The Value of 476: Charting the end of the Western Roman State

PhD Thesis

Thomas Campbell-Moffat

Research Degree in Ancient History

University College London

I, Thomas Campbell-Moffat, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Abstract

The subject of my thesis is when the western Roman state came to an end. The initial impulse for this question was the consideration that the apocryphal 'end' of the western empire – the deposition of Romulus Augustulus by Odovacer in 476 – lacked a great deal of explanative power. In fact, the concept of 'empire' is itself a little nebulous, making it difficult to determine what specifically ended. To that end, I have taken a five-point model for the early state derived from Chris Wickham's *Framing the Early Middle Ages* (2005). The criteria are as follows:

I) The centralisation of legitimate enforceable authority
II) Stable and independent resources for rulers
III) A class-based system for surplus extraction and stratification
IV) The specialisation of governance, and a system of office-holding that outlasted the individual officeholders themselves
V) The concept of a public power, or an ideological system separable from the rulers and ruled.

The aim is to take each of these criteria, apply them to the western Roman state, and to determine if, when, and how each could be said to have ended: essentially, what changed, when did it change, what were to consequences of that change. The primary objective is to offer a more factually accurate and historically compelling date than the traditional 'end' in 476. The secondary objective is to determine how each criterion fits into the overarching culturalist/structuralist debate that animates the field, as it is becoming increasingly clear that we are talking about separate things.

Impact Statement

Within the context of the field of late Roman and late antique history, the present thesis is useful in establishing a more accurate apocryphal date for 'the end of the western Roman state' than 476, which could potentially influence pedagogic accuracy. This date – 461 – is based on a structural assessment of the late Roman state, thereby providing a methodologically clear reason for the choice. Beyond this, I believe this thesis demonstrates the utility of taking models designed for state formation processes and inverting them in order to describe state deformation. Regarding the current state of contemporary debate concerning the culturalist/structuralist dichotomy, as well as the conceptual division between late imperial/early medieval and late antique history, I would hope that my methodology vindicates the utility of a structuralist approach to the subject. By extension, I would hope that this prompts a discussion as to whether or not a 'late antiquity' built around the concept of structural disintegration as well as or rather than transformation is plausible. If not, then, in light of the suggestion that our methodological approach is likely to determine some of the outcomes we receive, we must consider whether culturalist and structuralist historians are simply talking about different things, and whether a unified 'late antique' field is strictly necessary. On a personal level, I have found the discussion on public power to be particularly engaging, and I feel that my chapter on the subject could be the starting point for a more thorough assessment of late Roman political ideology than currently exists.

Beyond the realm of academia, I believe that my thesis is of most utility to those who wish to understand and influence states. Modern states are, of course, vastly more complex than early states, but a fundamental understanding of how states work on a more basic level could be fruitful. Furthermore, considering that we are facing systemic issues relating to political, economic, and structural instability, including but not limited to heightened immigration or climate change, then I would argue that this thesis would provide some much needed perspective. The end of the western Roman state is, after all, the archetypical collapse, and there remains a fair bit of misunderstanding about the exact nature of the process in the public realm. I would therefore recommend this work to think tanks interested in influencing governance. As an extension, I would recommend this to anyone in the media interested in a fuller understanding of the structural argument behind the collapse of western Roman rule.

Contents

1. Introduction .... p. 7

2. Classifying the Later Roman State .... p. 23

   2.1 Wickham's Model of the State .... p. 24

   2.2 The Early State .... p. 27

   2.3 The Western Roman State .... p. 35

   2.4 Conclusion .... p. 48

3. Stable and Independent Resources for Rulers .... p. 51

   3.1 Introduction .... p. 51

   3.2 Defining Rulers, Resources, Independence, and Stability .... p. 53

   3.3 Initial Conditions .... p. 58

      3.3.1 Demography and Manpower Shortages .... p. 58

      3.3.2 Élite Competition and the Gold economy.. p. 61

   3.4 Crisis .... p. 71

      3.4.1 Invasion and Occupation .... p. 72

         3.4.1.1 Britain .... p. 74

         3.4.1.2 Gaul .... p. 77

         3.4.1.3 The Iberian Peninsula .... p. 81

         3.4.1.4 Illyricum .... p. 85

         3.4.1.5 North Africa .... p. 88

         3.4.1.6 Italy .... p. 92

         3.4.1.7 Observations .... p. 96

      3.4.2 The Impact of Crisis: Political and Social Weaknesses .... p. 98

   3.5 Conclusion .... p. 102

4. A Class-Based System of Surplus Extraction and Stratification .... p. 104

   4.1 Introduction .... p. 104

   4.2 Defining a Class-Based System .... p. 107

4.3 Peasantries .... p. 110
4.3.1 Regional Survey .... p. 113
4.3.2 Observations .... p. 119
4.4 Aristocracies .... p. 121
4.4.1 Regional Survey .... p. 126
4.4.1.1 Britain .... p. 126
4.4.1.2 Gaul/Francia .... p. 127
4.4.1.3 The Iberian Peninsula .... p. 131
4.4.1.4 North Africa .... p. 134
4.4.1.5 Italy .... p. 135
4.4.2 Observations .... p. 139
4.5 Conclusion .... p. 141

5. The Specialisation of Governance .... p. 142
5.1 Introduction .... p. 142
5.2 Defining Governmental Specialisation .... p. 144
5.3 The Specialisation of Late Roman Governance .... p. 146
5.3.1 Tax-Raising .... p. 146
5.3.2 Lawgiving .... p. 150
5.3.3 Security .... p. 154
5.3.4 Observations .... p. 156
5.4 The Specialisation of Governance in the post-Roman Kingdoms .... p. 163
5.4.1 The Merovingian Kingdoms .... p. 164
5.4.2 The Visigothic Kingdom .... p. 170
5.4.3 The Vandal Kingdom .... p. 175
5.4.4 The Polities of the Italian Peninsula .... p. 177
5.4.5 Observations .... p. 182
5.5 Conclusion .... p. 185

6. The Concept of a Public Power .... p. 187
6.1 Introduction .... p. 187
6.2 Defining Public Power and Ideology .... p. 189

6.3 Popular Sovereignty and the Late Roman *Res Publica* .... p. 191
6.4 The Late Roman Practice of Public Power .... p. 199
6.5 Public Power in the post-Roman Kingdoms .... p. 212
6.5.1 The Merovingian Kingdoms .... p. 214
6.5.2 The Visigothic Kingdom .... p. 217
6.5.3 The Lombard Kingdom and Duchies .... p. 221
6.5.4 Observations .... p. 222
6.6 Conclusion .... p. 227

7. The Centralisation of Legitimate Enforceable Authority .... p. 228
7.1 Introduction .... p. 228
7.2 Defining Centralisation, Legitimacy, and Authority .... p. 230
7.3 The Monopolisation of Violence .... p. 232
7.3.1 The end of the 'traditional Roman army' .... p. 236
7.3.2 'Barbarisation' and the Privatisation of Violence .... p. 244
7.3.3 Observations .... p. 251
7.4 The End of Imperial Rule .... p. 252
7.4.1 A Theory of Late Imperial Rule .... p. 255
7.4.2 Parallel Autocracy .... p. 257
7.4.3 East and West .... p. 268
7.4.4 The Disintegration of Western Imperial Authority .... p. 273
7.5 Conclusion .... p. 282

8. Epilogue .... p. 285
9. Appendix: Military Campaigns 364-476 .... p. 291
10. Bibliography .... p. 299

Introduction

"Odovacer, king of the Goths, took Rome. Odovacer cut down Orestes on the spot. Odovacer condemned Augustulus, the son of Orestes, with the punishment of exile in Lucullanum, a fort in Campania. With this Augustulus perished the Western empire of the Roman people, which the first Augustus, Octavian, began to rule in the seven hundred and ninth year from the foundation of the city. This occurred in the five hundred and twenty-second year of the kingdom of the departed emperors, with Gothic kings thereafter holding Rome." – Marcellinus *comes*, *Chronicle*, s.a. 476 §2

Such was the chronicle entry for the year 476 given by Marcellinus *comes*, an Illyrian ex-functionary writing in Constantinople in the early sixth century.[1] In selecting 476 as his terminal point for the western Roman empire, Marcellinus drew an implicit link between the survival of the Roman state and the maintenance of imperial rule: with the deposition of Romulus Augustulus, the last western emperor, and with the return of the imperial regalia to Constantinople, the western empire had self-evidently ceased to exist. This suggestion would likely have annoyed Julius Nepos: the Dalmatian warlord technically remained the western *Augustus* until his assassination in 480.[2] However, there is a further reason that 476 might be considered the 'end' of the western empire, for it was in this year that Odovacer reportedly extended 'barbarian' land settlements to the remainder of the Italian peninsula (§3.4.1.7).[3] This issue had afforded Odovacer the opportunity to topple Orestes, and by this act it could be argued that the last part of the western empire was finally being peripheralised and colonised by the 'barbarians'. The above constitutes the grand total of the reasons for which 476 has traditionally been taken as the apocryphal 'end of the western Roman empire'. This is, as has long been acknowledged, pretty thin gruel. For one

---

[1] Cf. Jord., *Rom.* 344-345 implicitly dates this saga to 479, but is close enough in wording to Marcellinus to suggest that Jordanes was using him as the source. For a full overview of Marcellinus *comes*, see Croke (2001)

[2] Marcell. *com.*, s.a. 480; *Fast. Vind. Prior.* s.a. 480 (May 9th); Anon. Val. 7.36; *PLRE* IIB, 777-778

[3] Procop. *Bell.* 1.1.5-8; Goffart (1980), chpt. 3, esp. 60; O'Flynn (1983), 135, 142-143

thing, the pattern of sixth-century easterners like Marcellinus suddenly deciding that the western empire had fallen corresponded suspiciously well with the bellicose intentions of Justinian's regime: it is unclear whether or not any contemporary westerners shared their opinion.[4] In the early modern period, Marcellinus's suggestion was willingly recycled by writers intent on making a very particular point when they advanced the image of a helpless child being deposed by a warlord with a distinctly non-Roman name: one was, I suppose, intended to imagine Odovacer draped in skins and decked out with axe and horned helmet.[5] However, in repeating Marcellinus's claim, Edward Gibbon himself saw fit to append a footnote to this final date, in which he stated that, although "AD 476 appears to have the sanction of authentic chronicles … [t]he precise year in which the Western empire was extinguished is not positively ascertained."[6] Despite this, the terminal date of 476 remains a catechism of historical writing as an heuristic yardstick, a way of measuring in shorthand how far we have come and how far we have yet to travel down the historical path of late antiquity. It is, even today, the most frequently given date for what Arnaldo Momigliano referred to as *la caduta senza rumore di un impero* – "the silent fall of an empire".[7]

The question with which I began this investigation was whether or not it was possible to determine a more appropriate 'end' date for the western Roman empire. The first problem is that 'empire' is simply too unwieldy a concept for something so precise as an 'end' to be identifiable. By contrast, the concept of a 'state', although still contested in many ways, is arguably clear enough in sociology to make a more targeted approach possible. The mature form of the question came with a reading of Chris Wickham's *Framing the Early Middle Ages* (2005), in which Wickham briefly sketched out a five-part model for the 'ancient state' that could be used for the purpose of comparative analysis. These five criteria are: the centralisation of legitimate enforceable authority; stable and independent resources for rulers; a class-based system for surplus extraction and stratification; the specialisation of

[4] Kulikowski (2021), 261

[5] Ibid., 260-261

[6] Gibbon, III.36.521 n.2

[7] Momigliano (1980), 159-165

governance; and the concept of a public power.[8] Wickham's model forms the basis of this thesis. The aim here has been to take each of the five criteria independently and to assess if, how, and when these went from operating in a distinctly late Roman manner to something observably different: in other words, what changed, when did it change, and what were the consequences of that change? This means using Wickham's model in a manner unintended by its creator. Wickham's theory was meant to describe state formation in the early medieval epoch: by fundamentally assuming that a model designed to account for state formation must reflexively be able to explain its antithesis, I have inverted Wickham's approach and applied the same model to describe the disintegration of the western Roman state. Once each criterion has been assessed, we can then compare and contrast the information gathered to assess whether an 'end' point is discernible or necessary. The aim is to chart the 'end' of the western Roman state in such a way as to more clearly differentiate between the various strands that compose statehood: politics, political-economy, socioeconomics, ideology, and administration.

The above begs an obvious question: to what extent are criteria developed to describe state formation applicable to the process of state deformation or collapse. The relevance of the comparison was suggested to me by an observation made in an article by Walter Scheidel (2013).[9] In a discussion of premodern states, it was stated that the fundamental difference between a state and a pre-state formation such as a chiefdom was the ability of the former, and the corresponding inability of the latter, to restrain the process of fission.[10] According to Ronald Cohen (via Scheidel), fission can be defined as:

> "...a (horizontal) response to scalar stress – caused by decision making among too many units – whereas superordination to hierarchy is a (vertical) alternative. The state can be defined as a means to restrain fission."[11]

---

[8] Wickham (2005), 57

[9] Scheidel (2013), 9-10

[10] Ibid, 10

[11] Cohen (1978), 4 in Scheidel (2013), 10

With regard to the political disintegration of the western Roman state outlined in chapter 7 (§7.4), it struck me at an early stage that fission was an effective way to describe the process by which the authority of the imperial court gradually drained away. It further occurred that if one sociological process that describes the evolution of pre-state formations into states can be effective in describing the opposite process, then it stands to reason that there must be others. There are, it goes without saying, some obvious pitfalls in this approach. State formation and state deformation are not the same thing. Whilst state formation is almost by necessity slow, laborious, and convoluted, state deformation or collapse can be, and often is, rather more immediate. There is, therefore, the risk of attempting to cram state deformation into a mould in which it does not fit. However, I would argue that even the most committed catastrophist would not currently suggest that the western Roman state experienced a total collapse in the fifth century, and we are therefore looking at a longer term process to which similar criteria might apply. Indeed, one way to interpret late antiquity as an era is that it exists to contain the *longue durée* disintegration of the Roman empire into its recognisable successor states. As to the exact criteria we have used, there is no better way to ascertain the validity of any criteria than simply to start testing. A further issue is that if focussing on state formation may give the over-impression of continuity, then focussing on state deformation may do the reverse; one may get the impression that the Carolingian era was essentially a wasteland characterised by the ruins of what came before it. This is obviously not the case: the purpose of this work is to focus on the strands of statehood that characterised the Roman era and what happened to them. The strands of statehood that gradually evolved from that context and their aftermath, whist germane, are not the primary focus. We should not, however, forget their presence.

Next, we must address a second problem. Here I quote a recent comment made by Michael Kulikowski:

> "Pick a date for the fall of the Roman empire: 476, when Odoacer deposed Romulus and packed him off to comfortable retirement? 480, when Nepos, the last western emperor acknowledged by the legitimate senior eastern augustus, died? 568, when armies of Lombard client kings shattered the

> eastern Roman hegemony briefly reinstalled, at huge economic and social cost, by the emperor Justinian after 535? 1204, when the Venetian doge bamboozled credulous and covetous Crusaders into sacking Constantinople? Or 1453, when the city fell to Mehmet the Conqueror, founder of what we now know as the Ottoman empire? It's a parlour game: good fun, but ultimately pointless." – Michael Kulikowski (2021), 260

Indeed, the problem runs deeper than this, for the question of when something ends must inevitably also be a question of why it ends, and the question of 'why the western Roman empire ended' has bedevilled the field since its inception. Momigliano referred to this as a "sleeping beauty": "somewhere in the wood the true cause of the decline and fall of the Roman empire lies hidden and only awaits to be awakened by [them], the lucky D.Phil. candidate".[12] It would be an act of rank intellectual dishonesty not to address the very real probability that I am that DPhil candidate. Firstly, I must stress that whilst I am of the opinion that there is a better single year in which to fix the apocryphal "end of the western Roman state" – 461 – and whilst I am going to enunciate the reasons for this as we progress, this is not the primary intent of the thesis. Indeed, if anything has emerged from this investigation, it is that any 'end' we might detect depends very much on the perspective from which we set out to find it: each historian sees that to which they are most disciplinarily inclined. Furthermore, simply picking a new date would misunderstand the historical value of 476. To be clear, 476 is not the year in which the empire ended, and never was. But catechisms do not exist in historical consciousness for the same reasons as points in a historical debate. Catechisms are a function of shared historical consciousness, a form of storytelling by which we communally structure our shared past. We know, for instance, that the First World War did not actually begin when Gavrilo Princip shot Archduke Franz Ferdinand – we know it began with the subsequent declarations of war – but Sarajevo has meaning because we all *agree* that this is the starting point. Similarly, 476 has value because it is the most readily recognisable date in the historical consciousness shared by academic historians, our students, and the laity for 'the fall of the western Roman empire'. For the academic historian, this poses a conundrum. Academic history is nothing if not self-

[12] Momigliano (1966), 49-50; Matthews (2010), 6

referential, and, for the purist, periodisation is a purposeless framework that serves only to obstruct genuine historical understanding. This becomes a problem only when we are forced to communicate historical knowledge to the fairly extensive group of people who would have no professional reason to be aware of Jacques Le Goff's important reminder that 'history is not a cured sausage' that exists to be sliced every which way.[13] Periodisation, apocryphality, and catechisms may not have much value to academic history itself, but they are vital when it comes to pedagogy. For better or worse, 'when did the empire end' is the question I am most frequently asked by a general population amongst whom the term 'Dark Ages' is still very much current, and for whom 'Merovingian' refers more readily to a character in the second Matrix film than to the founding dynasty of France. To put it another way, Kulikowski is right: it is a parlour game. However, playing this game is a useful way of engaging in education, and if we're going to play it – and playing it means engaging in apocryphality and catechism – then we might as well be using the best catechism available, and so improve the game by our passing.

As I have just stated, the question of how the empire ended has quite the pedigree. The notion that there was an intrinsic cause for the 'fall of the Roman empire' – a notion that launched a centuries-long aetiological witch-hunt – is attributable largely to Montesquieu's *Consíderations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains* (1734) and to Edward Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-1789). For these Enlightenment philosophes, the degradation of traditional martial virtues, the end of 'Republican' freedoms in the face of imperial despotism, the increasing reliance on foreign 'barbarians' instead of home-grown Romans for defence, and the gradual encroachment of Christian pacifism all sapped the power and greatness of the empire long before the supposed 'barbarian hordes' arrived to kick in the gates.[14] For our purposes, this perspective had two important consequences. The first was in fixing 'the end' – or, at least, 'the beginning of the end' – as early as either the Antonine or even the Republican periods of Roman history.[15] The second was in portraying the later empire – the 'Dominate' or '*bas-empire'*, as it came disparagingly

[13] Carrié (2017), 180-181

[14] Liebeschuetz (1990), 236-239; Diaz (2017), 21-22

[15] Matthews (2010), 3-4

to be known – as an atrophied and decadent version of its predecessor.[16] The moralism, Tacitean nostalgia, and ethno-essentialism of 'decline and fall' theory proved remarkably tenacious: they still formed many of the fundamental assumptions of John Bury's *History of the Later Roman Empire* (1889). The next phase in the Anglophone history of the period decisively arrived with the publication of A.H.M. Jones's *The Later Roman Empire 284-602* (1964). Eschewing moralising in favour of dispassion (Momigliano referred to the work as "the Jones Report on the state of the Roman Empire") Jones used his unparalleled command of the textual material to produce a thoroughgoing analysis of the empire's administration, institutions, and economy – essentially, to flesh out what Gibbon had obliquely referred to as the 'stupendous fabric' of the later Roman state.[17] Whilst it was not the aim of his work to do so, Jones nonetheless ventured an opinion on the root causes of Roman collapse, focussing in particular on corruption, depopulation, and inequality as internal factors, and on strategic vulnerability to invasion as an external factor.[18] Jones's work contributed more than anything to the formation of the structuralist school in Anglophone research, and although it did not decisively break with the pre-existing orthodoxy, the *LRE* (as it is still affectionately known) altered the sentiments with which the field was approached. Firstly, the late empire was no longer seen as a decayed husk, but increasingly as a high water mark of Roman civilisation. Secondly, no one now lamented the fall of this proto-totalitarian state.

Conversely, a profound challenge to the orthodoxy arrived in 1971 with the publication of Peter Brown's *The World of Late Antiquity AD 150-750*. Brown's work posited a new historical period – late antiquity – as a conscious antidote to the doomsaying of 'decline and fall' theory, accompanied by a new series of foci and methodologies – religion and identity, sociology and anthropology – around which to organise a picture of broad continuity from the classical past to the medieval epoch.[19] Late antiquity rapidly came to form a new orthodoxy exemplified in the work of scholars such as Glen Bowerstock, Walter Goffart, and

[16] Bang (2013), 415

[17] Momigliano (1965); Liebeschuetz (1990), 240; Gibbon, *Decline and Fall*, IV.XXXVIII.119

[18] *LRE* II, 1025-1068; Liebeschuetz (1990), 241-242

[19] See also Brown (1978)

Averil Cameron – the 'continuist' or 'culturalist' school.[20] Structuralism, with its attendant focus on institutional, economic, and political history, was very much out of vogue, increasingly derided as 'catastrophism' by its opponents.[21] However, whilst the late twentieth century was very much the era of continuist triumphalism, there were clouds on the horizon. For one thing, although continuism prioritised 'late antiquity' over 'the later empire' this did not prevent it from further burnishing the image of the later empire as a field worthy of investigation in its own right. This, unwittingly, may have made it easier to contrast the later empire with what came next. The main problem, however, was that this also corresponded with the period in which the historical and archaeological disciplines began to share their work to a greater extent. When historians finally got a look at the archaeological record for the transition from the late Roman to the early medieval period in western Europe, what they found was not a picture of idyllic continuity, but one of material simplification, economic dislocation, and demographic retreat.[22] This threw something of a spanner into the works of the culturalist critique, which prioritised transformation over rupture. A Counter-Reformation was brewing, and it duly arrived in the early twenty-first century with the publication of such works as Wolf Liebeschuetz's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman City* (2001), Peter Heather's *The Fall of the Roman Empire: A New History* (2005), and, perhaps most provocatively, Bryan Ward-Perkin's *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization* (2005).[23] By incorporating the archaeological record more fully into the structuralist critique, these scholars re-advanced the proposition that the empire did fall, and that the process was often traumatic for those who lived through it. This set the stage for nearly two decades of polemical trench warfare.

But 2005 was not only notable for the Counter-Reformation, as this was also the year in which Chris Wickham produced *Framing the Early Middle Ages*. This book is unique, in that it is possibly the only work regarded as crucial by both culturalists and structuralists.

---

[20] Cameron (1993); Goffart (1980); Bowerstock, Brown, and Graber (eds.) (1999)

[21] Salzman (2021) more recently referred to it as "neo-Gibbonianism"

[22] Ward-Perkins (2005), 87; Temin (2013), 255

[23] The term 'Counter-Reformation' was used by James O'Donnell, *BMCR* 2005.07.69; See also Liebeschuetz (2006); Dey (2015), 5

Perhaps the most straightforward way of encapsulating why is to say that Wickham's argument paints a picture of broad continuity using a methodological toolkit that immediately appeals to structuralists: socioeconomics and infrastructural history backed up by archaeology. The thesis of *Framing the Early Middle Ages*, logically following from the 'world economy' theory first advanced by Fernand Braudel, is that the redistributive power of the tax-system held the Roman empire together, and that without it the various regions, sub-regions, and localities of the empire gradually went their own separate ways: this process characterised post-Roman state formation.[24] For structuralists, this thesis has three important consequences. Firstly, it binds structuralism to frame itself within a broadly continuist outlook, as the methodologies deployed by Wickham and shared by structuralists were undeniably successful at making the point: we are not looking at a fifth-century *Götterdämmerung*, but at a *longue durée* process, albeit one interspersed with crises, that could be characterised as a downhill slope in terms of administrative, economic, and material integration and complexity.[25] Secondly, it advances the notion that, instead of looking for a holistic theory for 'the end of the Roman empire', we are instead looking at a kaleidoscopic series of local and micro-realities caused by the disintegration of one greater macro-reality – the empire - and that these micro-realities should be assessed separately, region by region. Thirdly, it posits that the most obvious difference between the imperial and post-imperial realities across the board is the transition from a tax-based to a land-based system of military service, which fundamentally altered the socioeconomic basis of the state across the west in the post-Roman centuries: this has become something of a shibboleth in recent years. On the one hand, Wickham's focus on taxation likely inspired the numerous studies in the last decade or so that seek to apply sociological frameworks of the state to the period, such as those of John Haldon (2012) or Peter Bang (2013), which have focussed the structuralist argument in new and exciting ways. On the other, a danger beckons in the regional focus of Wickham's work: I might call this 'atomisation', or the risk that the entire field of late antiquity dissipates entirely into a sea of unrelated micro-realities. The question that looms over the debate today, then, is whether the 'end of the western Roman empire' can be fit into a "procrustean bed" that favours either a culturalist

[24] Carrié (2017), 196-199

[25] See Kulikowski (2004) for an example of this approach with regards to Iberia

or a structuralist holistic theory, or whether the field might be allowed to disintegrate into a series of smaller, less interrelated disciplines that do not require such holistic theorising at all.[26]

I am more inclined towards a structuralist than a culturalist reading of the 'end of the western Roman empire'. By 'structuralist', I mean a reading that focusses on the interrelationship between human behaviour and the structures of the state in which they lived, which determined the conceptual range of options for action.[27] This is not an absolute theory, but is useful particularly when we are analysing a period of history for which there is comparatively little direct evidence. This is not to denigrate a culturalist approach or its conclusions, but to say that being more inclined towards structuralism commits one to a series of methodological approaches that influence emphases, create dichotomies, and favour certain outcomes. It also inevitably leads to blind spots. The most prominent of these is that the forthcoming thesis is quite secular in outlook: the histories of Christianity and of the church, so vital to a culturalist reading, are afforded comparatively little focus. Part of the reason for this is the historiographical tradition in which the current work is being written. Whilst he dedicated space to both the organisation of the Church and contemporary religious culture, it is notable that Jones effectively sequestered these topics within the relevant section: the remainder of his critique of the late Roman state is remarkably secular.[28] One cannot help but also suspect an element of historiographical reactivity amongst recent structuralist historians in defining their scope against that of Peter Brown and his successors, who tend to organise their understanding of the field around the tent-pole of Christianity and the church. However, in my case the root cause is somewhat more immediate. For whatever reason, Wickham was singularly disinterested in discussing religion or the church in *Framing the Middle Ages*, and that has bled through into my approach.[29] This is, in many ways, a methodological anachronism. For 'decline and fall'

---

[26] Dey (2015), 9

[27] See, e.g., Potter (2004), 4

[28] *LRE* II, chpt. 12, 13

[29] Oddly enough, Wickham extensively discusses both Christianity and the church in *The Inheritance of Rome* (2009), so I am honestly unsure as to why he did not do so in the preceding work

theorists, as romantically halcyon about the classical world as they were convinced that Christian piety had caused it to rot from the inside out, there was a concerted attempt, in theoretical terms, to isolate the former from the latter, to treat Christianity and the church as fundamentally alien to the context that had created them. On the other side of the coin, we find a Christian historiographical tradition keen to smooth out any kinks and creases on the way to the eventual (and supposedly inevitable) triumph of Nicene Christianity and the Roman-Catholic Church in both its Medieval and Modern forms.[30] Whilst neither of these perspectives are sustainable, they still contextualize the way in which we approach the field. The core issue is that, in assessing a field focussed on the parallel tracks of transformation and disintegration, the fact remains that the Roman state disappeared, and the church did not. The room for interpretating this phenomenon, particularly given the relative paucity of evidence for the immediately post-Roman centuries, is as spacious as it is fraught with symbolism.[31] Let me state clearly, therefore, that I am fully aware that the late Roman church was in essence an institution of the late Roman state; that bishops were, to all intents and purposes, state employees; and that emperors derived a great deal of their legitimacy from being viewed as God's vice-regent on earth. The survival of the church into the Medieval period, regardless of the trials and tribulations it encountered along the way, would simply not have occurred without its time in the incubator of the Roman state. However, sequestering the institutional history of the church from that of the secular Roman state has the beneficial effect of streamlining what is already a large and unwieldy topic.[32] With the full knowledge that I am violating Le Goff's maxim, producing a secular history of the topic at hand is a daunting enough prospect. For better or worse – and I suspect it will be the latter – this is the reason for the omission.

Secondly, the terms 'Roman' and 'barbarian' are used primarily to denote patterns of behaviour, mainly institutional but also personal, that correspond to differing contemporary identities. The term 'barbarian' – an artefact of Hellenistic xenophobia – is used in lieu of

---

[30] Heather (2023), xiii-xxiv

[31] See Heather (2023) in general

[32] Cf. D'Avrey (2019), (2022) for perspectives that would argue that the two are not inherently separable

the terms ‘Germanic’ or ‘Teutonic’ to avoid inappropriately incorporating the peoples described into a problematic teleology inspired by Tacitus. If there is a loose definition for how ‘barbarian’ will be used here, it is to describe people whom our Roman sources chose to perceive as being distinct from themselves, and in relation to whom many assumed a degree of cultural superiority.[33] It is always apostrophised, and subsists for lack of a better catch-all alternative.[34] I should stress that I adhere to the theory of ethnogenesis advanced by Herwig Wolfram, Reinhard Wenskus, and Walter Pohl which rejects ‘barbarian’ ethno-essentialism in favour of contextual identities formed during the migration and settlement periods.[35] The term ‘Roman’ has hitherto also been used in ways that are either nebulous or as essentialist as ‘barbarian’. Rather than being a function of the presence or absence of certain cultural markers, such as classical urban topography, the *paideia*, the Julian calendar, circus shows, the imperial cult, or Roman citizenship, ‘Romanness’ is here taken to imply a set of institutional practices that define the late Roman period, and either compare or contrast with practices in different contexts.[36] This does not make such practices – for example, bureaucratisation, ceremonialisation, legalism, and taxation used to support a standing army – specifically and exclusively Roman. It is to say that these were features that defined the form and function of the later Roman state, and this must be the benchmark by which change is to be judged. ‘Roman’ and ‘barbarian’ are therefore convenient structural labels rather than essential facts.

A great deal of the field of late antiquity is defined by which labels we use, such as ‘decline’, ‘transformation’, or ‘rupture’.[37] As such, we must here discuss the labels that are most applicable to the present investigation. Let us begin with ‘end’. ‘End’ is quite difficult to define, as the point at which something has changed enough to constitute something else is always contested territory. With that being said, we might consider the work of Jean Durliat and Elisabeth Magnou-Nortier – the so-called ‘hyper-Romanist’ school – who argued that

[33] Antonova (2019), 212-303; Stutz (2023), 6

[34] Whittker (1994), 132-3

[35] Wolfram (1988); Heather (1991); Wickham (2005), 82-83, (2009) 99

[36] E.g., Ristuccia (2018), 18; see also Potter (2004), 23

[37] See Diaz (2017) for an excellent discussion on the subject

political structures in the ninth century were so unchanged that an 'end' to the later Roman state was unnecessary.[38] Like *Framing the Early Middle Ages*, this theory also has the distinction of having united the field, albeit in condemnation rather than praise. Let us accept, therefore, that the western Roman state did end: nobody alive today believes that it still exists, and there came either a point or period in the past when contemporaries ceased to believe either that they could be subject to it or that they could act on its behalf.[39] Crucially, this is the reason why this thesis largely avoids relying on evidence originating in the eastern Roman empire. I take the view that, from the separation of the empire in 364, the eastern and western Roman states are following a separate institutional trajectory, and whilst what happens in the east obviously has relevance to what happens in the west, it would be a mistake to interpolate eastern evidence to make up for a paucity of its counterpart. Similarly, we must take care to differentiate between the emulation of living Byzantine practices and the recycling of late western Roman precedents in the successor kingdoms, as it is the latter that we are specifically investigating. Incidentally, a similar argument relates to any suggestion that the Holy Roman Empire restored western Roman imperial rule, which it did not.[40] As we will see, the structures of the late Roman and Carolingian/Ottonian states were different enough to constitute opposing ends of a dialectic of infrastructural complexity. Lastly, this thesis presumes a rupture between post-Roman and 'Umayyad rule, particularly in relation to the Iberian Peninsula. Whilst the 'Umayyads used many of the same practices as the late Romans – for example, tax-based armies – the coming of a new language, religion, and culture to the now-Arabic lands has to mark a watershed.

A crucial concept to which we must resort is 'crisis'. Originally derived from the verb *khrino*, meaning 'to differentiate, select, judge, or decide', the term was used by in the classical world either to denote judicial decision-making or, more famously, in medical terms to describe the period in which the patient either recovers or succumbs to a particular

---

[38] Durliat (1990); Magnou-Nortier (1989)

[39] See Dey (2015), 9 for the importance of the personal in the period

[40] E.g., Osiander (2007)

ailment.[41] The term has been liberally applied to Roman history, particularly to the third and fifth centuries, as a result of the opacity of our sources, which do not allow us to chart the course of events with the same clarity as we would for, say, the late Republican period. The result has been the congealing of long periods of crisis, sometimes lasting centuries.[42] For our purposes, it is worth considering the concept of historical crises offered by Reinhart Kosellek in his seminal work, *Critique and Crisis* (1955):

> "It is in the nature of crises that problems crying out for solution go unresolved. And it is also in the nature of crisis that the solution, that which the future holds in state, is not predictable. The uncertainty of a critical situation contains one certainty only – its end. The only unknown quantity is when and how. The eventual solution is uncertain, but the end of the crisis, a change in the existing situation – threatening, feared and eagerly anticipated – is not. The question of the historical future is inherent in the crisis."[43]

Whilst the historical context in which Kosellek formed and applied this theory of crisis – the pre-Enlightenment – is wildly different from the context of the classical and late antique worlds, the concept remains applicable here. This is particularly true of the analysis of the political situation advanced in chapter 7 (§7.4), which might be phrased as a crisis in the authority of the emperor and the imperial state that had to be resolved one way or another. It is tempting to take Kosellek's interpretation further and suggest a wholesale crisis in late Roman 'Absolutism' similar to that experienced in the seventeenth century, but this would be a massive retrojection. If we were to interpret 'crisis' on a less conceptual and more practical level, we might say that the fifth and sixth centuries saw a series of smaller crises – mainly invasions and wars – set against the larger backdrop of a gradually unfolding economic crisis that defines the transition from late antiquity to the early Medieval. With

[41] Kosellek (1988), 103-104; the medical usage subsumed other interpretations in Medieval Latin

[42] E.g., Rémondon (1964) argued that the empire was in crisis from the reign of Marcus Aurelius to that of Anastasius

[43] Kosellek (1988), 127

that being said, Kosellek's conceptualisation of 'crisis' – put pithily, the old having yet to die, and the new being as of yet unable to be born – holds some interesting analytical value.

Traditionally speaking, the labels most frequently applied to the study of our period are 'continuity', 'transformation', and 'rupture', and these reflect the opposing priorities of the culturalist/structuralist dichotomy. However, the three labels that I have found most useful are 'consolidation', 'disintegration', and 'recycling'. From this perspective, the onset of late antiquity is defined by the consolidation of state structures that defines the later Roman empire against its predecessor. The remainder of the period is defined by continued attempts at consolidation counterposed by disintegration, as well as frequent acts of recycling as people in post-Roman states attempted to salvage aspects of Roman institutional practice, sometimes successfully, other times not, outside of their original tax-raising context. Regarding both complexity and disintegration, it is crucial to remember that these do not have to be inherently negative experiences for those involved, nor are we required to view them negatively. They are morally relative phenomena, and we need not pass judgement on them.

To conclude, if there is any way that I have of contextualising both the upcoming thesis and the culturalist/structuralist divide around which it must almost invariably be orientated, it is in relation to the difference between 'the state' and 'the State'. 'The state' – small 's' – is, in the words of Michael Mann, "an arena", a space in which the members of a polity negotiate over what that polity means and over their place either within it or in relation to it.[44] This is the soft concept of 'the state', the cultural and ideological aspects that exist in popular consciousness without the need for institutions or systems of power. It is the more subliminal, Rousseauist concept of the state, capable of developing, transforming, or ending without anyone necessarily noticing. 'The State', by contrast, is more Hobbesian. This is the tentacular institution that sits atop a polity, raising resources, redirecting surpluses, making laws, waging wars, and so forth. It is the authoritative expression of a polity, capable in some circumstances of gaining independence from the polity that created it and exercising power in its own right. In regards the 'ending' of the western Roman state, I have gradually

[44] Mann (1984), 187

come to regard structuralism as more applicable in describing ‘the State’, whereas culturalism almost has to be framed through the concept of ‘the state’ in order to make sense. It must be said that this dichotomy is an anachronism. As we shall see, the Romans themselves did not have a method of describing their polity in this way, although this probably didn’t stop the average Roman peasant from perceiving a marked difference between their own outlook and that of imperial officials. However, this distinction is important because very often – though, as we shall see, not always – it is ‘the State’ that ends, where as ‘the state’ continues. I will conclude by saying that, in my opinion, the ‘western Roman State’ was a real historical institution; it did end; and that ending occurred primarily, although not exclusively, over the course of the fifth and sixth centuries. With that, let us begin.

Classifying the Later Roman State

"The state is undeniably a messy concept"

Michael Mann (1984)

In order to ascertain if or when the western Roman state ended, we must first assess what exactly is meant by "the western Roman state". Once we have done this, we can begin to analyse the various processes that make up 'the western Roman state' to determine if, when, and how each came to an end. To borrow a phrase from Clifford Ando, "what demands explication is not the fact of the process, but its shape".[45]

It is the purpose of this chapter to define the western Roman state at the outset of our period, at the point of the Valentinianic settlement of 364. Here, we must assess the institutional, functional, and claims-making properties of the western Roman state: what did it look like, what did it do, and what did it aspire to be?[46] The main problem that confronts us is that there is no unified concept of 'the early state', but rather a cluttered field of competing theories that share some basic assumptions. In the field of contemporary sociology, this flexibility is of obvious benefit when it comes to comparative analysis, as it allows us to assess states in relation to each other with full appreciation of the variability and divergence that we will inevitably discover. In this instance, the comparisons will be with the Principate, the forerunner of the late Roman/western Roman state, and with the Romano-Germanic successor states that came to dominate the post-imperial landscape.

This investigation will begin with an appraisal of Chris Wickham's theory of the early state, as expressed in *Framing the Early Middle Ages* (2005), as this is the model we will be using. Here, we will address the conceptual bases of Wickham's theory, as well as its position in current debate. Next, we will discuss the concept of 'the early state', in order to provide a workable definition with which to be going forwards. Lastly, we will analyse the western Roman state specifically, by giving a brief summary of its most salient features –

[45] Ando (2008), 40

[46] Mann (1984), 187

geographical, administrative, military, economic, social, and religious. The overall aim is to define the western Roman state as it existed at the outset of our period, so that we can fully assess the scope and scale of continuity or disintegration.

2.1: Wickham's Model of the State

The model set forth in *Framing the Early Middle Ages* (2005) is divided into five parts. These are as follows:

I) The centralisation of legitimate enforceable authority (justice and the army)

II) The specialisation of governmental roles, with an official hierarchy which outlasted the people who held official position at any one time

III) The concept of a public power, that is, of a ruling system ideologically separable from the ruled population and from the individual rulers themselves

IV) Stable and independent resources for rulers

V) A class based system for surplus extraction and stratification"[47]

Wickham states that his model is based on two specific antecedents: the 'seven criteria' contained within Henri Claessen's 'The Early State: A Structural Approach' (1978) and a sketch presented in chapter three of W.G. Runciman's *Confessions of a Reluctant Theorist* (1989).[48] All three models share an emphasis on the centralisation of legitimate enforceable authority, an extractive system based on social stratification, and a legitimising ideology that binds rulers and ruled. The unique feature in Wickham's model is the requirement for "stable and independent resources for rulers".[49]

It follows that the process of redistribution is the central theme of Wickham's concept of the early state – more plainly, the process by which aristocracies extracted wealth and resources from the lower classes. Wickham's model is very firmly a 'conflict-based' theory of

[47] Wickham (2005), 57
[48] Claessen (1978), 586-589; Runciman (1989), 53
[49] Ibid, 57

state formation: according to Walter Scheidel, this mode of thought suggests that the state originates "out of competition within a given group (i.e. between strata or 'classes') and between groups", and that as a consequence, "the state depends on…maintains…and reinforces inequality".[50] This puts Wickham's theory on the Marxian end of what Michael Mann referred to as the "Marxified Weberianism" of contemporary comparative sociology.[51] The core of Weber's theory of the state is as follows:

> *"A 'ruling organisation' will be called 'political' insofar as its existence and order is continuously safeguarded within a given territorial area by the threat and application of physical force on the part of the administrative staff. A compulsory political organisation with continuous operations (politischer Anstaltsbetreib) will be called a 'state' insofar as its administrative staff successfully upholds the claim to the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force in the enforcement of its order".*[52] – Max Weber (1978), 54

Where the Marxian analysis differs from the Weberian is in the analysis of *why* inequality is maintained between those applying and those submitting to or resisting physical force, namely the maintenance of surplus-based extraction. As far as Wickham's own histories of the period are concerned, the Marxian influences in both *Land and Power* (1994) and *Framing the Early Middle Ages* (2005) are both readily evident and self-acknowledged.[53]

The unique feature of Wickham's theory, as we have said, is the 'stable and independent resources for rulers' criterion: in the case of the later Roman state, this refers most readily to the tax system. In analysing the transition from the Roman state to the post-Roman kingdoms, Wickham posits that "the single major change that took place when the western empire broke up was the collapse of the tax-system, because a political system that is based

---

[50] Scheidel (2013), 11

[51] Mann (1984), 186-7

[52] Ando (2017), 11-12f; see also Scheidel (2013), 5

[53] Wickham (2005), 60

on tax-raising is fundamentally different in its basic structure to one that is not".[54] Broadly speaking, the fiscal engine of the Roman state raised taxes in cash and kind and used them to fund a large standing army, whilst monetising the economy, facilitating long-distance trade, and creating markets as it did so. This fiscal superstructure gave unity to the vast expanse of Roman territory, as well as providing the state with effective mechanisms for restraining aristocratic disloyalty. By contrast, the post-Roman kings primarily rewarded their military followers with land, and so the logic of tax-raising ceased to make political or fiscal sense. As a result, the parameters of aristocratic competition substantively changed, the tax system experienced an involution, and the territory of the Roman state disintegrated with it. This concept has come to inform a great deal of subsequent scholarship.[55] Both Peter Heather and Brian Ward-Perkins, neither quite as continuist as Wickham, readily made the connection between the well-being of Rome's tax-base, the financing of large scale professional armies, and the transition away from this system constituting the end of one epoch and the beginning of another.[56] More recently, Pablo Diaz stated that "…as long as the tax system remained effective, since it was the lifeblood of all the Empire's expenses, (army, administration, transport, and legal system), unity seemed an absolute fact. Conversely, if the tax system were to fail, the Empire would crumble".[57]

Wickham's theory occupies an odd place in the wider field of late antiquity, in that its findings are generally welcomed in the field despite the fact that the methodological approach employed differs from the standard roster used to analyse late antique cultural change (mainly anthropology and the culture-studies aspects of sociology).[58] Whilst being broadly continuist in outlook, the focus on socio-economics and the archaeology that underpins it has far more in common with work that might be better characterised as catastrophist, such as Ward-Perkins' *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilisation* (2005) or

---

[54] Wickham (2005), 58

[55] E.g., Bang (2013), 459

[56] See also Heather (2005) in Carrié (2017); Ward-Perkins (2005), 41-42

[57] Diaz (2017), 23

[58] Anthony Kaldellis made this point far better than I have in a review of Mark Humphries' *Cities and the Meaning of Late Antiquity* (2019)

Michael Kulikowski's *Imperial Tragedy* (2019). The benefit of this is that this makes *Framing the Early Middle Ages* a sort of historiographical Panmunjom from which further rationalisation of the two competing traditions might be attempted.[59] However, it must be stressed that Wickham's model was intended to reflect the 'ideal type' of early state in order to facilitate comparison. In a situation in which we are comparing specific states, this may become an issue.

2.2: The Early State

In this section, we will define a generic 'early state' against which we can compare and contrast the western Roman state of the late fourth century. The state, according to Michael Mann, "is an arena, the condensation, the crystallisation, the summation of social relations within its territories".[60] However, the early state differs significantly from the modern state in terms of complexity. Early states first appeared in Egypt and Mesopotamia between 6-5,000 years ago, and most states up to the advent of modernity would have fallen into this category. The point at which an early state progresses into being a mature state is disputed – state formation is not guaranteed, and is in any event multipolar – but boundaries could be placed either when sufficient managerial, redistributive, or infrastructural complexity is achieved, or when the dominant ideology no longer relies on the supernatural power of the leader or on the perpetuation of his reciprocal obligations.[61] Here, we aim to set out the institutional, functional, and claims-making properties of 'territorial' or 'imperial' early states: what did early states look like, what did they do, and what did the élites who ran them claim them to be?[62]

What were the institutional properties of the early state? What might we expect it to look like? According to Max Weber, a state is characterised by a centrally organised set of institutions and personnel radiating a political relationship outward across a territorially-

---

[59] Dey (2015), 8, n. 26

[60] Mann (1984), 208

[61] Claessen and Skalník (1978), 633; Scheidel (2013), 14-15

[62] See esp. Mann (1984); Haldon (2012); Scheidel (2013); Ando and Richardson (2017)

demarcated area.[63] This central location could be either stationary – in most cases, a complex within a city – or mobile, as would be the case with the roving camps of nomadic empires.[64] Within the territory claimed by an early state, we would expect to see a clear division between the society of the élites and the multitude of local subordinate societies.[65] Internally, a state was organised in opposition to both its own subaltern communities and the other élite interest groups within its territory with which it negotiated.[66] Externally, the state was organised in opposition to other states or political groupings beyond its frontiers.[67] We would expect to see an "autonomous state elite" wielding executive authority over this space.[68] This autonomy was gained when the state élite redeployed the resources it extracted from its subordinate populations to play off both internal power groupings and external competitors against each other. In time, according to Haldon, the state gains independence from the political and economic interests of its own élites as "a field of action, as a role-constituting site of power and practices".[69] Henri Claessen, in characterising the state as a process rather than a static entity, posited the development of the state through the stages of 'inchoate', 'typical', and 'transitional'. The development from the first to the last stage follows the shifting balance of political relationships from personal to professional, with the formalisation – and thus distancing – of the relationship between rulers and ruled, and the growing reliance of the rulers on market-generated resources as opposed to aristocratic reciprocity.[70] As a result of this process, we might expect to see a degree of permanence and stability that would not be possible in political systems dependent on other alternatives, such as force or exchange, as none of these could

[63] Weber (1978) I, 64: see also Eisenstadt (1969), 5; Tilly (1975), 27, 70; Mann (1984), 188; Haldon (1993), 32-3, (2012), 1121; Goldstone and Haldon (2009), 6

[64] Haldon (2012), 1122

[65] Scheidel (2013), 19

[66] Mann (1984), 186-7, 199

[67] Hintze (1975), 183; Skocpol (1979), 29-31; Mann (1984), 187

[68] Mann (1984), 189-90

[69] Haldon (2012), 1122

[70] Claessen (1978), 589; see also Haldon (2012), 1124

guarantee order in the long term as effectively as a state structure.[71] As such, the institutional properties of an early state would include an autonomous set of institutions and personnel claiming authority over a territory and the societies living within it. It follows that we would observe a clear distinction between rulers and ruled. Lastly, assuming the development pattern suggested by Claessen continued uninterrupted, we might also observe a degree of stability and permanence that we would not find in a different kind of socio-political structure, such as a tribe or a chiefdom.

It is potentially easier to define an early state by what it wasn't rather than what it was, and so comparing and contrasting early states with both pre-state formations and empires is useful. Pre-state formations, such as chiefdoms or confederacies, are usually characterised by various communities coming together under the temporary authority of one symbolic or military leader in the pursuit of some specific aim.[72] The 'empire' of Attila or the Gallic confederacy of Vercingetorix both serve as potential examples of this phenomenon. However, such groupings do not as yet possess the ideological, legal, or military capacity to prevent 'fission' – horizontal decision-making by too many élites – and are only capable of developing into states if they achieve a degree of institutional permanence or dynastic legitimacy over several generations.[73] The difference between a 'territorial' state and an 'imperial' state is somewhat murkier. Alexander Motyl, for example, described imperial polities as a 'rimless wheel', with various peripheral communities subordinated to an imperial core that mediated and redistributed resources between them.[74] According to Shmuel Eisenstadt, empires developed according to their level of penetration into subordinate communities.[75] In the 'patrimonial' phase, the imperial core will content itself with domination, whilst allowing subaltern communities to govern themselves; in the 'bureaucratic/territorial' phase, the cultural distinction between centre and periphery weakens and allows the imperial core to reorganise the peripheries according to its needs. It

[71] Scheidel (2013), 7

[72] Haldon (2012), 1122

[73] Scheidel (2013), 10; Haldon (2012), 1122-1123

[74] Motyl (2001), 4, 16-18, 23-24; Scheidel (2013), 27-29

[75] Eisenstadt (1969); Scheidel (2013), 29

is not hard to detect the progression of the Roman empire in this perspective. Beyond such distinctions, however, 'imperial' states tended to operate in a similar fashion to 'territorial' states; the only real distinction is frequently the size of the claimed territory and the cultural distinctiveness that this entailed between different communities within the empire.

Whilst one might be inclined to wonder what society looked like in an early state, the modern distinction between state and society was still a long way in the future. Indeed, we there is no single 'society' to find in early states, because neither was there a universal set of norms to which all of the residents subscribed, and nor did the state encourage one to exist.[76] Political society in early states was composed of heterarchically-organised élite interest groups orientated towards the centralised state-élite.[77] This horizontal configuration of élites sat precariously atop the vast mass of the population, who lived, worked, and died in their own localities and who were neither integrated into nor invited to join in with political affairs. The crucial feature of this situation is that, due to both the inability of the state to effectively penetrate its own subaltern communities and its overwhelming reliance on co-opted aristocracies, the relationship between the state and the vast majority of its inhabitants – primarily the agrarian working poor, but also the city-dwelling proletariat – was distant at best and hostile at worst.[78] Élite interest groups can roughly be divided into economic, ideological, and political/military categories. The economic group would have been comprised primarily of aristocratic landowners, although merchant conglomerates may also have played a part in some circumstances; the ideological group is associated primarily with priesthoods; and the military/political group with commanders and high officials.[79] Given that the interests of state and non-state élites were never entirely coextensive, as both relied on the same pool of agricultural resources, it was necessary for early states to try and assimilate non-state élites in any way possible.[80] As early states developed, new infrastructural and organisational mechanisms for élite co-

[76] Kautsky (1982), 24-25; Hall (1986), 29-30; Scheidel (2013), 16, 22

[77] Crumley (1987); Ehrenreich, Crumley and Levy (1985); Scheidel (2013), 25

[78] Crone (2003); Scheidel (2013), 16

[79] Mann (1984), 198-199

[80] Scheidel (2013), 23

option, such as bureaucratisation and taxation in coinage, became available.[81] However, not only did such mechanisms develop their own attendant problems, they could do nothing to avoid the fundamental reality that early states, even at their most developed, relied overwhelmingly on aristocrats who could (and did) frustrate state aims for their own ends. The only tangible consideration that bound this overarching élite together was their shared interest in maintaining their own position over everybody else. It is within this context that the maintenance of difference is best understood. Incapable as they were of actually integrating local communities, early state élites contented themselves with managing their independence from both aristocracies and each other. By engaging in this “Bonapartist balancing act”, the state preserved its own precarious autonomy.[82] To that end, we note that political society in early states was composed of state and non-state élites, who competed with each other for the same pool of resources.

Having touched on the matter already, we must now discuss the functions of the early state: essentially, what did the early state do? Beginning once more with Max Weber, we acknowledge that the primary function of the state lies in its monopolisation of both “authoritative binding rule-making” and the legitimate use of punitive force.[83] According to Mann, this authority originates in necessity: developing polities eventually require an authoritative body to set rules regarding the protection of life and property, and the state develops out of this imperative.[84] It should be noted that neither Weber nor those theorists who have succeeded him have suggested a total monopoly of violence: instead, we would expect the claim to legitimate enforceable rule-making, with the actual capacity for coercion overwhelmingly diffused into co-opted power groupings or into local communities.[85] At most, the state had to be capable of mounting punitive expeditions against those who did not obey its directives. In a domestic context, this monopoly was used to protect the allies of the state élite from non-aligned competitors and the property-less; externally, it was

[81] Ibid, 23-24

[82] Mann (1984), 198

[83] Weber (1978), 64: see also Mann (1984), 196; Goldstone and Haldon (2009), 6

[84] Mann (1984), 195

[85] Scheidel (2013), 5

used to wage war against rivals of the state.[86] Armies, agents of the state, and courts all served this function.[87] The development of these organs required resources, which necessitated extraction, the parallel primary function of early states.[88] This was predominantly the extraction of agricultural surpluses – the development of subsistence agriculture and of the early state seem, after all, to have been coextensive – but resources could equally be extracted in the form of money, minerals, manufactured goods, or forced labour.[89] Once the basic coercive needs had been met, anything extracted beyond this could be considered "monopoly profit" or "tribute": the degree of tribute depended on the aims of those in control of the state.[90] This function was carried out by financial agents and institutions. Charles Tilly also identified three supplementary types of state activity - adjudication, distribution, and production – whereby the state could settle disputes (usually through courts of law), or reallocate or stimulate the creation of certain goods and services among the subject population.[91] In order to fulfil all of these functions, the state had to extend its infrastructural capacity by co-opting and repurposing technological developments in order to better penetrate subordinate societies.[92] Examples of the techniques used include the development of both coinage and weights and measures; the development and dissemination of literacy; the constructions of roads, harbours and ships to facilitate communications and transport; and, where possible, the division of labour.[93] As such, the functions of the early state were primarily the monopolisation of legitimate enforceable authority and the extraction of surpluses, firstly to cover the costs of protection and then as tribute to the autonomous state élite. Secondary functions could include the adjudication of disputes, the redistribution of goods, and the stimulation of certain modes of production. All

[86] Mann (1984), 196; Tilly (1992), 96

[87] Tilly (1985), 171, 181

[88] Tilly (1992), 96; Scheidel (2013), 19-20

[89] Claessen (1978), 545

[90] Lane (1979), 25, 27, 53

[91] Tilly (1992), 97

[92] Mann (1984), 189-90, 193-4

[93] Ibid, 192

of the above were facilitated by the development of infrastructure intended to more effectively penetrate subaltern communities.

Despite this roster of functions, the activities of early states were perennially hampered by comparatively low infrastructural reach.[94] The slowness of communications and the cost of transporting goods are frequently cited as limiting factors. This conditioned the scope within which early states conducted themselves. It would be inappropriate, therefore, to describe the activity of early states as 'governance' if, as Anthony Giddens has pointed out, governance refers to the "concern of the state with the regularised administration of the overall territory claimed as its own".[95] Early states were reactionary in intent and primitive in scope: being broadly incapable of penetrating into the societies they ruled over, they instead devoted their energies to keeping things in place rather than initiating development.[96] Day-to-day rule was carried out by co-opted élites: the possibility of the state's intervention, and the inherent threat that this entailed, was usually enough to keep things ticking over. The arbitrariness and predatory nature of state power was matched only by the remoteness of the possibility of it being applied: when it came to local peace and welfare, self-help was usually the order of the day.[97] To that end, we conclude that the low infrastructural capacity of the early state adversely conditioned its ability to function at every observable level, to the extent that early states did not actively engage in what we would now call governance.

The rulers of early states habitually sought to compensate for their low infrastructural power with expansive claims to the contrary.[98] The central claim made by the rulers of early states was of universal protection against "supernatural forces, secular powers, poverty and anarchy" to all inhabitants of their domains.[99] This claim was reflexively tied up in the

[94] Mann (1984), 205

[95] Giddens (1987), 47, 57

[96] Crone (2003); Scheidel (2013), 16-17

[97] Scheidel (2013), 16; Kelly (2004), 119-120

[98] Richardson (2012)

[99] Claessen (1978), 567; Eisenstadt (1969); Mann (1984), 204

legitimacy of the sovereign: this was usually a monarch, although oligarchic councils or democratic assemblies could also fill the role. Supernatural protection was afforded by the sacrality of the sovereign, which was conveyed upon him both by his genealogy and by his correct observance of rituals intended to propitiate the cosmic dimension on behalf of his subjects.[100] The terrestrial hierarchy at the summit of which the sovereign sat was reflected onto the cosmic plane: according to Bruce Trigger, élite-building was reflected in divine pantheons, and ritual sacrifice mirrored the demands of taxation.[101] It should come as no surprise, therefore, that state investment in religion was correspondingly high, and that religious appointments and mysteries became a crucial feature of élite-building in many cases.[102] Protection against secular powers was tied up in the sovereign's claim to be a 'supreme commander', as well as his projected relationship with military organisations such as warrior castes, standing armies, royal bodyguards or professional officer corps.[103] Protection against poverty was symbolised by the sovereign's claims of benevolence, demonstrated by acts of public largesse and gift-giving, although this was usually enacted at a wholly disproportionate rate.[104] The sovereign's role as the giver and guarantor of law conceptually served as protection from anarchy. This claim could be actuated in the provision of law courts or legal codices, or more rarely peace-keeping forces.[105] Overall, the claim of the reciprocal granting of universal protection by the ruler to the ruled in return for taxation and labour formed the basis for a unifying state ideology. To that end, we observe that the claims of early states amounted to the granting of universal protection vested in the legitimacy of the sovereign.

To conclude, the average early state consisted of a set of centralised institutions and personnel claiming authority over a territorially circumscribed area and the societies living within it. This entails a distinction between rulers and ruled, a degree of stability or

[100] Claessen (1978), 557-558

[101] Trigger (2003), 405-406, 638-650

[102] Ibid.

[103] Claessen (1978), 562-563

[104] Ibid, 563, 575

[105] Ibid, 559-560

permanence, and a political system defined by the competition between state and non-state élites for the same pool of resources. Early states engaged in the monopolisation of the claim to the use of force and the institutions necessary to back that claim up, the extraction of surpluses, the redistribution of goods, the stimulation of production, the adjudication of disputes, and the development of other specialised infrastructure. However, these activities were circumscribed by low infrastructural capacity and restricted to reactive as opposed to positive politics. These limitations were conceptually ameliorated by the claim to universal protection vested in the legitimacy of the sovereign. Having settled on this broad analysis of the early state, we must turn now to the western Roman state itself.

2.3: The Western Roman State

Technically, the western Roman empire never existed. In late antiquity, the Roman empire theoretically remained a united entity under a college of emperors, with officials, troops, and resources habitually shared between the two *partes imperii* to the extent that speaking of a boundary may seem inapplicable. The two halves of the empire also shared a dynasty up until the death of Valentinian III (excepting a few interspersed periods of internecine turmoil), and this was expressed in the joint promulgation of all legislation, the theoretical applicability of said legislation to all parts of the empire unless expressly stipulated otherwise, and the shared naming of the annual consuls.[106] Whilst periods of hostility could occur between the two halves – the supremacy of Stilicho (395-408) marked a particularly low point in relations – both usually functioned on the principle that they constituted a single state, and what happened to one simultaneously befell the other. The practical manifestations of this interrelationship are somewhat harder to grasp. It is fair to say that few, if any, historical states have ever attempted to replicate the relationship between the eastern and western Roman empire, and as such it is difficult to draw comparisons. However, the division of imperial rule into regional blocs and the coalescing of clear spheres of competence for the praetorian prefectures during the fourth century, when coupled with the longstanding vernacular distinction between the Latin-speaking west and the Greek-speaking east, had long-term implications for imperial unity from an administrative

[106] *LRE* II, 532-533

perspective. We can see this in the composition of our surviving copy of the *Notitia Dignitatum*: the compiler, presumably the western *primicerius notariorum*, did not see fit to update the eastern portions of the list in line with their western counterparts up to 425, indicating that this was no longer practically necessary. Given that administration is a vital preserve of the state, this aspect is of crucial importance to this investigation. In *Roman Imperial Policy from Julian to Theodosius* (2006), R. Malcolm Errington moved the apocryphal date for the permanent separation of the empire into its eastern and western halves from 395 to 364, arguing that the Valentinianic settlement effectively set the two *partes imperii* on different administrative trajectories.[107] This position was then echoed by both Mark Merrony and Michael Kulikowski.[108] Whilst this is much too neat an incision to capture the longer term development of the interrelationship between the eastern and western empires in the fourth and fifth centuries – the two *partes* were, after all, still cooperating closely and exchanging legislation until well into the fifth century – I would argue that accepting this as a line has a certain heuristic value. Given that we are attempting to assess when the western Roman state specifically ceased to exist, it is potentially useful to denote the point at which that system exists either independently or quasi-independently of any other system. What follows, therefore, is an attempt to establish a base of analysis by giving an account of the western Roman state in the late fourth century. This description will briefly describe the geological and climatic nature of the territory occupied by the Roman state, the administrative system, and will offer precis of its military, economic, social, and religious systems.

As John Haldon pointed out, the Roman empire, and in particular its western half, must be seen as "a historical aberration" from a geographical perspective.[109] Unlike, for example, contemporary Chinese empires, the territory occupied by the Roman state does not form a contiguous zone that would encourage the evolution of the shared cultural phenotypes that render unification a natural impulse. Indeed, the territories occupied by the western Roman

[107] Errington (2006), 1-3, 47-54

[108] Merrony (2019), 104; Kulikowski (2021), 37

[109] Haldon (2012), 1120-1121; in a more evocative turn of phrase, David Potter (2004, 6) described the Roman Empire as a "geographic monstrosity"

state are remarkable for their difference in geography and climate. The geographical spread of the empire presented the Roman state with a wide variety of logistical problems. Firstly, the empire's one contiguous geographical feature – the Mediterranean Sea – only unified parts of its littoral territory.[110] Secondly, the state occupied two major climate zones, the division between which sits roughly in south-central Gaul. These might best be described as the "grape and grain" climate of the Mediterranean south and the 'butter and beer' climate of northern Europe.[111] This naturally varied the agriculture and pastoral activities that could be practised in certain areas, a picture complicated further by the fact that both southern Iberian and the North African territories had to conduct settled agriculture on the desert fringe. Furthermore, the Iberian interior presented issues for any state hoping to integrate the whole peninsula, as its littoral regions and arable zones in the Ebro and Guadalquivir valleys are separated from each other by the high central *Meseta*.[112] In addition, the island of Britain was separated from the mainland by the Atlantic tides and the winter storms of the English Channel, which presented a formidable barrier to any culture whose experience of sea-faring evolved in a Mediterranean context. For our purposes, there are two observations we must make. Firstly, the disconnectedness of the territory was reflected in the movement of goods and commerce: goods moved much more freely between certain areas, such as North Africa, Sicily, and Italy, than others. Secondly, the empire was faced with a series of immensely long strategic frontiers, particularly in the north, that were inherently difficult to police.

The variability of Roman territory will have exacerbated the problems created by distance, Braudel's "First Enemy" of the premodern state.[113] On land, communications occurred at the speed of the fastest available horse. The journey from Rome to Ravenna took five days and going from Rome to Trier or Sirmium could take a month.[114] This was mitigated by the

---

[110] Potter (2004), 10-11

[111] Harper (2017), 8

[112] Wickham (2005), 37-38

[113] Braudel (1972), Vol. 1, 355; Brown (1992), 9, 17; Kelly (2004), 115; (2008), 157; Wickham (2009), 26

[114] Rome to Ravenna = *Coll. Avell.* 14-16, 33; Kelly (2004), 116; Wickham (2009), 26

institution of the public post (*cursus publicus*), from which imperial officials could secure fresh horses at a system of waystations (*mansiones* or *mutationes*) every few miles along the imperial roads.[115] The Mediterranean and the river systems sped up communications by sail: the journey from Ostia to Carthage usually took two or three days, depending on the weather and season.[116] The effect of this is evident in the transmission of imperial legislation; it sometimes took between twelve and sixty-six days for an edict issued in Milan to be posted in Rome.[117] Moving large quantities of goods or armies was slower and trickier. By land, the heavy division of the public post (*cursus clabularis*) maintained ox wagons capable of carrying 1,500 lbs. for carrying the foodstuffs and equipment required by the army.[118] In spite of this, under the Tetrarchy a wagonload of wheat valued at 6,000 denarii would double in price after a journey of 300 miles inland, and it was in fact cheaper to ship grain across the entire Mediterranean than to move it 75 miles inland.[119] The scale of similar operations by sea is partially visible in the state grain fleets that carried the *annona* between Africa Proconsularis and the port cities that fed Rome, which was reportedly large enough to supply around 120,000 recipients with daily bread in the early fourth century.[120] In another example, in 359 Julian managed to increase the corn supply from Britain to the Rhine frontier by moving the produce on boats upriver against the current.[121] It must be stressed that the later Roman state benefitted greatly from investment in infrastructure, such as roads and ports, that occurred under the Republic and Principate. The state could therefore invest further in energy-intense – and therefore expensive – methods for speeding up communications or supplying vital infrastructure. However, such innovations never quite overcame the fundamental division of territory, and some areas, such as the

---

[115] *LRE* II, 830-832

[116] Plin. *Nat. Hist*. 15.75, 19.3

[117] *LRE* I, 402-403, III, 91-93 n. 76; Kelly (2004), 116

[118] *LRE* II, 831

[119] Ibid, 841-842; de Ste. Croix (1981), 11

[120] Ibid, 696; cf. Garnsey and Whittaker (2008), 328

[121] Lib. *Or*. XVIII.82-3; Zos. III.5.2; Amm. Marc. XVIII.11.3; cf. Jul. *Ep. ad Ath.* 8, 279d-80a; de Ste. Croix (1981), 11-12

Iberian interior, northern Gaul, and Britain, remained logistically difficult for Mediterranean commodities to reach.

In administrative terms, the later Roman empire was, in the words of John Matthews, “an iron autocracy”.[122] Theoretically, the emperor was the supreme commander of the armed forces, and could determine foreign policy at will; he was responsible for all civil and military appointments; he was the sole source of emendations to existing law; and he had total dispensation over how all taxation was spent. The putative power of the emperor was therefore the central pillar around which the rest of the state was organised. The central political nexus of the state was the imperial court (*comitatus*), at times based in Trier, Arles, Milan, Ravenna, or Rome. Alongside imperial households and the general run of courtiers, the court was home to the six principal palatine bureaux that made up the central bureaucracy, various palace guard corps, the field army commands, and the summit of the provincial administration. Considering this agglomeration, the political advantages of proximity to the emperor were immense.[123] In numerical terms, the administration of the empire had grown in late antiquity. Whereas under the Principate the bureaucracy was restricted to a couple of hundred salaried officials and around 10,000 slaves and soldiers on secondment, the number of salaried bureaucrats was estimated by A.H.M. Jones to have grown to around 35,000 in the fourth century.[124] As Chris Wickham argues, this was likely a vast underestimate.[125] The central bureaucracy was predominantly composed of the *sacrum cubiculum* (the imperial household), the office of the *magister officiorum* (palatine administration, domestic and foreign policy) and *quaestor sacri palatii* (legal office), the *sacrae largitiones* and *rei privatae* (state and imperial finances), and the corps of notaries headed by the *primicerius notariorum*.[126] The field armies were commanded by one of two *magistri militum* – the *magistri peditum* and *equitum praesentalis* – in the late fourth

[122] Matthews (1975), 48; Wickham (2009), 26; Marcone (2008), 352; Brown (1992), 7

[123] Brown (1992), 11; Kelly (2004), 193; (2008), 151

[124] *LRE* III, 341-342 n.44; Kelly (2004), 111; MacMullen (1988), 144; Bang (2013), 436-437; Heather (2008), 438 suggested 24,000 for the total size of the late Roman bureaucracy

[125] Wickham (2005), 73

[126] Kelly (2008), 163-166; *LRE* I, 366-373; Barnwell (1992); Delmaire (1995)

century.[127] One unit of palace guards, the *protectores domesticorum*, served under a *comes domesticorum*, whilst the others, the *scholae* and *candidati*, ostensibly answered to the emperor personally.[128] The provincial administration was headed by the Praetorian Prefecture, of which there were two in the west. The central Prefecture controlled the Italian peninsula, Raetia, the Balkans, the Mediterranean islands, and North Africa up to modern Morocco. The Gallic Prefecture controlled Gaul, Germany up to the Rhine, lowland Britain, the Iberian Peninsula, and the adjacent segment of North Africa. The responsibilities of the Prefecture were extensive, but their primary task was raising the resources necessary to maintain the army and the city of Rome, and to transport them to their destinations. According to the *Notitia Dignitatum*, the Prefectures were further divided into eight dioceses composed of fifty-seven provinces, each with a vicar or provincial governor.[129] These administrative units were intended to administer justice and manage finances in coordination with other imperial officials.[130] Beneath this administrative firmament, the empire fundamentally remained a constellation of cities and their hinterlands.[131] Day-to-day management was conducted under the auspices of local *curiae*, although imperial authorities had begun to cut deeply into the political and financial independence of fourth-century cities. Frontier armies were commanded by *duces* or by *comites rei militaris* sent on assignment to the provinces. We should note, finally, that both Rome itself and the province of Africa Proconsularis ostensibly sat outside of the official hierarchy. The former was governed by the Urban Prefect, the latter by a proconsul, both of whom were notionally answerable to the emperor personally.

For our purposes, there are five aspects of this administrative structure that should be foregrounded. Firstly, we should note that the territorial centrality of the state had decisively shifted in late antiquity. Whilst the imperial court had been brought closer to the frontiers in order to serve crucial military requirements, this had been accomplished at the

[127] Kulikowski (2021), 14-15

[128] Ibid, 15

[129] *LRE* Map II

[130] Bang (2013), 450

[131] *LRE* II, 712-714; de Ste. Croix (1981), 10-19; Merrony (2019), 81; Brown (1992), 25

expense of a political and cultural centrality based on the city of Rome and the Italian Peninsula. According to both Robert Errington and Michael Kulikowski, this fundamentally changed the relationship between the hub and the spokes of Alexander Motyl's wheel. The extension of imperial government into the provinces created the impetus for the growth of regional political blocs composed of imperial officials, local aristocrats, and the resident military commanders, who competed with each other for dominance over imperial courts.[132] This would have profound political consequences in the fourth and fifth centuries. Secondly, following Fergus Millar, we must stress that the late Roman government remained essentially reactive.[133] It did not govern in the traditional sense, but instead responded to crises when they arose. Thirdly, we should note that the administrative structure was significantly less rigidly hierarchical than it is presented in legislation or the *Notitia Dignitatum*. Emperors often bypassed multiple levels of administration to communicate directly with their subordinates. Fourthly, we should note that official administrative arrangements took place against the backdrop of the traditional patronage structures that had hitherto defined Roman societies, in which the political and financial relationship between client and patron was paramount. Lastly, in accordance with Wickham's theory, we note that the primary function of the state was raising taxation in cash and kind and using these to fund a professional standing army.

From what we can tell, the Roman army grew in late antiquity. Our contemporary sources differ significantly. John Lydus, writing under Justinian, indicated that the Tetrarchic establishment numbered 389,704 on land and a further 45,562 in the fleets.[134] Another sixth century source, Agathius, gives us the figure of 645,000 at an unspecified point in time.[135] Modern assessments of these figures vary. A.H.M. Jones, for example, was prepared to accept their comparative accuracy.[136] Ramsey MacMullen was not, arguing instead that these figures represented the paper strength of a much smaller army, the bulk of which

[132] Errington (2006), 79-80; Kulikowski (2021), 33

[133] Millar (1977)

[134] Joh. Lydus, *Mens*. I.27; *LRE* II, 679, III 209 n. 168

[135] Agath. V.13; *LRE* II, 680, III, 210 n. 168

[136] *LRE* II, 679-689

could not have been efficiently deployed in battle.[137] More recent assessments, such as those of Doug Lee or Peter Fibiger Bang, have taken a more moderate approach. By analysing the putative strength of armies deployed in the field in the fourth century – Julian's army of 13,000 at Strasbourg, or Barbatio's army of 25,000 (both according to Ammianus) – and setting them against the figures we have for the Principate, it has been argued that we can accommodate a larger military establishment without resorting to the exaggerated figures offered by Agathius.[138] Lee argues for a real strength of c.350,000 – 400,000, whereas Bang argues for 300,000 – 400,000.[139] If we accept the 7:5 ratio between east/west advocated by Michael Whitby, the western military establishment may have numbered between c.125,000 – c.167,000 in the late fourth century.[140] This military establishment was divided into field armies stationed mainly in cities and border garrisons stationed at the frontiers. However, John Lydus's preening about the accuracy of prefectural records raises the question as to what the discrepancy between actual and paper strength was in the fourth century. This is a crucial point, as the state will have raised and paid out based on its own figures, which could easily have been obfuscated by collusion between provincial administrators and military officials who sought to pocket the difference.[141] In any event, it is widely agreed that the army was by far the most expensive item on the budget, hoovering up somewhere between 30 – 75% of state resources annually.[142]

The fiscal system that fed this army was the vital integral feature of the late Roman economic landscape. Land was the basis of the economy, and around 90% of taxes were

[137]MacMullen (1988), 171-197

[138] Lee (2008), 220; Bang (2013), 454-455; Julian's army – Amm. Marc. XVI.12.1; Barbatio's army = Amm. Marc. XVI.11.7

[139] Merrony (2019), 175-176

[140] Whitby (2008), 292; *LRE* II, 683-684

[141] de Ste. Croix (1981), 491

[142] Anon., 5.1-2; Amm. Marc. XX.11.5; Hebblewhite (2017), 107; Wickham (2005), 73, (2009), 33; MacMullen (1984), 571-580; Duncan-Jones (1994), 45-46; Potter (2015), 32; Treadgold (1995), 166-167, 195-197; Shaw (1999), 141; Merrony (2019), 135; Hopkins (1980), 116-117, 124

raised exclusively from agricultural produce.[143] The overall tax rate appears to have been high, at around 20%.[144] Under the Tetrarchy, emergency requisitions were organised into a new yearly system of indictions based on *iugera* (units of land) and *capita* (heads), allowing for a more standardised and universalised tax system that could effectively connect the disparate regions of the empire. Contrary to the interpretation of Moses Finley, who saw the Roman economy as a series of autonomous local economies, it is now more widely accepted that substantial regional and interregional exchange did take place.[145] This shift in perception was largely driven by the archaeological evidence. On the one hand, the abundance of African Red-Slip ware pottery or oil amphorae across western sites attests to the prevalence of the long-distance bulk movement of mid-ranged goods, whether by market forces or for private consumption.[146] On the other, the influx of taxes in cash and kind to frontier regions, such as the hinterlands of Trier, led to an efflorescence of urban townhouse and villa construction on an unprecedented scale.[147] The fiscal system was the engine for the interconnection of local and regional economies.[148] The state invested in infrastructure – roads, ships, ports, etc. – to move resources around, as well as underwriting transportation costs. This provided both the means and the method for commercial and private interests to 'piggyback' their goods on state resource channels.[149] At the other end, the fiscal system created new markets among the bureaucrats, soldiery, and cities to which such resources were directed. Following the failed monetary reforms of Aurelian and Diocletian, the trimetallic currency was pegged to the value of the gold *solidus*, struck at 72 to the pound, during the reign of Constantine.[150] This stabilised the currency market, albeit

[143] *LRE* I, 452; II, 769-770; Wickham (2009), 36; Hopkins (1980), 104. The figure of approx. 90% was suggested by Jones based on the rent rolls of the *Liber Pontificalis (Lib. Pont.* xxxiv, xxxv, xxxix, xlii, xlvi; *LRE* III, p. 248, n. 6) which records Constantinian land grants to churches in Rome and Italy.

[144] Wickham (2005), 64; Merrony (2019), 115; Ward-Perkins (2008b), 379-80

[145] Finley (1973), 22-23; Ward-Perkins (2008b), 382; Wickham (2005), 10; Potter (2004), 8-9

[146] Ward-Perkins (2008b), 369-370

[147] Ibid, 377

[148] Banaji (2001), 55

[149] Wickham (2005), 72

[150] Banaji (2001), 40

at the expense of spiralling fourth-century inflation in the bronze and silver coinages (§3.3.2).[151] In an influential paper published in 1980, Keith Hopkins argued that the imposition of taxes in cash between 200 B.C. and A.D. 400 greatly increased trade, as it forced peasant producers to sell more to raise the necessary coinage.[152] Furthermore, we should note that locally-minted bronze coinage was a ubiquitous feature of market exchange in local Roman economies, and its disappearance – for example, in Britain during the early fourth century and after – suggests that the Roman state was quite successful in monetising economic activity within its territories and focussing said activity onto urban markets.[153] With that being said, the Roman state minted money solely to pay the army: the monetisation of the economy was a side-effect of this imperative, not the point.

The growth and intrusiveness of the late antique state and the evolution of the gold economy created a more vertiginously stratified Roman society.[154] This term is misleading, as there was never a single monolithic Roman society, but rather a mosaic of different societies broadly divisible between an upper class of landowners and a lower class of labourers.[155] The upper classes were made up of the expanded senatorial order, imperial functionaries and veterans, Christian clergymen, and regional city-dwelling landowners. This disparate group was unified by a shared basis of wealth, political orientation toward the imperial court, and interest in maintaining their position, as well as shared languages, education, and literary culture. This aristocracy sat atop the vast mass of subsistence farmers and urban citizens who made up approximately 90% of the population. The lower classes were defined by their juridical vulnerability to physical punishment, their subjection to both official and patrimonial authority and, increasingly, their lack of personal freedom in the face of compulsory social organisation.[156] With that being said, the range of wealth among the lower classes was considerable, and there is ample evidence for the existence of

[151] Ibid, 47, 48f; Ando (2008), 45

[152] Hopkins (1980), 102-104; Merrony (2019), 113-114

[153] Potter (2004), 8, 137

[154] Marcone (2008), 338; Bang (2013), 456

[155] Ando (2017), 119; Carrié (2017), 187

[156] See *CTh.* V.17.1 (October 30, 332); Marcone (2008), 357; MacMullen (1988), 139-141

richer peasants and urban professionals who were fully integrated into the systems of market and fiscal exchange.[157] The gulf in wealth between the poorest and richest aristocrats was considerably wider. Surviving accounts of the wealth of some senatorial families can be startling. The breathless testimony of Olympiodorus of Thebes indicates the splendour of Rome's aristocratic houses - complete with hippodromes, temples, *fora*, and baths - and suggest that the annual income of the richest clans could amount to some 5,000 lb. of gold (375,000 solidi), of which three quarters were from rents in money.[158] This was the equivalent of some 80,000 family farms per year, or four to five times the tax income of some provinces (§3.4.1.5).[159] Similarly, our accounts of the property holdings of Melania the Younger suggest that this middle-ranking swath of landholdings comprised properties in Italy, Sicily, Iberia, Gaul, Britain, and North Africa, as well as over 8,000 unfree dependants: when Melania chose to liquidate her estates, the glut temporarily crashed the property market.[160] These hyper-wealthy landowners were a fundamental feature of both the fiscal system and the social landscape with which the state had to negotiate. Alongside the state, the sheer scale of western aristocratic wealth provided a significant impetus towards production and monetisation wherever such élites owned property. This wealth, coupled with the survival of the Roman senate as a corporate institution vested with traditional legitimacy and the concomitant ability of senatorial aristocrats to trace their descent (whether real or imaginary) to earlier peers, made the upper reaches of the western aristocracy harder for the state to integrate than their more easily dominated eastern counterparts: there was less distance between themselves and the emperor in terms of economic power.[161] As long as the imperial court remained politically strong, tensions between the otiose hereditary landowners and the *arriviste* functionary aristocracy could be kept in check.[162] We should note two further features. Firstly, whilst the shared concept of

---

[157] Harper (2017), 182-183

[158] Olymp. *fr.* 41.1-2; Wickham (2005), 162-163 (calculation in *solidi* is Wickham's)

[159] Comparison to family farms: Harper (2017), 182; comparison to provincial tax income: *NVal.* XIII; Wickham (2005), 162-163

[160] Harper (2011), 192, (2017), 181-182; Melania: Pall. *Hist. Laus.* 61; Geront. *V. Mel.* 10-12

[161] Brown (1971), 116; Marcone (2008), 351, 357

[162] Brown (1971), 120

‘Romanía’ had made some headway in late antiquity, this must be counterposed against the high degree of regionalisation that we have discussed: ‘Roman’ though they may have been, the inhabitants of the empire did not necessarily see themselves as being the same.[163] Secondly, as Arnaldo Marcone argues, the attempts of the state to more effectively regulate society often had the opposite intended effect.[164] The expansion of the state and its coordinate institutions – army, bureaucracy, and clergy – produced avenues for the enterprising to escape the demands laid upon them, and the advance of the gold economy and the persistence of patronage structures gave them the means to do so. Far from being a static society, we should not underestimate the social dynamism of the late Roman world.

