

Chapter 1

Barbarian agency and imperial withdrawal: the causes and consequences of political change in fourth- and fifth-century Trier and Cologne

Introduction

Snapshots from the years 310, 410, and 510 reveal that the political landscape of the Rhineland changed almost beyond recognition over the course of three centuries. In 310 AD, Trier was one of the foremost cities of the Roman Empire, acting as a main residence of the Emperor Constantine and the seat of the Gallic praetorian prefecture. In Cologne, meanwhile, the completion of the fortress of *Divitia* just across the Rhine reinforced the city's significance in the context of imperial defensive strategy. By 410 AD, however, both the imperial residence and the praetorian prefecture had been removed from Trier, and many frontier troops who had been stationed near Cologne were gone. The Rhineland had suffered an apparently devastating barbarian invasion, that of the Vandals, Alans, and Sueves in 406, and was to face many more attacks in the coming half-century. After the invasion, the legitimate emperors were never to re-establish their firm control in the region, and the reign of the usurper Constantine III (407 - 411) marked the last period of effective imperial rule. Around 510 AD, the last vestiges of imperial political power had vanished, and both Trier and Cologne were part of the Frankish kingdom of Clovis.

The speed and extent of this change must have dramatically affected many aspects of life within the cities, and, as such, it is crucial that we seek to understand what brought it about. In so doing, we must consider the fundamental question of whether responsibility for the collapse of imperial power in the Rhineland ultimately lies with the imperial authorities themselves, who withdrew from the region, or with the

various barbarian groups, who launched attacks on the frontier provinces and undermined the Empire's control. Unsurprisingly, this question has long been the subject of historical debate, with opinion divided between those historians to whom Halsall refers as 'movers', who attribute imperial collapse to the actions of barbarian groups who breached the Empire's frontiers, and those he describes as 'shakers', who believe tensions within the Empire shook it to its core and caused its demise, allowing the relatively peaceful settlement of barbarian peoples within the erstwhile Roman provinces, and the assumption of political control by their kings.¹ Halsall defines himself as more of a 'shaker' than a 'mover', emphasising the lack of cohesiveness of the barbarian groups, their regular manipulation by Roman authorities, and the emergence of power vacuums at the fringes of the Empire, into which barbarian leaders were drawn.² Goffart is arguably the most influential 'shaker', having asserted that the barbarians were neither particularly unified nor especially numerous, whilst their establishment on Roman soil was 'an ostensibly peaceful and smooth process'.³ Amongst the latest generation of 'movers', meanwhile, Heather has become especially prominent, with his often-reiterated claims that there were no signs in the fourth century of the Empire's imminent collapse under its own weight, and that the Huns were the trigger for the movements of barbarian peoples across the Danube in 376 and the Rhine in 406.⁴ It goes almost without saying that this study cannot purport to pass judgement on the respective roles of the imperial authorities and the barbarian groups in bringing an end to the Western Roman Empire in its entirety. However, by approaching political

¹G. Halsall, 'Movers and Shakers: the Barbarians and the Fall of Rome', in T. F. X. Noble (ed.), *From Roman Provinces to Medieval Kingdoms* (New York and London, 2006), p. 277.

²Halsall, 'Movers', p. 287; G. Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 23, 149, 420.

³W. Goffart, 'The Barbarians in Late Antiquity and how they were accommodated in the West', in Noble (ed.), *From Roman Provinces to Medieval Kingdoms*, pp. 236, 246; W. Goffart, *Barbarian Tides: The Migration Age and the Later Roman Empire* (Pennsylvania, 2006), pp. 25, 29, 34.

⁴P. Heather, 'The Western Empire', in A. Cameron et al (eds), *Cambridge Ancient History XIV* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 4-7; P. Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire* (London, 2005), pp. 141, 202.

change from the perspectives of Trier and Cologne, two cities with very different but crucial roles in the Empire's defensive strategy at the Rhine frontier, it is hoped that a valuable new interpretation of the collapse of imperial power in the Rhineland will be offered.

Before embarking upon this discussion, an introductory point must be made regarding the vocabulary adopted throughout this thesis. In the fourth and fifth centuries, as we shall see, the Empire faced numerous attacks across its Rhine frontier, carried out by its barbarian neighbours across the river. In the part of the Rhineland where Trier and Cologne are located, the groups responsible were usually from the conglomeration of peoples known as the Franks. In this chapter, it will be argued that these attacks were not isolated or random incidents, but were part of an established pattern of imperial-barbarian relations. These recurrent attacks will be termed *incursions*. They should be seen as distinct from the two fifth-century assaults across the Rhine frontier, in 406 and 451, whose perpetrators – the Vandals, Alans and Sueves, and the Huns respectively – had travelled to the Rhine from the vicinity of the Danube; as such, their attacks did not form part of the normal, familiar pattern of imperial-barbarian relations at the Rhine frontier. This crucial distinction is consciously reflected in the terminology adopted throughout this chapter, in that the attacks of 406 and 451 will be referred to as *invasions*.

1.1 The Fourth Century

1.1.1 Overview

In attempting to understand and explain political change in Trier and Cologne in the fourth and fifth centuries, a methodology that seeks to trace patterns of behaviour

and inter-connections between events over the course of each century is more fruitful than a strictly chronological approach. In order for this methodology to succeed, however, a brief chronological overview of each century provides a necessary frame of reference. At the beginning of the fourth century, Trier had already been elevated to the status of an imperial capital, and was then adopted as a main residence by Constantine I (306 – 337). In the first decade of the century, Constantine carried out successful campaigns against the barbarians across the Rhine, who had breached the frontier following the death of his father, Constantius Chlorus. Soon thereafter, measures were implemented to shore up frontier defences, which included the construction of the fortress of *Divitia*, across the river from Cologne. The Rhineland then remained relatively peaceful until the mid-fourth century, when Constantine's son, Constans (337 – 350), was ousted by the usurper Magnentius. His usurpation proved short-lived; he was defeated by Constantine's remaining son, Constantius II, in 353. Magnentius' death was followed by a spate of damaging barbarian incursions, initially combated by a general named Silvanus, until political intrigue at Constantius' court saw Silvanus also condemned to death as a usurper. Imperial control in the Rhineland was then restored by Julian in the late 350s, but the next emperor to spend a significant amount of time in residence in Trier was Valentinian I (364 – 375). Both he and his son Gratian (375 – 383) campaigned in the Rhineland, but their reigns were nevertheless periods of relative peace at the frontier. In 380, Gratian transferred his court to Italy. The next serious breaches of the Rhine defences came in the wake of the defeat of another usurper, Magnus Maximus (383 – 388), who had overthrown Gratian. Following the reinstatement of imperial hegemony, the region was visited by Gratian's half-brother, Valentinian II (375 – 392), and later by the general Arbogast and his puppet emperor, Eugenius (392 – 394), but soon thereafter, the praetorian prefecture was transferred

from Trier to Arles, marking the point at which the Rhineland lost its position as one of the hubs of imperial politics.

1.1.2 The Rhineland as the political centre of the West

If we are to establish how and why the political circumstances of Trier and Cologne changed over the course of the fourth and fifth centuries, it is obviously important that we begin by determining how the Rhineland had come to be the political centre of the West, and what effect this had on the regional political landscape. It seems readily apparent that the decision to concentrate imperial power in the region came about in response to the third-century crisis, the events of which had presented a serious challenge to the territorial integrity of the Western Roman Empire. Given the chronological scope of this study, the precise details of this crisis need not concern us, but some key points do need to be made. From the perspective of the legitimate imperial authorities, the crisis began with the relatively rapid establishment of a separatist Gallic Empire by the usurper Postumus, which at its peak included the provinces of Britain, Gaul, and the Iberian Peninsula. Significantly for this study, this empire had its capital first at Cologne, then, from around 272, at Trier.⁵ The collapse of the Gallic Empire came with the defeat of its then-emperor, Tetricius, by the Roman emperor, Aurelian, in 274; the ensuing tumult was exploited by barbarian groups living across the Rhine, whose incursions severely affected Trier and at least the area around Cologne, if not the city itself.⁶ Clearly, then, from the viewpoint of the Roman emperors, the Rhineland in the late third century was a region in which rebellions might take hold, and barbarian

⁵Eck, *Köln*, pp. 566-79; Heinen, *Trevererland*, pp. 90-5.

⁶Eck, *Köln*, p. 582; J. F. Drinkwater, *The Alamanni and Rome 213-496 (Caracalla to Clovis)* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 52-3; C. Witschel, 'Re-evaluating the Roman West in the 3rd C. AD', *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 17 (2004), pp. 269-72.

attacks might take place; in short, it was a part of the Empire to which it would have seemed wise to pay very close attention.

Once the decision was taken to make the Rhineland a primary political centre in the West, Trier was the logical choice to serve as the imperial residence, and not merely because of its recent history as capital of the breakaway Gallic Empire.⁷ As we have seen, the city was located only approximately seventy-five kilometres – or two days' march – from Cologne, whilst its transport connections by river and road placed it on a main line of communication between the Mediterranean and the Rhine frontier. Trier's elevation to a political and administrative pre-eminence unparalleled in Gaul is clearly indicated by numismatic evidence, which shows that the city's mint became operational in late 293 or early 294, after Constantius Chlorus was made Caesar and consul.⁸ The consequences of this decision to concentrate imperial power in the Rhineland in the fourth century will be one of our primary concerns in the subsequent chapters of this thesis. For the purposes of this chapter, however, which is aimed more at establishing the causes of political changes than the analysis of their effects, we need only concern ourselves with the demographic implications, since these were in themselves motors for political change within the cities. There can be little doubt that Trier's enhanced status directly and dramatically transformed the size and composition of its population, as powerful and ambitious military and civilian élites from across the Empire came to the city in the hope of securing a position with the imperial court or praetorian prefecture. At the same time, the number of such offices proliferated as a result of the expansion of

⁷On the importance of Trier's location: H. Bernhard, 'Die römische Geschichte in Rheinland-Pfalz', in Cüppers (ed.), *Rheinland-Pfalz*, p. 133; Heinen, *Trevererland*, p. 99.

⁸The first known coin of Constantius Chlorus minted in Trier shows him wearing consular garments: K. – J. Gilles, 'Münzprägung im römischen Trier', in A. Demandt and J. Engemann (eds), *Konstantin der Grosse: Ausstellungskatalog* (Mainz, 2007), p. 314.

the imperial bureaucracy.⁹ The *Notitia Dignitatum* reveals a varied array of officials associated with the Gallic praetorian prefecture.¹⁰ This information is supplemented by a range of anecdotal literary references. For example, an anonymous panegyrist, clearly an experienced rhetorician who had taught several men then in service at the palace, made clear that his motive in coming to Trier in 310 to deliver his speech to Constantine was to leave behind what he saw as ‘the ignoble cares of private studies’ for a position serving the emperor.¹¹ In the later fourth century, the poet Ausonius came to the imperial court in the city to act as tutor to Valentinian’s sons, Gratian and Valentinian II; a letter he received from the famous Roman senator Symmachus reveals that the latter also spent time by the Mosel ‘on the staff of the immortal emperors’.¹² Similarly, Augustine of Hippo tells us of the time spent in Trier by his acquaintance, Ponticianus, who was presumably a junior imperial official.¹³ Finally, Jerome came to Trier as a young man, probably to further his civil career rather than his education, since the city was a natural destination for young aristocrats seeking office, whereas its rhetorical schools were not especially renowned.¹⁴

Epigraphic evidence complements these sources, offering examples of lower-ranking, otherwise unknown, imperial office-holders who died in Trier. It is possible

⁹B. Ward-Perkins stresses that this centralisation, although causing a decline of curial government to the detriment of many cities, was beneficial to imperial capitals: ‘The Cities’, in A. Cameron and P. Garnsey (eds), *Cambridge Ancient History XIII* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 386.

