice of secular aristocrats against clerical careers. The letter is generally dated to around 479, with Sidonius having been elected bishop of Clermont around 470. By embarking on a career in the church, Sidonius withdrew from the pursuit of a career within the rump Roman state;<sup>278</sup> in the eyes of an extremely patriotic Gallo-Roman aristocrat like Sidonius, who had expected an eventual Roman resurgence that would restore him and his family to their rightful place, the move from civil and secular power into the church could conceivably have been traumatic, entailing an admission that there was no longer any hope of a *risorgimento*,<sup>279</sup> something that was

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<sup>275</sup> *PLRE* 2.465-466

<sup>276</sup> Sid. Ap., *Ep.*, 7.12.3

<sup>277</sup> Sid. Ap., *Ep.*, 7.12.4

<sup>278</sup> Cf. Stevens (1933) 29

<sup>279</sup> Cf. Bartlett (2001) 208 on the undesirability of a church career to Italian secular aristocrats, 202 on aristocratic attitudes which militated against a church career.

underlined by the Gothic conquest of Clermont in 474.<sup>280</sup> Far from being a meaningful exchange about aristocratic attitudes to clerical careers, the letter is an attempt by an aristocratic churchman to justify his retreat from the secular world to a fellow noble whose pedigree, achievements and career were extremely impressive. Mathisen's interpretation is too uncritical and fails to consider not only Sidonius' motives in writing and his desire to justify himself but also the reasons why Ferreolus was so offended in the first place.

In the longer term, rather than arguing that churchmen still constituted full members of the aristocracy, élite churchmen like Sidonius may genuinely have come to see themselves as the only true nobles with their marginalisation from secular politics somehow underlining their superiority and commitment to Roman custom. They may have regarded those who sought power within the *regna* as innovators who had turned their backs on the *mores maiorum* and true *nobilitas*. As Marcone said, bishops exercised "a relatively traditional form of late Roman political behaviour, a continuation and a revival, following clearly intelligible models, of the aristocratic ethos".<sup>281</sup> I conclude that aristocratic Gallo-Roman bishops of the fifth century increasingly saw the secular world, dominated by heretical non-Roman kings and barbarian or barbarising aristocracies, as alien territory, one that was beneath them and which could bring no advantage to those who were unwilling to compromise their traditional Roman identity and ideologies by adopting Germanic-inspired modes of behaviour and definitions of élite status.

In the section that follows, I argue that these Gallo-Roman bishops sought a marker of distinction, something to show unambiguously that the spiritual leaders of Gaul were superior to the secular lords even if they were actually politically subordinate to German *reges*. They found in asceticism the perfect marker of superiority, a superiority that, being rooted in religious life, would be instantly obvious and comprehensible to all who saw it in a way that classical culture would not. Through ascetic practices, ecclesiastical aristocrats could replace the holy man, could become holy men themselves and could put forth an image of themselves as spiritually, as well as economically and socially, superior.

#### ***(b) Asceticism: a new badge for the old aristocracy?***

Even a cursory examination of late antique religion shows up the extraordinary power that asceticism possessed over the Christian imagination in late antiquity. Ascetic withdrawal from the world had always been a feature of ancient life and was not a distinctly Christian

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<sup>280</sup> On Sidonius' "confused mental condition" after the fall of Clermont, see Harries (1994) 174

<sup>281</sup> Marcone (1998) 349

phenomenon,<sup>282</sup> but it became so central a part of Christian thought that we are now inclined to think of late antique asceticism exclusively in terms of the Christian monk, rather than the pagan philosopher.<sup>283</sup>

In Gaul, in particular, asceticism became popular with people of all ranks and its practitioners, monks and hermits, were highly esteemed by congregations and oftentimes acquired influence within Christian communities.<sup>284</sup> The regard for asceticism became so great amongst the élite that it is comparatively difficult to find any fifth century Gallic bishop who did not engage in ascetic practices, whether before or after ascending the *cathedra*.<sup>285</sup> In this section, I will discuss the political advantages which monasticism offered to someone intent on an ecclesiastical career and show why, both in Gaul particularly, asceticism was held in such high regard. I will argue that asceticism became an important marker of distinction for members of the traditional Gallo-Roman élite who had entered the church, that it became a way of displaying religiosity – and therefore superiority – in an acceptable form and that a reputation for asceticism enhanced the standing of a churchman.

I will not discuss the development of asceticism in great detail – largely because it would require a thesis of its own to do it proper justice – but it is necessary to understand how and when ascetic thought first filtered into Gaul. Ascetic practice had a long history within Christianity – examples abound of Christians who undertook lives of abstinence, chastity and self-denial<sup>286</sup> – but the phenomenon of monastic asceticism, which became the dominant form of ascetic practice in the west, emerged in Egypt. The men who set the pattern for the development of coenobitic monastic asceticism were Antony (died c. 356) and his contemporary Pachomius (died c. 346), both Egyptian anchorites who gathered local Christian hermits into religious communities. While it is probably impossible to define a specific point at which Egyptian ascetic principles and influences were first imported from the east into the west, we can be reasonably certain that a Latin version of the *Vita Antonii* was published around 370 (judging from Jerome's *Vita Pauli*, written between 374 and 379, where

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<sup>282</sup> Brown (1998a) 601-603, 607-612 on pagan ascetics; Cox (1983) 25-30, "By the late first century A.D., the profession of philosophy and an ascetic mode of living were firmly linked in the popular mind and in the thinking of the intelligentsia as well" (quote from 25), citing Dodds (1970) 1-36; cf. Geffcken (1978) 240ff. on the "[h]oliness, purity, mortification of bodily being, and union with the world of the gods" which were the hallmarks of the "late Hellenes".

<sup>283</sup> Jones (1964) 929; Brown (1998a) 601; cf. Palanque (1952) 532

<sup>284</sup> Cf. Lee (2000) 36 on the esteem for asceticism, as an outward manifestation of *pietas*, in the eastern Roman empire.

<sup>285</sup> Cf. Dill (1898) 215-216, where it is argued that there was a clearer distinction between aristocratic bishops, on the one hand, and monk-bishops on the other.

<sup>286</sup> Stancliffe (1983) 268-269; cf. Palanque (1952) 525

the existence of *Vitae* in Greek and Latin are mentioned<sup>287</sup>) and that it rapidly became popular.<sup>288</sup>

During the first decade of the fifth century, Honoratus, a Gallic aristocrat from a consular family, settled on Lerinum, between Cannes and Antibes, and established a monastery which has come to be known by its modern French name of Lérins, the so-called “nursery of bishops and saints”.<sup>289</sup> Honoratus had previously travelled in the eastern empire – Rousseau suggests that he visited Syria and Egypt – and appears to have been influenced by the monastic concepts which he met there.<sup>290</sup> Monasticism at Lérins was informed or influenced by the writings of Cassian who himself founded two monasteries near Marseilles,<sup>291</sup> either a little before the founding of Lérins or in the decade following, and whose work Rousseau describes as “an amalgamation of Egyptian and Palestinian practice”.<sup>292</sup> These new monastic centres acted as gateways through which eastern coenobitic monastic thought entered Gaul.<sup>293</sup>

The foundation of Lérins went ahead with the approval of Leontius, bishop of Fréjus, in whose diocese the island lay.<sup>294</sup> In a short time, it became so popular a centre for ascetic retreat that Honoratus’ biographers could ask, “What land, what nation does not have its own citizens in that monastery?”.<sup>295</sup> Mathisen conjectures that many of the monks were friends or relatives of Honoratus<sup>296</sup> and, while his hypothesis can be neither proved nor disproved, the contention of the *Vita*, that many nationalities were represented in the monastery, seems to contradict Mathisen’s thesis that monks were predominantly from the founder’s circle of aristocratic refugees from eastern Lugdunensis;<sup>297</sup> however, as Harries says, identification with a *civitas* was seldom exclusive<sup>298</sup> so the fact that some monks had apparent connexions with Lugdunensis need not mean that the monks themselves identified with the place.

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<sup>287</sup> Jerome, *Vita Pauli*, 1, *Igitur quia de Antonio tam Graeco quam Romano stilo diligenter memoriae traditum est, pauca de Pauli principio et fine scribere disposui, magis quia res omissa erat quam fretus ingenio* (“Therefore, since accounts of Antony have been handed down meticulously, in Greek no less than in Latin, I have decided to write a little about the early days and end of Paul, more because the matter has been ignored than from enthusiasm about my ability”).

<sup>288</sup> Rousseau (1991) 113-114

<sup>289</sup> Montalembert (1896) 1.464; cf. “school for bishops”, Rousseau (2000) 765

<sup>290</sup> Rousseau (2000) 764

<sup>291</sup> On Cassian’s eastern influences, cf. Christophe (1969) 20-21; O. Chadwick (1950) 82-96

<sup>292</sup> Rousseau, (2000) 764

<sup>293</sup> Cf. Av. Cameron (1998) 700ff. on ascetic literature

<sup>294</sup> *Vita Honorati*, 15

<sup>295</sup> *Vita Honorati*, 17, *Quae adhuc terra, quae natio in monasterio illius cives suos non habet...?*; Jones (1964) 930; Haarhoff (1920) 177

<sup>296</sup> Mathisen (1989) 77

<sup>297</sup> Mathisen (1993) 60, (1989) 77-78

<sup>298</sup> Harries (1994) 34; cf. Lewis (2000)

The Provençal foundations, while destined to become famous, were not the first monastic foundations in Gaul; Ligugé and Marmoutier had been established a couple of generations earlier (the former around 360, the latter around 370) and, while neither was a true ‘monastery’ in the Egyptian sense (being rather closer to the *laurae* of the east<sup>299</sup>), they both had many monastic characteristics<sup>300</sup> (e.g., coenobitism, communal worship, common ownership) or, at least, characteristics which seem to anticipate the archetypal monasticism of Lérins.

Having provided this brief introduction to the beginnings of eastern-influenced coenobitic monastic asceticism in Gaul, I now turn to the uses that aristocrats made of the phenomenon. The connexion between Gallic aristocracy and monasticism in the fifth century is well-established in scholarship and has been for quite some time; scholars of earlier generations noted that there seemed to be something innately fashionable in monasticism and asceticism in the fifth century<sup>301</sup> while the late William Frend uncharitably described western monasticism as “the vogue of an escapist aristocracy” in contrast to the “popular” form found in the east.<sup>302</sup>

As I mentioned earlier, aristocratic bishops usually either had an ascetic background or, after ascending the *cathedra*, began to pursue an ostentatiously ascetic lifestyle; even nobles who were not officers of the church found ascetic ideology attractive. Yet, the rapid spread of ascetic values through Gallic episcopal aristocrats has not yet been fully explained. While Mathisen highlights the relationships that may have existed between Honoratus and some Lérinsian monks<sup>303</sup> and argues that some aristocrats fled to monasteries to escape invasions and imperial purges,<sup>304</sup> he can only explain why these monks would go to Lérins rather than to some other monastery; he does not explain why they would have sought the ascetic life in the first place.<sup>305</sup>

Asceticism – and, in this discussion, monasticism and asceticism are effectively the same thing – had not always been an acceptable expression of religiosity. In some circumstances,

<sup>299</sup> Rousseau (2000) 746, 750-751

<sup>300</sup> Stancliffe (1983) 23-26

<sup>301</sup> Haarhoff (1920) 177; Stevens (1933) 70; cf. N. Chadwick (1955) 146, who questions the extent of Pachomius’ influence in late antiquity; and Dill (1898) 215-216.

<sup>302</sup> Frend (1969) 10; cf. Leyser (1999) 193 for a different view.

<sup>303</sup> Mathisen (1989) 76; cf. Leyser (1999) 199 on Honoratus bringing his kinsman Hilary to Arles.

<sup>304</sup> Perhaps supporting Mathisen’s view, Eucherius’ *De laude eremi*, 42, refers to the island as a sanctuary for those escaping the “shipwrecks of a storm-tossed world” (*procellosi naufragiis mundi effusis*).

<sup>305</sup> Mathisen (1989) 81-3; cf. Markus (1990) 161 who notes, with particular reference to Lérins, that “The vocabulary of monastic conversion is saturated with the language of spatial separation: taking flight, seeking refuge, leaving behind, emigrating”.

asceticism had the potential to be deeply subversive, to challenge the authority of bishops and the church. Late antiquity and the early middle ages were periods in which, as Brown puts it, “the average Christian believer...was encouraged to draw comfort from the expectation that, somewhere, in his own times...a chosen few of his fellows had achieved, usually through prolonged ascetic labour, an exceptional degree of closeness to God”.<sup>306</sup> In other words, this was an age in which God was believed to intervene in the material world through a small number of exceptional holy men, allowing them to act as conduits for supernatural powers that flowed from Him.<sup>307</sup>

The ascetic lifestyle – and a typically ascetic appearance<sup>308</sup> – constituted a clear declaration of one’s religious belief, perhaps even that one existed in a state that was above the worldly, hinting at the possibility of a connexion to the divine and of being invested with, or having access to, exceptional powers that derived from this relationship with the divine.<sup>309</sup> The late antique holy man could, if his claims of purity and sanctity were widely accepted, provide an alternate source of leadership for Christian communities<sup>310</sup> and act as a rival to the authority of the local bishop and, conceivably, the church as a whole;<sup>311</sup> moreover, any such holy man, if unsanctioned by the church and hostile to the bishop, was necessarily setting the established church and the local community at odds, something which could have led to heresy or, indeed, been innately heretical.<sup>312</sup> Babut went so far as to argue that Priscillian was such a holy man and his condemnation for heresy the result of the fear he instilled in non-ascetic bishops.<sup>313</sup>

Thus, we find numerous fifth century examples of hostile reactions against asceticism from bishops; the practice was condemned as a sign of Manichaeism<sup>314</sup> and, in the aftermath of the Priscillian heresy, ascetics across Spain and Gaul faced accusations of heresy because of their

<sup>306</sup> Brown (2000) 781; cf. Cox (1983) 48

<sup>307</sup> Brown (1978) 18-19 on the difference between “earthly” supernatural powers (*i.e.*, sorcery) and “divine” supernatural powers (*i.e.*, miracles), 22 on the debate (in the Gnostic *Acta Thomae*) about whether Thomas was a saint or a sorcerer; see also Brown (2000) 790 on God allowing a “person of tested sanctity” to exercise miraculous powers.

<sup>308</sup> Cf. Eunapius, fr. 48.2 [= Blockley (1983) 74-76]

<sup>309</sup> Brown (1978) 11-12

<sup>310</sup> Cf. Marcone (1998) 348; Leyser (1999) 197-198 on Hilary’s *Sermo de vita Sancti Honorati* as an attempt at convincing the people of Arles of his own worthiness to succeed Honoratus.

<sup>311</sup> It is not clear to me how far we can, in the fifth and sixth centuries, construe the Gallic church as anything like a monolithic entity; it is not clear that an individual who was hostile to one bishop would necessarily be objectionable to the bishop of a neighbouring see: Stancliffe (1983) 288, see also 278, 284

<sup>312</sup> Cf. Brown (1981) 101-103 on “clean power” derived from official sources (*e.g.*, bishops, backed by the saints) as opposed to “unclean power” derived from unofficial sources.

<sup>313</sup> Babut (1909) 125, 167

<sup>314</sup> H. Chadwick (1998) 582-583

austere lifestyle and appearance.<sup>315</sup> Jerome, himself a stringent ascetic, claimed that the inhabitants of Rome said that any woman who looked pale or sad was “miserable, monkish and Manichaean” and that they equated fasting with heresy;<sup>316</sup> he later recounts popular anger when the extreme ascetic routines of Blaesilla, daughter of the senatorial noblewoman Paula, led to her death.<sup>317</sup> It was easy for asceticism to be construed as a disruptive and heretical force, tantamount to a complete rejection of the material world which, because rejection of the material world constituted the rejection of the greater part of God’s creation, carried the taint of Gnostic dualism;<sup>318</sup> Philaster of Brescia actually listed the ascetics, in his ‘Book of Different Heresies’ as an offshoot of the Gnostics and Manichaeans.<sup>319</sup> Tertullian expressed the fundamentals of Catholic thought on the matter when he laid the injunction that, “while we remain separate [from sinners] in worldly matters, the world is of God but that which is worldly is nevertheless of the Devil”;<sup>320</sup> and while this very orthodox doctrine, whereby the world is a good thing contaminated by human wickedness, differs from the Manichaean belief that the material world and all flesh are innately evil, the two were similar enough that some Christians could not differentiate between them. Moreover, although some ascetics did not recognise how close their *Weltanschauung* was to Manichaean principles,<sup>321</sup> Cassian warned that the visions and supernatural powers which asceticism sometimes brought, and which were seen as proof of a special connexion to God, could be devil-sent to dupe the unwary.<sup>322</sup>

For all these reasons, some in the ecclesiastical hierarchy and the wider community took a dim view of asceticism, because it was imbued with the potential to deceive;<sup>323</sup> many devout

<sup>315</sup> Sulpicius Severus, *Chronica* 2.50.3-4, *hic stultitiae eo usque processerat, ut omnes etiam sanctos viros, quibus aut studium inerat lectionis aut propositum erat certare ieiuniis, tamquam Priscilliani socios aut discipulos in crimen arcesseret. ausus etiam miser est ea tempestate Martino episcopo, viro plane Apostolis conferendo, palam obiectare haeresis infamiam.* “He [Ithacius] proceeded with such stupidity, that he even accused all those holy men, to whom the study of reading was important or who were keen to compete at fasting, of being either friends of Priscillian or his students. The wretched man even dared to throw the infamous charge of heresy at Martin, a man obviously comparable to the Apostles, who was at that time bishop.”

<sup>316</sup> Jerome, *Ep.*, 22.13 *miseram et monacham et Manicheam*

<sup>317</sup> Jerome, *Ep.*, 39; cf. Brown (1968) 98 on late fourth century hostility to ascetic conversions in Rome. Cf. *Ep.*, 38.2 where Jerome calls for Christians to celebrate Blaesilla’s demise and. *Ep.*, 38.4 where Jerome seems to say that an ascetic lifestyle is a commandment of Christ and that anyone who dislikes it is an Antichrist.

<sup>318</sup> Cf. Brown (1967) 47-48; see also Moorhead (1999) 56-59 on the “hostility” of late antique thinkers towards the “corruptible body” and also on the influence of Neoplatonism.

<sup>319</sup> Philastrius Brixienensis, *Liber diversarum hereseon*, 55 (CSEL 38, 1898, ed. F. Marx)

<sup>320</sup> Tertullian, *De spectaculis*, 15.8, *sed tamen in saecularibus separamur, quia saeculum dei est, saecularia autem diaboli.*

<sup>321</sup> Brown (1967) 369-370

<sup>322</sup> Stancliffe (1983) 236-237

<sup>323</sup> Cf. Trout (1999) 113-115 and Frend (1969) 6 on Pope Siricius’ dislike for Paulinus of Nola (“the arrogant aloofness of the Pope of Rome”, *urbici papae superba discretio*, Paul. Nolensis *Ep.* 5.14) on account of his asceticism; Buse (1856) 1.193 explained Siricius’ brusque manner by referring to the apparent irregularity of Paulinus’ episcopal election; at the same time, it is interesting to note that

and committed Christians saw, in the severe existence of people like Jerome, something that looked distinctly unchristian, even heretical.<sup>324</sup> This is why Martin of Tours, first of Gaul's monk-bishops (though himself of neither Gallic nor aristocratic extraction), was treated with such indifference by Gaul's ecclesiastical establishment in the years following his death;<sup>325</sup> and, while Babut goes too far in saying that Cassian and the Lérins monastic establishment were actively hostile to Martin's legacy, it is clear that aristocratic Gallic monks were generally uncomfortable with the dishevelled thaumaturgy that is so characteristic of Martin's brand of asceticism.<sup>326</sup> Martin may have been treated a potential intercessor after his death, but he was not held up as a model for emulation.<sup>327</sup> Despite the apparent importance of Martin's evangelical and monastic activities and the later significance of Sulpicius Severus' *Vita Martini*, Martin is not mentioned by any fifth century monastic source (e.g., Cassian, Pomerius or any of the monks of Lérins).

The apparent lack of influence of Martin's monastic foundations is particularly perplexing given that Marmoutier and Ligugé, like Lérins, could be given the appellation "a nursery for future bishops".<sup>328</sup> Martin and his brand of asceticism must be seen merely as one part of the wider Gallic ascetic phenomenon, rather than as the origin, representing a parallel to Lérins rather than being itself a catalyst for the development either of Lérins specifically or of Gallic monasticism in general. In terms of monastic development in southern Gaul and the Rhône valley, Martin's influence was not felt as keenly as his biographer might have wished us to believe; his methods and, indeed, his whole approach both to monasticism and to the purpose of the episcopacy differed drastically from what we find amongst the ecclesiastical aristocrats of the fifth century. At its heart, "la culture lérinienne"<sup>329</sup> was not the same as the ascetic culture Martin established in the Touraine; in place of the potentially threatening "holy man...marked by so many histrionic feats of self-mortification",<sup>330</sup> Lérinsian monasticism was led and defined by aristocrats, men tied to the church as their only remaining source of power and the only means by which they could continue to lead their communities and, in

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Jerome, *Ep.*, 127.9 is also critical of Siricius' judgement. I share Frend's view that, in Siricius, we see someone who is sceptical about the religious merit of asceticism and who distrusts and fears ascetics.

<sup>324</sup> Lienhard (1977) 119-127

<sup>325</sup> Babut (1912) 13ff.

<sup>326</sup> Cf. Stancliffe (1983) 256-257 and Stewart (1998) 17; Leyser (1999) 193-194 disagrees with the traditional division between Martin's "northern asceticism" and the "urbane, institutionally well developed monastic culture" of Lérins, between "cenobitic orderliness" and "disorganized charisma". I sense something of the straw man about Leyser's argument.

<sup>327</sup> Rousselle (1971) 96

<sup>328</sup> Stancliffe (1983) 350-351, future bishops who spent time at Martin's monasteries included Heros of Arles and Lazarus of Aix.

<sup>329</sup> Courçelle (1968)

<sup>330</sup> Brown (1961) 91; cf. Stewart (1998) 17

their hands, asceticism became something used to support and maintain the church rather than to subvert it.

Having discussed why asceticism had not always been acceptable to many Christians, I now explain why we find so many aristocratic monks, many of whom went on to become bishops, in fifth century southern Gaul. A wide combination of factors combines to explain asceticism's peculiar power, the most important of which is religious zeal, the conviction that one is pleasing God by giving up things of the flesh in favour of spiritual devotion. The reason why the asceticism of Martin might have threatened the church while that of Cassian and Honoratus did not probably has much to do with the social status of the respective practitioners; Martin was an unkempt lowborn ex-soldier while Honoratus was an aristocrat and Cassian (in spite of Gennadius' belief that he was Scythian) was the Provençal son of wealthy parents.<sup>331</sup> It is not hard to see why the former might seem to represent something subversive,<sup>332</sup> with authority over the community devolving to a man without the birthright to rule, while the latter are pillars of the secular establishment, rich and noble-born.

There were certain precedents prefiguring what we might think of as the archetypal aristocratic southern Gallic monk<sup>333</sup> – Christian aristocrats of the fourth century and earlier who became hermits in their own homes, married couples who lived chastely as brother and sister, and so on (Paulinus of Nola and Therasia constitute merely one example of the trend<sup>334</sup>). The difference between these earlier ascetics and the monks of Lérins lies in the formalisation of the process; the founding of Lérins went ahead with the approval of Leontius of Fréjus and was, to a greater or lesser extent, under the umbrella of the church. We can see evidence of just how integrated Lérins was into the wider southern Gallic religious *milieu* when we observe that Honoratus, the founder of Lérins, became bishop of Arles from 426 and his successor as bishop, Hilarius (bishop from 429/430), was not only a former member of the Lérinsian community but had actually been Honoratus' successor as abbot! The monastery went on to provide bishops for many other sees, but from the very beginning of Lérins, both the monastery and its personnel constituted an integral part of the neighbouring see at Arles and the wider Gallic church in a way that Martin's foundations in the fourth century had not.<sup>335</sup>

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<sup>331</sup> Gennadius, *De viris illustribus*, 62

<sup>332</sup> Stancliffe (1983) 349-350

<sup>333</sup> Cf. Rousseau (1991) 114

<sup>334</sup> Cf. Basson (1996) 273-274 on Paulinus' belief, expressed in *Carm.* 25, that the marriage of Titia to Julian of Eclenum would be similarly chaste.

<sup>335</sup> Stancliffe (1983) 356-357; cf. Stewart (1998) 17 on Cassian's disregard for monasticism in *occiduis Galliarum partibus*.

Asceticism was acceptable, even laudable, as long as it was anchored within the tradition of aristocratic leadership and participation by non-élite individuals was strictly controlled by the ecclesiastical hierarchy; in the sixth and late fifth centuries “isolated [though] the ascetic may appear to be... [he] was integrated into the wider organization of the diocese”,<sup>336</sup> which is a vision much removed from Brown’s characterisation of the fourth century ascetic as a man standing outside all traditional social links and networks<sup>337</sup> or of Markus’ view that monastic asceticism was the rejection of society and pursuit of “primal freedom”.<sup>338</sup> (Leyser has a heterodox view of popular and widespread hostility to aristocratic ascetic leadership but I am not convinced by his arguments<sup>339</sup> which seem to fly in the face of our extant evidence from individuals such as Eucherius whose “monastic links...stood him in good stead among members of congregation eager to continue the ascetic tradition in the see [of Lyons]”.<sup>340</sup>)

The absorption of monasticism by the mainstream church explains why no-one ever levelled an accusation of Gnosticism at the monks of Lérins, why no-one ever accused Honoratus of being a closet heretic and why the comparison of asceticism to Manichaeism is seldom made in the west after the founding of Lérins and the other Provençal monasteries. But this merely explains why Lérinsian asceticism was not deemed suspect and does not explain why an ascetic lifestyle was actually attractive. To grasp these attractions fully, we must interpret asceticism as another marker of status, prestige and superiority (just like education in an earlier age<sup>341</sup>). The ascetic lifestyle allowed aristocratic churchmen, some of whom had entered the church precisely because they had lost power in the secular world, to create a new hierarchy of social authority with themselves at the peak.

Devotion to an exceptionally rigorous religious life created a means of excluding those who were less rigorous and of crafting the impression of greater piety than one’s fellows (in other words, of showing in a concrete way that one was ‘holier-than-thou’). As Brown has noted, late antique aristocrats seldom had much tolerance for parvenus (“spiritual or social”<sup>342</sup>) and asceticism did indeed serve as a means of excluding those who may have threatened the status of the élite – upstarts, *nouveaux riches*, and others who may have felt an entitlement to membership of the élite, but who were themselves *personae non gratae*<sup>343</sup> – but, at the same

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<sup>336</sup> Wood (1981) 14

<sup>337</sup> Brown (1961) 91-92; cf. Geary (1988) 137

<sup>338</sup> Markus (1990) 165

<sup>339</sup> Leyser (1999) 194

<sup>340</sup> Harries (1994) 181

<sup>341</sup> Cf. Brown (1968) 96 on the proliferation of ways in which groups could display their status in late antiquity.

<sup>342</sup> Brown (2000) 787-788

<sup>343</sup> Cf. Heather (1994) and Lot (1927) 179 on élite Latin as an artificial and exclusionary construct.

time and more importantly, asceticism excluded secular aristocrats. As discussed earlier, the church became a place of refuge for nobles who were not prepared to barbarise. It was a centre in which they could, if not recreate the cultural life of the civic urban aristocracy, at least preserve much of what was important to that aristocracy (for example, learning, classical literature, 'high' Latin, an unmilitarised lifestyle, avoidance of barbarian influences and, more than any other, the preservation of traditional aristocratic authority within one's community without the need to adopt Germanic concepts of social and political authority).<sup>344</sup>

The aristocratic monks of Lérins, whatever their position in the church, never ceased thinking of themselves as noblemen, better and worthier than non-nobles by virtue of their birth.<sup>345</sup> In the same connexion, we must take into account the experiences of Paulinus of Nola, whose life in Spain was, for all practical purposes, the same as that of a monk even though he was himself a layman<sup>346</sup>, or of his friend Sulpicius Severus who, after his wife's death, lived a monastic life on his own estate in much the same way as Paulinus had (and one recalls Brown's somewhat clichéd comment that the desert to which hermits withdrew was, in fact, "a landscape of the mind"<sup>347</sup>). In these cases, and others which have not been preserved to the present, nobles reacted to personal traumas by retreating from the world; here we see that aristocratic asceticism could be the product of traditional Roman élite ideology, with its values of sobriety, dignity and gravity, projected onto a religious setting which exalted Christian devotion and a socio-political background which saw the élite status of traditional aristocracies, along with the existence of the Roman state which defended them, under severe threat.

From a purely religious perspective, ascetic devotion marked one out as an élite within the Christian community (provided that such devotion performed under the control of the church hierarchy). The monk's exceptional dedication to God and Scripture set him apart from – or, rather, above – the rest of his community. It formed a visible proof of the monk's acceptance of and obedience to the very letter of Christian law and of his willingness to place religious commitment above worldly concerns. Pomerius and Faustus of Riez described the "contemplative life" of the monk as the peak of achievement, the most perfect state for a Christian.<sup>348</sup> Asceticism granted the aristocrat spiritual prestige – perhaps even a kind of power – that elevated him yet further over his social subordinates and, moreover, gave him an

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<sup>344</sup> Cf. Brown (1981) 32-33 on the tensions between the secular élite and the new episcopal élite over who should lead communities.

<sup>345</sup> Bartlett (2001) 214

<sup>346</sup> Paul. Nolensis, *Ep.* 5.4

<sup>347</sup> Brown (1998a) 614

<sup>348</sup> Faustus Rhegiensis, *PL* 67.1057; Pomerius, *De vita cont.*, 1.12.1

advantage over members of the secular élite who could be characterised as worldly and selfish. Where the secular aristocrat's power and wealth marked out his superiority in this world, so the ascetic's lifestyle – his conspicuous non-consumption – showed his superior devotion to God and, by extension, the greater favour and reward that he would receive in the next world.

Asceticism – the ostentatious rejection of the material benefits of aristocratic rank – offered a means by which nobles could close what Michael Grant described as “the credibility gap”.<sup>349</sup> Asceticism allowed a person whose élite socio-economic status depended on the exploitation of subordinates to demonstrate his moral superiority and worth – here, in the person of the ascetic aristocrat, is someone who *could* live a life of great luxury but was choosing voluntarily to reject that lifestyle. The *Vita Melaniae Iunioris*, written in the mid-fifth century by Gerontius, a priest at Melania's monastery and her eventual successor, gives us some indication of the scale of the opulence available to western aristocrats in the first half of the fifth century, even after the barbarian invasions: “The estate was extremely beautiful, having baths within it and a swimming pool, so that it was like a sea extending from one side while, from the other, there were groves of trees in which different animals and game were found. Thus, when one washed in the pool, one was accustomed to see both boats passing and wild animals in the forest... The estate itself had sixty farm hands”;<sup>350</sup> “The larger estate was of the city itself, having a bath, many statues of gold, silver and bronze; and two bishops, one of our faith and another of the heretics”.<sup>351</sup>

The rejection of a lifestyle as sumptuous as this in favour of an austere and abstemious (and, in the case of Melania the Younger and her husband, chaste) existence was to telegraph one's religious devotion far and wide, to set oneself above the mass of people.<sup>352</sup> The ascetic *patronus* would have stood out as better, worthier, more prestigious and perhaps more reliable and less self-interested than other (non-ascetic) members of his class. Indeed, when we find secular aristocrats adopting ascetic lives (as happened in Italy, where some aristocrats lived lives of remarkable austerity while rejecting any notion of a career in the church<sup>353</sup>), we may be seeing an attempt by élite laymen to neutralise the advantages of spiritual prestige and

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<sup>349</sup> Grant (1990) 87ff

<sup>350</sup> *Vita Melaniae Iunioris*, 1.18, *Erat enim possessio nimis praeclara, habens balneum infra se et natatorium in ea, ita ut ex uno latere mare, ex alio silvarum nemora haberentur, in qua diversae bestiae et venatiores haberentur. Cum igitur lavaret in natatoria, videbat et naves transeuntes et venationem in silva... Habebat enim ipsa possessio sexaginta servos agricultores* (*Vita Mel. Iun.* 1.18).

<sup>351</sup> *Vita Mel. Iun.* 1.21, *Possessio maior erat etiam civitatis ipsius, habens balneum, artifices multos, aurifices, argentarios et aerarios; et duos episcopos, unum nostrae fidei at alium haereticorum.*

<sup>352</sup> Cf. Hunt (1998) 258ff; also Salvian, *Ad ecclesiam* 3.10.41-43 on the need to abandon wealth *non mediocriter sed abundanter*.

<sup>353</sup> Bartlett (2001) esp. 208

credibility and to demonstrate that these qualities were not the exclusive domain of churchmen.

For someone aspiring to an ecclesiastical career, the ascetic candidate for a see – perhaps one who had spent time in a respected ascetic centre like Lérins or who simply had a reputation for austere living<sup>354</sup> – would have had an especially strong claim (Sidonius speaks of the anchorite's *praerogativa* or special privilege<sup>355</sup>); in fact, some secular nobles lived as ascetics in expectation of receiving a church office.<sup>356</sup> An ascetic lifestyle would shield a candidate from claims that he was self-serving for seeking control over an important see. But, apart from that, bishops of the church, as Brown points out, had a particular rôle as “lovers of the poor”<sup>357</sup> and there could be few better demonstration of one's devotion to the poor than to live, as they did, a life of toil with little food and no comfort other than pious devotion. Moreover, by sharing their humble lifestyle, the bishop was able to erase some of the cultural barriers which alienated the poor from the urban élite;<sup>358</sup> further, by sanctifying the life of the poor in this way, ascetic churchmen reinforced existing social conditions, emphasising the transience of this world and life – and, by extension, the importance of the life to come – and the moral and spiritual credit that one garnered by suffering in poverty, even while using the church's considerable holdings as a means of alleviating some of the worst effects of poverty.<sup>359</sup>

Popularity with the community, of whom the poor or those vulnerable to becoming poor formed a massive component,<sup>360</sup> was a prize of no small worth for the aspiring churchman. Although a bishop was appointed and consecrated by other bishops, the will of the local Christian community could not always be ignored completely. Episcopal elections were not always cut-and-dried affairs, but often devolved into conflict, factionalism and even, on some occasions, violence;<sup>361</sup> the election of Caesarius of Arles, Klingshirn argues (citing the tenth century *fasti* of Arles which show another bishop, Iohannes, succeeding Caesarius' relative

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<sup>354</sup> Cf. Leyser (1999) 204-205 on Caesarius' warning to the monks of Lérins not to abandon their rigorous ascetic life and rely instead on the monastery's pious reputation.

<sup>355</sup> Cf. Sid. Ap., Ep., 7.9.9 *si quempiam nominavero monachorum, quamvis illum, Paulis Antoniis, Hilarionibus Macariis conferendum, sectatae anachoreseos praerogativa comitetur, aures ilico meas incondito tumultu circumstrepitas ignobilium pumilionum murmur everberat conquerentem.* (“If I nominate one of the monks [for the office of bishop], even though he may be comparable to the Pauls or the Antonies, to the Hilaries or the Macarii, even though he has the special privilege of having followed an anchoritic existence, the noise of lowborn midgets' complaints assaults my ears at once with a disordered racket.”)

<sup>356</sup> Klingshirn (1994a) 79

<sup>357</sup> Brown (1992) 78, 94

<sup>358</sup> Hopwood (1989) 174

<sup>359</sup> Cf. Brown (2002) 51

<sup>360</sup> Brown (2002) 15, 49

<sup>361</sup> Whitby (2000) 487; Geary (1989) 133-134

Aeonius and preceding Caesarius himself), may even have been marred by this kind of ecclesiastical in-fighting<sup>362</sup> while Hilary of Arles famously went so far as to depose a fellow metropolitan, Chelidonius of Besançon, resulting in the intervention of Pope Leo.<sup>363</sup>

The support of the community potentially had valuable to candidates who could not be certain that they would ascend the *cathedra* unchallenged by rivals or who faced hostility from other bishops or royal courts. While the community could not be expected to refuse a candidate who had enough support to impose himself in a see, it is nevertheless true that the successful election of a bishop often depended on outside clerics reaching a consensus with the local community, as Jones showed.<sup>364</sup> Popularity, if handled properly, could be a tool for acquiring church offices and asceticism was potentially a way of accruing popularity or, if popularity is perhaps not exactly the right word, then prestige, an image of otherworldly authority, of being above corporeal matters and of occupying a privileged position as intercessor between the community and God.<sup>365</sup>

While arguing that a reputation for asceticism could be helpful in securing an episcopal throne, it is important to recognise that an appearance of great piety was also important for individuals who had already become bishops. Episcopal authority was invested far less in the office of bishop than in the individual holding that office;<sup>366</sup> a bishop perceived as worldly or impious would never be afforded the kind of respect that was paid to his pious, devout and ascetic counterpart and, consequently, his authority would never stretch as far. Moreover, in a world where people often understood the world in terms of late antique social hierarchies, it was necessarily true that a devout bishop was a better 'friend' of God than a worldly bishop and could, therefore, serve the community better both in this life and, following his death, as a *patronus* in heaven.<sup>367</sup>

It is possible, therefore, to find bishops behaving in an ostentatiously devout way after their enthronement despite no previous involvement with asceticism. Gregory of Tours provides an example of this. He tells a story of another of our sources, Sidonius Apollinaris, and how, being a saintly and charitable man, Sidonius took to removing silver vessels from his home and giving them away to the poor; his wife (unnamed in Gregory's anecdote), when she

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<sup>362</sup> Klingshim (1994a) 85-86

<sup>363</sup> Mathisen (1989) 147-153 gives a sound account of the affair; cf. Heinzelmann (1992) 241; see *PL* 54.633-635 for Pope Leo's response laying out the established and proper procedure for the appointment of a bishop.

<sup>364</sup> Jones (1964) 875, 915-916

<sup>365</sup> Wes (1992) 257-258 and 259 fig. 22.3

<sup>366</sup> Van Dam (1993) 71-72; Geary (1989) 135

<sup>367</sup> Brown (1978) 63

discovered what her husband had done, would buy the silverware back from the poor and return it to her home.<sup>368</sup> This is an amusing vignette and one can imagine the scene being repeated time and again as the bishop gave away the silverware and his wife brought it back.

Whether literal or wholly fabricated, this story tells us a great deal about the importance attached to an ascetic appearance. If the story is factual, it shows Sidonius' impatience to be seen as a devout and holy man. Sidonius did not give money to the poor. He and his wife possess money, because she uses it to buy the silverware back, but the bishop made a conscious decision to give away personal property rather than mere coinage. Hard cash would be more useful to beggars than silverware, so we must wonder why Sidonius did not simply give money. The answer must be that Sidonius was trying to do things in the most dramatic way possible; he was seeking attention and approbation for his actions but there is nothing particularly ostentatious in giving coins to a beggar, nothing so special that it would convince people of Sidonius' exceptional holiness, nothing, in fact, that would draw comment – certainly nothing that would make Gregory record the story for posterity. It was practically an obligation for bishops to dispense money and food to the poor; but to give away his own personal property from his own home, his aristocratic patrimony and his children's inheritance, to paupers is very ostentatious; it calls out for comment. The act itself may have been influenced by Martin's famous acts of charity (such as tearing his cloak in half for a beggar); that itself is interesting given the fear that holy men like Martin could provoke in aristocratic churchmen. We can extrapolate that the legitimacy – or otherwise – or various aspects of late antique asceticism derived not from the act itself but from the person carrying it out. An act which is destabilising when carried out by St Martin becomes a legitimising act when carried out by the aristocratic Sidonius.<sup>369</sup>

If the story is merely a fabrication, it nevertheless suggests that the church in Clermont – Sidonius' successors on the episcopal throne and the guardians of Sidonius' saintly cult – were committed to promoting parables that painted Sidonius in a pious fashion. So, even if Sidonius had no personal involvement in creating this tale, people closely associated with the promotion and preservation of Sidonius' memory nevertheless saw the value in portraying him as unworldly and virtuous. Whether the anecdote began with Sidonius or with later

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<sup>368</sup> Greg. Tur., *Hist. Franc.*, 2.22, *Cum autem esset magnificae sanctitatis atque, ut diximus, ex senatoribus primis, plerumque nesciente coniuge vasa argentea auferebat a domo et pauperibus erogabat. Quod illa cum cognosceret, scandalizabatur in eum, sed tamen, dato egenis pretio, species domi restituebat.* ("But Sidonius was a man of immense holiness, as I have said, from one of the foremost senatorial families. He was often bearing off silverware from his house, without telling his wife, and giving them out to the paupers. But when she found out, she used to carp at him and then, having given its price to the poor, she returned the silver to the house.")

<sup>369</sup> Brown (1981) 101-103

clerics, the effect was the same, viz. to present a late Roman aristocrat as being unconnected and unconcerned with material and worldly concerns. Literally true or pure fabrication, the motive behind the story was the same.

It is significant, moreover, that the source for this anecdote should be Gregory, a man with close ties to the church and clerics Clermont. Following his father's death, the young Gregory was cared for by his paternal uncle, Gallus of Clermont,<sup>370</sup> and the little education he claimed to possess had been imparted by Avitus of Clermont.<sup>371</sup> Gregory, in a very real sense, was closely involved with the ecclesiastical *milieu* of Clermont and, as the nephew of the bishop (who was also custodian of Clermont's saintly cults) and the pupil of a future bishop, it is to be expected that he would have been exposed to stories about past bishops of Clermont. Indeed, Sidonius is far from the only cleric from Clermont about whom tales of sanctity are told by Gregory.<sup>372</sup>

The clear likelihood is that such tales were a way in which churchmen could define themselves, in the eyes of their congregations and other clergy alike, as truly holy men. It was important that bishops be seen as holy and unworldly. By giving away his own property in such an offhand manner, Sidonius was portrayed as devoted more to his faith than to his possessions. Whether the story originated with Sidonius or was a later invention and whether literally true or wholly fabricated, its function is the same: to present Sidonius as a man of great virtue.

One interesting facet of the story is the fact that Sidonius' possessions constituted his children's inheritance and that, naturally, would have been the reason for his wife's conduct in returning the silverware to her home. Geary describes Gregory's treatment of Sidonius' wife in this story correctly as "somewhat negative".<sup>373</sup> We may take things further: Sidonius is praiseworthy for his selfless generosity – indeed, in introducing this vignette, Gregory says *cum autem esset magnificae sanctitatis* – but his wife is worldly. When she finds out what Sidonius has done, Gregory writes *scandalizabatur in eum* which I translate as "she used to carp at him" but the verb *scandalizo* means properly 'to cause to stumble' or 'to tempt to evil'. A contrast is created: Sidonius is a holy man with a worldly wife who seeks to undermine his sanctity.

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<sup>370</sup> Greg. Tur., *Vita Patrum* 2.2

<sup>371</sup> Greg. Tur., *Vita Pat. 2 praefatio* [= *MGH SRM*, 1.2, p.688, (ed. B. Krusch, 1885)]

<sup>372</sup> See, e.g., Greg. Tur., *Hist. Franc.* 4.32 on the miracles of the monk Julian of Clermont.

<sup>373</sup> Geary (1989) 131

The story itself, with a husband giving away the family silver in order to elevate his reputation and a wife trying to ensure that her children have an inheritance, neatly illustrates one of the ways in which some aspects of asceticism could invert social and aristocratic norms and undermine some of the most imperative aristocratic concepts such the maintenance of the family line and the preservation and transmission of family property.<sup>374</sup>

### *Conclusion*

Asceticism and the aristocratic colonisation of the episcopate go hand-in-hand. As the Gallo-Roman nobility increasingly saw the bishop's throne as a means of retaining power and relevance, they necessarily adopted asceticism as a means of legitimising and strengthening their claims to authority.

Fundamentally, asceticism reinforced élite leadership of church at a time when the ecclesiastical leadership had morphed into the leadership of the wider community. Pious austerity impressed the Christian community; Christians liked and wanted to have incorruptible leaders unaffected by worldly interests; they were correspondingly more likely to accept or support such a man as their leader. A bishop whose lifestyle was known to be abstemious and disciplined was more likely to receive the respect of other clerics and to be seen as a model for emulation. Yet the very things which made asceticism so important to clerics made it dangerous in the hands of ordinary people; if someone outside the church body was believed to possess miraculous powers, he could and did act as an alternate source of spiritual authority, leading the community away from the bishop's control, a dangerous thing given the level of decentralisation at work in the fifth century Gallic church. So, in the development of southern Gallic aristocratic monasticism and the tendency of high-born monks to become bishops, we see a strategy which brought asceticism under élite control and which replaced the archetypal dishevelled 'holy man' with members of the ecclesiastical élite.

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<sup>374</sup> Cf. Wood (2000a) 419-420; Van Uytenghe (1987) 72-74

## Chapter Four

### *Kinship in fifth and sixth century episcopal elections*

In this long chapter, I undertake an examination of those episcopal elections of the mid-fifth to mid-sixth centuries for which useful sources exist. Having mentioned in the previous chapter that kinship often played an important part in episcopal politics and that small numbers of families could monopolise sees, in this chapter I will establish kinship's rôle more fully and to show how its relevance and function changed as time progressed. I have endeavoured to present the elections in a broadly chronological order, but the hazy nature of chronology for this period means that I cannot guarantee that they are presented in every case in the order in which they actually happened.

Troublesome chronology, however, is not the only issue confronting a study of episcopal elections. Difficulties also exist with sources. To begin with, it would be optimistic to believe that one can make a completely systematic assessment of kinship's rôle in these elections; quite simply, our sources are incomplete and, in many instances, their authors deliberately obscure the very information which is most pertinent to this chapter, viz. family influence in securing sees. The problem is illustrated by the case of Caesarius; we know that he was related to his predecessor, Aeonius, and that other kinsmen from their hometown (Chalon-sur-Saône) served in the Arlesian church, but only because, in an act of supreme irony, Caesarius' biographers report these facts in order to deny their relevance.<sup>375</sup> Had the biographers not mentioned these relationships, later historians would have been ignorant of them; in the very act of diminishing the importance of kinship to Caesarius' career, his biographers underline its existence. We would not be wide of the mark if we assumed that there were other episcopal elections, including those reported in sources, where important family connexions were excised from the historical record.

In other words, even if sources neither expressly state nor even imply that a relationship existed between a bishop and his predecessor or successor, we cannot be sure that the sources tell the whole story which means that any reading of the sources, including this chapter, most involve large elements of speculation. Moreover, although modern prosopographical works – especially the monumental *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire* – are an invaluable tool for the historian, they too are limited both by the shortcomings of the ancient sources, which may circumscribe issues of family, and also by the focus of individual historians (the

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<sup>375</sup> *Vita Caes.* 1.10 for the allegedly unexpected discovery that Caesarius and Aeonius were *conciues* and *propinqui*, 1.29 for the would-be betrayer of Arles who turns out also to be *conciuis et consanguineus*.

*PLRE*, for example, ignores contemporary clergy, including Caesarius of Arles, Rusticius of Narbonne and many other significant ecclesiastical figures, because clergy are outwith the authors' particular focus).

But this chapter is by no means a jeremiad. There are problems with our sources, often fundamental ones, and these place limitations on our ability to analyse the period, but the sources still offer tantalising clues which, alongside modern prosopographical research, can offer the historian much that is useful. Although we cannot hope, on the basis of extant sources, to arrive at an absolutely complete understanding of kinship's rôle in episcopal politics during the last century of the western empire, we can certainly add something to our knowledge of the function of kinship and *amicitia* within an ecclesiastical career; we can come to understand not only how networks aristocratic families monopolised the episcopate – something on which other scholars have written at length<sup>376</sup> – but also how they themselves saw and felt about the phenomenon of kinship.

### *The election of Iohannes at Chalon-sur-Saône (c.470)*

I begin with an election at Chalon-sur-Saône recounted in one of Sidonius' letter.<sup>377</sup> I have chosen this as a starting point not only because it is one of the earlier examples of an episcopal election but also because it has the potential to shed interesting light on the family of another important sources – Caesarius himself.

Our source-letter, written to Domnulus, is, to my eyes, a moderately curious document. While it is not an exceptionally long letter, it treats the election in surprising depth and does seem rather longer than it really needed to be. Even allowing for the fact that Sidonius and Domnulus were both clerics who might be expected to show an interest in an episcopal election, it seems significant that Sidonius should choose to write about this subject, especially since he does not, to my knowledge, habitually discuss such matters.<sup>378</sup> It is likely that he wrote about this election because its outcome was noteworthy and unexpected. A second curious point is the extent to which Sidonius diminishes his own involvement in the election's outcome. Although he almost certainly attended the election in his rôle as a bishop and probably participated in choosing the new bishop, he hands all responsibility to Euphronius of Autun and Patiens of Lyon. He was probably the most junior of the three by

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<sup>376</sup> For example, Heinzelmann (1975), Gaudemet (1958)

<sup>377</sup> Sid. Ap., Ep. 4.25

<sup>378</sup> The only two elections Sidonius discusses in any depth are those at Chalon (Ep. 4.25) and Bourges (Ep. 7.9).

quite a margin, but, even so, it is striking that he portrays himself as no more than an onlooker to the decision of senior bishops. After laying out Sidonius' account of the election, I shall explain why he presented matters as he did and will lay out the function of kinship in this election and also the possible consequences of the election for the family of Caesarius.

The letter opens by explaining that Sidonius will share a *gaudium grande* – Patiens of Lyon has visited the town of Cabillonum to ordain a new bishop following the death of Paulus.<sup>379</sup> The *pontificale concilium*, which must have included Sidonius, found the people of the town riven by partisan strife as three candidates vied for the see. These candidates are treated in a fairly vituperative and distinctly Juvenalian fashion – the first was a moral degenerate who prattled about his ancestral claims to the see, the second only had supporters because of the feasts he provided for his parasites and the third had announced that his adherents would be allowed to plunder church lands after a successful election.<sup>380</sup> The two named members of the “priestly council”, Euphronius and Patiens, become conscious of this and ordain someone of their own choosing, the *sanctus Iohannes*. This account is followed by a long discussion of Iohannes' pious qualities.

The tendentious nature of Sidonius' account need hardly be expanded upon; it speaks for itself and its implications are clear enough. What is perhaps less obvious is Sidonius' position in even having been in Chalon at the time of the election; his references to a *pontificale concilium* suggest that there were more than just a couple of bishops in attendance and, at the time of writing, Sidonius had almost certainly already ascended the *cathedra* of Clermont. It is certain that Sidonius was present in his episcopal rôle and that he played some part in Iohannes' election. If this is so, we must ask why he diminished his part in proceedings. The answer, I suggest, lies with the first candidate.

The anonymous first candidate, however disgraceful his character, felt that he had a strong claim to the see on the basis of “the ancient claim of birth”. This remark unambiguously indicates a blood relationship between the first candidate and previous holders of the see (not only Paulus but also other earlier bishops). If the description of Paulus as a *iunior episcopus*

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<sup>379</sup> Paulus is described as *iunior episcopus* which the Loeb translates as “junior bishop”; I favour the translation “fairly young bishop”.

<sup>380</sup> Sid. Ap., Ep. 4.25.2, *quorum hic antiquam natalium praerogativam reliqua destitutus morum dote ructabat, hic per fragores parasiticos culinarum suffragio comparatos Apicianis plausibus ingerebatur, hic, apice votivo si potiretur, tacita pactione promiserat ecclesiastica plausoribus suis praedae praedia fore*. The extent to which this section of the letter is informed by Roman satirical or, at least, comical literature is not to be underestimated (note particularly the pairing of puns *Apicianis* with *apice* and *praedae* with *praedia*). The use of satiric language recalls Juvenal above all else and is a method by which the candidates can be connected with the immoral and un-Roman figures who formed the basis of his Satires.

mean that he was, in fact, a comparatively young man at the time of his death, it is entirely possible – even likely – that he died unexpectedly and without having nominated a successor; had he lived longer and been able to groom someone, it is possible that the first candidate – or some other relative – would have been his choice.

If these suppositions are correct, a number of things are explained. We can see why Sidonius downplayed his part in choosing Iohannes. By placing responsibility with his more senior colleagues, he may have been trying to avoid conflict with the family of Paulus and the anonymous first candidate and, indeed, it may be significant that Sidonius hides the names of the candidates. By keeping them anonymous, Sidonius diminishes the likelihood that his opinion of them will be disclosed. Even though Sidonius surely intended his letter to Domnulus, like his other letters, to be disseminated amongst his friends, he may have expected that a passing comment on candidates in an obscure election in a distant corner of the Burgundian kingdom would go largely unnoticed;<sup>381</sup> if, however, he were to set an actual name down on the page, it would surely have become widely known a very short time resulting, no doubt, in discord with the candidate and his clan.

Apart from this, the failure of the first candidate to secure the see may explain why so many clerics from Chalon ended up in the Arlesian church, where they took control of the most important episcopal see in late antique Gaul. The migration of *cives* from Chalon-sur-Saône to Arles may go back to this election and the anonymous first candidate may himself have been a kinsman of Caesarius and Aeonius. If we assume that their family had controlled the see of Cabillonum for some time – that is, for two or three generations at least<sup>382</sup> – the enthronement of Iohannes might have constituted a serious blow to the family's fortunes and influence in the region, particularly if, in the wake of the election, Iohannes felt antipathetic towards them. This may have precipitated a move southwards to Arles by young and ambitious family members looking for an ecclesiastical career. It is even possible that some members of the family were already present in Arles, that there was a subsidiary branch of the clan who had already sought careers there (perhaps because the Arlesian church, being larger, could offer more opportunities).

Aeonius may have moved from Chalon in the aftermath of the election or he may already have been based there; if the latter, his budding career in Arles would have become the focus of his family's efforts and influence. In either case, Aeonius gained control of Arles following the death of Leontius in about 490, roughly twenty years after the election of Iohannes at

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<sup>381</sup> On Cabillonum in this period, see Klingshirn (1994a) 17

<sup>382</sup> Unfortunately, we have no record of the bishops before Paulus; see Duchesne (1900) 2.190ff.

Chalon; twenty years seems a reasonable space of time within which an ambitious late Roman cleric might leave his home and rise to high rank in a new see. If this is the case, Aeonius not only secured the *cathedra* for himself but also ensured that another from his clan would control the see after his death. Nor was Caesarius the only emigrant from Chalon to be found in Arles – the *Vita Caesarii* mentions that the would-be betrayer of the city during the siege of 507/8 was “a fellow citizen and blood-kinsman” of the bishop.<sup>383</sup> We can safely infer that many young men from the clan of Caesarius and Aeonius left their homes in Chalon to pursue a career in the south, in an important see their family controlled, but we might go further and say that the impetus for the southern migration could have been the loss of Chalon to Iohannes in about 470.

This all raises the question of why Euphronius and Patiens were unwilling to see the diocese of Chalon remain in the hands of Paulus’ family. It could be the case that there was some underlying hostility, that Paulus’ family were rivals to one or both of these bishops and that they took the opportunity to remove that threat, although I do not feel confident in this argument. A stronger possibility, I think, may be that Euphronius and Patiens were allies of Iohannes and his family; indeed, it is not impossible that one or the other was related to him (and, if this had been the case, Sidonius would certainly have hidden it). But perhaps the likeliest reason is also the simplest – none of the proposed candidates were actually clerics and none of them seem to have taken even the most rudimentary steps towards proving their worthiness to become bishop (although this does place a lot of weight on Sidonius’ description of them, possibly more weight than can be borne by so tendentious an account). Conceivably, the *pontificale concilium* felt uncomfortable about the prospect of gifting a see to an individual who, whatever his familial claim, was not behaving with clerical dignity. This would certainly not have been the first time that a senior bishop moved against an impious subordinate.<sup>384</sup>

There are many interesting strands to the election at Cabillonum, both on its own account and in terms of its implications for our understanding of other aspects of contemporary ecclesiastical political life, but one of the more significant ones, from the perspective of this chapter, is that it demonstrates that kinship was not always a trump card. Our anonymous first candidate felt entitled to an office which, in all likelihood, had been left vacant by the death of a relative; he felt that, on the basis of kinship, he ought to be installed as the new bishop. This was hardly an uncommon practice in fifth and sixth century Gaul and it was probably not

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<sup>383</sup> *Vita Caes.* 1.29; the word *consanguineus*, rather than *propinquus*, implies a close blood-based relationship between Caesarius and the traitor.

