

THE GALLIC ARISTOCRACY AND THE ROMAN IMPERIAL
GOVERNMENT IN THE FIFTH CENTURY A.D.

by

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CHAPTER I

GAUL AND THE IMPERIAL GOVERNMENT TO THE ASCENSION OF VALENTINIAN III

The fourth century proved to be almost as peaceful and prosperous for Gaul as the third century had been tumultuous and destructive. The civil wars, barbarian raids and the great plague of the third century were highly disruptive to the economy of Gaul. The depopulation of the countryside caused much arable land to fall into disuse. Many peasants fled from their lands or turned them over to landed magnates, either to obtain protection from the troops and barbarians or to escape the increasingly higher taxes imposed on land owners by the imperial government to finance the wars against the rebels and barbarians. With the exception of the rebellion of Magnentius, 350-53, and the civil war against the emperor Gratian by Maximus in 383, however, the fourth century was a time of general peace and recovery in Gaul. The barbarian raids, though they did not cease, did subside in number somewhat, and it was possible for peasants to return to their land and to put much of the land back into agricultural production. But while there was some relief for the peasants, the curiales, that class which was responsible for the municipal magistracies, were

still overburdened by the financial drain of their positions. They found ways, however, to evade these financially crippling offices--the richer curiales by legally or illegally creeping into the senatorial order, and the poorer ones by giving up their lands and becoming coloni. The Gallic nobles had been much better prepared to weather the disruptions and hardships of the third century and had in some ways profited from the period. In the third and fourth centuries they were able to evade the levies of their coloni for military service by fraud or force, and tax evasion is said to have been the most highly cultivated art in Gaul.¹ With the retention of men and monies in Gaul and the regained stability of the fourth century, the region made great strides toward recovery by the turn of the fifth century.²

The recovery, however, proved to be too superficial for the continuing prosperity of either Gaul or the Western Roman Empire. The problems of the imperial government continued with little relief. The government still had to drive out and keep out the barbarians, maintain the

¹Olwen Brogan, Roman Gaul (Cambridge, 1953), p. 229.

²Brogan, Roman Gaul, p. 226; Joseph Vogt, The Decline of Rome: the Metamorphosis of Ancient Civilization, trans. Janet Sondheimer (London, 1967), p. 193; Stewart I. Oost, Galla Placidia Augusta (Chicago, 1968), pp. 69-70.

increasingly expensive imperial court and the expense of an increasingly mercenary army, and strive for the recovery of agriculture and the general economy. Yet while the recovery of Gaul was beneficial to the Empire, Gaul was not the first or greatest concern of the imperial government. The defense and prosperity of Italy was of foremost concern, followed by that of Africa, with its grain supply to Rome and Italy, and then followed by the safety and well-being of Gaul. These general imperial priorities were to have a major influence on the minds and activities of the Gallic aristocracy in the fifth century.³

The first priority for defense and imperial economical policy, in the minds of the people and aristocracy of Gaul, was rather obviously, their own native land. Gaul was, in fact, of key importance in the defense of Italy: it was vital for communication with and the protection of both Spain and Britain; and it supplied the Western Empire with a large part of its public officials, tax revenues, and agricultural commodities.⁴ While nothing happened to bring the matter of priorities into the forefront, relations between Gaul and the imperial government remained cordial

³Brogan, Roman Gaul, p. 215; Vogt, Decline of Rome, pp. 193-94; Oost, Placidia, pp. 145-46; Johannes Sundwall, Weströmische Studien (Berlin, 1915), p. 12.

⁴Oost, Placidia, p. 146.

and untroubled, as did the relationship between the two major aristocracies of the West: the Italian and Gallic.

Relations between the Italian and Gallic aristocracies proved in the fifth century to be of great importance to the Western Empire. Since the time of Constantine I, the high aristocracy had been given an ever increasing role in the affairs of the Western Empire.⁵ The provincial governorships and imperial offices again were largely reserved for the aristocracy after years of dwindling participation by the high aristocracy in imperial administration, which culminated with an almost total exclusion of nobles from these offices under Diocletian. As the imperial government became more and more pressed for manpower and monies, the illustres, or high aristocracy,⁶ the masters of most of the wealth and much of the manpower,⁷ became increasingly important and continuously received concessions from the imperial court. The aristocracy of the Western Empire was not, however, one unified body. The two major aristocracies,

⁵M. T. W. Arnheim, The Senatorial Aristocracy in the Later Roman Empire (Oxford, 1972), based on extensive analysis, pp. 39-73.

⁶The terms 'nobles' and 'aristocracy' will refer in this paper to the illustres and the high aristocracy.

⁷The aristocracy, owning most of the land, thereby controlled a large percentage of the populace which was bound to the land, often by law, for agricultural purposes.

the Gallic and Italian, had remained on generally amiable terms, but had never merged into one group--one imperial or Western aristocracy. The Italian aristocracy had jealously retained preeminence in the West and had continuously held a disproportionately high percentage of the imperial offices. The praetorian prefectures,⁸ the Italian and African provincial governorships were almost exclusively in the hands of the Italian nobles.⁹ Even the provincial governorships of Gaul were generally held by Italians. The only Gallic families to regularly reach high imperial office during the late fourth and early fifth centuries were the Firmini-Magni-Ennodii and the Claudii.¹⁰ A separation between the two aristocracies can also be seen in a comparison of their land holdings. The Italian nobles owned vast estates in

⁸ Arnheim, Senatorial Aristocracies, p. 170.

⁹ Between 376 and 423, there were four Gauls who served as proconsularis Africae: Decimius Hilarius Hesperius in 376-77; the father of Paulinus Pellaeus in 377-78; Ennodius in 395; and Felix Ennodius sometime between 408 and 423. There were also three praefectus praetorio Italiae: Decimius Hilarius Hesperius in 378-79; Fl. Afranius Syagrius in 380-81; and Venantius in 423. If the Firmini and Magni were in fact branches of the Ennodii, then all four pro-consuls and the first, and possibly the second, mentioned prefects were related, and may have owed their offices to the influence, prestige or memory of Magnus Ausonius.

¹⁰ Besides the Ennodii mentioned in note 9, Magnus Arborius was praefectus urbis in 380. Of the Claudii, the careers of Cl. Lepidus, Cl. Dardanus, Cl. Lachanius and Rutilius Cl. Namatianus will be briefly discussed later.

both Italy and Africa, but apparently little land in Gaul. The majority of the estates of the Gallic nobles appear to have been in Gaul itself, with some holdings in northern Italy, but apparently few if any in Africa. This distribution of land holdings was to influence greatly the relative viewpoints of the two aristocracies pertaining to imperial policies, and was to become increasingly important in the fifth century.¹¹

The fragile nature of the stability and recovery of Gaul can be seen in the military situation in Gaul at the turn of the fifth century. The forces in Gaul were not only suffering from the recruitment difficulties common to the whole Western Empire at the time, but had been further depleted by the revolt of Magnentius, the draining of troops from the Rhine frontier and Britain by Maximus in the 380's, and the further drain of troops from the Rhine frontier in the first years of the fifth century by Stilicho for the defense of Italy.¹² The army of Gaul was gradually being dispersed, and the defense of the Rhine frontier was more

¹¹For a more complete discussion of the western aristocracies in the Later Empire, see both Arnheim, Senatorial Aristocracies, pp. 39-102, 169-71; and John Matthews, Western Aristocracies and the Imperial Court: A.D. 364-425 (Oxford, 1975), pp. 1-100, 146-72.

¹²Brogan, Roman Gaul, p. 236.

left to Frankish foederati.¹³ The fragile peace and prosperity of Gaul was very soon to be tested.

Peace in Gaul was irreparably broken on the last day of the year 406. On New Year's Eve, the Asding and Siling Vandals, the Suebi and Alani crossed the frozen Rhine, not in a raid as before, but in a large scale movement of peoples.¹⁴ For two years the barbarians moved across Gaul toward the Pyrenees. According to Orientius, "Gaul smoked like one huge pyre."¹⁵ The imperial government failed completely to confront the invasion. Certain foederati, notably the Franks, did put up an initial resistance to the invaders, but were unable to stop the numerically superior forces. Despite the seriousness of the situation in Gaul, Stilicho held to his plans for an Illyrian campaign¹⁶ and did not send an army to Gaul to face the barbarians. In Germania Prima, the Alemanni joined the barbarian attack, taking Moguntiacus, Remi, Argenoratus and other key cities of the province.¹⁷ Against this barbarian incursion as

¹³Oost, Placidia, p. 69, n. 106.

¹⁴Zos. 6. 3; Greg. Tur. HF 2. 2.

¹⁵Orientius, *Commonitorium* 2. 184 (CSEL, 16. 234), 'uno fumavit Gallia tota rogo.'

¹⁶Soz. HE 9. 4.

¹⁷Jerome, Ep. 123. 15. 3.

well, the imperial government failed to send help. This lack of assistance from the government at Ravenna left Gaul on its own to face the invasions. The first seeds of independent spirit and action in Gaul were all but forced on the people of Gaul by the lack of support on the part of the imperial government.

The reasons for the failure of Stilicho and the imperial government to aid Gaul at this crisis are not fully known. It is known, however, that Stilicho's main interest lay in the East and his desire to unite the whole empire under his effective control. He had been in 406-07 gathering an army in Italy for a campaign in Illyria, in conjunction with Alaric and the Visigoths, and apparently felt that this campaign was more important than the defense of Gaul. From 407 on, Gaul was increasingly to consider the imperial government as indifferent to the condition and needs of Gaul. For whatever reasons, the priorities of Stilicho, the indifference of the imperial court, or other reasons, Gaul was left to stand alone against the barbarians in 407 and the immediately following years.

In 407, while the barbarian invasion continued unopposed by the government at Ravenna, the usurpation of the common soldier Fl. Claudius Constantinus began in Britain, and quickly spread to Gaul. Partly because of his name, and because of the lack of imperial interest in troubled

Gaul, Constantine was widely accepted by the Gallic people and many of the nobles.¹⁸ The initial opposition of the forces under Sarus, sent by Stilicho to put down the usurpation, was finally crushed by the successful military actions of Constantine's magistri militum Edobichus and Gerontius.¹⁹ It is interesting to note that the imperial government at Ravenna had made no effort to oppose the invading barbarians, but was quick to confront a usurper. The authority of the imperial court at Ravenna was apparently more important to that court than was the safety of Gaul.

In 408, Stilicho and Honorius were planning an invasion of Gaul, but after the death of Stilicho on 22 August, and the political difficulties that ensued, the plans were tabled. This left Constantine the opportunity to invade Spain and consolidate the whole of the Gallic prefecture under his control.

The conquest of Spain, under Constantine's son Constans and the general Gerontius, was successful. From this position of power, Constantine in 409 requested and received recognition from Honorius at Ravenna. Honorius sent him royal robes, allowed his coinage to be minted at

¹⁸ Zos. 6. 2; Soz. HE 9. 11; Olympiod. fr. 12, cited in Matthews, Western Aristocracies, p. 308.

¹⁹ Zos. 6. 2.

Milan,²⁰ and opened negotiations for assistance against Alaric and the Visigoths in Italy.²¹ Constantine III, as he may now be called, having received recognition from the senior Augustus, promised a levy of British, Spanish and Gallic troops for the campaign.²² Events, unforeseen at the time, however, would negate the possibility of any such combined operation. Had such a campaign been carried out, Constantine might well have successfully perpetuated his recognition and confirmed his legitimacy.

Several reasons can be given for Honorius' recognition of Constantine in 409. Honorius did not have the military strength to dislodge Constantine, with Stilicho now dead and the Visigoths in Italy. Further, Honorius was hopeful that by recognizing Constantine he could assure the safety

²⁰David R. Sear, Roman Coins and their Values, rev. ed. (London, 1970), p. 348 lists Milan as a mint for coinage of Constantine. Although Constantine is reported in Olympiod. fr. 14 and Soz. HE 9. 12. 4 to have journeyed to northern Italy, it seems unlikely that he would have used a mint in the territory of Honorius to mint his own coinage without the consent of Honorius. It seems more likely that the coinage was struck by the authority of Honorius, possibly with the intention of providing Constantine with additional proof of his recognition by Honorius.

²¹Matthews, Western Aristocracies, p. 310 cites a Greek inscription found at Trier (IG, XIV, 2559) as proof that Honorius and Constantine held a joint consulship in 409.

