The Last Romans:
Emperor Majorian and the Fall of Rome

A study of the Late Empire and its energetic Emperor

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Abstract

This paper concerns the reign of Emperor Julius Flavius Valerius Majorianus (r. 457-461), placed within the context of the Empire that had started unravelling in the years before his ascension. By analysing the state of Rome during its final period, and the way it faced its barbarian enemies, we can more clearly define and appreciate the sort of task that the last Emperors had to face.

In so doing, a case will be presented in which the destruction of Rome was not yet set in stone by the time of Majorian's reign. From our modern perspective, we are primed to think of the fall of Rome as a long, progressive and inevitable process. This is part of the intellectual heritage of Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Though the paradigm does not hold as much power as it has in the past, as current scholarship includes a dogged debate on whether the fall of Rome was mainly due to internal causes or due to external causes, this paradigm remains highly influential.

The linear thinking of progressive decline, or progressive causes of decline, is still well represented in both traditions. The downside of this perspective is that it does not work well with such figures as Majorian who defy the paradigm by embodying success, rather than failure. For Emperor Majorian, the fall of Rome was not something that was as inevitable as the decline and fall paradigm purports it to be. This has made the case of Majorian difficult for scholars from Gibbon onward. The solution has often been to present Majorian as some sort of heroic character who had deserved to live in a better time, but, through an unfortunate twist of fate, found himself in the Empire's twilight.

In this aspect, this paper can contribute to the larger debate surrounding the fall of Rome. By focusing on individuals and opportunities, an additional perspective can be provided that does not attempt to explain the fall of Rome in a completely systematic way. Though the goal is not to argue that the fall of Rome was merely down to a series of particularly unfortunate events heaped upon each other, I believe that individual motives and characters ought to be given fair attention, especially in the case of such defiant characters as Emperor Majorian. The paper will explain how, in a period where the Western Roman Empire is generally considered to be so weak, it was possible that one individual such as Emperor Majorian managed to turn this loss around, though briefly, and recover almost the entirety of the Western Roman Empire.

Thesis Outline

List of Figures

Introduction and Academic Background

Although we have learned more about Late Rome and the so-called barbarians and their invasions since Gibbon's original study, the fall of Rome remains one of the most controversial events of European history. Interestingly, the end of our studies on the causes of the decline and/or fall of the Roman Empire are often not much more enlightening than Gibbon's original study was, as the academic world cannot seem to agree on any one way to explain the issue. For example, in *The Fall of the Roman Empire: A New History of Rome and the Barbarians* (2007), Peter Heather's (simplified) thesis is that the development of the barbarian communities across the border meant that the Late Empire faced much stronger opponents than the Early Empire did, which tipped the odds against the Romans and eventually caused the end of their Empire. On the other hand, Walter Goffart, writing on the various Germanic tribes in *Barbarian Tides: The Migration Age and the Later Roman Empire* (2006) rejects such theses as he argues against the greater unity and strength of the barbarians in Late Antiquity. Similarly, Adrian Goldsworthy (*How Rome Fell: Death of a Superpower*, 2009) sees little reason to name the barbarians as conquerors of Rome, instead placing the responsibility for the fall of the Empire on Roman infighting, which occurred so often due to the ease of usurping power in Late Rome.

Rather than also writing a six-volume work on such complicated issues, I will take a smaller scale approach, focusing on the historical character of Emperor Flavius Julius Valerius Majorianus, who ruled the Western Roman Empire for four years from 457 to 461. He is generally considered one of the best Emperors of the Late Empire, with Gibbon even calling him "(...) a great and heroic character, such as sometimes arise, in a degenerate age, to vindicate the honour of the human species."[1] By analysing the final period of the Roman Empire through individual efforts, we can take a different perspective on the fall of Rome than one that builds up the story from (say) the Dominate onwards. Looking at Majorian's accomplishments and defeats provides a valuable insight in the Late Roman state and what it could do, what it perceived it could do and what it eventually proved it could not do.

In order to achieve this, the paper will first briefly cover the events of the first half of the fifth century, as most studies on the fall of Rome do. This period is marked by vital events leading up to the deposition of Romulus Augustulus in 476. As the topic is still subject to great debate, I feel that a brief summary with a subsequent elaboration of the author's position (or bias, if you will) is necessary. This is followed by a brief show of evidence regarding barbarians before the 5th century. This topic is relevant to both the internal and the external positions and I think it wise to briefly elaborate on the author's viewpoints on this topic as well. Part II will discuss the barbarians more in-depth from the moment that they crossed over into imperial territory. How they maintained themselves and how they constructed their first societies is interesting not only by itself, but can tell us something about how strong and capable their regimes were. Finally, Part III will cover the life of Majorian, which will then be used as a bridgehead for drawing all of these various aspects together and making a case that, contrary to intuition, the Empire's fall was not yet guaranteed by the time of Majorian's reign.

[1] Gibbon, E. (1781). T*he History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Volume III

Part I: Background

The Empire of Honorius, Stilicho and Constantius

After the death of Theodosius the Great in 395, the Western and Eastern halves of the Empire were separated a final time. Though too young to rule, Theodosius' children, Arcadius and Honorius, ascended to the thrones of the Eastern and Western Roman Empires, respectively. Honorius was assisted by his guardian Stilicho, who had been a friend of his father, and a capable general. Honorius' rule was a troubled one and Honorius had to deal with a number of incursions. It is during Honorius' reign that the various barbarian groups first entered and established themselves inside the Roman Empire (Figure 1). While some of these groups, notably that of Radagaisus and Uldin, were destroyed, the other invaders, Alaric's Goths (the Visigoths), Vandals, Alans and Sueves remained on imperial soil mostly unharmed.

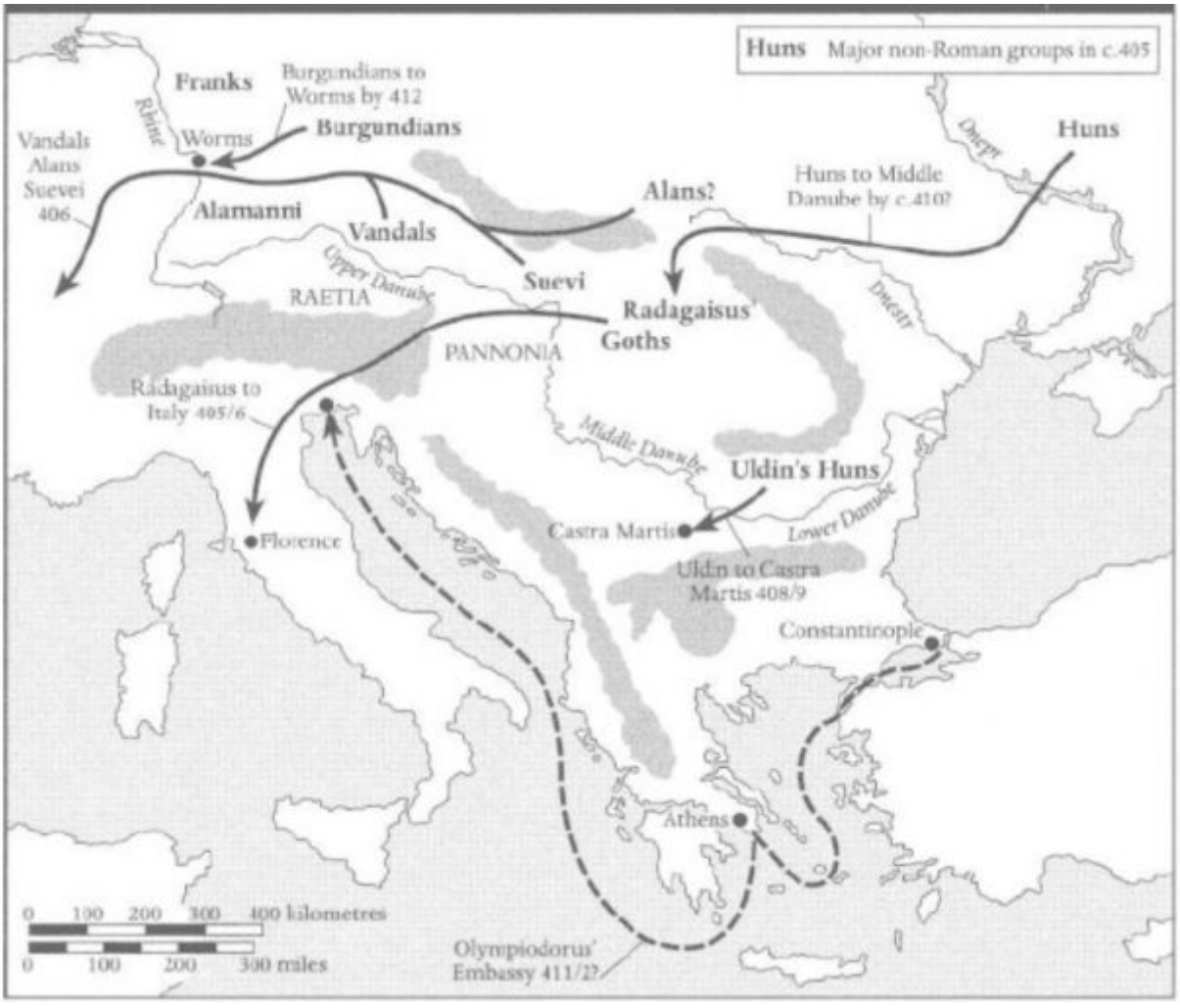

Figure I. The invasions of the early fifth century. After Heather, 2007.

Perhaps as a response to these invasions, or, as Peter Heather suggests, as a response to trouble the Romans knew was brewing on the frontier, Roman Britain elected their own Emperors in a series of usurpations.[2] Though the first two did not last long, the third usurper by the name of Constantine, apparently elected by grace of the confidence inspired by his name, proved a capable enough ruler.[3] Constantine III, as he became known, took the remainder of the British field army and crossed into Gaul. Though our sources Orosius and Zosimus are generally hostile to Constantine III, he quickly took control of Gaul, except for a small area around Arles (Arlelate), as well as Spain. It seems likely that the Gauls eagerly welcomed Constantine, as Honorius and Stilicho had failed to repel the invaders.[4] Though he did not fully destroy them, Constantine III managed to contain the barbarian menace to Northern Gaul, away from the Gallic heartlands.[5]

Constantine's position in Gaul and Spain deteriorated rapidly when his general Gerontius took control of Spain and put forward his own pretender, Maximus. Making use of the situation, or perhaps being incited by Gerontius, the Rhine invaders broke out of their confinement and resumed their plundering of Gaul.[6] This, in turn, incited the people of Britain and Armorica to expel Constantine's officials and take matters into their own hands, effectively achieving independence.[7] The Vandals, Sueves and Alans made use of the confusion and decided to cross over into Spain in 409. However, after plundering it, the barbarians quickly 'betook to the plough', as Orosius put it (Figure II).

[2] Heather (2007), *The Fall of the Roman Empire: A New History of Rome and the Barbarians*, 211.
[3] Orosius, *History Against the Pagans.* Book VII. 40.
[4] Drinkwater, *The Usurpers Constantine III (407-411) and Jovinus (411-413)*, 271. Kulikowski (2000), *Barbarians in Gaul, Usurpers in Britain*, 333.
[5] Zosimus, *The History of Zosimus*, Book VI.173. Kulikowski, 333. Goldsworthy, *How Rome Fell: Death of a Superpower*, 296.
[6] Zosimus, VI. 174.
[7] Zosimus, VI. 175.

Figure II. The state of the Western Roman Empire at the death of Alaric in 410. After Halsall.

While this was happening, the imperial court hamstrung itself through its execution of Stilicho in 408, which led to the Gothic invasion of Italy, culminating in the (in)famous sack of Rome in 410. The politics of the court fell into place when Constantius, a former supporter of Stilicho came to power. Meanwhile, after sacking Rome, Alaric had died and the leadership of the Goths passed over to Athaulf, who started moving his Goths out of Italy. The Italian field army that had previously been stuck between the double threat of Constantine III to the west and the Goths to the south could now be rallied and put to work. Constantius quickly set out and managed to eliminate Constantine III and Gerontius relatively quickly.

The Gothic king Athaulf, who had married Honorius' sister Galla Placidia, who was taken with the Goths after the sack of Rome, jockeyed for a position in the imperial hierarchy and aided Constantius in destroying a final usurper, Jovinus. Constantius did not appreciate such an arrangement and induced a Gothic power struggle in which Wallia came up on top. King Wallia was much more amenable to making a deal with the Romans than Athaulf had been and he returned Galla Placidia to Ravenna, in return for a continuation of the grain supplies. More importantly, Wallia agreed to fight the Alans, Sueves and Vandals for the Romans. He "wiped out the Siling Vandals, and the Alans (...) who were ruling over the Vandals and Sueves, suffered such heavy losses that the few survivors placed themselves under the protection of Gunderic, the king of the [Hasding] Vandals."[8] Having achieved this, Constantius decided to settle his Goths in Aquitaine,[9] for reasons which are still debated today. Constantius' ability to stabilise the Empire was matched by his ability to control court politics, as he married Galla Placidia and became co-emperor in 421. His ambitions were halted by the flow of time as he died later that year.

The Empire of Valentinian and Aetius

As Honorius' death followed in 424, the Empire was thrown in dynastic chaos. After an attempt by one Joannes to claim the purple, the Eastern Empire intervened and placed Constantius' and Galla Placidia's son, Valentinian III, on the throne in 425, at the age of only six.[10] A power struggle for control over the young boy was completed in 433, when Aetius received the honorary title of *patricius*, confirming his supreme status. In the previous years, Aetius dealt with his political rivals, Felix and Boniface, to emerge as the Western Empire's next powerful general. However, in this downtime of the Roman state, the barbarians were left to make a ruckus of their own. The bishop Hydatius mentions hostile activities by Sueves, bands of rebel Goths, rebel Nori and Franks being active in this period.[11] Moreover, the Vandals, under Gaiseric, who ascended to the throne in 428, had made their crossing to Africa, arriving in Mauritania in 429.[12]

Thus, though Aetius found himself in control of the Empire, many parts of it had gone missing, including those political vacuums of Spain and Britain, as well as Vandal Mauretania and Northern Gaul. Moreover, the Roman infighting from before 433 would also have taken many Roman casualties.[13] Aetius tried his best to take control of the situation. He enlisted Eastern support which came in the form of general Aspar who was to aid in the war against the Vandals in Africa.[14] This allowed Aetius to focus on campaigns in Gaul, for which he purchased Hunnic aid, trading Roman soil in Pannonia for military support.[15] With his Hunnic support, Aetius dealt blows to the Goths, that had risen up in revolt again, as well as the Burgundians,[16] who were beaten into submission. He then resettled the survivors as

[8] Hydatius, 416-18.
[9] Hydatius, 418.
[10] Hydatius, 425.
[11] Hydatius, 429-433.
[12] Hydatius, 429.
[13] Halsall, 243.
[14] Halsall, 242. Heather, 286.
[15] Heather, 287.
[16] Hydatius, 436-438.

Roman allies.[17] Moreover, Aetius dealt with those Armoricans that had thrown off Constantine III's rule years before.[18] Finally, Hydatius' Gallaecians seemed to be on their way to conducting peace settlements with the Sueves and with the other barbarians gone, Spain was put in some kind of order.[19]

However, the Eastern Romans could not afford to keep Aspar in Carthage for long. After fighting the Vandals to a standstill and securing a treaty, Aspar was recalled by Constantinople. When the coast was clear in 439, Gaiseric took Carthage by surprise.[20] This led to Aetius having to loosen the reins over Spain and Gaul, which then saw a rise of barbarian and rebel activity, in order to attempt to deal with the Vandal situation.[21] An attempt to dislodge the Vandals with Eastern Roman aid had to be cancelled and the Vandals remained in Carthage. A treaty was drawn up to acknowledge the new status quo, which was much to Gaiseric's satisfaction as it included a betrothal of Valentinian's daughter Eudoxia to his son Huneric.[22]

The cancellation of the expedition was due to the aggression of Attila's Huns. Recalling the Eastern expeditionary force nevertheless did not stop the Huns from rampaging across the Eastern Empire in the 440's.[23] Attila then decided to turn westward, invading Gaul in 451, leading up to the Battle of the Catalaunian Plains (or Campus Mauriacus), where he was halted by a coalition led by Aetius and Theodoric I of the Goths. Attila turned his sights to Italy in 452, when he was apparently turned back by Pope Leo I, though probably more earthly forces like disease and Roman harassment were at work. This would be Attila's last major offensive, as he died in 453.[24]

Forcing Attila back might have been an impressive feat by Aetius and his allies, but the Empire was still in a much-diminished position. Moreover, Valentinian III had become restless and fed up with his general and personally assassinated him in 454.[25] In this act, the Emperor marked himself for death as well. Those dissenters that had been keen to see Aetius go were now joined by the army, as Aetius retained his popularity with the soldiers even in death.[26] Heather considers Aetius' death to be an end of an era, as the Huns could no longer be used as a mechanism for maintaining a balance of power.[27] Nevertheless this balance of power depended heavily upon holding the various powers in check, and the situation in which those after Valentinian and Aetius would find themselves was precarious (Figure IV). Whether Aetius was a genius for being able to keep this together, or his reign a failure for letting the situation get to this point is something that can be debated.

[17] Heather, 287.
[18] Halsall, 244. Heather, 287.
[19] Hydatius, 438. Heather, 288.
[20] Hydatius, 439.
[21] Halsall, 245.
[22] Goldsworthy, 329-330. Halsall, 247. Heather, 291-292.
[23] Heather, 306-312.
[24] Goldsworthy, 330-333. Halsall, 253-254. Heather, 338-345. Hydatius, 451-453.
[25] Hydatius, 454.
[26] Heather, 373-374.
[27] Heather, 374-375.

Figure III. The Western Roman Empire by the end of the reign of Valentinian III. After Halsall.

Petronius Maximus, who had been one of the chief plotters in both assassinations, proclaimed himself to be the next Emperor. He ruled for scarcely 3 months before Gaiseric appeared with a fleet near Ostia, perhaps because Petronius Maximus had married off Huneric's betrothed, Valentinian III's daughter Eudocia, to his son in an attempt to gain legitimacy. In his attempt to escape Rome, he was torn apart by an angry mob. Petronius Maximus' death alone did not satisfy Gaiseric and Rome was sacked again in 455. Gaiseric's sack was a lot more thorough than Alaric's had been and he carried of a great amount of treasure from the city, as well as the widow and daughter of Valentinian.[28]

Avitus, who had been Petronius' ambassador to the Goths, enlisted their aid to become the next Emperor, marching into Rome with his Goth allies. However, the Italian army commanders Majorian and Ricimer withdrew their support and gave battle at Piacenza (Placentia), and deposed Avitus, in 456. In 457, Majorian claimed the purple.

Interim Conclusions

There are a number of aspects of these years that can be focused on for the 5th century. Almost every writer who provides a narrative account on the 5th century chooses to focus on one or a number of aspects that, in their view, are the main reasons of the decline and/or fall of the Roman Empire. My brief account builds on such narratives, but is inserted here chiefly to stress the importance of such aspects for the Roman Empire in the first half of the 5th century, leading up to the reign of Majorian.

Firstly, the barbarian invasions and their subsequent activity are closely linked to lapses in Roman government, generally in the form of deaths of important political characters in the Roman world. These lapses were frequently followed by barbarian attempts to make use of the situation. This is for example the case in the death of Stilicho in 408 which was followed by Alaric's invasion of Italy. The conflicts between Constantine III and Gerontius allowed for the barbarian crossing to Spain in 409. The deaths of Constantius and Honorius in the early 420s, led to a 10-year period of weakened Roman government and the deaths of Aetius and Valentinian around 455, further weakened the Roman state and extinguished the Theodosian house.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that the barbarians were merely opportunists. Especially the Goths and the Vandals (the Vandal-Alan coalition) managed a number of impressive feats, such as Wallia's Spanish campaign and Gaiseric's seizure of Carthage. Even if some authors downplay the external (barbarian) causes for Roman decline in favour of internal ones, the barbarians of the 5th century proved to be no pushovers.