The attempt to expand state despotic power and infrastructural reach was augmented with a corresponding expansion in spiritual claims-making.[165] This process had its roots in third-century responses to crisis, and was aided by the gradual adoption of Christianity as the sole religion of state between the reigns of Constantine and Theodosius I.[166] Christianity provided the state with an exclusive corporate ideology that it had never evolved under the syncretistic polytheism of the earlier period: indeed, one almost gets the impression at times of a proto-one party state. According to Peter Fibiger Bang, “monotheism offered other advantages; it presented an image of the cosmos as the product of one, indivisible supreme force, just as empire and world ought to be governed by one sole power; and it was supported by a set of ‘codified’ teachings fixed in writing and with universalist aspirations”.[167] The quasi-divinity of the emperor was enhanced; from henceforth, to contest the imperial will was an act of sacrilege.[168] The sacrosanctity of the emperors was accentuated by military victories, the issuing of laws, and, in particular, by the correct observance of the complex ceremonies that formed the core of the interaction between

---

[163] Athan. *Hist. Ar.* 35; de Ste. Croix (1981), 485; Potter (2004), 23

[164] Marcone (2008), 363-365

[165] Mann (1984), 191

[166] Sommer (2011), 179-180; Bang (2013), 452-453; Kelly (2008), 140

[167] Bang (2013), 453; Brown (1992), 19

[168] *LRE* I, 321; MacMullen (1988), 139; Marcone (2008), 352; Bang (2013), 452

ruler, court, and public, which consciously mirrored the celestial hierarchy.[169] This new attitude to authority is best exhibited in surviving legislation, which trembles beneath the weight of its own bloodthirsty self-righteousness:[170]

> *"Let the rapacious hands of officials now cease. Let them cease, I say: unless they do heed this warning and cease, they shall be cut off with swords … if any should imagine that a bribe may be demanded in cases of civil jurisdiction, armed vengeance shall be present to sever the head from the neck of the wicked offender". – CTh.* I.16.7 (Constantinople, November 1st 331)

According to John Weisweiler, the late antique emphasis on imperial universalism facilitated a shift away from an expensive alliance with the traditional senatorial aristocracy, whilst simultaneously providing a legitimate cause for the state to involve itself much more directly in the day-to-day affairs of its subaltern communities.[171] How well this worked in practice is debatable; despite claiming to protect the populace against the depredations of the aristocracy, our surviving accounts from the Constantinian empire quite frequently imply precisely the opposite.[172] However, the conversion to Christianity provided the state with its most important coordinate institution: the church. Following the conversion of Constantine, the church was granted tax exemptions and provided with land endowments that rendered it both wealthy and financially independent of the state. Correspondingly, bishops were accorded a new social and political prestige exhibited by their involvement in the oecumenical councils that provide a great deal of the surviving corpus of fourth-century ecclesiastical drama. As a coordinate entity, the church provided the state with a moral and political reach into the individual cities of the empire, bolstering the claims of the emperor to be God's chosen regent on earth. Again, the efficacy of this relationship is questionable. The church was never wholly subordinate, and the conspicuous frequency with which

[169] Matthews (1989), 248-249, 255

[170] Ibid, pp. 255-262; MacMullen (1988), pp. 140-144

[171] Weisweiler (2017), 157; Kelly (2004), 109-110

[172] E.g., Amm. Marc. XVI.8.12; Anon. II.1-2

leading clerics turned their moral invectives on the state might lead one to question how well the Christian ethic ever gelled with the vanity of state power.[173] Furthermore, the involvement of the emperors in trying to impose doctrinal unity on the church clearly exacerbated the sectarianism of Christian societies: the smouldering conflict between the Donatists and Catholics of North Africa between the fourth and seventh centuries was a long-standing testament to the limitations of imperial reach.[174] The conclusion is that the state intensified its religious claims and refocussed them onto the person of the emperor and his relationship with the Christian church. This allowed for an intensification of imperial claims to universalism, as well as the allegiance of a useful coordinate organisation across the empire. However, this necessarily involved emancipating some power and handing it to church leaders, who were capable of independent action.

2.4 Conclusion

How then should we best characterise the western Roman state? Let us turn to Michael Mann, who suggested analysing the state by comparing despotic power with infrastructural coordination.[175] In Mann's reading, despotic power is "the range of actions that the [state] elite is empowered to undertake without routine, institutionalised negotiation with civil society groups"; infrastructural coordination is "the capacity of the state actually to penetrate civil society, and to implement logistically political decisions throughout the realm".[176] According to Mann, infrastructural coordination has increased over time. Feudal states (low despotic/low infrastructure) and empires (high despotic/low infrastructure) are premodern phenomena, whereas bureaucratic liberal democracies (low despotic/high infrastructure) and totalitarian states (high despotic/high infrastructure) are exclusively

[173] MacMullen (1988), 154; de Ste. Croix (1981), 474; Wickham (2005), 62-63; Liebeschuetz (1990), Part 3, for the tumultuous career of John Chrysostom; see also Max. Taur. *Sermo*. 26.103; Salv. *De gub. Dei*, IV.30-31, V.17-45

[174] de Ste. Croix (1981), 497

[175] Mann (1984), 191

[176] Ando (2017), 117

modern.[177] If we accept the Principate as a classic example of an empire, we can interpret the transition from the Principate to the later empire as an attempt – whether successful or not – to develop both despotic power and infrastructural reach in tandem.

The results of this transformation in ambition were noticeable. Despite a less favourable climate (§3.3.1) and greater pressure on the frontiers, the western Roman state managed to field a large professional army, feed the vastly oversized city of Rome, and maintain an elaborate imperial court and bureaucracy from an increased overall rate of taxation. Presumably building on Hopkins' suggestion of a low overall tax rate under the Principate, Walter Scheidel has suggested that the most pressing difference between the Principate and the later empire was that monopoly profits were no longer being reduced in line with external threats but were instead being maximised to maintain the largest possible enterprise.[178] In Scheidel's terms, this forms the difference between a monarchy and a junta. This distinction may be a bit stark: as Peter Fibiger Bang argues, the Augustan Principate certainly funnelled a disproportionate amount of wealth towards its armed forces.[179] Similarly, we might argue that the process was evidently incomplete. For, although one can find much to agree with in John Matthews observation that the later Roman state was "unmatched in Greco-Roman history in its scale and complexity of organisation, in its physical incidence on society, the rhetorical extravagance with which it expressed, and the calculated violence with which it attempted to impose its will", the western Roman state never fully actualised the level of authoritarianism it claimed over its subjects to the extent that would be possible for a modern totalitarian regime.[180] However, if we compare the later Roman state with the Principate, characterising it as a premodern junta is perhaps the most accurate way of describing it. This accounts for the rise in taxation and redistribution to the army, the increasingly depressed state of the notionally free population, and the formation of corporate regimes of leading generals behind military autocrats (§7.4.1). How

---

[177] Mann (1984), 192; Ando (2017), 117

[178] Hopkins (1980), 120; Scheidel (2013), 20-21; see also Bransbourg (2017), 85

[179] Bang (2013), 419-420

[180] Matthews (1989), 253

these features played out when the system came under sustained pressure in the early fifth century and after forms the remainder of the present thesis.

Stable and Independent Resources for Rulers

3.1 Introduction

"We do not doubt that it occurs to the thoughts of all men, that nothing is so necessary as that the strength of a numerous army should be prepared for the exhausted circumstances and the afflicted condition of the State. But neither have We been able, through various kinds of expenditures to affect the arrangement of a matter so salutary … neither for those who are bound by new oaths of military service, nor even for the veteran army can those supplies seem to suffice that are delivered with the greatest difficulty by the exhausted taxpayers, and it seems that from that source the supplies that are necessary for food and clothing cannot be furnished." – *NVal.* XV.1 (September 11th 444 – January 18th 445)

By this law, the government of Valentinian III admitted to an uncomfortable truth: the western Roman state was running out of the resources necessary to maintain its standing professional army. Such an admission by the usually grandiloquently self-confident imperial government is, by the 440s, hardly surprising. By this time, western Roman territorial and infrastructural power were decisively in retreat. Britain was lost, the Gallic Prefecture had been thrown into turmoil by invasion and civil war, and North Africa, breadbasket of the west, had been seized by the Vandals. Contrary to certain historians, such as Frank Walbank, who argued that the collapse of Roman power was the result of a decline in trade and industrial activity between the Principate and the late empire, it is now accepted, as Chris Wickham has argued, that the economic prosperity and infrastructural stability of the empire at the turn of the fifth century suggests that it was in no immediate danger of collapse.[181] The invasions and occupations of the fifth century are thus required as a catalyst to explain the fiscal and economic involution during the remainder of late antiquity.[182] The

[181] Walbank (1946); Wickham (2005, 80

[182] *LRE* II, 1039; Ward-Perkins (2005), esp. 122, fig. 6.1

primary purpose of this chapter is to chart how this process of invasion, occupation, and settlement caused the Roman tax system to stop working. Furthermore, if we accept that the Roman fiscal system did not simply vanish into the aether on conquest, we must assess what happened to the aspects of it that survived. In order to accomplish these goals, however, we must first assess the strengths and weaknesses of the fiscal system as it existed in 406, the year in which the Rhine frontier collapsed, as this will form the starting point of our analysis.

Any analysis of the fiscal procedures of the late Roman and post-Roman polities is inevitably going to run into the problem of the paucity of direct financial evidence, not to mention the questionable reliability of the evidence we do possess. The Roman state does not seem to have recorded its incomes and outlays with any degree of specificity (either that, or these have not survived). The *Notitia Dignitatum* gives us some indication of the administrative breakdown of the western provinces, as well as the distribution of both military units and the infrastructure of the command economy, for the late fourth and the early fifth century. However, the imprecise dating (i.e., somewhere up to 425) and the frequent duplications, omissions, and revisions must raise questions as to its accuracy.[183] The *Notitia Dignitatum* is therefore at its most useful in situations where other fragmentary evidence can be assessed against it. Beyond this, direct figures for taxation and income are rare. We possess some indication as to the incomes of certain African provinces from the *Novellae* of Valentinian III, as well as an indication of the extent of imperial landholdings in Africa Proconsularis and Byzacena from the Theodosian Code (§3.4.1.5). However, the survival of this information in a context in which North Africa takes on a great deal of importance may serve to bias our analysis further in that direction; it is at least plausible that we would be saying the loss of Iberia was a terminal catastrophe if Iberian evidence of a similar nature had survived instead. Further, we have some indication as to the expense of maintaining a *comitatensis* infantryman and a cavalry trooper on a yearly basis (approximately 6 and 10.5 *solidi* respectively).[184] However, considering that the paper strength of cohorts, *vexillationes*, and legions is likely to have varied significantly from actual troop numbers, only the daring

[183] See *LRE* III, Appendix II, 347-358

[184] Elton (1996), 120-125

would offer a guess as to specific regional military outlays. Beyond this, we face a fractal landscape of random numerals and patchy local accounts. Systematisation is therefore not possible, and we must make do with a necessarily cautious impression based on the figures and accounts we do possess.

3.2 Defining Rulers, Resources, Independence, and Stability

In order to investigate effectively, we must be clear about what questions we are asking. Firstly, who were the rulers? Secondly, upon what resources were they drawing? Thirdly, how do we assess the independence of these resources? And, lastly, what does it mean to say that these resources were stable?

The rulers of the Roman state were the emperor and his court; we might extend this classification to include the heads of the six palatine bureaux, who were responsible for raising and transmitting resources, and the military high command, who were their main recipients. Following Wickham, it is important to distinguish here between the resources of rulers and of the ruling class, which can also be seen as a clear distinction between wealth raised in taxation versus wealth raised in rents.[185] Despite often being prodigious landowners, the officials of the Roman court were first and foremost salaried employees paid in taxes: if a ruler wished to dispense with their services, he could simply cease to pay the salary.[186] By contrast, although aristocrats such as Petronius Probus, Ausonius, or Petronius Maximus might occasionally enjoy long careers in official service, their personal wealth is clearly distinguishable from state resources.[187] Bishops similarly seem to have received a salary from the state, although the substantial land-grants ceded to the church often served to make sees independently wealthy.[188] In addition, the staffs of diocesan and provincial authorities will have been salaried state employees, and these form the base of the administrative pyramid. As we shall see, however, the state depended on the members

[185] Wickham (2005), 304

[186] Ibid, 58

[187] *PLRE* IA 140-141; IB, 736-740; IIB, 749-751

[188] *LRE* II, 904-905, 907

of local *curiae* to collect and transmit taxes, and they served not as direct state employees but within the context of curial obligations towards the imperial government: they will not have been directly salaried but drew their wealth from landholding. In the post-Roman period, we find simplified versions of the same system (§5.4). Instead of an emperor, we find a series of post-Roman kings whose courts also sent out tax-officials to the provinces, albeit neither in the same numbers nor with the same degree of infrastructural intensity, and operating on a far smaller geographical scale.

The empire's most plentiful resource was land, its fruits, and what livestock could be raised from it. This could be directly extracted as taxation-in-kind (*annona*), which had been regularised under Diocletian into a fixed yearly indiction that spanned the whole empire and was administered by the Praetorian Prefecture.[189] Down to the end of the fourth century, the Prefecture was also responsible for the state armaments factories (*fabricae armaturae*), a list of which is preserved in the *Notitia Dignitatum*.[190] The state also collected significant quantities of taxation in money, and gold in particular, although collection of taxes in silver persisted intermittently.[191] The main surviving taxes included direct land taxes (*tributum soli*), capitation taxes (*tributum capitis*), rents on public lands, extraneous military requisitions, and a series of other indirect taxes such as those regarding inheritances or manumissions.[192] These could be paid in cash or kind. Furthermore, there were customs duties;[193] the *aurum coronarium*, paid by city councils and landowners; the *aurum oblaticium*, paid by the senate on ceremonial occasions; the *collatio glebalis/follis*, extracted annually from senators; and the much-loathed *collatio lustralis* or *chrysargyron*, a quinquennial sales and trade tax that fell predominantly on urban craftsmen, merchants, and prostitutes.[194] The state could also mint new coinage either from previously raised taxes

---

[189] *LRE* I, 449

[190] *Not. Dig. Occ.* IX; Ward-Perkins (2005), 102-103

[191] *LRE* I, 440-441; Banaji (2001), 39-40; Merrony (2019), 103-104; Wickham (2005), 74

[192] Merrony (2019), 115; Bransbourg (2017), 80

[193] Frank (1933), 324; (1940), 6-7, 49-50; Rathbone (2001), 39-50; Bowman (2017), 12-13; Merrony (2019), 114-115; *LRE* I, 429-430

[194] *LRE* I, 110, 219, 430-431; de Ste. Croix (1981), 493; Merrony (2019), 115

in cash or bullion or from mining operations. In most circumstances, the raising and redistribution of cash was the responsibility of the *sacrae largitiones*, which was also responsible for supplying clothing to both the army and the officials of the court.[195] The state also drew extensively on forced labour (*operae*) to maintain infrastructure and public works and imposed specific *munera sordida* as part of the indiction to make up for gaps in state production.[196] The personal finances of the emperor himself, largely raised from rents on imperial lands, gifts, bequests, and confiscations under the laws of treason, were managed by the *res privata*. We can see, therefore, that state resources fell broadly into four categories: land, cash, kind, and labour.

The question of the independence of resources is deceptively straightforward if we interpret independence as the ability of the ruler to collect and redistribute resources without physical or legal restraint. In a system as nakedly autocratic as the later Roman empire, we might expect all available resources to be *de facto*, if not strictly speaking *de jure*, within the emperor's control. There were, however, three clear elements which conditioned the independence of imperial resources. Firstly, despite the comparatively extensive infrastructural reach afforded by overlapping matrices of palatine officials and provincial bureaucrats, state élites still frequently found their diktats "becalmed on a Sargasso Sea" once they had arrived in the provinces.[197] This was the result of politics, as officials travelling away from the court could never be sure of their position in their absence.[198] Secondly, as we have already stated, the empire was relying at its fiscal base on *curiales* to collect and redistribute its taxes.[199] These were not directly employed by the state but were nonetheless rendered liable for any shortfalls in the tax yield.[200] The frankly gargantuan section of the Theodosian Code entitled *de decurionibus* (XII.1) preserves a litany of repeated (and therefore presumably ineffectual) legislation aimed at tying the *curiales* to

---

[195] *LRE* I, 433-434

[196] *LRE* I, 452; Duncan-Jones (1990), 188-193; Bowman (2017), 5; Merrony (2019), 115

[197] *LRE* I, 407-409; Brown (1992), 12-14

[198] Brown (1992), 17

[199] *CTh.* XII.1.173 (Aug. 26, 409/410)

[200] Dionisotti (1982), 104; Brown (1992), 25; *LRE* I, 456-460; Wickham (2005), 68; Hopkins (1980), 121

these duties. Of the 192 laws in this section, 129 (67%) are concerned in some way with returning *curiales* to the compulsory public service they owed to their municipalities.[201] The following law of 371 should give some indication as to the flavour of the legislation:

> *"Persons who are of the birth status of decurions shall be led forth from all homes and shall be dragged forth to undergo the performance of their compulsory public services. Of course, the harbourers of such persons shall be threatened with loss of their property as well as loss of status, if they should proceed farther and should esteem the public welfare less than their personal desires and protection."* – *CTh.* XII.1.76 (Ancyra, July 13th 371)

The state, therefore, was relying on a constellation of non-aligned élites to manage and communicate resources and regarded coercion as an appropriate means of controlling them. It is at this level of the fiscal hierarchy that the infrastructural reach of the state seems to dissolve, although we should not underestimate the extent to which these élites continued to cooperate. Lastly, it seems clear that the vast discrepancy in wealth allowed the accumulation of a great deal of the available resources into the hands of an oligopoly of western families, and in particular the senatorial aristocrats of Rome.[202] This becomes particularly apparent during shortages, when *principales*/*potentiores* such as the Symmachi were capable of leveraging their monopoly over resources to artificially inflate prices.[203] In essence, there was more of a parity in wealth between these aristocratic clans and the imperial court, which gave the former comparatively more bargaining power than their less affluent eastern counterparts.

The stability of resources refers to the potentiality of the imperial fiscal system to rectify disruptions to the equilibrium of resource management – should a shortfall occur, could the system effectively plug the hole? On one level, it seems relatively clear that the empire was

---

[201] E.g., *CTh.* XII.1.11 (Oct 7, 325), 22 (Aug. 22, 336), 24 (Dec. 12, 338), 82 (March 17, 380), 100 (April 19, 383), 161 (Aug. 16, 399), 170 (Nov. 26, 409/412)

[202] Garnsey & Whittaker (2008), 334-335

[203] Ibid.; Amb. *de Off*. III.41; Amm. Marc. XXVII.3.3-4

operating hand-to-mouth for most of its history.[204] The vast majority of its fiscal system was built upon what could be drawn from the land and was constrained by the limitations of pre-industrialised agriculture. Building up reserves of perishable goods was largely impossible in this environment, although this was offset by the ability to store up reserves in precious metals. However, as Clifford Ando notes, a reliance on a reserve of precious metals exposed the state to liquidity crises, as it relied on an abundance of gold and silver, the time and security necessary to convert cash into resources or *vice versa*, and stable markets in which to do so.[205] To this we must add the consideration that the empire was not one single contiguous economic system, but a series of interconnected economies unified by the fiscal apparatus. There could easily be plenty in one province and famine in another, and the constraints imposed by the cost of transporting goods and perishability will have limited the extent to which resources in one place could be used to help its neighbours.[206] In spite of the herculean efforts of the late imperial administration, we must accept that most resources will have continued to be produced and consumed locally.[207] On the one hand, this meant that segments of the empire could cease to produce resources without necessarily disturbing the economies of neighbouring regions: so long as enough regions remained active, the fiscal superstructure would survive. On the other hand, this also meant that there may not have been an immediate economic need to restore peripheral areas once they had stopped communicating resources, and if enough dropped out the superstructure would become unsustainable. Following Mark Merrony, we also note that the earlier empire could accelerate conquest and plunder to make up for shortfalls in internal resources. However, the booty economy appears to have subsided following the Constantinian period, which coincides with the last great flowering of imperial architecture.[208]

---

[204] Hopkins (1980), 104

[205] Ando (2008), 45-46

[206] *LRE* I, 445

[207] *LRE* I, 458

[208] Merrony (2019), 100-101, 120; Bransbourg (2017), 92

With all of that being said, one cannot help but be impressed with the formidable capacity of the later Roman state to marshal and redistribute resources on a massive scale.[209] As Chris Kelly has pointed out, the fourth-century state managed to fund an enlarged professional army, finance a new religion, and construct a new imperial capital on top of its pre-existing obligations.[210] However, despite its comparative sophistication and infrastructural reach, the imperial command economy remained a fundamentally reactive organism perched atop a series of not-quite-fully integrated regional economies: it specialised in reinforcement, not diversification. This made it a blessing in a predictable crisis and a hindrance in an unpredictable one, as we shall see.

3.3 Initial Conditions

3.3.1 Demography and Manpower Shortages

In order to generate the produce, taxes, and labour that the fiscal system required to function, the Roman state necessarily needed a base of labouring taxpayers. It follows that if there were not enough taxpayers by the end of the fourth century, then the smooth functioning of the fiscal system would be imperilled. So, did the state run short on manpower? This question was raised by A.H.M. Jones, amongst others, in analysing whether an acute shortage of manpower led to the collapse of the Roman state.[211] Considering that around 90% of imperial taxes were raised from agricultural production, a drop in overall population would have been of concern to a state that had to squeeze both an enlarged army and compulsory labour for public works from an agricultural base comprising approximately 80% of the total population.[212] To this we must add the consideration that the number of "idle mouths" – non-producing élites who lived off of the surpluses of others – had grown in the later empire. On top of the court, the army, and the otiose landowning aristocracy, the agricultural surpluses of the empire now had to support both an expanded

---

[209] *LRE* I, 406; Brown (1990), 27

[210] Kelly (2004), 110

[211] *LRE* II, 1040-1045; Boak (1955); cf. Finley (1958), 156-164

[212] Wickham (2009), 36; Hopkins (1980), 104; *LRE* I, 452

bureaucracy and the clergy, who Raymond Van Dam estimates may have numbered half as many again as the armed forces.[213] The urban citizens of the empire were also primarily consumers, and these comprised around 10% of the empire's total population.[214] When we consider Lynn White's estimate that it took ten people working the land for one person to live away from it, it is at least plausible that the empire was habitually sitting at the threshold of a Malthusian trap.[215] If too many agricultural labourers were being removed from circulation, and too much of their produce was being redirected to privileged 'idle mouths', then peasant birth rates would decline precipitously, and total agricultural yield would follow.[216] If this was the case, then the imperial command economy would have been operating with a razor-thin margin of resilience even before a crisis set in.

Our available evidence suggests that the state was suffering from a manpower shortage in late antiquity, although the severity is questionable. As Kyle Harper argues, the general population may have decreased due to the ending of the Roman Climate Optimum (RCO) from the late second century onwards.[217] Whilst some northern areas of the empire experienced heavier rainfall as a result, the Mediterranean basin became gradually more arid; the productivity of some agricultural areas, particularly the Iberian interior and southern Italy, seems to have declined permanently.[218] Whilst there were no major pandemic events in the fourth and fifth centuries, regional epidemics continued to suppress population growth and there are more numerous attestations to famines than are present in our earlier sources, although these could be attributed to the greater care with which Christian chroniclers sought to document the suffering of their co-religionists.[219] Urban life seems to have recovered from the third century, but cities were smaller and there were fewer of them, though the decline of urban populations during the collapse of the western

---

[213] Harper (2017), 186-187; Van Dam (2010), 27; *LRE* II, 1042-1043

[214] Garnsey & Whittaker (2008), 312

[215] White in Cipolla ed. (1972), 144-145, quoted in de Ste. Croix (1981), 10-11; Potter (2004), 17

[216] 'idle mouths': *LRE* II, 1045-1048; de Ste. Croix (1981), 492; Liebeschuetz (1990), 241-242

[217] Harper (2017), 131

[218] Ibid, 168-170; Wickham (2005)

[219] Ibid, 162, 170; Symm. *Rel*. 3.15

Roman empire should not be overstated.[220] Beyond this, we have some circumstantial evidence for manpower shortages, such as the tightening up of military recruitment (§7.3.1), the frequent cutting back of exemptions to *munera sordida*, and the enforcement of compulsory social organisation in relation to the colonate.[221] Furthermore, both Jones and Ramsey MacMullen have respectively suggested that the high overall incidence of taxation was responsible for population decline.[222] However, our archaeological evidence, and in particular agrarian surveys, suggests that a great deal of productive land was brough under cultivation for the first time in late antiquity, and that the fourth century was overall one of general prosperity, which will have led to a corresponding increase in birth-rates.[223] As such, we have compelling evidence for pressures on population growth but not for wholesale demographic retreat. It is difficult to estimate the size of the general population at any given time, but we might estimate the total population of the western empire at the turn of the fifth century at somewhere in the 20-30 million range: sparse by modern standards, but large in contemporary terms.[224] Whilst this is a conjecture, it seems that if the empire did have its foot on a Malthusian Trap, it was pressing down gently. This factor could condition the stability and independence of imperial resources, but I would argue that any large-scale demographic retreat that we find (§4.3) was a product of, rather than the cause of, the ending of the western Roman state.

---

[220] *LRE* II, 1040-1041; Harper (2017), 184; the health of late antique cities: Garnsey & Whittaker (2008), 326-327; Dey (2015)

[221] *Munera Sordida*: *LRE* I, 452. Colonate: *CTh.* V.17.1 (30 Oct. 332); *CJ*. XI.48.3 (31 July 365), XI.51 (25 Oct. 386?); John Chrys., *Hom. in Matt.* 61.31; Marcone (2008), 357-358; *LRE* II, 795-803, 1042.

[222] MacMullen (1988), 42; Merrony (2019), 115; Wickham (2005),64, (2009), 34; de Ste. Croix (1981), 498; Bowman (2017), 3-4; cf. Lo Cascio (2007), 623; Hopkins (1980), 105

[223] Banaji (2016), 196; cf. Merrony (2019), 120

[224] Population estimates: *LRE* II, 1040, III. n. 14; Bowman & Wilson (2011) present an array of comparative surveys; Merrony (2019), 112; Bury (1958), Vol. I, 62; Hopkins (1980), 118

3.3.2 Élite Competition and the Gold Economy

Whilst introducing the later Roman state, Wickham offered the following observation:

> "...would not argue that there were any inherent instabilities in the Roman state that would explain its collapse in the West in the fifth century...the late empire was a period of violence, injustice, and brutal exploitation, but these were standard features of ancient (indeed most) societies, and can...easily coexist with stability."[225]

This is substantively correct, although there is a caveat lurking between these claims. By this, I mean that a system is only as stable as the environment in which it operates, and features that may be beneficial to state resilience in a stable environment can quickly become liabilities should that environment destabilize. In this section, I will argue that this is true of the later Roman state when we look at the intersection of the social and monetary systems that emerged following the reign of Constantine. In particular, we must look at the evolution of the gold economy, and how this intersected with élite competition for wealth, status, and office. The specific aim here is to enunciate the benefits and drawbacks of the intersection of these systems, as the manner in which they operated (or ceased to operate) under crisis conditions had crucial implications for the function of the Roman political economy.

To illustrate both aspects of this issue, let us here turn to a quotation from the anonymously-authored *de Rebus bellicis*, probably written sometime in the mid-fourth century:[226]

> *"It was in the age of Constantine that extravagant grants assigned gold instead of bronze (which earlier was considered of great value) to petty*

[225] Wickham (2005), 80; see also 146-147

[226] Thompson (1952), 1-2; Banaji (2001), 46-47; cf. Brandt (1988) has the Anonymous writing in the fifth century

> *commercial transactions; but the greed I spoke of is thought to have arisen from the following causes. When the gold and silver and the huge quantity of precious stones which had been stored away in the temples long ago reached the public, they enkindled all mans' possessive and spend-thrift instincts. And while the expenditure of bronze itself … seemed already vast and burdensome enough, yet from some kind of blind folly there ensued an even more extravagant passion for spending gold, which is considered more precious. This store of gold meant that the houses of the powerful were crammed full and their splendour enhanced to the destruction of the poor, the poorer classes of course being held down by force."*[227] – Anonymous, *de rebus bellicis*, II.1-2

Considering that the stated purpose of *de Rebus bellicis* was the sustenance of the armies and the State, (coupled with the inadvisability of transmitting even constructive criticism to a state as hostile to critique as the later Roman empire), we have no reason to presume that the anonymous author was being insincere in his observations.[228] Contrary to A.H.M. Jones, Jairus Banaji has argued that the above passage relates two lived realities.[229] Firstly, it attests to the precipitous accumulation of gold in the hands of élites. Secondly, it stresses that this wealth was extracted, often violently, from the empire's poorer inhabitants. It falls to us to assess the impact of these processes on the functioning of the later Roman state.

On the social side, *de Rebus bellicis* captures the process by which the imperial élite was being reconstituted in the fourth century. This was the result of the expansion of the central and provincial bureaucracies as well as the appropriation by the imperial government of a significant proportion of civic revenues that had formerly been managed by the city councils (§5.3.1).[230] This provided powerful incentives for *curiales* to secure appointment to a position within the bureaucracy if they wanted to remain politically relevant. The prospect

[227] see also Amm. Marc. XVI.8.12

[228] Anon. *de Reb. Bell.* Pref. 10; see Thompson (1952) in general

[229] Banaji (2001), 47-48; cf. Jones (1953), (repr. 1974), 206; see also Amm. Marc. XVI.8.12

[230] Heather (1994), 18-19, 22-23

was sweetened by the various tax reductions dangled before serving and ex-officials, and also by the heightened social prestige of *honorati* in their native cities.[231] This social precedence is readily visible on the Timgad inscription, upon which the first 12 of the 283 names recorded as being associated with contemporary local governance were those of former holders of high imperial rank.[232] According to Peter Heather's calculations, there will have been approximately ten thousand bureaucratic jobs attractive to *curiales* in each half of the empire per generation by 400.[233] Whilst the emperor was notionally responsible for personally appointing candidates to such positions (§5.3.4), competition for these jobs will have run through the patronage structures upon which Roman imperial rule was traditionally based.[234] Around a quarter of Symmachus's surviving letters contain recommendations of his associates for positions within the bureaucracy, as do a significant proportion of the letters that survive Libanius.[235] As in the early empire, this patronage structure existed alongside an "oily, present-giving world" in which money and gifts could also secure important positions.[236] The equation for élites was simple: securing an imperial office could be expensive, but offered widespread opportunities for recouping the costs once secured. According to Chris Kelly, the difference between the early and late empires when it came to charging money for services or advancement lies in the extent to which it was considered culturally grubby in the former and was actively standardized and promoted in the latter.[237] The most obvious evidence for this were the ubiquitous regimes of illicit tips (*sportulae*) charged by bureaucrats on top of their regular salaries. Turning again to the Timgad inscription, we find a fully standardized charge sheet for the process of litigation

[231] Ibid, 25-29; Barnish, Lee, and Whitby (2008), 176

[232] Chastagnol (1978); Heather (1994), 27-28; Kelly (2004), 146

[233] Heather (1994), 18-21

[234] *LRE* I, 391-396; MacMullen (1988), 99; Kelly (2004), 107-113; Garnsey (2010)

[235] For Libanius, *Epp.* 1224, 1260, 1426, 1443, 1449, 1474, 1489, 1510; *LRE* I, 392; Bradbury (2014), 228-232; For Symmachus, Symm. *Ep.* 2.43; Kelly (2004), 160

[236] MacMullen (1988), 126; Kelly (2004), 133-137

[237] E.g., Plin. *Ep.* 7.29.3, 8.6.17 (Pallas); Dio 73.12 (Cleander); Kelly (2004), 138-139; *LRE* II, 1054; de Ste. Croix (1981), 492

that would have been publicly visible on the north wall of the civic *curia*, of which a section is quoted below:

> *"The payment which must be made to the head of the governor's staff for appointing an official* [to serve a summons on a defendant]*: within the town, five modii* (bushels) *of wheat or the price thereof; within one mile of the town, seven modii of wheat or the price thereof; for every additional ten miles, two modii of wheat or the price thereof; if the official is required to travel overseas, then one hundred modii of wheat or the price thereof is required"*. – *CIL* 8.17896

According to Kelly's calculations, the lowest possible price for a plaintiff and defendant laid out on this inscription is 81 and 59 *modii* respectively: this works out to between 3 and 4 gold *solidi* per person.[238] In a world in which the poorest could subsist on a single *solidus* for a year, such fees could prove prohibitively expensive.[239] It is also in this period that we find a greater toleration for the outright sale of offices, although this was not explicitly legalized and standardized until the reigns of Anastasius and Justinian.[240] To give some idea of the sums that could change hands at moments of high political drama, we turn to a leaked letter from Cyril, Patriarch of Alexandria, aimed at influencing the outcome of the Council of Ephesus in 431. Evidently not content with leaving the success of his preferred doctrinal interpretation in the hands of the Almighty, Cyril decided to grease the wheels, offering, via his agents, "blessings" (*benedictiones*) to various members of the imperial court amounting to:

> "...1,080 pounds of gold (77,760 *solidi*)...among the recipients, 100 pounds of gold was paid out to Heleniana, the wife of the eastern praetorian prefect; 100 each to the *magister officiorum* and the *quaestor sacri palatii*; 50 pounds to the *praepositus* Paul; 200 to the *praepositus* Chryseros; to the *cubicularii*

[238] Chastagnol (1978), 82, 86; Kelly (2004), 140, 277 n. 8

[239] Kelly (2004), 141

[240] John. Ant. *fr.* 215; *LRE* I, 391-396; Kelly (2004), 158-165; Barnish, Lee, and Whitby (2008), 187-188

> Scholasticus, Domninus, and Romanus, 100, 50, and 30 pounds of gold respectively; to Marcella and Droseria, *cubicularae* in the empress Pulcheria's household, 50 pounds each..."[241]

These "blessings" had the desired effect: Cyril's opponent, Nestorius, was condemned.[242] The overarching point here is that élite competition focussed heavily on a limited number of bureaucratic jobs; that securing these jobs frequently required large sums of cash in gold on top of traditional patronage; that these jobs subsequently offered expansive opportunities for under-the-table remuneration once they had been secured; and, as a result, the normalization and scale of the monetization of government gradually increased. This cycle constituted a significant proportion of the political economy of the later empire.

From the government's perspective, this process had obvious benefits. As Peter Heather has noted, reorientating political competition onto bureaucratic jobs cut down on civic autonomy and provided the imperial authorities with a deep well of curial talent upon which to draw.[243] We might observe that many of the laws aimed at clearing *curiales* out of the imperial service offered numerous loopholes for those who were enterprising enough to evade detection (§3.2).[244] Furthermore, accepting the monetization of this process alongside patronage networks created an impersonal mechanism by which the imperial authorities could further regulate élite competition. Under stable conditions, such processes augmented the centripetal pressures driving the more capable *curiales* into the orbit of the imperial government. However, it is undeniable that this system disproportionally benefitted the winners of political competition, often at high expense to the losers. For local *curiales* who did not have the clout, connections, or cash to make the jump into imperial service, the structural advantages enjoyed by *honorati* in the municipalities could prove decisive. Not only did *honorati* enjoy the privilege of being able to sit on judicial benches

---

[241] Kelly (2004), 171-172; *Collectio Casinensis* 293-294 (*ACOec.* 1.4: 222-225); see also Brown (1992), 15-17; *LRE* I, 346

[242] Heather (2023), 297-298

[243] Heather (1994), 30-31

[244] *CTh.*12.1.13 (326), 22 (336), 31 (341), 38 (346/357); Heather (1994), 24

with governors, they were also held responsible for auditing their respective curias and for adjusting tax assessments in line with census data.[245] This allowed *honorati* to determine the tax assessments of their fellow landowners, and the evidence suggests that they habitually let their friends off easy whilst shifting the bulk of the assessment onto the shoulders of the poorer *curiales*.[246] These *curiales* were then forced to extort even more money from the taxpayers if they wanted to make up the difference: as Wickham points out, *curiales* "constantly complained that they were being bankrupted by the burden of underwriting taxes, while all the other taxpayers complained about their tyranny".[247] Jones calculated that such extortion, combined with the regular regime of *sportulae*, may have added as much as 25% (2 *solidi* to the *iugum* in Italy) onto the already high taxation experienced by the average western taxpayer by the early fifth century (§2.3).[248] Beyond this, the sheer expense that *sportulae* added to the cost of services and litigation will have prevented all but the wealthy from availing themselves of state structures.[249] This worked to the state's benefit, both in that it streamlined the already enormous quantity of paperwork that bureaucrats were expected to manage as well as restricting legal recourse to the wealthy landowners who were the imperial government's most important political constituency.[250] However, this arguably flew in the face of the process of standardization that was the inexorable consequence of the *constitutio antoniniana*. As Gilles Bransbourg suggests, "legal equality meant equal taxation":[251]

[245] Heather (1994), 28

[246] Basil, *Ep.* 299; Lib. *Or.* XLVIII.4, XLIX.8; Lepelly (1983), 154; Hopkins (1980), 121; de Ste. Croix (1981), 471; MacMullen (1988), 44, 49; Brown (1992), 26; Heather (1994), 28; Wickham (2005), 68; Diaz (2017), 26

[247] Wickham (2005), 68; Salv. *De gub. Dei.* V.18.27f; John Chrys*., Hom. in Matt.* 61.3, 123f; Basil, *Homil. In divites* 5; MacMullen (1988), 48; Brown (1992), 27

[248] *LRE* I, 207, II, 1056-1057, III, 341 n. 43; figure based on *NVal*. III § 4 (440); *NMaj*. VII, § 16 (458)

[249] E.g., Prisc. *fr.* 11.2.436-53; Kelly (2004), 138-145

[250] Ibid, 144

[251] Bransbourg (2017), 91

> "Diocletian's tax reform represented the most logical outcome to Caracalla's granting of citizenship. Taxation had to become moral, justified by the common good, and had to be perceived, or at least conceived, as an accepted compulsory system based on a fair estimate of all existing resources...Fairness, transparency, and moderate fiscal treatment that was proportionate to wealth and income, became pervasive throughout the way late imperial legislation is set out and articulated from the fourth century on."[252]

Whilst this represents quite a halcyon view of the late Roman state, the point is that the monetisation of élite competition seems to have depressed the economic condition of the average taxpayer, and that this was perceptible to those on the receiving end. As we will now see, this situation was exacerbated by the aurification of the monetary economy.

To quote Jairus Banaji, "the chief economic impact of the later Roman state may be identified as the role it played in creating and sustaining the expansion of a powerful monetary economy based on gold".[253] This refers, as previously stated (§2.3), to the pegging of a trimetallic currency to the value of the gold *solidus*, struck at 72 to the pound. The gold coinage and minting system underwent further reforms under Valentinian I, and by the culmination of the fourth century the Roman state was collecting a significant portion of its land taxes, bulk-purchasing agricultural products, and paying most of its employees' salaries and perquisites in gold.[254] At the same time, commutation of taxes into gold increased gradually during the fourth century, driven both by the gradual inflation of bureaucratic ranks and pay grades and by the concomitant desire of officials to be remunerated in *solidi*.[255] It is worth noting that officials appear to have consistently manipulated commutation rates, forcing local authorities to purchase unwanted goods in exchange for

[252] Bransbourg (2017), 92-93; e.g., *P. Cair. Isidor.* 1, I.3.1; *CTh.* 11.12.3 (365); *NVal.* 10.4 (441)

[253] Banaji (2016), 191; (2001), 39-88; Carrié (2017), 188

[254] Amm. Marc. XVII.9.4; *LRE* I, 445; Amandry (1982), 279-95; Banaji (2001), 51, 57-60; (2016), 192

[255] *LRE* I, 460-461; Banaji (2001), 50-51; Wickham (2005), 74-75

gold.[256] In response to these pressures, the state gradually increased the minting of *solidi* during the fourth century, and by its end the use of gold coinage appears to have permeated every facet of society.[257] However, this “rivoluzione monetaria constantiniana” had simultaneous consequences for the stability of the other two metallic currencies.[258] The silver coinage survived as *siliquae* or *miliarenses*, but appears to have been restricted to irregular military donatives in lieu of the gold currency in which their value was expressed.[259] Whilst the value of the silver coinage fluctuated occasionally, Banaji has demonstrated that it remained relatively stable, with the value in relation to gold gradually depreciating from c.1:12 under Julian to c.1:18 under Heraclius.[260] It is in relation to the bronze/copper currencies that problems emerged. The state appears to have continued to mint base metal coinage as a matter of tradition, although it was used both for paying the troops’ (essentially worthless) *stipendium* and for buying back gold at fixed rates from money changers.[261] Furthermore, local bronze/copper coinages also continued to be minted on a municipal level. By contrast to the gold currency, which seems to have experienced a relatively high turnover of reminting, it is likely that the quantity of copper currency simply increased, as none was being removed from circulation in taxes or for reminting.[262] The problem, however, ran deeper than straightforward hyperinflation. The real revolution in monetary policy was that the whole currency was no longer expressed relative to the value of a notional *denarius*, as it had been prior to the reign of Constantine, but was now pegged to both the market and intrinsic value of the very real gold *solidus*.[263] The logic of the new system effectively undermined the logic of its predecessor, as the Anonymous dimly grasped. The result, coupled with the increasing amounts of base metal coinage that could be expressed both in *denarii* and in relation to the *solidus*, was spiralling depreciation of the

---

[256] E.g., Lib. *Or.* 57.51; *CTh.* 7.4.1 (325); Banaji (2001), 55-56; *LRE* II, 1052

[257] Banaji (2001), 49, 60, 76

[258] Mazzarino (1976), 3.674

[259] E.g., Zos. 3.13.3; Banaji (2001), 39-44; *LRE* I, 440

[260] Banaji (2001), 44; cf. *LRE* I, 439-440

[261] *LRE* I, 441-442; Esmonde Cleary (2013), 332-333

[262] *LRE* I, 441-442; Banaji (2001), 76-84

[263] Banaji (2001), 39 nn.1-4

former currency in terms of the latter.[264] Based on the records preserved primarily in Egyptian papyri of exchange rates between gold and copper (i.e., the price of the *solidus* determined in 'myriads of *denarii*'), Banaji has shown that, from a value of 0.083 myriads in 300[265], the *solidus* was worth 730 myriads in 350[266], 1360 myriads in 359[267], to c. 3900-4000 myriads in 423.[268] In other words, a *solidus* that was worth 275,000 *denarii* at the end of Constantine's reign was worth 4,600,000 *denarii* in the later part of his son Constantius II's.[269] Given that the Roman state did not possess a modern understanding of economics, and therefore was in no position to comprehend the nature of the crisis they had wrought on the empire's monetary system, I am inclined to agree with both Jones and Banaji that the imperial government was grappling with forces beyond its control.[270] The problem was that the state had inadvertently undermined the stability of the base metal coinage with which the vast majority of the inhabitants of the empire had traditionally conducted their everyday transactions. As the *solidus* displaced the defunct currencies from every social stratum, this forced the general populace into competition with élites in the acquisition of a strong gold currency; and, as we have already seen, élites enjoyed enormous structural advantages in this competition. Whilst the government recognised that this was a problem, and made the occasional fitful attempt to arrest the inflation, the problem did not rank highly on its list of priorities because coinage had always been a mechanism for paying troops and officials rather than an infrastructural perk granted to the population at large.[271] As such, whilst we can see that the provision of a strong, stable gold currency was beneficial to both state finances and to monetizing élite competition, it exacerbated the already vertiginous social distance between the upper and lower classes in late Roman societies.[272]

---

[264] *LRE* I, 440

[265] *P. Beatty Panop.* 2.215ff.

[266] *P. Oxy.* XXXIV 2729

[267] *P. Oxy.* LI 3624

[268] *P. Oxy.* LI 3628-3636; Banaji (2001), Appendix I, Table I, pp. 222-223

[269] *LRE* I, 440

[270] Ibid, 441; Banaji (2001), 45

[271] E.g., *NVal.* XVI (445); *LRE* I, 441; Esmonde Cleary (2013), 348

[272] Banaji (2001), 68; Carrié (2017), 188

Commenting on rioting among the *ptōchoi* (casual labourers) in response to Justinian's attempt to devalue the *follis* in 533, Banaji suggests that the "notable lack of any mass resistance to the Arab invasions had as much to do with this profound monetary divide" than other reasons.[273] As shall be argued in §3.4.2, it seems likely that something of this nature occurred in the fifth-century west.

It is tempting to characterise the operation of the late Roman political economy as 'corruption', and many have been inclined to do so.[274] However, as Chris Kelly attests, "few would disagree that it would be both inapplicable and ill-conceived to attempt to understand corruption in any historical bureaucracy through the imposition of patterns and prescriptions derived from modern Western morality and institutions".[275] Conversely, whilst there was certainly a moral element in the Roman conception of *res publica* (§6.3), Bransbourg's foregrounding of the fair intent of late Roman taxation and legal procedure is a step too far in the opposite direction.[276] In terms anticipated by Charles Tilly, it makes more sense to think of the later Roman state as a protection racket when it comes to matters of political economy.[277] As we have already intimated, the state's interest was primarily in domination, not in the betterment of its subject population, and the ubiquitous profiteering that we observe in our sources was a significant sop with which the imperial government kept Roman aristocracies onside. With that being said, we should resist the urge to normalise this illicit profiteering entirely. Contemporary sources of practically every stripe, including imperial legislators, complained about peculation constantly in the late imperial period, to the extent that such complaints form a distinct literary topos.[278] Whilst

---

[273] Malalas, *Chron.* 486c; Banaji (2001), 66-67

[274] E.g., *LRE* II, 1053; de Ste. Croix (1981), 492; MacMullen (1988), 168

[275] Kelly (2004), 3

[276] Bransbourg (2017), 92-93

[277] Tilly (1985), 169, 177; Scheidel (2013), 21

[278] E.g., Anon. *de Reb. Bell.* IV.1; *CTh.* VI.4.21.3 (372); XI.1.11 (17 May 365), 11.1 (368/370/373); Lib. *Or.* 47.31-33; Amm. Marc. XXX.4.21, XXXI.4; Max. Taur., *Sermo* 26.103 (*CC Ser. Lat.* 23; date p. xxxiii, ca. A.D. 400); Zos. V.1.1f (392); Aug. *Ep*. 153.23f; Symm. *Ep.* V.63.2; Paul. *Vit. Amb.* 41 (*PL* 14.41B) and 43 (42B); Prisc. *fr.* 11.2.436-453

the late Roman political economy, based on the symbiotic expansion of the gold currency and the competition of élites for bureaucratic positions, may have benefitted state cohesion under stable conditions, it was also an exorbitantly expensive system that operated by shifting the expense, often violently, onto the poorest members of society.[279] This system was sustainable for as long as the state maintained a monopoly of violence sufficient to keep the taxpayers in their place. It was precisely this monopoly that was threatened in the gathering crises of the fifth century.

3.4 Crisis

The crisis duly arrived on New Year's Day, 406, when the Rhine frontier collapsed.[280] Gaul and Iberia were overrun, a military debacle that coincided with a chain of usurpations: at the peak of the crisis, the resources still nominally under imperial control were effectively split six-fold between rival regimes.[281] The size of the invading forces of Vandals, Alans, and Suebes has been much debated, although the notion of vast hordes sweeping all before them can be safely jettisoned.[282] What seems clear, however, is that the processes of invasion, usurpation, and occupation removed large swathes of land and population from within the grasp of the central authorities, making the collection of resources extremely difficult owing to the lack of security, and thereby catalysed the pre-existing weaknesses in the empire's fiscal system. It was, in short, a catastrophe for the stability and independence of imperial resources.[283] A degree of stability appears to have been achieved, albeit in strained circumstances, after 411, but this new equilibrium was then disrupted by the seizure of North Africa by the Vandals in the 430s. According to A.H.M. Jones, "only when

[279] Banaji (2001), 68

[280] Diaz (2017), 21

[281] *LRE* I, chpt. 6; Merrony (2019), 131

[282] Mathisen (2019), 141-142; Goffart (1980), 3-39; Whittaker (1994), 159; Wood (2013), 499. The much-quoted figure of 80,000 per tribe is derived from Gaiseric's 'census' of his peoples before their passage to North Africa, and this may well have been inflated in order to intimidate imperial observers

[283] *LRE* I, 204

the barbarian invaders had occupied much of Gaul, Spain, and Africa did the government of Valentinian III fall into financial difficulties": the conquest of North Africa must necessarily loom large in our assessment.[284] With that being said, our analysis must focus on the question of whether the fiscal basis of the state was being destroyed outright or redirected to other authorities. In the former circumstance, the stability and independence of resources is being wholly eliminated; in the latter, it survives, but is not being used by the Roman state. This distinction, as we shall see, forms the fiscal basis of the post-Roman kingdoms.

3.4.1 Invasion and Occupation

When considering the manner in which the 'barbarian invasions' of the fifth century affected imperial resources, it is prudent to treat the issue on a regional rather than an empire-wide basis. The invasions were experienced very differently by the regions of the western empire, and their impact was correspondingly diverse. Our sources, largely composed from excerpts in contemporary chronicles and the distant observations of eastern historians of the sixth century and later, make definitive chronological accounts of the process difficult to construct. Direct attestations from western contemporaries, when they are comprehensive, tend towards the eschatological or hyperbolic, as was the case with this poem by Orientius, bishop of Auch:

> *"Some lay as food for dogs; for many, a burning roof. Both took their soul, and cremated their corpse. Through villages and villas, through countryside and market-place, through all regions, on all roads, in this place and that, there was Death, Misery, Destruction, Burning, and Mourning. The whole of Gaul smoked on a single funeral pyre."*[285] – Orientius of Auch, *Commonitorum*, 179-184

[284] *LRE* I, 468

[285] Ward-Perkins (2005), 22-23; Merrony (2019), 128

Such exaggeration does not lend itself to ascertaining historical detail. In particular, it is hard to assess whether or not a given region was producing and transmitting any resources to the Roman state at any given time. It often remains unclear whether the infrastructure and security necessary for the successful transportation of goods was possible even in areas that remained notionally under Roman control, such as in Iberia or Gaul. In *The Plight of Rome in the Fifth Century AD* (2017/2019), Mark Merrony articulated a useful metric for analysing the scope of the damage to imperial resources during this period. Drawing on Jones' analysis of the basic economic structure of the Roman empire as an interconnected series of cities and their hinterlands, Merrony likened the superstructure to a beehive, with each municipal cell of the honeycomb contributing to the overall well-being of the emperor (the queen) and the empire (the hive).[286] This analogy is useful for a couple of reasons. It allows for regional variations in production; it distinguishes between the individual cells of the structure and the superstructure of the imperial œcumene; and it further differentiates between the tax-based system of the Romans and the land-based system of military remuneration that succeeded Roman rule. We might, however, consider expanding Merrony's interpretation to include the provinces, the dioceses, and the prefectures, which provided three extra levels of administrative organisation between the imperial court and the cities. These levels served both to connect and to compartmentalise sections of the imperial fiscal system, meaning that one or more sections could be deactivated, so to speak, without endangering the superstructure as a whole.

Our brief regional survey will account for the regions of Britain, Gaul, Iberia, Illyricum, Africa, and Italy. For three of these – Britain, Gaul, and Africa – we have definitive information regarding the spread and distribution of cities. We also have information preserved in the *Notitia Dignitatum* as to the putative size of the military establishment in each region, which may give us some indication as to regional military outlays, assuming again that most resources would have been raised and consumed locally. Beyond this, we must rely on what circumstantial evidence is available. It follows that we are unlikely to generate anything more than an impression of the impact of invasion, usurpation, and occupation on the resource management of the state, but this should nonetheless enable us to draw a few

[286] *LRE* II, 712; Ward-Perkins (2005), 41; Brown (1992), 25; Merrony (2019), 137

conclusions. The chief criterion by which we must measure is security, by far the most valuable asset that the state offered to its subjects. Without security on the roads and waterways of the empire, both the movements of goods and monies for the command economy and the trade that accompanied them would not have been possible. If our sources indicate widespread instability and raiding, even if the area remained notionally under Roman authority, we must question whether it was in fact producing and transporting the surpluses necessary for the maintenance of imperial resources on a consistent basis.

The purpose of the present section is to detail how Roman resource management was disrupted to the point of becoming ineffective. The question of how the Roman tax system was repurposed or replaced by the successor kingdoms is naturally relevant, but is dealt with more fully in the chapter entitled 'The Specialisation of Governance' (§5). Here, it will suffice to say that in the areas for which we have solid evidence – Gaul, Italy, the Iberian Peninsula, and North Africa – some semblance of the Roman tax-system was maintained, but was redirected towards the treasury of the king. This seems to have provided post-Roman royal courts with the centripetal pressure necessary to drive aristocrats into their orbit. However, in every case the transition from a tax-based to a land-based system of recruitment removed the tax-system from its fundamental operating principle, and it seems to have broken down (either gradually or suddenly) across the post-Roman west by the Carolingian era.

3.4.1.1 Britain

According to the sixth-century account of Gildas, presumably quoting from a late Roman *Notitia*, Roman Britain contained 28 *civitates* spanning 5 provinces.[287] The majority of these (around twenty of them) will have been located in the lowland provinces, along with most rural villas and other forms of agricultural settlement; highland Britain was predominantly a

[287] *LRE* II, 715; see Map V for distribution. See Map II for provincial organisation. Provinces = Britannia I, Britannia II, Maxima Caesariensis, Flavia Caesariensis, Valentia

militarised zone.[288] Martin Millett has estimated that the population of Britain was c.3.7 million during the fourth century; the island was not particularly densely populated during the period.[289] The British military establishment was divided between the *Dux Britanniae* and the *Comes Litoris Saxonici per Britanniam*.[290] Jones estimated the number of *limitanei* divided between the two to have been around 28,000 in number.[291] He further summarised that there were only five field army units and 43 units of *limitanei* in Britain at the last relevant revision of the *Notitia Dignitatum*.[292] By contrast, Peter Salway suggests that there were nine units of *comitatenses* present in Britain in the 390s, possibly a task force sent to deal with the Picts that had become a permanent establishment.[293] The impression, therefore, is of a large establishment of *limitanei* but a relatively denuded corps of field units by comparison to earlier periods, with most having been withdrawn for fighting elsewhere. The total cost of the army in Britain is impossible to estimate, as is the total income derived from the provinces. London did not possess a mint for most of the fourth century, so pay in *donativa* must have come from the mainland; pay in kind, we must assume, was raised locally.[294] The appurtenances of the command economy in Britain were a *thesaurus* (supply depot/treasury) at Augusta and a *gynaecium* (wool-mill) at Venta.[295]

Our evidence for the political history of Britain during the fifth century is virtually non-existent beyond the earliest part, after which we are forced to rely on later chronicles and a scant archaeological record. Britain contributed the lion's share of its field army to two

[288] Wickham (2005), 306

[289] Millett (1990), 181-186; Salway (1993), 387-396; Wickham (2005), 312; most estimates of the fourth-century British population sit somewhere in the 3-4 million range.

[290] *LRE* III, Appendix II, Table IV, 35, 48, pp. 362-363

[291] Ibid, Table XV, 379

[292] *LRE* I, 196-7; III, Appendix II, Table VI, 364

[293] Salway (1993), 314

[294] *LRE*, Map III; Merrony (2019), 145: mints at Londinium and Camelodunum had been shut down in 324

[295] *LRE,* Map III

major usurpations, that of Magnus Maximus in 383 and that of Constantine III in 406.[296] Furthermore, Peter Salway has argued, based on his reading of Claudian and Gildas, that it is likely that troop numbers in Britain were already being drawn down under Stilicho in the wake of repeated stalemates in the Pictish wars of the 390s.[297] This is likely to have drastically reduced the effective military force on the island, as well as the primary recipient of the imperial tax system: the numismatic record indicates that Roman coinage ceased to be imported after 410.[298] What happened next is unclear, and there are competing theories. One tradition, based on Gildas and Zosimus and favoured by Martin Millett, Peter Heather, and Ian Wood argues in favour of a revolt of the British aristocracy, who simultaneously ejected the Roman officials from the island whilst importing large numbers of Anglo-Saxon mercenaries in imitation of Theodosian federate policy.[299] An alternative tradition, favoured by Simon Esmonde Cleary and Chris Wickham, suggests that the British economy was too enmeshed in the Roman fiscal network to survive the withdrawal of the Roman army/state, and that this withdrawal in or around 410 abruptly halted taxation and plunged Romano-British élite society into a fatal crisis.[300] The involution of Roman hierarchical society had been completed by the time the Anglo-Saxons settled in numbers: Wickham suggests that total disintegration is the only way in which Anglo-Saxon military superiority and the all-encompassing extent of acculturation to Anglo-Saxon precedents in 'England' is explicable.[301] In any event, the archaeological record suggests the almost total levelling of complex hierarchical society in the fifth century.[302] Almost all villa settlements, urban economies, and specialised production cannot reliably be traced after 450, although landscape analysis suggests that agricultural activity conducted by a resident population did

[296] Magnus Maximus: Zos. IV.35.3. Constantine III: Zos. VI.2.1-6; Constantine III = *PLRE* IIA, pp. 316-317

[297] Salway (1993), 311-320

[298] Wickham (2005), 309

[299] Gildas 23. Zos. VI.3.3.; Millett (1990), 227-230; Heather (2008), 2; Wood (2013), 499

[300] Esmonde Cleary (1989), 138-161; Wickham (2005), 310; also Potter (2004), 7-9

[301] Wickham (2005), 314

[302] Ward-Perkins (2005), 117-120; Dey (2015), 128

continue, thereby staving off the notion of total demographic collapse.[303] Whilst small-scale travel and commerce continued between Britain and the mainland, it is noteworthy that our surviving Gallic sources almost entirely cease to refer to Britain in the fifth century: it was evidently no longer considered to be a part of their world.[304]

Britain is an outlier in our case study, as it is the only part of the Roman west (with the possible exception of inland Illyricum) in which the state came to a decisive end.[305] It seems fair to assume, therefore, that no British resources or manpower could be salvaged, although a refugee Romano-British contingent under Riothamus is attested in Gaul during the supremacy of Aetius.[306] The collapse of Britain will also have removed both the gold mines at Dolcucothi and the argentiferous lead mines from the Roman fiscal network.[307] Unlike the other regions of the west, however, British resources were not immediately available to be redirected to new rulers, as the social mechanisms for generating and aggregating surpluses seem to have largely disintegrated. The post-Roman population had to start state-building from scratch, and a recognisable state does not re-emerge on the island until the eighth century, with the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Mercia.[308]

3.4.1.2 Gaul

The *Notitia Galliarum*, a turn-of-the-fifth century administrative source, lists 113 *civitates, castra*, and *portus* within 17 provinces comprising the dioceses of the Gauls (*Galliae*) and Five Provinces (*Quinque Provinciae*).[309] According to this *Notitia*, there are 61 urban

[303] Wickham (2005), 307-309; an exception – the villa at Chedworth – is discussed below in § 4.4.1.5; see Papworth (2021)

[304] Wickham (2005), 309; Salway (1993), 308

[305] Wickham (2005), 303

[306] *PLRE* IIB, 945

[307] Mines: Strab. *Geo*. IV.5.2; Hirt (2010), 51-81; Merrony (2019), 131-132, 145

[308] Wickham (2005), 303-304

[309] Merrony (2019), 168-169; *LRE* Map II, Map V. Provinces = *Galliae*: I. Lugdunensis Prima; II. Lugdunensis Secunda; III. Lugdunensis Tertia; IV. Lugdunensis Senonia; V. Belgica Prima; VI. Belgica

settlements listed for the northern diocese, and 60 for the southern diocese. These appear to have been widely diffused, with the greatest concentration being in the Rhône valley in Viennensis.[310] . Extrapolating outwards from an analysis of capitation figures from the *Civitas Aeduorum*, Jones estimated that the total population of most of southern Gaul would have been less than two and a half million.[311] The size and structure of the Gallic military establishment changed significantly over our period, as is reflected in the *Notitia Dignitatum*. According to Jones, there were 14 units of *limitanei* stationed under the dukes of Sequanica, Moguntiacum, Belgica II, and Armorica, comprising approximately 17,500 troops.[312] In contrast to these comparatively limited border garrisons, the Gallic field army was extensive, comprising 58 units (approximately 35,000 troops) under the *magister equitum per Gallias*.[313] Again, we have no information for the total productive value of these provinces, and the cost of the army is hard to gauge. The organs of the command economy in the two dioceses of Gaul were extensive at the turn of the fifth century. The northern diocese contained six *fabricae* (arms factories), two *fabricae barbaricariorum* (for adorning officers armour with precious metals), three *thesauri*, four *gynaecia*, and two mints at Trier and Lugdunum.[314] The southern diocese contained one *fabrica*, one *fabrica barbaricariorum*, one *linyphium* (linen-mill), two *baphia* (dyeing works), one *gynaecium*, one *thesaurus*, and a mint at Arelate (Arles).[315] According to Wickham, the two dioceses of Gaul were fiscally self-sufficient in the fourth century, in that all of the resources necessary for their defence could be sourced within the diocesan boundaries insofar as security

---

Secunda; VII. Germania Prima; VIII. Germania Secunda; IX. Maxima Sequanorum; X. Alpium Graiarum et Poeniarum. *Septem Provinciae* = XI. Viennensis; XII. Aquitanica Prima; XIII. Aquitanica Secunda; XIV. Novempopulana; XV. Narbonensis Prima; XVI. Narbonensis Secunda; XVII. Alpium Maratimarum

[310] *LRE* Map II

[311] *LRE* II, 1040-1041, III. n.15; *Pan. Lat.* V.II

[312] *LRE* I, 196; III, Appendix II, Table XV, 380

[313] *LRE* I, 196-197; III, Appendix II, Table VI, 364; promoted *limitanei* = Table VII.84-110, 365-366; distribution of the field army in Gaul = Table XIII, 379

[314] *LRE,* Map III

[315] Ibid.

pertained.[316] We might add, as Julian demonstrated, that supplies could be sourced from Britain at a pinch.

As Jones has pointed out, our figures for the Gallic field army of c. 425 reveal that, of the 58 units in the *comitatus*, only 21 units had existed prior to 395: 11 new units had been recruited and 26 promoted from *limitanei* garrisons.[317] According to Jones, and with revisions offered by Heather, this implies that the Gallic army had lost approximately half of its fighting forces in the thirty years of Honorius' reign.[318] Considering the political history of Gaul in this period, this grisly testimonial is unsurprising. Gaul had contributed field army units to the usurpations of both Magnus Maximus and Eugenius/Arbogast, and many of these must have been destroyed in the fighting with Theodosius. This assessment is borne out by Stilicho's frantic recruiting drives: clearly what was left of the western *comitatus* was not adequate for the needs of defence.[319] The extent of the damage inflicted upon Gaul when the frontier collapsed is difficult to judge in retrospect, although it may initially have been contained to the north-east by the usurpation of Constantine III.[320] The remaining history of Gaul in the fifth century is one of almost continuous warfare between the imperial authorities, the Goths, the Burgundians, the Huns, the *bagaudae*, the Franks, and the breakaway regime under Aegidius and Syagrius. South-western Gaul also experienced heavy fighting in the early sixth century between the Goths and Franks.[321] In the process, sections of Gaul were parcelled away to various 'barbarian' groups in settlement deals, thereby removing their resources permanently from imperial control.[322] Based on the *Notitia Galliarum*, Mark Merrony has provided estimates for the extent of the losses of municipalities and their territories. The Visigoths were settled in the Garonne valley in 418,

[316] Wickham (2005), 102

[317] *LRE* I, 198

[318] Ibid.; Heather (2005), 247; Merrony (2019), 133; McEvoy (2013), 202

[319] Stilichonian recruiting drives: Claud. *De Bell. Get.* 319f.; 400f.; *De Cons. Stil.* I 188f.; Symm. *Ep.* IV 28; Matthews (1975), 271, 273

[320] Wood (2013), 513

[321] Ibid.

[322] Goffart (1980)

and Merrony estimates the original settlement to have comprised the territories of eight *civitates*, or approximately 13% of the total number of *civitates* in the diocese of *Quinque Provinciae*.[323] The Goths subsequently annexed a further 34 *civitates* and one *castrum*, amounting in total to 58% of the urban centres of the southern diocese.[324] This will have removed the gold mines at Lemovicum from Roman control, as well as all but the *linyphium* and one *baphium*.[325] The Alans were settled between 440 and 442 in and around the *civitates* of Valentia and Cenabum, and there is some evidence in modern place-names for Alanic settlements in Armorica, where they are recorded as having engaged the *bagaudae* on Aetius' behalf.[326] The Burgundians were initially settled in the territory of Sapaudia in 443, and in the 460s their kingdom expanded to include eighteen *civitates*, or 41% of the total in the southern diocese.[327] This will have consumed the last *linyphium* in the southern diocese, as well as two *fabricae* and a *gynaecium* in the northern diocese.[328] The Franks initially controlled the territories of five *civitates* in Belgica Secunda and Germania Secunda between the 430s and 450s, then subsequently annexed some 49 *civitates*, or 80% of the urban settlements, in the northern diocese of Gaul.[329] By the 460s, this left the imperial authorities with only a limited area of the Mediterranean littoral under their direct control.

The Rhine army in its fourth-century form was the most conspicuous victim of the tumult of the early fifth century, and excavations at Rhine forts such as Alzey indicate that none were occupied after 450.[330] Contemporaneously, the Gallic mints at Trier and Lugdunum were shuttered, whilst that at Arelate fell to the Goths: new issues of coinage from Italian mints

[323] Merrony (2019), 169, esp. Table 5.1

[324] Ibid, 169-170, esp. Table 5.2

[325] Gold Mines: Edmondson (1989), 92; Merrony (2019), 132; *LRE,* Map III: *linyphium* = Vienna, *Baphium* = Telo

[326] Merrony (2019), 171, esp. Table 5.3; cf. Esmonde Cleary (2013), 381, who suggests that the Alanic placenames in Armorica are only attested from the ninth century or later.

[327] Ibid, 171-172, esp. Table 5.4

[328] *LRE*, Map III: *fabricae* = Matsico, Augustodunum, *gynaecium* = Augustodunum

[329] Ibid, 171, 173, esp. Tables 5.5, 5.6

[330] Alzey: Oldenstein (1986), 290-356; (1994), 69-112; Esmonde Cleary (2013), 345-346; Wickham (2005), 102-103

"did not penetrate north of the Alps in any quantity" after 425.[331] As Simon Esmonde Cleary notes, the diocesan staffs of both the *magister officiorum* and the *sacrae largitiones* are also difficult to detect in Gaul after the early fifth century, although those of the Praetorian Prefecture remain.[332] As Chris Wickham argues, this indicates that the taxation infrastructure necessary for supplying the army, as well as the markets created by that army, effectively ceased to exist in the early fifth century.[333] Regarding what replaced it, it will suffice here to say that a civic tax system survived into the Merovingian period, which was focussed onto the treasuries of the various Frankish kings (§5.4.3)..[334] However, this system was extremely susceptible to the transition from a tax-based to a land-based system of recruitment, and instead of an integrated tax system we increasingly find a series of disconnected and non-standardised resources in the hands of local militarised aristocrats. By the Carolingian period, taxation in Francia was a distant memory.

3.4.1.3 The Iberian Peninsula

The Roman diocese of Hispania consisted of the five peninsular provinces of Tarraconensis, Carthaginiensis, Baetica, Lusitania, and Gallaecia, as well as the Balearic Isles (attached administratively to Carthaginiensis) and the province of Tingitania across the straits of Gibraltar. According to Michael Kulikowski, the peninsula contained between three hundred and four hundred cities, of which approximately fifty-four were major *civitates*: the most important, the diocesan capital of Emerita Augusta (modern Mérida) was located in Lusitania.[335] Recent surveys of Iberian rural sites in the Extremadura and the Guadalquivir Valley suggest that many more were built in the third century than previously suspected, indicating a growth in population in late antiquity that led to correspondingly more intensive cultivation of marginal land.[336] The military establishment in the dioceses of

---

[331] Mints: Merrony (2019), 145; Esmonde Cleary (2013), 349

[332] Esmonde Cleary (2013), 349

[333] Wickham (2005), 102-103

[334] Wood (1994), 64-66; Wickham (2005), 106

[335] See the map on xxi of Kulikowski (2004) for the spread and distribution of cities in Hispania

[336] Kulikowski (2004), 130-131

Hispania does not appear to have been extensive. According to Jones, there were approximately 5,500 *limitanei* in Iberia itself, with a further 4,000 in Tingitania under the *comes Tingitaniae*.[337] The field army in Hispania was comprised of 16 units, with a further 5 units in Tingitania; the presence of field army units is confirmed by a reference to them in the *Epistula Honorii*.[338] There were no mints recorded in Hispania in the fourth century in the *Notitia Dignitatum*, although coinage exists for the usurper Maximus, indicating that there was at least some minting activity at Tarragona.[339] Furthermore, we do not possess any information on the apparatus of the imperial supply system in the peninsula, although we know of a *baphium* on the Balearic Isles.[340] Given how peaceful the diocese usually seems to have been, we must assume that its defensive needs could be met locally, with surpluses being directed to the frontiers in Tingitania. Hispania was also the locus of significant mining activity throughout the Roman period, although Claude Domergue argues that precious metal exploitation in the peninsula, and particularly in the Sierra Moreno, had already gone into terminal decline by the fourth century.[341]

Although the invasion of 409 has sometimes been taken as the end of Roman Hispania in itself, the disintegration of the diocese took significantly longer and was far less clear cut.[342] The chronicle of Hydatius allows us to chart, albeit imprecisely, the disintegration of Roman administration in Hispania, although we must be cautious: Hydatius is speaking mostly about Gallaecia (he was the bishop of Aquae Flaviae, in modern northern Portugal), and his pronounced eschatological bent leads him to paint the most pessimistic possible picture of events.[343] The Vandals, Suebes, and Alans invaded Iberia with widespread pillaging in 409, and by 411 had occupied its various provinces: the Hasding Vandals and Suebes took Gallaecia, the Alans took Lusitania and Carthaginiensis, and the Siling Vandals took

[337] *LRE* III, Appendix II., Table IV, n. 33, 362; Table XV, 380

[338] Ibid., Table V, 364; Kulikowski (2004), 76-77, Appendix I, 311-312

[339] *RIC* X, 150-151; Marot (1997); Kulikowski (2004), 158

[340] *LRE*, Map III

[341] Domergue (1990), 309-313 in Kulikowski (2004), 21

[342] E.g., García Moreno (1976); Arce (1988), 110

[343] Hydatius = *PLRE* IIA, 574-575; Burgess (1993), 4; Kulikowski (2004), 154-155

Baetica.[344] From thenceforth, the direct sphere of Roman influence appears to have been largely restricted to Tarraconensis, which Hydatius attests remained under Roman rule until it was invaded by the Suebes in 456, although there appear to have been persistent problems with *bagaudae* that required repeated forays from the Gallic army and/or Gothic federates to resolve.[345] It is hard to discern from Hydatius' chronicle the process by which the *civitates* of Hispania were gradually annexed, although we know that the Vandals ravaged the Balearic isles in 425 and took Hispalis in 428; the Suebes under Rechila took Emerita in 439, Martylis in 440, and Seville in 441; the Vandals raided Turonium in 445; the Goths sacked Bracara and pillaged Asturica and Palentia in 456-7; the Suebes took Lucus whilst the Goths under Sunierícus took Scallabis in 460; Conimbrica was plundered in 467; and Ulixippona was seized by the Suebes in 468.[346] The accounts of widespread pillaging are ubiquitous in Hydatius' account, and we must assume that the security necessary for communication and the transportation of goods had been badly disrupted. Regular Roman forces are recorded as having launched various expeditions into Iberia under Asterius, Castinus, Merobaudes, Vitus, and Majorian, although these never seem to have allowed the Romans to establish more of a foothold in the peninsula.[347] It is difficult to detect whether these commanders were relying on troops originally stationed in Iberia or on detachments from Gaul and Italy, although they were certainly relying heavily on *fœderati*, who occasionally proved unreliable.[348] As Peter Heather argues, the forces stationed in Tingitania were almost certainly wiped out by the Vandals once they had crossed from Baetica.[349] The

[344] Hydat. 34 [42], 41 [49] s.a. 409, 411

[345] Ibid, s.a. 456. *Bagaudae* = s.a. 441, 443, 449, 453-4

[346] Balearic Isles = s.a. 425; Hispalis = s.a. 428; Emerita = s.a. 439; Martylis = s.a. 440; Seville = s.a. 441; Turonium = s.a. 445; Bracara = s.a. 456-7; Asturica/Palentia = s.a. 457; Lucus/Scallabis = s.a. 460; Conimbrica = s.a. 467; Ulixippona = s.a. 468

[347] Asterius: s.a. 420, 441 (Asterius = *PLRE* IIA, 171); Castinus: s.a. 422 (Castinus = *PLRE* IIA, 269-270); Merobaudes: s.a. 443 (Merobaudes = *PLRE* IIB, 756-758); Vitus: s.a. 446 (Vitus = *PLRE* IIB,1179); Majorian: s.a. 460 (Majorian = *PLRE* IIB, 702-703

[348] Kulikowski (2004), 171-172 argues that the dispersal of field troops in Iberia recorded in the *Notita Dignitatum* should be dated to the period between Wallia's reconquest and Asterius' campaigns, and his is the only reconstruction of this type that I am aware of

[349] Heather (2005), 652-653

overwhelming impression is that the imperial authorities largely disengaged from Iberia following Asterius' campaign, and events in the peninsula overtook them from this point onwards.[350] Quite how any regular troops were being paid and provisioned, if at all, remains a mystery, but given the circumstances the most obvious answer is in plunder. The gold mines of Asturia, Gaellicia, and Lusitania will have been lost in this period, although they had almost certainly experienced a decline in production from their attested apex of 20,000 lb. per annum during the first century.[351] The silver mines at Rio Tinto, Tharsis, San Domingos, and Aljustrel will also have been lost.[352] In brief, Kulikowski's reconstruction of the course of events in Iberia suggests that the imperial authorities gradually relinquished control over Iberia in the fifth century, during which time the territory was contested (if not actually controlled) by the Suebes and the Goths. He places the terminal point following the withdrawal of Majorian, after which stable central authority in Ibera disintegrated until the reign of Leovigild (r. 568-586).[353]

As with Gaul, whilst a centralised system for tax and tribute decisively re-emerged in Iberia under Leovigild and his successors, this was also subject to the transition from a tax-based to a land-based system of recruitment (§5.4.2). Whilst initially used to fund an elaborate ceremonial monarchy in Toledo, Visigothic taxation appears to have been highly fragmented and embedded in local practices, and declined significantly in political importance by the seventh century.[354] This corresponds to Kulikowski's observation, based on the *Nomina hispanarum sedium*, that of the several hundreds of cities in the Iberian Peninsula known under the Principate, only around eighty are still directly attested by the seventh century.[355] This does not necessarily mean that the cities had all vanished, only that there were now fewer prominent administrative centres. Whilst taxation remained city-focussed, this

[350] Kulikowski (2004), 176

[351] Gold mines: Plin. *Nat. Hist*, XXXIII.21.78; Merrony (2019), 132, 145

[352] Merrony (2019), 145

[353] Kulikowski (2004), 152; Fernández (2017), 250; Wickham (2005), 94

[354] Wickham (2005), 97-99; Fernández (2017), 246-249

[355] Kulikowski (2004), 287; Dey (2015), 159

nonetheless indicates either an overall decline in the taxable population, or a simplification in the methods of taxation.

3.4.1.4 Illyricum

We do not possess a *Notitia* for the *civitates* of Illyricum, although from what we can tell the diocese was comparatively non-urbanised.[356] The Illyrian and Dalmatian coastline appears to have sported several *civitates,* with the most prominent being Salona. The itinerary of the fourth-century Bordeaux pilgrim records a string of sixteen cities on the main road from Aquileia to Constantinople, of which eight alone were concentrated in the 175 miles between Mursa (Osijek, Croatia) and Viminacium (near Kostolac, Serbia).[357] Noricum, according to Bryan Ward-Perkin's reconstruction, contained the *civitates* of Ioviaco, Lauriacum, Favianis, Asturis, and Comagenis.[358] Our understanding of the number and distribution of *civitates* in the Pannonias, Valeria, and Savia is limited, although Sirmium remained the most prominent *civitatis* as a former imperial capital. From what we can tell, the area may have been quite sparsely populated. The military establishment in Illyricum appears to have been prodigious, although the extent to which it was worn down is very hard to ascertain. There appear to have been approximately 70,000 *limitanei* distributed almost evenly between the provinces of Pannonia I, Pannonia II, and Valeria.[359] The extent of the Illyrian *comitatus* recorded in the *Notitia Dignitatum* comprises 22 units serving under the *comes Illyrici*.[360] The mint at Sirmium is not recorded as being operational after 364, and the mint at Siscia closed in the 390s.[361] The apparatus of the Roman command economy in the two diocese were extensive, incorporating five *fabricae*, three *thesauri*, two *gynaecia* and two *baphia*.[362] This was, in short, a highly militarised area.

---

[356] *LRE*, Map V

[357] *LRE* II, 716, III n. 9; the Bordeaux itinerary is published in O. Cuntz, *Itineraria Romana*, I.

[358] See Ward-Perkins (2005), 18, 2.2.