²²Zos. 6. 4; Soz. HE 9. 12; Oros. 7. 40. 5, cited in Matthews, Western Aristocracies, p. 309; Oost, Placidia, pp. 78-79.

of his relatives living in Spain. Two of these relatives, Varenianus and Didymus, had already by this time been killed, probably with the knowledge and consent of Constantine.²³ Finally, refusal to recognize Constantine when he now held all of the Gallic prefecture might have caused him to cast eyes on Italy, and if militarily successful in Italy, to replace Honorius as the sole emperor in the West. Honorius had little choice but to recognize Constantine.

The recognition of Constantine by the people of Gaul had been far quicker and easier. He was widely accepted from his first landing in 407. The people and many of the nobles were desperate for leadership and support which they felt were not forthcoming from the government at Ravenna.²⁴ There is no evidence that Gaul wished at this time to separate from the Empire or to perpetuate a separate emperor for the Gallic prefecture. The aristocracy supported Constantine as a means of protection against their enemies, the barbarians, and not as an act of rebellion against the imperial government at Ravenna.²⁵ There was a need for

²³ Zos. 6. 5 says that Varenianus and Didymus were conducted before Constantine and were forthwith killed. Soz. HE 9. 11-12 says that they were commanded to be brought before Constans and were shortly thereafter killed.

²⁴ Oost, Placidia, p. 76.

²⁵ Sundwall, Studien, p. 10.

effective, concerned leadership in and for Gaul, and an emperor who would appreciate and help relieve the hardships and destruction caused by the barbarians.

A valuable enticement offered by Constantine to gain the support of the Gallic nobility was the appointment of Gallic nobles to the office of praefectus praetorio Galliciarum, an office which had not been held by a Gaul since Fl. Afranius Syagrius in 380.²⁶ Apollinaris, the grandfather of the famous Sidonius Apollinaris and probably from Lugdunum, received the office in 407 and accompanied Gerontius and Constans in the invasion of Spain.²⁷ Decimius Rusticus of Lugdunum was first magister officiorum for Constantine, and in 410 became praetorian prefect of the Gauls.²⁸ Although the names of most of Constantine's officials have not come down to us, a large number must have come from the Gallic aristocracy, because Constantine had little other source from which to draw these appointees.

The fact that some Gallic nobles supported Constantine does not, however, mean that he was supported by all of the

²⁶Karl F. Stroheker, Der senatorische Adel im spätantiken Gallien (Tubingen, 1948), p. 220.

²⁷Zos. 6. 4; Ap. Sid. Ep. 5. 9. 1.

²⁸Soz. HE 9. 12. 5; Greg. Tur. HF 2. 9; Olympiod. fr. 16 cited in Matthews, Western Aristocracies, p. 310; Zos. 6. 13 says that the Augustus Constans was praetorian prefect after Apollinaris.

Gallic aristocracy. Two of the most illustrious careers of Gauls in the imperial service, those of Rutilius Claudius Namatianus and Claudius Postumus Dardanus, took place in the period when Gaul was ruled by usurpers. Rutilius Namatianus was the son of Claudius Lachanius, a high dignitary in the court of Theodosius I. Lachanius had served as consularis Tusciae et Umbriae in 389, comes sacrarum largitionum, quaestor sacri palatii, and in 396, prefect of the city of Constantinople.²⁹ Rutilius, the author of De Reditu Suo, an account of his return to Gaul from Rome in 416,³⁰ served as magister officiorum in 412 and praefectus urbis Romae in 414.³¹ The years of his service in these high offices coincide with the last years of Constantine and with the usurpation of Jovinus in Gaul. The single most illustrious career in this period may well be that of Cl. Postumus Dardanus. He served Honorius as consularis provinciae Viennensis, magister scrinii libellorum, quaestor sacri palatii, and in 412-13, praefectus praetorio Galliarum.³² It was Dardanus, as praetorian prefect, who

²⁹ Sundwall, Studien, p. 63; Stroheker, Adel, p. 187.

³⁰ Eleanor S. Duckett, Latin Writers of the Fifth Century (n.p., 1969), p. 38.

³¹ Sundwall, Studien, p. 108; Stroheker, Adel, p. 194.

³² Sundwall, Studien, p. 67; Stroheker, Adel, pp. 162-63.

led the imperial efforts against the usurper Jovinus in Gaul. For this service he was made patricius by Honorius. Dardanus' success against Jovinus, however, also cost him the disfavor of many Gallic nobles, and he was not widely received by the aristocracy in Gaul after his retirement from the imperial service.³³

The support of the Gallic aristocracy, however, was not to determine the success or failure of the emperor Constantine. In September 409, the barbarians broke through the garrisons of the Pyrenees and began setting up their own kingdoms in northern Spain.³⁴ Shortly thereafter, Gerontius, Constantine's general in Spain, rebelled against his master and raised his own client Maximus to the throne at Tarraco.³⁵ Gerontius and Maximus quickly invaded Gaul with the support of barbarian foederati. Constans was captured and executed by Maximus and Gerontius at Vienne in 411, and Constantine was besieged at Arelate by his rivals.³⁶ With Britain and the Gallic region of Armorica in a state of rebellion against both Constantine and Honorius,³⁷ with

³³Matthews, Western Aristocracies, p. 323.

³⁴Soz. HE 9. 12; Hyd. 42 (II, 17).

³⁵Ren. Prof. Frig. ap. Greg. Tur. HF 2. 9; Soz. HE 9. 13.

³⁶Soz. HE 9. 13.

³⁷Zos. 6. 5; Rut. Nam. De Red 1. 312-16.

Constantine besieged at Arelate and his son dead, the government of Honorius, which had previously recognized Constantine as Augustus, now took the opportunity to act against him. The generals Fl. Constantius and Ulfila were sent to Gaul to bring the prefecture back under the control of Ravenna, and hopefully thereafter, it was hoped, to use the resources of Gaul against the Visigoths in Italy. In the wake of their advance, Gerontius committed suicide and Maximus fled to his barbarian supporters.³⁸ Constantine was besieged by Ulfila and Constantius at Arelate, soon defeated, and executed en route to Ravenna.³⁹

Immediately before the fall of Constantine, a new usurper arose in Gaul who demonstrated a fundamental change in the motivation and machinations of the Gallic aristocracy. Jovinus, a Gallic noble from Narbo, was chosen by his peers and supported by Gundahar, king of the Burgundians, Goar, king of the Alani, and some Franks and Alemanni.⁴⁰ In contrast to the usurpation of Constantine, that of Jovinus

³⁸Sulp. Alex. ap. Greg. Tur. HF 2. 9; Soz. HE 9. 13.

³⁹Zos. 6. 5; Soz. HE 9. 14-15; Oost, Placidia, pp. 108-111; Matthews, Western Aristocracies, pp. 312-13; Ren. Prof. Frig. ap. Greg. Tur. HF 2. 9 says that Constantine surrendered to the imperial forces upon hearing of the rise of the usurper Jovinus and his approaching army.

⁴⁰Ren Prof. Frig. ap. Greg. Tur. HF 2. 9; Ap. Sid. Carm. 23. 170-75; Oros. 7. 42. 6; Olympiod. fr. 17 cited in Matthews, Western Aristocracies, p. 314.

found the Gallic aristocracy and the barbarians allied against the imperial government at Ravenna.⁴¹ Support of Jovinus seems to have been widespread among the people, and his control over the provinces of the prefecture was apparently extensive. Decimius Rusticus, who had previously been praetorian prefect under Constantine, served Jovinus in the same capacity.⁴² The three mints of Gaul, ranging from Treveri in Belgica Prima to Arelate in Narbonensis Prima, all minted coinage for Jovinus.⁴³

A poorly timed move by Honorius almost assured the success of Jovinus. To rid Italy of the Visigoths, Honorius agreed to their settlement in Narbonensis as foederati. The weakness of the imperial government and the undefeated state of the Visigothic forces made them foederati in name only, and in Gaul, their king Athaulf quickly agreed to support Jovinus. But trouble soon arose between Jovinus and Athaulf, both of whom wished to rule Gaul. When Jovinus raised his brother Sebastianus to Augustus instead of agreeing to rule Gaul equally with Athaulf, the Visigothic king split with the usurper and informed Honorius that he would defeat the

⁴¹Sundwall, Studien, p. 11.

⁴²Ren. Prof. Frig. ap. Greg. Tur. HF 2. 9; Stroheker, Adel, p. 45.

⁴³Sear, Roman Coins, p. 349.

usurpers for the government at Ravenna and send their heads to Honorius.⁴⁴ Oaths were exchanged between Athaulf and Dardanus, the loyal praetorian prefect of the Gauls, presumably with the promise that if the Visigoths continued to serve the emperor militarily, they could occupy Aquitania Secunda after the fall of Jovinus.⁴⁵ Athaulf lived up to his promise, defeating Jovinus and Sebastianus in 413.⁴⁶ Jovinus, Decimius Rusticus and others were executed in Narbo by Dardanus,⁴⁷ probably as a warning to the populace of the city, who had supported two usurpers in the past six years.⁴⁸

After defeating Jovinus, the Visigoths, apparently without fear of imperial opposition, took Tolosa and Burdigala, and tried unsuccessfully also to take Massilia.⁴⁹ This barbarian activity in Gaul still does not appear to

⁴⁴Olympiod, fr. 19, cited in Matthews, Western Aristocracies, p. 315.

⁴⁵Chron. Gall. a. 452. 72 (I, 654); Oost, Placidia, p. 117.

⁴⁶Chron. Gall. a. 452. 69 (I, 654).

⁴⁷Hyd. 54 (II, 18); Ren. Prof. Frig. ap. Greg. Tur. HF 2. 9; Olympiod. fr. 19, cited in Matthews, Western Aristocracies, p. 315.

⁴⁸Brogan, Roman Gaul, p. 236; Matthews, Western Aristocracies, pp. 314, 321-22, 333; Oost, Placidia, pp. 116-117, 227.

⁴⁹Olympiod. fr. 21, cited in Matthews, Western Aristocracies, p. 316.

have prompted imperial response, but the plight of the emperor's half-sister, Galla Placidia, a captive of the Visigoths since the sack of Rome in 410, did cause concern at the court. The return of Placidia had been promised in the agreement of 413 in exchange for a large quantity of grain, but when Honorius was unable to deliver the grain due to difficulties with the grain supply from Africa,⁵⁰ Athaulf not only refused to release Placidia, but married her. The wedding took place in Narbo in January 414 at the home of Ingenius, a leading citizen of the city, with several Gallic notables present and participating in the ceremonies.⁵¹ If the execution of Jovinus in Narbo the previous year was designed to impress imperial loyalty on the nobles of the city, it was apparently unsuccessful. Whether prompted by the marriage of Placidia to the barbarian king, as appears to be the case, or for other reasons, the imperial government, after seven years of inactivity towards the barbarians in Gaul, finally took action under the leadership of Fl. Constantius.

Constantius moved against the Visigoths in Gaul in 414, laying a strict naval blockade on Narbo in an attempt

⁵⁰Oros. 7. 42. 10, cited in Matthews, Western Aristocracies, p. 316.

⁵¹Hyd. 57 (II, 18); Olympiod. fr. 24, cited in Matthews, Western Aristocracies, p. 316.

to force the Visigoths out of that city.⁵² During the blockade, Athaulf raised Priscus Attalus to the imperial throne, with himself as the usurper's magister militum. Attalus had in 410 been proclaimed emperor by the Senate, at the insistence of Alaric, and had been forced by Alaric later that same year to abdicate. Now he was again raised to the purple, possibly in an attempt by Athaulf to enlist the support of the Gallic people and aristocracy. Even though the Gallic nobility and populace were apparently on moderately good terms with Athaulf, there is little evidence that they supported his puppet Attalus. In an attempt to involve the aristocracy in the regime, Paulinus of Pella, the grandson of Decimus Magnus Ausonius, was given the office of *comes privatae largitionis*, an office which Paulinus said was given to him in his absence and which brought him much grief and hazard.⁵³ The usurpation of Priscus Attalus accomplished little, if anything, and Attalus was captured, publicly humiliated and exiled by Constantius as he attempted to escape Narbo during the city's evacuation by the Visigoths.⁵⁴ The Visigoths sacked

⁵²Oros. 7. 43. 1, cited in Matthews, Western Aristocracies, p. 317.

⁵³Paul. Pell. Euch. 2. 291-301.

⁵⁴Matthews, Western Aristocracies, pp. 317-18; Sundwall, Studien, p. 11; Chadwick, Poetry, p. 123; Oost, Placidia, p. 130.

Burdigala on their departure⁵⁵ and were pursued by Constantius into Spain, where they were again blockaded.