¹⁰*Notitia Dignitatum: accedunt Notitia urbis Constantinopolitanae et laterculi provinciarum*, ch. 3, ed. O. Seeck (Berlin, 1876), pp. 111-12: *princeps; cornicularius; adiutor; commentariensis; ab actis; numerarii; subadiuvae; cura epistolarum; regerendarius; exceptores; adiutores; singularii*.

¹¹*Panegyric VI*, 23, 3, in *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors: The Panegyrici Latini*, ed. and trans. C. E. V. Nixon and B. S. Rodgers, with the Latin text of R. A. B. Mynors (Berkeley, 1994), p. 253.

¹²Ausonius, *Mosella*, lines 448-53, trans. H. G. Evelyn-White (London, 1919), Book X, p. 260; H. S. Sivan, *Ausonius of Bordeaux: Genesis of a Gallic Aristocracy* (London, 1993), pp. 101-4.

¹³Ponticianus’ friend ‘decided to abandon his career in the world’, having encountered a *Life of St Antony* in a private house: Augustine, *The Confessions of Augustine*, VIII, 6, trans. W. Watts (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1946), pp. 430-4; P. R. L. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (London, 1967), pp. 99, 152.

¹⁴J. N. D. Kelly, *Jerome: His Life, Writings, and Controversies* (London, 1975), pp. 25-31; J. Steinhausen, ‘Hieronymus und Laktanz in Trier’, *Trierer Zeitschrift* 20 (1951), pp. 126-54. It was whilst in Trier that Jerome copied out the works of St Hilary of Poitiers: Jerome, *Letter 5*, 2, in *Letters and Select Works*, NPNF series II, vol. 6, ed. W. H. Fremantle (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1968), p. 7.

that some of these individuals were local aristocrats, for whom the presence of the imperial court offered new opportunities. We know of Bonifatius, an official who was responsible for the emperor's ceremonial garments, through an inscription commemorating his wife, and of Felix, whose epitaph records his holding of the same role.¹⁵ The epitaph of a *palatinus* called Probatius suggests that Trier also drew in ambitious young aristocrats from other major imperial cities, since it uses the word 'sepulchorum', which is very rare in Trier and the Rhineland up to the seventh century, where 'tumulo' is almost always used instead, but is known in fourth-century inscriptions from Rome, suggesting that may have been his city of origin.¹⁶ From the military sphere, we know of two men who held the office of *protector domesticus*, named Flavius Gabso and Hariulfus. The second of these was a Burgundian prince, whose father, Hanhavalodus, was 'regalis gentis Burgundionum'. It is likely that Hariulfus, as well as being an imperial official, was a hostage.¹⁷

In Cologne, meanwhile, the city's frontier position had long since ensured its importance as a centre for military personnel stationed at the Rhine. As we might expect, this continued throughout the fourth century, as is revealed by several epitaphs remembering soldiers, both serving and retired. An inscription commemorating Viatorinus reveals that he died fighting the Franks in their territory, whilst another remembers the veteran Emeterius, 'c(e)n/t(enarius) ex numer(o) Gentil(ium)'. This 'numerus Gentilium' is otherwise unknown, but one can only assume that it was a division of the army stationed near Cologne in the fourth century. We also have

¹⁵For Bonifatius: Rheinisches Landmuseum Trier, *Trier: Kaiserresidenz und Bischofssitz* (Mainz, 1984), catalogue, no. 107, p. 223; E. Gose, *Katalog der frühchristlichen Inschriften in Trier* (Berlin, 1958), no. 37, p. 12; *Inscriptiones Belgicae, CIL XIII, pars 1, fasc. 2*, ed. O. Hirschfeld (Berlin, 1904), no. 3691. For Felix: *Kaiserresidenz und Bischofssitz*, catalogue, no. 108, p. 224; Gose, *Katalog der frühchristlichen Inschriften*, no. 427, pp. 56-7.

¹⁶*Kaiserresidenz und Bischofssitz*, catalogue, no. 110, p. 225; Gose, *Katalog der frühchristlichen Inschriften*, no. 454, p. 66.

¹⁷*Kaiserresidenz und Bischofssitz*, catalogue, nos. 109 and 186, pp. 224, 349; Gose, *Katalog der frühchristlichen Inschriften*, no. 430, pp. 57-8; *CIL XIII*, nos. 3681 and 3682.

evidence of an African soldier or former soldier, Donatus, ‘*ex pro/(tectorib)us civis Afer*’, who clearly held a similar role to that of Hariulfus and Flavius Gabso in Trier, although it is not clear whether he, like them, was *protector domesticus*, or *protector* of the *magister militum*.¹⁸ In the civilian sphere, meanwhile, individuals from Cologne may have gained opportunities to work at the imperial court or praetorian prefecture by virtue of their city’s proximity to the imperial and prefectural seat. One early fifth-century epitaph commemorating a man from Cologne named Geminus, discovered on an elaborate sarcophagus in Arles, provides possible corroboration of this. The sarcophagus is a clear demonstration of Geminus’ wealth, so it is conceivable that he was a high-ranking official attached to the praetorian prefecture, who relocated to Arles when the prefecture was transferred there from Trier.¹⁹

Additionally, the importance of the Rhineland within the imperial system ensured that fourth-century Cologne periodically attracted the highest-ranking imperial military officials, including, of course, the emperors themselves. Constantine I is known to have visited the city in 310, for example, since the inscription commemorating the completion of the fortress of *Divitia*, across the Rhine from Cologne, declares that it was constructed ‘in the presence of the emperor’.²⁰ Towards the end of the century, a visit by the *magister militum*, Arbogast, and the usurper, Eugenius, is confirmed by an

¹⁸Viatorinus: W. Schmitz, ‘Die spätantiken und frühmittelalterlichen Grabinschriften in Köln (4-7. Jahrh. n. Chr.)’, *Kölner Jahrbuch für Vor- und Frühgeschichte* 28 (1995), no. 12, pp. 687-90; *Inscriptiones Germaniae Inferioris. Miliaria Galliarum et Germaniarum*, *CIL XIII, pars II, fasc. 2*, ed. T. Mommsen et al (Berlin, 1907), no. 8274. Emeterius: Schmitz, ‘Grabinschriften in Köln’, no. 4, pp. 663-6; *CIL XIII*, no. 8331. Donatus: Schmitz, ‘Grabinschriften in Köln’, no. 3, pp. 658-62.

¹⁹Eck, *Köln*, pp. 616-7.

²⁰G. Wolff, *Roman-Germanic Cologne* (Cologne, 2003), p. 283; *Römische Inschriften Datenbank 24*: www.rid24.de, I.D. no. 250K [accessed 19 March 2013]; *CIL XIII*, no. 8502. For a detailed discussion of this inscription and the construction of the fortress, see below, pp. 224-6.

inscription celebrating the former's repair of a public building.²¹ In between times, Ammianus' account of the usurpation of the general Silvanus, an event discussed in more detail below, suggests that Cologne may have been the regular base for the commanding officer of the Rhine frontier troops in the 350s. It was in a chapel in the city that Silvanus was put to death.²²

Clearly, then, the concentration of imperial power in the fourth-century Rhineland brought wealthy new residents and enhanced status to Trier and, to a lesser extent, Cologne, as well as probably providing ample opportunities for local aristocrats to gain roles in the central imperial bureaucracy. This undoubtedly created new hierarchies at the pinnacle of the social and political order, and therefore marked a significant change in its own right. However, it is important to bear in mind that the presence of this new imperial élite was entirely dependent on the decision taken at the end of the third century to make Trier an imperial capital, and to redouble efforts to protect the Rhine frontier. When this policy was subsequently reversed, Trier and Cologne were liable to see their most affluent and influential inhabitants depart as quickly as they had arrived, leaving a power vacuum at the highest level of local leadership.

²¹The inscription mentions both Theodosius I and Eugenius, so the identification of the Arbogast mentioned with the *magister militum* is not in doubt. It reads: '[.....]s et imperatoribus nost(ri)s / [...Theodo]sio Fl(avio) Arcadio et Fl(avio) Eugenio / [.....] et conlabsam ussu viri cl(arissimi) / [...Arboga]stis comitis et instantia V(iri) C(larissimi) / [.....Co]mitis Domesticorum ei(us) / [.....]s ex integro opere faciun / [dum cura]vit magister pr(imus) Aelius': Wolff, *Roman-Germanic Cologne*, pp. 116-7; *CIL* XIII, no. 8262. For a further discussion of this inscription, see below, pp. 228-9.

²²Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, XV, 5, 31, trans. J. C. Rolfe (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1939-50), p. 152; see below, pp. 27-8.

1.1.3 Roman-barbarian relations from the imperial perspective

Throughout most of the fourth century, until Gratian transferred his court to Italy in 380, Trier was, therefore, one of the foremost political centres of the Western Empire, and the Rhineland remained relatively trouble-free, with the peace only occasionally shattered by barbarian incursions. If we are to establish whether the actions of the imperial authorities or the activities of barbarian groups were ultimately responsible for the collapse of the Roman Empire in the Rhineland in the fifth century, it is essential that we understand the nature of the interactions between these parties in this preceding period of relative political stability. In approaching this issue from the imperial side, we must consider what mechanisms were used to keep the barbarian groups in check in times of peace, and how successfully the Empire responded to the incursions that did take place. Ammianus Marcellinus is by far our fullest and most reliable source of evidence, although his work must be read with an eye to his admiration of the general Ursicinus and the Emperor Julian, since this certainly shaped his disparaging portrayal of the Emperor Constantius and his hyperbolic account of Julian's campaigns in Gaul. Additionally, we must recognise that Ammianus does not provide a linear narrative, but rather presents a series of distinct, frequently discontinuous stories, which we, as historians, must seek to interconnect.²³

With regard to the question of how the Empire was able to keep its barbarian neighbours in check, it appears that diplomacy played a decisive role in the restoration

²³T. D. Barnes, *Ammianus Marcellinus and the Representation of Historical Reality* (Ithaca, 1998), pp. 2, 15-17, 138, 152; J. Matthews, *The Roman Empire of Ammianus Marcellinus* (London, 1989), pp. 20, 33, 38; D. Hunt, 'The Outsider Inside: Ammianus on the Rebellion of Silvanus', in J. W. Drijvers and D. Hunt (eds), *The Late Roman World and its Historian: Interpreting Ammianus Marcellinus* (London, 1999), p. 47; G. Kelly, *Ammianus Marcellinus: The Allusive Historian* (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 46-7.

and maintenance of peaceful relations.²⁴ No detailed source exists to confirm the precise terms of any of the treaties concluded, although several clues enable us to speculate with reasonable confidence as to their general scope. The imperial authorities, for their part, seem to have provided goods and favours, which conferred prestige and legitimacy upon barbarian leaders with whom agreements had been concluded.²⁵ This is confirmed by a reference made by Ammianus to an incursion mounted by the Alamanni during the reign of Valentinian I (364 – 375). Ammianus reveals that the Alamanni had reacted angrily to the provision of annual gifts of lesser quality than was customary, thereby providing indications of the frequency of such exchanges, the usual calibre of the goods the imperial authorities handed over, and the potentially damaging effect on the barbarian ruler's status – and therefore the Empire's security – if those goods were not up to scratch.²⁶ In exchange, we know the emperors often received hostages, as in the case of an agreement concluded between the Frankish kings, Marcomer and Sunno, and Valentinian II's *magister militum*, Arbogast, in the late 380s.²⁷ Additionally, we may naturally assume that they were given a guarantee of peace at the frontier.

Although the precise terms of such agreements are unclear, the importance of diplomacy in the maintenance or re-establishment of peaceful relations at the Rhine frontier in the fourth century is confirmed by numerous references to treaties having

²⁴P. Heather, 'The Late Roman Art of Client Management: Imperial Defence in the Fourth-Century West', in W. Pohl et al (eds), *The Transformation of Frontiers from Late Antiquity to the Carolingians* (Leiden, 2001), pp. 20-2; P. Heather, 'Foedera and Foederati of the Fourth Century', in Noble (ed.), *From Roman Provinces to Medieval Kingdoms*, p. 292; P. Heather, 'The Barbarian in Late Antiquity: Image, Reality, and Transformation', in R. Miles (ed.), *Constructing Identities in Late Antiquity* (London, 1999), p. 238.