Finally, the sources on the barbarian invasions do insist on the destructive nature of this era. All major Roman factions and all major barbarian factions had to frequently engage in, or suffer under, violent military campaigns. Considering this continued military activity in almost every area of the Western Roman Empire, it seems fair to conclude that the suffering of the peasants can only have led to reduced prosperity and tax income. For this, we do not even need to mingle in the controversial discussions regarding the economic state of Late Rome's cities and countryside.[29] As such, the idea of a 'transformation' of the Roman Empire

[28] Halsall, 378-379. Heather, 378-379.

[29] See for example Gwynn: *A. H. M. Jones and the Later Roman Empire*, mainly chapters 8-10 for brief descriptions of Jones' work on Late Roman society.

can, in my opinion, be discarded due to all this military activity. As transformation implies a relatively peaceful transition, the concept does not add anything useful to the discussion regarding the fall of Rome.

Overall, the period is marked by a continued struggle from the beginning of the 5th century onwards. This was both in-and external, and the damage done to the Roman state in the 5th century is neither solely due to internal causes or external ones. Additionally, there were a few men that did manage to stop the bleeding for a little while. However, these ad hoc solutions left loose ends for their successors, which kept the situation very volatile.

Archaeology in Barbaricum

Having thus given an account of the various political and population movements of the factions fighting in against or for the Western Roman Empire up to 457, the next step of the stage-setting is a more in-depth look into the barbarians before they crossed into the Empire. Tracing the development of these barbarians can go back a long time, all the way to the sudden disappearance of traditional barbarian names from the historical record and the subsequent appearance of new ones, such as the Franks, Goths and Alamanni. The Late Roman barbarians are however not only different in name from the earlier barbarians, but also seem more impressive from a political and military standpoint.

Archaeology provides valuable insights into their societies. Most barbarian groups beyond the close frontier appear to have been formed as a result of Roman influence in the local societies. Meddling in barbarian politics was an efficient tool for Rome to keep allies strong, enemies weak and borders secure. One simple Roman control method was subsidising favoured barbarians with so-called prestige goods, which local leaders could use to improve their position in their local communities.[30] In Barbaricum ('the land of the barbarians') this shows up in the burial record, where so-called princely graves appear as barbarian chiefs had themselves buried with imported Roman prestige goods. These appear not only along the immediate frontier, but end up as far as Denmark and Southern Sweden (Figure IV). Also interesting is the homogeneity between these graves, which can be taken to represent increased connectivity between barbarian groups.[31]

[30] Hedeager, *Rome and Northern Europe from AD 1 - 400*, 128-129. Brather, A*cculturation and Ethnogenesis along the Frontier: Rome and the Ancient Germans in an Archaeological Perspective*, 145-149. Todd (1997), *The Germanic Peoples*. Todd (2005), *Germanic Peoples and Germanic Society*, 443. Kulikowski (2008), *Rome's Gothic Wars: From the Third Century to Alaric*, 37. Heather, 89-90.

[31] Hedeager, 131. Brather, 147.

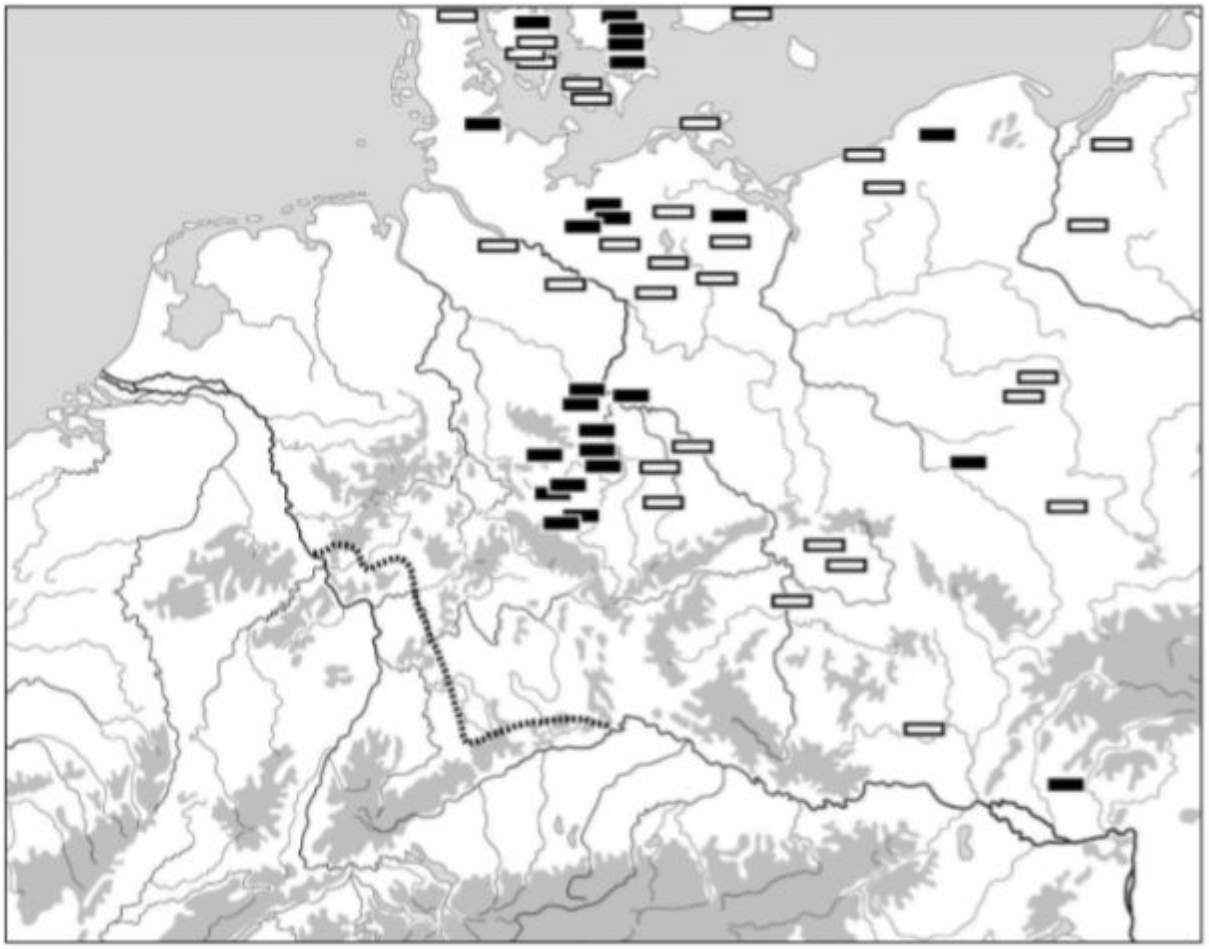

Figure IV. A map of the distribution of princely graves beyond the frontier of the first three centuries AD: first-to second-century burials of the so-called Lübsow type in white and third- and early fourth-century graves of the so called group 'Haßleben-Leuna in Black. After Brather, 2005.

In addition to the increased stratification and political control from the barbarian 'princes', many of the settlements the barbarians lived in were also becoming much more impressive (Figure VI). Perhaps the most important factor is the switch from extensive to intensive agriculture in Barbaricum.[32] Though it has been argued as both cause and effect, intensified agriculture does allow for the sustenance of an increased population. Larger cemeteries[33] and settlements that also started appearing in the Later Roman periods are generally taken to indicate a population increase. There are a number of examples of such large settlements, but in Western Europe Wijster is probably the best-known example.[34] For the Eastern regions of Barbaricum, north of the Black Sea, Heather gives the example of Budesty as one such substantial settlement.[35]

[32] Hedeager, 134. Heather, 86-87. Todd (1997), 473.
[33] Todd (1997), 472.
[34] Hedeager, 134. Todd (1997), 473-474. Todd (2005), 448. Heather, 87. Es, *Wijster: A Native Village beyond the Imperial Frontier, 150 - 425 A.D*. Halsall, 132.
[35] Heather, 87. Heather (1997), *Goths and Huns, C. 320 - 425*.

These villages also had other characteristics, such as regular and functional layouts, enclosures that seem to denote ownership, buildings that can be identified as belonging to a chief, more stables and granaries and more local industry, of which iron-working is the best example.[36] Especially interesting cases are some Alamannic settlements on soil that had once belonged to the Empire. This gave them the opportunity to use and make minor changes to the Roman structures that remained there.[37] On the Danube frontier, some Gothic buildings made use of stone in their construction.[38] Additionally the Gothic Tervingi had an extensive defence system which might have been constructed with imperial support.[39]

[36] Hedeager, 134. Todd (1997), 473. Todd (2005), 448. Kulikowski (2008), 90. Godlowski, *Jakuszowice: A Multi-period Settlement in Southern Poland*, 673-674. Halsall, 132.
[37] Drinkwater, *The Alamanni and Rome 213-496: (Caracalla to Clovis)*. Ammianus Marcellinus, *The Roman History of Ammianus Marcellinus*, Book XVII. 7
[38] Heather (2007), 91.
[39] Kulikowski (2008), 79.

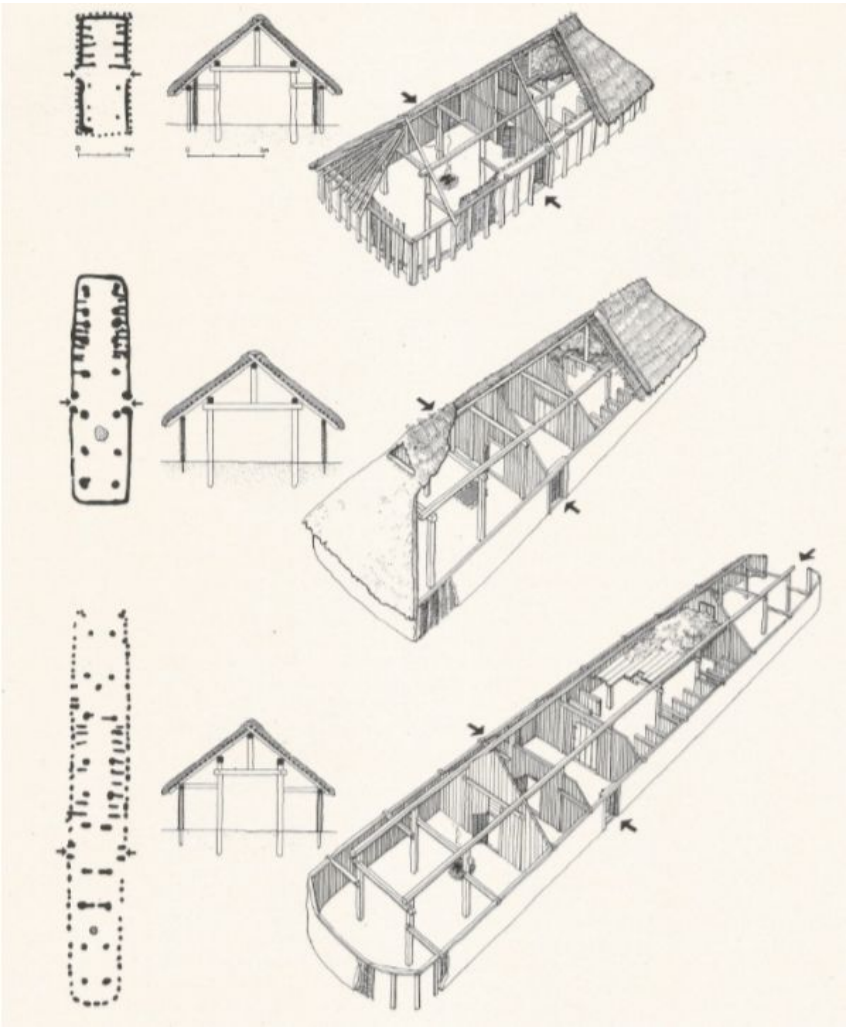

Figure V. Evolution of Danish Longhouses, showing a steady growth in size and complexity from 500-300 BC, to 100 BC and finally from 200-500 AD. It is interesting to note how it seems that, even this far north, growth was afoot in Barbaricum, even if not at the same level as on the frontier. After Hedeager.

Though these are only a number of examples from a vast archaeological field, they show a steady growth in the various areas of development for the tribes, including population, centralization, inter-barbarian contacts, trade and craftsmanship. These developments are especially poignant in the areas immediately bordering the Empire's provinces, which show a sort of extra-territorial Romanization, and the creation of a frontier culture between the provinces and bordering Barbaricum.[40] Not only do Roman trade and prestige goods appear, but more direct examples of barbarian development opportunities due to Roman favouritism can be found. On the Rhine frontier, the Alamani were living in former imperial territory, where Ammianus describes Roman villas. On the Danube, the state-sponsored Gothic Tervingi were able to subdue their neighbours thanks to Roman aid. These Tervingi thus drove other barbarian tribes, such as the Carpi, into the Empire, forcing the Romans to deal with these unwelcome invaders.[41]

[40] Brather, 171-172.
[41] Kulikowski (2008), 78-80.

Barbarian Military and Organization before the Border Crossings

Regarding barbarian society and activity towards Rome, there are also a number of interesting historiographical sources to build upon. In Late Antiquity there were a number of impressive raids on Roman soil. Perhaps the most interesting is the Gothic (called Scythians) raid onto Asia Minor described by Zosimus. Zosimus mentions how the Scythians moved onto the Bosporus and commandeered the ships of the local rulers, who dared not refuse. This led to the Scythians being able to enter and pillage the cities of Asia Minor, including great cities such as Trapezos and Nicomedia. Moreover, in one of their naval assaults they managed to make their way into the Aegean, which allowed them to plunder Greece as well.[42] Kulikowski takes Gregory Thaumaturgus, the 'Wonderworker' as a good example of the war's calamities, as he answers such Christian questions as what to do with rape victims, looters, escaped barbarian prisoners and even those that joined the attackers.[43] Overall, this is a good example of some of the havoc the barbarians can cause on imperial soil and the shock it generated. Though not a fundamental threat on the Empire on their own, these Scythians in their raids did do serious damage to the lives and livelihoods of the people of Anatolia and showed a great level of audacity and aptitude in attacking the Empire.

From all the tribes that crossed into the Empire in the late 4th and early 5th century, the Tervingi are the ones with whom the Empire had had the most contact in the previous century. This allows us to get some insights into their societal organization. Though the same tribal organization cannot have carried over when the Tervingi crossed the Danube and merged with other Gothic tribes to create the Gothic group that would later be led by Alaric, it provides us with insights into the control of Gothic leaders over their subjects.

One example of this is the story of *The Passion of St. Saba*. Saba was a poor Tervingi Christian villager in the late 4th century, when, perhaps to spite the Eastern Emperor Valens, Christians were persecuted in Gothia by Judge (*Iudex*) Athanaric. The Judge in Gothic society seems to have been the overall ruler of the Tervingi, with the Tervingi kings being subordinate to the Judge, though the degree of control and the balance of power is hard to measure.[44] Returning to the persecution, in order to snuff the Christians out, Athanaric and the Gothic kings made use of small retinues or 'officials', if you will, to pass from village to village and oversee the progress.[45]

One test was to oversee the consumption of sacrificial meat dedicated to the pagan Gods, which, in the village of Saba, were being undermined by the local populace. The villagers, showing sympathy to the Christians in their village, switched the 'unclean' sacrificial meat for normal meat, that Christians could safely consume. Saba, who was striving for martyrdom, would not be part of this deception and wished to make his Christianity known to the aristocratic overseers. His fellow villagers exiled him in order to keep him from stirring up trouble, though he was readmitted soon after. When another Gothic noble came to the village to apply the same test, Saba stepped forward as a Christian once more. The noble, in an act of mercy, merely expulsed Saba for the second time, as he did not conceive a poor

[42] Zosimus, Book I. 23-28.
[43] Kulikowski (2008), 19.
[44] Heather (2007), 95-96. Kulikowski (2008), 101.
[45] Heather (2007), 96.

villager to be any sort of danger to Gothic society. When travelling to another village to celebrate Easter, a miraculous snowfall turned Saba back to his own village, where he and the Christian priest Sansalas were caught and tortured by Atharidus, the son of the Gothic king Rothesteus. Once more the villagers interfered and Saba was freed, but he chose to stay and turn himself in. Saba was finally condemned to being drowned in the river. The soldiers that were sent to drown him considered to let the poor fool go, but Saba urged them to complete their task, and they finally drowned him.[46]

Though this story is of course primarily meant as a saint story, which somes with all the historiographical flaws that such Christian writing is normally emburdened with, it does show a reliable picture of Gothic society. Overall, it appears that the collective Tervingi leadership, decided to persecute the Christians. The villages were supposed to carry out this order, while enforcement was in the hands of the nobles with their retinues. The information gap between these nobles and the village elders was large enough for the villagers to be able to thwart these efforts without engaging in any serious rebellious activity. Even the soldiers that made up the retinues were willing to let Saba go, which shows that noble control over their subjects was loose. Drawing these over to society at large, Halsall concludes that Tervingi society was probably based on the collection of tribute from villages by their nobles, along with their retinues of warriors, based in centralised or high-status settlements, which reflect those aspects of increased settlement growth and stratification as discussed previously.[47]

Discussing the Evidence

Taking together the evidence from the plethora of archaeological finds, the various written sources that describe the exploits of the barbarians and the sources that give us insights into their lives and societies, we get an image of a potent rival to Roman power. Late Antique barbarians seem to be more numerous, better organized, more connected to their peers and generally better at productive activity, ranging from farming to industry. At the top, leaders were in control over more settlements and lesser nobles than previous confederations. Finally, Late Antique barbarians were more able to strike farther away from the frontiers, of which the Black Sea raids are a good example.

Still, relations between the barbarians and Rome are a controversial issue. For example, Walter Goffart puts his ‘Recipe of the Germans overthrowing the Roman Empire’ on trial, stating that “This ‘inner development’ [of the Germans/barbarians] is not an established, verifiable fact of ancient history; it is the aggregate of five or six discrete groups of facts, widely separate in time and space, joined together by emphatic affirmations that they combine into a coherent and progressive tale: the rise of ‘the Germans’."[48] He is not entirely unjustified in saying this. The idea that all barbarians are essentially the same and can be lumped together is nothing more than copying the opinions of Roman authors before us. We can definitely tell that there were differences between various barbarian groups (Figure VI). Neither should all barbarian evidence be casually lumped together.[49] In some ways, my brief explanation is probably guilty of this method, though this is more so due to

[46] Halsall, 3-5. Heather (2007), 96. Kulikowski (2008), 118-120.
[47] Halsall, 135.
[48] Goffart, *Barbarian Tides: The Migration Age and the Later Roman Empire*, 27.
[49] Halsall, 23.

the aim of briefly taking together the various examples than any deliberate effort to piece disparate things together. Still, some line of defence must be prepared against Goffart and other authors that would deny the gradual evolution of the northern barbarians.