The fall of Priscus Attalus, however, marked the end of the period of usurpations in Gaul. There was not to be another usurper in Gaul during the remaining years of the Western Empire. What had been the effect of this period on Gaul and the Gallic aristocracy, and what were the effects on their relationship with the imperial government? The usurpations had to a large degree been accepted and supported in Gaul because of the belief, real or imagined, that they had been abandoned by the imperial government at Ravenna, particularly during the barbarian invasions of 406 and the following years. The leadership of an emperor concerned with the situation in Gaul was both desired and desperately needed. The usurpers were therefore accepted. The belief held by many Gauls that the imperial government was indifferent to their plight is substantiated in part by the fact that while the imperial government failed to confront the barbarians in Gaul in the years 407-13, it was quick to send military forces to confront the usurpers Constantine and Jovinus. The imperial court had also moved to relieve the situation in Italy by agreeing to settle the Visigoths in Gaul--a region which had suffered as much, if

⁵⁵Paul. Pell. Euch. 2. 311-14.

not more, destruction at the hands of the barbarians than had Italy. Even the efforts against the Visigoths in 414 most probably provoked by the refusal of the barbarians to return Galla Placidia, and her marriage to Athaulf, and were not to any significant degree the result of imperial concern for the safety or well-being of Gaul. The government at Ravenna appears to have been attacking the results of the problem in Gaul, and not the problem itself. The problem was the barbarian invasions: the usurpers arose, or at least were more readily accepted and supported, because they promised relief from the problem, either by opposing the barbarians or by developing some level of cooperation or coexistence with them. The policies of the imperial government in regard to the barbarians and the usurpers in Gaul supported all too well the Gallic belief that they had been left to their own means to face the barbarians.

The campaign of Constantius against the Visigoths in Spain, however, was marked with determination and success. By 417, the Visigoths were forced to sign a treaty with Constantius in which they agreed again to become foederati, to return the now widowed Placidia, and to fight against the Vandals and Alani in Spain.⁵⁶ The Visigoths did fight for the Romans in Spain, almost annihilating the Siling

⁵⁶Oros. 7. 43. 12-13, cited in Oost, Placidia, p. 319.

Vandals, the remnant of whom joined the Asding Vandals to form one tribe.⁵⁷ But in 418, before the Visigoths had completed their war in Spain, they were settled in Aquitania Prima and adjacent parts of Novempopulana and Narbonensis Prima, including the city of Tolosa, which became their capital.⁵⁸

Much controversy has arisen over why Constantius recalled the Visigoths from Spain in 418 and settled them in Gaul before they had completed the war against the Vandals and Alani, and why they were settled as foederati in Aquitania. The more traditional view is that the imperial government did not want the Visigoths to totally defeat the barbarians in Spain; that Rome did not want the Visigoths to become too powerful. But though it is possible that the barbarians in Spain might have been used later as Roman foederati against the Visigoths, still the argument is not convincing. There seems to be little logic in allowing two enemies to exist when one was well on the way to destroying the other, and even the victor would have been weakened by the continuance of the war.⁵⁹ The more convincing argument

⁵⁷Oros. 7. 43. 15, cited by Oost, Placidia, p. 140.

⁵⁸Hyd. 69 (II, 19).

⁵⁹It must be conceded, however, that other known actions and policies of the imperial government in this period show little logic.

is that the Visigoths were needed elsewhere. E. A. Thompson argues that this and subsequent settlements of barbarians in Gaul were designed to secure Gaul from the menace of the Bacaudae.⁶⁰ The Bacaudae were bands of landless peasants, runaway slaves and discontented soldiers who had, since the third century, periodically risen up and upset the social order and administration of Gaul and other regions of the Western Empire.⁶¹ The Bacaudae were powerful enough to hold the Alpine passes and demand the booty collected by Sarus in Gaul in 407 in return for his safe passage into Italy.⁶² It was likewise they who rebelled against the nobility following the evacuation of the Visigoths from Gaul in 414⁶³ and who led the civil rebellion in Armorica which was put down by Exuperantius in 417.⁶⁴ As Thompson argues, it was after major uprisings of the Bacaudae had been quelled that Constantius and later Aetius settled bands of barbarians in strategical locations in Gaul. It was apparently intended that the settled barbarians would deem future uprisings

⁶⁰For a full discussion, see E. A. Thompson, "The settlement of the Barbarians in Southern Gaul," JRS 46 (1956), pp. 65-75.

⁶¹Brogan, Roman Gaul, p. 231.

⁶²Thompson, JRS 46, p. 69.

⁶³Paul. Pell. Euch. 2. 333-36; Thompson, JRS 46, p. 69.

⁶⁴Rut. Nam. De Red. 2. 213-16; Thompson, JRS 46, p. 70.

as detrimental to themselves and their land, as well as to the Gallo-Romans, and would thus willingly support the Roman efforts to put down the uprisings.⁶⁵ It should be noted that the imperial military efforts in Gaul which were not directed against the usurpers were against the Bacaudae, and again it appears that although the imperial government did not react to the barbarian invasions, it would not tolerate civil rebellion against its authority. And here again the imperial government appears to have been attacking the results of the problem and not the problem itself. The uprisings of the Bacaudae were facilitated, if not caused, by the disruptions of the barbarian invasions and of the conflicts between the usurpers and the imperial government.

With the success of Exuperantius against the Bacaudae in 417 and the settlement of the Visigoths in Aquitania in 418, it appeared that Gaul was recovering from the ravages and troubles of the past twelve years. Honorius at this time reestablished the old Council of Gaul, although it was now composed of only the provinces of the diocese of Viennensis. The area under control of the Council adequately reflect the authority of the Roman court at Arelate; much of northern and eastern Gaul was in civil turmoil or in the hands of the Franks.⁶⁶ The professed purpose of the

⁶⁵Thompson, JRS 46, p. 72.

⁶⁶Brogan, Roman Gaul, p. 237.

reinstitution of the Council was to provide a forum for discussion of public and private matters, although the underlying purpose was to focus Gallic loyalties on the new capital in the south, Arelate, and to assist the political and administrative adjustment caused by the move from Treveri.⁶⁷ The imperial government had reason to be suspicious and concerned over Gallic loyalties after the widespread support given to the usurpations of Constantius and Jovinus by the people and nobility of Gaul. Besides the reinstitution of the Council and the inclusion of several young Gallic nobles as tribuni et notarii⁶⁸ in the imperial court of Honorius, the imperial government seems to have again attacked the results of the problem instead of the problem itself. The Gallic nobles wanted a share in the governing of the Empire, and yet were to a large degree excluded from it by Honorius, and Valentinian III during the regency of his mother Galla Placidia. Almost no Gallic nobles held high imperial office between 414 and 448,⁶⁹ except for the office of praefectus praetorio Galliarum.

⁶⁷Matthews, Western Aristocracies, pp. 334-36.

⁶⁸Among the young Gallic nobles serving as tribuni et notarii were the sons of Constantine's two praetorian prefects. Sundwall, Studien, pp. 48-49.

⁶⁹The few exceptions were: Agricola, cos. 421, and Venantius, praetorian prefect of Italy, 423. Sundwall, Studien, pp. 42, 143.

This position was a high and important one, but by allotting the Gallic aristocracy only this one high office, one which affected only their own homeland,⁷⁰ the imperial government was further excluding the Gallic aristocracy from involvement in the overall affairs of the Western Empire. To a large extent, the Gallic nobility was excluded from the government of the Western Empire because it had supported the usurpers; it had supported the usurpers at least partially because it wanted a greater participation in the imperial government. Even the Claudii, who had faithfully served the emperor during the usurpations of Constantine and Jovinus, did not assume high office for the remainder of the reign of Honorius, probably because their disfavor among their fellow Gallic nobles would have endangered imperial attempts at the restoration of cordial relations with Gaul.

On 27 August 423, Honorius died, leaving no direct heir to the throne. Theoretically Theodosius II, the Eastern emperor, became the sole Augustus of an undivided Empire, but the emergence of the usurper Johannes in Italy caused Theodosius to recognize what had been known for over a century, that a separate emperor was needed for the West.

⁷⁰Technically the Gallic prefecture included Britain and Spain as well as Gaul, but by this time Britain was largely lost to the Empire, and much of Spain was in the hands of the Vandals, Alani and Suebi.

Galla Placidia and her son by Constantius, Fl. Placidus Valentinianus, were sent with an Eastern army to Italy to quell the usurpation.⁷¹

There is little concerning the usurpation of Johannes which is important to this discussion except the emergence of Aetius, and the fact that Johannes apparently held control in Gaul.⁷² Aetius first appears as a minor court official, cura palatii, to Johannes.⁷³ He was born in Silistria, the son of a noble Italian woman and Gaudentius, a magnate in the province of Scythia who had risen to the rank of magister equitum under Stilicho.⁷⁴ In his youth, Aetius had spent three years as a hostage of the Visigoths and an indefinite time as a hostage of the Huns. As cura palatii to Johannes, Aetius was sent to the Huns to raise an army to fight against the approaching forces of Theodosius II.⁷⁵ Aetius returned to Italy with the Hunnic army three days after the capture of Ravenna and the decapitation of Johannes. The Hunnic army, however, proved to be the

⁷¹For a full discussion of Constantius and Placidia, see Oost, Placidia, pp. 136-209.

⁷²Coinage of Johannes was minted at Arelate. Sear, Roman Coins, p. 351.

⁷³Sundwall, Studien, pp. 40-41.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, p. 82.

⁷⁵Ren. Prof. Frig. ap. Greg. Tur. HF 2. 8.

salvation of Aetius. With the support of the Hunnic army, he negotiated for his personal safety and a military command in Gaul. Placidia had little choice but to grant him the command. There had apparently been no Gallic opposition to Johannes, and there was to be wide acceptance and support of the usurper's official, Aetius.

CHAPTER II

AETIUS AND THE ATTEMPTED RESTORATION OF THE WESTERN EMPIRE

The assignment of Aetius to the military command in Gaul proved to be of great significance to the Western Empire. It was from this base that Aetius gained complete military power in the West and it was from this position that he designed to restore the Western Empire, centered on a stabilized, pacified Gaul.

With his newly acquired military command and the title of comes, Aetius immediately moved against the Visigoths, who had seized the opportunity offered by the usurpation of Johannes in Italy in 425 to invade Provence and lay siege to Arelate.¹ Aetius defeated them and caused the Visigoths to retire to their allotted territory. But Aetius' military actions in Gaul were not restricted to the containment of the Visigoths. In 428 the Ripuarian Franks, who had served faithfully as foederati during the barbarian invasion of 406, but had since taken over lands on the left bank of the Rhine, were defeated by Aetius at

¹Prosp. 1290 (I, 471); Hyd. 92 (II, 21); J. B. Bury, History of the Later Roman Empire, From the Death of Theodosius I to the Death of Justinian (A.D. 395 to A.D. 565), 2nd ed., London, 1931, p. 242.

the Rhine.² Two years later the Visigoths again moved against Arelate and were again defeated by Aetius. That same year Aetius defeated the Iuthungi in Noricum, and in 432 again defeated the Franks.³ In these seven years in Gaul, Aetius pursued a positive, active policy against the barbarians and began to build a solid reputation for success against the tribes. In the eighteen years between the invasion of 406 and the assumption of the military command in Gaul by Aetius, the imperial government at Ravenna had shown almost no interest in Gaul or action against the barbarians there. The one campaign against the Visigoths, conducted by Constantius, was influenced more by the capture and marriage of Galla Placidia than by any design or desire to relieve Gaul. The people and aristocracy of Gaul could not have failed to notice the significance of Aetius' presence in Gaul, nor failed to support the first representative of the central government in years to demonstrate active concern for their homeland. Aetius was restoring the peace and stability of Gaul by his positive actions against the barbarians and was building for himself a base of power for the future.

²Pros. 1298 (I, 472); Bury, Later Roman Empire, pp. 242-43.

³Hyd. 93, 98 (II, 22); Matthews, Western Aristocracies, p. 330.

While Aetius was pursuing this policy in Gaul, Galla Placidia was maintaining her position as regent to her young son Valentinian III by a careful balancing of power among her three generals: Aetius in Gaul, Boniface in Africa, and Felix in Italy.⁴ Felix had apparently been appointed from the East; Boniface had gained the post of comes Africae by the influence of Placidia and had supported Placidia and her son from that post while they were in Constantinople;⁵ Aetius had gained his position by force after supporting the usurper Johannes over Placidia's son. Although the balance among the three was fairly well maintained for seven years, there appears always to have been some degree of rivalry among the three generals, with each attempting to enhance his power at the expense of the others. In 427 when Boniface had fallen into disfavor with the pious Placidia because of his laxity in confronting Arianism in Africa (and possibly his own conversion to Arianism),⁶ Felix convinced Placidia to recall Boniface to Italy. Boniface refused to return, and two expeditions were sent against him in Africa in the next three years, although neither was

⁴Oost, Placidia, pp. 210-12.