<sup>384</sup> Or, in the case of Hilary of Arles, an impious metropolitan! Cf. Mathisen (1989) 147-153

uncommon in Paulus' family. Nevertheless, the unwillingness of senior bishops from other sees to endorse him effectively terminated his candidacy and ended his family's control of the see. Kinship, while important in securing a see, was, ultimately, only one factor and, in the face of powerful opposition from within the ecclesiastical establishment, it could not be the deciding factor.

### *The election of Simplicius at Bourges (c.472)*

The next election I will examine is also recounted by Sidonius although, unlike the one at Chalon, he is explicit about the fact that he was present in his rôle as a senior cleric in order to ordain a new bishop – and, indeed, the new metropolitan for his own province<sup>385</sup> – to replace the deceased Eulodius of Bourges.<sup>386</sup> The source-letter is addressed to bishop Perpetuus of Tours and seems, by Sidonius' standards, an uncommonly long piece although most of the letter is actually taken up by Sidonius' *Contio* delivered at Bourges and, apparently, requested by his correspondent.

The first thing Sidonius recounts is the sheer number of candidates. In place of the mere trio at Chalon, we find at Bourges a multitude who can hardly be accommodated by the available benches and not one of whom was happy about the presence of so many competitors.<sup>387</sup> The dissent was so great and the chances of finding an acceptable outcome so small that the congregation passed responsibility for choosing a new bishop entirely to the visiting clerics.<sup>388</sup> The rest of the letter consists entirely of the *Contio* which lays out, amongst other things, the slanders which Sidonius feels will be directed against him<sup>389</sup> and a list of objectionable characteristics found in some candidates.<sup>390</sup> He goes on to explain that some – even many – of the candidates are genuinely worthy of episcopal status “but they cannot all be bishops”;<sup>391</sup> therefore, despite having viable candidates, Sidonius claims that he must appoint someone of

<sup>385</sup> Duchesne (1900) 2.22ff. on Bourges as a metropolitan see; Duchesne places the election in 472 “ou à peu près” (*op. cit.*, 24).

<sup>386</sup> *PLRE* 2.418; see Duchesne (1900) 2.22 for the *fasti* of Bourges.

<sup>387</sup> Sid. Ap., *Ep.*, 7.9.2, *etenim tanta turba competitorum, ut cathedrae unius numerosissimos candidatos nec duo recipere scamna potuissent. omnes placebant sibi, omnes omnibus displicebant.* (“Such was the crowd of competitors that not even two benches would have held the extraordinary number of candidates for a single see. All were as pleased with themselves as they were displeased with the others.”)

<sup>388</sup> Sid. Ap., *Ep.*, 7.9.3

<sup>389</sup> Sid. Ap., *Ep.*, 7.9.8-9

<sup>390</sup> Sid. Ap., *Ep.*, 7.9.10

<sup>391</sup> Sid. Ap., *Ep.*, 7.9.13, *sane id liberius dico, de multitudine circumstantium multos episcopales esse, sed totos episcopos esse non posse.*

his own choosing in order to avoid partisan conflict (because “all candidates satisfy themselves but no candidate satisfies everyone”<sup>392</sup>).

His choice for the new bishop, therefore, is not one of the multitude of candidates but Simplicius; this choice seems, if Sidonius is taken at face value, to be peculiar not only because Simplicius was a layman but because he had not actually declared his candidacy for the vacant *cathedra* in the first place.<sup>393</sup> Sidonius gives, as one reason for choosing Simplicius, his family’s history and high status – as he says, apparently feeling that his choice will be justified by this information, “If reverence ought to be given to lineage...his ancestors presided over either episcopal thrones or courts of law. His illustrious family, in whichever calling, has flourished either as bishops or as prefects; thus, the custom of his ancestors has always been to pronounce the law, whether divine or human.”<sup>394</sup> These comments alone suggest that family played a considerable part in securing the episcopate for Simplicius. Sidonius does actually mention Simplicius’ personal characteristics and conduct, which qualify him for the bishop’s throne,<sup>395</sup> but I take from these the general air of their being something of a justification for a decision already taken rather than an actual reason for his elevation to the *cathedra*.

We might ask why Sidonius was so enthusiastic about Simplicius and why he should have pushed aside the declared candidates in favour of an apparent outsider, albeit one whose family included bishops and tribunes.<sup>396</sup> The answer might at first seem to lie with Simplicius’ social status. Sidonius does emphasise that Simplicius is from a family that is used to leadership, whose members occupied the highest tiers of church and state (and, indeed, Simplicius is himself one such man having embarked on a career in the imperial administration).<sup>397</sup> It is not unlikely that Sidonius and Simplicius were on friendly terms although it must be significant that Simplicius is not the recipient of any of letters from Sidonius.

But, in fact, the most important factor is one to which Sidonius does not refer directly: Simplicius was the son and son-in-law of two previous bishops of Bourges and, most

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<sup>392</sup> Sid. Ap., Ep., 7.9.13, *sufficere omnes sibi, omnibus neminem*.

<sup>393</sup> Sid. Ap., Ep., 7.9.16

<sup>394</sup> Sid. Ap. Ep., 7.9.17, *si natalibus servanda reverentia est... parentes ipsius aut cathedris aut tribunalibus praesederunt. inlustris in utraque conversatione prosapia aut episcopis floruit aut praefectis: ita semper huiusce maioribus aut humanum aut divinum dictare ius usui fuit*.

<sup>395</sup> Sid. Ap., Ep., 7.9.18-20

<sup>396</sup> Mathisen (1979) 166-167 seems to assume that Sidonius favoured Simplicius largely or exclusively because, like Sidonius, he was “another former secular official”.

<sup>397</sup> PLRE 2.1015

probably, of *the* two previous bishops of Bourges! The *PLRE* suggests – and I agree – that his father-in-law was Palladius (who had held the see before Eulodius, the recently deceased bishop) based on Sidonius' comment that his wife was *de Palladiorum stirpe*;<sup>398</sup> it is also probably the case that the deceased Eulodius was Simplicius' father.<sup>399</sup> If this is so, not only was Simplicius related to bishops in general, as Sidonius says, he was in fact the blood kin of the previous bishop of Bourges and the son-in-law of the one before that; his ascendancy to the throne was hardly that of an undeclared outsider chosen by Sidonius on spiritual grounds so much as it was the *cathedra* of Bourges being returned to the family which had held it for the past two generations and which felt the moral right to hold it for another.

Seen in this light, the choice of Simplicius in favour of the multitude of qualified candidates makes perfect sense. Simplicius was very likely the ideal – and certainly the safest – candidate for this see; he would probably been acceptable to the congregants of Bourges because one imagines that the townspeople were probably keen to have a bishop who was connected in a meaningful way to their *civitas*, not some carpetbagger forced on them by external powers.<sup>400</sup>

In saying this, however, I would not like to imply that the citizens of Bourges were unanimous in their embrace of Simplicius. The fact that they would have found him acceptable does not mean that they universally and wholeheartedly endorsed him. Indeed, Sidonius' account of his speech strongly implies that he anticipates complaints from partisans within Bourges; I have already stated that I feel his enumeration of Simplicius' pious qualities has the air of a *post facto* justification, but there are clearer statements in the *Contio* demonstrating Sidonius' consciousness of the criticisms that he anticipated would be levelled at him. Whatever decision Sidonius makes will, he says, be a cause for complaint and, to prove it, he presents an interminable list of the criticisms he will face whether he nominates a monk, a humble man, a cleric, a layman, a man from an administrative background, an outspoken man, or anyone else.<sup>401</sup> The thing that must have been uppermost in his mind, but which he would never articulate, was the thought that if he nominated the heir of the last bishop and, more or less consciously, turned the see of Bourges into the private property of one family, there would be objections from legitimate candidates whose church careers merited the *cathedra* because Simplicius had received his throne for no reason other than the politics of blood and marriage. It is within this context that Sidonius' remarks about the

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<sup>398</sup> *PLRE* 2. 821; Sid. Ap., Ep., 7.9.24

<sup>399</sup> *PLRE* 2.418

<sup>400</sup> Cf. Lewis (2000) on the *civitas* and identity.

<sup>401</sup> Sid. Ap., Ep., 7.9.9-14

impossibility of granting a see to every man who was worthy of one take on a particular resonance.<sup>402</sup> They were intended to anticipate the charge that he was perfectly aware would and probably should be levelled at him.

In making his choice, Sidonius was motivated to choose Simplicius by simple politics. Both the Palladii and the blood-kin of Simplicius were likely to have possessed influence within the church in central Gaul and, conceivably, retained some degree of relevance further south. By endorsing the family's preferred candidate and ensuring that the see passed from father to son, Sidonius may have acted out of *amicitia*. He may already have had the Palladii and Simplicii as allies or he may have hoped to cultivate them as such (or, conceivably, simply did not wish to offend them – a possibility supported by the absence of Simplicius amongst Sidonius' correspondents). But Sidonius was not alone at Bourges; he explicitly mentions the presence of a metropolitan bishop who is generally held to have been Agroecius of Sens.<sup>403</sup> We know nothing about Agroecius' political or personal relationships with Simplicius' family and little about his relationships with Sidonius; we can, however, say that he was Sidonius' senior colleague and that, if he felt any obligations of *amicitia* or, for that matter, of kinship towards Simplicius, he might have brought pressure to bear on Sidonius who, for the sake of pleasing his superior, would surely have acceded. This remains conjecture but, nevertheless, it is incontestable that kinship was the single most important factor in bringing Simplicius to the *cathedra*.

Whatever his reasons, Sidonius reinforced and reaffirmed one clan's control of a see and, in doing so, he felt the need, as one sees in his encomiastic description of Simplicius' character, to justify his choice. The townspeople and other candidates may not have expected Simplicius to be chosen. Perhaps they assumed, based on his laity and failure to declare himself a candidate, that Simplicius was excusing himself from further involvement with his father's old diocese – which would explain why Sidonius felt compelled to validate his choice with his *Contio*. To a large extent, we can pass over these details which are, in any case, unknowable. What is clear, though, is that Simplicius was picked purely on the basis of kinship and that he was chosen despite not announcing his candidacy and despite the presence of large numbers of aspiring churchmen who, Sidonius concedes, certainly warranted a see.

Like the election at Chalon, final power to choose the new occupant of Bourges' *cathedra* rested with bishops from other sees. Unlike Chalon, kinship proved to be the most important element in the election and the true key to securing power. Moreover, by looking at

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<sup>402</sup> Sid. Ap., Ep., 7.9.13

<sup>403</sup> Sid. Ap., Ep., 7.9.6; Agroecius 3 in *PLRE* 2.39

Simplicius' background – the son and son-in-law of the two previous bishops – we can see the efforts of powerful ecclesiastical aristocrats at securing their sees for their families in perpetuity. The children of two bishops of Bourges, Palladius and Eulodius, were married to each other, something which would cement relations between the two clans and bolster Simplicius' eventual claim to the see. The incomplete historical record means that we cannot know what became of Simplicius two sons,<sup>404</sup> but it seems probable to me that, short of external interference (which, in the sixth century, would be most likely to mean royal interference), one of these two sons would eventually become bishop of Bourges in his own right as the son and grandson of three previous holders of the see – or, at the very least, Simplicius must have expected one of his sons to inherit the see – and it is certainly possible, although I would put it no more strongly, that one of the succeeding bishops on the *fasti* of Bourges could be a son or grandson of Simplicius.<sup>405</sup>

### *The election of Aeonius at Arles (c.490)*

At various points in this thesis, I have mentioned Aeonius of Arles, referring to him primarily as the predecessor and kinsman of Caesarius and as the man whose manoeuvrings probably brought Caesarius to the episcopal throne. While in a later chapter I deal with Caesarius' rise in detail, I will look here at Aeonius himself. Very little is actually known about him – he does not merit a mention in the *PLRE*; he has left us no letters, no *Vita* and no sermons; the major sources on his tenure, apart from the *Vita Caesarii*, are a few letters addressed to him.<sup>406</sup> We know nothing about the background to Aeonius' accession, although I have outlined what may have been the spur for the migration of his family from Chalon-sur-Saône to Arles, and a little about his family or political connexions. Given that the man, an outsider to Arles, managed not only to secure the most important and prestigious see in late antique Gaul but to pass it on to a kinsman, the lack of information on his person and career is

<sup>404</sup> Sid. Ap, *Ep.*, 7.9.24

<sup>405</sup> See Duchesne (1900) 2.22; Simplicius was bishop for seven years and three months and it is interesting that it is he is one of a small number of bishops of Bourges for whom such precise measurements are given – perhaps a sign that his short tenure surprised contemporaries and that his death was unexpected. (Of the first forty-seven bishops of Bourges, only three receive a detailed handling of the dates of their episcopate and Simplicius is actually the first. After Vulfadus, the forty-eighth bishop, it becomes common to give precise dates, often going into details of the months and days of a bishop's reign.) If Simplicius' sons were too young to succeed him upon his death, it is possible that Roricus (who succeeded Simplicius' immediate successor, Tetradius) was a relative. If he was not, then, given that Simplicius' successor, Tetradius, held the episcopate for nineteen years and Roricus for a further twelve, it is improbable that either of his sons ever got a chance to be bishop of Bourges although it is possible that their sons might have taken the throne at some later date. I wonder, however, whether the name Roricus in the *fasti* refers to a relative of Ruricius of Limoges by whose relatives the see of Bourges may have been taken over; Ruricius' family was, after all, extensive and quite active within the episcopate; cf. Mathisen (1999) 19-28, esp. 27

<sup>406</sup> Most notably Ruricius, *Ep.*, 1.15, 2.8, 2.9 and 2.16, along with some letters from Rome (*Ep. Arel.* 22 from pope Gelatius, and *Ep. Arel.* 23 and 24 from Symmachus).

disappointing. In spite of this, I will argue that there are sufficient clues in the sources to suggest that kinship played a part in the rise of Aeonius, although not, I contend, in the way one might expect.

Aeonius' predecessor as bishop of Arles was one Leontius who rose to the throne around 461.<sup>407</sup> Sources on Leontius are in short supply; he is the recipient of one letter from Sidonius<sup>408</sup> but otherwise seems best known for convening the council which condemned Lucidus' extreme predestinarian views.<sup>409</sup> The lack of information on Leontius' career is due, in no small part, to his frosty relations with the papacy; from the mid-460s, the lines of communication between Arles and Rome were broken and not fully restored until Aeonius occupied Arles' *cathedra*. It is not clear why things should have fallen out this way between Leontius and the pope (Hilary); certainly, as Klingshirn shows, relations between the two started out well enough with Hilary seeming to elevate the bishop of Arles to a position which was "conceived of...as more than a simple metropolitan bishop".<sup>410</sup> For whatever reason, relations broke down; while I should think that the reason may have related to Leontius acting with a greater independence than was acceptable to the pope, the details of their falling out are unimportant.<sup>411</sup> What matters, as a starting point for discussing kinship in the rise of Aeonius, is the simple fact that Rome, under Hilary and his successors, was unhappy with Leontius and actively avoided dealings with Arles until Aeonius had been elected.

As far as kinship is concerned, Leontius of Arles was probably a relative of Ruricius of Limoges; that is to say, he was probably a scion of a large family that was closely connected to the episcopate in many Gallic sees. Although the sources do not allow us to say this as absolute fact, there is sufficient supporting evidence to suggest that these two men, Ruricius and Leontius, belonged to the same aristocratic dynasty. The *PLRE* provides no listing for Leontius of Arles, but one is struck by the number of people involved with Ruricius who bear that name. His own brother was called Leontius,<sup>412</sup> as was one of his sons;<sup>413</sup> Mathisen posits that their mother's name was Leontia and that she was from the influential Leontii family

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<sup>407</sup> Duchesne (1894) 1.250

<sup>408</sup> Sid. Ap., Ep., 6.3

<sup>409</sup> Duchesne (1894) 1.250; significantly, nothing of Leontius survives from this controversy although a letter of Faustus to Lucidus survives (Ep. 18 = *MGH AA* 8.288), as does Lucidus' reply to the bishops who condemned him (= *CSEL* 21.165-168).

<sup>410</sup> Klingshirn (1985) 197

<sup>411</sup> This was not, however, the first time that bishops of Arles and popes of Rome had disputed with one another; Hilary of Arles (d.449) seems to have been perpetually quarrelling with Rome.

<sup>412</sup> *PLRE* 2.670

<sup>413</sup> Leontius 18, *PLRE* 2.672

from Bordeaux.<sup>414</sup> With regard to Ruricius' son and brother, it is worth noting that his other son was named Ommatius after his wife's father;<sup>415</sup> it is conceivable that a similar pattern had been followed by Ruricius' parents who might have chosen to name one son after the maternal line. But, in any case, although we cannot say that Ruricius is related to each and every individual named Leontius, nor even that his wife was definitely connected with the Leontii of Aquitaine, it seems likely that the two families were related and, therefore, that Ruricius of Limoges and Leontius of Arles were related, especially in view of certain other pieces of evidence.

Ruricius wrote a number of letters to both Aeonius and Caesarius and there is sufficient detail in them to suggest some relationship with Leontius. In his first letter to Aeonius, Ruricius was replying to something which Aeonius had actually sent to him.<sup>416</sup> The background details surrounding the letter are perhaps debatable but, to me, it seems that Ruricius was replying to a missive which Aeonius had sent announcing the death of Leontius and his own succession. Mathisen however suggests a different context and a revised chronology.<sup>417</sup> I feel we can pass over these minor issues and proceed to examine the letter's key points. Ruricius begins by saying that he had never actually met Leontius in the flesh, despite their spiritual relationship,<sup>418</sup> something which need not militate against Ruricius and Leontius being kinsmen. The likelihood of some form of family connexion is underlined when Ruricius states that he had already heard of Leontius' death and Aeonius' accession and was actually planning to write to Aeonius when his letter arrived;<sup>419</sup> Aeonius' original letter, intended to inform Ruricius of a changed situation, thus contained second-hand news. This hints at Ruricius having connexions at Arles who fed him information about events there, although this does not, by itself, demonstrate any familial link to the place. However, the fact that Ruricius seems to emphasise his connexions at Arles in this way is important because it suggests that he wanted to remind the new metropolitan of his own reach and influence, of the

<sup>414</sup> Mathisen (1999) 24, stressing particularly Pontius Leontius (*PLRE* 2.674-675); see also Mathisen's "fanciful" *stemma* at (1999) 29 which expands upon *stemma* 16 found in the *PLRE* 2.1319. I do not find the proposed *stemma* terribly fanciful; on the contrary, it looks to me like a perfectly reasonable proposition.

<sup>415</sup> *PLRE* 804-805

<sup>416</sup> Ruricius, *Ep.* 1.15

<sup>417</sup> Mathisen (1999) 126-127; Ruricius was bishop of Limoges from 485-507 while Aeonius is accepted as having become bishop around 490; Mathisen however suggests that it may be possible to push Aeonius' accession back further so that, in effect, Aeonius' letter, to which Ruricius is replying, was actually congratulating Ruricius on becoming bishop of Limoges. I prefer not to accept this interpretation.

<sup>418</sup> Rur., *Ep.*, 1.15.1.-2, *animo et mente confusus diu multumque tristatus sum, quod et, impediētibz peccatis meis, tanto antistiti occurrere non merueram et tali essem parente privatus. Cuius etsi exterioris hominis non fruebar aspectu, interioris tamen gratia delectabar et mentis acie iugiter adhaerebam.*

<sup>419</sup> Rur., *Ep.*, 1.15.5, *nunc vero, ut dicere institueram, accensione ipsius domini mei et apostolatus vestri ordinatione comperta, ad officium vestrum mittere cogitabam.*

friends and allies he had even in Aeonius' own locale. This could even be seen as the reaction of a local – one could almost say parochial – southern Gallic noble to the rise of an interloper from a more distant region and as a reminder to this relative outsider of the continuing power of Ruricius' clan.

Looking more generally at Ruricius' letter, including his justificatory statement that he had planned to write congratulating the new metropolitan, we might interpret the entire missive as the extension of an olive branch. If Aeonius' election, perhaps with papal support, had effectively cost Ruricius' extended family control of the most important see in Gaul, Aeonius might have expected future trouble from those sees still controlled by the family and also from partisans and *amici* of the family in Arles itself. This may explain why Aeonius was so keen to initiate contact with Ruricius, so keen, in fact, that his letter took Ruricius by surprise, arriving in Limoges before Ruricius could compose his own planned letter to Arles. At the same time, given that Limoges was a comparatively humble see, Ruricius might have welcomed the chance to establish peaceful relations with metropolitan Arles and effectively to disavow involvement in any further factional politicking.

If Aeonius' accession had been acrimonious and if Leontius' kin had expected Arles to be given to one of them, both of which seem likely to me, it is perfectly possible that some partisans were still attempting to undermine Aeonius' authority. Against a background of strife and factionalism, it would have been politically advantageous for Aeonius to produce evidence that he and Ruricius, a kinsman of the late bishop, could reach an *entente*. Despite the comparative insignificance of the see of Limoges, it would have sent an important message if Ruricius, a relative of Leontius and surely a relative of any defeated candidate advanced by Leontius' *amici* and family in Arles, was happy to find a *modus vivendi* with the man who might have been seen as a carpetbagger who had stolen the see from its rightful possessors.

Similarly, if Ruricius wished to distance himself from members of his family who were actively hostile to Aeonius, perhaps feeling that a see like Limoges could not defy a metropolitan, it would explain why almost the first thing Ruricius does in his letter is to distance himself from the late Leontius. By diminishing his relationship, by stating that they had never met and by avoiding any direct reference to a blood relationship, Ruricius was trying to set himself at a remove from the factionalism and conflict which attended Aeonius' election. But, even so, when Ruricius tells Aeonius that he is well informed about events at Arles, he underlines his continued influence in Aeonius' own see.

To be sure, Ruricius was not hostile to Aeonius and would likely have gone to considerable lengths to avoid conflict, but, nevertheless, it was probably important for an aristocrat like Ruricius to establish his credentials, to demonstrate that he was eminent and influential; whatever the relative powers and statuses of their sees, Ruricius, as a noble, wished to establish his social equality and his aristocratic (rather than ecclesiastical) reach and influence and these are quite likely to be the reasons behind the air of touchiness that Mathisen detects in Ruricius' missive, a certain bridling at Aeonius' presumptuousness even as he tries to avoid conflict him.<sup>420</sup>

The family of Ruricius and Leontius did not abandon their interest in Arles. When Aeonius died, there was probably some conflict and it is against this background that the ephemeral bishop Iohannes appears in the *fasti* of Arles after Aeonius and before Caesarius.<sup>421</sup> I discuss Iohannes later in the thesis, but I wish to mention the relationship between Iohannes and the kinsmen of Leontius and Ruricius. Necessarily, in the absence of hard evidence, I can only advance supposition and conjecture but, nevertheless, there is some superficial evidence that the family of Leontius may have continued to press a claim on Arles.

This evidence comes in two forms. First, there is a letter of Ruricius to Capillutus in which he discusses the strife that surrounded Caesarius' election.<sup>422</sup> This letter is significant because Ruricius states that he cannot really oppose the election of a man who has been chosen by *communis consensus*.<sup>423</sup> The language Ruricius uses in that sentence alone is striking and seems to carry the sense that he was displeased by the election of Caesarius but felt unable to oppose it. Presented with a candidate who had managed to garner the support of both the congregants and a portion of the Arlesian clergy, Ruricius could do little more than swallow his dislike and accept the *fait accompli* (probably not least because his own see was not hugely influential). Nevertheless, we should not overlook the extent to which Ruricius was irritated by the rise of Caesarius; as Mathisen says, in this short letter Ruricius makes

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<sup>420</sup> Mathisen (1999) 128, n.14

<sup>421</sup> Duchesne (1894) 1.249-250; Duchesne, interestingly, denies (1.250, n.8) the possibility that Iohannes existed ("les dyptiques marquent un Jean entre Aeonius et Césaire; il est sûr que Césaire a succédé immédiatement à Aeonius") largely on the basis of his non-appearance in the *Vita Caesarii* but this is a naïve position. As Klingshirn (1994a) 85-86 notes, although the *Vita* "strongly implies" a direct succession between Caesarius and Aeonius – and although this is clearly the impression the authors wished their readers to take away – it does not actually say explicitly that there was a direct succession. For the background to the ninth or tenth century manuscript which gives the earliest mention of Iohannes, see Duchesne (1894) 1.243

<sup>422</sup> Ruricius, Ep. 2.31; Klingshirn (1994a) 86 believes that the bishops discussed in this letter is Iohannes, not Caesarius.

<sup>423</sup> Ruricius, Ep. 2.31, *et ideo, quia qui vobis et fratribus vestris placet nobis displicere non debet, bene facitis, ut hominem quem communis consensus elegit ordinetis*. ("Indeed, because he who pleases you and your brothers ought not to displease me, you have done well in that you have ordained a man whom the common consensus chose.")

continual reference to unpleasant aspects of the electoral process.<sup>424</sup> The remarks made by Ruricius about the need for the Arlesian clergy, in effect, to monitor, supervise and correct their new bishop not only informs us of how acrimonious the election must have been but also suggests that Ruricius did not trust Caesarius either to perform effectively as bishop or to move beyond his personal concerns with taking revenge on those who had opposed him.<sup>425</sup> As I hope to demonstrate, Ruricius' views were not entirely misguided.

With that, I turn to the second piece of evidence suggesting that Ruricius' family may have tried to reclaim Arles and that Iohannes may have been one of their kinsmen. Caesarius famously wrote to Ruricius admonishing him for his failure to attend the council of Agde in the autumn of 506.<sup>426</sup> I discuss this below, where I mention my belief that this letter reflects both the insufferable arrogance that Caesarius displayed in dealing with clerical colleagues and also his belief that he ought to be the final arbiter of what constituted proper piety, but, at this point, I wish to examine the letter from a different angle. Specifically, I believe that the acrimonious election at Arles provides a useful means of understanding this letter. If Ruricius' family – and conceivably Ruricius himself – had supported Iohannes, it is likely, in view of Caesarius' character, that the new bishop of Arles would have done all he could to diminish and harass those he saw as enemies. This letter was an attempt to put Ruricius in his place, to underline the imbalance in power between Arles and Limoges and to punish, albeit in a rather self-indulgent and petty way, the older bishop for imagined slights against Caesarius.

Ruricius, for whatever it may be worth, does not seem to have been a particularly partisan or hostile man; in fact, he seems positively passive in places and more than willing to compromise his own desires in pursuit of peace. For these reasons, Ruricius was willing and able to accept not only the loss of Arles to Aeonius but his family's failure to reclaim the see upon Aeonius' death. Ruricius may have accepted Aeonius' rise because he felt that, in a generation's time, the family would regain Arles. However, with Aeonius' cultivation of Caesarius as an heir, the possibility of regaining Arles receded somewhat; when the family's

<sup>424</sup> Mathisen (1999) 189, "'falsity', 'perdition', 'discord', 'cupidity', and 'rapine'" (in the Latin text, *sed admonete illum, ut veritati studeat, non falsitati, paci, non perditioni, disciplinae, non discordiae, utilitati publicae, non privatae cupiditati, iustitiae, non rapinae*; "But admonish him that he should cleave to truth, not to dishonesty, to peace, not to damnation, to discipline, not discord, to the common welfare, not to private greed".)

<sup>425</sup> Mathisen (1999) 42-43 offers an ingenious but unconvincing hypothesis that Ruricius may have been involved in negotiating for Caesarius' release from exile which would probably suggest a fairly friendly collegial relationship between the two. While I am not persuaded by Mathisen's argument, I would concede that, given the apparent characters of Ruricius and Caesarius as revealed in the sources, it does not seem beyond the pale that Ruricius might actively try to help Caesarius only to be treated with antagonism afterwards.

<sup>426</sup> Caesarius, *Ep.* 3 [= *Epist. ad Ruricium*, 12, *MGH AA* 8.274]

candidate, Iohannes, proved unable to gain a decisive victory and with Caesarius apparently enjoying considerable congregational support, it is likely that Ruricius acted as he had upon Aeonius' accession – which is to say, he recognised the victor and sought an accommodation. It is unfortunate that Caesarius proved to be a less magnanimous victor than his predecessor and that he continued to nurse a grudge.

Kinship was a defining element in the elevation of Caesarius to the Arlesian episcopate (something discussed in greater detail in a later chapter). We have also seen that kinship played a part in the career of Aeonius and, no less importantly, in defining the relationship between Caesarius and those he considered his opponents. Kinship did not allow the family of Leontius to keep its hold on Arles; kinship could not stop the rise of Aeonius and his family, effectively carpetbaggers from Chalon, who pushed out a family which expected to maintain its hold on Arles. Issues of kinship and of competing familial claims to a see rose again when Aeonius died. The biographers of Caesarius preferred to emphasise their subject's personal piety and ascetic commitment as the basis of his elevation to metropolitan of Arles but he could never have dreamt of achieving such a position without being the kinsman and nominated successor of Aeonius; to strengthen his family's position in Arles, Aeonius had imported other relatives from Chalon and had granted them positions within the Arlesian ecclesiastical establishment, in effect creating a mafia which formed the backbone of the local church during Caesarius' episcopate and whose support must ultimately have helped to bring him to the throne – and, we might also say, it was the desire of this clique to whitewash their kinsman's reputation that led to the creation of the expurgated *Vita* we now possess.

But even as kinship was central to Caesarius' campaign for the *cathedra*, it was no less important to his opponents who saw, with the death of Aeonius, a chance to resurrect their claims and to place one of their own back in control of Arles. The fact that Caesarius eventually won the day did not induce him to view the partisans and relatives of Iohannes with any particular clemency. The mere fact that Ruricius was related to Leontius – and, therefore, probably to Iohannes too – made him a foe, regardless of whether or not he ever acted as a foe. Kinship defined both the relative claims of individuals to the Arlesian episcopate and also their relations with others. To be the blood-kin of an opponent of Caesarius *ipso facto* made Ruricius an opponent of Caesarius too.

One may say that kinship played an important rôle in the early career of Aeonius and was pivotal to his successor's ascension but that it was different from what one might have expected. We may see at work the conflicts that arose when two claimants each felt a family-based entitlement to a see and how clan rivalries shaped the attitudes of family members. The

absence of information in the *Vita Caesarii* should not militate against this interpretation but, instead, should be seen as underlining the victors' desire to suppress both the claims – no less legitimate than Caesarius' own – of the opposing faction and the picture of the saintly Caesarius engaging ruthlessly and unscrupulously in blood-based factional politicking. Nor did the eventual victor at Arles, one of the biggest personalities and most important figures of the period, stop seeing the kinsmen of his erstwhile opponent as true enemies to himself, his family and his episcopal authority.

### *The election of Avitus at Vienne (c.494)*

Alcimus Ecdicius Avitus presents an interesting and, apparently, quite straightforward example of a man who owed his position wholly to kinship. His own *Vita* is open and seemingly unashamed about the fact that Avitus succeeded his father Hesychius to the episcopal throne.<sup>427</sup> The very first sentence of the *Vita* lays out the familial connexion between the two bishops; its second sentence, lays out the family's aristocratic status – "This Hesychius was a man of senatorial dignity".<sup>428</sup> He was that and more having held office within the Roman state before becoming bishop and with two of his sons also rising to the episcopate.<sup>429</sup> He was related both to Sidonius Apollinaris (one of his sons, later to become bishop of Valence, was named Apollinaris<sup>430</sup>) and to Eparchius Avitus, the ephemeral emperor of 455/6. The pedigree is impressive and perhaps it should not be surprising that Avitus and his biographers were proud of these connexions.

Nevertheless, Avitus' candidness about his father raises questions (in my mind, at least). If Avitus saw family relationships as a matter of pride and if his biographers saw no shame in reporting them, we must wonder why Caesarius and his biographers concealed and downplayed his relationship with Aeonius. We can answer this question by examining the status and relationships of Avitus' family at Vienne and by then contrasting them to those of Caesarius' family. This will demonstrate the regional nature of aristocratic influence and

<sup>427</sup> *Vita Aviti* 1 [= *Vita Beati Aviti Episcopi Viennensis*, MGH AA 6.2, ed. R. Peiper (Berlin, 1883), 177-181], *Tempore Zenonis imperatoris beatus Avitus episcopus sapientia et doctrina mirabilis deo mortalibus favente Viennensem ecclesiam post patrem Isicium acque episcopum suscepit regendam*. ("In the time of the emperor Zeno, the blessed bishop Avitus, a man remarkable for his wisdom and learning, took up, through God's favour to mortals, the see and church at Vienne after his father, Hesychius, who was also bishop.") The *Vita Apollinaris episcopi Valentiniensis* – the *Vita* of Avitus' brother who was bishop of Valence – also emphasises, in its first few lines, the family's aristocratic status [= MGH SRM 3, ed. B. Krusch (Hanover, 1896), 197-198].

<sup>428</sup> *Vita Aviti* 1, *Hic Isicium vir primum fuit senatoriae dignitatis*.

<sup>429</sup> PLRE 2.555 states simply that "He held an unidentified secular post" but Shanzer & Wood (2002) 4 identify Hesychius (rightly, I think) with the *tribunus legatus* sent to Theoderic and mentioned in Hydatius, *Chronica* 177 [= MGH AA 11, ed. Mommsen (1894), 29]

<sup>430</sup> PLRE 2.115; Duchesne (1894) 1.218

relationships in Gaul at the turn of the fifth century and illustrate the extent to which Caesarius' family were outsiders to Arles.

Hesychius became bishop of Arles following the death of bishop Mamertus (brother of Claudianus Mamertus). Hesychius and Mamertus were probably not related or, if they were, the sources do not mention of it – and, in this case, we might have expected them to do so. Despite the absence of a blood relationship, there is evidence in Avitus' homilies to suggest that his family enjoyed extremely good relations with Mamertus, something which leaves open the possibility that Hesychius was chosen by Mamertus as his successor. Specifically, Avitus refers to Mamertus as “a spiritual father to me since baptism”,<sup>431</sup> indicating a longstanding friendship between Mamertus and Hesychius. Although it is hypothetically possible that Mamertus was related to Hesychius, I am, overall, more comfortable treating them as *amici* and seeing Hesychius' succession as an example of *amicitia* rather than kinship. While I favour the view that Mamertus chose Hesychius as his successor, it is entirely possible that Hesychius was simply a friend and ally of the bishop who, on account of this as well as of his secular rank and influence in the region, was selected by the clergy and congregation of Vienne. In either case, the key points are that there was a friendly association between Mamertus and his successor and that this friendship played a significant part in Hesychius' election. It is *amicitia*, in its most classical form, at work.

We cannot know exactly what happened when Hesychius himself died and his son, Avitus, succeeded him. There is no description of events in the sources and it is certainly not impossible that the election was a cut-and-dried affair with Avitus having the blessing of his predecessor, the support of his family and strong relations with influential families in the region. Indeed, Avitus' brother, Apollinaris, may already have received his episcopal throne at Valence,<sup>432</sup> which would mean that Avitus' campaign to succeed his father (assuming one was necessary) would have enjoyed the support a fairly important suffragan see. Ties of kinship must have played a central rôle in Apollinaris' rise to the *cathedra* and would have

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<sup>431</sup> Avitus, Homily 6 [=MGH AA 6.2, 110], *Praedecessor namque meus et spiritalis mihi a baptismo pater Mamertus sacerdos, cui ante non paucos annos pater carnis meae accepto, sicut deo visum est, sacerdotii tempore successit...* (“My predecessor and the man who was a spiritual father to me from baptism, bishop Mamertus, whom the father of my flesh succeeded to the episcopate not a few years ago when, as seemed right to God, Mamertus was taken...”). Shanzer & Wood (2002) 388 have an extended discussion of the Latin in this section although, for my part, I feel that the problems they identify are largely of their own making, that the Latin is clear and that detailed dissection of its grammar is unnecessary.

<sup>432</sup> Apollinaris (PLRE 2.115) attended the council of Épaone in 517 but he must have been bishop for some time before that. It is by no means impossible nor even improbable, though of course one cannot say how likely it is, that Apollinaris ascended the throne of Valence before Avitus ascended that of Vienne, in which case Avitus would have been able to depend upon the support of his own blood kin within the provincial episcopal network of Vienne.

been extremely useful in Avitus' rise – not only could Avitus depend on the father-son relationship but he could also count on his brother's influence being brought to bear. The centrality of kinship to Avitus' acquisition of Vienne cannot be overstated.

But, be that as it may, one must return to the questions I posed above and deal with the contrasting reactions to kinship found in the *Vitae* of Avitus and Caesarius. I think it likely that the reason for these differing reactions – embarrassment for Caesarius' biographers and pride for Avitus' – has to do with the relative status of each man in his *civitas*. Avitus belonged to an aristocratic family with a proud pedigree and deep roots in the region; whether by blood or by marriage, the Aviti had close connexions to many influential families including Sidonius'.<sup>433</sup> They were the epitome of the southern Gallic senatorial aristocracy and took pride in this, seeing power as their birthright.

Caesarius, though, was an émigré and the successor to another émigré. He was an outsider and his family's influence in the south of Gaul was circumscribed to a degree.<sup>434</sup> His kinsman, Aeonius, had been lucky to gain control of Arles and Caesarius was equally lucky to be able to retain the diocese, but he could not claim, as Avitus might, that ancestral connexion to the *civitas* granted him an entitlement to the see. In southern Gaul, Caesarius remained an outsider without a birthright and that, in my opinion, represents a stark difference between him and Avitus. Where Avitus could treat his acquisition of Vienne as a matter of inheritance with the see remaining in the hands of an established local clan, Caesarius and Aeonius could make no such claim about Arles. Caesarius probably appeared to be something of a carpetbagger – an outsider who had come to Arles purely to feather his own nest and who owed his position to the patronage of a relative who himself had no meaningful association with Arles. It may have offended the Arlesian nobility to see Aeonius importing kinsmen from Chalon and gifting them office in the local church. Better for Caesarius, then, to diminish his connexion to Aeonius and better for his biographers to pretend that Caesarius and Aeonius had not even been conscious of their relationship.

I am conscious that, in highlighting the extent to which Caesarius was an outsider and Avitus was not, I undermine the popular view that Caesarius was a member of the supposed Lérins faction and that he enjoyed considerable support in the region.<sup>435</sup> I am also at odds with Mathisen's view that many of the most important churchmen in southern Gaul were members

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<sup>433</sup> Cf. *PLRE* 2.1317; note the recurrence of names within the families of Sidonius and Avitus.

<sup>434</sup> Note that one of Riculf's justifications for his move against Gregory is to free Tours from the grip of a clique from Clermont; Greg. Tur., *Hist. Franc.*, 5.49, '*Recognoscite dominum vestrum, qui victoriam de inimicis obtinuit, cuius ingenium Turonicam urbem ab Arvernibus populis emundavit*'.

<sup>435</sup> I deal with this in detail in a later chapter.

of a circle of émigrés from Lugdunensis<sup>436</sup> who were “aristocratic, influential, and...interrelated”.<sup>437</sup> There may be specific individuals who meet Mathisen’s criteria and for whom his thesis holds true, but it is clear to me that Caesarius was deeply conscious of being an outsider with no real connexion to southern Gaul or its urban aristocracy and felt, as did his biographers, that stressing the position of kinship in his succession would highlight his status as someone who did not really belong. His status was liable to alienate the local aristocracy as they saw outsiders, like Caesarius, coming to their city expressly to further their careers – something which, in the highly competitive environment of the late fifth century Gallic church, must necessarily involve retarding the advancement of nobles who did come from the area.<sup>438</sup>

Thus, kinship could be a double-edged weapon in an election. It was useful to have family in high places who might assist one’s career but, if one’s family came from outside the region, there was the possibility that locals would take umbrage and see the migration of foreign aristocrats into the highest offices of the local church as constituting an attack on the rights and privileges of the indigenous nobility. Kinship, then, was a political minefield for Caesarius while being a straightforward – and advantageous – thing for Avitus.

### *The elections of Volusianus (c.488-491) and Verus (c.495/6/497) at Tours*

The elections of Volusianus and of his successor Verus highlight some interesting facets of episcopal dynasticism during the closing decades of the fifth century. Taking into account the claim of Gregory of Tours that all but five of the previous eighteen bishops of Tours were relatives of his,<sup>439</sup> it seems more than likely that Volusianus was a relative too. Volusianus was certainly related to his immediate predecessor, Perpetuus, who was himself related to his predecessor Eustochius.<sup>440</sup> There is no definite information on Volusianus’ successor, Verus, but, as I shall explain below, that may be because Verus was not connected to Volusianus at

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<sup>436</sup> Mathisen (1993) 60, (1989) 77-78

<sup>437</sup> Mathisen (1989) 76

<sup>438</sup> Cf. Marcone (1998) 343 on “the bonds of power joining together the bishop and the richer classes of the city”. In Avitus’ case, as with many southern Gallic bishops, the bonds were strong because the bishop was drawn from these “richer classes”; Caesarius, though of aristocratic extraction, was not a part of the upper class social *milieu* of the southern Rhône valley. He did not belong to the city or its ruling class and so the “bonds of power” were weaker and his position potentially more tenuous.

<sup>439</sup> Greg. Tur., *Hist. Franc.*, 5.49, *ignorans miser, quod praeter quinque episcopos reliqui omnes, qui sacerdotium Turonicum susceperunt, parentum nostrorum prosapiae sunt coniuncti*. (“Ignorant wretch! Except for a bare five bishops, all of those who had held the episcopate of Tours had been connected with my family.”)

<sup>440</sup> Greg. Tur., *Hist. Franc.*, 10.31; see *PLRE* 2.1183 for Volusianus (4), 2.860-861 for Perpetuus and 2.437 for Eustochius (3).

all. But, in any case, the statistics alone make it probable that the three bishops Volusianus, Eustochius and Perpetuus were relatives of Gregory.

However, in Gregory's discussion of previous bishops of Tours at the end of the *Historia Francorum*, Perpetuus is described as being "of senatorial stock, so they say, and a relative of his predecessor".<sup>441</sup> The inclusion of *ut aiunt* demands explanation because it suggests that Gregory was uncertain about Perpetuus' status and was repeating the claims of others. While this would not eliminate the possibility that Perpetuus was a distant relative (perhaps from a less celebrated branch of the family related by marriage<sup>442</sup>), it seems strange that Gregory would not be more aware of Perpetuus' status.<sup>443</sup> It is conceivable that these three were an anomaly amongst the bishops of Tours and that, despite being related to each other, they were not connected to Gregory's family; a more likely explanation, though, is that Perpetuus was related to Gregory only in the most indirect of fashions.<sup>444</sup> His family may not have been important politically or socially or he may have come from an outlying region; indeed, it is likely that Perpetuus was related to the Volusianus and Eustochius only by bonds of marriage – and even those bonds may have been fragile and distant.

As for Volusianus himself, whatever his connexion to Gregory's family in the late sixth century, he can be located within the aristocratic *milieu* of fifth century Gaul as the recipient of one letter from Sidonius and the subject of another.<sup>445</sup> In the very first line of his letter to Volusianus, Sidonius describes his correspondent as his *frater* (which I read as a sign of close

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<sup>441</sup> Greg. Tur., *Hist. Franc.*, 10.31, *de genere et ipse, ut aiunt, senatorio et propinquus decessoris sui*.

<sup>442</sup> Heinzelmann (2001) 20 discusses the connexion between Eustochius and Perpetuus and the family of Gregory of Langres (the maternal great-grandfather of Gregory of Tours) and Eufronius of Autun; although I am not without concerns about his use of the evidence, he is probably correct if for no other reason than simple statistical likelihood, given that thirteen of eighteen bishops are connected to a single family.

<sup>443</sup> The fact that his status was uncertain strongly supports Stroheker (1942) 294 contending that "Nicht Ansehen, Macht und Reichtum, sondern die Abstammung von einem dieser senatorischen Geschlechter lassen den einzelnen zum Senator werden"; cf. Kurth (1919) for the view that *senator* meant, in Gregory's day, anyone of high rank. Gilliard (1979) 691 states that, "When he says merely that someone was a *senator*, or *ex senatoribus*, or *de genere senatorio*, as he often does, a definition cannot be inferred"; however, when Gregory expresses clear doubts about whether someone was or was not of senatorial rank, even while referring to the individual's wealth and importance, we have no option but to assume that Gregory is attaching a technical meaning to the word.

<sup>444</sup> Curiously, while Gregory is vague on Perpetuus, he is definite that both Eustochius (*loc.cit.*, *vir sanctus et timens Deum ex genere senatorio*) and Volusianus (*loc.cit.*, *vero Volusianus ordinatur episcopus, ex genere senatorio, vir sanctus et valde dives, propinquus et ipse Perpetui episcopi decessoris sui*)

were of senatorial rank. I cannot explain why Gregory handles the middle link in this chain of related bishops in such a wise unless it is because Perpetuus was some kind of outsider, perhaps having married into the family of Eustochius and Volusianus, rather than a blood relative or part of the true heart of the family.

<sup>445</sup> Sid. Ap., *Ep.* 7.17 and 4.18 respectively.

friendship rather than as a piece of religious terminology<sup>446</sup>) and makes reference to the *lex amicitiae* by which they are bound. Whatever the status of Perpetuus' claim to senatorial rank, Volusianus was accepted by Sidonius, who is as close to an arbiter of aristocratic pedigree as we can hope to get, as an equal, an *amicus* and a brother.

Like Sidonius, Volusianus may have entered the episcopate following a successful secular career in the vestigial Roman bureaucracy. There is no hard evidence to that effect, but it was an event common enough as not to be unlikely. In any case, he ascended the throne in 488/9 or 491, depending on how one calculates Gregory's dates;<sup>447</sup> for my purposes, the precise date of his election is unimportant because the issues that really matter are, first, his relationship to his predecessors and successor and, second, the approximate length of his reign and those of his predecessors.

Volusianus' predecessor, Perpetuus, was bishop for thirty years, an extremely long period in office, though not uniquely so. He ascended the throne in 458/461 and died in 488/491. Eustochius had held office for a more modest period of between sixteen and twenty years (beginning in 442 and ending in 458/61). Such long reigns granted bishops the opportunity to cultivate successors and to place supporters and relatives within their church; a bishop who ruled for an entire generation, as Perpetuus did, must have had endless opportunities to stack the local ecclesiastical establishment with partisans and creatures as natural wastage removed existing officeholders. Eustochius' shorter (though hardly short) tenure must also have provided openings for placing allies in useful positions – and, of course, apart from these new allies, the election of Eustochius in the first place implies that the family already had plenty of supporters amongst the clergy of Tours.

Despite the absence of sources on the election or tenure of Volusianus, one would have to be extremely curmudgeonly to argue that family affiliations did not play a significant part in his elevation to the episcopate. The exact nature of his relationship to Perpetuus is unimportant because, whatever the shades and fine distinctions, he *was* a relative just as Perpetuus was somehow related to his predecessor. Given the length of Perpetuus' reign, we may assume that, like Aeonius, he actively cultivated an heir – after all, with thirty years on the throne, he would have had ample time to contemplate what should happen after his death – and that he chose this heir from within his own family. The pool of relatives from which he drew

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<sup>446</sup> Cf. Sid. Ap., Ep. 4.18.2, *...tuque fraterque communis Volusianus...* ("...both you and Volusianus, the brother we hold in common...") and 6.2.2 *...venerabilis fratris...prebyteri Agrippini...*; cf. James (1991) 20, n.5

<sup>447</sup> PLRE 2.1183

probably extended beyond his immediate family – by which I mean his own sons or his siblings or their children – to include a larger, wider and more diffuse group of individuals linked not just (or, conceivably, at all) by blood but by marriage. One distinct possibility is that Eustochius passed the see to Perpetuus, a distant relative by blood or marriage who was preferred over closer relatives for reasons we cannot know, and that Perpetuus then chose Volusianus, a close relative of Eustochius (perhaps a nephew or such) as his heir. In this way, the throne may have passed away from the main trunk of the family tree for a while before returning.

We cannot know what opposition, if any, Volusianus met when he declared his candidacy (which assumes, of course, that he felt the need to declare a candidacy<sup>448</sup>), but he clearly overcame it. His family brought its influence to bear to secure the see not just for Volusianus but for themselves. When one of their own was elected, it benefited the family as a whole and they could reasonably expect that Volusianus would, in due course, begin grooming one of them to succeed him to the episcopal throne thus continuing the cycle of episcopal dynasticism. And yet I think things may well have fallen apart for Volusianus' family much sooner than they could have expected.

Volusianus, like Simplicius of Bourges, died a mere seven years after taking the *cathedra*. He died in exile, in Toulouse or in Spain, suspected by the Goths of sympathising with the Franks.<sup>449</sup> The mixture of a short tenure in office, physical separation from Tours and the political hostility of barbarian rulers probably reduced Volusianus' influence. The late bishop would not have had the time or opportunity to groom a replacement but, even if he had or if his family had someone in mind, the bishop's physical absence together with explicit royal opposition to Volusianus (and, by extension, his partisans) must have been a gift to ambitious clerics from outside the clan. It is against this background that Verus succeeded Volusianus. On the basis of Gregory's description, we can be confident that Verus was not related to Volusianus; if any relationship had existed, Gregory would have documented it as he always did. Indeed, Gregory almost completely passes over Verus in his account of the bishops of Tours; the only information he gives, other than the length of his reign (eleven years and eight days), is the fact that Verus was also exiled for imagined Frankish sympathies. The lack of information on Verus is most easily explained if we assume that Gregory simply did not *have* much information on him because he came from outside the aristocratic clans which had dominated Tours and was one of the five bishops unrelated to Gregory.

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<sup>448</sup> Cf. Sid. Ap., *Ep.* 7.9 on Simplicius' election despite not having been a candidate.

<sup>449</sup> Greg. Tur., *Hist. Franc.* 2.26, 10.31

Volusianus' story illustrates some intriguing aspects of episcopal dynasticism. The vague but definite relationship between Volusianus, Perpetuus and Eustochius – particularly that they were all related despite Perpetuus' status being uncertain – underlines the fact that politically active families could be, and probably often were, large and diffuse. Family relationships in such large clans could not always be based upon close bonds; Simplicius was the son and son-in-law of the previous two bishops of Bourges, but there were other bishops who owed power to comparatively distant family connexions. We might place Caesarius of Arles in this category since his *Vita* is extremely vague on his relationship to Aeonius; Aeonius may have been an uncle or some other reasonably close relative but he might equally have been a cousin either to Caesarius himself or to one of Caesarius' parents. Their relationship could conceivably have been based on the marriage of third parties.

My point is that aristocratic episcopal dynasties bore less resemblance to conventional nuclear families than to large political groupings. Individuals within these families supported each other less because of the bonds of familial love than because they knew that an episcopal kinsman would look within his own family for successors, would seek to position relatives within his church to secure the collective power and advantage of the extended family. This is certainly one of the reasons why, as I see it, Mathisen's theory of monastery-based factions must be revised to take greater account of extended family-based factions. In the wider sense, although this is not something on which the sources provide much information, these diffuse episcopal families may have seen internecine conflict when family members sought sees in competition with one another; naturally, the larger the family, the more likely conflict would have been and the more difficult it would have been to maintain any meaningful sense of unity or collectivity.

### *The elections of Apollinaris and Quintianus (515)*

Events surrounding the ephemeral episcopate of Apollinaris are informative about the changing functions of both kinship and the Frankish crown in episcopal elections. Apollinaris was, of course, the son of Sidonius and thus born into the highest – or, at least, most celebrated – social circles of late Roman Gaul. His father's career needs no exposition on my part so I shall concentrate on Apollinaris'. Born into an illustrious family, grandson of an emperor and son of a bishop, it was to be expected that Apollinaris would rise to a position of influence whether in church or state and, in fact, sources indicate that he did both. Born rather too late to be troubled by the kind of scruples that so affected his father, Apollinaris entered

the service of the Visigothic king Alaric II and gained the title *vir inlustris*.<sup>450</sup> He appears later at Vouillé in 507 commanding a contingent of Gallo-Roman soldiers from the Auvergne – the *PLRE* posits that he may have been *comes Arvernorum* – and somehow managing to avoid the unfortunate fate of his fellow *primi*.<sup>451</sup>

Whatever his part in resisting the Franks at Vouillé, Apollinaris seems to have been able to find a place for himself in the new Frankish-ruled Auvergne because, in 515, after the death of bishop Euphrasius of Clermont, Apollinaris seems to have secured the throne for himself. Euphrasius had ruled for twenty-three years, succeeding Aprunculus who had himself been the chosen successor of Sidonius.<sup>452</sup> At first glance, it might not seem terribly surprising that Apollinaris, as the son of a previous bishop of the city and the holder of high secular office, should assume the episcopate; but Gregory's account – which, given his connexion to Clermont and the family of Sidonius, is likely to be trustworthy – tells us that the people actually chose Quintianus, the elderly bishop of Rodez. Apollinaris only gained the throne through the intervention of his wife and sister, Placidina and Alcima, who persuaded Quintianus not to accept the throne, partly because he had already held the episcopate once and partly because, as bishop, Apollinaris would obey all his wishes anyway.<sup>453</sup> Quintianus, in Gregory's account, assents to this arrangement without actually doing anything so gauche as saying so explicitly – he merely states that he has no control over the election and no interest in anything other than prayer and having enough to eat. Apollinaris promptly visits the Frankish king Theuderic, taking with him *multa munera*, and is awarded the episcopate of Clermont.

The unfortunate Apollinaris was not destined to enjoy his new prize for long. After a mere three or four months, this “évêque éphémère” died and was replaced with Quintianus, the

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<sup>450</sup> *PLRE* 2.114

<sup>451</sup> Greg. Tur., *Hist. Franc.* 2.37, *Maximus ibi tunc Arvernorum populus, qui cum Apollinare venerat, et primi qui erant ex senatoribus corruerunt*. (“The greatest part of the Arverni had come with Apollinaris and their leaders, draw from the senators, were annihilated”).

<sup>452</sup> Greg. Tur., *Hist. Franc.* 2.23; cf. Duchesne (1900) 2.35

<sup>453</sup> Greg. Tur., *Hist. Franc.* 3.2, *Alcima et Placidina, uxor sororque Apollinaris, ad sanctum Quintianum venientes, dicunt: ‘Sufficiat, domne sancte, senectute tuae, quod es episcopus ordenatus. Permittat’, inquit, ‘pietas tua servo tuo Apollinari locum huius honoris adipisci. Ille vero, cum ad hunc apicem ascenderet, sicut tibi placitum fuerit obsequitur; tu quoque imperabis, et ille tuae parebit in omnibus iussioni’*. (“Alcima and Placidina, the wife and sister of Apollinaris, came to the holy Quintianus saying, ‘Let it be enough, holy lord, in your old age, that you have already been ordained bishop. May your piety allow your servant Apollinaris to undertake this honour. Indeed, he, when he ascended this peak, will be inclined to obey you; and you will give orders and he will be ready to follow your will in all things.’”)

congregation's original choice.<sup>454</sup> Despite the people's support, Gregory is clear that it was the will of the king which elevated Quintianus to his second *cathedra*.

An interesting picture thus emerges of events surrounding the succession of Euphrasius. For one thing, although it is not the most important, we can see that Apollinaris felt some manner of connexion to the see of Clermont – or, rather, to the power which the see represented – and we may surmise that this was largely, though perhaps not exclusively, on the basis of his parental relationship. His father having been bishop, Apollinaris felt that it was now his time to become bishop; if he had indeed been *comes* of Clermont, this would have seemed to him like a natural progression, what Geary calls “the normal crowning of the *cursus honorum* which followed the position of count”.<sup>455</sup> However, we can also see that neither family connexion nor secular office could guarantee a see; at the same time, the full support of the congregation and clergy could not guarantee a see either. At this stage, with the Franks ascendant in southern Gaul, royal favour was the ultimate source of episcopal power. It was from Theuderic's hand that the see of Clermont was received, first by Apollinaris but then by Quintianus.