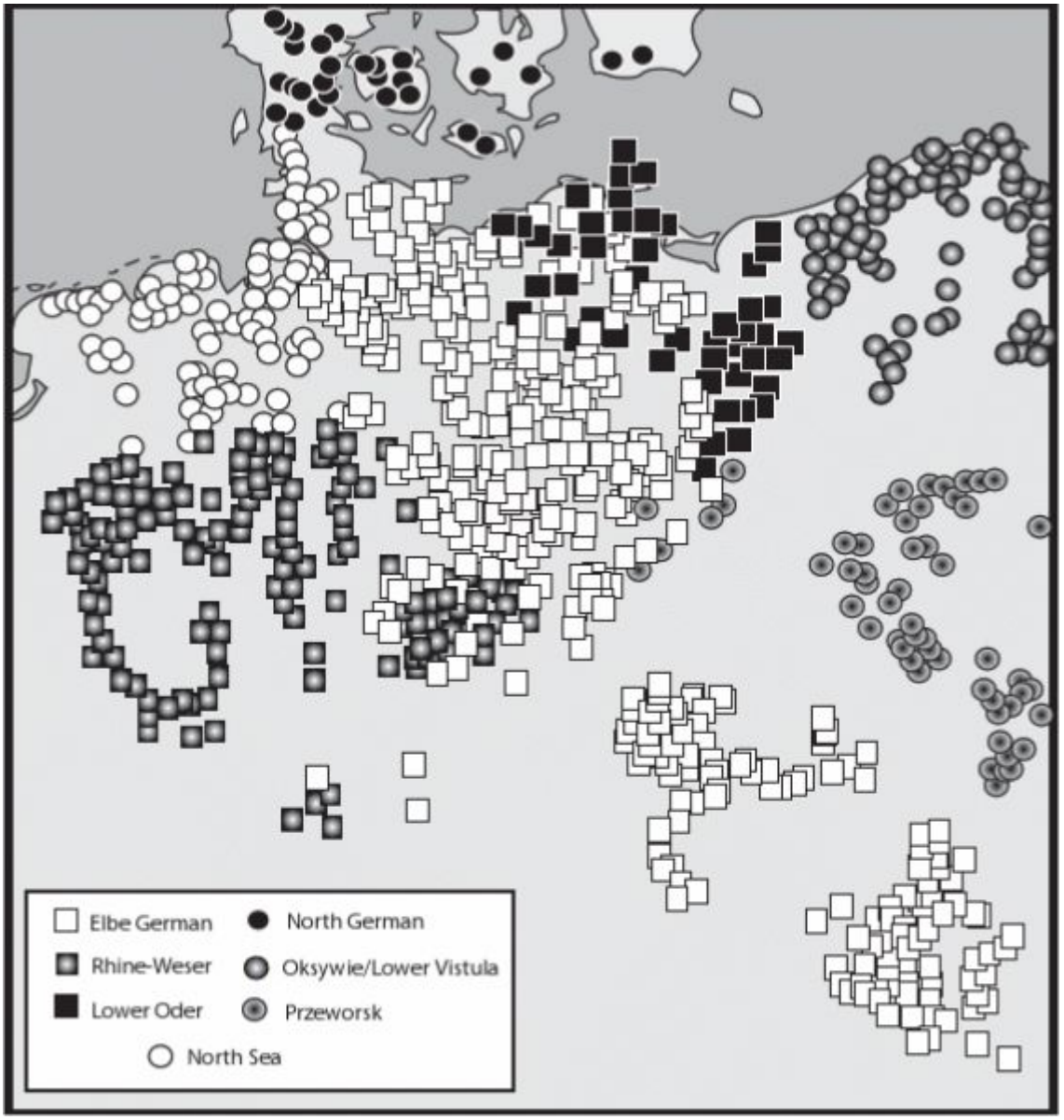

Figure VI. Different Germanic culture groupings, defined by archaeological findings such as ceramics, metalware and burial findings. After Halsall.

While the various finds from Barbaricum and the episodes of major barbarian activity are by no means definitely interrelated or chronological, the way of drawing conclusions from the evidence we find is to study them by looking at their contexts and developments. Indeed, looking at each object of study only by its own terms provides us with very little to work with, especially in the case of archaeology, where one would be digging up evidence solely for the sake of digging up evidence. Though this was done in the past at major cultural sites, modern digs set out with a clear purpose. The result of any investigation, whether historical or archaeological is to be taken up by archaeologists and historians to patch everything

together and paint a coherent picture. The usage of archaeological evidence by historians is of course subject to various debates, as many archaeologists for example argue for the inherent value of their work, rather than as a supporting tool for historians in general, to name but one example. Still, the same inherent value also forces us to try to understand and incorporate it the best we can. Relating to Goffart, if the final picture of an archaeological and historical investigation is indeed the recipe of the 'Germans overthrowing the Western Roman Empire', it does not necessarily mean it is incorrect due to the usage of evidence from various times and places. Indeed, trying to trace each barbarian tribe from their earliest appearance to Late Antiquity is an impossible endeavour. If evidence is scarce, we must simply make do with whatever we can get our hands on, even if the evidence is disparate.

Following the advice of Halsall, however, acting as if finds from different groupings, whether archaeological or historiographical apply to other groupings equally is certainly a mistake as well. Indeed, even comparing historiographical tribes with archaeological cultures is a dangerous affair. Earlier tendencies to equate these with one another, for example the Przeworsk culture consisting of Vandals, or the Cernjachov culture being the Goths, have been shown to be oversimplified These cultures zones incorporate areas probably inhabited by multiple peoples, and cultural aspects overlap cultural zones. Thus, there are differences, but no demarcations.[50] Drawing conclusions about barbarians 'in general', as we still need to do when comparing them to imperial Rome, then rely on the finding of similar developments between different groups independently.

Although the evidence is not perfect and the archaeological findings are prone to discussion just like historiographical sources are, I do think that the overall picture of stronger and better organized barbarian groupings is correct. However, this is not to say that Goffart's 'Recipe' is. Aside from Goffart, different authors have differing views on the impact this would have had on Rome. The examples of Heather's and Goldsworthy's have already been mentioned, and are good ones for them being polar opposites of each other. The role that barbarians played in the fall of Rome can still be debated upon, but that late barbarian society was more intricate and that they were capable of grander feats is sufficiently clear.

[50] Heather (2007), 199-200

Part II: Into the Breach

Adapting to a new home

We can clearly see how aspects of barbarian societal growth remained relevant and, in some ways, got further enhanced since the river crossings of the various groups. As the Vandals, Alans, Sueves and especially the Goths maintained themselves on imperial soil for as long as they did, different factors would have impacted the people in the barbarian groupings. On the one hand, they would have had to deal with various levels of attrition as they made their way around the country. For example, the Rhine crossers, crossing on the last day of December, would have struggled to maintain themselves in light of the year's winter. Keeping such a varied group together in such dire circumstances must have taken a lot of work from the barbarian leadership. On the other hand, the time spent within the borders also had its benefits. For example, it was long enough for some of the barbarian children to become of age. The Vandal king Gaiseric is a good example of this. As he became king in 428 and ruled for 49 years after his ascension, we can deduce that he was either born within imperial borders or crossed into the Empire at a very young age. Moreover, it seems that most barbarian groupings actually gained followers inside the borders. The best example of this are Alaric's Goths, as the group included many Roman slaves and former followers of Radagaisus, who joined them as they were rampaging across Italy[51] and later included many Gallo-Romans in its regime.[52]

The Goths

Arguably the most successful of the barbarian invaders were the Goths, mainly the branch originally led by Alaric that we now call the Visigoths. They were on imperial soil the longest of all barbarian groups, having already crossed the Danube in 376. This means they had the most extensive dealings with the Empire. They were also the ones that were incorporated most into the empire of all the barbarian groups. For example, kings Theodoric I and Theodoric II held relatively stable alliances with Aetius and Majorian respectively. Inversely, under Euric they gave up on the idea of Empire, as, after the defeat of Emperor Anthemius' invasion fleet in 468, Euric struck out to claim land for the Goths in his own name.

Overall, the Goths were endowed with a relatively high degree of *romanitas* in comparison to the other barbarians. (Nominal) allegiance to the Empire remained an important part of Gothic policy until Euric realised the Empire was dying. They were first settled as Roman allies by Theodosius the Great and Arcadius continued his father's policy by granting Alaric the title of *magister militum per Illyricum* prior to the Goths' invasion of Italy, meaning they must have been funded and supplied by the treasury of the Eastern Empire. Even during his invasion of Italy, Alaric only ever wanted a position within the imperial hierarchy and was clearly amenable to deal with the Romans. Stilicho intended to ally with Alaric's Goths in a dispute over the Illyrian provinces with the Eastern court before Radagaisus' invasion delayed his plans.[53] Before he sacked Rome, Alaric had tried to

[51] Heather (2007), 224. Heather, (2011). *Visigoths and the fall of Rome*, 35-36
[52] Heather (2011), 43.
[53] Zosimus, Book VI.

bargain multiple times for a command on the borders of the Western Empire, including imperial supplies and pay.[54]

By this time, his troops would certainly have looked the part. Though they were originally a group of refugees in 376, their conflicts with Rome allowed them to loot Roman arms and equipment.[55] They were also joined by other Goths and Romans, who preferred being Goth over being Roman.[56] The Gothic track record of battle was also quite impressive. Neither Alaric nor his successors seemed to have lost a major battle against the Romans, aside from the Aetius' victory over Theodoric I and the 'certain battle' mentioned by Hydatius that re-established ties between the Goths and Romans during Majorian's reign.[57] Moreover, when turned against the Vandals, Alans and Sueves in Iberia, Wallia's Goths easily annihilated the Alans and Siling Vandals, the remainder of which sought refuge with the Hasdings[58]

By doing so, Wallia finally achieved something akin to what Alaric had set out for, as Gothic support was traded for a Roman alliance and supplies. This makes the settlement in Aquitaine the most poignant part of the history of the Goths, as this would be where they would stay until the end of the Empire. By fighting on the Roman side, Wallia had achieved what his people had been looking for in previous years, namely a stable alliance with Rome and a place within the imperial system, even if it was a more marginal one than the one Alaric first envisioned. What is especially interesting about the Goths is that they straddled both the Roman and the Gothic hierarchies. The Gothic kings functioned as kings of the Goths within a Roman province and command structure, but could make use of both their Roman and their Gothic status at will. In the years following their settlement, the Goths would expand their power with the help of the local Gallic Romans.

For this reason, Michael Kulikowski could make an interesting case for the troops of Theodoric and Aetius at the Catalaunian Plains. Kulikowski claims: "When Aëtius and Theodoric I went to war for several years in the later 430s, both were a part of western provincial society. Perhaps more significantly, from everything we can tell, Theodoric's 'barbarian' and 'Gothic' side fielded more men who had been born and raised inside the frontiers of the empire than did the imperial and 'Roman' side of Aëtius—recruited in large part beyond the frontiers. That is to say, many of the barbarians in the 5th c. West, whom we are conditioned to think of as invaders, were in fact first-, second- and third-generation inhabitants of the imperial provinces. However comforting it may be to cling to the old images of encroaching barbarian waves, the wars of the 5th c. West were not for the most part invasions, but rather civil wars within Roman provinces."[59] Though I find his conclusion a bit extreme, as it ignores the basic facts that, there were still real or perceived differences between Goths and Romans, his argument does show quite well how these provincial Romans were amenable to signing up with these Goths.

In the same vein, Saint Sidonius Apollinaris, a Gallo-Roman aristocratic writer, Avitus' son in law and, after Avitus' reign, a supporter of Emperors Majorian and Anthemius, did not necessarily have a problem with the Goths. Sidonius left us with a charming description of

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[54] Zosimus, Book VI.
[55] Ammianus Marcellinus, Book XXXI. V, 9. Book XXX., VI. 2-3.
[56] Ammianus Marcellinus, Book XXXI. VI. 2-3. Book XXXI. VI. 6.
[57] Hydatius, 459. MacDowall, *Conquerors of the Roman Empire: The Goths,* Chapter 6. ¶Gothic Military Power.
[58] Hydatius, 416-418.
[59] Kulikowski (2013), *The Archaeology of War and the 5th C. 'Invasions'*, 685.

king Theodoric II in a letter to his brother-in-law Agricola. In this letter, Sidonius praises the barbarian king abundantly. However, this is not merely praise for an allied barbarian, Theodoric is presented as being (almost) a Roman. This is reflected not only in his own appearance and behaviour, but also by the way he runs his court. I feel the best way to summarise it is to use the poet's own words: "In short, you will find elegance of Greece, good cheer of Gaul, Italian nimbleness, the state of public banquets with the attentive service of a private table, and everywhere the discipline of a king's house." What is still amusing in his description is Theodoric's love for dice games after dinner. Sidonius mentions how "petitions that some wrecked influence had left derelict come unexpectedly to port; I myself am gladly beaten by him when I have a favour to ask, since the loss of my game may mean the gaining of my cause."[60] Nevertheless, it is clear that Sidonius tried to paint a picture of a ruler that had nothing in common with stereotypical skin-clad barbarians. The overall picture of the king is one akin to a good Roman ruler.

In this sense, Sidonius seems to agree with Kulikowski's portrayal of Theodoric as an essentially Western Roman provincial politician. For Sidonius, Theodoric (nominally) being part of the imperial government was what allowed him to work with him in good conscience. When Euric finally did away with the idea of Empire, we find Sidonius rebelling against his expansionist policies.[61]

This made him perhaps one of the more upstanding Gallo-Romans. Peter Heather often stresses the ties of the landowning classes with their land as being their most valuable possession. Though he mentions it often, the following argument phrases it very well: "Roman landowners were a small elite, the prime beneficiaries of the hugely unequal wealth distribution which the Empire's socio-economic and legal systems protected. When the central state, due to financial shortages and consequent military decline, became increasingly unable to fulfill its role of protection, the landowners' position came under direct threat, and in some parts of the west (notably southern Britain and northern Gaul), they did not manage to survive the process of collapse, their properties being acquired by incoming outsiders. As this perspective underlines that, wherever they could, Roman landowners had in fact no choice but to come to accommodations with whichever of the new barbarian kingdoms began to hold sway in their region or risk losing everything that gave them status and wealth. Some moved quicker than others, certainly, but in the end there was no choice."[62] The fact that the barbarians were taking over the lands in which the aristocrats' land and wealth was based simply meant that, if they were to keep on to their land and wealth, these aristocrats had to come to terms with their new overlords.

This meant that the times in which Sidonius lived were certainly strange ones. This process of coming to terms was certainly an awkward one and went hand in hand with both positive and negative experiences. We have already seen Sidonius' description of Theodoric, but he also had something to say when he famously complained of two Gothic women chattering outside his door in the evening hours. He graciously called them: "quarrelsome, drunken and disgusting creatures, whose like will not easily be seen again."[63] When a certain Catullinus asked Sidonius to put his poetic genius to work on a song,

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[60] Sidonius Apollinaris, *Delphi Complete Works of Sidonius Apollinaris,* To Agricola.
[61] Sidonius Apollinaris, I Letter to the Lord Bishop Mamertus. II.To his friend Constantius. III To his brother-in-law Ecdicius. V To the Lord Bishop Agroeclus. X (XI) To the Lord Bishop Graecus.
[62] Heather (2011), 43.
[63] Sidonius Apollinaris, III To his friend Leo.

Sidonius protested on the grounds that the Burgundians whom he had to share his house with drove away the muse, calling his correspondent lucky that "[he] was not invaded even before dawn, like an old grandfather or a foster-father, by a crowd of giants so many and so big that not even the kitchen of Alcinous could support them."[64] On the other hand, he commended his friend Syagrius for being able to pick up the German tongue so well and so quickly, even calling him "a new Solon in the elucidation of Burgundian law."[65] Overall then, some of the difficulties of adapting oneself to the new reality are the same as one would expect. Still, if one could associate himself with Theodoric, or become a 'Solon of Burgundian law', the situation also provided opportunities. It was perhaps best to attempt to work with the barbarians from an early stage because, as Heather pointed out, resistance proved to be futile in the end.

Similarly to how those Gallo-Romans who found themselves within a new barbarian kingdom preferred to work with it rather than oppose it, the Goths were also the preferred partner of the Roman state against the other barbarians. Gothic incorporation is perhaps most poignant during the reigns of Aetius and Avitus, though the ways by which they obtained their support was different. Avitus included the Goths into his bid for the Empire from the start, while Aetius had a more turbulent relationship with them. Stilicho, Constantius and Majorian also had all struggled to keep the Goths involved in their military policies in some way, so that it does seem that the Gothic power from Aquitaine was crucial to imperial ambition during the 5th century.

We can make a few assumptions as to why that is. On the most basic level it can easily be interpreted as the need or desire to align oneself with one of the larger barbarian power blocks, as the events of the Sack of Rome in 410, Wallia's annihilation of the Alans and Silings in 418 and Theodoric's vital support in the Battle of the Catalaunian Plains indicate that the Goths were a powerful force. Additionally, the Gothic settlement in Aquitaine was close to the Roman bridgehead between Gaul and Hispania. This also meant that, if the Goths weren't kept in check, they could easily expand into Hispania, or cut the Roman connection between the Italian heartlands and Hispania in an effort to gain access to the Mediterranean.

In the light of the scarcity of sources on such information, it could be argued that the decision to appeal to the Goths before any other group was not due to the impressive position of the Goths. While that is a valid argument, it merely shifts the focus of the issue. From a Roman point of view, choosing the Goths makes most sense from a military or ideological standpoint. In other words, if not for the crucial importance of Gothic support, courting the Goths only makes sense if they show a willingness to play by the Roman rulebook, once again confirmed by their actions.

In conclusion, the greatest strength for the Goths had been their great flexibility in adapting and adopting all things Roman. In their 100 years within the Empire, they went from refugees and plunderers to a full-fledged barbarian kingdom within the Empire. During their time in the East under Valens, they gained access to Roman arms and armour, while under Theodosius and Arcadius, they held official posts within the Eastern Empire. Considering the time they spent in Illyricum when Alaric was *magister militum*, it makes sense that they would already have used that time to stabilise and consolidate their position. The invasion of Italy in the early 5th century, was marked by the masses of the late Stilicho's soldiers, (barbarian)

[64] Sidonius Apollinaris, XII To Catullinus, Senator.
[65] Sidonius Apollinaris, V To his friend Syagrius.

slaves and other lowborns joining up with the Goths, bolstering their numbers.[66] Ambition within the Empire went from high stakes with a Gothic puppet Emperor Priscus Attalus and Honorius' sister Galla Placidia to low stakes under Wallia, but the settlement in Aquitaine was all they really needed to set themselves up for success. The period in Aquitaine is marked by the Gothic assaults on the Spanish barbarians and the Huns, as well as their incorporation within the Gallic establishment, becoming something that men like Avitus and Sidonius could align themselves with, as proper Romans.

Regarding this subject, it is perhaps interesting to speculate about the possibility of imperially sanctioned Gothic control of Spain by Avitus and Theodoric. Returning to the earlier argument of Kulikowski about the nature of the Goths as being essentially Western Roman provincial powers, one could easily imagine a situation in which the Goths would control Spain for the Empire. In this case, the Empire's failure to keep Spain and the Goths in line would be due to a failure of incorporating its various people to a representative degree. Considering the number of Romans happily serving under the Goths, this situation would then not seem to be too far off.

Perhaps an interesting comparison can be drawn to the Eastern Roman Emperor Zeno who reigned from 474 to 491. For this discussion, what is interesting about Zeno is his Isaurian descent. The Isaurians were the designated trouble-makers of Asia Minor, and Ammianus Marcellinus' work is full of outbursts of Isaurian raiding, rebellions and banditry all the way through the 5th century. Zeno himself was a successful military commander who married his way into the imperial family, eventually finding himself as the sole Emperor of the East. His reign was not popular, as he was seen as an Isaurian barbarian and he was deposed, having to fight a number of civil wars to regain his throne. He gained support by strengthening his ties to his Isaurian countrymen, incorporating them in his bid for power and his the imperial system.[67]

Imagining that Avitus had been successful in maintaining himself in the face of the Italian resistance under Ricimer and Majorian, his reign might have been rather similar to Zeno's in this aspect. If the Goths' choice of Emperor was enough to placate them, they could be integrated more thoroughly within the imperial system as one of the major political factions. The bad faith that had shadowed Romano-Gothic relations ever since the reign of Theodosius could be dismantled by virtue of this cooperation. Remembering how the goals of the Goths had always been inclusion into the political system, Avitus presenting Theodoric with a prestigious government post, such as *magister militum* and/or *patricius,* might have worked to finally allow for a relatively peaceful incorporation of the Gothic Kingdom into the Roman Empire.

Such a chain of events would certainly have been Avitus' greatest triumph, as it would completely shift the political scene of the Western Empire. Nevertheless, Avitus' focus on including the Goths had estranged other key factions and his reign was struck short by Ricimer and Majorian. What Theodoric's and Avitus' plans had been thus becomes hard to pinpoint. Nevertheless, when Majorian allied himself with the Goths after Avitus' reign, Spain basically came with the package. Apparently, the Goths took good care of Spain in the Empire's absence.

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[66] Heather (2007), 224. Heather (2011), 35-36
Heather (2011),

[67] Wilkinson, *Private Armies and Personal Power in the Late Roman Empire*, 72-75.

The Rhine Crossers

The Alans, Sueves and Vandals spent a great deal of their time together by virtue of their collective Rhine crossing on the last day of 406. The Vandals were almost destroyed in battle by the Franks, when the Alans rode and broke the Frankish lines, which allowed the Vandals and Alans to force their crossing into Gaul.[68] Where the Sueves were at that time is not mentioned by Gregory, but as they crossed over into Spain together with the others and only split up with their division of Spain, we can treat the first period of their migration in common.