[359] *LRE* III, Appendix II, Table XV, 380; MacGeorge (2002), 24

[360] *LRE* I, 196-197, III, Appendix II, Table VI, 364; MacGeorge (2002), 24

[361] Merrony (2019), 145; *LRE,* Map III

[362] *LRE* Map III; see also MacGeorge (2002), 20

The history of the conquest of Illyricum is particularly hazy, as indeed is the question of which imperial government was notionally responsible for the area.[363] The eastern authorities seem to have returned control of the two dioceses to the west in the early fifth century, if only to drop the Gothic hot potato into Stilicho's lap. There is also evidence that these dioceses were returned to eastern rule as part of the marriage settlement between Valentinian III and Eudoxia in 437, although Procopius implies that Dalmatia remained a part of the western empire.[364] The confusion among our contemporary sources is likely a product of the divergence between the administrative niceties and the reality of the situation: most of Illyricum was probably beyond imperial control from the beginning of the fifth century. Our evidence suggests that it was essentially Alaric's fiefdom during the supremacy of Stilicho, and it later sat right next to the heart of Hunnic power on the Hungarian plain. Penny MacGeorge suggests that most of inland Illyricum was abandoned in the early fifth century, and we have little reason to doubt this.[365]

We have information regarding only two areas of Illyricum in the mid- to late-fifth century: Dalmatia and Noricum. Dalmatia appears to have remained operational as it was isolated from inland Illyricum by mountain ranges. There were clearly military forces available in the area, although the degree of continuity between these troops and the Illyrian field armies and border garrisons is debatable, and MacGeorge is of the opinion that defence was likely being organised locally.[366] A reported six thousand Dalmatian troops under Valens arrived in Italy to reinforce Ravenna in 409, and there were still sufficient forces in Dalmatia to allow Marcellinus to defend Sicily from the Vandals between 460-465, to return with Anthemius in 467-468, and for Julius Nepos to invade Italy in 474.[367] However, there is very little fifth-

[363] MacGeorge (2002), 23-24

[364] Cass. *Var.* XI.1.9; Jord. *Rom*. 329; contra Procop. *Bell*. III.vi.7-8; MacGeorge (2002), 34-37

[365] MacGeorge (2002), 18-19

[366] Ibid, 27

[367] Valens = Zos. V.1-2 (Valens = *PLRE* IIB, 1137); MacGeorge (2002), pp. 25-26. Marcellinus, 460-465 = Priscus, *fr.* 38.1, 39.1; Hydat. 223 [227], s.a. 464-5; MacGeorge (2002), 46-51 – it is plausible that there were two Sicilian campaigns in this time period. Marcellinus, 467-8 = Hydat. 230 [234], 241

century coinage in Dalmatia after the early part of the century, and most of what has been recovered is eastern in origin.[368] It would appear that the breakaway regime that emerged in Dalmatia under Marcellinus in the 460s was more integrated into the east than the west, and indeed seems to have been viewed more as a threat than a resource by the latter government. Furthermore, there was some revival in the inland mining areas of Dalmatia, although any revenues produced will likely have been at the disposal of local rather than imperial needs.[369] In short, any resources being produced in Illyricum will likely have been redirected to forces outside of the western governments' control.[370] For Noricum, we have Eugippius' *Life of Saint Severinus*, which chronicles the activities of the saint in Noricum Ripensis between 453-483, although this preserves only a series of incidents that give some inkling as to the condition of the province. According to Eugippius, imperial defence was already a matter of history:

> *"Throughout the time that the Roman empire existed, the soldiery of many towns was maintained at public expense for the defence of the frontier. When this practice fell into abeyance, both these troops and the frontier disappeared".* – Eugippius, *Vita Severini* 20

It would appear from Eugippius' account that the initiative for defence had fallen on individual municipalities, which do not seem to have been able to guarantee security even within their immediate hinterlands.[371] The *civitates* of Asturis and Ioviaco were conquered, whilst both Lauriacum and Comagenis surrendered to the 'barbarians' and were incorporated into their polities.[372] By the death of Severinus, all of Noricum was in 'barbarian' hands. The putative history of the province of Noricum Ripensis has a rather

---

[247] s.a. 465-6, 468; Procop. *Bell.* III.vi.8, 25; MacGeorge (2002), 51-60 (Marcellinus = *PLRE* IIB, 708-710). Julius Nepos = *Anon. Val.* 7; Malchus, *fr.* 14

[368] Vasic (1988), 183; Duncan (1993), 72; MacGeorge (2002), 23

[369] Wilkes (1969), 417; MacGeorge (2002), 18

[370] MacGeorge (2002), 62-63

[371] Ward-Perkins (2005), 19

[372] Ibid, 19-20

neat ending: following two campaigns against the Rugi, Odovacer is reported to have evacuated the entire Roman population to Italy.[373] From these accounts, it appears that Noricum was absorbing rather than producing resources during the fifth century, and there does not appear to have been sufficient security to guarantee the stable transportation of goods on a large scale. However, according to Eugippius, troops stationed in Noricum during the life of Severinus were reported to have tried to cross into Italy to collect their pay: the attempt was apparently unsuccessful, but it demonstrates that regular remuneration was still an expected feature of military service in the late fifth century.[374]

Illyricum was largely annexed by Odoacer and the Ostrogoths respectively, and we must assume that its resources were then plugged back into the fiscal system of Italy to some extent.[375] However, it is unclear quite how the diocese was controlled in the aftermath of the wars between the Byzantines and the Ostrogoths. We know that it was the focus of Lombard power prior to their invasion of Italy, and subsequently seems to have been home to both the Slavs and the Avars. The survival of state structures in the area, let alone any appurtenances of the Roman tax system, is difficult to ascertain, but it seems fair to say that the area fell beyond the zone governed by the post-Roman kingdoms from the late-sixth and seventh centuries onwards.

3.4.1.5 North Africa

A cursory glance at A.H.M. Jones' reconstruction of the *civitates* of North Africa suggests that the area was both densely populated and heavily urbanised by fifth-century standards.[376] Mark Merrony's assessment of the bishoprics attested in the six provinces making up the diocese indicate that there were 1,420 municipalities large enough to require a bishop, although, as David Hunt argues, this number was likely inflated by the competition

---

[373] Eugippius, *Vit. Sev.* 44; John Ant. *fr.* 214.7; *Anon. Val.* 48; *Cons. Ital.* s.a. 487; Cass. *Chron*. 1316; O'Flynn (1983) 144, 199 n. 70

[374] Eugippius, *Vit. Sev.* 20

[375] MacGeorge (2002), 62-63

[376] *LRE*, Map V.

between Catholics and Donatists in creating as many bishoprics as possible.[377] The area was almost entirely responsible for the supply of the *annona* to Rome, and produced grain, olive oil, wine, and pottery on an industrial scale.[378] North Africa was also a main focus of Italian senatorial landholding, and, crucially, a large proportion of imperial properties feeding directly into the *res privata.* According to a return dating to 422, Africa Proconsularis contained 14,702 *centuriae* of imperial land out of a total of c.80,000, whereas Byzacena contained 15,075 *centuriae* out of a total of c.100,000, or 18.5% and 15% respectively.[379] By contrast, the military establishment in North Africa appears to have been a light presence. There are only two units (3,500 men) of *limitanei* recorded for Tripolitania, and of the 31 units recorded for the *comitatus*, 30 were upgraded *limitanei*.[380] By and large, this force was only intended to deal with low-level raiding from Berber princes, and for larger scale conflicts, such as the revolts of Firmus or Gildo, forces were dispatched to North Africa from elsewhere. We are fortunate to have some indication of the regular income from the provinces of Numidia and Mauretania Sitifensis. According to a novel of Valentinian III dating to 455, the revenue from Numidia prior to 429 amounted to 33,600 *solidi*, 9,600 *annonae*, and 1,600 *capita*; Mauretania Sitifensis produced 40,000 *solidi* and 400 *capita*.[381] We can only guess at the income of the richer provinces of Proconsularis and Byzacena. Beyond the infrastructure necessary for transporting the *annona*, the fiscal machinery of North Africa also seems relatively limited, likely owing to the absence of large portions of the *comitatus*. Carthage had no mint, and there is only one *gynaecium* (at Carthage) and two *baphia* (one at Girba) reported for the diocese.[382] The importance of North Africa to imperial resources was best summed up by Wickham in his description of the "tax-spine" linking the region to Italy: in his estimation, the stability of the resources available to both

[377] Merrony (2019), 174, esp. Table 5.7. Provinces = Africa Proconsularis, Byzacena, Tripolitania, Mauretania Sitifensis, Numidia, Mauretania Caesariensis; Hunt (2008), 241-242

[378] Merrony (2019), 174

[379] *CTh.* XI.28.13, (20 Feb. 422); *LRE* I, 415-416, III, 97 n. 9

[380] *LRE* I, 196-197; III, Appendix II, Table VI, 364; Table XV, 380

[381] *NVal*. XIII (21 June 445), XXXIV (13 July 451); *LRE* I, 207-208; II, 1110, n. 83; Harries (1994), 245; McEvoy (2013), 265

[382] *LRE,* Map III

the state and the aristocracy of the superstructure depended fundamentally on this link remaining unbroken.[383]

The Vandal seizure of North Africa "snapped the tax-spine" like a twig.[384] The Vandals invaded North Africa from Baetica in 429, and despite being defeated by Boniface twice in 430 and 435 respectively, were able to secure parts of Mauretania and Numidia by treaty.[385] The Vandals subsequently broke this treaty and seized Carthage in 439.[386] A second treaty was agreed in 442, by which the Vandals were ceded Proconsularis, Byzacena, western Tripolitania, and eastern Numidia; a law of Theodosius II indicates that the Romans retained jurisdiction over the remaining parts of Numidia, Mauretania Sitifensis, and Mauretania Caesariensis.[387] The taxation figures recorded in the previous paragraph were in the context of massive tax remissions being granted to the now-devastated provinces: according to the laws, both Numidia and Mauretania Sitifensis were only producing one-eighth of their former revenues.[388] The Vandals continued to send a token grain tribute to Italy, but this was almost certainly on a for-profit basis.[389] Furthermore, treaty obligations were clearly only a matter of convenience for the Vandals, and in the following years they seized Corsica, Sardinia, and the Balearic Isles, and mounted a series of large scale raids on Sicily and Italy, further devastating the empire's resource base. Every indication suggests that the Vandal seizure of North Africa was a turning point in the stability and independence of the Roman state's available resources.[390] In one swoop, the empire had lost its richest tax-yielding provinces, its means of supplying the *annona* to the city of Rome, and a vast chunk of both

---

[383] Wickham (2009), 41

[384] Wickham (2005), 87-93, 711-712; Diaz (2017), 25

[385] Possid., *Vit. Aug.* 27-31; Vict. Vit., I.3-7; Wolfram (1997), 162-167. Courtois (1955), 155-171; Merrony (2019), 142

[386] Marcellinus *comes*, s.a. 439(3); Hydat. 107 [115], 110 [118], s.a. 439; Prosper 1339; *Chron. Pasch.,* p. 583, 5-7; McEvoy (2013), 261

[387] Procop. *Bell*. III.4.13-15; *NTh.* XXXIV, (July 451); Merrony (2019), 142

[388] Matthews (1975), 357-358; McEvoy (2013), 264; Heather (2005), 715

[389] Heather (2005), 705-706; Esmonde Cleary (2013), 400

[390] Wickham (2009), 78; Thompson (1950), 59; Brown (1971), 126; Matthews (1975), 357-358; McEvoy (2013), 264-265; Esmonde Cleary (2013), 399-400

imperial and aristocratic landholdings.[391] Beyond the aforementioned provincial tax figures we have little way of knowing the specific impact of the loss on Roman revenues, although we can gauge the extent of the damage by legislation emanating from the imperial court in the following years. A law of 24th January 440 withdrew all tax remissions or reductions granted by the emperor; a law of 4th June 440 explicitly suspended the customary rake-offs of imperial tax officials; a law of 14th March 441 withdrew all tax privileges from imperial and clerical land, which were now to be assessed regularly, as well as all exemptions from *munera sordida*.[392] In 444 a new sales tax – the *siliquaticum* – was explicitly instituted to counter the fact that state revenues were now insufficient to feed and clothe existing troops, let alone recruit new ones, and a further law of 444 demanded cash from élites in order to cover the cost of new recruits.[393] As Peter Heather points out, these reforms overwhelmingly targeted landowners, the empire's most valued political constituency, which only serves to emphasize the depth of the crisis.[394] Based on Hugh Elton's calculations that the average *comitatensis* cost six *solidi* and the average cavalry trooper 10.5 *solidi* per year to maintain, Heather calculates that the losses from Numidia and the Mauritanian provinces alone will have cost the empire the equivalent of 18,000 infantry or 10,000 cavalry; the losses from Proconsularis and Byzacena, he estimates, will have cost around 40,000 infantry or in excess of 20,000 cavalry, essentially the kind of functional field army that accompanied Julian into Persia.[395] The full extent of the damage done by the loss of North Africa may never be calculable, but to quote Mark Merrony: "if there was a final nail in Rome's coffin, this was surely it."[396]

[391] McEvoy (2013), 264-265; Diaz (2017), 24

[392] *NVal.* IV (24 Jan. 440); *NVal*. VII.1-2 (4 June 440/27 Sept. 442); *NVal*. X (14 March 441); Heather (2005), 715

[393] *NVal.* XV (11 Sept. 444 – 18 Jan. 445); *NVal*. VI.3 (14 July 444); *LRE* I, 201; McEvoy (2013), 265; Whitby (2008), 296

[394] Heather (2005), 717

[395] Ibid, 720; Elton (1996), 120-125

[396] Merrony (2019), 174

From what we can tell, the Vandals maintained some semblance of the Roman tax system, although the sources do not shed much light on how efficient it was (§5.4.1). The transition from a tax-based to a land-based military/political system, combined with the fact that North African resources were no longer being alienated from the region by the *annona*, must initially have made the Vandal kings and aristocracy rich beyond the dreams of Croesus.[397] However, such a tax system must have been wildly imbalanced, and Wickham has argued that the Vandal century is the likely period in which city-based taxation broke down in North Africa.[398]

3.4.1.6 Italy

Somewhat surprisingly, we do not possess an administrative *Notitia* for Italy, so the number and distribution of *civitates* in the peninsula is difficult to determine.[399] The most conspicuous feature of Italian urban settlement was the city of Rome, which remained disproportionally large (at between 300,000 - 700,000 inhabitants at the turn of the fifth century) due to the *annona* lavished on its inhabitants by the state.[400] According to A.H.M. Jones, some 120,000 Romans were still registered for the dole in the middle of the fifth century.[401] The vast majority of the *annona* was met by shipments from North Africa and Sicily.[402] Rome also remained home to both the senatorial aristocracy and the See of St. Peter, both of which were immensely wealthy. Beyond this, the resources of Italy had to support the imperial court – first at Milan, then in Ravenna – the bureaucracy, and the

---

[397] Examples of Vandal royal wealth: Vict. Vit. I.22, II.2; Ferr. *Vit. Fulg.*, cc. 1-2; Procop. *Bell*. III.5.15, 10.25-28, 17.8-10, IV.3.25-27 (IV.4.33-41 for Gelimer's personal treasury, which was distinct from the Vandal treasury); Wickham (2005), 89-90

[398] Wickham (2005), 89

[399] *LRE,* Map V

[400] Wickham (2005), 73, n. 45: figure based on the pork rations

[401] *LRE* II, 687, esp. 695-705; see also Olymp. *fr.* 25; Matthews (1975), 355; Harper (2017), 185, n. 47

[402] Wickham (2005), 76

attendant largesse that came with direct imperial patronage.[403] The Italian *comitatus* was comprised of 44 units (or around 30,000 men) at its last registered point in the *Notitia Dignitatum* in 425.[404] Furthermore, there were 11,000 *limitanei* and one field legion (III Italica) recorded for Raetia under the *Dux Raetiae I et II* stationed at Vallatum, Submuntorium, Cambodunum, Foetes, and Terioli.[405] The mints at Rome, Milan, and Ravenna remained operational throughout the period, although the mint at Aquileia was shuttered around 425; mints at Ticinum and Ostia had ceased production in the fourth century.[406] Beyond this, Italy was home to six *fabricae*, four *thesauri*, five *gynaecia*, two *baphia*, and one *linyphium*.[407] Italy, therefore, housed both its own local economies and the foci of the imperial superstructure. The local economies were as vulnerable to invasions, civil wars, and settlements as any other part of the provincial world; the superstructure was unsustainable on the same scale without the vast quantities of resources being redirected to it from across the Mediterranean, and was therefore vulnerable even if Italy escaped widespread devastation.

The fiscal system of Italy went through considerable turbulence in the fifth century, particularly due to the Vandal seizure of North Africa.[408] Northern Italy was subjected to invasion during Stilicho's supremacy, first by Alaric and then by Radagaisus. Once Stilicho had been executed, the Goths invaded Italy in earnest; Rome was sacked for the first time in 410 and judging by the tax concessions granted by Honorius' government – one-fifth of the previous assessment for the suburbicarian provinces in 413, and a reduction of the liability of Picenum and Tuscany to one-seventh and of Campania to one-ninth of their former

[403] McEvoy (2010) has also demonstrated that the imperial court spent significant periods of time at Rome during the fifth century

[404] *LRE* I, 196-7; III, Appendix II, Table VI, 364

[405] *LRE* III, Appendix II, Table IX, 372, Table XV, 380

[406] MacGeorge (2002), 222 for the mint at Milan; Merrony (2019), 145; Esmonde Cleary (2013), 349; *LRE,* Map III.

[407] *LRE,* Map III.; see Ward-Perkins (2005), 102-103 for the specialisation of the Italian *fabricae*

[408] Wickham (2005), 92

assessments in 418 – we must assume widespread devastation.[409] Italy then experienced multiple civil wars between Constantius and Heraclianus, in the campaign to install Valentinian III, and in the fighting between Aetius and Boniface. In the 440s Italy was again invaded by the Huns, and we know from Priscus' account that Milan, Aquileia, Ticinum, and various other cities in Venetia were sacked.[410] Once North Africa had been lost, both Italy and Sicily were subjected to raids by the Vandal fleets: Rome was sacked again by Gaiseric in 455, Ricimer is recorded as having defeated Vandals at Agrigento in Sicily and on Corsica in 456, and Majorian again defeated Vandals in Campania in 458.[411] A law of 441 records that taxes in Sicily and the surrounding islands were remitted to a seventh of their usual assessment, ostensibly as a result of devastation.[412] The Vandals then used their naval superiority to interrupt the grain supplies to Rome.[413] Italy was then subjected to another round of civil wars between Avitus and Majorian/Ricimer, and then between Ricimer and Anthemius: during the latter, Rome was sacked for a third time.[414] Before long, the new political nexus of the Italian monarchy developed under Ricimer and Odovacer had supplanted the imperial court as the main focus of resource management, although this did not prevent one last devastating bout of warfare between Odovacer and Theoderic.

Briefly, the Roman tax system appears to have been preserved intact under Odovacer, Theoderic, and the Ostrogoths; the *Variae* of Cassiodorus certainly do not suggest the breakdown of the economic and fiscal cohesion of the peninsula during this period.[415] This changed following the wars between the Byzantines and the Ostrogoths (535-554) and the Lombard conquest (569-574). One potential index for the cessation of resources being sent

---

[409] *CTh.* XI.28.7 (8 May 413); XI.28.12 (15 Nov. 418); *LRE* I, 452-453; McEvoy (2013), 202

[410] Priscus, *fr.* 22.1-3

[411] Whitby (2008), 293; Wijnendaele (2018), 429-430

[412] *NVal*. I.2 (440/441)

[413] Priscus, *fr.* 31.1; Sid. Ap. *Carm*. II.367-70, V.388-440; Whitby (2008), 293-294

[414] Cass. *Chron*. 1293 s.a. 472; Gelasius, *Adversus Andromachum* col. 15; MacGeorge (2002), 255 n. 174

[415] Wickham (2005), 92, 115

to Italy in large quantities is the reported size of the population of Rome itself. Under the Ostrogoths, Cassiodorus obliquely admitted that Rome was not as populous as it had been:

> *"It is evident how great was the population of the city of Rome, seeing that it was fed by supplies furnished even from far off regions, and that this imported abundance was reserved for it … For the vast extent of the walls bears witness to the throngs of citizens, as do the swollen capacity of the buildings of entertainment, the wonderful size of the baths, and that great number of water-mills which were clearly provided especially for the food supply."* – Cassiodorus, *Variae* XI.39.1

The sixth century wars appear to have caused Rome's urban population to collapse. Based on current estimates, Michelle Salzman has suggested that Rome's population dropped from somewhere around 100-140,000 under the Ostrogoths to 50-90,000 by the end of the sixth century, although these figures are sketchy: Procopius's suggestion that there were only 500 common folk left in Rome when Totila retook the city is an obvious over-exaggeration.[416] Whilst this drop in population is predominantly attributable to repeated sieges, we should remember that both the Ostrogoths and Justinian attempted to maintain some semblance of the *annona*: the fact that the population dropped regardless attests to the difference in the scale of resource management possible under various regimes.[417] All evidence suggests that the Lombards abandoned taxation, preferring a fiscal system determined by the politics of land supplemented by *ad hoc* tribute (§5.4.4).[418] However, the end of the tax system does not appear to have fundamentally weakened either Lombard royal resources or the Lombard state, which showed no sign of structural weakness on the eve of the Frankish conquest of 773-774.

[416] Procop. *Bell.* VII.17.17-19, 20.18-21; Salzman (2021), 266, n. 121

[417] *LRE* II, 710-711

[418] Wickham (2005, 116-120

3.4.1.7 Observations

The first observation is that the processes of invasion, civil war, and occupation had a devastating impact on the stability and independence of imperial resources. The initial invasions of 406-411 rendered the Gallic Prefecture unstable, and the conquest of North Africa removed the fiscal engine from the Italian Prefecture. By the 460s, the state controlled only Italy and sections of the Gallic and Iberian littorals, and even these were insecure. A large portion of the army, the main recipient of the tax system and a crucial nexus for exchange, was also destroyed in this period. We must assume that the movement of goods, people, cash, and information became extremely difficult, and without these the imperial tax system was gravely imperilled.[419] Whilst it is extremely difficult to calculate the damage to imperial resources with specificity, Peter Brown has estimated that in 440 the western state was probably only collecting around 25% of the revenues that had been available to it on the eve of Adrianople.[420] Without a functioning tax system, a standing army requiring up to 70% of the imperial budget each year was an impossibility.[421] Insecurity will have made the realising of landed wealth into gold virtually impossible, as this was administratively complex, time-consuming, and required stable markets. This will have forced the state to look for alternative methods to maintain troop numbers at a level that could facilitate defence, and increasingly this will have meant federate land settlements, given that land was the one resource that the state held in quantity. As we have seen, it is this transition from a tax-based to a land-based system of military recruitment that marks the fundamental shift from a Roman to a post-Roman system of resource management, and the terminal point, if there is one, is the final extension of land settlements in Italy under Odovacer.

The second observation is that, except for Britain in the fifth century and the possible exception of inland Illyricum in the sixth, the Roman tax system did not break down in its entirety. Rather, it was reorganised after a period of disruption and redirected to new rulers

---

[419] Diaz (2017), 24

[420] Brown (2012), 389

[421] Merrony (2019), 176

in the former provinces – the Merovingian courts of northern Gaul, the Visigothic court of Toledo, and the Vandal court at Carthage. In Italy, a new series of kings preserved the Roman fiscal administration essentially unchanged until the Ostrogothic wars of the sixth century, after which the Lombard overlords of the peninsula abandoned Roman taxation within decades. The above examples of continuity, however, must be seen within the context of a rapid shift from a tax-based to a land-based system of military service, which removed the imperial tax system from its original context. This allowed the tax system to be repurposed to build up vast stores of material wealth in the hands of the post-Roman kings. Whilst this differed from the political uses to which the Roman state had used taxation, it nonetheless facilitated the stability and independence of royal resources, as it created centripetal pressures drawing aristocrats towards the courts in search of power, wealth, and rank. Despite the political usefulness of the tax system, however, it could not escape the gravitational pull of the tax-to-land transition, which reorientated the fiscal basis of the state in the post-Roman world. Once taxation had ceased to be part of a fiscal superstructure and had come to be seen as a disconnected series of local resources, the economic cohesion afforded by the Roman tax system slowly yet irretrievably disintegrated. This process was facilitated, as we shall see, by the retreat of bureaucracy and the reallocation of responsibility for tax collection into the hands of private militarised landowners.

In short, we can perceive a two-stage process. In the first stage, Roman rulers lost control of the resources of the tax system because of invasion, civil war, and occupation; these rulers were then politically superseded and replaced by a new political configuration within Italy, which maintained the tax system within their domains into the sixth century. In this first stage, the Roman tax system survived intact only within the Kingdom of Italy. In the second stage, the tax system irretrievably broke down – sometimes slowly with institutional change; sometimes quickly, in the case of Italy, with multiple conquests – as a result of the long-term repercussions of the transition from the tax-based to the land-based system of military service. This process had run its course by the Carolingian period in Francia.

3.4.2 The Impact of Crisis: Political and Social Weaknesses

It should be clear from the above that conquest and civil war were the main reason why the stability and independence of imperial resources came to an end. It should also be clear that it was not so much the resource management system itself that ended, at least in the short term, but its focus on the emperor and his court. To that end, we must return to the impact of the internal factors discussed in §3.3 that, it was claimed, could affect imperial resource management should a crisis emerge. Broadly speaking, these can be divided into political and social weaknesses. The aim here is to demonstrate that these factors rendered it *more likely* that resources would be liberated from imperial control and redirected to other needs, thereby facilitating the development of new centres of authority.

It seems clear that the political weakness of the imperial court led frequently to strategic decisions that exacerbated issues with resource management. The first problem, evident particularly under Honorius, was the habit of prioritising suppressing usurpers over expelling 'barbarians'.[422] On the one hand, this ceded the political initiative to 'barbarian' groups, as clearly happened in southern Gaul and Hispania.[423] On the other, this led to the more frequent suborning of 'barbarian' groups in pursuit of the defeat of rival Roman regimes. Given that these groups were more likely to expect land settlements, this caused the further involution of the cash-based tax system, as the markets that had heretofore relied on the existence of salaried soldiers to survive progressively atrophied. This development is attested by the increasing absence of coinage from frontier military sites in archaeological finds dating to the fifth century; the troops were evidently being recouped in some other fashion.[424] In the longer term, the cessation of coinage as military pay localised military service: if coins from distant mints were neither available nor required, then reward for

---

[422] *Narratio de imperatoribus domus Valentinianae et Theodosianae*, *Chron. Min. Saec. iv, v, vi, vii*, p. 629: "*This emperor* [Honorius]*, while he never had any success against external enemies, had great good fortune in destroying usurpers*"; Ward-Perkins (2005), 44; Merrony (2019), 130-131

[423] Kulikowski (2004), chpt. 7-8

[424] Burns (1994), 201

service would most likely have to be sourced from the immediate environs.[425] The second problem was that the imperial court expended vast quantities of resources attempting to keep the Italian landowning aristocracy onside in ways that, whilst making strategic sense, were nonetheless risky in fiscally strained circumstances. The governments of both Honorius and Valentinian III were, to quote Jones, “culpably lavish” in granting immunities or wiping out aristocratic debts, at least prior to the fall of North Africa.[426] Subsequent attempts to retake North Africa were substantial - Majorian’s involved 300 ships and a composite federate army, and Ricimer’s reportedly involved a force of 6,000 men – and the attempt of 468 required an eastern intervention that reportedly cost 169,000 lb. of gold.[427] The point is that the nascent royal court of Italy, although evidently keen under Odovacer and Theoderic to court aristocratic opinion, was far less politically beholding to the landowning aristocracy of Italy, as they depended for their power primarily on the newly established non-Roman landowners that made up their military followings. In short, the necessity of placating senatorial landowners who owned extensively in North Africa may in fact have priced the imperial regime out of competition. It is worth concluding, however, on the observation that the blame sometimes laid at the door of the senatorial aristocracy and the senior clergy in not paying their fair share towards Roman defence has been overstated in the past.[428] Whilst the number of “idle mouths”, endemic profiteering, and the poor relationship between the army and civilian élites were certainly problems, the bellicose policy favoured by the Roman aristocracy suggests that they understood implicitly the extent to which they owed their wealth and status to the continued existence of the state.[429] It is more likely that

[425] Ibid, 200

[426] E.g., *CTh*. XI.28.4 (13 Sept. 408), VI.2.25 (24 Feb. 426); *NVal*. IV. (440), X. (441); *LRE* I, 205, III. 39, n. 75; McEvoy (2013), 190, 240

[427] Expeditions of 440: Heather (2005), 701-702; Expedition of 460-461: Army - Procop. *Bell.* III.7.4; Sid. Ap. *Pan*. V, 474-9, 484; Fleet - Priscus, *fr.* 36(2); Sid. Ap. *Pan*. V, 446-448; *NMaj*. II (11 March 458); MacGeorge (2002), 205-206; Expedition (?) of 467: Hydat. 232 [236] s.a. 466-7; John Ant. *fr.* 207; MacGeorge (2002), 240, n. 130; Expedition of 469: Hydat. 241 [247] s.a. 468; Candidus, *fr.* 2 (193); Merrony (2019), 150

[428] Brown (1971), 119; Matthews (1975), 277

[429] Matthews (1975), 270

most élites continued to contribute, but that their resources were harder to realise owing to the continued unrest. The disassociation of élites from the fate of the imperial regime was likely a product, not a cause, of the collapse of the imperial superstructure.[430]

The maintenance of the political relationship between the imperial court and landowning élites could, however, exacerbate social weaknesses in times of crisis. This was primarily because the relationship was predicated on the shared understanding that the overwhelming majority of resources were going to be procured, by hook or by crook, from the empire's agricultural population. It should be remembered that, even at the best of times, taxation was both high and violent and that the gold economy had produced a vertiginously unequal society. Let us turn to two laws dating to the reigns of Valentinian III and Majorian, both dealing with the experience of tax collection. The first, promulgated in 450, states as follows:

> *"When such a tax investigator comes to a frightened province, accompanied by the ministers of his chicanery, in his exaltation he takes pride in the expensive services; he seeks the assistance of the provincial office staff; he often also joins to his service the scholarians, so that by multiplying both the number of men and of office staffs, he extorts by terror whatever is pleasing to his avarice. … scarcely does one investigator depart from a province when another rushes forth with new authority."* – *NVal*. I.3.1 (March 5th 450)

The second, promulgated in 458, states:

> *"The afflicted fortunes of the provincials have been exhausted by a varied and multiple exaction of tribute and by extraordinary burdens of fiscal payments, and this they have lost the substance for the customary tax … now no person before a provincial judge can convict the collectors of the regular tax who are terrible because of the authority of their superior imperial service and who rage against the vitals and to the ruin of the provincials, since the power of*

[430] Cf. Brown (1971), 119

the provincial court is subject and subservient to the arrogant apparitors…" – *NMaj.* II.1-2 (March 11th 458)

Crucially, both laws date to the aftermath of the tightening up of fiscal procedures following the fall of North Africa. It is noteworthy that, even at a time of acute crisis, the authorities tasked with tax collection do not appear to have ceased their regular depredations. If anything, profiteering seems to have increased in inverse proportion to the attention that the imperial government could devote to combatting it, as the regime of Valentinian III acknowledged when it stated that "We and Our nobles are constrained by the weight of other cares".[431] It is noteworthy that Majorian also attempted to reinforce the role of the *defensores* to act as a buffer between civic populations and his own tax collectors.[432] The point is that in the social economy of the late Roman world, overextraction did not stop at the water's edge – élites would keep extracting until the bitter end. However, the Roman tax system relied on overwhelming military superiority to cow attempted revolts, which could become unsustainable if this superiority no longer pertained or if any competing (i.e., cheaper) systems of protection were introduced. Geoffrey de Ste. Croix has argued that this is effectively what happened in the fifth century, as peasant populations joined the 'barbarians' and the *bagaudae* in significant numbers or retreated from out of the reach of élite control.[433] Beyond the revolt mentioned by Paulinus of Pella, Jerome attests to Pannonian citizens joining the 'barbarians' to ransack Gaul, and both Orosius and Salvian describe the desire of provincial populations to live under 'barbarian' rule rather than continuing to face the Roman tax system.[434] As we shall see in the next chapter (§4.3), the flight of the peasantry is reflected in the topography of rural settlement, a great deal of which escaped direct élite control in the post-Roman period. As Roman military power retreated, peasants who did not escape élite control would nonetheless find themselves transmitting resources to more proximate cities or rulers rather than to the distant imperial

---

[431] *NVal*. I.3.2 (March 5, 450)

[432] *NMaj*. III (May 8, 458)

[433] de Ste. Croix (1981), 474-475

[434] Jerome, *Ep*. 123.15.2; Paul. *Euch.* 328ff., esp. 333-6, in *CSEL* XVI.i.304; Oros. VII.41.7; Salv., *De gub. Dei* IV. 20-1, 30-1, V.17-18, 21-3, 25-6, 27-32, 34-44; de Ste. Croix (1981), 480-481

regime or regional standing armies. To that end, we might argue that the Roman tendency to allow both imperial officials and coordinate élites to engage in overextraction likely worked against the survival of the state once the military superiority necessary to sustain it had evaporated, and the social injunctions necessary to inform élites as and when to stop had never been cultivated. It is noteworthy that there are no recorded instances of post-Roman peasantries clamouring for the restoration of imperial rule.

3.5 Conclusion

In order to understand precisely what aspects of the imperial fiscal superstructure collapsed, let us return to our reformulation of Mark Merrony's honeycomb theory. The fiscal superstructure seems largely to have survived semi-intact on a municipal, provincial, and even diocesan level: only in Britain did the system wholly collapse in the fifth century. What changed, once the crises had abated, was the rulers to whom the imperial resource system was contributing: the nascent royal courts of the post-Roman west rather than the imperial government. We might go further in pointing out that the central apparatus of the command economy survived intact in Italy and parts of Illyricum into the sixth century under Odovacer and the Ostrogoths. Crucially, however, the system did not survive on either a prefectural or an imperial level. Insofar as these levels were coextensive with the empire itself – and I would argue that they were – the imperial fiscal system did not survive the fifth century.

If we assess our evidence in light of a dialectical opposition between internal and external factors for the end of the Roman fiscal system, then the external factors must carry the day: invasion, occupation, and settlement are the main reason for the disintegration on both the prefectural and the imperial level. However, this does not mean that internal factors were negligible. The comparative weakness of the imperial court as a political configuration had already set in before the invasions (§7.4), and this must account for why it expended so much valuable time and capital on fighting civil wars and usurpations rather than focussing its attentions on the invaders. This weakness also explains the survival of the central apparatus past the extinction of the court itself. Beyond this, the burden of taxation, the transition to the gold economy, and endemic profiteering all served to exacerbate social

weaknesses within the empire. The state required overwhelming military superiority to guarantee that its taxpayers would remain *in situ*, as well as the absence of cheaper monopolies of violence: these factors were both voided in the fifth century. However, we must once again stress that there was no evidence that these internal factors would spell the end of imperial rule without first being catalysed: the invasion of 406 was required to set the dominos tumbling.

Lastly, we must note that the long-term collapse of the imperial fiscal system is one of the factors that gives substance and form to the period of late antiquity. Except for in Britain, neither taxation nor Roman methods for collecting and transmitting it ended in the fifth century. Instead, taxes were redirected to kings who parleyed the revenues into political capital by drawing aristocrats towards their courts in hope of royal munificence. However, in every circumstance taxation appears to have succumbed in the long term to the politics of land. Once it had been shorn of its original purpose in paying for a salaried standing army, taxation became yet another in a series of local resources that could be bequeathed to coordinate élites in exchange for loyalty and service: it thus gradually became subsumed into rents and ceased to be a politically viable aspect of state resources. The stability and independence of resources for rulers did not end, and thus the state did not end (*pace* Britain). What ended was the Roman purpose for these resources, and the Roman method for managing them, as the basis for the state came to depend entirely on land by the eighth century.

A Class-Based System of Surplus Extraction and Stratification

4.1 Introduction

> *"Who could be more oppressive than a landowner? If one looks at the manner in which they treat their poor tenants, they appear fiercer than barbarians. They continually impose intolerable taxes on men who are weakened by hunger and suffering and exact from them the labours of burdensome drudgery, using their bodies as if they were those of asses or mules".*[435]

In *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World* (1981), Geoffrey de Ste. Croix argued that "the principal reason for the decline of Classical civilisation" was the intensity of exploitation fostered by the Roman fiscal system. "[T]he Roman political system", according to de Ste. Croix, "facilitated a most intense and ultimately destructive economic exploitation of the great mass of the people, whether slave or free, and it made radical reform impossible. The result was that the propertied class … who had deliberately created this system for their own benefit, drained the life-blood from their world and thus destroyed Graeco-Roman civilisation over a large part of the empire…".[436] This was a perspective with a noble pedigree, traceable back to Edward Gibbon's assertion that "the stupendous fabric" of the empire "yielded to the pressure of its own weight".[437] It can be found in A.H.M. Jones's assertions concerning the proliferation of 'idle mouths', and in Peter Brown's suggestion that "altogether, the prosperity of the Mediterranean world seems to have drained to the top".[438] As we saw (§3.4.2), de Ste. Croix backed up this argument with reference to the voluminous literary material describing the depredations of the tax system and its agents, the misery of the provincials, and their attempts to rise up against their overlords. It is a compelling picture, and one might ask why we need look further than the wholesale

---

[435] Joh. Chrys. *Hom. in Matt.* 61.3; Marcone (2008), 358

[436] de Ste. Croix (1981), 502

[437] Gibbon, *Decline and Fall*, Chpt. XXXVIII, 119; de Ste. Croix (1981), 503

[438] *LRE* II, 1045-1048; Brown (1971), 34

withdrawal of popular support for the cause of the disintegration of the western Roman state.

And yet, the revolution never came. The conflicts detailed by de Ste. Croix may have weakened the Roman fiscal system during a period of crisis, but they do not seem to have wrought any lasting changes to labour relations or to the class structure. The empire passed from existence, and yet peasants continued to labour, and aristocrats continued to exploit them. It is here that we must distinguish, as de Ste. Croix did, between active political class-struggle, the tip of the iceberg, and the class structure that cruises beneath the waves of history. It is the whole iceberg, not merely its visible crest, that is the focus of the present chapter. Here, we ask the following questions: did changes to the Roman class structure bring about the end of the Roman state, and what were the consequences of the end of the Roman state for the class structure of the post-Roman west?

Textual sources will only take us so far in this endeavour. Despite the sound and fury of Salvian or Libanius, we must remember that our written accounts all originate either with aristocrats or the state, and all had axes to grind.[439] This injunction is of particular importance when we come to legislation, as it is all too easy to fall into the trap of assuming that laws were intended to describe social relations accurately. One could do worse than to keep Domenico Vera's pithy admonition in mind that, "to continue to do economic and social history starting from the Code is like crushing water in a mortar".[440] Despite this, it is worth restating Wickham's assertions that laws are both reflective of imperial values and imagery, in that they reflect perceptions of social dependence and change, and that laws had a real impact upon social relations insofar as they influenced the normative behaviour of all social classes.[441] This does not expressly require that laws were always enforced, only that there was a realistic expectation that they could be.[442] Wills and testaments, where they are available, can give us some indication as to the scale and scope of landholdings,

[439] For Salvian, Stutz (2023); for Libanius, Van Hoof (2014)

[440] Vera (1992-3), 320; Wickham (2005), 522, 524; see also King (1972), ix

[441] Wickham (2005), 524-525

[442] Ibid, 525

although we thereby run the real risk of generalising based on a limited number of sources. Further, accounts of estate management such as the Visigothic slates or Ravenna papyri can sometimes inform us about the nature of labour relations, although these are limited in number and are drawn from different contexts. Given the limitations of our textual evidence, archaeology must fill the void. The archaeological record – and ceramic and landscape surveys in particular – can tell us a great deal about settlement patterns, distribution networks, and the changing nature of urban or rural élite residences. However, the record is silent on the aims and intentions of its originators: we might spy a nucleated settlement close to a villa, but we cannot know the nature of the labour relations between the two. Furthermore, to confront the post-Roman archaeological record is to confront a sea of sub- and microregional realities; deriving general observations from the record is necessarily difficult, as such observations require consistent patterns and inconsistency is the post-Roman norm. The present analysis is therefore a synthesis of both the available textual and archaeological material, with a view to establishing broad trends across the region with reference to micro-realities when they seem salient. In general, it is an analysis of the transition from a relatively uniform, 'Roman' reality to a more localised post-Roman reality: the exact details of this new reality are important, but it is the transition itself that is our specific concern.

Broadly speaking, this chapter deals with the visible transition in the archaeological record from a world of greater to one of lesser material complexity, a shift that affected the whole post-Roman social structure to various degrees. The aim of this chapter is to claim that post-Roman social structures operated on a reduced socioeconomic scale relative to their Roman predecessors, albeit structures that operated along more or less the same patterns of exploitation. There is a temptation to see changes to material sophistication as driven almost exclusively by cultural concerns: for example, militarising post-Roman aristocracies eschewing the creature comforts of their Roman predecessors purely out of choice rather than as a result of more strained economic circumstances. Whilst this certainly may have occurred, I would argue that cultural tastes, particularly those affecting the whole of societies rather than just the narrow band of élites still capable of importing and consuming luxury goods, are usually conditioned by both the availability of resources and the sophistication of production, both of which are tied to socioeconomic realities. To put it

another way, I do not view the reduction in material complexity by the eighth century as being restricted to a matter of cultural change: it is a matter of structural atrophy affecting the range of cultural choices available.

4.2 Defining a Class-Based System

First, we must ask what is meant by "a class-based system of surplus extraction and stratification".[443] It will serve our purposes here to use the definitions offered by Geoffrey de Ste. Croix in *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World* (1981), based as they are on a contextual analysis of Marx's work. 'Class' is defined as "a relationship" which characterises "the way in which exploitation is embodied in a social structure": 'exploitation' is defined as "the appropriation of part of the product of the labour of others".[444] 'A class', by contrast, is defined as "a group of persons in a community identified by their position in the whole system of social production, defined above all according to their relationship (primarily in terms of the degree of ownership or control) to the conditions of production … and to other classes".[445] Classes are then organised into a 'class society' or 'class-based system', which de Ste. Croix defines as follows:

> "…one or more of the smaller classes, in virtue of their control over the conditions of production … will be able to exploit … the larger classes, and thus constitute an economically and socially (and therefore probably also politically) superior class or classes. The exploitation may be direct or individual, as for example of wage-labourers, slaves, serfs, coloni, tenant-farmers, or debtors by particular employers, masters, money-lenders or landlords, or it may be indirect and collective, as when taxation, military conscription, forced labour or other services are extracted solely or disproportionally from a particular class or classes … by a State dominated by a superior class." – Geoffrey de Ste. Croix (1981), 44

[443] Wickham (2005), 57

[444] de Ste. Croix (1981), 32, 43

[445] Ibid, 43-44

When considering degrees of exploitation, de Ste. Croix points out that exploitation can be either direct or indirect, and posits a further category which he terms 'imperialism', defined as follows:

> "…involving some kind of economic/political subjection to a foreign power outside the community … in which the exploitation effected by the imperial power (in the form of tribute, for instance), or by its individual members, need not necessarily involve direct control over the conditions of production. In such a situation … the class struggle within the subject community is very likely to be affected, for example through support given by the imperial power or its agents to the exploiting class or classes within that community, if not by the acquisition by the imperial power or its individual members of control over the conditions of production in the subject community." – Geoffrey de Ste. Croix (1981), 44

The Roman state best fits this imperial category. From the above, we might define 'a class-based system of surplus extraction and stratification' as a statement in favour of the fundamental importance of the means of production and exploitation in giving shape to the social structure, which resolves itself once a certain degree of specialisation has been reached into a dominant class of expropriators and a subordinate class of labourers – the upper and lower classes.

However, to make use of 'class' as the fundamental heuristic quality of societal relations, as both de Ste. Croix and Wickham do, is to face a series of interpretive problems. The first is that 'class' is not an inert concept: it is an analytical tool for assessing the progression of socioeconomic relations from one form to another. If 'class' can be proven useful in analysing ancient societies, then this implies that it *must* remain useful in analysing modern societies. This is problematic for those historians who believe that the past must be exclusively understood in its own context.[446] Such historians have tended to avoid using

[446] E.g., Millar (1977); Barnwell (1992), (1996)

‘class’ when describing ancient social relations, as this would risk extrapolating a modern theory backwards through time. Overwhelmingly, this has meant substituting ‘class’ for ‘status’ or ‘order’ in the Weberian sense, which is the approach taken by Moses Finley (1971), Ramsey MacMullen (1988), and Arnaldo Marcone (2008), amongst others.[447] Such accounts tend to focus on the vertical relationships inherent in the patronage structure, which, it is argued, formed the spine of societal relations and social mobility.[448] However, whilst there is no inherent problem with using ‘status/order’ to *describe* ancient societal relations, a problem emerges when each account is required to explain how societal relations were generated. As de Ste. Croix pointed out, both Weber and Finley ultimately accepted property as the predicate for status qualifications, despite Finley’s assertion that “the nature and conditions of labour in antiquity precluded the emergence of…the idea of a working class”; MacMullen broadly divides his society into ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’ despite his statement that “a sense of class never developed” in the Roman world; and Marcone, after arguing that social levels were too broad and heterogeneous to be termed classes, nonetheless goes out of his way to point to wealth as most readily determining social position.[449] The problem seems more historiographical than historical. Those antithetical to the analytical usefulness of ‘class’ can point out, with some justification, that their opponents are superimposing a modern theory of societal relations onto an ancient context in which it has no explicit reference. Conversely, proponents of ‘class’ may point out that using any other descriptive system for ancient societal relations tends to falter when we ask what determines these relations, as the answer is ‘wealth’, and it follows that we must then ask how wealth was generated.

The second problem, as we have previously alluded, is that ‘class’ and ‘class struggle’ are frequently restricted to the realm of conscious political action.[450] By such readings we would

[447] Finley (1971), 67-68; MacMullen (1988), 119; Marcone (2008), 339; de Ste. Croix (1981), 87-88

[448] See Marcone (2008), 361-363; MacMullen (1988); see also Wickham (2005) 527-529 for some salient thoughts on the symbiotic relationship between patronage and taxation

[449] de Ste. Croix (1981), 92; Finley (1971), 81; MacMullen (1988), 119; Marcone (2008), 339, 357, based on Alföldy (1975), 165-177

[450] E.g., MacMullen (1988), 119; de Ste. Croix (1981), 58; Finley (1971), 68; Marcone (2008), 339

need not only a Tibatto, but that Tibatto had left a precise account of his express intent to overthrow the class-based social order and seize the means of production.[451] This is wholly reasonable – as historians we must address the evidence we have, rather than that we wish we had – but it does sidestep both the scarcity of general evidence in our period and the fact that our textual evidence almost entirely originates with élites, who rarely had any interest in discussing the goings-on of the poor.[452] In other words, just because we don't have explicit accounts doesn't mean that the events they may have described did not occur. As it stands, the only direct attestation to acute class struggle we have is the account of the revolt at Vasates recorded by Paulinus of Pella (§3.4.2).[453] This, at least, indicates that uprisings against the nobility were plausible. If, however, we accept Geoffrey de Ste. Croix's interpretation that both class consciousness and class struggle are endemic features of societal relations that do not require political action, then the wider scope of evidence – from attestations of *civitates* hoarding food during shortages to the extent that rural peasants starved in the streets, to the possibility of the odd sabotaged tool on a villa estate – can contribute to our understanding of class relations.[454] Considering the limitations of the evidence, such an approach does not seem beyond the reasonable, although caution must always be advised.

4.3 Peasantries

The exploited classes encompass all those within the empire who worked to create a surplus for others to live off. In a world in which around 80% of the total population were subsistence farmers and in which approximately 90% of all revenues were derived from the

[451] *PLRE* IIB, 1118-1119; for Tibatto's revolt, see *Chron. Gall. s.a.* 435, 437

[452] Marcone (2008), 339-340; Amm. Marc. XIV.6.25 for a contemporary statement to that effect; de Ste. Croix (1981), 66. Salvian, and other Christian figures, are of course the counterpoint, although they were usually aristocrats who spoke from a privileged institutional position

[453] Paul., *Euch*. 328ff., esp. 333-6; de Ste. Croix (1981), 480, 651 n. 18

[454] de Ste. Croix (1981), 57, 65, 219-221; *LRE* II, 1044; see e.g., Lib. *Or.* XXVII.6, 14 for a famine in Antioch in 384-5; Amb. *Off*. III.45 ff. suggests that it was the usual practice to expel all non-residents from Rome during famines; *LRE* II, 810-811, III, 263-264, nn. 95-96

land, by far the most important aspect of exploitation was that directed by landowners against agricultural labour.[455] This class can be identified via textual sources – census data, legislation, wills, etc., – or via archaeological means, such as field surveys.[456] On the face of it, the question of how the exploited classes were affected by the end of the western Roman state may seem deceptively straightforward: they entered our period as oppressed subsistence cultivators and left it as oppressed subsistence cultivators. As Chris Wickham argues, the peasantry was probably the class least directly affected by the end of the Roman state, but this does not mean that there were no consequences to speak of. Rather, we are dealing with a period of gradual change, in which peasants saw shifts in the intensity of exploitation, the burden of fiscal obligations, the nature of landowning, and their access to market goods.[457]

Broadly speaking, the fourth-century landscape in which peasants would have lived was defined, overwhelmingly if not universally, by a settlement pattern dominated by estate-centres interspersed with scattered smallholdings.[458] Nucleated peasant settlements were relatively rare, which stands the west in sharp contrast to the village-dominated settlement patterns of the contemporary east.[459] The settlement pattern was mirrored in the use of *fundi* (units of ownership) to describe geographical locations; this practice can be found in the sixth-century Ravenna papyri, as well as in the *Tablettes Albertini* dating to c.490 from Tunisia, which document a *fundus Tuletianos* divided into units of agricultural products.[460] There is also, in southern Gaul, northern Italy, and northern Iberia, some evidence for the development of fortified hilltop *castra* by the turn of the fifth century, a phenomenon which seems unconnected from the existence of the Roman state and which would spread in the

[455] *LRE* I, 452; II, 769-770; Wickham (2009), 36; Hopkins (1980), 104

[456] Ward-Perkins (2008a), 336

[457] Wickham (2005), 519-520

[458] Ibid, 466; Ward-Perkins (2008a), 328

[459] Ward-Perkins (2008a), 332

[460] Ibid, 470-471

post-Roman period.[461] The Roman west in c.400, in general, was a world dominated by landowners and contextualised by property-ownership. This is the baseline from which any change should be measured.

We should dispense here with the Marxian metanarrative which posits that the transition from the classical to the medieval worlds can be found in the transition from the slave-based to the feudal system of labour exploitation.[462] The argument runs that the slave-based economy of the early empire gave way to the colonate of the late empire, and that the post-Roman world inherited a system of labour relations based on bound tenantry.[463] This metanarrative may be partially responsible for arguments that the end of the Roman state allowed aristocracies to immediately intensify their exploitation of dependant peasantries, thereby transitioning the colonate directly into medieval serfdom.[464] The problem with this metanarrative is that all indications point to the fact that tenantry, whether bound or free, was the normal procedure of labour relations across the entire Roman and post-Roman period.[465] Chattel-slavery never seems to have been practised widely outside of central Italy, Sicily, and parts of Greece; it required significant numbers of cheap slaves to be economically viable, and therefore can only have been practised by the richest landowners at times of high availability; and nonetheless seems to have been going out of fashion by the second century AD, when the younger Pliny regarded it as an incorrigible aberration.[466] In late antiquity, the agricultural slaves in our documents are found more frequently settled as nuclear families either in small groups on medium-sized farms or individually on single plots of land: it is therefore difficult to distinguish them from

[461] Ward-Perkins (2008a), 479: Monte Cildá, La Yecla, and Puig Rom in N. Iberia; Monte Barro, Belmonte, and Invillino in N. Italy; Lombren, Roc de Pampelune, and St-Blaise in S. Gaul

[462] Marx, *Cap.* III. 831; de Ste. Croix (1981), 53-54; Wickham (2005), 259, 261

[463] E.g., Finley (1971), 83, 85

[464] E.g., Goffart (1989), 198-253

[465] Fustel de Coulanges (1885); Wickham (2005), 521, 525

[466] Wickham (2005), 262, 276-277; *LRE* II, 794; see also Hopkins (1978), 12, 99-111; Plin. *Nat. Hist.* XVIII.21.35-6; Columella I.3.12; Plin. *Ep.* III.xix.7; de Ste. Croix (1981), 238-239

bound or free tenants in terms of labour and exploitation.[467] Conversely, whilst the number of *coloni* may have been increasing in the fourth and fifth centuries, we must remember that our surviving sources overwhelmingly focus on large estates, where *coloni* may have been preponderant anyway.[468] Indeed, we do not possess the statistical data necessary to determine what percentage of labourers were either slaves or tenants at any point during Roman history.[469] Roman law collected in the Theodosian Code (V.17-18) does little to distinguish between *coloni* and slaves – both were essentially unfree as far as the Roman state was concerned – and does not detail labour relations, only that fugitive labourers be returned forthwith to their landlords; the same is true of the equivalent law in the Visigothic code (*LV* IX.1.21, AD 702). What texts we do possess point to tenantry. An estate description from a sixth-century Ravennate church (*P. Ital.* 3) records dues and labour service owed by tenants near Padua, indicating demesne-type feudal relations; the *Tablettes Albertini* suggest smallholders leasing on a permanent basis under the *Lex Manciana*; and the 160 Visigothic slates (*pizarras visigodas*), primarily from Diego Álvaro, seem to imply bound tenantry, with rents paid to landlords in kind.[470] The indication, therefore, is that the fundamental nature of labour relations remained the same across the period; we are looking not for a fundamental rupture, but for a potential change in the intensity of exploitation.

4.3.1 Regional Survey

Let us turn now to an analysis of rural settlement patterns across the west, in order to determine the nature of labour relations from the archaeological evidence. From the broadly homogeneous late Roman reality expressed above, the period between the fourth

---

[467] MacMullen (1987); Brown (1984), 202-4 (sixth-century Italy); Bonnassie (1991), 71-74, 93-96 (for Visigothic Iberia); Ward-Perkins (2008a), 343 n. 64; de Ste. Croix (1981), 237; e.g., *CTh.* XVI.5.21 (392); *LRE* II, 793-795

[468] Ward-Perkins (2008a), 344; Carrié (1983); Wickham (2005), 521-522

[469] Ward-Perkins (2008a), 343

[470] Ravennate church estate: *P. Ital.* 3; Wickham (2005), 224-225, 271, 526. Albertini tablets: Courtois *et al.* (1952); Ward-Perkins (2008a), 340. Visigothic slates: Fernández (2017), 259

and eighth centuries sees an immense degree of sub- and microregional divergence that is difficult to contextualize with any specificity. The following survey is not exhaustive but will highlight important trends.

In North Africa, there is a sharp divergence in the scope and quality of evidence we have prior to and after the Vandal conquest.[471] The North African rural landscape in the late Roman period was highly variegated, but was nonetheless contextualized by landownership. Transhumance and pastoralism still occurred, but came to be heavily circumscribed by the late second and early third centuries AD.[472] The most conspicuous feature of the countryside were large estate centres (*fundi*/*villae*) serviced by dependent rural settlements (*vici*), as is outlined in a passage of the *agrimensores*, in which *vici* are almost universally named after their respective owners (e.g., *vicus Aureli*, *vicus Iuliani*, *vicus Valeriani* etc).[473] These villa estates were frequently owned by the richest of senatorial or imperial landowners – the property of Count Heraclianus, taken into imperial receivership after his failed revolt, was reportedly valued at 2000 lb. of gold.[474] Alongside such estate centres we find indigenous fortified settlements, known as *castellae*, which served as a focus for their own networks of dependent rural landscapes.[475] *Castellae*, which were essentially fortified granaries that coalesced and dominated villages, survived well into the Arab period: the new rulers came to refer to them as *ksour*.[476] As the Albertini Tablets demonstrate, patterns of landownership based on tenantry continued into the Vandal period. According to J.A. Greene, rural settlement around Carthage itself continued to coalesce in the fifth century and did not reach an apogee until the sixth.[477] However, as we shall discuss in §4.4.1.4, North Africa's settlement patterns were inextricable from the Mediterranean-wide export industry exemplified by the distribution of ARS ware, and were not sustainable without the

[471] Wickham (2005), 475

[472] Tertullian, *Adversus Iudaeos* 7.8; Banaji (2001), 13-14

[473] Banaji (2001), 12 n. 41

[474] Olymp. *fr.* 23; Banaji (2001), 14

[475] E.g., Plin. *NH.* 5.1.1; Amm. Marc. XXIX.5.25, 39, 44, 49, 55; Banaji (2001), 7-10

[476] Banaji (2001), 9

[477] Greene (1992); Banaji (2001), 16

corresponding influx of wealth and investment. It is notable that the Arab period seems to have seen a definitive swing back towards transhumance and pastoralism, representing possibly the most dramatic reversal of a rural settlement pattern in the post-Roman period.

In Italy, extensive field surveys conducted in the centre and south of the peninsula show a steady decline in rural prosperity between the third and sixth centuries, and by the seventh and eighth centuries it is difficult to find any traces of rural settlement at all, owing to the wholesale transition to perishable building materials.[478] Excavations in Lazio and Tuscany – for example, John Moreland's excavations around the monastery at Farfa, or excavations by Marco Valenti in southern Chianti – reveal variable landscapes, with some estate-centres, developing hilltop villages, and scattered individual houses by 700.[479] At Casteldebole in eastern Emilia, as in some areas of the southern Chianti, the rural settlement hierarchy appears to have broken down entirely by the early sixth century, as we find only scattered individual houses alongside a much-reduced estate-centre now partially covered by a cemetery.[480] Interestingly, it should be noted that in Lombard areas, by contrast to Byzantine areas, the *fundi*-based mode of geographical nomenclature gives way to reference by village-settlement (*vici*): this is how the edict of Rothari (643) refers to matters relating to peasants.[481]

In Mediterranean Gaul (Languedoc and Provence), a settlement hierarchy based on estate-centres lasts until the sixth century; where these estate centres remained occupied, as at Lunel Viel, La Ramière, Loupian, or Saint-André-de-Codols, the continuing occupation was on simpler material terms, eschewing stone buildings in favour of construction in timber.[482] Surveys of the surrounding countryside from the fifth and early-sixth century – for example, along the Golfe de Fos and around the *étangs* of Saint-Blaise – show significant numbers of

[478] Greene (1986), 103-109; Lewit (1991), esp.172-175, 188-192; Ward-Perkins (2008a), 325; (2008b), 355; Wickham (2005), 486

[479] Wickham (2005), 482-485

[480] Ibid, 480

[481] Rothari 19, 279, 340, 346; Wickham (2005), 487

[482] Raynaud (1990), (2001); Esmonde Cleary (2013), 446

new rural settlements.[483] Around Lunel Viel, Loupian, and Dassargues, excavations show a similar pattern of dispersed agricultural settlement in the same period, largely grouped around waterways, with sunken-featured buildings constructed from wood.[484] As previously noted, there is also a growth in the number of hilltop settlements settled in the late fifth-century, such as Roc de Pampelune, St-Blaise, Lombren, and La Màlene.[485] Quite how these related to the settlement hierarchy is unclear – they are sometimes fortified, but do not yield evidence of military activity, and it is unclear if élites were in residence.[486] The best guess is that they were more defensible positions for settlement in times when the Roman state could no longer guarantee security, but more cannot be said at this point. We find here, however, a growing distinction between the coherence of highland and lowland sites that will be mirrored elsewhere.

The settlement patterns of the Iberian Peninsula are extremely regionally diverse. In Catalonia, at sites such as El Bovalar, Vilaclara, and Puig Rom (a coastal hilltop *castrum*), we find a network of small villages composed of stone or wooden buildings by the late-seventh and early-eighth centuries.[487] This is reflected in Carolingian documentation for the ninth- and tenth-centuries, which show numerous lowland villages, although El Bovalar – a group of small stone buildings clustered around a church with a communal oil press – may have been unusually nucleated.[488] In the Pyrenees, ninth-century documentation reveals a pattern of nucleated villages (*villae* or *castra*), often with over a hundred occupants, structured identities, and evidence for peasant collective church-building.[489] On the Mediterranean coast between Murcia-Alicante, excavations conducted by Paul Reynolds and Sonia Gutíerrez have revealed a radically different landscape from Roman precedent.

[483] Trément (1999); Esmonde Cleary (2013), 446

[484] Esmonde Cleary (2013), 447

[485] Roc de Pampelune: Schneider (2007), 27-9, 34-8; La Màlene: Schneider and Raynaud (2011), 27-9; St-Blaise: Démains d'Archimbaud (1994); Esmonde Cleary (2013), 447-450; Wickham (2005), 479

[486] Esmonde Cleary (2013), 448-449

[487] Wickham (2005), 488

[488] Palol (1989); Wickham (2005), 488; Esmonde Cleary (2013), 444

[489] Baraut (1978), nn.I, 4-26 for the documents; Wickham (2005), 489

From the fifth century onwards, the settlement hierarchy dependent on estate-centres breaks down and we find instead a network of very small settlements with no clear hierarchy: this mirrors our finds in eastern Emilia.[490] There is a break in the lowland areas in settlement occupation dating to around the Arab conquest (early eighth century), whilst the highland areas show more coherence between the fifth and tenth centuries, when a settlement hierarchy was re-established. A similar, if less extreme, picture emerges from Antonio Gómez's excavations around Salobreña on the Granada coast, where we find a steady abandonment of estate-centres in the fifth and sixth centuries and relatively weak settlement hierarchies until around 900.[491] By contrast, settlement hierarchies in the Guadalquivir valley – based, for example, Juan Carlos Castillo's excavations around Jaén - seem to have remained relatively stable across the post-Roman period.[492] This is likely as a result of the survival of rich aristocracies in cities such as Mérida, Cordoba, and Seville, as well as the fact that 'Umayyad power came to be focussed on the area in the eighth century. Again, we find substantially more continuity at highland sites, as is evidenced by the Loja survey conducted by Miguel Jiménez.[493] On the Meseta, excavations around Madrid show some abandonment or simplification of estate-centres between the fifth and seventh centuries, such as at Tinto Juan de la Cruz and El Val, with a changeover in rural settlement patterns during the fifth century itself.[494] New settlements seeded in the fifth century, such as Congosto, Gózquez, La Indiana, El Pelícano, and El Soto/Encadenado, are characterised by "simple, sill-wall or sill-beam structures and post-built timber surface structures", sunken-featured buildings, and grain silos.[495] Congosto, which was nucleated around a single stone-founded building, lasted from the mid-fifth to the mid-seventh century; Gózquez and El Pelícano lasted from the mid-fifth to the later eighth.[496] The evidence presented here is extremely variable, but we can see both a general retreat of estate-centres, the levelling of

[490] Wickham (2005), 489

[491] Ibid, 490

[492] Ibid.

[493] Ibid, 491

[494] López Quiroga *et al.* (2006), 56-58; Esmonde Cleary (2013), 441-442

[495] Quirós Castillo and Vigil-Escalera Guirado (2006); Esmonde Cleary (2013), 442

[496] Esmonde Cleary (2013), 442-443

the vertiginous Roman settlement hierarchy, and the capacity for highland and hilltop sites to survive for longer and to grow more nucleated over time.

By contrast, our evidence for northern Gaul/Francia is both more extensive and more cohesive. Focussing on the Île de France region, we find that changes to the settlement hierarchy began earlier, in the mid-fourth century, with a move away from sophisticated estate-centres towards simpler and smaller *Grubenhäuser* buildings in a relatively dispersed settlement pattern.[497] These would, by the mid-sixth century, resolve themselves into village layouts, such as that found at Goudelancourt-les-Pierrepont (Aisne): "groups of modular farmstead units, sometimes arrayed in tight groups (of varying size), sometimes more scattered".[498] There is further evidence for the seeding of new sites, such as Herblay, Pontavert, Pincevent, Juvincourt-et-Damary, Berry-au-Bac, Villiers-le-Sec, and Serris, as well as for a break in occupation from the Roman period but with medieval settlement continuing on the same site: for example, in excavations at Marne-la-Vallée, 55% of twenty late Roman sites were still occupied in the seventh century.[499] The evidence, therefore, is for estate-centres to have gradually resolved themselves into villages, with significantly less visible social stratification within settlements. Similar patterns have emerged in Rhineland excavations around Cologne, Aachen, and Krefeld.[500] The extent of nucleation on such sites by the sixth century is debatable. The law on migration into villages, *De migrantibus,* contained in the *Pactus legis Salicae* (c.510) requires outside authorities to adjudicate on the aims of the villagers, suggesting that there was as yet insufficient nucleation for an intra-village court.[501] Furthermore, in a similar development as that in Lombard Italy, the term *villa* came gradually to mean 'village' as a geographical location rather than as an estate-unit; this is reflected in the anecdotes of Gregory of Tours, the *Formulae Andecavenses* (Angers), and the *Formulae Arvernenses* (Clermont).[502] From this, we can conclude that

[497] Wickham (2005), 505; Van Ossel (2006), (2010); Esmonde Cleary (2013), 452

[498] Nice (1994), 21-63; Wickham (2005), 504-505, 510

[499] Wickham (2005), 505, 507; Esmonde Cleary (2013), 452

[500] Ibid, 509

[501] *Pactus*, cc. 102; Wickham (2005), 513

[502] Wickham (2005), 510

Roman settlement patterns largely survived, albeit in a simpler architectural and material idiom; that villages as cohesive settlement units were emerging, if very slowly; and that, based on the decline of c.45% on Roman settlement patterns, that the rural population had nonetheless substantially receded in the fifth century and after.

The evidence for northern Gaul/Franica contrasts with that of lowland Britain. Here, Anglo-Saxon rural settlements such as Mucking in Essex or West Stow in Suffolk, show similar building types to those found on the continent, but often much smaller and in much less nucleated settlements.[503] Indeed, the English settlement pattern is most comparable to Emilia and Murcia-Alicante, with essentially no settlement hierarchy emerging until the seventh century. From this point onwards, settlements such as Wicken Bonhunt (Essex, seventh-ninth centuries), Pennyland (Buckinghamshire, sixth-eighth centuries), Yarnton (Oxfordshire, sixth-tenth centuries), and Catholme (Staffordshire, sixth-tenth centuries) demonstrate an English countryside moving towards the settlement patterns already established in Francia.[504] This ties in with the evidence for a profound socioeconomic crisis affecting Britain in the fifth century, from which a settlement hierarchy had to be resurrected.

4.3.2 Observations

The first feature of note is that rural settlements are universally materially less complex or durable, with construction in stone overwhelmingly being replaced by much simpler structures in wood. On a local level, this would indicate an absence of the specialised tradesmen necessary for such construction methods, or the absence of the necessary wealth with which to pay them. This points to the twin-importance of the Roman fiscal system in stimulating exchange networks and of aristocratic demand in prompting specialisation: both appear to have been required for the peasantry to retain material sophistication. This tallies with the gradual cessation of minting the copper coins outside of

[503] Ibid, 502

[504] Ibid, 503

a few entrepôts (Seville, Marseilles, and Rome) after the fourth/fifth centuries.[505] Essentially, peasants lost access to the sophisticated Roman exchange networks, probably in the mid-fourth century for Britain and northern Gaul, and in the mid-sixth century across the western Mediterranean. Secondly, we note the move to hilltop sites during and after the fifth century, which showed more longevity than their lowland counterparts. What these meant for social stratification is unclear: Simon Esmonde Cleary argued that they were evidence of a new mode of élite power projection across the countryside, although they may as easily have been peasant communities condensing to escape the clutches of lowland landlords.[506] Thirdly, we note the beginnings of a process of nucleation into villages, coupled with a growing identification with geography and community over property structures (in Francia and Lombard Italy at least); the nucleated villages and peasant collective activity of the Carolingian ninth century were some way away, but the beginnings of that process are nonetheless visible. Lastly – and we will be returning to these points in more detail – we note both a levelling of the settlement hierarchy, with élite buildings being far more similar to peasant buildings than before, as well as a retreat in the domination of landscapes by estate-centres.

There are, I think, three general observation we might draw about the interrelationship between our evidence and the end of the western Roman state. The first is that, outside of areas such as Britain, Emilia, and Murcia-Alicante where the settlement hierarchy effectively collapsed, there is evidence for broad continuity with lower population density and more strained economic circumstances. The overall fact of exploitation via tenantry remains consistent. The second is, as stated above, the importance of the Mediterranean exchange network fostered by the Roman fiscal system in promoting the availability of durable building materials and sophisticated craftsmanship for peasant settlements. The correlation in time between the disintegration of this system and the reduced wealth of the peasantry is too obvious to ignore; peasants evidently needed the fiscal engine of the empire if they wanted tiled rooves and stone floors. The third, and most crucial, can be seen in the growing nucleation and (possibly) in the greater prominence of hilltop settlements in the

[505] Ward-Perkins (2005), 113, 207 n. 38

[506] E.g., Esmonde Cleary (2013), 449

fifth century and after. On one level, this may have been a reaction to the increasing absence of security in the post-Roman west. However, it is plausible that, without the despotic power and infrastructural reach of the Roman state behind them, the capacity for élites to dominate peasants and command surpluses had substantially decreased, and that this allowed peasants to more effectively slip the leash in the immediate post-Roman centuries. Wickham has postulated a 'peasant-mode' of production, in which production fell back to the level of the individual household, with household economies linked together for mutual support, with corresponding low levels of labour intensity, specialisation, and market exchange.[507] This mode, he argues, will have achieved greater prominence across the post-Roman west as landlordly control retreated, and will have been found interspersed with areas where the landlord-tenant relationship still pertained. I find this argument convincing and would conclude that in the absence of the Roman state, it is likely that peasants were freer from direct control than they had been in centuries. In the *longue durée*, this relatively disintegrated landscape would lead both to greater nucleation into villages and greater landlordly control in the ninth century and after.

4.4 Aristocracies

Aristocracies, or élites, are the exploiting or propertied classes, all those who lived off the surpluses generated by others. The concept of what constitutes a premodern aristocracy encompasses a wide variation in wealth and status, although the common criterion is usually political power founded in landed wealth.[508] Chris Wickham outlined six criteria that can varyingly serve to identify the ideal-type aristocrat: "distinction of ancestry; landed wealth; position in an official hierarchy; imperial or royal favour; recognition by other political leaders; and lifestyle".[509] As regards class relations, aristocracies can be identified in a number of different ways. Textual sources, originating as they did overwhelmingly with aristocrats, are an excellent identifier, as are archaeological remains such as elaborate villas or townhouses, mausoleums, grave goods, epigraphy, and general evidence of conspicuous

[507] Wickham (2005), 535-550

[508] Wickham (2005), 153

[509] Ibid, 154

consumption. On the face of it, the most obvious feature is that aristocracies and a class-based system survived the end of the western empire.[510] However, the straightforward dialectic between the weakening of state power and the strengthening of aristocracies that is evident from the ninth century onwards should not be taken for granted. Instead, we will explore if and when the Roman aristocratic structure gave way to a recognisably post-Roman structure, and what role, if any, was played by the end of the western Roman state in this transition.

To accomplish this task, we much first establish what constitutes a Roman aristocracy. There are many ways of approaching such a question, but for our purposes here we must focus on socio-economic over cultural phenomena. Generally speaking, we can identify a porous five-part Roman aristocracy: the imperial family; the Roman senatorial aristocracy; imperial officeholders, whether civilian or military; the episcopate; and provincial landowners. The first and most conspicuous feature of these aristocracies is that they were frequently extremely wealthy, and that the disparity in wealth between the richest and least prosperous aristocrats was often vertiginous (§2.3). This implies that the capacity of Roman aristocrats to extract surpluses from the population was relatively high by comparison to other areas and periods. Secondly, we note that the richer aristocrats – such as Q. Aurelius Symmachus or Melania the Younger, for whom we have documentary evidence – often owned property across the span of the empire.[511] Below the senatorial firmament, we can detect members of the élite such as Ausonius, Sidonius Apollinaris, or Paulinus of Pella, who owned properties on a regional rather than an interregional level but who were nonetheless very wealthy. The property-holding of most provincial aristocrats will likely have been restricted to their immediate city-territories, but the crucial point is that the capacity for long-range landholding was available. The Roman state facilitated the spread of landholding and the extraction of surpluses by maintaining the standing army, which provided security and allowed the state to bully recalcitrant peasants back into line. The state also provided infrastructure, such as standardised law and courts, currency, accounting, weights and

[510] Esmonde Cleary (2013), 437; Papworth (2021)

[511] Symmachus: Symm. *Ep.* VII.66; Matthews (1975), 24-25; Melania the Younger: Pall. *Hist. Laus.* 61; Geront., *V. Mel.* 10-12

measures, and so forth. Furthermore, it also had a habit of writing off aristocratic debts (§3.4.2). In return, the state could expect aristocrats to pay taxes in cash and kind. In cultural terms, Roman aristocracies can be identified by the primacy of the civilian outlook embodied in the *paideia* and the preference for *otium*;[512] by their preference for city-dwelling;[513] and by their political and cultural orientation towards the imperial court, from which all offices, honours, and prestige were ultimately derived.[514]

In the following section, we will conduct a second regional survey, as the evidence for the transition between Roman and post-Roman aristocracies demonstrates the same degree of variation as we found with peasantries. Three criteria have been selected for analysis: the survival of villas as a mode of labour exploitation and surplus extraction; the textual evidence for the spread and scale of élite landholding; and the coherence of exchange networks for fine-ware ceramics. Villas have been selected as a criterion because they were a distinctively Roman phenomenon that spanned the entire western Roman world, and because their subsequent disappearance was a ubiquitous feature: we may therefore be able to offer a general observation for the whole region based on our findings. In the late Roman context, the 'villa economy' was based on the economic rationale of the production and mobilisation of significant surpluses for the purposes of taxation and market exchange: the end of the villa phase may then imply something about changes to the viability of this rationale.[515] Landholding patterns have been selected because they can give us some idea of the disintegration of a relatively homogeneous region – the Roman west – into a series of

---

[512] The *Paideia*: Matthews (1975), 7-9; *LRE* II, 1021-1024; Wickham (2005), 157-158; (2009), 29-31; Brown (1992), 3-4; Heather (2008), 439; Lib. *Ep.* 994.2 (XI. 124) for Libanius' misgivings about the difference between the *paideia* and the new diktats of Christian piety; *Otium*: Matthews (1975), 1-31, esp. 9-12; Symm. *Ep.* I.23, 26, 42, 92; II.27; III.70; VI.38; VII.50, 117; VIII.13; see *Ep.* I.58 for Symmachus's admonitions of Petronius Probus; see also Anon., *Expositio Totius Mundi et Gentium* 55 (ed. Rougé, *SChr* 124, 194 (1966)): "although they [senators] could hold office, they are unwilling to do so, since they prefer to live in ease and enjoy their possessions".

[513] Sid. *Epp*. I.6, VII.15, VIII.8; *Carm.* XXII.ii.180-91; de Ste. Croix (1981), 10; Wickham (2005), 467-468, 595; Dey (2015), 2

[514] Heather (2008), 438-439

[515] Esmonde Cleary (2013), 267-268

sub- and micro-regions; this adds a political dimension that can structure our understanding of the socio-economic situation. Lastly, fine-ware ceramic patterns have been chosen because, as Wickham argues, aristocratic demand structured exchange networks; if demand changed, then this implies something about the wealth-index and coherence of regional aristocrats, as well as the extent of the specialisation of production.[516] By combining our findings, we may be able to gain some insight into the scale of aristocracies, and the nature of their labour relations with post-Roman peasantries.

'Scale' is the key word here. As with peasantries, the most conspicuous feature of post-Roman aristocracies is that they lived in a world that was significantly less materially complex than its predecessor. We know that post-Roman kings and aristocrats were often very rich (§3.4.1) – in the case of Merovingian élites, fabulously so – and therefore we must ask why this wealth did not translate into more impressive material surroundings. Cultural explanations, such as the militarisation or Christianisation of élites, only explain socioeconomic circumstances to an extent. In defining economic scale, Wickham pointed to bulk goods produced to a median standard, such as cloth, iron, or ceramics: "[t]he level of productive organisation of these goods, the distance they are moved, and the degree to which any given product type dominates local availability in any given area, are all elements that need to be kept in mind when assessing economic scale".[517] I would argue not only that this basic conception of scale can reflexively be applied to the scale of aristocracies: if there was less demand and a less complex material culture, we can also argue that the socioeconomic scale of the aristocracy had decreased. This is important, because a stable, vertiginously wealthy, and infrastructurally supported aristocracy, such as that of the late Roman period, is logically more capable of exploiting peasants than an aristocracy that is not structured to this scale. In correlation to our findings with the peasantry, I would argue that the scale of the post-Roman aristocracy had decreased in most areas, and that this is the reason that peasants had a greater ability to evade the demands of élites in the post-Roman centuries.

---

[516] Wickham (2005), 706-707

[517] Wickham (2005), 700

It should be said that none of our criteria is ideal. Let us deal with the drawbacks of villas first. Our excavations of villas have tended to focus on the luxurious *partes urbanae* – the élite residence – over the more functional *partes rusticae* – the estate-centres engaged in production.[518] The survival or disappearance of *partes urbanae* probably tells us more about the changing architectural tastes of élites than it does about their economic circumstances. Furthermore, just because the monumental estate-centre ceased to be maintained does not mean that an estate-centre working on the same labour relations did not persist in its place. Indeed, the archaeological record alone cannot tell us about the specifics of labour relations between a *pars urbana* and the surrounding rural settlements, or even if the two were connected. In addition, villa-excavations have not been even across the region: the relative absence of North African excavation is a particularly irksome lacuna. As regards élite landowning, our documentation is patchy: we possess significantly more for both Merovingian Francia and Lombard Italy than we do for Visigothic Iberia, complicating the attempt to draw general conclusions. Furthermore, we do not possess evidence for the property-holding of kings, who were always by far the richest aristocrats, particularly in Lombard Italy. Ceramic patterns are, as has been extensively argued elsewhere, the best indicator we have for economic complexity and scale – they are infinitely more useful than luxury goods, which will always be marginal to exchange anywhere and at any time – but they are only a reflection of wider exchange networks.[519] The ceramic record can tell us about the complexity and scale of the network, but it is mute on the context: for instance, it can show us that the northern Gallic network remained relatively robust across the period, whilst its sister-network in Britain substantively collapsed, but it cannot tell us why. However, if we combine all three types of evidence, we can gain some idea of the scale of post-Roman aristocracies and their capacity to influence labour relations.