Having said that, the zeal with which Apollinaris' ambitious female relatives approach Quintianus<sup>456</sup> and seek his approval demonstrates that even the king's favour could not be guaranteed, however great one's *munera*, if there was another politically viable candidate. Apollinaris and his supporters – which must have included a good deal more people than merely his wife and sister – felt that it would not be politically possible for the king to grant him the episcopate while Quintianus remained the congregation's preferred candidate. The only solution was to remove Quintianus, something which could only be done voluntarily. Therefore, to my eyes, the events surrounding the brief episcopate of Apollinaris illustrate the circumscriptions which attended royal power and familial claim as they pertain to the episcopate. Theuderic might have been quite willing to hand the vacant see over to Apollinaris but, so long as Quintianus was present with the support of the congregation, he was unlikely to have been able to do so without himself appearing to engaging in improper conduct. Not every king would necessarily have been worried by such charges but, for whatever reason, Theuderic may have been concerned about the expenditure of political

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<sup>454</sup> Duchesne (1900) 2.35; Greg. Tur., *Vita pat.*, 4.1. Note that, in his *Vita patrum*, Gregory carefully passes over any hint of impropriety in the election of Apollinaris; perhaps not surprisingly, given the subject matter, no mention is made of the virtual horse-trading in which Apollinaris and Quintianus engaged.

<sup>455</sup> Geary (1988) 130

<sup>456</sup> It is interesting – and potentially informative of Gregory's attitudes – that responsibility for what might be seen as an improper suggestion is placed squarely with the women around Apollinaris and not with Apollinaris himself.

capital which might attend so blatant a sale of office. Apollinaris too might have been concerned about the impact on his episcopal authority if it became known that he had effectively bribed the king to set aside a superior and more widely supported candidate.

The undignified horse-trading and Quintianus' willingness to become Apollinaris' *éminence grise* show the cold reality of episcopal politicking, but they also show that kinship's part in Apollinaris' episcopal ascension was minimal. Within the new and considerably more complex world of Frankish Gaul, old certainties of blood and nepotism could no longer be counted upon to deliver what they had under the Arian kings. Royal favour had certainly become the *sine qua non* for any who aspired to power but, at the same time, the crown, in the form of Theuderic, was not in this case willing to take the political risk of forcing its will through in the face of a recalcitrant congregation. Nor was Apollinaris powerful enough to push Quintianus out of the race; negotiation and persuasion had to do for Apollinaris what *amicitia* and kinship did for Simplicius a generation earlier.

In the end, it was all for nothing as the see returned to Quintianus after Apollinaris' death, a bare few months after he had acquired it. We might wonder why Quintianus had gone along with Apollinaris' plan in the first place, why he had given up his claim to the see despite popular support. I would not necessarily dismiss completely the excuse he gave – that of not caring for episcopal office – but, ever the cynic, I feel that he may well have been conscious of the conflict that might have resulted had he refused Apollinaris' request. Apollinaris, if he was not still count of Clermont, remained a man of influence in the secular world and there are plenty of examples of discord between bishops and counts in Frankish Gaul; the prospect of being eternally at war with a jealous and still influential *comes* might well have taken the shine off the *cathedra*. The assurance given in the *Historia Francorum*, that Apollinaris, as bishop, would do whatever Quintianus told him, may or may not have moved the old bishop of Rodez (depending, of course, on whether or not he believed that Apollinaris would keep this promise), but he must certainly have been conscious of the hostility he could expect from Apollinaris and his allies if he refused the offer. He may have felt that he would not be able to accomplish much as bishop in the face of Apollinaris' opposition, although that itself raises the question, to which there is no easy answer, of why Apollinaris, if his influence so worried Quintianus, could not garner the support of the congregation and clergy of Clermont.

### ***The election of Gallus at Clermont (525)***

The story of Gallus' election is a fascinating one which highlights two important threads in episcopal dynasticism. First, it demonstrates the increasing rôle for monarchs in the sixth

century church and, second, it shows that great families were continuing to war with each other over important sees, as I shall show.

According to the *Vita patrum*, Gallus of Clermont was not merely of senatorial family but was related, through his mother, to Vettius Epagatus, the martyr of Lyon in 177.<sup>457</sup> “None could be found in Gaul of better birth or more nobility” than Gallus who happened to be the uncle of Gregory of Tours, so his excellent birth and connexions to the roots of Gallic Christianity reflected Gregory’s own.<sup>458</sup>

Gregory’s account of Gallus’ life is formulaic. As a young man, he ran away to a monastery after his father sought to marry him to a girl of senatorial rank. Like Caesarius of Arles, he was accompanied by only a single slave.<sup>459</sup> In short order, he was accepted at Cournon, near Clermont, where he lived a perfectly pious life; he became noted for his mellifluous voice, fasted often, was perfectly chaste and was not even troubled by impure thoughts (though one might wonder how Gregory knew this).<sup>460</sup> His piety impressed king Theoderic who “loved him more than his own son” and brought him to live at the royal court in Trier; the queen, too, loved Gallus, “not just for the excellence of his voice, but also because of his bodily chastity”.<sup>461</sup> Despite the king’s habit of sending priests from Clermont to the church of Trier, he would not send Gallus because he could not stand the separation. Later, while deacon, Gallus and a friend burnt down a local pagan temple at which votive offerings for healing were given; in the aftermath, royal intervention was actually required to protect Gallus from enraged worshippers.

In 525, the bishop of Clermont, Quintianus, died.<sup>462</sup> The congregants went immediately to the priest Impetratus – brother of Gregory’s grandmother, Leucadia,<sup>463</sup> uncle to Gallus and great-uncle to Gregory – in hopes of finding a worthy successor; when none was immediately forthcoming, the congregation dispersed to their homes. Gallus, “having been filled with the

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<sup>457</sup> Greg. Tur., *Vita patrum*, 6.1, *Pater eius Georgius nomine, mater vero Leucadia ab stirpe Vetii Epagati descendens, quem Lugduno passum Eusebi testatur historia. Qui ita de primoribus senatoribus fuerunt, ut in Galliis nihil inveniatur esse generiosus atque nobilior.* [=MGH SRM 1.2, ed. W. Arndt and B. Krusch (Hannover, 1885), p.680]. On the martyrdom of Vettius Epagatus, an ancestor of Gregory, see *Hist. Franc.* 1.31.

<sup>458</sup> See *stemma* 12, *PLRE* 3.1545 for the family of Gregory. For Gallus, see *PLRE* 3.502.

<sup>459</sup> Greg. Tur., *Vita pat.*, 6.1; cf. *Vita Caes.* 1.3

<sup>460</sup> Greg. Tur., *Vita pat.*, 6.2, *Erat autem egregiae castitatis et tamquam senior nihil perversae appetens, a iocis etiam iuvenilibus cohibebat, habens mirae dulcedinis vocem cum modulatione suavi, lectioni incumbens assidue, delectans ieiuniis et abstenens se multum a cibis.*

<sup>461</sup> Greg. Tur., *Vita pat.*, 6.2, *tanta dilectione excoluit, ut eum proprio filio plus amaret; a regina autem eius simili amore dilegebatur non solum pro honestate vocis sed etiam pro castimonia corporis.*

<sup>462</sup> Greg. Tur., *Vita pat.*, 6.3; Quintianus is the subject of the fourth book of the *Vita patrum*.

<sup>463</sup> Leocadia in the *PLRE*.

holy spirit”, announced that all this discourse was silly because he would obviously be the next bishop “for the Lord will deign to confer this honour to me”.<sup>464</sup> A cleric (Viventius) hearing this was outraged and assaulted Gallus before leaving altogether. Impetratus counselled Gallus to go immediately to the king and to inform of all that had transpired because “If the Lord inspires him to grant you the episcopate, we shall give great thanks to God. If not, at least you will be commended to the one who is ordained”.<sup>465</sup> Gallus did as he was bade and was promptly granted the see of Clermont (though not before the people of Trier came to beg for Gallus to become their new bishop following the death of Aprunculus). Thereafter, a rumour seems to have sprung up to the effect that Gallus had bribed the king for his see so, at the king’s advice, a feast was held for the people of Clermont at public expense. And that, according to the *Vita patrum*, was how Gallus became bishop.

It is a silly and tendentious account which, like so much else in the *Vita patrum*, contains self-contradictory elements. And yet, in its efforts to slant events, it actually reveals much that is useful, provided one reads it with a sufficiently sceptical eye. First, it is far from unbelievable that Gallus did, in fact, announce that he would be the next bishop; although he was almost certainly unrelated to Quintianus (who was of African, not Gallic, extraction), he appears to have been close to the king and, in Impetratus, had at least one useful ally in Clermont’s clerical establishment. Moreover, Impetratus was clearly more than a mere priest given that it was to him that the congregation turned upon the death of Quintianus. If Gallus had, in fact, been boasting of his inevitable accession, it is hardly surprising that it might offend other clerics, whether from jealousy or because of Gallus’ utter lack of decorum. The idea that Impetratus was deliberately trying to manoeuvre his nephew onto the *cathedra* is strengthened by his reaction to Viventius’ outrage – it was Impetratus who pushed Gallus to go to Trier and seek the episcopate from the king. Rather than dispute with Viventius or simply wait for the holy spirit to work its will, Impetratus insisted that Gallus must actively seek the episcopate. It is telling, too, that Impetratus wished his nephew to go directly to the king, whose affection for Gallus had already been mentioned.

What happened at the royal court is unclear – that is to say, the *Vita patrum* does not state what happened explicitly. However, Gregory took pains to explain that the “many gifts” which Gallus and his friends brought to the king had nothing to do with simony (“For that germ of sin had begun to bloom, whereby the episcopate was sold by kings or bought by

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<sup>464</sup> Greg. Tur., *Vita pat.*, 6.3, ...*et inruente in se Spiritu sancto, ait: "...Ego ero episcopus; mihi Dominus hunc honorem largire dignabitur!"*

<sup>465</sup> Greg. Tur., *Vita pat.*, 6.3, “*Et si ei inspirat Dominus, ut tibi hoc sacerdotium largiatur, magnas Deo referimus gratias; sin aliud, vel ei qui ordinatus fuerit commendaris.*”

priests").<sup>466</sup> James, in his English edition of the *Vita patrum*, rightly notes that simony was not a major concern of Gregory and that this is one of the very few places where he mentions it at all.<sup>467</sup> I cannot believe that Gregory would have raised the matter at all had it not been a major topic in relation to Gallus' election. As a close relative, Gregory naturally sprang to Gallus' defence but, as often happens, in arguing that his subject did not commit a sin, he merely draws our attention to the existence of that sin. Modern scholars would not have known of this charge of simony but for Gregory; the congregants of the time were, however, wholly conscious of it. It was to mollify popular indignation at the selling of their see that Gallus was compelled to hold a public feast.

It is within this context that we must locate the report that the citizens of Trier wanted Gallus as their bishop. In attempting to validate his uncle's claim to the episcopate, Gregory repeats a tale – which he may or may not have believed – that Gallus was definitely going to become a bishop – whether of Clermont or Trier, he *was* destined to receive a *cathedra*. The logic of the tale, as I interpret it, is to stress the idea that Gallus was recognised as worthy to be bishop of Trier and was, therefore, necessarily worthy to become bishop of Clermont.

Gallus was opposed, later in his career, by a priest named Ennodius who, the *Vita patrum* tells us, was from a senatorial family.<sup>468</sup> Ennodius was not just a senator, though; he was actually the son of Hortensius, a count of Clermont who had made an enemy of Gallus' predecessor as bishop.<sup>469</sup> Ennodius belonged to a great family, then, with considerable influence in the Auvergne and, to judge from his father's tenure as *comes*, some favour at the royal court. That Ennodius was ambitious is proved by the fact that he managed to become bishop of Javols, to south of Clermont, and, while it cannot be proved, it is likely that Ennodius' hostility towards Gallus derived from a desire to secure Clermont for himself. Given his father's position and his own connexion to the city, he may have expected at least to have a chance at securing Clermont only to be confronted with Gallus' royal *fait accompli* and it is more than likely that Ennodius and his partisans spread the (almost certainly true) story that Gallus had bought the see.

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<sup>466</sup> Greg. Tur., *Vita pat.*, 6.3, ...*multa munera ad regem venerunt. Iam tunc germen illud iniquum coeperat fructificare, ut sacerdotium aut vinderetur a regibus aut conpararetur a clericis*. Not only clerical offices were sold – Nicetius (*PLRE* 3.955) bought the office of *dux Arvernorum* (Greg. Tur., *Hist. Franc.*, 8.18) and Mummolus (*PLRE* 3.899-901) who essentially bought his father's office of *comes Autissiodorensis* (Greg. Tur., *Hist. Franc.*, 4.42).

<sup>467</sup> James (1991) 36, n.12

<sup>468</sup> Greg. Tur., *Vita pat.*, 6.4; *PLRE* 3.462 renders Ennodius as Evodius.

<sup>469</sup> Greg. Tur., *Vita pat.*, 4.3; *PLRE* 2.572

Although Ennodius was later elected bishop of Javols, he was never consecrated due to a popular uprising which drove him from the city. If one were particularly paranoid, one might see the hand of Gallus' family in this; I would not go that far but the rivalry between the two families is clear and it must have revolved around their competing claims on Clermont. Indeed, in 571, Ennodius' son, Euphrasius, stood for election to the see of Clermont only to be beaten by an Avitus. Throughout, we see the commitment of this family to acquiring power in Clermont whether secular, as with Hortensius, or clerical, as with his son and grandson; at the same time, we see their efforts thwarted by others – specifically Gallus and Impetratus and their family and, later, by an Avitus who was probably related, ultimately, to Sidonius and Eparchius Avitus.<sup>470</sup> At the same time, we also see the same ambitions in Gregory's family. The major difference between the families lies in the effectiveness of their execution; where Ennodius and his family were ultimately ineffective, Gregory's family succeeded in securing the sees they desired.

Having said that, though, the major difference that must be recognised between the elections of the fifth century and earlier in the sixth and the election at Clermont at 525 lies squarely with the rôle of the king. In this election, unlike the others I have so far looked at, royal intervention was the single most important element in granting Gallus the see. The king's favour may have due to a genuine friendship felt for Gallus or, more likely, it may have been the result of simple bribery but what matters is that the king positioned himself firmly at the centre of episcopal politics which created a new variable – and a new opportunity – for clerics seeking a *cathedra*.

I ended a previous section on Volusianus with an explanation of why I felt that Mathisen's thesis of monastery-based factions must be revised. I end this section by saying that Van Dam's argument that competing ecclesiastical factions were based on adherence to saintly cults ought to be thrown out altogether.<sup>471</sup> The conflict which surrounded the acquisition of episcopal sees in late antique Gaul can be seen in many of the examples in this chapter but probably nowhere more clearly than in the case of Gallus. Van Dam's insistence that saintly cults were at once the totems around which aspiring clerics gathered and the means by which they created "harmony and cooperation" between potentially "divisive alliances"<sup>472</sup> actually has the effect of diminishing – practically to the point of dismissing entirely – the extent to which there was genuine and lasting conflict for control of sees between rival family groupings. And, if we are to take only a single fact away from the career of Gallus, it must be

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<sup>470</sup> Note that Avitus 1, *PLRE* 2.194 owned property in the vicinity of Clermont.

<sup>471</sup> Van Dam (1993), esp. 50-81

<sup>472</sup> Van Dam (1993) 68

that interfamily conflicts were real and could last over generations – and this should inform our interpretation of events surrounding the election not only of Caesarius but of others too.

### *The election of Nicetius (551) and Priscus (573) at Lyon*

In 551, Sacerdos, bishop of Lyon and in Heinzelmänn's view "the principal *Reichsbischof* of Childebert I",<sup>473</sup> died and was succeeded by his nephew Nicetius.<sup>474</sup> Gregory's *Vita patrum* recounts that Sacerdos, as he lay on his deathbed, requested that Childebert grant his dying request that Nicetius should succeed him as bishop of Lyon. The king agreed, saying "Fiat voluntas Dei", and Nicetius thus ascended the episcopal throne.<sup>475</sup> Although, as usual, Gregory does not deal with the issue explicitly, Nicetius and Sacerdos were both related to him (as, in one way or another, were most of the subjects of the *Vita patrum*) as well as to each other.<sup>476</sup>

The thing that a reader surely notes in this vignette is how kinship and royal favour come together, as they did in the case of Gallus of Clermont, to create a bishop with no reference to the wishes either of the wider ecclesiastical establishment or of the congregation. This constitutes a very different political landscape from the one which southern Gallic bishops of the fifth and early sixth centuries inhabited and it demonstrates the growing influence of the Frankish crown within the church and also the Frankish crown's developing sense that the ecclesiastical sphere was entirely within the bailiwick of the king. Sacerdos did not, in the strictest sense, treat the see purely as the patrimony of his family – that is to say, he did not simply name Nicetius as his heir and assume that this would be enough – but he most assuredly wanted to keep the see within his family and he utilised his friendship with the king to ensure that this would happen. He displayed an awareness that the Gallic episcopate had come to be within the gift of the monarch and that any desire to keep a diocese under his family's control would have to rely not on conventional *amicitia* with other aristocrats but on royal favour.

As for Nicetius himself, the *Vita patrum* makes extensive reference to his holiness and piety – he was a *pacis amator* "and if offended by someone else, immediately either forgave the

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<sup>473</sup> Heinzelmänn (2001) 9

<sup>474</sup> Greg. Tur., *Hist. Franc.*, 4.36, *Vita pat.*, 8.3; see Duchesne (1900) 2.157 for the *fasti* of the bishops of Lyon.

<sup>475</sup> Greg. Tur., *Vita pat.*, 8.3

<sup>476</sup> *PLRE* 3.944; Nicetius was Gregory's great-uncle. Note that Gregory generally passes over family matters; it is, in fact, only when discussing the plots of an enemy that he mentions his relationship to a previous thirteen of the bishops of Tours (*Hist. Franc.* 5.49).

offence or indicated through another that pardon ought to be asked".<sup>477</sup> While there is necessarily an element of subjectivity in interpreting the figure of Nicetius, I would contend that there is a distinct tension between Gregory's description of Nicetius' supposedly splendid personality and his account of Nicetius' behaviour which seems overweening and, at the least, rather petty.<sup>478</sup> In his conflict with the *comes* Armentarius over episcopal jurisdiction in secular cases,<sup>479</sup> Nicetius seems surly and unreasonable both in his jealousy of imagined authority and his resentment of perceived slights; he appears, moreover, to rely on his subordinates to extricate him from problems of his own creation.<sup>480</sup>

However, given that Nicetius was not only a relative of Gregory but was actually a mentor of sorts for him, it is to be expected that Gregory should be enthusiastic in defending the man. Nor does Nicetius appear to have been remiss in his devotion to his family's interests; apart from finding a place within the church for his grand-nephew (and, we may reasonably surmise, for other members of his family), Nicetius, in his will, broke with ecclesiastical tradition by bequeathing nothing to his church, a fact which led one priest to complain that he was a dimwit (*stolidus*)<sup>481</sup> – although Nicetius' shade appeared to the angry priest a couple of days later, along with two other ghostly bishops of Lyon, and chided him for his check. We see at work the perfectly comprehensible aristocratic desire to preserve inherited patrimony by passing it to an heir from within the family,<sup>482</sup> but there is necessarily a degree of conflict, seen and expressed by the anonymous *presbiter basilicae*, between this aristocratic imperative to preserve and transmit wealth and the ecclesiastical expectation that bishops would expend at least some of their wealth in constructing, maintaining and expanding churches in their own dioceses. With Nicetius, though, the almost complete focus on his family's interests reflects his awareness of his own dependence on family links and influence in bringing him to the *cathedra* in the first place – and I think we might safely presume that there were other bishops with a similar background and mindset.

If Nicetius' accession highlights both the importance of influential kinsmen and also the rôle of king in choosing the bishops of Frankish Gaul, the events surrounding his successor,

<sup>477</sup> Greg. Tur., *Vita pat.*, 8.3, *et si laesus fuisset ab aliquo, statim aut remittebat propriae, aut per alium insinuabat veniam deprecari.*

<sup>478</sup> Cf. Greg. Tur., *Vita pat.*, 8.5, *Presbiter quoque basilicae...ait: 'Agebant semper plerique stolidum fuisse Nicetium; nunc ad liquidum verum esse patet, cum nihil basilicae in qua tumulatus est delegavit.'* ("One of the priest of the church...said 'Everyone always used to say that Nicetius was a dimwit; now it is shown to be absolutely true, because he has left nothing to the church in which he was buried'.")

<sup>479</sup> Armentarius 3, *PLRE* 3.121

<sup>480</sup> Greg. Tur., *Vita pat.*, 8.3

<sup>481</sup> Greg. Tur., *Vita pat.* 8.5

<sup>482</sup> I have already discussed a not dissimilar situation with respect to a story told of Sidonius (Greg. Tur., *Hist. Franc.*, 2.22).

Priscus, highlight the ongoing issue of conflict between the families and partisans of candidates for episcopal sees. Priscus took the throne following Nicetius' death, although Gregory provides no context or explanation for his election, in either the *Historia Francorum* or in the *Vita patrum*. He does, however, emphasise just how hostile Priscus (and his "evil wife" Susanna<sup>483</sup>) were to Nicetius' friends and followers: "Bishop Priscus, who succeeded him, began, along with his wife Susanna, to persecute and to kill many of those whom the man of God had held closest, not for any guilt on their part, nor for any crime over which they had been arrested but because, with burning envy, he was jealous that they were faithful to him [Nicetius]".<sup>484</sup> Given that Priscus and Susanna were apparently daily murdering the partisans of Nicetius,<sup>485</sup> we might think that Gregory was extremely lucky to survive. We can probably dismiss the more extreme elements of Gregory's story – including both the alleged murders and the anecdote which has Susanna possessed by a devil and running through the streets of Lyon confessing that Nicetius was truly an *amicus Christi*.

What we should not dismiss is the very clear feud that existed between Priscus and the friends and family of his predecessor. Brennan argued that the conflict "centered [sic] on this bishop's outright refusal to promote the sanctification of his predecessor, Nicetius"<sup>486</sup> but I think there is rather more to it and that Priscus' refusal to sanctify Nicetius was a symptom, rather than a cause, of the conflict. It seems likely to me that the family of Nicetius expected to retain control of Lyon after his death – after all, Sacerdos had passed the see to his nephew and there was no reason why it should not continue to be treated as an heritable possession. For reasons we cannot know, but which may certainly have had to do with Priscus' relationship with king Guntram,<sup>487</sup> the episcopal throne was taken from the family of Gregory, Sacerdos and Nicetius and passed to an outsider. Immediately upon taking up his throne in Lyon, it is likely that Priscus was presented with hostile partisans within the local church, clerics who owed their position to Nicetius and had transferred their loyalties to his wider family. We cannot know if there had been an election and, if so, who the family-endorsed candidate actually was; to some extent, by the mid-sixth century, the Gallic episcopate had reached the point where elections were not strictly necessary provided one could acquire the royal endorsement. For this reason, we cannot know whether Priscus faced an equivalent of Iohannes, the

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<sup>483</sup> Brennan (1985) 315

<sup>484</sup> Greg. Tur., *Hist. Franc.*, 4.36, *Igitur Priscus episcopus, qui ei successerat, cum coniuge sua Susanna coepit persequi ac interficere multos de his quos vir Dei familiares habuerat, non culpa aliqua victos, non in crimine comprobatos, non furto deprehensos, tantum inflammante malitia invidus, cur ei fideles fuissent.*

<sup>485</sup> Paradoxically, given his depiction by Gregory, extant inscriptions suggests that Priscus was *potens* and *prudens* in administering justice; *CIL* 13.2399

<sup>486</sup> Brennan (1985) 315

<sup>487</sup> Priscus (3, *PLRE* 3.1052) was the *domesticus* of Guntram and very likely to have received his bishopric as a reward for loyal service.

ephemeral bishop from the *fasti* of Arles who probably opposed Caesarius, but we can be sure, on the basis of Gregory's own vituperativeness, that the family of Nicetius were actively trying to undermine Priscus, to reduce his authority and to create a political narrative in which Priscus and his wife are seen as immoral interlopers whose sole desire, born of jealousy, is to destroy the family, friends and reputation of the previous bishop. Even the account of Priscus' constant criticism of Nicetius and his fixation on hearing stories of Nicetius' immorality more probably reflects the attitude of Gregory and his *amici* towards Priscus than of Priscus towards Nicetius.<sup>488</sup>

In the end, the accession of both these bishops underscores the position of the crown in choosing bishops. As the Catholic monarchy became increasingly focused on the episcopate and came to see dioceses as existing with the gift of the crown, the importance of kinship diminished; it was the favour and friendship of royalty which allowed Sacerdos to pass his *cathedra* to Nicetius and I think it exceedingly likely that it also allowed the *domesticus* Priscus to become the *episcopus* Priscus. One's kinsmen and *amici* both within a particular see and in the wider church, unless they enjoyed the favour of royalty, could no longer guarantee success in episcopal elections and this, as we see from Gregory's bitter treatment of Priscus, was obviously a matter of great distress to the existing episcopal dynasties.

### *The election of Nonnichius at Nantes (584)*

In 584 as Felix of Nantes lay dying of the plague (*inguinaria*), he summoned the neighbouring bishops to his deathbed and extracted from them their signatures on a document recognising his nephew, Burgundio, as his heir and the next bishop of Nantes.<sup>489</sup> The nephew and the document were dispatched to Gregory of Tours but, instead of giving Burgundio his tonsure and bringing him into the church, Gregory refused to go along with Felix's plans. Burgundio was sent away on the canonical grounds that no-one could be consecrated as bishop without having first having passed through all the clerical grades. Felix died shortly thereafter and, at the king's command, was succeeded not by Burgundio but by his cousin Nonnichius.

The basic narrative seems straightforward enough and, other than Gregory's description of his own actions (rendered in direct speech), it does not appear to have much in the way of

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<sup>488</sup> Greg. Tur., *Hist. Franc.*, 4.36

<sup>489</sup> Greg. Tur., *Hist. Franc.*, 6.15; Van Dam (1993) 122-123 sees this as Felix acting "like a metropolitan".

editorial comment. Even so, there is material within this story which is relevant to this chapter's broad concerns with kinship and the episcopacy.

To begin with, it is striking, both in view of the part played in earlier time by congregations in the election of a bishop and in view of the canonical requirements that new bishops be chosen jointly by the congregation and neighbouring bishops, that the congregants of Nantes are not mentioned. Their opinion was seemingly not sought by Felix or Gregory; one cannot say that their assent was assumed by Nantes because it seems to be more the case that Felix simply overlooked the possibility that the community might – or should – have an opinion on the choice of new bishop. In attempting to retain the *cathedra* for his family, Felix recognised that the episcopal college constituted the key constituency whose support had to be secured. Within the political landscape of the late sixth century Frankish church, quite unlike that of the late Roman church of the fifth century, congregations could safely be ignored.

Over and above such issues, Gregory's reaction speaks of the long-standing feud between himself and Felix – and probably between their extended families. Felix is mentioned in Gregory's work a number of times,<sup>490</sup> but two occasions are of particular significance. First, Gregory recounts that his brother, Petrus, was accused of murder by Felix – a charge levelled, he says, only because Felix coveted a piece of land belonging to Gregory's church.<sup>491</sup> The account includes details of the vituperative correspondence that the two of them carried out before dismissing Felix as a man of *cupiditas* and *iactantia*. The second relevant mention of Felix concerns Riculf's attempted coup in Tours. Gregory recounts Riculf's various crimes and explains that, on the advice of his suffragan bishops, he had ordered Riculf to be confined in a monastery only for Riculf to escape due to the intervention of Felix of Nantes who welcomed him warmly and granted him sanctuary.<sup>492</sup>

The events surrounding Gregory's rejection of Burgundio cannot be read but through the lens of this long-standing conflict. Felix endeavoured to garner the support of his neighbouring bishops and to present it in writing to Gregory precisely because he knew that it was from his

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<sup>490</sup> See *PLRE* 3.481 for details.

<sup>491</sup> Greg. Tur., *Hist. Franc.*, 5.5

<sup>492</sup> Greg. Tur., *Hist. Franc.*, 5.49, *Cumque ibidem artius distringeretur, intercedentibus Felicis episcopi missis, qui memoratae causae fautor extiterat, circumventum periuriis abbatem, fuga labitur et usque ad Felicem accedit episcopum, eumque ille ambientur collegit, quem execrare debuerat.* ("He was kept there and closely watched, but, with the aid of agents sent by bishop Felix who supported the charge against me, the abbot was deceived by lies and Riculf escaped and took himself to bishop Felix, and that man welcomed him when he ought to have damned him".)

direction that resistance to Burgundio's succession would necessarily flow.<sup>493</sup> Having spent no small amount of time actively undermining his metropolitan and supporting his foes, Felix was faced with the problem that he now needed the support of that metropolitan in order to guarantee that he would be replaced by his favoured successor. I do not think it can have surprised Felix, or anyone else, that Gregory would contest his wishes. Nor should we imagine that Gregory's adherence to the very letter of canonical law in rejecting Burgundio necessarily means that he would have adhered to these same laws for other individuals. In fact, we would not be wide of the mark if we said that Gregory, faced with a similar canonical quandary, might well have taken a more liberal stance for a friend or relative – or even a complete stranger – than he took with Burgundio. In practical terms, the rejection of Felix's nephew had little to do with canons, laws or ecclesiastical tradition but was the result of Gregory's desire to undo the work of a dangerous rival, to undermine Felix as Felix had tried to undermine him. One cannot read Gregory's distinctly avuncular explanation of the problems of canonical law and Burgundio's lack of clerical experience without detecting a satisfied air as he pulls the very rug from under his rival's feet all the while cloaking his actions in the rectitude of obeying established canons.<sup>494</sup>

In the end, we might say that both Felix and Gregory had reason to feel victorious for, after Felix's death, the next bishop of Nantes was Felix's cousin Nonnichius who, as Gregory reports "succeeded him at the command of the king".<sup>495</sup> The see of Nantes remained under the control of Felix's family while, simultaneously, failing to go to Felix's nominee. The situation highlights several interesting points about kinship and the episcopate. It demonstrates, first, some of the ways in which bishops could and did undercut their rivals; where Felix opted for open confrontation with Gregory by backing alternate claimant to the *cathedra* of Tours, Gregory was able to spoil his rival's plans simply through strategically choosing when to employ a strict interpretation of canonical law.

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<sup>493</sup> Cf. Van Dam (1993) 120-123 where personal conflict between Felix and Gregory is completely ignored within the context of Burgundio's nomination.

<sup>494</sup> Greg. Tur., *Hist. Franc.*, 6.15, '*Habemus scriptum in canonibus, fili, non posse quemquam ad episcopatum accedere, nisi prius ecclesiasticus gradus regulariter sortiatur. Tu ergo, dilectissime, revertere illuc et pete, ut ipse te qui elegit debeat tonsorare. Cumque presbiterii honorem acciperis, ad ecclesiam adsiduus esto; et cum eum Deus migrare voluerit, tunc tu facile episcopale gradum ascendes.*' ("We have it written out in the canons, my son, that no-one can accede to the episcopate unless he has first been passed through the ecclesiastical grades in the normal fashion. Therefore, you, my dear boy, must return and see that the person who chose you ought also to give you the tonsure. When you have accepted the honour of the priesthood, apply yourself dutifully to the church; then, when God wishes to remove him [=Felix], you might easily attain episcopal rank.")

<sup>495</sup> Greg. Tur., *Hist. Franc.*, 6.15, *Cui Nonnichius consobrinus, rege ordinante, successit*; cf. Duchesne (1900) 2.362-363

Moreover, the fact that these two bishops were effectively at war with one another in this way demonstrates the extent to which personal rivalries – and the struggle between Felix and Gregory must be seen as a personal, not purely factional, conflict – could shape the direction, behaviour and policies of holders of the episcopate. One can see how naïve is the view espoused by Van Dam, whereby clerics are seen to be committed to the development “of harmony and cooperation” in spite of their “conflicting ambitions”,<sup>496</sup> when set against the background of the bitter and sometimes petty contest between the bishops of Nantes and Tours. Van Dam’s thesis that factions were based on adherence to saintly cults – an idea that is, in its details, different from but, in practice, largely identical to Mathisen’s ideas on factions – should be dismissed altogether not only because little supporting evidence is ever offered to advance the thesis but also because it ignores instances of genuine and lasting conflict between clerical rivals and their familie. Sometimes this conflict was for control of vacant sees but, as we see in this example, sometimes the issue of the control of sees was simply a convenient battleground on which clerical aristocrats could strive to undercut their enemies and diminish their power and influence.

Quite apart from that, we see at work the ever-expanding influence of the Frankish monarchy within the church. In the end, it is neither Gregory nor Felix – nor any churchman at all – who chooses the next bishop of Nantes – and this despite the fact that Nantes was, theoretically, a suffragan diocese of Tours. Instead, the bishop is appointed at the whim and by the will of the king. Yet again we have an election where episcopal traditional and canonical law are overturned or, at the very least, circumscribed by the realities of royal power.

### ***Conclusion***

The phenomenon of episcopal kinship in the fifth and sixth centuries was, as these case studies have shown, multifaceted. Comparatively few things can be said about kinship’s rôle which would be applicable in every case and at every point from the mid-fifth to late sixth centuries. We can see that members of the same families regularly reappear in the episcopate – and often in the same see – whether in examples like that of Simplicius, son and son-in-law of two previous metropolitans, or like that of Gregory whose wide web of a family tree included thirteen of Tours’ previous eighteen bishops. We can assume that the kinsmen of bishops felt some kind of claim to a *cathedra* on the basis of their family relationships and we may equally assume that the families of bishops would very much have wished to see dioceses – especially the larger ones – kept within their clan. At the same time, the story of episcopal elections, particularly in the sixth century, is of a steady and discernable diminution

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<sup>496</sup> Van Dam (1993) 68

in the importance of kinship paralleled by the rise of royal involvement in elections and in ecclesiastical politics more generally.

The second half of the fifth century was a period within which we may still locate the Gallo-Roman ecclesiastical leadership and the barbarian monarchies in quite distinct spheres. It was a period when the influence of Arian kings did not really touch the election of Catholic bishops. It is within this period, before the Frankish absorption of Arian-ruled Gaul, that kinship takes on its greatest importance in relation to the episcopate. Nevertheless, one should not endeavour to see kinship as a trump card; significant though kinship was – and as we have seen it to be in the examples above (particularly those of Simplicius, Caesarius, Avitus and, to some extent, Volusianus) – kinship, by itself, could not overcome powerful ecclesiastical opposition which is illustrated, as I interpret it, by the events surrounding the election of Iohannes at Chalon and the apparent rejection of a candidate despite his appeal to kinship.

Kinship was one facet of ecclesiastical politics, one tool to be employed in pursuit of a see, but it should not really be held as completely separate from the wider issues of ecclesiastical *amicitia*. If one had episcopal allies – as Simplicius did at Bourges and as Iohannes seems to have had at Chalon – or if one faced opposition from within the episcopal establishment, the importance of kinship to one's electoral prospects was somewhat diminished. Fundamentally, it was the favour and approval of one's fellow bishops and preferably of metropolitan that, in the second half of the fifth century, would bring one to the *cathedra*. At the same time, with the nature of episcopal leadership being what it was (*viz.* almost entirely aristocratic), membership of or connexion to an influential Gallo-Roman family was, as one would expect, potentially significant in securing the goodwill of other ecclesiastical aristocrats. I am quite sure that Sidonius was conscious, in choosing Simplicius as bishop of Bourges, of the potential for offending his family, including not only his blood relatives but also his relatives by marriages, the Palladii.

The fact that Simplicius' supporters included not solely blood relatives helps to illustrate the diffuse nature of the aristocratic families who competed for sees. Gregory's family, though, is probably even more illustrative of this; Gregory proudly claimed to be connected to thirteen previous bishops of Tours, but his definition of what constitutes a meaningful familial connexion obviously extends far beyond the simplistic sense that he was the direct descendant of all these bishops or even that he and all these bishops shared a single common ancestor. Indeed, Gregory explicitly uses the Latin *prosapiae coniuncti sunt* – “they were connected to

my family”<sup>497</sup> – to explain, and to indicate the complexity of, his relationship to previous bishops of Tours. As the children of episcopal families married each other, meaningful and politically useful bonds of kinship were forged, bonds which strengthened and legitimated the episcopal claims of family members.

From these extended families, claimants could draw support in their campaigns for a see. This support might have taken concrete form – as family members became active partisans of a candidate and called upon their own *amici* – but it could equally take a more abstract form as candidates employed their ancestry and family connexions as a means of legitimating their own candidacy (which is very much what Sidonius’ morally bankrupt prattler did at Chalon<sup>498</sup> and what Avitus and his brother Apollinaris are likely to have done at Vienne and Valence). Necessarily, when a family was as large and dispersed as, for example, Gregory’s, two things would happen: first, because the bonds of kinship which unified the family might not be completely obvious, possibly being based on marriages that took place a number of generations ago, the external observer might not actually be conscious that kinship was a unifying factor. Such an observer could be forgiven for assuming that what was, in effect, a large extended family was actually some other manner of partisan faction. Kinship, seen from a certain angle, must have looked a lot like *amicitia*.

Apart from this, a second result of large family groupings must have been internal conflict. As the number of relatives grew larger, conflicts must have arisen between family members. Such conflicts might have taken a number of forms; it is easy, for example, to imagine two members of a family both vying for the same see,<sup>499</sup> but conflicts might have taken a more subtle form as different groups within the extended family simply supported different candidates (who themselves might not even have been members of the family). In effect, as a family’s web of political allies grew larger, as more members married into it and as more links were forged with other clans, it necessarily grew less centralised, less controllable, less likely – even less able – to act with a single purpose. It was probably very easy for Simplicius to mobilise his siblings and in-laws in support of his candidacy but it would have been considerably more difficult to gain the support of relatives who were spread out all across

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<sup>497</sup> Greg. Tur., *Hist. Franc.*, 5.49

<sup>498</sup> Sid. Ap., *Ep.* 4.25.2

<sup>499</sup> The sources, unfortunately, provide no concrete evidence of this kind of inter-familial conflict within the episcopate. Such conflict must surely have happened but perhaps, for the sake of good taste, our sources felt it inappropriate to bring it up. The closest event I have found is Mummolus who usurped his father’s office as count of Auxerre (Greg. Tur., *Hist. Franc.*, 4.42), an event Gregory probably mentioned only because it is quite extreme and because he does not seem to have liked Mummolus very much; had they been friendlier, one wonders if Gregory would have reported the story.

Gaul, especially if those relatives were eyeing the vacant see themselves or were already committed to another candidate.

And, indeed, even within a comparatively small family, competing ambitions could have had a deleterious effect, preventing the formation of any effective unity of purpose. When members of the same family both competed for the same office – and this would be as true in the secular sphere as in the ecclesiastical – not only would family members have to choose which candidate to back (thus dividing and diluting the family's influence) but so too would any *amici*. But, having said that, it seems most likely to me that individuals with a modicum of political nous would have recognised and avoided such a self-defeating situation. A family's collective influence could only be diminished by infighting and increased by cooperation. Moreover, cooperation would bring opportunities of its own – when a candidate was elected to a see, he would naturally look to his own family to provide clergy for the new diocese; if the successful candidate were a metropolitan, he would very possibly look to his kinsmen as candidates for suffragan sees that became vacant. We see this at work most clearly with Aeonius and Caesarius, who stuffed the church of Arles with relatives from Chalon, and with Hesychius and his sons Avitus and Apollinaris. But, in fact, we also see it at work in the seemingly endless number of bishops whose sons, nephews and grandsons go on to take sees of their own.

Kinship, though, was not always a completely positive force in developing one's career. There were times and places where kinship was potentially detrimental; these were situations in which the arrival of ambitious individuals from outside the region, along with their allies and kinsmen, alienated established regional élites. Again, Caesarius' succession of Aeonius is probably the best example of this process in action, of local reactions against episcopal carpetbaggers. If my speculative reading of the events surrounding Caesarius' election is correct, then we may say that resentment of carpetbaggers could be an impetus for powerful locals to advance candidates of their own – and if Caesarius' ephemeral opponent, Iohannes, was both real and, as I suspect, a relative of Ruricius of Limoges and Leontius of Arles, we may apprehend the scale of the conflicts that could develop between local and incoming aristocratic clans.

As the sixth century wore on, we have seen how kinship's importance was diminished by Frankish royal power. Ultimately, royal opposition destroyed one's chances of gaining a see while royal support all but guaranteed it, as demonstrated by the cases recounted by Gregory. The growth of royal influence in episcopal elections was tied to the growth of Frankish power in Gaul; effectively, and excluding the late conversion of certain Gibichungs, the Franks were

the only barbarian group in Gaul who were actually Catholic. The Arian kings of the Burgundians and Visigoths certainly had plenty of dealings, for good or ill, with Catholic Gallo-Roman bishops but, in broad terms, the Arians remained aloof from the actual running of the Catholic ecclesiastical establishment. The Goths exiled plenty of bishops – including some of the most famous names of the period, such as Sidonius and Caesarius – but Gothic kings did not issue decrees appointing specific individuals as bishops. If they had tried, their decrees and their appointees would have been dismissed as illegitimate.

The Franks, though, were strikingly different. They were Catholic and were, from at least 511 when a Frankish king staged the council of Orléans, closely involved with the running of the Gallic Catholic church. In the absence of any centralised ecclesiastical authority in Gaul, the region's sole Catholic monarchy took on a leadership rôle and it was not very long before the Frankish crown's position of primacy over the church resulted in bishops being appointed directly by royal decree.

As royal favour became more important and as the authority of the episcopal college and congregations diminished, so the relationship between kinship and the episcopacy changed. Indeed, the relationship between kinship and *amicitia* changed; the two concepts had always been related but, with the rise of royal involvement in the church, kinship was wholly sunk within *amicitia*. It was no longer enough merely to be the relative of a bishop, but it could still be advantageous if one's kin were favoured by the king. If one's family was close to royal power, if one's family was looked upon by the crown as reliable, then one's relatives might be able to bring the king's favour to bear, delivering offices and influence. But, even so, this is a changed form of kinship when compared to the kind we saw at work at the close of the fifth century. Blood relationships to previous bishops no longer qualified one for the episcopate automatically; at best, family connexions could deliver royal *amicitia* which, in turn, might deliver authority – which is what we see happening to Gregory's family. Fundamentally, with the rise of a Catholic monarchy that closely involved itself with ecclesiastical business – in other words, with the drift of decision-making away from the congregation of a diocese and the bishops of surrounding sees and into the hands of the royal centre – episcopal kinship, as a distinct phenomenon, was subsumed within the conventional landscape of royal *amicitia*.

## Chapter Five

### *The theology of Lérins and the theological culture of the southern Gallic episcopate*

In this chapter, I will discuss a number of topics related to the general question of theological or doctrinal learning in fifth century southern Gaul. At the most fundamental level, I posit that mainstream episcopal thought, which predominates in our sources, was largely uninterested in forensic theology – that is, in discussing matters of doctrine or of making formalised studies of Scripture. In later chapters, this argument will be developed further to argue that the Gallic ecclesiastical mainstream was also more or less uninterested in conversion of or communication with non-élite populations.

Since this chapter is concerned with refuting the usual interpretation of the theological leanings of the Gallic episcopacy, it seems appropriate to begin with Lérins and the argument that its theological influence and position as a centre of Christian thought, literature and education have been overstated by modern scholars and that, in fact, its sole significance lay in its ascetic reputation which granted that its “alumni”<sup>500</sup> a patina of ascetic respectability and piety for having achieved the imagined Lérinsian *vita perfecta*.<sup>501</sup> It is a commonplace of modern scholarship to present Lérins as, in the words of the Comte de Montalembert, a “nursery of bishops and saints”;<sup>502</sup> one of Montalembert’s contemporaries could speak of “that illustrious monastery of Lérins, which gave twelve archbishops, twelve bishops and more than one hundred martyrs to the church”.<sup>503</sup> The monastery’s position as a great centre of Christian culture and theology is taken as read and any Gallic bishop who spent time at Lérins – and there were many<sup>504</sup> – is assumed to have received some undefined education which prepared him for the episcopate.<sup>505</sup> As I argued in chapter three that a reputation for asceticism was beneficial in attaining a *cathedra*, I will show in this chapter that Lérins could

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<sup>500</sup> A term I borrow from Mathisen (1981) 105, Markus (1990) 200 and Leyser (1999) 189 although I remain deeply uncomfortable with the implications of the word, viz., that Lérins was a school of some kind; cf. Leyser, *loc. cit.*, on Lérins as the “alma mater” of Caesarius. Having said that, the “alumni” of Lérins are not far removed from Fauriel’s “sortis des cloîtres de Lérins” (*Histoire de la Gaule méridionale sous la domination des conquérants germains*, 1836, 1.403)

<sup>501</sup> Cassian, *Institutiones*, praefatio 7

<sup>502</sup> Montalembert (1896) 1.464; cf. Markus (1990) 200 citing Celestine, *Ep.*, 4.4.7 (PL 50.443); cf. Leyser (1999) 198 interpreting Hilary’s *Vita Sancti Honorati* as showing “the wilderness to be only a corridor to the promised land” (i.e., that the only reason to attend a monastery is to leave it for something better).

<sup>503</sup> Michelet (1844) 1.64

<sup>504</sup> Mathisen (1981) 105-106

<sup>505</sup> Cf. Harries (1994) 36 on “the ambience of Lérins”.

provide just such a reputation but that, in spite of this, Lérins was not in any recognisable sense a theological centre or school.

After this, I will consider the attitudes of churchmen to matter of theological controversy, arguing that, in the main, they strove to avoid controversy and sought modes of doctrinal compromise and the establishment of an inoffensive theology of convention. I discuss this with particular reference to the semi-Pelagian theology, for which Lérins is, perhaps wrongly, famous.

#### (a) *Reconsidering the school of Lérins*

The image of Lérins as a centre of religious and literary education is one that has settled in the minds of many scholars<sup>506</sup> (with Riché an honourable exception) and yet it is one for which there is little evidence. Riché, in discussing Sidonius and Ennodius on Lérins, wrote, “ni l’ un ni l’ autre ne parlent de l’ île comme d’ un centre de formation scriptuaire ou théologique... Sidoine évoque, comme Eucher autrefois, les jeûnes, les veilles, les psalmodies”.<sup>507</sup> If we derive our understanding of life and culture at Lérins exclusively from the sources, we cannot help but arrive at the same conclusions as Riché amongst which is the impression that Lérins, insofar as it was a school at all, ‘taught’ only asceticism.<sup>508</sup>

Yet such conclusions are so at odds with most Lérinsian scholarship that an explanation is needed. Haarhoff provides a salient example of the inconsistency between sources and the usual interpretation when he assumes the existence of a school at Lérins based on the “commendation” of Sidonius which “says much for the educational standard reached by Lérins”,<sup>509</sup> yet the poem cited for its “enthusiastic...praise” actually says nothing about education at Lérins but merely makes a metaphorical remark on the number of bishops who had spent time there.<sup>510</sup> The preceding lines, moreover, describe only the psalmodies, fasts and general abstemiousness of the place, as remarked upon by Riché; moreover, Sidonius, in describing Lupus of Troyes’ experiences of Lérins, refers to *desudatae militiae Lirinensis excubiae* – “exhausting watches of service at Lérins” – highlighting again that, in Sidonius’

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<sup>506</sup> E.g., Rousseau (1976) 365, 368 on the “school of Lérins”, but he is far from a solitary voice.

<sup>507</sup> Riché (1995) 90 citing Sid. Ap., *Carm.* 16

<sup>508</sup> Cf. Courcelle (1968) 379

<sup>509</sup> Haarhoff (1920) 179

<sup>510</sup> Sid. Ap., *Carm.*, 16.109ff, *quantos illa insula plana / miserit in caelum montes* (“that flat island has sent such a number of mountains into the sky”); Haarhoff does not note that Caesarius, *Serm.* 236.1, copies this motif: *Beata, inquam, et felix insula Lyrinensis, quae cum parvula et plana esse videatur, innumerabiles tamen montes ad caelum misisse cognoscitur!* I presume that Caesarius copied the imagery.

mind, Lérins was a place of hard physical exertion, not of leisured literary study.<sup>511</sup> Even Haarhoff had to recognise, elsewhere, Lérins' deserved reputation for uncompromising asceticism.<sup>512</sup> So, ultimately, Haarhoff's vision of Lérinsian education is unsupported by the sources.

In his article on "nouveaux aspects de la culture lérinienne", Courcelle seemed to recognise some of the problems facing the interpretation of Lérins as a centre of secular and theological study. Alliez, he wrote, had assumed that the monastery was a centre of learning "sans aucune preuves".<sup>513</sup> Nevertheless, unlike Riché, Courcelle still thought that high culture was integral to life at the monastery: he concluded that Lérins must have had "une belle bibliothèque" and that the monks were proud of their familiarity with profane literature and secular learning, even though they retained a particular love for theology and especially Augustine.<sup>514</sup> Lacking evidence from the sources to support this view, Courcelle turned to a close reading of works written by individuals who had spent time at Lérins, particularly Eucherius but also Faustus of Riez,<sup>515</sup> and made an exhaustive and impressive study of the common strands between these writers and classical authors. Amongst the things he uncovered were the recopying of lines from the *Confessiones*,<sup>516</sup> the influence of Ambrose<sup>517</sup> and shadows of Cicero's *De officiis* dealing with "la vie contemplative dans la solitude" (he also notes "Eucher a donc comparé la littérature ascétique chrétienne avec la littérature profane touchant l' *otium* contemplatif"<sup>518</sup>).

Courcelle's conclusions were identical to Haarhoff's but without the latter's over-reliance on subjective implications derived from Sidonius' comments on the island. Yet, although Courcelle's methodology was undeniably more rigorous than Haarhoff's, his conclusions still depended on assumption and supposition unsupported by – and, at times, actually contrary to – the evidence of the sources.

Courcelle's argument can be explained only by assuming either that Eucherius and Faustus (and others) were uneducated when they arrived at Lérins and duly received an education there or that, although not actually 'schooled' at Lérins, they could not have produced their extant works without access to the monastery's "belle bibliothèque". Neither explanation

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<sup>511</sup> Sid. Ap., Ep., 6.1.3

<sup>512</sup> Haarhoff (1920) 195

<sup>513</sup> Courcelle (1968) 379

<sup>514</sup> Courcelle (1968) 407-408

<sup>515</sup> Courcelle (1968) 380ff.

<sup>516</sup> Courcelle (1968) 390

<sup>517</sup> Courcelle (1968) 392

<sup>518</sup> Courcelle (1968) 398-399; others have noted the "conspicuous debt owed to the *De officiis* [of Cicero]" by Ambrose of Milan, Walsh (2000) xxxv; cf. McLynn (1994) 77 on how Ambrose "quarried" Cicero, Emeneau (1930) and Davidson (2002).

holds water. Eucherius and Faustus, both highborn men<sup>519</sup> who came to Lérins as adults, would have been educated long before coming to the monastery – indeed, Eucherius had fathered two sons who came with him to the island-monastery;<sup>520</sup> moreover, Eucherius' anti-Gothic activities<sup>521</sup> provide us with a sense of his identity as a very traditional Roman aristocrat for whom classical education would have been important.

Neither was educated at Lérins, but it is no more realistic to imagine that they were incapable of citing or copying Ambrose or Cicero without having access to a reference library. It was hardly uncommon in the ancient world for the educated to have an admirable ability to recollect classical works (e.g., the friend of Augustine who had memorised all of Vergil and much of Cicero<sup>522</sup>), the result of an education which placed tremendous value on “memorising rules and learning by heart”.<sup>523</sup> I do note and accept that in the far less common situation where a western Latin writer was utilising Greek texts, he would probably need to refer to the originals and not simply rely on memory.<sup>524</sup> But this is patently not the case with Eucherius, Faustus or any other Lérinsian.

Moreover, to offer a contrast with Courcelle's interpretation of the monastic library, Clancy and Márkus, after surveying the extant works produced by the monks of Iona, have drawn up a “partial catalogue of Iona's library”;<sup>525</sup> this catalogue is made up entirely of religious works, including Augustine, Sulpicius and Cassian, and, in this respect, it surely had much more in common with the library of Lérins than Courcelle imagines. In a monastic environment, religious texts would have occupied the minds and time of the community, and any evidence that our sources read profane works sheds more light on their pre-monastic education than on activities at Lérins.

Nothing in the arguments of either Haarhoff or Courcelle convinces me and the sources do little to confirm their vision of profane culture and education at Lérins and yet their vision is one which continues to constitute scholarly orthodoxy. Klingshirn provides a characterisation of Lérins which I find problematic insofar as it clearly shares the broad idea that Lérins was an educational centre while steadfastly avoiding actually saying so. Klingshirn has described

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<sup>519</sup> Hall (2000) 740; Harries (1994) 181 argues that Eucherius may not have been senatorial because he is never described as *nobilis* in extant texts; I favour Stroheker (1948) 168 and *PLRE* 2.405 which both place Eucherius in the senatorial class.

<sup>520</sup> Pricoco (1978) 41ff.

<sup>521</sup> Heather (2000a) 30

<sup>522</sup> Augustine, *De anima et eius origine*, 4.7.9

<sup>523</sup> Heather (1994) 184

<sup>524</sup> R. P. H. Green (1990) 314

<sup>525</sup> Clancy & Márkus (1995) 211-222

the monastery as a place which “offered outstanding intellectual and religious opportunities”<sup>526</sup> and talks of the “intellectual fruits he [Caesarius] had gathered at Lérins”.<sup>527</sup> These phrases fit well with the general picture painted of Lérins by Courcelle, Haarhoff and their predecessors but, at the same, they are rendered meaningless by their complete subjectivity.<sup>528</sup> It is impossible to argue that Lérins did not, in fact, provide “intellectual and religious opportunities” for the simple reason that there is no definition of what constitutes a ‘religious opportunity’ or an ‘intellectual fruit’.

Something similar can be said in respect of Eucherius’ sons, Salonius and Veranius, who came to Lérins with their father and, under the care of Honoratus, Hilary, Salvian and Vincent,<sup>529</sup> received what Wace called “an ecclesiastical education”.<sup>530</sup> However, the experience of Eucherius’ sons, such as it was, does not provide evidence of Lérinsian intellectuality. The act of entrusting his sons to the monastic community is a reflection of Eucherius’ interest in the ascetic life and does not indicate that the provision of formal education was part of the standard function of the monastery.

As for what the monks might have taught them, at the very least the two would have been completely literate before coming to the monastery, so there would have been no need for instruction in the rudiments of reading and writing;<sup>531</sup> moreover, as they were apparently grown men when they entered Lérins, they would already have some instruction in the classics. In either case, it is unrealistic to believe that Lérinsian anchorites would have spent their time (most of which was given over to manual labour anyway) teaching Cicero or Pliny. Common sense tells us that the only ‘education’ Lérins could have offered would have consisted of a grounding in Scripture and an introduction to other Christian works. It is to Riché that we again turn for a characterisation of matters: referring to Caesarius’ treatise *De trinitate*, he says “l’instruction religieuse tenait donc certainement une place importante dans la formation de la jeunesse”,<sup>532</sup> remarks which are true of the general trend of southern Gallic monasticism at this time. Insofar as education was provided at Lérins, the lion’s share of the time and energy would have been devoted to religious instruction in preparation for the ascetic life, a fact that Riché has made abundantly clear citing Eucherius’ own *Instructiones*

<sup>526</sup> Klingshirn (1994a) 24

<sup>527</sup> Klingshirn (1994a) 32; cf. Kors & Peters (2001) 47 on the “excellent education and...extensive familiarity with the work of Augustine” which Caesarius is supposed to have received at Lérins.

<sup>528</sup> I find K.’s biography to be excessively optimistic and, in places, worryingly uncritical; see, e.g., Klingshirn (1994a) 107-110 for an attempt, clearly informed by modern attitudes and with no basis in the sources, at explaining why Caesarius of Arles was not hostile to Jews; cf. Lévi (1895)

<sup>529</sup> Eucherius, *Instructiones ad Salonium, praefatio*; Salvian, *Ep.*, 8.2

<sup>530</sup> Wace (1911) 305-306

<sup>531</sup> Cf. Lane Fox (1994) 129

<sup>532</sup> Riché (1995) 61-62

*ad Salonium* which states that the young Salonius was educated *per omnes spiritualium rerum disciplinas*.<sup>533</sup> While this may fit Klingshirn's description of the 'religious opportunity' that Lérins is supposed to have provided, it is hard to see how the teaching of "all the disciplines of spiritual matters" can imply the existence of a cultured school or fine library.