Tracking their movements is difficult to do in detail. Heather attempted to trace their movements from Gaul to Spain, but his effort is based on slightly unreliable and disparate sources, including authors like Jerome and making use of coin hoards as clues. It suffices to say they must have raided far and wide over Gaul, before being halted by Constantine III. In any case, their story becomes more interesting upon their entering of the Iberian Peninsula. When they 'betook to the plough', the Rhine invaders divided Spain amongst them 'by lot', with the Hasdings taking Gallaecia, the Sueves the North-western part of that same province, the Silings taking Baetica and the Alans taking Lusitania and Carthaginiensis.[69] By lot seems rather hard to believe, considering that the powerful Alans took the wealthiest provinces, while the weaker Hasdings and Sueves had to share the poorer region of Gallaecia (Figure VII).

[68] Gregory of Tours. *A History of the Franks.* Book II. 9.
[69] Hydatius, 411.

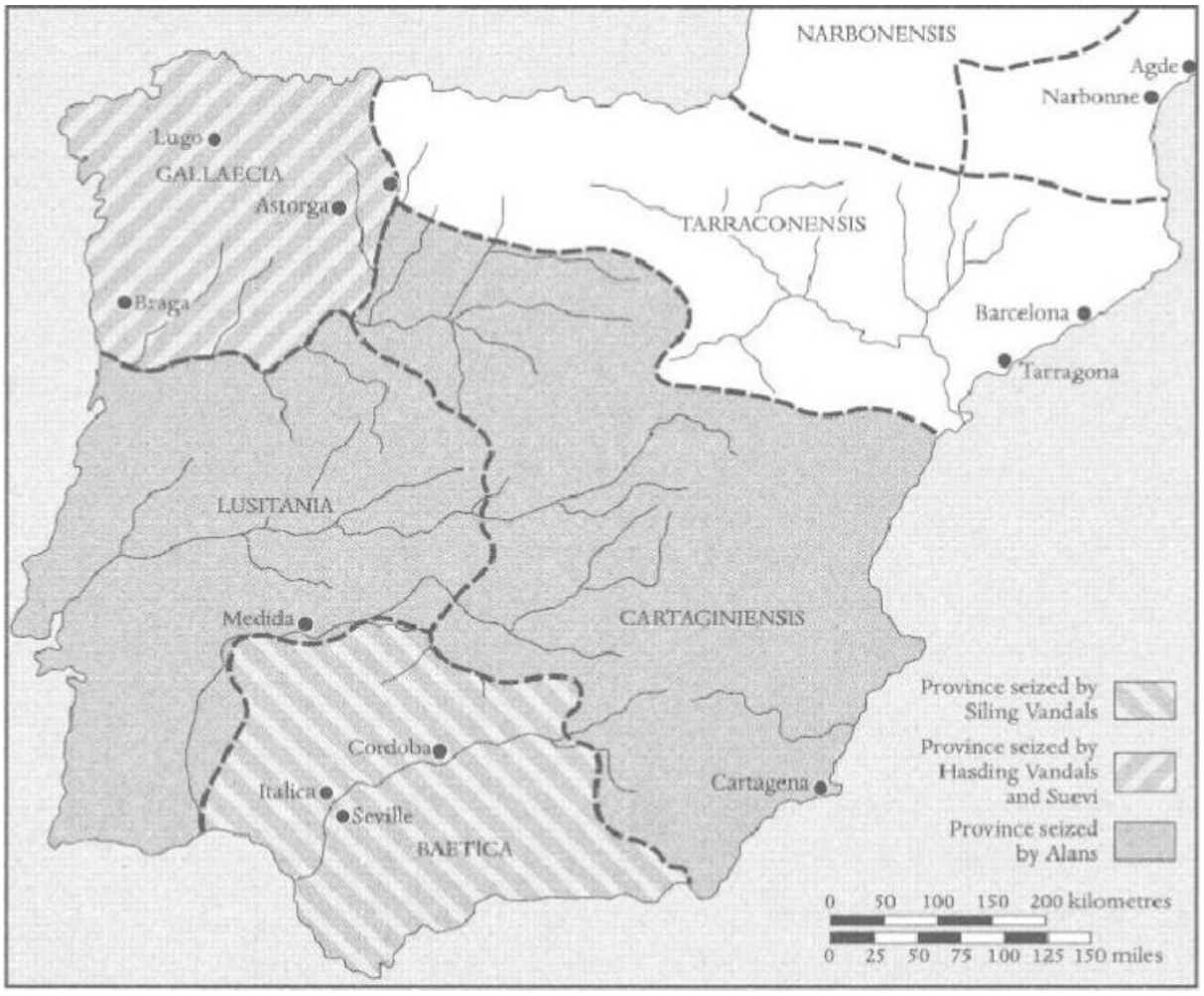

Figure VII. The barbarian division of Spain in 411. Tarraconensis was held by Gerontius and Maximus.

What exactly was going in these areas around this time is perhaps harder to determine. Returning to Hydatius, it is perhaps interesting to note that amidst all the horror going on in 410 (which he describes in the blackest terms), when the barbarians had just arrived in Spain, he also mentions a tyrannical tax-collector, and soldiers consuming the stored goods of the cities.[70] By tyrannical tax-collector, Hydatius seems to imply that Maximus' (a so-called tyrant) government was still at work in the same regions as the barbarians were plundering.[71]

The peninsula must have been relatively quiet in the period between the barbarian settlement in 411 and Wallia's campaign. Hydatius mentions how "the Spaniards (...) who had survived the disasters surrendered themselves to servitude under the barbarians", implying a halt to the widespread disaster that he was talking about only 1 paragraph before.[72] By servitude, Hydatius probably meant a diversion of tax revenue from the Emperor to the barbarians or an imposition of tribute of some kind, as the barbarians cannot have been so

[70] Hydatius, 410.
[71] Kulikowski (2010), *Late Roman Spain and its Cities*, 161-165.
[72] Hydatius, 410.

numerous as to be able to oppress population as large as that of Roman Spain.[73] If nothing else, the time in the Spanish provinces would have given our barbarians some breathing space to finally recover from their adventures after the Rhine crossing in 406. The extent to which they would have been able to reinforce their numbers with local Hispano-Romans, or equip themselves with Roman arms in Gothic fashion can only be guessed at.

The peace was finally broken when Constantius sent Wallia's Goths into Spain in 416. It is interesting how the Goths managed to smack down the Rhine-Crossers in a time span of only two years before being recalled by Constantius. The most powerful groups, the Alans and Siling Vandals, were hammered to such an extent that they sought refuge with the Hasding Vandals.[74] At this point then, only two barbarian groups were left in Spain, the Hasding-Siling-Alan coalition (from now on simply referred to as Vandals) and the Sueves. Moreover, with the Goths clearing out the Silings and Alans, most of Spain had once again become properly Roman. After Wallia's campaigns we once again see Roman officials in the peninsula.[75]

Though they apparently shared the province of Gallaecia before, a quarrel broke out between the Vandals and Sueves, and the Vandals besieged the Sueves. Asterius, the *comes Hispaniarum*, perhaps sniffing an opportunity to finally eradicate the Spanish barbarians, decided to engage the Vandals. According to Hydatius "(...) the Vandals abandoned their blockade of the Sueves and, after a number of men under the *Vicarius* Maurocellus had been killed while escaping from Bracara, the Vandals quit Gallaecia and crossed into Baetica." Though Hydatius states it rather plainly, what he describes sounds like a disaster for the Romans. Not only did the barbarians stop their infighting, but the Vandals killed Roman troops and crossed into Baetica, the heart of Roman Spain that Wallia had fought for only a few years ago.[76]

Moreover, the *magister militum* Castinus launched an attack with Roman and Gothic troops onto the Vandals in Baetica. According to Hydatius, he had the Vandals besieged and ready to surrender when he recklessly engaged in open battle and lost the day.[77] As Honorius' death in 424 threw the Empire into another war of succession, Castinus' attempt against the barbarians would be the last one for a long time, giving the barbarians free reign in Spain once more.

Spain and the Suevi

The Suevi did not do much to make use of the situation. One attempt to raid into Baetica in 429, just before the Vandal crossing to Africa, was repulsed by the Vandals, and their king Heremigarius was drowned in a river.[78] Even an attempt to raid the central parts of Gallaecia was not so successful, as "(...) the people who remained in possession of the more secure forts" put up a successful resistance.[79] More conflicts around 433 and 438 seemed to have similar results.[80] Only by 439 do we see some success when a new king,

[73] Kulikowski (2010), 163.
[74] Hydatius, 416-18
[75] Kulikowski (2010), 171-172.
[76] Hydatius, 420. Kulikowski (2010), 173.
[77] Hydatius, 422.
[78] Hydatius, 429.
[79] Hydatius, 430.
[80] Hydatius, 433-438.

Rechila, entered Merida (*Emerita Augusta)*, the capital of the Roman diocese of Spain. This was followed by him seizing Baetica and Carthaginiensis. A Roman attempt by *magister utriusque militiae* Vitus to engage the Sueves met with defeat.[81] Kulikowski considers Rechila's policy more in the light of exacting tribute and eliminating Roman resistance, thus securing his own hegemony and making Rome unable to make use of Spain's resources. An attempt to systematically occupy the entirety of Spain is unlikely considering the small numbers of Suevi. This also means he thinks the Romans regained some sort of control over the important regions of Spain with Vitus campaign, while the Sueves themselves remained in Lusitania.[82]

Rechila's son Rechiar is an interesting character, as he is the first barbarian to mint coins in his own name, a sign of independence from the Empire.[83] The period from his ascension in 448 onwards is nevertheless not particularly eventful, aside from the usual occasional plundering and Bagaudae rebel uprisings.[84] With the Romans otherwise occupied, the military interventions in Spain were done by proxy through the Gothic kingdom.[85] It seems that the Goths were able to keep the Sueves in line for the most part. Thus, when relations between Goths and Romans were good, Spain was relatively safe.

The Gothic campaigns for Rome deserve some attention in their own light, as they provide the final moments of Roman influence in Spain. The first Gothic campaign since Wallia was done by the brother of king Theodoric, Frederic, who dealt with the Bagaudae in Tarraconensis around 454.[86] The next campaigns came from Avitus, the Emperor who gained the throne with (or by) Gothic support. According to Hydatius, Avitus and Theodoric both sent envoys to the Sueves, who nevertheless 'broke their oaths' and invaded Tarraconensis.[87]

The Romano-Gothic response was an imperially sanctioned invasion of Spain by Theodoric's Goths. Continuing the pattern set by Wallia, Theodoric soundly defeated the Sueves and routed them to Gallaecia.[88] The amount of control Avitus would have had over Theodoric's Goths is an interesting question in its own right. Avitus himself would have been busy attempting (and failing) to establish himself as the uncontested ruler of the Empire. Meanwhile, Theodoric was happily campaigning in Spain as Hydatius reports his sack of Bracara, in which a great number of Romans were taken captive, had their possession stolen from them and, as is typical for a chronicle, had their churches defiled.[89]

It is fair to imagine that Theodoric was, to a large degree, acting in his own interest. Through aiding Avitus, a significant Goth-sympathiser was raised to the purple. What concrete benefits this would bring them is of course difficult to , but it boded well for the future of the Goths. In any case, at the time of his Spanish campaign, Avitus being Emperor gave Theodoric a carte blanche in Spain, as long as he kept some manner of loyalty to the Emperor.

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[81] Hydatius, 441-446.
[82] Kulikowski (2010), 184.
[83] Kulikowski (2010), 185.
[84] Hydatius, 448-449
[85] Hydatius, 452-545.
[86] Hydatius, 454.
[87] Hydatius, 455-457.
[88] Hydatius, 457.
[89] Hydatius, 457.

On the other hand, Hydatius' description of the sack of Bracara may be a bit of an overreaction, considering he was one of those Christian authors that had the tendency to paint bleak pictures in anticipation of the impending Apocalypse. Indeed, he focuses more so on desecration of churches and holy places, comparing it to the heavenly wrath on the city of Jerusalem, as Bracara was actually taken without bloodshed. It can also be reasoned that, as Theodoric remained in the city for a few months after the sack, the situation in Bracara cannot have been too bad.[90] Moreover, it is also possible that these Romans were what we would call Suevi collaborators. As Rechiar was himself a Catholic, the first Christian king of the Suevi, it could be that the clergy had been willing to attach themselves to the new Christian king.[91]

Whatever the means he used, Theodoric was, at least initially, relatively successful. According to Hydatius, he completely shattered the Suevian kingdom.[92]
Ironically, two new Sueve kings continued on the usual Suevian raids on Spanish territory even after Theodoric had shattered the kingdom. Theodoric remained in Spain for a while in order to deal with this regrouped Suevi resistance. Still, by the time of Majorian, the Sueves were once again confined to the coastal regions of Gallaecia and did not appear to be particularly threatening.

The Vandals

The Vandal career after the death of Honorius is more interesting than the Suevian one. In Spain, they were more or less just another minor barbarian group bottled up in the provinces. While the Suevi always remained in Spain as minor players in the imperial political system, the Vandals would become Rome's worst enemy when a revived Carthage fought it's fourth conflict with Rome. Despite the consistent attempts by Rome to destroy them, the Vandals were never dislodged from the valuable Roman territory they held and many historians credit them with a key role in bringing down Rome.

Considering the importance of the wealthy African provinces and the unexpectedness of their crossing, the Roman alarm bells must have been set off in 429, when the Vandals crossed the Straits of Gibraltar. Boniface, the *comes Africae*, though often accused of conspiring with the Vandals[93], attempted to hold the line against them but was defeated in battle. The Vandals besieged Hippo Regius, the home town of St. Augustine, later in that same year.

Boniface himself returned to Italy to fight his power struggle with Aetius. Interesting to note in that light as well, is the fact that Boniface, though unable to halt the Vandal invasion, actually won the battle with Aetius in 432, before expiring from his wounds. With its count gone, the defence of Africa fell to Aspar, a capable general sent by Constantinople to save Roman North Africa. With Gaiseric holding Hippo Regius, and Aspar holding Carthage, a treaty was drawn up in 435, which acknowledged the territorial gains of the Vandals from the past 6 years (Figure VIII). While Aetius was focusing himself on Northern Gaul, the Vandals

[90] Kulikowski (2010), 188.
[91] Barbero and Loring, *The Formation of the Sueve and Visigothic Kingdoms in Spain*, 164.
[92] Hydatius, 457.
[93] Procopius, *The Complete Procopius Anthology: The Wars of Justinian, The Secret History of the Court of Justinian, The Buildings of Justinian,* The Vandal War, Book III. 455. MacDowall, *Conquerors of the Roman Empire: The Vandals*, 57. Goldsworthy, 329.

were left to their own devices for the next years. With Constantinople recalling Aspar, the Vandals took Carthage in 439 by, what Hydatius calls "(...) a great stratagem". It is probably fair to say that the Romans had not considered Gaiseric to be the threat that he really was and were made to immediately regret this carelessness.

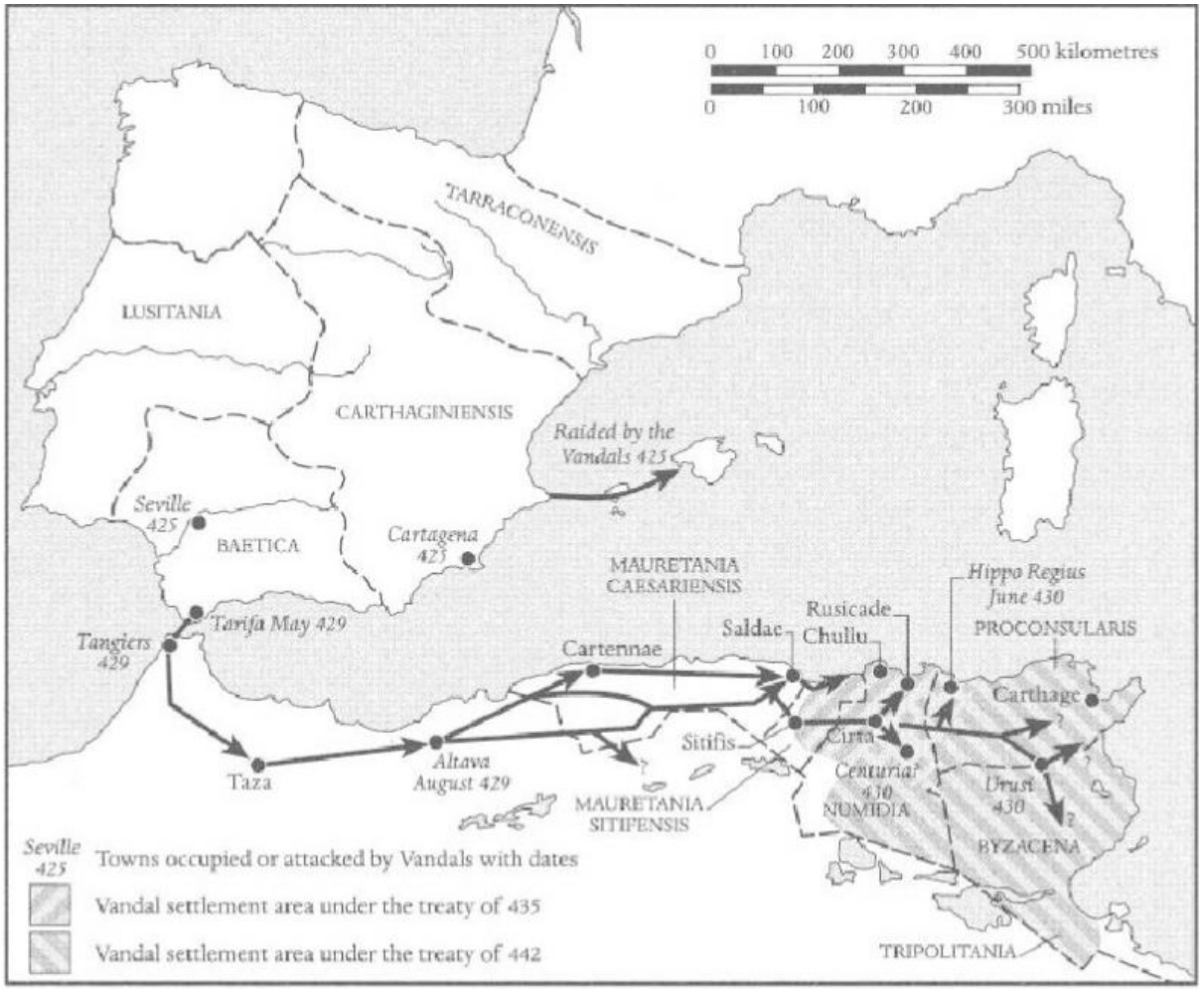

Figure VIII. The land route that would have been taken by the Vandals in 429. Including treaties of 435 and 442. After Heather (2007).

A planned expedition by the combined Empires to dislodge them from their seat in Carthage came to nothing, as the threat of the Huns loomed too large over the Eastern Empire and their forces had to be recalled to Thrace.[94] The next fight for Africa would only come by the time of Majorian's reign. The important provinces of Africa and its capital of Carthage were permanently removed from imperial control. As Africa was often considered to be the richest region of the Western Empire, its loss led to an immediate financial crisis. This was followed by a flurry of imperial laws to frantically garner more tax revenue.[95]

Vandal North Africa is an interesting subject in its own right. Whereas the Goths are marked by their ability to incorporate the local Romans and the Sueves got into frequent

[94] Goldsworthy, 429-430. Heather (2007), 289-292
[95] Heather (2007), 295-297.

conflict with the local Gallaecians and other Hispano-Romans, the Vandals had elements of both approaches, maintaining both ambiguous relations with local Africans (including the Moors), as well as with the imperial court.