⁵Olympiod. frag. 40, cited in Oost, Placidia, pp. 170, 173.

⁶Oost, Placidia, p. 214.

successful.⁷ Placidia desired finally that the conflict should be settled by peaceful means, and sent a high official of the court to Africa to negotiate with Boniface. Peace ensued and Boniface was restored to his position as comes Africae. During this conflict with Boniface, Felix had held a consulship and had been promoted to the particariate, while Aetius was promoted to magister militum per Gallias.⁸

The most important struggle between two of the generals, however, came in 430 when Placidia informed Aetius that Felix was plotting against him.⁹ Rather than wait for Felix' plots to materialize, Aetius is said to have instigated a riot of soldiers in Ravenna in which Felix, his wife Padusia and the deacon Grunitus were killed on the steps of the Basilica Ursiana.¹⁰ Later the same year,

⁷ Prosp. 1294 (I, 471); Bury, Later Roman Empire, p. 245.

⁸ Prosp. 1300 (I, 472).

⁹ Prosp. 1303 (I, 473); Oost, Placidia, p. 229, n. 74 considers whether Joh. Ant. frag. 201. 3 implies that Aetius thought Felix was plotting against him at the suggestion of Placidia, or that Aetius was informed of the plotting by Placidia. Oost concludes that Placidia must have informed Aetius, because it was in her interest to have the three generals suspicious of each other, but not in her interest to aid one general in eliminating another.

¹⁰ Prosp. 1303 (I, 473); there is some question about this account because it is doubtful that Aetius had enough power in Ravenna to instigate a rebellion or riot of the soldiers.

however, a blow was struck at Aetius' base of support: the Huns were decisively defeated by the Burgundians.¹¹ The defeat deprived Aetius of much of the Hunnic mercenary support with which he had originally secured his command in Gaul and with which he had conducted his campaigns against the barbarians there. With the general's Hunnic support weakened, the Augusta chose to act. In 432, the year of Aetius' first consulship, Placidia decided to relieve Aetius. She recalled Boniface from Africa and granted him the rank of patrician.¹² Aetius moved on Italy from Gaul, but was met by Boniface at the fifth milestone from Ariminum and defeated.¹³ Aetius fled to his Hunnic friends, but Boniface died three months later from wounds he had received in the battle with Aetius, and was replaced by his son-in-law Sebastianus.¹⁴ Aetius returned to Italy with a Hunnic army raised from King Rua by promise of territorial concessions to the Huns. Upon the approach of Aetius, Sebastianus was dismissed by Placidia and Aetius was reinstated with the office of master of the soldiers, followed

¹¹Soc. HE 7. 30. 1-6; Oost, Placidia, p. 231.

¹²Marcell. s.a. 435, 2 (II, 79).

¹³Hyd. 99 (II, 22); Prosp. 1310 (I, 473); Chron. Gall. 111 (I, 658).

¹⁴Ibid.

in 433 or 434 by the title of patrician.¹⁵ Aetius had been successful among the three rivals and now held the sole military power in the Western Empire. With his rivals removed, Aetius could now attempt to initiate his policy of Western imperial restoration based on a secure and faithful Gaul. But first Aetius had to complete the pacification of Gaul.

Aetius again initiated action against the barbarians in Gaul, and also against the civil revolts of the Bacaudae. In 436 the Huns, under the command of Aetius, or at least with his knowledge, revenged the defeat of six years earlier with a crushing victory over the Burgundians.¹⁶ The Bacaudae had again risen in revolt in northern Gaul and were put down by Aetius in 437.¹⁷ In much the same way that Constantius had settled the Visigoths in Aquitania in 418 after putting down a rebellion of the Bacaudae, Aetius in 440 settled a group of Alani under Sambida in the agri deserti around Valence, and after another uprising in 440-41, settled another group under King Goar in Gallia Ulterior near Cenabum (Orleans).¹⁸

¹⁵Hyd. 103 (II, 22); E. R. Boak and W. G. Sinnigen, A History of Rome to A.D. 565 (5th ed., New York, 1968), p. 471.

¹⁶Hyd. 108 (II, 22); Prosp. 1322 (I, 475); Chron. Gall. 118 (I, 660); Bury, Later Roman Empire, p. 249.

¹⁷Apoll. Sid. Carm. 7. 246-50; Chron. Gall. 118 (I, 660),

¹⁸Chron. Gall. 124, 127 (I, 660); A. H. M. Jones, The Later Roman Empire, 284-602, Norman, Oklahoma, 1963, p. 189.

During the Bacaudae uprisings in the mid and late 430's, the Visigoths again attacked Narbo and other cities of that area.¹⁹ Litorius was dispatched in 437 with Hunnic forces and successfully relieved Narbo. In 439 he carried the war into Visigothic territory and was stopped only at the walls of Tolosa. Litorius was himself killed at Tolosa, but the Visigoths had been sufficiently beaten to sign a treaty with Aetius, negotiated by the praetorian prefect of the Gauls, Eparchius Avitus.²⁰

In 443, after six years in which there is no mention of the Burgundians, the remnants of that tribe were recalled from Germania Prima and settled in southeastern Gaul as hospites.²¹ Here again S. Thompson sees the settlement as a protection against the Bacaudae of the region.²² The only instance in which settled barbarians did in fact move against an uprising of the Bacaudae was in 444-45 when King Goar and his Alani moved against the Bacaudae in Armorica, but were stopped by the intercessions of Bishop Germanus of Auxerre.²³ The barbarians of Gaul were, however, acting as

¹⁹Hyd. 107, 110 (II, 22-23); Prosp. 1324 (I, 660).

²⁰Apoll. Sid. Carm. 7. 295-315; Bury, Later Roman Empire, p. 250.

²¹Chron. Gall. 128 (I, 660).

²²Thompson, JRS 46 (1956), 67.

²³Vita S. Germani, 28; Thompson, JRS (1956), 71.

faithful foederati of the Western Empire. Aetius had successfully subdued the barbarian tribes and was now using them to maintain the stability and peace of Gaul. The remainder of the Western Empire, however, was not being stabilized or restored during these years.

Between 425 and 445, while Aetius was carrying out successful campaigns against the barbarians and Bacaudae in Gaul, other parts of the Western Empire were lost to the Empire. In 429, while Boniface was comes Africae, the Vandals crossed over from Spain into Tingitania on the northwest tip of Africa.²⁴ The story is now generally discredited that Boniface invited the Vandals over into Africa to support him in his struggle against the imperial government at that time.²⁵ The truth is more probably that the Vandals were able to cross into Africa because of the struggle. However it was that they were allowed to cross, Boniface was unable to defeat or dislodge them, even in 431-32 with the aid of forces from the Eastern army.²⁶ In 432, Aetius was relieved and Boniface was recalled from Africa, with the Eastern forces still in Africa and the Vandals still undefeated.

²⁴Chron. Gall. 108 (I, 658); Hyd. 90 (II, 21); Jones, Later Roman Empire, p. 189.

²⁵Procop. Bell. 3 (Vand. 1). 3. 22-31, discussed in Oost, Placidia, p. 223, n. 58.

²⁶Procop. Bell. 3 (Vand. 1). 3. 34-35.

Too often modern historians follow the ancient practice of placing the blame for the fall of Africa to the Vandals on an individual, and often the individual blamed is Aetius. If historians must blame someone, it is as easy to blame Placidia and Boniface, because of this untimely move, as to blame Aetius for his later failure to contain or dislodge the Vandals. Taking the argument back further, had not Constantius recalled the Visigoths from Spain before they could finish their war against the Vandals in 418, the Vandals would not have been in Africa in 429. This writer is not attempting to place the blame for the fall of Africa on Constantius, Placidia, Boniface or anyone, but to show that neither is it correct to place the blame on Aetius. Aetius had been markedly successful against the barbarians in his sphere of influence, Gaul, between 425 and 432; Boniface, even with the assistance of the Eastern army, had been markedly unsuccessful. Once the Vandals had become established in Africa, under the regime of Boniface, they were not defeated by Roman forces in Africa until the campaign of Belisarius in 533.

With the previous poor showing of Boniface and the Eastern army in Africa, and with continued barbarian unrest in Gaul, it is not surprising that Aetius agreed to a treaty recognizing the Vandals as an independent kingdom in

442.²⁷ What other option was open to him? With the barbarians and the Bacaudae active in Gaul, could Aetius have staged a major campaign in Africa? The matter of priorities must also enter into this discussion. As was stated before, there had already existed a divergence of opinion on priorities of imperial interest and action between the imperial court and the Italian aristocracy on one hand, and the Gallic aristocracy on the other. As Sundwall has pointed out, the loss of Africa was not only a loss for the Empire, but also for the Italian aristocracy, with their large landholdings there, while it strengthened the position of the Gallic aristocracy.²⁸ The loss of Africa was obviously a great loss for the Empire, but it was not a fatal one. Aetius was attempting to build a strong base of power for the Western Empire around a stabilized Gaul and an Italy protected from barbarian interference. Aetius to a large

²⁷ Bury, Later Roman Empire, pp. 255-56, contends that the loss of Africa was a worse blow to the Empire than the Visigothic occupation of Gaul. J. R. Moss, "The Effects of the Policies of Aetius on the History of Western Europe,," Historia 22 (1973), 711-31, argues that Aetius' policy was wrong; that too much emphasis was placed on Gaul, damaging the economic and military position of the Empire. For the treaty of 442, Procop. Bell. 3 (Vand. 1). 4. 13-14; the treaty actually recognized Geiseric and the Vandals as allies who were to pay an annual tribute. In effect, the Vandals were independent and agreed only to keep the grain supply open to Rome, which was of greater financial profit to the Vandals than the debit accrued by the loss of tribute.

²⁸ Sundwall, Studien, p. 13.

degree succeeded in this plan. Gaul was stabilized and remained at relative peace, except immediately following the deaths of both Aetius and Valentinian III, for about twenty years. Italy did not suffer any barbarian attacks, except the Hunnic invasion of 453, during the primacy of Aetius. The matter of whether his was the correct policy, whether Gaul was properly treated as more important than Africa, was debated then and still is today. Several points, however, can be made in support of Aetius' policy. Africa was separated from Italy by the Mediterranean Sea, and would have been much harder to defend than was Gaul, particularly in this period when Roman seapower was at a dangerously low level.²⁹ The Western Empire did not have the manpower or resources to stabilize both Gaul and Africa at this time; because of the potential resources of Gaul, the Western Empire would have been in a better position to recover Africa with a stabilized Gaul, than the reverse. The fall of Gaul would have also created a much greater physical threat to the security of Italy than did the loss of Africa. The fall of Gaul would likewise have probably brought on the immediate loss of Spain, which was not a result of the fall of Africa. Gaul was more important than Africa to the Empire for several other reasons besides

²⁹Moss, Historia 22 (1973), 722-31.

physical security. The loss of Gaul would have been more serious to the Empire in terms of loyal citizenry, public officials, culture and education, manpower, natural resources and commodities other than grain. It is also possible that the tax revenues of Gaul exceeded those from Africa. A large percentage of the land in Africa was owned by the Italian nobles, who were also the group who enjoyed the largest amount of tax exemptions and privileges. Finally, all the barbarian tribes of Gaul had served the Empire as foederati or hospites, while the Vandals of Africa had never served the Empire. The barbarians of Gaul were therefore more likely to support the Empire in future campaigns than were the Vandals. These points, though not conclusive, do tend to support the policy of Aetius against his critics, both ancient and modern.

With the policy of Aetius oriented towards Gaul, it is not surprising that the general was so widely supported among the Gallic aristocracy. The support seems to have been mutual. Gallic nobles were again appointed to high imperial offices under the patronage of Aetius and the obviously assisted Aetius in the administration of his policies. There was now renewed hope for the Gallic nobles for influence within the imperial government and in guiding the Empire in a way which would restore the Empire to its former stability and glory. After an absence from high office of

twenty-six years, in the year 448 the Gallic nobles again appear in the imperial administration.³⁰ It is interesting to note, however, that the prominent families of the earlier period were replaced by a group of interrelated families who centered around Eparchius Avitus, the praefectus praetorio Galliarum of 439-40, and future emperor.