[518] Lewit (2003), 260; Esmonde Cleary (2013), 299

[519] See Ward-Perkins (2005), 87-93; Wickham (2005), 702-706; Esmonde Cleary (2013), 303-304

4.4.1 Regional Survey

4.4.1.1 Britain

Firstly, it is worth considering our evidence for Britain. Here, the villa phase ended between 350-450, although excavations at the villa at Chedworth in the Cotswolds have revealed a late-fifth century mosaic and eastern Mediterranean ceramic imports dating into the sixth century, meaning that there were, at least, some exceptions.[520] Unlike elsewhere, however, there is little to no evidence of settlement continuity on former villa sites, although this may have something to do with the heavy-handedness of 19th century archaeologists. The evidence for élite landowning is essentially non-existent: indeed, it is exceedingly difficult to detect élites in the immediately post-Roman centuries at all. The first new élite site is the 'royal palace' at Yeavering in Northumberland, possibly the villa of Edwin I (r.616-33).[521] Despite being unusually complex for a contemporary Anglo-Saxon site – including a line of large halls c.70m long, complete with a facsimile of a Roman theatre, presumably for holding assemblies – it is nonetheless very modest by continental standards. Anglo-Saxon property charters do not reappear until the 670s and later and are not related to Roman precedents: one suspects that landholding had to be resurrected from scratch.[522] As far as ceramics are concerned, all industries indigenous to Britain appear to have failed in the mid-fifth century.[523] Kent still maintained some imports from Francia, but on most early Anglo-Saxon sites the ceramics tend to be hand-made of very coarse quality. The first standardised ceramic production – Ipswich ware, a coarse ware originating in East Anglia – did not occur until the eighth century.[524]

Although there is a general paucity of evidence for post-Roman élites evident in architecture or field surveys, they are nonetheless observable in our findings amongst grave goods. In his

[520] Papworth (2021)

[521] Wickham (2009), 238-239; Ward-Perkins (2005), 139-142

[522] Wickham (2005), 306

[523] Ibid, 806

[524] Ibid, 810

survey of post-Roman burial practices, Guy Halsall has noted a shift in post-Roman Britain between the fifth and seventh centuries.[525] Put simply, new burial practices appear in the early fifth century, which introduced more lavish grave goods to inhumation burials, as well as occasional examples of cremation or partial cremation.[526] Rejecting a fully conquest-orientated explanation for this shift, Halsall has posited that the change may reflect Romano-British élites acclimatising to Anglo-Saxon funerary practices.[527] Whilst the extent to which this is accurate is unclear, what is clear is that the opulence of grave goods has gradually reduced by the seventh century, the so-called 'final phase burials' (for example, cemetery II at Winnall).[528] This could indicate a further tightening of élite scale as the centuries progressed.

As discussed in the preceding chapter, there are competing theories for why Britain's economic activity and specialisation collapsed as precipitously as it did in the fifth century (§3.4.1.1). For our purposes, it is worth restating the possibility that Britain's aristocracy was tied too closely to the Roman fiscal system, and that the withdrawal of this system in or around 410 led to a fatal crisis. This is, to my mind, the best argument we have for the almost total absence of élites from the British archaeological record in the immediately post-Roman centuries.

4.4.1.2 Gaul/Francia

Gaul is a distinctive region for more than one reason. Firstly, its exchange network was divided between the North and South, with the former being effectively separate from the Mediterranean exchange network by the fourth century. Northern Gaul/Francia shows the most pronounced degree of aristocratic continuation across our period, with production and landowning patterns not entirely unlike those of the Roman epoch. Despite this, the villa phase in the north ended early, between c.350-450, to be replaced by the aforementioned

[525] Halsall (1995), 5-7

[526] Ibid.

[527] Ibid, 38

[528] Ibid, 7

nucleated settlements with *Grubenhäuser* and sunken-floor buildings constructed from timber (§4.3.1).[529] In the south, monumental villas held on longer, although they are very rare after 600.[530] Well-excavated sites such as Séviac and Montmaurin show evidence that the fourth and early-fifth century monumental spaces were subdivided in the late fifth century, with postholes and hearths cutting across earlier mosaics.[531] Similar evidence has been found at Castelculier-Lamarque and Moncrabeau-Bapteste, the latter of which also sported a grain silo by the late fifth century.[532] To give some idea of the time frame for villa disappearance, a recent survey conducted in Languedoc has indicated that of the 71 villas present from the second century onwards, 50% still showed activity in the fifth century, 20% showed activity in the sixth, and 7% showed activity later.[533] A similar survey indicated that of 89 possible villa sites, 73% were still in active use in the fifth century, dropping to 42% in the sixth and 25% thereafter.[534] It is unclear whether we are looking at continued aristocratic occupation in more strained economic circumstances or at nucleated settlements occupied by peasants from the late fifth century onwards.[535] Again, there is evidence for very late villa survival, as with the villa at Marboué, c.100km south of Paris, which demonstrates some seventh-century architectural elaboration.[536] However, our general findings once again are for the gradual reuse of villa sites as more workaday foci for agricultural labour.

We possess approximately sixteen wills from Merovingian Francia between 572 and 739, and it will suffice to give a precis here. In general, Frankish aristocrats were the richest post-Roman landowners, and were capable of owning on a regional level, although this was conditioned by the division of the Merovingian territories loosely between Neustria,

[529] Esmonde Cleary (2013), 429-430; Wickham (2005), 476

[530] Wickham (2005), 174

[531] Esmonde Cleary (2013), 419-423

[532] Jacques (2006), 92-101; Esmonde Cleary (2013), 422-423

[533] Pellecuer (1996); Esmonde Cleary (2013), 446

[534] Pellecuer and Pomarèdes (2001); Esmonde Cleary (2013), 446

[535] Lewit (2003); Bowes and Gutteridge (2005); Esmonde Cleary (2013), 421-422

[536] Wickham (2005), 478

Austrasia, Burgundy, and Aquitaine, as well as the shifting political fortunes of the rival *teilreiche*. As an example of the uppermost echelons of Frankish landowning, let us turn to the will of Bertram, bishop of Le Mans (616). Bertram's will detailed "well over a hundred properties, mostly estates, in at least seventeen city territories, from Le Mans (the largest collection) southwards as far as Bordeaux and Cahors, and eastwards, to a line from Provence to Soissons", making him staggeringly wealthy by post-Roman standards.[537] Although Bertram was the largest landowner for whom we have evidence, he was not alone in this stratum: Desiderius of Cahors, Widerad of Falvigny, and Abbo of Maurienne all left wills detailing over seventy-five estates apiece. However, these tended to be more geographically concentrated: for Desiderius (649-50) around Cahors and Albi; for Widerad (717-19), in eleven counties around Dijon; and for Abbo (739) in the western Alps and eastern Provence.[538] Conversely, some aristocrats with smaller holdings could nonetheless own quite widely: the will of Wademir and Ecramberta (690-1), though focussed on Paris, details thirty-three estates disseminated "across the south and west of the middle Seine valley and into what is now Normandy, with substantial outliers south from there to Le Mans and Angers in Neustria and Cahors in southern Aquitaine".[539] The general level of Merovingian landowning was more modest. The late-seventh century will of the 'son of Idda', for example, details nine *villae* and three *villares* within 30km of Paris, whereas the will of Adalgisel-Grimo (634), whilst focussed on Verdun, nonetheless distributed the thirteen *villae* detailed to churches across Austrasia.[540] Beneath this, we find landowners such as Remigius of Rheims (d. c. 532) or Aredius of Limoges (572) who owned mostly within single city territories, in this case Rheims and Limousin respectively.[541] We can conclude from this that Frankish landowning could be extensive; however, landownership concentrated on single city territories remained prominent, and the impact of Merovingian sub-regional boundaries should be kept in mind.

---

[537] *ChLA*, XIII, XIV

[538] *Vita Desiderii*, c. 30; *Cartulary of Flavigny*, nn. 1-2, 57-8; Wickham (2005), 189-190 n. 96,

[539] *ChLA*, XIII, n. 571, with XIV, n. 594 (a. 682); Wickham (2005), 187 n. 92

[540] *ChLA*, XIII, n. 569; Wickham (2005), 188-189 nn. 94, 96

[541] Wickham (2005), 173, 180-181

Gallic ceramic patterns are also broadly divisible between the north and south. In the south, ARS ware imports were reaching through Languedoc and Provence to Toulouse and Bordeaux until the seventh century, at which point they ceased. Southern Gaul also had its own fine ware, known as DSP, which enjoyed a pattern of independent production and distribution networks within the sub-region between the mid-fifth and seventh centuries, after which it is hard to find on sites.[542] This was replaced by common and coarse ware productions, such as *céramiques à pâte kaolinitique* and E-ware, which were still produced in standardised ways and distributed on some scale in the ninth century; E-ware has, in fact, been found on sites in Britain and Ireland.[543] Ceramic patterns in northern Gaul, by contrast, show much more durability. The main fine ware in the north was Argonne ware, found within a 400km radius of the Argonne Forest; this was distributed alongside other fine ware productions, such as *céramique à l'éponge* from Poitou and Jaugles-Villiers-Vineux ware from northern Burgundy.[544] The range at which Argonne ware is found contracted to c.200km in the fifth century, although it still enjoyed a wide distribution pattern in the sixth, whereas the Jaugles-Villiers-Vineux industry appears to have gone defunct sometime around 400. Alongside this, new fine ware types, such as the black *céramique biconique*, were developed in northern Gaul in the sixth and seventh centuries, indicating the existence of an élite capable of stimulating new stylistic demands as well as sustaining the pre-existing trends.[545] Alongside these fine ware productions, we also find a coarse ware type, Mayen ware, that was developed in the fourth century, with fifth century imitators such as *céramique granuleuse*/*rugueuse*. Not only did these ceramics enjoy almost as wide a distribution as Argonne ware, but they were also still in production in the tenth century.[546] The evidence, therefore, is for a relatively stable and wealthy pattern of production and distribution in northern Gaul, indicative of strong aristocratic demand.

---

[542] Ibid, 746-747; Esmonde Cleary (2013), 423-424

[543] Ibid, 747

[544] Wickham (2005), 794-795; Esmonde Cleary (2013), 424-425

[545] Wickham (2005), 796

[546] Ibid; Esmonde Cleary (2013), 425

Southern Gaul, therefore, conforms broadly to our findings in Italy and the Iberian Peninsula. Northern Gaul is the outlier, with a relatively prosperous and stable aristocracy capable of stimulating production through demand. We should, however, note the continued absence of the hyper-wealthy; though Bertram was wealthy on the level of an Ausonius, he would likely have been met with polite condescension by the Anicii or Petronii of the late Roman period. Quite why northern Gaul remained relatively stable is a curiosity. Being disconnected from the Mediterranean exchange networks, and having experienced its crisis in the fourth century, it is plausible that increased immigration from across the Rhine in this period had already set it on its new trajectory by the fifth and sixth centuries, when the Mediterranean world began to encounter its own major crises. However, if northern Gaul was already a 'military procurement zone', it weathered the absence of the Roman fiscal system surprisingly well. Despite this, the material culture of élites, at least architecturally, was still quite modest by Roman standards.

4.4.1.3 The Iberian Peninsula

As we saw in the corresponding section on peasantries, our evidence for the Iberian Peninsula is extremely fragmented. In most areas the villa-phase ended in the fifth and sixth centuries.[547] Villa sites frequently remained inhabited, but now they had been subdivided into smaller residences, seemingly for separate families; new construction was carried out in wood or clay, often with *spolia* floors; and former villa sites now often sported cemeteries, churches, and grain silos.[548] Examples of this include the villa at Saucedo in the province of Toledo; Torre Llauder in the Catalan Maresme; Almedinilla near Granada; and El Val, Torrecilla, and Tinto Juan de la Cruz near Madrid.[549] What we see, therefore, is that small nucleated villages with agricultural or industrial functions tended to spring up in the monumental remains of villas. There were exceptions: somewhat surprisingly, a Vitruvian-style villa dating to the seventh or eighth centuries has been found at Pla de Nadal near

[547] Gorges (1979); Wickham (2005), 475; Esmonde Cleary (2013), 410; Kulikowski (2004), 298-303

[548] Esmonde Cleary (2013), 415

[549] Kulikowski (2004), 298-303; Esmonde Cleary (2013), 414-417, 441

Valencia.[550] In general, though, our findings for villas mirror the evidence presented in our section on peasantries, with a gradual narrowing of the settlement hierarchy and increasing nucleation on former villa sites into villages.

Our textual sources for landowning in the Visigothic period are extremely sparse, but the evidence points to a series of often wealthy landowners who, like in Italy, tended to own predominantly within the locality of individual cities. We possess, for example, the land registers of Bishop Vincentius of Huesca (c.551/576), in the Ebro valley, which show that he owned in thirty locations in an 100km triangle between Zaragoza, Lleida, and Huesca, although the documents do not tell us how large the parcels of land were.[551] Other evidence is more circumstantial. The *Vita S. Aemiliani*, written by Braulio of Zaragoza in c.636, shows a Romanising civic aristocracy operating independently of the Visigothic kingdom in the late-sixth century. For Mérida, the *Vitas patrae Emeritensium* reveals a world of often very rich local aristocrats, such as the bishops Paul, Fidelis, and Masona, as well as a host of local civic notables; however, given that Toledo is the only other city mentioned in the whole text, we might assume that these, too, owned primarily within the limits of the territory of Mérida.[552] What evidence we have, therefore, points to still prosperous local aristocracies based in single city territories, although these aristocracies appears to have been rich on more of a Lombard than on a Frankish scale.

The evidence for fine ware exchange networks is conditioned by the fact that the internal economy within the peninsula was comparatively disjointed in the Roman period, being divided between areas with and without exposure to the Mediterranean network. The most interesting evidence is for the exchange of *terra sigillata hispánica tardía* (TSHT) fine ware on the Meseta, as this was a closed network of production and exchange in the fourth century that operated wherever ARS imports did not reach.[553] The production and distribution of TSHT appears to have dropped precipitously in the fifth century, and by 500

[550] Kulikowski (2004), 302-303; Wickham (2005), 478

[551] Fita, (1906) 137-169; Wickham (2005), 222-223

[552] *VPE*, IV.2-5, V.3, 10-11

[553] Wickham (2005), 742; Esmonde Cleary (2013), 323-324

they had been replaced on sites such as Monté Cilda and El Castellar in Palencia by local imitation semi-fine wares.[554] Fine ware production does not appear to have been restored on the Meseta until the tenth century. Andalucía and the Guadalquivir valley, by contrast, had been supplied extensively with ARS ware until c.600/625, after which imports ceased: these were gradually replaced by locally produced common and coarse wares, such as those found in Córdoba and Mérida.[555] On the Mediterranean coast, which had been particularly saturated with ARS imports, no fine ware production or distribution seems to have survived past 700.[556] The inland site of El Tolmo de Minateda (seventh-ninth centuries) produced some good quality slipped and glazed common wares in a late Roman style, but this is as specialised as coastal production gets during this period.[557]

The Iberian evidence points towards varying degrees of aristocratic scale, with élites remaining stronger in the Ebro and Guadalquivir valleys where urbanism was more pronounced and productive industries had been more entrenched. The coast, by contrast, suffered more from the end of the African export industry, and urbanism appears to have retreated significantly in this area. In all cases, however, élites seem to have fallen back predominantly into relatively circumscribed territories based on single cities. Most interestingly for our purposes, the political unification of the peninsula under the Visigoths, with a focus on the capital at Toledo, does not appear to have been accompanied by a revival of a unified fiscal system that would have underwritten demand in the same way as its Roman predecessor. The Meseta seems to have suffered just as much as everywhere else, despite being the central locus of the Visigothic kingdom after Leovigild. The threshold for retreat seems to have occurred mainly between the fifth and seventh centuries, with a nadir in the eighth.

[554] Esmonde Cleary (2013), 417, 476; Wickham (2005), 742-743

[555] Wickham (2005), 744; Kulikowski (2004), 288

[556] Ibid, 748-749

[557] Ibid, 749

4.4.1.4 North Africa

Based on the textual evidence we possess, it seems clear that the Vandals systematically expropriated the late Roman aristocracy of their possessions and property on conquest, which formed the basis of Vandal landowing (*sortes Vandalorum*).[558] Victor of Vita, our most comprehensive written source (albeit one hostile to Vandal overlordship) details the scope of Geiseric's division of his conquests as such:

> *"He* [Geiseric] *also made an arrangement concerning the individual provinces: Byzacena, Abaritana and Gaetulia and part of Numidia he kept for himself; Zeugitana and the proconsular province he divided up as 'an allotted portion for his people'* (I Chron. 16:18)*..."* (Victor of Vita, I.13)

Victor goes on to describe the mistreatment and exile of senators and *honorati*, which must have been accompanied by expropriation.[559] His assertions are repeated by Procopius, who was present in North Africa during Belisarius's reconquest.[560] Vandal settlement in North Africa is also alluded to in the Justinianic legislation setting up the new North African prefecture, although the exact contours of Vandal landownership are not explicitly stated.[561] While the Vandals clearly lived in villas – and evidently developed a taste for late Roman art and architecture – it is difficult to know to what extent the villa phase outlived the Vandal era.[562] Furthermore, beyond the *Tablettes Albertini*, our available evidence for the scale and scope of Vandal landownership is limited to the cursory descriptions offered by Victor.

We are, however, in a better position to describe exchange networks. Under the later empire, North Africa produced a fine ware ceramic known as African Red Slip (ARS) ware, which was produced in bulk at sites such as El Mahrine, Oudhna, Sidi Khalifa, and Sidi

---

[558] Courtois (1955), 218-220

[559] Vict. Vit. I.14-15; see also *CJ* 27.1.pr.2

[560] Procop. *Bell.* I.5.11

[561] *CJ* 27.1.pr.1-9

[562] Wickham (2005), 475

Marzouk Tounsi and exported across the Mediterranean by 'piggybacking' on the fiscal system.[563] Curiously, however, ARS finds within North Africa itself tend to be marginal: evidently this was an industry geared almost entirely towards export. By the late Vandal and Byzantine periods, the North African economy appears to have undergone a profound involution. ARS production declines precipitously during the sixth and seventh centuries, and by c.700 it had almost entirely ceased. For example, the Dougga survey shows a seventh-century rural landscape in which sites with common wares outnumbered sites with ARS by three to one.[564] As we observed in the previous chapter, the Vandal economy must have been wildly imbalanced (§3.4.1.5). Considering the scale of the export market, we must assume that the wealth and stability of the Roman-era North African aristocracy was fundamentally tied up with production for export or redistribution. Once the export market was cut off from both the Roman fiscal system and the axis of senatorial landowning, North African production lacked sufficient alternative markets to offload its products. As we shall see in the following sections, the end of ARS production and distribution is the best indicator we have for the disintegration of the western Mediterranean exchange economy that was precipitated by the Vandal takeover, although this crisis took two centuries to reach maturity. Quite what this did to the African aristocracy, which was reintegrated into the eastern Mediterranean market for nearly two centuries, is hard to say, but it is notable that the North African agricultural economy was almost exclusively pastoral in the Arab period. It is not unreasonable to suggest that North African élites never reattained the economic clout they had enjoyed prior to the Vandal conquest.

4.4.1.5 Italy

In Italy, the major events structuring aristocratic scale were the breaking of the Rome-North Africa tax spine in the mid-fifth century and the devastating Gothic and Lombard wars in the mid-sixth. From the late-sixth century, Italy was divided into three Lombard polities interspersed with a myriad of Byzantine enclaves.[565] It was during this period that villas

---

[563] Wickham (2005), 720

[564] Ibid, 724; see also *CTh*. XIII.5.21, (Feb. 16, 392),26 (Dec. 23, 396)

[565] Wickham (2005), 203

largely disappeared. For example, the villa-phases at Piazza Armerina and Patti Marina in Sicily ended around c.450, although occupation of the sites continued; the villas at S. Giovanni di Ruoto in Lucania and at Mola di Monte Gelato, north of Rome, were abandoned in the sixth century.[566] A notable exception is the villa at Contrada Saraceno in Agrigento, which was still occupied in the seventh/eighth centuries, albeit without the luxury elements.[567] Rural estates still continued to exist, but owing to the perishability of the materials used to build them they are difficult to locate by the seventh and eighth centuries.

The scale of élite landowning contracted from the mid-fifth century onwards. Senatorial élites and the Papal See still owned widely in the Ostrogothic period, particularly in the 'senatorial region' connecting Rome to southern Italy and Sicily along the Tyrrhenian coast. The Anicii Cethegi owned in both Rome and Sicily in the mid-to-late sixth century;[568] Gregory the Great's friend Rusticiana also owned extensively in Sicily;[569] Cassiodorus retired to estates in Squillace following the end of his career; and Tom Brown has counted some twenty-nine people in Gregory's letters with senatorial names who still lived in Rome, Campania, or Sicily.[570] Furthermore, the church of Rome owned a swath of properties in Italy, Sicily, Sardinia and Corsica, Africa, Gaul, and Dalmatia in the late-sixth century, although it was evidently difficult for Gregory and his peers to realise the revenues from their more distant holdings.[571] This scale of landowning dropped sharply in the seventh century; after this, élite landholding was largely restricted to single city-territories. We possess, for example, the records of Ravennate archbishops leasing property to aristocrats in the seventh and eighth centuries: whilst the archbishop himself owned more widely, he leased property in Rimini and Senigallia exclusively to élites from those cities.[572] The church

[566] Ibid, 204-205

[567] Brogiolo (1996); Wickham (2005), 478

[568] Cethegus the Elder: *PLRE* IIA, 281-282; Procop. *Bell*. VII.13.12; Pelagius I, *Ep*. 33. Cethegus the Younger: Greg., *Ep.* IX.72

[569] Greg., *Ep.* XIII.26

[570] Brown (1984), 21-24; Wickham (2005), 206

[571] *LRE* II, 781-782, III, nn. 31, 45; Ward-Perkins (2008a), 337, 341

[572] *Codice Bavaro*, nn. 27, 29, 36, 64, 80

of Rome lost access to its properties outside of Lazio in the 730s, when the Byzantine emperor Leo III transferred Papal revenues from Calabria and Sicily to Constantinople, although it remained an unusually wealthy landowner within the region around Rome, as evidenced by the establishment of manorial *domusculate Capracorum* in S. Cornelia and Mola di Monte Gelato in the late eighth century.[573]

Landownership in Lombard territories was structured by the concomitant facts that the Lombard kings were disproportionally larger landowners than all of their subjects, and by the focus of Lombard politics and identity onto individual city-territories.[574] We possess around 300 charters for the Lombard period, which demonstrate that the scale of Lombard landholding was very modest by comparison to that of contemporary Francia. Beneath the king and the ruling dukes of Spoleto and Benevento, we can perceive a relatively slim upper aristocracy, who could own fragmented properties on some scale; a widespread median aristocracy, both of which tended to be focussed on specific cities; and a large body of small and medium landowners.[575] Examples of the upper stratum include Gaidoald of Pistoia, who gave six estates in the territories of Pistoia, Lucca, Florence, and Cornino to the monastery of S. Bartolomeo in Pistoia in 767, and Taido of Bergamo, whose will (774) largely consisted of eight estates and ten tenant-houses in the territories of Bergamo, Sirmione, and Verona.[576] In both cases, despite the range of landholding (250km and 100km respectively), clear concentrations in the territories of Pistoia and Bergamo are clearly visible for each. As an example of the more usual level of Lombard élite landowning, we possess the will of Rotpert, *vir magnificus* of Agrate, who left "four estates, two or more tenant houses, and two fields to his female heirs and his favourite churches in 745": this was apparently a summation of half of Rotpert's property.[577] As regards the southern duchies, the geographical spread of landowning could be wider – aristocrats in Benevento could own on the Adriatic coast, 200km away, in the eighth century – but again the texts do not indicate

[573] Theoph. *Chron.* AM 6224; Ward-Perkins (2008a), 337; Wickham (2005), 483

[574] Wickham (2005), 211

[575] Wickham (2005), 214-215

[576] Gaidoald: *CDL* I, n. 116; Taido: *CDL* II, n. 293; Wickham (2005), 214-215, n. 160

[577] *CDL* I, n.82; Wickham (2005), 214

that individuals owned more than eight to ten estates apiece.[578] Our evidence indicates, therefore, that whilst a handful of substantial landowners did exist in Italy, they were vastly outnumbered by medium to small range landholders who owned primarily within single city territories.

Italian ceramic distribution networks in the late Roman period were dominated by the dissemination of ARS throughout the peninsula (with the partial exception of the Po plain), with associated productions of Italian sub-regional fine wares.[579] From the mid-fifth century, problems with ARS distribution emerged, and we see a range of local imitations spring up in its place.[580] From the mid-sixth century onwards, Italian fine ware patterns show a great deal of fragmentation and retreat. Lombard *ceramica langobarda* fine wares, such as those found at the kiln at the former Capitolium in Brescia, enjoyed some initial success, but by the mid-seventh century fine ware production on the Po plain had ceased.[581] In Tuscany, some semi-fine wares in red paint or red slip continued to be produced across the period in Pisa, Siena, and Florence.[582] From the *crypta Balbi,* a late-seventh century ceramic deposit in Rome, we can tell that the percentage of imported fine ware (especially ARS) was very limited by c.700 (approximately three per cent of 100,000 shards), and the rest were made up of African, eastern Mediterranean, or local Italian wares.[583] Rome was the first locality with enough demand to stimulate the production of the first distinctively early medieval fine ware - Forum ware - from the late eighth century onwards, which enjoyed a visible export network.[584] A pattern of substantial exchange evidently still existed along the Tyrrhenian coastline, and there is evidence for some fine and semi-fine ware production in the inland South (e.g., Crecchio ware).[585] The notable features of the Italian exchange

[578] Wickham (2005), 217

[579] Ibid, 729

[580] Ibid, 730

[581] Ibid, 731-732

[582] Ibid, 734-735

[583] Sagui (1998), 305-330; Wickham (2005), 712

[584] Wickham (2005), 736

[585] Ibid, 736-738

network, therefore, are the intense degree of regionalisation once imports ended, and the gradual breakdown of most fine ware production, which had to be gradually re-established from the eighth century onwards.

From the above, we can infer the Italian aristocracies by the eighth century were relatively modest in scale by comparison to their Frankish counterparts. Their habitation was not especially durable; their ceramics were less fine, although local fine ware productions certainly continued, indicating continued élite economic clout; and when they owned widely, it was still largely restricted to single city territories. Alongside them was a substantial group of small to medium owners, who made up the bulk of Lombard landholding. Most noticeably, the hyper-wealthy firmament of the Roman senatorial aristocracy had completely vanished, although the Tyrrhenian coast remained an unusually vibrant exchange network by early medieval standards. Exploitation still evidently continued, but its scale and scope had decreased.

4.4.2 Observations

From our regional survey, we may draw the following conclusions concerning the impact of the end of the Roman state on the aristocracies of the post-Roman west. Firstly, the threshold in time differs between north and south. In the north, the crisis arrived earlier, between 350 and 450: élites in northern Gaul weathered it admirably, whereas those of Britain succumbed. In the Mediterranean, the process was slower, culminating in the late-sixth and seventh centuries. In general, aristocrats were materially poorer, as is evidenced by the retreat of fine ware production and distribution and the perishability of aristocratic residences. Furthermore, aristocrats were more restricted in the spread of their landholdings, with most being focussed on the territories of specific cities. On the level of the whole west, political disintegration circumscribed the possibility of landholding on a trans-regional level. Consequently, the hyper-wealthy stratum of the Roman senatorial élite is nowhere in evidence and did not subsequently reappear.

However, we should not overstate these changes. Whilst we can draw the implication from the retreat in material wealth and productive specialisation that aristocrats were struggling

to realise surpluses on the level of their Roman predecessors, the fact that there remained aristocrats – and often very rich ones – directly suggests that exploitation and surplus extraction continued. What we are looking at is a retreat in the ability of aristocrats to own property, exploit labourers, and stimulate production on the same scale as their Roman predecessors. Only in Britain, the coast between Alicante-Murcia, and eastern Emilia do we see any evidence for wholesale aristocratic collapse, and this was the exception rather than the rule. Furthermore, we must remember that a decline in specialisation does not necessarily entail a retreat in exploitation: it is plausible, if we consider political disintegration and population decline, that specialised skills (such as the production of ceramic roof tiles or bricks) had simply become harder to pass from generation to generation. Lastly, we must remember that change can also be attributed to shifts in cultural preferences. For example, a retreat in the material complexity of aristocratic residences in the post-Roman west corresponds to more wealth invested in urban church or rural monastery construction (although these still remained quite humble by late Roman standards). Élites often still had money to invest in architecture, but often chose to invest it in demonstrations of Christian piety and urban munificence rather than in displays of personal grandeur.

The disintegration of the Roman fiscal system, and the Mediterranean exchange network that was fostered in its wake, hovers behind every observation we have made thus far. The firmament of senatorial wealth and landholding, the vast productive industries of North Africa, and the security and standardisation necessary to stimulate specialisation and consumption on the level that could produce the villa landscape of the late Roman period were evidently not sustainable without the fiscal system. Once it had ceased to exist on a transregional level – in the mid-fifth century, that is – the post-Roman Mediterranean experienced a long-term economic involution that reached its nadir in the eighth century. The exchange network of the north appears to have been more regionally circumscribed, and it remains a curiosity that the Franks were capable of sustaining quite high levels of demand, specialisation, and landholding, whereas the Britons and Anglo-Saxons weren't. The role of the Roman state is therefore defined by its absence. The fiscal system had defied economic logic in uniting the disparate aristocracies of the Roman west, and without it, the network linking élite demand gradually disintegrated. Élites continued to exist, but they

were materially poorer and lacked the sophisticated means to corral the peasantry on the level enjoyed by their Roman predecessors.

4.5 Conclusion

In most cases, the Roman class structure survived the end of the Roman state, albeit under more strained circumstances. The fundamental nature of class relations – of the exploitation of agricultural labour within the structure of tenantry, whether free or unfree – did not substantively change. However, the importance of the Roman state, and in particular of the Roman fiscal system, comes into view when we consider the inability of post-Roman élites to sustain the long-range landholding, the production and distribution networks, and the architectural magnificence of their predecessors. We might conclude, not unreasonably, that élites had needed both the fiscal motor and the infrastructural specialisations fostered by the Roman state to sustain this scale, and that without them, surpluses were neither as necessary nor as easy to raise. Aristocrats in the post-Roman west still existed, and were often still comparatively powerful, but not to the extent of their Roman forbears or their high medieval successors. Conversely, peasants appear to have enjoyed greater success at evading the demands of landholders in the immediately post-Roman centuries. It is equally evident that the overwhelming despotic power of the Roman state, coupled with its overbearing fiscal demands and attempts at regimentation, was required to keep peasantries in line to the extent that a Roman-era scale of surpluses could be comfortably extracted. Without the infrastructural and despotic consolidation of the Roman state, a comparative degree of aristocratic retreat and peasant freedom could be maintained for centuries. This state of affairs would alter with the onset of a new socioeconomic settlement between monarch and aristocracy in the Carolingian period and after, a settlement that depended on the absence of such intense state structures to function.

The Specialisation of Governance

5.1 Introduction

> "The later Roman empire was before all things a bureaucratic state. Civil servants played a vital role in all departments of government, in the drafting and circulation of laws and ordinances and the administration of justice, in the recruitment and supply of the armies, and above all in the operation of the vast and complicated fiscal machine…Without its civil servants the whole complicated machine of government which held the vast empire together would have collapsed." – A.H.M. Jones, *LRE* I.563

Such was the verdict of A.H.M. Jones when tasked with assessing the importance of the civil service to the functioning of the later Roman empire. It is not difficult for the modern observer to find themselves impressed by the labyrinthine palatinate *officia* described in John Lydus's *de magistratibus*, the meticulous official hierarchies of the *Notitia Dignitatum*, or the neat tabulation in eastern law of the 446 scurrying officials who made up the office of the *sacrae largitiones*.[586] It is clear that the passage to late antiquity saw an intensification of Roman governance, an attempt to expand the infrastructural reach of the state by the method of bureaucratisation: and bureaucratisation – with its insistence on literacy and record-keeping, salaries, tenures of office, carefully circumscribed spheres of responsibility, and predatory oversight – entailed governmental specialisation. Fast forward to the Carolingian epoch, and we find an administrative apparatus that, according to Roger Collins, was "so rudimentary as to make it questionable whether we should regard the Frankish empire of Charlemagne as a state in any meaningful way".[587] In contrast to the six bustling palatine bureaux of the late Roman *comitatus*, Carolingian central administration consisted of the king's personal entourage and a handful of clerics in the royal chapel; whereas provincial governors in the late Roman period might have an *officium* of a hundred salaried

[586] *Not. Dig. Or.* XIII; *CTh.* VI.30.7 = *CJ* XII.23.7 (June 10, 384); *LRE* I, 427-428, II, p. 583 (tabulation); Matthews (1989), 254; Barnwell (1992), 28; Delmaire (1995), 122-127, esp. 124

[587] Collins (2010), 304

bureaucrats, Carolingian counts were served by only a single royally-stipulated notary who handled all of their paperwork; and whereas, in the words of Michael McCormick, "the emperor's purple ink fuelled the engines of bureaucracy", Charlemagne, according to Einhard, never properly learned to read or write.[588] On the face of it, it would appear that, in the centuries that intervened between the collapse of western Roman power and the rise of the Carolingian dynasty, governmental specialisation had fallen off a cliff.

The reality is, of course, significantly more nuanced. Despite its lofty pretensions, Roman administration was never as specialised as its denizens liked to believe. Senior offices were frequently converted into the personal fiefdoms of otiose aristocratic amateurs;[589] there is little reason to suppose that the average bureaucrat was any more professional than their aristocratic counterparts; and the whole system was perennially exposed to the sledgehammer of autocratic intervention. Simultaneously, there is no reason to believe, with the exception of in Britain, that the retreat of Roman power led immediately to the end of governmental specialisation and the corresponding growth of private aristocratic power at the expense of the state. As Chris Wickham has pointed out, literacy remained far more widespread amongst the lay aristocracy than has previously been thought – though doubtless the clergy now took on a greater proportion of administration – and governance remained reliant on writing until after the Carolingian period.[590] As we shall see in this chapter, post-Roman polities attempted to preserve Roman approaches to governmental specialisation, such as tax-raising and lawgiving, and tended to use some form of Roman-style bureaucracy to achieve this. However, they were hampered in the attempt by the fact that post-Roman security and political economy was based on land rather than a tax system. In the long term, this fundamentally undermined the practicability of maintaining governmental specialisation and complex bureaucracies, and forced state agents to explore other mechanisms for exercising despotic and infrastructural power. It is the purpose of this chapter to chart that process.

[588] Einhard 25; McCormick (2008), 143; Collins (2010), 304-306

[589] Kulikowski (2021), 133-134

[590] Wickham (2009), 173

5.2 Defining Governmental Specialisation

Firstly, we must be clear as to what is meant by 'specialisation'. Specialisation in relation to governance refers to a circumscribed competence or authority conducted by a specific official on behalf of the state. For example, the late Roman *quaestor sacrii palatii* was officially concerned with legal affairs – with drafting laws, letters, and rescripts, and with answering petitions to the emperor. *Quaestores* were therefore drawn from amongst legal scholars and were not, as far as we can discern, involved in financial, administrative, or military matters.[591] Doubtless *quaestores* were sometimes drawn into such affairs – they evidently spent a lot of their time directly interacting with monarchs – but it was not their specific job under normal circumstances. The broader the set of responsibilities an official had, and the greater the extent to which official competences overlapped with each other, the less governance was specialised. Governmental specialisation also infers the existence of an impersonal authority – in this case, the state – and can be contrasted with private responsibilities conducted under the auspices of patronage. It is from this that we derive the notion that official positions must outlast the officeholders themselves – we are looking for a degree of institutional continuity that defines power relations that exist beyond the narrow band of personal obligations to specific rulers inherent in a chiefdom. Lastly, we must note that governmental specialisation implies a high degree of the despotic and infrastructural power necessary for rulers to keep their officials in line: without this, officials are likely to diversify their options in order to maintain power and status irrespective of the fortunes of the central authority.

Wickham's full criterion – "the specialisation of governmental roles, with an official hierarchy which outlasted the people who held official position at any given time" – can be approached in two ways. On the one hand, we can focus on the way in which Roman governance was practised in comparison to other systems; on the other, we can focus on the structure of the offices that made up both the Roman and post-Roman systems in order to discern similarities and differences. There are benefits and drawbacks to both

[591] *Not. Dig. Occ.* X; Cass. *Var.* VI.5; Bury (1958), 29; *LRE* I, 387; Barnwell (1992), 25; Delmaire (1995), 59-62

approaches. If we focus directly on how government was conducted – on what specifically it was doing, rather than on who was doing it – we can avoid confusing a recitation of the hierarchy of Roman officialdom for the actual function of Roman governance. The problem is that the content of our source material – primarily textual sources such as the Theodosian Code, the *Notitia Dignitatum*, the *Relationes* of Symmachus during his tenure as Urban Prefect, and the *Variae* of Cassiodorus – make the latter approach much easier, with a correspondingly high change of encountering a pitfall. Firstly, it is all too easy to assume that the Roman state was as rigidly hierarchical and heavily bureaucratised as its occupants wanted to present it.[592] Secondly, just because we find someone with an official title does not mean that they were conducting themselves in the specified manner. In rare cases, officials like Arvandus (Praetorian Prefect of the Gauls 464-8) and Seronatus (the contemporary vicar of *septem provinciae*) might be arraigned and tried for misconduct (in this case, collaboration with the Goths), but many officials, such as Romanus, the *comes Africae* under Valentinian I, might escape punishment for blatant infringements of their duties.[593] Thirdly, we should not automatically assume that a large number of attested officeholders correlates directly to governmental specialisation. In the late Roman period, there were a vast number of sinecures, supernumeraries, and holders of corruptly obtained codicils who held the title and collected the salary but discharged none of the functions of office.[594] It is prudent, therefore, to focus our inquiry on how governance was specialised, with resort to our evidence on the structure and scale of the official hierarchies when and where this becomes useful.

As regards the relationship between governmental specialisation and the end of the western Roman state, what questions must we be asking? The first and foremost must be identifying the ways in which Roman governance was specialised, determining if such practices survived into the post-Roman period, and, if not, ascertaining how and when they

[592] *LRE* I, 374; Barnish (1992), xlii; see also the law of Valentinian I attempting to fix the precedence of imperial officials in place: *CTh.* VI.7.1 (Sept. 3, 372); *LRE* I, 378-379

[593] Sid. Ap. *Ep.* I.7, VII.7 §2; Amm. Marc. XXVII 9.1-3, XXVIII 6.7-28, XXIX 5.2-3; Zos. IV.16.3; Arvandus = *PLRE* IIA, 157-158; Seronatus = *PLRE* IIB, 995-996; Romanus = *PLRE* IB, 768

[594] Joh. Lydus, *Mag.* III.21; *LRE* II, 601-606

came to an end. We might also look to the manner in which officials were recruited and remunerated, and by whom, as both criteria appear to have changed with the transition from a tax-based to a land-based system of political power. Further, we might try to ascertain when the Roman imperial regime ceased appointing officials to, or accepting them from, given regions of the empire; following Michael Kulikowski, we might accept the proposal that "where imperial bureaucrats held office, the empire existed. Where they did not, it did not."[595] First, however, we must establish the manner in which late Roman governance was specialised, in order to establish the norm from which any continuities or deviations must be assessed.

5.3 The Specialisation of Late Roman Governance

Previously, we gave brief synopses of the form and function of the western Roman state in the late-fourth century – how it was structured on a central and provincial level; how its primary function was raising taxes in cash and kind and funnelling them to a salaried professional army, the imperial court, and the city of Rome; and how it was, by the standards of the day, extensively bureaucratised (§2.3). The purpose of this section is to highlight further salient features of late Roman governmental specialisation in the late fourth and early fifth century in order to provide a benchmark for analysis. To do this, we will focus on three essential functions of late Roman governance: tax-raising, lawgiving, and security. However, we must again remind ourselves that late Roman governance was fundamentally reactive: officials responded to the needs of the moment rather than pre-empting them. This limited the extent of governmental specialisation when viewed from a modern perspective.

5.3.1 Tax-Raising

Taxation on agricultural land and on the agrarian population was standardised into units (*iugera* for land, *capita* for people) to be paid in instalments over the course of the fiscal

[595] Kulikowski (2004), 152

year.[596] The indiction was determined centrally and communicated via the Praetorian Prefecture to the vicars and provincial governors, who in turn communicated it to municipalities and landlords.[597] Landlords appear to have paid taxes on behalf of their bound tenants, whereas free peasants paid taxes directly to collectors.[598] Taxes were collected on the level of the city and its territory, and were then transmitted to their destinations via the public post.[599] Within cities, we find officials such as *excatores* and *susceptores*, who managed tax-collection; *praepositi horreorum,* who managed the state granaries and warehouses into which taxes were collected; *conductores,* who managed the public post stations; and the *curator civitatis*, who was responsible for the civic finances themselves. Whilst notionally imperial appointments, all of these officials tended to be selected from within the local *curiae* by the councillors themselves.[600] Within each province, the provincial governor, assisted by two *numerarii* dispatched by the Praetorian Prefecture, appears to have had responsibility for taxation. These responsibilities were, at least in theory, closely circumscribed:

> *"The duty of tax collection in the provinces, which is sustained throughout Africa by the governors, the prefects of the annona, and the fiscal representatives, must not be usurped by the higher judges, but this duty must be fulfilled only by those persons upon whom the responsibility is imposed for tax collection." – CTh.* XI.7.8 (Carthage, November 12th 355/356)

Whilst most taxation is likely to have moved a relatively limited distance to where it was needed, the *annona* feeding the city of Rome was conducted on a larger scale. Rome was supplied by the state with corn and oil from North Africa and Sicily, shipped by the

[596] *CTh.* XI.1.15 (Reims, May 19 366/June 18 367); XI.16.1 (Nicomedia, Oct. 25 367)

[597] *CTh.* XI.1.3 (Oct. 9 336); Praetorian Prefects = *Not. Dig. Occ.* II, III; *vicarii = Not. Dig. Occ.* XXII, XXIII; see also Dionisotti (1982), 104; Brown (1992), 25

[598] *CTh.* XI.1.7 (May 3 361); XI.1.14 (Constantinople, May 1 366-374(?))

[599] *CTh*. XI.1.9 (Trier, March 6, 365)

[600] *LRE* II, 725-727

navicularii (shipping guilds), and with pork from the south of the Italian peninsula.[601] The organisational structure for the *annona* to Rome evidently overlapped. The process seems to have been overseen by the Praetorian Prefect for Italy via the *praefectus annonae Africae*; the *vicarius* of Africa was likely responsible for collection on the African side; and there appears to have been some friction, at least whilst Symmachus was Urban Prefect, between his office and that of the urban *vicarius*.[602] A.H.M. Jones estimates that the annual shipments of corn into Rome during the fourth century will have amounted to some five and a half million *modii* (almost 50 million litres), giving some indication as to the scale of state enterprise.[603]

Fiscal responsibilities were divided between three departments of the *comitatus*: the Praetorian Prefecture, the *sacrae largitiones*, and the *res privata*.[604] On the financial side, the Prefecture was responsible for raising the in-kind taxation necessary to supply the army, the imperial court and its officials, and the workers involved in state production: this entailed the management of both the public post and payments to the *navicularii*.[605] As a result, the officials of the Prefecture could be found throughout the provinces; in the east in the fifth century, we find "one *scrinium* for each diocese, one for public works throughout the prefecture, one for the chest (*arca*) … one for military expenditure, that is the payments of *annonae* and *capitus*, and one for armaments, which dealt with the supply of raw materials to state factories".[606] The *sacrae largitiones* was responsible for precious metals, whether in terms of mining them, raising and transporting them in taxes, or paying them out as coinage to state employees in the army or bureaucracy.[607] It was also responsible for

---

[601] Grain/bread: *CTh.* XIV.15.1-6, 17.2-6; Oil: *CTh.* XIV.24.1 (328); Pork: *CTh.* XIV.4.10 §3 (419); *NVal.* XXXVI §2 (452); *LRE* II, 695-705, 827-830 for the *navicularii*; Cass. *Var.* XI.39.3, XII.22.1-2

[602] *CTh.* I.6.5 (365), 7 (367); *LRE* II, 690

[603] *LRE* I, xiv; II, 698

[604] *Not. Dig. Occ.* XI, XII

[605] *LRE* I, 448-449, III 116 n. 94; see in particular *CTh.* I.5.5 (355), 6 (357); Cass. *Var.* VI.3.6

[606] *LRE* II, 589; see *CJ* XII.xlix.10 (485-6)

[607] *LRE* I, 369-370, II, 427; Barnwell (1992), 28; Bury (1958), 51; Delmaire (1995), 121; Barnish, Lee, and Whitby (2008), 171

clothing state employees, and therefore controlled both the state weaving and dyeing factories and the *barbaricarii* for adorning officer's armour with gold and silver.[608] The precise structure of the eastern *sacrae largitiones* is preserved in a law of Theodosius I (June 10th 384), with a full list of the offices preserved in the Code of Justinian.[609] The *scrinia* of the *sacrae largitiones* were composed of eighteen departments, comprising 446 bureaucrats.[610] The department also had an extensive staff at the diocesan, provincial, and civic level.[611] At the diocesan level, we find *rationales summarum*, headed by *comites largitionum*/*largitionalium titulorum* in Illyricum, Africa, Gaul, and Italy.[612] We also find a series of depots (*thesauri*) in the charge of *praepositi thesaurorum* at which gold, silver, clothing, and other goods could be collected for reissue, and to where officials submitted their accounts.[613] Lastly, we find officials entitled *largitionales civitatum* or *urbium singularum* in some prominent cities; whilst we do not know their specific remit, it is conceivable that they helped administer the civic finances that the state had co-opted in the fourth century.[614] The *res privata*, by contrast, handled the rents and management of imperial estates.[615] Whilst this might properly be considered a private fund, we must remember that the distinction drawn between imperial public and private finances was murky at best: it is very probably that the remits of the *sacrae largitiones* and the *res privata* overlapped. Much like the *sacrae largitiones*, the *res privata* operated on a central, diocesan, provincial, and local level. At the centre, the *privatani* were divided into five departments: *exceptores*, *beneficia*, *canones*, *securitates*, and *privatae largitiones*.[616] At the diocesan and provincial level, we find *magistri*/*rationales rei privatae* with their own

---

608 *LRE* I, 370; Barnwell (1992), 28; Kelly (2008), 166

609 *CTh*. VI.30.7 (384) = *CJ* XII.23.7

610 *Not. Dig. Or.* XIII.21-34, *Occ.* XI. 87-99; *CTh.* VI.30.7 (384); *LRE* I, 427-428, II, 583; Barnwell (1992), 28; Delmaire (1995), 122-127, esp. 124

611 Barnwell (1992), 29

612 *LRE* I, 428

613 *Not. Dig. Occ.* XI.21-37 for distribution of western *thesauri*; *LRE* I, 428-429

614 *LRE* I, 429; Delmaire (1995), 121

615 Barnish, Lee, and Whitby (2008), 171

616 *LRE* I, 413-414

officia.[617]Below these we find *procuratores* and *actores* successively; Jones speculates that the former was responsible for the management of specific agglomerations, and the latter for smaller groups of estates.[618]

The tax system was therefore a quasi-capillary structure; information spread from the centre out to the provinces and back again, but the presence of tax infrastructure and officials in the provinces indicates that most revenue in cash and kind would be collected and disseminated on a provincial and a diocesan rather than on an imperial level. Whilst we cannot definitely describe the specific remit of every official involved, a high degree of record-keeping and information exchange was evidently necessary to keep the system ticking over. The setting of an annual budget by the Praetorian Prefecture in the fourth century was, from what we can tell, a first in the history of administration.[619] It will suffice to restate, following Wickham, that it is very likely that the movement of goods and information inherent in the tax system was what kept the empire in one piece.

5.3.2 Lawgiving

The codification of imperial law was a distinct late antique phenomenon that gathered pace as traditional aristocratic jurisprudence gave way to a more dirigiste interpretation of imperial legislative fiat in the period after Hadrian (r.117-138). The first of these collections of imperial constitutions were published under Diocletian by the lawyers Gregorius and Hermogenianus (291/295), although these early codes enjoyed no specific official sanction.[620] The scale of legal codification increased exponentially in the fifth century with the promulgation of the Theodosian Code (438), the compilers of which seem to have drawn extensively on the diocesan archives of North Africa during their stint in the West setting up the court of Valentinian III.[621] Several more circumspect collections of imperial constitutions

[617] *LRE* I, 412-413, III 95-96 n. 2; Barnwell (1992), 31

[618] Ibid, 412-414, III 96 nn. 3-5

[619] *LRE* I, 448-456; Brown (1992), 25

[620] *LRE* I, 474

[621] Ibid, 474-5

(*novellae*) were promulgated in both the East and the West – Valentinian III, Majorian, Severus, and Anthemius all contributed smaller codes to the expanding body of imperial law – and this practice was then adopted extensively by post-Roman rulers of every stripe. The codification of law was, therefore, a potent symbol of legitimacy: it expressed the distinctly Roman claim to civilisation over barbarism, which post-Roman rulers were understandably keen to emulate.

Following the tradition established by the Praetorian Edict of the 130s, the emperor was increasingly the only legitimate source of emendations to existing law.[622] Late imperial governments took an active approach in creating law, as edicts, letters, or rescripts in response to specific issues. This supplemented the pre-existing mass of legislation available in civic or private records, which remained in effect unless explicitly stated otherwise.[623] Law was formed by consultation within the consistory, in which the *quaestor sacrii palatii* was the chief legal officer.[624] Ammianus provides us with two fourth-century instances of the work of the *quaestor* within the consistory. In the first, Valentinian I was convinced to rescind a wave of terror unleashed on the Roman senate by the urging of his *quaestor* Eupraxius (§6.2).[625] Eupraxius similarly managed to convince Valentinian I not to execute decurions in 367, on the grounds that they would be honoured as martyrs.[626] According to Sam Barnish and Roland Delmaire, the *quaestor* does not seem to have had a department of his own within the *comitatus*, but shared staff with the *magister officiorum*.[627] Once an edict, letter, or rescript was formulated, it was either communicated to its specific intended recipients or promulgated more widely. We must assume that imperial laws would be posted in public within municipalities, particularly if they were considered relevant or salutary by local notables.[628] The most extreme example is Diocletian's abortive Edict on Maximal Prices (301), inscribed fragments of which have been found in Italy as well as

---

[622] Harries (1999), 14-15

[623] Ibid, 20-21; Millar (1977), 252-253; Mousourakis (2007), 421-423

[624] *Not. Dig. Occ.* X

[625] Amm. Marc. XXVIII.1.24

[626] Amm. Marc. XXVII.7.6

[627] Barnish (1992), xli; Delmaire (1995), 59; see also Millar (1977), 258

[628] Potter (2004), 6; Barnish, Lee, and Whitby (2008), 182

widely disseminated across the east.[629] Most, such as Constantine's edict "to the Africans" on the excesses of *stationarii*, posted in Carthage in 315 according to the Code of Justinian, will have been more targeted.[630] In the east, we know from John Chrysostom that imperial edicts were read out in the theatres; the trepidation was evidently enough to silence even the rowdiest audiences.[631]

The act of imperial lawgiving went hand in hand with an extensive system of courts.[632] Within municipalities, imperially appointed *defensores* were responsible for judging in minor cases.[633] Within each province, provincial governors were the judge of first instance (*iudex ordinarius*), although governors could assign cases to deputies; cases could then be appealed up the administrative chain to the vicars, Praetorian Prefects or, in the final instance, to the emperor himself. Praetorian Prefects, African proconsuls, and Urban Prefects theoretically possessed the *vice sacra* – the right to judge in place of the emperor – but in reality the inherent politicisation of the judicial system meant that important decisions would invariably be referred back to the consistory.[634] To give a prominent example, Q. Aurelius Symmachus preserved forty-nine instances of correspondence between himself and the imperial court on legal and administrative matters during his eight-month tenure as Urban Prefect in 384, at a rate of once every four or five days.[635] The legal relationship between the Urban Prefect and the consistory is summed up by Symmachus's following statement:

> *"I prefer to reserve judgement … for the merciful emperors. Magistrates, if they pass sentences milder than those prescribed by law, give the impression*

[629] Millar (1977), 258; see Rees (2004), 139-146 for the text

[630] *CJ.* XII.57.1; Millar (1977), 258

[631] Joh. Chrys. *Hom. in Gen.* 14.2 (*PG* 53:112), 44.1 (*PG* 54:406); *Hom. in Matt*. 1.8 (*PG* 57:24); Kelly (2004), 218

[632] *LRE* I, 471

[633] *CTh.* I.29; *NMaj.* 3.1 (Ravenna, May 8 458); Harries (1999), 54-55

[634] Harries (1999), 55

[635] Harries (1999), 114-117; Errington (2006), 125-126

> *of having been corrupted, whereas the power of the divine emperors is different: for it is appropriate for them to ameliorate the harshness of the law."* – Symmachus, *Relationes* 49.4

However unrepresentative the cases in Symmachus' *relationes* may have been of the usual run of judicial proceedings, it seems clear that the consistory must have been constantly clogged with pending legal work. According to Ammianus, judges themselves were not professional legal scholars, instead relying on the advice of professional experts.[636] These were evidently in abundance, as were trained advocates, owing to the increasing standardisation of law and proliferation of courts in late antiquity: in the east, Libanius was moved to complain that few young aristocrats now pursued an education in rhetoric and philosophy, instead choosing to run off to the law schools in Beirut, Constantinople, or Rome.[637]

Despite the lofty moralistic claims of the Roman state in making or standardising law – Theodosius II claimed, on promulgating the Theodosian Code, that it should stand as "a teacher of life" in instructing the user in "what should be observed and what avoided"[638] – quite how well the judicial system worked in practice is an open question. The requirement for fee payments to secure a place in trials, as is evidenced by the Timgad inscription, skewed the judicial system in favour of those who could afford it.[639] Corruption certainly occurred, and the possibility of violence will have deterred many from seeking legal recourse for injustices. Lastly, we must assume that the greater availability of courts and the proliferation of professional lawyers, who now relied on cases continuing to secure income, will have left the system heavily burdened with casework.[640] However, it is very likely that our evidence for the function of the legal system represents only a fraction of conflict resolution in the late Roman world, most of which will likely never have gone near a

---

[636] Amm. Marc. XXIII.6.82

[637] Lib. *Ep.* 1170, 1203

[638] *CTh.* I.1.5 (429)

[639] E.g., Prisc. *fr.* 11.2.436-53

[640] Liebs (2008), 238-239

courtroom. To conclude, it is worth restating that however well the judicial system worked, the fact that the state provided for it and clearly vested its interest in maintaining it is suggestive of the importance of law and legal procedure to the later Roman statecraft.

5.3.3 Security

The later Roman world did not possess any clear equivalent to a modern police force. In Rome, the three urban cohorts and seven cohorts of the *vigiles* founded by Augustus seem to have been disbanded by the fourth century.[641] Late Roman Urban Prefects evidently had no regular forces at their disposal with which to prevent or contain unrest: during bread riots in 359, Tertullus resorted to offering his children as hostages to a mob, and the younger Symmachus was forced to rely on loaned soldiers to restore order in the disputed papal election between Eulalius and Boniface (418/419).[642] If Rome did not have a police force, then we must assume that provincial cities also lacked one. Rudimentary local policing was likely conducted by private *vigiles* or *collegiati*. Similarly, whilst the *agentes in rebus, curiosi*, and *notarii* are sometimes characterised as a form of secret police force, there is no evidence that this was their primary function.[643] These officials were used at times to spy on their peers – in the case of the *agentes*, as *principes officii* - but they appear just as frequently in our sources as reporters, ambassadors, or negotiators.[644] In most circumstances, the army was the one organisation upon which the imperial government most relied to provide security. This security could be provided against external threats, such as 'barbarian' incursions, or internal threats, such as military usurpations, popular revolts, or brigandage. We are relatively well informed about external wars and usurpations, which pockmarked the fourth century; we are less well informed about popular revolts, although Ammianus obliquely admitted that they did occur; and we know very little about

---

[641] *LRE* II, 693

[642] Tertullus: Amm. Marc. XIX.10.2-3; Symmachus: *Coll. Avell.* 16, 32; *PLRE* IIB, 1043-1044

[643] Lib. *Or.* 18.135, 140, 136, 138, 131, 134; Barnwell (1992), 23; *LRE* II, 578-579; Kelly (2004), 206; Delmaire (1995), 78; Bury (1958), 30-31

[644] *CTh.* VI.xxix.4 (359), 2 §1 (357), 8 (395), 10 (412) for *agentes* reporting on provinces; Kelly (2004), p. 210

how the military dealt with the everyday brigandage that was a ubiquitous feature of provincial Roman life.[645]

The most interesting feature of the Roman military hierarchy was that, at least until the reign of Valentinian I, it was firmly sequestered from the civilian hierarchy.[646] This was increasingly less the case as the position evolving from the role of *magister peditum* gained prominence (§7.4.2), and by the turn of the fifth century we can clearly see the dominance of this position in a piece of Stilichonian legislation that appears to give military tax collectors primacy over their civilian counterparts.[647] Broadly speaking, the military hierarchy can be divided into central and provincial command structures, although the structure presented in the *Notitia Dignitatum* is clearly an overly rigid presentation of a more fluid situation. At the centre, the emperor was the commander of the praesental field army, and was guarded by the *comes domesticorum* and the palace guards, the *protectores domestici*.[648] Command of the field armies belonged to the *magistri militi,* of whom there were three recorded in the west in the *Notitia Dignitatum*: the *magister peditum in praesenti,* the *magister equitum in praesenti*, and the *magister equitum per Gallias*.[649] Military counts – *comites rei militaris* – seem to have been sent from the centre on specific missions as the commanders of field army units, although the *Notitia* does show a series of regional counts with specific military remits.[650] Three of these – the *comites Africae*, *Tingitaniae*, and *Litoris Saxonici per Britanniam* – had both troops and an *officium* in the *Notitia*.[651] We know from the chronicle of Hydatius of a fourth, Asterius, the *comes Hispaniarum*.[652] It is likely that these positions originated as temporary postings that became semi-permanent owing to the political power of their occupants, such as the

[645] Amm. Marc. XXVII.2.11; Marcone (2008), p. 366

[646] Amm. Marc. XXI.16.1f, XXVII.9.4; Matthews (1989), 253-254

[647] *CTh.* XI.7.16 (Milan, July 13 401)

[648] Barnwell (1992), 37-38

[649] *Not. Dig. Occ.* V, VI; *LRE* III, Appendix II, Table IV, 362; Barnwell (1992), 41

[650] Barnwell (1992), 34

[651] *Not. Dig. Occ.* XXV, XXVI, XXVIII; *LRE* III, Appendix II, Table IV, 362

[652] Hydat. 66 [74], s.a. 420

comites Africae Romanus and Heraclian. Permanent command over provincial commands belonged to the *duces*, of whom there are eleven recorded in the *Notitia*.[653] The *duces* commanded the *limitanei* stationed along the imperial frontiers.

5.3.4 Observations

There are a few salient features of Roman official practice that are worth highlighting. The first is that Roman officials were all salaried, being paid in cash and kind from the proceeds of the tax system. Salaries were calculated in kind until the fifth century, although they were increasingly commuted into gold *solidi*.[654] We possess no evidence for pay differentials in the contemporary west. Our best evidence is a sixth-century edict issued by Justinian in the process of setting up a new Praetorian Prefecture in North Africa.[655]

> *"In the first bureau: ten men, 19 ½ in rations, 12 ½ in fodder, totalling 147 ½ solidi. As follows: to the chief accountant (numerarius), 6 rations of 5 solidi and 4 fodder of 4 solidi, totalling 46 solidi. To the second official, 3 rations of 5 solidi and 2 fodder of 4 solidi, totalling 23 solidi. To the third official, 2 rations of 5 solidi and 1 ½ fodder of 4 solidi, totalling 16 solidi. To the fourth, fifth, and sixth, officials, 1 ½ rations of 5 solidi and 1 fodder of 4 solidi, totalling 34 ½ solidi. To the four remaining officials, 1 ration of 5 solidi and ½ fodder of 4 solidi, totalling 28 solidi."* – *CJ.* I.XXVII.1 §22 (Constantinople, April 1st 534)

This law indicates that most bureaucrats were paid approximately the same as the *comitatenses* and cavalry troopers (§3.1)[656] Unsurprisingly, officials systematically supplemented their salaries with established regimes of illicit tips. Following Wickham, we note that the payment of salaries was crucial in the construction of the Roman state, as a

[653] *Not. Dig. Occ.* XXX-XXXVIII, XL-XLI; *LRE* III, Appendix II, Table IV, 363

[654] *LRE* I, 397

[655] *CJ* I.XXVII.1 §§21-39 (534)

[656] *LRE* II, 591

government that wishes to dispense with someone under such a system can simply stop paying their salary.[657]

The next key feature is tenure. There were two types of Roman officeholding: *militia* and *dignitas*. *Militiae* were permanent appointments made within the bureaucracy; the officeholders were issued with a *probatoria* (certificate of enlistment). By contrast, *dignitates* were held at the emperor's pleasure, and often for very brief periods; these officeholders were issued with a codicil either by the emperor personally or by the *primicerius notariorum*.[658] Members of the *militia* served for their whole careers, and advancement was by strict seniority. This will have guaranteed a degree of professionalism within each office, but also meant that the system was a permanently clogged gerontocracy in its upper echelons.[659] By contrast, holders of *dignitates* usually held office for brief periods, probably to prevent power being accumulated in their hands. Our information is best for the Urban Prefecture of Rome. To give an example, of the twelve named Urban Prefects appointed under Honorius between 410-423, eight served for around a year (although two of these – Iunius Valerius Bellicius (408/423) and Anicius Acilius Glabrio Faustus (421/423) – served twice).[660] Two – Fl. Annius Eucharius Epiphanius and Petronius Maximus – served for between eighteen and twenty months apiece, and Petronius Maximus held the Prefecture twice (420/421/439).[661] According to Jones's calculations, the average tenure of office of the Urban Prefect between 284 and 425 was just over a year.[662] By comparison, of the ten named Praetorian Prefects under Honorius between 410-423, six seem to have served for less than a year; three – Melitius (16 months), Seleucus (c.20 months), and Hadrianus (7 months) served longer; and one, Fl. Iunius Quartus Palladius, served for around five years.[663] Of the five named Honorian *comites sacrarum largitionum*,

[657] Wickham (2005), 58

[658] *LRE* I, 377-378, III 81 n. 28

[659] *LRE* II, 602-606

[660] Salzman (2021), Table 3.1; *PLRE* II, 233, 452-454

[661] Ibid.; *PLRE* II, 399, 749-751

[662] *LRE* I, 380, III, n. 32

[663] Salzman (2021), Table 3.4; *PLRE* II, 527, 753, 822-824, 987-988

three – Gaiso, Lucillus, and Rufinus – seem to have served for under a year; one, Probus, served for twenty-eight months; and Petronius Maximus served for around three years.[664] One important observation is that the vast majority of the individuals named above were senatorial aristocrats who held office in brief interludes to their otherwise otiose lifestyles. By comparison to the expertise built up within the palatine bureaux, the political positions occupied by the holders of *dignitates* were staffed almost entirely with amateurs.[665] There were, of course, exceptions. Petronius Maximus, who served as a *praetor* in 411, as a tribune in 415, as *comes sacrarum largitionum* between 416-419, as Urban Prefect in 420-21 (and again in 439), as Praetorian Prefect of Italy in 439-441, and briefly as emperor in 455, demonstrated the capacity for senatorial élites to flourish in the upper reaches of administration.[666] By and large, however, we can discern a tenure pattern that was lifelong for career bureaucrats and usually brief for high officeholders.

The professionalism of the main bureaux is likely to have aided consistent record-keeping, without which complex administration and tax collection will have been impossible. The flow of information to and from the imperial court must usually have been voluminous. We know from legislation that provincial governors were expected to submit reports of judicial proceedings twice yearly to the Praetorian Prefect, and of financial returns every four months to the *comes sacrarum largitiones*.[667] Furthermore, according to Symmachus, the minutes of the Senate of Rome were sent to the imperial court every month on the off chance that the emperor should want to read them. The Urban Prefect was also expected to submit reports on the progress of university students at Rome on an annual basis.[668] Our best evidence for the internal mechanics of the bureaux is found in John Lydus's *de magistratibus*, which is both sixth century and Constantinopolitan in origin. For example, John's figure, quoted above, for a Diocletianic military establishment of 389,704 soldiers and 45,562 sailors was intended as a boast concerning the supposed accuracy of the records of

[664] Ibid, Table 3.2; *PLRE* II, 490, 691, 910, 952

[665] Brown (1971), 120; Wickham (2009), 26-27; Matthews (1989), 278

[666] Wickham (2009), 27-28

[667] *CTh.* I.16.3 (Sirmium, Oct. 24 318/319), I.10.7 (Milan, Feb. 27 401)

[668] Symm. *Rel.* 24.1; *CTh.* XIV.9.1 (Trier, March 12 370)

the contemporary Praetorian Prefecture (§2.3)[669] To give a further example, John records that legal cases before the Prefect's tribunal would be summarised twice; one copy was for the *secretaries*, the other (the *personalium*) was for the *auditor* attached to the *ab actis*.[670] Such duplication increased the possibility that records would be maintained even if primary copies were misplaced. John also demonstrated the importance of record-keeping for the provincials in an attack on his erstwhile superior, John the Cappadocian: complaining that the Cappadocian had replaced the regular officials with yes-men who didn't know how to maintain records properly, John reported that:

> *"Whenever significant difficulties arose for the taxpayers because the documents had not been processed according to the proper procedures, the Cappadocian grew angry and sentenced to death those who did not understand the force of the documents which had been so carelessly and haphazardly issued."*[671] – John Lydus, *On the magistracies of the Roman people* III.68

However, as John also amply demonstrated, complex record-keeping could also be accompanied by a deliberately obtuse jargon that served to insulate the bureaucracy from external interference in its spheres of influence.[672] The extent to which the sixth-century eastern situation corresponds to that of the fourth/fifth century west is unclear: the eastern court was significantly less peripatetic, and the attendant bureaucracy had longer to grow institutional roots. However, the closest comparable western texts – the *Variae* of Cassiodorus – shed far less light on the internal mechanics of administration. It is worth noting that, impressive though Roman record keeping may seem in context, it was still hampered by pre-modern conditions and media; to borrow a term from Jones, sifting through the *papyrasserie* must have been a daunting task for late imperial bureaucrats.[673]

---

[669] Joh. Lydus, *Mens*. I.27; *LRE* II, 679, III 209 n. 168

[670] Joh. Lydus, *Mag.* III.11, 20; Kelly (2004), 31-32

[671] Kelly (2004), 35

[672] Joh. Lydus, *Mag.* II.22; Kelly (2004), 28

[673] *LRE* I, 410; Kelly (2004), 186-231

Considering how many official positions had to be filled, the consistory retained a high level of control over appointments.[674] As the *missorium* of Theodosius I depicted (§7.4.3), codicils of appointment were, if possible, to be exclusively handed out by the emperor personally.[675] By contrast, responsibility for the issuing of *probatoriae* was divided in "a quite arbitrary way" between the various palatine bureaux.[676] To quote Chris Kelly's paraphrasing of Jones, "the *scrinium memoriae* dealt with the appointment of *agentes in rebus*, palatine officials in the financial departments, and junior military commands; the *scrinium epistularum* with the staff of the Praetorian and Urban Prefects, proconsuls, and *vicarii*; and the *scrinium libellorum* with officials attached to senior military commanders".[677] Appointments were usually made on the recommendation (*suffragium*) of those with proximity to the throne, meaning that most would be made on the basis of patronage relationships in practice. This led to agglomerations of officials from preferred regions, for example of Pannonians such as Maximinus and Festus under Valentinian I, or of Aquitainians owing to Ausonius's influence over Gratian.[678] By comparison, Symmachus's complaint about the quality of the officials being sent by the consistory to serve under him met with a biting retort from the government of Valentinian II; evidently the Prefect had no say in the matter (§7.2).[679] The imperial government clearly understood that there was likely to be a negative impact on administration resulting from accepting place-men over longstanding bureaucrats. Valentinian I, for example, ruled that those who attained the rank of *protector* with the aid of *suffragium* were to pay 50 *solidi*, by comparison to the 5-10 demanded from those of long service.[680] To that end, we can observe that the process of appointment was highly

---

[674] *LRE* I, 401-406, esp. 403; Kelly (2004), 193, 205; (2008), 151-152

[675] Kelly (2004), 193; Matthews (1989), 253

[676] *LRE* I, 576

[677] Kelly (2004), 209

[678] Maximinus: Amm. Marc. XXVIII.1.5; *PLRE* IB 577-578; Festus: Amm. Marc. XXIX.2.22; *PLRE* IA 334-335; *LRE* I, 392; Matthews (1975), 35-39, 56-87; (1989), 272-273

[679] Symm. *Rel.* 17; *CTh.* I.6.9 (385)

[680] *CTh.* VI.24.3 (Aug. 19 364/5)

centralised, but was also very susceptible to the patronage system, meaning that the most deserving rarely got the job when faced with competitors with effective political backing.

Lastly, we must address the question of whether to view the late Roman system as primarily bureaucratic or monarchical. As we previously observed, the bureaucracy had unavoidably grown in the passage from the Principate to the later empire (§2.3). This is never more apparent than in the "curiously miscellaneous group of duties" assigned to the *magister officiorum*, who combined the roles of head of the bureaucracy and interior/foreign minister.[681] According to Roland Delmaire, of the laws addressed to the *magister officiorum* in the Theodosian Code, 25 dealt with the *agentes in rebus* and the public post, 31 with civil servants (<*milices palatines*>), 6 with the *fabricae armaturae*, 15 with the housing of soldiers and functionaries, 10 with civil law (droit civil), 5 with the jurisdiction of the palatine ministries, and one apiece for the frontier troops, statues, and the clergy.[682] The *magister officiorum* also oversaw the *magistri memoriae*, *epistularum*, and *libellorum*, meaning that he was ultimately responsible for the issuing of *probatoriae*; he was responsible for conducting palace ceremony and embassies to the imperial court; he was responsible for the *agentes in rebus* and *curiosi*; and at times ran both the public post and the state armaments factories, leading Rutilius Namatianus to recall that, during his tenure as *magister officiorum*, he had ruled over the palace and the armourers.[683] For Jones, the later empire was "before all things a bureaucratic state", although his view was explicitly tempered by the centrality of the emperor to decision making, and by his ability to bypass

[681] *Not. Dig. Occ.* IX; *LRE* I, 368; Barnwell (1992), 23-24; Bury (1958), 29; Delmaire (1995), 78, 82; Barnish, Lee, and Whitby (2008), 172; on the *magister officiorum*'s relations with foreign sovereigns: Amm. Marc. XXVI.5.7, XXIX.5.2; Prisc. *fr.* 7

[682] Delmaire (1995), 78

[683] *LRE* I, 368, II, 575, 582-584; *Not. Dig. Occ.* IX.; Delmaire (1995), 78-82; Bury (1958), 30-31; Rut. Nam. I.563-4: *officiis regerem cum regia tecta magister armigerasque pii principis excubias.* Identification of Rutilius as *magister officiorum*: *CTh*. VI.27.15 (7th Sept. 412), although he is here referred to as Namatius

multiple layers of administration at whim.[684] Building on Jones's analysis, Paul Barnwell argued that:

> "The most significant single point to emerge from the enquiry into the administrative workings of the court is that a courtier's title was not necessarily the key to an understanding of his activities at all times: although courtiers certainly held 'offices' which indicated their normal spheres of activity, such offices did not preclude activity in other areas. The administrative structure which was centred upon the court was not, therefore, bureaucratic, but depended upon a group of courtiers, or 'companions' (*comites*) of the emperor, who could, no matter what their specific titles, be called upon to carry out the emperor's will in almost any way." – Paul Barnwell (1992), 49

This observation is true of many Roman officials, but particularly so of our accounts of *comites,* notaries, and *agentes in rebus.*[685] The question is important because a bureaucratic system is more specialised than a monarchical one. A monarch is entitled to involve himself in any and all spheres of governmental activity; if officials are purely responsive to the monarch's needs, then they are more likely to be tasked with a correspondingly wide variety of duties and therefore less likely to be specialised. By contrast, developed bureaucracies can keep functioning smoothly either with weak or absent monarchical input. In the final chapter of *Ruling the Later Roman Empire* (2004), entitled 'Autocracy and Bureaucracy', Chris Kelly sets out the tensions and compromises inherent in the competing demands of monarchy and bureaucratisation:

> "In the Later Roman Empire, the conflict between the competing demands of bureaucracy and autocracy exerted a double pressure. On the one hand, for emperors to subordinate themselves to regulation, to delegate power, or to conform to the demands of order was to strengthen the bureaucracy at the

[684] *LRE* I, 374, II, 563

[685] Kelly (2004), 206

> cost of their own independence and authority. On the other hand, for emperors to resist the constraints imposed by a more institutional pattern of rule was to assert their own preferences at the cost of that certainty and reliability necessary for administrative efficiency…The art of successful rule was, in part, the art of incomplete and uncertain delegation. The exercise of imperial power sometimes entailed the ability to destroy established patterns or to prevent their formation, to create chaos, and to confound expectation. Intermittent terror and instability … added force to their insistent claim that the continued importance of officialdom in the government of empire was dependent upon them personally and upon the vicissitudes of imperial will." – Chris Kelly (2004), 191

The conclusion that Kelly reached, in contravention of Jones, was that "the later Roman Empire was before all things a monarchical state".[686] I find Kelly's argument compelling, although I would emphasize two counterpoints. The first is that the preponderance of autocracy in the later Roman empire was framed by a system that was highly bureaucratised in comparison to other contemporary systems, and the methods for maintaining imperial rule should be understood within this context – i.e., we are dealing with a bureaucratised autocracy. The second is that the maintenance of autocracy required hands-on management from emperors who did not wish to become *rois fainéants*, and even then the risk was high. As we shall later see, this was a risk that was fully realised in the late Roman west (§§7.4.2-4).

5.4 The Specialisation of Governance in the post-Roman Kingdoms

Having established the manner in which Roman governance was specialised, we turn now to how it may be compared and contrasted with governance in the successor kingdoms. Our approach will mirror that taken in the previous section, with a primary focus on the specialisation of governmental functions – finance, legislating and adjudication, and security – with a secondary focus on the structure of officialdoms. If possible, we will also ascertain

[686] Ibid, 225

when the imperial government ceased to send or receive officials from each region, as this is as good a date as any to denote the separation of regions from the imperial superstructure. A regional approach will again be necessary, owing to the disparity between the administrative history of each post-Roman kingdom. Below, we will consider the governmental specialisation of the Vandal kingdom in North Africa, the Visigothic kingdom in Iberia, the Frankish kingdoms of Gaul, and both the Ostrogothic kingdom and Lombard polities of the Italian peninsula. Britain has been excluded, as administrative complexity did not return until the foundation of the kingdom of Mercia in the eighth century (§3.4.1.1).

5.4.1 The Merovingian Kingdoms

Any history of Merovingian governmental specialisation is complicated by the fact that the repeated division of Frankish territory between royal sons led to the rapid breakdown of the late Roman administrative boundaries in the fifth and sixth centuries. Incessant civil wars between rival Frankish kings will only have militated against administrative continuity.[687] As a result, following Ian Wood, we note that our sources for Merovingian administration imply a lack of uniformity.[688] We might here think of Gregory of Tours' conflict with the tax assessors of Childebert, who sought to impose the same taxes on Tours as on Poitiers, only to be informed that Tours had been exempt from such taxes since the time of Lothar I: evidently what was true for one Merovingian *civitas* was not necessarily true for others.[689] This lack of administrative uniformity immediately suggests that we are unlikely to find a bureaucratised Merovingian environment, as bureaucratisation and standardisation tend to go hand in hand.

Dating the point at which imperial officials ceased to be sent to Gaul, or to be dispatched from Gaul, is difficult to do with any precision. This is partly because Gaul did not drop out of imperial control with the same uniformity as North Africa, but was lost piecemeal over the course of the fifth century. Under Avitus and Majorian, there was still a significant

[687] Wood (1994); Dey (2015), 161

[688] Wood (1994), 60-61

[689] Greg. Tur. IX.30

transfer of officials from Gaul to Italy.[690] Under Majorian (r. 457-461), Gauls such as Ennodius served as *comes rei privata*; Magnus served as the Praetorian Prefect of Gaul; Catullinus served as a tribune and notary; and Sidonius Apollinaris served as the Urban Prefect.[691] In the following reigns of Libius Severus, Olybrius, Glycerius, and Julius Nepos, known Gauls served only as the Praetorian Prefect of the Gauls: they had ceased to serve in Italy.[692] There are no known Gauls serving in Italian positions under Odovacer or the Ostrogoths, although the latter did appoint officials to the segment of Provence that remained under Ostrogothic control. This tallies with the breakdown of communication between much of Gaul and Italy with the death of Majorian and the defection of Aegidius. We might conclude that 461 marks a border – if a potentially permeable one – in the transfer of officials between Gaul and Italy.