Interestingly, the peace treaty of 442, returned the Mauretanian provinces to the imperial administration, though how they could effectively govern it might be questioned. Additionally, Gaiseric's son Huneric was sent to the imperial court as a hostage. In this same capacity he was betrothed to Valentinian's daughter Eudocia, which was the the first imperially sanctioned marriage between imperial and barbarian royalty. As Huneric was already betrothed to the daughter of Theodoric, Gaiseric allegedly accused her of treason, cutting of her nose and ears before sending her back to her father. Finally, a continuation of the grain tribute from Africa to Rome was agreed upon. This supply probably did not make up for the loss of the grain shipments that had been coming before the loss of Carthage, or did not come for free. Still, it was somewhat helpful in keeping the poor of Rome fed.[96]

In Africa, meanwhile, the clergy and the nobility suffered under Gaiseric's rule. The Vandals had by this time converted to Homoian Christianity (Arianism) and were thus considered heretics by the Nicene (Catholic) populace. On the other hand, the feeling often seems to have been mutual, as Gaiseric had started persecutions of the Catholic clergy soon after his arrival in Africa. Edward Gibbon mentions how the divisions in Christianity helped Gaiseric in this, as the Donatists aligned themselves with the Vandals, as common enemy of the Catholic faith. The persecutions and fall of Roman North Africa was thus due to the secret zealotry and fanaticism of these Vandal allies.[97] Of course, Gibbon is known for his great criticism of Christianity, so he might be slightly biased in his assessment.

Nevertheless, religious tension was real. Our main source for the persecution is a Catholic bishop named Victor of Vita; a highly biased author. Modern re-examinations of Victor and other Catholic writers of this period instead suggest that there was no such thing as a religious persecution. Rather, they were simply part and parcel of war and conquest.[98] In a similar vein, the adoption of Arianism can be explained better by practical purpose than by the devil's interference. Some hints in the Catholic sources themselves even allude to this.[99] Moreover, though the persecution was cataclysmic for some circles, it was not as much so as Victor would have us believe and changed in intensity depending on the needs of the king, clearly showing the political and pragmatic motive, rather than a religious one.[100]

Overall then, the Vandal creed was not aimed at destroying the Catholics in Africa, but rather was a useful tool, as it allowed for a way to copy the Roman religious model, but in a distinctly Vandal fashion. This also allowed the Vandal king some control over his subjects, as he could demand religious conversion from them. The Vandals used a system of rebaptism, which was a local African Christian tradition, strengthening their ties to the new African homeland, in order to gain support and cement identity, especially vis-à-vis those who would not convert.[101] Considering how the Vandals had recently accomplished their goal of finally settling down in a safe and satisfactory region, it makes sense for Gaiseric to

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[96] Goldsworthy, 330. Halsall, 247-248, Heather (2007), 292-293. Macdowall, 111. Procopius, The Vandal War, IV, 450.
[97] Gibbon, 324-325.
[98] Fournier (2017), *The Vandal Conquest of North Africa*.
[99] Fournier, 697-711.
[100] Heather, (2007). *Christianity and the Vandals in the Reign of Geiseric*.
[101] Fournier, (2012). *Rebaptism as a Ritual of Cultural Integration in Vandal Africa*. 244-254.

attempt to bind his various followers together before, rather than fighting the Romans, they would fight amongst themselves.

Dealing with the upper class went similarly, as Gaiseric confiscated noble estates in Proconsularis in order to hand them out to his followers. These were the so-called *Sortes Vandalorum*. Both the nobles and the clergy were hit hardest in Proconsularis, as that was the key province of Vandal North Africa. In the other provinces oppression of the Catholics and confiscation of noble estates was much less common.[102]

Though the eviction of the Catholic clergy and upper classes was necessary, it was also part of an attempt of integration with the land of Africa. We have already seen the links to the Donatists and rebaptism, but the Vandals also strengthened their ties to Africa as a Roman province. For example, Procopius describes the (6th century) Vandals as the nation being the most luxurious. “For the Vandals, since the time when they gained possession of Libya, used to indulge in baths, all of them, every day, and enjoyed a table abounding in all things, the sweetest and the best that the earth and seas produce. And they wore gold very generally, and clothed themselves in the Medic garments, (...) and passed their time, thus dressed, in theatres and hippodromes and in other pleasurable pursuits, and above all else in hunting.” Procopius also mentions parks and gardens, banquets and “(...) all manner of sexual pleasures”.[103] Though Procopius mainly employs it to contrast the Vandals from the Moors, who are more accustomed to a harsher lifestyle, it clearly indicates that the Vandals had, at least by this point, been fully acquainted with all the finer aspects of Roman life.

Of course, we should be careful about such descriptions. Not only is Procopius a very controversial author, but the way we interpret his descriptions can also easily be prone to confirmation bias. For example, the below figures have been interpreted as Vandal horsemen, by grace of the way they wear their hair. The cross mark on his horse is equated to a Sarmatian (and thus Alan) tradition.[104] It should be noted that we simply have no real way to confirm or deny such statements. As there is no arrow pointing *Eques Vandali*, it is probably best not to interpret it in such fashion.

[102] Heather, The Fall of the Roman Empire, 293-295. Procopius, The Vandalic War, IV.
[103] Procopius, The Vandalic War (Continued), VI.
[104] MacDowall, 96.

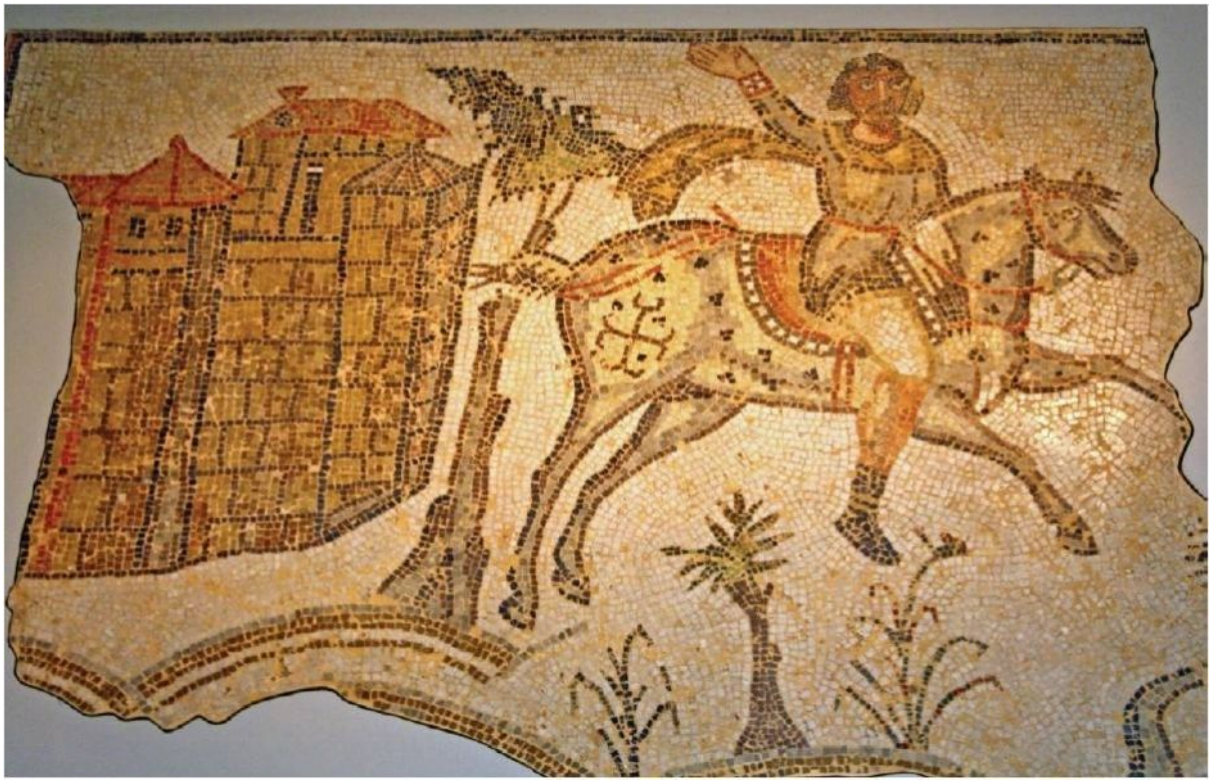

Figure IX. A ‘Vandal’ horseman in front of ‘his estate’. After MacDowall.

Figure X. A ‘Vandal’ horseman hunting. After MacDowall.

Moreover, it is important to note that this conversion to Romano-Punic culture is not an event, but a process. The rate at which this adoption took place is impossible to tell. The Vandal Kingdom lasted from the 440’s to its destruction by Belisarius in 534, which gives a time span of about a century for the evolution of Vandal culture.

Still, the fact the adaptation to Africa was rapid can be deduced from a number of aspects. The Vandals had made the conscious decision to appeal to a new Punic/African cultural identity, rather than a Germanic one. One example of this is the dating formula: *Anno Karthaginis*, which conveniently ignores all that time not spent in Africa.[105] Additionally, their coinage showed a distinctly Punic style, rather than Roman styled propaganda (Figure XII). This allowed them to both distance themselves from the Roman Empire, as well as strengthen their ties to the new African homeland and their Romano-African subjects. The material is once again hard to date, so that it is not agreed upon whether some of these coins can predate the fall of Rome in 476, or if they only came after the Empire fell apart, thus perhaps even claiming a hand in it as chief enemy of Rome.[106]

Figure XI. Vandal coin with a standing warrior and the typically Punic horse head on the right. Miles, 2017. After Álvarez Jiménez, 2016.

The adoption of this Punic/Carthaginian heritage also makes sense in the light of the way Rome saw Carthage's new occupants. Perhaps comparable to Roman historians' insistent usage of ancient and traditional topoi for describing current events, the Vandals were often compared to the Carthaginians by the Romans themselves, of which Sidonius Apollinaris is the most obvious example. His paneygrics to Avitus, Majorian and Anthemius all feature this trope, but he is certainly not the only one to employ it.[107] Additionally, Punic history was still held in a negative light by a great many Romans, as anti-Punic/African stereotypes remained prevalent even throughout Late Antiquity.[108]

Nevertheless, in the Vandal Kingdom itself the local Africans could, for the most part, be sufficiently integrated. The local Romano-African populace had clear uses for the Vandals. Firstly, the Vandals could make use of the pre-existing Roman governmental structures and occupy them with its own loyalists, Roman or Vandal. Secondly, the Vandals,

[105] MIles (2017), *Vandal North Africa and the Fourth Punic War*. 8.
[106] Miles, 4-9.
[107] Sidonius Apollinaris, Panegyric II. Panegyric V, Panegyric VII. Jiménes, *Sidonius Apollinaris and the Fourth Punic War*, 8-19
[108] Miles, 10-12.

in acquiring one of the most important ports of the Western Empire (if not the most important one), had all the maritime knowledge of its populace at its fingertips. For a nation that emerged from landlocked Germania, the ability to cross over from Spain to Africa, and then to conduct all their naval raids and invasions from Carthage can only have been possible with the active participation of local Romano-Africans. Finally, locals continued to form the lower class as they had always done. If not pressed too hard by their barbarian overlords, most locals had no problems in working with the invaders.

On the other hand, Procopius mentions that Gaiseric tore down the walls of all cities of Africa, other than Carthage, so that "(...) neither the Libyans themselves, espousing the cause of the Romans, might have a strong base from which to begin a rebellion, nor those sent by the Emperor have any ground for hoping to capture a city and, by establishing a garrison in it, to make trouble for the Vandals."[109] This event Procopius places after the Vandal sack of Rome, when the major campaigns against the Vandal kingdom were still to come. Apparently then, Gaiseric's control over his new subjects was not absolute. Of course, Procopius also mentions how "(...) these cities, being without walls, were captured by Belisarius all the more easily and with less exertion. Gaiseric was then condemned to much ridicule." This decision is a double-edged sword. While reducing the ability for rebels or hostiles to form strongholds, it also allowed for easier capture of cities.

Related to this is Belisarius' policy towards the local Romano-Africans. Procopius describes an episode in which he severely punishes his own troops for taking fruit from the locals. Belisarius argues: "For I have disembarked you upon this land basing my incidence on this alone, that the Libyans, being Romans from of old, are unfaithful and hostile to the Vandals, and for this reason I thought that no necessaries [supplies] would fail us and, besides, that the enemy would not do us any injury by a sudden attack. But now your lack of self-control has changed it all and made the opposite true. For you have doubtless reconciled the Libyans to the Vandals, bringing their hostility round upon your own selves."[110] Belisarius' policy of appeasing these 'Romans of old' paid off in the end, despite his soldiers' thievery, as it does seem that Belisarius was gladly welcomed in Africa. Taken together these two aspects indicate that Vandal relations to the locals were two-sided. For some it provided opportunities to participate in the Vandal administration and other could enrol in the Vandal navy. On the other hand, those not involved in the Vandal regime did not have a particular love for it.

The ease by which the Vandal kingdom was taken apart by Belisarius' expeditionary force is remarkable. On the one hand, one could argue that the external pressure put upon the Vandals was simply too much, being overrun by the Romans, after having overrun the Romans. On the other hand, Belisarius' expeditionary force should easily have been crushed by the Vandals. Procopius indeed alludes to this fact a number of times.

Firstly, he mentions how the soldiers literally told Belisarius that they would flee if Vandal ships would approach them at sea. "(...) for, they said, they were not able to contend against two enemies at once, both men and water."[111] The Vandal victories against the Empires after its establishment in Carthage were all naval battles. The Vandal King Gelimer did not engage Belisarius at sea, which could have ended the war in one single stroke. Instead, the Vandals were more occupied with crushing a revolt by Godas in Sardinia,

[109] Procopius, Book III. The Vandalic War. V, 457.
[110] Procopius, Book III. The Vandalic War. XVI.
[111] Procopius,The Vandalic War, XIV.

possibly instigated by the Romans, than with engaging the Romans before, during, or shortly after their landing. The ever-present threat of the Vandal navy that Belisarius and his troops were so afraid of thus never materialised.

Secondly, relating again to the fruit theft and the destructions of walls, Belisarius is not reported to have encountered any significant resistance walking all over Africa before he was confronted by the Vandal king at Ad Decimum. The Vandals neither fostered loyalty in their subjects, nor were they able to enforce it. Gaiseric's strategy of destroying the walls was not reverted with constructions of renewed fortifications in key sectors by any of his successors. Moreover, Gelimer did not properly employ Gaiseric's strategy with a scorched earth policy, which would have made managing troop supplies and morale a much greater challenge for Belisarius. This could easily have weakened his army's combat effectiveness to a significant and perhaps crucial degree.

Thirdly, even in the major battle of Ad Decimum in which Belisarius was victorious, it was a close battle that could easily have swung in favour of the Vandals. Indeed, Gelimer could have completely routed the Roman force, but gave up his chase to bury one of his brothers who was slain on the field, allowing Belisarius to regroup and counterattack.[112] Similarly, the Battle at Tricamarum, the final battle that the Vandal King would deliver, also has the air of a tactical disaster from the Vandal side. Gelimer, who was now joined by his brother Tzazon, who had crushed Godas' revolt in Sardinia, took no initiative in this battle. Gelimer held a static line behind a small stream, with Tzazon's fresh troops in the centre, while those Vandals he still had left after Ad Decimum made up the flanks. Belisarius' lieutenant John the Armenian charged the centre held by Tzazon three times without incurring a Vandal response. In the third charge, combat became vicious and Tzazon was slain, which led to a mass rout from the Vandals.[113]

All in all, with the way the Vandal kingdom is described by Procopius, it does seem Belisarius simply managed to exploit the cracks in a kingdom and a king grown complacent, turning the decline and fall narrative into an ironic twist. Whether the Eastern Roman conquest of the Vandal Kingdom would have been possible in Gaiseric's time is an interesting question. Tracking the Vandal Kingdom throughout its life-span is difficult to do, but the main difference between Majorian's and Anthemius' try for Carthage and that of Belisarius was the presence of Gaiseric.

Descriptions of the man are not so flattering. Perhaps the fullest description comes from Jordanes, who says "(...) [he] was a man of moderate height and lame in consequence of a fall from his horse. He was a man of deep thought and few words, holding luxury in disdain, furious in anger, greedy for gain, shrewd in winning over the barbarians and skilled in sowing the seeds of dissension to arouse enmity. Such was he who, as we have said, came at the solicitous invitation of Boniface to the country of Africa. There he reigned for a long time, receiving authority, as they say, from God himself."[114] Procopius likewise states that "(...) Gizeric had been excellently trained in warfare, and was the cleverest of all men."[115] The image we get could hardly be clearer, and can best be summarised by stating he was perhaps the most shrewd statesman of Late Antiquity. Nevertheless, his actions speak louder than his words, as, through his stratagems, he conquered Carthage, defeated

[112] Procopius,The Vandalic War, XIX. MacDowall, 137-140.
[113] Procopius, The Vandalic Wars (Continued), III. MacDowall, 144-147.
[114] Jordanes, *The Origins and Deeds of the Goths*, The Divided Goths: The Visigoths. XXXIII.
[115] Procopius, The Vandalic War, III. 455 AD.

Majorian's invasion fleet and even Anthemius' combined Western-Eastern invasion fleet with very few losses, feats which contemporaries never expected.

Perhaps Vandal Africa was held as firmly as it was thanks to one man alone, as the Vandal Kingdom was at its peak under Gaiseric and slowly started losing territory afterwards. There are, to my knowledge, no real ways to track the Vandals' efficiency in warfare between Majorian's and Belisarius' time. Instead, we find losses of chunks of territory to the Goths (the Ostrogoths) in Sicily, and increased trouble with the Moors. We find no real way to test the Vandal Kingdom more thoroughly, as the first major conflict it faced since Anthemius' expedition was also its last.

Still, considering how they got there in the first place, combined by the numbers they could churn out in conflict with Rome and Belisarius in later years, it seems that the Vandals were a dangerous foe. Moreover, Gaiseric's persona was an awesome one. Gibbon states that: "(...) in the destruction of the Roman Empire, [Gaiseric's name] deserved an equal rank with the names of Alaric and Attila",[116] a claim in which I think he was right.

[116] Gibbon, Volume III. 321.

Part III: Flavius Julius Valerius Majorianus

The Life of Majorian through Carmen V

Majorian's life is not so well known, especially before his claiming of the purple. Our major source is Sidonius Apollinaris' panegyric. Sidonius is an interesting character due to his association with three Emperors. Before supporting Majorian, he had been an adamant supporter of the Emperor Avitus, who was his father in law. For Anthemius, the Emperor after Majorian, he also wrote a panegyric. Relations between Majorian and Sidonius must have been rather awkward at first, as Majorian was responsible for the death of Avitus. Moreover, Gaul was the scene of a rebellion against the rule of Majorian and Sidonius' city of Lugdunum (Lyon) was one of the chief culprits.

The writing of the panegyric was probably part of an effort by Sidonius to ease out some of the tensions between Gaul and Italy. Despite the turbulent history, Sidonius was willing to put aside some differences for the good of his city, as, through writing the panegyric, he could place himself within the good graces of the fresh Emperor, which would be good for himself and his city. Thus the panegyric is a risky source to interpret. On the one hand, relations between Sidonius and Majorian are suspect. On the other hand, panegyrics were always written to lavish praise upon the Emperor. This means it is full with all of the rhetoric that we would expect from a fine poet like Sidonius. Nevertheless, it can still be a valuable source of some of Majorian's exploits, if we can filter out the many exaggerations in such a work.

Studying Majorian's life chronologically starts with Majorian's family, which was not of a particularly great dynasty. The first ancestor Sidonius mentions in his panegyric is his maternal grandfather, also named Majorian. This elder Majorian reached the peak of his career when he "(...) ruled the land of Illyricum together with the Danube-regions" as *magister militum* for Emperor Theodosius the Great. He resided in Aquincum (called Acincus by the poet), right on the border of the Empire.[117] G. E. Max infers that he was already present in this region as *dux*, perhaps also holding civil and thus judicial power, before being designated *magister.*[118] Sidonius also mentions he fought some conflicts against Goths, stating that "(...) his troops were launched against the Scythian landsmen and marched over the Hypanis, and even the camp-followers mocked at frozen Peuce, bidding welcome to the frosts."[119] With Scythians, Sidonius merely adopted that tradition of assigning classical names to its current peoples, as we had already seen in the description of the Black Sea raids. Peuce seems to have been an island in the Danube delta, while the Hypanis was a river deep in Gothic territory which we now know as the Southern Bug. Thus, grandfather Majorian is portrayed as having been a capable military man. Still, he is not mentioned by such historians as Zosimus and Ammianus Marcellinus, so that his career was probably not successful enough to be worth mentioning by these authors. If that is so, Sidonius perhaps simply deemed the elder Majorian the one in his family most worthy of praise, and something he could work with. Interesting to note in this regard is that Emperor Majorian's father, whom Sidonius covers next, is never mentioned by name, while his grandfather, who shared the same name, is.