One of the dominant Gallic families of the fourth and fifth centuries was the Ennodii, of which the Magni and Firmini were apparently branches. The connection among these three families becomes evident in the name and parentage of the poet Magnis Felix Ennodius, the son of a Firminus.³¹ In the late fifth and early sixth centuries there is a Firminus, son of a Ferreolus, which appears to show a connection between the Firmini and the Ferreoli, by blood or marriage.³² Tonantius Ferreolus, praetorian prefect of the Gauls in 451, and possibly the father of the above Ferreolus, was prefect of the Gauls at the same time that Firminus was praetorian prefect of Italy.³³ Because it was common for

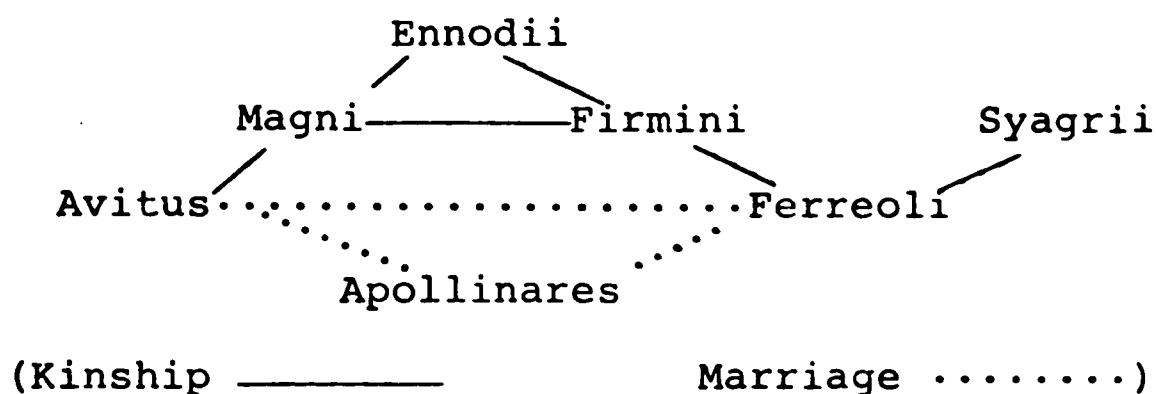
³⁰There was no Gallic noble in the office of praetorian prefect of Italy for twenty-six years, 423-49; no prefect of Rome for thirty-seven years, 414-51; no patrician for thirty-two years, 419-51; and no consul for thirty-two years, 421-53. Briggs Twyman, "Aetius and the Aristocracy," Historia 19 (1970), 487.

³¹Stroheker, Adel, p. 166.

³²Ibid., p. 174.

³³Sundwall, Studien, pp. 77-78.

kin to hold high office at the same time, and a father and son of the next generation share the same names as the prefects, it seems likely that the families of the two prefects were related.³⁴ Tonantius Ferreolus is also known to have been related by marriage to both Eparchius Avitus, himself related to the Magni, and to Apollinaris Sidonius.³⁵ There appears, then, to have been family connections along the lines of the following graph:



It should be noted that members of this network of inter-related families not only held three praetorian prefectures of the Gauls, one praetorian prefecture of Italy, a consulship and two patriciates in the years 439-54, but an additional eight praetorian prefectures of the Gauls, an urban prefecture, consulship, patriciate and the emperorship

³⁴The interrelationship of the nobility and the tendency of kin to hold office at the same time is discussed in Arnheim, Senatorial Aristocracy, pp. 103-42.

³⁵Sundwall, Studien, pp. 77-78; Stroheker, Adel, p. 173.

in the twenty-two years after the death of Aetius.³⁶ This network of families rose to prominence under Aetius, supported his policies, and continued to hold high imperial office until the fall of the Western Empire.

One area in which the Gallic aristocracy aided Aetius in an attempt to control the imperial administration is in the area of financial policy. And here it appears that, although in general opposition to Aetius and the Gallic aristocracy, there were some few Italian nobles who did support Aetius, the chief one of whom was Petronius Maximus. Although it is generally believed that Maximus was opposed to Aetius, B. Twyman has argued that novels issued on the suggestio of Maximus as praefectus praetorio Italiae in 440 show that he was in agreement with financial policies of Aetius.³⁷ There was a definite split between those policies of Aetius, Maximus and the Gallic nobles on one hand, and the policies of the Italian nobles on the other. Aetius and his supporters appear to have been attempting a

³⁶ Praetorian prefects of the Gauls: Eparchius Avitus, 439-40; Apollinaris filius, 448-49; Tonantius Ferreolus, 451; Priscus Valerius, 455-56; Magnus, 458-59; Auxanii pater, 457?-65; Arvandus, 465-69; Agricola, between 467-76; Polemius, 471-72?; Ecdicius, 470's; and Magnus Felix, 474-75?. Praetorian prefect of Italy: Firminus, 449-52. Urban prefect: Apollinaris Sidonius, 468. Consuls: Fl. Venantius Opilio, 453; Magnus, 460. Patricians: Firminus, 451; Opilio, 451; Ecdicius, 474. Augustus: Avitus, 455-56.

³⁷ Twyman, Historia 19 (1970), 488.

more equitable and productive system of taxation by abolishing the privileges that the landed aristocracy had amassed over the years: the opposition to Aetius, mainly the Italian nobles with their long predominance in the imperial court, was attempting to use its influence to maintain these privileges and exemptions, which they themselves had arranged and were the chief beneficiaries of.³⁸ A novel of 24 January 440, issued on the formal suggestion of Maximus, abolished all tax exemptions not in accordance with a degree of 426, and a subsequent novel of 14 March 441, also on the suggestio of Maximus, abolished all tax exemptions and special privileges whatsoever.³⁹ Other novels of 440 and 450, issued upon the formal suggestion of Maximus and Firminus respectively, attempted to protect the provincials from the oppressive tax investigations of the palatini by reserving final jurisdiction in cases involving complaints against the palatini for the praetorian prefect instead of the comites of the treasuries.⁴⁰ By investigating the support of or opposition to aristocratic tax privileges and the centralization of financial control under the comites

³⁸ Twyman, Historia 19 (1970), 490.

³⁹ Nov. Val. iv; C. Pharr, The Theodosian Code (Princeton, 1952), p. 519, n. 6; Nov. Val. x.

⁴⁰ Twyman, Historia 19 (1970), 488-93; Oost, Placidia, pp. 236-38.

of both treasuries, Twyman has demonstrated that, particularly in the years 440-52, there was a definite conflict between the two groups for control of imperial finances. Aetius had control of the finances when Gallic nobles were in high imperial offices. With Gallic nobles in the imperial administration and Gaul stabilized, Aetius was at the pinnacle of his power.⁴¹

The career of Aetius took a sharp turn for the worse in 451, ironically at the hands of his old friends and supporters, the Huns. Aetius had profited immensely in 425 and again in 432 from his friendship with the Huns and had effectively used the Hunnic military strength to suppress the barbarians and Bacaudae of Gaul. Now in 451, however, Attila planned the invasion of the Western Empire.⁴² Aetius was forced to recruit an army from among the barbarian tribes which he had previously defeated with Hunnic support. irrespective of the gravity of the situation to Gallo-Roman and barbarian in Gaul alike, it was a major diplomatic achievement by Aetius to assemble the army which met Attila at Cenabum and defeated the Huns at the Mauriac Plains.⁴³

⁴¹Twyman, Historia 19 (1970), 488-93; Oost, Placidia, pp. 236-38.

⁴²Whether or not Attila was enticed by Justa Grata Honoria, and desired to carve an empire out of Gaul, is not important here. For a full discussion, see J. B. Bury, "Justa Grata Honoria," JRS 9 (1919), 1-13.

⁴³Greg. Tur. HF 2. 7; Hyd. 150 (II, 26); Prosp. 1364, 1367 (I, 481-82).

The significance of the Hunnic invasion is not the victory on the Mauriac Plains, nor that the Visigoths left the battlefield before the Huns had been completely defeated,⁴⁴ but that Aetius had lost his old base of military support, and that Attila was asute enough to follow up his defeat in Gaul with an invasion of Italy in 453. Aetius was not prepared for this Hunnic invasion of Italy and could put up no major military opposition to Attila. The accusation that Aetius did not concern himself with the defense of Italy and allowed Attila to invade it at will is ridiculous;⁴⁵ why would Aetius have allowed Italy, the heart of the Western Empire, to be devastated? Such a deliberate action would have undoubtedly resulted in his fall from power. It appears more likely that Aetius had exhausted all resources in amassing the army which defeated the Huns in Gaul, and when the barbarian forces returned home, he had no force adequate to confront the Huns in Italy, even had he not been caught by surprise by Attila's move.

Aetius had been hated by Galla Placidia and was most assuredly not beloved by Valentinian III, but he had been both useful and successful. After the Hunnic invasion of

⁴⁴For a full discussion, see Ulf Tackholm, "Aetius and the Battle on the Catalaunian Fields," Opuscula Romana (Institutum Romanum Regni Sueciae) 7 (1964), 259-76.

⁴⁵Ridiculous in my opinion, but so expressed by Prosp. 1367 (I, 482).

Italy, however, his position changed. With the death of Attila and the disintegration of the Hunnic threat, the philo-Roman policy of the new Visigothic king Theodoric II, and the treaty of peace with the Suebi in Spain, Aetius was no longer as useful to the Western Empire as before.⁴⁶ The loss of his ready supply of Hunnic troops had greatly decreased his means of maintaining power. The time was opportune to relieve the man who had made a dominant impact on the Western Empire for twenty-two years. On 21 September 454, Aetius was summoned before Valentinian, and was killed by the emperor's own hand.⁴⁷ Valentinian also had Boethius, the praetorian prefect of Italy and a friend of Aetius, executed.⁴⁸ The "last of the Romans," whether it was Boniface or Aetius, was now gone.⁴⁹

The death of Aetius was avenged six months later on the Campus Martius, when Occila, the trumpeter of Aetius, killed the emperor Valentinian III, the last surviving male of the house of Theodosius.⁵⁰ The wealthy Italian noble Petronius

⁴⁶Ernest Barker, CMH, I (1911), 392-432 at 418.

⁴⁷Apoll. Sid. Carm. 5. 305-14; Prosp. 1373 (I, 483); Hyd. 160 (II, 27).

⁴⁸Prosp. 1373 (I, 483).

⁴⁹Procop. Bell. 3 (Vand. 1). 3. 15.

⁵⁰Greg, Tur. HF 2. 8.

Maximus was said to have been involved in the assassination, either because he aspired to the vacant position of Aetius and did not receive it from Valentinian, or because his wife had been seduced by the emperor.⁵¹ Either or both are possible, but could also be ancient explanations for the succession of Maximus to the vacated throne of Valentinian. It is interesting to note, however, that it is possible to link Maximus to the support of Aetius' financial policies years before, and now he is linked by some sources to the death of the murderer of Aetius. It would be difficult to determine whether or not Maximus was involved in the assassination. If it could be shown that Maximus continued the policies of Aetius, then it might be supported that Maximus was involved in the assassination for reasons of policy, but regretfully Maximus reigned for too brief a time to determine what his policies as emperor would have been.

It is important, however, to briefly evaluate the advantages and disadvantages realized or suffered by the Western Empire from the reign of Valentinian III and the primacy of the patrician Aetius. These two men had respectively ruled and defended the Western Empire for over two decades. Had the Empire benefited from their rule? In 425,

⁵¹ Joh. Ant. frag. 201. 4, as cited in Oost, Placidia, p. 302, n. 15.

when the two first came into prominence, Britain was still nominally within the Empire; Spain was largely under the control of the Vandals, Alani and Suebi; Gaul had been overrun by barbarians and was largely under the control of the Visigoths, Franks, Burgundians, or in civil rebellion; Italy, Africa and Illyria were reasonably stable. By 455, Britain was completely lost to the Empire; Spain was still largely under the control of the barbarians, the Suebi, but a treaty had just been signed with them; part of Illyria had been ceded to the Eastern Empire and the remainder occupied by the Huns; Africa was an independent Vandal kingdom; Italy was again reasonably stable after the invasion of the Huns in 453; and the stability of Gaul had been largely reestablished.⁵² The loss of Britain, limited control of Spain, and the cession and occupation of Illyria were not of critical importance to the Western Empire; the fall of Africa was a major loss. The policies of Aetius had centered around Gaul and had been to a large degree successful. It has been proposed above that Gaul, with its federate barbarians, political stability, renewed loyalty to the imperial court, manpower, a key defensive position in relation to Italy, and its educated and public-minded aristocracy, was of greater overall value to the Western Empire than was

⁵²Barker, CMH I, 413.

grain-rich Africa.⁵³ Under Avitus and Majorian, Gaul would in fact be used as a base for imperial military actions to combat the Vandals and recover Africa. Africa was lost for thirty-seven years before the fall of the Western Empire; the Western Empire was to fall before the last remnant of Roman control in Gaul, under Syagrius.⁵⁴ Twenty-twenty hindsight might discover a better policy for the Western Empire than the policy of Aetius, but it still remains clear that the decline of the Western Empire was to accelerate greatly after the death of Aetius and the abandonment of his policies. And although the house of Theodosius did provide a stabilizing influence on the Empire, the military successes in Gaul, the attempt at a more equitable and effective tax system, and the loyalty of the Gallic aristocracy can be attributed directly to Aetius.⁵⁵ S. I. Oost has said that Aetius was a traitor and Valentinian was justified in killing him.⁵⁶ J. R. Moss concurs completely, calling Aetius

⁵³Moss, Historia 22 (1973), 711-20 presents the opposing view that Africa was of greater value to the Empire than was Gaul, and therefore Aetius' policies centered on Gaul were wrong. Bury, Later Roman Empire, 255-56 also supports this opinion.