If Salonius and Veranius received some kind of elementary training in Scriptural matters, they would not have been unique. In spite of the preponderance of aristocratic monks at Lérins, there must have been would-be anchorites from lower social classes who arrived without any education. Some monks must have spent a little time teaching illiterate novices to read and write, probably through the medium of the Bible, and also to memorise certain parts of the Scriptures (though, as Riché says, it is not easy to imagine Salvian as "maître des novices"<sup>534</sup>). We can see the shadows of this Lérinsian 'education' in the monastic *regulae* of Caesarius, which require every prospective monk to be literate and able to memorise the psalms. Such education as was available at Lérins provided only a basic framework for monks who had arrived there without sufficient preparation for the more "bookish" aspects of their vocation.<sup>535</sup> This kind of simple, undeveloped instruction is very far away from the high intellectual models of Courcelle, Haarhoff and Klingshirn.

Having said all of that and shown that the sources do not support a vision of high culture and literary education at Lérins, I feel comfortable acknowledging that many of the 'alumni' of Lérins were very active in literary endeavours.<sup>536</sup> Mathisen provides a sketch of these individuals who were active in letters and a catalogue of their extant letters,<sup>537</sup> yet it is by no means an exhaustive list; there were many other Gallic writers, including Sidonius, who, because they either attended the monastery for a time or maintained epistolary links with those who had, could be called members of the "literary circle of Lérins". But, as the sources show, the strong connexion between Lérins and cultured churchmen cannot be construed as proof that Lérins was itself a cultural centre, not least because, whatever the literary inclinations of the sophisticated gentlemen who attended the monastery, very little was actually written there.

Only a single work, the *Commonitorium* of Vincent, was produced on the island. But this should not be surprising. The monks of Lérins known to us from the sources were (with some

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<sup>533</sup> Riché (1995) 89 with Latin text of Eucherius on 443, n.15

<sup>534</sup> Riché (1995) 443, n.15, *contra* N. Chadwick (1955) 150

<sup>535</sup> Marrou (1956) 321

<sup>536</sup> Mathisen (1989) 83, "The monks' love of literature is seen in the great number of extant works which they wrote".

<sup>537</sup> Mathisen (1981) 105

exceptions) highly educated men of elevated status; they were usually drawn from noble families, so they arrived at the monastery with refined literary tastes, members of a class which required its number to participate in epistolary activities to maintain links with others of their class and family. Here we find, simultaneously, the reason why Lérins provided no literary education (*viz.*, it was not needed) and the reason why the monastery's 'alumni' were such active letter-writers.

Thus, if by the phrase "literary centre" one is describing a place which was frequented by cultured noblemen many of whom had a strong interest in literature (described by Mathisen, unhelpfully, as the "literary circle of Lérins"<sup>538</sup>) but where almost nothing was actually written, then Lérins certainly deserves the label. But that is not the natural interpretation of the phrase and it is probably best to accept that Lérins was not a true literary centre and that there was no school (in any meaningful sense of that word) on the island.

*(b) Lérins, theology and the Gallic episcopal community: cooperation, conformity and accommodation*

In the preceding section, we saw that the proposition that Lérins was an educational or literary centre is unsupported by sources, but what of Lérins' position as an "école théologique"?<sup>539</sup> So many of the outstanding names in the Gallic church are associated with the monastery that it is easy to see why Roger's assumptions would be superficially convincing; Caesarius, Faustus of Riez, Lupus of Troyes, Salvian, Vincent, author of the *Commonitorium*, and Eucherius of Lyons (as well as his two sons) are some of the better known 'theologians' or, rather, writers on doctrinal matters, who passed through Lérins while others, such as Cassian, had links with the place.<sup>540</sup> Moreover, Lérins' great fame continues to be as a centre of semi-Pelagian theology; from the days of Cassian at Marseilles, the monks of all the Provençal monasteries seem to have held a particular affinity for this doctrine, an affinity not ended until the Council of Orange imposed Augustinianism in 529.

The superficial appearance is that Lérins must have been a theological centre. At the very least, one could be forgiven for assuming that it must have been a true "foyer de méditation chrétienne intense",<sup>541</sup> although Loyer's characterisation is sufficiently ambiguous to forestall any serious argument against it – after all, what *is* "intense Christian meditation" and how do

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<sup>538</sup> Mathisen (1989) 93ff; (1981) 105ff.

<sup>539</sup> Roger (1905) 149

<sup>540</sup> Markus (1990) 164, 168

<sup>541</sup> Loyer (1956) 278

we recognise it and distinguish it from the kinds of meditation taking place at other monasteries? Were there, in fact, monasteries where “intense Christian meditation” did not take place?

When we take a closer look at the works produced by the men who passed through Lérins and examine the origins of the semi-Pelagianism for which Gaul became notorious and particularly when we approach traditional scholarly interpretations in a critical fashion, we see that the evidence that Lérins was a theological centre is shallow. More than that, evidence for any kind of theological activity amongst the Gallic bishops is scant. Bishops’ understanding of church doctrine was often surprisingly basic and certainly far less than has generally been assumed. The bishops were more often followers of convention than well-informed doctrinal thinkers. In pursuit of episcopal concord and in their desire to avoid disputes, they sidestepped confrontation in theological matters and rarely questioned the views of their peers.<sup>542</sup> As I will show, unless confronted with an absolute and incontrovertible case of heresy, the bishops were committed to ignoring, not challenging, unorthodox theology.

#### (b) i. *The Semi-Pelagian Controversy and Lérins: background*

I will begin by considering Lérins reputation as the centre of semi-Pelagian thought, something widely repeated amongst scholars (for example, by Markus who talks of Prosper’s rôle as “leader of the theological opposition” to a Pelagianism “centred on the monasteries of Marseille and Lerins and articulated primarily by John Cassian”<sup>543</sup>). “The dispute with Pelagius,” in Henry Chadwick’s words “turned on issues of extreme intricacy but of an apparent simplicity”.<sup>544</sup> In response to what he may have thought was the Manichaean taint of the Augustinian doctrine of grace<sup>545</sup> and definitely because determinism seemed “to undermine moral responsibility and to preach cheap grace”,<sup>546</sup> Pelagius argued that divine grace was not the sole requirement for salvation and that one’s works were also taken into account; at the same time, he rejected most of the doctrine of original sin.<sup>547</sup>

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<sup>542</sup> Cf. Harries (1994) 30 on an analogous situation – the conspiracy of silence that followed Ecdicius’ murder of Constantius’ *Magister militum* Edobichus (Sozomen, 9.14.3-4); when faced with something unpalatable, embarrassing or troubling, it was preferable for aristocrats simply to ignore the topic.

<sup>543</sup> Markus (1986) 31

<sup>544</sup> H. Chadwick (1998) 588

<sup>545</sup> See Ogliari (2003) 394-401 for an argument that there was nothing truly Manichaean about Augustine’s predestinarian theology.

<sup>546</sup> H. Chadwick (1967) 227; cf. Brown (1968) 109 on the “moral torpor” which Julian of Eclanum claimed was inspired by Augustinian thought.

<sup>547</sup> But cf. Brown (1968) 100-101, “What strikes the modern reader in the Pelagian writings are the extreme positions: we see Pelagianism, therefore, in terms of its radical emphasis on the independence of the individual, for instance, or on the equity of God’s law”.

Pelagian dogma dovetailed with many existing Christian ideas and practices, such as asceticism or helping the poor, which seemed to connect personal behaviour with worthiness to receive salvation. It was within this context that William Frend, in an attractive turn of phrase, described Pelagius as “defending the Roman tradition of rationality and of the universal force of law now given permanent validity as the law of God”.<sup>548</sup> In some ways, it seems Augustine was more of a religious innovator in this dispute than Pelagius;<sup>549</sup> even original sin, with the notion that humans are born flawed and polluted, cast a sufficiently Manichaean shadow that devout Christians might have questioned it, might have seen it as a Manichaean-influenced novelty.<sup>550</sup>

In any case, I will pass over most of the minutiae of the Pelagian controversy as I do not feel it would be useful, from the point of view of this thesis, with its aims and limitations, to explore it in detail. The most important thing to understand is that the dispute’s final outcome – the condemnation of Pelagianism as a heresy – was not an inevitability, not least because, as I said, Pelagius’ approach was one that found much sympathy amongst the many Christians who were already committed to doing good works or who approved of or engaged in ascetic practice<sup>551</sup> (activities which implied that divine grace was not freely given but that it was the individual’s responsibility to earn or to be worthy of it<sup>552</sup>). Although Augustinianism, championed particularly by the African bishops, was the final victor, there were points during the dispute when it might have seemed as though Pelagianism would be accepted as orthodox or, at least, that it could avoid being deemed heretical and, therefore, that it could have become part of the church’s established doctrine.

Pelagianism was officially condemned by Pope Innocent in January of 417 but his successor from March 417, Zosimus, was sympathetic to the Pelagian argument, though possibly more for reasons of politics than out of a genuine conviction,<sup>553</sup> and a synod was held at Rome which declared Pelagius’ teachings orthodox. A synod of fourteen bishops at Diospolis in Palestine had already met, in December 415, and judged Pelagius’ teachings to be

<sup>548</sup> W. H. C. Frend, review of *Augustine of Hippo: a biography* by P. Brown, *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 19.2 (1968) 656

<sup>549</sup> Brown (1968) 107; see also O. Chadwick (1950) 119 on seeing Cassian’s anti-Augustinian views in *Institutiones* 12 as part of a defence of theological tradition against novelty and innovation.

<sup>550</sup> The late antique vision of the religious universe presented by Brown (1998b) 636-367 seems to me to have a distinctly Manichaean air which is, perhaps, not surprising because Brown bases his interpretation largely on the reformed Manichee Augustine.

<sup>551</sup> Cf. Lorenz (1966) 36-38 on the attraction Pelagian doctrine held for monks.

<sup>552</sup> Cf. Brown (1968) 102-105; on Pelagius’ strong approval for the application of traditional rigorist asceticism across the whole of the Christian community, see Brown (1968) 111-112 and Pelagius, *Epistula ad Demetriadum*, 10, *in causa iustitiae, omnes unum debemus: virgo, vidua, nupta, summus medius et imus gradus, aequaliter iubentur impere praecepta*. See also Markus (1990) 65.

<sup>553</sup> Duffy (1993) 89; H. Chadwick (1998) 591; Brown (1970); Pietri (1976) 2.1223

orthodox,<sup>554</sup> although Orosius says that this was because Pelagius' Latin text was not properly understood by Greek-speaking bishops.<sup>555</sup> The condemnation of Pelagianism as heretical did not happen until Zosimus' hand was forced by the secular authorities through a decree of Honorius that Brown describes as "the most depressing edict in the Later Roman Empire";<sup>556</sup> after Zosimus' death, Pelagian churchmen, under Julian of Eclanum, attempted to appeal to the emperor but were blocked by Augustine and his partisans who managed "to obtain a law to coerce any bishop suspected of Pelagian leanings".<sup>557</sup>

The two points I want particularly to make are that there were times and places when and where the espousal of Pelagian doctrines would not have been deemed heterodox in the least and, moreover, that many aspects of Pelagian doctrine would not have been at all out of step with commonly-held Christian views of the "Late Roman man in the street"<sup>558</sup> (what Stewart, if I understand his terminology correctly, calls "traditional theological anthropology"<sup>559</sup>) which predated Pelagius and Augustine both. In addition, several influential southern Gallic churchmen with connexions to Lérins can be shown to have been present in these places and at these times: Zosimus' consecration as pontiff was attended by Patroclus, who had succeeded the fiercely anti-Pelagian Heros as bishop of Arles in 412 after the people of the city rose up and drove him out.<sup>560</sup> Patroclus gained influence with the pope and, in fact, it was Zosimus who first granted Arles metropolitan rights over all bishops of Narbonensis I and II and Viennensis.<sup>561</sup> Honoratus, founder of Lérins, had spent time in the east, in places where Pelagianism had found a sympathetic audience, and was heavily influenced by eastern monastic thought.<sup>562</sup> After Patroclus was assassinated,<sup>563</sup> he was succeeded as bishop of Arles by Honoratus. Thus, the see of Arles and the monastery of Lérins were under the influence, from at least 417, of men who either had friendly relationships with influential Pelagian churchmen or had spent time in regions where the established church was sympathetic to Pelagian doctrine.

Accordingly, Lérinsian 'theology' – that is, the semi-Pelagianism for which the monastery became famous (or, conceivably, infamous) – had its origins not in 'pure' heresy but in a doctrine which, at various points in time, was deemed entirely orthodox by the Catholic

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<sup>554</sup> Augustine, *De gestis Pelagii*

<sup>555</sup> Rohrbacher (2002) 137

<sup>556</sup> Brown (1967) 361; I cannot disagree with Brown's characterisation.

<sup>557</sup> Brown (1967) 362

<sup>558</sup> Brown (1968) 93

<sup>559</sup> Stewart (1998) 19

<sup>560</sup> Mathisen (1989) 37-39

<sup>561</sup> Mathisen (1989) 49-51

<sup>562</sup> Above ch.2, 51ff.; cf. also Markus (1990) 160-161 on the oriental aspects of Lérinsian monasticism.

<sup>563</sup> Prosper, 1292 (*MGH AA* 9.471)

hierarchy and which was probably closer to popular Christian belief than the extreme determinism that might be said to lie behind Augustinianism.

(b) ii. *Southern Gallic theology: conservatism, conformity and compromise*

The development of semi-Pelagian doctrines by churchmen connected to Lérins had a lot to do with the innate conservatism of clerics and their desire to preserve the doctrines promoted and taught by previous abbots and bishops, many of whom were later canonised. Leyser, with whom I do not necessarily agree, actually casts this desire as something pressing and necessary “to rally the second generation at Lérins...[who] had no personal experience of Honoratus’s abbacy” in order to prevent the “breakup (sic) and dispersal” which was “the most likely outcome for Lérins – as for many other early monastic communities”,<sup>564</sup> but, it also merged with their need to uphold established friendship networks and familial relationships by supporting the writings and beliefs of their friends and relatives. In other words, it was simply not the done thing to criticise things said or written by one’s friends and relatives, even if one disagreed with them.

The theologies adopted in southern Gaul can often be seen as representing a desire on the part of episcopal and monastic hierarchies to avoid taking firm doctrinal stands which might have given offence to other members of the aristocratic and ecclesiastical communities. The semi-Pelagian theologies evolved to incorporate sufficient elements of ‘Pelagian thought’<sup>565</sup> to remain true to the ideas endorsed by Patroclus, Honoratus and Cassian – and also to the very traditional modes of Christian thought<sup>566</sup> on good works that were comprehensible to and popular with ordinary congregations and aristocratic families alike – but also sufficient of Augustine’s teachings to remain anchored in the conventional doctrinal teachings of the church.<sup>567</sup> These theologies constitute something of a fudge in which uncontroversial elements of both theologies are embraced and more thorny issues ignored.

While our attentions are naturally drawn more to the noisy religious controversies over which so much scholarly ink has been spilt, I feel that describing the religious beliefs of Gallic

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<sup>564</sup> Leyser (1999) 200, citing Pricoco (1978) 93-127 on “the ephemeral character of fifth century monastic initiatives”.

<sup>565</sup> In using this term, I am referring more to ideas about good works which were shared by Pelagianism and many Christians than to strictly Pelagian notions about original sin or the inevitability of Adam’s death.

<sup>566</sup> Clancy & Márkus (1995) 57-58 note the influence of Cassian on Celtic monasticism. However much the Cassianic ‘brand’ had been contaminated by its association with Pelagianism, it nevertheless remained influential amongst Catholic ascetics in the following centuries.

<sup>567</sup> Leyser (1999) 202 defines the matter correctly when he speaks of Lérinsian monks “maintaining a decorous facade of respect for the authority of the bishop of Hippo” while actually ignoring much of Augustinian thinking.

Christians of the period – both lay persons and clergy – in terms of any particular ‘theology’ is not something which will necessarily help our understanding of the period but, in fact, has the potential to mislead. Rather than applying potentially ambiguous labels to these people and their beliefs, we ought to view the beliefs and experiences of most Christians in terms of their basic conventionality; by using this term – and I hope I am not using an ambiguous label of my own – I mean that most people’s beliefs were guided and shaped by the conventions they found around them, by the beliefs of their neighbours and patrons and by their natural desire to conform to views held widely in the community. The religious beliefs of lower status Gallic Christians, including some clerics and many monks, could not have been founded on studying and meditating on religious texts – after all, many of these Christians would have been illiterate.<sup>568</sup> Instead, in this “Age of Authority” where deviation from the dictates of authorities might bring severe punishment,<sup>569</sup> Christians would have accepted the doctrines passed down to them by their priests, abbots and bishops. If the doctrines received in this way were heterodox, it would not have been within the ability of most congregants to recognise that heterodoxy nor would it have been natural for them to question their superiors.<sup>570</sup>

Ultimately, we must assume that the average low or middle status Gallic Christian would have believed largely what his neighbours and the wider community believed and that the community as a whole would have accepted whatever doctrines were laid down by their spiritual leaders;<sup>571</sup> even if the individual did not necessarily believe, in an absolute sense, the doctrines of faith with which he was presented, the need to conform in order to avoid persecution was strong.<sup>572</sup> (In saying this, I contradict the idealised and distinctly rose-tinted view of Catholic doctrinal development given by Fousek.<sup>573</sup>) Moreover, given that Pelagian teachings were a lot closer to traditional beliefs and that the doctrine of being judged for and by one’s works is a good deal more easily comprehended than the predestinarian message of extreme Augustinianism, it is easy to see why Christian communities would be susceptible to

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<sup>568</sup> Cf. Caesarius, *Serm.*, 6.8

<sup>569</sup> Brown (1998b) 638-639

<sup>570</sup> Cf. Palanque (1952) 547-548 on Augustine’s *De catechizandis rudibus*: the instructor’s goal is not the “narrating or even summarising [of] all the facts” but the illustration of Christian faith through “a few, the most wonderful, or the most affecting” stories because “Once this truth [of Christ’s function] is grasped, it matters little what details are forgotten”; however, instructors “must not hesitate to dwell on the promises of the resurrection...and also on the sanctions of the after-life”. Thus one can hardly expect the average Christian, particularly those of lower social status, to be in a position to apprehend any but the most basic tenets of their religion.

<sup>571</sup> Cf. Lee (1993) 150 on the oral nature of such communication in semi-literate late antiquity: ultimately, Christian communities had to be told verbally by bishops what was expected of them and what constituted orthodoxy.

<sup>572</sup> Cf. Brown (1998b) 641, 644-645

<sup>573</sup> Fousek (1971) 76

semi-Pelagian messages which deviated from Catholic norms.

Mathisen has rightly made the point that many churchmen who have been characterised, by both modern scholarship and ancient sources, as semi-Pelagians are actually rather better defined by their hostility to extreme Augustinianism than by their attachment to Pelagius' teachings.<sup>574</sup> From this, we may extrapolate that Augustinian ideas of predestination sat less comfortably with the mass of Christian congregations than Pelagian ideas about the importance of works. In part, the popularity of semi-Pelagian (or anti-Augustinian) doctrine would have been the result of simple common sense which insists that God would not save the wicked and condemn the righteous but must instead take account of how one has lived one's life. This, as I mentioned in the previous paragraph, dovetailed with traditional Roman concepts like aristocratic euergetism,<sup>575</sup> and its related late antique Christian aristocratic variant of doing good works for the poor,<sup>576</sup> and ascetic Christian retreat, both of which could be taken as examples of Christians demonstrating their piety to God and their worthiness to receive salvation. However, an additional part of semi-Pelagianism's popularity would have lain in the seal of official approval given to it by many bishops and abbots and, indeed, by Pope Zosimus. Simple logic, aristocratic tradition and ecclesiastical authority all came together to provide endorsements for the ordinary Gallic Christian to accept the anti-predestinarian message of Pelagius.

Amongst the church's senior hierarchs, similar elements brought about an atmosphere that was particularly conducive to semi-Pelagianism (or, as the case may be, semi-Augustinianism). Others have made the point that acceptance by one's aristocratic peers often revolved around one's own acceptance and espousal of commonly-held ideas<sup>577</sup> and I have discussed this elsewhere in the thesis. What has not been emphasised is the extent to which the aristocratic desire to avoid confrontation was carried over into religious life. Within the clerical community, this theory of "thinking, blaming and praising the same thing" can be applied to theology: clerics would follow the doctrines set down by their ecclesiastical patrons (the churchmen on whose support they depended or to whom they perhaps owed their appointment to a *cathedra* – and to whom they may have been related) and, in dealing with the wider ecclesiastical network, would endorse and support the doctrines supported by their

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<sup>574</sup> Mathisen (1989) 129-130, but this is by no means a novel idea and, in fact, merely echoes Amann's contention from 1796: see Ogliari (2003) 12

<sup>575</sup> Cf. Veyne (1976) 15-183 on aristocratic obligation to assist the community and Ganz (2002) 24 on the aristocratic monastic tendency towards helping the poor (citing particularly Paulinus of Nola and Hilary of Arles).

<sup>576</sup> Cf. Brown (2002) *passim*; also Amm. Marc. 27.3.5-6 on Lampadius' apparent generosity to the beggars of the Vatican.

<sup>577</sup> E.g., Sid. Ap., Ep., 4.1.1., *idem sentimus culpamus laudamus*

friends; so long as these endorsements stopped short of the outright embrace of heresiarchs, they could be and were tolerated by the ecclesiastical community<sup>578</sup> and, if I may echo Mathisen once more in *his* echoing of Amann, the semi-Pelagians of southern Gaul certainly did not endorse Pelagius vocally and, indeed, rarely referred to him as anything other than a heretic. It was an atmosphere wholly reminiscent of Columbanus' later letter to the Frankish bishops refusing to appear before them for fear of causing an argument, an attitude which itself derives from the New Testament.<sup>579</sup>

The thing brought immediately to mind, apart from the Bible's comments on the importance of spiritual concord, is the semi-Pelagian writer Vincent of Lérins and his contention that Catholicism was that which was believed everywhere, at all times by all people.<sup>580</sup> In a sense, that was precisely the mentality of the clergy: the doctrines they espoused were those agreed upon and approved by their friends and correspondents; in effect and to rework Vincent's aphorism, southern Gallic Catholicism was that which was accepted by all aristocratic bishops at any given time with the wider community, naturally, following the lead of their bishops. (And, again, in saying this, I argue against Fousek's very positive view of the rôle of "tradition" in establishing orthodox Catholic doctrine.<sup>581</sup>)

However, to maintain this theological concord among the ecclesiastical aristocracy, a degree of personal moderation had to be applied. Individuals had to avoid hot topics and extreme interpretations, things which might have provoked a response and shown up divisions within the episcopacy. We can see this attitude of compromise at work in two places: first, in the letters of Avitus of Vienne and second, perhaps unexpectedly, in the *Chronica Gallica ad CCCCLII*. Beginning with the latter, *Chron.* 452 contains two entries commenting on the theologies of Augustine and Pelagius and, intriguingly, both entries are critical. For the entry under the year 400, we read "the insane Pelagius attempted to defile churches with his reprehensible doctrine",<sup>582</sup> which might make us believe that the *Chron.* 452 is an Augustinian document were it not for the entry under the year 417 telling us that "the emergent heresy of the predestinarians, which is said to have received its principles from

<sup>578</sup> Cf. Bonner (1999) 68; Markus (1989) 220

<sup>579</sup> Columbanus, *Ep.*, 2.6, *Ego autem ad vos ire non ausus sum, ne forte contenderem praesens contra apostoli dictum dicentis, Noli verbis contendere, et iterum, Si quis contentiosus est, nos talem consuetudinem non habemus neque ecclesia Dei.* (2 Tim. 2.14 and 1 Cor. 11.16)

<sup>580</sup> Vincent, *Commonitorium*, 2.5 [= CCSL 64.149], *Quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est*; cf. the imperial rescript of 418 against Pelagius and Caelestinus saying that the Pelagians considered it a mark of their superiority to disagree with everyone else [= PL 48.379-386]; D. Wright (1991) 158

<sup>581</sup> Fousek (1971) 78

<sup>582</sup> Burgess (2001a) 72, *Pelagius uesanus doctrina execrabili aecclesias conmaculare conatur.*

Augustine, slithered abroad in these days”.<sup>583</sup>

In the same document, sitting very close to each other, we see condemnation of both Pelagian and Augustinian doctrines – and, while I do not wish to read too much into this fact, the word ‘heresy’ is used only of the predestinarian doctrine. This apparent schizophrenia can best be understood within the model I have presented above, a model which sees the central importance of conformity, compromise and moderation in doctrinal matters as a means of avoiding disputes within the clerical community. When Markus said of Lérins that, “The peculiar intellectual alchemy of the community [of Lérins] combine (sic) a veneration for Augustine with a spirituality of markedly Cassianic stamp”,<sup>584</sup> he was describing just this kind of compromise in which apparently opposing ideas are reconciled by removing those aspects, usually the most extreme, which are mutually exclusive.

Turning to Avitus, Shanzer and Wood note some occasions on which Avitus seems to make fairly elementary theological mistakes; for example, in the *Libri contra Eutychianam haeresim*, Avitus confuses the positions of the Monophysites and the orthodox and fails to understand precisely what they are arguing about.<sup>585</sup> Perhaps it is to be expected that a western bishop would have an imperfect understanding of eastern theology, but perhaps it is a sign of a deeper lack of interest in complex and forensic theology. It was possibly in response to the Gallic episcopacy’s lack of theological awareness that Pope Hormisdas penned a letter in September 515 to Caesarius of Arles and his subordinate bishops with what I construe as a strongly didactic message laying out the nature of the Eutychian heresy and condemning also the followers of Nestorius (*qui dividit incarnationem domini nostri Iesu Christi et per hoc duos filios conatur adserere. Euthices, carnis negans veritatem et duas naturas in una persona non praedicans, ut Manicheam fantasiam ecclesiis Christi, quae admodum putavit, insereret, simili ratione damnatur*<sup>586</sup>). If the pope could not count on many Gallic bishops to understand the controversies of the day, the Italian bishops, to judge from Boethius’ comments, were not much better – to him, those attending a church council were “a gang of idiots” (*grex indoctorum*) and “lunatics” (*furiosi*).<sup>587</sup>

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<sup>583</sup> Burgess (2001a) 75, *Predicatorum heresis, quae ab Augustino accepisse initium dicitur, his temporibus sepe exorsa*.

<sup>584</sup> Markus (1990) 164

<sup>585</sup> See Shanzer & Wood (2002) 91-92, 106ff. for some of Avitus’ theological shortcomings.

<sup>586</sup> *Epistulae Arelatenses* 30, “...who divided the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ and, through this, attempted to declare that there were two sons. Eutyches, denying the truth of the Flesh and not proclaiming that there were two natures in a single person, so that, whatever he thought, he introduced the Manichean fantasy to the churches of Christ, is condemned for a similar reason.”

<sup>587</sup> Boethius, *Contra Eutychen et Nestorium, praefatio*

Many churchmen simply did not concern themselves with the study of theology or even of Scripture. Their conception of Catholic theology was comparatively simple. They must have been aware of the most egregious heresies – as Bonner says, “concern with heresy, both small and great, increasingly restricted the limits of speculation”<sup>588</sup> – and would have been conscious of those doctrines that were completely anathema and to be avoided entirely. However, as we saw with the *Chron.* 452, provided one was sufficiently circumspect and did not go so far as to voice unambiguous approval for condemned heresiarchs,<sup>589</sup> it was eminently possible to espouse ideas that were close to heresy and to attack doctrines that were orthodox. Into this same category, we can put all those semi-Pelagian authors who Mathisen believes were actually anti-Pelagian.<sup>590</sup> Fundamentally Pelagian ideas could be accepted into the Gallic church and the only compromises were that they were not openly called Pelagian and that Pelagius himself was still reviled as an heresiarch.

This state of affairs – of compromise between aristocratic bishops who operated a theology of convention and conciliation nominally endorsing official church doctrines while, in practice, adapting them to local circumstances – was possible only so long as no-one issued an open challenge to the existing order or, to put it another way, so long as no-one mentioned the elephant in the room. Politeness and the avoidance of embarrassment, the avoidance of arguments with or challenges to fellow bishops, can be seen in Avitus’ confusion of the two Fausti. When the Burgundian *rex* Gundobad asked Avitus about a letter written by Faustus of Riez in which he said that sudden penitence (*subitanea paenitentia*), for example on the deathbed, had no value, Avitus, I believe, deliberately misled Gundobad by ascribing the argument to ‘Faustus the Manichee’<sup>591</sup> – Faustus of Milevis<sup>592</sup> – and specifically saying that the namesake who lived in Riez should not be blamed for what the Manichee wrote.

In this way, Avitus avoided entanglement in an unpleasant and embarrassing situation.

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<sup>588</sup> Bonner (1999) 68

<sup>589</sup> Mathisen (1989) 139-140, describing Hilary of Arles’ hostility towards Pelagians and his desire to expel Pelagian bishops from Gaul, shows what could happen if one went so far as to adopt a stance which was unambiguously contrary to the fundamentals of church doctrine.

<sup>590</sup> Mathisen (1989) 129-130

<sup>591</sup> Avitus, *Ep.* 4, *praefati haeretici mentionem idcirco praemisi, ne Manichaei ipsius Fausti opus infaustum citeriore hunc, quem etiam gloria vestra noverat, ortu Britannum habitaculo Regiensem, titulo nominis accusaret.* (“I made mention of the aforesaid heretic so that the unfavourable work of Faustus the Manichee should not accuse the other Faustus, who as Your Majesty knows, is of British extraction but now dwells in Riez, because of the name.”).

<sup>592</sup> Shanzer & Wood (2002) 193 entertain the possibility that Avitus did not know that Faustus of Riez was the author on the grounds that a previous work (presumably the *Quaeris a me* of about 469) had circulated anonymously; I would contend that, since Avitus knew that the author was called Faustus, the author of the work to which Gundobad referred was not anonymous and Avitus must have known that Faustus of Riez was responsible; see also Mathisen (1989) 267-268 noting that the Council of Orange in 529 did not actually name Faustus either.

Faustus of Riez had authored an anonymous pamphlet, the *Quaeris a me*,<sup>593</sup> which argued for the corporeality of the soul. Sidonius Apollinaris, a relative of Avitus and spiritual protégé of Faustus of Riez, had himself engaged Mamertus Claudianus (in Sidonius' opinion, the most learned scholar of all time<sup>594</sup>) to write a reply, the *De statu animae*, to Faustus' tract.<sup>595</sup> We can only imagine how disagreeable this situation must have been for Sidonius and the wider aristocracy when the anonymous author's identity was revealed – dirty laundry, best kept hidden, had been exposed for all to see, as Sidonius and his *amici* were found to be in open opposition to Sidonius' own ecclesiastical mentor and close friend – and how keen Avitus must have been to avoid repeating his kinsman's performance, a performance, which could have been avoided had Faustus, in the first place, made less of his opinions and had Sidonius been less eager to defend what he construed as orthodoxy. Fudge and compromise could have continued to win the day.

The fact that the southern Gallic church was able to settle into an arrangement of condemning Pelagius and praising Augustine while moderating Augustinian doctrine is itself proof that the systematic study of theology was not widespread and proof, too, that the popular vision of Lérins' particular affinity for Augustine<sup>596</sup> is too simplistic. Instead of studying the subject in depth and analysing its many complexities, the southern Gallic (by which one necessarily means the Lérinsian) approach to theology was pragmatic and somewhat evasive; its ultimate function was to establish a *modus vivendi* within the church and the wider community in which difficult or controversial issues were ignored or fudged.

With the writings of Vincent of Lérins and Faustus of Riez, this *modus vivendi*, based on a willingness to overlook the deviations of others provided they were circumspect in declaring their beliefs, could no longer function. In Faustus, there was a strong and zealous critic of Augustinianism who, rather than equivocate and compromise, openly declared his hostility. This deviation provoked a response not necessarily from genuine defenders of orthodoxy but perhaps more from clerics who felt that, by challenging Faustus' ideas, they could establish their own orthodox credentials and declare their commitment to Catholic convention and from others who, while not necessarily disagreeing with the substance of Faustus' argument,

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<sup>593</sup> *Quaeris a me* = *Fausti aliorumque epistulae* 20, *MGH AA* 8.292-298; the text follows the basics of the epistolary genre (opening with a vocative, for example – *Quaeris a me, reverentissime sacerdotum...*) but it was less a letter, in the purest sense, than a doctrinal tract.

<sup>594</sup> *Sid. Ap., Ep.*, 5.2.1

<sup>595</sup> Brittain (2001) gives an excellent account of the affair; Mathisen (1989) 139 thinks that Sidonius' encouragement of Claudianus may merely have been "his exercise of the accepted literary convention of the day" but I do not agree with what is, to my eyes, an attempt to absolve Sidonius of responsibility for essentially picking a fight with his good friend Faustus.

<sup>596</sup> E.g., Courcelle (1968) 407-408

nevertheless objected to so patent an expression of deviation from contemporary ecclesiastical standards. By being blatant in his disregard for convention, by failing at least to appear to be paying proper deference to established doctrine, Faustus contributed to the creation of an environment in which making a clear demonstration of one's conformity with the accepted teachings of the church became paramount in order to avoid being tarred with the brush of heresy; bishops, who had heretofore enjoyed great latitude in the doctrines they espoused, felt obliged to toe the church's line in the very strictest sense or to face being labelled an enemy of orthodoxy – hence Sidonius' indirect attack on his close friend and ally Faustus.

The dispute between Claudianus Mamertus and Faustus of Riez over the corporeality of the soul provides a window into the state and condition of theological learning in late fifth century Gaul. By examining the events and the individuals involved, we can demonstrate that the kind of complex theology in which Claudianus and Faustus dealt was extremely rare and was certainly not taught at Lérins. Moreover, in the response of Sidonius Apollinaris and Avitus to the affair, we see at once evidence of the lack of theological learning amongst bishops and also of the tendency to compromise in religious matters, to go along with the beliefs and doctrines of friends and episcopal peers. Finally, as I shall now show, the evidence of many contemporary ecclesiastical writers shows that, even as churchmen deviated from Augustine's writings, the need to venerate him and, at a bare minimum, to pay lip service to his doctrines was absolute if one wished to be accepted as legitimate – meaning, in essence, that the closest thing we may find to a genuine theology being taught in the southern Gallic monasteries is this commitment to a simplified Augustinianism combined with a comparatively insincere veneration for Augustine himself.

#### (b) iii. *Theological learning in southern Gaul*

The lack of theological learning is clear in many sources, nowhere more so than in the case of Sidonius to whom Faustus of Riez was a "friend and spiritual mentor"<sup>597</sup> and also the "sponsoring bishop...[at] his full initiation into the life of the Church".<sup>598</sup> Nevertheless, Sidonius apparently remained so ignorant of his mentor's views on important theological matters (e.g., the corporeality of the soul, issues of penitence and repentance, and so on) that he actually managed to induce another friend to attack Faustus.<sup>599</sup> Had Faustus and Sidonius spoken about theology, had doctrinal matters been a topic of discussion between them – something one naturally expects to be the case given the pastoral relationship between them – Sidonius could not have helped but recognise his old friend's ideas; the fact that he did not is

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<sup>597</sup> Wood (1992) 10

<sup>598</sup> Harries (1994) 105, see also 41

<sup>599</sup> Cf. Stevens (1933) 135

highly informative. Mentor or not, protégé or not, theology was not something that these men discussed either when they both sat on *cathedrae* or when Faustus baptised Sidonius.

We can hardly doubt that there was a pervasive impetus for friends and relatives to support each other's work, to endorse their opinions and writings<sup>600</sup> and it seems to be accepted that Sidonius was completely unaware that the anonymous pamphleteer was his friend Faustus;<sup>601</sup> the essence of the matter is that Sidonius was just so ignorant of Faustus' beliefs that he could not connect the heterodox arguments of the *Quaeris a me* with his old friend and ally; Sidonius had obviously assumed that Faustus' doctrinal beliefs were blandly conventional, deviating not a jot from Sidonius' own (which, in turn, were those of the wider episcopal community). We can hardly doubt that, had he been aware that the anonymous pamphlet espoused the views of his close ally, Sidonius would have remained aloof and certainly would not have encouraged Claudianus' attack.

The question we face, obviously, is that of why Sidonius would have been unaware of his friend's beliefs. Clearly, the answer is that, however close their relationship and irrespective of Faustus' rôle as a mentor, the complex theological matters debated by Faustus and Claudianus never arose between Sidonius and Faustus, were never discussed by them. In other words, it was possible – indeed, it was probably common – for two Gallic bishops, even when one was very much the protégé of the other, not to discuss or confer about theology. The pressing concern for most Catholic bishops was clearly to maintain the kind of compromise and conformity that I have described above.

All this being so, it follows that individuals like Faustus and Claudianus (and even Prosper<sup>602</sup>), men well-versed in theology and capable of formulating complex arguments on spiritual matters, must have been rarities, true exceptions amongst their contemporaries (just as Boethius was amongst his). This is not to suggest that the Gallic bishops were unintelligent or uneducated – as we know, they were far from being either – but, nevertheless, most of them did not study theology, did not debate it, did not attempt to arrive at any independent conclusions about it and, if they ever discussed theological matters, probably only did so as a means of declaring and establishing their own credentials as a conformist. We find theology being studied really only amongst small numbers of very educated Roman gentlemen who employed their traditional rhetorical education in studying Scripture and applied to Christian

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<sup>600</sup> Cf. Mathisen (1989) 238-239 on Claudianus' brother being "hard pressed to disavow, even had he been so inclined, a share in the polemics which his brother leveled (sic) against Faustus".

<sup>601</sup> Cf. Sid. Ap., Ep., 9.9.1 which has the air of an extremely embarrassed and perhaps slightly sulky attempt by Sidonius at re-establishing relations with his old friend.

<sup>602</sup> Muhlberger (1992) 29-30

doctrine concepts and forms of thought and logic found in classical philosophy. This, in fact, was what Augustine had done in laying out the doctrines which Catholicism continues to embrace down to the present and it was to be the pattern for the small number of Gallo-Roman clerics who actually engaged with – and thought about – the theological complexities of *doctrina Christiana*.

As a collegiate body, therefore, the bishops of southern Gaul maintained an outwardly respectful countenance towards all the teachings of Augustine and all the doctrines endorsed by the wider church – and, as I mentioned above, we must interpret Hormisdas' letter to Caesarius as just such an endorsement, an explanation of what constitutes the party line – while keeping a discreet silence about the actual beliefs of their peers. Fearing the embarrassment that might result from pressing the issue and desiring, above all, to avoid any rupture in episcopal unity, most Gallic bishops had no interest in exploring theological matters in any detail, preferring instead to mouth their support for various religious authorities, particularly Augustine, whose status as the church's doctrinal authority *par excellence* was unchallenged and unchallengeable. It is for these reasons that, with the odd exception such as Faustus and Claudianus, on the comparatively rare occasions when we do actually find fifth century Gallic bishops holding forth on theology, they can usually be seen to advocate a solidly orthodox Augustinian model – and this is true, interestingly, even when the bishop in question obviously does not approve of the Augustinian model.<sup>603</sup>

The absence of real theological enquiry and the dependence on authorities can be demonstrated by reference to the sources. When writing to Constantinople about contemporary religious troubles in the eastern empire, Avitus often seems confused with only a vague understanding and all too often he is simply outright wrong in the things he says; perhaps this is because, as a westerner, events in the east were too distant for him to know about, but, in the first place, Avitus wrote regularly to the emperor in Constantinople and, in the second, the papal encyclical of 515 suggests that the pope felt that western bishops ought to be conscious of the fundamentals of Eutyches' heresy. Wood gives Avitus a little too much credit when, discussing the reaction of Gregory of Tours to the letters of Avitus, he says, "What impressed him [Gregory] was their theology. Nor was a theological reading a stupid one"; Avitus' "anti-Arian and anti-Eutychian letters were theologically topical". Wood also highlights the importance which later churchmen (specifically, Felix of Urgel and Agobard)

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<sup>603</sup> Cf. Leyser (2000) 82-83, (1999) 204 and D. Wright (1991) 161 where both authors argue correctly that even Caesarius, the erstwhile 'champion' of Augustinianism at Orange in 529, was far from enthusiastic in his endorsement of Augustine and accepted only a more modest version of Augustinian doctrine – one, in fact, that rejected predestinarian doctrines and which, I believe, would not have been very different from the views held by many contemporary churchmen, including even semi-Pelagians.

attached to Avitus' pronouncements.<sup>604</sup> Nevertheless, we can safely pass over the views of later mediaeval theologians. For Felix and Agobard, and for the later church generally, Avitus was an authoritative voice from the very distant past. They were unaware of his mistakes and did not look at his work critically – for them (and for Gregory), Avitus was not someone to question, not someone whose letters could be dissected; rather, like Augustine before him, he was a true figure of authority within the church whose written works were statements of theological actuality automatically rendered orthodox and authoritative by virtue of Avitus having been a bishop and saint.<sup>605</sup> In Avitus' works, they heard an imposing ecclesiastical voice making absolute declarations against which one could not argue; they discerned none of the confusion that we can hear now.

In terms of his poetry too, which Wood has recently examined, we hear an authorial voice which is heavily informed by Augustine's interpretations of and commentary on Genesis and Exodus.<sup>606</sup> Where Augustine's guidance is missing, as in the *De transitu Maris Rubri*, Wood and Shanzer argue that the resulting work is inferior,<sup>607</sup> although, for my purposes, the literary worth of the poem is unimportant; what matters is Avitus' dependence on Augustine and his unwillingness or inability to formulate independent thought on religious matters, even within the context of his own literary product.<sup>608</sup>

The *De spiritualis historiae gestis* was composed to suit the peculiar spiritual environment of the Gibichung kingdom, in which Avitus debated religion with Burgundian kings and converted princes to Catholicism, and is best understood as a theological work. Its theology can be seen only and entirely as a declaration of Augustinian (and, thus, orthodox Catholic) doctrine. Moreover, Avitus' audience was certainly largely ecclesiastical,<sup>609</sup> so it is also probably true to say that Avitus saw his poetry as an opportunity not only to inform his readership about the Augustinian reading of Genesis and Exodus (as Wood says) but to show his own continued commitment to orthodoxy and to the conventions of Gallic Christianity which required that, whatever one's personal feelings about particular doctrinal matters, one's public face should always be turned in the same direction as the wider episcopal community, united in their ostensible veneration of Augustinian orthodoxy.

To recapitulate, then, many – probably most - aristocratic churchmen, like Sidonius and

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<sup>604</sup> Wood (1993) 35

<sup>605</sup> Cf. Brittain (2001) 247 on the *Quaeris a me* as an authoritative declaration of fact to the wider church rather than a part of a debate.

<sup>606</sup> Wood (2001) 265

<sup>607</sup> Shanzer & Wood (2002) 12; cf. Shea (1997) 45ff.

<sup>608</sup> For Avitus' poetic models, both pagan and Christian, see Arweiler (1999) 221-301

<sup>609</sup> Wood (2001) 275

Avitus, had little interest in and less understanding of complex theology. 'True' theologians, like Faustus or Claudianus, who devoted themselves to the study of both scripture and the patristic authorities existed but were a rarity. The scale and profundity of learning demonstrated by these unusual individuals is impressive but also exceptional and represents the utilisation of classical Roman education, in the *artes liberales* – and especially rhetoric, philosophy and logic – for the purposes of creating a more perfect, more precise understanding of the Bible's meaning. Brown described the fourth century Roman preference for pagan philosophy over Christian dogma as representing an adherence to "the most advanced, rationally based knowledge available...Quite bluntly, the pagans were the 'wise' men, the 'experts', *prudentes*; and the Christians were 'stupid'".<sup>610</sup> In those patristic sources who wrote on matters that we would describe as theology, we certainly can see moves towards the wedding of Roman culture's rational philosophy with Christian belief, but the evidence suggests that the Scriptural enquiry of such sources represents the exception, not the rule, amongst fifth and sixth century bishops.

The extant sources for the general ecclesiastical *milieu* in southern Gaul suggest to me that most high-ranking churchmen never attempted to make a systematic study of theology and that the subject was rarely discussed in clerical circles. Little effort was made to educate churchmen in theology beyond, apparently, stressing the importance of Augustinian treatises and commentaries and the aristocratic tradition of avoiding anything which might foster divisions and embarrassment amongst the peer group by, for example, questioning a fellow cleric's opinions or beliefs.

Their limited introduction to orthodox theology allowed churchmen like Sidonius or Avitus, when confronted with something that was candidly and vociferously heterodox (as with, for example, Faustus' writings), to recognise deviation. Beyond that, however, their grasp of doctrinal matters was hazy and imprecise and was clearly based more on the recitation of what they believed to be the position of the patristic authorities than on critical judgment and awareness of theological texts. To sum up, bishops repeated what they thought was the party line and, even then, were sometimes sufficiently unschooled to go astray. Curiously, they themselves seldom showed any interest in the pursuit of Scriptural study which may perhaps lend credence to the idea that religious office, despite their *cathedrae*, was not their vocation but simply a means by which they could acquire or retain power in and over their communities.

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<sup>610</sup> Brown (1967) 301-302

With all of this being so, what can we say about the existence (or otherwise) of Roger's *école théologique* at Lérins? We may say, with confidence, that there was no theological school in any meaningful sense. Certainly, patristic works would have been available and it is by no means difficult to imagine that young monks may have been given some instruction therein, but nothing in the sources, in either explicit or implicit terms, suggests that a theological school – in the sense of a place where complex theology was taught systematically – existed either on Lérins or anywhere else in southern Gaul.

When we look at modern scholarship in holistic terms, I think we may discern a predisposition to see in our sources implications that are not present and then to use these implications (rather than the sources themselves) to advance certain theses. Courcelle is, in my opinion, the most guilty of this and the effect is that much of his widely-read scholarship creates a misleading vision of Lérins and southern Gallic religious culture and that these erroneous accounts gradually become accepted by the wider academic community.

Attention to the sources reveals no school at Lérins, whether secular or theological, although Courcelle argued that both were present. The weakness which lies at the heart of his methodology, which has been accepted too uncritically, can also be illustrated by his treatment of the doctrinal dispute between Faustus and Claudianus. Basing his argument on what he believed to be the presence of traces of Greek philosophical thought in the works of both these authors, Courcelle argued in favour of “a renaissance of Greek culture in [fifth century] Gaul”<sup>611</sup> with the knowledge of Greek language and philosophy, apparently, becoming ever more common amongst the educated classes. However, Charles Brittain, by close examination of the sources, has laid Courcelle's thesis to rest and has shown convincingly and, I hope, finally that any ‘philosophy’ found in the texts of the period was derived from patristic writings<sup>612</sup> and, for Claudianus, the major source was the *De quantitate animae* of Augustine. We see Gallo-Romans applying to patristic scholarship the dialectical techniques learnt from the *rhetor* in the classical schoolroom.

### Conclusion

In this chapter, we have seen that certain broad conclusions can be drawn about the position of Lérins as a centre of education and also about the state of religious thought and learning amongst Gallic bishops and their desire to avoid controversy. When controversies did emerge, we have seen that they usually derived from the church's failure, before Orange II in 529, to

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<sup>611</sup> Courcelle (1969) 236; cf. Kirkby (1981) 55ff. on the “extravagant claims...for a so-called Hellenist renaissance” in sixth century Italy.

<sup>612</sup> Brittain (2001) 243ff.; cf. R. P. H. Green (1990) 317 on Gallic ignorance of Greek philosophy.

establish any meaningful degree of doctrinal uniformity, a failure which was reinforced by the episcopal community's unwillingness to take a firm stand on what they, as a college, actually believed and what they considered heterodox and unacceptable.

By granting such doctrinal leeway, by allowing the power to define doctrine to devolve into the hand of clerics who often knew little about – and were uninterested in – Catholicism's stance on complex matters of theology and doctrine, the Gallic church laid the foundations of what came to be known at the semi-Pelagian controversy. With the church's leadership made up of Roman aristocrats, many of whom saw the church as a sanctuary and new source of power in a barbarian-ruled world, it was perhaps inevitable that, in place of a narrow declaration of what constituted Catholicism, the episcopal community and wider church should emphasise solidarity and concord and the accommodation of all views which were not blatantly heretical.

Religious instruction never dealt with speculative or academic theology and it is wrong to speak of *Lérins*, or anywhere else in Gaul, as a centre for such study. Even for the reading of the Scriptures, there was great dependence on the commentaries and guides of patristic authorities who themselves had applied the lessons of Roman education to the Bible. There were occasional clerics who happened to be great religious thinkers and it is not hard to believe that there must have been many churchmen, at many varying ranks in the ecclesiastical hierarchy, whose grasp of the Bible was firm, but, for my purposes, these exceptions are less important than the rule.

## Chapter Six

### Monachus pontificale decus: *Lérins, factionalism and theology in the career of Caesarius of Arles*<sup>613</sup>

In this chapter, I will discuss the life, career and experiences of Caesarius of Arles, who was probably the most influential churchman of his time. I argue that Caesarius' experiences contradict certain modern claims about Lérins particularly and the episcopate generally. I also show that certain modern assumptions about Caesarius are not founded on the extant evidence, that Caesarius' advancement in the church relied neither on membership of the "Lérins faction"<sup>614</sup> nor on a network of friends from Lérins but, rather, on traditional family connexions combined with a personal reputation for piety and ascetic accomplishment. I will also argue that his theology, insofar as we may usefully speak of such a thing, derived neither from his Lérins background nor from devotion to Augustine but was influenced instead by a desire for theological conformity in Gaul and unity with the wider Catholic church.

#### (a) *Caesarius, Lérins and competing ascetic brands*

To begin with his background, we turn of course to the *Vita Caesarii*, which forms two books written in the decade following his death in 543 by Cyprian of Toulon and some other clerics who had known Caesarius during his lifetime.<sup>615</sup> Caesarius was born to a noble family in Chalon-sur-Saône<sup>616</sup> in 469/70. As a young man, he set out for Lérins, forsaking family and homeland in favour of monastic life, with only a single slave to accompany him.<sup>617</sup> At the monastery, Caesarius was made cellarer (something like a quartermaster) but aroused the anger of his fellow monks by withholding their rations. He was removed from his post, whereupon he began starving himself to the point where the abbot, Porcarius, intervened and packed him off to Arles<sup>618</sup> where Caesarius, supposedly to his complete surprise, discovered that the bishop of Arles, Aeonius, was actually a relative from his own home city (*concivis pariter et propinquus*). Aeonius, impressed by his kinsman's devotion, named him his successor and appointed him abbot of one of the Arlesian monasteries. Upon Aeonius' death,

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<sup>613</sup> Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina*, 5.2. 68-70, *regula Caesarii praesulis alma pii/ qui fuit antistes Arelas de sorte Lerini/ et mansit monachus pontificale decus*.

<sup>614</sup> Mathisen (1989) 69ff.; cf. Harries (1994) 40-41

<sup>615</sup> Klingshim (1994b) 1; see Browning (2000) 875 on the apparent simplicity of their Latin.

<sup>616</sup> Cf. Amm. Marc., 15.11.11, 14.10.3 on the city's importance.

<sup>617</sup> *Vita Caesarii*, 1.3-5, *Cumque iter cum uno tantum famulo socius ageret...*

<sup>618</sup> *Vita Caes.*, 1.6-7, *Cumque de infirmitate ipsius abba sanctus graviter turbaretur...sanctus pater, in conoebio nullum eidem remedium posse praestari, ubi etiamsi medicus adesset, fervens ad spiritualia pueri consuetudo nihil sibi pateretur de abstinentiae frenis et vigiliarum rigore laxari, iubet eum, immo cogit beatissimus abba ad civitatem Arelatensem causa recuperandae salutis adduci*; Caesarius' disregard for the physical health of himself and others echoes the attitude found in *Sermo* 50 where he says that although prayer for bodily health is permissible, it is far less important than spiritual health.

the people of Arles compelled Caesarius, “sincerely against his own wish”,<sup>619</sup> to become bishop.<sup>620</sup>

I need not say that the *Vita* is slanted and, in places, probably deliberately misleading. Someone reading Caesarius’ story for the first time, with no knowledge of the historical background or environment, would immediately become suspicious of, for example, Caesarius’ convenient ignorance of his relationship to the bishop of Arles. Nevertheless, there is much in the *Vita* that can serve as useful evidence. To begin with, we see that, far from having the support of Mathisen’s “Lérins faction” or Harries’ “Lérins connections”,<sup>621</sup> Caesarius seems to have been loathed by his fellow monks on salient and perfectly reasonable grounds. Thus, while Leyser can speak of Caesarius as “one of the monastery’s most powerful alumni” and talk of his “flattery of his alma mater”<sup>622</sup> and Rousseau may claim that “the prestige of Lérins...reached a peak in the career...of Caesarius of Arles”,<sup>623</sup> we face the problem that Caesarius, whatever his successes as bishop of Arles, was all but expelled from Lérins (in spite of Wace’s baseless insistence that he was actually sent to Arles “to recruit”<sup>624</sup> – a conclusion supported by no source). He did not depart the monastery as an ‘alumnus’ of Lérins nor did he go forth into the world with the elaborate network of friends and factional allies which Mathisen and Harries imagine. Nor, for that matter, did his way of life and his concept of how an ascetic ought to live and behave integrate at all with the Lérinsian approach.

We would have to be supremely naïve not to apprehend that, in sending him to Arles, Porcarius was ridding himself of a troublemaker who was incapable of functioning within Lérins’ coenobitic system; indeed, Porcarius was not merely sending Caesarius away from the monastery but was actually sending him back to his family for, in spite of the *Vita*’s protestations, it defies belief and reason that Caesarius – and Porcarius – did not know that he was a kinsman was bishop of Arles. In fact, I believe that the only reason Porcarius applied the fig leaf of concern over Caesarius’ health was out of fear of offending an eminent churchmen; had Caesarius’ relatives been less influential, he would simply have been cast out of the monastery entirely and without apology. Klingshirn points out that Arles had a

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<sup>619</sup> Wace (1911) 231

<sup>620</sup> *Vita Caes.*, 1.8-14

<sup>621</sup> Harries (1994) 40-41

<sup>622</sup> Leyser (1999) 188-189

<sup>623</sup> Rousseau (2000) 768

<sup>624</sup> Wace (1911) 230

reputation for its doctors,<sup>625</sup> amongst many other things, but this was not Porcarius' reason for sending the troublemaker Caesarius there.

Caesarius' Arlesian career seems to have advanced quickly. His family connexions served him well and his position may have been cemented by his reputation for extreme asceticism and intense religious devotion. Indeed, had it become widely known that Caesarius was too ascetic for Lérins, it could only have boosted his credibility with the congregation – a man so pious that he “had been asked to leave Lérins, having outdone the monks in austerity and holiness”<sup>626</sup> could not but impress a Christian congregation that was already sympathetic to ascetics and viewed asceticism as a visible manifestation of Christian devotion. Moreover, the story of Caesarius' experiences at Lérins would not have been kept from the population; the inclusion of his experiences in the *Vita* shows that Caesarius and his biographers wanted events to be widely known as part of their effort at the “fashioning of Caesarius”, of presenting a vision of him which would appeal to Arlesian Christians.<sup>627</sup>

The importance of shaping the popular interpretation of the events of Caesarius' life cannot be overstated. The manipulation and control of the congregation's perception of Caesarius was central to his success as a bishop and, indeed, to his acquisition of the episcopal throne in the first place. As a comparative newcomer to Arles who, in addition to being a relative of the current bishop (and thus a potential carpetbagger), had failed to secure much goodwill from the local monastic authorities, it is not certain that the city's ecclesiastical establishment would have been sympathetic to Caesarius. In fact, Caesarius' ascension to the *cathedra* may not have been as smooth as the *Vita* implies.<sup>628</sup> He may have faced challenges from local candidates, a possibility supported by the episcopal *fasti* of Arles which name one Iohannes as Aeonius' successor;<sup>629</sup> Klingshirn has explored the evidence in some detail and I have touched upon it myself in chapter four and, while one cannot go so far as to say that Iohannes' existence is fact (rather than a later interpolation), Klingshirn nevertheless made a persuasive case for the presence of a local candidate who may have enjoyed rather more support amongst elements the clerical establishment of Arles than Caesarius did.<sup>630</sup> It is, I think, more than likely that Iohannes stood against Caesarius and may even have won or, at least, secured enough clerical backing to muddy the waters.