²⁵Heather, 'Client Management', p. 25.

²⁶Ammianus Marcellinus, XXVI, 5, 7, pp. 590-2; Drinkwater, *Alamanni*, pp. 267-8; Halsall, *Migrations*, p. 123; Heather, 'Client Management', pp. 26-7.

²⁷Gregory of Tours, *Ten Books of History*, II, 9, *Libri Historiarum*, ed. B. Krusch, *MGH SSRM I*, 1 (Hannover, 1937), p. 54 (English translation: Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks*, trans. L. Thorpe (London, 1974)); Heather, 'Client Management', p. 24.

been agreed, following a barbarian capitulation.²⁸ When Ammianus recounted Julian's recovery of Cologne from the Franks in the late 350s, for example, he noted that Julian entered into an agreement with them that was to be of benefit to the Roman state. The Alamanni are likewise known to have had an accord with the Empire during this period, since Constantius II is said to have persuaded them to 'pretend to break the treaty of peace from time to time' by attacking the provinces bordering the Rhine, causing problems for Julian.²⁹ Significantly, the initiative in instigating these diplomatic negotiations was not always taken by the imperial authorities, as Ammianus reveals in his description of the summer campaigning season of 358. He reports that Julian 'marched against the Franks, namely those whom custom calls the Salii, who had formerly boldly ventured to establish their homes on Roman soil near Toxandria', a region of modern Belgium and the Netherlands, between the Meuse and Scheldt rivers. He then explains that these Franks had sent envoys to Julian, seeking to secure a treaty granting them retrospective permission to settle peacefully in this area without repercussions. As it transpired, their attempt at negotiation failed, in that they were comprehensively defeated, and only then granted permission to stay put.³⁰ Nonetheless, this example demonstrates that the Franks were routinely enmeshed in imperial politics, and were aware of the role of diplomacy within their established pattern of relations with the imperial authorities.

This long-established framework for peaceful relations at the Rhine frontier was still functioning normally at the very end of the fourth century. The emperors were still the ones calling the shots, and there was no obvious indication that this was about to change. We have seen how, following the defeat of Magnus Maximus, the *magister*

²⁸Heather, 'Client Management', p. 28. This relationship between barbarian surrender and the establishment of treaties is especially prominent in Ammianus' writings: Heather, 'Foedera', p. 295.

²⁹Ammianus Marcellinus, XXI, 3, 4, p. 102; Drinkwater, *Alamanni*, pp. 257-9.

³⁰Ammianus Marcellinus, XVII, 8, 3-4, pp. 350-2; Drinkwater, *Alamanni*, p. 242.

militum, Arbogast, reportedly made a peace agreement with the Frankish petty kings, Marcomer and Sunno, which involved the exchange of hostages.³¹ Soon after, following Valentinian II's death, Arbogast's puppet emperor, Eugenius, is said to have 'renewed the traditional treaties with the kings of the Alamanni and the Franks'.³² The next *magister militum*, Stilicho, is likewise said to have concluded diplomatic negotiations during his short visit to the Rhineland around 396.³³ We might assume that the continued renewal and successful implementation of these treaties underpinned the peace on the frontier that generally endured until after the invasion of the Vandals, Alans, and Sueves on the last day of 406.

Nevertheless, the lengthy periods of peace in the fourth century were punctuated by occasional episodes of violence, as these treaties broke down and the Franks and others mounted incursions across the Rhine frontier. Interestingly, there is a clear chronological connection between the most serious of these incursions, which took place in the 350s and the late 380s, and the major internal political crises of the fourth century in Gaul, the usurpations of Magnentius (350 – 353), Silvanus (355), and Magnus Maximus (383 – 388). One might think that in crossing the frontier during these periods of upheaval, the barbarians were behaving purely opportunistically. It would seem, however, that there was more to their behaviour than mere exploitation. These internal political crises disrupted normal channels of imperial patronage to the barbarian leaders, causing the breakdown of diplomatic agreements, and prompting raids aimed at securing moveable wealth.³⁴ Since they came to focus upon the Rhineland, the usurpations would certainly have rendered the legitimate emperors

³¹Gregory of Tours, *History*, II, 9, p. 54; Drinkwater, *Alamanni*, p. 318.

³²Gregory of Tours, *History*, II, 9, p. 55.

³³Claudian, *On the Fourth Consulship of Honorius*, lines 440-59, *On the Consulship of Stilicho*, Book I, lines 194-214, in *Claudian*, trans. M. Platnauer (London, 1922), vol. I, pp. 318-20, 378-80.

³⁴Halsall, *Migrations*, pp. 123, 150-1; Heather, 'Client Management', p. 41.

unable to meet the terms of the treaties they had concluded, whilst any alternative arrangements the barbarian leaders then formed with the usurpers would have been voided by the usurper's eventual defeat. Moreover, when usurpations occurred, the struggle for the imperial throne was routinely prioritised by emperor and usurper alike, and neither party would therefore have jeopardised their own efforts to secure the throne by making any significant attempt to conciliate barbarian leaders, protect the frontier, or expel unwanted incomers. Concern for the defensive situation at the Rhine frontier was, in such situations, temporarily disregarded, and frontier troops were probably summoned to participate in such internecine conflicts, providing the barbarians with the opportunity, as well as the motive, to launch their incursions.³⁵

This interpretation fits well with the sequence of events Ammianus describes in his fairly detailed account of Silvanus' usurpation. He reports that Silvanus' campaigns against the barbarians met with early success, 'driving forth the savages, who had now lost their confidence and courage', before his usurpation attempt and death sparked them to carry out further serious assaults. It was soon after Julian's appointment to the post of Caesar in the West, Ammianus says, that the news reached him that Cologne, 'a city of great renown in Lower Germany, after an obstinate siege by the savages in great force, had been stormed and destroyed'.³⁶ Given that Ammianus suggests that Silvanus had defeated the barbarians fairly comprehensively, and was himself based at the frontier, in Cologne, it seems reasonable to assume that he would have concluded treaties with the leaders of the Franks and Alamanni before his demise. The incursions that resulted in the capture of Cologne therefore appear to have been part of a

³⁵Halsall, *Migrations*, p. 148; W. Goffart, 'Rome, Constantinople, and the Barbarians', *American Historical Review* 86, issue 2 (1981), p. 282.

³⁶Ammianus Marcellinus, XV, 5, 4, p. 134; XV, 8, 19, p. 174.

resumption of hostilities, which came about in response to the invalidation of these treaties.

It is, however, important to note that this chronological and causal connection between internal political instability, the weakening of the imperial presence in the Rhineland, and the incidence of barbarian incursions did not prove a significant threat to imperial control over the region in the fourth century, since the Empire was able consistently and rapidly to reassert itself following the defeat of the usurpers.³⁷ Where it may instead prove important is as an indication of the sequence of events that led to the Empire's collapse in the Rhineland in the fifth century, once the institutions of central government were withdrawn, and the region's security slipped down the Empire's list of priorities. Additionally, we must recognise that these usurpations were not necessarily destined to be a bad thing from the perspective of those living in the Rhineland, or for frontier security, in the way that they certainly were for the imperial authorities. The strategic and political significance of the region, even after the imperial court had been transferred, ensured that Magnentius and Magnus Maximus, whose usurpations had begun elsewhere, each made rapid attempts to secure the Rhine frontier and to win the support of local residents. Magnentius replaced Constans as the occupant of the imperial palace in Trier, and had he been accepted by the Eastern emperor, Constantius II, this transition of power would probably have made little difference to the Rhineland. Magnus Maximus, on the other hand, adopted Trier as his residence following Gratian's move to Milan, and, as such, his usurpation was of greater benefit to the city and its surrounding area, since it restored the political importance that Gratian had recently withdrawn. The usurper recreated a fully-functioning imperial court in Trier, to which those who wished to petition him were expected to travel, as is most clearly evident

³⁷Heather, 'Client Management', p. 19.

from the series of events known to modern scholarship as the Felician controversy.³⁸ From the viewpoint of the locally-based elites, who had benefited from the patronage and status that came with the presence of an emperor, his decision to march on Italy was, therefore, probably a worse outcome than his usurpation had been. Moreover, his presence in Trier had potential to represent a positive change with regard to the security of the Rhine frontier, since it reinstated direct imperial oversight of the region, to which Romans and barbarians alike had become accustomed.

Silvanus' short-lived usurpation was very different in character to those of Magnentius and Magnus Maximus, and not merely because it was based in Cologne rather than Trier. A skilled infantry commander, Silvanus is portrayed as a reluctant usurper, who was 'driven to extreme measures' by an accusation that he had conspired against Constantius, and his own inability to reach the Eastern emperor in time to deny the allegations.³⁹ His misfortune is reflected in Ammianus' sympathy for him, despite the fact that Ammianus himself had assisted Constantius' general, Ursicinus, in bringing about his death.⁴⁰ The circumstances of Silvanus' usurpation and the speed with which he was challenged by Constantius ensured that Silvanus posed a far less serious threat to the authority of the legitimate emperor than did Magnentius and Magnus Maximus. However, his rebellion demonstrates the danger of isolating influential and ambitious generals at the Rhine frontier, and therefore confirms the good sense behind the choice of Trier as an imperial residence. Although Silvanus had his

³⁸See below, pp. 123-4.

³⁹For the full account of this episode, see Ammianus Marcellinus, XV, 5, 1 – XV, 5, 32, pp. 132-52. The quotation is from XV, 5, 16, p. 142. For a more detailed discussion of the episode and Ammianus' treatment of it, see Hunt, 'Outsider', pp. 46-56.

⁴⁰Ammianus Marcellinus, XV, 5, 31, p. 152. This sympathy manifests itself in his portrayal of Silvanus as a Roman soldier, despite mentioning his Frankish roots; Ammianus makes clear Silvanus' belief that the Franks, not perceiving Silvanus as one of their own, 'would kill him or upon receipt of a bribe betray him': XV, 5, 16, p. 142. Silvanus, who had grown up within the Empire as the son of the Frankish general in the Roman army, Bonitus, was clearly thoroughly Romanised: C. Wickham, *The Inheritance of Rome* (London, 2009), p. 47; D. Hunt, 'The Successors of Constantine', in Cameron and Garnsey (eds), *CAH XIII*, p. 28.

hand forced by the plot against him, the Rhineland, and Cologne in particular, had a history of producing usurpers, whilst Silvanus had the support of his own troops. As such, establishing himself as the new emperor in a region by now very much used to having one appeared his most promising option.⁴¹ The relationship between the empty chair in Trier and Silvanus' usurpation seems to have been recognised by Constantius II, and probably influenced his decision to promote Julian.

Turning our attention to the question of how the Empire responded to the barbarians' incursions, it is clear that defence of the Rhineland was an imperial priority throughout the fourth century, and the resolution of internal political crises was always followed in short order by concerted and thoroughgoing campaigns, designed not merely to expel the barbarians from imperial territory, but to thoroughly subjugate them.⁴² A panegyric celebrating the marriage of Constantine and Fausta in 307, probably delivered in Trier, recounts Constantine's swift and uncompromising treatment of the Franks who had breached the Rhine frontier following the death of his father. Having captured their kings, he 'both punished their past crimes, and bound the slippery faith of the whole race with bonds of fear'.⁴³ Further detail is provided by the anonymous panegyrist who spoke in Trier in 310, describing how the emperor 'did not hesitate to punish with the ultimate penalty the kings of Francia themselves, who took the opportunity of [his] father's absence to violate the peace'.⁴⁴ This 'ultimate penalty' was meted out in Trier's amphitheatre, where the kings were thrown to wild beasts.⁴⁵

These speeches are interesting not merely for their description of Constantine's brutal retaliation against the Franks, but also for their evidence of how the barbarians were

⁴¹ Ammianus tells us that Silvanus had managed to get his chief officers on-side with promises of rewards: XV, 5, 16, p. 142.