Taxation evidently occurred in the Merovingian kingdoms – Gregory makes several references to it – although as we have seen it was not uniform between *civitates*:

> *"King Chilperic decreed that a new series of taxes should be levied throughout the kingdom, and these were extremely heavy…The new tax laws laid it down that a landowner must pay five gallons of wine for every half-acre which he possessed…When they realised how they were being mulcted by this taxation, the people of Limoges called a meeting on 1st March and decided to kill Mark, the tax-collector who had been ordered to put the new laws into effect…A mob gathered: the people seized the tax-collectors demand books and burned them to ashes."* – Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks* V.28

[690] Salzman (2021), Table 4.1 for officials appointed by Avitus

[691] Ennodius = *PLRE* IIA, 392-393; Magnus = *PLRE* IIB, 700-701; Catullinus = *PLRE* IIA, 272-273; Sidonius Apollinaris = *PLRE* IIB, 115-118; Salzman (2021), Table 4.2

[692] Arvandus = *PLRE* IIA, 157-158; Polemius = *PLRE* IIB, 895; Aurelianus = *PLRE* IIA, 199; Protadius = *PLRE* IIB, 927; Agricola = *PLRE* IIA, 37; Matthews (1975), 333-334

Ferdinand Lot has calculated that this tax amounted to approximately ten per cent of the crop, or half of the official late Roman level.[693] We have, therefore, evidence for record-keeping and for tax officials, such as Mark (who, incidentally, survived the ordeal), referred to elsewhere as a 'referendary'.[694] Referendaries are found producing proceedings and decrees, keeping royal seals, and drawing up tax lists, indicating that they could be used in whatever capacity required a knowledge of writing.[695] Gregory also referenced other royal tax officials, such as Parthenius, who was described as a tax official of Theudebert: unlike Mark, he did not escape the ire of the taxpayers.[696] At a municipal level, *comites civitatis* – all presumably royal appointees - could be found collecting and submitting taxes to the royal treasuries.[697] Within royal courts, there are references to *camerarii* and *thesaurorii*, who appear wherever there is a royal treasury: according to Barnwell, these officials were responsible for collecting fines and seizing treasure owed to the fisc.[698] Merovingian taxation, therefore, appears to have been particularly subject to the contemporary political situation: it was not uniform (and therefore probably not bureaucratised), and was gradually being subsumed into treasure privately owed to the royal fisc rather than as a public resource for expenditure on state directives.[699]

The role of law and legislating in the Merovingian kingdoms presents a mixed picture. On the one hand, this period sees the issue of the first Frankish legal codes – the Salian (c.511 or earlier) and Ribuarian Laws – which were written in Latin and undoubtedly influenced by Roman examples.[700] Frankish kings stepped into the role of legislator vacated by Roman emperors, and could issue edicts (e.g., the *Decretio Childeberti*, the *Edictum Chilperici*, and

[693] Lot (1928), 85-86

[694] Greg. Tur. VI.28

[695] Proceedings: *MGH Concilia* I, 162-163 (Council of Valence, 585); Decree: *Childeberti II Decretio, Cap. Mer.* 14; Tax lists: Greg. Tur. V.28, 34, VI.28.; *LRE* I, 261; Keeping seals: Greg. Tur. V.3

[696] Greg. Tur. III.36; Heather (2008), 445

[697] Greg. Tur. VII.23, IX.21

[698] Barnwell (1992), 106-107; (1997), 25-26

[699] Wood (1994), 64-66

[700] Wormald (1977), 115

the *Pactus pro tenore pacis*) as well as offering additions and emendations to existing bodies of customary law.[701] In this effort they were assisted by Roman officials.[702] Childebert's edicts seem to have been drafted with the aid of an official named Asclepiodatus, and according to the Formulary of Marculf there were, by the seventh century, officials at Merovingian courts entitled *comes palatii*, whom P.S. Barnwell suggests were chief legal officers.[703] The courts themselves appear to have possessed defined legal cultures. Late Merovingian *placita* – documents recording the settlement of particular cases – record the assembly of significant bodies of secular and ecclesiastical élites to hear disputes between fellow aristocrats, help the king judge their cases, and sign their names onto the final settlement.[704] Similarly, the fact that all three of Childebert's edicts (594, 5, 6) were promulgated on March 1st indicates that this was done at a yearly assembly of notables, thereby further reinforcing a sense of élite legal solidarity.[705] Royal legislation was also frequently promulgated after Church councils, which kings were responsible for summoning.[706] On the other hand, the influence of Roman precedent on Frankish legal practices does not appear to have been as extensive as was the case in the more southerly successor kingdoms.[707] Frankish law was based on pre-existing custom to such an extent that it is difficult to determine whether documents like the Salian law represent a legal tradition or simply the "distillation of Frankish identity" by royal legislators.[708] The short prologue of the Salian law does not attribute the origins of its contents to monarchical initiative, but to four (almost certainly mythical) lawmakers named Wisogast, Arogast, Salegast, and Widogast who purportedly originated in the Frankish communities beyond the

[701] *Pactus*, 79-93; 106-116; *Liber historiae Francorum* 4; *Lex Ribuaria*, 32; 50.1; 56; 73.2; Wood (1994), 110

[702] Wood (1994), 112

[703] Wood (1994), 107-108; *PLRE* IIIA, 134; Charles-Edwards (2008), 270; Barnwell (1992), 108; Wormald (1977), 125-126

[704] Wood (1994), 262-263; Heather (2008), 452

[705] Wood (1994), 104; Barnwell and Mostert (2003), 25-26

[706] Wood (1994), 104-105

[707] Rio (2011), 7

[708] Wood (1994), 109-110; Wormald (2003), 32; Rio (2007), 7; Heather (2008), 451-452

Rhine; unsurprisingly, the texts of the Salian law we possess are "undilutedly Germanic" in a way that other post-Roman codes were not.[709] Furthermore, there does not appear to have been a centrally organised system of courts in Merovingian Gaul of the type we find in the Visigothic Kingdom. Instead, legal authority seems to have been vested in local men, called *rachinburgii*, whose duty it was to pass judgement based on their knowledge of custom.[710] This tallies with the fact that, if the text of the *Pactus Legis Salicae* is to be believed, a great deal of Salian law remained unwritten.[711] Within municipalities, the *comites civitatis* appear in our sources as the judge of first instance.[712] As we have said, while Merovingian courts had clearly defined legal cultures that bound them to their élites in conflict resolution, the extent to which royal legal pronouncements were used in practice beyond the court is unclear. Given that the grammarian system so essential to the formulation of written law in the Roman period broke down north of the Alps sometime before 500 (Gregory of Tours' confused verb endings would likely have appalled Sidonius), the extent to which Merovingian written law was useful to the population at large, which cannot have been extensively literate in Latin, is open to dispute.[713] Added to this was the fact that the *Teilreiche* were a constantly shifting political environment, and could not necessarily be counted on to enforce the legal rulings of any given Merovingian king in the mid- to long-term (although the Salian law does present a picture of kings adopting and adding to each other's legislation).[714] It is noteworthy that by the mid-seventh century different Frankish law codes were considered operative in different regions of the kingdoms: the *Pactus legis salicae* for Neustria, the *Lex Ribuaria* for Austrasia, and the *Liber Constitutionum* (*Lex Gundobada*) for Burgundy.[715] This indicates a lack of systematization. Overall, the implication is that Merovingian royal legislating was aimed mainly at securing élite

[709] Wormald (1977), 126; Wood (1994), 109

[710] Wood (1994); (2013), 506; Heather (2008), 451-452

[711] Wood (1994), 110

[712] Greg. Tur. V.48; Venant., *Carm*. X.19; *Pactus* 32.5, 45.2, 50.3, 50.4, 51.1-3, 53.2, 53.4, 53.6, 53.8; *Chilperici I edictus, Cap. Mer., 8.*

[713] Wormald (1977), 115, 135; Heather (2011), 141; (2023), 320, 337-338

[714] E.g., *Pactus*, epilogue; Wood (1994), 111; cf. *Passio Leudegarii* II.6

[715] Wood (1994), 114-115

cooperation with the courts and augmenting royal legitimacy – in other words, in presenting Frankish kings as successors to law-giving Roman emperors - but that this took place against a decentralised system of local legal authority that was essentially indistinguishable from Frankish customary practices.

In terms of security, it is noteworthy that the *Pactus pro tenore pacis*, which mainly dealt with theft, envisages officials called *centenarii* – seemingly attached to the *comites civitatis* – pursuing criminals across political boundaries.[716] This indicates some level of policing, although it is likely that *centenarii* were selected from amongst the *leudes* (retainers) of individual *comites civitatis*. Frankish military power appears to have been landed, with followers rewarded in land and gifts rather than with cash salaries. There are multiple references to regional dukes, who seem to have held overall command in a circumscribed area.[717] Interestingly, Merovingian warfare seems to have been conducted using militia raised from individual *civitates*, who likely fought under their own notables:[718]

> *"No sooner was Chilperic dead…than the men of Orleans joined forces with the inhabitants of Blois and attacked the citizens of Châteaudun out of the blue and beat them…They had not gone far when the Dunois, supported in this by the other people from the Chartres neighbourhood, followed in their tracks and meted out to them the same treatment which they themselves had received…The two sides pressed on with the struggle, starting new quarrels among themselves. The men of Orleans were on the point of taking up arms for a counterattack when the Counts came between them and peace was enforced until the case could be heard…"* – Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks* VII.2

---

[716] Ibid, p. 107; Barnwell (1992), 110, 210 nn. 173-175

[717] E.g., Beppolen: Greg. Tur. VIII.42, V.29, X.9; Fred. IV.12; Berulf and Ennodius: Greg. Tur. VIII.26; Lupus: Greg. Tur. VI.4; Fred. III.86; Wintrio: Greg. Tur. VIII.18; Fred. IV.14; Nicetius: Greg. Tur. VIII.18; Gundulf: Greg. Tur. VI.11

[718] Greg. Tur. IV.30, VII.13, 29, X.9; Venant., *Carm*. X.19; Heather (2008), 441; Wickham (2005), 107

Every indication is that security in the Merovingian world was privatised in the hands of military aristocrats, or organised as part of the levy of services owed by individual *civitates* to specific kings.

Our evidence for governmental specialisation in the Merovingian kingdoms is quite variable, although it points firmly to the retreat of bureaucratisation and the atomisation of an overarching administrative system into a shifting pattern of bilateral relations between courts and *civitates*. Governmental specialisation, particularly in the realm of lawgiving, evidently continued, but on a more restricted scale. Officials were likely remunerated in gifts rather than salaries, and there is no evidence in Gregory for specific periods of tenure. Overall, the Merovingian political situation was overtly monarchical, and less conspicuously Romanising than was the case in the Visigothic kingdom.

5.4.2 The Visigothic Kingdom

Our evidence for the administrative structure of the Visigothic kingdom, composed of both secular and ecclesiastical legislation, the proceedings of church councils, chronicles, saint's lives, and the *pizarras visigodas*, is significantly better than that we possess for Vandal North Africa.[719] However, the picture is complicated by the long period of confusion in notionally Visigothic territories. Roman administration began to disintegrate following the invasion of the Vandals, Alans, and Suebes in 409, and the Visigoths did not establish control over the peninsula until the 480s; indeed, it was not until the reign of Leovigild (569-586) that a stable central authority was decisively reconstituted.[720] Michael Kulikowski has argued that between 409 and 461 Iberia ostensibly remained subject to Roman administration, but that this ended with the death of Majorian. After this point, it was neither possible to hold imperial office within Iberia nor for Hispano-Romans to hold imperial office outside of Iberia.[721] It is worth pointing out that the vast majority of Roman officials appointed to Hispania in its final years as part of the empire were military officials sent on expeditions

[719] Wickham (2005), 93; Barnwell (1997), 57-62

[720] Ibid, 93-94

[721] Kulikowski (2004), 152, 192; see also Dey (2015), 149

into the peninsula; the last know *vicarius* of Hispania, Maurocellus, is recorded by Hydatius as being in office in 420.[722] According to Kulikowski, Flavius Merobaudes is the last Hispano-Roman we know of to have served outside of Iberia, and Magnus, a Narbonensian senator who held the post of *magister* in Hispania under Majorian, is the last non-Hispano-Roman we know of serving within Iberia.[723]

As we intimated previously, tax-raising continued in the Visigothic kingdom, but declined in political importance as time went on.[724] There are references to two leading financial officials at court – the *comes patrimonii*/*patrimoniorum* and the *comes thesaurorum*.[725] The former appears to have been in charge of the royal treasury and of crown estates (*domus fiscales*/*dominicae*), and to have been responsible for the *numerarii* (local tax officials).[726] The latter may have been in charge of the provincial treasuries, and Paul Barnwell speculates that he could have been the successor to the *comes sacrarum largitionum*.[727] *Numerarii* are envisaged in a law of Reccared (r. 586-601) as being appointed by the bishop and populace, and conducted taxation either in a single city or a group of cities.[728] In *de fisco Barcinonensi*, *numerarii* were responsible for assessing and collecting taxes, but were to be overseen by bishops.[729]

By contrast to the Merovingian Kingdoms, the legal system of the Visigothic Kingdom was more centralised and Romanising in character. The two early Visigothic legal codes, the

---

[722] Hydat. 66 [74], s.a. 420; Kulikowski (2004), 194; Appendix 2, 313-315; Asturius = Hydat. 117 [125], s.a. 441 (*dux*), 120 [128], s.a. 443 (*magister*); Merobaudes = Hydat. 120 [128], s.a. 443; Vitus = Hydat. 126 [134], s.a. 446; Censurius = Hydat. 88 [98], s.a. 432; Olympiad 91 [100], s.a. 433; 103 [111], s.a. 437; 113 [121] s.a. 440; 131 [139], s.a. 449; Mansuetus = 147 [155], s.a. 452-3; Fronto = Hydat. 147 [155], s.a. 452-3; 163 [170], s.a. 456

[723] Kulikowski (2004), 196

[724] *LV* XII.1.2, V.4.19; Isidore, *Hist. Goth.* 55; Fernández (2017), 255; Wickham (2005), 96

[725] *LV* XII.2.2

[726] *LRE* I, 257-258; Fernández (2017), 253-254; Dey (2015), 146-147

[727] Barnwell (1997), 75

[728] García Moreno (1974), 35-54; King (1972), 53; Fernández (2017), 254

[729] *LV* XII.2.2; Fernández (2017), 251; Wickham (2005), 96-97

Code of Euric (c. 476) and the *Breviarum* of Alaric (c. 506), were largely restatements of Roman law with appropriate emendations for cases dealing with the relationship between Romans and Goths. It is likely that the Theodosian Code initially remained in effect for the general population. Following the issue of a revision of Euric's Code (*Codex Revisus*) by Leovigild, this compilation was superseded by the promulgation of the Visigothic Code (*Forum Iudicum*) under Reccared (r. 586-601) which was subsequently appended by his successors, mainly Chindaswinth (r. 642-653), Recceswinth (r. 649-672) and Ervig (r. 680-687).[730] The structure of the Visigothic Code was overwhelmingly influenced by that of its Roman and Byzantine counterparts, being subdivided into twelve books (apparently in imitation of the Roman Twelve Tables) organized according to topic.[731] By comparison to contemporary Frankish laws, the legislation collected in the Visigothic Code almost entirely derives from royal *capitula* rather than statements of custom, and the constant additions form a sharp contrast to the doggedly traditionalistic Salian law.[732] Visigothic kings naturally retained the sole right of legislating, and their legal authority was expressed by a network of royally-sanctioned courts and judges across the kingdom.[733] This reflects the fact that royal decrees were to be considered legally binding for all people living under Visigothic rule.[734] *Defensores* are supposed to have been nominated from amongst the populace alongside *numerarii*, and they are likely to have acted as the judge of first instance within municipalities.[735] There are also references to *comites civitatis*, who were paired with *iudices territorii* in judging cases; it is possible that the *comites civitatis* was a centrally appointed Gothic representative of the monarchy, whilst the *iudex territorii* was a judge

[730] Wormald (1977), 133; Heather (2008), 451; cf. King (1972), who gives a different chronology that focuses on the last great revision of the *Forum Iudicum* issued under Ervig

[731] Wormald (1977), 130

[732] E.g., *LV* II.1.2; King (1972), 20, 29; Heather (2008), 451

[733] *LV* XII.1.2; King (1972), 79-84; Heather (2008), 451; Fernández (2017), 251

[734] King (1972), 32

[735] *LV* XII.1.2; King (1972), 79-84; Fernández (2017), 251

appointed from amongst the Roman populace to judge on behalf of Romans.[736] The text of the Visigothic Code was expressly required to be used in local legal proceedings, and any matter not covered by the laws contained therein was to be referred back to the king.[737] We know that reference to the Code did in fact occur in legal cases from Julian of Toledo's account of the trial of Count Paul, in which the appropriate law was cited by book, title, and verse.[738] Whilst the interruption of the 'Umayyad conquest makes it difficult to know how well this judicial system worked kingdom-wide between the sixth and early eighth centuries, owing to discontinuities in the textual record, the surviving evidence for Asturias, León, and the Frankish march in Catalonia indicates unequivocally that the Visigothic Code remained in extensive usage in these areas until past the tenth century.[739] Considering how intensely the Visigoths sought to emulate the Byzantines, we must assume that, the penetration of royal legal authority into the provinces notwithstanding, the main ideological purpose of legislating must have been the divine legitimation of Visigothic kingship.[740]

In terms of security, military service in the Visigothic kingdom, at least by the reigns of Wamba (r. 672-680) and Ervig, was privatised under the commands of regional dukes and counts.[741] By Egica's reign (687-702), *duces* are represented as being the permanent military leaders of territories, such as Claudius, *dux* of Lusitania or Ranosind, *dux Tarraconensis*; Gallia Narbonensis is also described as being a *ducatus* in legislation.[742] By the reign of Chindaswinth at the latest, *duces* also had civil jurisdiction over "taxation, judicial affairs, the despoilation of churches, capital cases, the enforcement of proper court procedure, and

---

[736] Barnwell (1997), 82; administering justice = *LV*. II.1.11, 1.31, VI.1.1, VII.1.5; marriage law = *LV*. III.4.17, 6.1; army supplies = *LV.* IX.2.6; preventing devastation = *LV.* VIII.1.9; *iudex territorii* = *LV*. VI.4.4, VII.5.1, IX.1.6, X.1.16; coupled with *comes civitatis* = *LV*. III.6.1, VII.1.5

[737] Wormald (1977), 119; Heather (2008), 451

[738] Jul., *Hist. Wam. Reg.* 7; Wormald (1977), 121

[739] Collins (1986); Heather (2008), 451

[740] King (1972), 23-51

[741] Wickham (2005), 98

[742] XVII Toledo, *tomus* of Egica, 525; Barnwell (1997), 80; Claudius = John of Biclar, *s.a.* 598; Ranosind = *Hist. Wam.* 7

crimes committed by other judges".[743] All free-born able-bodied men (and ten per cent of the unfree) were eligible for military service under their local lord, in what Wickham indicated was a proto-feudalistic arrangement.[744]

Visigothic legislation envisaged that officials were salaried from proceeds raised in taxation: "for we are well aware that when we appoint judges, we, at the same time, provide them with the means of subsistence".[745] We know from the same law that officials such as the *numerarii* and *defensores* were intended to be tenured:

> *"In order that proper supervision may be exercised over the royal officials in charge of our domains, we have agreed that the tax collectors and defensores shall be changed every year, and, as we are well aware that in consequence of this, much injury results to our people, we hereby decree that any tax collector or defensor, who has been elected by the bishops or the people, shall serve the full term for which he was chosen." – Forum Iudicum* XII.1.2

The *pizarras visigodas* are firm evidence for a pattern of local record keeping inspired by the demands of taxation, which was evidently linked to tenurial rents owed to large landowners who paid into the fisc.[746] There is also evidence for tax records (*poliptica publica*) in the law code dating to the 610s, as well as references to *gesta municipalia* maintained by *curiae*.[747] However, the issue we face in the Visigothic context is that the evidence in legislation for a centralised bureaucratic state on late Roman or Byzantine lines does not correspond closely with the archaeological record, which points towards fragmentation. Whilst there evidently was a complex palace organisation (*palatinum officium*) in Toledo, the ability of this

---

743 Barnwell (1997), 80; Taxation = XIII Toledo, *edictum de tributis relaxatis*, 436; judicial affairs = *LV.* III.4.7; churches = *LV.* IV.5.6; capital cases = *LV.* VI.5.12; court procedure and judicial crimes = *LV*. II.1.18, 1.19, 1.24, 2.7; VI.4.3; XII Toledo, *tomus* of Ervig, 383

744 Wickham (2005), 98-99; see also Fernández (2017), 244

745 *LV* XII.1.2; see also Collins (1986), 86

746 Fernández (2017), 259

747 *LV* XII.2.13; *Form. Wis.,* nn.21, 25; Wickham (2005), 97

organisation to penetrate local societies appears to have significantly diminished from the late Roman period.[748] Following Damián Fernández, we might best see the Visigothic state as operating by "the embedding of despotic decisions into the practices of specific social actors".[749] Fernández takes the *pizarras visigodas* as emblematic of this approach: "…the development of managerial practices of record keeping that could be used for a different purpose, namely estate management … which would, in turn, benefit the state".[750] This allowed the Visigothic state to grow stronger even as it outsourced everyday authority to municipal notables or regional military landowners. It also meant that the Visigothic state was operating with a skeleton of the complex late Roman bureaucracy that had preceded it. The focus of the fiscal system onto the private patrimony of the monarch, coupled with the increasing exchange of tax for land shares and military service based on landownership, would lead us to conclude that the Visigothic state was significantly less bureaucratised and more monarchical than its predecessor.

5.4.3 The Vandal Kingdom

Our sources for the Vandal Kingdom are not extensive, and neither of our most comprehensive sources – the Vandal sections of Procopius's *Wars* and Victor of Vita's *History of the Persecution of the Africa Province* – were concerned with administrative details.[751] Beyond this, we are reliant on a scattering of poems and ecclesiastical accounts.[752] However, we can be fairly certain, considering the longstanding hostility between the Vandals and the Roman state, that the seizure of Carthage in 439 marked the end of central Roman appointments to those areas under Vandal rule. There is a reference to a Proconsul of Carthage, Victorianus of Hadrumentum, although how he came to be appointed and his specific area of responsibility is unknown. It is plausible that the role was

---

[748] Wickham (2005), 98; Barnwell (1997), 72-76 for details

[749] Fernández (2017), 265

[750] Ibid, 262

[751] Barnwell (1992), 114-115

[752] Ibid, 115

a reward for a prominent Roman supporter of the Vandal regime, as the regular duties of the African proconsul are likely to have been co-opted by the Vandal kings.[753]

It would appear that Vandal administration was largely recycled from the pre-existing Roman provincial administration.[754] From a fiscal perspective, we can see that tax-raising continued. According to Ferrandus, Fulgentius was a *procurator* – a city-based tax official – in or around 490.[755] Similarly, Belisarius is supposed to have met an overseer of the public post at Sullecthum in 533; whilst this implies that the post was still functioning, we do not know if it was being burdened with an extensive *annona* system, as in the Roman period.[756] Beyond this, we know of royal officials termed the *procuratores domus* and the *cellarita regis*.[757] Jones speculates that both were financial officials in charge of the estates of each royal household; Barnwell ventures only that the *cellarita regis* may have been in charge of royal servants.[758] In terms of lawgiving, the Vandals certainly legislated in a Romanising fashion: the most famous example is Huneric's edict targeting Catholics with persecution.[759] A possible chief legal official, the *primiscriniarius*, appears in one of the poems of Luxorius, which indicates that this official was involved in the administration of justice and was habitually present at the king's judgements.[760] According to Victor of Vita, provincial governors (*iudices provinciarum*) existed under the Vandals, and we might assume from their titles that they retained their judicial functions.[761] The structure of the Vandal military

---

[753] Vict. Vit. II.39, III.27; Barnwell (1992), 121; *LRE* I, 260; *PLRE* IIB, 1160

[754] Wickham (2005), 88-89; *LRE* I, 259; Barnwell (1992), 123

[755] Ferr. *Vit. Fulg.* C.1; Wickham (2005), 89

[756] Procop. *Bell.* III.16.12; Vict. Vit. II.38

[757] Barnwell (1992), 121; *procurator domus* = Vict. Vit. I.45, 48; Ferr. *Vit. Fulg.* 14 suggests that other great landowners also had *procuratores domus*; *Cellarita regis* = Vict. Vit. III.33; The names of the *procuratores* were Fulgentius, Felix, and Saturnus; *LRE* I, 260

[758] *LRE* I, 260; Barnwell (1992), 121

[759]Vict. Vit., II.38-40, III.2-14

[760] *Anthol. Lat.* SB248 (=R254); Barnwell (1992), 122; *PLRE* IIB, 1161

[761] Vict. Vit. III.13

is unclear, although it would seem that the Vandals served as a militarised ruling class that received land-shares (*sortes*) in return for service.[762]

From what we can tell, the tax system continued to be used to pay officials in cash and kind.[763] How officials were appointed, or how long their tenure of office was, we cannot say. There appears to have been a mix of Roman and Vandal officials, with Roman officials likely being preponderant.[764] It is hard to tell how extensively Vandal administration was bureaucratised, but we find *comites, domestici*, *ministri regis*, and *notarii* in our sources: in every instance, these officials appear to have been sent on miscellaneous missions to the provinces by the king.[765] If Roman provincial administration survived relatively intact into the Vandal period, then it may have framed Vandal monarchy; however, it still seems prudent to suggest that in the Vandal system, autocracy had gained ground in the face of bureaucratic retreat.

5.4.4 The Polities of the Italian Peninsula

The present section is divided by necessity between the kingdoms of Odovacer and the Ostrogoths and the kingdom and duchies of the Lombards. The former are notable for their close mirroring of, and the latter for their sharp divergence from, Roman administrative precedents. There is no precise date at which Roman officials ceased to be appointed by the imperial court; rather, responsibility for the appointment of officials passed from the authority of the emperors to that of Odovacer and the Ostrogothic kings, and then to the Lombard kings and the emperors in Constantinople. Responsibility for appointments was thus subject to the political situation in Italy, which differed from the rest of the west.

The kingdoms of Odovacer and the Ostrogoths inherited the structure of the central *comitatus*, the palatine bureaux, and the Italian Prefecture from the Romans, and their

[762] Procop. *Bell.* IV.6.6-9; Wickham (2005), 90-91

[763] Vict. Vit. II.10; Wickham (2005), 89

[764] Wickham (2005), 89

[765] Barnwell (1992), 120-121; *LRE* I, 259

administrative practices continued on from Roman precedent.[766] The *Variae* of Cassiodorus make frequent references to taxation, which was still conducted under the auspices of the Praetorian Prefecture and the *sacrae largitiones*; in one missive, there is a reference to the *canonicaria*, which according to Sam Barnish may have been the *canon vestium* which paid for military clothing:[767]

> *"And therefore…I order you to advise the land-owner in your province, for the first indiction* [537-8], *that he must loyally pay his tax money, keeping to the three instalments…Let no man exceed the amount of the just weight, and let the scales be altogether just: there will be no end to plundering, should it be permissible to exceed the weight. Furthermore, you are to send my secretariat, in regular form, an accurate four monthly record of the expenses of collection, so that truth may shine in the public accounts, with all error and obscurity wiped away."* – Cassiodorus, *Variae* XII.16 (September 1st 537)

Tax collection was supervised by royal officials, dubbed *comitiaci*, *saiones*, or *exactores*, who were sent out into the provinces from the court, where they were responsible to the provincial governors.[768] Whilst the Ostrogothic kings did not legislate, they issued a series of edicts restating Roman law via the *quaestor sacrii palatii*, many of which are preserved from Cassiodorus's time in that office.[769] Both the Urban Prefect and provincial governors survived alongside the Praetorian Prefect, and they continued to hold judicial responsibilities.[770] As an exasperated edict of King Athalaric, addressed to all provincial governors, stated:

---

[766] *LRE* I, 253

[767] Cass. *Var.*, *preface,* 6; II.16; III.8; XII.16; see also *LRE* I, 254

[768] Cass. *Var*. II.4, IV.14, 32, 34; IX.10; XII.8

[769] Barnish (1992), xli; see Cass. *Var.* VI.5; *LRE* I, 254

[770] See Cass. *Var.* IV.22 (King Theoderic to the Illustrious Agricolus, Prefect of the City of Rome, a.510-11) for the legal duties of the Urban Prefect

> *"Although…I provide for my provinces by the annual renewal* [of governors], *and courts are distributed through every corner of Italy, I have learnt that a wealth of cases are arising from the shortage of justice. It is clearly the fault of your negligence, when men are forced to request from me the help of the laws. For who would choose to seek so far afield what he sees arriving in bis own territory?"* – Cassiodorus, *Variae* IX.20 (533-4)

We also find *comites provinciarum* and *civitates* who were tasked with suppressing brigandage and administering justice on a regional and local level.[771] As regards security, a standing army paid with tax revenues and commanded by *comites* or *duces* was garrisoned in the provinces and in some key cities, such as Syracuse and Naples.[772]

Despite Cassiodorus's attempt to portray a seamless transition from Roman imperial rule to a thoroughly Romanised Ostrogothic rule, we can see between the cracks that the Ostrogothic court implemented many measures intended to bypass the traditional bureaucracy and focus power more firmly into the hands of the Gothic king. In the realm of finance, we find a *comes patrimonium* who was directly responsible for the royal treasury.[773] One holder of this office, Bergantius, is found supervising the transfer of royal estates and the mining of gold on said estates; another, Wilia, was charged with finding timber on royal lands; and a third, Julian, was tasked with assessing the damage to tenant farmers as a result of enemy action.[774] These duties must have cut across those of the *sacrae largitiones* and *res privata*. Similarly, *comitiaci* and *saiones* appear to have been responsible to the king personally, rather than to the *magister officiorum* in the fashion of *agentes in rebus*, and are found conducting a wide variety of miscellaneous tasks in the provinces.[775] Lastly, whilst both Goths and Romans were involved in administration, there is

---

[771] *LRE* I, 256-257

[772] *LRE* I, 256

[773] *LRE* I, 255-256; Barnwell (1992), 148-150; Cass. *Var*. VI.9; Barnish, Lee, and Whitby (2008), 171

[774] Bergantius: Cass. *Var*. VIII.23, IX.3; Wilia: Cass. *Var*. V.18; Julian: Cass. *Var*. I.16 (see also Ennodius *Ep*. VII.1). Barnwell (1992), 149-150

[775] Barnwell (1992), 145

some indication that the Goths preferred to exclude Romans from military matters entirely: this, according to Jones, may be the root of Cassiodorus's admonition: "[w]hile the Gothic army wages war, let the Roman be at peace".[776] Considering the supremacy of the military inherited from the Roman period, this likely will have loaded civic administrative duties onto Gothic *duces* and *comites*.[777] We can therefore say that a process had begun by which Ostrogothic royal administration was beginning to bypass the Roman bureaucratic system, becoming more overtly monarchical in the process. How this would have played out in the long term is impossible to say, as the Gothic wars of the mid-sixth century annihilated the Roman administrative apparatus of Italy, which then had to be rebuilt respectively by the Byzantines and the Lombards.[778]

In contrast to the Ostrogothic state, the Lombard state does not appear to have maintained the tax system beyond the early seventh century. There are no references to a land tax in any royal edicts or other writings relating to administration.[779] Two texts militate against this position. The first is two passages of Paul the Deacon's *Historia Langobardorum* (790s), which describes the Romans being made *tributarii*/*adgravati* of the Lombards during the settlement of the 570s/80s.[780] The terminology Paul used may have been derived from the account of Secundus of Non (d. 612), who served at the Lombard court in c.600; Secundus's terminology mirrors that of his contemporary Gregory of Tours when the latter defended his cities' tax exemptions.[781] As Chris Wickham observes, based on observations made by Walter Pohl, it is plausible that the Lombards maintained some version of the Roman tax system on conquest, but discontinued it in favour of ad hoc tribute and direct control of land.[782] The only possible financial official referred to is the *stolesaz* (*infertor* in Latin), who

[776] Cass. *Var.* XI.39; *LRE* I, 256

[777] *LRE* I, 256

[778] Wickham (2005), 93

[779] Wickham (2005), 117

[780] Paul, *HL*, II.32, III.16

[781] Paul, *HL*, III.29, IV.27, 40

[782] Wickham (2005), 115-117

may have been the royal treasurer.[783] In the absence of a tax system, the Lombard state was straightforwardly less bureaucratised, as the complex record-keeping and oversight needed for taxation was not required.

Our evidence for Lombard legal procedures is thin on the ground before the eighth century, but gets much stronger for the late Lombard and subsequent Carolingian periods. Lombard kings legislated extensively on a wide variety of topics.[784] The earliest Lombard legal code was issued by Rothari (642/3), and was subsequently emended by other kings.[785] At first, this largely involved a restatement of Lombard customary law; the transition to a more 'rational' legal formulation was more gradual, but had largely occurred by the eighth and ninth centuries.[786] Rothari's edict, for example, still assumed that legal cases would be decided by either oath-keeping or duelling, and these outcomes only seem to have been displaced in practice (although never in theory) by charters, witnesses, and inquests as time progressed.[787] The adoption of legislating in Latin attests firmly to the influence of Roman precepts and officials on the developing process of Lombard administration. The court of Pavia seems to have become the focus for a great deal of legal activity – travelling there to attend royal legal cases was evidently a regular feature of aristocratic life – and we find references to notaries and referendaries composing and authenticating royal *diplomata*.[788] Beyond the court, we find a system of regular royally-sanctioned courts and judicial officials throughout the cities of the Lombard kingdom.[789] In practice, the *comes civitatis* seems usually to have been the senior judge, and he was joined by a variety of other lesser officials – *gastalds*, *scabini*, *locopositi*, *adstantes*, etc. – in adjudicating cases.[790] The *placita* left behind by the operation of these courts demonstrate the extent to which judicial

[783] Barnwell (1997), 126; Wickham (1981), 159

[784] Wickham (2005), 118

[785] Paul, *HL*, XLII.5-6; Wickham (1986), 113

[786] Wickham (1986), 113

[787] Ibid.

[788] *CDL* I.17, II.163, III.i.13; Barnwell (1997), 126-127; Wickham (2005), 118

[789] Heather (2008), 451

[790] *CDL* III.i.6; II.163; Wickham (1986), 109; Barnwell (1997), 125-126

proceedings relied on written charters and mutual pledges of liability (*wadiae*).[791] The indication is that, by the Carolingian period at least, the system of legal recourse precipitated by the Lombards had become a firmly entrenched mechanism for those who could not find a way to settle their differences outside court. As Wickham argued, this may have more to do with the longstanding propensity for Italian societies to rely on judicial proceedings and written evidence than on the capacity of the Lombard state to enforce its legal decisions, which seems to have remained quite weak.[792] Despite this, the Lombard and Carolingian periods evidently see the early development of the formidable legal capabilities exhibited by the Italian city-republics of the high medieval.

The line between military service and civic administration in the Lombard kingdom was extremely permeable, and it is clear that most if not all officials were expected to fight on behalf of the kings if required to do so. *Duces* are certainly recorded as being involved in judicial disputes as well as military leadership.[793] By comparison to the Frankish and Visigothic cases, Lombard administration appears to have devolved ever further onto *civitates*. Given that Lombard politics and economics revolved so firmly around land, we must assume that the processes of salaried remuneration and tenure of office had broken down, and that administration and military service were being conducted almost exclusively within the politics of land gifts. Considering that the Lombard kings were also disproportionally greater landowners than their subordinates, we must assume that the system was monarchical rather than bureaucratised.

5.4.5 Observations

Broadly speaking, we are dealing in each case with a degree of administrative continuity, as post-Roman courts attempted to maintain Roman practices and make use of the talents of their Roman subjects. However, in every case the process of administration was affected by the transition from a tax-based to a land-based system of military recruitment, which

[791] Wickham (1986)

[792] Ibid, p. 119

[793] *CDL* I.21, III.i.113

undermined the necessity of the Roman tax system and the bureaucracy that had been generated to manage it. In financial terms, taxation was initially maintained in each case, but seems to have declined in importance as time went on. Whilst officials similar to the *comes rei privata*, who had been responsible for funnelling resources directly into private royal coffers, survived unscathed, equivalents to the Praetorian Prefect (excluding in Ostrogothic Italy) quickly vanished. Public finances had evidently declined in importance in relation to the private finances of kings. Lawgiving, by contrast, was maintained as a royal prerogative in a continuation of late Roman (or an emulation of Byzantine) precedent. Again, this was contextualised by the end of the standardised tax system and its attendant bureaucracy, which had given the Roman state a higher degree of infrastructural reach into subaltern communities. In the Frankish, Visigothic, and Lombard kingdoms, standardised taxation was gradually disintegrating, with the resources of individual *civitates*, often managed by local officials, seen as pools of taxable or tributary income that could be raised on a more ad hoc basis. Post-Roman states, therefore, had to maintain their despotic claims in an environment in which their infrastructural reach was being outsourced to subordinate *civitates*, and legislating in a strident and moralising fashion could fill that void. Post-Roman kings were no different from Roman emperors in this regard – for the latter, legislating had always been a somewhat fruitless attempt to impose their authority on the world beneath them – but it is probable that post-Roman monarchs found it even harder to actualise their despotic claims than did emperors. However, this period does see the gradual development of extensive networks of regular courts staffed by royally-appointed officials, usually based on the legal norms established by post-Roman kings: evidently subject populations were buying, if slowly, into what their monarchs were selling. Furthermore, it is likely that the switch to landed armies commanded by militarised aristocrats led to a deterioration in security. The Roman interior had always been violent, even if Ammianus did not want to directly admit it, but there are no comparable accounts in the Roman period to the private warring of civic militias recorded by Gregory of Tours. The political history of the Merovingian kingdoms is one of constant internecine warfare, and that of the Visigothic kingdom was punctuated frequently by *coup d'états* and provincial revolts. Security begets effective administration, as expertise and systematic practices have time to develop; the absence of security, especially when the aristocrats you are hoping will specialize are too busy feuding with each other, makes specialisation more difficult.

There are two further general observations that we can make about the transition from Roman to post-Roman patterns of governmental specialisation. The first concerns the extent of bureaucratisation, and the second concerns the scale of the administrative hierarchy. Regarding bureaucratisation, it seems clear that there were fewer officials overall. We might here counterpose the multitude of different tax officials in the Roman system with the single *numerarius* responsible for multiple *civitates* in the Visigothic case. Furthermore, whilst *agentes in rebus, cubicularii*, and *notarii* in the Roman system could be found fulfilling a wide variety of tasks on behalf of emperors, it would appear that the specialisation of official remits had decreased exponentially in the aftermath of Roman rule. Post-Roman officials were much more likely to have non-circumscribed responsibilities: in particular, they combined military, administrative, and judicial roles in a way that the Roman system consciously tried to prevent. Regarding the administrative hierarchy, it appears that the complex layers that linked individual *civitates* to provinces, dioceses, Prefectures, and the imperial court and its attendant bureaux in the Roman period had been replaced with much more straightforward links between courts and cities. The most obvious feature of this is the growth in prominence of *comites civitatis* and *gastalds*, royally appointed officials combining military, administrative, and judicial responsibilities in the *civitates*. It is these officials we find most prominently negotiating on behalf of royal power in Gregory of Tours, when we do not find kings negotiating with local magnates or bishops directly. Both of these developments signal the retreat of bureaucratisation in the face of monarchical and private power; if we might posit a difference in terminology, they mark the transition from a 'bureaucratised autocracy' to a series of 'courtly autocracies'.

All of the above begs the question: what is the best way to characterise the relationship between late Roman and post-Roman governmental specialisation? Evidently specialisation continued, and much of it was either a continuation of Roman precedent or a process of fitting pre-existing 'Germanic' customary practices into a Roman framework. One might view this as syncretistic; however, I would argue that this underplays both the simplification of governance and the long term diminishing returns of administration. The word that best describes post-Roman administration is 'recycling'. Post-Roman states recycled Roman precedents, such as taxation and lawgiving, as best they could, but only after they had been

removed from the tax-raising context which had underwritten Roman governmental specialisation, bureaucratisation, and the complex official hierarchy. It is interesting to note that, by contrast to the post-'Abbasid states, all of which mirrored the Caliphate administratively, the post-Roman kingdoms struggled to maintain Roman administrative practices in polities that governed significantly less territory than the empire had done, and eventually gave up trying.[794] The transition from a tax-based to a land-based system of power had long term, inexorable effects on the practice of administration and governmental specialisation in the post-Roman west.

5.5 Conclusion

With the exception of Britain, governmental specialisation did not end in the fifth and sixth centuries. Rather, Roman administrative practices such as tax-raising and lawgiving, not to mention vestiges of the officeholding structure, were preserved and recycled by the post-Roman kingdoms. These were then combined with 'Germanic' customary practices that allowed for continuity in a new guise. However, the transition from a tax-based to a land-based system of military recruitment had long term effects on the capacity of post-Roman states to maintain governmental specialisation and bureaucratisation. Roman methods for limiting private power – salaries, tenure, and carefully specified official competences – were all casualties of this transition. Eventually, tax-raising and bureaucracies would be abandoned by states, weakening their despotic and infrastructural reach in the face of private powers. This was not an immediate development, but played out in the *longue durée* between the fifth and tenth centuries. It is in this context that the early medieval Church filled the void in terms of record-keeping, episcopal administration, and the maintenance of aristocratic wealth in rural monasteries, not to mention to steady provision of literate and lettered scribes; this required secular powers to have largely stepped back from the role first.

If, broadly speaking, we are looking at a picture of disintegration and transformation, then we might ask if there are any points of rupture that correspond with the end of the Roman

[794] Heather (2005); Carrié (2017), 195

state? The dating for the end of the transmission of officials between regions, and for their responsibility to the imperial court – 410 for Britain, 439 for North Africa, 461 broadly for Iberia and Gaul – at least implies the fifth-century disintegration of western imperial officialdom. In Italy itself, responsibility for appointment was arrogated to the royal court that was gradually supplanting the imperial government; the decisive break in administration does not occur until the dust had settled from the Lombard invasions at the end of the sixth century. Interesting though these points of rupture are for the political history of the fifth and sixth centuries, they do not explain a great deal about the Roman state as an administrative phenomenon. The 'end' of Roman governmental specialisation was both gradual and never total, subsumed within the local contexts of the polities that emerged in the wake of the empire.

The Concept of a Public Power

6.1 Introduction

"I was one of those who went with abu-'Ubaidah to meet 'Umar as he was coming to Syria. As 'Umar was passing, he was met by the singers and tambourine players of the inhabitants of Adhri'ât with swords and myrtle. Seeing that, 'Umar shouted, 'Keep still, stop them.' But abu-'Ubaidah replied, 'This is their custom (or some other word like it), Commander of the Believers, and if thou shouldst stop them from doing it, they would take that as indicating thy intention to violate their covenant.' 'Well then,' said 'Umar, 'let them go on'."[795] – al-Balâdhuri

In this excerpt, al-Balâdhuri records the consternation of the Arabic conquerors of seventh-century Syria on encountering late Roman civic traditions. The particular ceremony to which 'Umar and his followers were being treated was the *adventus*, the procedure by which the inhabitants of a city greeted their rulers and high officials. Here we encounter a fundamental truth about the Roman world: that its power was expressed publicly, in processions, speeches, and ceremonies that brought together ruler and ruled within the spatial context of the Roman city.[796] All Roman cities were designed around expressions of public power, with their central forums, wide streets, and demarcated procession routes.[797] This notion of a public power had deep roots in the Hellenistic past, and it took the coming of an entirely new religion, dominant language, and administrative culture to sweep it from the Roman east in the seventh century and after. In the west, the picture is more complicated. In many ways, the Roman concept of a public power survived the fragmentation of the western Roman state, but in ways that subtly altered the trajectory on which public power operated. It is the purpose of this chapter to explain precisely how Roman public power worked, how it differed from the public power of the post-Roman

[795] Hitti (1916), 214-215, a translation of al-Balâdhuri; MacCormack (1981), 22

[796] Wickham (2009), 67

[797] Dey (2015)

kingdoms, and if, how, and when the Roman concept of a public power came to an end in the post-Roman west.

In 'Classifying the Later Roman State', we noted that 'the reciprocal granting of universal protection by the ruler to the ruled in return for taxation and labour formed the basis for a unifying state ideology' (§2.2). However, ideology is a fiddly concept, and it is all too easy to fall into the trap of assuming that Christianity, imperial rule, or some combination of the two constituted the 'ideology' of the late Roman world.[798] While both certainly framed late Roman power, neither actually governed how it was conducted in practice. As we shall see, both religious observance and the practice of power had to be phrased within a pre-existing understanding between the rulers and the ruled of the Roman world that the people were, on some fundamental level, working towards a shared common good, rather than simply *for* the benefit of their leaders. The role of the leader, in this context, is as the guarantor of this public benefit. It is this, more than anything, that separates an ideology of public power from the private power of the feudal lords of tenth-century Europe and after, and it must be the benchmark for our examination of Roman public power here. As such, we will first establish how late Romans conceived of and applied their understanding of public power, and will then compare and contrast this to public practice in the longer lasting post-Roman kingdoms – Visigothic Iberia, Merovingian Francia, and Lombard Italy.

As we have just hinted, an issue with the source material is that it largely emanates first from imperial authorities during the late Roman period, then from ecclesiastical authorities during the post-Roman period. In the case of the former, this makes it very easy to overemphasize the extent to which the concept of the emperor dominated the Roman public consciousness in practice rather than in theory. This issue is emphasised by the fact that most of our accounts of public ceremony focus on the emperor and the city of Rome, neither of which are typical examples. We should bear in mind that a vast array of public ceremonies involving urban élites and populations occurred constantly without being

[798] E.g., Cameron (2006), 14: "The empire was held together by a strong ideology based on its court and capital at Constantinople. This ideology revolved around two axes: the imperial power and the Orthodox religion"; Haldon (2012), 1132

illuminated by our surviving accounts. In the post-Roman period, we must beware of allowing the attitudes of contemporary ecclesiastical authorities to be coloured by the later history of western Christianity: just because Gregory of Tours emphasizes the role of bishops does not mean 'the Church' or 'Christendom' have inevitably come into being as widespread ideological concepts in the sixth century (§6.5).[799]

6.2 Defining Public Power and Ideology

When analysing what Wickham meant by "the concept of a public power, that is, of a ruling system ideologically separable from the ruled population and from the individual rulers themselves", we must first acknowledge that there is a difference between an ideology shared by the rulers and the populace and an ideology *about* the rulers. Ideology, as defined by Anthony Kaldellis in *The Byzantine Republic* (2015), is:

> "…background beliefs, shared between rulers and subjects, about the normative aspects of a given political order, which can be shown to have shaped how the population interacted within the political sphere, especially in times when there was a disagreement about the allocation of power". – Anthony Kaldellis (2015), 2

Ideology seen in this perspective is an *a priori* sentiment; it must exist before 'the state' as understood by modern sociology can emerge. By contrast, an ideology *about* the rulers is a property of a state that has already come into existence, and its efficacy is measured in its ability to maintain power dynamics in the state's favour. As we shall see, the Romans understood the *res publica* in the classical sense more evident in Rousseau than in the post-Hobbesian mode used by modern sociology. The state could not be abstracted from the *res publica*, and therefore could not be impersonal in the same manner as the modern distinction between 'state' and 'civil society' would imply.[800] The problem is that ideology understood in this sense is a concept that existed in the shared consciousness of

[799] E.g., Ristuccia (2018); see Heather (2023)

[800] Kaldellis (2015), 33, 39, 97-100; Arena (2022), 51-52

contemporaries, and is therefore inaccessible through the evidence we have available. What we do possess is various types of evidence – accounts of ceremony, legislation, religious literature, and so forth – from which we might attempt to piece together an understanding of Roman ideology. This is the source of the misunderstanding: approaching ideology purely through these aspects runs the risk of failing to see the forest for the trees.

The other approach – viewing the Roman concept of a public power as *a priori* to the existence of the state - saddles us with a couple of methodological problems. Firstly, any search for the "morals, customs, and above all opinion" from which a Rousseauist ideology is composed will invariably run into the pointed silence of the sources.[801] The later Roman empire was not an environment that lent itself to frank discussions of political theory or ideology.[802] Ammianus, our most expansive source, makes clear that the contemporary authorities had a propensity for combining paranoia and bloodlust in equal measure.[803] It is noteworthy that the letters of Symmachus are devoid of the type of political theorising found in Cicero: evidently political opinions were not considered prudent. In addition, the only contemporary extant document that even approaches a secular critique of the state – *de Rebus bellicis* – was (probably wisely) published anonymously: had the author been identified, Ammianus informs us that Valentinian I kept two man-eating she-bears (apparently named 'Goldflake' and 'Innocence') in cages outside his bedroom for dealing with dissenters.[804] It goes without saying that the opinions of the lower classes were never considered relevant by our aristocratic sources, and the compilers of imperial law codes were more interested in preserving the specific point rather than the overarching *raison d'être* of legislation.[805] This has conditioned the approach to the available source material, which almost entirely emanates from the imperial government itself. It is only natural that we should attempt to parse an understanding of late Roman ideology from the laws, panegyrics, diptychs, and accounts of ceremony that we do possess; but we must remember

[801] Rousseau, *The Social Contract* 2.12

[802] MacMullen (1988), 137-146; Brown (1992), 23

[803] Amm. Marc. XIV.5; XXVIII.1; Harries (1999), 40

[804] Anon. I.1-10; Thompson (1952), 24; Amm. Marc. XXIX.3

[805] Harries (1999), 25

that this reflects how the imperial authorities wanted to present themselves to élite audiences.

There are, as we have said, good reasons for approaching ideology as a more dirigiste phenomenon. However, if we agree with Kaldellis that "“[i]deology is what was taken for granted in the political culture and not only, or not primarily, what was loudly and defensively proclaimed”, then we must begin by assessing the fundamental shared ideology of the late Roman world – popular sovereignty – and then assess how the political authority of the *res publica*, the imperial government, justified itself to its citizens.[806] This will give us a more complete picture of late Roman ideology from which we can assess the processes of transformation and rupture that characterised the late antique period.

6.3 Popular Sovereignty and the Late Roman *Res Publica*

Firstly, we must examine what Romans meant when they used the term *res publica* during both the Republican and Imperial periods. In spite of how it is sometimes translated, the Latin term *res publica* does not directly correspond to the modern terms ‘Republic’ or ‘State’. Harriet Flower has made clear that the Romans “did not have a way of labelling their government with terms that specifically designated a republic … Moreover, *res publica* was the term still employed to describe the government during the subsequent ‘imperial’ period, both by emperors and by their critics”.[807] In the Roman conception, a monarchy could serve the needs of the *res publica* just as readily as a senatorial or consular regime: the differentiation between the two is an inheritance of Tacitus’s personal antipathy towards imperial rule.[808] Conversely, *res publica* does not mean ‘the State’ in the modern, post-Hobbesian sense, because it could not be abstracted from the political community in either a purely personal or a purely impersonal way.[809] Contrary to the opinions of those who see imperial rule as personal – Paul Veyne, for example, argued that “the state was the

[806] Kaldellis (2015), 3

[807] Flower (2011), 19

[808] Kaldellis (2015), 5; see also Cicero, *de Rep*. I.54, II.43

[809] Arena (2022), 44; Barnish, Lee, and Whitby (2008), 170

emperor" – we must remember that no Roman leader, even in the nakedly autocratic late imperial period, ever articulated a formula for personal power in public.[810] Power and authority, as Majorian made clear in the introduction to his legal code, were always to be wielded in the name of the public benefit:

> *"…May a propitious Divinity attend the high opinion of you all, and may it increase the success of Our reign for your welfare and the public welfare as well, since I have come to the high honour of sustaining the duties of Emperor not by my own will, but on account of my obedient service of public devotion, in order that I might neither live for myself alone nor by such a refusal might I be judged ungrateful to the State* (res publica) *for which I was born."*[811]

Conversely, the theory of an impersonal state is not applicable because a state that "simply exists, apparently with its own interests" does not account for the moral dimension of imperial rule: it had to be justified in the name of the common good, or else it lacked any legitimacy.[812] Originally, when Roman citizens in the Republican period contested their rights within a political context, they did so not as agents with power delegated by an authoritative *res publica*, but as members with a personal stake in the *res publica*.[813] This is evident from Roman civil law, which was explicitly susceptible to social mores. For example, in his consideration of the Praetorian Edict of c. 130, which stated that a legal action could be brought if someone shouted, "contrary to good morals", Ulpian concluded that the morals being referred to here were those of the city (*civitas*), and that this was actionable whether or not a specific offence had been committed.[814] We might add that a second century jurist argued that "the laws are binding on us only because they have been accepted by the judgement of the people".[815] The fact that the compilers of the Digest included this

---

[810] Veyne (2005) in Kaldellis (2015), p. 53; see also Cheynet (2002), p. 28; Lendon (1997), p. 18

[811] *NMaj*. I.1, (Jan. 11th, 458)

[812] Kaldellis (2015), pp. 38-39

[813] Arena (2022), p. 44

[814] Just. *Dig.* 47.10.15.2, 6; Harries (1999), 3-4

[815] Just. *Dig.* I.3.32

fragment of jurisprudence indicates that it could still be taken as binding in a sixth-century court. We must also remember the incessant complaints of our late Roman sources against official corruption, which would have been meaningless if the state had not been expected to work on behalf of the public good. Cicero defined *res publica* as follows:

> "*…the property of a people. But a people is not just any collection of human beings brought together in any sort of way, but an assemblage of people in large numbers associated in an agreement with respect to justice and a partnership for the common good."* – Cicero, *de re publica* I.39

In extension of this, Valentina Arena has argued that Cicero's understanding of the people as a gathering of individuals united towards a common purpose was subsequently readapted by both Varro and Alfenus Varus in such a way as to give a unitary, timeless quality to a more abstract *populus*, albeit one that still maintained very real rights within the *res publica*.[816] We see, therefore, that *res publica* described the totality of the political community, rather than just the central authority that administered it; that it contained a moral quality that conferred legitimacy in a way that was neither wholly personal nor impersonal; and that its purpose was the promotion of the common benefit of all of its members. In short, *res publica* describes an underlying ideology of popular sovereignty that bound the Roman political community together, and of which the imperial government was the authoritative expression.[817]

The above definitions relate to how *res publica* would have been understood in the late Republican and early Imperial periods. Appeals to *res publica* also permeate the late Roman period, indicating that the concept was still alive and well, although the meaning varies. The anonymous author of *de Rebus Bellicis* opened his work with the following:

[816] Arena (2022), 51, 54

[817] Moatti (2017), 36: *res publica* = "the world of affairs about which the citizens have conflicts or debates, and about which they act in common"

> *"Most Sacred Emperors: In order to ensure the successful realisation of your divine policies, proposals should be put forward on suitable occasions for the profit of your Commonwealth* (*Reipublicae*)*, ever flourishing under Heaven's inspiration*." – Anonymous, *de Rebus Bellicis,* preface 1.

This excerpt, the work of an outsider to formal governance, reflects the intersectionality of imperial authority, public welfare, fiscal prudence, and divine favour that characterises the contemporary use of the term *res publica.* The *res gestae* of Ammianus also demonstrate the variability of how the term *res publica* could be deployed. Considering that Ammianus was a soldier first and foremost, it is unsurprising to find *res publica* frequently referring to the military-fiscal engine a modern writer might refer to as 'the State' (XVIII.5.1/XXIV.3.4), and certainly this is how he has sometimes been translated.[818] However, we also find the *res publica* as the 'parent' of the emperor (XXV.3.18), and as the 'public business' that the emperor was obliged to conduct (XVI.5.5). According to John Matthews, the subtext of this was Ammianus' firm belief in the primacy of the public good over the exercise of arbitrary power, which characterised *civile iustumque imperium*, or 'civil and rightful empire' (XIV.1.4).[819] There are also frequent appeals to the concept of *res publica* on imperial coinage, usually but not exclusively relating to accessions. In the period between the accession of Gratian and the deposition of Julius Nepos, we find a wide variety of coins struck in the west with reverse legends such as *SALVS REI PUBLICAE* (the safety/salvation/welfare of the Republic), *BONO REI PUBLICAE* (for the common good of the Republic), or *RESTITUTIO/REPARATIO REI PUBLICAE* (for the restoration/repair of the Republic). Of an assessment of all denominations struck in the west for specifically western *Augusti* under Gratian and Valentinian II, we find twenty such coins for the former and seventeen for the latter.[820] Restricting ourselves to just denominations in gold and silver, we

[818] E.g., Amm. Marc. XV.III, VIII

[819] See also Amm. Marc. XXIX.2.18; Matthews (1989), 251-252; Brown (1992), 8-9

[820] Gratian = *RIC* IX Aquileia 12C, 18B, 29, 30A; Arelate 19B, 20A; Lugdunum 21B, 23B, 28A; Rome 18, 20C, 24C, 28B, 43A; Siscia 15C, 22B, 26A; Treveri 32C, 48B, 65A: Valentinian II = Aquileia 18C, 20A, 30B, 30C, 58A; Arelate 20B, 20C; Lugdunum 28B; Rome 28C, 43B, 43C, 63A, 64A, 69A; Siscia 26B; Treveri 48C, 65B

find ten under Honorius, two under Priscus Attalus, one for Constantine III, nine under Jovinus, twelve under John, twenty-five under Valentinian III, two under Libius Severus, a disproportionate thirty-five under Anthemius, and one under Julius Nepos.[821] There were likely more coins with similar legends, but the above should give some indication as to their prevalence. By contrast, coinage issued by Odovacer and the Ostrogoths eschewed such legends in favour of references to the sovereignty of the eastern emperor (i.e., their reverse legends typically read "in the name of [the reigning eastern emperor]).[822] As for legislation, the terms *res publica*/*rei publicae* appear across the Theodosian Code and can be variously interpreted. In Clyde Pharr's translation, *res publica* is often rendered either as the property or governance of a municipality.[823] In other examples, *res publica* is translated as "the State", and implies the corporate governing entity to which officials could belong, and to which soldiers owed their allegiance.[824] However, *res publica* is also frequently deployed in the general sense of 'public business' or 'public good'.[825] It is in this context that we might see the laws curtailing the illicit activities of current or ex-palatine officials, which only make sense if the public benefit of the populace takes priority over the wealth and status of government officials.[826] From the above, we can see that late Roman governments deployed the term *res publica* to indicate fiscal management, the management of *civitates*, the

---

[821] *RIC* X Honorius 1237, 1238, 1244-1249, 1333, 1354; Priscus Attalus 1416-1417; Constantine III 1501; Jovinus 1703-1709, 1720, 1721; Johannes 1912-1923; Valentinian III 2009, 2022, 2047, 2051-2057, 2082-2083, 2106-2117, 2151; Libius Severus 2707-2708; Anthemius 2801-2805, 2807-2809, 2836-2839, 2840, 2866-2873, 2884-2896, 2905; Julius Nepos 3209

[822] O'Flynn (1983), p. 142; https://en.numista.com/catalogue/ostrogothic_kigdom-1.html

[823] *CTh*. I.12.6 (May 21, 398); II.18.3 (July 30/May 23, 325); X.3; X.10.24 (Nov. 6, 405); XI.13.1 (Jan. 19, 383); XI.28.14 (Feb. 8, 423); XII.1.6 (July 1, 318/319); XII.1.9 (July 9, 324); XII.1.105 (May 6, 384); XII.2.1 (Oct. 3, 349); XII.11.1 (Jan. 30, 314-320); XV.1.18 (Jan. 26, 374); XV.1.32 (June 21, 395); XV.1.33 (July 5, 395); XV.9.2 (Feb. 25, 409)

[824] *CTh*. VI.24.6; VI.27.4; VI.29.2 (April 17, 356/357); VI.35.14 (May 8, 423); VII.1.5 (April 29, 364); VII.13.4 (April 27, 367); VIII.4.8 (March 13, 364); XV.1.47 (Feb. 21, 409)

[825] *CTh*. I.1.6; VII.8.14 (June 22, 427); VIII.5.43 (Feb. 1, 384); XI.31.2 (Feb. 16, 365); XII.1.32 (August 17, 341); XII.1.178 (Jan. 21, 415); XIII.11.5 (Nov. 29, 393)

[826] *CTh*. VI.24.6 (Oct. 3, 395); VI.27.4 (March 21, 382); VI.29.2 (April 17, 356/357); VI.35.14 (May 8, 423); VIII.1.7 (March 1, 362); VIII.4.8 (March 13, 364); XII.14.1 (Dec. 25, 409)

palatine government, a sense of shared communal wealth, or the polity to which the army (the intended recipients of imperial coinage) owed their ultimate allegiance. Evidently, the late Roman use of *res publica* was significantly more dirigiste than was the case in the late Republican period, corresponding as it does quite closely to the notion of ideology offered in §2.2. Whilst this makes sense given how much more autocratic the late Roman period was, I would argue that there remains an underlying suggestion that administration had to be conducted in the name of the public benefit in order to be considered legitimate: certainly, this was how Ammianus understood it. This, coupled with the inability of late Roman emperors to articulate a doctrine of personal power in public, implies that the notion of popular sovereignty inherent in *res publica* had not been conceptually overturned in late antiquity, but remained the latent understanding of how power was to be conducted.

In §2.2-3, it was suggested that the legitimacy of the rulers of early states was tied up in their sacrality – i.e., in their correct observance of sacred rituals, offer of universal protection, and the divine affirmation afforded by military victory – and late Roman emperors are absolutely no exception to this pattern. The question is how this reality squares in practice with the notions of popular sovereignty inherent in the concept of *res publica*. To put it another way, whilst late Roman emperors certainly saw themselves and were seen by their subjects as divinely appointed, as Valentinian II testily made clear in a missive to Symmachus (§7.2), there is a difference between this and what we would refer to today as the 'divine right' practised by European early modern Absolutist monarchs.[827] In the bluntest of terms, 'divine right' bestows a specifically personal sanction that is absent from late Roman practice. Whilst Roman emperors had to continuously find ways of earning their divine sanction (e.g., military victory, issuing law codes, calling œcumenical councils and so forth), an Absolutist like Charles I of England (r.1625-1649) really needed to mess up on quite a spectacular scale before anyone even considered the possibility that he did not enjoy such a sanction. The more cynical way of looking at this difference would be to suggest that imperial pretensions to divinity were either "a mode of rhetorical damage control, as Anthony Kaldellis has argued, or that they were simply a post-factum gloss for

[827] *CTh.* I.6.9. (384/385)

success – particularly military success – as has been argued by Meaghan McEvoy.[828] As far as the actual practice of politics was concerned, emperors were too frequently dispatched by coups or assassination to imply that anyone actually took their pretensions to divinity seriously. This, however, would be to take the interpretation too far: politics does not require conceptual backing to determine legitimacy in most if not all historical situations. There is nonetheless some truth to the cynical position that should be foregrounded. Straightforwardly attributing late Roman political ideology to 'divine right' or divine sanction would be to miss that such sanction existed in symbiosis with the demands of popular sovereignty and was frequently pre-empted by them. Emperors had to act for the public benefit in order to garner divine sanction, not *vice versa*.

Lastly, we must address the balance between the notion of popular sovereignty to which Roman rule appealed and the obviously dirigiste nature of imperial power. The observant reader will have noticed that we have thus far been making extensive use of Anthony Kaldellis' conception of *res publica* as advanced in *The Byzantine Republic* (2015). Given that this theory was developed for the Byzantine empire of the sixth century onwards, its spatial, temporal, and political contexts are not immediately appropriate for the western Roman empire of the fourth and fifth centuries. However, Kaldellis makes a further argument that is worth restating in full:

> "…historians who are familiar with the model of the Principate look at the roaming and militaristic emperors of the third century and afterward; they observe the rise in claims to divine election; and are told by Byzantinists that the empire now had a thoroughly Christian ideology and was "not really Roman"; and so reasonably conclude that Byzantium, which they assume was the product and extension of late antiquity, must also have been a military dictatorship whose 'ideology' was that of divine election. Some even call it still an oriental despotism. I propose, by contrast, that those roughly 200 years in late antiquity were, politically speaking, a deviation from the populist norms of the Roman res publica, and so broader conclusions that are often

[828] Kaldellis (2015), 174-176; McEvoy (2013), 36; MacCormack (1981), 170

> drawn from it about 'Byzantium' are distorted. With the reestablishment of the court in New Rome c.a. 400 and the tight relationship that it developed with the populace, we witness both a return to civilian (Roman) modes and an intensification of republican principles." – Anthony Kaldellis (2015), 109-110

In §2.4, it was argued that the later Roman empire most closely resembles a premodern junta from the perspective of modern sociology. Where Peter Fibiger Bang and John Haldon did not go, and where Anthony Kaldellis only pointed, was that the later Roman state was also a junta when seen from the perspective of classical ideology. By this, I mean that late Roman emperors framed themselves as the successors to their senatorial predecessors, but in an idiom of power that emphasised distance, visible magnificence, and universalism over accessibility: the diadems and carefully manicured ceremonies visible in our sources are the late antique equivalent of the modern chest covered in medals. Arena argued that the reconceptualisation of the *populus* as something unitary and eternal was necessary for the transition to imperial rule, as only a *populus* conceived of an individual could transfer custody of its rights to another authority.[829] However, seeing as both the *populus* and the emperor remained constituent members of the *res publica*, it is unsurprising to find that, over time, the emperor came to take on the all-encompassing and eternal characteristics we find that he possessed in late antiquity. To put it another way, the fundamental ideology of popular sovereignty embodied in the *res publica* remained the basis of late Roman public power, which is what bound the later empire to its predecessor. However, the manner in which the imperial authorities approached expressions of public power were altered during the passage to late antiquity, partially by accident and partially by design, in such a way as to reduce drastically the demands of direct popular sovereignty on the exercise of power. Emperors still conceptually ruled for the benefit of the population, but instead of being conceived of as dynamic partners, late antique artwork and ceremony suggests that both emperor and population had been fixed in place as sole legitimate actor and passive observers respectively. The most obvious consequences of this were overwhelming ceremonialisation, intensifying militarism, and the limiting of the conceptual role of the civic

[829] Arena (2022), 53; see also Skinner (2018)

population in imperial politics. In the next section, it will be our task to examine how late Roman public power worked in practice, and to chart the growth of these phenomena.

6.4 The Late Roman Practice of Public Power

> "By a philosophic observer the system of the Roman government might have been mistaken for a splendid theatre, filled with players of every character and degree … Like the modesty affected by Augustus, the state maintained by Diocletian was a theatrical representation; but it must be confessed that, of the two comedies, the former was of a more liberal and manly character than the latter. It was the aim of the one to disguise, and the object of the other to display, the unbounded power which the emperors possessed over the Roman world." – Edward Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, I.13.422-423, II.17.103-104

There remains, two-and-a-half centuries later, much to recommend Edward Gibbon's assessment of the ceremonialisation of late Roman power, in that he correctly noted its centrality to the practice of politics and the exalted status that it afforded to the emperor. What Gibbon missed was that ceremony, rather than being a stylistic mask for the practice of politics, was the mechanism by which the late Roman *res publica* achieved its *consensus universorum*.[830] The purpose of this section is to offer a precis of the variety of public ceremonies in order to demonstrate how crucial they were to the late Roman exercise of public power, as well as to show how this notion of public power was grounded in, or deviated from, the concept of popular sovereignty. In particular, we will focus on the ceremonies of accession and *adventus*. Whilst these are relatively well reflected in our source material – primarily panegyrics, textual histories, and stone or metal reliefs – they are only two of a wide range of ceremonies that made up late Roman public life. Crucially, however, both directly involved the imperial regime itself, which helps to reflect the intersection between imperial self-representation and the sovereignty of the Roman populace.

[830] MacCormack (1981), 9, 272-273

Public ceremonies played an integral role in late Roman urban life and the forming of community consciousness. Chief amongst them are the public games – chariot races, wild beast hunts, athletic competitions, and, until they were banned by the government of Honorius, gladiatorial spectacles – that were funded as a mandatory public liturgy by civic aristocrats.[831] Olympiodorus preserved some figures for the outlays on a series of early-fifth century Roman praetorian games: 2,000 lbs. of gold for the son of Symmachus 'the writer' in c. 401, 1,200 lbs. of gold for Probus, the son of Olympius, in c. 424, and a staggering 4,000 lbs. of gold for the 'son of Maximus' in c. 411.[832] Whether these figures were accurate or not, they still give some indication as to the expense such spectacles could incur. The letters of Q. Aurelius Symmachus also record the lengths to which the orator went to provide magnificent games for his son's adlection into the senate: Scottish wolfhounds, North African bears, Iberian racehorses, crocodiles, and a troop of actors and circus performers who somehow got lost in the bay of Naples on the way to Rome.[833] Given the proliferation of hippodromes and theatres across the west, we can safely assume that preoccupation with public spectacles was a consistent feature of urban provincial life: according to a disgusted Salvian, the first request of the city of Trier to the imperial government once peace had been restored after 406 was for chariot races.[834] Of similar importance was the extent to which Christian veneration of saint's feast days and martyr cults came to colonise the festive calendar by the late fourth century.[835] The poems of Prudentius alluded to the fervour with which the natives of Tarraco, Mérida, Zaragoza, and Prudentius's own native Calagurris venerated the shrines of local martyrs, and recorded in a trip to Rome the size of the crowds making their way to a joint celebration at the shrines of Peter and Paul.[836] Similarly, Paulinus of Nola revelled in the throngs that attended the shrine of St. Felix at his yearly festival, and Bishop Victricius of Rouen recorded that a full scale *adventus* took place

[831] *LRE* II, 1016-1021

[832] Olymp. *fr.* 41.2

[833] Symm. *Ep.* IV.58-62; V.56, 62; VI.33, 42-43

[834] Salv. *de gub. Dei* VI.82-9; *LRE* II, 1016; Stutz (2023), 15

[835] Hunt (2008), 252-254

[836] Prudent. *Perist.* VI.54, 136 f., I.6 f., III.186 f., XII.57-8; Matthews (1975), 148; Hunt (2008), 254

to commemorate the arrival of some relics in his city in 390.[837] Although we do not possess many sources for the actual conduct of civic governance, a fourth-century schoolbook preserves a scene which implies that the communication of the tax indiction was ritualised: the *curiales* would be summoned to the governor's palace, where a herald would read out the specific tax demands.[838] Decisions taken within *civitates* may not have directly involved the population, but they were certainly announced publicly to them: Sidonius Apollinaris's naming of a new bishop of Bourges evidently involved justifying his decision in a speech to an assembled crowd.[839] The communication of imperial legislation was certainly ritualised. Preserved in the *Gesta Senatus Urbis Romae* in the opening section of the Theodosian code (§5), we find a recording of the acclamation that the assembled senators are supposed to have given when promulgating the code:

> *"Augustuses of Augustuses, the greatest of Augustuses!"*
>
> *Repeated eight times.*
>
> *"God gave You to us! God save You for us!"*
>
> *Repeated twenty-seven times.*
>
> *"As Roman Emperors, pious and felicitous, may You rule for many years!"*
>
> *Repeated twenty-two times.*
>
> *"For the good of the human race, for the good of the Senate, for the good of the State, for the good of all!"*
>
> *Repeated twenty-four times.*[840]

This is but the opening few lines of a recitation that must have taken hours to complete. With respect to the imperial government itself, we know that both codicils of appointment and *donativa* were supposed to be handed out by the emperor personally, which will certainly have been a ceremonial occasion. If Zosimus's account of the massacre at Ticinum (408) is correct, then most of the senior palatine officials had accompanied Honorius on the

---

[837] Paul. *Carm.* XIV.82-5, XXVII.379-81; Vict. *De laude sanct.* 12.15-42; Dufraigne (1994), 303-308

[838] Dionisotti (1982), 104-105

[839] Sid. Ap. *Ep.* VII.5,8,9

[840] *Gesta Senatus Urbis Romae*, §5

occasion, which may well have involved issuing *donativa* to the troops: the presence of both emperor and senior officials will have necessitated a complex ceremony.[841] The above is just a small sampling of the array of ceremonies that made up late Roman public life, but they serve to illustrate the point: the observance of ceremony was how the late Roman *res publica* created and maintained its *consensus universorum*, by forming a ritualised environment that structured relationships, determined hierarchy, and projected harmony.

Let us turn to the ceremony of accession, or the ritual act of creating an emperor. As we will discuss further in the next chapter (§.7.4.1), there was never a clearly defined legal process or accepted tradition for elevating a new emperor, which fundamentally remained a matter of political expedience. As a third-century rabbi acidly observed:

> *"The legions clothed a dux in the purple. What did he do? He remitted the tax-arrears, burnt the records of them and led forth the legions. And this is what is known as the beginning of his reign."*[842]

Crucially, this rabbi noted the vital role played by the army in creating new emperors. As Anthony Birley has shown, the integral relationship between emperor and army meant that the troops had frequently played such a role (or been suborned to do so) under the Principate.[843] There was, however, a shift in this relationship in the late third century, after which emperors were exclusively chosen from the senior military ranks and spent most of their time on the frontiers with their armies, resulting in the divorce of imperial power from the political and spatial-temporal context of Rome itself.[844] The result was that "the army [took] over the role of the sovereign Roman people" in selecting emperors.[845] We might add

[841] Zos. V.32.3-7

[842] Ziegler (1903), 2, quoted in MacCormack (1981), 162

[843] Birley (2007), 379-394; see also Cassius Dio XLIII.18.1-2; Bang (2013), 412, 414; Ando (2008), 43-44

[844] Aur. Vict., *Caes.* XXXIII.34, XXXVII.5-6; *LRE* I, pp. 24-25; Watson (1999), 10; Matthews (1989), 249; Kaldellis (2015), 175

[845] Birley (2007), 390

to Birley's assessment that this role was now more exclusive than previously. We possess several accounts of western Roman accession ceremonies from the fourth and fifth centuries, mostly found in panegyrics. Our best non-panegyrical account is Ammianus' record of the elevation of Julian to *Augustus* (361), which states that "[h]e was placed on an infantry shield, raised aloft, and proclaimed *Augustus* without a dissentient voice".[846] Aside from being raised on a shield – a supposedly 'Germanic' custom – Julian was hastily clothed in some semblance of the imperial regalia, issued a *donativum,* and received a loyalty oath from the soldiery.[847] According to Ammianus, Julian's elevation to *Caesar* had also taken place "on a high platform surrounded by eagles and standards in the presence of all the troops".[848] Indeed, of the nine accessions described in our surviving books of Ammianus, all except one took place in the camp and were the exclusive work of the army.[849] The role of the army in electing emperors is further emphasised in Eusebius's panegyric for Constantine:

> *"The whole army consented your election, the minds and eyes of all pointed to you … your electors by their eagerness anticipated what the emperors shortly confirmed by their verdict. As soon as the soldiers could gain access to you, when you came out to them, they clothed you in purple, securing thereby the interests of the common weal rather than your own desires…"*[850]

Eusebius's formulation is mirrored by a similar panegyric delivered by an anonymous western orator for Constantine in 310:

> *"For no sooner had he been snatched from the earth than the whole army agreed upon you, and the minds and eyes of all marked you out, and although you referred to the senior rulers the question of what they thought should be*

---

[846] Amm. Marc. XX.4.17

[847] Amm. Marc. XXI.5.10

[848] Amm. Marc. XV.8.2

[849] Silvanus: Amm. Marc. XV.5.16; Julian: XV.8.3,11,15-16; XX.4.17-18; Jovian: XXV.5.1-7; Valentinian: XXVI.2.1-5, 11; Valens: XXVI.4.1-3; Procopius: XXVI.6.15-20; XXVII.6.4-5, 10-11; Valentinian II: XXX.10.1-6

[850] *Pan. Lat.* VII.8.2 in MacCormack (1981), 180

> *done in the interests of the State, the soldiers anticipated in their eagerness what those leaders soon approved by their decision."*[851]

We also possess Symmachus' panegyric on the elevation of Gratian, which originates in an exclusively western idiom:

> *"On the one side is the Augustus, on the other the legions and in the midst of these is the young candidate of empire. There was a prolonged and twofold contest on both sides as everyone eagerly acclaimed the father who only slowly gave in. The squadrons beseeching the emperor, the divisions canvassing support – this is a scene worthy of the ages…"* – Symmachus*, Orationes* III.5

The vital role of the army in elevating emperors in also demonstrated on a *largitio* bowl attributed to Valentinian I, which shows the nimbate and spear-wielding emperor surrounded by soldiers as he is crowned by Victory:[852] Firstly, we must note that these panegyrics were post-factum creations intended to forge a *consensus universorum* following a military elevation: as MacCormack notes, the military aspect of imperial elevations "would cut little ice with the civilian population of the empire" who largely seem to have detested the army.[853] The acceptance of the role of this *castrensis senatus* by Symmachus contrasts sharply with the disdain of his early imperial forbears for the *senatus caligatus*, Dio amongst them.[854] Conversely, even if alternative sources of legitimation were presented after an accession, (such as divine right, a relationship with the City of Rome, or a civilian *consensus*), the vital role of the army could not be ignored. However, we note also that our panegyrists still rely heavily on notions of election and consent: the ceremony of accession may have been exclusively military, but the soldiers still filled the conceptual role of the *populus*

---

[851] *Pan. Lat.* VI.8.2; MacCormack (1981), 180

[852] Delbrueck (1933), 179-182, pl. 79; MacCormack (1981), 204-205, pl. 52

[853] MacCormack (1981), 175; MacMullen (1988), 145-146

[854] Symm. *Rel.* I.9; Dio, XLVIII.12.1-3; Birley (2007), 390

Romanus from which they had originally been severed by the Augustan settlement.[855] The point is that this entirely military ceremony for creating emperors was novel in the fourth century, and speaks to the extent to which the army had replaced the civilian population (particularly that of Rome) in exercising the role of the *populus Romanus* as acting legitimately on behalf of the *res publica*.[856]

The replacement of any element of the civilian *populus Romanus* with the army in the creation of emperors is one of the main reasons why we might characterise the later Roman state as a junta, and had a couple of important consequences. Firstly, it further emphasised what Jean Gagé described as the “imperial theology of victory”, the notion that imperial rule was predominantly legitimised by successful military endeavours.[857] This would be of crucial importance if emperors ceased to actively campaign, as they did in the late fourth and fifth centuries (§7.4.2). Secondly, in an era of regionalised armies with distinct command structures, it both legitimised civil war and made it structurally more likely. As Johannes Wienand has argued, the development in the Constantinian period and after of a rhetoric that accepted other Roman soldiers as targets for legitimate violence and portrayed rival imperial candidates as ‘tyrants’ after their defeat was indicative of a new, militarised *consensus universorum* increasingly divorced from any shared notion of public benefit.[858] As an example, we might take references in panegyrics to Constantine personally fighting Roman soldiers, who are characterised as more worthy of conquest because of their superiority to ‘barbarian’ warriors.[859] This change of attitude, it seems, was not lost on the civilian population. Ammianus had nothing but harsh words for Constantius II’s celebration of his victory over Magnentius “to which he had no title, since it had been won by the spilling of Roman blood”.[860] As both Michael McCormick and Johannes Wienand pointed out, Ammianus is likely to have declaimed his work in Rome at around the time of

[855] Ando (2008), 44

[856] MacCormack (1981), 200

[857] Gagé (1933), 1-43; McCormick (1986), 11; McEvoy (2013), 36

[858] Wienand (2015), 169-197

[859] *Pan. Lat.* XII.9.2-4; XII.24.1-2

[860] Amm. Marc. XVI.10.1-2

Theodosius' victory celebrations over Magnus Maximus; the audience will likely have taken his criticisms of Constantius II as a tacit dig at a more proximate emperor.[861] Claudian put similar words into the mouth of the personified Roma on the occasion of Honorius's consulship in 404:

> *"Could any man think that for a loving mother the lamentations of her sons were cause for joy? Tyrants they were who died, but when they died, still they were mine. Though he boasted at large of his battles against the Gauls, Caesar kept silent on Pharsalus. For when ally fights with ally and kindred raise their standards against each other, then, just as it is pitiful to lose, so also it never brings honour to have won."*[862] – Claudian, *Panegyric for the Fourth Consulship of Honorius*, 394-406

The ceremony of accession in its late antique form represents, therefore, the fact that the army had replaced the civilian population as the *populus Romanus* in selecting emperors. Whilst this could conceptually still fulfil the requirements of popular sovereignty, the notion that it was being conducted for anyone's benefit other than the army's is likely to have stretched credibility. In the process, military elections enhanced the power of the military, deepened the divide between the military and civilian populations, and legitimised civil war. Within this context, it is hard to conceive of a *res publica* based on any notion of shared public benefit.

The distance between emperor and civilian population is increasingly visible when we turn to the *adventus*, or the ceremonial arrival of an emperor at a *civitas* and his reception by the local population. In the typical *adventus,* the emperor (or visiting dignitary) would have been greeted by the population beyond the city walls, after which he processed through the gates and on to the heart of the city (presumably to the forum, *praetorium*, or palace) along an extensively decorated processional route via the most notable local landmarks.[863] The

---

[861] McCormick (1896), 83; Wienand (2015), 188

[862] Claud. *VI cons. Hon.* 394-406 (trans. Dewar 1996, with slight modifications from Wienand)

[863] Dey (2015), 12-13, 57-64

role of the local population, led by their notables, as a cheering crowd was a vital component of this ceremony. To give an example, the *gratiarum actio* following Constantine's *adventus* into Autun (311) stated:

> *"You asked with astonishment, Emperor, whence came the great multitude which poured out to meet you … For all the men of every age flocked from the fields to see the one whom they would gladly wish to survive them … We decorated the streets which lead to the palace … we brought out the banners of all the colleges and the images of all our gods, and produced our paltry number of musical instruments, which by means of shortcuts were to greet you several times over."*[864]

A similar image was conjured from Theodosius's *adventus* into Emona in 388 following his defeat of Magnus Maximus:

> *"Why should I recall … the gates crowned with green garlands and the main streets waving with tapestries, and the day prolonged with blazing torches? Why recount the crowds pouring out of their houses into the public places, old men congratulating themselves on their years, youngsters pledging long service upon your behalf, joyful mothers and girls without a care? You had not yet brought the whole war to an end and you were already celebrating a triumph."*[865]

As with accessions, such descriptions of *adventus* ceremonies were a novelty in the fourth century, and indicate that the arrival of an emperor or similar dignitary into a city was fast becoming one of the main ceremonial events for the local population. To quote Sabine MacCormack's analysis of the *adventus* ceremony:[866]

[864] *Pan. Lat.* V.8.1-4

[865] *Pan. Lat.* XII(2).37.4

[866] See also Dey (2015), 59-60; see also MacCormack (1981), 18, 39; McCormick (1986), 85

> "The ruler thus encountered an orderly and organized body of citizens, headed by their dignitaries, with whom business could be transacted. At the same time, the enumeration serves to indicate that everyone was present, that this body of people was in a position to express that *consensus omnium* which was fundamental to most classical and late antique theories about legitimate government."[867] – Sabine MacCormack (1981), 21

This renders descriptions of *adventus* ceremonies one of the most effective ways we have of assessing the relationship between emperor and civilian in a ceremonial context.