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<sup>625</sup> Klingshirn (1994b) 13 n.11

<sup>626</sup> Harries (1994) 182

<sup>627</sup> Cf. Leyser (2000) 84ff. and Greenblatt (1980) *passim*.

<sup>628</sup> Cf. Klingshirn (1994a) 85-86

<sup>629</sup> Duchesne (1894) 1.243

<sup>630</sup> Klingshirn (1994a) 85-87; note esp. Klingshirn's connexion of the letter from Ruricius to Capillutus (*Ep.* 2.31) with the tense *milieu* that would have followed a disputed episcopal election.

Asceticism was a positive trait in a potential bishop; at least one candidate, Eucherius, owed his election to “monastic links...[which] stood him in good stead among members of congregation eager to continue the ascetic tradition in the see”.<sup>631</sup> But, for those who opposed Caesarius, his ascetic background could have been construed – conceivably by local people but more by ecclesiastical hierarchies – as a challenge to the monastic establishment, a rejection of church authority and communal asceticism;<sup>632</sup> as Leyser describes it, “His headstrong fasting...[betrayed] proud lack of self-control rather than humble temperance”.<sup>633</sup>

This period was a time of tension and competition between solitary ascetic hermits and ascetic communities<sup>634</sup> and Caesarius, far from being the conquering alumnus of Lérins, could have been – and, in certain quarters, certainly was – seen as an upstart, someone who had proved incapable of taking the usual ascetic route and who was correspondingly untrustworthy and potentially threatening<sup>635</sup> for, in spite of Markus’ vision of monasticism as the reclamation of “primal freedom”, the late antique monastery was essentially a vehicle for church control of asceticism.<sup>636</sup> When Leyser speaks of Caesarius’ election as a victory for “the ascetic party in Gaul” and a sign of the “advances” they had made,<sup>637</sup> we ought to be cautious of accepting so simplistic a model and recognise, instead, that no such “ascetic party” existed, that this was a period in which differing types of asceticism still competed,<sup>638</sup> a period in which someone like Caesarius, even if it was not his intention, could appear, by virtue of his failures with church-sanctioned coenobitic asceticism, to be an enemy of the ecclesiastical establishment.

Moreover, Caesarius’ relationship to Aeonius could also have been used against him. While the acquisition of a see often required powerful patronage and while the support of the current occupant of the throne at which one aimed was certainly helpful, Caesarius could have been portrayed as an ambitious and power-hungry newcomer who had failed to function at Lérins and whose only claim to the see of Arles was that he and the current bishop were *propinqui*.

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<sup>631</sup> Harries (1994) 181

<sup>632</sup> Cf. Duchesne (1907) 2.491; Rousseau (1991) 118 describes church-sanctioned monasticism as a “corporate endeavour fully integrated into the life of the Church and dominated by its episcopal leadership”; Caesarius’ ascetic practices were rather different.

<sup>633</sup> Leyser (2000) 86; n.22 describes Klingshirn (1994a) 30 as saying that “the episode is constructed as an illustration of Cassian’s teachings on fastings”; this misrepresents Klingshirn (1994a) 30-31 who merely points out that Caesarius’ behaviour “broke two of Cassian’s cardinal rules for fasting”, something I take to be an academic point of no concern to Caesarius or his colleagues.

<sup>634</sup> Cf. Rousseau (1991) 117-118

<sup>635</sup> See Palanque (1952) 495-496 on the sometime hostility of the authorities to monks and Rutilius, *De red. suo*, 1.439-452, 1.517-526

<sup>636</sup> Markus (1990) 165

<sup>637</sup> Leyser (2000) 87

<sup>638</sup> Rousseau (1991) 116 puts it very neatly, in my opinion: “ascetic behaviour and reflection sprang from and operated within many different levels of Christian society”.

That the *Vita Caesarii* takes such care to downplay this connexion must be interpreted as proof that this charge was actually made. In attempting to rebut it, Caesarius, his partisans and, later, his biographers emphasised his ascetic merit above all else, presenting his failure to adapt to the monastic lifestyle as proof of his superiority to the Lérinsian monks, of his devotion to a stricter brand of Christian living than could be found even in Provence's most celebrated monastery. As Leyser puts it, "a relentless show of moral superiority...safeguarded the bishop and his family from the crude accusation of feathering their own nest";<sup>639</sup> a man whose devotion to God was so obvious and who was – or, rather, wanted to be seen as – above material considerations could hardly be suspected of vulgar ambition and this is reemphasised by the writers of the *Vita* when they insist that Caesarius was elected to the episcopacy against his will (itself a common topos in saintly *Vitae*).

In the end, Caesarius gained his episcopal throne through a variety of factors, the two most important of which were his personal reputation for asceticism and his blood relationship to Aeonius. Without both advantages, it is not easy to imagine how he could have become bishop – the connexion between family and position in late antique political life is well-established (and I have discussed it already) but could, as Leyser says, potentially have been turned against Caesarius. While he undoubtedly sought the episcopal throne actively, obvious personal ambition was liable to disqualify a candidate in the eyes of the congregation. Ostentatious ascetic devotion combined with fastidious attention to personal image (and the repetition of the topos that Caesarius' election had been against his will) went a long way towards neutralising the danger Leyser identifies.

#### (b) *The ecclesiastical faction and its part in Caesarius' career*

Within the context of modern scholarship, the most important thing highlighted by Caesarius' career is the practical irrelevance of the Lérinsian *nutrix sanctorum* and the "Lérins faction"<sup>640</sup> to his success in first acquiring the episcopacy and then in becoming Gaul's pre-eminent bishop.

Mathisen has, for some time, advanced the argument, which now constitutes the orthodox view, that "ecclesiastical factionalism" developed during the fifth century.<sup>641</sup> He contends that Arles and its suffragan sees came under the control, from 426 onwards, of an alliance of aristocratic monks from outside Provence. The first of these were Honoratus, founder of Lérins and, from 426, bishop of Arles, and his successor and relative, Hilary (abbot of Lérins

<sup>639</sup> Leyser (2000) 86

<sup>640</sup> Harries (1994) 40-41; Mathisen (1989) 117ff.

<sup>641</sup> Mathisen (1989)

from 426 and bishop of Arles from 430).<sup>642</sup> As time passed, a faction developed in which monks from Lérins, who were generally related by blood and shared a common origin in Lugdunensis,<sup>643</sup> would support one another in advancing their careers.<sup>644</sup> I do Mathisen's thesis a disservice by recapitulating it in a few lines but I believe that its essence has been set out and that it is possible to see how Caesarius' career reveals Mathisen's idea to be rather less definite than is often assumed.

One feature of political life in any period is that the powerful and ambitious – and bishops of the fifth century were both – seek to place allies in potentially useful positions. In Syme's words, "In all ages, whatever the form and name of government, be it monarchy, republic, or democracy, an oligarchy lurks behind the façade".<sup>645</sup> Within the context of Roman history, Mathisen's description of the "Lérins faction" or of factionalism in general brings to mind *amicitia* and the republic. Even if Mathisen's description of monastic alliances (many of which were, as Mathisen admits, ephemeral<sup>646</sup>) is correct, there is nothing unprecedented or innovative in what he terms "ecclesiastical factionalism"; rather, it is the local Gallic manifestation of an established part of political life and something with a long pedigree in the ancient world.

Leaving aside the ephemerality of some alliances and turning to the particular matter of the Lérins faction, two issues must be addressed. The first is to explain how Caesarius could have achieved such success without the support of this faction which is said to have dominated Gallic episcopal politics; the second is to explain why, when Mathisen readily admits that his Lérins faction is basically an extended family grouping from Lugdunensis ("aristocratic, influential, and...interrelated"),<sup>647</sup> it is presented as being centred not on familial bonds between faction members but on their shared experience as "alumni" of Lérins.

To begin with the second point, obviously if many of the members of the Lérins "alumni" were related to one another by blood or marriage,<sup>648</sup> we should assume that their experience of Lérins was irrelevant to the formation of an alliance between them. Family connexions

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<sup>642</sup> Mathisen (1989) 76

<sup>643</sup> Mathisen (1989) 76, (1981) 105

<sup>644</sup> Cf. Leyser (1999) 194 who argues that Lérinsians were "thrown into heady confusion by their success" which does not suggest they possessed the kind of hardnosed political ambition envisioned by Mathisen.

<sup>645</sup> Syme (1939) 7

<sup>646</sup> Mathisen (1989) ix

<sup>647</sup> Mathisen (1989) 76, (1981) 105

<sup>648</sup> Mathisen (1981) 105-107

were very important in securing any kind of position in the late antique world<sup>649</sup> – something illustrated by Caesarius and Aeonius. Relatives acted as reliable allies, the trustworthy rock on which careers were built. It was natural for kinsmen to look after one another's interests, to advance each other's careers and to see one another as natural successors (as Aeonius saw Caesarius), all for the purely pragmatic and self-interested reason that cousin, siblings or brothers-in-law were, in most situations, more dependable than non-relatives.

We can reasonably dismiss the notion that Lérins was a nexus where privileged and ambitious young men met, forged alliances and vied for the patronage of their superiors. Mathisen himself says, in discussing family relationships and their common origin in Lugdunensis, that many of these politically ambitious monks knew each other and their abbot before they ever came to the monastery; their relationships predated their monastic careers. Just as Caesarius became bishop through nepotism, so the “alumni” of Lérins relied on the support of family networks in pursuit of office.

Nevertheless, the notion that “Lérins connections”<sup>650</sup> were vital to a career is widespread. Almost any person who reaches high office in fifth century Gaul is appropriated by certain scholars as a member of the imagined Lérinsian old boys' network. In fact, Harries actually says that bishops “not directly connected with Lérins” could be absorbed into the Lérinsian circle of power,<sup>651</sup> but this is an act of self-contradiction; if someone who never attended that monastery and was decidedly *not* a part of the Lérinsian *milieu* can be deemed a member of the Lérins faction, the label itself becomes meaningless and ceases to serve any valid purpose.<sup>652</sup>

Rather than a faction based on shared attendance of Lérins, we have fluid groupings of churchmen who cooperate with each other in the hope of advancing their own careers or those of relatives and *amici*. These groupings were sometimes based on kinship and sometimes on the more transient basis of shared interests in specific situations. This kind of politicking was not unique to the “alumni” of Lérins but is a characteristic of all political life. Harries' appropriation of non-Lérinsian bishops for the Lérins circle illustrates the nature of this

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<sup>649</sup> Cf. Rousseau (1976) 359-361, Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina* 4.8.7-8, *Ordo sacerdotum cui fluxit utroque parente/ Venit ad heredem pontificalis apex*. (“To whom the order of bishops flowed from either parent;/ the priestly pinnacle came to the heir”, spoken of a bishop of Périgueux.) and Sid. Ap., *Ep.*, 1.3.1

<sup>650</sup> Harries (1994) 40-41

<sup>651</sup> Harries (1994) 42

<sup>652</sup> This situation of assuming *a priori* the existence of a group and then appropriating convenient figures – who, in practice, have only very limited connexions (if any) to the other members of the group – and using them as evidence of the group's influence is comparable to the issues Alan Cameron (1977) highlighted regarding Symmachus.

politicking; alliances had more to do with the interests and ambitions of individuals aspiring to office and with the ability of their friends and relatives to assist them than with the bonds forged by the shared experience of Lérins. Ambitious churchmen sought the assistance of those who could help them; no doubt influential relatives were often in a position to provide aid but, as we see from the example provided by Harries (of Germanus being absorbed into the imagined Lérins circle despite having no connexion with the place), people from outside one's family and monastery could also provide backing.

We should not imagine that Lérins was unique in providing bishops for its region. The relationship between monasticism and episcopal office predated Lérins' foundation; Martin of Tours may have been Gaul's first authentic monk-turned-bishop and continued his monastic lifestyle after ascending the *cathedra*.<sup>653</sup> The monastery of St Victor, founded by Cassian, whose influence on Gallic monasticism was to prove so great,<sup>654</sup> was the *nutrix* and *alma mater* of Rusticius of Narbonne, a member of an episcopal dynasty, none of whom had Lérinsian connexions, and an active participant in literary activities.<sup>655</sup>

I conclude that we gain little by speaking of a "Lérins faction" if its distinguishing characteristic is that influential men appointed *amici* and relatives (and, in the particular case of Lérins, one must emphasise the latter) to vacant offices. The exercise becomes particularly fruitless when one arbitrarily adopts individuals into the Lérins faction despite their never having had any direct connexion to the place. Yet this arbitrariness appears to me to be the very heart of the problem with Mathisen's thesis of factionalism – faced with situations in which aristocratic kinsmen support one another's careers, it seems hugely arbitrary to link their alliance to their common but often exceedingly brief presence at Lérins.<sup>656</sup>

Mathisen offers the attempts by Hilary of Arles to extend his authority at the Council of Riez in 439 as proof of the Lérins faction's machinations, and cites the large number of individuals at that council who are known to have supported Hilary's efforts.<sup>657</sup> However, metropolitan sees often tried to expand their authority – there is nothing unprecedented or even unusual in

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<sup>653</sup> *Vita Martini*, 10

<sup>654</sup> Cf. Stewart (1988), O. Chadwick (1950). Klingshirn (1994a) 30-31 provides a strange illustration of Cassian's influence when he lists the ways in which Caesarius' behaviour at Lérins seems to contradict Cassianic rules.

<sup>655</sup> Mathisen (1989) 119-120

<sup>656</sup> Mathisen (1989) 83 acknowledges that many monks only stayed very briefly at Lérins.

<sup>657</sup> Mathisen (1989) 106-108; but note that, of the men Mathisen names, only three are known alumni of Lérins while five others were appointed to sees by Hilary.

it.<sup>658</sup> Indeed, in examining Hilary's part in the Chelidonius affair (when Hilary had illegally dethroned the metropolitan of Besançon), Mathisen, in an early essay, drew attention to the significance of the very points which I am stressing – "family connections...family interests"<sup>659</sup> – in explaining Hilary's behaviour.

The experience of Hilary of Arles shows us groups of clerics, often related to each other, clustering around patron-bishops and working to advance their patron's interests, which, in a larger sense, would be their own interests. In return for their support, they were rewarded with offices. Their unity of purpose derived not from attendance of Lérins or from friendship forged in the monastic crucible, but from self-interest and family connexions (the two often being difficult to disentangle). Moreover, if we accept Hall's characterisation of Hilary's motives, which is supported by the sources, as having a large religious dimension, then the 'Lérins faction', in the context of Hilary's policies, ceases to be a political faction in any meaningful sense, becoming instead a clique of zealous ascetics under the leadership of an *über*-ascetic.

Rather than a "Lérins faction", we find the partisans of particular bishops. Lérins itself was wholly incidental to the relationship between members of the so-called faction; attending the monastery signified nothing other than an interest in asceticism and would have had no effect on an individual's relations with others; family relations, by blood and marriage, combined with traditional politicking (*i.e.*, supporting those who could advance or had already advanced one's career) led to a natural and wholly predictable system of patronage emerging in the southern Gallic dioceses. We see the selfish element of this patronage at work when we consider the squabbles – such as that between Theodore of Fréjus and abbot Faustus of Lérins (later of Riez) when the latter resisted the former's attempts to bring the monastery under his control<sup>660</sup> – which periodically occurred between the bishops of Fréjus and the abbots of Lérins;<sup>661</sup> both offices were close politically to Arles<sup>662</sup> and both abbot and bishop should, following Mathisen's thesis, have been members of the Lérins faction yet self-interest and the desire for personal advantage led them to manoeuvre against each other. The supposed faction was not the monolithic entity Mathisen envisions.

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<sup>658</sup> Jones (1964) 890 notes that Arles and Vienne were still squabbling over jurisdiction in the sixth century. Klingshirn (1985) argues convincingly that Caesarius' ransoming of captives was an attempt to extend his authority and undermine that of his neighbour, Avitus of Vienne.

<sup>659</sup> Mathisen (1979) 167-168

<sup>660</sup> Arnold (1894) 36; Schetter (1994) 247-248

<sup>661</sup> N. Chadwick (1955) 148

<sup>662</sup> Although Fréjus was actually part of the metropolitan province of Aix; Duchesne (1894) 1.276

One could possibly indulge in semantic arguments about whether such arrangements constitute a *factio*, but the fundamental points are, first, that the relationship between a fifth century Gallic bishop and his supporters differs from that envisioned by Mathisen and, second, that, insofar as *factiones* existed, they had minimal connexion to the members' shared monastic experience but were rooted in family bonds and *amicitia*. Mathisen's imagined "factional man"<sup>663</sup> has nothing to do with ecclesiastical politics or religious controversy in fifth century Gaul.

Having said all that, I return to the single case which undercuts not only Mathisen's thesis on the Lérins faction but also many wider assumptions about the monastery's rôle as a nursery of bishops: if Caesarius of Arles was, as his *Vita* says, effectively thrown out of Lérins with neither the support nor the goodwill of the Lérins faction, how could he have advanced to the most important episcopal see in southern Gaul? If the Lérins faction, as Mathisen presents it, was a reality, they would have ensured that one of their own members took this key diocese; on the other hand, if Caesarius (and, for that matter, Aeonius before him) could become bishop of Arles without the faction's support, the faction could not have existed in the way that Mathisen depicts it.

This has led to a serious misrepresentation of Caesarius' career by scholars who are committed to the notion of Lérinsian factionalism and influence. Conscious that Caesarius could not have become bishop if the influence of the Lérins faction was real and if Caesarius had made an enemy of his Lérinsian colleagues, Caesarius is now lauded as a product of Lérins, an alumnus, a devoted son of his monastic *alma mater* and, ultimately, as the very peak of the imagined Lérins faction's political success and hard proof of its existence.<sup>664</sup> The fact that he was driven out of Lérins after making enemies of the denizens of the *nutrix sanctorum* is ignored.

How can we conclude that Caesarius did *not* enjoy the support of the Lérins faction? While conscious of the impossibility of proving a negative, from what we know of Caesarius' time at the monastery, one cannot argue that he was anything but a disruptive influence, disliked by his fellow monks and tolerated by the abbot probably only on account of his influential relatives. Caesarius, in what may be a unique occurrence (I know of no comparable event), proved so unbearable that he was forced to leave the monastery. Modern sources accept and understand this but often seem to embellish the expulsion by treating it as some manner of quixotic victory or as a harmless but ultimately irrelevant manifestation of Caesarius' spiritual

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<sup>663</sup> Mathisen (1989) 3, esp. n.16; note that Mathisen's translation of the Latin is nonsensical.

<sup>664</sup> E.g., Leyser (1999) 188-189; Rousseau (2000) 768; Klingshim (1994a) 31-32

character. For example, Harries' remark that Caesarius "had...outdone the monks in austerity and holiness"<sup>665</sup> is entirely true but its full implications are ignored; Klingshirn's attitude is comparable – the expulsion is noted but not discussed. For Leyser, Caesarius was the epitome of the Lérinsian product and a devotee to his monastic "alma mater".<sup>666</sup> But Caesarius was no alumnus and Lérins was not his *alma mater*. He left after a concerted effort by his fellow monks to drive him out, an effort which Porcarius resisted probably only from fear of offending Aeonius. To argue that Caesarius left the monastery with a coterie of allies ready to support him is to defy the available evidence.

Indeed, if we wish to find a likely Lérinsian candidate for the episcopacy of Arles – an individual who might have had the support of the ecclesiastical and monastic establishment – it is more probable that the ephemeral Iohannes, from the episcopal *fasti*, was that man. It is intriguing that, as Klingshirn notes,<sup>667</sup> Ruricius wrote, in what seems to be a reference to the election at Arles, that he was unable to condemn the election of a bishop who enjoyed the *communis consensus*, which Klingshirn takes as a reference to the election of Iohannes. It seems more probable to me that Ruricius' letter refers to the election of Caesarius and that it constitutes the grudging acceptance of Caesarius' election, which could not be stopped because he enjoyed so much congregational support. It would have been natural for Ruricius to doubt Caesarius' ability; after all, a man who was incapable of following the rules at Lérins and whose immoderate behaviour as cellarer could have been a sign of his egotism, of a desire to flaunt his imagined piety, might not make a good or competent bishop.

I would go so far as to say that, when we turn to Caesarius' own letter to Ruricius,<sup>668</sup> we see that these misgivings were not baseless, that Caesarius, at least in the early years of his episcopate, lacked the skills to deal with other members of the church hierarchy. Ruricius, bishop of Limoges from 485 until his death in 510 at around the age of 70, had failed to attend the council of Agde in September 506 and had not sent any representative in his place, although he did send an explanatory letter which apparently failed to reach Caesarius.<sup>669</sup> Caesarius, who had at this stage been bishop of Arles for rather less than four years, wrote to

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<sup>665</sup> Harries (1994) 182; this is merely one example and by no stretch of the imagination could it be considered the most egregious – almost any source dealing with this topic either glosses over Caesarius' expulsion or treats it as a matter which casts great credit on him. Its wider implications are never treated.

<sup>666</sup> Leyser (1999) 189

<sup>667</sup> Klingshirn (1994a) 85-87 citing Ruricius, *Ep.*, 2.31; I discuss this topic in an earlier chapter.

<sup>668</sup> Caesarius, *Ep.* 3 [= *Epist. ad Ruricium*, 12, *MGH AA* 8.274]

<sup>669</sup> Caesarius, *Ep.* 3, ...*per suum diaconum mihi Agate vestras litteras destinasset, quas ego nescio quo casu aut qua neglegantia me non retineo suscepisse*. ("...that he had sent your letter to me at Agde through his deacon, which, for some reason or due to some mistake that I know nothing about, I do not remember having received.")

Ruricius criticising his non-attendance (which Klingshirn assumes was out of hurt pride at having received a late invitation;<sup>670</sup> I take the source at face value, accepting that Ruricius, possibly in his sixty-seventh year at this time, only a few years before his death, was not well enough to undertake the journey).<sup>671</sup>

While there is an element of subjectivity at work in any literary interpretation, I construe Caesarius' letter as sarcastic in places and, overall, condescending; I draw attention to the question of subjectivity because Klingshirn takes the opposite view and speaks of Caesarius' "deferential tone".<sup>672</sup> Caesarius stresses, in a way that does not seem remotely deferential to me, the importance of council attendance and says that although Ruricius sent his "holy and desirable writings" (*sanctos et desiderabiles apices*), he ought to have arranged for a person to have come to the council and signed in his place (*ut personam dirigeretis, quae ad vicem vestram subscriberet et quod sancti fratres vestri statuerunt in persona vestra firmaretur*) "as you yourself know perfectly well" (*tamen sicut ipsi optime nostis*). Allowing for subjectivity, I nevertheless take, in the first place, the comment *tamen...nostis* to be an unsubtle admonishment completely inappropriate given the comparative difference in age and experience between the two. Moreover, the Latin *apices*, used in place of *litteras* to describe Ruricius' letter, is possibly an inflated, decorative term which could have had a sarcastic edge. If so, it is a wholly inappropriate comment – a man not yet forty with less than four years experience should not condescend to a man in his mid-sixties with twenty years on the *cathedra*. I do concede that Caesarius' tone softens as the letter progresses and that Klingshirn's sense of a deferential quality becomes truer (in a strictly comparative sense) in the letter's final two-thirds, but, nevertheless, there are aspects in the letter which evoke Caesarius' inability to deal with others and his obvious need to present himself an authority figure. Indeed, the authorial voice of the letter to Ruricius brings instantly to mind the self-righteousness and priggish superiority of the cellarer at Lérins who felt that it was his job, not the abbot's, to decide when and how much the monks should eat.

Not only could Caesarius not function within Lérins' monastic environment, he struggled to carry out the basic political functions of his office. Even if we assume that the Lérinsian monks who had disliked Caesarius so much during his time there actually came to appreciate him after his departure, we still face the issue that he was not capable of dealing with the sophisticated political networks that Mathisen describes.

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<sup>670</sup> Klingshirn (1994a) 97

<sup>671</sup> Cf. Caesarius, *Ep.* 19 to Agroecius of Antibbes, a letter written in the later 520s and which is even terser than *Ep.* 3.

<sup>672</sup> Klingshirn (1994b) 83

If we interpret the evidence as I propose, we arrive at the conclusion that Caesarius owed his election to a combination of nepotism and personal popularity based on a pious reputation. His brand of asceticism – either in spite of its detachment from church-endorsed practices or because of that detachment – appealed to the congregation of Arles providing the *communis consensus* of which Ruricius spoke. Caesarius' position as a maverick may well have worried other bishops who then backed his rival Iohannes. Ultimately, however, the opinion of the people of Arles could not be overcome and it was they, not the Lérins faction, who delivered the see in Caesarius' hands.

Insofar as we may usefully speak of factionalism in terms of Caesarius' career, the only faction whose existence is suggested by the evidence is the hypothetical alliance of established churchmen attempting to undermine Caesarius' election. Their failure to stop the election of someone so divorced from the established church, and the fact that Caesarius could succeed without the support of his "Lérins connections",<sup>673</sup> militates strongly against the existence of Gallic ecclesiastical factionalism, as Mathisen explains it, and against the Lérins faction in particular.

### (c) *Lérins, Pomerius and the formulation of Caesarius' thought*

In this section I will argue that Caesarius' religious outlook – his personal theology, such as it was – stemmed not from the teachings of Lérins but from those of Julius Pomerius. I will contend that our sources, including Pomerius' own *De vita contemplativa*, a dialogue between a bishop named Julian and his advisor (Pomerius himself),<sup>674</sup> provide demonstrable evidence that Caesarius derived his devotion to Cassianic and Augustinian doctrine and his commitment to Christianisation from the principles laid out by Pomerius and not from Lérins. Moreover, I will show that this supports the view that Lérins was neither school nor theological centre and that, therefore, the usual view of Caesarius as heavily influenced by his time at the monastery is mistaken.

After Caesarius had arrived at Arles, two Arlesians named Firminus and Gregoria, "persons with a generosity of spirit",<sup>675</sup> were so impressed with his holiness that they engaged a friend of theirs, the African rhetor Pomerius, to teach him "so that his monastic simplicity might be

<sup>673</sup> Harries (1994) 40-41

<sup>674</sup> Like Markus (1990) 189, I suspect that bishop Julianus is an *alter ego* of Julianus Pomerius.

<sup>675</sup> *Vita Caes.* 1.9, *animo generosae personae*. The *Vita* does not elaborate on the nature of their relationship; Klingshirn (1994b) 13 n.13 says they may be husband and wife while Kaster (1988) 343 prefers to have them as mother and son; either is possible though I favour Klingshirn. On Firminus' aristocratic connexions and possible relationship with Ennodius, see Kaster *loc. cit.* and Klingshirn (1994a) 72, also Stroheker (1947) 156 and *PLRE* 2.471.

polished by the disciplines of secular learning".<sup>676</sup> Caesarius, the *Vita* says, did not take to secular learning but, nevertheless, we find the influences of Pomerius at work in much of what we know of Caesarius' life.

The *Vita*'s contention that Caesarius lacked secular education is extremely unlikely and, indeed, I think that certain of Caesarius' own writings actively militate against the idea that he was an *illiteratus*. In the first place, it simply does not seem likely that the offspring of a noble Gallo-Roman family could reach adulthood in the late fifth century without receiving some kind of education; further, when we look at Caesarius' writings, we see evidence that he was fully conscious of, even if he was not actively involved in, the fifth century aristocratic cultural milieu. Caesarius' *Sermo* 236 includes a short prose paean to Lérins: *Beata, inquam, et felix insula Lyrinensis, quae cum parvula et plana esse videatur, innumerabiles tamen montes ad caelum misisse cognoscitur* ("The blessed and happy island of Lérins, though apparently small and flat, is nevertheless known to have sent countless mountains up to heaven").<sup>677</sup> Motif and language are clearly borrowed from Sidonius *Carmen* 16 which is also about Lérins: *quantos illa insula plana / miserit in caelum montes* ("that flat island has sent so many mountains into the sky").<sup>678</sup> Either Caesarius was familiar enough with the poetry of Sidonius that he could rework and reuse his texts or both he and Sidonius were drawing on a separate third source. Whichever is the case (and I think the former more likely), the result is, I think, the same: Caesarius was familiar with the cultural product of the fifth century Gallo-Roman aristocracy. Necessarily, this means he was educated. One arrives at the same conclusions over Caesarius' use of the Ciceronian literary devices which I discuss below.<sup>679</sup> Riché, too, has found Juvenalian and Vergilian allusions in Caesarius' work.<sup>680</sup>

One asks, then, why the authors of the *Vita* should have gone to such lengths to promote the vision of Caesarius as unlettered and what, exactly, Pomerius taught the future bishop of Arles. The answer must be that Pomerius was engaged to teach *doctrina Christiana*; Caesarius probably arrived at Arles with a poor knowledge of theological learning – something not uncommon amongst contemporary clerics – and his time at Lérins did little to improve his doctrinal awareness. I suspect that Aeonius and his allies felt that Caesarius' claim to the Arlesian throne would be that much stronger if a vision could be promoted of him as a deeply religious figure (rather than as a nest-feathering carpetbagger). His ascetic background at Lérins was valuable in this regard, particularly as it pertains to winning over

<sup>676</sup> *Vita Caes.* 1.9, *ut saecularis scientiae disciplinis monasterialis in eo simplicitas poleretur.*

<sup>677</sup> *Caes., Serm.* 236.1

<sup>678</sup> *Sid. Ap., Carm.*, 16.109-110

<sup>679</sup> Specifically, I discuss the pairing of words in *Sermo* 86.

<sup>680</sup> Cf. Riché (1995) 99

the congregation, but a grounding in complex theology would also have been useful in underscoring his religiosity, in showing, above all to an ecclesiastical audience, that Caesarius was motivated by love of the church and of his clerical vocation, not by mere ambition.

While I would not like to push matters too far, the two named individuals who apparently engaged Pomerius as a teacher – Firminus and Gregoria – were possibly native Arlesians rather than *concives* from Chalon and their part in the hiring of Pomerius may have been intended to demonstrate that Caesarius was a true churchman who should be acceptable to the local aristocracy, not some carpetbagger from Chalon who was in Arles because he was following his successful relatives around. If Aeonius and his allies could demonstrate that Caesarius was friendly with and acceptable to the local nobility, it could have removed one potential stumbling block by diminishing Caesarius' status as an outsider who had migrated to Arles purely to advance his career.

But who was Pomerius? As Leyser puts it, "To moderns, Pomerius himself seems a relatively obscure figure"<sup>681</sup> but he was, nevertheless, significant in his own day, a renowned rhetor<sup>682</sup> who had come to Gaul from Africa to escape the Vandal persecutions<sup>683</sup> and may have been ordained. I will pass over the basic biographical details,<sup>684</sup> which are not necessarily important for my purposes, and move directly to the relationship between Pomerius and his pupil, Caesarius.

To judge from the *Vita*, we might be forgiven for overlooking Pomerius entirely, as he is mentioned only once in the entire text<sup>685</sup> and, in fact, directly after this, the *Vita* recounts a dream, curiously reminiscent of Jerome's, which leads Caesarius to reject worldly learning and, by extension, Pomerius. Perhaps this is why Riché effectively dismisses his impact on Caesarius saying merely that Pomerius may have had "une certain influence" on "son ancien et éphémère élève" (and, indeed, Riché's index contains only two entries under Pomère).<sup>686</sup> Yet the connexion between Pomerius' philosophy, expounded in the *De vita contemplativa*, and Caesarius' own sermons is well established; the resonance between the writings of Pomerius and Caesarius was noted by Arnold (and, to a somewhat lesser extent, Malnory)

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<sup>681</sup> Leyser (2000) 66

<sup>682</sup> Kaster (1988) 342-343

<sup>683</sup> Riché (1995) 32 and Arnold (1894) 82; Leyser (2000) 66 says only that he "may have been a refugee from Vandal persecution".

<sup>684</sup> Kaster *loc. cit.* collates the relevant information and Suelzer (1947) 3-12 provides an outline of his life and works.

<sup>685</sup> *Vita Caes.* 1.9, where he is described dispassionately as, *Erat...quidam Pomerius nomine, scientia rethor, Afer genere.*

<sup>686</sup> Riché (1995) 79

more than a century ago.<sup>687</sup> Even Caesarius' commitment to Augustine was probably the result of Pomerius' influence.<sup>688</sup>

The *De vita contemplativa* poses a question that was enormously relevant in fifth and sixth century Gaul: how could an ascetic bishop reconcile his duties to the congregation with the ascetic desire for withdrawal in pursuit of contemplative holiness? Pomerius' conclusion was not merely that one could reconcile these two dynamics but that one should because the ascetic was uniquely placed to provide moral leadership; his personal sanctity and purity would inspire others while his pastoral duties would bring relief to the lives of his flock and this, in itself, was as virtuous as the contemplative life.<sup>689</sup> The second book of the dialogue acts as a sort of manual on how a good priest ought to behave while the third is a straightforward explanation of the major vices and virtues.<sup>690</sup>

Pomerius' conclusion, that the ascetic was the best spiritual leader for a community and that there was no contradiction between ascetic contemplation and episcopal leadership, validated the *monachus pontificalis*. It spoke of the unique "moral authority available to ascetics in a position of power",<sup>691</sup> so it was naturally attractive to someone like Caesarius; having come from Lérins, an environment that was simply not as rigorous as he wished, Caesarius must have seen Pomerius' teachings as a vindication of his expulsion from the monastery and as a piece of prescriptivism for his own ecclesiastical career telling him to utilise his piety to provide leadership for the wider community. Pomerius' philosophy of the contemplative life demanded that its adherents set about "expounding the Scriptures to people"<sup>692</sup> and that is exactly what Caesarius did. The authors of the *Vita*, in presenting Caesarius as rejecting the forms of learning Pomerius offered, have the effect, as Klingshirn notes, of setting the two men in opposition<sup>693</sup> and, in doing so, they mislead the reader; Caesarius embraced Pomerius' wedding of Augustinian and Cassianic doctrines<sup>694</sup> and his emphasis on the importance of preaching – and thus Christianisation – as the prime function of the bishop.

We see, therefore, considerably more evidence that the three things for which Caesarius is best known – his commitment to Cassianic monasticism, his championing of Augustinian

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<sup>687</sup> Arnold (1894) 122-128

<sup>688</sup> Arnold (1894) 83ff., 115ff.; Malnory (1894) 23

<sup>689</sup> Pomerius, *De vita contemplativa*, 1.25.1

<sup>690</sup> For an introduction to the work, see Leyser (2000) 65ff.

<sup>691</sup> Leyser (2000) 68

<sup>692</sup> Leyser (2000) 71

<sup>693</sup> Klingshirn (1994a) 74

<sup>694</sup> See Arnold (1894) 83-84 on Caesarius having received Augustinian instruction from Pomerius, but cf. Leyser (2000) 83 on Caesarius' promotion of a Cassianic model of works rather than simple Augustinian grace leading to salvation.

orthodoxy at Orange in 529 and his devotion to Christianisation – derived from Pomerius' teachings than from Lérins. Nevertheless, the view that his time at Lérins was seminal, that his worldview was shaped by what he learnt there, continues to be taken as incontrovertible fact by many modern scholars – including, bizarrely, Leyser whose work on Pomerius' influence on Caesarius is so compelling.

Klingshirn, whose 1994 monograph will shape the study of Caesarius for decades to come and who acknowledges the rôle Pomerius played in the wider argument in favour of church reform,<sup>695</sup> says in dreamy language that “the success of Caesarius' life at Lérins should not be measured by what happened there but by what he took away from there: a set of habits, ideas, and values that would have a profound impact on his career as a bishop, preacher, pastor, and reformer”.<sup>696</sup> Yet close examination of Caesarius' career shows no hard evidence that he took anything away from Lérins other, perhaps, than a vague sense that the monks were lacking in ascetic devotion. Caesarius' extant writings and his general commitment to Augustinian doctrine reveal much more of Pomerius' influence than of Lérins'; moreover, this connexion between Pomerius' teachings and Caesarius' outlook as bishop is a fact that has been documented for well over a century.<sup>697</sup> The failure of modern scholars (including Klingshirn and Leyser) to engage more fully with the source of many of Caesarius' attitudes and beliefs lies, I think, in the presumption that Lérins was a great school of Catholic religious thought and that it imparted a particular philosophy on those who passed through its doors so that the Lérinsian “alumni” can be presented not merely as individuals who share an interest in asceticism and the ascetic lifestyle but as a monolithic entity sharing an absolutely uniform spiritual and theological outlook dictated by the experience of Lérins.

One sees this assumption at work throughout Klingshirn's monograph. Discussing the outcome of the second council of Orange, at which Caesarius finally compelled the Gallic church to reject semi-Pelagianism, Klingshirn insists that the outcome represents “a compromise that owed much to Caesarius' own theological sympathies, which were divided between the ‘semi-Pelagianism’ of Lérins and the Augustinianism of Pomerius”.<sup>698</sup> Klingshirn gives voice to a dogmatic assumption that Lérins was not only a centre of semi-Pelagian theology but that Caesarius was so indoctrinated by Lérinsian thought that he was eternally sympathetic to semi-Pelagianism *qua* Lérinsianism. Faced with Caesarius' abolition of semi-

<sup>695</sup> Klingshirn (1994a) 72ff., esp. 75-82

<sup>696</sup> Klingshirn (1994a) 31, cf. p. 8 above on Klingshirn's Lérinsian fruits.

<sup>697</sup> Especially by Arnold (1894) 83-84, 122-128 and Malnory (1894); more recently, Leyser (2000) has written at length about Pomerius' influence on the religious *milieu* of southern Gaul generally (in his third chapter, 65ff.) and on Caesarius particularly (in his fourth chapter, 81ff.).

<sup>698</sup> Klingshirn (1994a) 142

Pelagianism and, thus, the eradication of this alleged Lérinsian theological tradition, Klingshirn presents it as a “compromise” so that Caesarius appears more as a saviour of Lérins than as its enemy, as someone who brings together Lérinsian thought and the established doctrines of the church. Clearly, Klingshirn’s interpretation cannot stand.

There has often been what Leyser describes as a dogmatic interpretation of Caesarius as a champion of Augustinianism at Orange<sup>699</sup> and while this interpretation certainly lacked nuance,<sup>700</sup> Klingshirn’s view of Caesarius as a Lérinsian product – or in Leyser’s words as an “alumnus” of his Lérinsian “alma mater”<sup>701</sup> – is no less *doctrinaire*, no less a dogmatic presumption without basis in the evidence. In fact, when we look at the canons of Orange,<sup>702</sup> we see that the doctrines Caesarius presented and forced through in 529 were derived from *capitula* sent from Rome;<sup>703</sup> in other words, Caesarius was not an agent of Lérins but of the papacy and the wider church. As a Gallic ascetic, Caesarius was sympathetic to Cassian’s monastic doctrines – although this should not be construed as a sign that he was a closeted semi-Pelagian – and one can hardly doubt that he was eager to bring about a synthesis of the Cassianic ideologies so prevalent in Gallic monasticism and the teachings of Augustine to whom Caesarius and the wider church owed much.<sup>704</sup> But for Caesarius it was Pomerius, not Lérins, who brought together “the contrasting approaches of Augustine and Cassian”.<sup>705</sup>

Does the second council of Orange represent a “compromise”? It does not. Caesarius’ alleged semi-Pelagian sympathy and partiality for his “alma mater” cannot be proved unless one wishes to treat his so-called moderate approach to Augustinianism as evidence. Yet the qualified Augustinianism (or “augustinisme intermédiaire”<sup>706</sup>) that emerged from Orange was hardly unique to Gaul and, as Cappuyns demonstrated and, indeed, as Caesarius bluntly says in the preface to the canons of Orange, derived largely from the reading of Augustine favoured at Rome and promoted by Pope Hormisdas.<sup>707</sup> Moreover, the only moderate characteristic attending Caesarius’ interpretation of Augustine is in its rejection of the

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<sup>699</sup> Leyser (2000) 82-83

<sup>700</sup> Cf. D. Wright (1991) 161

<sup>701</sup> Leyser (1999) 189

<sup>702</sup> I discuss the outcome of this council – and all of Caesarius’ councils of the 520s – at length in chapter eight.

<sup>703</sup> Cappuyns (1934) 124-125; Markus (1989) 225; *Capitula sancti Augustini in urbem Romam transmissa*, CCSL 85A (1978) ed. F. Glorie, 251-273

<sup>704</sup> Cf. Klingshirn (1994a) 91 on Caesarius’ enactment of Augustinian reforms, 142-143 on sermons of Caesarius modelled on those of Augustine.

<sup>705</sup> Leyser (2000) 68

<sup>706</sup> Cappuyns (1934) 126

<sup>707</sup> Markus (1989) 225; although based of Hormisdas’ reading, it was Felix IV who actually transmitted them to Caesarius.

extreme predestinarian doctrine.<sup>708</sup> However, as we see from the *capitula sancti Augustini*, the moderate Augustinian view was actually the one favoured by the wider church. Markus argues that Augustine's influence on Pomerius (and by extension, I suppose, Pomerius' influence on Caesarius) was limited, that the influence did not extend to "the doctrine of predestination" and notes instead "the stress laid on aspects of Augustine most acceptable to the Lérinese milieu"<sup>709</sup> but this misses the point: there were not many sixth century churchmen anywhere in the west arguing in favour of a strict predestinarian message and we certainly have no evidence that either Caesarius or Hormisdas ever sympathised with such an absolutist message; when Leyser speaks of the superficiality of Caesarius' devotion to Augustine by contrast with his veneration for Cassian,<sup>710</sup> it is a superficiality that was nearly universal amongst western churchmen.

The insistence that Lérins was the source of Caesarius' qualified Augustinianism has no basis. Not only was qualified Augustinianism *not* unique to Lérins, it was not unusual in the contemporary church; churchmen at Rome, including popes, promoted such an interpretation, despite having no connexion to Lérins. We see that the evidence does not support Klingshirn's contention that the canons of Orange were a "compromise" brought about by Caesarius' background at Lérins.

The faulty explanations of Klingshirn and others for Caesarius' actions at Orange derive from their own construction of elaborate but defective theories about the existence of a Lérinsian faction, the epic rôle that they assign to Lérins in shaping doctrinal beliefs and the idea that Caesarius, having spent time there, was necessarily influenced in everything he did as bishop by his Lérinsian experiences (despite his time there having been short and his experiences largely unhappy – not least for the other monks). Faced with the unpalatable fact that the man who destroyed Gallic semi-Pelagianism forever and compelled the Gallic church to endorse Augustinian doctrine was an "alumnus" of the very institution which is most connected with semi-Pelagianism (an institution which was allegedly home to an alliance of clerics who worked to further the interests and careers of the alumni of Lérins), these scholars seem to fall back on special pleading whereby Caesarius' conduct at Orange, which completely undermines the notion that the so-called alumni of Lérins were all committed semi-Pelagians inspired by affection for their alma mater, is rewritten and his endorsement of conventional Augustinianism (which excises the predestinarian elements) is presented not as a victory for Rome and the established church but as a sign of Caesarius' continued devotion to Lérinsian

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<sup>708</sup> Cf. Daly (1970) 7, 22

<sup>709</sup> Markus (1989) 233, n.53

<sup>710</sup> Leyser (1999) 204

semi-Pelagianism. Klingshirn and others tell us that Caesarius did not actually erase semi-Pelagianism from Gaul; rather, he modified Augustinianism forever and so brought the semi-Pelagian rejection of predestination into the mainstream of church doctrine.

It is understandable that scholars so committed to the image of Caesarius as a product of Lérins should engineer such solutions; after all, how else can we explain why two alumni of Lérins, Faustus of Riez and Caesarius of Arles, who, according to the usual orthodoxy and Mathisen's thesis of ecclesiastical factionalism, ought to be working together, find themselves on opposite sides of a debate over the very future of Lérinsian theology, the theology inculcated by their "alma mater", the theology of which both ought to be devoted exponents?

In the end, however, the orthodox interpretation is neither convincing nor supported by the sources. It hangs together only if one skews the evidence. In a very real sense, such evidence as we possess shows that Caesarius was not a semi-Pelagian, that he felt no particular affection for Lérins (other than in his formulaic regurgitation of Sidonius' *pacan*), that his time at Lérins did not have any real impact on his personal development or thought and that his religious outlook was derived from the teachings of Pomerius in Arles not the teachings of the monks of Lérins.

### *Conclusion*

We have seen, in this chapter, that the monasteries of Gaul were not great theological centres, that the monks who lived in them were rarely profound theological thinkers and that Lérins, in particular, has been built up for a long time into something greater than it actually was, something for which there is no evidence. Lérins was not home to a great school or a fine library and it did not export trained theologians; Caesarius, during his time at Lérins, was not trained in semi-Pelagian theology and, in fact, he never, during his career, espoused semi-Pelagianism.

Few people in contemporary Gaul, whether monks or otherwise, actually demonstrated much knowledge of theology or much interest in the formalised study of doctrine and Scripture. Exceptions exist – Faustus of Riez, Victor of Lérins and Claudianus Mamertus, to name only three – but they stand out precisely because they *were* exceptions, because they devoted their time to doctrinal treatises instead of letters and poetry, like their episcopal peers. We can recognise this only when we treat the individuals whose work has survived to us as creatures of fifth and sixth century Gaul, people rooted in the sub-Roman world with a perspective on religion that differs from the modern. When we take the opposite approach and try, as I believe Courcelle, Klingshirn and others have, to make an unbroken link between modern

Catholicism and that of late antiquity – and, by extension, between the Gallic bishops and modern Catholic intellectuals – we necessarily find ourselves insisting, in the face of the evidence, that these bishops were deep-thinking theologians with a wide-ranging understanding of doctrinal issues when, plainly, they were not.

Most churchmen of the period were comparatively uninformed on the complex details of doctrine. They rarely undertook the forensic study of theology and rarely suffered for it, because a detailed knowledge of theology was not a prerequisite either for gaining a *cathedra* or for carrying out episcopal duties. Moreover, if one were elected to the episcopate, there was little to gain and, as we see from the contretemps between Faustus, Sidonius and Claudianus Mamertus, potentially much to lose by making noise about theological topics. It was better – and safer – to maintain a discreet silence about theology, to draw one's ideas not from the great doctors of the church but from one's peers and from established conventions and, above all, to avoid controversy.

From the career of Caesarius, we derive evidence which supports the vision of Gaul which I have presented. Instead of a land where monastic schools turn out theological graduates who go on to conquer the episcopacy, all the while supporting their old monastic chums and venerating their *alma mater*, we see a Gaul where the monastery's only real function was as an ascetic place of retreat, a Gaul where a bishop was more likely to be *au fait* with Vergil than with Pelagius or Augustine, where theology was not a matter that bishops, favouring conformity and conservatism, discussed much amongst themselves, where so-called factions mattered far less in pursuit of a *cathedra* than one's ability to impress the congregation with one's piety. Above all, it was a place where a man who had been thrown out of Lérins could become a bishop, purely on the basis of kinship and personal reputation.

At the same time, we must understand the church's natural fear of and dislike for charismatic holy men whose ostentatious displays could undermine the hold of church and bishop over a community; Sidonius' comment that he admired "the priestly man more than the priest" was the articulation of a widely-held opinion.<sup>711</sup> The right to lead a religious community ultimately derived from that community's acceptance of one's religious merit. For ambitious aristocrats who felt that leadership was their birthright but were unwilling to make careers in the barbarian *regna*, the monastery was the forge in which they could fashion an ascetic vision of themselves. Thus, it was not the school of Lérins that attracted new monks or taught them how to become bishops; rather, the monastery's reputation for austerity and devotion

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<sup>711</sup> Sid. Ap., Ep., 4.9.5, *plus ego admiror sacerdotalem virum quam sacerdotem*, referring to Vettius or Vectius.

gave its occupants a patina of ascetic respectability with which to impress congregations. For Caesarius, the truthful claim that he was so rigorous that he could outshine even Lérins must have been a valuable addition to his armoury in the battle for control of Arles.

Monasteries produced bishops because communities increasingly demanded ascetics as their leaders. The rôle of saintly *Vitae* in promoting the view that the ascetic was uniquely well-qualified to lead, while not something specifically within the purview of this thesis, is not to be underestimated and we can see in the *Vita Caesarii* how the biographers emphasised Caesarius' ascetic experiences in order to justify his ascension to the privileged position of bishop.<sup>712</sup> But the monastery was not a school and it was not a meeting place; factions, insofar as they existed, derived from the bonds of family not from shared monastic experience. Above all, the monastery, and perhaps Lérins more than any other, was a vehicle for the ambitious.

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<sup>712</sup> Hayward (1999) 127 suggests that “[m]any *Vitae*...originated within aristocratic households” for the “celebration of their subject’s feasts”; while I certainly recognise that churchmen composed poetry for saints’ holy days (e.g., Paulinus of Nola), the reduction of *Vitae* to pieces of aristocratic theatre goes too far in my opinion.

## Chapter Seven

### *Caesarius and the barbarians*

In this chapter, I examine Caesarius' relationship with barbarians in the period 507-529. I will show how Caesarius endeavoured to make use of the barbarians to advance his own ecclesiastical agenda, to counter his political opponents and to promote his personal authority within his own see and the wider Gallic church.

I will discuss the events which brought Arles (both the city and the see) under Ostrogothic control and then discuss Caesarius' relationship with the Ostrogothic king and the pope; in the following chapter, I will discuss the series of church councils called by Caesarius during the 520s, when the whole of the metropolitan see of Arles was under Ostrogothic rule, and demonstrate how Caesarius made use of the political realities of the day in pursuing his ecclesiastical programme. We will see, in both chapters, exactly how aware Caesarius was of the Gallic *Realpolitik* and how willing he was to engage in plots and conspiracies if it advanced his position and authority within the church. At the same time, we will see that, for all his political amorality, Caesarius was not always a particularly adept player and that, more than once, he was outmanoeuvred by barbarians and backed the wrong political horse. For all his willingness to play politics, I hope to show that Caesarius, ultimately, was not able to function effectively within the complex political environment of post-Roman Gaul and Italy. In the end, we will see that Caesarius attained his ambitions only because they happened to correspond to the political outcomes either sought by the Visigothic and Ostrogothic kings.

#### (a) *Caesarius in Visigothic Arles: siege, treason and spin*

Having been consecrated bishop of Visigothic Arles in December 502, it was not long before Caesarius experienced personally the scale of barbarian royal power in his city and over his person. In 504/5, a cleric named Licinianus reported to the Visigoths that Caesarius, who had been born in Burgundian-controlled Chalon, was an agent of the Burgundians.<sup>713</sup> It was probably not just his birthplace which counted against him but, rather, that the realities of contemporary ecclesiastical politics placed the bishop of Arles under *ex officio* suspicion. The Burgundian-ruled see of Vienne enjoyed effective control of eleven dioceses north of the Durance which were traditionally (and legally) part of the metropolitan see of Arles and it is reasonable to imagine that, had Arles fallen to the Burgundians, Caesarius might have hoped or expected to regain control over them. This could not have escaped the Visigoths and may

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<sup>713</sup> *Vita Caes.* 1.21

have raised suspicions about Caesarius' loyalties, about his willingness perhaps to seek an accommodation with the Burgundians in the hope of regaining control of Arles' lost dioceses.<sup>714</sup> Situations like this were not necessarily unusual in the Visigothic kingdom of Alaric II; other bishops were similarly accused and exiled.<sup>715</sup>

Caesarius was exiled to Bordeaux in 505 but released to return to Arles in 506;<sup>716</sup> it was a very short exile and the release probably the result of internal Visigothic politics.<sup>717</sup> Its effect must have been to underline, to Caesarius and his congregants, the degree of barbarian control over the church leadership – and, since bishops at this time were functioning as the *de facto* leadership of the Gallo-Roman *civitates*, it also emphasised the subordination of Romans to the barbarian kings. But, in any case, Caesarius' return to his diocese was marked by celebrations;<sup>718</sup> according to *Vita*, the congregants, outraged by their bishop's exile, decided to stone his accuser, Licinianus, to death,<sup>719</sup> a Biblical punishment, as Klingshirn says, for those who had borne false witness.<sup>720</sup> Caesarius, though, intervened and forgave his betrayer.

Needless to say, we cannot assume that the *Vita* provides unvarnished truth in this or in other matters;<sup>721</sup> it may well be the case that Caesarius' return to Arles was not universally celebrated, that Licinianus was not unique in disliking the bishop and that there were others – possibly adherents of the ephemeral Iohannes from the episcopal *fasti* – who would have been glad to see an end to Caesarius' tenure. Having said that, it is reasonably safe to assume, given Caesarius' heavily ascetic background and reputation, that the popular sentiment in Arles – that is to say, the opinion of most ordinary congregants rather than of aristocrats or other clerics – was broadly in favour of Caesarius and welcomed his return.

In September 506, not long after Caesarius' homecoming, a council was convened at Agde; while the council itself is not vital to my argument, I would like to examine four points which arise from it. First, this council was attended by twenty-four bishops from regions "wholly or partly under Visigothic control",<sup>722</sup> which highlights the degree to which episcopal authority

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<sup>714</sup> Schäferdiek (1967) 38

<sup>715</sup> Klingshirn (1994a) 93-94

<sup>716</sup> Other interesting exiles of the period include Volusianus and Verus, both bishops of Tours sent to Toulouse (or possibly Spain) because they were suspected of conspiring with the Franks.

<sup>717</sup> Schäferdiek (1967) 57-59

<sup>718</sup> *Vita Caes.* 1.26

<sup>719</sup> *Vita Caes.* 1.24

<sup>720</sup> Klingshirn (1994a) 96

<sup>721</sup> Cf. Klingshirn (1985) 187, where the "authenticity and historical value of *Vita Caesarii* may be fairly said to be beyond doubt"; see esp. n. 37 "Even Krusch, whom Morin once called 'ce terrible critique', accepted the authenticity of the *Vita*". I am, predictably, less sanguine in this respect than Klingshirn, Krusch or Morin.

<sup>722</sup> Klingshirn (1994a) 97

(and perhaps also episcopal collegiality) was circumscribed by the political borders of the *regna* and, by extension, the degree to which the claims and theoretical boundaries of metropolitan authority were no longer relevant unless they happened to correspond to practical royal boundaries. Second, Agde shows the connexion that existed, in Caesarius' mind, between council attendance and episcopal authority; Caesarius demonstrated, not only by attending the council but also by taking a lead in condemning Ruricius of Limoges for non-attendance, that his return from exile was complete and that he had been restored to full authority. Thirdly, the council was an opportunity for Caesarius to resurrect, in the presence of other churchmen, Arles' old metropolitan claims to sees which lay in the Burgundian kingdom, beyond the political control of the Visigoths and of Caesarius himself; the other bishops attending the council legitimised Caesarius' claims by their mere presence. Lastly, Agde anticipates the council of Orléans of 511; both were called by barbarian kings, not by churchman, and were circumscribed by the political geography of barbarian Gaul (that is to say, they were attended only bishops from within a specific *regnum* rather than by all bishops in the region). All four of these points recur in significant fashion in Caesarius' later career and in the councils he himself held.

In 507 the Visigoths found themselves at war with an alliance of Franks and Burgundians egged on by the emperor Anastasius. War soon came to Arles itself as a Franco-Burgundian army besieged the city and its Visigothic garrison. What followed is interesting and, depending how events are interpreted, may shed light on Caesarius' political sympathies and also on the earlier affair with Licinianus.

As the siege progressed, a relative of Caesarius – another of Aeonius' clan of kinsmen from Chalon (*quidam e clericis concivis et consanguineus ipsius*)<sup>723</sup> – slipped out of the city by night and into the Burgundian camp. The *Vita Caesarii* could not be any clearer in its simultaneous disavowal of Caesarius' involvement and pardon of the traitor – the man acted only from *timor captivitatis* brought about by *levitas iuvenilis*<sup>724</sup> – but the people and garrison of the city assumed that Caesarius had sent his kinsman out to betray Arles and so arrested him. Not long after, the *Vita* claims, a unit of Jewish soldiers guarding part of the wall of Arles wrote a letter to the Burgundians: they would allow the besiegers to mount their section of the walls in return for Jewish exemption from plunder and enslavement following the city's capture.<sup>725</sup> The letter was found and Caesarius promptly released; apparently, everything had been the fault of the Jews whose perfidy had now been exposed.