⁴² Heather, 'Client Management', p. 20.

⁴³ *Panegyric VII, 4*, in *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors*, ed. and trans. Nixon and Rodgers, p. 195.

⁴⁴ *Panegyric VI, 10*, in *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors*, ed. and trans. Nixon and Rodgers, pp. 232-3; Heather, *Fall*, pp. 68, 81; Drinkwater, *Alamanni*, p. 191.

⁴⁵ See below, p. 220.

perceived and portrayed, at least in rhetorical contexts, as ‘slippery’, opportunistic, and capricious, and so thoroughly deserving of the harsh treatment they received.

Imperial reactions to the incursions of the mid-350s and late 380s reveal that Constantine’s hard-line approach to the defence of the Rhine frontier was continued by his successors, even though internal political conflicts were routinely prioritised over any risk barbarian groups posed to the border provinces. We have seen how Silvanus’ death was followed by a new spate of barbarian incursions, during which Cologne was captured. The barbarians then appear to have dispersed across a wide area of northern Gaul, although one may surely detect hyperbole in Julian’s claim that by the spring of 357, ‘the number of the towns whose walls had been dismantled was about forty-five, without counting citadels and smaller forts’.⁴⁶ Julian’s response to these attacks was swift and decisive, and imperial control was reinstated throughout the Rhineland, with particular emphasis placed by Ammianus on the recovery of Cologne. In addition to his aforementioned reference to the city’s capture, he reported how Julian, ‘having entered Cologne, did not stir from there until he had overawed the Frankish kings and lessened their pugnacity’, and had ‘recovered that very strongly fortified city’.⁴⁷ This emphasis in Ammianus’ account, despite the fact that the majority of Julian’s campaigns were against the Alamanni, whose territory lay significantly upstream from the city, is made clearer when his version of events is compared with that of Julian himself, which focuses on the more general nature of the disruption caused by the barbarians. Clearly, to Ammianus’ mind, Cologne was extremely important, presumably more because of its strategic and military significance than its role as a provincial capital. It is not certain at

⁴⁶Julian, *Letter to the Senate and People of Athens*, 279A, in *The Works of the Emperor Julian*, trans. W. C. Wright (London, 1913-23), p. 269. For overviews of Julian’s time in Gaul, see: G. W. Bowersock, *Julian the Apostate* (London, 1978), pp. 32-45; S. Tougher, *Julian the Apostate* (Edinburgh, 2007), pp. 31-43; Drinkwater, *Alamanni*, pp. 214-59.

⁴⁷Ammianus Marcellinus, XVI, 3, 1-2, p. 210.

what date the city was recovered, since Julian himself implies that this took place only after he was allowed full military control in 357, whereas Ammianus places it in 356, during Julian's first campaign season after being appointed Caesar.⁴⁸ As Bowersock notes, the earlier date seems more plausible, on the basis that Julian probably had more control in his first campaign season than his account suggests, and also had good reason to re-date his success to 357, in the form of his attempt to bolster his own claim to the imperial throne by tarnishing Constantius' reputation.⁴⁹ If we are to accept the date of 356, however, we should probably also re-date Julian's aforementioned reference to the state of affairs in spring 357 to the spring of the previous year.

Whatever the precise chronology of events, Julian's recovery of Cologne seems to have been followed by the regaining of Strasbourg and his capturing of the Alamannic king, Chnodomar, whom he sent to Constantius. After two further seasons, 'all the barbarians had been driven out of Gaul, most of the towns had been recovered, and a whole fleet of many ships had arrived from Britain'. To consolidate these accomplishments, Julian engaged in a series of further campaigns on the barbarians' side of the Rhine.⁵⁰ This successful reassertion of imperial control over the Rhineland undoubtedly helped to secure the region's peace and prosperity for the coming three decades or so. However, the length of time it took Julian to overcome the barbarians, together with the apparent extent of the geographical area through which they had dispersed, are important indications of how quickly and how seriously the situation could deteriorate when imperial attention was diverted away from the Rhine frontier.

⁴⁸Julian, *Letter to the Senate and People of Athens*, 278D-279C, pp. 269-71; Ammianus Marcellinus, XVI, 3, 2-3, p. 210.

⁴⁹Bowersock, *Julian*, p. 38.

⁵⁰Julian, *Letter to the Senate and People of Athens*, 279D-280D, pp. 271-3.

The reigns of Valentinian and Gratian were comparatively peaceful, but, as has been mentioned, the aftermath of the usurpation of Magnus Maximus (383 – 388) brought with it a new period of crisis at the Rhine, which affected Cologne’s inhabitants in particular. An important source for this period is the lost history of Sulpicius Alexander, as quoted by Gregory of Tours.⁵¹ The Franks, apparently exploiting a depletion in Roman troops at the Rhine and the preoccupation of both the usurper and the legitimate emperors, Theodosius I and Valentinian II, with their internal power struggle, are said to have crossed the frontier, slaughtered many inhabitants of the Roman provinces, and ‘ravaged the most fertile areas’ of Germania Secunda. Sulpicius reported that this attack ‘terrified the townspeople of Cologne’.⁵² Again, however, the imperial authorities, once they turned their attention to the matter, were soon successful in combating the barbarian threat. Nannienus and Quintinus, who were based in Trier and who commanded the Roman forces under Magnus Maximus, drove out those Franks who had not already returned to the eastern bank of the Rhine. This victory on Roman soil was followed by a disastrous campaign in Frankish territory, in which the imperial forces appear to have been outdone by the Franks’ skill as skirmishers.⁵³ Soon after, responsibility for dealing with the Franks passed to Arbogast, in his capacity as Valentinian II’s *magister militum*. We have already seen how he concluded an agreement with Marcomer and Sunno, the Frankish petty kings.⁵⁴ According to Gregory of Tours, he then travelled to Cologne in pursuit of the same kings, crossing the bridge over the Rhine and laying waste to the lands of the Frankish Bructeri and Chamavi. We can reasonably assume that his campaign was launched from Cologne’s bridgehead fortress of *Divitia*, which must have remained operational. His motivation for this

⁵¹Gregory of Tours, *History*, II, 9, pp. 52-5.

⁵²*Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁵³*Ibid.*, pp. 52-4.

⁵⁴See above, pp. 23-4.

expedition is not entirely clear, but it seems unlikely that Arbogast was, as Sulpicius claims, ‘urged on by tribal hatred’. Instead, it seems more plausible that the recently concluded agreement had broken down, or that it was decided that the barbarians’ incursions, coupled with their defeat of Nannienus’ and Quintinus’ forces, warranted further punishment than that which had already been meted out.⁵⁵ Despite the Empire’s defeat on barbarian soil, an embarrassing setback, Arbogast’s campaigns east of the Rhine are highly revealing of the imperial attitude to defence of the frontier in the late fourth century. Roman forces clearly remained committed to a policy of active defence, not only driving out barbarian groups who had crossed the river, but also engaging in retaliatory strikes in the territories of these groups, in order to nullify the danger they posed as comprehensively as possible and to remind them of Rome’s supremacy.⁵⁶

To conclude, it is clear that defence of the Rhine frontier was high on the Empire’s agenda in the fourth century, even if it was routinely subordinated to internal conflicts between emperors and usurpers. Whenever the Franks and Alamanni did launch attacks across the river, Roman emperors and generals never failed to drive out and punish those responsible. As such, these encounters, although at first glance giving the impression of a zone of frequent conflict around the frontier, serve to demonstrate that when suitable forces were applied to the task, the Empire was comfortably able to overcome any challenges its neighbours presented. The barbarians posed no real danger, even if our late antique sources would have us believe otherwise in order to accentuate

⁵⁵Gregory of Tours, *History*, II, 9, p. 55; H. Elton, ‘Defence in fifth-century Gaul’, in J. F. Drinkwater and H. Elton (eds), *Fifth-century Gaul: A Crisis of Identity?* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 167-8. As Heather has pointed out, the imperial authorities were keen to ensure that the barbarians were comprehensively defeated, and the Empire entered into negotiations as the dominant player: ‘Client Management’, pp. 19-20, 28.

⁵⁶Heather, ‘Client Management’, pp. 18, 20.

imperial military successes.⁵⁷ These tenacious efforts to defend the Rhine frontier in the fourth century should probably be seen in the context of the establishment of the praetorian prefecture and the imperial residence in Trier. The decision to concentrate imperial resources and attention within the region made the Empire's geographical periphery a core political centre, necessitating its stringent defence, and ensuring that those incursions which did occur, although damaging in the short term, did not pose a threat to the territorial integrity of the Empire. In times of internal political stability, meanwhile, the Rhineland's significance encouraged both sides to comply with the terms of the treaties that regulated relations between them. It facilitated imperial retaliation if the barbarians were seen to contravene their agreements with the Empire, whilst incentivising the imperial authorities to meet their obligations to their barbarian clients, in order to prevent attacks that would occur in uncomfortable proximity to the institutions of central government.

1.1.4 Roman-barbarian relations from the barbarian perspective

We have established that interactions between the imperial authorities and barbarian groups in the fourth century were characterised by lengthy periods of relative peace, regulated by diplomatic agreements, and occasional episodes of conflict, coinciding with internal imperial political crises. In order that we may fully understand these interactions, however, it is essential that we consider them from the barbarian as well as the imperial perspective. This is not easily achieved, since all of our sources were written by individuals who experienced and interpreted events through Roman

⁵⁷Drinkwater, *Alamanni*, pp. 178, 198-9, 243-4, 272-3, 302, 360-1; J. F. Drinkwater, "'The Germanic Threat on the Rhine Frontier": A Romano-Gallic Artefact?', in R. W. Mathisen and H. S. Sivan (eds), *Shifting Frontiers in Late Antiquity* (Aldershot, 1996), pp. 22-5; I. Wood, 'Barbarian Invasions and First Settlements', in Cameron and Garnsey (eds), *CAH XIII*, p. 516; Heather, 'The Barbarian in Late Antiquity', pp. 240-1.

eyes; we are, in fact, heavily reliant on precisely the same sources as were used above to reconstruct the Empire's attitude to defence of the Rhine frontier. In these sources, the barbarians almost universally serve as literary constructs in one way or another, and invariably live up to their savage, uncivilised, and untrustworthy stereotype.⁵⁸

Nevertheless, occasional remarks do allow us to offer limited answers to the most fundamental questions, of why the barbarians occasionally breached the Rhine frontier, and what they hoped to gain by doing so.

In respect of the first of these questions, we have noted how the usurpations of Magnentius (350 – 353), Silvanus (355), and Magnus Maximus (383 – 388) appear to have provided the Franks and Alamanni with both motive and opportunity to breach the frontier. In terms of motive, raiding was an indispensable component of barbarian life, whilst the acquisition of Roman goods was a crucial means by which barbarian leaders garnered prestige and enhanced their legitimacy. As such, it would have been a virtual necessity for these leaders to cross the Rhine in pursuit of plunder and to encourage new negotiations, if regime change meant that the normal diplomatic channels by which they usually received Roman material were disrupted.⁵⁹ With regard to opportunity, the coincidence between the barbarians' most serious incursions and usurpation attempts based in the Rhineland clearly implies that the Franks and Alamanni exploited periods during which imperial control was at a low ebb, the Empire's defensive capacity was

⁵⁸Heather, 'The Barbarian in Late Antiquity', pp. 234-7.