However, militarism and the growing distance between emperor and subject are increasingly clear in the source material. As both MacCormack and McCormick have argued, the doctrine of universal imperial victory meant that *adventus* ceremonies always served as victory celebrations regardless of whether or not, as Jörg Rüpke, Ernst Künzl, and Katarzyna Balbuza have respectively argued, they constituted an actual *triumphus* of the traditional stripe.[868] Whilst rarely referred to by panegyrists, it goes without saying that emperors were accompanied on their *adventus* route by armed troops. What appears to have happened, based on the evidence from Rome at least, is that an *adventus* was divided between the ceremony itself, in which the citizenry was required only as a passive, approving audience, and the post-ceremony, in which the personability and liberality of the emperor would be exhibited to the population.[869] This is certainly evident in the friezes on the arch of Constantine, in which the population of Rome are present for the *adlocutio* and *liberalitas* scenes but not for the *adventus* itself.[870] This is also evident in Ammianus's account of the *adventus* of Constantius II into Rome in 357:

[867] MacCormack (1981), 21, see also 54

[868] MacCormack (1981), 41-42; McCormick (1986), 35-36, 80-81, 84; Rüpke (1990), 233-234; Künzl (1988), 119, 134; Balbuza (2002), 365; Wienand (2015), 173-174; see also Beard (2007), 318-328

[869] MacCormack (1981), 36-37

[870] Rose (2021)

> *"The emperor was greeted with welcoming cheers … but in spite of the din he exhibited no emotion, but kept the same impassive air as he commonly wore before his subjects in the provinces … he was like a dummy, gazing straight before him as if his head were in a vice and turning neither right nor left … All this was no doubt affectation, but he gave other evidence in his personal life of an unusual degree of self-control, which one was given to believe belonged to him alone."* – Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae* XVI.10.9-10

Once the ceremony had ended, however, Ammianus records that:

> *"After addressing the nobility in the senate-house and the people from the tribune he entered the palace amid many demonstrations of good will ... On several occasions, when he held races in the Circus, he was amused by the witty sallies of the people, who kept their traditional freedom of speech without any loss of respect, and he himself took care to observe the proper forms."* – Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae* XVI.10.13

What we find here, therefore, is a conceptual distancing of emperor and citizenry played out in art and ceremonial. This is important because, as we have seen above, the citizenry was still considered absolutely vital of the legitimate formulation of a *consensus universorum*. Their approval could not be omitted, but they could be relegated to the role of passive, separate spectators rather than active participants in imperial ceremonial. Conversely, we find the emperor ever more raised to the status of an icon, as Constantius II attempted to demonstrate in his *adventus.* This is also evident from a *largitio* bowl attributed to the same emperor. As MacCormack has argued, the three-quarter frontality of the image, the discreet lowering of the eyes of the other participants in the imperial presence, and the directing of the imperial gaze beyond the confines of the image "portrays a reality where those who accompany the emperor serve merely as a background and exist on a different plane".[871] Claudian conjures a similar image when he described Honorius during his *adventus* into Milan in 398:

[871] MacCormack (1981), 43-44

> *"Now, what garments, what miracles of splendour*
> *Have we not seen, when, clad in the robe of Italy*
> *You passed through Liguria more exalted than is your custom*
> *And when you were carried amidst the cohorts clad in white,*
> *And picked soldiers bore upon their shoulders*
> *A starry burden. Thus in Memphis are gods brought out*
> *Before the people. The image leaves its shrine."*
>
> - Claudian, *Panegyric on the Fourth Consulship of Honorius* 565-572

In this passage, Honorius is almost explicitly referred to in iconic terms.[872] From the above, we can see that western imperial rule did not require a notion of divine right to raise itself conceptually beyond the earthly realm.

To conclude, it should be clear that Roman imperial legitimation rested on the notion of a *consensus universorum* supplied either by the army in acclamations or by the citizenry in urban festivities. However, the role played by the army involved the active exercise of popular sovereignty (in actively choosing an emperor, and thus participating in the actual conduct of politics), whereas the role of the citizenry was passive, as the audience or recipient of imperial largesse. In this way, we can see that whilst late imperial rulership was still founded on a notion of popular sovereignty embodied in the *res publica*, a shared notion of public benefit was being stretched in ways that increasingly exalted the ruler and excluded anything but the passive approval of the civilian population. On one level, this is unsurprising. Roman imperial rule had never been remotely democratic, and the introduction of compulsory social organisation under Constantine and the extension of corporal punishment, torture, and capital penalties to an ever-expanding roster of the civic population is likely to have reinforced the notion that imperial power was being exercised in practice on behalf of a select few.[873] It is in this light that we might view the assertions of Sabine MacCormack and John Matthews that the aim of late imperial ceremony was to

---

[872] MacCormack (1981), 54-55

[873] Bury (1958), 55-63; Matthews (1989), 255-262; MacMullen (1988), 140-144

"eliminate spontaneity" in the relationship between emperor and subject, and thus to render the relationship more predictable and susceptible to control.[874] To quote Camille Jullian:

> "…the mass of the population cannot have had any spirit, courage, or love of country … it is highly probable that the common folk, the proletariat and slaves, had little interest in Rome and the empire … they knew the state only by the recruiting sergeant who sent them off to the armies or the fiscal agent who took from them their trifling wealth."[875]

Judging by the references to endemic brigandage and revolts by *bagaudae* between the third and fifth centuries, we might conclude that the average Roman peasant had noticed that the ideology of popular sovereignty didn't mean very much to their rulers.[876] In spite of this, late imperial rule was still fundamentally justified as being exercised for the public benefit, regardless of whether or not it actually lived up to this promise. In terms of policy, the maintenance of the *annona* to the city of Rome, the attempts to standardize laws and access to legal recourse, frequent legal denunciations of corruption or heresy, attempts to standardize taxation, provision for military security, and the funding of a church aimed at spiritual salvation all make clear that late imperial governments were at the very least trying to realise some version of public benefit, rather than simply maintaining themselves in power.[877] It is this basic conception and set of practices that the successor kingdoms inherited, and, as we shall see, did not see fit to fundamentally challenge.

---

[874] MacCormack (1981), 55; Matthews (1989), 233, 249

[875] Jullian (1908-1926) 8.353f; MacMullen (1988), 52-53; cf. Wickham (2009), 69-70

[876] For the revolts in Tarraconensis and Aracelli: Hydat. 117 [125], s.a. 441; 120 [128], s.a. 442; for the revolt of Basilius, Hydat. 133 [141], s.a. 449; *Chron. Gall. s.a.* 435, 437; Merrony (2019), 140; Drinkwater (1992), 208-217; Ward-Perkins (2005), 45; de Ste. Croix (1981), 478; Marcone (2008), 366-367; see also Amm. Marc. XXVII.2.11; Thompson (1952), 33-34; Rut. Nam., I.213-16

[877] *LRE* II, 695-705; Weisweiler (2017), 163-166; Dossey (2010), 173-194; Bransbourg (2017), 93

6.5 Public Power in the Successor Kingdoms

"Letters reached Clovis from the Emperor Anastasius to confer the consulate on him. In Saint Martin's church he stood clad in a purple tunic and the military mantle, and he crowned himself with a diadem. He then rode out on his horse and with his own hand showered gold and silver coins among the people present all the way from the doorway of Saint Martin's church to Tours cathedral. From that day on he was called Consul or Augustus." – Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks* II.38

This excerpt, related by Gregory of Tours, describes Clovis's celebrations on the occasion of his victory over the Visigoths as Vouillé (507).[878] We observe here the prominent role of the church; the importance of a procession route between the notable urban topography of Tours; and the crucial involvement of the urban population as spectators and recipients of the royal largesse. In short, we observe the continuation of late Roman practices of public power into the post-Roman period. Nor was this a peculiarly Frankish phenomenon. For Italy, the *Vita Fulgentii* and the *Excerpta Valesiana* record Theoderic's *adventus* into Rome on the occasion of his thirtieth year of kingship, complete with parade, speech, circus races, and royal gifts.[879] Similarly, a letter written by Cassiodorus on behalf of Athalaric to Severus, the *corrector* of Lucania and Bruttium, reflects that the urban crowds drawn to the ceremonial concourse (*conventum*) demonstrate the healthy cities that make up the natural function of the *res publica*.[880] The question that confronts us, therefore, is not whether or not public power survived in the successor kingdoms, but the extent to which it conformed or deviated from its late Roman framework. To that end, we will briefly analyse both political assemblies and public processions in the Merovingian, Visigothic, and Lombard kingdoms in order to demonstrate the longer term development of public power in the post-Roman period.

---

[878] McCormick (1986), 335-337; Dey (2015), 162-164

[879] Ferr. *Vit. Fulg.* IX; *Exc. Val.,* 65-7; McCormick (1986), 273 n. 60

[880] Cass. *Var.* III.31.1-3; Dey (2015), 137-138

We must first address how the notion of *res publica* – and with it, the concept of popular sovereignty – was used in the post-Roman era. Cassiodorus, as we have just seen, used the term frequently in the *Variae* in the traditional sense. However, we must remember that Cassiodorus was as determined to present Ostrogothic rule in the most Romanised fashion possible as the Ostrogothic kings were to present themselves as acceptable pseudo-vassals of the Constantinopolitan emperors.[881] To put this into context, Gregory of Tours mentions the term *res publica* twice in the ten extant books of his *Historia Francorum*, both times referring exclusively to the eastern empire.[882] This comports with Sidonius's belief that Roman rule had come to an end in Gaul when the emperor ceded Provence; this meant that Sidonius, much to his regret, was no longer a Roman citizen.[883] Generally speaking, if writers in the post-Roman period were referring to the *res publica*, they were referring to the Byzantine empire, rather than to their own polities. This is not to say that the term dropped out of usage entirely: the opening laws of the Visigothic *Forum Iudicum* describe the law as "the rudder of the state" (*rei publicae*), and stipulate that the lawmaker should act "not for private gain but for the benefit of the people; so that it may conclusively appear that the law has not been made for any private or personal advantage, but for the protection and profit of the whole body of citizens".[884] This conception was likely a reflection of the living Constantinopolitan example rather than a fossilised reference to western Roman precedent. Conversely, the immediately post-Roman centuries see the first usage of the term *res publica christiana* - originally an Augustinian phrase – to describe what we might call the 'Christian commonwealth' or 'Christendom'.[885] However, as Nathan Ristuccia has argued, the term did not gain widespread usage until the eleventh century at the earliest.[886] In the immediately post-Roman centuries, it is almost exclusively found in papal missives, first to

[881] Cass. *Var.* I.1; Jord. *Get.* 304; Barnish, Lee, and Whitby (2008), 167

[882] Greg. Tur. VI.30, X.2

[883] Sid. Ap. *Ep.* VII.7, to Graecus; Harries (1994); Kulikowski (2004), 152

[884] *LV* I.1.3, 2.2; cf. Scott (1910) xi, the translator, who argued that "the State became synonymous with the Council; the theory of popular representation had vanished"

[885] Aug. *de op. Mon.* 23.33; *Civ. Dei* 2.21, 19.21, 19.24; Ristuccia (2018), 16-17

[886] Ristuccia (2018), 17-18

the Byzantine emperors and then, later, to Carolingian sovereigns.[887] On the one hand, the fact that the Roman bishops were found extolling the concept of *res publica* seems highly particular to their environment; on the other, the term was used to exhort putative overlords to defend the church against external or theological enemies rather than in any clear context of popular sovereignty.[888] It does not seem unreasonable to conclude, therefore, that western post-Roman populations did not habitually identify their own polities as constituting *rei publicae*; furthermore, the concept of Christendom was still some distance in the future. This is not as sharp a break as it might seem, considering how little later Roman rule involved actual popular sovereignty. As we shall see, the term did not need to be current for the involvement of the population in important ceremonies or gatherings to be of fundamental importance.

6.5.1 The Merovingian Kingdoms

There is a less than flattering anecdote in Gregory's *Historia Francorum* about Clovis, which has the king publicly murdering a retainer after the man had the temerity to question the distribution of spoils at an assembly.[889] Brutal though this was, it illustrates an important point: Merovingian royal power was ostensibly built on consultation and consensus formed in political assemblies composed of all free Franks – read 'warriors' – and that any war booty was theoretically considered common property of the assembly.[890] Such assemblies could be composed of secular aristocrats, ecclesiastical luminaries, or 'the people', and were called for both routine and exceptional circumstances.[891] Regarding routine assemblies, we have already observed the annual 1st March meeting in the *Decretio Childeberti*, in which decisions were taken in consultation with *optimates* before being communicated to the *leudes* or 'all'.[892] This practice, traceable from the late sixth century, was still going on in the

887 Ibid, nn. 66-67

888 Ibid, 17-18

889 Greg. Tur. II.27

890 Wickham (2009), 100-101

891 Barnwell and Mostert (2003), 13

892 Barnwell and Mostert (2003), 25

eighth on the basis of the *Lex Alemmannorum*, which stipulated regular gatherings on each *kalends*.[893] Beyond agreeing on laws, according to Paul Barnwell, these assemblies met for the purpose of receiving foreign legates, announcing important decisions or appointments, resolving judicial proceedings, or performing rituals.[894] The results of such meetings are recorded in *placita*, documents stating the joint decision reached by the king and those called upon to advise him.[895] Exceptional assemblies could be called for the purpose of elevating a king, as Gregory, Fredegar, and the author of the *Passiones Leudegarii* record for a succession of Merovingian monarchs.[896] We must assume that these were military elevations instigated by aristocrats and their warrior followings: it is noteworthy that, according to Gregory, Sigibert I was elevated by being raised on a shield in the fashion of his Roman predecessors. Elevations seem to have been accompanied by public oaths of fealty, such as those offered to Charibert and the pretender Munderic; according to the Formulary of Marculf, there was a set loyalty oath intended to be administered by the *comes civitatis*.[897] Assemblies could also be called for important trials and punishments, such as the investigation of Fredegund (584) or the execution of Brunhild (613).[898] The same principle applied to bishops, as in the cases of Praetextatus of Rouen (577), Gregory himself (580), and Leudegar of Autun, although these could only be tried by other ecclesiastical authorities.[899] It is worth noting that whilst rule by consent was important in principle, how it worked in practice was a matter of politics. For example, the first *Passio Leudegarii* records how the Neustrian *maior domus* Ebroin tried to dispense with direct kingship following the death of Lothar III in 673, only to have the Austrasian king Childeric III foisted on him by an assembly of nobles.[900] By contrast, when Dagobert I decided to make his son

---

[893] *Lex Alemmannorum* 17.2; Barnwell and Mostert (2003), 26

[894] Barnwell and Mostert (2003), 26

[895] Wood (1994), 163; Barnwell and Mostert (2003), 21-22

[896] Clovis: Greg. Tur. II.40; Sigibert I: Greg. Tur. IV.51; Childebert II: Greg. Tur. V.1; Sigibert II: Freg. IV.40; Dagobert: Fred. IV.56; Clovis II: Fred. IV.79; Childeric III: *Passio I Leudegarii* 5

[897] Greg. Tur. III.14, IX.30; Marc. *Form.* I.40

[898] Fred. *Chron.* IV.42; *Liber Historiae Francorum* 40; Greg. Tur. VII.7, 14

[899] Greg. Tur. V.18, 49, VII.16; *Passio I Leudegarii* 33, *Passio II* 16-17

[900] *Passio I Leudegarii* 5

Sigibert the sub-king of Austrasia, Fredegar records that the nobles agreed out of fear.[901] As with late Roman precedent, popular consent operated in a world contextualised by autocratic power.

Turning now to public ceremonies, the standard repertoire inherited by the Merovingians originated in late Roman and Byzantine precedents.[902] As Hendrik Dey has demonstrated, the bipartite topography of Merovingian cities – each organised around a single colonnaded route between the extramural shrine or martyrium and the intramural cathedral, *episcopium*, and palace by way of all the notable local landmarks – was expressly maintained to provide a backdrop for public ceremonies intended to exalt kings, bishops, and other dignitaries.[903] Given that Merovingian kings were, if anything, even more peripatetic than late Roman emperors, the *adventus* ceremony remained a crucial feature of urban life. For example, Gregory recorded the following for Guntram's *adventus* in Orléans in 585 after having defeated the pretender Gundovald:

> *"The day of his entry into Orléans was the feast of Saint Martin, that is 4 July. A vast crowd of citizens came out to meet him, carrying flags and banners, and singing songs in his praise. The speech of the Syrians contrasted sharply with that of those using Gallo-Roman and again with that of the Jews, as they each sang his praises in their own tongue."* – Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks* VIII.1

A similar scene seems to have met Theudebert on his entry into Soissons in 589.[904] Bishops and secular aristocrats could also be the recipients of such a ceremony: according to his *passio*, Leudegar was treated to an *adventus* along the *platea* of Autun in the late seventh century.[905] Ceremonies and banquets were clearly a matter of course for episcopal

---

[901] Fred. *Chron.* IV.76

[902] Dey (2015), 162

[903] Ibid, 160-178

[904] Greg. Tur. IX.36

[905] *Passiones Leudegarii* c.17; Dey (2015), 177; McCormick (1986), 330-331 nn.9, 12

enthronements: Gregory records the usurpation of Sidonius Apollinaris' seat of Clermont as follows:

> *"He* [the usurping priest] *rode proudly through the whole city. On the Sunday following the death of the holy Bishop, this priest prepared a feast in the church-house and ordered all the townspeople to be invited."* – Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks* II.23

In addition, Gregory also records multiple instances of the *circuitus murorum*, a ceremonial procession around the walls by the inhabitants of a besieged or beleaguered city.[906] Furthermore, there is some indication that circus races, such as those staged by Chilperic prior to his civil war with Guntram and Childebert, were still held in the Merovingian period.[907] Lastly, we will note that accessions still seem to have been public events by the eve of the Carolingian era. For example, the coronation of Lothar IV in Cologne at the instigation of Charles Martel in 717 took place, according to the *Liber Historiae Francorum*, along the main *cardio* of the city, and crowned Martel's ascendancy to power in Austrasia.[908]

6.5.2 The Visigothic Kingdom

Whilst we are not quite as well served in surviving accounts of Visigothic political assemblies, our evidence indicates that Visigothic public life was almost entirely derived from late Roman precedent and contemporary Byzantine practice.[909] Our most extensive sources for political assemblies are the canons of the various Councils of Toledo, which were called to legitimize decisions taken by the king and to approve the codification of his laws.[910] It seems clear from both the canons and the laws of the *Forum Iudicum* that the aim of such

[906] Greg. Tur. I.12, III.29; McCormick (1986), 343-344

[907] Greg. Tur. V.17, Procop. *Bell.* VII.33.5; McCormick (1986), 332-333; Dey (2015), 167

[908] *Liber Historiae Francorum*, c. 53; Dey (2015), 175-176

[909] McCormick (1986), 298-299, 314

[910] Esp. VIII Toledo, canon 10; Stocking (2000), 64-68, 85-88; Barnwell and Mostert (2003), 23, 27

assemblies was to create the impression of consensus between the king, secular aristocracy, and bishops. For example, both the 75th canon of the Fourth Council and the 3rd canon of the Fifth Council stipulate that kings should be chosen variously by the consensus of the bishops, the "primates of the people", or "all".[911] The selectorate had been tightened up by the Eighth Council, when a canon restricted those capable of choosing a king to the bishops and the chief courtiers (*maiores palatii*).[912] According to Julian of Toledo's *Historia Wambae Regis,* Wamba's coronation took place in the palace church in Toledo.[913] We might assume from this that, whilst onlookers were certainly necessary, the audience for the ceremony itself was probably restricted to the aforementioned élites.[914] Élite trials were also ostensibly a matter of consensus.[915] The trial of Count Paul is recorded by Julian, who indicates that the audience included senior courtiers, the king's armed retainers, and minor palace officials; McCormick assumed that this would have included the armed followings of these proto-feudal aristocrats, thereby constituting the Visigothic army, although this is not certain.[916] Similarly, a law of Chindaswinth states that traitors could not be pardoned without the consent of the bishops and *maiores palatii*.[917] This seems to have been the case in the trial of Archbishop Sisebut of Toledo, who was convicted of treason against Egica at the Sixteenth Council of Toledo (693) by a secular or mixed group of aristocrats.[918] If élite trials were potentially quite restricted affairs, then punishments certainly weren't. Count Paul, for example, was first subjected to *calcatio colli* in Nîmes, before being carted back to Toledo for a victory procession in which he was paraded through the streets on the back of a camel.[919] This is by no means the only example of Visigothic public punishments. In the

[911] IV Toledo, canon 75 (633); V Toledo, canon 3 (636); Barnwell and Mostert (2003), 16

[912] VIII Toledo, canon 10

[913] Jul., *Hist. Wam. Reg.* 2-3

[914] Dey (2015), 142

[915] XIII Toledo, canon 2; Barnwell and Mostert (2003), 19

[916] Jul., *Hist. Wam. Reg.* 27; McCormick (1986), 315; cf. Barnwell and Mostert (2003), 18

[917] *LV* VI.1.7

[918] Thompson (1969), 244-245; Barnwell and Mostert (2003), 19

[919] Jul., *Hist. Wam. Reg.* 27, 29-30; McCormick (1986), 313-314; Barnwell and Mostert (2003), 18; Dey (2015), 144-145

490s, the *Consularia Caesaraugustana* records that a certain Burdunelus, an opponent of Euric, was publicly roasted alive in a bronze bull in Toulouse.[920] The same document relates the execution of Petrus, the 'Tyrant of Dertosa', whose severed head was paraded about the streets of Zaragoza in 500: this practice, to which Constantine subjected Maxentius, had deep roots in late Roman precedent.[921] Furthermore, the Chronicle of John of Biclar records that the rebellious Duke Argimund was shaven, had his right hand amputated, and was then paraded through the streets of Toledo on the back of an ass in 589.[922] We have, by contrast, next to no evidence for local political assemblies, although these almost certainly occurred.[923] For instance, a law of Egica (r. 687-702) concerning loyalty oaths indicates that officials entitled *discussores iuramenti* were supposed to travel the kingdom administering the oath of allegiance on the coronation of new kings; as Paul Barnwell argues, this must have required some form of assembly.[924] The overall impression given, therefore, is of an ideological commitment to consensus that was primarily contextualised by autocratic power and the need to balance élite competition.

As our records of public punishments would suggest, public ceremonies in the Visigothic kingdom were an all pervasive feature of urban life. As in the Merovingian context, Visigothic cities were situated – and, in the case of Récopolis, consciously designed – around a central colonnaded *cardio* that led from vital extramural cult sites to an urban centre dominated by cathedrals and palaces.[925] Again, this formed the backdrop to performances of public power, whether royal, élite, or ecclesiastical, for which the urban audience was the vital component.[926] Julian records several instances of the *adventus* ceremony, such as this account of Wamba's triumphant procession into the subjugated city of Nîmes:

---

[920] *Cons. Caes.* 75a

[921] *Cons. Caes.* 87a

[922] John of Biclar, 93

[923] Barnwell and Mostert (2003), 26-27

[924] *LV* II.1.7; Barnwell and Mostert (2003), 17 n.37

[925] Dey (2015), 147-154

[926] Ibid, 149, 159

> *"Hurrying on his way, the princeps came to the city with the admirable spectacle of his army and an awesome parade…Who could explain what a parade there was of the army, what glory of arms, what beauty of youth, what consensus of spirits?"* – Julian of Toledo, *History of King Wamba* 23

Similar ceremonies were performed in Narbonne and Toledo.[927] Regarding ecclesiastical processions, the *Vitas Patrum Emeritensium* records an instance in which a conspirator, pardoned by the bishop Masona, was required to parade from the extramural church of St. Eulalia to the episcopal palace, walking before a mounted deacon.[928] Indeed, Masona was reputedly so rich that he had his church slaves attired in silk *olosericae chlamydes* – the type of cape worn by imperial officials – for when they processed before him through the city.[929] Such ecclesiastical processions and festivals were clearly commonplace in cities: the epitaph of the sixth-century bishop Justinian of Valencia proudly records the festivals that he had patronised for his local populace.[930] Furthermore, there is some limited evidence for the continuation of circus games in Toledo, where excavations may have uncovered a sixth/seventh century circus/palace complex.[931] Lastly, we might observe that the prominence of urban public spectacle as a mode of consensus building survived into the kingdom of Asturias.[932] Surviving chronicles indicate that Alfonso II (r. 791-842) had the Asturian capital Oviedo constructed in imitation of Toledo for the purposes of holding processions, which he then used to stage at least one *adventus* ceremony on his return from a successful campaign in Gallaecia.[933]

---

[927] Ibid, 28-29

[928] *VPE* 5.11-12

[929] Ibid, 5.3.12

[930] *ILERV* 279 = *IRVT* 117; Kulikowski (2004), 290

[931] Carrobles Santos et al. (2007), 59-64; Dey (2015), 157-158

[932] Dey (2015), 158-159

[933] *Albelda Chronicle,* 44.1; *Chron. Alf. III,* 14.1-2

6.5.3 The Lombard Kingdom

It has frequently been argued that the Lombard's shorter period of exposure to Mediterranean civilisation meant that they were slower to acculturate to late Roman practices, such as specific modes of ceremony or urban planning.[934] However, the Lombards also settled in one of the most densely urbanised parts of the post-Roman west, so it would be surprising if said traditions were not replicated. Again, what evidence we have indicates that Lombard kings and dukes were quite happy to adopt and adapt late Roman or Byzantine precedents. Like the Franks, the Lombards held regular assemblies for the promulgation of laws.[935] Most surviving legislation indicates that these assemblies were to be held on the 1st March, although the laws of Grimoald (r. 662-671) and the Edict of Rothari (643) were promulgated in November and July respectively.[936] Surviving laws suggest that the assemblies were composed of *iudices*, *fideles*, or *optimates*.[937] There are occasional references to either 'all the people' or 'the Lombards' being present at assemblies, although these categories are not further defined.[938] As in the Visigothic and Frankish cases, the extent to which such assemblies represented an actual attempt to garner consensus or were merely an act of rubber-stamping royal prerogatives is unclear.[939] The laws of Grimoald explicitly suggest that the recorded laws were "suggested by the *iudices* and with the consent of all" (*per suggestion iudicum omniumque consensus*), whilst the confirmatory title at the end of Rothari's Edict states that the king "obtained consent from the judges, strengthened by the people, and confirmed by the ritual of gairethinx", possibly, according to Paul Barnwell, a brandishing of weaponry.[940] However compelling this may be, Lombard legislation, as is the case with our extant copies of the Theodosian Code, does not preserve

---

[934] McCormick (1986), 285; Dey (2015), 178

[935] Barnwell and Mostert (2003), 24

[936] Prefaces to the *leges Grimoaldi* [*Liutprandi*]/*Edictum Rothari* in Azzara and Gasparri (1992)

[937] Barnwell and Mostert (2003), 24

[938] 'all the people' = Liutprand 713, 720; 'the Lombards' = Liutprand 717, 720, 723, 731; Ratchis 746; Aistulf 750

[939] Barnwell and Mostert (2003), 24

[940] Ibid, 24-25

the context of laws, only their content. As such, we cannot be sure of exactly what happened at Lombard assemblies. As regards king-making, Paul the Deacon's accounts of the elevations of Agilulf (590) and Adaloald (604) suggest that both took place at a public assembly in Milan.[941] In the case of the latter, the use of the Milanese circus is explicitly mentioned. The accounts of the accessions of Perctarit (672), Cunincpert (688), and Liutprand (712) suggest that they were each supported by 'all the Lombards', implying some form of ceremony, whilst those of Celph (572) and Authari (584) are recorded only to have garnered wide support.[942]

As regards public ceremonies, our best evidence is from the Lombard capital of Pavia. Particular emphasis is placed on the construction of the Palatine gate under Perctarit, which seems to have been modelled on the Chalchi gate in Ravenna: Hendrik Dey suggests that such ostentatious architecture only makes sense if one presumes a ceremonial purpose redolent of Byzantines practices.[943] Furthermore, Paul the Deacon hints at *adventus* ceremonies in the case of Perctarit's return to Italy and Cunincpert's two entries into Ticinum.[944] There is some further indication that *adventus* ceremonies were practised by Lombard dukes, although the evidence is very slight.[945] The ceremonialisation of Lombard rule is perhaps clearest in the 10th century *Chronicon Salernitanum*, which records the reception of the embassy sent to Arechis by Charlemagne, which appears to have been orchestrated to emphasize the tenuous royalty of the last independent Lombard ruler.[946]

6.5.4 Observations

The obvious conclusion from the above is that the longer lasting post-Roman polities adopted or adapted practices of public power either inherited from the late Romans or in

[941] Paul, *HL* III.35, IV.30

[942] Paul, *HL* II.31, III.16, V.33, V.39, VI.35; see also McCormick (1986), 288

[943] Paul, *HL* V.36; McCormick (1986), 289; Dey (2015), 180

[944] Paul, *HL* V.33, 39, 41

[945] Paul, *HL* V.10 (Grimoald's return to Benevento)

[946] Dey (2015), 186-187

emulation of the Byzantines. This is particularly true of the repertoire of public ceremonies in post-Roman cities, which continued to be organised around a distinctly late Roman armature of monuments that provided a backdrop for élite self-representation. In the case of political assemblies, it seems clear that we are dealing with pre-existing 'Germanic' practices that were maintained into the period of the successor kingdoms. On the one hand, it seems clear that these were then adapted to the spatial and temporal context of new environments: we might think here of using circuses for accession ceremonies. On the other, we might note the curious similarity between our late Roman and post-Roman accounts of accession, involving military acclamation, loyalty oaths, and being raised on shields. It is certainly possible that, whilst the conceptual framework that promoted popular sovereignty or royal rule in the name of the public benefit was no longer explicit, or had potentially been dropped entirely, very little actually changed in practice.

Turning to the notion of popular sovereignty, we must assume that when our post-Roman sources refer to "all the people" or to a specific *gens*, they are referring in practice to the military followings of the élites who made up the armies of each polity. On one level, this is a direct continuation of late Roman precedent, in which the army were the only *populus* that mattered in practice, albeit now filtered through the transition from a tax-based to a land-based system of service. The greater emphasis on the militarism in our accounts of *adventus* ceremonies reflects the gradual replacement of a late Roman élite paradigm that favoured a civilian ethos with the increasingly military orientation of post-Roman élites. If our accounts are to be believed, then the consent of this 'people', whether actual or ceremonial, mattered in political decision making. Quite how this 'people' was composed is another matter. Both Roman and post-Roman legal codes maintained a distinction between Romans and non-Romans. Intermarriage between the two was prohibited under Roman and Visigothic law, although this is unlikely to have ever been stringently enforced.[947] In post-Roman legal cases involving both a Roman and a non-Roman, the standard practice seems to have been to try them in accordance with the laws of the latter before a non-Roman

[947] *CTh.* III.14.1 (368/370/373); *LV* III.1.1; Heather (2008), 454

judge, giving non-Romans a structural advantage.[948] The distinction drawn between Romans and non-Romans is also demonstrated by the differing *wergilds* (blood-prices) offered for the two under the Frankish Salic laws:

> "*But if anyone kills a free Frank … let him be liable for … 200 solidi. But if a Roman landowner … is killed, let him … be held liable for … 100 solidi.*"[949] – *Pactus Legis Salicae* 41.1.5, 8, 9

In addition, post-Roman kings seem at least initially to have reserved the tax burden exclusively for their Roman subjects, exempting their non-Roman followers.[950] Furthermore, in the beginning at least there seems to have been a language barrier. The sixth-century Italian aristocrat Cyprianus is reported by Cassiodorus to have had his sons educated in Gothic so as to further their careers at Theoderic's court, and the *Life* of Epiphanius records how, on the bishops' embassy to the Visigothic court in Toulouse, the king Euric spoke Gothic to his courtiers and conversed with the embassy through a Latin interpreter.[951] All of the above would suggest that the 'people' whose consensus was required by post-Roman kings was restricted to their *gens*, the warriors of their specific people, from which the wider Roman population was excluded. Against this we would counterpose the relative speed of acculturation. If there were language barriers, they seem to have quickly dissolved. According to Chris Wickham, all of the Vandals we know about spoke Latin; Gothic was, by 500, a liturgical language; and Gregory of Tours never gives the slightest hint that he had trouble communicating with anyone in the Frankish kingdoms despite being a monoglot Latin speaker.[952] Furthermore, the gradual conversion of non-Roman élites to Catholicism is likely to have aided the forging of a shared cultural identity. Peter Heather has argued that

---

[948] *Lib. Const. Pref.* 3,8; cf. 22 and 25, *Constitutiones Extravagantes* 20; Preceptio of Clothar II, c.4: '*Inter Romanus negutia causarum romanis legebus praecepemus terminari*': *Cap. Mer.* 1.19; Charles-Edwards (2008) 282; Ward-Perkins (2005), 71; Liebeschuetz (2008), 231; Wood (2013), 506

[949] Ward-Perkins (2005), 71, 201 n. 17; Heather (2008), 440

[950] Wickham (2005), 105; Heather (2008), 444; Liebeschuetz (2008), 235-236; Wood (2013), 504, 508

[951] Cass. *Var.* V.40.5, VIII.21.6-7, VIII.22.5; Ennodius, *Vit. Epiph.*

[952] Wickham (2009), 77, 99-100

original ethnic descriptors gave way to identifiers of status or location: so ‘Franks’ lived in the north in sixth/seventh century Francia whereas ‘Romans’ lived in the south, or ‘Goth’ came to describe an élite landowner in seventh-century Iberia.[953] To this we might add Michael McCormick’s argument, based on the way in which the term *gens* is used in such works as Isidore’s ‘Praise of Spain’, Julian’s ‘Revilement of the Despicable Province of Gaul’, or the anonymous ‘Origins of the People of the Lombards’, that victory had come to be a property of the people, rather than of a specific person or office, such as the Roman emperor.[954] From this we might discern the translocation of popular sovereignty from a political community based on shared citizenship – the *res publica* – to one based on a shared cultural heritage – the *gens* – that prefigures both the Middle Ages and, eventually, the development of nations. The point is that post-Roman identity must be seen through the prism of ethnogenesis, or as a situational construct rather than anything fixed.[955] As such, it is very likely that, over time, these political assemblies will have been open to all involved in the military following of élites irrespective of ethnicity: consensus was unlikely to have been ethnically exclusive in practice. Lastly, for those who discerned the extent to which the ‘consensus’ derived from post-Roman political assemblies was really a cover for the coercive tactics of autocrats, this too was profoundly late Roman.

It is worth asking to what extent our findings comport with notions of Christianisation and ‘divine right’ that would emerge in Europe in later centuries. ‘Christianisation’, as Nathan Ristuccia argued, refers primarily to a process that changes collectives and the way in which individuals within those collectives interact with each other, such as the framing of marriages or kinship bonds.[956] As such, ritual performances were an important part of how communities self-actualised. Whilst it is clear that most of the post-Roman Christian rituals, such as urban processions or festivals, had their roots firmly in Roman precedent, we might argue that some of the religious ambiguity that had framed Roman civic traditions had been jettisoned. To an extent, this was a consequence of the continuous attempt of post-Roman

[953] Heather (2008), 453

[954] McCormick (1986), 296, 326-327

[955] Wickham (2005), 82-83; (2009), 99; Ward-Perkins (2005), 77-78

[956] Ristuccia (2018), 6

ecclesiastical authorities to fit local traditions they encountered into a Christian conceptual framework.[957] To give an example of the tension that could exist, the *Life* of Eligius, bishop of Noyon (d. 660) records his disapproval of the supposedly pagan "demonic games and wicked leapings" that took place on St. Peters Day. However, such festivities seem to have involved the followers of the Neustrian *maior domus* Erchinoald, and were taken to be "legitimate…customs" by the local population.[958] If we do discern an increasingly Christian emphasis on public life, this must be counterposed by a couple of considerations. Firstly, the difference between paganism and Christianity when seen from the perspective of public ceremony, rather than from the perspective of Christian intellectuals and rigorists who were very much interested in changing people's minds, was not necessarily discernible: both Eligius and his laity could lay claim to a legitimate form of Christianity, whatever the other thought.[959] Secondly, this was a Christianity that existed in a very localised environment. The church as of yet lacked institutional unity across the post-Roman west – 'The Church' as an institutional phenomenon was very much a high medieval concept – and we are instead dealing with what Peter Brown referred to as a series of 'micro-Christendoms', in which divergent rituals and practices could develop comfortably.[960] Doctrinal and institutional unity was a feature of the Carolingian period onwards, when kings reorganised the church along Frankish lines and reconnected it institutionally to Rome. An articulated notion of divine right is also likely attributable to the Carolingians, who had to appeal to Roman, Trojan, and Israelite royal power in order to contextualize their monumental self-confidence.[961] Christianisation certainly occurred, but it was a feature of the *longue durée* transformation of continental modes of public power.

[957] Wickham (2009), 54, 176

[958] *Vita Eligii* II.16, 20

[959] Wickham (2009), 56-57

[960] Ibid, 172, 174, 177; Brown (1995), chpt. 13; see also Heather (2023), 308

[961] Wickham (2009), 201

6.6 Conclusion

In this chapter we have seen that, although the specific terminology and identity structures that were used to describe the Roman ideological community, such as *res publica* or *Romanitas*, ceased to be used by continental European populations, this did not change a great deal in practice. In fact, post-Roman polities inherited the repertoire of late Roman public power and ceremony almost verbatim. To this they frequently added the emulation of living Byzantine precedent and their own traditional annual gatherings. Furthermore, they also preserved the opacity of Roman public power relations, which allowed the permanent competition between kings and aristocrats to take place within a context framed by the pursuit of consent. If there were any changes, these are restricted to the ways non-Roman kings and aristocrats adapted their approach to public power to the urban topography that they had inherited from the Romans, as well as the gradual acculturation of post-Roman subject populations to the practice of warrior-gathering based on the *gens* that naturally followed the transition from a tax-based to a land-based system of military service. Similarly, the advance of Christianisation must be seen within the longer term process by which ecclesiastical figures adapted local practices into an idiom that they could accommodate and influence: no rupture or drastic alteration was required, nor would likely have been immediately observable to the average lay contemporary. The change to this formula – the extension of royal power, the privatising of aristocratic military service, and the growing restraints on peasant freedoms – were a phenomenon beginning in the Carolingian period, and more properly belonging to the tenth century and after.[962] In this way, an ideology of popular sovereignty is what unites the classical, late antique, and early medieval worlds in a long-term pattern of gradual transformation.

[962] Wickham (2009), 74-75, 529-551

The Centralisation of Legitimate Enforceable Authority

7.1 Introduction

> *"Both in the theory and in the practice of the constitution the emperor's powers were absolute. He controlled foreign policy, making peace and war at will: he could raise what taxes he willed and spend the money at his pleasure: he personally appointed to all offices, civil and military: he had the power of life and death over all his subjects. He was moreover the sole fount of law and could make new rules or abrogate old at pleasure: 'quod principi placuit legis habet vigorem', as Justinian quotes from Ulpian."*[963] – A.H.M. Jones, *LRE* I.321

One cannot discuss the centralisation of legitimate enforceable authority in a Roman context without appreciating the centrality of the emperors. This was as much wished upon them by the other members of political society as it was a projection of their own need to maintain their autocracy.[964] And yet, by the end of the fifth century, emperors had vanished from the west. This was not a sudden occurrence, but was the product of a long-term process by which the authority of emperors was gradually diminished, allowing other political configurations to exercise power in their stead. Furthermore, the end of imperial rule did not spell the end of western centralised authorities: as we have seen, multiple successor kingdoms sprang up in its wake, each recycling many of the official practices and cultural habits of the Roman autocracy (§5.4). Indeed, the centralised authority of post-Roman Italy not only directly inherited the appurtenances of the Roman central government, but directly evolved from a Roman military office, that of the *magister peditum*, or Master of the Infantry. What had changed was the scale of the enterprise. Roman imperial rule had, it would seem, been necessary for holding the disparate geographical regions and their various élites together, by orientating them all towards the imperial court. No post-Roman kingdom operated on nearly the same scale.

[963] quote reads 'what the emperor pleases has the force of law'
[964] Brown (1992), p. 11

The present chapter is an investigation into if, when, and how the centralised legitimate authority of the western imperial court came to an end. This is framed within the processes of transformation, disintegration, and rupture that characterise our period. Two approaches have been taken here. The first is military, focussing on the changing nature of the monopoly of violence. Here, we will argue that the end of western imperial rule should not be seen exclusively as a straightforward military defeat – although, as we saw in §3.4, the process of invasion and occupation were crucially important - but also as a product of the changing composition and organisation of Roman armies, as well as the practicability of maintaining them as a standing, salaried force. In particular, this will be framed within the twin developments of 'barbarisation' and privatisation. Both were important, but of the two, the latter had the more impact: the former became important only once the monopoly of violence had been lost. The second approach is political, and has to do with the changing nature of imperial rule itself. Here, we will discuss the long-term diminution of imperial authority at the expense of military leaders, regional warlords, and the eastern court. In the context of the crises of the fifth century, this diminution undermined imperial rule and allowed other centralised authorities to emerge, although none had the capacity to hold the western Roman state together to the same degree. The aim is to enunciate long term trends in transformation and rupture, although it will be argued that in the political process we are discussing, the year 461 – and in particular the deposition and execution of Majorian by Ricimer – holds critical explanatory potential.

The evidence base for the present chapter is overwhelmingly textual, particularly focussing on political and military developments. When dealing with the position of emperor, we must highlight the particular utility of panegyrics in detailing the ideal qualities wished upon emperors by their subordinates, as is discussed by Menander *rhetor* in his *Basilikos logos*. Such textual accounts have been supplemented where appropriate with physical evidence, such as diptychs and coinage, which can reveal how emperors and military leaders were portrayed to select audiences. Unavoidably, however, the subject material has led to quite a wide net being cast. This, coupled with the general murkiness of the fifth-century evidence, means that a great deal of caution must be taken in assessing the accuracy and motivations of our writers, particularly when they were easterners often looking back across great spans of time and distance.

7.2 Defining Centralisation, Legitimacy, and Authority

'The centralisation of legitimate enforceable authority' refers to the despotic claims of the state in reserving to itself the right to engage in normative rulemaking and the deployment of violence, and to its capacity to back these claims up via infrastructural means. 'Centralisation' is vested in a centrally organised set of institutions and personnel radiating a political relationship out over a territorially demarcated area. These institutions are organised in relation and in opposition to subaltern communities, coordinate élites, and external powers (§2.2). In the later Roman empire, this refers most readily to the imperial court and the consistory, which, as we have seen already, arrogated (at least in theory) the majority of decision-making in both civil and military matters, as well as responsibility for appointments, to itself (§5.3.4).[965] 'Legitimacy' is the shared belief in the right of a given authority to govern and of the obligation of the subordinates of that authority to obey its laws or orders.[966] In 'Studying the State' (2013), Walter Scheidel gave a more practical definition of 'legitimacy' as "the possibility that other authorities will act to confirm the decisions of a given authority".[967] In the later Roman context, both the emperor and the *res publica* were considered legitimate. In the western context, we might think of the curt response of Valentinian II to Symmachus's questioning of imperial appointments to the Urban Prefecture:

> *"There must be no dispute concerning an imperial judgement, for it is a kind of sacrilege to doubt whether the person whom the Emperor has selected is worthy." – CTh.* I.6.9 (Milan, December 28th 384/April 27th 385)

This response, coupled with Symmachus's habit of referring most complex legal decisions up the chain, implies that the emperor, acting for the public benefit in law-making, was the one indisputably legitimate authority. Enforceability in the late Roman context was

---

[965] *LRE* I, 403; Brown (1992), 10; Kelly (2008), 151-152

[966] See definition provided by Ian Hurd for the Encyclopaedia Princetoniensis: https://pesd.princeton.edu/node/516

[967] Scheidel (2013), 20; drawn from Tilly (1985), 171, 181

institutionally vested in state agents such as the military, judicial authorities, and tax collectors who ensured compliance, suppressed dissent, or combated external foes. We should add, following Max Weber, that this does not entail a total monopoly of violence or coercion – this would have been beyond the capacity of an early state – but a monopoly of the claim to exercise legitimate force.[968] Lastly, 'authority' is the ability to make decisions and issue commands, and to expect that these will be carried out. In the late Roman period, this was clearly vested in the emperor, or in those appointed by him.

Two things should be clear from the above discussion. The first is that we are dealing firmly with a political criterion, and the investigation that follows will be political in nature. The second is that the Roman emperor was clearly vital to the manner in which the 'centralisation of legitimate enforceable authority' was both conceived of and practiced by contemporaries. What follows, therefore, will be an analysis of how the political configuration focussed on the emperor and the imperial court gave way to a series of political centres run from different places and by different monarchs.

There is an important point that must be made about how the later Roman empire was centralised if we are to understand the political process. As Michael Mann made clear, premodern states did not possess the infrastructural reach necessary to convert imperial rule into what in the modern period we would refer to as totalitarianism.[969] This meant that any intensification of infrastructural reach came at the expense of the range at which that reach could be exercised. From the third century onwards, no single emperor could reasonably expect to control the entire empire and simultaneously manage the complex and intrusive *annona militaris*; for this to work, control over state infrastructure had to be delegated, and this put potential rivals in far too strong a position. Fourth-century emperors responded by creating junior colleagues (*caesares*), to whom regional bureaucracies and army groups could report. Whilst this was not intended to divide up the empire in theory, in practice it apportioned specific geographical remits to different imperial regimes. Furthermore, each segment of the empire would then develop its own institutional and

[968] Scheidel (2013), 5

[969] Mann (1984), 191-192

administrative history, reflected in the growing solidity of the four Praetorian Prefectures. The price for governmental intensification was, therefore, the permanent division of the empire. For western imperial regimes, there were two risks inherent in this development that define our period. The first was the possibility that regional power structures could become stable enough to dominate emperors, forming oligarchies behind the rule of imperial puppets. The second was that, having lost half of its available resources to new court formations in the east, the western imperial regime would be forced to share sovereignty with an eastern counterpart that was increasingly in a stronger political, financial, and military position. In a political system defined, both theoretically and practically, by the centralisation of power into the hands of the emperor, either development could be extremely problematic.

7.3 The Monopolisation of Violence

> *"…the method of the ancients* [for arming the troops] *is no longer followed. For though after the example of the Goths, the Alans, and the Huns, we have made some improvement in the arms of the cavalry, yet it is plain that the infantry are entirely defenceless. From the foundation of the city until the reign of the Emperor Gratian, the foot wore cuirasses and helmets. But negligence and sloth having by degrees introduced a total relaxation of discipline, the soldiers began to think their armour too heavy, as they seldom put it on…In consequence of this, our troops in their engagements with the Goths were often overwhelmed with their showers of arrows…"* – Vegetius, *de re militaris* I.20

This was the opinion of Flavius Vegetius Renatus (c.390). Vegetius's criticisms of the contemporary Roman army have had a great deal of influence on historical accounts that wish to identify military decay as the root cause of the end of the western Roman empire.[970] Both Edward Gibbon and the Baron de Montesquieu attributed imperial collapse to the recruitment of 'barbarians', following Vegetius in blaming this on a lack of martial vigour

[970] Stickler (2007), 498-499 for a summation

and patriotism on the part of the Roman aristocracy and populace.[971] More recent assessments, such as those of Ramsey MacMullen (1988) and Wolf Liebeschuetz (1990), have taken a similar line with regards to the enfeeblement of the Roman army and the inadvisability of recruiting 'barbarians'.[972] This military argument finds its most pointed expression in Arthur Ferrill's assertion that: "as the western army became barbarised, it lost its tactical superiority, and Rome fell to an onrush of barbarism".[973] The problem, as George Watson pointed out, is that "Vegetius…was neither a historian nor a soldier: his work is a compilation carelessly constructed from material of all ages, a congeries of inconsistencies".[974] The counterargument, primarily the work of military historians such as Doug Lee and Hugh Elton, has focussed on the track record of the Roman army in battle, the preponderance of 'barbarian' troops within its ranks, and their record of loyalty.[975] The conclusion they reach is that the Roman army remained effective when it was deployed in combat throughout the fifth century; that people with 'barbarian' names made up a quarter of Rome's army in the fourth century; and that primary texts conclude that they were broadly loyal. As we saw in §3.4.2, if there is a military argument to be made for the collapse of the western Roman state, it has more to do with strategic incompetence than with 'barbarisation'.[976] With that being said, Vegetius identified an issue – the growing military incapacity of the Romans vis-à-vis the 'barbarians' – and we should not assume this was only kneejerk moralising bigotry. Instead, it can be a starting point in our investigation into if, how, and when the western Roman state lost its claim to the monopoly of violence.

The fact is that, to quote Arnaldo Momigliano, "ultimately Rome fell because it was conquered" and this entails a military failure of some description.[977] As we have seen (§3.4),

---

[971] Montesquieu (1734); Gibbon, *Decline and Fall*, II.17.176ff; Liebeschuetz (1990), 236-239; Merrony (2019), 110

[972] MacMullen (1988), esp. 171-176; Liebeschuetz (1990), 25, 35, 248

[973] Ferrill (1986), 164-169 in Merrony (2019), 147

[974] Watson (1985), 26

[975] Elton (1996), 128-152; Lee (2008), 232-234

[976] Diaz (2017), 25

[977] Quote in MacMullen (1988), 52

the invading forces of the late fourth and early fifth centuries were immensely important in this process, but their strength was never overwhelming, and it follows that something was going wrong with the Roman army to the same extent as it was going right for the Goths or Vandals. The visible record of the Roman army in the pitched battles of which we are aware is patchy, but does not point to wholesale military collapse. The Roman army suffered a crippling defeat at Adrianople (378);[978] fought to a stalemate against Alaric in northern Italy on two separate occasions (401/402);[979] and was resoundingly defeated by the Vandals in Iberia during Castinus's ill-fated expedition to the Peninsula (422).[980] However, the western army was also frequently successful in major pitched battles, most notably against Radagaisus at Faesulae (405) and against Attila at the Catalaunian Plains (451). The evidence therefore indicates that the Roman army remained relatively effective in battle when it was deployed. However, we can perceive in the fourth and fifth centuries a gradual shrinking of the punitive range at which Roman armies operated, an uptick in intra-Roman conflict, and the slow cessation of traditional Roman patterns of recruitment. We also know that the reliance on 'barbarian' *fœderati* increased in the reign of Theodosius I and after, and that 'barbarian' armies led by 'barbarians' would eventually assume control over the former western empire. If there was no total military collapse, then we cannot ignore the logical connection between these developments; the so-called 'barbarisation' of the Roman army must have some relevance.[981] This section will therefore examine both processes – the disappearance of the 'traditional Roman army' and the increasing use of 'barbarian' *fœderati* – in tandem. It is these processes that best explain the failure of the Roman state to maintain its claims to the monopoly of violence.

This leaves us with some interpretive issues. The first is that it is not particularly easy to define exactly what is meant by 'the Roman army'. By this I mean that we should avoid seeing the Roman army, as Vegetius did, as an archetype from which contemporary practices deviated. Similarly, we should not assume that just because a significant number

[978] Amm. Marc. XXXI.13

[979] Claud. *de bell. Get.*, *de VI cos. Hon.*

[980] Hydat. 77 [69]

[981] Stickler (2007), 498

of non-Romans were serving in the army, or because it was led by a non-Roman, that it automatically ceased to be a 'Roman army'. The Roman army had always contained a significant proportion of non-Romans, whether Italian *socii* under the Republic or 'barbarian' *auxilia* under the Principate. Features that can identify a Roman army include ultimate subordination to the emperor; remuneration in salaries in cash or kind; and organisation into the structure denoted in the *Notitia Dignitatum*.[982] Ultimately, though, membership of a Roman army came down to an issue of loyalty, or the willingness of armies and their commanders to act on the authority of the emperor and imperial court. Loyalty is extremely difficult to quantify, although our evidence certainly suggests that it was an issue. Ammianus suggested that the Gallic armies had a reputation for disloyalty, probably owing to his experience of working with them and the number of usurpers they sponsored.[983] On the 'barbarian' side, the history of Eunapius details a dispute between the Gothic commanders Fravitta and Eriulf in 393:

> *"They* [the Goths]*, being loaded with honours by the Emperor and observing that everything was theirs for the taking, came into considerable conflict amongst themselves. One side said that they should rejoice in and accept the present good fortune, the other that they should keep the oaths that they had sworn at home and not break their pledge. This pledge, a most unholy one that went beyond the normal savagery of the barbarians, was that, even if they were to receive the greatest kindness from the Romans, they would plot against them in every way and use every treacherous device to harm those who had taken them in, in order that they might gain possession of all their territory."*[984] – Eunapius, *Fragmenta* 59-60

This particular dispute ended with Fravitta murdering Eriulf in the wake of a wedding banquet personally attended by Theodosius I. The point is that if we can glimpse such a debate taking place amongst the eastern high command – Fravitta eventually rose to be

[982] *Not. Dig. Or.* V-VII

[983] Amm. Marc. 30.10.1

[984] see also Zos. IV.56.1-3

magister militum praesentalis and consul – then we can be sure that it was taking place amongst other 'barbarian' troops.[985] If it is our task to ask how and why changes to the Roman army were enough to bring its loyalty to the central authority into question, then these points are germane.

7.3.1 The end of the 'traditional Roman army'

It would be inappropriate to judge the later Roman army, as Vegetius did, by its predecessor. The Roman army of the Severan era was "a fossil", and required drastic reorganisation in order to meet the increased external threats and political instability of the third and fourth centuries.[986] The result, as Doug Lee suggested, was "a larger number of smaller armies".[987] Archaeological evidence compiled by Richard Duncan-Jones (1990) demonstrates that late Roman barracks blocks were smaller, indicating the comparative size of regiments overall.[988] Unlike the army of the Principate, which was concentrated on the *limes,* the late Roman army was divided between praesental armies (led by the emperor personally), field armies (under the command of the *magistri militum*), and *limitanei*/*ripenses* stationed on the frontiers under the command of *duces*.[989] The field armies (*comitatenses*) were barracked within cities, which kept costs down whilst inviting the risk of civilianisation.[990] Field armies were composed of three types of regiments: *legiones* of c.1000 Romans, cavalry *vexillationes* of c.500 non-Romans, and *auxilia* of between 500-800 non-Romans.[991] A crucial difference, particularly following the reign of Constantine, was the reliance on non-Roman *auxilia* as the main striking force of the elite praesental armies, thereby enhancing the integral importance of non-Romans in the

[985] *PLRE* IA, 372-373

[986] Potter (2004), 125

[987] Lee (2008), 215

[988] Duncan-Jones (1990), Appendix 4

[989] *CTh*. VII.20.4 (325) for the institution of the *comitatenses* under Constantine

[990] *CTh.* VII.9; *LRE* II, 631-632; MacMullen (1988), 176; Lee (2008), 229-230; Whitby (2008), 289

[991] Lee (2008), 214

army.[992] Late Roman field armies were therefore smaller and more specialised than their forbears. They were intended to be used to meet and neutralise incoming threats from across the frontiers rather than launch grand campaigns in the style of Trajan; Julian's ill-fated expedition into Persia is both the only example and, perhaps, the case in point.[993] We are dealing with a world in which the strategic range of Roman punitive force had been reduced to accommodate a sharpening of specific capabilities.

Questions have been raised in the past about the supposed ineffectiveness of the *limitanei*, based largely on a tract of the notoriously unreliable *Historia Augusta* which indicates that, by the third century, these troops were a settled agrarian militia rather than regular soldiers.[994] As A.H.M. Jones has pointed out, such a view is not reflected in the surviving legal evidence, which indicates that *limitanei* were to be granted land on retirement, suggesting that they did not already possess it. This backs up a similar observation by the anonymous author of *de Rebus bellicis*:[995]

> *"A provision of this kind will increase the population of the provinces by supplying veterans enriched with imperial gifts who will still be strong enough to cultivate the land. They will live upon the frontiers, they will plow the areas which they recently defended, and having won what they longed to obtain from their toil they will be taxpayers instead of soldiers."* – Anonymous, *de Rebus Bellicis* V.4

Furthermore, Jones' assessment of the *Notitia Dignitatum* indicates that *limitanei* were still being upgraded into *comitatenses* up to the end of Honorius's reign, which would only have been practicable if they were soldiers rather than peasant militias.[996] This is not, of course, to say that the *limitanei* were always effective, or that they had not degraded in quality by

[992] Lee (2008), 215; Liebeschuetz (1990), 32-33

[993] Nicasie (1998), 13-42; Diaz (2017), 17

[994] *SHA Sev. Alex.* 58; Whitby (2008), 289

[995] *CTh.* VII.20.3 (320), 8 (364); *LRE* II, 650

[996] *LRE* III, Appendix 2, Table 6; *Not. Dig. Occ.* VII

the mid-fifth century; it is to state that they were not *prima facie* ineffective troops.[997] As Karl Strobel has made emphatically clear, *limitanei* were in the main both professional and well-trained.[998]

The structure of the late Roman army caused issues that could become problematic in crises, however. The first problem was regionalisation. Smaller armies barracked in cities (with, one presumes, their families), designed for short range campaigning, mostly resourced locally, and subject to regional command structures were unlikely to want to be deployed further afield. Whilst it is likely a literary construction, Ammianus has Julian pleading with Constantius on behalf of the troops demanded by the latter, stating:

> *"Their resentment at failing to receive their promotion or annual pay was increased by the unexpected order that men who are accustomed to a cold climate should be transferred to the furthest parts of the East, separated from their wives and children, and marched off in a state of want and destitution."*
> – Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae* XX.8

This statement would have had no teeth if this wasn't a regular complaint. The second problem, attendant on the first, was the increased probability of intra-Roman conflict, which could often be bloody in the extreme. To give one example, Zonaras suggested that at the battle of Mursa (351) between Magnentius and Constantius II, the former lost two-thirds of his men whilst the latter lost forty percent of his.[999] If Zonaras is correct in saying that Magnentius's forces numbered 36,000 men – our only extant figure – and if, as Eutropius indicates, a significant number of regular Roman troops were amongst the slain, then this would have had catastrophic consequences for the strength of the field armies.[1000] The point, as both Adrian Goldsworthy and Mark Merrony have respectively made, is that the conflict between professionally trained and heavily armoured Roman *comitatenses* is likely

---

[997] *LRE* II, 649-654; Lee (2008), 234-237

[998] Strobel (2007), 268

[999] Zon. XIII.8b; Zos. II.51.1; Eutr. *Brev.* X.12

[1000] Zon. XIII.8

to have inflicted terrible losses every time it occurred, and it occurred frequently.[1001] On the one hand, this will have depleted the number of trained *comitatenses* available to the imperial field armies. On the other, the movement of any army, Roman or not, through imperial territory, let alone waging war on imperial territory, will have had devastating consequences for civilians in its path in terms of spoilation and destruction. We must not underestimate the impact of civil war on the military strength of the empire.

Turning to the issue of pay, the Roman army was traditionally salaried in cash (the *stipendium*) and kind (the *annona militaris*), accompanied by irregular cash donatives on days important to the imperial calendar.[1002] In the fourth century, the *stipendium* declined gradually in value, and was discontinued by c.395.[1003] Instead, cash *donativa* became the primary means for remunerating troops. This was because, as Mark Hebblewhite has argued, they were seen by emperors as a "flexible and potent political tool" by which armies could be kept on side.[1004] We possess little information as to the exact rates for *donativa* – Ammianus states that Julian's accession donative amounted to five *aurei* and a pound of silver – nor is it clear if this was a flat rate for all the troops or a differential rate to be paid on the basis of political importance (given the sums at stake, the latter seems more likely). Hugh Elton, in his estimation, has argued that soldiers received an average of 2 *solidi* per year.[1005] Crucially, it is clear that *donativa* were paid out in a specific ceremony, with the emperor handing out the donative personally in a form of loyalty ritual that emphasised the vital link between emperor and army.[1006] This system of remuneration contained a couple of faults that proved problematic. Firstly, the absence of a stable salary paid out by the *aerarium* or provincial *fiscus* made payment entirely dependent on the political fortunes of

[1001] Goldsworthy (2003), 214; (2009), 409; Merrony (2019), 148-149

[1002] Hebblewhite (2017), 72; Kehne (2007), 330; Merrony (2019), 134

[1003] Hebblewhite (2017), 87-90; Lee (2008), 220

[1004] Ibid, 77

[1005] Amm. Marc. XX.4.18; Hebblewhite (2017), 77-79, 83; Elton (1996), 120-125; Merrony (2019), 134-135

[1006] Hebblewhite (2017), 83; see, for example, Zos. IV.46.2 for Magnus Maximus personally distributing money to his troops

emperors; it goes without saying that this reinforced the centrality of the emperor to military remuneration.[1007] Secondly, payments in *solidi* were extremely susceptible to liquidity crises, which could occur if, as we saw earlier (§3.4), widespread destruction interrupted the regular flow of taxation. Thirdly, if Elton's assessment is correct, then the regular *donativa* issued to soldiers still only amounted to a quarter of what their counterparts under the Principate received.[1008] If we choose to see the Roman army as a mercenary force, as did Brian Campbell (1984), then the diminishing rate and instability of pay should have been of some concern; if, by contrast, we see *donativa* as "a symbolic gift within the framework of classical patronage and euergetism", as did both Sara Phang and Mark Hebblewhite, then the absolute centrality of the emperor could prove an issue if, as occurred, the relationship between emperor and army was disrupted (§7.4.2).[1009]

There is significant evidence from the fourth and fifth centuries that the recruitment of Romans had become significantly more difficult. This is unlikely to have been a demographic issue. Even if we accept the upper range of 167,000 in a population of c.20 million for the western army vis-à-vis the western empire, this still works out to only 0.835% of the total population serving under arms. The problem, to quote Doug Lee, was "an unwillingness to enlist".[1010] Traditional recruitment into the Roman army was hereditary, with the sons of veterans expected to follow their fathers into service, and was supplemented by annual recruiting drives.[1011] The fact that the laws pressing the sons of veterans into service had to be repeated so often suggests that they were routinely avoided.[1012] St. Martin, whose father was a military tribune, is perhaps the most famous recalcitrant draftee:

[1007] Ando (2008), 43-44; Bang (2013), 413-414

[1008] Elton (1996), 120-125

[1009] Phang (2008), 153-201; Hebblewhite (2017), 71

[1010] Lee (2008), 221

[1011] Sons of Veterans: *CTh.* VII.22.1 (313), 2 (326), 5 (333), 4 (=*CJ* XII.i.35) (343), VII.1.5 (364), 8 (365), XXII.7 (365), 8 (372), 9-10 (380); Recruiting drives: Amm. Marc. 31.4.4; *CTh.* VII.18.14 (403); *LRE* II, pp.614-615

[1012] *CTh*. VII.22.1 (319), 2 (326), 3 (331), 7 (365-373), 8 (372), 9 (380), 10 (380)

"…when an edict was issued by the ruling powers in the state, that the sons of veterans should be enrolled for military service, and he, on the information furnished by his father…having been seized and put in chains, when he was fifteen years old, was compelled to take the military oath…" – Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Martini* II

There are various reasons to suspect that the average Roman did not make a good recruit. They were likely decidedly unmilitary, owing to the prohibitions on civilians carrying arms, which had to be rescinded by the laws of Valentinian III and Majorian.[1013] Furthermore, the urban population is likely to have been noticeably unhealthy by comparison to potential 'barbarian' recruits, owing to the "exceptionally burdensome pathogen load" endemic to Roman urban civilisation.[1014] They were certainly shorter: a comparison of Italian femur lengths demonstrates a significant average dip during the Roman period, with the average male femur shortened from a pre-Roman length of 454mm to 446mm, and lengthening out again to 456 mm in the medieval period.[1015] A similar study from Britain shows that an average Roman male femur length of 444mm extended to an early medieval average of 465mm.[1016] Whilst this is a crude differential, it may account for why the government of Valentinian I felt it necessary to legally lower the height threshold for new recruits by three inches to 5' 7".[1017] In addition, the practice of self-mutilation to get out of service – usually by amputating the thumbs – was apparently widespread enough to warrant targeted legislation; Ammianus suggested that this practice was particularly prevalent in Italy, where the draft-dodgers were known as *murci*.[1018] In general, draft-dodging and desertion appear to have been regular features, and the state was forced as a result to periodically round up

[1013] *NVal.* IX (June 24, 440); the text of *NMaj.* VIII is sadly lost; Mathisen (2019), 144; Liebeschuetz (1990), 247

[1014] Harper (2017), 80

[1015] Giannecchini and Moggi-Cecchi (2008); Harper (2017), 76

[1016] Gowland and Walther (2018); Harper (2017), 76

[1017] *CTh.* VII.13.3 (April 27, 367)

[1018] *CTh.* VII.12.1 (313); 13.4 (367), 5 (368), 10 (381); Amm. Marc. XV.12

vagrants (*vagi*) to be pressed into service.[1019] As we noted previously (§6.4), the average Roman is unlikely to have had much direct loyalty to the empire or the emperor personally.[1020] Add to this demilitarisation, general un-healthiness, poor pay rates, and high physical risk, and it is little wonder that the state was struggling to maintain military numbers.

Corruption did not help matters. The practice of levying recruits involved grouping villages, estates, or landholders into *temones* or *capitula*, each of which was responsible for furnishing a recruit; the largest landholders were expected to provide recruits independently.[1021] In lieu of a recruit, one could pay a recruit tax (*aurum tironicum*), and both Ammianus and the anonymous author of *de Rebus bellicis* make clear that this could be the source of great profiteering: Jones conjectures that “provincial governors levied commutation for recruits from the taxpayers at exorbitant rates, and then secured the recruits by offering bounties at lower, but still extravagant, rates to casual volunteers”.[1022] On top of this, there were, as one might expect, a mess of exemptions for high officials.[1023] There is evidence, particularly from the Stilichonian period, for aristocrats conspiring to secure exemptions or pushing for cash payments in order to hold onto their tenants.[1024] A series of laws dated to between June 17th and November 12th 397, during the period in which Stilicho was apparently recruiting to make up for the loss of the eastern portion of the field army, indicates that he attempted to strongarm recruits out of the aristocracy, only to back down in the face of opposition.[1025] Beyond that which is illuminated by our textual accounts, we must assume that levying recruits from powerful senatorial aristocrats could be physically risky, and that collusion between aristocrats and recruiting sergeants must

---

[1019] Desertion: *CTh.* VII.18.4 (380), 6 (382), 9 §1 (396), 14 §1 (403); *Vagi*: *CTh.* VII.18.10 (400), 17 (412)

[1020] de Ste. Croix (1981), 474-488; MacMullen (1988), 52

[1021] *CTh.* VII.18.14 (403), 13.7 §1 (375); *LRE* II, 615

[1022] *LRE* II, 616; Amm. Marc. XXXI.4; Anon. *de Reb. bell.* IV

[1023] *CTh.* XI.18.1 (412); VI.26.14 (412), 30.20 (413), 23.2 (423); VII.13.22 (428)

[1024] Vegetius, I.28; Matthews (1975), 268-70, 276-8; Stickler (2007), 506; Whitby (2008), 290

[1025] *CTh.* VII.13.12-14 (397)

have been rife.[1026] The political environment of the western empire, in which the richest aristocrats had more latitude when dealing with the demands of the imperial court, did not lend itself to securing the necessary number of recruits, which could leave armies undermanned in times of crisis.

Between 405-407, Stilicho went on a further recruiting drive, presumably to counter the invasion of Radagaisus. The relevant sections of the *Notitia Dignitatum* indicate the wholesale upgrading of *limitanei* units into *comitatenses* or *pseudocomitatenses*.[1027] Similarly, contemporary laws dangled the reward of ten *solidi* to any provincial willing to enlist and, more drastically, offered two *solidi* and freedom to slaves.[1028] With these measures, according to Zosimus and Orosius, Stilicho was able to amass thirty regiments at Ticinum, supplemented by Gothic, Alanic, and Hunnic auxiliaries.[1029] This is the last clear reference to traditional recruitment patterns in our western sources.[1030] Furthermore, as we saw earlier (§3.4.1), the Gallic field army may have lost half of its fighting force during the reign of Honorius, the British field army was probably whittled into nothing during the revolt of Constantine III, and what few field army units there were stationed in Iberia are unlikely to have fared well after the invasion of the Vandals, Alans, and Suebes.[1031] Whilst the disappearance of the Roman army as a distinct institution is impossible to date with any real precision, it is in many ways visible for the last time in the Stilichonian period. As we can see in Appendix I, this is also the period in which, according to our textual sources, Roman authorities came to reply increasingly on *fœderati* to do their fighting for them. It is to the emergence and importance of this process that we now turn.

[1026] LRE I, 198-9; Liebeschuetz (1990), 247

[1027] *Not. Dig. Occ.* VII; *LRE* III, Appendix II, Table VII

[1028] *CTh.* VII.13.16-17 (406)

[1029] Zos. V.26; Oros. VII.37

[1030] Cf. Liebeschuetz (1990), 41-42, who argues, based on Demougeout (1979), that the last traditional recruiting drive occurred under Constantius

[1031] Cf. Kulikowski (2004), 171-172

<u>7.3.2 'Barbarisation' and the Privatisation of Violence</u>

Roman reliance on non-Romans to fill out their armies was not new, although 'barbarian' *auxilia* appear to have taken on new prominence as the main strike force in praesental field armies in the fourth century.[1032] This was accompanied by the increasing number of non-Romans found in senior military roles, as well as the settlement of Frankish *laeti*/*gentiles* in homogeneous groups in northern Gaul, which is reflected in the changing material culture mentioned in §§4.3.2/4.4.1.4.[1033] The decisive change for Roman imperial policy was the treaty concluded between Theodosius I and the Gothic leaders in 381/382.[1034]

> *"Finally you* [Theodosius I] *granted the privileged status of fellow soldiers to the barbarian peoples who promised to give you voluntary service, both to remove from the frontier forces of dubious loyalty, and to add reinforcements to your army. Attracted by your kindness, all the Scythian* [Gothic] *nations flocked to you in such great numbers that you seemed to have imposed a levy upon barbarians from which you exempted your subjects."*[1035]

This treaty allowed the Goths to settle within the empire under their own leadership on the provision that they serve under treaty obligations – as *fœderati* – in the Roman army.[1036] The term *fœderati* (derived from the Latin *fœdus*, meaning treaty) is, as Timo Stickler points out, an anachronism applied backwards onto the fourth/fifth century evidence by sixth-

---

[1032] Recruitment of 'barbarians' under the Principate: Caesar, *B. Gal*. VII.65.4; Cassius Dio 71.21; Tac. *Ann*. II.63; Vell. Pat. II.129.3; Suet. *Tib.* 37.4

[1033] Non-Romans serving in the Roman army: MacMullen (1988), Appendix A, 199-204; *laeti*: *Pan. Lat.* 8[5].21.1; *gentiles*: *CIL* 13.6592 = *ILS* 9184; Stickler (2007), 499-502

[1034] *LRE* I, 157-158; Stickler (2007), 505; Burns (1994), 77

[1035] *Pan. Lat.* II, 32.3-5; see also Them. *Or.* 16.211, 34.20-4; Syn. *De Reg.* 14-15 for a negative perspective on the treaty

[1036] See also *Cons. Const.* s.a. 382: *Ipso anno uniuersa gens Gothorum cum rege suo in Romanium se tradiderunt…*

century eastern writers such as Jordanes and Procopius.[1037] Stickler suggests that this anachronism could reflect a specific contemporary understanding of the relationship, although what this meant in practice, and how it conformed to the usual diktats of *hospitalitas* or *deditio*, is unclear.[1038] Whilst the terms used to describe these troops are often confused by contemporaries, it is clear what they were from our perspective: non-Roman troops who fought under their own leaders rather than being incorporated into the regular Roman military structure. As Wolf Liebeschuetz attested, the para-official status of such units is reflected in their being omitted from the *Notitia Dignitatum*, despite their presence being corroborated by other textual accounts.[1039] It is probable that 'barbarian' *auxilia* were cheaper on the whole than the professional standing army, as *auxilia* had always been paid less than regular legionaries and 'barbarian' troops could be dismissed after a single campaign if necessary.[1040] The net result was that, following the Theodosian period, the empire came to rely much more heavily on 'barbarian' *fœderati* to wage its wars. However practical increased 'barbarian' recruitment may have seemed, it had far-reaching consequences for the maintenance of the Roman monopoly of violence.

The changing composition of armies is evident from our textual sources. Beyond Stilicho's forces at Ticinum, which may have included Goths serving under Sarus and Huns serving under Uldin, we have descriptions of the composite forces of both Aetius and Majorian.[1041] According to Jordanes, writing in Constantinople a century after the events, the *auxilia* amassed by Aetius at the Cataulanian plains (451) included:

> *"…Franks, Sarmatians, Armoricans, Liticians, Burgundians, Saxons, Riparians, Olibriones (once Roman soldiers and now the flower of the allied forces), and some other Celtic or German tribes."* -Jordanes, *Getica* 36.191

[1037] Jord. *Get.* 145; Procop. *Bell*. IV.5.13; Olymp. *fr.* 7.4

[1038] Stickler (2007), 496; Liebeschuetz (1990), 36

[1039] Liebeschuetz (1990), pp. 32-34

[1040] Alston (1994), 113-123; Mathisen (2019), 145

[1041] Oros. VII.37.12; Marcell. *Com.* s.a. 406

Correspondingly, Sidonius Apollinaris described the army Majorian led into Gaul as follows:

> *"Bastarnian, Suevian, Pannonian, Neuran, Hun, Getan, Dacian, Alan, Bellonotan, Rugi, Burgundian, Visigoth, Alites, Bisalta, Ostrogoth, Procrustian, Sarmatian, Moschan … all of the Caucasus and the Scythian drinker of the Don."* – Sidonius Apollinaris, *Panegyric* V.474-9

Whilst we may doubt the accuracy of these accounts – on the basis of the distance from the events in space and time, the stylistic requirements of panegyrics, and the anachronistic terms used for some of the peoples mentioned – the fact that such lists could replace descriptions of legions as leitmotifs indicates that the core of the 'traditional' army had become hard for contemporaries to distinguish. We might add further that, prior to the hostility of Attila, Aetius relied heavily on Hunnic *fœderati* to maintain his pre-eminence within the Roman political system; the army that Marcellinus led to Sicily in 461 was comprised mostly of Huns or Goths; and that there were enough Franks in Aegidius' following for Gregory of Tours to style him as 'King of the Franks'.[1042] In the fourth century, Ammianus made multiple references to 'barbarian' leaders – *reguli*, *subreguli*, *regales*, or *duces* – who provided detachments of their own men and served outside of the traditional command structure.[1043] In the fifth century, independent non-Roman leaders such as Alaric and Sarus gained even greater prominence.[1044] Ralph Mathisen has referred to such figures as 'independent military contractors', who professionally provided for the shortfall in available 'barbarian' recruits in exchange for Roman official status, access to the *annona militaris*, and cash payments.[1045] This corresponds to the formation of private military entourages, usually known as *buccellarii*, attached to individual Roman leaders.[1046] Zosimus records that, at the time of his death, Stilicho maintained a Hunnic bodyguard.[1047] Augustine

[1042] Olymp. *fr.* 43.1; Greg. Tur. II.12; MacGeorge (2002), 41; *LRE* I, 241-242

[1043] Amm. Marc. XVII.12.9-11, 13.19-20; XX.1.3, 8.1; Mathisen (2019), 143

[1044] Liebeschuetz (1990), 37-38; Alaric = *PLRE* IIA, 43-48; Sarus = *PLRE* IIB, 978-979

[1045] Mathisen (2019), 147

[1046] Olymp. *fr.* 7.4; Wijnendaele (2018), 439; Mathisen (2019), 146; Liebeschuetz (1990), 43-47

[1047] Zos. V.34.1; Claud. *Cons. Stil.* III. 220-3

castigated Boniface when the rogue general allowed his *buccellarii* to pillage the African countryside, and it is recorded that one of the prominent reasons for which Aetius married Boniface's widow was in order to secure the loyalty of his dead rivals retainers.[1048] Furthermore, Olympiodorus records that Galla Placidia had inherited a Gothic bodyguard from her marriages to Athaulf and Constantius.[1049] The implication is that *buccellarii* constituted an elite: Damascius records, for instance, that the *buccellarii* of Marcellinus in Sicily were "distinguished for the preparedness of [their] equipment".[1050] Lastly, we also note the potentiality for private landowners, such as Didymus and Verenianus, the relatives of Honorius, to raise private armies on their own account.[1051] All of the above points to the evolving capacity for private violence in the face of the coercive power of the state in the fifth century.