[117] Sidonius Apollinaris, Panegyric V, ¶5
[118] Max, *Majorian Augustus*, 29.
[119] Sidonius Apollinaris, Panegyric V, ¶5

Majorian's father is described as "(...) a renowned man who was content to the end with a single high office in the imperial service, that he might follow one single friend and cling to him in times of jeopardy." With this friend, Sidonius means none other than Aetius. Apparently, Majorian's father was so loyal to him that not even offers of being awarded the consulship swayed his loyalty to the famous warlord. Further, Sidonius says: "He was what of old the quaestor was to the consuls; he controlled the public funds by right of his office; and such moderation did he maintain that rumour declared he was thus early saving the future possessions of his son."[120] His ranking in society can only be guessed at, though it can be argued that the elder Majorian would probably not have allowed his daughter to marry too far beneath her station.[121]

Overall then, although his family was not one of the great houses of the Roman world, Sidonius did his best to lavish some praise upon it. For this he chose the logical path in emphasising their military careers. Both Majorian's father and his grandfather were in the military and were connected to great people. For his grandfather this was Theodosius, for his father Aetius. His father's connections certainly benefited Majorian, as we find Majorian himself enrolled in Aetius' army at a very young age. Sidonius goes through great effort to mention the various exploits of the young Majorian during this time. Important for us to note is how this means he is, to all intents and purposes, a soldier first and foremost, not a statesman trained with a proper liberal arts education.

The next part of the panegyric focuses on Majorian's qualities as a soldier, including all the standard martial prowess one would expect. In the panegyric, Majorian outshines such mythical characters as Castor and Pollux.[122] Such extravagant praise doesn't help us much. What is somewhat helpful is Sidonius' description of Majorian's early career. It mainly involved campaigns in Gaul, where he accompanied Aetius "(...) as a learner, not as a soldier (...)", alluding to the fact that in these Gallic campaigns Majorian certainly would have gotten his fair share of military experience. Sidonius also mentions exceptional bravery in combat.[123]

The next period in his life was spent in exile, which is, in Sidonius' panegyric, due to Majorian's imperial ambitions through a betrothal with the Emperor's daughter Placidia. In his native fields, Majorian was, of course, also the best of farmers.[124] Max thinks this period of political exile was an opportunity for Majorian to make up for his lack of a formal education, though it is impossible to say for sure.[125] Valentinian III returned Majorian to active service when, after the death of Aetius, he commissioned Majorian to bring Aetius' *Bucellarii* retinue into Valentinian's control.[126] Of course, Valentinian was murdered too soon for these *Bucellarii* to help him in any way, though we can safely assume that it was not due to Majorian failing his commission. It is possible that this is the time when he got his title of *comes domesticorum*, though this is not certain.

Returning to Pelagia's accusation that Majorian was a threat to her imperial ambitions for her son, we can see it was not entirely ungrounded. When Pelagia is raging to her husband, she asks: "What realm shall I win for my son (...) if our little Gaudentius is trodden

[120] Sidonius Apollinaris, Panegyric V, ¶5
[121] Max, 26.
[122] Sidonius Apollinaris, Panegyric V, ¶7-8.
[123] Sidonius Apollinaris, Panegyric V, ¶8.
[124] Sidonius Apollinaris, Panegyric V, ¶10
[125] Max, 49.
[126] Sidonius Apollinaris, Panegyric V, ¶11.

underfoot by this youth's (Majorian's) destiny?"[127] With these lines, Pelagia is attesting to Majorian being a treat to Aetius' plan to secure the succession of his son, Gaudentius, to the imperial throne. As the way Aetius intended to do so was through a betrothal of his son to Placidia (which may have been what pushed the Emperor to execute him), we can conclude that Majorian was considered to be a likely candidate to be Placidia's husband.

Though she was Valentinian's younger daughter, the importance of a political marriage with her cannot be overstated, as Valentinian had no male heirs and Eudocia, the older daughter, was already promised to Huneric. The only Roman with a connection to the imperial house would be the one that married Placidia. A marriage between Majorian and Placidia would have designated Majorian to be the next Emperor.[128]

Valentinian's reasons for such a betrothal are hard to gauge. Sidonius had mentioned that 'the court' wanted to steal Majorian's father away from Aetius, but he was too loyal.[129] Perhaps they also tried to purchase Majorian's loyalty, though this time through a betrothal to Placidia. Considering his evident disapproval for Aetius' plan to engage Gaudentius with his daughter,[130] Valentinian could have considered Majorian as a possible counterweight to the Aetian influence in his court. This plan led to his being exiled and nothing ever came of the marriage plans.

Another point of interest is the succession game after Valentinian III. Apparently, John of Antioch lists a contention of the throne among Petronius Maximus, one Maximian and Majorian, with Majorian having support of the late Emperor's wife, Eudoxia. Anicius Olybrius, who was later betrothed to Placidia, is not listed.[131] It is indeed an interesting idea that Eudoxia supported Majorian for the purple in this time as it increases the possibilities for ties between the Theodosian house and Majorian, but John of Antioch is the only source, which makes the story not very reliable.

Despite what John of Antioch states, Majorian seems to have maintained himself by somewhat fading into the background during the upheaval of the assassination of Valentinian, and the subsequent reign of Petronius Maximus. Perhaps Majorian would have intervened in Valentinian's death or its aftermath, but was unable to do so as Petronius Maximus proclaimed himself Emperor before anybody even knew what was going on. The segment of the panegyric discussing this period also houses the lines most puzzling in this work: "(...) and so [Petronius Maximus] fell, O Rome, bringing thee lower than he himself was brought. Yet even when the kindly fates with their golden distaff were evolving the reign of our present chief; but the calamities of the people shrank from bringing enmity on such a man." Sidonius continues: "All who had been chosen to bear the name of Augustus had held a throne left for them by the Caesars; but he, when thou wert captured and in sore trouble, created that which he now holds." Next, Sidonius describes a number of successions of Emperors from the past, before comparing Majorian with Vespasianus and Trajanus: "(...) Vespasian had been chosen Emperor with the same titles won by the same toil as Trajan's and Majorian's."

The significance of these lines can certainly be grappled with. In the first lines, it seems as if 'our present chief' is spared from the enmity he justly deserves by the calamities

[127] Sidonius Apollinaris, Panegyric V, ¶8.
[128] Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, 371-372. Max, 46-47. Oost, *Aetius and Majorian*, 24.
[129] Sidonius Apollinaris, Panegyric V, ¶5.
[130] Max, 61.
[131] Max, 63. Oost, 24.

of the people. What the calamities of the people are is clear enough, as the disastrous reign of Maximus and the 455 sack of Rome must have been fresh in all Romans' memory. However, why he deserves enmity, and how the calamities of the people spare him from it is harder to answer.

Max points out that both Vespasian and Trajan can be considered children of circumstance, and that both assumed the throne after the fall of an imperial dynasty.[132] As to being a benefactor of circumstance, Emperor Avitus, Sidonius' father in law, had been as much as an opportunist as Majorian was, so the critique would harm Sidonius' idol as much as it would harm Majorian, making it weird for Sidonius to make such an accusation with a straight face. Regarding the fall of a dynasty, the fact that Petronius Maximus and Avitus were between Valentinian and Majorian should clean Majorian from the blame of ending the prestigious Theodosian dynasty, even if Sidonius wisely refuses to mention Avitus. Such a situation can also be found in Vespasian and Trajan, who came to power shortly (not directly) after the ending of a previous dynasty. In the case of Majorian, the allegation is especially suspect as he seems to have held warm ties with the imperial family throughout most of his career. Moreover, as Majorian, Vespasian and Trajan all came to power shortly after the ending of a previous dynasty, these men all served to re-establish order after periods of internal disorder. Overall, this is a good thing.

A different explanation is provided by Philip Rousseau: "By the end of the section, however, [Majorian] succeeds as smoothly as Vespasian did, or in the style of Trajan after Nerva (already presented as a model moment) - even though the context within which he supposedly made his bid included the destruction of Avitus as well as the bloodstained tyranny of Petronius Maximus." Then adding: "His personal ambition, already ridiculed by Aetius's wife, is made ambiguous and insufficiently distinguished from the undesirable qualities of Petronius Maximus, his ostensible predecessor."[133] While the time in which Majorian ascended the throne was a dark one, blaming this upon him through a connection to Petronius' reign is inappropriate.

Perhaps there is a simpler way to reconcile these issues. Comparing Vespasian and Trajan with Majorian is an easy fit, as all three were primarily distinguished soldier-emperors after the reign of a weaker one; the decadent Vitellius for Vespasian, old Nerva for Trajan, and the tyrannical Petronius Maximus for Majorian. As Avitus is never mentioned through the entire panegyric, the fact he was between Maximus and Majorian is not such an issue for rhetorical purposes. We thus get examples of times in which fresh blood was needed after a period in which the Emperor was tyrannical or ineffective. These Emperors all came to power after the ending of a dynasty. As such, they are not marked by the dishonour of ending one, but are rather praised by re-establishing order and, in the case of Trajan and Vespasian, by establishing a new stable dynasty.

Relating the 'calamities of the people to the enmity on such a man' could be done by considering a personal investment of Majorian into these calamities. Majorian, as *comes domesticorum* had apparently not done anything to stop Maximus or the Sack of Rome, so enmity would be warranted. However, if we interpret the passage "(Sed) publica damna (invidiam fugere viri)" as a matter of state involvement by the Emperor, in other words, a feeling of responsibility and subsequent guilt for allowing such a disaster to occur, (whether through unwillingness or inability, though probably the latter) does not seem unreasonable

[132] Max, 71.
[133] Rousseau, *The Censure in Carmen V*, 256.

for any good ruler. Majorian would then be suffering with his people and thus not deserving enmity.

This line of argument could draw some additional strength from the treatment of the imperial women by Maximus and Gaiseric. Considering how Placidia's mother and sister were first taken and used for marriage by Maximus and then by Gaiseric, Sidonius could present this episode as being both a tragedy on the political, as well as the personal level.

Though perhaps a bit shaky, I do think this interpretation offers some advantages over the others I mentioned, as those are built upon tenuous interpretations that are hard to maintain in the face of their own conclusions. On the other hand, arguing on the basis of loss, while also hard to prove in a definitively satisfactory manner, is not inherently inconsistent, as it would simply allow the panegyrist to mention some aspects of personal involvement, drive and humanitas in the new ruler. It also makes more sense to have both aspects of these lines carry a single value judgement. It is strange and inconsistent to praise the succession while not-quite condemning him for his (in)action regarding the miseries of the state. The interpretations I have offered also both offer a positive cadence, which would be more logical in a panegyric. Overall, this interpretation allows for a good presentation of Majorian, both to Sidonius' audience and to us, as an Emperor thoroughly involved in the issues of the state.

Rousseau's Hidden Critique

Long discussion on such a segment is warranted by the great importance of our source. Sidonius Apollinaris is practically the only first-hand source we have about Majorian aside from his *Novellae* (imperial laws), meaning that Sidonius needs to be examined thoroughly and critically in order to get a full and fair view of the Emperor. Sidonius could easily have been quite a biased source, as he was both personally and politically extremely involved in the reign of his father-in-law Avitus.

Keeping this in mind, Rousseau wrote an article in which he explores the idea of a hidden message in Sidonius' panegyric. Sidonius supposedly disapproves of Majorian's reign and shows it by voicing his carefully buried critique within his narrative. Additionally, Rousseau compares the panegyric for Majorian with that of Avitus, which he finds a lot more hopeful and compelling.

Rousseau's argument in Majorian's panegyric builds around the character of Aetius' wife, Pelagia, (the widow of the late Boniface). It is Pelagia who gives us the stories of Majorian's personal prowess and warcraft. However, for her, this is a problem as she thinks Majorian a threat, accusing him of 'fighting for himself' rather than for the Emperor. She accuses Majorian of desiring to claim the purple which would put a stop to her ambitions for her own son, Gaudentius.[134] She then recommends Aetius to deal with Majorian's friend Ricimer by "weaving crafty flatteries", while letting Majorian himself be "attacked with the sword".[135] This is apparently the reason for Majorian's exile, as Aetius, scorning the woman, refuses to order his death, but nevertheless exiles him.[136]

[134] Sidonius Apollinaris, Panegyric V, ¶8.
[135] Sidonius Apollinaris, Panegyric V, ¶8.
[136] Sidonius Apollinaris, Panegyric V, ¶9.

Rousseau thinks this passage serves as an antithesis to Majorian's father. As, in this segment, Majorian's personal interests and desire for personal gain are brought to the fore. This of course in contrast to his father, whom we have already seen displayed as the most loyal and honourable man. Indeed, his father's loyalty to Aetius and his son is the only thing we know of his character.[137]

The final part of his argument covers those controversial lines regarding Petronius' reign and the Sack of Rome. Taking these together, Rousseau concludes that "His personal ambition, already ridiculed by Aetius' wife, is made ambiguous and insufficiently distinguished from the undesirable qualities of Petronius Maximus, his ostensible predecessor."[138] In short, Rousseau draws the following conclusion: "Few allusions could summarize so clearly the political traditions in comparison with which Majorian appeared only distorted and dangerous - weakened by self-aggrandizement and menacing in his armed might, unfettered by respect for the past. Victory in war was necessary to the times and desirable in those who ruled; but it could not to be waged at the expense of civil freedom or the stability of the State. It is to his credit that Sidonius did not shrink from making the point."[139]

Thus, Rousseau's argument comes down to a hidden dual accusation. Firstly, the character of Aetius' wife is the one whose opinions Sidonius ascribes to. Pelagia acknowledges the great prowess of Majorian in war, but accuses him of not employing them to the right ends. Rather than working for Rome and the Emperor, he is merely looking to aggrandize himself. Having both the desire and the ability to do harm to the state, Majorian is a real danger to Rome. The second part of Rousseau's argument is that Majorian, in looking to aggrandize himself, can easily stray from the proper path, and walk the road of a tyrant. This is why Petronius Maximus features so prominently in the panegyric; Majorian is accused of being a tyrant of the same calibre.

Overall, I find Rousseau's argument unappealing. Comparing Sidonius' optimism in Avitus' reign to his less positive attitude towards Majorian can hardly be taken as solid evidence. Sidonius being more excited and positive in Avitus' panegyric (if we agree that it is indeed there in the first place) can be explained more easily by Sidonius' personal attachment to Avitus, than by a hidden critique of Majorian. Is it not logical that one is more keen and excited to see one's relative and countryman ascend the imperial throne than the one that killed that same man? Finding a hint of resentment in Sidonius attitude would only be natural in such circumstances.

Furthermore, accusing one of ambition is rather a strange thing to do in this era, as all men had to be ambitious. The way in which Majorian's ambition is aimed is not particularly different from any of the other major warlords of the 5th century, including Aetius himself. Of course, Sidonius could easily be tempted to critique the destruction of Avitus and his Gallic army by the Italian army, but this is, again, not something new to the Roman political scene. If Avitus had won at Placentia, he probably would have inflicted pains upon Majorian and Ricimer similar to those that they inflicted upon him.

Finally, the comparison Petronius Maximus-Majorian is suspect. The passage itself is very ambiguous, and Rousseau's argument is basically based upon his interpretation of

[137] Sidonius Apollinaris, Panegyric V, ¶5.
[138] Rousseau, 257.
[139] Rousseau, 257.

Sidonius not creating an adequate distance between the likes of Maximus and Majorian, an argumentum ad absentia which I do not find particularly convincing.

Final Elements of Carmen V

The description of the early life of Majorian seems as good and reliable as any, and having thus saved Sidonius from the allegation (or praise) of covertly criticising Majorian, we can explore some final elements of the panegyric before concluding this interesting piece of writing.

Carmen V paints the picture of a thoroughly military man. From an early age, Majorian was apparently involved in the military, and closely associated with Aetius. In the panegyric, this military career was marked by his great martial and tactical prowess. This aspect of his character comes back multiple times when Sidonius praises his actions against other barbarians, and when inciting him to action against the savage Vandals. The goddess Roma consoles the saddened Africa using the simple words “Pervenit et vincit”, he comes, he conquers.[140] Overall, Majorian’s character in Carmen V can be summarised as an active, ambitious and capable military man.

There are a number of other minor favours Sidonius does for Majorian in the panegyric which are briefly worth mentioning. Firstly, Sidonius connects Majorian, through grandfather Majorian, with the land of Pannonia. This region was, especially from the reign of Aetius onward, a fertile Roman recruiting ground and Majorian’s army for the Vandal expedition was mainly recruited here. Sidonius himself poetically mentions Bastarnian, Suebian, Pannonian, Neuran, Hun, Getan, Dacian, Alan, Bellonotan, Rugian, Burgundian, Visigoth, Alites, Bisalta, Ostrogoth, Procrustian, Sarmatian and Moschan ranging themselves behind Majorian’s eagles.[141] The exercise gave Majorian some connections to his ragtag barbarian army, which he might have needed as the unit cohesion of this army was not very high. Sidonius alludes to this as well when he states that “Caesar, (...) stayed a mutinous outburst with the sword; yet as he thus cut off his own limbs, driven thereto by the compelling need of his cause, he wept for those he destroyed.” Fortunately, Sidonius turns this around by saying that “this rising was a benefit to thine arms; henceforth whatever thine orders might be, if a barbarian hearkened not he fell, that the soldiers might fear.”[142]

He does a similar service regarding the cities of Gaul. As Majorian is constructing his fleet (“Down into the water falls every forest of the Apennines”), “Gaul, though wearied by unceasing tribute, is now eager to gain approval by a new levy for this end, and feels not a burden wherein she beholds a benefit.”[143] Amusingly, the final part of the panegyric asks also for a tax reduction in Sidonius’ home city of Lugdunum. Acknowledging his mercy and benign graciousness, Sidonius urges Majorian onward to victory.[144] The tax reduction Sidonius asked for was later granted.

[140] Sidonius Apollinaris, Panegyric V, ¶13
[141] Sidonius Apollinaris, Panegyric V, ¶16
[142] Sidonius Apollinaris, Panegyric V, ¶17
[143] Sidonius Apollinaris, Panegyric V, ¶15
[144] Sidonius Apollinaris, Panegyric V, ¶18.

From Avitus to Emperor

The next part of Majorian's life is bound with his predecessor Avitus, who had been proclaimed Emperor late in 455. Unfortunately, the period itself is also one in which the details are difficult to track. At first, Majorian seems to have accepted his rule. For his ally Ricimer, whom Hydatius called a *comes*, we know that he dealt with "a great horde of Vandals who had advanced from Carthage towards Gaul and Italy with sixty ships" through some sort of subterfuge.[145] Not much later, another "horde of Vandals had been slaughtered in Corsica". This action is sometimes attributed to Ricimer, sometimes to Majorian.[146]

Avitus immediately made himself very unpopular in Italy, which quickly led to his downfall. Ralph Mathisen and Richard Burgess wrote interesting articles in which they grappled with the exact chronology and events of the final moments of the reign of Avitus.[147] The sources of this time are indeed hard to reconcile. The most likely series of events is as follows: Avitus had moved into Rome in order to be recognized Emperor, backed by some sort of Gothic support. Meanwhile, Theodoric was campaigning in Spain for Avitus, or with his permission. It thus appears Avitus had no idea of the chaos about to unfold around him. However, this became clear soon enough, as the city of Rome was running low on food due to the hostilities between Rome and Carthage. As a result, he had to dismiss his Gothic troops, whom he had to pay off by melting down remaining Roman statues.[148]

Meanwhile, Ricimer and Majorian revolted, and Remistus, Avitus' *patricius,* was defeated in battle by Ricimer. Avitus then tried to retreat back into Gaul, but could not escape from Ricimer. Avitus made his final stand in Placentia, but was soundly defeated. Majorian himself seemed to have only arrived at the scene in time for the deposition of the Emperor, rather than the actual battle. Avitus was ordained a bishop, but later killed by Majorian's followers. The various reports of the sources regarding Avitus' death and deposition can then easily be explained by an imperial effort to sweep Majorian's involvement in it under the rug, as being a known murderer would probably hamper his efforts of gathering political support, especially in Gaul.[149]

After Avitus' death followed a period of a number of months in which the imperial throne was vacant. In this period, Majorian was probably busy gathering the support he needed to ensure his reign. In the period between the deposition of Avitus and the ascension of Majorian, there also was a Gallic plot by the name of the *Coniuratio Marcelliana.* The details of this plot are scarce. What its goals were and who it was named after are subject of debate, but the plot did not amount to anything in the end.[150] Sidonius also rather casually described the incident, either downplaying its importance, or acknowledging it was no serious threat after all.