⁵⁹Halsall, *Migrations*, pp. 150-1; G. Halsall, 'The Barbarian Invasions', in P. Fouracre (ed.), *The New Cambridge Medieval History I: c. 500 – c. 700* (Cambridge, 2005), p. 47; P. Geary, 'Barbarians and ethnicity', in G. W. Bowersock et al, *Interpreting Late Antiquity: Essays on the Postclassical World* (Cambridge, MA, 2001), p. 113; Heather, 'Client Management', pp. 25-7.

temporarily weakened, and both the legitimate imperial authorities and the usurpers were focused upon their internecine conflict.⁶⁰

In the 350s, the incursions that Silvanus was sent to deal with had clearly begun in the context of a fairly lengthy absence of effective imperial control over the Rhineland, since it was ‘through long neglect’ that ‘Gaul was enduring bitter massacres, pillage, and the ravages of fire’.⁶¹ As such, it is clear that the opportunity existed for the barbarians to cross the frontier, whilst their motive was, as we have seen, probably provided by the breakdown of treaties that had previously helped to maintain peaceful relations. Silvanus restored order and probably concluded new treaties, but his death was followed by a fresh spate of attacks. The general’s Frankish ancestry has prompted Geary to suggest that these attacks were motivated by a desire to avenge him, but this seems highly unlikely for several reasons: Silvanus was the son of Constantine I’s general, Bonitus, and he had grown up within the Empire and was entirely Romanised; indeed, he had feared his Frankish kinsmen would kill him if he had gone to them seeking refuge from Constantius II.⁶² Instead, it is more plausible that this case conforms to the more general pattern; the frontier was breached because the leaders of the Franks and Alamanni were once more faced with a climate of political instability and a lack of effective Roman leadership in north-eastern Gaul, which prevented them from securing goods and favours through diplomacy, but provided them with an opportunity to plunder.⁶³

More blatant opportunism is described elsewhere in Ammianus’ account. He reports how Severus, the *magister equitum*, was on his way to Reims via Cologne when

⁶⁰For discussions of and references to the opportunism of the Franks and Alamanni, see: Drinkwater, *Alamanni*, pp. 201-59; Drinkwater, “Germanic Threat”, pp. 21-5; Halsall, *Migrations*, p. 148; Elton, ‘Defence’, pp. 168-9.

⁶¹Ammianus Marcellinus, XV, 5, 2, p. 132.

⁶²Geary, ‘Barbarians and Ethnicity’, p. 115.

⁶³Heather, ‘Client Management’, pp. 25-7, 41.

he encountered six hundred light-armed Frankish skirmishers, ‘who were plundering the districts unprotected by garrisons’. He goes on to explain that ‘the favourable opportunity that had roused their boldness to the point of action was that they thought that while Caesar was busily employed among the retreats of the Alamanni, and there was no one to prevent them, they could load themselves with a wealth of booty’. He suggests that Julian was ‘disturbed by the novelty of the act’, but this novelty probably lay more in the Franks’ brazenness in carrying out raids whilst a campaign at the frontier was ongoing, than their breaching of the frontier in itself.⁶⁴ We have seen, after all, that opportunistic raids were not in themselves uncommon reactions to periods of crisis within the Empire at this time. Similarly, Ammianus is clear that in 378, the Alamannic *Lentienses*’ decision to cross the frozen Rhine, with the intention of plundering the provinces, was prompted by the news brought by one of their kinsmen serving in the Roman army that Gratian was about to march east with many of his forces to assist his uncle, Valens, against the Goths. Their plan was foiled and they were comprehensively defeated, but this example demonstrates that the barbarians’ regular interactions with the Empire brought them a heightened awareness – even anticipation – of imperial political circumstances, which they were ready to use to their advantage, should an opportunity present itself.⁶⁵

A comparable combination of motive and opportunity is identifiable with regard to the incursions associated with Magnus Maximus’ usurpation in the 380s, although we lack such a comprehensive account as Ammianus provides for the events of the 350s. To judge by the extracts presented by Gregory of Tours, Sulpicius Alexander does not appear to have made an explicit causal connection between the internal political instability and the incursions, but he certainly implied that they were interrelated

⁶⁴ Ammianus Marcellinus, XVII, 2, 1-2, pp. 310-12.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, XXXI, 10, 2-17, pp. 444-52; Drinkwater, *Alamanni*, pp. 310-12.

episodes. He recounted ‘how Maximus gave up all hope of the imperial throne, lost his reason and went to live in Aquileia’, and how it was ‘at that time’ that ‘the Franks invaded the Roman province of Germania under their leaders Genobaud, Marcomer, and Sunno’.⁶⁶ On the limited basis of this chronological connection made by our source, it seems reasonable to infer that the circumstances under which the barbarians breached the Rhine frontier in the late 380s were probably broadly similar to those that had existed in the 350s.

Turning our attention to the issue of what the Franks and Alamanni hoped to gain by breaching the frontier, it is quite apparent that the intention was not usually to seize or settle within imperial territory, but rather to plunder the provinces, before returning to their own lands east of the Rhine with their booty. As such, despite the emphasis placed on their pugnacity and dangerousness by Ammianus and Julian, we should conceive of them operating primarily in small groups, which would have been well-suited to destructive smash-and-grab raids, but not to sustained military conflicts or siege warfare. The aforementioned incident involving six hundred Frankish skirmishers is probably the most useful guide to the numbers involved in a typical war-band. By comparison, their more sustained attacks, such as their capture of Cologne in the mid-350s, were exceptional, and should probably be seen to have resulted from the Empire’s failure to respond, rather than from the intentions, numbers, or tactics of the barbarians themselves.⁶⁷

The predominant interest in raiding, rather than the seizure of territory, is confirmed by numerous references in our sources. For example, Ammianus records that, following Constantius’ defeat of Magnentius, the emperor waged war upon the

⁶⁶Gregory of Tours, *History*, II, 9, p. 52.

⁶⁷Halsall, *Migrations*, p. 145; see above, pp. 25-6, 29-30.

Alamannic kings, Gundomarius and Vandomarius, ‘whose frequent raids were devastating that part of Gaul which adjoined their frontiers’.⁶⁸ In the reign of Valentinian I, meanwhile, Mainz was attacked by ‘a prince of the Alamanni named Rando... with a light-armed band equipped only for brigandage’.⁶⁹ Similarly, in reference to the 380s, Sulpicius Alexander recorded that many Franks ‘were heavily laden with booty, for they had plundered the richest parts of the province’ when they ‘crossed back over the Rhine’.⁷⁰ Those who still remained on Roman territory had been ‘planning to get back to their plundering’, when they were attacked and defeated by Nannienus and Quintinus.⁷¹ Exceptions to this preoccupation with raiding seem rare, but include the aforementioned settlement of Franks in Toxandria, which was eventually sanctioned by Julian.⁷²

We can conclude, therefore, that the barbarians involved in attacks across the Rhine in the fourth century were the Empire’s immediate neighbours, whose activities within imperial territory essentially amounted to opportunistic, short-term raiding by relatively small, uncoordinated groups. Such incursions took place when both emperor and usurper were focused on their internecine rivalry, and were brought under control shortly after the civil unrest was resolved. As such, the raids posed no threat to the territorial integrity of the Empire, and caused no more than limited and reparable material damage to the cities of Trier and Cologne. It was, however, largely down to this civil unrest that the incursions had occurred at all. Despite a paucity of specific evidence, it appears that a temporary neglect of frontier defences and the breakdown of diplomatic arrangements between the Empire and the barbarian leaders provided the

⁶⁸Ammianus Marcellinus, XIV, 10, 1, p. 78.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, XXVII, 10, 1, p. 62.

⁷⁰Gregory of Tours, *History*, II, 9, p. 53.

⁷¹*Ibid.*

⁷²See above, p. 23.

two essential contexts in which attacks took place. The society of the Empire's barbarian neighbours was so closely intertwined with the affairs of the Empire itself that when the Empire was troubled by internal instability, political relationships amongst the barbarian peoples were also destabilised. Nonetheless, it should be emphasised that Franks and Alamanni were active agents, who exercised their own will, who were prepared to cooperate with or attack the Empire depending on their leaders' assessments of the complex and changing political landscape, and whose interaction with imperial authorities took place within a long-established and complex framework.

1.1.5 Imperial withdrawal from the Rhineland

So far in this chapter, we have determined that the collapse of imperial power in the Rhineland did not take place before the end of the fourth century, since the frontier remained intact and treaties were still being renewed with the Franks and Alamanni as late as the 390s. However, we have also uncovered several clues to suggest that the maintenance of peaceful relations at the frontier was dependent upon the Empire's strong presence in the region, and the emperors' readiness to reassert their authority there following internal political crises and barbarian incursions. The apparent severity of the barbarian raids of the 350s and 380s can, meanwhile, serve as an indication of how rapidly regional security could deteriorate if left unchecked. In light of all of this, it is crucial that we seek to understand the thorny issues of the transfer of the imperial residence and the praetorian prefecture out of Trier. If these relocations, to Milan and to Arles respectively, can be shown to have been decided upon *in the absence of* any immediate contingencies, they would represent a reassessment of imperial strategy, and, by extension, of the importance of the Rhineland within it. In turn, this may suggest that

the imperial authorities should be held at least partly responsible for causing or allowing the disintegration of imperial power in the region in the fifth century. If, on the other hand, the withdrawal of the institutions of central government from Trier can be seen to have occurred *after* devastating barbarian attacks, the decision to pull out would be easier to explain, and this would go some way towards exonerating the Empire from having played any significant role in its own downfall in the Belgic and Germanic provinces.

The Emperor Gratian's transfer of his court from Trier to Milan took place around 380. Thereafter, imperial visits to Trier, including by Gratian's brother, Valentinian II (375 – 392), were infrequent and relatively brief, and it was not until the reign of the Frankish king, Clovis (c. 481 – 511), that a strong and centralising political presence was once again established on a long-term basis in the Rhineland.⁷³ As such, Gratian's decision marked a crucial turning-point for the region in the long term, although it is not entirely clear why it came about. It certainly does not appear to have been triggered by immediate defensive concerns at the Rhine frontier, since Gratian's father, Valentinian I, had not only campaigned against the Alamanni, but also 'fortified the entire Rhine'.⁷⁴ Gratian himself had since defeated the Alamannic *Lentienses* in 378, having been forced by their incursions to delay his march eastwards to assist Valens against the Goths.⁷⁵ He was, therefore, militarily experienced, and a far cry from Wightman's description of a 'gentle and likeable character, though unfortunately for himself lacking the tougher qualities', whom we might expect to have run for the hills at

⁷³Halsall, *Migrations*, p. 209.

⁷⁴Ammianus Marcellinus, XXVIII, 2, 1, p. 122; XXVIII, 5, 8-12, pp. 164-6; Heather, 'The Barbarian in Late Antiquity', p. 240.

⁷⁵Ammianus Marcellinus, XXXI, 10, 2-17, pp. 444-52; Orosius, *Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*, VII, 33, 8, ed. and trans. A. Fear (Liverpool, 2010), p. 382; Drinkwater, *Alamanni*, pp. 310-12; see above, p. 36.

the first sign of trouble.⁷⁶ That Gratian's decision was part of a more comprehensive strategic reorganisation of the Empire is also unlikely, since if this were the case, we might expect the praetorian prefecture to have been transferred to southern Gaul at the same time, to ease communication between the prefect and the emperor in Italy, rather than somewhat later. It seems most plausible, therefore, that the relocation of the imperial residence to Milan was not a reflection of circumstances in or attitudes towards the Rhineland at all. Rather, the fact that it came soon after Valens' defeat at Adrianople, and in the context of continued trouble at the Danube frontier, suggests that it was probably a sensible contingent measure, intended to safeguard Italy and the Western provinces against the Visigothic threat, in a similar way as the imperial presence in Trier had helped to secure Gaul for much of the century.⁷⁷ It was not necessarily intended from the outset to be anything more than a temporary expedient. However, it rapidly resulted in the emergence of a power vacuum in the Rhineland, which was to prove fatal for Gratian, whose absence from Trier was exploited by the usurper Magnus Maximus in 383. From the perspective of those living in the Rhineland, the speed with which this usurpation followed Gratian's departure probably mitigated the effects of the emperor's leaving. As such, whereas Gratian's transfer of his court to Italy proved a pivotal event in the long term, because it became a permanent measure, the fundamental turning-point in the short-term was, as Halsall rightly suggests, probably Magnus Maximus' defeat.⁷⁸

Sometime after the imperial residence was moved to northern Italy in 380, the praetorian prefecture was relocated to Arles; this again was an important decision, since it completed the withdrawal of the institutions of central government from Trier.