⁵⁴Greg. Tur. HF 2. 25; Jones, Later Roman Empire, p. 247; Brogan, Roman Gaul, p. 239.

⁵⁵The Gallic aristocracy had shown no qualms about supporting usurpers against Honorius. There were no usurpers in Gaul during the long reign of Valentinian III, largely because of the relationship between the Gallic aristocracy and Aetius.

⁵⁶Oost, Placidia, pp. 301-02.

a traitor and stating that his policy had placed too much importance on Gaul at the exclusion of the rest of the Western Empire, leading to a decisive weakening of the economic and military position of the Empire.⁵⁷ There is no doubt that Aetius had violated Roman laws which carried the death sentence, but in killing his able general, Valentinian assured his own death, thereby eliminating both the effective and the legitimate rulers of the Western Empire. The act did not cause the fall of the Western Empire, but it did help the fall to come more quickly. Contrary to the opinion of Moss, Aetius and the Gallic aristocracy had bolstered the military position of the Western Empire, and had attempted to revitalize the financial administration of the imperial government. The importance of Aetius and his policies can best be seen in the deterioration of the Western Empire after the death of Valentinian.

The day following the assassination of Valentinian, Petronius Maximus was proclaimed emperor.⁵⁸ Following the death of Aetius six months earlier, not only had certain Gallic nobles wished to elevate Eparchius Avitus to the throne, but the barbarian general Fl. Ricimer had wished the throne for the young Italian noble Julius Maiorianus. Both

⁵⁷ Moss, Historia 22 (1973), 712.

⁵⁸ Marcel. 455. 2 (II, 86); Prosp. 1375 (I, 484).

of these potential candidates were to later wear the purple. Neither, however, offered any overt opposition to Maximus, possibly because all three had been to some degree supporters of Aetius. Maximus, as discussed briefly above and in detail by B. Twyman, had assisted Aetius in legislation pertaining to the imperial financial administration;⁵⁹ Avitus had served under Aetius as praetorian prefect of the Gauls and magister equitum, and had been on close personal terms with him;⁶⁰ Majorian's father Domninus apparently controlled the war-coffers of Aetius, and Majorian himself had served in the military under Aetius and had gained favor with the general before being relieved and sent home, apparently because Aetius feared that Majorian was attempting to arrange a marriage with the daughter of Valentinian, thereby becoming a potential heir to the Empire.⁶¹ It will be argued later in this discussion that both Avitus and Majorian carried out and extended the policies of Aetius in their short reigns as Augusti.

Maximus was not to have the opportunity to develop any imperial policies, for his reign was to be less than three

⁵⁹Twyman, Historia 19 (1970), 488-92.

⁶⁰Ibid.; Sundwall, Studien, p. 54; Stroheker, Adel, p. 154.

⁶¹Sundwall, Studien, p. 99; Oost, CP 59 (1964), 23-29; Apoll. Sid. Carm. 5. 126-294.

months.⁶² On 2 June 455, as the Vandals under Geiseric entered Rome to begin a two week long sack of the city, Maximus was killed by the fleeing mob as he himself attempted to escape the city.⁶³

The key appointment made by Maximus in his brief reign was that of Eparchius Avitus to the post of magister utriusque militiae per Gallias.⁶⁴ This appointment may have been made purely because of the preeminence of the individual, for Avitus was the leading Gallic noble of his day, but the appointment might also support the proposition that Maximus had been allied with Aetius. Avitus was a known supporter of Aetius, and had himself probably aspired to the throne on the death of Valentinian, but he had accepted the elevation of Maximus and had accepted a major military post under him. At the same time, it would not have been very wise of Maximus to give a military command to a potential rival who had not been his friend. In this command, Avitus was successful in containing the barbarians in Gaul who had generally risen against Roman control after the death of Aetius.⁶⁵ Avitus quickly repelled the Gepidae and the Burgundians, forced the retirement of the Franks and the Alemanni in Germania

⁶² 17 March 455-31 May 455.

⁶³ Prosp. 1375 (I, 484); Marcel. 455. 2 (II, 86).

⁶⁴ Apol. Sid. Carm. 7. 375-78; Sundwall, Studien. p. 99.

⁶⁵ C. E. Stevens, Sidonius Apollinaris and his Age (Oxford, 1933), p. 25; Apol. Sid. Carm. 7. 357-411.

Secunda, stopped the raids of the Saxons, and through his lieutenant Messianus, held the Visigoths in check.⁶⁶ Avitus himself journeyed to Bordigada to persuade the Visigoths under Theodoric II to keep their treaty.⁶⁷ Within Gaul, Avitus successfully carried out the old policy of Aetius.

His negotiations with Theodoric were obviously successful; on the death of Maximus, Avitus was proclaimed Augustus by the Gallic aristocracy with the full support of the Visigoths.⁶⁸ With his army and his Visigothic bodyguard, Avitus entered Italy and was accepted as Augustus in Rome. One of his first actions as emperor was to threaten the Vandals with an invasion if Geiseric did not keep the treaty of 442.⁶⁹ Although powerful, Avitus did not have the necessary army or navy to carry out such a threat at this time. The threat had been a bluff, but when Geiseric called the bluff by sending a fleet of sixty ships to ravage Sicily, Avitus successfully countered by sending a fleet under his magister equitum Ricimer which defeated the Vandals. The Vandal fleet escaped to Corsica and was defeated a second time by Ricimer.⁷⁰

⁶⁶Stevens, Sidonius, pp. 26-27; Apol. Sid. Carm. 7. 375-78.

⁶⁷Apol. Sid. Carm. 7. 411-40.

⁶⁸Apol. Sid. Carm. 7. 450-63.

⁶⁹Priscus, frag. 24, as cited in Stevens, Sidonius, p. 36.

⁷⁰Hyd. 176, 177 (II, 29).

The people of Rome had probably accepted Avitus because of his promise to confront the Vandals, and the Gallic emperor had lived up to his promise.⁷¹ A major famine in Rome, however, quickly caused the populace to turn against their new emperor.⁷² They demanded that Avitus send his Visigothic army home to alleviate the drain on the food supply of Rome. Avitus agreed to do this, but the Visigoths demanded their pay before leaving Rome, and Avitus could only raise the necessary monies by stripping the bronze from the roofs of the public buildings. The sack of Rome by the Vandals had left little else of value with which to pay the soldiers. This move by Avitus was viewed as anti-Roman by the populace and the Senate, and because of rioting in Rome, the emperor was forced to flee to Gaul.⁷³

It has been proposed by C. E. Stevens that the Senate and Roman people did not object to Avitus because he was Gallic, but rather because his policies were unpleasing to them.⁷⁴ Avitus had his diplomatic abilities under Aetius and his military abilities under Maximus. As emperor, he had promised action against the Vandals and had been

⁷¹Stevens, Sidonius, p. 36.

⁷²Hyd. 177 (II, 29).

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴Stevens, Sidonius, p. 39.

successful. The Vandals had systematically sacked Rome for two weeks just before the ascension of Avitus, and so there is little wonder that there was famine in Rome, or that there was difficulty in paying the Visigothic soldiers. It is easy to believe that the Roman people were more interested in their own stomachs, or even that their civic pride was injured by the stripping of the public roofs, but it is most difficult to suppose that the intelligent, educated men of the Senate did not understand the situation, nor see that Avitus promised success against the enemies of Rome. Whether or not Maximus had been a supporter of Aetius, he had at least been an Italian noble, and there is no record in his short reign of opposition to him by the Senate. Here, in Avitus, however, is a man who in a very short time had already proven that he could be successful against the greatest enemy of Rome at that time, and had been more successful against the Vandals than had been Boniface, the Eastern army, Aetius, Valentinian, or their own Petronius Maximus; and yet these Italian nobles joined the irrational populace in the expulsion of the emperor. And when Avitus had been expelled, the Senate and people of Rome freely accepted and supported the barbarian general Ricimer and his string of puppets, beginning with Majorian. It seems evident that the expulsion of Avitus was not caused by disapproval of his policies, but by the rivalry between the

Italian and Gallic aristocracies. The stripping of the public roofs was most probably the excuse used by the Italian nobles to incite the mob to carry out their design to get rid of the Gallic emperor. The fact that Ricimer was opposed to the Gallic noble was apparently enough to warrant the initial support of the Italian aristocracy for his predominance.

When Avitus left Rome and returned to Gaul, his general Ricimer and Majorian rose in revolt against the emperor. The two defeated the patrician Remistus at Ravenna in September 456.⁷⁵ Avitus had trouble raising a Visigothic army because the tribe was still occupied in Spain, but when he had collected an army, he returned to Italy and met Ricimer and Majorian at Placentia, where he was defeated and on 17 or 18 October, surrendered to the rebels.⁷⁶ At the request of Eusebius, bishop of Milan, Avitus was spared and consecrated bishop of Placentia. Several accounts exist of the death of Avitus, including the reports that he died in a church while under siege by Majorian,⁷⁷ or that he was simply murdered by Majorian.⁷⁸ The account of Gregory of

⁷⁵Cont. Prosp. 579 (I, 304); Jones, Later Roman Empire, p. 240.

⁷⁶Cont. Prosp. 580 (I, 304); Barker, CMH, I, 421.

⁷⁷Joh. Ant. frag. 202, as cited in Stevens, Sidonius, p. 38.

⁷⁸Chron. Gall. a. dxi. 628 (I, 644).

Tours, that Avitus died shortly after his defeat while on a journey to Brioude, seems to be the most accurate of the several traditions.⁷⁹ Not only was Gregory himself of noble Gallic family, and so probably better informed, but his account would better explain the cordial relations between the Gallic aristocracy and Majorian in 461-62.

The reign of the only Gallic emperor had come to a close. Avitus had continued the policies of Aetius in Gaul and had either begun to carry out the unaccomplished plans of Aetius, or had extended the policy of the general by his actions against the Vandals. Whether or not Aetius had ever intended to campaign against the Vandals, Avitus had shown that with Gaul pacified, it was possible to shift the main focus away from Gaul towards Africa. The success of any actions against the Vandals was now to depend on the stability of the imperial government, but there was to be no stability now that the last legitimate dynasty of the Western Empire had come to an end with the death of Valentinian III. Aetius had been relatively successful in his attempt to restore the stability of the Western Empire based on a loyal, pacified Gaul. Avitus had shown in his brief reign that that policy could be continued and extended. The ascendancy of Avitus had also demonstrated that the

⁷⁹Greg. Tur. HF 2. 11; Stroheker, Adel, pp. 179-80.

Italian aristocracy was not going to allow a Gallic noble to rule the Western Empire, irrespective of his policies or successes. With the death of Avitus, the Italian aristocracy returned to its previous preeminence, and under Ricimer, the imperial government would abandon Aetius' attempt at restoration and relegate Gaul to the secondary position it had held under Honorius.

CHAPTER III

RICIMER AND THE FALL OF THE WESTERN EMPIRE

Not long after the deaths of Aetius and Valentinian III, the Western Empire entered its final stage of existence. Eparchius Avitus and the Gallic aristocracy had seized the opportunity presented by the Vandal sack of Rome and the death of the emperor Petronius Maximus to attempt to carry out the policies of Aetius. They had tried to use stabilized Gaul as a base for the restoration of the Western Empire, but had failed because of the opposition of the Italian aristocracy and the rise of the barbarian general Fl. Ricimer. With the overthrow of the emperor Avitus, Ricimer began sixteen years of military supremacy in the West. It will be seen that Ricimer abandoned the policies of Aetius, and in so doing hastened the eventual fall of the Roman Empire in the West.