We might question how this evidence squares with the notion that 'barbarisation' undermined the loyalty and efficiency of the Roman monopoly of violence. As we have said, these composite forces seem to have remained loyal, if not to the emperor personally, then at least to the general upon whom they were dependent; Optila and Thraustila, the Hunnic followers of Aetius, clearly felt strongly enough about their leader's murder to visit the same fate upon his killer, Valentinian III, in 455.[1052] Indeed, there is little reason to doubt that many 'barbarian' *fœderati* in the fourth and fifth centuries will have been Romanised, or that there will have been significant numbers of Romans mixed up in supposedly 'barbarian' detachments.[1053] The problem was not so much 'barbarian' loyalty as Roman prejudice, which stalks our textual sources.[1054] The examples are legion. Stilicho, "offspring of that

---

[1048] Aug. *Ep.* 220.6; John Ant. *fr.* 201; Marcell. *com.*, s.a. 432; Wijnendaele (2018), 439; O'Flynn (1983), 81

[1049] Olymp. *fr.* 38

[1050] *Suda* II, 473 (=Damascius, *fr.* 156); MacGeorge (2002), 43 tentatively identified these troops as the *buccellarii* of Marcellinus

[1051] Zos. VI.4.3; Soz. IX.11-12; Oros. VII.40.5; *PLRE* IIA, 358, IIB, 1155

[1052] Greg. Tur. II.8; Marcell. *com*. s.a. 455; Jord. *Rom.* 334

[1053] Mathisen (2019), 145

[1054] Salway (1993), 310-311

effete, greedy, treacherous, and sorrow-bringing race, the Vandals" is perhaps the most famous victim.[1055] Despite being a member of the imperial family – and, arguably, doing his best within the context of a federate policy established by Theodosius I - he was roundly denounced after his fall as a fifth columnist.[1056] Towards the end of our extant section of his poem *Going Home*, Rutilius Namatianus felt it necessary to level following invective:

> *"How much more bitter was the crime of Stilicho,*
> *the cruel betrayer of the empire's heart?*
> *As he struggled to outlast the Roman race*
> *his bloody madness overturned our world,*
>
> *and while he feared the very Goths who made him feared,*
> *he sent barbarian arms for Latium's death*
> *and plunged an armed foe into her naked vitals –*
> *an even bolder trick that brought disaster."*
>
> - Rutilius Namatianus, *de Reditu Suo* II.4

According to Zosimus, the families of 'barbarian' *auxilia* quartered in Roman cities under Stilicho was slaughtered following his downfall; evidently the general population were no fonder of 'barbarians' than was Rutilius.[1057] The *fœderati* themselves joined Alaric, who then spent the next two years engaged in fruitless negotiations with various recalcitrant Roman factions. In one instance, Zosimus intimates that Attalus and his entourage botched the seizure of North Africa because they were unwilling to entrust the province to Alaric's 'barbarian' troops.[1058] In the contemporary east, Synesius, presumably in response to the activities of Gainas and Tribigild, was busy advising Arcadius to eject all 'barbarians' from the army:

[1055] Oros. VII.38.1

[1056] Olymp. *fr.* 5.2; Soz. IX.4.4-8; Oros. VII.38.1-5; Jerome, *Ep.* 123.17

[1057] Zos. V.35.3-6

[1058] Zos. VI.12.1

> *"But the shepherd must not mix wolves with his dogs, even if caught as whelps they may seem to be tamed, or in an evil hour he will entrust his flock to them; for the moment that they notice any weakness or slackness in the dogs, they will attack these and the flock and the shepherds likewise."* – Synesius, *On Kingship* XIV.4

Sidonius Apollinaris reflected this cultural snobbery when he congratulated Arbogast of Trier on maintaining Roman literary standards in an area where the use of Latin was supposedly in abeyance.[1059] Furthermore, Ennodius, writing in the sixth century, chose to have his Anthemius describe the patrician Ricimer as a "skin-clad Goth" and a "foreigner", which might indicate that such attitudes were expected of contemporaries.[1060] This is understandable in the context of a Roman patriotism that saw military victory over 'barbarians' as the quintessential imperial virtue: Priscus, for example, relates Attila's fury at discovering an imperial throne in Milan decorated with reliefs of slaughtered 'Scythians'.[1061] As Thomas Burns argued, the anti-barbarian sentiments of the Roman population and élite are likely to have been conflated and compounded by the civilian antipathy towards the military once the army became more exclusively 'barbarian'.[1062] The point here is that late Roman patriotism, of which anti-barbarian sentiment had been a crucial part, was singularly ill-suited to a military situation in which 'barbarians' were now almost exclusively filling out the armies. This is not to say that 'barbarian' federate commanders were always loyal but misunderstood vassals: Alaric, Sarus, and Tribigild all demonstrated, in their own ways, the capacity for such commanders to operate in their own interests if the need arose. But it does go some way to explaining why, in the synthesis of Roman and non-Roman practices that made up the post-Roman kingdoms, the new ruling élites chose not to see themselves as Roman even if they maintained Roman precedents, and why those kingdoms did not resemble 'mini-empires'.[1063] This should be

[1059] Sid. Ap. *Ep.* IV.17

[1060] Ennod. *Vita Epiph*. 51-4

[1061] Priscus *fr.* 22.3

[1062] Burns (1994), 222-223

[1063] Ward-Perkins (2005), 63-83; Mathisen (2019), 152

considered in tandem with the hostile takeover of segments of the Roman empire by other 'barbarian' groups (such as the Vandals or Sueves) as outlined in Chapter 2; the difference here is that hostile takeover undermined the Roman tax-base, where as anti-'barbarian' prejudice ensured that no post-Roman ruler seems to have been interested in reconstituting it. The 'barbarisation' of the Roman army is important because, having been consistently treated as second-class citizens by the empire they served, 'barbarians' had little reason to identify with that empire once they were in the driving seat. The *Romanía* supported by Gothic arms envisaged by Athaulf (related by Orosius, and, if true, probably inserted into the Gothic king's mouth by his fiancé, Galla Placidia) was unrepresentative of the reality of the contemporary relations between Romans and 'barbarians'.[1064] Cruel though it may have been, there is subtly more honesty in the grinning vindictiveness of Huneric's edict of persecution against the Catholics – in other words, in the turning of the tables against Romans in impeccably Roman style.[1065]

'Barbarisation', therefore, did not strictly speaking end the Roman monopoly of violence, and only had a decisive impact once this monopoly had ended. Up until that point, it was a relatively effective way to secure a plentiful supply of cheap recruits. We might add that, if the accounts of battles such as the Frigidus are to be believed, it was preferable for Roman commanders to let 'barbarians' slaughter each other, thereby preserving Roman lives.[1066] The problem was privatisation, with the Roman state consistently outsourcing its own reconquest to 'private military contractors' or allied 'barbarian' kings. Examples of this include Constantius' dispatching of the Goths under Wallia to fight the Vandals, Suebes, and Alans in Iberia in 414-415: the Goths were subsequently rewarded with land in the Garonne valley in 418.[1067] Furthermore, Prosper records that Aetius was responsible for suppressing the Armorican *bagaudae* under Tibatto in 435-7; however, both the *Vita Germani* and the Gallic Chronicle record that it was the Alans under Goar who did the actual fighting, a fact backed up by the Alan-centric place names of the region that attest to their subsequent

[1064] Oros. VII.43.5-6

[1065] Vict. Vit., II.38-40, III.2-14; Wickham (2009), 76-77

[1066] Zos. IV.58.2

[1067] Oros. VII.42.13; Hydat. 55 [63], 59 [67], 61 [69], s.a. 417-418

settlement.[1068] Similarly, Hydatius records that Aetius was responsible for defeating the Burgundians in the same years, although Prosper records that he in fact suborned the Huns to do so for him.[1069] By the 460s, this pattern of behaviour was entrenched enough for Ricimer to send the Visigoths to combat Aegidius, an appointed Roman *magister militum*, and to then pay them in Roman land.[1070] Furthermore, many of these federate commanders – particularly Alaric and Sarus – had their own agendas that often conflicted with the best interests of the state the purportedly served. The practice of outsourcing reconquest, coupled with the tendency to apportion geographic remits to military competences, the need to reward federate leaders with land, and the strained economic resources of the western imperial regime after the fall of North Africa, effectively meant that the state was paying for reconquests in the territory conquered. This was self-evidently a policy with diminishing returns.

7.3.3 Observations

In this section, we have seen that the salaried, professional Roman army had become harder and harder to maintain as the fourth century progressed, and was increasingly replaced with cheaper, more readily available 'barbarian' units, often serving under their own commanders in tandem with formal Roman military structures, who could then be used to massacre each other in a 'win-win' for imperial authorities. In the west, the 'traditional Roman army' disappears from view somewhere during the supremacies of Stilicho and Constantius; from thenceforth, composite federate forces seem to have predominated. This was coupled with the increasing privatisation of violence, which placed the monopoly of violence further from the states' control. As the fifth century progressed, and the military and financial position of the western imperial regime deteriorated, it became harder to keep these forces onside without rewarding them with land, which

[1068] Mer. *Pan.* II. 8-15 (a. 446); *Chron. Min.* I (Prosper 117.XII, 119.XIIII), 660; *Vita Germani* 28, 40; *Chron. Gall. a.* CCCCLII. Entries 124, 127, 128, 660; Merrony (2019), 171 for Alanic place names in Armorica

[1069] *Chron. Min.* I (Prosper 1322, a. 435/*Chron. Gall.* 118.XIII, a. 436) 475, 660; *CIL* VI.41389

[1070] Hydat. 212 [217],, s.a. 462; *Vita Lupicini* II, 11; MacGeorge (2002), 92

gradually reduced the range in which the Roman state could exercise its authority. In this way, the Roman state never experienced a total military collapse, but nonetheless gradually lost the monopoly of violence. Crucially, the hostility with which Romans traditionally viewed 'barbarians' was problematic once the state was outsourcing both violence and territory into their hands; in lieu of stable payments, it gave non-Roman troops and commanders precious little reason to remain loyal once the authority of the imperial regime had dissipated.

If we want to see how this process affected the end of the Roman centralisation of legitimate enforceable authority, we must turn again to the issue of loyalty. As we have seen, loyalty is very difficult to quantify, but it would appear that, broadly speaking, non-Romans remained loyal to the imperial regime for as long as they had cause to do so. What changed was the nature of the imperial regime itself. In the next section, we will turn to the question of why, in political terms, the western imperial government ceased to be an effective tent-pole around which the rest of western political and military authority could be organised.

7.4 The End of Imperial Rule

> *"Valentinian* [II] *was vexed at this* [the supremacy of Arbogast] *and often threatened him, but to no avail, because Arbogastes was supported by the loyalty of the whole army. One day, when he could no longer bear being subject to this man, he saw Arbogastes approaching as he sat on the imperial throne, and … handed him a letter terminating his command. Arbogastes, when he had read it, said that the emperor had not given him his command and could not take it away, and so saying tore up the letter, threw it on the floor, and went away. From that time on their antipathy was no longer nurtured in secret: it was obvious to everyone."*[1071] – Zosimus, *New History* IV.53.2-3

[1071] see also Paul., *Vit. Amb.* 30; Eunap. *fr*. 58.2.22-9; 58.2.29-38; John Ant., *fr*. 187; Greg. Tur. 2.9

This episode, occurring in the early 390s, had a tragic end: driven to despair by his own powerlessness, the young Valentinian II committed suicide. Arbogast, reportedly unable to convince Theodosius I that he was not directly responsible for Valentinian's death, resorted to throwing up a puppet usurper, Eugenius. Both were then defeated by Theodosius at the battle of the Frigidus river, with reportedly shocking casualties for both sides.[1072] There is a great deal here of interest to us: the inability of the emperor to exercise authority over his leading general; the comparative power of that general in relation to the Roman army; the ability of the eastern court to impose its choice of officials on its western counterpart; and the prospect of civil war should the political consensus break down. Crucially, it is an excellent starting point in an examination of the defining political process of our period: the infantilisation of imperial rule.[1073] This infantilisation, once it occurred, prompted the development of alternate strategies for exercising political authority and legitimacy in the west which, in the context of the crises of the fifth century, fatally undermined the imperial regime that had hitherto held western societies together like an 'iron clamp'. It is the purpose of this section of outline this process in detail.

Owing to the political focus, this section is framed through the actions (or lack thereof) of certain political protagonists, be they emperors, generalissimos, or warlords. There is an inherent risk with such an approach, best referred to as 'Great Man theory'. Based on classical historical writing, which tended to be personality focussed (take, for example, Plutarch's *Lives*), this theory suggests that the unique 'genius' of certain individuals made them curiously suited to exploit the situation of their times, or *vice versa*.[1074] This is obviously inaccurate. As Stewart Oost argued in 1968, referring to the death of Athaulf and Galla Placidia's infant son Theodosius:

> "If one believes that if the accession of this child had come to pass the West Roman Empire might have been saved, then one must necessarily also subscribe to the theory that great events in history depend on accident

[1072] Zos. IV.58

[1073] This is the term used by McEvoy (2010), (2013)

[1074] Wijnendaele (2018), 446-447, 62f

> rather than deep-rooted causes, a type of aetiology likely to be repugnant to most students of history today". – Stewart Oost (1968), 133

Certainly, I would argue that the decisions of political figures have consequences, but these must be framed not in the context of the unique genius, incompetence, or treachery of individuals, but in the context of what we might refer to as historical determinism. The context determines what actions occur to individuals, who are in turn utterly constrained by what they think they can plausibly achieve: within that context, however, human agency matters.[1075] From the structuralist perspective, this context is most frequently provided by political, economic, or social institutions, and the orientation of individuals in relation to them. To give one prominent example, Aetius is frequently castigated by modern historians for his decision not to defend North Africa in favour of remaining in Gaul. Whilst this was, with hindsight, an extraordinary strategic blunder, we have no way of knowing if any contemporary saw it as such. Indeed, Aetius's decision to defend his own Gallic powerbase made political and military sense in context. For our purposes, this becomes a pressing problem when we come to Ricimer and Majorian. Majorian has, in modern historical writing, received unusually good press.[1076] By contrast, Ricimer is frequently reviled as a 'barbarian' traitor.[1077] Oost described him thus:

> "…the German patrician was a cold calculating sinister man who hesitated at no crime, no murder, no treason, no perfidy to maintain himself securely in power". – Stewart Oost (1970), 228

It goes without saying that we know next to nothing for certain about either man personally. As for their political decisions, each made sense in context, and it was the context that determined them. As a counterpoint, there is perhaps only one fifth-century

[1075] Dey (2015), 9

[1076] E.g., Gibbon IV.15, 24; Hodgkin (1880), 434; Barker (1911), 423; Dill (1926), 18; Solari (1938), 400-420; Stein (1959), 341; Max (1979), 281; see MacGeorge (2002), 262

[1077] MacGeorge (2002), 262-264

western political figure – Gaiseric – who was sufficiently secure in his position to dictate the course of events. The rest were treading water in a historical riptide.

7.4.1 A Theory of Late Imperial Rule

The best and the worst aspect of any system is usually the same thing when seen from a different perspective. In the case of the Roman empire, it was the absence of any clear legal or constitutional system for determining eligibility for being an emperor, or for laying down legal principles by which the succession was to be conducted.[1078] This gave imperial succession an immense degree of elasticity. Against this elasticity, however, we must counterpose certain fundamental principles. Firstly, if we accept Max Weber's division of authority into 'traditional', 'legal', and 'charismatic' categories, then we must accept that the source of the emperor's charismatic authority was found in his institutional relationship with the army, and in his attaining military victories.[1079] Secondly, despite attempts under the Antonine dynasty and the Tetrarchy to establish alternate approaches to the succession, imperial rule tended towards dynasticism from the beginning. Thirdly, the empire was always in principle "an uncompromising autocracy": no matter the political reality of imperial power, it was never presented to the outside world as anything else.[1080] These three principles represented the underlying norm of imperial power across the Roman period. However, the transition from the Principate to the later empire altered the political environment in which these principles operated. To start with, having been removed from the city of Rome, the 'traditional authority' of imperial power that had been derived from association with the city's civic institutions – i.e., by which the emperor was the *princeps* of the *res publica* – was undermined. On the one hand, this was replaced with a growing emphasis on the emperor's 'legal authority': the bureaucratisation that had occurred in the context of needing to maintain the *annona militaris* also served to increase the output of the writing office. On the other hand, the military crises of the third century, the military origins of later emperors, and the presence of the praesental field army wherever the

[1078] Sommer (2011), 160; cf. Kaldellis (2015), esp. 101

[1079] Bang (2013), 414; see also McEvoy (2013), 28

[1080] Wickham (2009), 26; LRE I, 321; Bury (1909), 9

emperor happened to be, all directly reinforced the 'charismatic authority' that the emperor enjoyed in close association with the army – provided, of course, that he remained victorious. Furthermore, as Henning Börm has argued, the dynastic principle of legitimate succession was heavily emphasised by Constantine is his attempt to differentiate his claims from those of his Tetrarchic opponents.[1081] This emphasis on dynasticism remained prevalent in the fourth and fifth centuries, but could never become the sole legitimate mode of succession.[1082] There is therefore a subtle tension at the heart of late imperial rule between the increased charismatic authority available to the successful soldier-emperor and the real risk of mundanisation inherent in bureaucratisation, legalism, and the prioritising of a single, predictable mode of succession. In order to be a successful western Roman emperor, one needed to be dynastically acceptable, a consistently victorious general, and capable of dominating "the spreading foothills of the bureaucracy" with "the organizing principles of irregularity, disruption, and division".[1083] Constantine may have managed it; Valentinian I struggled; his successors were in deep water.

In the event, what seems to have happened in the late fourth century is that mundanisation produced corporate regimes operating behind child-emperors, and the infantilisation of the imperial office – by this, I mean the habit of treating emperors as though they weren't capable of leading or decision-making even when they had reached adulthood - carried over into the fifth as a matter of political expedience. Simultaneously, the overwhelming need for an effective military autocrat led to the evolution of a parallel autocracy exercised by a succession of western generalissimos.[1084] From a constitutionalist perspective, this was impracticable.[1085] As Theodor Mommsen made clear, there was no provision in Roman law for what we would call a regency: *Augusti* theoretically wielded the full panoply of their powers from the moment of accession.[1086] In any event, as Alan Cameron points out, *tutela*

[1081] Börm (2015), 247

[1082] Ibid, 252-253; McEvoy (2013), 10

[1083] Matthews (1989), 274; Kelly (2008), 170

[1084] 'Generalissimo' is the term used by O'Flynn (1983)

[1085] O'Flynn (1983), 45-46; McEvoy (2013), 10

[1086] Mommsen (1903), 101-115; Cameron (1970), 39

– the period of guardianship for youths – ended at fourteen under Roman law, so any exercise of authority over an emperor from that age was legally illegitimate.[1087] In a different situation, this might have led to the evolution of what we would now call a constitutional monarchy: however, given that there was no explicit constitutional foundation to imperial rule, this seems to have proven impossible under the circumstances. As such, whilst these generalissimos could exercise authority over the army and appointments to the *comitatus*, they had no legitimacy without a political relationship with the ruling dynasty. Emperors had become functionally irrelevant, and yet politically indispensable. This political paradox naturally had to resolve itself one way or another, and the disintegration of the centralised legitimate authority of the western imperial court was the result. This investigation will therefore be divided into two further parts. Firstly, we shall establish the formation of these parallel autocracies; secondly, we shall detail how this development led to the extinction of western imperial rule.

7.4.2 Parallel Autocracy

Let us turn to the reign of Valentinian I, which saw three developments that are crucial to our investigation. The first, as has already been noted, is that both Jovian and Valentinian I were elevated to the rank of *Augustus* as compromise candidates by the high commands of the regional militaries.[1088] Consequently, as Ammianus suggests, Valentinian I had difficulty controlling his generals, which led to the increasing erosion of the division and parity between civil and military offices upon which the fourth-century state was built.[1089] This established a precedent by which coteries of courtiers could elevate *Augusti* should the need arise. This is most evident in Ammianus' account of the subsequent elevation of Valentinian II:

> *"Finally, the highest-ranking officers decided … that Merobaudes should be immediately recalled in Valentinian's name, as if he were still living … In*

[1087] Cameron (1970), 39

[1088] Amm. Marc. XXV.5, XXVI.1; Kulikowski (2021), 32-33, 35-36

[1089] Amm. Marc. XXX.9.1; Matthews (1989), 270

> *accordance with secret instructions he* [Merobaudes] *removed Sebastian, who was still unaware of the emperor's death, to a distant post. He was a quiet and peaceful man but very popular with the troops, and needed therefore to be closely watched … On Merobaudes' return and after the most careful deliberation it was proposed that young Valentinian, the four-year-old son of the deceased, should be sent for and co-opted emperor … The proposal was met with unanimous assent, and Cerialis, the boy's uncle, was sent to fetch him at once …"*[1090] – Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae* XXX.10

Both Zosimus and (the pseudo-)Aurelius Victor further note the involvement of Flavius Equitius, and Ammianus and Rufinus of Aquileia allude to the influence of Petronius Probus in the decision.[1091] Furthermore, we might note that it was around this time that the *magister equitum* Theodosius was executed at Carthage under suspicious circumstances; evidently, like Sebastian, he was felt to be too popular with the army for the comfort of his peers.[1092] This indicates that regional high commands felt it necessary to limit the charismatic authority available to emperors, as this enhanced their own political ability to manoeuvre.[1093] Considering how important charismatic authority was to late imperial rule, this had the potential to become a serious problem. The second development was the rise of Flavius Merobaudes.[1094] Probably of Frankish origin, Merobaudes was an officer under Julian, and served as *magister peditum* under Valentinian I, Gratian, and Magnus Maximus (375-388).[1095] He was also appointed as the western consul three times, in 377, 383, and 388, making him the first non-member of the imperial family to hold the position more than once since the reign of Constantine.[1096] Crucially, not only was Merobaudes capable of

---

[1090] See also Zos. IV.19; Aur. Vict. *Caes*., 45.10

[1091] Rufinus 11.12; Amm. Marc. XXX.5.10

[1092] *PLRE* IB, 902-904; Jerome, *Chron.* s.a. 376; Oros. VII.33.7; Jord. *Rom.* 312; cf. Amb. *De ob. Theod.* 53

[1093] McEvoy (2013), 59

[1094] *PLRE* IB, 598-599

[1095] Officer: Philost. VIII.1; Zos. IV.17.1. *Magister peditum*: Amm. Marc. XXX.5.13; Zos. IV.17.1

[1096] O'Flynn (1983), 2-3

successfully planting Valentinian II on the throne without consulting either Valens or Gratian, he managed to survive switching sides from Gratian to Magnus Maximus with his prestige intact.[1097] Jerome O'Flynn argued that Merobaudes' tenure as *magister peditum* marked a turning point. Merobaudes' survival strongly suggests the independent power that a holder of this office could wield if he had the loyalty and respect of his army; as a result, it is from this time that we see western military power increasingly concentrated into the position of *magister peditum*, which was subsequently held by both Bauto and Arbogast, both of whom fulfilled a similar role under Valentinian II.[1098] The power concentrated by Stilicho into the position of *comes et magister utriusque militiae in praesentalis* evolved directly from the position of *magister peditum*.[1099] The third development was the decision by Valentinian I to elevate his eight-year-old son, Gratian, directly to the rank of *Augustus* (367).[1100] This was done partially because Valentinian I had recently been seriously ill, and partially to secure a dynastic succession. There had been child-emperors before: what had changed was the context. Both Gratian and Valentinian II were elevated in an environment in which authority could now be wielded much more effectively by coteries of officials or by powerful *magistri peditum*. Gratian seems to have tried to rule in the military style of his father, but was regarded as being, in the words of Pacatus, "not equal to the task": he was rewarded with the betrayal of Merobaudes.[1101] Valentinian II, who according to Ambrose had been eager to lead an army in defence of Italy, never escaped from under Arbogast's thumb.[1102] Honorius, subsequently elevated to the rank of *Augustus* at the age of eight (393), conspicuously did not try in any discernible way to govern either military or civil affairs. As Thomas Burns points out, the one period in which Honorius may have been making any decisions (408-411) coincides with Alaric's sack of Rome, which suggests nothing

[1097] Pac. *Pan. Lat.* XII; *PLRE* IB, 599

[1098] *PLRE* IA, 95-97, 159-160; O'Flynn (1983), 4-6; Liebeschuetz (2015), 69; Wijnendaele (2018), 433

[1099] *Not. Dig. Occ.* V-VI; Liebeschuetz (2015), 70; MacGeorge (2002), 5

[1100] Amm. Marc. XXVII.6

[1101] Amm. Marc. XXXI.10.6; Zos. IV.35.5-6; Pac. *Pan. Lat.* II.5; McEvoy (2013), 113

[1102] Amb. *de ob. Val.* II.24

positive about his leadership.[1103] Meaghan McEvoy has argued, contrary to the frequent disparaging assessments of this emperor, that it is possible that Honorius implicitly understood that remaining passive was the key to his survival.[1104] Considering that he remained on the throne for thirty years and died of natural causes in a period of immense political instability, this perspective is at least plausible. Regardless of whether it was by accident or design, Honorius' long inertia is of vital importance. Valentinian III (r. 425-455), who came to the throne at the age of five, does not seem to have been allowed near an army until after he had murdered Aetius; his subsequent attempt at military leadership proved fatal. The problem was, leaving aside the inability of children to govern, that this opened up a space in which courtiers could establish supremacy over emperors, meaning that emperors would never be required to learn how to successfully manage the autocracy, be this via military, legal, or administrative means.[1105] It is notable that even when Valentinian II, Honorius, and Valentinian III reached adulthood, power was still conspicuously exercised on their behalf, whether they wanted it or not. If emperors could not lead armies, make laws, or manage the bureaucracy, then their purpose could fundamentally be called into question. Child-emperorship, which had begun as a political expedient and had then become institutionalised, had the potential to undermine imperial rule altogether.

The three developments we have just outlined led to what I have referred to as a 'parallel autocracy'. By this, I mean a paradoxical system in which there are two acknowledged autocrats sharing the same centralised institutional structures and legitimising criteria in an unstable partnership in which one partner – the emperor – possesses legitimacy but no authority, and in which the other – the generalissimo – possesses authority but no legitimacy. It is a phenomenon emblematic of a political system in flux. This differs from the model of 'partnership rule' presented by Meaghan McEvoy in *Child Emperor Rule in the Late Roman West, AD 367-455* (2013) in that McEvoy was much more willing to present the

[1103] Burns (1994), 236: "From time to time the emperor, autocrat of the Roman world, actually seems to have made his own decisions. Most, though not all, were bad."

[1104] McEvoy (2013), 188; Doyle (2019), 1-9

[1105] McCormick (2008), 143: "a child who could not write could not rule"

development as a stable phenomenon that maintained the crucial political link with the eastern court and prevented civil war in the provinces.[1106] I would suggest two counterarguments, both predicated on the privatisation of violence. As Arbogast demonstrated, generalissimos were not officials in the ordinary sense, and could not be dismissed: they could only be removed from their position by assassination, execution, or military defeat.[1107] At the centre, this made the interrelationship between emperor and generalissimo extremely susceptible to courtly intrigue or personal pique.[1108] Stilicho, despite being the emperor's father-in-law, was executed once Honorius, led on one presumes by Olympius and his faction, turned on him.[1109] Aetius, by contrast, was murdered by Valentinian III personally in a manner that does not indicate stability.[1110] On the peripheries, peace could only be maintained whilst one generalissimo remained ascendant – once that ascendancy was lost, civil war or secession were effectively inevitable. Here, we might think of the conflict between Constantius and Heraclian (413), or that between Aetius and Boniface (432).[1111] As long as this situation pertained, extreme instability could be expected every time a generalissimo fell from power, and yet the weight of institutional determinism prevented emperors from reclaiming their commanding position.

In explanation, we now turn to the way in which 'parallel autocracy' was presented by contemporaries. Following both Alan Cameron and Meaghan McEvoy, we note the particular utility of panegyrics, on the one hand as an idealised form of imperial rule wished upon emperors, and on the other as a mode of communication between the regime and the

[1106] McEvoy (2013), 217

[1107] Goffart (2006), 194; Wijnendaele (2018), 433

[1108] *LRE* I, 344; McEvoy (2013), 12

[1109] Zos. V.32-34

[1110] Prisc. *fr.* 30

[1111] Constantius vs. Heraclian: Olymp. *fr.* 23; Oros. VII.42.12-13; Hydat. 48 [56] s.a. 412-413; Marcell. *com.* s.a. 412-413; Prosper s.a. 413; *Chron. Gall.* 452, no. 75; Jord. *Rom.* 325; Aetius vs. Boniface: Prosper s.a. 432; *Chron. Gall.* s.a. 452, no. 111, s.a. 432; Hydat. 89 [99], s.a. 432; Marcell. *com.* s.a. 432; Wijnendaele (2018), 437

élites crucial to maintaining it.[1112] The *basilikos logos* of Menander, written in the late third century, details the various components from which a successful imperial panegyric was to be constructed: background, eduction, innate virtues, wisdom in appointments, mildness and humanity in justice, and, above all, martial prowess. We begin not with a panegyric, but with the remembrances of Augustine who, prior to his celebrated conversion, served at the court of Valentinian II in Milan:

> *"How wretched was I at the time, and how You dealt with me, to make me sensible of my wretchedness on that day wherein I was preparing to recite a panegyric on the Emperor, wherein I was to deliver many a lie, and lying was to be applauded by those who knew I lied…"* – Augustine, *Confessions* VI.6.9

We must assume that the 'lies' of which Augustine speaks were applications of traditional imperial virtues, such as martial prowess, to the decidedly unmilitary Valentinian II. What is interesting here is not that the panegyric was untruthful: panegyrics were a method for sanitising events and presenting them in a manner beneficial to the regime of the day, so massaging the evidence was par for the course. What is interesting is that, when we turn to the panegyrics of Claudian, there appears to have been no substantive adjustment of the traditional imperial image to account for child-emperor rule. In Claudian's panegyrics, Honorius is portrayed as crawling amongst the shields of the soldiers in his father's camp,[1113] his cradle hedged about by battle standards,[1114] his face shining as he wore his father's helmet or grasped his grandfather's spear.[1115] At the tender age of four, Honorius is even presented as desperately begging his father to ride to war with him against both Magnus Maximus and Eugenius![1116] This corresponds to other representations that show Honorius in a martial guise. For example, the consular diptych of Anicius Petronius Probus

[1112] McEvoy (2013), 23-47; Cameron (1965), 502; see also MacCormack (1981), 1-14

[1113] Claud. *III Cons.* 22

[1114] Claud. *III Cons.* 17

[1115] Claud. *IV Cons.* 518-22; see also Cameron (1970), pp. 40-41

[1116] contra Magnus Maximus, Claud. *IV Cons.* 353-68; contra Eugenius, Claud. *III Cons.* 83-7

shows Honorius in the imagery of Christian-themed military poise:[1117] Similarly, Honorius' gold coinage frequently depicts the emperor in a helmet or cuirass; obverses can show a winged victory, an equestrian Honorius, or Honorius trampling an opponent in victory:[1118] We might also think of Honorius' *adventus* into Rome in 416. Based on the account preserved in Olympiodorus, Honorius may have performed the ritual of *calcatio colli* – pressing down with one foot on the neck of a defeated rival – on the usurper Priscus Attalus.[1119] Honorius, of course, had played no part in bringing the usurper to heel: that honour belonged to the generalissimo Constantius.[1120] The point is that despite the fact that Honorius was entirely unmilitary, no alternative mode of presenting him appears to have occurred to his contemporaries. This is where the problem of the fundamental principle of the emperor as a military victor comes into focus: it had to be maintained, however inappropriate it may have seemed.

By comparison, we can see in Claudian's panegyrics honouring the consulates of his patron Stilicho that generalissimos were rapidly coming to share in the same modes of representation previously reserved for emperors. Stilicho is presented as having restored the safety of the state through military victory;[1121] as inspiring loyalty in his troops and leading them by example;[1122] and as both terrifying the enemy and yet never taking up arms against a fellow citizen.[1123] Similarly, the Monza diptych that supposedly portrays Stilicho has the general in an armed stance intended to evoke Mars.[1124] Whilst this was representative of Stilicho's role within the state, and reflected how he was perceived, the fact that it encroached onto imperial representational territory is still worthy of note:

[1117] See also *RIC* X Honorius 1310; MacCormack (1981), 221; McEvoy (2013), 205

[1118] E.g., *RIC* X Honorius 1205, 1206, 1209, 1240, 1252, 1287, 1309, 1310, 1319, 1321, 1323, 1326, 1328, 1348, 1349, 1350, 1352 (all of the above are western issues)

[1119] Olymp. *fr.* 26.2; Wienand (2015), 169-170

[1120] Oros. VII. 42.9; Prosper s.a. 415

[1121] Claud. *Stil*. I. 384-5; II. 184-207

[1122] Claud. *Get.* 353-6; *Ruf*. II. 171-4; *Stil.* I. 160-9, II.145-9, 152-6

[1123] *Ruf.* I.259-67; *Nupt.* 328-34

[1124] McEvoy (2013), 166

evidently Honorius was in no position to contest it. This practice of borrowing from and supplanting imperial representation finds more pointed expression in the panegyrics of Flavius Merobaudes for Aetius. In his first panegyric (c. 432), Merobaudes heavily foregrounds Aetius's martial attributes:

> *"For your bed is a barren rock or a thin covering on the ground; you spend your nights in watchfulness, your days in toil; furthermore, you undergo hardship willingly; your breastplate is not so much a defence as a garment … not a magnificent display but a way of life; finally … what is readiness for battle to others is routine to you."* – Merobaudes, *Panegyric* I, *fragment* IA.15-21

From this basis, Merobaudes then goes on to poach from the broader range of imperial attributes laid out by Menander:

> *"But aside from distinction in battle, who is there who exhibits so great a celerity in planning, a strictness in judgement, a gentleness in conversation, a serenity of expression, a brevity of anger and enduring love?"* - Merobaudes, *Panegyric* I, *fragmenta* IB.9-14

Most interestingly, Merobaudes goes on to stress the independence and self-reliance of Aetius; Valentinian III is referred to only passively and not by name in the text:

> *"You rely on yourself, you look to yourself, and you seek no model which you wish to imitate beyond yourself."* – Merobaudes, *Panegyric* I, *fragmenta* IIA.19-21

On the one hand, we should not forget that both Claudian and Merobaudes were the clients of the generalissimos they were adulating, so their compositions are to be expected. On the other hand, the extent to which it was possible for them to poach from traditional imperial virtues reflects the political reality: the generalissimos were the ones actually running the

show, with emperors serving as a "cloaking mechanism" for this reality.[1125] We might add that the growing confidence of Merobaudes when compared to Claudian could indicate that contemporary élite audiences were growing more comfortable with ignoring ceremonial emperors as well.

Beyond ceremonial presentation, it is also clear that generalissimos took over the responsibility for staff appointments to the *comitatus*. Given that Gratian's regime seems to have been staffed by candidates selected by Ausonius, his Praetorian Prefect, and that Arbogast is reported to have killed Valentinian II's ministers in front of him, full control over appointments likely began with Stilicho.[1126] If we turn to Zosimus' and Olympiodorus' accounts of the mutiny against Stilicho at Ticinum (408), we note that the mutineers targeted a wide spread of high officials, presumably because they were all Stilichonian appointees. The victims reportedly included Limenius, Praetorian Prefect of the Gauls; Chariobaudes, the Gallic *magister militum*; Vincentius, *magister equitum* of Italy; Salvius, the *comes domesticorum;* Naimorius, the *magister officiorum;* Patroinus, the *comes sacrarum largitionem;* Salvius, the *quaestor;* and Longinianus, the Praetorian Prefect of Italy.[1127] We have some idea as to the Praetorian and Urban Prefects appointed under Valentinian III due to the recipients of his *Novellae*, and McEvoy argues that Aetius' willingness to absent himself from the court for long periods of time suggests that he could implicitly trust Valentinian's officials.[1128] We might also add that contemporaries seem to have assumed that generalissimos were in a position of primary political authority. We have evidence from Gildas for an embassy directed by provincial élites to Aetius from Britain appealing for help against 'barbarians': it is notable that this request was not directed to the court of Valentinain III.[1129] The implication is that generalissimos almost certainly controlled the tax system and were capable of influencing the formation of law, as we can see from Stilicho's

[1125] McEvoy (2013), 219

[1126] Eunap. *fr.* 58 = John Ant. *fr.* 187; Matthews (1975), 56-87, 253-283

[1127] Zos. V.32.3-7; Olymp. *fr.* 5.2.12-21; Matthews (1975), 280-281; McEvoy (2013), 182

[1128] McEvoy (2013), 253

[1129] Gildas 20; cf. Hydat. 92 [101], s.a. 432

attempted to wring recruits out of the aristocracy. Their authority was not simply a product of presentation: it had infrastructural roots.

To conclude this section, we turn to the example of Flavius Constantius, or Constantius III.[1130] Constantius succeeded to the position of *comes et magister utriusque militiae* in c.411, and was responsible for the suppression of the usurpations of Constantine III and Gerontius, as well as coming to terms with the Goths. Where Stilicho had reinforced his links to the ruling dynasty by marrying Honorius to both his daughters in succession, Constantius married Honorius's half-sister, Galla Placidia, in 417.[1131] This marriage produced two children, the second of which was the future emperor Valentinian III. Since Honorius remained unmarried and childless, this made Constantius the father of the presumptive heir to the throne. Constantius successfully parlayed this into an accession as co-*Augustus* in 421. To engage for a moment in some counterfactual determinism, we might assume that this would be the end of the process: that generalissimos would displace and replace emperors at some point.[1132] This was, however, not to be the case. Firstly, Honorius was not deposed. Secondly, the eastern court refused to recognize Constantius's elevation.[1133] Thirdly, Constantius died six months into his reign, and no subsequent generalissimos tried to follow him onto the imperial throne. Later generalissimos preferred to install their sons (as Aetius attempted to do and Orestes did) or rule through puppets (as in the case of both Ricimer and Gundobad). It is difficult to discern why. It is usually presumed, with reference again to Roman prejudices, that the 'barbarian' backgrounds of figures like Stilicho and Ricimer prevented them from being acceptable imperial candidates to the aristocracy, although this does not explain Aetius's reluctance. There is, however, one clue preserved in Olympiodorus that might give some indication as to another reason:

> *"Constantius…regretted his elevation, that he no longer had the freedom to go off whenever and in whatever manner he wished and could not, because*

[1130] *PLRE* IIA, 321-325

[1131] Olymp. *fr.* 34

[1132] MacGeorge (2002), 6

[1133] Ibid.; Philost. XII.12

> *he was Emperor, enjoy the pastimes which he had been accustomed to enjoy."* – Olympiodorus, *Fragmenta* 33.1

While it is uncertain how Olympiodorus came by this information, as an eastern diplomat with excellent western aristocratic connections it is conceivable that his account is based on first or second-hand experience. Similarly, though from a greater remove and with the deliberate intention to rebut, Sidonius described Petronius Maximus as being "imprisoned…behind the doors of the palace" on becoming emperor, such that he could no longer enjoy his previous felicity.[1134] The implication is that the role of emperor had been ceremonialised to the extent that it now restricted the ability of the occupant to act freely; this will have made responding to military crises extremely difficult. As we have already stated, it was likely the extended passivity of Honorius that cemented this ceremonialisation in place. The irony is that it was the actions of successive generalissimos in defending the imperial dynasty that had gradually leeched all but the ceremonial aspects of imperial rule away from the throne. It only became clear that 'parallel autocracy' was parasitic once someone tried to occupy the imperial office alongside the reigning emperor, only to discover that the role was no longer fit for purpose.

Imperial rule had been the organising principle around which western political societies had orientated themselves. Parallel autocracy destabilised these relationships by focussing loyalty and authority onto generalissimos, whose positions were only legitimate in relation to the rule of ceremonial emperors who they were forced to dominate in order to remain in power. Parallel autocracy was a political paradox emblematic of the elasticity of the Roman political system as it underwent a period of evolution in response to crisis, as had occurred at the end of the Republic and during the third century. In normal circumstances, this would have entailed a period of renegotiation between centre and periphery as a new political settlement emerged. In the east, a similar process of evolution in the fifth century ended with emperors reasserting themselves as civilian autocrats dominating the centralised political arena of Constantinople. The problem, in the west, was that their process of evolution did not occur in a vacuum; it was a response to the most serious political and

[1134] Sid. Ap. *Ep.* II.13.4

military crises that the empire had faced in well over a century. How the process we have outlined above played out in context defines the end of western imperial authority.

7.4.3 East and West

As previously stated (§7.2), there was an inherent risk in the imbalance of power between the eastern and western courts in the fifth century that threatened the authority and legitimacy of the western imperial regime being folded into that of its Constantinopolitan twin. At the outset of the fifth century, the eastern court was undergoing many of the same issues as its western counterpart, owing to the incapacity of Arcadius as a ruler, the revolt of Tribigild, and the attempted supremacy of Gainas. However, political instability in the east was ameliorated by several features. As A.H.M. Jones pointed out, the eastern empire was far less strategically vulnerable than the west: its frontiers were shorter, the Hellespont divided its territory, and the two field armies defending Constantinople made this a virtually impregnable barrier to invaders.[1135] Furthermore, with the exception of two brief wars in 421-2 and 440-2, the east enjoyed a long period of peace with Persia.[1136] In addition, the court settled down in Constantinople permanently at the turn of the fifth century, making the city the physical focus of power. The aristocracies of the east were less wealthy than their western counterparts, and did not have the long-standing institution of the Roman senate to act as an alternative locus of prestige.[1137] As such, the formation of a more-easily-dominated eastern senate under Constantius II, coupled with the allure of Constantinopolitan bureaucratic positions, created an eastern courtly establishment that was far more cohesive and potent than that of the west. If Wolf Liebeschuetz's assessment of Synesius' *De Providentia* is correct, the entire Gainas affair – resulting in the fall of the would-be generalissimo and the massacre of his supporters in Constantinople – was the result of competing policies pursued by the Praetorian Prefects Aurelian and Eutychianus; evidently civilian ministers in the east were creating generalissimos, and not *vice versa*.[1138]

[1135] *LRE* II, 1027

[1136] Ibid, 1030

[1137] Brown (1971), 116; Marcone (2008), 351, 357

[1138] Liebeschuetz (1990), pp. 111-125

We might add that the political focus on the court at Constantinople seems to have militated against separatism; competition, even civil war, was aimed at influencing the court or securing the throne. Lastly, with the exception of the Anatolian plateau, the east was a much more cohesive economic zone than the west, and in the absence of comparable strategic threats we must assume that it was comparatively wealthier during this period. All of this amounted to an eastern establishment that had the potential to dominate a weaker western court, particularly considering the need to maintain the illusion of political unity through the dynastic relationship.

This imbalance of power meant that, in the fifth century, the eastern court gradually began to subsume the legitimacy of its counterpart. This process had already begun under Theodosius I, who defeated two western usurpations whilst maintaining the puppet regime of Valentinian II. The *missorium* of Theodosius I depicts Valentinian II, who was ostensibly the senior *Augustus* in the imperial college, in an obviously subordinate position. Honorius was also planted on the western throne by the eastern regime. Furthermore, Stilicho's background was as an eastern court official, which explains why he never relaxed his claims to guardianship over Arcadius or ceased trying to influence the eastern situation. The eastern hold on western imperial politics grew stronger after 425, when the east toppled the regime of John/Castinus and replaced it with that of Valentinian III.[1139] This is reflected in the early occupants of high positions in Valentinian III's government: Felix, the first *magister militum*, had no known western career prior to this; Ardaburius, the eastern *magister utriusque militiae,* was awarded the western consulship for 427, indicating that he was still stationed in the west at the time; and Helion, the eastern *magister officiorum*, both crowned Valentinian III in 425 and was not reported back in Constantinople until December 426.[1140] The subordination of Valentinian III's government to that of Theodosius II was made clear when, one the occasion of Valentinian's wedding to his daughter Licinia Eudoxia in Constantinople (Oct. 437), the government of Theodosius II minted a *solidus* that mirrored

[1139] Olymp. *fr.* 39.1-2; Marcellinus *comes* s.a. 424(3); Hydat. 74 [83], s.a. 424; Procop. *Bell.* III.3.5-8; McEvoy (2013), p. 233; *PLRE* IIA, pp. 269-270, 594-595

[1140] *PLRE* IIA, 137-138, 461-462, 533; *CTh.* VI.27.20 (23 Dec. 426) for the law addressed to Helion; McEvoy (2013), 233-234

the imagery of the *missorium* of Theodosius I. Theodosius' government also took the opportunity of the dynastic wedding to promulgate the newly compiled Theodosian Code, from which Valentinian's name was conspicuously omitted.[1141] As Meaghan McEvoy points out, a significant body of the laws compiled in the Code had been taken from archives in Italy and North Africa, suggesting a corps of eastern officials working in the west during this period.[1142] This might also explain why the output of extant legislation from the west drops significantly between 427-437. It is plausible that eastern officials were responsible for writing western laws at the time, after which they took the copies back with them to Constantinople for incorporation into the Code; the eastern *quaestor* Antiochus has been suggested as the specific individual on the ground in the west.[1143] Crucially, this seems to have been the last period in which western legislation was deemed admissible in the east: there are no western laws in the Code of Justinian dated to later than 432. In 447, Theodosius ruled that no laws from the west should be valid in the east without specific consent in the course of communicating his *Novellae* to Valentinian for promulgation; there is no indication that Valentinian submitted his own *Novellae* eastwards, although this had been requested.[1144] Despite the obvious commitment to dynastic loyalty, it seems clear that the western court was increasingly being treated as an outpost of its eastern counterpart rather than as a coequal partner.

Although the genealogical link of the Theodosian dynasty ended with the deaths of Theodosius II (450) and Valentinian III (455), this did not end eastern involvement in western affairs. Here we must discuss Anthemius (r. 467-472) and Julius Nepos (r. 474-480).[1145] Notably, neither of these *Augusti* had any roots in the western political scene prior to their elevation. Anthemius was the grandson of the eastern Praetorian Prefect of the same name and the son of Procopius, an eastern *magister utriusque militiae*; he had risen to prominence as a military official under Marcian, and was married to Marcian's daughter.

[1141] Harries (1999), 64; McEvoy (2013), 258

[1142] McEvoy (2013), 258

[1143] *PLRE* IIA, 102-103; Harries (1999), 37, 63; Honoré (1999), 253-257; McEvoy (2013), 241-242

[1144] *NTh.* I.2 (Oct. 1, 447); *NVal.* 26.1 (June 3, 448); Harries (1999), 61

[1145] *PLRE* IIA, 96-98, IIB 777-778

According to Sidonius, Anthemius laid claim to the eastern throne after Marcian's death, but it is likely that the opposition of Aspar prevented him from attaining it.[1146] As a result, he was probably sent westwards by Leo to remove a highly successful general with better dynastic credentials from the eastern political scene. It is worth noting that Anthemius' eastern origins were not appreciated by his western contemporaries: Sidonius pointedly referred to him at the time as the 'Greek emperor' (*Graecus imperator*) and, in the sixth century, Ennodius had his Ricimer referring to Anthemius as *Graeculus*, or as an 'excitable Galatian'.[1147] The fact that Anthemius appointed Marcellinus as a patrician to counterbalance Ricimer, who was reportedly a personal enemy of the Dalmatian warlord, suggests the tensions inherent in this political settlement.[1148] Julius Nepos, by contrast, was Marcellinus's nephew and successor as the ruler of Dalmatia, which, according to Penny MacGeorge, had been functionally independent of the western state from the 450s onwards.[1149] His primary relationship was with the eastern court: an eastern law of 473 addressed him as *magister militum Dalmatiae*.[1150] According to John of Antioch, Julius Nepos was dispatched to Italy in 474 with Leo's backing, although this does not appear to have translated into financial or military support.[1151] We might also add that Olybrius (r. 472), despite being a Roman senator and being married to Valentinian III's daughter, had been resident in Constantinople from the Vandal sack of Rome in 455, and was subsequently named as an eastern consul (464) and patrician.[1152] He was then dispatched by Leo to Italy to act as a peacemaker between Ricimer and Anthemius; Ricimer, however, proclaimed him emperor instead. Considering his family ties, one again suspects Leo's political machinations in sending Olybrius westwards. In any event, Olybrius does not appear to have been anything more than Ricimer's puppet, and he only survived six months

[1146] Sid. Ap. *Carm.* II.210-12

[1147] Sid. Ap. *Ep.* I.7.5; Ennod. *Vit. Epiph.* 51-4

[1148] *PLRE* IIB, 708-710

[1149] MacGeorge (2002), 18-56, esp. 40; see *Suda*, M 202 (= Damascius, *frgs.* 158, 155, 159); Marcellinus *comes*, s.a. 474

[1150] *CJ* VI.61.5 (June 1st 473)

[1151] John Ant. *fr.* 209

[1152] *PLRE* IIB, 796-798

on the throne. Jerome O'Flynn has argued that Julius Nepos stood no chance of establishing himself successfully as the western *Augustus* because the political situation in the west no longer had room for an actively campaigning emperor:

> "Nepos did not command their ['barbarian' troops] allegiance, but at the same time was clearly too strong a personality and too competent a general in his own right to tolerate the usurpation of real power by a barbarian [sic] generalissimo. Leo had chosen Nepos intending him to rule the West in the way that he himself ruled the East, and the choice would have been an excellent one if the West had been amenable to the same sort of government that existed in the East. Under the circumstances Nepos could enjoy neither real nor nominal supremacy in the West because Leo had chosen neither a barbarian [sic] nor a nonentity." – Jerome O'Flynn (1983), 132-133

I think the general thrust of O'Flynn's point is poignant. Despite repeatedly expending what must have been exorbitant sums on securing the political situation in the west – in particular, the three joint naval expeditions to North Africa in 431, 441, and 468 - the problem that all three figures had was that they had very little purchase on the western political scene.[1153] To put it bluntly, Anthemius and Nepos were conquistadors. Both were primarily relevant to the eastern political context, and both failed as a result in the face of opposition from western generalissimos – in this case, Ricimer and Orestes - who by the 460-70s totally dominated the western political scene. If we measure legitimacy by that embeddedness in the western political context, then neither Anthemius nor Nepos were truly 'legitimate' western *Augusti*.

The argument in this section therefore concerns legitimacy. In the fifth century, the eastern court stopped trusting its western counterpart to make decisions on its own behalf, and gradually stopped confirming the decisions it did make. This forced western political leaders into a subservient position if they wanted to maintain the flow of military or political support offered by the east. Considering the theoretical equality of the two courts, being in

[1153] McEvoy (2013), 255-256

an obviously subservient position must have undermined the legitimacy of the western court in the eyes of its subjects. Now, we must turn to how power dynamics worked within the west itself, in order to ascertain how western imperial authority disintegrated within its own domains.

7.4.4 The Disintegration of Western Imperial Authority – Periphery and Centre

The most obvious feature of the disintegration of western imperial authority in the fifth century is that it occurred at different times within different regions of the empire. Whilst there was no uniform process, it is clear that the diminution of imperial authority, the privatisation of violence, and the military pressure of 'barbarian' interlopers formed the context. Broadly speaking, we can determine two separate processes. In the provinces, imperial authority disintegrated by the mid-fifth century; and in the centre, Italy, it did not fully disintegrate until the mid-sixth. In the former, at differing rates, privatised violence and military pressure produced a series of 'warlords', with the dominant factions eventually going on to form the nuclei of new kingdoms, and thus new centralised authorities. In the centre, a new political configuration – the 'royal court of Italy' – co-opted what was left of imperial authority, dispensing with the emperors and ruling in their stead. This marked both a continuation of centralised authority and a break with modes of legitimacy, which will be explored below. Let us deal first with the periphery, then with the centre.

The term 'warlord' is here used to describe fifth-century military leaders at the peripheries who, although often having roots in the Roman political or social system, led forces loyal to themselves personally, and who could therefore act independently.[1154] The growth of warlordism was aided by the late Roman habit of delegating specific areas to frontier regional commands, the process of privatisation that made troops more reliant on their commanders to instil a sense of unity, the weakening of imperial finances, and the parlous security situation in the fifth century west. In the context of weakening imperial authority, we increasingly find warlords operating independently of imperial diktats, which indicates the disintegration of imperial authority at the peripheries. Crucially, as Ian Wood argued, no

[1154] Cf. MacGeorge (2002), 1-2, who fit both peripheral and central 'warlords' into the same category

warlords of this type were attempting to place themselves beyond the imperial system indefinitely, although their independence seems to have inadvertently accelerated the disintegration of the authority they were trying to work around.[1155] In North Africa, warlordism is apparent in two ways. On the one hand, we might look to the fourth century habit of elevating Moorish 'petty kings' (*reguli*) to the position of *praepositus limitis* and delegating frontier defence to them; both Firmus (373) and Gildo (397) used this position to contest imperial authority in the fourth century.[1156] On the other, we might look to the para-official status of figures such as Heraclian and Boniface, both of whom used their position as *comes Africae* to contest for the role of generalissimo.[1157] Boniface in particular is a good example, as he used his power base in North Africa to fight local Moorish rebels, Vandal invaders, and Roman forces dispatched from the centre.[1158] However, the long-term development of these processes in North Africa was interrupted by the Vandals. A similar situation is observable in Dalmatia under Marcellinus and Julius Nepos. Marcellinus's origins are unknown, but MacGeorge speculates that he was a local aristocrat from Salona; according to Procopius, his early military career was served under Aetius.[1159] Priscus records that Marcellinus's military following was composed of 'Scythians', which could mean either Huns or Ostrogoths; it is conceivable that he was in command of the remnants of the Illyrian field army or *limitanei*, but there is no direct evidence to this effect.[1160] In any event, his military association with eastern expeditions and his obvious hostility to Ricimer indicate that he was operating independently.[1161] Similar evidence for Iberia and Britain is sadly limited to the point of being non-existent, although both were heavily contested by non-Roman leaders and their respective military followings.

[1155] Wood (2008), 508; Wijnendaele (2018), 444

[1156] Oros. VI.36; *PLRE* IA, 340, 395-396; Whittaker (1994), 243-278; Liebeschuetz (2015), 67; Cameron (1970), 93-95

[1157] Oros. VI.42; *PLRE* IIA, 237-240, 539-540; McEvoy (2013), 199-200; Wijnendaele (2018), 436

[1158] O'Flynn (1983), 75, 78-80

[1159] Procop. *BV.* I.6.7; MacGeorge (2002), 42

[1160] Prisc. *fr.* 38; Blockley (1983), 395 n. 147; Demandt (1989), 173; MacGeorge (2002), 41-42

[1161] Ricimer's hostility: Prisc. *fr.* 29

The process is most readily observable in Gaul, although we must avoid the temptation to regard it as archetypical. As we have seen, fifth-century Gaul was largely fiscally self-sufficient, possessed its own *foci* for imperial authority (Arles), and was directly in the path of the most serious military unrest.[1162] After 418, Gaul was broadly divided into three parts: Roman Gaul, focussed on the Gallic council at Arles set up by Constantius and headed by the Gallic Praetorian Prefect; the new Visigothic kingdom of Toulouse; and the territory north of the Loire, which appears to have been in a state of constant turmoil.[1163] Aetius's power base was clearly in Gaul – he is most frequently recorded on campaign there – and his long supremacy as generalissimo helped hold Gaul and Italy together politically.[1164] The career of Eparchius Avitus (r. 455-456) is also an interesting case study of the evolution of warlordism in Gaul.[1165] Avitus' background was decisively Gallic; he had been a successful general under Aetius, and rose to be the Praetorian Prefect of the Gauls in 439.[1166] His elevation to *Augustus* in 455 was prompted by the urging of the Visigoths and the Gallic Council: his subsequent defeat and deposition at the hands of Ricimer and Majorian was owed to his insufficient political roots within Italy. According to both Jordanes and Sidonius, his son, Ecdicius, conducted prolonged warfare against the Visigoths with no official post.[1167] It is Ecdicius's private power, coupled with his origins in the Gallic political scene, that led to his being awarded the role of patrician under Anthemius and Julius Nepos (he may also have been *magister utriusque militiae* under the latter): he was essentially a parallel warlord that Italian leaders had to keep on side if they wanted to operate successfully in Gaul.[1168] North of the Loire, we find another splinter faction headed by Aegidius and his son Syagrius.[1169]

[1162] Wickham (2005), 107; Matthews (1975), 333-335

[1163] Matthews (1975), 329-338

[1164] On Aetius' campaigns in Gaul: Mer. *Pan.* I, *fr.* II.B, 11-24; Prosper 1324, 1326, 1333, 1338; Sid. *Carm*. 7.246-8; Jord., *Get.* 34.176-7; Hydat. 98 [107], 99 [108], 101 [110], 102 [110], 104 [112], 108 [116], 109 [117]; see also Matthews (1975), 329-330; *LRE* I. 189; O'Flynn (1983), 89-90; McEvoy (2013), 252, n. 2

[1165] *PLRE* IIA, 196-198

[1166] Sid. Ap. *Carm.* VII.295-298

[1167] Jord. *Get.* 240; Sid. Ap. *Ep.* V.16.1 describes him as *privatus*; *PLRE* IIA, 383-384

[1168] Sid. Ap. *Ep.* V.16.1

[1169] *PLRE* IIA, 11-13; IIB, 1041-1042; MacGeorge (2002), 71-164

Aegidius had originally served under Aetius, and was appointed as *magister militum per Gallias* either under Avitus or Majorian.[1170] Following the murder of Majorian (461), he refused to recognise the authority of Ricimer/Libius Severus, instead setting himself up as a parallel warlord: he refused to recognise his putative replacement, Agrippinus, and even threatened to invade Italy.[1171] Hydatius records a possible embassy from Aegidius to Gaiseric in 464-5: Penny MacGeorge speculates that this may have been an attempt to organise resistance to Ricimer.[1172] Syagrius inherited Aegidius' military following after the latter's murder (465), and does not appear to have ever operated under any official Roman title.[1173] Although both Gregory of Tours and the *Liber Historiae Francorum* described Syagrius as being the leader of a Roman kingdom based on Soissons, Edward James has argued that this so-called 'Kingdom of Soissons' is a creation of modern history: this likely reflects a later Merovingian era misunderstanding of the intersection between fifth century private military leadership and the territoriality of late Roman commands.[1174] According to Gregory, Syagrius' independent power was ended by Clovis, who defeated him and had him executed; any territory and resources he controlled will then have been folded into the Merovingian kingdom.[1175] Beyond the Aegidius/Syagrius faction, there are further references to an Arbogast, who seems to have controlled Trier and its environs during the 470s;[1176] a Breton/Armorican King named Riothamus in 469/72 who opposed the Visigoths;[1177] a tyrant at Rouen named Hubald;[1178] and a brief reference to Ioannes, *comes Castrodunensis*.[1179] Gaul, therefore, offers multiple examples of the process by which

[1170] Greg. Tur. II.11-12

[1171] Prisc. *fr.* 30; Hydat. 211 [217] s.a. 462; MacGeorge (2002), 89

[1172] Hydat. 220 [224], s.a. 464-5; MacGeorge (2002), 94

[1173] Cf. Bury (1958), 346

[1174] Greg. Tur. II.27; *Liber Historia Francorum* 8; James (1988), 71, 78-80; MacGeorge (2002), 111-113

[1175] Greg. Tur. II.27

[1176]Auspicius, *Ep.*; Sid. Ap. *Ep.* IV.xvii, 1-2; *PLRE* IIA, 128-129

[1177] Jord. *Get.* 237-8; Sid. Ap. *Ep*. III, 9; *PLRE* IIB, 945

[1178] *Vita Germani*, VII. 23, *AASS* May I (2 May)

[1179] *Vita Avetini*, 1-2 and 5, *AASS* (I Feb) 484-5; MacGeorge (2002), 76

military forces loyal to their commanders gradually ceased cooperating with the imperial court in Italy and began to forge their own independent path.

The situation at the centre is more complex. As we have seen, a centralised legitimate authority based on Ravenna survived from the fifth century into the sixth – indeed, it may even have grown stronger during this period. What had changed was that the political configuration focussed on the generalissimos had finally supplanted the imperial court of the Roman emperors. This was a direct consequence of the paradox of parallel autocracy, and in particular the fact that emperors no longer commanded armies. In the context of the deteriorating military and financial situation and the privatisation of violence, people invariably looked to the generalissimo who actually led the armies – and therefore provided some semblance of security – as the actual figure in charge. The political situation remained largely stable during the long supremacy of Aetius (c. 433-454), who, according to Meaghan McEvoy, appears to have enjoyed a tacit *modus vivendi* with the eastern court: if Aetius would refrain from interrupting the paternalistic claims of the court of Theodosius II over that of Valentinian III, then the east would recognise his command, titles, and consulates (432, 437, and 446).[1180] Beyond his successful military career, Aetius' political supremacy is demonstrated by the various settlements of 'barbarians' he supervised – such as those of the Alans under Sambida and Goar in the Rhone valley and Armorica respectively (440 and 442), and of the Burgundians in Savoy in 443[1181] - and of the various diplomatic efforts he engaged in - such as his ties with the court of Attila or his resolving of a disputed Frankish succession.[1182] It is also noteworthy that Valentinian III experienced no attempted usurpations during this period: either there simply weren't the resources to sustain a successful usurpation, or it was not felt politically necessary.[1183] This situation was only destabilised following the war with Attila – from which time Aetius no longer enjoyed Hunnic military backing – and with the death of Theodosius II (450). In this period, we see both Aetius's attempts to marry his son Gaudentius into the imperial family – and therefore

[1180] *PLRE* IIA, 21-29; McEvoy (2013), 254-256

[1181] *Chron. Gall.* 452 no. 124, s.a. 440, no. 127, s.a. 442, no. 128, s.a. 443

[1182] Prisc. *fr.* 7-8, 16; Greg. Tur. II.7

[1183] McEvoy (2013), 224-225; Wijnendaele (2018), 443-444

to forge a dynastic relationship similar to that attempted by Stilicho and Constantius – and Valentinian's corresponding attempts to rule in his own stead.[1184] Once both were dead, the stability of the situation rapidly unravelled.

If there is a crucial moment that exemplifies the transition from the supremacy of one political configuration – the nascent 'royal court' of Italy – over another – the western imperial court – I would argue that it is the execution/murder of Majorian by the agents of Ricimer (461).[1185] There are several reasons for this, all rooted in the western political context and in how these two leaders related to it. Turning to Majorian, we may regard this emperor as something of an anomaly for the period. Majorian's origins are obscure – he may originally have been Illyrian – although his family was almost certainly based in Italy: he was, therefore, not a product of the eastern political arena.[1186] Majorian appears to have been a competent field commander, making him the first campaigning emperor since Constantius III, and the first to rule alone for an extended period of time since Magnus Maximus.[1187] He had served as *comes domesticorum* under Valentinian III and was the last Theodosian emperor's personal choice of successor, as Valentinian had attempted to marry him to his daughter.[1188] He was clearly accepted by both the army and the senatorial aristocracy, indicated by his acclamations, and the *d.n.* (*dominus noster*) recorded in the account of his elevation in the *Fasti Vindabonenses* implies that he was recognised as legitimate by the eastern emperor, unlike Constantius III.[1189] Furthermore, Majorian issued his own series of laws, burnishing his legal credentials, and was at least initially militarily successful. He was, while he ruled, the last western emperor embedded in a specifically western political context capable of holding some semblance of the western political scene – Italy, Gaul, Dalmatia, and the Mediterranean littoral of Iberia – together as a single entity.

[1184] Ibid, 273-304; Prosper 1373

[1185] Joh. Ant. *fr.* 203; *Fast. Vind. Prior.,* s.a. 461; *Chron. Gall.* 511 no. 635; Hydat. 205 [210], s.a. 461; Marcell. *com.* s.a. 461; Evagr. *HE* II.7; Theoph. *Chron.* AM 5955

[1186] MacGeorge (2002), 172, 191

[1187] O'Flynn (1983), 110; Wijnendaele (2018), 430

[1188] *Chron. Gall.* A 511, 628; Sid. Ap. *Pan.* V, 306-8

[1189] *Fasti Vind*. *Prior*. s.a 457(2); MacGeorge (2002), 197

However, the circumstances of his reign demonstrate the difficulties of maintaining such a political unity in this period. Firstly, the fact that Majorian had displaced the Gallic emperor Avitus in order to secure the throne demonstrates the divergent political aims of Italy and Gaul. Secondly, it is clear that despite his acclamation as emperor, Ricimer remained the more secure member of the partnership. According to the *Fasti Vindabonenses*, Ricimer was confirmed as patrician on 28th February before Majorian was raised to the rank of emperor on 1st April: Majorian initially only received promotion to *magister militum.*[1190] The nature of their relationship is further evidenced by the opening paragraphs of Majorian's first law:

> "*Military matters will be the watchful concern of ourself and our parent and patrician Ricimer. We shall, by the grace of God, protect the position of the Roman world, which we liberated, by our joint vigilance, from the foreign enemy and from internal disaster" – NMaj.* I (November 1st 458)

Whilst I would agree with MacGeorge, contra O'Flynn, that there is nothing inherently peculiar in Majorian placing his own military importance alongside that of Ricimer, it is nonetheless noteworthy that Ricimer's rank and role were now necessarily maintained alongside that of the emperor, even when that emperor was competent.[1191] In the event, despite his initial successes, Majorian failed in his expedition against North Africa in 461, and was arrested and executed by Ricimer on his return to Italy.[1192] Quite why this happened is obscure. Perhaps Ricimer feared Majorian's agency; perhaps he had been unable to tolerate Majorian's wasting of what meagre resources remained available to the west; perhaps he had spied a political opportunity; or perhaps failure simply hadn't been an option.[1193] We will likely never know the answer. What is clear is that Majorian was the last western emperor worthy of the title, at least by the standards promulgated by Menander and required by the scale of the crisis facing the west. In practical terms, his death marked

[1190] *Fasti Vind. Prior.* s.a. 457 (I)

[1191] O'Flynn (1983), 109-110; MacGeorge (2002), 200 n. 105

[1192] Hydat. 195 [200], s.a. 460; 205 [210] s.a. 461; *Fast. Vind. Prior.* s.a. 461; *Chron. Gall.* a 511, 635; John. Ant. *fr.* 203; Prisc. *fr.* 36(2)

[1193] MacGeorge (2002), 206-208

the disintegration of western imperial authority both beyond the confines of Italy and Provence and, as we shall see, within Italy itself.

As regards Ricimer, it seems clear that his supremacy (457-472) was the period in which the gradual transformation of the power of western generalissimos into the nascent court of the kingdom of Italy took on a clear shape. This was a matter of political reality rather than the constitutional niceties of titulature and official competence.[1194] Certainly Ricimer never appears to have styled himself as king – he is only later referred to as 'Ricimer *rege*' by Marcellinus *comes* and as *princeps* by Ennodius, although Sidonius does refer to him as 'Italy's royalty' in his panegyric to Anthemius – but as *patricius*.[1195] It is plausible that Ricimer was referred to as *rex* by the troops of the Italian field army, in the style used by both Marcellinus *comes* and Jordanes to describe Sarus, although this has yet to be proved.[1196] This ambiguity may be a product of Ricimer's origins as the relative of the Suebian, Gothic, and Burgundian royal families – he was evidently royalty in his own right – but this is not to imply, as has been frequently argued, that Ricimer was a 'barbarian' fifth-columnist bent on betraying Roman power.[1197] Conversely, there is no reason to suppose that Ricimer was attempting to envisage a new society, as argued by Arturo Solari or Annunziata Papini, or that he was operating under a viceregal context, as argued by O'Flynn: from what we can tell from our meagre sources, Ricimer seems to have been responding purely to the political turbulence through which he lived and attempting to secure his own dominant position within it.[1198] What is clear is that Ricimer ruled Italy during his supremacy, and that several developments of import took place as a result. Firstly, it is during this period that we have the first imperial *interregna*. For four months after the

[1194] Ibid, 215-261, esp. 229-230

[1195] Marcell. *com.,* s.a. 464; Ennod. *Vita Epiph.* 51-4; Sid. Ap. *Pan.* II, 484-6; *Vita Aniani* 3 also seems to refer to Ricimer as *princeps*

[1196] Marcell. *com.* s.a. 406; Jord. *Rom*. 321

[1197] E.g., Malalas, 368; Gibbon, IV.14, 16, 24-5, etc.; Seeck (1920), p. 258; Ensslin (1930), 589; Kent (1966), 146; Oost (1970), 228; O'Flynn (1983), 104 ff; see MacGeorge (2002), 262-264; Scott (1984), 29 n.18

[1198] Solari (1938); Papini (1959); MacGeorge (2002), 263; O'Flynn (1983), 108-109, 127

death of Majorian, and for a year and a half after the death of Libius Severus, Ricimer was content to leave the throne empty.[1199] When he did elevate emperors, he twice chose civilian nonentities: Libius Severus and Olybrius. The elevation of Anthemius appears to have been geared towards securing eastern support in an expedition against Gaiseric: however, this devolved into civil war owing both to Anthemius' military failures and to his inability to accommodate Ricimer's power with his own appointees. As Penny MacGeorge notes, Ricimer was quite clearly in primary control of imperial appointments during this period.[1200] MacGeorge argues that both Agrippinus and Arvandus were likely acting on Ricimer's instructions, and the *magister officiorum* and patrician Romanus, whose execution reportedly sparked the civil war between Anthemius and Ricimer, was described by John of Antioch as one of Ricimer's appointees.[1201] Crucially, MacGeorge further argues that rule in Italy under Ricimer came geographically to be divided between the peninsula, ruled from Rome, and the north, ruled through a series of 'barbarian' military settler colonies from Milan by Ricimer.[1202] This was arguably the basis of the extension of military settlements throughout Italy under Odovacer. It is noteworthy that Ricimer rarely if ever left Italy, his power base and the locus of the Italian field army, which he now led in a privatised fashion.[1203] All of this amounts to the clear emergence of a competing political configuration – the nascent 'royal court of Italy' – based in the north on the Italian field army, capable of fully dominating western imperial authority and either mediating or competing with eastern imperial authority and its agents. This was a clear development in the process that led to the kingdoms of Odovacer and Theoderic, titulature notwithstanding.

We have then, under the brief joint rule of Ricimer and Majorian, an example of what Reinhart Kosellek termed "gleichzeitigkeit des ungleichzeitigen", or the simultaneity of the non-simultaneous: a western Roman emperor and an Italian proto-king ruling at the same time. If there is a political difference between the two, it was that Majorian's legitimacy

---

[1199] Theoph. *Chron.* AM 5947; O'Flynn (1983), 111-114

[1200] MacGeorge (2002), 222-227

[1201] John Ant. *fr.* 207 (Prisc. *fr.* 62); MacGeorge (2002), 224, 246-248

[1202] MacGeorge (2002), 252-253

[1203] O'Flynn (1983), 126

rested on an attempt to reclaim the span of the former western empire, whilst Ricimer's did not. Ricimer's royal genealogy, greater cultural closeness with his troops, and the hostility that both incurred on the part of Roman traditionalists, likely played a part in the evolution of the Italian monarchy, but it was success that really determined events: Majorian failed, so his model of rule had to be dispensed with to make Ricimer's model practicable. Without either a successful campaigning emperor or an emperor that could secure the dynastic link with the east, the west finally fell apart into feuding warlord fiefdoms in 461.[1204] The centralisation of political enforceable authority that had been gradually evolving from the position of *magister peditum* finally supplanted imperial rule under Ricimer, and was subsequently developed into the sixth century by Odovacer and the Ostrogoths, but it cost Italy the rest of the west in the process. The last western emperors were variously eastern adventurers, aristocratic non-entities, and, true to fifth-century form, a child propped up by a transient generalissimo. When Odovacer seized the position that Gundobad and Orestes had inherited from Ricimer in 476, his returning of the imperial regalia to Constantinople and his extension of land settlements was simply the recognition of a *fait accompli*: the political centralisation of legitimate enforceable authority focussed on the western Roman emperor had ceased to exist fifteen years earlier.

7.5 Conclusion

The end of the legitimate enforceable authority as exercised by the western Roman emperor and imperial court was inherently bound up in two processes. The first was the gradual replacement of a salaried Roman army paid by, and directly loyal to, the reigning emperor with a series of private armies personally loyal to their immediate commanders. The fact that both these commanders and the ranks of the armies were increasingly staffed by 'barbarian' *fœderati* is significant, although not for the traditionally assumed reasons. 'Barbarians' had long served in and commanded Roman armies, and every indication is that they largely remained both effective and loyal troops as long as they had cause to do so. The problem was that a combination of Roman jingoism and a general civilian distaste for the soldiery combined to produce profound distrust in the 'barbarian' elements of Roman

[1204] Wijnendaele (2018), 430, 446

armies. This led to any number of unfortunate incidents – Alaric's sack of Rome (410) is the most notorious – but the longer term problem was that it gave 'barbarians' little reason to aim for the restoration or continuity of the Roman state once it was no longer the dominant political force with which they had to negotiate. This was coupled with the parlous military and financial situation, and the increasing difficulty in maintaining, paying, and provisioning troops (§3.4.1.7). Given that the Romans had always treated them as a form of second-class citizen, 'barbarians' had little or no reason to remain loyal once other options – other centralised authorities – had become a possibility.

The second process was the infantilisation of imperial rule, and its gradual replacement with the rule of generalissimos who were the evolutionary forebears of the first kings of Italy. Effective imperial rule had been crucial in holding the large, complex, and geographically disparate élite groups that ran the empire together, as well as in focussing the loyalty of and paying for the armies. The elevation of dynastically legitimate but militarily and administratively incapable children, behind whom either coteries or generalissimos could operate with impunity, caused these relationships to atrophy. In the absence of the crises of the fifth century, it is conceivable that a functional, empire-wide political system may have reasserted itself in time, but this is not what happened. In the event, the parlous security and financial situation, coupled with the privatisation of violence, led to ruinous rounds of infighting, secession, and lost territory, interrupted only briefly by the dominance of generalissimos such as Stilicho, Constantius, or Aetius. Furthermore, the relative weakness of the western imperial court meant that its eastern neighbour could more easily dominate it, gradually diminishing the legitimacy of western emperors and the position they held. Once the dynastic link was lost, there was very little of imperial rule left to salvage, and the imperial centre was co-opted by the political configuration that had gradually been evolving around the generalissimos: the 'royal court of Italy'. Piece by piece, the periphery dropped out of imperial control altogether.

Whilst we are dealing with a long term process rather than a specific rupture, I would still argue that the events of 461 are a crucial inflection point. I would here agree with Jeroen Wijnendaele (2018) that, with the death of Majorian, "[t]he Roman empire finally became a

failed state in the western Mediterranean and its hinterland".[1205] It is here that the overlapping importance of active western-based imperial rule (and its final disappearance) and the emergence of the 'royal court of Italy' come quite clearly into focus. It is also the last moment at which some semblance of the former territories of the west were being held together by a Roman emperor: after Majorian, the western periphery disintegrated into a series of warlord fiefdoms.[1206] It is an unusual moment, purely because Majorian, as a seemingly active, campaigning emperor whose background was focussed on Italy was an anomaly for the fifth century. Perhaps his reign might best be seen as the exception that proves the rule: an active autocrat was crucial for holding the west together. The future would belong to Ricimer and his ultimate successors: Gundobad, Orestes, Odovacer, and, eventually, Theoderic.

[1205] Wijnendaele (2018), 431

[1206] Ibid, 430, 446

Epilogue

The above investigations, whilst overlapping in multiple ways, broadly fit into five categories: political economy (chpt.3), socioeconomics (chpt.4), administration (chpt.5), ideology (chpt.6), and politics (chpt.7). Having concluded each investigation separately, we must now compare and contrast our findings. Firstly, we must see if an 'end' has been determined, and if so, when and in what way. Secondly, in the interest of pedagogy, we must attempt to discern a more appropriate apocryphal end-date for the western Roman state. Again, this is not the actual 'end': it is intended as a more appropriate catechism than 476. Thirdly, we must assess what our findings mean for the validity of structuralism – the focus on the interrelationship between human beings and the social, political, and economic structures they erect - as an approach to the subject.

Based on our investigations, I think it is fair to say that an 'end' – or, in other words, a meaningful rupture - to the western Roman state is only really discernible from the perspectives of politics, political economy, and the upper strata of the socioeconomic spectrum. In other words, this refers to the structures of 'the State' in the post—Hobbesian sense: the imperial court, complex provincial administrative superstructure, tax-system, and standing army. In political terms, we can see the diminution of imperial authority dovetailing with the increasing reliance on 'barbarians' to fill out the army, coupled with the encroachment and settlement of 'barbarian' groups within imperial territory (§§3.4.1 / 7.3.2 / 7.4). This led inexorably to the emergence of new centres of legitimate enforceable authority in both the peripheries and centre of the empire in the fifth century, centres that had little reason to attempt to resurrect the empire from which they had co-opted power (§§3.4.1 / 7.4.4). Piece by piece, this entailed the end of the structures of provincial administration and the communication of officials and normative authority between centre and periphery (§5.4). However, the end of imperial power did not entail the actual end of centralised legitimate authority anywhere except Britain: in Italy, Gaul, Iberia, and North Africa, monarchies continued to exercise authority in complex hierarchical states that recycled a great deal of late Roman precedent (§§ 3.4.1 / 5.4). With regard to political economy, the invasions and general military unrest of the fifth century greatly destabilised

the tax-system (§3.4.1). In the long term, this system was never adequately salvaged, and its gradual disintegration defines the *longue durée* of late antique statecraft. Again, this did not wholly end resource management for rulers. Instead, we find that resource management was fundamentally altered, albeit slowly, by the transition from a tax-based to a land-based system of military service. Initially, this focussed resources onto the personal treasuries of post-Roman kings, which reinforced courts as the nexus for political activity and favour. In the long term, however, taxation had been removed from its original context, and thus atrophied as a matter of statecraft. Lastly, we note that the hyper-wealthy of the late Roman senatorial order on the level of the Anicii or Petronii ceased to exist in the post-Roman period, probably due to the impossibility of landowning on the same geographical scale and the shifting intensity of exploitation (§4.4, esp. 4.4.1.2). Clearly, both the infrastructural scale and fiscal motor of the Roman state was required for this level of wealth to be possible. With that being said, wide socioeconomic divergence still existed: kings and aristocrats like Bertram of Le Mans may not have owned across the whole of what had been the western empire, but they remained fabulously wealthy in comparison to the average tenant farmer (§4.4.1.4).

By contrast, if we examine both the remainder of our socioeconomic and administrative evidence, we find a world characterised more by gradual disintegration than rupture. Regarding the former, the basic model of late Roman societies – tenant farmers being exploited by aristocrats – remained consistent (§4.3). What changed was that, in the context of the weaker despotic and infrastructural power of post-Roman states, peasantries had more opportunity to escape direct aristocratic control. This was a corollary of the disintegration of long-range networks of exchange for goods of middling productive quality, best evidenced by the remaining ceramic evidence (§4.4.1.1-7). Again, the Roman state was clearly needed to underwrite long-range sophisticated exchange and aristocratic control, and its absence clearly caused these structures to atrophy in the long-term. Our administrative evidence speaks to a similar process. Post-Roman states clearly attempted to maintain the same format for governance as their predecessor in terms of tax-raising, lawgiving, and war-making backed up by bureaucratisation, but their capacity to do so was fundamentally affected by the transition from a tax-based to a land-based system of military service (§5.4.1-5). The result was a long-term reduction in bureaucratisation and

specialisation leading into the Carolingian period. However, governmental specialisation of a Roman type certainly never vanished, and existed as a basis upon which medieval statecraft could be built. Lastly, in the realm of ideology we find the most pronounced continuity from the Roman period onwards. The exact terms and participants may have changed, but we find the same attempt to balance an underlying notion of popular sovereignty with the political reality of competition between monarchs and élites (§6.5.1-4). This would not change demonstrably until the onset of the Carolingian period.

The fate of Britain forms both a corollary and a contrast to the above picture, and we must consider the ways in which the island conformed and varied to the above trends. As discussed in section §3.4.1.1, it is difficult to discern why Britain seems to have suffered a more precipitous collapse than elsewhere, but the withdrawal of the army, coupled with the Romano-British élite's integration into and dependence on the tax system that supplied the army, must be a crucial factor. From the perspective of conformity, we should stress that we are not dealing with the total collapse of all British societies in the fifth century and after. Land surveys still indicate that agriculture continued on broadly the same format, and inhumation burials often sport lavish grave goods – the Sutton Hoo find being the most famous – that prove the presence of élites. Indeed, a less fractured picture of continuity may have been possible, but sadly the archaeological surveys of the nineteenth century lacked the finesse of their modern counterparts, and it is likely that a great deal of evidence is now not recoverable. Hope remains though, as the recent mosaic find at Chedworth demonstrates: evidently there was both a late Roman aristocracy and the necessary craft specialisation to produce such work in the mid- to late-fifth century, and we should not discount the possibility of other examples emerging. Ultimately, hiving Britain off from the Continent by treating its post-Roman state structures as different is a judgement call: considering that recognisable states did re-emerge in the eighth century and after, one might be tempted to wonder at the extent to which it was necessary.

The difference between Britain and the Continent lies more than anywhere else in scale, although cultural discontinuity is also a factor. I would suggest strongly that in the intervening two centuries between the end of direct Roman rule and the emergence of a more stable Mercian polity, we are dealing with a shifting landscape of chiefdoms rather

than states. The evidence for economic breakdown is unmistakeable: however wealthy the owner of the Sutton Hoo armour was when he was buried, his successors seem to have gotten progressively less wealthy in correspondence with the environment into which they had introduced themselves (based on their own grave goods, at least). Similarly, whilst landscape patterns remained consistent, the settlement hierarchy seems negligible; doubtless there were élites, but a stable, self-perpetuating aristocracy had yet to emerge. From a cultural perspective, it is noteworthy that the earliest Anglo-Saxon legal codes were written in the vernacular, by contrast to their Continental counterparts, and seem not to have been influenced by the content of their Roman antecedents (although doubtless the form proved salutary). Similarly, it is notable that, as clerical literacy gradually increased, formal Latin grammar handbooks had to be reproduced in Britain, suggesting that knowledge of Latin had rapidly fallen into abeyance in the fifth and sixth centuries.[1207] However, the simple truth is that a great deal of this perspective is based on the unfortunate absence of a direct political narrative for the immediate post-Roman centuries, barring, of course, the fragments we glean from clerical accounts. The impression of an unstable mosaic of warring chiefdoms stems directly from these: the extent to which it is entirely accurate is somewhat unknowable. I would argue, in light of the current evidence, that Britain is a useful test case with which to contrast Continental successor states, as the process of disintegration was more sudden, more extreme, and took longer to remedy.