⁷⁶Wightman, *Trier*, p. 64.

⁷⁷Drinkwater, "Germanic Threat", p. 29. M. Kulikowski, *Rome's Gothic Wars: From the Third Century to Alaric* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 151-2.

⁷⁸Halsall, *Migrations*, p. 199.

Establishing the precise date at which this transfer took place is fraught with difficulty but is an issue of considerable importance, if we are to understand what role the Empire played in the disintegration of imperial power in the Rhineland in the fifth century.⁷⁹

Whereas a date after the invasion of the Vandals, Alans, and Sueves in 406 would imply that the Empire merely responded to its loss of regional military control, and to the danger facing the praetorian prefect, a date earlier than the invasion would suggest that the central imperial authorities had chosen to shift political authority away from north-eastern Gaul, without their hand having been forced in any obvious or immediate way.

The broad parameters for establishing the date of the transfer of the prefecture are provided by two pieces of legislation. The first of these was issued by Theodosius I, then at Milan, and was promulgated by the Gallic prefect on 17th June 390 in Trier, where the prefecture was evidently still located.⁸⁰ The second, known as the *Constitutio Saluberrima*, which re-established the Gallic Council, was issued by Honorius on 17 April 418 and received by the prefect in Arles on 23 May.⁸¹ We can then restrict this timeframe further, thanks to circumstantial indicators. First, it seems highly unlikely that the prefecture was transferred before 395. After the death of Valentinian II in 392, control of the West fell to Eugenius and Arbogast, the *magister militum* who had installed him. The pair spent most of their time in the Rhineland until their departure for Italy in the spring of 393, and Arbogast arranged the repair of an important building in Cologne and carried out a campaign across the river.⁸² In light of this initial concentration of effort within the Rhineland, it is difficult to envisage them having been inclined to remove the Gallic administrative centre from the region. Furthermore, civil

⁷⁹Heinen, *Trevererland*, p. 261.

⁸⁰*Theodosian Code*, VIII, 5, 50, in *The Theodosian Code and Novels and the Sirmondian Constitutions*, ed. and trans. C. Pharr (Princeton, 1952), p. 202; J. –R. Palanque, *Essai sur la Préfecture du Prétoire du Bas-Empire* (Paris, 1933), pp. 80-1.

⁸¹*Epistolae Arelatenses genuinae* 8, ed. W. Gundlach, *MGH Epp.* III, 1 (Berlin, 1892), pp. 13-14.

⁸²This building may have been the *Praetorium*: see below, pp. 228-9. Gregory of Tours, *History*, II, 9, p. 55.

war soon became inevitable, given that Eugenius was not recognised by Theodosius, creating a context in which it is highly unlikely that the general and his puppet emperor would have had time for sweeping administrative reorganisation. Their defeat did not come until early September 394, so it is doubtful that the transfer of the prefecture could have occurred before the start of 395.⁸³ On the other hand, it seems improbable that the transfer took place any later than 408. The usurper Constantine III, unlike Arbogast and Eugenius, and every fourth-century usurper before them, did not head directly for the Rhineland upon launching his bid for the imperial throne, but instead seems to have landed in Boulogne, before heading south, rather than towards the Rhine. By early summer 408, he had established his court in Arles, implying that the praetorian prefecture was probably already based there.⁸⁴

Attempts to achieve greater precision within this window have in recent times been shaped by the opposing interpretations of Palanque and Chastagnol, who have respectively argued for dates of c.395 and c.407.⁸⁵ Kulikowski, for example, has favoured the latter date, whilst Ewig deemed Stilicho responsible for the transfer, in 395.⁸⁶ Others, including Halsall and Heinen, have orientated themselves within this framework, whilst remaining firmly on the fence. Halsall, reluctant to tackle the problem, emphasised that ‘there is little decisive evidence either way, although it must

⁸³J. –R. Palanque, ‘La date du transfert de la Préfecture des Gaules de Trèves à Arles’, *Revue des Etudes Anciennes* 36 (1934), p. 364; Orosius, *Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*, VII, 35, 11-14, pp. 390-1.

⁸⁴J. F. Drinkwater, ‘The Usurpers Constantine III (407-411) and Jovinus (411-413)’, *Britannia* 29 (1998), pp. 275-6; Palanque, ‘La date du transfert’, p. 360; J. Matthews, *Western Aristocracies and The Imperial Court* (Oxford, 1975), p. 309; T. S. Burns, *Barbarians within the Gates of Rome: A Study of Roman Military Policy and the Barbarians, ca.375-425 A.D.* (Indianapolis, 1994), p. 214.

⁸⁵Palanque, ‘La date du transfert’, pp. 359-65; A. Chastagnol, ‘Le repli sur Arles des services administratifs gaulois en l’an 407 de notre ère’, *Revue Historique* 249 (1973), pp. 23-40. In 1980, in the context of his study of the council of Turin, C. Chaffin published a balanced appraisal of the debate between these two: ‘The application of Nicaea Canon 6 and the date of the synod of Turin’, *Rivista di Storia e Letteratura Religiosa* 16 (1980), pp. 257-72.

⁸⁶M. Kulikowski, ‘Barbarians in Gaul, usurpers in Britain’, *Britannia* 31 (2000), p. 332; M. Kulikowski, ‘Two Councils of Turin’, *Journal of Theological Studies* 47 (April 1996), p. 163; E. Ewig, ‘Von der Kaiserstadt zur Bischofsstadt. Beobachtungen zur Geschichte von Trier im 5. Jahrhundert’, in Ewig (ed.), *Spätantikes und Fränkisches Gallien*, II, p. 34.

have taken place between 395 and 418', before expressing a slight preference for an earlier date, on the basis of the closure of Trier's mint in the early 390s.⁸⁷ For his part, Heinen decides that 'a firm decision... does not appear possible, on the basis of the given sources'.⁸⁸

The evidence is indeed both limited in volume and problematic in interpretation, but the importance of the event in the context of this study means that it warrants particularly close consideration. It seems sensible to proceed by means of the interpretations of Palanque and Chastagnol, which have proven so influential. In his attempt to prove that the prefecture was transferred in or soon after 395, Palanque drew upon a letter written by the Roman senator Symmachus to his friend Protasius, in which Symmachus remarked, 'if you consider that now the best prince and chief magistrate are absent, no-one of our order travels to and from the neighbourhood of the Rhine'.⁸⁹ Symmachus' death in the first half of 402 provides a *terminus ante quem* for the letter, but its relevance to the issue of the prefecture is uncertain. The 'best prince' is obviously Honorius, but given that Honorius' reign was largely orchestrated by Stilicho, it seems far more logical to interpret the phrase 'chief magistrate' as a reference to him than to the Gallic praetorian prefect. It is possible that Symmachus had in mind that Stilicho was consul in 400, since the consulship was a magistracy, and that the letter was written in that year.⁹⁰ It is, therefore, conceivable that the letter bears no relevance to the issue of the transfer of the prefecture, and alludes instead to the withdrawal of the imperial residence from Trier a couple of decades earlier. Similarly flawed is Palanque's argument that references to the southern Gallic provinces as the 'Seven

⁸⁷Halsall, *Migrations*, p. 209. On the closure of the mint: Gilles, 'Münzprägung', p. 317.

⁸⁸Heinen, *Trevererland*, p. 263.

⁸⁹Symmachus, *Letter to Protasius*, Book IV, Letter 28, 1, in *Lettres*, ed. J. -P. Callu, vol. II (Paris, 1982), p. 109; Palanque, 'La date du transfert', p. 360.

⁹⁰Heinen, *Trevererland*, pp. 262-3; Kulikowski, 'Two Councils', p. 163. Palanque suggests that it is more likely to be a reference to the praetorian prefect than to Stilicho: Palanque, 'La date du transfert', p. 360.

Provinces' from 396 onwards, rather than the 'Five Provinces' or 'Aquitania', represented a real change, and were a direct consequence of the transfer of the prefecture. Chastagnol has decisively shown the irrelevance of this semantic change to the issue at hand.⁹¹

Nonetheless, Chastagnol's own argument, for a date in 407, is equally problematic. It depends upon the presumption that the relocation of the prefecture would have necessitated contemporaneous transfers to Arles of the vicar of the southern diocese and the governor of Viennensis, and relies heavily upon an inscription found at the Vatican in the 1950s. This inscription records the death of an Eventius in mid-summer 407, who had 'dispensed justice in Vienne'.⁹² It seems reasonable to interpret this as meaning that he had been provincial governor, or *consularis*, of Viennensis. According to Chastagnol, this demonstrates that neither the governor of Viennensis nor the praetorian prefect were yet in Arles by summer 407, although he suggests they would have moved there shortly thereafter, to escape the Vandals, Alans, and Sueves, and the usurper, Constantine III.⁹³ In making this latter claim, he echoed the analysis Marrou offered in his original publication of the inscription.⁹⁴ However, there is nothing in the inscription itself to suggest that Eventius was still governor of Viennensis when he died, and we should also consider that he may well have travelled to Rome for reasons other than flight from the invaders and usurper, for example to advance his career.⁹⁵ The inscription is not, therefore, convincing evidence that the governor was based in Vienne in until 407, and it would not, in any case, have been essential that that

⁹¹Palanque, 'La date du transfert', pp. 360-3; Chastagnol, 'Le repli sur Arles', pp. 24-7.

⁹²'*Dixit iura Viennae*'; literally, 'said the law in Vienne'. H. -I. Marrou, 'L'epitaphe vaticane du consulaire de Vienne Eventius', *Revue des Études anciennes* 54 (1952), pp. 326-30.

⁹³Chastagnol, 'Le repli sur Arles', pp. 31-2. This interpretation is accepted by Kulikowski, 'Two Councils', p. 163.

⁹⁴Marrou, 'L'epitaphe', pp. 326-30.

⁹⁵Drinkwater, 'The Usurpers', p. 276.

the vicar and governor moved to Arles at the same time as the prefecture did.⁹⁶

Meanwhile, Chastagnol's argument that the Gallic Council established by means of the *Constitutio Saluberrima* in 418 had a predecessor, set up by the praetorian prefect Petronius earlier in the fifth century, seems reasonable in itself. It is also plausible that this council was formed after the praetorian prefecture was transferred.⁹⁷ However, Petronius' prefecture cannot be dated with any greater specificity than to the period between 402 and 408, so his establishment of this prototype Gallic Council could just as easily have occurred in c. 402, following the transfer of the prefecture in the late 390s, as in 408.⁹⁸

Another possibility, offered by Drinkwater, also warrants some brief consideration. Accepting Chastagnol's interpretation that the prefecture was transferred to Arles in 407, he has proposed an intermediate stage, whereby it was first moved to Lyons in the early years of the fifth century, before being relocated again. His grounds for this suggestion are that it is difficult to imagine a large-scale reorganisation of the imperial administrative system, such as a relocation of the prefecture directly from Trier to Arles would entail, having been undertaken during the troubles of 407.⁹⁹ This is certainly true, but dating the transfer to c.395 gets around this problem equally well, especially since there seems to be no hard evidence to support his conjecture, which merely adds another layer of complication to an issue that is already complex enough.

We have, therefore, identified serious concerns with the existing attempts to pin down the timing of the transfer of the prefecture, and must look further if we are to seek a satisfactory, if not definitive, solution to the question of when it took place. One

⁹⁶Matthews, *Aristocracies*, pp. 275, 333; Chaffin, 'Nicaea Canon 6', p. 260.

⁹⁷Chastagnol, 'Le repli sur Arles', p. 29.

⁹⁸Petronius, *PLRE II*, ed. J. R. Martindale (Cambridge, 1980), p. 862.