After the deposition of Avitus on 17 October 456, there was officially no emperor in the West for fourteen months.¹ In the early months of the interval occurred the coniuratio Marcelliana, a now obscure conspiracy among the Gallic aristocracy. The vague references in the letters of Apollinaris

¹17 October 456 to 28 December 457.

Sidonius provide no clear clues to the exact nature or composition of the conspiracy, but it appears to have been either an attempt to elevate another emperor acceptable to the Gallic aristocracy, or to form some sort of separatist Roman government in opposition to the rule of the barbarian Ricimer in Italy.² Whether the conspiracy involved the magister militum Marcellinus, who had ruled Dalmatia independently of the Western Empire since the death of Avitus, or an unknown Marcellus in Gaul, is likewise uncertain.³ But it is clear that the vicar of Aquitania, Petrus, a vir spectabilis, seized the opportunity to function unappointed by the imperial government in Italy as the praetorian prefect of the Gauls.⁴ Petrus was later officially recognized in the post, and raised to vir illustris. The conspiracy came to an end in April 457 when Majorian was proclaimed Augustus by the soldiers in Rome.⁵

Although proclaimed emperor on 1 April, Majorian refused to accept the office immediately, apparently awaiting the

²Apol. Sid. Ep. 1. ll. 6-7; Stevens, Sidonius Apollinaris, pp. 41-43.

³Stevens, Sidonius Apollinaris, p. 42.

⁴Apol. Sid. Ep. 1. ll. 6; Stevens, Sidonius Apollinaris, p. 43.

⁵Ibid.

nomination of the Eastern emperor Leo I.⁶ The day before the proclamation by the troops, Majorian had been named magister utriusque militiae by Leo, and Ricimer had been elevated to the patriciate. When the nomination by the Eastern emperor did not come, however, Majorian allowed himself to be proclaimed by the soldiers and elected by the Roman Senate on 28 December 457, without the consent of Leo.⁷ The patrician Ricimer, the more powerful of the two men who overthrew Avitus and until the elevation of Majorian to the purple the more senior in imperial office, was unacceptable as emperor because of his Suebian-Visigothic descent and his Arian faith, and apparently did not desire to ascend the imperial throne. He wished to rule the Western Empire as the patrician to a weak emperor, much as Aetius had done with Valentinian.⁸ Majorian, however, was not to prove a weak emperor.

Almost immediately Majorian took the initiative against the barbarians, demonstrating his leadership and abilities as a military commander. He induced Marcellinus to return to imperial allegiance and bring his Hunnic army to Sicily

⁶ Jones, Later Roman Empire, p. 241; A. H. M. Jones, The Decline of the Ancient World (New York, 1966), p. 89.

⁷ Ibid.; Chron. Gall. 630 (I, 664); Marcell. s.a. 457 (II, 87).

⁸ Jones, Later Roman Empire, p. 240.

to combat a Vandalic attack on the island.⁹ To combat the Burgundian siege of Lugdunum, the emperor dispatched the magister epistularum Petrus with an army to the city. The Burgundians were forced to retire after renewing their foedus with Rome.¹⁰ Shortly thereafter, Majorian himself advanced into Gaul and relieved the Visigothic siege of Arelate. Much of the Visigothic army was still in Spain, where they had occupied much of Gallaecia, Lusitania and Baetica on the orders of Avitus. Theodoric therefore could not resist the imperial forces, and so renewed the alliance with Rome.¹¹ Majorian had also achieved several minor successes against the Vandal fleet until his own fleet was decisively defeated at Cartegena.¹² After the defeat of his fleet, Majorian retired into Gaul to prepare for future campaigns against the Vandals. From a passage in the panegyric delivered in his honor by Apollinaris Sidonius, it appears that Majorian recruited the support of the barbarian tribes of Gaul, very possibly the Burgundians and

⁹ Ibid., p. 241.

¹⁰ Apol. Sid. Carm. 5. 571-84; Stevens, Sidonius Apollinaris, p. 50.

¹¹ Chron. Gall. 633 (I, 664); Stevens, Sidonius Apollinaris, p. 51.

¹² Chron. Gall. 634 (I, 664); Dill, Roman Society, p. 17.

Visigoths, for his planned expedition to Africa.¹³ In all these activities, Majorian, as Avitus before him, was following the policies of Aetius, a move which was certain to gain the support of the Gallic aristocracy.

Majorian spent a full year in Gaul and was widely and warmly received by the local aristocracy.¹⁴ Sidonius, the son-in-law of the late emperor Avitus, delivered a glowing panegyric in honor of Majorian at Lugdunum, and many Gallic nobles are recorded as dinner guest of the emperor during his stay in Gaul.¹⁵ Besides his energetic campaigns against the barbarians in Gaul, Majorian most probably gained favor and support from the Gallic aristocracy by his appointment of Aegidius, probably a descendant of the prominent Gallic noble Fl. Afranius Syagrius, and a military protege of Aetius, to the military command in Gaul.¹⁶

Majorian had proven too independent and too strong a leader and military commander for the purposes of the patrician Ricimer. The emperor had continued the policies

¹³Apol. Sid. Carm. 5. 364-65: "he (Majorian) advances to your wars (Vandals) by way of other wars (Gaul, Spain), adding fresh forces from divers peoples."

¹⁴Apol. Sid. Ep. 1. 11.

¹⁵Ibid.; Apol. Sid. Carm. 5; Stevens, Sidonius Apollinaris, pp. 52-54.

¹⁶Greg, Tur. HF 2. 11; Sundwall, Studien, p. 39.

of Aetius in Gaul, been warmly received by the Gallic aristocracy, and had led the imperial forces himself rather than entrust the wars of the Empire to his patrician. Ricimer determined to resolve the situation. When Majorian returned from Gaul without his army, he was met at Dertona on 2 August 461 by Ricimer and forced to abdicate. Five days later Ricimer announced that Majorian had died of disease.¹⁷ The threat to the primacy of Ricimer had been removed. Majorian is considered by many modern historians as the last strong, capable emperor and the last worthy of the title Augustus.¹⁸ A comparison of Majorian with the emperors who followed him substantiates this opinion. He was the last emperor to personally lead the imperial forces and the last to successfully defend the provinces of the Western Empire against the barbarians.

Ricimer did not repeat his mistake of elevating a strong emperor, but rather raised the weak senator Libius Severus to the throne. Almost nothing is known of Severus except the dates of his birth, ascension and death. Ricimer

¹⁷ Chron. Gall. 635 (I, 664); Marcell. s.a. 461. 2; Jones, Later Roman Empire, p. 241.

¹⁸ Dill, Roman Society, p. 18: "(Majorian), whose reign was the last hope or illusion of old Roman sentiment, was the real close of the Western Empire." Brogan, Roman Gaul, p. 239: "He was the last Western emperor worthy of the name..." Oost, CP 59 (1964), 23: "(Majorian was), with the possible exception of Anthemius, the last West Roman emperor of real importance."

ruled the Western Empire in all but name while Severus held the imperial title from 19 November 461 to his death on 15 August 465. After the death of Severus, there was an interregnum of twenty months, and yet there was no coniuratio among the Gallic aristocracy, for as J. Matthews states, "They had begun at last to despair of the republic."¹⁹ For almost two years, Ricimer was to rule without even the pretense of a puppet emperor.²⁰

The policies and actions of Ricimer during and after the reign of Severus demonstrate the patrician's abandonment of Aetius' efforts at the restoration of the Western Empire and his disdain for Gaul and the Gallic aristocracy. Not only the Eastern emperor Leo, but also Aegidius in Gaul, the magister militum Nepotianus in Spain and Marcellinus in Sicily, refused to recognize Severus. Aegidius threatened to march on Italy, and Ricimer only prevented him from doing so by stirring up the Burgundians and Visigoths against him in Gaul. As a reward for their services to the patrician, the Visigoths were allowed to occupy Narbo and the Burgundians were probably permitted control of Lugdunum.²¹ The

¹⁹Matthews, Western Aristocracies, p. 92.

²⁰15 August 465 to 12 April 467; Jones, Later Roman Empire, p. 242.

²¹Jones, Later Roman Empire, pp. 241-42.

Burgundian king Gundiuc was made magister utriusque militiae per Gallias in place of Aegidius, and the Visigothic king Theodoric II was allowed to replace Nepotianus in Spain with his own appointment, Arborius.²² Ricimer bribed the Hunnic mercenaries of Marcellinus in Sicily to revolt against the comes, but Marcellinus was able to escape to Dalmatia.²³ To secure his own position, Ricimer was using the barbarians against the three generals appointed by Majorian. The foedera arranged by Aetius and renewed by Avitus and Majorian to fight with the Empire against her enemies were now being used by the barbarian master of the imperial government to fight against faithful Roman generals.

In 467, when Ricimer was in need of assistance from the Eastern Empire to confront the threat of the Vandals, the patrician was forced to accept the nomination of a Western emperor by Leo. The Greek philosopher Anthemius, the son-in-law of the late Eastern emperor Marcian, was proclaimed Augustus on 12 April 467, and shortly thereafter, to promote harmony with Ricimer, gave his daughter Alypia to the patrician in marriage.²⁴ The main objective of the nomination and reign of Anthemius was to unite Eastern and Western

²² Ibid.

²³ Hyd. 213 (II, 32); Sundwall, Studien, pp. 39, 109.

²⁴ Sundwall, Studien, p. 126; Jones, Later Roman Empire, p. 242.

forces in a campaign to crush the naval power of the Vandals.²⁵ The campaign was planned for 467 under the joint command of Eastern and Western generals. The Western forces were under the command of Marcellinus, and not Ricimer. Likewise Aspar, the dominant military figure in the East was not actively involved in the campaign.²⁶ Before the expedition could get under way, however, Marcellinus was killed in Sicily. It is unknown whether Ricimer was involved in the assassination, but it is likely that the patrician was fearful that a success by Marcellinus would put the comes in a position to rival or replace the patrician.²⁷ With the death of Marcellinus and the recall of the Eastern fleet to Constantinople, the great expedition never materialized, and the Vandals were able to conquer Sicily.²⁸

A second objective of the reign of Anthemius was to make closer the contacts between the imperial government and the Gallic aristocracy, primarily in an attempt to check the advances of the Visigothic king Euric. No less a Gallic

²⁵Apul. Sid. Carm. 2. 13-18, 2. 385-86; Jones, Later Roman Empire, p. 242.

²⁶Bury, Later Roman Empire, pp. 333-37; Barker, CMH I, 427.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Bury, Later Roman Empire, pp. 336-37; Jones, Ancient World, p. 90.

noble than Apollinaris Sidonius was asked to deliver a deliver a panegyric in the emperor's honor, on 1 January 468, and was rewarded with the office of praefectus urbis for that year.²⁹ Anthemius also sent his son with an army into Gaul to relieve the siege of Arelate by the Visigoths, but the Roman army was defeated and Euric ravaged the Rhone valley at will.³⁰ Alliances were made with the independent Britons north of the Loire, the Franks in northeast Gaul, and friendly relations were renewed with Syagrius, the son of Aegidius, between the Loire, Somme and Meuse, all in an attempt to check the advances of Euric.³¹ By 470, however, Euric had defeated the Britons under their king Riothamus and had occupied Bourges, and had seized all of Narbonensis Prima and all the cities of Aquitania Prima except Averni, the defense of which was led by the local bishop, Apollinaris Sidonius. Anthemius' attempts to contain Euric in Gaul had proven unsuccessful.

Relations between Anthemius and Ricimer had never been cordial, and although the emperor had proven sufficiently

²⁹Sundwall, Studien, pp. 133-34; Stroheker, Adel, pp. 217-19.

³⁰Matthews, Senatorial Aristocracies, p. 149; Chron. Gall. 650 (I, 664).

³¹Matthews, Senatorial Aristocracies, pp. 149-51; Chron. Gall. 657 (I, 665); Stroheker, Adel, pp. 218-19.

weak, he had still acted independently of the patrician. In early 472, civil war broke out between the two. In April, Ricimer elevated Fl. Anicius Olybrius to the throne. Olybrius, the husband of Placidia, the daughter of Valentinian III who was held captive by the Vandals, was supported by Geiseric, but held in suspicion by Leo. The Eastern emperor sent Olybrius to Rome thinking he would be killed there, but he was proclaimed Western emperor by Ricimer shortly after his arrival.³² Ricimer was besieging Anthemius at Rome and on 11 July 472 captured the city and had the emperor executed. The patrician, however, suffered a stroke during the battle and died on 18 August. Olybrius survived the patrician by only two and a half months, dying on 2 November 472.³³

The sixteen year primacy of the patrician and 'king maker' Fl. Ricimer had come to an end. He had elevated three of the five emperors he had served to the throne, and had waged civil war against or killed three of them.³⁴ The latter three, Severus, Anthemius and Olybrius, had been

³²Marcell. s.a. 472 (II, 90); Bury, Later Roman Empire, pp. 339-40.