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<sup>723</sup> *Vita Caes.* 1.29

<sup>724</sup> *Vita Caes.* 1.29

<sup>725</sup> *Vita Caes.* 1.31

The narrative of the siege of Arles, Caesarius' arrest and redemption and Jewish duplicity is an uncomfortable one, particularly in view of modern sensibilities. It is impossible not to see a deeply unpleasant strain of anti-Jewish malice in the *Vita*'s account which is not merely tendentious but surely mendacious. And yet, for modern Catholic scholars, it must be equally uncomfortable to discuss the possibility that St Caesarius and his followers lied and betrayed and, when caught, placed the blame on innocent people. It is this discomfort and, I imagine, probably also a desire to avoid appearing to undermine a major figure in Catholic history which led the Jewish scholar Katz to throw the baby out with the bathwater by dismissing the whole account of the siege as a hagiographical fabrication which should stain the honour of neither Jews nor Caesarius.<sup>726</sup>

One major function – perhaps *the* major function – of the *Vita Caesarii* was to defend Caesarius' actions, to paint over his (surprisingly numerous) questionable actions; the *Vita* is a work of spin, in its purest form, and the account of the siege is only fully understood when read within that context. The *Vita* is neither true historiography nor true hagiography; rather, it is the political biography of a leader who gained power amidst acrimony and partisan squabbling, whose career was marked by conflict with other bishops and whose controversial actions on the episcopal throne did not always meet with widespread approval.

Within the particular context of the siege of Arles, one notes that Caesarius' death – and the composition of the *Vita* – came less than thirty-five years after the siege occurred and that there must still have been living witnesses to events; accounts must have circulated at the time – and must still have been circulating when the *Vita* was written – which set Caesarius in a less than wholesome light. The *Vita*, then, is an attempt at answering such accusations by laying out an authoritative version of events, a version exonerating Caesarius (who becomes a second Daniel) and implicating the Jews and some anonymous relative whose behaviour is explained away as a youthful indiscretion caused by fear.

But the falsity of the account given in the *Vita* is all too patent. Caesarius' young unnamed relative – and it is interesting that here, as in the tale of Caesarius' arrival at Arles, we find yet more of this Chalon-based clan operating within the Arlesian church – was almost certainly sent out either by Caesarius or, at the very least, with Caesarius' approval to effect an alliance with the Burgundians. It seems very likely that Licinianus' accusations against Caesarius were based in reality and that the siege was not the first occasion on which Caesarius had

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<sup>726</sup> Katz (1937) 115

attempted to conspire with the Burgundians. However, on this occasion too, Caesarius' machinations were exposed so the *Vita* placed all blame for the treason onto the one group, as Klingshirn says, Arians and Catholics alike could happily condemn – the Jews.<sup>727</sup> It was, of course, not necessary for the Jews actually to have done anything. In fact, Katz may be a little closer to the mark here than Klingshirn; the latter assumes that the conspiracy to blame the Jews arose during the siege and, while this could be true, it could equally be the case – as I believe – that the allegations against the Jews arose not in 508 but much later; they may even have originated with Cyprianus, author of the *Vita*.

As for the reason behind Caesarius' dalliances with the Burgundians, one can discern why such an association would have been politically advantageous. At the most basic level, Burgundian control over Arles and the whole of the lower Rhône valley would have reunited Caesarius and metropolitan Arles with the lost suffragan dioceses beyond the Durance; thus, a Burgundian victory advanced Caesarius' episcopal authority. It is not necessarily the case that Caesarius 'liked' the pro-Roman Burgundians any more than the Visigoths or that he felt greater affinity towards them; it is simply that the Burgundian *regnum* offered him an opportunity for Arles to preside over a united province for the first time in a generation.

As it happens, it was neither the Burgundians nor the Visigoths (nor, for that matter, the Franks) who were to gain control over Arles but the Ostrogoths under Theoderic and it was, moreover, within the context of the Ostrogothic kingdom and the Ostrogothic political *milieu* that the rest of Caesarius' career was to take place.

#### (b) *Caesarius under Ostrogothic rule: ransoms, plots and a trip to Italy*

In 508, an Ostrogothic army under the *dux* Ibbas crossed the Alps and relieved the siege of Arles.<sup>728</sup> They did not stop there. In the aftermath of Vouillé, when the Visigothic army was roundly beaten by the Franks, the Ostrogoths absorbed parts of the Visigothic kingdom in Gaul with Theoderic becoming regent on behalf of the late Alaric II's grandson, Amalaric; the Burgundians, meanwhile, were reduced to a kind of vassalage.<sup>729</sup> These political changes meant that metropolitan Arles' ruler had changed but she still remained cut off from her

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<sup>727</sup> Klingshirn (1994a) 109-110

<sup>728</sup> Jordanes, *Getica*, 302

<sup>729</sup> Heather (1996) 231-233; Jordanes, *Getica*, 302 says that "so long as Theoderic lived, he maintained the Visigoths" (*et usque dum viveret, Wisigothas continuit*), a reference to his rôle as regent although *continuit* might, hypothetically, mean that he "checked" Visigothic power.

subordinate dioceses north of the Durance, which may have been behind Caesarius' refusal to convene any church councils until 524.<sup>730</sup>

Theoderic, aspiring to imperial status and keen to emulate Roman practice, reconstituted the praetorian prefecture of Gaul in his newly-acquired territory and appointed Liberius, a Roman patrician and former praetorian prefect of Italy, to the post.<sup>731</sup> Fortifications were laid down along the Durance,<sup>732</sup> implying not only that the Ostrogoths planned to maintain their presence in Provence indefinitely but that the Ostrogothic monarchy had, at this time, no interest in further expansion beyond the Durance. In practice, the change in rulership had comparatively little impact on Caesarius' position – he remained the leader of a province split in two by the boundaries of the *regna*.

Sensitivity to the status of his nominal dioceses in the Burgundian *regnum* may have been behind some of Caesarius' post-war activities. The *Vita* tells us that Caesarius used church furnishings to buy the freedom of Burgundian prisoners taken during the late hostilities;<sup>733</sup> in his sermons, we can actually hear the words of Caesarius exhorting the people of Arles to follow his example by donating their own money for this purpose.<sup>734</sup> The ransoming of these captives was controversial; the captives were enemies in the service of an heretical barbarian king who had, very recently, besieged Arles, a siege which carried with it the fear of sack and enslavement. The alienation of church property to purchase the freedom of such people seems almost designed to provoke a reaction.<sup>735</sup> Caesarius responded with arguments of a spiritual and religious nature which Klingshirn has neatly summarised,<sup>736</sup> but which are all essentially variations on the arguments put forward in the sermons. His articulated justification for the ransoming derived from biblical principles, often drawn from Ambrose and interpreted

<sup>730</sup> Cf. Klingshirn (1994a) 136-137; Pontal (1986) 51

<sup>731</sup> Jones (1964) 250-251; *PLRE* 2.499-500; Malnory (1894) 113 places Liberius' appointment no earlier than 513/4

<sup>732</sup> Cass., *Variae*, 3.41 on *castella super Druentiam constituta*; cf. Malnory (1894) 131-133

<sup>733</sup> *Vita Caes.* 1.31

<sup>734</sup> Caesarius, *Serm.* 30.4 (*ille vero qui captivos redimere et pauperes pascere vel vestire non praevallet, contra nullum hominem odium in corde reservet*), 35.4 (*nonne operante misericordia praebetur hospitalitas peregrinis, aluntur famelici, nudi vestiuntur, inopes adiuvantur, captivi redimuntur...*), 39.1 (*Si se pauper quisque voluerit excusare, quod esurientem pascere, nudum vestire, captivum liberare non possit...*); cf. Sid. Ap., *Ep.*, 4.11.4. It is interesting and possibly significant that, in his sermons, Caesarius' exhortations to ransom captives are always set amidst more general exhortations to do charitable works – probably an attempt to de-politicise the redemption of enemy prisoners.

<sup>735</sup> Caesarius, in the sermons cited, does actually stress the need for Christians to love their enemies (e.g., *Serm.* 30.4, *et inimicis suis non solum malum pro malo non reddat, sed etiam diligat, et pro eis orare non desinat: certus de promissione vel de misericordia domini sui, libera conscientia ante tribunal Christi dicere poterit: 'Da, domine, quia dedi'* – "The man who not only does not return evil for evil but actually loves his enemies and does not let up in his prayers for them: he will be sure of the promise and mercy of his Lord and, with a guiltless conscience, he can say before the tribunal of Christ: 'Give, Lord, as I gave'.")

<sup>736</sup> Klingshirn (1994a) 115

through the late Roman Christian lens of the episcopal patron. However, one particular argument is entirely Caesarius' own: failure to redeem these captives will leave them vulnerable to conversion by Arians and Jews who might buy them as slaves.<sup>737</sup> Beck therefore saw "significant pastoral thought" in the ransoming as Caesarius tries to save souls from Jewish or heretical contamination.<sup>738</sup>

There is, however, more to the story. Modern sources seem to accept blindly that the captives were, as Klingshirn calls them, "Arians and pagans"<sup>739</sup> which, given that they had fought in the Burgundian and Frankish armies, might not seem unreasonable. However, this does not square with Caesarius' concern that no "rational man redeemed by the blood of Christ" should be exposed to heresy.<sup>740</sup> If the captives were already Arians, one might hope to convert them but one would certainly not fear their being exposed to heresy. Klingshirn recognised this and argued that the captives must have been Frankish pagans but, to my eyes, this is unconvincing, for three reasons: first, it seems unlikely that the Burgundian king would be so concerned about the captivity of Frankish warriors (who were, after all, soldiers of a rival king and, though erstwhile allies, potential future enemies) that he would, for example, send grain ships to keep them fed.<sup>741</sup> Second, it does not seem likely that a Roman bishop writing for a Gallo-Roman audience would describe pagan Frankish barbarians as *rationabiles homines*. Such language is that typically used to describe Romans; Romans, after all, in classical ideology, were reasonable, rational humans who had mastered their passions whereas barbarians were temperamental, driven by whim and mastered by their passions.<sup>742</sup> Even if Caesarius was able to conceive of Frankish barbarians as "rational men", which is unlikely and absolutely cannot be assumed, it seems impossible that he could have described them as such before a Gallo-Roman congregation. Third, and finally, we come back to the fact that the prisoners are described as "having been redeemed by the blood of Christ" and Caesarius is particularly concerned about *servi Dei* being turned into *servi hominum*; yet there is no context within which a pagan could be described either as *redemptus sanguine Christi* or as *servus Dei*.

<sup>737</sup> *Vita Caes.* 1.32

<sup>738</sup> Beck (1950) 340

<sup>739</sup> Klingshirn (1994a) 115; cf. Brown (1996) 107 contending that those ransomed were "thousands of uprooted peasants".

<sup>740</sup> *Vita Caes.* 1.32, *hoc vir Dei dicens: 'ne rationabilis homo sanguine Christi redemptus, perditio libertatis statu, pro obnoxietate aut Arrianus forsitan efficiatur aut Iudaeus aut ex ingenuo servus aut ex Dei servo hominis'*. ("Thus the man of God spoke: 'Let no rational man, redeemed by the blood of Christ, with his liberty having been lost, perhaps be made, through his servile state, either an Arian or a Jew, nor let a slave be made from a freeborn man or a servant of man from a servant of God'.")

<sup>741</sup> *Vita Caes.* 2.8-9

<sup>742</sup> Woolf (1994) 84; Heather (1999) 236

It seems likely, therefore, that some – and, to judge from Caesarius' description, most or all – of the captives were not heretics or pagans at all; at least some of them were Gallo-Roman Catholics enrolled in the Burgundian army. We know that the Visigothic army at Vouillé contained a sizable Roman contingent<sup>743</sup> and that the Visigothic *Forum iudicum* sets out the Roman liability for military service under Wamba quite clearly (as well as the punishments for anyone – “Goth, Roman, freeman or freedman” – who fails to enlist when ordered).<sup>744</sup> We even know that the Visigothic army which besieged Sidonius' Clermont contained Romans.<sup>745</sup> Given that the Burgundians enjoyed a far friendlier relationship with the Romans than the Visigoths ever had and that, besides, the Burgundian population was smaller than the Visigothic (and, hence, in a more parlous state regarding military manpower), it is perfectly reasonable to imagine that the Burgundian *rex* would have depended heavily on Roman recruits for his campaigns, which may explain Burgundian enthusiasm for Roman military titles.<sup>746</sup>

If the captives were actually Catholic Romans, it would explain Caesarius' concern over their possible conversion to another religion and it would also add another element to Caesarius' decision to redeem them. The dioceses in the Burgundian kingdom beyond the Durance, whatever their theoretical suffragan status to Arles, were, in practice, subordinate to Vienne; Caesarius, in other words, was an irrelevance in the Burgundian kingdom. By redeeming Catholic captives, however, and sending them back to their homes, Caesarius made himself extremely relevant; he turned himself into the superlative patron who, in the moment of crisis, saved freeborn Christian men from slavery at the hands of heretics and Jews. The redemption of these captives meant that there would be a pool of individuals in the Burgundian *regnum* who were heavily indebted to Caesarius, something with the potential to be useful if, at some future date, Caesarius were to find himself in a position to press his claims against Vienne. At the same time, by freeing soldiers who had fought in the Burgundian army, Caesarius also established his friendly intentions towards the Gibichung monarchy and, to some extent, put them in his debt.

Furthermore, redemption of captives from north of the Durance sent a strong message that Caesarius considered the region to be part of his bailiwick.<sup>747</sup> It stated unequivocally that the

<sup>743</sup> Greg. Tur., *Hist. Franc.*, 11.37

<sup>744</sup> *Forum iudicum*, 9.2.8-9

<sup>745</sup> Sid. Ap., *Ep.*, 6.12 on Calminius who was, according to Sidonius, forced to fight for the Goths against his will; whether this is a means by which Sidonius covered for his friend's barbarisation or whether it was the truth (in whatever degree), the point remains that Gallo-Romans fought under Gothic colours at Clermont.

<sup>746</sup> Cf. Avitus, *Ep.* 9, 93

<sup>747</sup> Cf. Klingshirn (1985) 192ff.

people of the region were his responsibility and that, whatever the niceties of contemporary political boundaries, he was not willing to abandon his responsibilities. It would have had the effect of portraying Caesarius as a man profoundly committed to his flock, a bishop who was willing to put religious obligations to the faithful ahead of the finer points of politics (by which I mean the fact that the ransomed captives were recent enemies from a different kingdom) and who courted unpopularity at home for the sake of fulfilling what he considered to be his episcopal duties. The whole business of ransoming captives was, in many ways, a masterstroke in defining Caesarius and his character; in the eyes of the congregations, north and south of the Durance, and of the barbarian courts, Caesarius' piety and his commitment to religious duty were established. Even those who objected to ransoming enemies were effectively silenced by Caesarius' appeal to biblical and ecclesiastical principles. But, as I said, apart from spiritual prestige, Caesarius also stood to gain supporters in the severed northern dioceses, supporters who would feel a debt to the man who freed them but who would also think, from a purely self-interested outlook, that a bishop with Caesarius' attitude – one whose was energetic in looking after his congregants – would be a useful thing, that Caesarius would make an excellent and attentive episcopal patron.

In addition to this, Caesarius' active involvement in freeing the Burgundian king's soldiers was, more or less, as a statement of future political fealty. Caesarius was expressing his willingness to serve the Gibichungs; he demonstrated a sense of allegiance to the Burgundian monarchy and its interests by assisting them, even in the face of hostility from his own congregation. To understand why Caesarius felt the need to make such a declaration, we must apprehend the close relationship between the Burgundian monarchs and Avitus of Vienne, Caesarius' great rival for control of the dioceses beyond the Durance.

Avitus acted as what we might call an unofficial chancellor for the Burgundian kings; he drafted diplomatic correspondence, disputed religion and even converted Sigismund to Catholicism. Avitus existed at the very heart of the Burgundian court and enjoyed the closest of relationships with the *reges*. Caesarius must have been aware of this and conscious, therefore, that, should metropolitan Arles ever be annexed to the Burgundian *regnum*, Avitus was not certain simply to surrender the eleven dioceses he currently governed and might well have called upon the Burgundian king to intervene. If Caesarius was to be certain of seeing the lost dioceses returned, he could not rely just on episcopal law – or even papal decree – which might endorse his claim; he would, in fact, need a cordial relationship with the barbarian king in whose domain the disputed dioceses lay. That such a relationship either existed or was on the verge of blossoming is demonstrated by, amongst other things, Gundobad's dispatch of a number of grain ships to feed Burgundian soldiers in Arles who

could not be ransomed;<sup>748</sup> Caesarius' efforts were appreciated and recognised by the Burgundians and they did what they could to support his work. They could not, obviously, have sent money to assist Caesarius, as that would very likely have been seen as treasonous by the Ostrogoths, so they sent food instead which would have been much less contentious but no less useful.

Overall, Caesarius' handling of the business of ransoming brought him – as was probably intended – political capital in his lost dioceses and at the Burgundian court. Within Arles itself, use of church property in this way may have helped to advance Caesarius' programme for the construction of a women's monastery. The first iteration of a women's monastery, to be governed by the bishop's sister Caesaria,<sup>749</sup> had been built, Klingshirn argues, prior to 508<sup>750</sup> and burnt down during the siege of Arles before it was completed.<sup>751</sup> By unilaterally employing church property to ransom Burgundian captives, Caesarius created a precedent that would allow him to use his diocese's funds to rebuild the women's monastery. The canons of Agde, which dealt with issues relating to church property, granted bishops the right to alienate church property only if the property was small and of little value;<sup>752</sup> to alienate anything greater, the agreement of two other bishops was required.<sup>753</sup> The care of church property, thus, lay entirely in the hands of bishops while the wider Christian community was theoretically shut out of the decision-making process. The programme of ransoming captives allowed Caesarius to put the canons of Agde into action and to establish, in the minds of the congregation, that he, as bishop, possessed the final authority over the use and disposition of the diocese's property. Further, Caesarius' apparent lack of regard for the accumulated capital of his diocese – his willingness to spend large sums of money, to strip churches of their furnishings and to sell land in the furtherance of his programmes – may also have cast Caesarius, in the eyes of congregants and clerics alike, as a deeply unworldly man whose concern for doing good works and executing episcopal duties made him overlook the practical (and worldly) element.

Be that as it may, Caesarius' conduct was obviously not going to be universally popular. There must have been people, inside the church and out, who were angered or troubled by Caesarius' apparent fiscal recklessness. Klingshirn even suggests that Caesarius' arrest for

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<sup>748</sup> *Vita Caes.* 2.8-9

<sup>749</sup> Beck (1950) 379

<sup>750</sup> Klingshirn (1994a) 104

<sup>751</sup> *Vita Caes.* 1.28; cf. Arnold (1894) 246-247

<sup>752</sup> Agde (506), *Can.* 45

<sup>753</sup> Agde (506), *Can.* 7

treason in 512 was the result of discontent with his financial policies.<sup>754</sup> While I cannot agree with this explanation of Caesarius' arrest, I do think Klingshirn succeeds in drawing attention to the resentment that may have attended Caesarius' actions from some quarters. Not all congregants and clerics can have been happy at the loss of their diocese's property and still less at seeing the furnishings of their church stripped and sold off for the sake of soldiers who had recently besieged their city. That congregants may have believed that Caesarius was motivated only by religious conviction probably did little to alleviate their concerns.

I posit that the reason for Caesarius' sudden arrest in 512 was nothing to do with property disputes but must, instead, have been Ostrogothic awareness of Caesarius' overtures to the Burgundians.<sup>755</sup> As on the other two occasions when he was arrested, it was not Caesarius' ecclesiastical transgressions that were at stake but his political involvement with the Burgundians, which were likely to have been interpreted (correctly) as seditious. Having been arrested, he was transported to Ravenna to meet the Ostrogothic *rex*, Theoderic; the *Vita Caesarii* gives a tendentious account of what transpired<sup>756</sup> which, although valuable, must be read and interpreted with care – a point I make because Klingshirn takes the *Vita*'s account as completely factual and assumes that it incorporates the report – or is the work – of an eyewitness, Messianus,<sup>757</sup> something for which I see no supporting evidence either in the text itself or in Klingshirn's monograph. Indeed, the *Vita* actually indicates that Messianus' contribution was restricted to the second book of the *Vita*;<sup>758</sup> tellingly, the second book makes no mention of the Ostrogoths or of Theoderic although it does contain the information about Gundobad's grain ships. The second book's focus is far more on Arles itself and on Caesarius' pastoral activities in his diocese than on relations with secular overlords and the politics world of the *regna*.

I draw attention to this not to attack Klingshirn but because, in dealing with Ravenna, I feel that Klingshirn's narrative is skewed at a very fundamental level by certain assumptions about the nature of the *Vita*. His desire to validate its account causes him to overlook its obvious bias and even to miss some clear contradictions which suggest, to me, that much of the story in the *Vita* is rhetorical rather than literal.<sup>759</sup>

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<sup>754</sup> Klingshirn (1994a) 123-124

<sup>755</sup> Malnory (1894) 102

<sup>756</sup> *Vita Caes.* 1.37-43

<sup>757</sup> Klingshirn (1994a) 124-125

<sup>758</sup> *Vita Caes.* 1.63, 2.1

<sup>759</sup> See for example, *Vita Caes.* 1.36, where Theoderic's praise for Caesarius is reported despite the bishop having departed; Klingshirn takes this literally and assumes it was recounted by Messianus even though it is highly unlikely that Caesarius would have left the royal presence while his junior companions remained behind to witness the king's tribute.

In any case, having laid out my objections to Klingshirn's methodology, I will now discuss what I believe happened at Ravenna in 513. The *Vita* reports that Caesarius arrived in Ravenna where "the king, upon seeing the man of God, fearless and worthy of respect, rose up reverently to greet him and, having removed the crown from his head, most mildly received him".<sup>760</sup> The warmth of this greeting and Theoderic's kind words for a prisoner accused of treason necessarily compel us to question events. Unless we take the *Vita* literally and believe that the king saw the bishop's *vultus angelicus* and immediately discerned his innocence, there must have been a more concrete and politically expeditious reason for the lenient treatment Caesarius received.

It seems most likely to me that the Ostrogothic king, conscious that his hold on his new territory in Gaul might not be completely secure, did not wish to aggravate Caesarius' congregation. When Caesarius was first accused of treason during the siege of Arles in 507, the city seems broadly to have supported the Visigothic defenders (if their anger at Caesarius' apparent dealings with the enemy are indicative of anything); one might not be wide of the mark in assuming that the city only held out successfully because of the population's support for its defenders. In 513, Arles had a new Ostrogothic ruler for whom the people of Arles might not have felt the same degree of loyalty. If that new ruler were to remove, exile or otherwise punish Caesarius, the congregation might have rallied to their bishop and supported him in the face of external pressure. If, at any stage in the immediate future, war broke out in Gaul, the general mood in Arles would likely have been more sympathetic to the Burgundians than it had been in 507. For this reason, if for no other, it was in Theoderic's interests to settle things quickly, amicably and publicly.

We should assume that the audience reported in the *Vita* represents the public face which Theoderic and Caesarius both wished to put on the matter. There must have been discussions which have not been reported; the Ostrogoths must have laid out their dissatisfaction with Caesarius' constant – and rather inept – attempts at sedition. Stark warnings must have been given about the consequences of further misbehaviour. And then the olive branch must have been extended – Caesarius would be absolved of all guilt, because it was expedient for the Goths to do so, but would be expected to demonstrate future loyalty to the king. The report given in the *Vita* of their meeting is, therefore, a description of a performance meant for public consumption; it is description of the public face both men put on their relationship, the

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<sup>760</sup> *Vita Caes.* 1.36, *ut vero rex Dei hominem intrepidum venerandumque conspexit, ad salutandum reverenter adsurgit ac deposito ornatu de capite, clementissime resalutat.* [MGH edition has *hac* where I use *ac*]

face they wanted the wider world to see, a face which presented them both in the best light, one as a virtuous apostolic churchman with the face of an angel and the other as a magnanimous and truly Christian ruler whose actions are guided by neither whim nor logic but by a pious trust in God and in His holy men. This was the spin which Theoderic and Caesarius both wanted – and needed – to put on matters, a spin which placed both men to above mere political expediency and cloaked the *Realpolitik* in piety and godliness.

It is significant that Caesarius was not the first churchman in the Ostrogothic kingdom to face accusations of treason. The bishop of Aosta was also accused of being a “traitor to the fatherland” but was absolved by the king.<sup>761</sup> It is significant, too, that Aosta, like Arles, was close to the Burgundian frontier and had, at one point, been held by them. There were clearly churchmen in the northern parts of the Ostrogothic kingdom who, if they did not exactly constitute a fifth column, were far from loyal to Theoderic and quite willing to engage with the Burgundians. Rather than sweep these bishops away, as a less subtle ruler might, Theoderic chose to find a *modus vivendi* by which the disloyal bishops were retained in place, ensuring continued stability and avoiding antagonising the local congregations, while being left in no doubt both about Theoderic’s continued authority over them and about the consequences of further treason.

The public part of the arrangement between Theoderic and Caesarius was sealed when the king sent the bishop a silver bowl weighing sixty pounds and containing 300 *solidi*. In an apparent inversion of the traditions of ancient gift-giving and guest-friendship, Caesarius sold the bowl – for, as a holy man, he had no use for silverware other than spoons – and used the money to ransom yet more captives.<sup>762</sup> When Theoderic was informed of this, he was not offended by the disregard Caesarius had shown for the royal gift but, rather, admired his actions; the courtiers and senators, in imitation of their king, sent yet more gifts to the bishop so that they too could be sold and the money used to ransom captives.<sup>763</sup>

The *Vita* tells a fine and entertaining story but what transpired was, in all likelihood, devised ahead of time and was intended, like so much else, to cast Theoderic and Caesarius both in an excellent light. For Caesarius, around whom an air of opprobrium – and the rumour of treason – must still have hung, the act of giving away the king’s gift had the effect of presenting him to the public in a very specific way. By selling a royal gift, Caesarius obviously emphasised

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<sup>761</sup> Cass., *Variae*, 1.9, *Atque ideo, quod beatitudini vestrae gratissimum esse confidimus, praesenti tenore declaramus Augustanae civitatis episcopum proditoris patriae falsis criminationibus accusatum: qui a vobis honori pristino restitutus ius habeat episcopatus omne quod habet.*

<sup>762</sup> *Vita* Caes. 1.37

<sup>763</sup> *Vita* Caes. 1.38

his own piety – he was a man who cared nothing for baubles, who was devoted to the doing of good works – but he also appeared to come close to insulting Theoderic by spurning his gift; this had two effects: first, it made Caesarius appear so pious as to be almost naïve, which would have been useful in explaining or justifying any politically questionable (or borderline treasonous) activities – in effect, anything Caesarius had done in the past could be explained away by an appeal to his unworldly nature and general naïvety; the second, and related, effect was to demonstrate to the wider population that Caesarius' ransoming of Burgundian soldiers was a neutral act, that there was no political point to it. After all, if Caesarius was ransoming Burgundians in order to curry favour with the Gibichungs, he would hardly carry on his activities in the Ostrogothic capital, where he had been dragged on a charge of treason, before the eyes of the Ostrogothic king and court using money gifted by the crown. For Caesarius, the use of Theoderic's gift in this way was a masterstroke of spin, but there were also benefits for Theoderic himself.

The major advantage for Theoderic was that some potentially treacherous bishops – not Caesarius alone – were quietly brought to heel without the need for a public confrontation which would probably have been extremely divisive. Apart from these, Theoderic was able to make a public demonstration of his personal spirituality, his respect for the piety of others and his magnanimity. He exhibited the kind of moral *politesse* and good grace that cut across denominational lines; his conduct would have been appreciated not only by his Arian subjects but would have appealed particularly to Catholics, communicating to them both the king's manifest respect for Catholic clergy and the shared religious principles which formed a common ground for interaction between the heretical king and his orthodox subjects.

After being discharged by the king and performing a number of miracles in Ravenna, Caesarius travelled on to Rome. This journey, too, needs some explanation and, as with much of Caesarius' career, the explanation relates closely to the bishop's desire to be seen as a figure respected in spheres both temporal and spiritual. The first and, in my opinion, most important reason for visiting Rome was as a distraction from the circumstances in which he had first been brought to Italy; Caesarius had been arrested and brought to Ravenna against his will, probably because, for the third time in his career, he had been accused of betraying his ruler, but this is hardly the vision that either Caesarius or his biographers wanted history to remember. By visiting Rome, Caesarius turned his arrest into merely a part of a larger journey through Italy. His audience with Theoderic could be recast so that, from being a part of his detention, it became an element in a tour of the seats of power, a tour in which he would meet with his secular master, Theoderic, and his spiritual master, the pope. It is conceivable that this would have raised Caesarius' capital at home in Arles and in the Gallic church as a whole

by emphasising his and Arles' political importance: Caesarius was no mere parochial cleric but a universally respected man of God, bishop of Gaul's pre-eminent see, who discoursed with kings and conversed with popes.

In Rome, Caesarius petitioned Pope Symmachus over a number of matters. Klingshirn discusses these effectively and at length<sup>764</sup> so I will concentrate on only two matters which I consider to be of signal importance. Caesarius requested that clergy be forbidden from alienating church lands except in cases where monasteries would profit from the alienation; this was obviously related to his long-standing desire to fund the construction of a women's monastery at Arles and suggests that there was some degree of discontent at Arles over his use of church property and of the canons of Agde generally; thus, as Klingshirn says, the petition to Symmachus was meant to protect Caesarius from future complaints.

The second important petition relates to Arles' eleven lost dioceses and to the wider question of Caesarius' position within the Gallic church. Caesarius sought and received papal confirmation of his metropolitan rights as bishop of Arles; this was important in establishing that, whatever the political realities on the ground, the legal master of the dioceses beyond the Durance was, as far as the pope was concerned, Caesarius and the see of Arles. While the pope could not force Avitus or the Burgundians to return these dioceses, it was important for Caesarius to lay out the legal basis for his claim so that, if and when Arles and her lost dioceses were united in a single polity, there could be no challenge from Avitus or his successors in Vienne.

Neither the *Vita* nor the few extant letters shed enough light on the relationship that developed between Symmachus and Caesarius, but it is clear that each found in the other an ally and it seems more than likely that Caesarius' visit to Rome was the occasion upon which their association was truly founded. The closeness of their relationship is demonstrated best by the support which Symmachus continued to offer after Caesarius had departed Rome and returned to Arles. In 514, Caesarius was appointed *vicarius* of all Gaul,<sup>765</sup> the pope's personal deputy and representative with wide-ranging supervisory powers extending far beyond metropolitan Arles.

While Caesarius had not yet regained control over his lost dioceses, his appointment as papal vicar marked a significant shift in the power dynamic within the Gallic church and constituted an important victory for him. Prior to receiving the vicar's *pallium*, Caesarius and Avitus had,

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<sup>764</sup> Klingshirn (1994a) 127ff.

<sup>765</sup> Symmachus, *Epistulae Arelatenses*, 29; cf. *Vita Caes.* 1.42; Klingshirn (1994a) 130-131

effectively and practically, been equals within the church's episcopal college but, with his new position, Caesarius became the senior figure (despite being rather younger than his colleague and having spent fewer years on the *cathedra*). It was clearly implied – and, in fact, with the pope's recognition of Caesarius' metropolitan rights over Narbonensis II, it was stated outright – that Caesarius possessed considerable, though rather ill-defined, authority over the other Gallic bishops.

Caesarius' 'promotion' was not only beneficial to him nor even only to Pope Symmachus (who, as Klingshirn observes, used the vicariate to promote his own claims in regions which were outside his direct influence<sup>766</sup>); it also advanced Theoderic's interests and it is possible that he may ultimately have been responsible for suggesting or advocating the establishment of a Gallic vicariate. Theoderic, after all, must have been very concerned about the potential for episcopal treason, particularly from Caesarius who had a history of attempting treachery and was clearly obsessed with regaining control of Arles' lost dioceses, whatever the cost. Since the political price of neutralising Caesarius was surely too high to pay and since threats would probably restrain this most peculiar bishop for only so long, Theoderic – or one of his ministers – may have hit upon the idea of creating a papal vicariate. The vicariate had the effect of confirming and legitimising all of Caesarius' claims and of elevating him above all other Gallic bishops (particularly above his rival, Avitus); it represented a kind of compromise whereby Caesarius accepted the physical separation from some of his dioceses in return for being acknowledged as the most important churchman in Gaul and having his claims to his lost suffragan sees sanctioned by Rome and Ravenna alike. At a time when political borders had stripped Caesarius of some of his authority, the vicariate granted a 'trans-national' authority. It could not, of course, guarantee that Caesarius would remain loyal to Theoderic but it certainly provided him with an option other than treason. It calmed the situation by granting the recognition Caesarius craved while promising that, at some indefinite future date, Avitus might be compelled to return the lost dioceses without Caesarius having to ingratiate himself with the Gibichungs.

Upon returning to Arles, Caesarius worked to advance himself and his authority within the Gallic church. He did not, so far as we know, do anything else that might have been considered seditious. Having spent his first decade on the *cathedra* doing his best to bring his city under the control of the Burgundians, Caesarius, upon receiving the *pallium*, seems almost instantly to have become if not a loyal subject of Theoderic then, at least, one who did not find Ostrogothic rule so onerous that he was moved to resist it. The recognition, by church

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<sup>766</sup> Klingshirn (1994a) 131-132

and crown, of his notional suzerainty beyond the Durance was enough to put a stop to his Burgundian indiscretions.

### *Conclusion*

Much of Caesarius' career before 523 can be cast in terms of his obsession with reclaiming all of his suffragan sees and of establishing once more Arles' primacy within the Gallic episcopate and particularly over Vienne. Similarly, the accounts given in the *Vita Caesarii* can be seen as a concerted effort at controlling the popular interpretation of Caesarius' activities, of hiding or disguising much of Caesarius' behaviour and casting it in positive terms, in terms which will leave the reader impressed by Caesarius' piety, religiosity and so on. This suggests to me, too, that Caesarius himself had little talent at the art of propaganda; he seems to have behaved with an alarming degree of political recklessness, to have given little or no thought to the wider consequences of or reaction to his actions and, as a result, found himself continually caught in acts of sedition or facing popular resentment. The crafting of the narrative of Caesarius' career cannot really have come from Caesarius himself; it must have been the clerics around him, friends and kin who owed their careers to him – his *amici*, *propinqui* and *consanguinei* – who took charge of the business of presenting Caesarius' story to the world, of crafting his image to impress posterity. Caesarius himself probably did not worry about such things because he was too busy trying to find some way of reuniting Arles with its eleven lost dioceses.

There is a certain irony, given the energy Caesarius put into his conspiracies, in the fact that it was the Ostrogoths, not the Burgundians, who were finally to unite Arles with its lost dioceses. Following the Frankish invasion of the Burgundian kingdom and the death of Theoderic's son-in-law Sigismund, the Ostrogoths in 523 annexed a large swathe of formerly Burgundian territory<sup>767</sup> which included Arles' eleven dioceses beyond the Durance. Thus, Caesarius' nine years of comparative loyalty to the Goths brought him more than his decade of sedition. It was with the extension of his power of his entire province that Caesarius embarked upon a series of church councils which will form the focus of my next chapter.

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<sup>767</sup> Cass., *Variae*, 8.10

## Chapter Eight

### *Caesarius' ecclesiastical agenda and his councils of the 520s*

In this chapter, I examine the canons of Caesarius' councils of the 520s and compare them with the canons of Orléans from 511. I will show how the agendas pursued by Caesarius in southern Gaul during the 520s and those pursued by the bishops of the Frankish kingdom in 511 contrast, but I will also focus on the similarities which, in some respects, are greater than one might perhaps expect. But, nevertheless, it will become clear that a major part of Caesarius' ecclesiastical programme involved laying the foundations and providing the necessary resources for active Christianisation at the parish level.<sup>768</sup> Perhaps even more than that, Caesarius' councils revolved around his own need to present himself as a source of authority, as a figure to whom obedience was owed and to turn his theoretical superiority as papal *vicarius* into a more tangible primacy.

#### **The background to Caesarius' councils of the 520s**

In 523, Ostrogothic expansion into Burgundian-held territory reunited the whole of the metropolitan province of Arles under the rule of a single monarch for the first time in around 50 years. For the first time since ascending the *cathedra* two decades earlier, Caesarius of Arles had control of the eleven suffragan sees beyond the Durance. It is significant that Caesarius called his first church council in 524, only after seeing his whole province brought back under his control. This suggests that Caesarius consciously refrained from calling councils as a form of protest against what he probably saw as Vienne's illegal acquisition of rightfully Arlesian sees. It indicates, too, the importance that Caesarius attached not only to having control of all of his suffragan dioceses but of being seen as uncompromising when his personal authority was at stake. This obdurate attitude was a recurring theme in Caesarius' life and career from his earliest days as cellarer at Lérins.

The locations chosen for his four councils were themselves significant. The first council was called at Arles itself. Caesarius called all the attending bishops – not merely those whose sees were directly subordinate to metropolitan Arles, to his city, his headquarters. This was a means of presenting himself as a major authority figure in the southern Gallic church. It was a means of putting into action the theoretical authority granted to him by his office of papal

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<sup>768</sup> I am conscious that, as it pertains to late antiquity, "parish" is not necessarily the ideal translation for the Latin *parochia*. Nevertheless, it is a translation that seems standard in modern sources and it seems reasonably effective at capturing the sense that *parochiae* were the lowest sub-divisions of a diocese.

*vicarius* and of underlining the new power that he was determined to impose on the rest of the southern Gallic bishops, whether suffragan or metropolitan.

His next three councils (Carpentras, Orange and Vaison) were held in sees that had previously been under the control of Vienne and the Burgundians. Their locations, rather than the mere fact of their having been called at all, constituted a statement of personal authority by Caesarius as well as an explicit manifestation of what he considered to be Arles' proper metropolitan boundaries.

#### The Fourth Council of Arles, 6<sup>th</sup> June 524

Klingshirn characterises the councils convened by Caesarius in the 520s as important assemblies "to transact pressing church business" and "not...merely to demonstrate Caesarius's political control".<sup>769</sup> This may be true of the other councils of the 520s, but I am quite certain that it is not true of the council of Arles in 524. The first thing one notes about the council of Arles is how few in number its canons actually are – only four rulings are made by the council. While Arles IV was not unique in its brevity,<sup>770</sup> it is striking in the extreme that, after two decades on the episcopal throne, Caesarius was unable at his first council to find anything more to say. Nor is it only numerically that canons seem to be lacking; the subjects handled at Arles IV do not seem at all pressing. Indeed, the introduction to the canons seems to say that the council was called only because bishops were already present in Arles for the dedication of a basilica to St Mary and it seemed "reasonable" (*rationabile*) to take advantage of the situation by staging a discussion.

The first canon of Arles deals with failure to observe the established rules *antiquorum patrum* in their entirety (*ad integrum*) regarding the ordination of priests and deacons.<sup>771</sup> The council, therefore, states or, rather, restates that deacons may not be ordained before the age of twenty-five and laymen may not become bishops before the age of thirty and without a *conversatio* to the ecclesiastical lifestyle.<sup>772</sup>

The second canon constitutes another wholesale restatement of existing church law and, in fact, says so explicitly. While the *patres* wrote extensively about laymen, the growth in the number of *ecclesiae* (which should probably be taken to mean rural parishes or *parochiae*)

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<sup>769</sup> Klingshirn (1994a) 138

<sup>770</sup> Cf., e.g., the councils of Lyon [= SC 353, p.128-135] or Carpentras [=SC 353, p.146-151]

<sup>771</sup> Arles IV (524), *Can.* 1

<sup>772</sup> While this was the first council at which Caesarius had pressed this issue, he had brought it up before with pope Symmachus who endorsed the need for laymen to undergo a probationary period before ordination; see *Epistolae Arelatenses genuinae*, 26, 27 [= *MGH Epistolae III Epistolae Merovingici et Karolini aevi* (I) ed. W. Gundlach (Berlin, 1892) p.38, 40]

has caused a need for ever greater numbers of clerics. Even so, no metropolitan was to confer the episcopacy on a layman and no suffragan bishop to confer the priesthood or deaconate on a layman without a year's *conversio*.

The third canon forbids the ordination of a penitent or a twice-married man. This, too, is simply a reiteration of existing law (*Et licet haec iam prope omnium canonum statuta contineant...*)<sup>773</sup> rather than anything particularly new or pressing, although, the canons say, *inportunitas* and *suggestio iniqua* have led to the rule being ignored and, therefore, a more severe rule (*severior regula*) must now be adopted. A priest who breaks this rule will be forbidden from participating in mass for a year; a priest who refuses to acknowledge that decision will exempt himself from the charity of all his brothers (*ab omnium fratrum caritate se noverit alienum*). The canon ends with the ominous warning that he who contemns the institutions of the Holy Fathers will feel the severity of ecclesiastical discipline (*severitas ecclesiasticae disciplinae*). The extremely short fourth canon is effectively a continuation of the third and warns of excommunication for anyone who harbours a runaway cleric. (Klingshirn says that this canon refers only to bishops offering shelter to runaways but the Latin is more general than that.<sup>774</sup>)

What can one make of these canons? The first and, I think, most important thing about them is that none of them are remotely innovative; they are all based on existing canons and say so clearly. Of course, Arles IV was not unique in repeating the rulings of earlier councils – at Orléans in 511 a number of ancient canons were restated and renewed<sup>775</sup> – but there is no sense that any of the matters raised in 524 were especially pressing, that the council was filling any important ecclesiastical need or answering any weighty questions. Quite the opposite: the sense given by these canons is that they were an excuse, rather than a reason, for holding the council. It is likely that Caesarius had wanted to call a council purely as a means of demonstrating his new authority to attending bishops.

Caesarius, in 524, enjoyed a new and particularly authoritative position in the Gallic church. He was at once the pope's Gallic *vicarius* and the most senior metropolitan in the region; moreover, with the return of his lost suffragan dioceses, he no longer had any reason to stand aloof from the business of the church – his dignity was no longer outraged by Vienne's possession of Arlesian sees – and he therefore used Arles IV to announce his re-engagement

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<sup>773</sup> Arles IV (524), *Can.* 3

<sup>774</sup> Klingshirn (1994a) 138

<sup>775</sup> Orléans I (511), *Can.* 14 ff.

with ecclesiastical politics. He held the council, effectively, because he *could* hold a council and in order to prove that he could.

Another effect of Arles IV was to establish the hierarchical relationship not only between metropolitan Arles and the suffragan sees but also between Arles and the other metropolitan sees. Klingshirn noted that Maximus of Aix, who had been deprived of metropolitan authority over Narbonensis II in favour of Caesarius by Pope Symmachus in 514, does not appear at the head of the list of attending bishops but further down in order precedence thus indicating that he had abandoned his claims to metropolitan status. Klingshirn is, however, probably wrong to say that Maximus had been “forced to attend” the council;<sup>776</sup> I think it more likely that Caesarius, having brought various bishops of the region together for the purpose of attending a church dedication, obliged his visitors to discuss some unimportant and uncontroversial subjects which could then be given the grand title of the fourth council of Arles. In doing this, Caesarius pressed his authority, as papal representative and as a newly-ascendant metropolitan, onto the attending churchmen and forced them to recognise his seniority. The canons of the council were so uncontroversial as to render it virtually impossible for anyone to argue against them – after all, the canons of Arles were, for the most part, already part of church law – but, by endorsing them, the churchmen necessarily endorsed the man who presented them.

Maximus, like the other bishops, came to Arles voluntarily; he – and they – came to Arles not to attend a church council but for the dedication of a basilica. Klingshirn presents the impression that the bishops came to Arles specifically for the council and only afterwards decided to attend the church dedication.<sup>777</sup> The canons of Arles, however, are clear that the main reason for attendance was the church dedication. These clerics were invited to Arles for the dedication and only when present in the city, we must presume, were they informed of Caesarius’ desire for discussion.<sup>778</sup> This is the interpretation which keeps closest to the Latin text and it strongly suggests that Arles IV was not a regular church council, that it was not meant to address pressing issues so much as to demonstrate Caesarius’ authority to bishops who might otherwise have challenged him.

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<sup>776</sup> Klingshirn (1994a) 137

<sup>777</sup> Klingshirn (1994a) 138

<sup>778</sup> Arles IV (524), *Cum in voluntate Dei ad dedicationem basilicae sanctae Mariae in Arelatensi civitate sacerdotes Domini convenissent, congruum eis et rationabile visum est, ut primum de observandis canonibus attentissima sollicitudine pertractantes, qualiter ab ipsis ecclesiastica regula servaretur, salubri consilio definirent.*

Presented, in this way, with the *fait accompli* of a church council in which Caesarius posed as the senior cleric, as the venerable metropolitan before whose *cathedra* other bishops came to kneel, churchmen like Maximus faced the dilemma of having to choose whether to argue with Caesarius about where true power lay or of simply accepting what had happened and surrendering to Caesarius the theoretical authority and respect he craved. Maximus, and any others who were less than enamoured with Caesarius, also faced the particular problem that disputing Arles' authority could be seen as disputing the canons of Arles, a problem precisely because the canons were so derivative of existing church law which all bishops notionally accepted. Maximus seems, if the position of his signature in the list of bishops is as significant as Klingshirn believes, to have accepted what was effectively his own demotion; forcing Maximus into this position – and, more generally, forcing all attending bishops into the position of acknowledging his and Arles' seniority – was a part of Caesarius' strategy to establish his own authority over the southern Gallic church.

It is within this context that we must judge Arles IV. The council was an attempt to impose Arles' power onto the wider church rather than part of any agenda for reforming the church or for addressing Klingshirn's "pressing church business". In fact, the only significant aspect of the council, from the perspective of Caesarius' reforming mission, is almost parenthetical mention of the fact that there had been a large increase in the number of parishes and there was, therefore, a greater need for clerics.<sup>779</sup> While not dwelt upon at length by the canons, this does shed light on Caesarius' policy of Christianising the countryside, of actively proselytising and of allowing ordinary priests, rather than bishops, to preach to congregations.<sup>780</sup> Yet this is tangential to the main function of the council; Arles IV was not primarily concerned with supporting Caesarius' work in the countryside for the simple reason that Caesarius did not wish it to be concerned with this work. Its function and his agenda were to establish Caesarius' special position as Gaul's most senior cleric, to emphasise his power to his suffragans and to his rivals and to present those rivals (particularly the see of Vienne and the recalcitrant Maximus of Aix) with no option but to acknowledge his primacy.

### **The Council of Carpentras, 6<sup>th</sup> November 527**

Carpentras was the first of Caesarius' councils to follow what Mathisen considers to be the Gallic convention of holding church councils in the autumn.<sup>781</sup> I highlight this because the council of Carpentras, unlike its immediately preceding or succeeding councils (Arles IV and

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<sup>779</sup> Arles IV (524), *Can.* 2

<sup>780</sup> Cf. Hen (1995) 33; Bertelli (1998) 58; the reform on preaching by priests will be discussed below as it relates to the council of Vaison (529).

<sup>781</sup> Mathisen (1999) 42

Orange), gives the distinct sense of having been an ordinary meeting of clerics intended primarily to discuss and arrange comparatively routine financial business.

The council of Carpentras did not produce the neatly numbered succession of canonical rulings of the type we typically find at many other councils of the period. Instead, there is a fairly short section of text, which, in the *Sources Chrétiennes* edition, consists of only a single page of Latin,<sup>782</sup> followed by a letter to Agroecius of Antibes of roughly the same length.

The canons of Carpentras, insofar as one can use that term to refer to the product of this council, deal exclusively with matters pertaining to property. The canons themselves state that their function is to ensure that existing practices conform, in the interests of justice, to rules which are already contained in many other canons.<sup>783</sup> The main business of the council was to deal with the use and disposal of resources received by parishes from the faithful. The canons observed that valuables given by congregations had been resold “by certain bishops” (*ab aliquibus episcopis*) and the proceeds kept while the original recipient parish received nothing. The canons declare that this state of affairs must stop and that ecclesiastical property and donations were to be divided more equitably between bishops and their satellite parishes. Bishops, if their sees were financially well off, were now ordered to dispense any financial surplus to the parishes for the upkeep of clergy and maintenance of church buildings. On the other hand, bishops with many expenses and few resources were to have the right to call upon wealthier parishes to remit their financial surpluses to cover the bishop’s obligations;<sup>784</sup> bishops were never, however, to have the right to take either the actual land of the parish or its sacred vessels.<sup>785</sup>

Following the canons proper, there is a letter reprimanding Agroecius of Antibes. The ostensible reason for this letter is the ordination, by Agroecius, of one Protadius, a layman who had not undergone the full year-long *conversio* required by Arles IV,<sup>786</sup> a council at which Agroecius had been represented by the presbyter Catafronius who signed in his place.<sup>787</sup> The letter stresses that Agroecius is condemned not simply for violating the statutes of Arles, something which might have happened through simple ignorance, but for doing so

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<sup>782</sup> SC 353 p.146

<sup>783</sup> *Canones Carpentoratenses, Licet omnia, quae ecclesiastica regula praecipit observari, in multis canonibus contineantur inserta, nascuntur tamen causae, pro quibus necesse habent sacerdotes Domini, quod ad iustitiam pertinet, secundum disciplinam ecclesiasticam ordinare.*

<sup>784</sup> Carpentras (527), quod autem amplius fuerit, propter maiores expensas episcopus ad se debeat revocare.

<sup>785</sup> Cf. SC 353 p.147, n.2 on *ministerium*.

<sup>786</sup> Arles IV, Can. 2

<sup>787</sup> SC 353 p.143

knowingly and consciously after signing the canons (or, rather, after having his representative sign them on his behalf). The punishment therefore decided upon by the council – which, in all likelihood, means the punishment decided upon by Caesarius and rubber-stamped by the attending bishops – was that Agroecius was forbidden from celebrating mass for one year.

I begin my discussion of this council with the property canons because, from the perspective of establishing Caesarius' wider ecclesiastical agenda in the 520s, Carpentras' rulings on parish property are probably more significant than the letter (although the letter is not irrelevant).

It should not surprise us that Caesarius was paying so much attention to the organisation of satellite parishes. While small rural parishes could, and probably often did, operate below the radar of bishops, Caesarius always paid particular attention to them because his strategy for Christianising rural Gaul relied so heavily upon the parish, itself the smallest component of a see, and upon the parochial clergy who, unlike the bishop, came into daily contact with rural congregations. Nor was the council of Carpentras the only occasion on which Caesarius devoted his energies to rearranging ecclesiastical rules to stress the importance of the parochial rather than the episcopal in executing the process of Christianisation, as we shall see below.

By protecting the financial integrity of parishes, by ensuring that they retained the fiscal wherewithal to function properly and to maintain buildings and clergy alike, Caesarius was attempting to guarantee that there would always be a meaningful ecclesiastical presence in the Gallic countryside and that the funds would be available to carry out tasks related to evangelism. He was also effectively granting the parishes a very considerable degree of independence since they were now to enjoy full possession of any donations given to them while facing no obligation to surrender any of their property to their bishops, except in very specific circumstances; the parishes therefore had nearly complete freedom to expend resources as they saw fit; presumably, most of the donations, after paying for the upkeep of clergy and buildings, would have been used to alleviate rural poverty through alms-giving and such<sup>788</sup> – certainly the bishops themselves justified their close attendance to and control over matters of finance and property by referring to their desire to give more generous alms.<sup>789</sup> It

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<sup>788</sup> Cf. Brown (1992) 78, 94; Orléans I, *Can.* 5 specifically says that whatever fruits God provides shall be expended in repairing churches, maintaining clergy and paupers and redeeming captives (*ut in reparationibus ecclesiarum, alimoniis sacerdotum et pauperum vel redemptionibus captivorum, quidquid Deus in fructibus dare dignatus fuerit*).

<sup>789</sup> Caesarius, *Sermo* 1.9; Caesarius, interestingly, denies the veracity of such claims saying that such bishops are more interested in spending extravagantly on themselves than on working for the poor.

therefore seems likely, in my opinion, that Caesarius' overall goal at this council was to create a kind of dependence by the rural poor on the charity provided by the local parish and therefore to make the church more relevant to their everyday life. The church, in effect, would be doing concrete things within small rural communities and these acts would demonstrate the worth of Christianity and the church to the community.

In giving greater financial independence to the parishes, this council necessarily deprived bishops of some of their authority over the parishes. One cannot imagine that many bishops were happy about seeing their power over parochial finances diminished in this way. Indeed, the canons of Carpentras very much flew in the face of the usual processes of the church in Gaul; Orléans I actually guaranteed that one-third of all "lands, vineyards, slaves and properties" donated by the faithful within the parishes of the Frankish kingdom was to be remitted to the bishop – "all these things stand within the power of the bishop".<sup>790</sup> It is perhaps surprising and probably a testament to the huge personal authority developed by Caesarius that he was able to convince fifteen bishops to accede to his wishes.

Of course, the canons allowed for bishops whose expenses were particularly great to supplement their resources from the surpluses of wealthier parishes.<sup>791</sup> This was a recognition by Caesarius that situations would arise in which bishops did not have the resources to fulfil their responsibilities (or ambitions), a recognition too that, whatever the desirability of granting financial autonomy to the parishes, the option for dioceses to draw upon their constituent parishes would have to be retained in some circumstances. Caesarius probably had his own experiences in mind in drawing up the canons of Carpentras; it is, after all, unlikely that he could have found the money to fund either of his pet projects – the construction of the women's monastery at Arles and the ransoming of large numbers of Burgundian captives – had he not been able to draw upon his satellite parishes. Indeed, Caesarius had actually resorted to stripping the basilica of Arles of its silver furnishings to pay the ransoms of captives so, in drawing up these canons, he was keenly aware of the need – particularly *his* need but, presumably, that of other bishops too – to access larger sums of money than their own diocese could comfortably furnish.<sup>792</sup> It is with this in mind that a rider is effectively appended to the canons laying out condition under which bishops may continue to utilise strictly parochial resources. It was a sign that Caesarius understood the implicit tension between equipping parishes with everything they needed to execute their Christianising

<sup>790</sup> Orléans I, *Can. 15, De his, quae parrochiis in terris, vineis, mancipiis atque pecuniis quicumque fidelis obtulerint, antiquorum canonum statuta seruentur, ut omnia in episcopi potestate consistant; de his tamen, quae in altario accesserint, tertia fideliter episcopis deferatur.*

<sup>791</sup> Cf. Caes., *Serm. 37.1, sic dives saeculi huius...sustinet pauperes Christi.*

<sup>792</sup> *Vita Caes. 1.31*

function while allowing bishops the resources they needed to carry out their own policies, whether strictly ecclesiastical (as with the women's monastery) or rather more coldly political (as with the ransoming of Gundobad's soldiers).

Following the canons proper, we have the other piece of business conducted at Carpentras in 527 – the letter of reprimand to Agroecius. The letter opens with a fairly accusatory tone – Agroecius ought to have attended the council of Carpentras in person in order to give an account to the assembled bishops of his, apparently illegal, ordination of a layman Protadius in violation of the second canon of the fourth council of Arles.<sup>793</sup> The letter states that the assembled bishops have found him to have violated knowingly canons which his representative signed and punish him by forbidding his saying mass for one year, which is, in fact, the punishment laid out by Arles IV for violation of this statute.

The castigation of Agroecius is problematic, if for no other reason than that we have no account of Agroecius' response. We cannot know whether Agroecius accepted the council's penalty, which would have been a sure sign of Caesarius' growing authority and his ability to impose his will and his view of ecclesiastical discipline on the wider church, or whether he simply ignored it, which would itself be a sign that Caesarius was not in full possession of the authority to which he aspired, that churchmen could and did ignore him without meaningful consequence.

One thing of which we may feel sure, in my opinion, is that Agroecius, by violating the canons of Arles IV in the first place, was making comment of a kind on Caesarius' position. He was, in effect, demonstrating that he felt secure in flouting rules which Caesarius had pushed through and to which he, through his representative, had signed his name. One could get the impression that some of Caesarius' subordinate bishops were willing to acquiesce in ratifying Caesarius' decisions but had no intention of enforcing them or, at least, felt that they could safely ignore the canons they had signed once the council was over. In this way, Agroecius' conduct, if he did ordain Protadius contrary to the canons of Arles, could reflect a strain of condescension felt towards Caesarius and his reforms by some members of the episcopal community.<sup>794</sup> Both his reforms and his conception of what a bishop ought to be – and, for that matter, of the duties which the church ought to fulfil – may not have dovetailed with the expectations of more traditional bishops, amongst whose number Agroecius should

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<sup>793</sup> Carpentras (527), *Epistola synodalis ad Agricium episcopum* [= SC 353 p.148], *Licet ad synodum aut per vos aut per personam vicariam debueritis adesse, ut ordinationis tuae, quam fecisse diceris, in synodali conventu redderes rationem.*

<sup>794</sup> Cf. Klingshirn (1994a) 139 on "the opposition Caesarius faced in trying to impose an ascetic way of life on the clergy".

perhaps be counted, with the result that these bishops simply ignored the rulings of Caesarius' councils and continued to do business much as they always had.