⁹⁹Drinkwater, 'The Usurpers', pp. 274, 277.

source that stands up to scrutiny somewhat better than the others is the canons of the council of Turin, which was called ostensibly to deal with the divisive issue of imperial intervention in Church matters.¹⁰⁰ Canon two of the council is of particular interest to us, since it deals with the problem of metropolitan authority in the province of Viennensis, which was claimed by the bishops of both Vienne and Arles. The uncertainty over this issue implies that some change in circumstances must have occurred that could have led both bishops to believe their city had claims to be the provincial capital, since the Council of Nicaea in 325 had established the principle that metropolitan authority was to be determined on that basis.¹⁰¹ Those attending the council evidently shared the bishops' confusion, since a curious resolution came about, whereby it was decided that both bishops must try to prove their city was the metropolitan, but that in the meantime the cities of the province should be divided between them on the basis of geographical proximity. Given that the administration of Viennensis had long been based at Vienne, and the province took the name of that city, the bishop of Vienne's claim should be seen as based on tradition and the straightforward application of the Nicene rules. Arles, therefore, is the city that must have experienced a change in circumstances, which prompted its bishop to believe he had a valid claim to provincial primacy. That change in circumstances is most easily explained by a recent enhancement of the administrative status of Arles, in the form of the arrival of the praetorian prefecture.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ *Concilium Taurinense*, in *Concilia Galliae a. 314 – a. 506*, ed. C. Munier, CCSL 148 (Turnholt, 1963), pp. 52-58.

¹⁰¹ The connection between the canons of the Council of Turin and canon 6 of the Council of Nicaea of 325 is made by Chastagnol, 'Le repli sur Arles', p. 37. It is questioned by Chaffin, 'Nicaea Canon 6', p. 265.

¹⁰² Chaffin has suggested that this might be 'too simple' an explanation, but his alternative argument, that the metropolitan city was in fact the seat of the *consularis*, not the praetorian prefect, seems rather vague: 'Nicaea Canon 6', p. 265.

Establishing the date at which the council took place is, therefore, potentially a way of arriving at a *terminus ante quem* for the transfer of the prefecture from Trier to Arles.¹⁰³ Unfortunately, no sources explicitly provide this date, so we are reliant on internal data from within the canons themselves to determine the year. We can begin by noting that it must have been convened after the death of Ambrose of Milan on 4 April 397, since canon six referred to letters written by ‘Bishop Ambrose of blessed memory’.¹⁰⁴ It seems, moreover, to have preceded the death of Bishop Felix of Trier, on the basis of the canon’s mention of those who *are* in communication with him. Our earliest evidence for Felix’s death is his tenth-century *Vita*, which claims he died in 398 or 399, meaning that the council was most likely held in 398.¹⁰⁵ Of course, it would be mistaken to assume that this later *Vita* necessarily provides a historically accurate account of Felix’s life, and we should perhaps be wary of reading too much into a specific choice of tense within the canon. Nonetheless, these indications are interestingly consistent with other clues in favour of an early date. In the first place, a letter of Pope Zosimus, written in September 417, tells us that ‘many years later’ than the Council of Turin, at the time of the usurpation of Constantine III, Bishop Proculus of Marseille consecrated a monk named Lazarus bishop of Aix-en-Provence, even though he had previously concurred with the condemnation of Lazarus by the council in a dispute between him and Bishop Briccius of Tours.¹⁰⁶ On this basis, the council must have taken place earlier than 407, since it is unlikely that a large church council could have taken place during the troubles of that year, and we must also allow for the ‘many

¹⁰³ Although Drinkwater has remarked that the uncertainty surrounding the date of the council renders it unable to provide any reliable help in dating the transfer of the prefecture: ‘The Usurpers’, p. 274, footnote 32.

¹⁰⁴ *Concilium Taurinense*, Canon 6, p. 58; N. McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan: Church and Court in a Christian Capital* (Berkeley, 1994), pp. 366-8.

¹⁰⁵ *Concilium Taurinense*, Canon 6, pp. 57-8: the present-tense Latin verb used is ‘communicant’. Felix became bishop in late 386 or early 387, and his *Vita* claims that he retired after twelve years in office and died soon after his retirement: *De Sancto Felice Archiepiscopo Trevirensi*, III, 9, *AA SS Mart.* III (Antwerp, 1668), p. 624 = *BHL* 2892 (Brussels, 1898-1901).

¹⁰⁶ Pope Zosimus, *Letter* 3, 3, ed. J. -P. Migne, *PL* 20 (Paris, 1845), columns 655-6.

years' Pope Zosimus claims had elapsed between the council and Lazarus' consecration. In addition, it is worth noting, as Chaffin emphasises, that the formula used in the Turin documentation is similar to that used at Toledo in September 400. A date in the late 390s would also explain the canon's reference to letters written by Bishop Ambrose, who died in 397, since it would situate the council in a period when such appeals to Milan were common.¹⁰⁷

On balance, therefore, it seems reasonable to prefer an earlier date of 397 or 398, rather than a later date in the early fifth century, for the Council of Turin. If we accept that the Council's second canon alludes to an elevation in Arles' status, which is most reasonably explained by the arrival of the praetorian prefect there, then the transfer of the prefecture from Trier to Arles must have occurred sometime between 395 and 398. Within this timeframe, a date closer to 395 probably makes most sense, since this would give enough time for the row concerning ecclesiastical primacy over Viennensis to have developed, and would place the transfer around the time of Honorius' accession, which would have provided a context for such reorganisation. One may even speculate that the transfer may have been finalised by Honorius' general, Stilicho, during his visit to the Rhineland in the mid 390s, at which time he renewed treaties with the Empire's barbarian neighbours.¹⁰⁸ The closure of Trier's mint in the 390s, together with Stilicho's possible removal of frontier troops from the Rhine in 401, also make far more sense if the prefecture was transferred out of Trier c. 395 than if it remained in the city until c. 407.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷Chaffin, 'Nicaea Canon 6', p. 261; p. 264. Kulikowski has argued that there were two Councils of Turin, and that the extant canons belong to the second of these. However, his argument is unsubstantiated, and is probably best dismissed: 'Two Councils', pp. 159-68.

¹⁰⁸Ewig, 'Von der Kaiserstadt zur Bischofsstadt', p. 34; see above, p. 24.

¹⁰⁹Gilles, 'Münzprägung', p. 317; Wightman, *Trier*, p. 68; see below, pp. 53-5.

If we believe that the prefecture was transferred in or shortly after 395, this has important implications for our understanding of the Empire's role in its own collapse in the Rhineland in the early fifth century. It suggests that the decision to withdraw from the region was not made in the wake of a devastating barbarian invasion, but rather at a time of relative peace and stability at the frontier. It must, therefore, have been determined by internal political considerations, in which the Rhineland played no major part, rather than by external pressure. Among these domestic concerns, the progressive withdrawal of the emperors across the Alps to northern Italy in the last two decades of the fourth century should be seen as the crucial factor, since it made the relocation of the Gallic prefecture to Arles a sensible decision on logistical grounds, ensuring easier communication between the prefect and the emperor.¹¹⁰ Additional factors, of lesser immediacy and indeterminable importance, may have been the recent usurpation of Magnus Maximus, the death of Valentinian II in mysterious circumstances, and the subsequent attempt by Arbogast and Eugenius to establish control in the Rhineland, despite Theodosius I's opposition. Such events certainly could have created the perception that Trier was no longer a suitable location for the Empire's highest ranking officials.¹¹¹

The Empire's decision to transfer the praetorian prefecture to Arles appears to mark a further stage in what had evidently become a deliberate strategy of relocating the institutions of central imperial government to southern Gaul and Italy. Clearly, this significantly downgraded the importance of Trier, Cologne, and the Rhineland more generally vis-à-vis other cities and regions, and ensured that attention was henceforth to be concentrated upon the Mediterranean heartlands of the Empire, in which the major governmental institutions were now located. Our earlier discussion of the damaging

¹¹⁰Heinen, *Trevererland*, p. 262.

¹¹¹Palanque, 'La date du transfert', pp. 364-5.

barbarian incursions of the fourth century, which had occurred when imperial attention was temporarily diverted away from the defensive situation at the Rhine, are indicative of the potential risks that such a retreat from the Rhineland would pose to frontier security.

1.2 The Fifth Century

1.2.1 Overview

With the death of Valentinian II in 392, Theodosius I, the Eastern emperor, appointed his sons, Arcadius (383 – 408) and Honorius (393 – 423) junior emperors in the East and West respectively. Both became senior emperors upon the death of their father in January 395, although much imperial business was carried out by their generalissimos. Stilicho, Honorius' general until 408, faced real problems in the first few years of the fifth century; Italy was attacked by both Alaric and his Goths, and Radagaisus with a mixed group of barbarians. In order to deal with these threats, Stilicho may have removed troops from the Rhine frontier, since the Franks and Alamanni provided comparatively little immediate cause for concern. This appears, however, to have helped pave the way for a group of Vandals, Alans and Sueves to cross the river and enter Gaul largely unopposed on the last day of 406.¹¹² This is seen as one of the seminal moments in the history of the later Roman Empire, and was followed by a series of further incursions across the frontier by the Franks and Alamanni in the first half of the fifth century. The invasion was also an important

¹¹²Kulikowski, 'Barbarians in Gaul', pp. 325-31, has attempted to re-date this invasion to 31 December 405. His interpretation gained some acceptance, notably by Goffart, *Barbarian Tides*, p. 74, and Halsall, *Migrations*, p. 211. However, the chronology of the invasion and the usurpation of Constantine III, discussed below, does not necessitate this re-dating, whilst Kulikowski's own subsequent downplaying of this line of argument means that it is probably best ignored: Kulikowski, *Rome's Gothic Wars*, p. 217, footnote 37; M. Kulikowski, 'The Western Kingdoms', in S. F. Johnson (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity* (Oxford, 2012), p. 36.

context, although not the immediate motivation, for the usurpation of Constantine III (407 – 411), whose rebellion was immediately followed by that of Jovinus (411 – 413). By the mid-fifth century, the cumulative effect of these political crises had long since made it infeasible for the Empire to intervene in any meaningful way in northern Gaul. Cologne fell permanently to the Franks, whose incursions across the Rhine had apparently led to a growth in their influence. Trier, meanwhile, was under the direct control of a *comes* named Arbogast by the 470s. What remained of the Western Empire at this time was being ruled by one short-lived would-be emperor after another, none of whom was able, nor indeed can be seen to have tried very hard, to re-establish imperial control in northern Gaul. By around 480, Trier too had fallen into Frankish hands, and soon after the turn of the fifth century, both Trier and Cologne were absorbed into the rapidly-expanding Merovingian Frankish kingdom of Clovis (c. 481 – 511).

1.2.2 The barbarian *invasions* of 406 and 451 from the imperial perspective

At the beginning of the fifth century, the political status of the Rhineland was markedly different from that which had characterised the preceding hundred years. The imperial court and the Gallic praetorian prefecture had been transferred out of Trier, and the prioritisation of preventing rebellions and incursions in the region, which appears to have underpinned the decision to concentrate imperial power there in the fourth century, seems to have been replaced by a refocusing of attention on the Empire's Mediterranean heartlands. Our evidence concerning the fourth century reveals the danger that such imperial inattentiveness to the Rhineland, even on a temporary basis, posed to frontier security. As such, it is not all that surprising to observe that the first half of the fifth century saw numerous barbarian attacks across the Rhine frontier. It is, however,

important to note that there was a significant difference between some of these fifth-century attacks and the raids that had taken place in the previous century. As well as the routine Frankish and Alamannic *incursions* we might expect to have resulted from the Empire's distractedness, two major *invasions* occurred in 406 and 451, which were entirely game-changing insofar as imperial control over the Rhineland is concerned, and which do not fit within the normal framework of Roman-barbarian relations at the Rhine frontier. If we are to determine whether imperial collapse in the Rhineland in the first half of the fifth century resulted from internal problems that shook the Empire to its foundations, or from the movements of barbarian groups, it is essential that we seek to understand what role imperial withdrawal played in facilitating or initiating these barbarian invasions, and how the imperial authorities responded once the frontier had been breached. In considering the responses of the imperial authorities, particular attention must be paid to the actions of the *magistri militum* at the times of the invasions: Stilicho and Aetius.