Majorian was declared Emperor by the soldiers in April, but held off on the formal elevation by the Senate until later that year, as he seems to have been lobbying for imperial

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[145] Hydatius, 455.
[146] Hydatius, 455.
[147] See Mathisen, *The Third Regnal Year of Eparchius Avitus*. And Burgess, *The Third Regnal Year of Eparchius Avitus: a Reply*.
[148] Burgess, 339. Max. 82.
[149] Burgess, 339-340, 344.
[150] Max, 84-91. See also Max, *Political Intrigue during the Reigns of the Western Roman Emperors Avitus and Majorian*

recognition from the Eastern Emperor Leo. The degree of recognition Majorian received from Leo is subject to debate, but Majorian made continued overtures to Leo for both recognition and support.[151]

Novellae

Majorian's goal since his ascension had always been to dislodge the Vandals from Carthage. Aside from the political support he garnered in Italy and Constantinople, a lot of other matters needed to be put into place. Mainly the construction of a navy and the recruitment of an army capable of taking down the Vandals. However, in order to do this Majorian needed resources. As such, from shortly after his ascension, Majorian issued a great number of laws (*Novellae*). These were geared against the rampant corruption in the tax-collection system rather than the levying of new taxes, though the latter also occurred. Further laws were issued to guard the monuments of Rome, and a number of laws were passed with the aim of increasing the amount of marriages and possible childbirth, which included such regulations as women not being able to become a nun before the age of 40. Finally some efforts were made to increase the power of local city councils and reduce unnecessary bureaucracy, seemingly also attempts of increasing cohesion between the Emperor and his subjects, and reduce bureaucratic inefficiency and corruption.[152]

His energy and intent are praiseworthy, and indeed Gibbon flatteringly summarises his laws thus: "his laws, remarkable for an original cast of thought and expression, faithfully represent the character of a sovereign who loved his people, who sympathized in their distress, who had studied the causes of the decline of the Empire, and who was capable of applying (as far as such reformation was practicable) judicious and effectual remedies to the public disorders. His regulations concerning the finances manifestly tended to remove, or at least to mitigate, the most intolerable grievances."[153] To what extent these laws were successful is hard to gauge, and these laws can only really tell us something about the character of the man issuing them and the problems of the state at the time. On the other hand, some of the laws that dealt with some of the more notable abuses were repealed after his death; they were clearly not popular with the Italian aristocracy.[154]

Asserting Rule

In his time in Italy preparing for his grand conquests, he dealt with two invasions, one by the Alamanni, when he was not yet Emperor, but held the rank of *magister militum* and one naval assault upon Campania by the Vandals. These are both described in Sidonius' panegyric. I find Sidonius rather amusing in his description of the Alaman invasion when he states: "(...) and thou didst send thither Burco with a band of followers, small indeed, but that suffices when *thou* bidst them fight."[155] Apparently, following Majorian's orders is a guaranteed path to victory, but it makes it hard to credit him with the victory in any meaningful sense. For the Vandal raid no Roman commander is named, so it might be that he led the attack personally. In any case, he caught the Vandals on their way out, as, laden

[151] Max, 92-97. Heather. *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, 391.
[152] Max, 112-124
[153] Gibbon, 434.
[154] Max, 123, 177-178
[155] Sidonius Apollinaris, Panegyric V,. ¶14.

with spoils, the Vandals were intercepted by Majorian's force. Being caught off guard, the Vandals made a desperate final stand, but were quickly routed. Sidonius remarks: "(...) no man of thine but had been stricken in the breast, none of the foe who was not stabbed in the back."[156] Apparently, Majorian was a true terror on the battlefield.

Nevertheless, his political movements outside Italy are much more interesting, as his Italian power base was already secured, but his effective authority ended there in the early stages of his reign. His first move was to assert himself in Gaul, making him the Italian mirror of Avitus. Majorian still had a large advantage over his Gallic predecessor however, in the form of Magnus and Aegidius.[157]

Magnus, based in Narbo, gave Majorian his link to Gaul and was later rewarded with a post of *praetorian prefect* of Gaul and the dubious honour of being the last *magister* in Spain.[158] Aegidius is the more interesting of these characters. Gregory of Tours claims he held both a Roman and a Frankish title in this period. Aegidius held control over what would later become the Domain of Soissons, but was also mentioned to have been king of the Franks in the period in which Childeric was in exile. A plot against his life before the return of Childeric also seems plausible, if we are to accept the original idea that Aegidius indeed held the Frankish kingship in the first place.[159]

In either case, Aegidius must have had access to a rather substantial military force. As he held the northernmost fringes of the Roman Empire, it would fall upon him to hold the Empire's enemies, mainly the Franks and Visigoths, at bay. He and his son Syagrius accomplished this feat until 486, even after the end of the Roman Empire. Why Aegidius was so quick to sign up with Majorian is unknown, but he ended up being one of Majorian's staunchest supporters, which is why Majorian made him his *magister militum per Gallias* sometime in 458. Aegidius was one of the key figures in taking control of Gaul, as the Emperor was faced with a Gallic-Burgundian revolt in Lugdunum led by the Burgundian king Gundioc. Moreover, Theodoric apparently felt he needed to support his Burgundian ally and also sided against Majorian. It was Aegidius that marched in to deal with the Lyonese-Burgundian rebels for the fresh Emperor.[160] The harsh penalties that followed the capture of Lyon probably provide us with the reason for Sidonius' mentioning the heavy tribute that Lyon and Gaul had to pay, and why he asked for a tax reduction in Carmen V.

Majorian marched his army over the Alps in winter, in person, if we are to believe Carmen V, and met up with Aegidius near Arles, which the Goths were besieging, to lift the siege. What exactly happened in this siege is not entirely clear and even if the siege was at Arles can be disputed. Details are rather unclear, as the *Life of Saint Martin* by Paulinus of Perigueux is the principal source, which does not tell us very much in a reliable or detailed manner.[161] Nevertheless, this battle might be the 'certain battle' that Hydatius mentions as the cause for Majorian and Theodoric establishing "(...) the strongest vows of peace between themselves.[162] Considering the report came from Nepotian and the Gothic *comes* Suniericus, it would appear that the Goths were returned to some sort of earlier status in which they were bound to aid in the Empire's military endeavours. As this still left them a lot of freedom,

[156] Sidonius Apollinaris, Panegyric V, ¶14.
[157] Max, 138.
[158] Kulikowski. *Late Roman Spain and its Cities*, 196.
[159] Gregory of Tours, Book II. 12.
[160] Max, 139-140, Kulikowski, 191.
[161] MacGeorge, *Late Roman Warlords*, 85-88.
[162] Hydatius, 459.

Kulikowski expects the force from Nepotian and Suniericus to be "(...) an imperial army provided by the Gothic king".[163] Imperial control of Spain thus hinged on Gothic cooperation once again.

The final figure whose support was particularly useful was Marcellinus of Dalmatia's. Marcellinus detached himself from the Western Empire following the turmoil surrounding the assassinations in the imperial court at the end of Valentinian's reign. Considering the barbarian presence near his borders, the extent to which he held power can be questioned, but it would hardly be possible for Majorian to recruit an army from the Danube without first re-establishing ties between the Empire and its provinces across the Adriatic. Max suggests Marcellinus' reconciliation with the Empire might have been part of Majorian's continuing attempts of improving relations with the Eastern Empire. When Leo stopped paying tribute to the Goths (the Ostrogoths) north of Marcellinus domain, the Goths responded by raiding Marcellinus. The next time we see Marcellinus, he is fighting the Vandals in Sicily. Though it is not certain to what extent these events are interrelated, and if and what Majorian's role in them would have been, it is certainly an interesting possibility.[164]

MacGeorge covered Marcellinus extensively in her book, but, in the end, we simply do not know much of who this man really was. Subsequently, what his official status had been, and how this would relate to what troops he had at his disposal is not so clear, though we know he hired some mercenaries to fight with him in Sicily and Ricimer bribed them away when relations between them became hostile.[165] Marcellinus may have been from a prominent local family. The presence of a Nepos family is attested with epigraphic evidence and Marcellinus' nephew was Julius Nepos, who would later be Emperor, making this link a good guess. Nevertheless, he must have been a capable and well-respected man, as he is described as such in the *Suda*. MacGeorge does consider Marcellinus serving under Majorian to be based on flimsy evidence.[166] Though she has a point when saying the evidence is weak, the difference is almost superficial; Majorian and Marcellinus were fighting the same enemy with the same interests.

[163] Kulikowski, 191.
[164] Max, 97-98
[165] MacGeorge, 41-43, 47.
[166] MacGeorge, 40-48.

Treachery and Defeat

With the flanks in Gaul and Italy covered by Aegidius and Ricimer and Marcellinus respectively, the road was now open to carry out the attack that Majorian had been planning since his ascension. Gaiseric was sufficiently alarmed to send envoys to ask for peace. This diplomatic exchange might be the inspiration for a legend Procopius gives in which Majorian pretends to be his own envoy, visiting Gaiseric to examine his strength and the loyalty of his subjects.[167] In any case, Gaiseric prepared himself for the invasion and deployed a scorched earth policy.[168] It would be hard for Majorian to find provisions and defence, with the African lands being desolated and the cities being stripped of its walls.

However, on the way to the south of Spain, Majorian was stopped dead in his tracks by Gaiseric's master stroke. His fleet had been destroyed or captured by the Vandals in a surprise attack. Hydatius reports: "In May, the Emperor Majorian entered Spain. As he made for the province of Carthaginiensis, a number of ships which he had been preparing for his crossing against the Vandals were seized from the Carthaginian shore by Vandals, who had been given information by traitors. Thus frustrated in his preparations, Majorian returned to Italy."[169]

Rather anticlimactically, Hydatius' report on the loss is about as much information as is available to us. The treachery allegation is a common one in Roman historiography, so even that does is not very informative. What truly happened at Cartagena has been lost to history. In any case, it was enough to force an end to Majorian's campaign and to make him sign a peace treaty, called disgraceful by John of Antioch.[170] The precise details of the treaty are, once again, lost to us.

Majorian disbanded his army and made his way back to Italy. No other activity is known from him in this period, other than a dinner party which we know of thanks to Sidonius Apollinaris.[171] Finally, on the way back to Rome, Majorian was arrested by Ricimer, forced to abdicate and executed.

Sweet Innocence and Intrigue

The loss of his fleet and his execution lead us to an important point in Majorian's character and his reign. As both of these events are due to Majorian not properly anticipating the moves of the most important characters in his political landscape, they can be easily explained by Majorian's inability of placing himself within the minds of others. Aside from these clear examples, there are a number of other moments that show some evidence in this direction as well. Firstly, whatever Majorian's own involvement, the plan to have Placidia married to Majorian, went against the direct wishes of Majorian's own patron and the most powerful figure in the Empire. The fact that he did not lose his life, as Pelagia insisted he should, is probably more so due to factors outside Majorian's control than thanks to his own cunning.[172] This would be either Aetius' mercy, as Carmen V claims,[173] or the simple reality

[167] Procopius, The Vandalic War, VII. 474 AD.
[168] Max, 147.
[169] Hydatius, 460.
[170] Max, 170.
[171] Sidonius Apollinaris. Letter to Montius
[172] Sidonius Apollinaris, Panegyric V, ¶8.

that executing his officer would have been deeply unpopular with Aetius' troops. The fact that Majorian lived for Sidonius to tell the tale seems to be good luck more so than anything else.

Sidonius also mentions a mutiny in Majorian's barbarian army in Carmen V.[174] As Max explains: "In a somewhat garbled description, Sidonius says Majorian had known of the mutiny, but had put off punishing the offenders for no reported reason; in so doing, the poet says, he caused greater bloodshed than had he acted at once."[175] Though Sidonius claims it boosted his own authority and his army's morale, it was, once again, not thanks to his own actions.

Overall, we get the image of a man who was perhaps too caught up in his own affairs for his own good. As he did not take into account the minds and ambitions of the men around him, this caused him major trouble at no less than four occasions, with the fourth one finally being fatal.

Ricimer and the Puppet Show

Ricimer is a character worth a study in his own right, as his importance to the Western Empire in its final years cannot be overstated. Ricimer was the kingmaker, or rather Emperor-maker for Libius Severus and Olybrius, as well as the de facto ruler of the Empire during the various interregna after the reign of Majorian. For our purposes, he is often considered to have had a looming presence, or direct control, over Majorian. Considering he won the Battle of Placentia against Avitus and held the most important military posts in Italy (*magister militum et patricius*), combined with the long history of having a military man acting as the real power behind the throne, the idea of Ricimer as Majorian's puppet master has always been an influential train of thought in Late Roman scholarship, as a result of which any study on the Emperor Majorian without addressing the issue that is Ricimer is basically an unfinished project.

Nevertheless, I feel that his importance in the reign of Majorian is rather overestimated. Granting that Ricimer was indeed the power behind the throne *after* the reign of Majorian, considering Ricimer to be Majorian's kingmaker as well stems from the attachment of a later status to an earlier date. Ricimer's position as being the power behind Majorian's throne is not affirmed in Majorian's reign at all and the actions by which we could ascribe him this position are only found in Majorian's rise and fall. These actions could be interpreted as easily by the standard affairs of politics as by a deliberate effort on Ricimer's part to control the throne.

Majorian's elevation to the purple can be more easily explained through alliance than puppeteering. Though it was Ricimer that defeated Avitus at Placentia, this is not enough evidence for making Majorian a Ricimerian puppet. Majorian's speech to the Senate upon his ascension gives us a clear clue in this direction: "Our own vigilance, and that of our father, the patrician Ricimer, (parente patricioque nostro Ricimere) shall regulate all military affairs, and provide for the safety of the Roman world, which we have saved from foreign and domestic enemies."[176] Though Ricimer gets this title which, indeed indicates his status of

[173] Sidonius Apollinaris, Panegyric V, ¶9.
[174] Sidonius Apollinaris, Panegyric V, ¶17.
[175] Max, 137.
[176] Gibbon, 433. Max, 110-111.

'generalissimo', as John O'Flynn calls it, Majorian clearly alludes to an alliance and cooperation between the two warlords, not domination of one by the other. This incidentally makes him the first Emperor since Constantius to be a military man.[177]

Comparing such an address with the political situation in the time of Emperor Anthemius, who reigned from 467 to 472, is additionally enlightening. In Sidonius' panegyric to Anthemius, Ricimer features incredibly prominently, indeed conspicuously so. Sidonius goes through great pains to ensure that the harmony between Anthemius and 'The Unconquerable' Ricimer is assured in his rhetoric, which is why the wedding between Anthemius' daughter and Ricimer features as prominently as it does.[178] This emphasis is rather too great to assume any type of real harmony between these figures within the roles and functions assigned to them, as later struggles between the two indeed confirmed. Considering the impressive powerbase that Anthemius brought with him from the East, Anthemius should easily have been able to control his insubordinate general, but he could not. If this was the situation in 467, when a new Emperor with the might of the East behind him had to be so careful around the *patricius*, what hope would Majorian have had of facing Ricimer? The only explanation that makes sense is that he did not have any, but indeed did not need to thanks to their alliance or friendship, paradoxically shown by Ricimer's unimportance in such propaganda as Carmen V and Majorian's 'inaugural address', which is contrasted by the almost frantic efforts of placating Ricimer in Carmen II.

Of course, Ricimer is mentioned in Carmen V, but his importance is much reduced and, one could argue, Sidonius even makes a tongue-in-cheek comment about Ricimer's character in Carmen V. After warning her husband about Majorian aiming for the purple by claiming the hand of Placidia, Pelagia warns Aetius of Ricimer as well: "Moreover, there is linked with him in bonds of affection one (Ricimer) who is armed with the spirit of a royal grandfather (Wallia). Whither canst thou turn? To the world's topmost pinnacle he directs his fate and both direct their thoughts. Arise and assail them at the same time unawares. Neither of them wilt thou be able to slay if thou shouldst order that both die; nay, rather weave crafty flatteries for the one, and let this man be attacked by the sword. But why do I speak vain words. 'Tis for naught that we seek to avert these fateful events. He will surely live that he may reign."[179] In this passage then, Sidonius attests to these bonds of affection between Ricimer and Majorian, but also poses Ricimer as a man susceptible to 'crafty flatteries'. Being accused of being susceptible to such trivialities can hardly be anything other than an insult. Indeed, it is the polar opposite of those qualities that Sidonius had praised in Majorian's father before turning to machinations of Pelagia. Also, Ricimer directs his thoughts to the world's topmost pinnacle, but it is Majorian whose fate is directed in that direction. Perhaps Sidonius is hinting towards some improper ambitions by the barbarian general.

The relations between Ricimer and Majorian up to his ascension can thus be summarised. It seems that both men were veterans of Aetius' army. For Majorian this is clearly alluded by Sidonius, for Ricimer it can be easily inferred by the simple fact that there were no other possible career paths that could have brought a barbarian like Ricimer to such high station in such a short time. Whether or not they fought together is not mentioned, but

[177] O'Flynn (1976), *Generalissimo's of the Western Roman Empire. A.D. 375-493*, 201-202. And (1983) *Generalissimos of the Western Roman Empire*, 107-110.
[178] Sidonius Apollinaris, Panegyric II. ¶18, ¶23.
[179] Sidonius Apollinaris, Panegyric V. ¶8.

Sidonius implies that their 'bonds of affection' were already formed in such an early stage, and, as Aetius' was the only functioning army in the West, it could hardly not be so. During the last moments of Avitus' reign, Majorian and Ricimer rebelled together, but were at different places. The honour of defeating Avitus went to Ricimer (at least in most sources), but this does not necessarily make him Majorian's overlord. In Majorian's address to the Senate, Ricimer is acknowledged clearly as a friend and ally, though only giving him special mention among others, such as the Senate and the 'most valiant' army. Again, no relation other than alliance and/or friendship can be justly inferred. This situation is in stark contrast to the later reign of Anthemius, who, even though he must have been much more powerful due to the backing of the Eastern Emperor Leo, had to place much effort into placating Ricimer, as reflected in Carmen II.

Majorian's further reign also does not give us any indication he was under Ricimer's thumb. We have already mentioned Majorian's laws and how some of these were repealed by Libius Severus. As it is unlikely that the situation changed so that the support of the aristocracy had become so much more important than the tax income, it seems that Ricimer did not approve of this piece of legislation in the first place.

What is also interesting is the power and location of Majorian and his generals during his reign. Majorian did not reside in Italy for most of his reign. The other major figures of the 'Majorian faction', being Aegidius, Marcellinus and Nepotian, were all active on the various fronts of the Empire, with Aegidius in Gaul, Marcellinus in Sicily and Nepotian in Romano-Gothic Spain. Ricimer remained in Italy. Perhaps he felt that leaving Italy was not in his best interest, or perhaps Majorian asked him to remain in Italy to guard against Vandal attacks. After all, Ricimer had destroyed at least one of the Vandal fleets mentioned by Hydatius[180] and perhaps also the other one, as we do not know for sure. As the defence of Italy was not a task to be taken lightly, it is a logical move for Majorian to leave someone he could trust in Italy. Or so he may have thought. The main point for now is that, with Ricimer in Italy and Majorian in Gaul, the *patricius* had no way of controlling his supposed puppet. Other than the plot that eventually ended Majorian's life, we are not aware of any meaningful activity on the part of Ricimer during this period.[181]

The plot itself does not actually provide any evidence for Majorian being a puppet either. Common sense dictates the opposite and it tells us something of Ricimer more so than of Majorian. Nevertheless, the death of Majorian is still worth examining in detail. That the loss of his fleet at Cartagena was the root cause for his death is a logical starting point. Even if he was already planning to rid himself of the Emperor in the near future, Ricimer must have been watching the events in Spain with a close eye. With the assault failed, there was nothing left for Ricimer to wait for before hatching his plot.