If this is the case, the punishment of Agroecius – even if Agroecius himself ignored it – is significant because it demonstrated to the southern Gallic episcopal community that Caesarius was not willing to turn a blind eye to infractions of recent canons, that he would enforce them and that he expected bishops to obey them. Moreover, Caesarius was not content to leave matters as they stood and actually wrote to the new pope, Felix IV, requesting confirmation of the canons of Arles IV; on 3<sup>rd</sup> February 528, Felix replied confirming that “lay conversion to sacerdotal office before a probationary period” was not to be permitted.<sup>795</sup> By appealing up the ladder in this way, Caesarius demonstrated effectively that he was not merely one cleric with an axe to grind but that he was, in a very real sense, representing the papacy in Gaul and that his reforms met with Rome's approval; to stand against him, whether by rejecting his authority outright or by demeaning it through agreeing to canons without enforcing them, was to stand against the apostolic see and the wider Catholic community.

In this sense, the reprimand to Agroecius agreed upon at Carpentras cannot really be dissociated from the wider ecclesiastical *milieu*, from Caesarius' programme of reforms and from his political relationship with the papacy. By reprimanding the bishop of Antibes, a message was sent about the gravity with which Caesarius viewed the councils of the 520s, about the importance he attached to the full implementation of the new canons and about the relationship Caesarius enjoyed with Rome. The reprimand underlined Caesarius' position, authority and unwillingness to brook resistance. It was very likely intended to inform other metropolitans, particularly in Vienne, the ancient rival of Arles, that there would be no tolerance for deviation from the Arlesian line.

I think it particularly significant that the issue over which Caesarius punished Agroecius was not necessarily an entirely novel one. As I said earlier, the fourth council of Arles did not introduce any completely new concepts into the Gallic church; the second canon, the violation of which was at stake in this case, was itself based on earlier canons. The council of Épaone in 517, for example, has a very similar canon requiring a conversion to clerical life ahead of receiving any church office.<sup>796</sup> The second canon of Arles itself refers to the historical background to this requirement for conversion by laymen entering the church – the *antiqui*

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<sup>795</sup> *Epistolae Arelatenses Genuinae*, 1.31, *Legi, quod inter fraternitatem vestram est constitutum, non licere ex laica conversatione ad officium sacerdotale ante probationem temere promoveri*. [= *MGH Epistolae III Epistolae Merovingici et Karolini aevi (I)* (Berlin, 1892) ed. W. Gundlach, p.45]; in Klingshirn's methodology, this letter is designated Letter 11; see Klingshirn (1994a) xviii-xix.

<sup>796</sup> Épaone (517), *Can. 37, Ne laicus nisi religione praemissa clericus ordinetur*.

*patres* required long delays before allowing laymen to enter the church and current rules must not undercut the *canones antiqui*. One might reasonably suspect that Caesarius was choosing to establish his authority using the issue of lay conversions precisely because it was already rooted firmly in the regulations of the church and, therefore, it would be hard for anyone to argue that Caesarius was wrong given the weight of tradition that lay at his back. Having established himself using this device, Caesarius could proceed with more radical reforms safe in the knowledge that, in punishing Agroecius, he had set a precedent for dealing with recalcitrant bishops and had, in the process, established his own authority over the Gallic church.

One could say that it really didn't matter whether Agroecius accepted the punishment and abstained from mass for a year; he could very well have ignored it and it would still have served Caesarius' agenda.

### **The Second Council of Orange, 3<sup>rd</sup> July 529**

The second council of Orange is one of the stranger synods of the early sixth century. It differs from other councils of the period, not only those held by Caesarius, in that it dealt not with matters of ecclesiastical organisation or discipline but with the actual substance of Catholic belief, with what it meant to be a Catholic and what constituted acceptable and unacceptable belief for congregations and clergy. It was the first Gallic council of the early mediaeval period to deal exclusively with issues relating to doctrinal theory and it is for that reason, more than any other, that the canons of Orange became so important to the later church and why, long after the rulings of Caesarius' other councils had ceased to matter to the church, Orange continued to define the essential dogma that lay behind the Catholic faith, as it did at the council of Trent in the early modern era.<sup>797</sup>

While the theological background to the council needs further explication, I have dealt elsewhere with the general religious *milieu* of southern Gaul in this period and will only recapitulate matters here very briefly. Gaul had remained a bastion of semi-Pelagian thought during the fifth and early sixth centuries; Lérins, rightly or wrongly, has come, more than any other place, to be associated with the doctrine. Semi-Pelagianism, with its reliance on good works and on human free will in making the choice to believe in God and therefore to be saved, stood in opposition to Augustine's teachings on divine grace which, at their most extreme, could imply that salvation was predestined and could never be earned by an individual's actions.

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<sup>797</sup> SC 353 p.153

Despite the church's official rejection of Pelagianism, which I have already discussed, and its embrace of Augustinian doctrine, there seems to have been no shortage of Christians, including churchmen, who preferred broadly Pelagian doctrines to Augustinian ones. In particular, Pelagian doctrine was attractive to those within the monastic setting,<sup>798</sup> perhaps because of Pelagius' particular emphasis on ascetic conduct,<sup>799</sup> perhaps because Cassian, one of the fathers of southern Gallic asceticism, tended towards Pelagian doctrines,<sup>800</sup> perhaps because, as ascetics, they were already acting in accordance with the belief that behaviour in this life would affect one's chance of salvation. In any case, a semi-Pelagianism philosophy of grace and free will emerged in the southern Gallic church in this period and became one of its major characteristics. Other scholars have rightly argued that this semi-Pelagianism might better be described as semi-Augustinianism but, for my purposes, that is not the most important thing. What matters is that the southern Gallic church was home to a doctrinal philosophy which was quite different from – and conceivably even hostile to – the church's official line. This situation was able to last because the leaders of the Gallic church preferred not to dispute doctrinal matters publicly – or, indeed, at all!

The council of Orange, however, put an end to this state of affairs. It was the death knell for semi-Pelagianism; it was the Roman church, in the form of Caesarius, bringing the bishops of Gaul to heel and doing away, once and for all, with doctrinal deviation. For these reasons, the canons of Orange occupy an important place in ecclesiastical history, but one might reasonably ask why the church chose this time, rather than any other, to deal with semi-Pelagianism and how this council relates to other early sixth century ecclesiastical councils and particularly to Caesarius' own programme of councils.

Having laid out the bare bones of the theological setting for the council of Orange, I now move on to discuss the immediate causes of and background to the council before going on to discuss its rulings, the reason for its rulings and its place in the wider ecclesiastical context of the period.

Given how far the canons of Orange depart from the products of most other contemporary councils, it cannot surprise one to learn that Orange II was not, in fact, part of the regular run of church councils in the 520s. Following the council of Carpentras, it was planned that

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<sup>798</sup> Cf. Lorenz (1966) 36-38

<sup>799</sup> Pelagius, *Epistola ad Demetriadem de virginitate et vitae perfectione*, 10

<sup>800</sup> Markus (1986) 31

Caesarius' bishops should meet again at Vaison in November 528,<sup>801</sup> exactly a year after Carpentras, which reinforces Mathisen's sense of regularity in the staging of these councils. In fact, Vaison was postponed for a year and, in July 529, the council of Orange was held where, unlike Caesarius' other councils which dealt with what we may broadly term church discipline, the matters under discussion related exclusively to doctrine, dogma and the limits of acceptable belief. This sudden summoning of bishops to Orange suggests strongly that the council should be seen as a reaction to some external event; it seems most likely that the event in question was the council of Valence convened by Julian of Vienne, an *ex officio* rival of Caesarius and Arles.

The canons of Valence are not extant so we have no means of comparing its rulings with those of Orange. However, Caesarius' biographers do give an account of events in the *Vita Caesarii* and, in my opinion, the fact that they would do so at all implies very strongly that the council of Valence in 528 was an important event in Caesarius' career, that what took place there had a significant enough impact to warrant a position in his biography even though Caesarius was not directly involved. The *Vita* tells us that Caesarius did not attend the council of Valence *infirmittatis solitae causa* (although we may reasonably suspect that he was suffering a diplomatic cold, either because he did not want to deal with his rival Julian or because he feared the implications for his own authority or even because he was conscious that the council would advance a doctrinal line which deviated excessively from his own orthodoxy and, as a result, he feared contamination by association); in his place, as his representative, went Cyprian of Toulon, future author of the *Vita Caesarii*.<sup>802</sup> The *Vita* describes Cyprian's conduct at Valence in little detail: "he [Cyprian] confirmed from the Holy Scriptures all the things which he [Caesarius] was saying".<sup>803</sup> The *Vita* does, however, make a clear statement that the topic at stake at Valence was the issue of the rôle of grace in salvation and that Cyprian specifically stated that "no action may be taken on one's own account in making divine progress unless one has first been called through the prevenient grace of God".<sup>804</sup>

The *Vita* explains that the bishops at the council of Valence "...sought to set their own justice in place but were not obedient to the justice of God".<sup>805</sup> It goes on to describe the ways in which the bishops at Valence deviated from Scripture. Reacting to the failings of Valence,

<sup>801</sup> Carpentras (527), *Hoc enim placuit custodiri, ut sequenti anno in vico Vasensi VIII id. Novembris debeat concilium congregari.*

<sup>802</sup> *Vita Caes.* 1.60

<sup>803</sup> *Vita Caes.* 1.60, *omnia quae dicebat de divinis utique scripturis adfirmans*

<sup>804</sup> *Vita Caes.* 1.60, *nihil per se in divinis profectibus quenquam arripere posse, nisi fuerit primitus, Dei gratia praeveniente, vocatus.*

<sup>805</sup> *Vita Caes.* 1.60, *Sed dum suam iustitiam quaerebant statuere, iustitiae Dei non erant subiecti*

“the man of Christ [Caesarius] gave a true and obvious response to their intentions, based on apostolic tradition”.<sup>806</sup> This is how the genesis of the council of Orange is described in the *Vita*. It was Caesarius’ reply to the canons of Valence and aimed at bringing true Christian doctrine to bishops who had strayed from orthodoxy. In this sense, Orange in 529 was not truly the first theological convention of the period; that honour must instead go to Valence.

We might wonder, then, why Julian of Vienne would have staged a council the sole purpose of which was to lay out a doctrinal framework which rejected many fundamentals of Augustinianism. Sadly, we cannot know this since no written explication of his reasons has been left and the canons themselves have not survived (surely because, as unorthodox documents, the church saw no benefit in their preservation). In the absence of the canons themselves and of any sources related to Julian, we are left to guess at his reasons. We can assume that Julian was more or less a rival to Caesarius, as bishops of Vienne were generally more or less rivals to bishops of Arles. Moreover, Julian, who had become bishop in about 520, had presided over the loss of eleven of his dioceses which, following the Ostrogothic expansion beyond the Durance, had been returned to Arles. He cannot have been happy about this. He must have been still less happy about Caesarius’ rising profile in these dioceses – after all, since their return in 523, Caesarius had convened two councils (Arles IV, Carpentras) and had a third planned (Vaison); one council had been in Caesarius’ home city and the other two, in what was clearly a message to the other Gallic bishops, were in the newly returned dioceses beyond the Durance. Caesarius was taking up the reins of power in Julian’s old bailiwick with considerable enthusiasm. Apart from this, Caesarius, as papal *vicarius*, was also Julian’s theoretical superior and, indeed, had nearly two decades of experience on the episcopal throne whereas Julian had less than a decade’s tenure. In many ways, therefore, Caesarius seemed, whether intentionally or otherwise, to be undermining Julian’s authority and to be eclipsing Vienne.

While I can echo Klingshirn in saying that one cannot absolutely ascribe a purely political – or, as one might say, cynical – motive for the staging of the council of Valence,<sup>807</sup> it is hard not to believe that Julian was keen to reassert his own authority, such as it was and, in that respect, Klingshirn is surely optimistic in diminishing the cynical, political aspect. Julian very likely needed to demonstrate that he, like Caesarius, had the power to call councils, that he could rally churchmen to his banner and that, whatever their relative positions in the disputed suffragan dioceses, he remained a powerful cleric who was not going to be intimidated by

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<sup>806</sup> *Vita Caes.* 1.60, *Quorum intentionibus homo Christi dedit veram et evidentem ex traditione apostolica rationem.*

<sup>807</sup> Klingshirn (1994a) 140

Caesarius' papal *pallium*. I think Julian must also have been aware that the semi-Pelagian view he espoused, and which his council endorsed, was popular in Gaul with laity and clergy alike; this is demonstrated by the simple fact that Cyprian, despite his position as a mouthpiece for Caesarius, was unable to carry the day at Valence. I suspect, at the risk of ascribing dark motives to his conduct, that the opportunity to embarrass Caesarius in this way appealed to Julian. Papal vicar or not, the council of Valence demonstrated, as Julian surely meant it to do, that Caesarius was at a remove from the church he claimed to lead. The council of Orange was Caesarius' response.

The bishops attending the second council of Orange, like those attending the fourth council of Arles, were ostensibly gathering for the dedication of a new basilica. On this occasion, the basilica had been gifted to the city of Orange by the praetorian prefect, Liberius, "out of his most sincere devotion"<sup>808</sup> and, indeed, amongst the subscribers to the canons we do find Liberius' name from which one could infer that the Ostrogothic monarchy, whose representative he was, felt no particular objection to the doctrinal path Caesarius was taking.<sup>809</sup> I would stress that the location of Orange II (in one of the suffragan dioceses recently recovered from Vienne) was probably coincidental; while Caesarius certainly staged his regular councils (Carpentras and Vaison) in dioceses which had, until recently, been outside his direct control, this was probably not the reason for Orange being chosen as the site of a council. Orange II was not something that had been planned ahead of time; it was, as the *Vita Caesarii* and canons of Carpentras seem to show, very much a response to the unforeseen council of Valence. I strongly suspect that Orange was chosen simply because many bishops would be congregating there for the dedication of Liberius' basilica (and it is interesting that Liberius chose to construct a major new building in a city which had only recently come under the Ostrogoths' control – perhaps a sign that, just as Caesarius used councils to imply his sovereignty over the dioceses, so Liberius used euergetism as a means of displaying Ostrogothic control over these cities).

In any case, a total of twenty-five canons were passed on the topics of grace and free will, along with a *Definitio fidei* which essentially recapitulated the canons and defined Catholic belief on these issues. Fourteen bishops, as well as Liberius, appended their names to the document. The canons themselves are not easily comparable to those of other councils from the period; where other councils discussed the arrangement of church property or finances,

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<sup>808</sup> Orange II (529), *Cum ad dedicationem basilicae, quam inlustrissimus praefectus et patricius filius noster Liberius in Arausica civitate fidelissima devotione construxit, deo propitiante et ipso invitante convenissemus*.

<sup>809</sup> Malnory (1894) 30

matters of ecclesiastical discipline, questions of precedence between bishops and abbots and so on, the canons of Orange constitute twenty-five rulings on issues such as original sin and its rôle in the corruption of humanity (*Can.* 1, 2, 15), whether divine grace can be sought freely (*Can.* 3, 4, 8), whether salvation can be earned (*Can.* 9, 10, 12), the position of baptism (*Can.* 5, 8, 13), and so on. Orange II ruled that original sin can be erased – and salvation achieved – only through God's grace which necessarily precedes the human desire to be saved; all things, including prayer, faith and works, spring from this divinely-inspired desire for salvation. When good works are done, they are the result of grace having been conferred and cannot themselves confer grace. Free will not only does not guide human salvation but was, in fact, wrecked by Adam's sin and can be restored only through baptism which, naturally, will be sought only by those who have received God's grace.

We see, then, that the topics at issue at Orange were very involved, very complex, and perhaps, as a result, they lay beyond the interests – and even the understanding – of the majority clergy of the period (a topic discussed earlier). These were not straightforward matters relating to the running of churches but cut, instead, to the core of what it meant to be a Christian and how one could be saved.

It is, therefore, difficult to find common ground between the canons of Orange in and those of, say, Orléans in 511. Where Orléans lays out the church's position on rehabilitating heretical churchmen,<sup>810</sup> Orange is more concerned with defining what heresy is – or, more accurately, what orthodoxy is. Where Orléans laid out the details on the organisation of Rogations,<sup>811</sup> the observation of Easter<sup>812</sup> and the bishop's responsibility not to leave mass before it was finished,<sup>813</sup> Orange delves into the detail of what is permissible thought and what is unacceptable, of which interpretation of Adam and the fall is holy and which is anathema. Seventeen of the canons delivered at Orange are accompanied by biblical quotations to demonstrate the authority from which those canons proceed and, by extension, to undercut the possibility of debate or departure. By no means can the canons of Orange be seen as something that was up for discussion, something to which the Gallic bishops could make a meaningful contribution; the canons should be taken, rather, to constitute a *diktat* from Caesarius making explicit the system of belief to which every bishop was expected to subscribe and brooking no dissent.

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<sup>810</sup> Orléans I, *Can.* 10

<sup>811</sup> Orléans I, *Can.* 27

<sup>812</sup> Orléans I, *Can.* 24

<sup>813</sup> Orléans I, *Can.* 26

In support of this uncompromising view of the canons, we have the not insignificant fact that the basis of the canons of Orange lies not with the bishops attending the council in 529 but in the *capitula sancti Augustini* sent to Caesarius by Pope Felix IV.<sup>814</sup> Indeed, the preface to the canons of Orange actually makes mention of the council's dependence on "a few *capitula* transmitted to us from the apostolic seat"<sup>815</sup> which themselves, the preface says, contained the thoughts of the ancient fathers on the scriptures (although, in reality, they were based on the views of Pope Hormisdas<sup>816</sup>).

The real significance of the origin of the canons – the fact that they do not represent the fruit of debates amongst the Gallic bishops but are, for all practical purposes, material given to Caesarius by the papacy for the express purpose of bringing Gaul into line with Rome – lies in the modern tendency to see Orange as representing some manner of compromise in which Caesarius treads a middle ground bringing together the extreme views of semi-Pelagianism and Augustinian predestinarianism so that conciliation wins the day. Certainly, Klingshirn presents as fact that idea that the canons of Orange were represents "a compromise that owed much to Caesarius' own theological sympathies, which were divided between the 'semi-Pelagianism' of Lérins and...Augustinianism".<sup>817</sup> The council of Orange becomes, in this interpretation, one aspect in Caesarius' imagined agenda of building a Gallic church in which Lérinsian influence (of which he himself is imagined to be both a beneficiary and a proponent) continues to be strong.

If the canons of Orange ultimately originate in letters sent to Caesarius by Felix IV in Rome, and they plainly do, then it becomes difficult to see how they can be cast as Caesarius' compromise. I have elsewhere discussed the assumption that Caesarius was steeped in semi-Pelagian doctrine and, in particular, the idea that he received his education in Pelagianism at Lérins (which becomes, in Leyser's interpretation, the Caesarian "alma mater"<sup>818</sup>) and I will try to avoid repeating myself here any more than is necessary; however, the attempt to locate Caesarius and the canons of Orange within the *milieu* of Lérinsian Pelagianism is factually incorrect and, I think, deeply damaging to our chances of understanding the full and proper context for the second council of Orange. By casting Caesarius' doctrinal beliefs as a product of Lérins and interpreting the canons of Orange as a product of a definitively 'Lérinsian' mind, Klingshirn and Leyser, and those who follow them, not only massively overstate

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<sup>814</sup> Cappuyns (1934) 124-125; for the *capitula* themselves, see *Capitula sancti Augustini in urbem Romam transmissa*, CCSL 85A (1978) ed. F. Glorie, 251-273

<sup>815</sup> Orange II (529), *pauca capitula ab apostolica nobis sede transmissa*

<sup>816</sup> Markus (1989) 225

<sup>817</sup> Klingshirn (1994a) 142; I discussed above Caesarius' relationship with and dependence on the Augustinian thinker Pomerius.

<sup>818</sup> Leyser (1999) 189

Lérins' influence on Caesarius (and, after all, he was not even present in the monastery for very long and, by the time of Orange II in 529, he had away from the monastery for, at the very least, the better of four decades) but also underplay Caesarius' relationship with the Rome and effectively ignore the political issues which were at play in Caesarius' career during the late 520s.

The canons of Orange represented the vision of Catholicism which had been endorsed by the papacy. Insofar as they indicate anything about Caesarius' doctrinal sympathies, they actually highlight his longstanding relationship with Rome and his willingness, for a number of reasons, to push enthusiastically for the Gallic church to embrace the papacy's stance on Augustinianism. The first reason why Caesarius would wish this has to do simply with his status as the papal *vicarius* in Gaul: for his office as the pope's representative to have any meaning – that is, for it to impart any actual authority – the pope's will had to carry real weight with the bishops of Gaul; if they contemned papal opinion, they would, one may safely presume, also condemn Caesarius' activities on behalf of the papacy. Essentially, a stronger position for the papacy equalled a stronger position for Caesarius.

The next reason for taking a robustly pro-Roman line has to do with what I believe to be Caesarius' desire for conformity within the Gallic church. The impression I take away from his life and career, from his early days as cellarer of Lérins through to his latter career as an authoritarian bishop who delighted in sending corrective letters to other clerics, is of a man who derived great satisfaction from uniformity of action and belief (which were preferably to take place under his personal guidance); so long as there were bishops who deviated from his line, from the official line, Caesarius was unhappy. The canons of Orange put an end to doctrinal untidiness and forced all bishops neatly within the same theological outlook, an outcome that was surely very gratifying for Caesarius' personally.

Yet another reason, less subjective and more to do with *Realpolitik*, simply relates to Caesarius' rivalry with Julian or Arles' long rivalry with Vienne. Julian had, for all practical purposes, thrown down the gauntlet with the council of Valence and any failure to answer this challenge – any failure to reject Valence's anti-Augustinian canons utterly – necessarily undermined Caesarius' position given his widely-known sympathies for the papacy's pro-Augustinian stance. This was very likely in Julian's mind in staging the council of Valence which itself was almost certainly intended as a response to his own dented personal authority resulting from the loss of eleven dioceses to Arles. By holding a council that rejected Caesarius' position, Julian underlined his imagined episcopal independence. And it was for

this reason that Caesarius could not let Valence pass uncontested; Julian had to be brought into line and the rest of the Gallic episcopacy with him.

One cannot really look at the councils of the 520s, I would contend, without seeing these recurring themes whereby Caesarius advances simultaneously the authority of the pope, his own personal power and the course of clerical uniformity. Certainly none of them should be overlooked in relation to Orange II.

Moreover, when dealing with the issue of semi-Pelagianism *versus* semi-Augustinianism, which lies at the core of Orange II, it is important to consider the position of Augustinianism within the wider church. In order for the findings of Orange to constitute a compromise between the two doctrines, as is argued by Leyser, Klingshirn and others, we would have to assume that extreme predestinarian Augustinianism was the Catholic church's official line and that, in pursuit of a compromise, Caesarius was somehow breaking ranks in order to bring "augustinisme intermédiaire"<sup>819</sup> to Gaul. It is, however, not clear to me that the wider church in the first half of the sixth century actually did embrace predestinarian thought. Certainly, the *capitula* of Augustine, on which the canons of Orange are based, do not give much of a hint that predestinarian thinking was widely accepted at Rome or, presumably, elsewhere in the western church. Nor can we say that this modified Augustinianism was a real innovation – after all, these *capitula*, the basis for Orange II, were based on Hormisdas' reading of Augustine.<sup>820</sup> We can safely assume that, for the duration of Hormisdas' papal tenure (514-523) at the very least, 'modified Augustinianism' was the rule in the church; moreover, it seems unlikely that Hormisdas' view was itself an innovation, so we would not be wide of the mark in thinking that extreme predestinarian doctrines had never had much traction in mainstream ecclesiastical thinking during the first few decades of the early sixth century.

In this connexion, it is interesting to note that the *Definitio fidei* produced at Orange II contains an explicit rejection of the idea of predestinarianism (or, at least, the idea that people were predestined to do evil and therefore to be damned) written in the crisp clear Latin that is so characteristic of Caesarius: "Not only do we not believe that no-one is predestined by divine power to do evil, we actually say, with complete revulsion, that if there are those who wish to believe something so evil, they are anathema".<sup>821</sup> To my eyes, it seems that this represents less of a compromise than an unambiguous statement that predestinarianism had

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<sup>819</sup> Cappuyns (1934) 126

<sup>820</sup> Markus (1989) 225

<sup>821</sup> Orange II (529), *aliquos vero ad malum divina potestate praedestinos esse non solum non credimus, sed etiam, si sunt, qui tantum mali credere velint, cum omni detestatione illis anathema dicimus.*[= SC 353 p.172]

never been accepted by the church and that the idea that church-endorsed Augustinianism was ever, in any way, predestinarian is simply wrong. It seems to be a response to what orthodox churchmen might have seen as the misinterpretation of Augustine by the semi-Pelagians or, indeed, by any others. It has a terse air which I believe reflects Caesarius' indignation in the face of the recurring trope that Augustine's doctrines, as accepted, interpreted and employed by the church of the day, constituted a predestinarian belief.

Insofar as one attempts to insert Orange II into the wider ecclesiastical agenda which Caesarius pursued in his councils of the 520s, one can only see it as an attempt to underpin his nominal authority over the southern Gallic episcopacy. Its function was to lay out a programme of Catholic doctrinal thought, as interpreted by the papacy and enforced by Caesarius, and to impose it upon the church. It surely constitutes a response to the defiance of Julian and his followers at Valence and is itself almost a challenge to Julian testing his resolve, his willingness to stand up for the popular but heterodox doctrines espoused at Valence. Orange II, therefore, had the effect of putting Julian in his place and of establishing his subordination to Caesarius and the papacy.

#### **The Second Council of Vaison, 5<sup>th</sup> November 529**

The second council of Vaison was held just a few months after Orange II, although, as I said above, it had originally been planned for November 528. Klingshirn describes the council in melodramatic terms: "The theological achievement of the Council of Orange was equalled a few months later by the pastoral achievement of the Council of Vaison".<sup>822</sup> In doing so, he might seem to imply – or, at least, to leave the implication hanging – that there was some connexion between the councils of Orange and Vaison, that they were meant to complement each other. In fact, there was no real connexion between the councils. Vaison II represented a return to Caesarius' scheduled programme of councils, whereas Orange II, as I have said, was very much a deviation from Caesarius' intended programme, an unplanned reaction to the council of Valence; moreover, Vaison II can and should be seen as being very much an integral part of the programme of councils during the 520s – its canons, that is to say, should be seen as relating very closely to canons established at other councils – while Orange was something quite different.

Caesarius and eleven suffragan bishops met at the city of Vaison which, like Orange and Carpentras, had been administered as part of the metropolitan province of Vienne until the Ostrogothic conquest. While the choice of locations for Orange was probably coincidental,

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<sup>822</sup> Klingshirn (1994a) 143

the choice of Vaison was surely not; as with Carpentras, it was chosen for a reason and that reason was to broadcast Caesarius' authority over the dioceses beyond the Durance. It was a message aimed particularly at Vienne and its metropolitan, Julian, and it was a message which must have picked up considerably more piquancy after Caesarius' triumph at Orange than it could ever have done had it been held, as was originally planned, in 528.

The bishops at Vaison adopted five canons. The first two represent genuine reforms to the actual mechanics of Christianisation at the parochial level while the latter three merely change elements of the liturgy. The first canon is of considerable interest because it decrees that presbyters will henceforth take youngsters into their homes where they will educate them in the Scriptures "in order that they may provide worthy successors for themselves and receive from the Lord an eternal reward".<sup>823</sup> As interesting as this canon may be (and, given that it shows Caesarius' concern for the presence of competent priests in his parishes, it certainly is interesting), it only attains its full significance when seen alongside the second canon of Vaison which, for the first time, allowed priests to preach and allowed deacons to recite homilies.<sup>824</sup>

The second canon is a departure from established ecclesiastical tradition which held that only bishops could preach. In spite of Augustine's suggestion that priests and deacons could, where necessary, read the sermons of the church fathers,<sup>825</sup> Gallic bishops seem to have guarded the privilege of preaching quite jealously. The canons of Vaison diminished, to a greater or lesser extent, the bishop's unique position by removing the episcopate's exclusive right of interpreting Scripture and preaching to congregations. The significance of this has been commented on elsewhere by other scholars and I will try not to retread well-worn ground here;<sup>826</sup> however, the first and second canons, taken together, form an important element of and important evidence for Caesarius' Christianisation programme. Further, when we place these two canons alongside the rulings of Carpentras on property, we see clearly a

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<sup>823</sup> Vaison II (529), ...*ut et sibi dignos successores provideant et a Domino praemia aeterna recipiant.* [=SC 323 p.188]

<sup>824</sup> Thus Klingshirn (1994a) 144 is not entirely correct in saying that the council "gave priests and deacons the right to preach"; in fact, this right was given only to priests while deacons were allowed to read homilies if the priest was indisposed. (Cf. Vaison II (520), *Can. 2, non solum in civitatibus, sed etiam in omnibus parochiis verbum faciendi daremus presbyteris potestatem, ita ut, si presbyter aliqua infirmitate prohibente per se ipsum non potuerit praedicare, sanctorum patrum homiliae a diaconibus recitentur.* [= SC 353 p.190]). It is particularly noteworthy that the language used to justify allowing deacons to read homilies (*si enim digni sunt diaconi, quod Christus in evangelio locutus est, legere, quare indigni iudicentur sanctorum patrum expositiones publice recitare?*) closely echoes *Sermo 1.15* (*si dignus est diaconus quisque ut legat quod locutus est Christus, non debet iudicari indignus ut recitet quod praedicavit sanctus Elarius, sanctus Ambrosius, sanctus Augustinus, vel reliqui patres*), an encyclical probably dating to the late 520s.

<sup>825</sup> Aug., *De doctrina Christiana*, 4.19.62

<sup>826</sup> Hen (1995) 33; Bertelli (1998) 58

focus on the parish, on the lowest level of ecclesiastical organisation and administration. At Carpentras, Caesarius had already equipped parishes with the financial resources needed to function effectively and autonomously; at Vaison, he gave priests the authority to engage fully with their communities, in a way that bishops probably rarely could, and to act as agents of a very forthright Christianisation effort.

It is possible to go too far and to read too much into these two canons, as with Marrou, who saw in the first canon the birth of parish schools,<sup>827</sup> and Reff, who sees the same canon as proof of some kind of anti-pagan plot (“As Caesarius understood, the key to eradicating pagan ‘superstitions’ was to remove the young people from the process of transmission”).<sup>828</sup> Nevertheless, the significance of the first two canons of Vaison II is huge. They were incredibly important innovations for the Gallic church with far-reaching consequences for episcopal authority<sup>829</sup> and for the process by which Christianity was to be spread through the southern Gallic countryside. Necessarily, these two canons – by giving priests the power to preach and by placing on their shoulders the responsibility to train replacements – diminished the unique position and authority of the bishop even as they increased the church’s presence in a rural environment which had hitherto been Christianised only in a superficial manner. These canons should be taken alongside the canons of Carpentras, which provide parishes with the necessary financial support, in laying the foundations for a determined policy of rural Christianisation, a policy which was clearly meant to be executed by priests at the parochial level with little reference to their episcopal superiors.

It is probably for these reasons, because they feared the rise of parochial authority and the diminution of their own, that so few bishops actually signed the canons of Vaison. Only eleven suffragan bishops appended their names to the canons, far fewer than agreed to his other church councils of the 520s.<sup>830</sup> Some of Caesarius’ closest allies, moreover, seem to have deserted him over this issue and these include individuals whose signatures were on the canons of Orange, a bare three months earlier, and who would go on to sign the canons of Marseilles in 533.<sup>831</sup> This could suggest the depth of opposition that existed towards Caesarius’ policies; the conflict surely did not devolve from opposition towards

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<sup>827</sup> Marrou (1956) 336, 342

<sup>828</sup> Reff (2005) 116

<sup>829</sup> Cf. Antonopolou (1997) 112-113 who believes that educational deficiency on the part of priests, rather than any particular concern with episcopal privilege or authority, was the reason for bishops’ retention of “preaching authority”. Caesarius (*Sermo* 1.13) appears to acknowledge that this was used as an excuse by bishops but, at the same time, he dismisses it; the real issue was not education but the guarding of authority.

<sup>830</sup> Eleven bishops signed Vaison II (529); thirteen signed Orange II (529); fifteen signed Carpentras (527); and seventeen signed Arles IV (524).

<sup>831</sup> Klingshim (1994a) 144

Christianisation *qua* Christianisation but from a rejection of the methods involved and from a sense, whether justified or not, that the position of the bishop was being undermined.

Curiously, the last three canons of Vaison are not controversial at all. The third canon calls for the introduction of the “sweet and extremely beneficial custom” of the *Kyrie eleison* “which was introduced in the apostolic seat and through all the Oriental provinces and those of Italy”.<sup>832</sup> The fourth canon merely calls for the pope’s name to be recited in churches and the fifth for the phrase *sicut erat in principio* to be added to the liturgy after the *Gloria*, as was done *per totum Orientem et totam Africam vel Italianam*.

It is hard to imagine that any bishops would have been particularly troubled by these additions to the liturgy, so we must assume that the unwillingness of even close allies to endorse Caesarius’ wishes reflects concern over the first two canons. Even so, in spite of their innocuous nature, these last three canons do offer a certain window into Caesarius’ mind. The third canon, in particular, seem to reflect Caesarius’ religio-aesthetic tastes – here was a man who apparently found tremendous beauty in the recitation of the phrase *sanctus sanctus sanctus* and who could not see how anyone could ever grow bored of such a *dulcis et desiderabilis vox*. But, beyond the purely aesthetic, the third, fourth and fifth canons reflect Caesarius’ perpetual desire to have the Gallic church conform to ‘international’ standards, to have the Gallic ecclesiastical establishment embrace all the norms, whether liturgical, organisational or disciplinary, of the wider Catholic church. This same way of thinking, this same belief that all Catholic clergy had to conduct themselves in exactly the same way and in accordance with exactly the same rules, lay the heart of Orange II, in the repetition of old canons at Arles IV and even in his reprimand of Agroecius: in Caesarius’ vision, the Catholic church truly had to be universal with the same practices followed by all Catholics and with no room for any kind of deviation.

### The councils of Caesarius and the first council of Orléans

The first council of Orléans was called by the Frankish king Clovis in 511, not long before his death.<sup>833</sup> It constitutes the Frankish kingdom’s first ‘national’ council (insofar as one may usefully employ so modern a term and construct) and had, to some extent, the effect of establishing a formal position of authority for the monarch over the church in his realm. It may be that this is one of Orléans’s more important facets, from the perspective of considering ecclesiastical relations with the crown; Clovis himself appears to have had close

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<sup>832</sup> Vaison II (529), *Can. 3, Et quia tam in sede apostolica, quam etiam per totas Orientales atque Italiae provincias dulcis et nimium salubris consuetudo est intromissa...*

<sup>833</sup> *Canones Aurelianenses, Epistola ad regem*

involvement with the policies established and adopted at Orléans. He not only called the council but was also asked to endorse its outcome which implies that the council of Orléans gained legitimacy less from the assembled college of Frankish bishops than from the king's pronouncement that the council's rulings were acceptable to him and would have force in his kingdom. Nor was this the only context in which the council of Orléans inserted royal authority into church business: laymen in the Frankish kingdom were not to be ordained without the approval of the king or a judge;<sup>834</sup> this canon can probably be seen to pave the way for a canon at the fifth council of Orléans (549) which forbade the ordination of a bishop without the approval of the king.<sup>835</sup>

The thirty-one canons of Orléans, which were signed by a total of thirty-two bishops, cover quite a variety of topics and, for convenience, I will summarise them here:

*Canon 1*, deals with issues of ecclesiastical sanctuary for murderers, robbers and adulterers, the circumstances in which those seeking sanctuary can be surrendered (only if an oath is given on the Gospels that the person surrendering will not be harmed); also prescribes the penalties for those who break an oath.

*Canon 2*, deals with sanctuary for rapists, the issue of a rapist bringing his victim into the church (in which case she is to be freed) and the respective positions of the victim's father and the rapist.

*Canon 3*, deals with slaves seeking sanctuary and the conditions under which they may be returned to their masters (again, slaves may not be surrendered without an oath that they will not be harmed).

*Canon 4*, forbids laymen from attaining clerical office without the approval of the king or a judge; exceptions are made for the sons, grandsons or great-grandsons of priests in which case they may attain office at a bishop's discretion.

*Canon 5*, deals with royal gifts to the church and the revenues derived which are to be expended in maintaining priests and church buildings, in assisting the poor

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<sup>834</sup> *Can 4, De ordinationibus clericorum id observandum esse censuimus ut nullus saecularium ad clericatus officium praesumatur nisi aut cum regis iussione aut cum iudicis voluntate.* The *Sources Chrétien* edition translates the Latin *iudex* as *comte* arguing that, in the late empire, *iudex* referred to the governor of a province rather than an actual judge. [SC 353, p. 75, n. 5]

<sup>835</sup> Orléans V (549), *Can 10* [= SC 353 p.308]

and in redeeming captives. Priests who fail in their duties are to be reprimanded and, if they do not mend their ways, excommunicated.

*Canon 6*, deals with slander against a bishop which is punishable by excommunication.

*Canon 7*, forbids abbots and priests from petitioning secular *domni* for favours.

*Canon 8*, deals with slaves who have run away and become priests and with the compensation a bishop owes to the master (which is simply the price of the slave but, if the bishop knew the slave was a runaway at the time of ordination, then the price is doubled).

*Canon 9*, deals with priests or deacons who commit a capital crime; they are to be excommunicated and their office is forfeit.

*Canon 10*, deals with the entry of heretical (Arian) priests into the Catholic church and the use of formerly Gothic churches.

*Canon 11*, deals with penitent priests who abandon the church and return to secular life. Not only are the penitents themselves to be excommunicated, but so is anyone who eats with them.

*Canon 12*, allows priests and deacons who, as penance, have been forbidden from saying mass nevertheless to carry out baptisms.

*Canon 13*, forbids the widow of a deacon or priest from remarrying and calls for her castigation; if she persists in her new marriage, she is to be excommunicated.

*Canon 14*, deals with the division of parochial offerings; in accordance with established canons, half is to go to the bishop and half to the local clergy.

*Canon 15*, deals with gifts of lands, vineyards and slaves given by the faithful to parishes; these are to remain in the bishop's power with one-third of all goods produced remitted directly to the bishop.

*Canon 16*, lays out the bishop's duty to feed and clothe the poor and sick, insofar as they are able.

*Canon 17*, establishes that new churches are to be subject to the bishop in whose province they are built.

*Canon 18*, forbids a man to marry either his brother's widow or his dead wife's sister; ecclesiastical sanctions are to be applied to transgressors.

*Canon 19*, lays out the ecclesiastical hierarchy (abbots are to be subject to bishops, monks to be subject to abbots). Abbots are to convene annually at a place appointed by their bishops. Runaway monks are to be restored to their monasteries with the support of the bishop.

*Canon 20*, forbids high boots and scarves for monks.

*Canon 21*, forbids monks who have been accepted into a monastery as *conversi* from having sexual contact with their wives.

*Canon 22*, forbids monks from abandoning their monasteries and setting up their own cells.

*Canon 23*, deals with ecclesiastical rights to property which has been given by a bishop to members of the clergy.

*Canon 24*, sets out the proper period for the observation of Easter.

*Canon 25*, forbids the inhabitants of a town from celebrating Easter, Pentecost or the Nativity within that town, unless illness can be proved.

*Canon 26*, forbids congregations from leaving church before the mass is finished or, if a bishop is present, before the benediction.

*Canon 27*, lays out the proper calendar for the celebration of Rogations and the related fasts; a holiday of three days is granted to all slaves and maids and everyone is to abstain from Lenten foods for three days.

*Canon 28*, establishes that negligent clergy are to be disciplined by their bishop.

*Canon 29*, orders bishops, priests and deacons to uphold all old canons on the subject of fraternisation between clergy and women.

*Canon 30*, forbids monks and clergy from auguries and divination. Those who engage in them anyway are to be excommunicated.

*Canon 31*, demands that bishops attend whichever church is closest to them on a Sunday.

This mixed bag of rules and regulations can probably be put under a number of broad headings. Canons 1-3 and 9 might be said to deal broadly with the church's relationship to secular law and crime. Canons 5, 14-16 and 23 all deal with some aspect of church property and finances. Matters of what could broadly be called church discipline – that is, rules on personal conduct, hierarchy, duties, responsibilities and so on – are handled in canons 11-13, 18-22 and 28-31. Slaves and their position in the church – or, perhaps, the church's position as it relates to slaves – are dealt with in canons 2 and 8. Matters relating to the organisation of religious worship are discussed in canons 24, 25 and 27.

Caesarius' councils, too, covered a great deal of ground, from the theological focus of Orange II to the concentration on parochial organisation seen at Vaison II and Carpentras to the rather odd fourth council of Arles which began Caesarius' programme of councils in 524. For this reason, simply because the matters discussed in 511 and in the 520s vary so widely, the business of comparing the two isn't a cut-and-dried affair. If we wish to arrive at some sense of Caesarius' overarching agenda, we must first recognise the extent to which the second council of Orange constitutes a cuckoo in the nest. It was not really planned by Caesarius and it deals exclusively with matters of forensic theology which are completely unlike anything dealt with by the bishops at Orléans. A direct comparison of its canons with those of Orléans is probably not a profitable exercise; instead, we should look particularly at the other councils of the 520s, the canons of which strongly indicate the shape and direction that Caesarius wished his church to take, and compare them to those of Orléans in 511.

Superficially, the differences between Caesarius' councils and Orléans are stark. Caesarius deals with fewer issues, fewer topics and spends much less time on the minute detail of organising ecclesiastical discipline; Orléans, on the other hand, covers a great many topics, as

I have said, and some of these seem comparatively minor (for example, *Can.* 20, 26 or 31) when compared to some of the topics at stake in Caesarius' councils. This ought not to surprise us, as it is quite clear that Caesarius' focus was different from that of Orléans, that his motive in holding any of the councils of the 520s differed. It should probably be abundantly clear, on the basis of what I have written above, that Caesarius' major aim in his councils of the 520s was to lay the foundation for a meaningful process of Christianisation. Particularly at Vaison and Carpentras, though also at Arles IV, rules were laid out to provide the money and manpower needed to carry out Christianising work in the countryside and for parishes to function as autonomous entities capable of performing euergetic duties without reference to the episcopal centre.

It would be easy, but probably incorrect, to assume that Caesarius allowed his interest in rural Christianisation to dominate his agenda to the point where all other issues were simply excluded. In fact, as I shall show below, Caesarius cannot be said to have been uninterested in matters such as church discipline or monastic organisation; nor, for that matter, were the bishops at Orléans oblivious to the needs of their parishes. Despite the superficial differences between their approaches and their canons, there exist similarities between the two, a number of canonical positions which indicate comparable – perhaps even analogous – approaches to issues.

The first point of similarity, in my opinion, between Orléans and the councils of the 520s lies in the recognition shown by both that parishes required proper resources to function. Orléans' canons lay out the use to which royal gifts and their outgrowths are to be put: "whatever God should deign to provide in fruits, let it be expended in the repair of churches, the upkeep of priests and paupers or the redeeming of captives",<sup>836</sup> an approach of which Caesarius would have approved wholeheartedly. The same canon threatens punishment, including excommunication, for those who fail to pay the proper attention to these duties. Canons 14 and 15 discuss the division of offerings received from the faithful – they are to be halved between the bishop and the parochial clergy – and the division of fruits derived from lands donated to parishes, with a third of produce being remitted to the bishop. Again, while Caesarius might not have endorsed an absolute rule stating that, in all circumstances, parochial donations are to be divided in these ways, he would have been pleased to see the recognition, implicit in this canon, that parish churches functioned as the centres of rural Christian communities and that, in order to serve congregations efficiently, resources were needed. If these two canons provide the bishop with various financial resources, canon 16 is

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<sup>836</sup> Orléans (511), *Can.* 5, in *reparationibus ecclesiarum, alimoniis sacerdotum et pauperum vel redemptionibus captivorum, quidquid Deus in fructibus dare dignatus fuerit, expendatur*

very closely related because it dictates how the bishop is expected to employ the donations he receives: "Let the bishop provide food and clothes, as far as is possible, to the poor or the sick who, because of their incapacity, cannot work with their own hands".<sup>837</sup> A cynic might think that the reason for stating this so baldly in a canon is that some bishops were using donations for reasons other than the care of their congregation.

The attitude found in these canons is close to some of Caesarius' own concerns. Indeed, it recalls Caesarius' unhappiness, expressed at Carpentras, about those bishops who were apparently appropriating parochial donations for their own use. Fundamentally, we can say that Caesarius and the bishops at Orléans both saw the importance of ensuring that parishes had funding; they probably differed in quite how much weight they attached to this issue and, clearly, Caesarius' canons at Carpentras, which calls for parishes and bishops to divide donations on a case-by-case basis paying attention to expenses and donations, are much more nuanced than the simple division decreed at Orléans. Nevertheless, both sets of canons show that bishops were attuned to the activities undertaken by their parishes and understood that part of their rôle, as the leaders of dioceses, was to support their parishes financially. Caesarius, of course, wanted to extend parochial activities and to allow priests and deacons to take on more important duties, such as preaching and reading homilies; as we saw when discussing Vaison, Caesarius' proposition was extremely innovative and did not meet with unconditional episcopal endorsement, even from bishops who were traditionally close supporters. In apprehending just how groundbreaking Caesarius' reform was, we understand why the bishops at Orléans attempted nothing of this kind. We also appreciate, I think, that this single difference, although considerable, should not undermine the degree to which we are conscious of the similarities.

True differences in agenda can be found in the approaches that are taken to matters such as church discipline. While Orléans seems particularly concerned with laying out disciplinary matters, including the establishment of a proper hierarchical relationship between bishops, abbots and monks, Caesarius' councils, with the single exception of Arles IV, seem largely to bypass such issues. Arles IV, as I have already said, was probably held primarily to demonstrate that Caesarius had the authority and the will to stage such councils rather than because it dealt with any pressing ecclesiastical issue. At Orléans, it seems unlikely that the assembled bishops would have discussed anything which was not, in fact, comparatively important to them. One particular point of interest, in this respect, lies in the twenty-second canon of Orléans which forbids any monk from abandoning his monastery and setting up his

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<sup>837</sup> Orléans (511), *Can. 16*, *Episcopus pauperibus vel infirmis, qui debilitate faciente non possunt suis manibus laborare, victum et vestitum, in quantum possibilitas habuerit, largiatur.*

own cell *ambitionis et vanitatis impulsu*. The absence of anything like this from Caesarius' canons may not, by itself, be extremely significant but its inclusion in the canons of Orléans suggests, I think, that this was an issue in the Frankish realm, the northern and western parts of Gaul. It is not unreasonable to imagine that this may be reflective of certain basic differences in ascetic and monastic tradition in these different regions of Gaul. While the southern Gallic model, most easily typified by Lérins, emphasised hierarchy and a coenobitic monastic organisation under the umbrella of the wider church, the western parts of Gaul, where Martin's non-aristocratic asceticism had gained ground, saw a continuation of the anchoritic holy man who withdrew from the world to pursue religious devotion on his own (and one recalls Brown's wonderful description of their "histrionic feats of self-mortification"<sup>838</sup>).

In fact, not only does canon 22 of Orléans reflect the differing monastic cultures of the Frankish kingdom and the Rhône valley, so too does canon 19. At Orléans, it was necessary to lay out the ecclesiastical hierarchy in formal terms and to state directly that abbots were subject to the bishop of the diocese in which their monastery was located. In southern Gaul and probably particularly in the province of Arles, the relationship between abbots and bishops had been established for some time; not only was Lérins a celebrated "nursery of bishops",<sup>839</sup> but from its very foundation it had been a part of the wider southern Gallic church. Admittedly, petty conflicts did occur between bishops of Fréjus and abbots of Lérins,<sup>840</sup> but this was probably more due to the unique status of the monastery (specifically the fact that the monastery was so closely linked to the metropolitan see of Arles to which Fréjus, as a suffragan see of Aix, was junior; on this account, the abbots may have felt themselves a cut above their suffragan neighbour) than with any underlying conflict about the relative positions of abbots and bishops.

Both Arles IV, in its fourth canon, and Orléans, in its nineteenth, make mention of runaway clerics. One supposes that this must have been a perennial problem as individuals who perhaps found that monastic life was less agreeable than they had expected attempted to desert either their vocation as a whole or merely their current monastery. Indeed, given that Arles IV did little more than restate existing canons, the issue of runaways did not suddenly find its way onto the ecclesiastical agenda in 524; it was a long-standing problem and one

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<sup>838</sup> Brown (1961) 91

<sup>839</sup> Montalembert (1896) 1.464; cf. Markus (1990) 200 citing Celestine, *Ep.*, 4.4.7 (*PL* 50.443); cf. Leyser (1999) 198 interpreting Hilary's *Vita Sancti Honorati* as showing "the wilderness to be only a corridor to the promised land" (*i.e.*, that the only reason to attend a monastery is to leave it for something better).

<sup>840</sup> N. Chadwick (1955) 148

might expect that it continued to be a problem long after the 520s. Similarly, the canons forbidding certain types of marriage (Orléans, *Can.* 13, 18), forbidding the ordination of men who had undertaken certain types of marriage (Arles IV, *Can.* 3) and constraining married clergy (Orléans, *Can.* 21) speak of what must have been recurring issues not only in this period and not only in Gaul.

One could say that Caesarius and the bishops at Orléans shared a general sense of how clergy ought to conduct themselves in private and public life and that this view was probably shared by most other bishops in most other regions. They did not want to see their clergy acting in ways that were obviously inappropriate for churchmen. Their definition of inappropriate conduct might vary, from the aforementioned rules on marriage to Orléans' concern that monks should not wear extravagant clothes (*Can.* 20 – a canon perhaps not needed in southern Gaul because existing *regulae*, drawing from well over a century of coenobitic tradition, would have left no doubt about what was unacceptable dress for a monk) even to Caesarius' reprimand to Agroecius at Carpentras (or, going back further, his letter to Ruricius of Limoges), but the essential point, that there were standards of behaviour below which clerics ought not to fall, remains.

Further, both sets of canons seem committed to drawing a clear dividing line between the secular and clerical worlds. Caesarius and the bishops at Orléans alike wanted to prevent members of the laity from taking up ecclesiastical posts. At Orléans, canons 4 and 7 are particularly significant in this regard; the former forbids laymen from taking up a post in the church without the approval of either the king or judge and makes an exception only for the descendant of a cleric whose entry to the church must, nevertheless, be approved by a bishop. This is very much a corollary to first canon of Arles IV which requires a period of *conversatio* from any laymen seeking the episcopate. The differences between the two canons – specifically, Orléans' reliance on royal judgment and Caesarius' fear that laymen were seeking the episcopate for selfish reasons – are rooted in the particular contexts in which the canons were written, one in a Frankish kingdom at a council being held under the king's eye and the other in a part of Gaul where Roman nobles increasingly saw church office as a means of gaining or retaining political power. Nevertheless, both sets of canons speak of a concern that positions of authority within the church were being taken by individuals who lacked real religious conviction.

The fear of undermined authority lies at the heart of canons 6 and 7 at Orléans. The seventh canon forbids priests from seeking favour from secular lords, a sign, I believe, that some clerics went behind the backs (or over the heads) of their bishops, that they actively

undermined ecclesiastical authority in pursuit of their own interests. This, obviously, ties in with the issues at stake in the fourth canon; not only do the bishops at Orléans fear that laymen are entering their church, they are also anxious about interference from secular lords, interference which was sometimes taking place at the instigation of ambitious laymen seeking church office. Similarly, the sixth canon of Orléans, which forbids slander against a bishop, is most likely an attempt to stop clerics from conspiring against their bishops, often by carrying stories to the secular authorities.

When we compare these canons, and the issues which must have sparked them, to Caesarius' canons of the 520s, we see a certain paradox. On the one hand, there seem to be no analogous canons, no easily comparable tenets adopted both in 511 and in the 520s. But, on the other hand, individuals like Licinianus were carrying out just the kinds of actions condemned at Orléans (when he accused Caesarius of treason in 504/5).

I would not like to explain this paradox by saying that the Frankish bishops passed these canons because they faced some manner of clerical assault on episcopal authority while things were less fraught in the southern Gallic church. At the same time, given that Caesarius himself was an unusually jealous guardian of his episcopal rights and prerogatives (as demonstrated by the decades-long tantrum during which he refused to hold church councils out of pique at the loss of eleven suffragan dioceses to Vienne), I can only assume that the absence of any complaints from him about secular interference in the church indicates that little or no such interference was taking place. If it had, he would certainly have mentioned it in either his canons or, at the very least, his letters and sermons. I would posit that the major reason why Caesarius does not discuss secular interference in the church is that, following his trip to Ravenna, he managed to come to terms with the Ostrogothic authorities (whether in the form of Theoderic or his prefect Liberius), had thrashed out a *modus vivendi* and was perhaps being left in peace to run his church as he wished in return for his continued loyalty.

### **Conclusion**

Differing circumstances in Frankish Gaul in 511 and Visigothic Gaul in the 520s produced sets of canons that often varied widely and which sought to address very different questions. The council of Orléans had no component equivalent to the canons of Orange, because there was no need for a discussion of complex theology. Similarly, none of Caesarius' councils ever had to deal with the issues raised by the tenth canon of Orléans which discussed the use of Gothic churches and the rehabilitation of Arian clergy, issues that came about only as a result of Frankish conquest of Visigothic southern Gaul. Other similarities did exist, as I have explained above, and Orléans certainly advanced a number of canons of which Caesarius

would wholeheartedly have approved but the issues facing Orléans and those facing Caesarius in the 520s differed in so many important respects that the similarities, though interesting and sometimes surprising, are probably less important than the divergences.

In the 520s, with control over his entire province returned to him for the first time, Caesarius saw his opportunity to launch a radical and innovative programme of Christianisation. His agenda required decentralisation of diocesan finances and ever greater autonomy for parishes and especially for priests who were to be the frontline soldiers in the campaign to Christianise the countryside. In the programme he advanced, there was no room for the involvement of secular kings (not least because, unlike the bishops at Orléans, Caesarius' king was an Arian heretic); indeed, there was little enough room for other bishops. Caesarius' insistence upon episcopal uniformity and submission to the pope's authority – which, with Caesarius as papal *vicarius*, necessarily meant the authority of Caesarius himself – were at the centre of the agenda he promoted. Bishops were meant to abandon not only a great deal of their authority over parishes but also much of the autonomy that they had traditionally enjoyed. Instead, they were to accept and endorse the views espoused by Caesarius, views which were derived almost entirely from the papacy and which he himself supported not from any deeply-held conviction about the nature of free will and original sin but because he was committed so completely to obeying any rulings which arose from apostolic seat. In his rôle as *vicarius*, he sought to impose this same obedience on the other bishops of the region, as demonstrated by Orange II.

## Chapter Nine

### *Christianisation and conversion in southern Gaul*

In this chapter, I advance one fundamental argument: that popular conversion was not a matter with which most Gallic bishops were particularly concerned and that those who sought to convert the non-élite population were very much the exception. Church leaders in southern Gaul in the fifth and early sixth centuries continued to see Christianity as the religion of the élite, from whose ranks most bishops came, and paid comparatively little attention to the rural poor. This is not to say that bishops were content for the poor to remain openly, ostentatiously pagan; rather, I contend that bishops worked on the principle that, if the patron was a Christian, his *clientes* would be too, and that simple self-identification by a poor man of himself as a member of Christian congregation was sufficient. There was no need for the non-élite individual to be well-informed about Christianity or to understand anything other than the faith's basic moral rules.