It falls to us now to finally ask if a better apocryphal date for 'the end of the western Roman state' than 476 exists. Again, I would argue that 461 – and specifically the events following the execution of Majorian by Ricimer – mark a better apocryphal threshold. This is not to say that 461 is the actual 'end of the western Roman state' any more than 476 was: it is, however, a more structurally appropriate apocryphal date for the moment at which the western empire became, in the words of Jeroen Wijnendaele, "a failed state in the Western Mediterranean and its hinterland".[1208] This makes the most sense from a political perspective (§7.4.4). Majorian was the last western emperor to fulfil the criteria for an active autocrat as laid down in contemporary panegyrics who was actually embedded in the

[1207] Heather (2023), 235-295

[1208] Wijnendaele (2018), 431

western political scene. Ricimer, by contrast, was an important step on the continuum by which the position of *magister peditum* evolved into the kingship of Italy. The execution of the former by the latter, and the subsequent interregnum, demonstrated that the western imperial political centre had finally become obsolete before emperors officially ceased to reign over the west. Furthermore, 461 is the last year in which it can realistically be claimed that the western centre exercised direct control over the peripheries in Iberia, Gaul, and Dalmatia. This relates to the importance of Majorian's origins in the western political arena: without him, or someone like him, at the centre, the peripheries of the empire finally split off into non-aligned warlord fiefdoms headed by the likes of Aegidius and Marcellinus. Furthermore, 461 is the last year in which we have clearly attested evidence for the transferral of officials between Gaul, Iberia, and Italy (§5.4.1-4). This suggests that the political fragmentation was matched administratively. A semblance of the imperial centre did continue in Italy into the sixth century, but this was now dominated by a royal court of Italy in infrequent competition with the eastern court in Constantinople: the western centre had disappeared as a source of genuine authority. I would argue, therefore, that 461 is a more appropriate apocryphal date for the political and administrative moment at which the peripheries of the west separated from the centre, and at which point power in the centre ceased to be effectively wielded by the imperial court. This gives it more structural importance by far than the moment at which a child was packed off into an early retirement by the man who already ruled Italy anyway.

Finally, we must address the appropriateness of a structuralist approach to the 'end of the western Roman state'. As we have seen, structuralism is an effective way of analysing state disintegration from a political, administrative, and economic perspective. If we apply structuralist methodologies – political, institutional, and socioeconomic history, for example – we find that we can chart the disintegration of the western Roman state across the span of the west in the fifth and sixth centuries. However, this refers to 'the State' in the post-Hobbesian sense. When we turn to 'the state' in the Rousseauist sense, our evidence points to broad continuity in social structure, ideology, and fundamental administrative practice from the late Roman to the Carolingian era, albeit a continuity defined by gradual simplification. In the introduction, I argued that Wickham's approach to state formation essentially committed structuralist historians to frame their findings within a broadly

continuist viewpoint. I would argue that our results have borne this assumption out when it comes to state deformation as well. Whatever way we look at it, we are looking at broad continuity on all but the level of macro-structures. With that being said, this continuity was not a stasis: it was instead one defined by disintegration and simplification resulting primarily from the end of the tax-system. The question for the field of late antiquity is whether or not the continuity upon which the whole period is built can be defined by oscillating disintegration or not. If not, then a structuralist approach would imply the prioritisation of "the later empire" as a peak of structural consolidation counterposed with what succeeded it, although I would admit that this is much too stark for a picture of such broad continuity. In addition, I also reflected on the fact that our methodological approach frequently conditions the outcomes we generate. Based on our findings, we might say that structuralism is most appropriate for assessing macro-structures; conversely, perhaps these most sharply come into focus purely because of the methodologies employed, and we are simply chasing our own tail? However, I would argue that, beyond macro-structures like military and fiscal policy, structuralism is also effective at analysing all the way down to what evidence we have for peasant societies and local ceramic networks; it remains effective across the board. If it has weaknesses, it is in determining behaviour on the level of the micro-realities to which Wickham's work pointed, which are never absolutely determined by structures: humans are never entirely predictable. Structuralism can contextualize these micro-realities, but is not efficient at analysing them: this is where a culturalist approach is more appropriate.

Appendix I: Military Campaigns 364-476

YEAR	LAUNCHED BY	AGAINST	COMPOSITION (IF KNOWN)	RESULT	SOURCE
365-375	Valentinian I	Alemanni	Roman army	Successful?	Amm. Marc. XXVII.10; XXVIII.2.1-9, 5; XXIX.4; XXX.3
375	Valentinian I / Merobaudes	Quadi	Roman army	Aborted	Amm. Marc. XXIX.6.1-16; XXX.5-6
367	Theodosius *comes*	Picts/Scots/Irish/Pirates	Roman army	Successful	Amm. Marc. XXVII.8; XXVIII.3
372	Theodosius *comes*	Firmus	Roman army	Successful	Amm. Marc. XXVIII.6; XXIX.5
375-378	Gratian	Lentienses	Roman army	Successful	Amm. Marc. XXXI.10-12
376-378	Frigeridus / Richomeres	Goths	Roman army	Stalemate	Amm. Marc. XXXI.7
381	Bauto / Arbogast	Goths	Roman army	Inconclusive	Zos. IV.33.1-2
383	Magnus Maximus	Gratian	Roman army	Skirmishing/no major battle	Zos. IV.35.4-5
387	Magnus Maximus	Valentinian II	Roman army	No resistance	Zos. IV.42-43
388	Magnus Maximus	Theodosius I	Roman army	Siscia/Poetovia - defeated	Zos. IV.46.3

394	Arbogast	Theodosius I	Roman army	Frigidus River - defeated	Zos. IV.58.2-4
395	Stilicho	Alaric	Roman army	Unstated/inconclusive	Claud. *In Ruf.* II 171f, esp., 185-7, 196-7; Eunap. *fr.* 63, 64; Zos. V.4-5
397	Stilicho	Alaric	Roman army	Unstated/inconclusive	Claud. *de IV Cos. Hon.* 459-83; Eunap. *fr.* 64; Zos. V.6.3-4
398	Stilicho / Mascazel	Gildo	Roman expeditionary force (5,000 men)	Successful	Zos. V.11.2; Oros. VII.36.2-6; Claud. *Gild.* 415-423
402	Stilicho	Alaric	Roman army (Gallic & British reserves)	Pollentia/Verona; successful – Alaric withdrew	Claud. *de Bell. Get.*550f; Oros. VII.37.2; Claud. *de VI Cos. Hon.* 204f
405-407	Stilicho	Radagaisus	Roman army + hastily recruited provincials and slaves + Gothic, Alanic, and Hunnic *fœderati*	Fæsulae; successful	Zos. V.26.3-5; Oros. VII.37.4-16; *Chron. Min.* I 299; *CTh*. VII.13.16-17 (April 17/19 406); Olymp. *fr.* 9
407-408	Stilicho / Sarus	Constantine III	Sarus's *fœderati*	Initially successful + withdrawal	Zos. VI.2.3-7

405	Alaric	Epirus	Alaric's *fœderati*	Aborted	Olymp. *fr.* 1.2 (Sozomen 9.4.2-4), p. 155; Zos. V.29.1, 9
410	Alaric	Ravenna	Alaric's *fœderati*	Aborted	Zos. VI.7-9; Olymp. *fr.* 10 (Philostorgius 12.3; Procop. *Bell.* 3.2.28-30)
407	Constantine III	Gaul / 'barbarian' invaders	British field army	Successful	Zos. V.27.2-3, VI.2; Oros. VII.40.4-5
408	Constantine III / Gerontius / Constans	Iberia	British field army	Successful (?)	Zos. VI.4; Oros. VII.40.7-10
408-409	Olympius	Reinforcement of Ravenna	6,000 troops from Dalmatia under Valens	Successful	Zos. V.45.1-2
409	Olympius	Athaulf / Gothic reinforcements	300 Hunnic auxiliaries	Successful minor skirmish	Zos. V.45.6
409-410	Honorius	Alaric	10,000 Hunnic *fœderati*	Forces never arrived	Zos. V.50.1
409-410	Priscus Attalus	Heraclianus	Constans – expedition reportedly undermanned	Defeated	Zos.VI.7-9; Olymp. *fr.* 10 (Sozomen. 9.8.)
411	Gerontius	Constantine III / Constans	Extensive use of *fœderati*	Successful	Oros. VII.42.4; Olymp. *fr.* 17.1-2 (*Bibl.*

					Cod. 80; Sozomen 9.13.1-15.3)
411	Constantius / Ulfila	Constantine III / Arles	Unstated	Successful	Oros. VII.42.3; Olymp. *fr.* 17.1-2
414-415	Constantius	Goths	Naval blockade of Narbonne and Barcelona	Successful	Oros. VII.43.1
415 - 418	Wallia	Vandals / Suebi / Alans in Iberia	Gothic army	Successful	Oros. VII.42.13; Hydat. 55 [63], 59 [67], s.a. 417-418
413	Heraclianus	Ravenna	Roman army	Utriculum; defeated	Oros. VII.42.12-14; Hydat. 48 [56], s.a. 413; Olymp. *fr*. 21 (Philostorgius 12.6)
420	Asterius	Vandals / Maximus	Unstated	Successful against Maximus / less so against the Vandals	Hydat. 66 [74], s.a. 420
422	Castinus	Vandals	Roman army + Gothic *fœderati*	Unsuccessful, possibly owing to treachery of Goths	Hydat. 69 [77], s.a. 422
425	Exsuperantius	Armorican *bagaudae*	Unstated	Successful?	*Chron. Min.* I (*Chron. Gall*. 97.II, a. 425);

					Rut. Nam. *de red. suo.* I 213-216; Zos. VI.5.3
422	Boniface	Africa / African 'barbarians'?	Small force of auxiliaries	Successful?	Olymp. *fr.* 38, 40; Augustine, *Ep.* 220
432	Boniface	Aetius	Unstated	Rimini; successful but Boniface mortally wounded	Prosper, s.a. 432; *Chron. Gall.* 452 no. 111 (s.a. 432), Hydat. 89 [99] s.a. 432; Marcell. *com.* s.a. 432; John Ant. *fr.* 201.3
424	Felix / Sigisvult	Boniface	Two expeditionary forces	First unsuccessful; second takes Carthage and Hippo	*Chron. Min.* I (Prosper 1295, a. 427; *Chron. Gall.* 96, a. 424)
425	Aetius	Candidianus / Aspar	60,000 Hunnic mercenaries	Stalemate	Olymp. *fr.* 43.1
427	Aetius	Arles	Unstated	Relieves Visigothic siege	*Chron. Min.* I (Prosper 1290, a. 425/*Chron. Gall.* 102.IIII, a. 427)
428	Aetius	Franks	Unstated	Reclaims some Gallic territory	*Chron. Min.* I (Prosper 1298, a. 428)

431	Aetius	Nori *bagaudae* (?)	Unstated	Successful	Hydat. 85 [95], s.a. 431
432	Aetius	Boniface	Unstated	Rimini; defeated and retreats to Gaul	*Chron. Min.* I (Prosper 1310, a. 432/*Chron. Gall.* 111, a. 432) pp. 473, 658; Hydat. 89 [99], s.a. 432
435-437	Aetius / Goar	Tibatto / Armorican *bagaudae*	Alanic *fœderati*	Successful	*Chron. Min.* I (Prosper 117.XII, 119.XIIII); *Vita Germani* 28, 40
435-437	Aetius	Burgundians	Hunnic *fœderati*	Successful	*Chron. Min.* I (Prosper 1322, a. 435/*Chron. Gall.* 118.XIII, a. 436) pp. 475, 660; *CIL* VI.41389
451	Aetius	Attila	Composite force of *fœderati*	Cataulanian Plains; successful; stalemate; Attila withdraws	Priscus, *fr.* 21.1-2; Jordanes, *Get.* 191
436-439	Litorius	Visigoths	Hunnic *fœderati*	Successful campaigns until the end, when Litorius was defeated	*Chron. Min.* I (Prosper 1324, a. 436; 1326, a. 437; 1333, a. 438;

					1335/1338, a. 439); Hydat. *Chron*. 108
441	Asturius	Tarraconensian *bagaudae*	Unstated	Inconclusive	Hydat. *Chron*. 117
443	Merobaudes	Tarraconensian *bagaudae*	Unstated	Inconclusive	Hydat. *Chron.* 120
446	Vitus	Carthaginiensian / Baetican rebels / Suebi	Substantial force of soldiers + Gothic *fœderati*	Defeated by Suebi under Rechila	Hydat. *Chron.* 126
456	Avitus	Ricimer	Unstated	Defeated, Placentia Oct. 17th	*Chron. Min.* I (*Consularia Italica* 579-580.1-2); Joh. Ant. 202; Greg. Tur. *HF*. II.11
456	Ricimer	Vandal raiders in Sicily	Unstated	Successful	Hydat. 169 [176], s.a. 456-7; Sid. Ap. *Carm*. II. 351-355
459-460	Majorian	Goths	Unstated	Prevented Gothic looting; possibly won a battle against the Goths	Hydat. 192 [197], s.a. 459
461	Majorian	Vandals	Unstated	Defeated; Vandals destroyed invasion fleet	Hydat. 195 [200], s.a. 460

457-460	Marcellinus	Vandals in Sicily	Hunnic *fœderati*	Successful?	Prisc. fr. 29; Procop. *Bell.* III.6.1-2, V.2.5
465-468	Marcellinus	Vandals	Unstated	Commanded the western portion of the naval invasion defeated at Cape Bon.	Procop. *Bell*. I. vi.; Hydat. 223 [227], s.a. 465
467-469	Anthemius / Paulus	Goths	Composite army	Prevented Euric from crossing the Loire; empire lost territory	*LRE* I, 243
467-469	Anthemius / Anthemiolus	Goths	Unstated	Defeated by the Goths besieging Arles	*LRE* I, 243
470-472	Ricimer	Anthemius	6,000 men gathered for war against the Vandals	Defeated Bilimer, sacked Rome, killed Anthemius	John Ant. *fr.* 207 (Priscus *fr.* 62); Cass. *Chron*. 1293, s.a. 472; Gelasius, *Adversus Andromachum* col. 115
473	Julius Nepos	Glycerius	Unstated	Successful; no resistance?	John Ant. 209.2
475	Julius Nepos	Goths	Unstated	Goths exchange two cities for Clermont Ferrand	*LRE* I, 244

Bibliography

Abbreviations

AASS	*Acta Sanctorum*, ed. J. Bollandus *et al.* (Antwerp, Tongerloo, Paris, Brussels, 1643-1925)
CAH XIII	*The Cambridge Ancient History, Volume 13: The Late Empire, AD 337-425*, Averil Cameron, Peter Garnsey (eds.), (published online 2008)
CAH XIV	*The Cambridge Ancient History, Volume 14: Late Antiquity, Empire and Successors, AD 425-600*, eds. Averil Cameron, Bryan Ward-Perkins, Michael Whitby, (published online 2008)
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina
CDL	*Codex diplomaticus Langobardiae*, ed. G. Porro-Lambertenghi (Turin, 1873)
CIL	*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* (Berlin, 1863-)
CSEL	*Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* (Vienna, 1866-)
CSHB	*Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae* (Bonn, 1828-97)
Gr. Schr.	*Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte* (Leipzig, 1897-1941; Leipzig and Berlin, 1953; Berlin, 1954-)
ILERV	*Inscriptiones Latinas de la España romana y visigoda*, ed. J. Vives, 2 Vols. (Barcelona, 1971-1972)
ILS	*Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae*, ed. H Dessau (Berlin, 1892-1916)
IRVT	*Inscripcions romanes de Valentia I el seu territori*, ed. J. Corell (Valencia, 1997)
JRS	*The Journal of Roman Studies*
LRE	Jones, A.H.M. (1964), *The Later Roman Empire 284-602: A Social Economic and Administrative Survey*, 3 Vols. and Maps (Blackwell)
MGH	*Monumenta Germaniae Historica* (*Auctores Antiquissimi*), ed. Th. Mommsen (Berlin,1892)
MGH SRM	*Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum*
PBSR	Papers of the British School at Rome

PG	*Patrologia Graeca*, ed. J.P. Migne (Paris, 1862)
PL	*Patrologia Latina*, J.P. Migne (Paris, 1841-65)
PLRE	*The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, A.H.M. Jones and J.R. Martindale, Vols. IA-B, IIA-B (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1980)
RIC	*The Roman Imperial Coinage*, Vols 10-11, Kent, J.P.C, Carson, R.A.G., Burnett, A.M. (eds.) (Spink & Son, London, 1994)

<u>Primary Sources</u>

Agath.	Agathius, *Historiarum libri V*, *CSHB*
Aistulf	*Leges Aistulfi*, ed. F. Beyerle, *Leges Langobardorum 643-866*, (Witzenhausen, 1962), 194-204
Albelda Chronicle	*Albelda Chronicle*, trans. and ed. Y. Bonnaz, *Chroniques Asturiennes (fin IXe siècle)* (Paris, 1987), 10-30
Amb. *De Off.*	Ambrose, *On the Duties of the Clergy,* trans. H. de Romestin, E. de Romestin, and H.T.F. Duckworth, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series* Volume 10, Schaff and Wace (eds.) (Buffalo, NY, 1896)
Amb. *de ob Theod.*	Ambrose, *de obitu Theodosii*, *CSEL* LXXIII., 371-401
Amb. *de ob. Val.*	Ambrose, *de obitu Valentiniani Iunioris*, *CSEL* LXXIII, pp. 329-367
Amm. Marc.	Ammianus Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire (A.D. 354-378)*, trans. Walter Hamilton (1986/2004) (London, Penguin)
Anon.	Anonymous, *De Rebus Bellicis* in *A Roman Reformer and Inventor* (1952), trans. E.A. Thompson (Clarendon Press, Oxford)
Anon. Val.	Anonymous Valesianus, *Excerpta Valesiana*, *Chron. Min.* I, *MGH* IX 249 ff.
Anthol. Lat.	*Anthologia Latina*, I, ed. A. Riese (Leipzig, 1869)
Athan. *Hist. Ar.*	Athanasius, *History of the Arians*, trans. M. Atkinson and A. Robertson, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second series, Vol. 4, (Buffalo, NY, 1892)
Aug. *Conf.*	Augustine, *Confessiones*, *CSEL* XXXIII
Aug. *Ep.*	*The Letters of Saint Augustine: Annotated Edition*, J.G. Cunningham (South Carolina, 2015)

Aug. *de op. Mon.* Augustine, *de opera Monachorum*, *CSEL* XLI, pp. 531-595

Aug. *Civ. Dei.* Augustine, *de Civitate Dei*, *CSEL* XL

Aur. Vict. *Caes*. (Ps-) Sextus Aurelius Victor, *Epitome De Caesaribus*, trans. T.M. Banchich (Buffalo, NY, 2009)

Auspicius, *Ep.* Auspicius of Toul, *Epistola, Versibus Expressa, ad Arbogastem comitem Trevirorum*, *PL* LCI pp. 1005-1008

Basil, *Ep.* Basil of Caesaria, *Letters*, trans. B. Jackson, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers,* Second Series, Vol. 8 (Buffalo NY, 1895)

Basil, *Homil. In divites* Basil of Caesaria, *Homilia in divites*, *PG* XXXI.293-296

Caesar, *B. Gall.* Gaius Julius Caesar, *Commentaries on the Gallic War*, trans. W.A. McDevitte and W.S. Bohn (New York, Harper & Brothers 1869)

Candidus Candidus, *Fragmenta*, trans. R.C. Blockley in *The Fragmentary Classicising Historians of the Later Roman Empire: Eunapius, Olympiodorus, Priscus and Malchus*, Vol. II, (1983/repr. 2007) (Francis Cairns, GB)

Cartulary of Falvigny *The cartulary of Falvigny, 717-1113*, ed. C.B. Bouchard (Cambridge, MA, 1991)

Cap. Mer. *Capitularia Merowingica,* ed., A. Boretius, *MGH*, *Capitularia regnum Francorum* 1 (Hannover, 1883)

Cass. *Chron.* Cassiodorus, *Chronica* in *Chronica Minora* 2, 109-62

Cass. *Var.* Cassiodorus, Selected *Variae*, trans. S.J.B. Barnish, Translated Texts for Historians, Vol. 12 (Liverpool University Press, Liverpool)

Cassius Dio Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, trans. E. Cary (Harvard University Press, 1914-1927)

ChLA *Chartae latinae antiquiores*, 1st series, 49 vols., general ed. A. Bruckner and R. Marichal (Olten and Zürich, 1954-1998)

Chron. Alf. III *Chronicle of Alfonso III*, ed. and trans. Y. Bonnaz, *Chroniques Asturiennes (fin IXe siècle)*, (Paris, 1987), 31-59

Chron. Gall. *Chronica Gallica* a. CCCCLII, *MGH* IX

Chron. Min. *Chronica Minora* (=*MGH (AA)* IX, XI, XIII) (ed. Th. Mommsen)

Chron. Pasch.	*Chronicon Paschale 284-628 AD*, trans. M. Whitby and M. Whitby (Liverpool University Press, Liverpool, 1989)
Cicero, *de Rep.*	Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De Re Publica*, trans. C.W. Keyes (1928), attalus.org
CJ.	The Codex of Justinian, 3 Vols., trans. Justice Fred H. Blume, ed. Bruce W. Frier (2016) (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge)
Claud.	Claudius Claudianus (Claudian), 2 Vols., trans. Maurice Platnauer (Cambridge, MA, 1927)
Codice Bavaro	*Breviarium ecclesiae Ravennatis (Codice Bavaro), secoli VII-X*, ed. G. Rabotti (Rome, 1985)
Coll. Avell.	*Collectio Avellana*, *CSEL* XXXV
Columella	Columella, *De re rustica*, Vol. I, trans. Harrison Boyd Ash (Cambridge MA, 1941)
Cons. Caes.	*Consularia Caesaraugustana*, ed. C. Cardelle de Hartmann, *CCSL* 173A (Turnhout, 2001)
Cons. Const.	*Consularia Constantinopolitana*, trans. R.W. Burgess in *The Chronicle of Hydatius and the Consularia Constantinopolitana: Two Contemporary Accounts of the Final Years of the Roman Empire* (1993) (Clarendon Press, Oxford)
Cons. Ital.	*Consularia Italica* in *Chronica Minora* I, 249-336
CTh.	The Theodosian Code in C. Pharr (trans.), *The Theodosian Code and Novels and the Sirmondian Constitutions* (New York, 1952)
Dio	Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, trans. E. Cary (Harvard University Press, 1914-1927)
Einhard	Einhard, *Vita Karoli Magni*, ed. O. Holder-Egger, *MGH SRM*; trans. P.E. Dutton, *Carolingian Civilization: A Reader* (Peterborough, Ontario, 1993), 24-42
Ennodius, *Ep.*	Ennodius, *Epistulae*, *CSEL* VI
Ennodius, *Vit. Epiph.*	Ennodius, *The Life of Saint Epiphanius*, *CSEL* VI
Eugippius, *Vit. Sev.*	Eugippius, *The Life of Saint Severinus*, trans. G.W. Robinson (Harvard University Press, 1914), tertullian.org

Eunap.	Eunapius, *Testimonia*, trans. R.C. Blockley in *The Fragmentary Classicising Historians of the Later Roman Empire: Eunapius, Olympiodorus, Priscus and Malchus*, Vol. II, (1983/repr. 2007) (Francis Cairns, GB)
Eus. *Laud. Const.*	Eusebius, *Oration in Praise of Constantine*, trans. E.C. Richardson (Buffalo, NY, 1890)
Eutr. *Brev*.	Eutropius, *Abridgment of Roman History*, trans. J.S. Watson (London, George Bell & Sons, 1886)
Evagr. *HE.*	Evagrius*, Historia Ecclesiastica*, trans. E. Walford (London, 1846)
Exc. Val.	*Excerpta Valesiana*, ed. J. Moreau and V. Velkov, 2nd edn (Leipzig, 1968)
Fast. Vind. Prior.	*Fasti Vindobonenses Priores*, *MGH* IX
Ferr. *Vit. Fulg.*	Ferrandus of Carthage, *Vita beati Fulgentii pontificis*, ed. G.-G. Lapeyre, *Vie de Saint Fulgence de Ruspe de Ferrand, diacre de Carthage* (Paris, 1929)
Form. Wis.	*Formulae Wisigothicae*, ed. J. Gil, *Miscellanea wisigothica* (Seville, 1972), 70-112
Fred.	Fredegar, *Chronicle*, ed., B. Krusch, *MGH*, *SRM* 2
Gelasius	Pope Gelasius I, *Against Andromachus and the Other Romans who hold that the Lupercalia should be celebrated according to the Ancient Custom* in *Coll. Avell.* 100
Geront. *V. Mel.*	Gerontius, *Vita Melaniae*, trans. Gorce, D. (Paris, 1962)
Greg. *Ep*.	Pope Gregory the Great, *Registrum epistolarum*, ed. P. Ewald and L.M. Hartmann, *MGH*, *Epp.*, I, II (Berlin, 1887-1899)
Greg. Tur.	Gregory of Tours, *The History of the Franks*, Trans. L. Thorpe (London, Penguin, 1974)
Gildas	Gildas, *de excidio et conquest Britanniae*, *MGH (AA)* XIII., 25-85
Hydat.	Hydatius, *Chronicle*, trans. R.W. Burgess in *The Chronicle of Hydatius and the Consularia Constantinopolitana: Two Contemporary Accounts of the Final Years of the Roman Empire* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1993)

Isidore, *Hist. Goth.* Isidore of Seville, *History of the Kings of the Goths, Vandals, and Suevi*, trans. G. Donini and G.B. Ford (Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1966)

Isidore, *Etym.* Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, ed. W.M. Lindsay (Oxford, 1910)

Jerome, *Chron.* Jerome, *Chronicle*, R. Helm, *Gr. Schr.* Vol. 24

Jerome, *Ep.* Jerome, *Epistulae*, *CSEL* LIV-LVI

John Ant. John of Antioch, *Fragmenta, FHG* IV.538-622; V.27-38

Joh. Lydus, *Mag.* John Lydus, *On the Magistracies of the Roman People,* trans. T.F. Carney (Lawrence, Kans., Coronado Press, 1971)

Joh. Lydus, *Mens.* John Lydus, *De Mensibus* (On the Months), trans. Mischa Hooker (2012)

Joh. Chrys. *Hom. In Gen* John Chrysostom, *Homiliae in Genesium*, *PG* LIII-LIV,

Joh. Chrys. *Hom. In Matt.* John Chrysostom, *Homiliae in Matthaeum*, *PG* LVII-LVIII

John of Biclar John of Biclar, *Chronicon*, ed. C. Cardelle de Hartmann, *CCSL* 173A (Turnhout, 2001), 59-83

Jord. *Rom.* Jordanes, *Romana*, trans. P. Van Nuffelen and L. Van Hoof in *Translates Texts for Historians* Vol. 75 (Liverpool University Press, 2020)

Jord. *Get.* Jordanes, *Getica*, trans. P. Van Nuffelen and L. Van Hoof in *Translates Texts for Historians* Vol. 75 (Liverpool University Press, 2020)

Jul. *Ep. ad Ath.* Julian, *Letter to the Athenians*, trans. Wilmer Cave Wright (1913), 2 vols., transcribed by Roger Pearse (2010), tertullian.org

Jul., *Hist. Wam. Reg.* Julian of Toledo, *Historia Wambae Regis*, ed. W. Levison, *MGH SRM* 5, (Hannover 1910), 486-535

Just. *Dig.* *The Digest of Justinian*, translated and edited by Alan Watson (Philadelphia, 1985)

Just. *Nov.* *The Novels of Justinian: A Complete Annotated English Translation*, D.J.D Miller and P. Sarris (eds.) (Cambridge University Press, 2018)

Lex Alemannorum *Lex Alemannorum*, ed. K. Lehmann, *MGH*, *Leges* 5, 1; trans. T.J. Rivers, *Laws of the Alemans and Bavarians* (Philadelphia, 1977)

Lex Baiwariorum — *Lex Baiwariorum*, ed., F. Beyerle and R. Buchner, *MGH*, *Leges* 3, 2; trans., T.J. Rivers, *Laws of the Alamans and Bavarians* (Philadelphia, 1977)

Lex Ribuaria — *Lex Ribuaria*, ed. F. Beyerle and R. Buchner, *MGH*, *Leges* 3, 2; trans., T.J. Rivers, *Laws of the Salian and Ripuarian Franks* (New York, 1986)

Lib. Const. — *Liber Constitutionum*, ed. L.R. von Salis, *Leges Burgundionum*, *MGH*, *Leges* 2, 1; trans. K.F. Drew, *The Burgundian Code* (Philadelphia, 1940)

Liber Historiae Francorum — *Liber Historiae Francorum*, ed., B. Krusch, *MGH*, *SRM* 2; trans, B. Bachrach (Lawrence, Kansas, 1973)

Lib. *Or.* — Libanius, *Orationes,* trans. A.F. Norman, Loeb Classical Library 451, 2 vols. (Harvard University Press, 1969)

Lib. Pont. — *Liber Pontificalis (pars prior), MGH* (*Gest. Pont. Rom.*) I

Liutprand — *Leges Liutprandi*, ed. F. Beyerle, *Leges Langobardorum 643-866* (Witzenhausen, 1962), 99-182

LV — *Forum Iudicum*, or *The Visigothic Code*, ed. S.P. Scott (Boston, 1910)

Malalas — John Malalas, *Chronographia*, *CSHB*

Malchus — Malchus, *Testimonia*, trans. R.C. Blockley in *The Fragmentary Classicising Historians of the Later Roman Empire: Eunapius, Olympiodorus, Priscus and Malchus*, Vol. II, (1983/repr. 2007) (Francis Cairns, GB)

Marc. *Form*. — Marculf, *Formulary*, ed., K. Zeumer, *MGH*, *Formulae*

Marcell. *com.* — Marcellinus *comes*, *The Chronicle of Marcellinus*, trans. B. Croke, *Byzantina Australiensia* 7

Max. Taur. *Sermo.* — Maximus of Turin, *Sermones, PL* LVII. 531-760

Mer. *Pan.* — Merobaudes, *Panegyricorum in consulatus Aetii fragmenta*, trans. F.M. Clover, *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 61, No. 1 (1971)

Not. Dig. Occ. — *Notitia Dignitatum Occidentalis*, trans. W. Fairley, *Translations and Reprints from Original Sources of European History* (Vol. 6:4) (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 1894)

Not. Dig. Or. — *Notitia Dignitatum Orientalis*, trans. W. Fairley (1894)

NMaj. — The Novels of Majorian in C. Pharr (trans.), *The Theodosian Code and Novels and the Sirmondian Constitutions* (New York, 1952)

NTh. — The Novels of Theodosius II in C. Pharr (trans.), *The Theodosian Code and Novels and the Sirmondian Constitutions* (New York, 1952)

NVal. — The Novels of Valentinian III in C. Pharr (trans.), *The Theodosian Code and Novels and the Sirmondian Constitutions* (New York, 1952)

Olymp. — Olympiodorus of Thebes, *Fragments*, trans. R.C. Blockley in *The Fragmentary Classicising Historians of the Later Roman Empire: Eunapius, Olympiodorus, Priscus and Malchus*, Vol. II, (1983/repr. 2007) (Francis Cairns, GB)

Orientus, *Comm.* — Orientius of Auch, *Commonitorum*, in R. Ellis (ed.) *Poeti Christianae Minores*, *CSEL* XVI (Vienna)

Oros. — Orosius, *Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*, trans. A.T. Fear (Liverpool, 2010)

P.Cair.Isidor. — Edict of Aristius Optatius (16 March, 297) in R.Rees, *Diocletian and the Tetrarchy* (2004), 158

P. Ital. — *Die nichtliterarischen lateinischen Papyri italiens aus der Zeit 445-700* (ed. J.O. Tjäder, 1955)

P. Oxy. — *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, B.P. Grenfell, A.S. Hunt *et al* (London 1898)

Pac. *Pan. Lat.* — Drepanius Pacatus, *Panegyrici Latini*, ed. E. Galletier (Budé)

Pactus — *Pactus legis Salicae*, ed. K.A. Eckhardt, *MGH*, *Leges*, IV.I (Hannover, 1962)

Pall. *Hist. Laus.* — Palladius, *The Lausiac History of Palladius*, 2 Vols., trans. C. Butler (1904) (Hildesheim)

Passiones Leudegarii — *Passiones Leudegarii*, ed. B. Krusch, *MGH, SRM* 5

Paul. *Carm.* — Paulinus of Nola, *Carmina*, trans. P.G. Walsh (New York, NY, 1975)

Paul. *Euch.* — Paulinus of Pella, *Eucharisticus*, *CSEL* XVI. 291-314 (ed. G. Brandes)

Paul. *HL*. — Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum*, trans. W.D. Foulke (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania, 1907)

Paul. *Vit. Amb.* — Paulinus of Milan, *The Life of Saint Ambrose*, *PL* XIV 27-46

Pan. Lat.	*Panegyrici Latini* in Nixon, C.E.V. and Rogers, B.S. eds. (1994/repr. 2015) *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors: The Panegyrici Latini with Latin Text of R.A.B. Mynors* (University of California Press)
Pelagius I	Pope Pelagius I, *Epistulae quae supersunt*, ed. P.M. Gassó and C.M. Batlle (Montserrat, 1956)
Philost.	Philostorgius, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, ed. J. Bidez, *Gr. Schr.* Vol. 21
Plin. *Nat. Hist.*	Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, trans. H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library 330, 10 vols. (Harvard University Press, 1938)
Plin. *Ep.*	Pliny the Younger, *Letters*, trans. B. Radice (Cambridge MA: 1969)
Possid. *Vit. Aug.*	Possidius, *Life of Saint Augustine*, trans. H.T. Weiskotten (Princeton 1919), tertullian.org
Prisc.	Priscus of Panium, *Fragments*, trans. R.C. Blockley in *The Fragmentary Classicising Historians of the Later Roman Empire: Eunapius, Olympiodorus, Priscus and Malchus*, Vol. II, (1983/repr. 2007) (Francis Cairns, GB)
Procop. *Bell.*	Procopius, *History of the Wars*, trans. H.B. Dewing, Loeb Classical Library, 5 Vols, (Harvard University Press, 1914-28)
Prosper	Prosper of Aquitaine, *Chronica* in *Chronica Minora* I, pp. 341-500 (*MGH (AA),* IX, 520 ff.)
Prudent. *Perist*.	Prudentius, *Liber Peristephanon*, trans. L. Krisak, *Prudentius' Crown of Martyrs* (Taylor and Francis, 2019)
Ratchis	*Leges Ratchis*, ed. F. Beyerle, *Leges Langobardorum 643-866* (Witzenhausen, 1962), 183-193
Rothari	*Edictus Rothari*, ed. F. Beyerle, *Leges Langobardorum 643-866* (Witzenhausen, 1962), 16-94
Rufinus	Rufinus of Aquileia, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, *PL* XXI, 467-540
Rut. Nam.	Rutilius Namatianus, *De Reditu Suo*, trans. M. Malamud (Abingdon, Routledge, 2017)
Salv. *De gub. Dei*	Salvian of Marseilles, *On the Government of God*, trans. Eva M. Sanford (1930), tertullian.org
SHA	*Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, ed. E. Hohl (Tuebner, 1927)

Sid. Ap.	Sidonius Apollinaris, *Poems and Letters*, 2 Vols., trans. W.B. Anderson, Loeb Classical Library (Harvard University Press, 1936)
Soz.	Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, ed. J. Bidez and G.C. Hanson, in *Gr. Schr.* 50 (1960)
Strab. *Geo.*	Strabo, *Geographia*, trans. H.L Jones, Loeb Classical Library (Harvard University Press, 1917-32)
Suda	*Suda*, ed. A. Adler, 2 Vols., (Leipzig, 1928-1938)
Suet.	Suetonius, *The Lives of the Twelve Caesars*, trans. J.C. Rolfe (Cambridge MA, 1913-1914)
Sulp. Sev. *Vit. Mart.*	Sulpicius Severus, *The Life of Saint Martin*, trans. A Roberts (1894); also *CSEL* I
Symm.	Q. Aurelius Symmachus, *Relationes et Epistulae*, in O. Seeck (ed.) *MGH, AA,* VI.1 (Berlin 1881), 1-317
Syn. *de Reg.*	Synesius of Cyrene, *On Kingship*, ed. N. Terzaghi (1944); trans. A. Fitzgerald, (London, 1930)
Tac. *Ann.*	Tacitus, *Annales*, trans. A.J. Church and W.J. Brodribb (London, Everyman's Library 2009)
Tertullian	Tertullian, *Adversus Judaeos*, trans. G. Dunn, *The Early Church Fathers*, (London, New York: Routledge, 2004) 63-104
Theod., *Hist. relig.*	Theodoret, *Historia religiosa*, *PG* LXXXII 1283-1496
Theoph. *Chron.*	Theophanes, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor*, trans. C. Mango (Oxford University Press, 1997)
Them. *Or.*	Themistius, *Orations*, ed. G. Downey and A.F. Norman, *Themistii Orationes*, 2 vols., (Leipzig 1951-1970)
Toledo	*Concilios visigóticos e hispano-romanos*, ed. J. Vives (Barcelona, 1963)
Vegetius	Flavius Vegetius Renatus, *De Rei Militaris*, trans. J. Clarke (1767), archive.org
Vell. Pat.	Velleius Paterculus, *The Roman History*, trans. F.W. Shipley (Cambridge MA, 1924)

Venant. *Carm.* Venantius Fortunatus, *Poems*, ed. and trans. M. Roberts (London, Harvard University Press, 2017)

Vict. *De laude sanct.* Victricius of Rouen, *De laude sanctorum*, R. Demeulenaere and I Mulders (eds.), *CCSL* 64 (Turnhout, 1985), pp. 53-93

Vict. Vit. Victor of Vita, *History of the Vandal Persecution*, trans. J.W. Moorhead (Liverpool, 1992)

Vita Aniani *Vita Aniani Episcopus Aurelianensis*, ed. B. Krusch, *MGH SRM* III (Hannover, 1896)

Vita Avetini *Vita Avetini*, *AASS* I, 484-5

Vita Desiderii *Vita Desiderii Cadurcae urbis episcopi*, ed. B. Krusch, *MGH*, *SRM*, IV (Hannover, 1902), 563-602

Vita Eligii *Vita Eligii episcopi Noviomagensis*, ed. B. Krusch, *MGH, SRM*, VI (Hannover, 1902), 663-742

Vita Germani Constantius, *Vita Germani episcopi Autissiodurensis* (ed. W. Levison, in *MGH* (*Scr. Rer. Mer.*) VII, 1920)

Vita Lupicini *Vita S. Lupicini*, ed. B. Krusch, *MGH SRM* III (1896), 143-153

VPE *Vitas sanctorum patrum Emeretensium*, ed. A. Maya Sánchez (Turnhout, 1992)

Zon. Zonaras, *Epitome Historiarum*, ed. L. Dindorf (Tuebner, 1868-1875)

Zos. Zosimus, *New History*, trans. R.T. Ridley, *Byzantina Australiensia* (The Netherlands, 1982/2017)

Secondary Sources

Alföldy, G. (1975), *Römische Sozialgeschichte* (Wiesbaden)

Alston, R. (1994), ‘Roman Military Pay from Caesar to Diocletian’, *JRS* 84, 113-123

Amandry, M. (1982), ‘L’affinage des métaux monnayés au Bas-Empire: les réformes valentiniennes de 364-368’, *NAC* 11, 279-295

Ando, C. (2008), ‘Decline, Fall, and Transformation’ in *Journal of Late Antiquity* 1.1 (Spring), (Johns Hopkins University Press) 31-60

Ando, C. (2017), 'Introduction: States and State Power in Antiquity' in Ando and Richardson (eds.), *Ancient States and Infrastructural Power: Europe, Asia, and America*, (University of Pennsylvania Press) 1-16

Antonova, S. (2019), *Barbarian or Greek? The Charge of Barbarism and Early Christian Apologetics*, Studies in the History of Christian Traditions 187 (Leiden)

Arce, J. (1988), *España entre elm undo antiguo y el mundo medieval* (Madrid)

Arena, V. (2022), '*Actiones Populares*, Popular Sovereignty, and the People', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 253, 38-57

Azzara, C. and Gasparri, S. (1992), *Le Leggi dei Longobardi: storia, memoria e diritto di un populo germanico* (Milan)

Balbuza, K. (2002), 'Triumph as the Expression of Roman Ideology of Victory from Augustus to Diocletianus', *Eos* 89, 361-366

Banaji, J. (2001/repr. 2012), *Agrarian Change in Late Antiquity: Gold, Labour, and Aristocratic Dominance* (Oxford University Press)

Banaji, J. (2016), *Exploring the Economy of Late Antiquity: Selected essays,* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge)

Bang, P.F. and Scheidel, W. eds. (2013/repr. 2016), *The Oxford Handbook of the State in the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean* (Oxford University Press)

Bang, P.F. (2013), 'The Roman Empire II: The Monarchy', Chpt. 15 in Bang & Scheidel (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of the State in the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean* (Oxford University Press)

Baraut, C. (1978), 'Les actes de consacracions d'esglésies del bisbat d'Urgell (segles IX-XII)', *Urgellia* I, 11-182

Barker, E. (1911), 'Italy and the West, 410-476' in H.M. Gwatkin and J.P. Whitney (eds.), *Cambridge Medieval History*, I: *The Christian Roman Empire and the Foundation of the Teutonic Kingdoms* (Cambridge), 392-432

Barnish, S.J.B., (1992), *Cassiodorus: Selected Variae*, (Liverpool University Press, Liverpool)

Barnish, S.J.B., Lee, A.D., and Whitby, M. (2008), 'Government and Administration', chpt. 7 in *CAH* XIV, 164-206

Barnwell, P.S. (1992), *Emperor, Prefects & Kings: The Roman West, 395-565* (University of North Carolina Press)

Barnwell, P.S. (1997), *Kings, Courtiers, and Imperium: The Barbarian West, 565-725* (Duckworth, London)

Barnwell, P.S. and Mostert, M. (eds.) (2003), *Political Assemblies in the Earlier Middle Ages* (Brepols publishers, Turhout, Belgium)

Beard, M. (2007), *The Roman Triumph* (Cambridge, MA)

Birley, A.R. (2007), 'Making Emperors: Imperial Instrument or Independent Force?' in P. Erdkamp (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to the Roman Army* (Oxford), 379-394

Boak, A.E.R. (1955), *Manpower Shortage and the Fall of the Roman Empire in the West* (University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor)

Bonnassie, P. (1991), *From slavery to feudalism in south-western Europe* (Cambridge)

Börm, H. (2015), 'Born to be Emperor: The Principle of Succession and the Roman Monarchy' in J. Wienand (ed.), *Contested Monarchy: Integrating the Roman Empire in the Fourth Century AD* (Oxford)

Bowerstock, G., Brown, P., and Grabar, O. (eds.) (1999), *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World* (Cambridge, MA)

Bowes, K. and Gutteridge, A. (2005), 'Rethinking the later Roman landscape', *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 18, 405-413

Bowman, A. and Wilson, A. (2011), 'Introduction' in *Settlement, Urbanization, and Population*, Bowman & Wilson (eds.), pp. 1-4 (Oxford University Press)

Bowman, A. (2017), 'The State and the Economy' in *Mining, Metal Supply and Coinage in the Roman Empire*, Bowman & Wilson (eds.) (Oxford University Press), 1-31

Bradbury, S. (2014), 'Libanius' networks' in L. Van Hoof (ed.), *Libanius: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge), chpt. 10, 220-240

Brandt, H. (1988), *Zeitkritik in der Spätantike. Untersuchungen zu den Reform-vorshlägen des Anonymus De rebus bellicis* (Munich)

Bransbourg, G. (2017), 'The late Roman empire and the dream of fair taxation' in R. Lizzi Testa (ed.), *Late Antiquity in Contemporary Debate* (Newcastle)

Braudel, F. (1972), *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II,* Vol. 1 (Collins)

Brogiolo, G.P. (ed.) (1996), *La fine della ville romane* (Mantua)

Brogiolo, G.P. (2000), ‘Capitali I residenze regie nell’Italia langobarda’, in Ripoll and Gurt (eds.) *Sedes regiae (ann.400-800)* (Barcelona)

Brown, P. (1971), *The World of Late Antiquity: From Marcus Aurelius to Mohammed* (Thames and Hudson)

Brown, P. (1978), *The Making of Late Antiquity* (Harvard University Press)

Brown, P. (1992), *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire* (University of Wisconsin Press)

Brown, P. (1995), *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity 200-1000* (Blackwell, Cambridge, MA)

Brown, P. (2012), *Through the Eye of a Needle. Wealth, the Fall of Rome and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350-550 AD* (Princeton University Press, Princeton/Oxford)

Brown, T.S. (1984), *Gentlemen and Officers* (Rome)

Burns, T.S. (1994), *Barbarians within the gates of Rome: A Study of Roman Military Policy and the Barbarians, c.a. 375-425 A.D.* (Indiana University Press)

Bury, J.B. (1909) ‘The Constitution of the Later Roman Empire’, Creighton Memorial Lecture

Bury, J.B. (1958), *History of the Later Roman Empire from the death of Theodosius I to the death of Justinian*, 2 Vols., (New York)

Cameron, A. (1965), ‘Wandering Poets: a literary movement in Byzantine Egypt’, *Historia* 14, 470-509

Cameron, A. (1970), *Claudian: Poetry and Propaganda at the Court of Honorius* (Clarendon)

Cameron, Av. (2006), *The Byzantines* (Malden, MA)

Cameron, Av. (1993/repr. 2012), *The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity AD 395-700* (2nd Edition, Abingdon)

Carrié, J.-M. (1983), ‘Un roman des origines’, *Opus* II, 205-251

Carrié, J.-M. (2017), ‘The Historical Path of “Late Antiquity”: from Transformation to Rupture’ in R. Lizzi Testa (ed.), *Late Antiquity in Contemporary Debate,* (Newcastle) 174-214

Carrobles Santos, J., Barroso Cabrera, R., Morín de Pablos, J., and Valdés Fernández, F., (2007), ‘Regia sedes toletana’, *La topografia de la cuidad de Toledo en la tardía antigüedad y alta edad media* (Toledo)

Charles-Edwards, T.M., (2008), ‘Law in the western kingdoms between the fifth and the seventh century’, chpt. 10 in *CAH* XIV, 260-287

Chastagnol, A. (1978), *L’album municipal de Timgad*, (Bonn)

Cheynet, J.-C. (2002), ‘Les limites du pouvoir à Byzance: une forme de tolerance?’ in A. Nikolaou, ed., Ανοχη και καταστολη στους μεσους χρονους: Μνημη Λενου Μαυροματη (Athens), 15-28

Claessen, H.J.M. (1978), ‘The Early State: A Structural Approach’ in Claessen & Skalník, *The Early State*, (Mouton Publishers, Great Britain) 533-596

Cohen, R. (1978), ‘Introduction’ in R. Cohen & E.R. Service (eds.), *Origins of the State: The anthropology of political evolution*, 1-20 (Philadelphia)

Collins, R. (1986), ‘Visigothic law and regional custom in early medieval Spain’ in W. Davies and P. Fouracre (eds.), *The Settlement of Disputes in Early Medieval Europe* (Cambridge)

Collins, R. (2010), *Early Medieval Europe 300-1000* (Third Edition) (Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke)

Courtois, C. (1955), *Les Vandales et l’Afrique* (Paris)

Croke, B. (2001), *Count Marcellinus and his Chronicle* (Oxford)

Crone, P. (2003), *Pre-industrial societies: Anatomy of the pre-modern world*, (2nd edn) (Oxford)

Crumley, C.L. (1987), ‘A dialectical critique of hierarchy’ in C.W. Gailey and T.C. Patterson (eds.) *Power Relations and State Formation*, pp. 155-169 (Washington, D.C.)

D’Avray, D. (2019), *Papal Jurisprudence c. 400: Sources of the Canon Law Tradition* (Cambridge)

D’Avray, D. (2022), *Papal Jurisprudence, 385-1234: Social Origins and Medieval Reception of Canon Law* (Cambridge)

Demandt, A. (1989), *Die Spätantike: römische Geschichte von Diocletian bis Justinian, 284-565 n. Chr* (Munich)

de Ste. Croix, G.E.M. (1981), *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World* (Duckworth)

Dey, H.W. (2015), *The Afterlife of the Roman City: Architecture and Ceremony in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge University Press)

Diaz, P.C. (2017), ‘Crisis, Transition, Transformation: The End of the Roman World and the Usefulness of Useless Categories’ in R. Lizzi Testa (ed.), *Late Antiquity in Contemporary Debate* (Newcastle)

Dionisotti, A.C. (1982), ‘From Ausonius’ Schooldays? A Schoolbook and Its Relatives’, *JRS,* Vol. 72, 83-125

Delbrueck, R. (1933), *Spätantike Kaiserporträts von Constantinus Magnus bis zum Ende des West-reichs* (Berlin)

Delmaire, R. (1995), *Les institutions du bas-empire romain, de Constantin à Justinien* (Cerf)

Démains d’Archimbaud, G. (ed.) (1994), *L’oppidum de Saint-Blaise du V au VII s. (Bouches-du-Rhône)*, Documents d’Archéologie Française 45, (Paris)

Demougeout, E. (1979), *La formation de l’Europe et les invasions barbares. De l’avènement de Dioclétien au début du Vie siècle* (Paris)

Dey, H.W. (2015), *The Afterlife of the Roman City: Architecture and Ceremony in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge University Press)

Dill, S. (1926), *Roman Society in Gaul in the Merovingian Age* (London)

Domergue, C. (1990), *Les mines de la péninsule ibérique dans l’antiquité romaine* (Rome)

Dossey, L. (2010), *Peasant and Empire in Christian North Africa* (University of California Press)

Doyle, C. (2019), *Honorius: The Fight for the Roman West AD 395-423* (Routledge, Abingdon)

Drinkwater, J. (1992), ‘The Bacaudae of fifth-century Gaul’ in Drinkwater and Elton (eds.) (1992), 208-217

Drinkwater, J. and Elton, H. (eds.) (1992), *Fifth-Century Gaul: A Crisis of Identity?* (Cambridge University Press)

Dufraigne, P. (1994), ‘Adventus augusti, adventus Christi’, *Recherche sur l’exploitation idéologique et littéraire d’un ceremonial dans l’antiquité tardive* (Paris)

Duncan, G.L. (1993), ‘Coin Circulation in the Danubian and Balkan Provinces of the Roman Empire AD 294-578,’ *Royal Numismatic Society*, 26 (London)

Duncan-Jones, R. (1990), *Structure and Scale in the Roman Economy* (Cambridge University Press)

Duncan-Jones, R. (1994), *Money and Government in the Roman Empire* (Cambridge University Press)

Durliat, J. (1990), *Les finances publiques de Dioclétien aux Carolingiens (284-888)* (Sigmaringen)

Edmondson, J. (1989), 'Mining in the Later Roman Empire and Beyond: continuity or disruption?' *JRS* 79, 84-102

Ehrenreich, R.M., Crumley, C.L., & Levy, J.E. (eds.) (1995), *Heterarchy and the analysis of complex societies* (Washington, D.C.)

Eisenstadt, S.M. (1969), *The Political Systems of Empires* (Transaction Publishers)

Elton, H. (1996), *Warfare in Roman Europe AD 350-425* (Oxford)

Ensslin, W. (1930), 'Maiorianus (1)', *RE* XIV (Stuttgart), 584-589

Errington, R.M. (2006), *Roman Imperial Policy from Julian to Theodosius* (University of North Carolina Press)

Esmonde Cleary, S. (1989), *The Ending of Roman Britain* (London)

Esmonde Cleary, S. (2013), *The Roman West, AD 200-500: An Archaeological Survey* (Cambridge University Press)

Fernández, D. (2017) 'Statehood, Taxation, and State Infrastructural Power in Visigothic Iberia', chpt. 8 in Ando and Richardson (eds.), *Ancient States and Infrastructural Power: Europe, Asia, and America* (University of Pennsylvania Press)

Ferrill, A. (1986), *The Fall of the Roman Empire: the military explanation* (London: Thames & Hudson)

Finley, M.I. (1958) Review in *JRS* 48 of A.E.R. Boak, *Manpower Shortage and the Fall of the Roman Empire in the West* (1955)

Finley, M.I. (1973), *The Ancient Economy* (Trowbridge & Esher)

Fita, F. (1906), 'Patrologia visigótica', *Boletín de la Real Academia de la Historia*, XLIX, 137-169

Flower, H. I. (2011), *Roman Republics* (Princeton University Press)

Frank, T. (1933), *An Economic Survey of Ancient Rome, Volume 1: Rome and Italy of the Republic* (Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, MD)

Frank, T. (1940), *An Economic Survey of Ancient Rome, Volume 5: Rome and Italy of the Empire* (Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, MD)

Fustel de Coulanges, N.D. (1885), 'Le colonat romain', in *Recherches sur quelques problems d'histoire* (Paris)

Gagé, J. (1933), 'La Théologie de la Victoire Impériale', *Revue Historique*, T. 171, Fasc. 1 (Presses Universitaires de France)

García Moreno, L.A. (1974), 'Estudios sobre la organización administrativa del reino visigodo de Toledo,' *AHDE* 44, 1-155

García Moreno, L.A. (1976), 'Hidacio y el ocaso del poder imperial en la peninsula ibérica,' *RABM* 79, 27-42

Garnsey, P. and Whittaker, C.R. (2008), 'Trade, Industry, and the Urban Economy' in *CAH* XIII, chpt. 10

Garnsey, P. (2010), 'Roman Patronage' in S. McGill, C. Sogno, & E. Watts (eds.) *From the Tetrarchs to the Theodosians: Later Roman History and Culture, 284-450 CE* (Cambridge), chpt. 2, 33-54

Giannecchini, M. and Moggi-Cecchi, J. (2008), 'Stature in Archaeological Samples from Central Italy: Methodological Issues and Diachronic Changes,' *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 135, 284-292

Gibbon, E. (1776-1789), *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 6 Vols., (Everyman's Library, London 1994)

Giddens, A. (1987), *The nation-state and violence: Volume two of a contemporary critique of historical materialism* (Berkeley, CA)

Goffart, W. (1980), *Barbarians and Romans A.D. 418-584: The Techniques of Accommodation* (Princeton University Press)

Goffart, W. (1989), *Rome's fall and after* (London)

Goffart, W. (2006), *Barbarian Tides: The Migration Age and the Later Roman Empire* (University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia)

Goldstone, J. and Haldon, J. (2009), 'Ancient States, Empires, and Exploitation: Problems and Perspectives' in Morris & Scheidel (eds.) *The Dynamics of Ancient Empires: State Power from Assyria to Byzantium* (Oxford University Press)

Goldsworthy, A. (2003), *The Complete Roman Army* (Thames & Hudson, London)

Goldsworthy, A. (2009), *How Rome Fell: the death of a Roman superpower* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London)

Gorges, J.-G., (1979), *Les villas hispano-romaines* (Paris)

Gowland, R. and Walther, L. (2018), 'Tall Stories: The Bioarchaeological Study of Growth and Stature in the Roman Empire,' in W. Scheidel (ed.), *The Science of Roman History* (Princeton)

Greene, J.A. (1992), 'Une reconnaissance archéologique dans l'arrière-pays de la Carthage antique', in A. Ennabli (ed.), *Pour sauver Carthage. Exploration et conservation de la cite punique, romaine et byzantine* (Paris and Tunis), 195-197

Greene, K. (1986), *The Archaeology of the Roman Economy* (London)

Haldon, J. (1993), *The State and the Tributary Mode of Production* (Verso, London)

Haldon, J. (2012), 'Comparative State Formation: the Later Roman Empire in the wider world' in Johnson (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity*, (Oxford University Press) 1111-1147

Hall, J.A. (1986), *Powers and liberties: The causes and consequences of the rise of the West* (Berkeley, California)

Halsall, G. (1995), *Early Medieval Cemetaries: An Introduction to Burial Archaeology in the Post-Roman West*, (Cruithne Press: Glasgow)

Harper, K. (2017), *The Fate of Rome: Climate, Disease & the End of Empire* (Princeton University Press)

Harries, J. (1994), *Sidonius Apollinaris and the fall of Rome* (Oxford)

Harries, J. (1999), *Law & Empire in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge)

Heather, P. (1991), *Goths and Romans 332-489* (Oxford)

Heather, P. (1994), 'New men for new Constantines?', in P. Magdalino (ed.), *New Constantines,* pp. 11-33 (Aldershot)

Heather, P. (2005), *The Fall of the Roman Empire: A New History of Rome and the Barbarians*, (Oxford University Press)

Heather, P. (2008), 'State, Lordship, and Community in the West (c. AD 400-600)', chpt. 16 in *CAH* XIV, 437-468

Heather, P. (2011), 'Law and Society in the Burgundian Kingdom' in A. Rio (ed.) *Law, Custom, and Justice in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Kings College London: Hertford)

Heather, P. (2023), *Christendom: The Triumph of a Religion, AD 300-1300* (Knopf, New York)

Hebblewhite, M. (2017), *The Emperor and the Roman Army in the Later Roman Empire, AD 235-395* (Routledge)

Hirt, A. (2010), *Imperial Mines and Quarries in the Roman World: organizational aspects 27BC – AD 235* (Oxford University Press)

Hintze, O. (1975), *The Historical Essays of Otto Hintze* (Oxford University Press)

Hitti, P.K. (1916), *The Origins of the Islamic State, being a Translation from the Arabic … of the Kitâb Futûh al-Buldâh of al Imâm abu-l 'Abbâs Ahmad ibn Jâbir al Balâdhuri* (New York)

Hodgkin, T. (1880), *Italy and her Invaders*, II, *376-476; The Hunnish Invasion; The Vandal Invasion and the Herulian Mutiny* (Oxford)

Honoré, T. (1999), *Law in the crisis of empire, 379-455 AD: the Theodosian dynasty and its Quaestors* (Oxford)

Hopkins, K. (1978), *Conquerors and slaves* (Cambridge)

Hopkins, K. (1980), 'Taxes and Trade in the Roman Empire (200 BC – AD 400)' *JRS* 70, 101-125

Humphries, M. (2019), *Cities and the Meaning of Late Antiquity* (Brill)

Hunt, D. (2008), 'The church as a public institution' in *CAH* XIII, 238-276

Jacques, P. (2006), 'Nouvelles données sur l'habitat rural antique en Lot-et-Garonne', in Réchin, F. (ed.) *Nouveaux regards sur les villae d'Aquitaine: bâtiments de vie et d'exploitation, domaines et postérités médiévales*, Archéologie des Pyrénées Occidentales et des Landes, Les Hors série 2, (Pau)

James, E. (1988), *The Franks* (Oxford)

Jones, A.H.M. (1953/1974), *The Roman Economy: studies in ancient economic and administrative history*, P.A. Brunt (ed.), (Blackwell, Oxford)

Jullian, C. (1908-1926), *Histoire de la Gaule* (Paris)

Kaldellis, A. (2015), *The Byzantine Republic: People and Power in New Rome* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA)

Kautsky, J.H. (1982), *The Politics of Aristocratic Empires* (University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill)

Kehne, P. (2007), 'War- and Peacetime Logistics: Supplying Imperial Armies in East and West' in P. Erdkamp (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to the Roman Army* (Oxford)

Kelly, C. (2004), *Ruling the Later Roman Empire* (Harvard University Press)

Kelly, C. (2008), 'Emperor and Court', Chpt. 6 in *CAH* XIV

Kent, J.P.C. (1966), 'Julius Nepos and the Fall of the Western Empire', in *Corolla Memoriae Erich Swoboda Dedicata* (Graz/Cologne), 146-150

King, P.D. (1972), *Law and Society in the Visigothic Kingdom* (Cambridge)

Kosellek, R. (1988), *Critique and Crisis: Enlightenment and the Pathogenesis of Modern Society* (Munich/Great Britain)

Kulikowski, M. (2004), *Late Roman Spain and Its Cities* (John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, MD)

Kulikowski, M. (2021), *Imperial Tragedy: From Constantine's Empire to the Destruction of Roman Italy (AD 363-568)* (London)

Künzl, E. (1988), *Der römische Triumph. Siegesfeiern im antiken Rom* (Munich)

Lane,, F.C. (1979), *Profits from Power: Readings in protection rent and violence-controlling enterprises* (Albany, NY)

Lee, A.D. (2008), 'The Army', Chpt. 7 in *CAH* XIII

Lendon, J.E. (1997), *Empire of Honour: The Art of Government in the Roman World* (Oxford)

Lepelley, C. (1983), 'Quot curiales, tot tyranni. L'Image de decurion oppresseur au Bas-Empire,' *Crise et redressement dans les provinces européennes de l'Empire*, *Actes du Colloque de Strasbourg*, 143-156

Lewit, T. (1991), *Agricultural production in the Roman economy, A.D. 200-400,* BAR, I568 (Oxford)

Lewit, T. (2003), '"Vanishing villas": what happened to élite rural habitation in the West in the 5th-6th c.?', *JRA*, XVI, 260-274

Liebeschuetz, J.H.W.G. (1990), *Barbarians and Bishops: Army, Church, and State in the Age of Arcadius and Chrysostom* (Clarendon Press, Oxford)

Liebeschuetz, J.H.W.G. (2006), 'Transformation and Decline: Are the Two Really Incompatible?,' in in *East and West in Late Antiquity: Invasion, Settlement, Ethnogenesis, and Conflicts of Religion*, *Impact of Empire*, Vol 20 (Leiden, Brill)

Liebeschuetz J.H.W.G. (2015), 'Warlords and Landlords' in *East and West in Late Antiquity: Invasion, Settlement, Ethnogenesis, and Conflicts of Religion*, *Impact of Empire*, Vol 20 (Leiden, Brill)

Liebs, D. (2008), 'Roman Law', chpt. 9 in *CAH* XIV, 238-259

Lo Cascio, E. (2007), 'The Early Roman Empire: the state and the economy' in *The Cambridge Economic History of the Greco-Roman World,* Scheidel, Morris, and Saller (eds.) (Cambridge University Press)

López Quiroga, J., Martínez Tejera, A.M., and Morín de Pablos, J. (eds.) (2006), *Gallia e Hispania en el context de la presencia 'germánica' (ss. V-VII): balance y perspectivas*, British Archaeological Reports, International Series, 1534, (Oxford)

Lot, F. (1928), *Le Fin du Monde Antique et le Début du Moyen Age* (Paris)

McCormick, M. (1986), *Eternal Victory: Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium and the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge University Press)

McCormick, M. (2008), 'Emperor and Court', chpt. 6 in *CAH* XIV, 135-163

McEvoy, M.A. (2010), 'Rome and the transformation of the imperial office in the late fourth-mid-fifth centuries AD', *PBSR* 79, 151-192

McEvoy, M.A. (2013), *Child-Emperor Rule in the Late Roman West, AD 367-455* (Oxford University Press)

MacCormack, S.G. (1981), *Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity*, (University of California Press)

MacGeorge, P. (2002), *Late Roman Warlords*, (Oxford University Press)

MacMullen, R. (1987), 'Late Roman Slavery', originally in *Historia* 87, in *Changes in the Roman Empire* (Princeton)

MacMullen, R. (1988), *Corruption and the Decline of Rome* (Yale University Press)

Magnou-Nortier, E. (1989), 'La gestion publique en Neustrie', in H. Atsma (ed.), *La Neustrie*, I pp.271-318 (Sigmaringen)

Mann. M. (1984), 'The autonomous power of the state: its origins, mechanisms and results', European Journal of Sociology, Vol. 25, no. 2, pp. 185-213 (Cambridge University Press)

Marcone, A. (2008), 'Late Roman Social Relations' in *CAH* XIII, chpt. 11

Marot, T. (1997), 'Algunas consideraciones sobre la significación de las emisiones del usurpador Máximo en *Barcino*,' in Teja and Pérez, *Congreso Internacional La Hispania de Teodosio, Segovia-Coca. Octubre 1995.* 2 Vols, (Salamanca)

Marx, K. (1970-2), *Capital* I-III (London)

Mathisen, R. (2019), 'The End of the Western Roman Empire in the fifth-century CE: Barbarian Auxiliaries, Independent Military Contractors, and Civil Wars' in N. Lenski and J.W. Drijvers (eds.), *The Fifth Century: Age of Transformation* (Edipuglia)

Matthews, J. (1975), *Western Aristocracies and Imperial Court A.D. 364-425* (Clarendon Press, Oxford)

Matthews, J. (1989/ repr. 2007), *The Roman Empire of Ammianus* (Michigan Classical Press)

Matthews, J. (2010), *Roman Perspectives: Studies in the social, political and cultural history of the First to the Fifth Centuries* (Rome)

Max, G.E. (1979), 'Political Intrigue during the Reigns of the Western Roman Emperors Avitus and Majorian,' *Historia,* 28, 225-237

Mazzarino, S. (1976), *L'impero Romano*, 3 vols. (2nd edn., Rome and Bari)

Merrony, M. (2019), *The Plight of Rome in the Fifth Century AD* (Routledge)

Millar, F. (1977), *The Emperor in the Roman World* (Cornell University Press)

Moatti, C. (2017), '*Res publica, forma rei publicae*, and *SPQR*', *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*, 60, 34-48

Mommsen, T. (1903), 'Stilicho und Alarich', *Hermes* 38, 101-115

Momigliano, A. (1976), 'A.H.M. Jones' *The Later Roman Empire*', *Oxford Magazine*, 4th March 1965, 264 ff.

Momigliano, A. (1966), *Studies in Historiography* (London)

Momigliano, A. (1980), *Contributo alla storia degli studi classici*, Pt. 6, 159-179 (Rome)

Montesquieu (1739), *Considerations on the Causes of the Greatness of the Romans and their Decline*, trans. D. Lowenthal, (London, Collier-MacMillan)

Motyl, A.J. (2001), *Imperial Ends: The Decay, Collapse, and Revival of Empires* (Columbia University Press)

Mousourakis, G. (2007), *A Legal History of Rome* (Abingdon, Routledge)

Nicasie, M.J. (1998), *Twilight of Empire: The Roman Army from the Reign of Diocletian until the Battle of Adrianople*, Dutch Monographs on Ancient History and Archaeology 19, (Amsterdam: J.C. Geiben)

Nice, A. (1994), 'L'habitat mérovingien de Goudelancourt-les-Pierrepont (Aisne)', *Revue archéologique de Picardie* 1-2, 21-63

O'Flynn, J.M. (1983), *Generalissimos of the western Roman empire*, (University of Alberta Press)

Oldenstein, J. (1986), 'Neue Forschungen im spätrömischen Kastell von Alzey: Vorbericht über die Ausgrabungen 1981-1985', *Bericht der Römisch-Germanischen Kommission* 67, 290-356

Oldenstein, J. (1994), 'Die letzen Jahrzehnte des römischen Limes zwischen Andernach und Selz unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des Kastells Alzey und der *Notitia Dignitatum*', in F. Staab (ed.), *Zur Kontinuität zwischen Antike und Mittelalter am Oberrhein* (Sigmaringen), 69-112

Oost, S.I. (1968), *Galla Placidia Augusta: A Biographical Essay* (Chicago, Ill.)

Oost, S.I. (1970), 'D. N. Libivs Severvs P. F. Avg.', *Classical Philology*, 65, 228-240

Osiander, A. (2007), *Before the State: Systemic Political Change in the West from the Greeks to the French Revolution* (Oxford)

Palol, P. de (1989), *El Bovalar (Seròs; Segrià): conjunt d'època paleocristiana i visigòtica* (Barcelona)

Papini, A.M. (1959), *Ricemero. L'agonia dell'Impero Romano d'Occidente* (Milan)

Papworth, M. (2021), 'The case for Chedworth villa', *Archaeology Today*, Issue 373, Vol. 32, No. 1 (April), 18-25

Pellecuer, C. (1996), 'Villa et domaine' in Fiches, J.-L. (ed.), *Le III siècle en Gaule narbonnaise*, (Sophia-Antipolis)

Pellecuer, C. and Pomarèdes, H. (2001), 'Crise, survie ou adaptation de la villa romaine en Narbonaise première? Contribution des récentes recherches de terrain en Languedoc-Roussillon', in Ouzoulias *et al.*, *Les campagnes de la Gaule à la fin de l'Antiquité,* IV colloque de l'association AGER, (Antibes)

Phang, S.E. (2008), *Roman Military Service – Ideologies of Discipline in the Late Republic and Early Principate* (Cambridge)

Potter, D. (2004), *The Roman Empire at Bay, AD 180-395* (Routledge, London)

Potter, D. (2015), 'Measuring the Power of the Roman Empire' in *East and West in the Roman Empire of the Fourth Century: an end to unity?,* Radbound Studies in Humanities 5, Dijkstra, R., van Poppel, S., & Slootjes, D. (eds.), pp. 26-48 (Brill, Leiden)

Quirós Castillo, J.A. and Vigil-Escalera Guirado, A. (2006), 'Networks of peasant villages between Toledo and *Velega Alabense*, north-western Spain (V-Xth centuries)', *Archeologia Medievale* 33, 79-128

Rathbone, D. (2001), 'The Muziris papyrus (SB XVIII 13167): financing Roman trade with India', *Bulletin de la Société d'Archéologie d'Alexandrie* 46 (Festschrift for Prof. Mostafa el-Abbadi), 39-50

Raynaud, C. (1990), *Le village gallo-romain de Lunel-Vieil (Hérault): la fouille du quartier oust (1981-1983)*, (Paris)

Rees, R. (2004), *Diocletian and the Tetrarchy* (Edinburgh University Press)

Rémondon, R. (1964), *La Crise de l'Empire Romain de Marc-Aurèle à Anastase* (Paris)

Richardson, S. (2012), 'Early Mesopotamia: The Presumptive State', *Past and Present,* No. 215 (May) (Oxford)

Rio, A. (2011), 'Introduction' in *Law, Custom, and Justice in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages: Proceedings of the 2008 Byzantine Colloquium* (Kings College London: Hertford)

Ripoll, G. and Arce, J. (2000), 'The transformation and end of Roman *villae* in the West (fourth-seventh centuries): problems and perspectives' in Brogiolo, Gauthier, and Christie (eds.), *Towns and their territories between late antiquity and the early middle ages* (Leiden)

Ristuccia, N. (2018), *Christianization and Commonwealth in Early Medieval Europe: A Ritual Interpretation* (Oxford University Press)

Rousseau, J.-J. (1997), *The Social Contract*, trans. V. Gourevitch, *Rousseau: The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings* (Cambridge)

Rose, C.B. (2021), 'Reconsidering the frieze on the Arch of Constantine', *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 34, 175-210

Runciman, W.G. (1989), *Confessions of a reluctant theorist: selected essays of W.G. Runciman*, (Harvester Wheatsheaf)

Rüpke, J. (1990), *Domi militia. Die religiose Konstruktion des Krieges in Rom* (Stuttgart)

Saguì, L. (ed.) (1998), *Ceramica in Italia: VI-VII secolo* (Florence)

Salway, P. (1993), *A History of Roman Britain* (Oxford University Press)

Salzman, M. R. (2021), *The Falls of Rome: Crises, Resilience, and Resurgence in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge University Press)

Scheidel, W. (2013), 'Studying the State', Chpt. 1 in Bang & Scheidel (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of the State in the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean* (Oxford University Press)

Schneider, L. (2007), 'Rythmes de l'occupation rurale et forms de l'habitat dans le sud-est de la France entre Antiquité et Moyen Age (IV-VIII s.): essai de synthèse', *Gallia* 64, 11-56

Schneider, L. and Raynaud, C. (2011), 'Etablissements perches de France méridionale (V-IX siècles)', *Dossiers de l'Archéologie* 344, 24-29

Scokpol, T. (1979), *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China* (Cambridge University Press)

Scott, L.R. (1984), 'Antibarbarian Sentiment and the 'Barbarian' General in Roman Imperial Service: the Case of Ricimer', *Proceedings of the VIIth Congress of the International Federation of the Societies of Classical Studies* 2, 23-33

Seeck, O. (1920), *Geschichte des Untergangs der Antiken Welt* VI (Berlin)

Shaw, B. (1999), 'War and Violence' in *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World,* Bowerstock, G., Brown, P., and Grabar, O. (eds.) (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA) 130-169

Skinner, Q. (2018), 'Classical Rhetoric and the Personation of the State' in *From Humanism to Hobbes: Studies in Rhetoric and Politics* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge), 12-44

Solari, A. (1938), *Il Rinnovamento dell'impero romano* (Milan)

Sommer, M. (2011), 'Empire of Glory: Weberian paradigms and the complexities of authority in imperial Rome', *Max Weber Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 155-191

Stein, E. (1959), *Histoire du Bas-Empire*, I, trans. and ed. J.-R. Palanque (Paris)

Stickler, T. (2007), 'The *Foederati*' in P. Erdkamp (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to the Roman Army* (Oxford)

Stocking, R.L. (2000), *Bishops, Councils, and Consensus in the Visigothic Kingdom, 589-633* (University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor)

Strobel, K. (2007), ‘Strategy and Army Structure between Septimius Severus and Constantine the Great’ in P. Erdkamp (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to the Roman Army* (Oxford)

Stutz, J. (2023), ‘‘When God sees us in the circuses’: Salvian of Marseille’s *De gubernatione Dei* and the critique of Roman society’, *Early Medieval Europe* 31, (I), 3-22

Temin, P. (2013), *The Roman Market Economy* (Princeton University Press)

Thompson, E.A. (1952), *A Roman Reformer and Inventor* (Clarendon Press, Oxford)

Thompson, E.A. (1969), *The Goths in Spain* (Oxford, Clarendon Press)

Tilly, C. (1975), *The Formation of National States in Western Europe* (Princeton University Press)

Tilly, C. (1985), ‘War making and state making as organised crime’ in P.B. Evans, D. Rueschemeyer, and T. Skocpol (eds.), *Bringing the state back in*, (Cambridge) 169-191

Tilly, C. (1992), *Coercion, capital, and European states AD 990-1992* (Cambridge, MA)

Treadgold, W. (1995), *Byzantium and its Army, 284-1081* (Stanford University Press)

Trément, F. (1999), *Archéologie d’un paysage: les étangs de Saint-Blaise (Bouches-du-Rhône),* Documents d’Archéologie Française, 74, (Paris)

Trigger, B. (2003), *Understanding early civilizations: A comparative study* (Cambridge)

Van Dam, R. (2010), *Rome and Constantinople: Rewriting Roman History during Late Antiquity* (Waco)

Van Hoof, L. (2014), *Libanius: A Critical Introduction* (Universiteit Ghent, Belgium)

Van Ossel, P. (ed.) (2006), *Les céramiques de l’Antiquité tardive en Ile-de-France et dans le Bassin parisien*, Vol. I: *Ensembles régionaux* (Paris)

Van Ossel, P. (2010), ‘Transformations et continuités aux contacts de trois cultures: les campagnes de la Gaule septentrionale au V siècle’, in Delogu and Gasparri (eds.) *Le trasformazioni del V secolo: L’Italia, I barbari e ‘Occidente romano* (Turnhout)

Vasić, M. (1988), ‘The Circulation of Bronze Coinage at the End of the Fourth and Beginning of the Fifth Centuries in Moesia Prima and Pannonia Secunda,’ in P. Kos and Ž. Demo (eds.), *Studia Numismatica Labacensia: Alexandro Jeločnik Oblata*, Situla 26 (Ljubljana), 165-184

Vera, D. (1992-3), 'Schiavitù rurale, colonate e trasformazioni agrarie nell'Italia imperiale', *Scienze dell'antichità,* VI-VII, 291-339

Veyne, P. (2005), *L'empire gréco-romain* (Paris)

Walbank, F.W. (1946), *The Decline of the Roman Empire in the West* (The Cobbett Press, London)

Ward-Perkins, B. (1997), 'Continuists, catastrophists, and the towns of post-Roman northern Italy', *PBSR* 65, 157-176

Ward-Perkins, B. (2005), *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilisation* (Oxford University Press)

Ward-Perkins, B. (2008a), 'Land, Labour and Settlement', chpt. 12 in *CAH* XIV, 315-345

Ward-Perkins, B. (2008b), 'Specialized production and exchange', chpt. 13 in *CAH* XIV, 346-391

Watson, A. (1999), *Aurelian and the Third Century* (London)

Watson, G. (1985), *The Roman Soldier* (Ithaca NY, Cornell University Press)

Weber, M. (1978), *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (University of California Press, Berkeley, CA)

Weisweiler, J. (2017), 'Populist Despotism and Infrastructural Power in the Later Roman Empire' in Ando and Richardson (eds.), *Ancient States and Infrastructural Power: Europe, Asia, and America*, (University of Pennsylvania Press)

Whitby, M. (2008), 'The army, c. 420-602', chpt. 11 in *CAH* XIV, 288-314

Whittaker, C.R. (1994), *Frontiers of the Roman Empire: A Social and Economic Study* (Johns Hopkins University Press, London)

Wickham, C. (1986), 'Land disputes and their social framework in Lombard-Carolingian Italy, 700-900' in Davies & Fouracre (eds.) 105-124

Wickham, C. (2005), *Framing the Early Middle Ages* (Oxford University Press)

Wickham, C. (2009), *The Inheritance of Rome: a history of Europe from 400 to 1000*, (Allen Lane)

Wienand, J. (2015), 'O tandem felix civili, Roma, victoria! Civil-War Triumphs from Honorius to Constantine and Back' in J. Wienand (ed.), *Contested Monarchy: Integrating the Roman Empire in the Fourth Century AD* (Oxford)

Wijnendaele, J.W.P. (2018) ‘Generalissimos and Warlords in the Late Roman West’, in Ñaco del Hoyo & López Sánchez (eds.), *War, Warlords, and Interstate Relations in the Ancient Mediterranean* (Brill)

Wilkes, J.J. (1969), *Dalmatia* (London)

Wolfram, H. (1988), *History of the Goths* (2nd edn.) (Berkeley, CA)

Wolfram, H. (1997), *The Roman Empire and its Germanic Peoples*, trans. T. Dunlap, (University of California Press, Berkeley, CA)

Wood, I.N. (1992), ‘Continuity and Calamity: the constraints of literary models’ in John Drinkwater and Hugh Elton (eds.), *Fifth-Century Gaul: A Crisis of Identity?* (Cambridge University Press)

Wood, I.N. (1994), *The Merovingian Kingdoms 450-751* (Pearson, England)

Wood, I.N. (2008), ‘The North-Western Provinces’, in *CAH* XIII 497-524

Wood, I.N. (2013), ‘The Germanic Successor States’, Chpt. 17 in Bang & Scheidel (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of the State in the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean* (Oxford University Press)

Wormald, P. (1977), ‘*Lex Scripta* and *Verbum Regis*: Legislation and Germanic Kingship, from Euric to Cnut’ in P.H. Sawyer and I.N. Wood (eds.), *Early Medieval Kingship* (Leeds)

Ziegler, I. (1903), *Die Königsgleichnisse des Midrasch beleuchtet durch die römische Kaiserzeit* (Breslau)