³³Jones, Later Roman Empire, p. 243.

³⁴Of Avitus, Majorian, Severus, Anthemius and Olybrius, Ricimer had elevated to the throne Majorian, Severus and Olybrius, and had killed or waged civil war against Avitus, Majorian and Anthemius.

little more than the puppets of the patrician. Severus and Olybrius were totally weak and had died natural deaths, but both Majorian and Anthemius had proven too independent of Ricimer and were overthrown.³⁵ Both of these last two emperors had established cordial relations with the Gallic aristocracy, appointed generals hostile to Ricimer, and conducted military operations on their own instead of entrusting all military affairs to the patrician. Both had befriended the Gallic supporters of Aetius and had attempted to carry out Aetius' policy of containing the barbarians in Gaul and attempting to use pacified Gaul as a source of manpower and resources for operations against the Vandals. Ricimer's actions against these two emperors and against Aegidius, Marcellinus and Syagrius demonstrate his policy of placing the highest priority on the safety of Italy, which he had defended adequately against the Vandals and Ostrogoths, and the abandonment of Aetius' policy of a strong and pacified Gaul as the basis for the restoration of the Western Empire. Ricimer overthrew the emperors who were friendly to the Gallic aristocracy and alienated and antagonized the nobility and citizenry of Gaul by his appointment of Burgundians instead of Romans to the military command in Gaul.³⁶ He

³⁵ Jones, Later Roman Empire, pp. 241, 243.

³⁶ After the death of Majorian, Gundiac was named magister militum per Gallias in place of Aegidius. On the death of Gundiac, his son Gundobad succeeded to the post.

further encouraged barbarian activity in Gaul against the forces of Aegidius and Syagrius, destroying the pacification of Gaul achieved by Aetius, Avitus, Majorian and Aegidius. While Anthemius had attempted to contain Euric in Gaul, the policies of Ricimer can only have encouraged the Visigothic king to continue to expand his conquest and control of Gaul and Spain. It is easy to understand why many Gallo-Romas began to support the barbarian kingdoms in Gaul and abandon all hope of assistance and cooperation from the imperial government. The Gallic aristocracy had supported and been deeply involved in Aetius' plans for the restoration of the Western Empire and had attempted to carry out those policies under Avitus and Majorian, but both of these emperors were overthrown by Ricimer. And the Gallic protege of Aetius and Majorian, Aegidius, had been campaigned against by Ricimer and the barbarians and acting under his support.

Ricimer's policies were not a change in the execution of the plans of Aetius, but rather a total abandonment of the policy of Western imperial restoration. The patician's policies centered almost entirely on Italy to the near total exclusion of the provinces. At the death of Aetius, Italy, Gaul and Dalmatia were pacified and stable, and Spain was marginally under Roman authority. At the death of Ricimer eighteen years later, little more than Italy was under the authority of the Western emperor. Although he remained in

power partially because of the support of the Italian aristocracy, and raised two seantors, Severus and Olybrius to the throne, Ricimer made no attempt to recover Africa for the Empire. Avitus had used Ricimer to combat the Vandal fleet with some success; Majorian had realized some limited success before the loss of his fleet at Cartegena; and Anthemius and Leo had planned a joint campaign against the Vandals in Africa, and yet Ricimer had taken no part in these last two campaigns. His failure to cooperate in the joint expedition, and possibly, his involvement in the assassination of Marcellinus, doomed the campaign to failure. Ricimer even raised Olybrius, the choice of Geiseric for Western emperor, to the throne during the patrician's civil war against Anthemius, the emperor raised by the Eastern Empire. Ricimer apparently had no interest in combating the Vandals except in the defense of Italy. He showed no interest in any province or prefecturate except Italy. Ricimer was in effect an undeclared German king of Italy ruling under the guise of a Roman emperor.³⁷ The patrician's policies, whether intentionally designed for the purpose or not, destroyed any progress towards restoration achieved by Aetius or his adherents. The Western Empire was to survive the death of Ricimer but by four years, and the policies of

³⁷Stevens, Sidonius Apollinaris, p. 107.

the patrician were greatly responsible for the accelerated demise.

Ricimer was succeeded as patrician and king maker by his Burgundian nephew Gundobad, who quickly elevated the comes domesticorum Glycerius to the Western throne.³⁸ Leo, however, sent the magister militum Julius Nepos, the nephew of Marcellinus, to Italy with an army. Gundobad fled to the Burgundians, Glycerius was deposed, and on 24 June 474, Nepos was elected emperor by the Roman Senate.³⁹

Nepos immediately planned to confront Euric and the Visigoths in southern Gaul, but those plans quickly proved impotent. In late 474, the quaestor Licinianus was unsuccessful in negotiations with the Visigothic king, and in the spring of 475 the army sent into Gaul by Nepos succeeded only in negotiating the return of parts of Provence to the Empire in exchange for the abandonment of Averni, which had held out for five summers against the Visigoths.⁴⁰ In the words of S. Dill, the imperial government had "abandoned (its) last devoted subjects and confessed the final impotence of the Empire."⁴¹

³⁸ Marcell. s.a. 473. 1 (II, 90); Bury, Later Roman Empire, p. 404.

³⁹ Marcell. s.a. 474. 2 (II, 90), 475. 2 (II, 91); Jones, Later Roman Empire, p. 244.

⁴⁰ Stevens, Sidonius Apollinaris, pp. 150-53; Apol. Sid. Ep. 7. 5. 3. 7. 7. 3-5.

⁴¹ Dill, Roman Society, p. 5.

The cession of Avernus to the Visigoths was to be the last major act of the emperor Nepos. On 28 August 475, the patrician Orestes drove Nepos out of Italy and proclaimed his own son Romulus Augustus as the Western emperor.⁴² The young emperor, who ironically combined the names of the founder of Rome and the founder of the Empire, reigned for exactly one year before a mutiny of soldiers led by the Scirian officer Odovacar overthrew Orestes and deposed the emperor.⁴³ Although Nepos was still alive in Dalmatia, the Roman Senate by the persuasion of Odovacar, sent the imperial regalia to the Eastern emperor Zeno, stating that there was no longer a need for a separate emperor in the West. Odovacar ruled Italy with the title of king, and there was not again to be a Western Roman emperor.⁴⁴ The fact and fiction of a Roman Empire in the West had come to an end. The Western Empire had been dismembered into separate and independent Germanic kingdoms, with no semblance of an imperial government.

In the person of Syagrius, the son of Aegidius, Roman Gaul survived the fall of the Western Empire by ten years.

⁴²Marcell. s.a. 475. 2 (II, 91); Jones, Later Roman Empire, p. 244.

⁴³Marcell. s.a. 476. 2 (II, 91); Jones, Later Roman Empire, p. 244.

⁴⁴Bury, Later Roman Empire, pp. 406-07.

Syagrius, called rex Romanorum by Gregory of Tours, attempted to maintain an area between the Loire, Somme and Meuse from his chief base at Soissons.⁴⁵ In 486, however, Syagrius was defeated by the Franks under Clovis and Ragnachar and put to death.⁴⁶ The last remnant of Roman authority in the West had ended, after surviving the fall of Western imperial government by a decade.

In Gaul there was no longer a choice between allegiance to the barbarian kingdoms or to the Empire. Now even those Gallic nobles who had remained steadfast to the end were forced by the reality of the situation to accept barbarian rule. Sidonius, after being released from Visigothic captivity by the intercession of his friend Leo, an official in the Visigothic administration, appealed to Euric for the return of some lands formerly belonging to his mother-in-law, the widow of the emperor Avitus.⁴⁷ Paulinis of Pella, whose sons had earlier left Roman Gaul to live in Bordigada, lamented,

Peace which, at that time desired by the general consent of the Goths themselves, was soon after granted to others, though purchased at a price, remains unregretted, since already in our state we see full many prospering through Gothic favor,

⁴⁵Greg. Tur. HF 2. 27.

⁴⁶Ibid.; Jones, Later Roman Empire, p. 247.

⁴⁷Stevens, Sidonius Apollinaris, p. 166.

though many first endured the full range of suffering, not least of whom was I, seeing that I was stripped of all my goods and outlived by fatherland.⁴⁸

⁴⁸Paul. Pell. 302-10, trans., H. C. Evelyn White (Oxford, 1921).

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSIONS

Through a multitude of administrative, economical and military reasons, the Western Empire would have eventually fallen irrespective of the careers of Honorius, Valentinian III, Aetius, Avitus, Majorian, Ricimer, Orestes and the others, but the policies and designs of the emperors Honorius and Valentinian and the patricians Aetius and Ricimer did greatly influence the actual chain of events which led to the fall of the Western Empire as it did occur. The preceding discussions support the following conclusions pertaining to the relationship of the Gallic aristocracy to the imperial government and the roles of Aetius and Ricimer in the formulation of imperial policy during the last half century of the Western Roman Empire.

The seeds of independent action among the Gallic people and aristocracy were sown by the indifferent attitude of the imperial government during and immediately after the barbarian invasion of 406. Because the imperial government failed to confront the invading barbarians, the Gallic aristocracy freely supported the usurpers Constantine and Jovinus, and were forced to come to friendly terms with the barbarians, particularly with Athaulf and the Visigoths in 413. Even the imperial military campaigns against Athaulf were aimed

at the recovery of the emperor's half sister Calla Placidia, and not from concern of, or in support of, the Gallo-Roman population.

Although there were no other usurpers in Gaul after the fall of Jovinus, there is no record of opposition to the usurper Johannes in Italy following the death of Honorius in 425. To the contrary, the Gallic aristocracy quickly supported the usurper's official Aetius, when the general assumed his military command in Gaul. Aetius earned the support of the Gallic nobles by his energetic campaigns against the barbarians in Gaul, and after the defeat of his rivals Felix and Boniface, Aetius used the Gallic aristocracy in his attempts to control the imperial financial administration. With pacified Gaul as a base, and with the support of the Gallic aristocracy, Aetius attempted to restore the Western Empire against its territorial losses to the barbarians and its financial and administrative collapse from within.

Although several followers of Aetius were to continue his policy of imperial restoration based on a strong, pacified Gaul, the assassination of Aetius by Valentinian insured the fall of the emperor, and with his death, the end of the Theodosian dynasty. Even though Honorius and Valentinian had both been weak emperors controlled by their patricians, they had provided the stabilizing effect of legitimate

imperial rule. With no Theodosian male to succeed Valentinian, the West was now to be ruled by string of generally ineffective emperors.

The chaos created by the Vandalic sack of Rome in 455 gave the Gallic aristocracy the opportunity to elevate one of their own, Eparchius Avitus, to the imperial throne. Although the Gallic emperor was initially successful against the Vandals, he was overthrown by the combined efforts of the Italian aristocracy, who resented the rule of a Gallic noble, and the barbarian general Ricimer, who wished to rule the Western Empire as the patrician to a weak emperor. Ricimer, however, was unable to find a suitably weak emperor to fit his designs. Majorian continued too closely along the policy lines of Aetius, and courted the favor and support of the Gallic aristocracy. Severus proved acceptable to Ricimer, but soon died. Anthemius, appointed by the Eastern emperor Leo, acted too independently of the patrician, and was replaced by Olybrius.

Ricimer completely disregarded Aetius' policy of imperial restoration based on a strong, pacified Gaul, but established no definite policy in its place. He showed outright contempt for Gaul, supporting the barbarians of Gaul against the Gallo-Romans, and showed no interest in any prefecture or province except Italy. Ricimer not only did not attempt to recover Africa from the Vandals, but actually

supported and elevated Olybrius, the candidate of Geiseric, to the Western throne.

The Gallic policy of Aetius had been a viable and effective plan for the restoration of the Western Empire. Although Africa was important to the Western Empire, the Empire could have been restored and continued to rule in the West under the Gallic policy. This policy also presented the best possibility for the recovery of Africa by the use of Gaul as a base for a major campaign against the Vandals in Africa. Aetius and the Gallic aristocracy had helped preserve the Western Roman Empire; Ricimer, with the support of the Italian aristocracy, had helped hasten the fall of the Roman imperial government in the West.

The Gallic aristocracy had in many ways represented the last faithful Romans, and had remained in education, loyalty, spirit and purpose Romans after all but a semblance of the Empire had died in the West. After the death of Syagrius, rex Romanorum, in 486, Roman Gaul came to an irreparable end. Not even in the western conquests of Justinian was Gaul to return to Roman authority.

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