Still, I think Majorian's position after the loss of his fleet is not as weak as it is generally portrayed to be. Majorian's Empire was mostly built up from garnering the support of a coalition of important figures and their domains. Thus, we find the 'Majorian faction' consisting of Majorian, Ricimer, Aegidius, Marcellinus, Nepotian and Theodoric. Leo's approval, in whatever form it actually materialised, should also be noted. The army that had been brought to Spain had by this time not taken any significant losses as far as we can tell, so it might have been possible for Majorian to call upon them again sometime in the future. Taken together we find a situation in which Majorian himself does not hold significantly more

[180] Hydatius, 456-457.
[181] O'Flynn (1976), 202.

power than the others, but functions as the glue keeping it all together. Aegidius' loyalty seems unquestionable and Marcellinus had an excellent track record of coming to the aid of the Western Empire, even during the reign of Ricimer (who perhaps can be linked to his conveniently timed death). Nepotian, who had married Marcellinus' sister, was a Majorian loyalist like Aegidius. Finally, Theodoric had been soundly subjugated by Majorian and lacked, if not the desire, the ability and casus belli to engage in open rebellion. Granted that Majorian's strike force was drastically reduced, especially against the Vandals, there was nothing in his position that inherently denied him the opportunity to try his assault again sometime in the future. Considering the fact that the Eastern Empire provided Anthemius with a 1200 ship invasion fleet, Majorian might have been able to solicit some support from that direction as well. Moreover, the ability to defend his old and new territories was relatively secure in the hands of his lieutenants in the meantime, as historically confirmed by Aegidius' domain of Soissons, Julius Nepos' position in Dalmatia and, if one is willing to count it as further evidence, the Visigothic kingdom in Spain.

Ricimer himself held on to Italy and the Italian field army. As such, he may have been more powerful than Majorian alone, but certainly not him and his supporters combined. If we are to attribute any type of major influence to Ricimer, it is more deserved in his ability to unmake what Majorian created, rather than to beat it. Aegidius and Marcellinus both refused to recognize Ricimer's puppet and proclaimed their loyalty solely to Leo. Theodoric could easily make use of the situation to oust any Roman officials in Spain and reassert himself in his (former) domains in both Gaul and Spain. Ricimer was left as 'generalissimo', to adopt Flynn's wording again, with a puppet Emperor in Italy and an alliance with the Burgundians.

Taking this argument one step further, we can ask if Majorian indeed needed to be afraid. For Ricimer, foreseeing the events that followed upon the death of Majorian cannot have been too difficult. Considering Aegidius', Marcellinus', Nepotian's and Theodoric's loyalties, he cannot possibly have expected them to fall in line after he murdered their chief and installed Severus. Theodoric and his Goths had always made use of political upheaval in the Empire to advance their own interests and, as it was Majorian that held them down, them breaking free from imperial control was to be expected. Assuming that both Majorian and Ricimer could make the same calculations, why would Ricimer want to kill his old comrade? Ricimer's position in Italy, though not that of an independent ruler was by no means a weak one. He held the advantage of having (or having had), close ties to his Emperor and could, in any case, not be dislodged from his seat of power without engaging in yet another civil war. As Majorian did not bring his army to Italy, Ricimer had nothing to fear or lose from the Emperor's presence in Italy and, with the Emperor and Ricimer's army conveniently stationed in the same place, one might imagine Ricimer could have imposed his will on the Emperor much more easily at this period in which Majorian was already down on his luck anyway. Though, for all we know, he might have tried and failed to do so. On the other hand, he had nothing to gain from being puppet master of Italy, as achieving this position cost the Empire the support of every other non-Italian interest group aside from the Burgundians. With his control stretching no further than Italy, it does not seem that being the emperor-maker was any more rewarding than being *magister militum et patricius* had been.

Aftermath

With the loss of the territories outside of Italy, the reign of Majorian can be seen as the last period in which the Roman Empire was still an Empire, rather than being the Kingdom of Italy. By Ricimer's decisions, the last Emperors that had a chance to restore the Empire, namely Majorian and Anthemius, were stopped in their tracks. By the time Ricimer had died, the Empire was disintegrated too far for it to assert itself outside Italy. In fact, holding Italy itself proved impossible.

Though it is perhaps not entirely within the subject of this paper, I think O'Flynn's conclusion of Ricimer worth responding to. O'Flynn, in response to those that regard Ricimer a traitor to the Empire claims that: "[Ricimer] had a conception of the Empire that differed radically from that of the traditionalists, a conception which unconsciously anticipated the imperial idea of the Middle Ages. He evidently thought of the Empire as something very lofty and very remote, a kind of symbol of civilization with which all reasonable men would naturally want to associate themselves, but which, on the concrete and day-to-day level, should not be allowed to interfere with the political separateness of its component nations. Thus the view of Vassili, who sees Ricimer as the great progressive of his age, working toward a new society, is probably more historically sound than the harshly critical view that pervades Seeck's treatment of him and represent a tradition going back to Gibbon. The titles chosen by both Gibbon and Seeck for their monumental works (*The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* and *Geschichte des Untergangs der antiken Welt* respectively) betray basic presuppositions which more or less preclude the possibility of seeing the world through Ricimer's eyes. It is as unreasonable to expect Ricimer to have enthused over the traditional forms of the Roman Empire as it would be to expect an African or Indian of the present day to strive to uphold the nineteenth-century British Empire; what the Commonwealth of the present day means to its members may serve to give some notion, however remote, of how Ricimer felt about the Empire."[182]

I think the argument has a number of problems. What O'Flynn does not say here (though he tacitly admits it) is that Ricimer was basically the one that brought the situation of the Empire being 'lofty', 'remote' and with 'political separateness of component nations' about, starting with the assassination of Majorian in 461. Claiming to know Ricimer's mind in such a fashion is suspect and similarly, the comparison to the British Empire does not really hold in the way O'Flynn uses it. During Majorian's reign, the Empire was still very much alive both ideologically and politically. Perhaps I am guilty of the same way of thinking as Gibbon and Seeck, because I cannot see his 'Middle Ages perspective' as a solid argument for the consequences of his actions. As far as I am aware, Ricimer was the only Roman sovereign that destroyed the Empire through carving it up with non-Romans, which makes him even worse for the health of the Empire than the likes of Honorius, Valentinian and Petronius Maximus. Although O'Flynn calls him a progressive, one might as well ascribe a certain type of cowardice to him, letting the Empire be destroyed so he could hold onto the pieces.

[182] O'Flynn (1983), 127.

Conclusions

Summarising the steps of Majorian's reign can be done as follows. The first step was dethroning Avitus. This step can perhaps be described as the necessary evil of Majorian's reign. As Peter Heather says when examining Avitus and Sidonius' panegyric for him: "It was a good try".[183] The circumstances of Avitus' ascension, with his general unpopularity, famine in Rome and the melting of the remaining bits of Rome's wealth simply meant that Avitus committed political suicide. The death of Avitus following his defeat is perhaps a blight on Majorian's character, but Majorian (and Ricimer) did need him out of the way.

Step two was the reconciliation of Gaul, which shows that Majorian was the best compromise the Gallo-Romans could have hoped for. Though the Gallo-Romans rebels and their Burgundian allies got crushed and punished for their disobedience, Majorian later lifted the heavy tribute imposed upon them. A deliberate effort was made to balance out the interests of (the aristocracy of) Gaul with the interests of (the aristocracy of) Italy in the imperial government. This is for example reflected in the distribution of government positions for Gauls and Italians.[184] The letter in which Sidonius describes a dinner which Majorian held and which was attended by Gallic aristocrats also clearly shows their reverence for him. This is especially poignant considering the Emperor was about to die at the hands of Ricimer; his defeat at Cartagena did not hurt the Gallo-Romans' opinion of the Emperor, or at least not in any significant degree.[185]

At some point close to this process, Marcellinus' loyalty or support was also secured. Though MacGeorge convincingly questions some of the relations between Majorian and Marcellinus,[186] Marcellinus was, at any rate, helping with the struggle against the Vandals with his troops in Sicily, which is all Majorian needed from him. Whether Marcellinus was a loyal servant of the Empire or a (semi-)independent ruler is thus not as important as the concrete actions he undertook to help the Empire during this time.

The Goths were the next issue for Majorian. Of course, since Constantius, the Goths never really fell under Roman control in such an absolute fashion again. Even Aetius had to carefully manage his relations with the them. Perhaps Theodoric would have returned Spain to Avitus, had Avitus' reign been a success, but that remains speculation. The only conclusion we can draw about Romano-Gothic Spain is that it could indeed easily switch hands thanks to the Roman government system still in place. Though the Goths seem to not have been enthusiastic to aid in Majorian's major venture, Hydatius mentions a combined Romano-Gothic force being sent against the Sueves.[187] The way Majorian handled the Goths is still respectable, even if not as impressive as Constantius' masterly blockade or Avitus' incorporation. If nothing else, they kept quiet during the remainder of Majorian's reign and allowed him to focus on the other fronts.

As already seen, the reintegration of Spain ties in with the Goths, as Roman rule was restored there by the treaty between Majorian and Theodoric. The degree of Roman control

[183] Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, 384.
[184] Max, 139.
[185] Sidonius Apollinaris. Letter to Montius.
[186] MacGeorge, 47-49.
[187] Hydatius, 460.

there can of course be debated. It seems fair to me that the process of 're-romanising' Spain was merely started by this time. The fact the Goths could so easily take it back is explicable by the fact that the Romans simply had not had the time and/or resources to strengthen the diocese of Spain in a fashion that did not involve the Goths, and thus making it able to stand on its own against them and the Sueves, like Aegidius' Domain of Soissons could stand against its enemies. Kulikowski places the end of Roman Spain at the end of the reign of Majorian precisely because Majorian still attempted to assert himself in Spain. This went hand in hand with the presence of Roman officials, such as Nepotian and Magnus, that would never again happen after his reign. Kulikowski explains: "With the withdrawal of Majorian from Spain and his subsequent execution, Spain ceased to be part of a Roman Empire, because none of the ephemeral claimants to the throne who followed him could secure their own positions in Italy and Gaul, let alone govern Spain. No imperial officials are attested in Spain after 460, and no Spaniards are known to have held imperial office after that date. The inference is clear: the end of Majorian severed the institutional links between Spain and the imperial government." [188] Overall, Majorian clearly attempted to reintegrate Spain to the Empire. Though he failed to do so in a structural manner in the end, as shown by its relapse into Gothic hands after his death, does not take away the fact he was successful during his own lifetime.

The final step of Majorian's plan was taking Carthage. As we do not know what happened to the fleet, placing blame on Majorian for this failed episode is difficult. Nevertheless, it does not seem that Majorian had given up on his dream in the least when he returned to Italy. Perhaps he was brooding so much on what he would do next that he was apparently not even aware of the danger he was in. We could speculate on what would have happened if Majorian was still alive to see the 1200 ships invasion fleet sent by Leo, though that brings us to the realm of fantasy as Ricimer killed Majorian almost as soon as he arrived in Italy.

Though the goal of his reign was not achieved in the end, Majorian did take all the necessary steps to set himself and the Empire up for success and a resurgence of Empire. The fact it failed is, in my opinion, not so much due to the loss of the fleet at Cartagena, as to Majorian falling victim to intrigue. A comparison can perhaps be drawn to Aetius' primacy, as both men were incredibly successful for their times, but both of them finally made a misstep in underestimating somebody they both thought they knew well, namely Valentinian III for Aetius and Ricimer for Majorian. The fact this got them killed was the fatal loss of political capital following a military defeat. Though relatively minor in the grand scheme of things, this hurt their political standing to such a degree it led to their deaths. Perhaps this can be better interpreted as the weakness of the Roman political system in the 5th century more so than by any fault of Aetius' or Majorian's. Nevertheless, the argument that they should have seen it coming is easily dispensed from our position. A final similarity is that the real damage to Rome followed after these men were killed, when alliances built around their person fell apart. After the death of Majorian, Rome simply did not have anything left to stand up to all its enemies and the Empire never recovered. Anthemius' expedition must be seen in exactly this light: It was an attempt by the Eastern Empire to bail out and reinvigorate the West. When it ultimately failed and the Western Empire was thrown back on its own resources, it was already as hopeless as it would be by its end in 476.

[188] Kulikowski, *Late Roman Spain and its Cities*, 192.

Passing Judgement: Majorianus and his Empire

We can make a number of final judgements on Majorian and his Empire which help us explain Majorian's major success. It is clear that Majorian embodied the 'Spirit of Rome', in that he was a very active and energetic Emperor who focused on the security of the Empire through the destruction of its enemies of which Rome had far too many at this time. How he managed to do so shows clear signs of both good statecraft and warfare. With his experience under Aetius, he must have gained a good level of military experience and expertise. As Emperor, he managed to flock a number of different factions under his banner and managed to pit them against the Empire's enemies with good success. His gains were secured by passing the responsibility of holding them onto his trusted lieutenants: Magnus and Aegidius in Gaul and Nepotian in Spain. Arguably, Marcellinus of Dalmatia in Sicily can also be counted among their number.

This was certainly a great achievement on Majorian's part, but also shows how the necessary building blocks were still in place. Bringing these together became more difficult as time went on due to the increased influence of the barbarian kingdoms settled within the Empire. In the periods of weakness in the Empire, this is reflected by the gradual encroachment of these kingdoms that cut off various parts of the Empire, both through direct occupation and cutting ties between the heartland and the provinces, of which the clearest examples are the isolation of Spain and Aegidius' domain after Majorian's death. Nevertheless, if the forces of the Empire could be properly combined by a good Roman ruler, they proved themselves capable of standing up to most of the challenges they faced even in 457.

In part this is because of the very nature of the Empire and its barbarian kingdoms. Throughout its existence, men had always wanted to be a part of the Empire. This key characteristic did not change with the various barbarian settlements, as a result of which a barbarian façade developed in which they nominally proclaimed themselves adherents of the Empire and left many imperial structures in place. The Goths are the clearest example of this, and the Gallo-Roman willingness to switch sides as easily as they did can be explained in part by this charade. Presumably, many were fine with serving the Gothic kings as long as they could perceive them as being part of the official Roman system. Aside from Sidonius' praises of Theodoric, we can also tell that he held Euric, who had given up on this idea of serving the Empire, in low regard.[189] Moreover, Sidonius was part of a rebellion against Euric in Clermont, of which he was bishop at that time, as a result of Euric's expansionist policies.[190] Overall, though the Gallo-Romans easily switched their allegiance, this could also work in favour of Rome if it managed to reassert itself against its enemies.

This is most clear in the case of Spain, which switched its allegiance around with the Visigoths, as it had always been the Goths that did most of the fighting in Spain. As the Roman structure was relatively intact, it could easily be reintegrated into the Empire. After

[189] Sidonius Apollinaris, VI To Lord Bishop Basilius. VII To his friend Vincentius,
[190] Sidonius Apollinaris, I Letter to the Lord Bishop Mamertus. II.To his friend Constantius. III To his brother-in-law Ecdicius. V To the Lord Bishop Agroeclus. X (XI) To the Lord Bishop Graecus.

Majorian's reign it lacked the military to hold its own against the Goths, presumably because the troops stationed there were supplied by Theodoric.

The Sueves fit less well into this structure as their relations to the local Hispano-Romans were relatively hostile, as attested by Hydatius. Thus, we find them in their province of Gallaecia for a long time quarrelling with the local Gallaecians, before they finally appear to break out and manage to raid and impose tribute on the other parts of Spain before being put back in their place by the Goths. This consistent hostility is in stark contrast to Gothic policy of incorporation of local Romans. Unfortunately for the Sueves, this policy also made them a clear enemy and made them a target for Romano-Gothic alliances.

The Vandals occupy something of a middle ground, which make them an incredibly interesting enemy of Rome. They were definitely hostile to the local aristocracy and the clergy at times, as shown by persecution and the redistribution of the lands in Proconsularis, but this hostility mostly had a political dimension. Like the Goths, they also took over the local Roman bureaucratic system, which allowed them to govern Africa very effectively. Local Romano-Africans and Moors seem to have gotten along reasonably well with the Vandals. The Vandal naval supremacy and its flirting with the local Punic culture, along with the introduction of *Anno Karthaginis* can only be explained thanks to this connection. Still, the destruction of the walls of the African cities and the ease by which Belisarius could march his army through Africa show that there was no love lost between Romans and Vandals. Perhaps those not connected to the Vandal regime did not care particularly much for their Vandal overlords, while those that enrolled in its navy and administration were more prone to feeling a bond, or perhaps they simply exploited the opportunity of making some money.

Of course, the Moors always had a reputation of being deceitful. Procopius' story of Majorian's adventure to Africa fits in with this scheme, as he was supposedly there to test their loyalties and see if they could be enticed into joining the Roman side. The reality of the loyalty of the Moors is hard to examine, as the story is part of a literary topos that fits in well with the classical adventures of Scipio Africanus.[191] Moreover, negative stereotypes about the fidelity of Africans had always existed in Roman society,[192] meaning that reports of African disloyalty are even more suspect than others.

Majorian could have been able to recapture Africa if he had managed to land his troops, as Procopius' *Vandal War* does allude to a number of weaknesses in the Vandal state that made it vulnerable. Though Procopius writes on a later date, it seems fair that most of these aspects were already in place by Majorian's time. Unfortunately, the main aspect of Vandal power, the genius of Gaiseric, prevented Majorian from exploiting these weaknesses as he would have wanted to do.

Still, an Emperor like Majorian could put all the pieces into place for an assault on the Vandals and it can be expected that the reconquest of Roman Africa would have immediately reaffirmed the Western Empire as being the dominant force in the West. With the wealth of Africa, the other barbarian enemies had little chance of facing Rome on their own in full-scale warfare, as shown by the incredible tenacity of the Empire's border guard Aegidius and the repeated subjugation of the Goths. As the Hunnic Empire had already fallen apart by Majorian's time and Rome was already bordered by powerful barbarian

[191] Max, 201-202.
[192] Miles, 384-487. See also: Isaac. *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity*, Chapter VI: Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Syrians.

kingdoms, there is no reason to expect that a new invasion could occur that would once again swing the balance of power into an unfortunate direction. Perhaps then, if Majorian had been more successful, Rome could have been saved, or at least for the time being.

This presents a problem for the way that historians attempt to structurally explain the fall of Rome. Focusing on structural issues in the way Rome failed in either internal or external policies takes away a lot of the agency that characters like Majorian had in the process. As a result, in such ways of thinking, Majorian often finds himself awkwardly placed in a grand narrative on the fall of Rome as the exception to the story that is being told. Of course, it is logical to focus on more than one man in such a grand endeavour, and my thesis could likewise not possibly hope to explain all the various elements at play in the fall. Nevertheless, I think a balance must be maintained in the importance we attach to structural and individual shortcomings and successes and the perspective we take in it, as focusing on a decline narrative can easily lead to Rome's more positive aspects being ignored.

For future research, I think this is an especially fertile prospect in studies that focus on internal causes and effects of Roman decline. The works of Goldsworthy, Halsall and O'Flynn, for example, all show various balancing acts of interests between the Emperor and the Empire and various possible dangers. This 'Imperial Tightrope' to (over)simplify the situation, consists of such varied dangers as usurpations and invasions, faction politics, individual ambitions, the imperial succession game and the management of powerful generals or generalissimos. Characters like Majorian walked the tightrope incredibly well by militarily dealing with their external enemies, but were prone to intrigue. Meanwhile, characters like Honorius and Valentinian were protected from such dangers through their imperial Theodosian dignity, but, as they were nonentities, invited a lot of conflict as to who would be the most powerful general or statesman, which weakened the state as well.

Theories that attempt to explain the decline and fall of the Roman Empire (or its fall and decline) can hardly be expected to properly reconcile such varied figures. Regarding such figures as individual characters, with their own goals and ambitions, set in a stage worth examining, allows us to go more in-depth into the issues of their time. Sometimes it is important to remember history covers people and events as well as processes. Especially in the case of remarkable figures, such as Majorian, who strive to and succeed in defying the paradigm of their time, not adhering rigorously to systems of decline (whether in- or external) can provide some new insights into the fall of Rome. Rather than somewhat glossing over such characters, as being strange and unfitting in the grand narrative, acknowledging that the concept of the fall of Rome was not a continuous decay, but rather a series of interrelated events that influenced the integrity of the Empire, can encourage us to look into such outliers and widen our perspective as a result.

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