Orality was the means by which clerics communicated with congregations. In a society where the majority of the population was completely illiterate, it was the spoken word which communicated Christian ideologies to most people. Accordingly, I will discuss orality as a means of communicating with congregations and the effect that evangelism – and a widening congregation – had upon Caesarius' Latin speech and the modes of language he used when speaking even with élite congregants.

Christianity, while profoundly connected to the written word, was dependent on the spoken word for evangelistic purposes. Speech – the sermon, the lesson, the exposition of parable, rather than the patristic commentary or epistle – made the tenets of Christianity available to communities. Classical culture was founded upon the importance of eloquence – the ability to persuade an audience was the peak of educational attainment in the ancient world. Mastery of speech, rather than of the written word, was the truest marker of the civilised man. Oratory formed the apex of classical education. Public speech was central both to traditional Roman ideologies and also to the dissemination of the Christian message.

The Christian reliance on the spoken word was itself as old as Christianity. There was never a point in the ancient world at which written texts by themselves could reach more people than the spoken word. For any Christian text (including the Bible), it was always necessary for a literate person to interpret the writings for the benefit of the illiterate majority. By the fifth century, there was an additional reason, apart from the pragmatic, for churchmen to esteem

orality; most senior churchmen – certainly in Gaul<sup>841</sup> but elsewhere too – were drawn from classes for whom oratory was a pillar of their *Kulturwelt*. In theory, therefore, aristocratic churchmen, whose main occupation was to instruct an uneducated congregation in the fundamentals of Christian belief, truth and doctrine, were equipped for the task by their secular education.

#### (a) Augustine's theory of oratory

The practice of conversion was somewhat different from the theory I have just laid out and I will now consider Augustine's approach to rhetoric before examining its status and function in the Rhône Valley of the fifth and early sixth centuries.

Augustine had harsh words for the science of rhetoric. Rhetoric was an empty discipline which taught the unsaved to speak eloquently about their sins.<sup>842</sup> It was a collection of tricks devoid of any moral context.<sup>843</sup> Its whole purpose was deception.<sup>844</sup> Yet, despite his outrage at the iniquities of rhetoric, Augustine still recognised the vital part orality played in communicating Christian ideologies. Nowhere is this clearer than in the *De doctrina Christiana*, the fourth book of which Clarke described as "a Christian *De Oratore*".<sup>845</sup> For the evangelist, a personal understanding of Christianity was useless unless it could be expressed clearly. Eloquence and persuasion were valuable tools in the expression of Christian truth and the winning of souls, but all was dependent on context: rhetoric used for wicked ends (such as acquitting a wrongdoer or justifying one's sins) was wrong but, when used to bring people to Christ, it was morally right and a vehicle for disseminating Christian truth. Augustine concluded that rhetoric was not invalidated by its availability to wrongdoers, although it may have taken him some years to arrive at this conclusion; the fourth book of the *De doctrina Christiana*, with its explicit justification of rhetoric, was written in 427 but the others three decades earlier.

One may ask, though, how effective rhetoric could have been in advancing Christianity's case. Any answer must depend on context. The *ars rhetorica*, though integral to the classical world, was not of unquestioned utility in every case; the high Latin of Cicero or Quintilian might not have been effective in swaying the uneducated. The traditional offices of the orator – *inventio*, *dispositio*, *elocutio*, *memoria* and *pronuntiatio* – are themselves probably universal

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<sup>841</sup> Cf. Heinzelmann (1975) 75-90

<sup>842</sup> Augustine, *Confessiones* 1.18.28-29

<sup>843</sup> Aug., *Conf.*, 3.3.6

<sup>844</sup> Aug., *Conf.* 9.2.2

<sup>845</sup> Clarke (1996) 151

in constituting a good speaker, whether formally trained or not, but, if the words spoken are largely incomprehensible to the audience, the stylistic perfection of the speaker is useless. Given that the Latin of public life was largely an artificial language, it is feasible that communication with the uneducated was retarded by the issue of comprehensibility. The rhetorical education could have been a barrier to communication with any audience other than one which shared the speaker's educational background.<sup>846</sup>

Augustine recognised this. He called upon speakers to employ a simple style even as they treat weighty matters;<sup>847</sup> the goal was not to impress an audience with the obscurity and opacity of one's Latin but to be understood with all stylistic concerns subordinate to that end, even though this kind of simplicity was not something that came easily to the educated.<sup>848</sup> More important than any words the orator speaks is the life the orator leads, an exemplary lifestyle making a powerful didactic tool to convey the speaker's moral worth and give weight to his words. A good example is more important than a good speech, a notion wholly in keeping with the Christian orator's didactic rôle.<sup>849</sup>

While the conventional orator of the forum delivered his speeches in a circumscribed environment, speaking on a specific case and often speaking as part of a team, the Christian orator, as envisioned by Augustine, was trying to change his audience's lives and lifestyles, to convey ideas that ought to affect many aspects of the listener's worldview and to provide at least a basic doctrinal and scriptural framework for people who knew little about Christian belief. Augustine found himself with a far wider brief than Cicero ever did. The evangelist's tools, therefore, must necessarily be that much wider. Speech alone can achieve only so much and the orator must serve as a model for emulation. Nevertheless, for conveying doctrinal principles, for introducing the fundamentals of belief, for enlightening an audience on how a Christian ought to behave, for explaining the actual words of the Bible, speech was not merely the best but the only means available to the churchman.

<sup>846</sup> Cf. Aug., *De catechizandis rudibus*, 2.4

<sup>847</sup> Aug., *De doctrina Christiana*, 4.104, *Et tamen cum doctor iste debeat rerum dictor esse magnarum, non semper eas debet granditer dicere, sed summissa cum aliquid docetur, temperate cum aliquid vituperatur sive laudatur.*

<sup>848</sup> Aug., *De catech. rud.*, 2.4, *nulla maior causa est cur nobis in imbuendis rudibus noster sermo vilescat, nisi quia libet inusitate cernere, et taedet usitate proloqui*, ("There is no greater reason why our speech, in instructing the uneducated, should offend us, unless because it pleases us to note something uncommon but sickens us to expound it in a common fashion.") and 12.17, *..usitata et parvulis congruentia saepe repetere fastidimus*. ("...we are wearied by often repeating common things appropriate to little ones.")

<sup>849</sup> Aug., *De doct. Chr.*, 4.151, *Habet autem ut oboedienter audiamur quantacumque granditate dictionis maius pondus vita dicentis.*

Christian orators also seem to have adapted their speech to include traditional themes and vocabulary in a deliberate effort to show that their novel ideas were compatible with the existing structures of the classical *oikoumenê*.<sup>850</sup> Christians were conceivably somewhat conservative in their speech and, in Cameron's words, "more willing to make concessions to traditional ideas and language".<sup>851</sup> In effect, élite Christian authors and orators, perhaps aware that their religion was only a recent arrival amongst the empire's higher social strata, were eager to emphasise that Christianity and classicism were not mutually exclusive and that there was no innate hostility between *romanitas* and *christianismus*.

**(b) *The rhetoric of conversion: high oratory and popular comprehension in practice***

For all that Augustine wrote, many questions remain about how Gallic bishops, some of whom were undoubtedly familiar with aspects of his work, actually approached the issue of public speech. How far and in what ways were Augustine's ideas about evangelistic oratory put into practice by these bishops? Was it feasible for an aristocratic bishop to communicate orally with an uneducated congregation? If orality, whether in the form of a sermon to an existing Christian congregation or as part of a conversion effort, was central to the bishop's office, how far did education and immersion in classical culture help or hinder the performance of the bishop's duty?

The problem with such questions is that they are predicated upon the idea that élite churchmen spent time speaking to non-élite congregations, and, while that assumption is widespread amongst modern scholars, the evidence suggests that they did not. Averil Cameron, for example, argues, citing the evidence of Ambrose and Augustine, that evangelism was a very high priority for the late antique bishop. She identifies and discusses the tension and paradox implicit in an aristocratic bishop needing to address and persuade a largely uneducated and confused audience.<sup>852</sup> In her model, new converts were brought to Christianity and existing Christians instructed in their faith through their bishop's speech. The process of Christianisation, however, may have been driven far less by active evangelism than by some form of "cultural osmosis"<sup>853</sup> whereby the new religion spreads from Christian élites to their low-status dependents who, being eager to please the patrons on whom they depend, adopt the most obvious outward forms of Christianity. In this case, the bishop's oratorical

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<sup>850</sup> Av. Cameron (1991) 131

<sup>851</sup> Av. Cameron (1991) 134

<sup>852</sup> Av. Cameron (1998) 670-671

<sup>853</sup> Marrou (1956) 319

activities would naturally be geared towards quite different ends than widespread conversion of the uneducated masses.

Evangelistic bishops such as Ambrose and Augustine certainly existed and actively practised the kind of evangelism described by Cameron, but they were also quite unusual and their conduct should not be held up as an example of typical episcopal activities.<sup>854</sup> The time and energy which Ambrose, Augustine or even Caesarius expended on evangelism set them apart from the typical aristocratic late antique bishop for whom ecclesiastical office was seen more as a birthright than a duty, a means to acquiring personal power and wealth and an alternative – or, later, a sequel – to a secular career.<sup>855</sup> Amongst aristocrats entering the church in the fifth and sixth centuries, there were any number of motivations, many of which were far removed from the spiritual dedication of an Augustine or an Ambrose. Individuals like Ambrose and Caesarius were the exception and their zeal for evangelism was not universally shared nor even necessarily understood by other bishops.<sup>856</sup>

Moreover, even where active evangelism was undertaken, the priority was more often to sway nobles than peasants, not least because peasants could be expected to follow their patron's lead in religious matters. Rizzi demonstrates that Ambrose himself aimed at garnering the support of members of his own class, the senatorial aristocracy;<sup>857</sup> he went so far as to advise his fellow bishop, Constantius, to improve his intellectual and rhetorical abilities to that end.<sup>858</sup> The difference between passive and active understanding notwithstanding, it is clear that many bishops were not particularly concerned with making their sermons accessible to uneducated members of the congregation, let alone with converting uneducated pagans. Insofar as the uneducated were considered at all in these contexts, they were a secondary audience listening to sermons that were intended for their aristocratic leaders.

The diametric opposite to this traditional mode of élite-centred religious oratory appears to be Caesarius of Arles. Amongst modern scholars, it seems universally accepted that Caesarius' language was simple and therefore infinitely more approachable for an uneducated audience

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<sup>854</sup> Liebeschuetz (2001) 162-163 discusses the Christianising concerns of late antique bishops but bases a lot of his case on the unusual case of Caesarius; his arguments, therefore, have the same weakness as Av. Cameron's in that they advance the exception as an example of the rule.

<sup>855</sup> Cf. Sid. Ap. Ep., 4.25.2, 7.9.17; Amherdt (2001) 17-21 summarises Sidonius in this respect. Cf. the later remarks of Venantius Fortunatus, *Carm.* 8.7-8 on family and church office.

<sup>856</sup> Cf. Pomerius, *De vita contemplativa* 3.28.1 on lazy bishops.

<sup>857</sup> Lizzi (1990) 165-6

<sup>858</sup> Ambrose, Ep. 2.3-4

than most of his contemporaries.<sup>859</sup> Auerbach described Caesarius as the first representative of a new literary style moving Gallic Latin away from mannered classicising forms and towards an “unadorned, utilitarian prose tending toward colloquial speech in its sentence structure, tone and choice of words”.<sup>860</sup> Moreover, it seems that those who discuss Caesarius’ language are often very quick to argue that his simple language was a conscious choice, not the result of ignorance (e.g., “This style, I am convinced, was not a mere product of faulty education or incapacity for classical expression”<sup>861</sup>).

Certainly, Caesarius’ sermons make as much use of rhetorical devices as other writers<sup>862</sup> and his Latin, whatever its other characteristics, is at least as syntactically and orthographically correct as the more sophisticated works of contemporaries such as Sidonius (and, in some ways, arguably rather more correct, since Caesarius is not focused on using elaborate and opaque language to impress his audience). Furthermore, Caesarius’ subject matter was by no means simplistic; several of his sermons are, in fact, adaptations of sermons by Augustine<sup>863</sup> and we should not discount the possibility that Caesarius’ techniques for addressing his congregation were influenced by the *De doctrina Christiana*.

Even as he dealt with fairly complicated matters, Caesarius utilised a deliberately straightforward tone in order to be understood by the greatest number of the congregation (which, again, is recommended by Augustine<sup>864</sup>). One might draw an analogy in their treatment of language between Caesarius and Paulinus of Nola who composed prayer-poems annually in honour of St Felix of Nola whose tomb was a centre for pilgrimage and the site of a religious festival.<sup>865</sup> His poems, intended to be read out to the pilgrims, are notable for their relative simplicity, even amongst much typically Vergilian language;<sup>866</sup> from the poet’s own work, we know that he anticipated that many of his listeners would be unlettered and uncultured though still faithful.<sup>867</sup>

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<sup>859</sup> For example (and by no means an exhaustive list), Hayward (1999) 127-128, Klingshirn (1994b) xiv, Auerbach (1965) 85ff., Cavadini (2004) 83, Hillgarth (1989) 54, Liebeschuetz (2001) 163, 335 – all discuss the simplicity of Caesarius’ style; cf. Morin, *Opera omnia* I.viii who says that, in Caesarius’ work, there is *nihil...affectate subtilitatis* which is so often found in the works of Sidonius, Ennodius and others and which *vix ferendam esse nemo negabit*.

<sup>860</sup> Auerbach (1965) 87

<sup>861</sup> Auerbach (1965) 87

<sup>862</sup> Theoretically, Caesarius could have arrived at these rhetorical techniques by himself without having been taught them formally – a point I owe to Prof. D. M. MacDowell – but, overall, I think it most likely that he was educated in rhetoric.

<sup>863</sup> Cf. Vaccari (1942) 145-146

<sup>864</sup> Aug., *De doct. Chr.*, 4.104

<sup>865</sup> Paulinus Nolensis, *Carm.* 14

<sup>866</sup> R. P. H. Green (1971) 26-8

<sup>867</sup> Paul. Nol. *Carm.* 27.548

The care Caesarius took to simplify his language for his audience led Wright to suggest that his sermons, although written down as correct but simple Latin, were delivered in the emerging vernacular Romance dialect of the region.<sup>868</sup> While Wright's hypothesis cannot be proved, because the manuscript tradition does not relate the nature of a work's original delivery, it is hypothetically possible that, in his drive to be understood, Caesarius abandoned Latin speech altogether. What is absolutely certain, however, is that Caesarius specifically asked the cultured and educated to be content with his simple style because, while the educated can descend to the level of the unlettered, the unlettered cannot comprehend the mannered speech of the educated.<sup>869</sup> In asking this, Caesarius employs a typically Ciceronian device pairing the parallel verbs *ascendere* and *inclinare* and the subject nouns *simplices* and *eriditi* (*imperiiti et simplices...non possunt ascendere, eriditi...dignentur...inclinare*). The Latin is not onerous to translate, but it is, in a stylistic sense, not quite the coarse populism one might expect from *sermo humilis* and may bear out Auerbach's claim that Caesarius' simplicity is not a sign of incompetence.<sup>870</sup>

The real importance of Caesarius' remark is twofold. Firstly, it tells us about the audience Caesarius expected to meet and about his evangelical purpose. The sermon provides a blunt statement that he anticipates an audience containing educated and uneducated alike and that he wished to communicate effectively with both. However, there is a second thing to be gleaned from this passage: while Caesarius wishes to be understood by the uneducated and alters his language accordingly, he does not entirely abandon élite mannerisms, hence the Ciceronian conceit. Social status and public language were so closely connected for the élite, of whom Caesarius was a member, that he could go only so far in compromising with what Vaccari called *volgarismi*. (This fact is one reason why Wright's premise – that Caesarius did not speak Latin to his congregation – may be wrong.)

Caesarius provides an outstanding example of Cameron's vision of episcopal aristocrats preoccupied with the conversion of the uneducated. He was an élite man committed to communicating effectively with the uneducated and, by extension, to forcing a kind of personal interaction with Christian belief and doctrine onto each and every member of his

<sup>868</sup> R. Wright (1982) 50-61, esp. 54, 56-58; cf. Vaccari (1942) 142-143

<sup>869</sup> *Et ideo rogo humiliter ut contentae sint eruditae aures verba rustica aequanimiter sustinere, dummodo totus grex domini simplici et ut ita dixerim pedestri sermone pabulum spiritale possit accipere. Et quia imperiti et simplices ad scholasticorum altitudinem non possunt ascendere, eruditi se dignentur ad illorum ignorantiam inclinare*, Caesarius, *Sermo* 86 ("I respectfully ask that educated ears be content to hear rustic speech, so that the whole congregation of the Lord can receive the spiritual nourishment which I have delivered through common speech. While the ignorant and the simple cannot ascend to the height of scholars, the educated can deign to lower themselves to their level.")

<sup>870</sup> Cf. Riché (1995) 99 for two other classical allusions in Caesarius' writings – "une citation de Juvénal" and "une réminiscence virgilienne".

congregation. Where many of his contemporary bishops and predecessors had been uninterested in the personal conversion of the lower classes and had been satisfied with *clientes* following their *patroni* into Christianity, Caesarius aimed at inculcating a truer understanding of Christianity in the minds of all nominal Christians. Caesarius comes much closer to the modern concept of religious conversion – where the individual comes to believe absolutely in the message of a religion and applies it to his own life – than, I suspect, most of his contemporaries in the church ever did.<sup>871</sup> It is likely that patronage, rather than sermons, would be the decisive factor in bringing new converts to Christianity; it is also likely that lower-class individuals who converted did so in a superficial way, without necessarily understanding (or attempting to understand) the details of Christian faith.

This notion of a shallow adherence to the faith, based on a tenuous understanding of the religion's basic beliefs and motivated by the desire to please a patron or landlord, must be unattractive to anyone wishing to see in the conversion of the poor a "psychological moment", like Augustine's, where truth is suddenly realised and conversion effected.<sup>872</sup> It is, nevertheless, more likely. Lizzi ascribes to Ambrose just such an evangelical strategy – the conversion of nobles who will then exert pressure, presumably more passive than active, on their tenants, slaves and other dependents.<sup>873</sup> Curran highlights the social context for the conversion of the household as a unit – with the conversion of a senior male member of the family (especially the *paterfamilias*), other members of the family follow suit out of "social solidarity" more than genuine conviction.<sup>874</sup> And, from Augustine, we can find explicit testimony to the importance of gaining high status converts.<sup>875</sup>

We can, therefore, argue that Cameron's model of the bishop seeking uneducated converts depicts only one strategy for evangelism. It was the strategy embraced by Caesarius, to be sure, but it the less common strategy. The 'top-down' conversion method of Ambrose and Augustine was embraced by most bishops but is less obvious in its execution than Caesarius' efforts at converting the unlettered and, conceptually, is removed from modern expectations about religious conversion.

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<sup>871</sup> Nock (1933) was influential in applying the anachronistic view that Christianity filled a spiritual need that traditional paganism did not and that conversion to Christianity marked a sea-change for the individual; Cochrane (1940) 501-503 is similar. Cf. Hunt (1993) 143 on the possibility that modern visions of ancient conversion have themselves been Christianised.

<sup>872</sup> MacMullen (1984) 3-4

<sup>873</sup> Lizzi (1990) 167

<sup>874</sup> Curran (2000) 8

<sup>875</sup> Aug., *Enarrationes in psalmos*, 54.13, *Ep.* 58.1

Other bishops may have attempted to evangelise after a fashion, while delivering sermons in mannered language, but it is less clear in their cases than in Caesarius'. Following the lead of Ambrose and Augustine, bishops may have sought to reinforce the essential messages of Christianity amongst their own class; they could reasonably expect that close retainers and clients of the élite would soon be won over by the religion of their patron and that, over time, Christianity would spread from élite centre to non-élite periphery. Dependence on a landlord's favour or a patron's protection, not belief in Christ's divinity, would be the principal reason for non-élite conversion. Even where a bishop is not obviously engaging in active missionary work amongst the lower classes, it does not follow that the bishop necessarily had no interest in bringing new converts into the church; rather, he may have approached conversion from a different angle. Conversion of the poor by first converting the élite (or, where the élite is already Christian, by reinforcing their beliefs and their commitment to the Christian community) would be a viable and also natural strategy for bishops, for whom the major priority was not to educate the masses in the minutiae of doctrine and ritual but to dissuade them from participating in overtly pagan rites.<sup>876</sup>

In discussing this kind of evangelical strategy, one has to define the preacher's audience. To whom did late antique bishops address their sermons? The question is not simply a matter of deciding who was physically present when a bishop spoke but of defining exactly who, of those present, mattered enough that the bishop wanted to sway them. MacMullen, drawing on the sermons of Chrysostom, demonstrates that, in the late antique east, congregational audiences appear to have contained larger numbers of wealthy participants.<sup>877</sup> In the west, MacMullen argues that sermons generally describe congregations composed of landowners and slaveholders, while Augustine, when he talks of *pauperes*, refers not to the genuinely penniless but to modest smallholders.<sup>878</sup>

This need not mean that the poor were completely absent, but it does mean that bishops were not interested in addressing the poor directly. This is what makes Caesarius, with his simplified Latin and clear declaration that he spoke not to the élite but to the uneducated,<sup>879</sup> all the more interesting: Caesarius departed radically from episcopal norms. The saint's *Vita* contains some intriguing evidence to support these contentions; we are told, for example, that the bishop worried that the poor would be too ashamed to petition him<sup>880</sup> – proof that the poor

<sup>876</sup> Markus (1990) 4ff; cf. Lizzi (1990) 167ff discussing Maximus of Turin and his reaction to the resurgence of paganistic practices in Christianised northern Italy.

<sup>877</sup> MacMullen (1989) 507-11

<sup>878</sup> MacMullen (1989) 509; cf. Aug. *Sermo* 52.10, *neque enim rudibus loquor*.

<sup>879</sup> Caes. *Sermo* 86

<sup>880</sup> *Vita Caes.*, 1.19

were members of audience but also that it was not common for the poor to speak to their spiritual leader. Caesarius also ordered the doors of the church bolted during services to prevent people sneaking out early<sup>881</sup> and, while there is no unambiguous statement about the social class of these deserters, it is likely they were low-status individuals; the picture of people sneaking out the door when no-one is looking does not square with MacMullen's description of bejewelled élites attending services accompanied by retinues of slaves and attendants.<sup>882</sup>

Caesarius also left the city to preach in rural parishes where there can be no doubt that his audience would be predominantly, perhaps exclusively, non-élite.<sup>883</sup> We can see the obvious importance that Caesarius attached to popular preaching from the canons of the council of Vaison in 529 which allowed priests, for the first time, to preach to congregations at mass and deacons to read homilies.<sup>884</sup> This was something of an abrogation of the bishop's privilege and conceivably a diminution of episcopal authority,<sup>885</sup> but it demonstrates Caesarius' commitment to reaching and converting the rural masses. It was, in fact, his overarching purpose.

#### (c) *The vestiges of paganism: Caesarius, conversion and pre-Christian practice*

A major element of Caesarius' evangelism was his active opposition to pagan and pagan-inspired practices in southern Gaul;<sup>886</sup> in Arles itself, he was confronted by men who, in a throwback to pre-Christian days, celebrated the Kalends of January by wearing antlers on their heads or dressing as prostitutes.<sup>887</sup> Although such people need not have been genuine worshippers of the pagan gods – any more than the Christians who attended pagan feasts but excused this behaviour by making the sign of the cross before eating were pagan worshippers<sup>888</sup> – the survival of such practices in nominally Christian communities suggests that Caesarius' predecessors as bishop had not been interested in policing the behaviour of lower status individuals and that they approached conversion with the intention of eliciting declarations of Christian faith rather than of trying to change the behaviour of would-be

<sup>881</sup> *Vita Caes.*, 1.27

<sup>882</sup> MacMullen (1989) 509-11

<sup>883</sup> *Vita Caes.*, 2.20

<sup>884</sup> Hen (1995) 33; Bertelli (1998) 58

<sup>885</sup> Antonopolou (1997) 112-113 argues that educational deficiency on the part of priests was the reason for bishops' retention of "preaching authority". I do not follow her argument.

<sup>886</sup> See e.g. Markus (1990) 206-207, Geffcken (1978) 230-231, Palanque (1952) 687

<sup>887</sup> Arbesmann (1979) 89-119, esp., 117; cf. Caesarius, *Serm.* 61.3, 182.4 on the continued existence of Roman-style mime and theatre in Merovingian Gaul (discussed by Hen (1995) 229-230).

<sup>888</sup> *Caes. Serm.* 54.6

converts.<sup>889</sup> Moreover, as Hunt says, laws promulgated in the fifth century treat paganism as an irrelevance compared to heresy<sup>890</sup> and yet pagan practices survived a century later.

One concludes that, so long as the poor called themselves Christians and presumably attended the appropriate masses and services, the authorities paid little attention to them. Liebeschuetz's remark that bishops possessed an "authority over the private life of believers, which was without parallel in the Roman world",<sup>891</sup> while objectively true, is not the whole story; in practice, many bishops were uninterested in exercising their authority over the urban poor. One can imagine that the rural poor were even further down a bishop's list of priorities. Only with Caesarius do we find an aristocratic southern Gallic bishop breaking with this mindset and actively seeking not merely to bring a nominal Christian identity to the poor but to inculcate an active understanding of Christianity, to exorcise pagan behaviour completely and to replace it with an uncompromisingly Christian standard of conduct.

While Caesarius was eager to accelerate the process of Christianisation in the countryside, a fact that lay behind his peregrinations through his diocese<sup>892</sup> and his reforms at Vaison, there is no unequivocal evidence in either the *Vita* or the *Sermones* that Caesarius personally preached to pagans. In fact, the evidence of his sermons seems to indicate that he was mainly concerned with arresting "pagan, superstitious or sacrilegious"<sup>893</sup> behaviour amongst people who were already nominally Christian.<sup>894</sup> It is possible that Caesarius' strategy for converting pagans was, therefore, a variant of the 'top-down' evangelising techniques of Ambrose and Augustine – that instead of preaching directly to the pagans, he reinforced the beliefs of existing rural Christians in the hope that they would serve to disseminate the faith amongst their neighbours, whether by active conversion efforts or passively by setting an example for emulation. This could appear to be an example of Marrou's "cultural osmosis"<sup>895</sup> and quite similar, in both purpose and method, to the approaches undertaken by more conventional bishops, although where they envisioned a vertical spread of the faith from high-status individuals to low, Caesarius anticipated a horizontal spread amongst low-status social equals. Nevertheless, the mere fact that Caesarius preached directly to non-élite audiences, including

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<sup>889</sup> Klingshirn (1994a) 209 states that we have evidence of paganism only because Caesarius "chose to attack" it; I may be misunderstanding Klingshirn, but I think that he is implying that Caesarius was the first bishop of Arles to articulate his anti-pagan activities but not the first to mount actual conversion efforts. If my reading of Klingshirn is correct, I must disagree with him.

<sup>890</sup> Hunt (1993) 157 citing *C.Th.* 16.10.25 from 435

<sup>891</sup> Liebeschuetz (2001) 139

<sup>892</sup> *Vita Caes.* 1.18ff.; Klingshirn (1985) discusses Caesarius' activities in the northern Italian and southern Gallic countryside; cf. Momigliano (1955) 211

<sup>893</sup> Markus (1990) 206; cf. Hillgarth (1989) 55

<sup>894</sup> Cf. Hen (1995) 167, Liebeschuetz (2001) 163

<sup>895</sup> Marrou (1956) 319

in the countryside, distinguishes his strategy from that of Ambrose or Augustine. Even if “osmosis” was an element of Caesarius’ strategy, he rejected the idea that the poor should convert only to please their landlords.

However, it is also possible that the line dividing pagans from Christians was hazy and easily permeated.<sup>896</sup> Rural practitioners of pagan religion – not just those who wore *anniculae* during festivals but the worshippers of the old gods who offered sacrifice and preserved pagan temples and groves – were also often nominal practitioners of the Christian faith.<sup>897</sup> Since most peasants were used to worshipping a multitude of gods under a variety of names and would usually have been introduced to the Christian religion via their social superiors, it is easy to imagine how a pagan peasant might begin worshipping the Christian deity to please his landlord. Such a person could attend church services yet never receive any proper introduction to Christian doctrine – indeed, if the bishop delivered sermons in too formal a mode of Latin, he might attend mass and not understand what was being said. Nevertheless, being used to a plethora of gods, the peasant would not find the addition of one more god onerous, especially if that god was favoured by his landlord. In this situation, from the peasant’s point of view, there was simply no tension between Christianity and the traditional gods; he might easily celebrate the festival of a Christian saint on one day and give a sacrifice to a Romano-Celtic god the next without seeing any particular contradiction.<sup>898</sup>

The way in which Gaul had become Romanised – in terms of language and thought – encouraged this plural sense of identity. Roman culture had, in many important ways, failed to penetrate the Gallic countryside; even between the Roman and native Gallic pagan religious practices, there was sometimes little other than a superficial similarity.<sup>899</sup> This failure to Romanise the countryside had nothing to do with native resistance to Roman culture;<sup>900</sup> instead, it was due to a lack of interest on the part of the Roman and Gallo-Roman élites in transmitting their culture to the rural population. So long as a peasant was compliant and paid taxes and rent on time, Roman governors and landlords had no cause to care about the language the peasant speaks or the names under which he worshipped the gods.<sup>901</sup> The archaeological record illustrates the extent to which pre-Roman cultural traditions survived in the countryside. Lavagne shows that, of some fifty dedications to the Celtic deity Teutates

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<sup>896</sup> Cf. Klingshirn (1994a) 211, “determining the religious affiliation of those whom Caesarius condemned for paganism is not a simple task”.

<sup>897</sup> H. Chadwick (2003) 649

<sup>898</sup> Caes. *Sermo* 53.1 on Christians who still go to pagan shrines and practise divination.

<sup>899</sup> Klingshirn (1994a) 49

<sup>900</sup> Cf. Woolf (1998) 19-20, 22-23, 159ff.

<sup>901</sup> Beard, North & Price (2000) 344-345 on religious syncretisation and hybrid Gallo-Roman deities; cf. Woolf (1998) 207-208 on the “distinctive” Celtic cults found in Gaul.

(equated with Mars), only three have been found in urban settings;<sup>902</sup> of these fifty dedications, thirty-eight bear names which could indicate cultural identity and, of these, twenty-two bear Celtic names.<sup>903</sup> From this, one might infer that Celtic names, for individuals and gods, were rarer in urban settings and that, by extension, the further one moved from an urban centre, the shallower the depth of Romanisation, the greater the cultural continuity and the more likely the local people were to have retained elements of their ancient pre-Roman Celtic culture and language. Weisgerber provided a similar model for Trier – of personal names uncovered in the region, Celtic roots make up no more than 15% of names in or near the city but up to 50% in peripheral districts.<sup>904</sup>

Christianisation in Gaul was, with some exceptions such as Martin of Tours, largely in the hands of élites who tended to overlook the poor or to assume that they would follow where their patrons led. Just as Romanisation tended to be a phenomenon that centred on the élite and the city, Christianisation often disregarded the non-élite rural population who either had no involvement with Christianity at all or were involved only at a superficial level, attending masses that they did not understand and celebrating Christian festivals whose meaning had not been explained. This process mirrored the partial Romanisation of Celtic religion in southern Gaul which Klingshirn discusses; although new Roman names were sometimes given to Celtic deities, religion in southern Gaul nevertheless remained a “native religion”<sup>905</sup> and the veneer of Roman-ness which had been superimposed was rarely more than a shallow effort at making peasant practices appear to match those of the élite.<sup>906</sup>

With Christianisation and Romanisation alike, the further an area was from the city, the less likely that area was to be affected by either phenomenon. Moreover, the further one was from the city, the less attention one was likely to receive – few urban bishops would have been aware of the location or even existence of each and every alpine village or isolated hamlet in his diocese. Nor would he have spent much time targeting these small settlements for missionary work; apart from the obvious issue that, prior to 529, preaching was the bishop’s duty alone and could not be delegated, many aristocratic bishops would not have seen the peasantry as a constituency for evangelism. Social relationships in the later empire made even free peasants subordinate to the élite. Against this background, it would be an unusual aristocrat who would attempt to persuade or convert a social inferior; any persuasion would

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<sup>902</sup> Lavagne (1979) 165

<sup>903</sup> Lavagne (1979) 162

<sup>904</sup> Weisgerber (1935) 301-356

<sup>905</sup> Klingshirn (1994a) 49

<sup>906</sup> On Celtic religious practice and especially its relationship to the landscape, see M. Green (1986) 179-199

be aimed at the patron with the peasant, if he even entered the bishop's thoughts, being expected to follow his master's religion automatically. Moreover, since the poor would have attended whatever Christian services their masters required, the bishop might easily believe them to be 'real' Christians and therefore be unaware that they also continued to practise their traditional religion.

Caesarius was the exception amongst aristocratic Gallic bishops. For him, it was not enough for people to pay lip service to Christianity as a means of currying a landlord's favour. The poor had to believe in Christian truth, had to understand Christian teachings and had to apply those teachings to their daily life. In a society where the spoken word was of inestimable importance in persuading and informing, Caesarius endeavoured not only to converse with the lower classes via his *sermo humilis* but to use the individual members of his congregation to evangelise amongst their non-Christian neighbours and to reinforce the beliefs of their co-religionists. We see these techniques at work in his sermons: he told his audience to memorise his words, ruminate on them and repeat them to others;<sup>907</sup> if they cannot read the Bible themselves, they can at least listen to others who can, perhaps even hiring literate people to read to them on long winter nights, just as illiterate merchants hire scribes.<sup>908</sup> Apart from sermons and lessons, music was utilised extensively. Caesarius was the first bishop to introduce the antiphonal chant to Arles<sup>909</sup> and called for the singing of psalms and hymns,<sup>910</sup> not to mention his liking for the *Kyrie eleison*.<sup>911</sup> The intended outcome was twofold: singing would facilitate the religious instruction of partially Christianised parishioners, giving them access to doctrinal information in a way that was easy to recall, and it would provide an alternative to traditional (hence pagan) music which predominated in the countryside.<sup>912</sup>

Nominal adherence to Christianity was insufficient for Caesarius. He demanded a full and all-encompassing devotion to the faith, a devotion which included not only abstention from traditional beliefs but active hostility towards them. In place of the complicated relationship which had emerged between pagan practice and Christianity, Caesarius insisted on a stark rejection of all traditional elements of faith, including horoscopes, votive offerings and the

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<sup>907</sup> Caes. *Serm.* 7.1, 8.2

<sup>908</sup> Caes. *Serm.* 6.2-8, *Quando noctes longiores sunt qui erit qui tantum possit dormire ut lectionem divinam vel tribus horis non possit aut ipse legere aut alios legentes audire? ... Negotiatores qui cum litteras non noverint requirunt sibi mercenarios litteratos.* ("When the nights are longer, who will be able to sleep so much that he is unable for perhaps three hours either to read the holy lesson himself or listen to others reading it?... Even merchants who do not know their letters employ hired scribes.")

<sup>909</sup> *Vita Caes.* 1.19

<sup>910</sup> Caes. *Serm.* 15.3, 101.5

<sup>911</sup> Vaison II (529), *Can.* 3

<sup>912</sup> Caes. *Serm.* 6.3, 130.5

singing of songs deemed pagan, and their replacement by orthodox and doctrinally sound Christian practice.

While marking a departure from conventional conversion strategies, Caesarius nevertheless appealed to landlords for support in the process of Christianisation, but only as a secondary consideration. He urged the élite to correct baptised tenants and slaves who still attended pagan rituals. Pagan altars and groves were also to be destroyed by Christian landlords and the establishment of new ones prevented.<sup>913</sup> Where other bishops saw the élite as the first step in converting the countryside, Caesarius treated them as enforcers of orthodoxy. The landowner was not the means for converting the rural poor but his influence could be used to forestall backsliding; moreover, this influence was to be applied in a direct and forceful way by physically destroying pagan sites and intimidating anyone who used them. Patrons would intervene as and when the rural poor required correction. Over time, however, their rôle would have diminished; as the powers and position of the parish priest grew, he, rather than the secular lord, would have taken on the task of intervening with those who acted contrary to church teachings.

The existence of priests in rural parishes opened another avenue for Caesarius' strategy of Christianisation. The council of Vaison of 529 allowed priests to take in unmarried lectors to be educated in Christian literature.<sup>914</sup> Initially intended to train future priests, these 'parish schools', while not quite the primary schools that Marrou envisioned,<sup>915</sup> educated many laymen.<sup>916</sup> The schools disseminated Christian doctrine throughout the community and isolated pupils from pagan traditions. Pupils would have no access to religious instruction other than within orthodox Christianity and would have no opportunity to deviate from Christian teachings. Over time, the need for secular élites to suppress pagan worship would have diminished; moreover, if secular support was needed, a noble who had been schooled in the "école presbytérale" may have been more willing to follow the church's directions – no small thing when the nobleman's rôle in suppressing paganism was voluntary.<sup>917</sup>

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<sup>913</sup> Caes. *Serm.* 53.1-2

<sup>914</sup> Vaison II (529), *Can.* 1, *Hoc enim placuit ut omnes presbyteri qui sunt in parochiis constituti secundum consuetudinem quam per totam Italiam satis salubriter teneri cognovimus iuniores lectores quantoscumque sine uxoribus habuerint secum in domo ubi ipsi habitare videntur recipiant, et eos quomodo boni patres spiritaliter nutriendos psalmos parare divinis lectionibus insistere et in lege Domini erudire contendant ut et sibi dignos successores provideant et a Domino praemia aeterna recipiant.*

<sup>915</sup> Marrou (1956) 336, 342

<sup>916</sup> Riché (1995) 109-110

<sup>917</sup> Klingshirn (1994a) 241

The system of schools instituted by Vaison was a variation on Caesarius' basic conversion strategy. While individual rural parishioners would come into contact with the bishop only rarely and might not attend daily services,<sup>918</sup> they would be in constant contact with the parish priest but especially with lay individuals versed in doctrine, whether from parish schools or from listening to hymns and sermons. The beliefs of the community would be reinforced in this way and heterodoxy or vestigial paganism would be challenged not just by clerics but by the community. This was a strategy for Christianisation by the grassroots, a radical shift from the approaches of other bishops.

### *Conclusion*

Ultimately, Caesarius was an exception in the contemporary Gallic church because the conversion of the wider population, not merely to Christian modes of worship but to a truly Christian lifestyle, was a priority for him. In this, he differed from most of his contemporaries. Their lack of interest in the poor probably derived from aristocratic prejudices; as Roman nobles utterly conscious of their moral and intellectual superiority to those below them and as the preservers of a culture and ideology which extolled the sophistication of its members and deprecated the worth of all others, these bishops could not view the non-élite population as important. The provincial population formed an undistinguishable, almost bovine, mass; their sole function was to obey their betters. There was no need for these people to have any conversion experience or to understand doctrine or even the Bible; all that was needed was for them to worship as and when their patrons and landlords told them to.

Caesarius demanded more from the poor than a nominal commitment to Christianity. Perhaps because his own beliefs were so absolute, so defined by zealous devotion to the Christian experience, he was not satisfied to cover the rural population with a mere patina of Christian religiosity. Instead, belief in the truth of the Christian message and an understanding of doctrine had to be spread to the whole of the population. It seems reasonable to say that Caesarius' career was defined entirely by his religious convictions. For many other bishops, their interest in the episcopacy was rather more selfish, more related to their need to find a place for themselves – a place offering both safety and political power – and by their ideological tendencies to view themselves as the leaders of their communities than by their faith. Against such a background, it is no surprise that they cared more about ensuring the obedience of the rural poor than about Christianising them.

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<sup>918</sup> Beck (1950) 132-133 on daily mass; cf. Hen (1995) 71-72 for the contrary view

## Conclusion

*"In political and religious history, late antiquity marks the end of one world and the beginning of another."*<sup>919</sup>

"The aristocrats of Roman Gaul faced a very different world after the arrival and settlement of the barbarians"<sup>920</sup>, wrote Mathisen in a statement that is, to modern eyes, perfectly obvious. The arrival of barbarians in Gaul brought radical changes to the political and cultural landscapes. One may debate whether there was a decline and fall or a more gradual transformation of the Roman world; one may debate the extent to which there was continuity between the Roman and post-Roman worlds; one may even debate the extent to which the non-élite population was impacted by the advent of the barbarians and the retraction of empire; one cannot, however, debate that changes took place which ended the ancient world, swept away nearly five hundred years of Roman power in Gaul and replaced it with something that would eventually morph into mediaeval Francia.

However obvious the new landscape may seem to modern eyes, it emerged gradually and the changes wrought were not necessarily obvious to those who lived through them. Some Gallo-Roman nobles continued to believe that Roman power had survived not just into the middle of the fifth century but practically to the end of that century; Sidonius' grief, after realising that Rome could not defeat the Visigoths and that his city was to be Roman no longer, is palpable.<sup>921</sup> Even the Burgundian *reges* of the sixth century do not seem to have understood that Roman power in the west was truly defunct.

One can easily understand why contemporaries failed to apprehend that their empire was gone. The empire's great age implied a kind of immortality. Roman power in Gaul had survived for so long – five centuries between Caesar's conquest and the final retreat – that it was probably impossible to imagine what life would be like outside of Roman power; in most minds, there was simply no awareness of a pre-Roman world and no ability to imagine a post-Roman one. Hydatius conflated the empire with the entire material world to the extent that barbarian penetration of the Rhine frontier could only be interpreted as a part of the apocalypse.<sup>922</sup> He was not the only Roman to believe that the entire world was *Romania*.<sup>923</sup>

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<sup>919</sup> Arjava (1996) 1

<sup>920</sup> Mathisen (1993) 144

<sup>921</sup> Cf. Harries (1994) 174

<sup>922</sup> Burgess (1996) 324-325, 332

This is surely why Gallo-Roman aristocrats continued to hold their *romanitas* so dear, why they eagerly preserved their ancestral culture and identity – they did not initially perceive the new *regna* as sources of legitimate power; they remained attached to the idea that legitimate power proceeded only from the imperial centre. In this context, Roman culture was interpreted as offering still a route to authority and prestige. Moreover, so long as the imperial centre was perceived to exist, there was no need to barbarise. To enter the service of barbarian kings would have made no sense when one could yet enter the service of the Roman state. This is the attitude that lay behind Sidonius' letter to Syagrius where barbarisers are renegades at worst and fools at best for abandoning *romanitas* and the structures of empire. At the heart of the Gallo-Roman aristocracy in the fifth century lies this tension between, on the one hand, those who sensed the changing political winds and reacted accordingly and, on the other, those who could or would not see that the empire was in retreat and who remained devoted to the symbiotic pairing of power and *romanitas*.

I suspect there were some Romans, perhaps associated with circles like that of Sidonius, who may have been conscious that Rome's star was fading but who could not abandon the idea that cultural merit ought to bring political power. For these men, the myth of their cultural worth, achievement and superiority – and the myth of the empire as a place where cultured men flourished and ruled – was too important to give up. If they ever suspected that the empire was gone and that culture could no longer bring power, they could not articulate the suspicion in disseminated texts. The myth was too important to discard.

As the fifth century progressed and the reality of barbarian power in Gaul became clearer, the problem facing cultured aristocrats changed subtly. Faced with the impossibility of using *romanitas* as the key to the door of secular power, they had to find new sources of authority. This new source had to be at once uncontaminated by the barbarians and appropriate for a cultured civil aristocracy. It had to complement, not contradict, Roman ideologies of aristocratic superiority. In pursuit of power, these *senatores* turned to the church. The episcopacy became the apex of achievement for nobles whose conceptualisation of class and identity were irrevocably bound up with Rome and Roman-ness. These were the nobles who could never compromise their *romanitas* by serving under a barbarian *rex* but who were so conscious of their own superiority and right to rule over others that they could not abandon the pursuit of power.

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<sup>923</sup> Whittaker (1994) 196-197

Thus, when Mathisen calls the influx of Gallic nobles to the church a “metaphorical exile”,<sup>924</sup> he misleads us. Rather than exiling themselves from public life, the new episcopal aristocracy redefined the battleground on which they struggled for power. Their new source of power – the church – was similar in many important respects to the empire’s pre-barbarian secular political landscape. One of the key aspects of the Roman aristocracy was its civil nature; unlike barbarian chieftains – or mediaeval barons – the Roman *senator* gained and held power through the exercise of culture and learning rather than of the sword. While bishops could occasionally be required to function as their community’s military leader (*e.g.*, Sidonius during the siege of Clermont), at a fundamental level the episcopacy was a position of leadership in his community that was similar, in its lack of martial aspects, to the old imperial aristocracy.

An ecclesiastical career allowed nobles to function in ways that were compatible with their traditional ideologies of *romanitas*; but it did more than just that. The church permitted the Roman *bonus* to evolve into the Christian *bonus* – not only was the aristocrat the cultural and intellectual superior to all others, he was now more righteous and more moral. The aristocrat’s right to rule over his clients and *coloni* became the bishop’s right to lead and direct the lives of his congregation; in time, it became the saint’s right to intercede between a Christian and God. The church facilitated this peculiar transition whereby Roman nobles who could not function in an increasingly un-Roman secular sphere came to dominate their community’s spiritual life and its relationship with God.

Peter Brown showed how the cult of the saints set late antique religious life in terms which would have been familiar and comprehensible to the non-élite population.<sup>925</sup> The saint, in Brown’s thesis, occupied a special position much like that of the late antique *patronus*. Just as one turned to a secular *patronus* to act as an intercessor with higher political authorities, so one turned to the *sanctus* to intercede with higher spiritual powers.<sup>926</sup> In both this world and the next, the aristocrat was to be the facilitator who could get things done and whose good will was vital. Brown’s interpretation of the cults of the saints was basically favourable<sup>927</sup> and a response to Gibbon’s harsh criticism of the corrupting superstition of saintly cults. Brown argued that saints allowed Christian supplicants to make requests of a “fellow human being”<sup>928</sup> rather than of an omnipotent deity; this optimism, however, led Brown to overlook

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<sup>924</sup> Mathisen (1993) 144

<sup>925</sup> Brown (1981)

<sup>926</sup> Brown (1981) 61

<sup>927</sup> Cf. Brown (1981) 126-127

<sup>928</sup> Brown (1981) 61

the “self-serving”<sup>929</sup> elements of aristocratic sanctity. Saints’ cults were merely one way in which the old élite fashioned a new relevance for itself. They were one more way in which nobles who would not interact with a barbarised secular world could make themselves indispensable patrons in their communities.

This leads us to another point, one glossed over by Mathisen: the episcopacy offered the Gallo-Roman élite a very real kind of power. The “metaphorical exile” in the church was actually the pursuit of new types of authority and new sources of wealth and prestige within new political landscapes controlled by the old aristocracy. The political landscape of the Gallic church was, moreover, one which, prior to the Frankish conquest of southern Gaul, was almost entirely free from the taint of the barbarian. Barbarian Arianism allowed the Gallo-Romans to fold *romanitas* neatly into *christianitas* so that they came to mean almost exactly the same thing;<sup>930</sup> heresy and barbarism, too, could also be folded into each other. The bishop was able to retain his ancestral culture while presenting himself at once as a champion of religious orthodoxy and as a defender of Rome (in all its forms).

All the while, the bishop stood as his community’s highest patron and leader. Tensions naturally emerged between episcopal and secular élites over the leadership of the *civitates* of post-Roman Gaul.<sup>931</sup> The pursuit of localised power within the *civitates* did not mark a true departure from established Gallo-Roman practice. It has long been argued that local élites in Gaul, especially prior to late antiquity, favoured local sources of power over the imperial centre. They avoided participating in imperial politics, instead “busying themselves with *civitas*- and *pagus*-affairs”;<sup>932</sup> Sivan takes the absence of Gallic nobles in imperial circles a step further by arguing that Gauls were excluded from imperial power and that no functioning Gallic aristocracy existed until Ausonius effectively created it.<sup>933</sup> Even if one rejects Sivan’s contentions, as I do, one nevertheless recognises that the pursuit of power centred on and expressed largely within the *civitas* had precedents for the Gallic aristocracy. One could go so far as to argue that the concentration on parochial affairs represents the Gallo-Roman aristocracy returning to pre-Roman Celtic modes.

The key point, however, is that the pursuit of local power was not alien to Roman Gaul. The acquisition of power had always been the goal of Gallo-Roman aristocrats and, if the grand offices of empire were closed to them, the bishopric represented something more attainable –

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<sup>929</sup> Hayward (1999) 142

<sup>930</sup> Cf. *Chron.* 452, s.a. 451 [= Burgess (2001a) 81]

<sup>931</sup> Brown (1981) 32-33

<sup>932</sup> Drinkwater (1989a) 138; cf. Drinkwater (1989b) 191-192

<sup>933</sup> Sivan (1993) *passim*, esp. 14-20, 140ff.

something which granted authority without compromising one's Roman-ness. The authority granted was "without parallel in the Roman world"<sup>934</sup> because the bishop was more than just a patron; his power extended beyond the material world; his favour was vital in providing salvation; his enmity could leave one excommunicated, utterly alienated from the community. Even in death, the bishop, as a saint, would continue to support his *civitas* and the locals would continue to request his favour.

The aristocratic retreat to the church was no "metaphorical exile"; indeed, in a real sense, it wasn't even a retreat but a repositioning of the élite, a transition from an insecure location in the secular world. While the church granted strictly local power, it was a more intense power than anything offered by either the secular Roman state or the barbarian *regna*. In some ways, the Gallic episcopate represents the elevation of aristocratic power to unprecedented levels.

There were, however, nobles who preferred to serve barbarians rather than the church. Given the level of fierce – sometimes violent – competition which surrounded vacant episcopal sees, there must have been nobles who sought a *cathedra* but were unsuccessful and settled for a secular career in the *regna*. Those who barbarised, whatever their reasons, almost certainly outnumbered those who entered the church. Proud Roman patriots like Sidonius and barbarisers like Syagrius shared one vitally important motivation: they both sought power. In their pursuit of power, moreover, they brought into the church the strategies of Roman public and political life: kinship and *amicitia* became as much a part of the Gallic church, during the transition from Roman to barbarian Gaul, as they had been in republican or imperial Rome. The importance of such strategies was diminished (though not excised completely) only when Gaul and the church were firmly under the control of a Catholic barbarian monarchy which swept away much of the episcopacy's practical autonomy.

The behaviour of Gallo-Roman nobles in the fifth century is almost always explicable in terms of the desire to gain or retain power and political relevance in a changing world. Those who were particularly committed to the ideology of Roman cultural superiority and personal cultural merit tended to see *romanitas* and *auctoritas* as so closely entwined that they were, for practical purposes, the same thing; these were the nobles for whom power had to be unconnected to barbarians in order to be legitimate; the church offered them that untainted power and, in the end, it was, in its own way, a far greater power than the secular magnates wielded.

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<sup>934</sup> Liebeschuetz (2001) 139

The only important difference between the classicising episcopal aristocrat and the barbarising secular noble was in the extent to which they were prepared to acknowledge the rôle of non-Romans in political life. The church, by appealing for power to a supernatural source, provided the Roman with power which itself bypassed the secular world and its rulers and which, therefore, allowed a noble to retain both position and identity, power and culture.

Those who barbarised may have been more pragmatic. They were certainly no less cultured, no less Roman, than their episcopal colleagues but they were more able to serve barbarians. Perhaps they were so used to the idea that power was innately secular that they failed to apprehend that the episcopacy offered true power. Perhaps, having striven for ecclesiastical power, they had failed and fallen back on the only remaining source of authority, the barbarians. Perhaps, like Lampridius or Leo of Narbonne, they had tried to remain Roman but finally saw no other option but to serve the barbarians.

The thing that matters is that the aristocratic bishop and the barbarising courtier possessed fundamentally the same motivation: power. The dilemma faced by the Romans of Gaul was how to remain a ruling class when all the structures which supported their rule were gone. As I have shown throughout this thesis, the story of the Gallic aristocracy in the fifth and early sixth centuries is of the acquisition and utilisation of power, the pursuit of new sources and the defence of old ones. Power is the defining characteristic of rulers and the Roman nobles very much wished to continue to rule rather than be ruled. Whether one's power came from serving a barbarian *rex* or derived from an episcopal throne, it was in essence the same; it was the thing that made one a *patronus*, that made one's favour important and that allowed one to control the non-élite population. This were the privileges of the élite under the empire and they were the privileges which Romans desperately sought to preserve after the empire had fallen.

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Abbreviations:	
AA	– <i>Auctores Antiquissimi</i>
CCSL	– <i>Corpus Christianorum Series Latina</i>
CSEL	– <i>Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum</i>
EP	– <i>Epistolae/ Epistulae</i>
LCL	– <i>Loeb Classical Library</i>
MGH	– <i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica</i>
PL	– <i>Patrologia Latina</i>
SC	– <i>Sources Chrétiennes</i>
SRM	– <i>Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum</i>
Teub.	– Teubner edition
ARATOR	CSEL 72, ed. A. MacKinlay (1951)
AUGUSTINE	<i>Confessiones</i> , LCL, ed. W. Watts (1912) <i>De anima et eius origine</i> , CSEL 60, ed. F. Wehrich (1887) <i>De Catechizandis rudibus</i> , CCSL, ed. J. Bauer (1969) <i>De Doctrina Christiana</i> , ed. R. P. H. Green (1996) <i>De gestis Pelagii</i> , CSEL 42, ed. J. F. Vrba and J. Zycha (1902) <i>Enarrationes in psalmos</i> , CCSL 38-40, ed. E. Dekkers and J. Fraipont
AVITUS OF VIENNE	<i>Epistulae</i> , MGH AA 6.2, ed. R. Peiper (1883)
CAESARIUS OF ARLES	<i>Sermones</i> , CCSL 103-104, ed., G. Morin (1953)
CLEMENT OF ROME	<i>Épître aux Corinthiens</i> , ed. A. Jaubert (1971)
CODEX JUSTINIANUS	<i>Corpus Iuris Civilis</i> , vol. 2, ed. P. Krüger (1954)
CODEX THEODOSIANUS	<i>Codex theodosianus</i> , 2 vols., ed. T. Mommsen, P. Meyer and P. Krüger (1905)
DIGESTA JUSTINIANI	<i>Digesta Iustiniani</i> , ed. L. Kofanov (2003)
ENNODIUS	MGH AA 7, ed. F. Vogel (1885)
EPISTULAE ARELATENSES	MGH EP 3, ed. W. Gundlach (1892)
EUCHERIUS	CSEL 31, ed. C. Wotke (1894)
EUSEBIUS	<i>Historia ecclesiastica</i> , SC 41, ed. G. Bardy (1955)
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GREGORY OF TOURS	<i>Historiarum libri decem</i> [= <i>Historia Francorum</i> ], MGH SRM 1.1, ed. B. Krusch (1937) <i>Vita Patrum</i> , MGH SRM 1.2, ed. B. Krusch (1885)
HILARIUS	<i>Sermo de vita Sancti Honorati Arelatensis</i> [= <i>Vita Honorati</i> ], PL 50, ed. J.-P. Migne (1874)
JORDANES	<i>De origine actibusque Getarum</i> [= <i>Getica</i> ], MGH AA 5.1, ed. T. Mommsen (1882)
JULIANUS POMERIUS	<i>De vita contemplativa</i> , PL 59, ed. J.-P. Migne (1862)
OVID	<i>Tristia</i> , Teub., ed. J. Burrie Hall (1995)
PAULINUS OF NOLA	CSEL 29-30, ed. W. Hartel (1894)
PHILASTER OF BRESCIA	<i>Liber diversarum hereseon</i> , CSEL 38, ed. F. Marx (1898)
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RUTILIUS NAMATIUS	<i>De Reditu Suo</i> , ed. C. H. Keene (1907)
SALVIAN	<i>Oeuvres</i> , 2 vols., SC 220, ed. G. Lagarrigue (1975)
SIDONIUS APOLLINARIS	<i>Sidonius</i> , LCL, 2 vols., ed. W. Anderson (1936-1965)
SISEBUT	<i>Vita Desiderii episcopi Viennensis</i> , MGH SRM 3, ed. B. Krusch (1896)
SULPICIUS SEVERUS	<i>CSEL</i> 1, ed K. Halm (1866)
SYMMACHUS	MGH AA 6.1, ed. O. Seeck (1883)
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