By the 390s, the Rhineland's defences were already considerably weaker than they had been only a couple of decades earlier. The Empire's removal of its major political institutions from the region dramatically reduced its importance within the imperial system; internal conflicts involving Magnus Maximus, and Arbogast and Eugenius probably prompted the withdrawal of soldiers from the Rhine as a short-term measure. Many lives were also lost in clashes between the usurpers and the legitimate emperors, and between Roman forces and the Franks and Alamanni.¹¹³ Rather than rectifying this situation, Stilicho, the *magister militum* at the turn of the fifth century, appears to have exacerbated it, or at best did little to improve it. The specific evidence for his action or inaction is nevertheless meagre. It takes the form of a line in Claudian's

¹¹³Halsall, *Migrations*, p. 199.

Gothic War, in which the author recounted that Stilicho left the Rhine frontier defended solely by ‘the fear of Rome’, and a line in his panegyric on the consulship of Stilicho, in which he mentioned how ‘no legion guards [the Gallic] frontier’.¹¹⁴ These statements are widely held to mean that the general summoned more troops from the already diminished frontier divisions in order to bolster his forces against the Gothic leaders, Alaric and Radagaisus, who were separately threatening Italy. This idea is, of course, not explicitly substantiated by Claudian’s statements, but it nonetheless has been widely endorsed by modern scholars, perhaps because it helps explain how the Vandals, Alans, and Sueves were able to enter the Empire unopposed on the final day of 406.¹¹⁵ However, we should bear in mind the already weakened state of the frontier defences, which means that Stilicho does not necessarily need to have removed further troops, in order for the Rhine to have appeared virtually ungarrisoned. What is clear from Claudian’s testimony, particularly in his panegyrics honouring Honorius and Stilicho, is that the lynchpin of Stilicho’s defensive strategy at the Rhine was the successful implementation of his treaties with neighbouring barbarian leaders, coupled with the fear of reprisals should raiding occur. This was a fairly traditional approach, albeit without the level of immediate deterrent the imperial presence in Trier and the larger number of frontier personnel had provided in the fourth century.¹¹⁶

With hindsight, Stilicho’s decision to pull back troops from the frontier, or, at best, to leave the Rhine in the insufficiently garrisoned state he found it, seems a crucial

¹¹⁴Claudian, *The Gothic War*, lines 421-2, in *Claudian*, trans. Platnauer, vol. II, p. 156; Claudian, *On the Consulship of Stilicho*, Book II, lines 186-7, in *Claudian*, trans. Platnauer, vol. II, p. 14.

¹¹⁵See, for example, A. D. Lee, ‘The Army’, in Cameron and Garnsey (eds), *CAH XIII*, p. 236; R. C. Blockley, ‘Warfare and Diplomacy’, in Cameron and Garnsey (eds), *CAH XIII*, p. 428; Drinkwater, *Alamanni*, p. 322.

¹¹⁶Claudian, *On the Fourth Consulship of Honorius*, lines 440-59, pp. 318-20; *On the Consulship of Stilicho*, Book I, lines 194-214, pp. 378-80. Gregory of Tours has it that ‘Stilicho, having assembled his men, crushed the Franks, crossed the Rhine, travelled through Gaul, and passed through to the Pyrenees’: Gregory of Tours, *History*, II, 9, p. 57. Gregory seems, however, to have garbled Orosius’ account, from which he derived this information. Orosius actually says that it was the Vandals, Alans, and Sueves, encouraged by Stilicho, who crushed the Franks, crossed the river, and invaded Gaul: Orosius, *Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*, VII, 40, 3, p. 404.

factor in facilitating the invasion by the Vandals, Alans, and Sueves on 31 December 406. However, it is vital that we distinguish between our understanding and Stilicho's own rationale. From our modern perspective, a clear difference is perceptible between the reduction in personnel at the Rhine in the early fifth century, which compounded the effects of the removal of the institutions of central government from the region, leaving it seemingly completely abandoned by the emperor and his generals, and the short periods of imperial inattentiveness to the defensive situation in the Rhineland in the fourth century, which temporarily weakened the defences of a region that was generally secure and under the direct control of central government. This distinction almost certainly would not have been obvious to Stilicho at the time. From his perspective, his decision was a logical one, which aimed to tackle the immediate problems facing Italy, where the imperial court was now located, by temporarily reducing personnel in a region that was assigned lesser political significance. It is extremely unlikely that it was intended to be part of a deliberate process of controlled retreat from the Rhineland. Moreover, the general had no obvious reason to fear the barbarians at the Rhine frontier, since the danger they posed had always been comprehensively nullified in the past, treaties were in place, and, as far as we know, there had been no noteworthy incursions since those that had followed Magnus Maximus' usurpation.¹¹⁷ In light of this, Stilicho cannot reasonably be blamed for having allowed the invasion on 31 December 406 because of his failure to ensure that the Rhine frontier was adequately garrisoned, even though this failure probably did provide the invaders with the opportunity to cross it.

Having established this, we must next seek to understand why Stilicho apparently made no attempt to head off the Vandals, Alans, and Sueves before they entered the Empire. One can do little more than guess at a ball-park figure for the

¹¹⁷Drinkwater, *Alamanni*, pp. 322-3; Drinkwater, 'The Usurpers', p. 273.

combined population involved in the invasion, but the invaders' speed of movement indicates that we should probably envisage them to have numbered less than Heather's suggestion of 100, 000 individuals, including 30, 000 warriors, and fewer also than Frigeridus' allusion to tens of thousands, which derives from his description of 20, 000 Vandal combatants having been killed by the Franks.¹¹⁸ On the other hand, the havoc they were able to wreak within the imperial provinces implies that there were probably considerably more people, with more diverse social identities, than Drinkwater's 'relatively small number of young warriors'.¹¹⁹ The confederacy of barbarian peoples was, therefore, fairly large, and its movement can hardly have gone unnoticed for long. As such, it seems safe to begin by dismissing the possibility that Stilicho remained unaware of the invaders' approach until they reached the Rhine frontier. Similarly unlikely is Heather's proposal that Stilicho planned to prevent the invasion by employing Alaric's Goths against the Vandals, Alans, and Sueves, but was unable to implement his scheme in time. This could explain his sudden preoccupation with gaining control of eastern Illyricum, in which Alaric and his followers were settled, in 405-6, but, as O'Flynn has suggested, it seems more plausible that the general intended to use Alaric's forces against the Eastern Roman Empire, with whom relations had again deteriorated.¹²⁰ Goffart's hypothesis that the failure to tackle the invaders was down to a change in strategy, whereby military force was used only for the purposes of containment until the barbarians could be settled within imperial territory, should also be ruled out, since, as Heather notes, Stilicho's reactions to the invasions by Alaric and Radagaisus clearly demonstrate that the Empire's preferred policy remained one of

¹¹⁸Heather, *Fall*, p. 198; Renatus Profuturus Frigeridus, quoted in Gregory of Tours, *History*, II, 9, p. 55.

¹¹⁹Drinkwater, 'The Usurpers', p. 273.

¹²⁰Heather, *Fall*, pp. 219-20; P. Heather, 'Why did the Barbarian Cross the Rhine?', *Journal of Late Antiquity* 2, issue 1 (Spring, 2009), pp. 26-7; J. M. O'Flynn, *Generalissimos of the Western Roman Empire* (Edmonton, Alberta, 1983), pp. 53-5.

stringent defence of its territories.¹²¹ Finally, the claims made by Orosius and in the Gallic Chronicle of 452 that Stilicho ‘most unjustly sent in’ the Vandals, Alans, and Sueves, in the hope that he could exploit the upheaval they caused to advance his personal agenda, should certainly be dismissed out of hand.¹²² These sources do not reflect how Stilicho’s decision-making was viewed by his contemporaries, but rather form part of a posthumous smear campaign of the mid-fifth century, as his reputation diminished in light of the Empire’s growing weakness. As Muhlberger has demonstrated, this is made clear if we contrast the chronicler of 452’s portrayal of the period 406-417 with that of Prosper of Aquitaine, written in the 430s, which emphasises dynastic crisis rather than barbarian invasions as the predominant political concern.¹²³

Having discounted these implausible interpretations, we must now consider what other reasons may have underpinned Stilicho’s failure to stop the invaders. Arguably the most convincing possibility is that he may have become aware of the impending invasion only once it was too late to muster an effective response. The Vandals’, Alans’, and Sueves’ westward movement certainly appears to have been fairly rapid, perhaps sparked by the Huns’ arrival in the Danube region,¹²⁴ whilst Stilicho would have needed to know at an extremely early stage of the impending crisis, in order to have any chance of mobilising reinforcements in time to prevent it; aside from the remaining Rhine frontier troops, the nearest units of the Roman army were in Britain, where the general’s authority was being undermined by a succession of

¹²¹Heather, ‘Why did the Barbarian Cross the Rhine?’, p. 11.

¹²²Orosius, *Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*, VII, 38, 3-4, p. 400; VII, 40, 3, p. 404; *The Gallic Chronicle of 452*, 55, *Chronica Gallica*, ed. T. Mommsen, *MGH AA IX* (Berlin, 1882), p. 652. The quotation is from *The Gallic Chronicle of 452*, 55: ‘*Diversarum gentium rabies Gallias dilacerare exorsa inmissu quam maxime Stiliconis indigne ferentis filio suo regnum negatum*’.

¹²³Prosper of Aquitaine, *Chronicle*, 1229-1263, *Epitoma Chronicon*, ed. T. Mommsen, *MGH AA IX* (Hannover, 1892), pp. 465-8; S. Muhlberger, ‘Looking back from mid-century: the Gallic Chronicler of 452 and the crisis of Honorius’ reign’, in Drinkwater and Elton (eds), *Fifth-century Gaul: A Crisis of Identity?*, pp. 30-2.

¹²⁴See below, pp. 83-6.

usurpations.¹²⁵ An alternative, and related, explanation for Stilicho's failure to act is that he may have been preoccupied elsewhere, with Radagaisus having only recently been defeated, and Alaric, who was in Illyricum, posing a latent threat to Italy.¹²⁶ It seems unlikely, however, that this situation in Italy can fully explain the general's inaction, since Radagaisus was eliminated in late summer 406, and Alaric caused no immediate problems in that year. Finally, it is possible that Stilicho knew that the invaders were drawing near at a sufficiently early stage to have reacted, but neglected to do so because he did not foresee the scale of the crisis he would face, nor the speed with which it would unfold, once they were at large inside the Empire; a significant error of judgement, but an understandable one, given how successfully the situation at the Rhine had been handled in the previous century, and his own recent victories against the forces of Alaric and Radagaisus.¹²⁷ It is, of course, impossible to know what Stilicho knew or thought, but it seems most likely, nonetheless, that his inaction was the result of a combination of these three plausible interpretations: impossible logistics, which rendered him unable to muster an effective response in time; continued anxiety and depleted resources, following the conflicts against Alaric and Radagaisus; and an underestimation of the danger the Vandals, Alans, and Sueves posed to the Empire, if he did not nullify their threat immediately.

Having now established that Stilicho's actions in the run-up to the invasion probably smoothed the path for the Vandals, Alans, and Sueves, even if he should not necessarily be blamed for causing or allowing them to cross the frontier, our next task must be to consider whether the imperial authorities should perhaps have challenged the

¹²⁵Goffart, *Tides*, pp. 95-6.

¹²⁶Heather, *Fall*, pp. 194 (on Radagaisus' invasion), 203 (on the imperial response to Radagaisus), 206 (on how dealing with Radagaisus may have weakened the Empire's ability to prevent the Vandals, Alans, and Sueves crossing the Rhine), 219 (on Alaric in Illyricum).

¹²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 219.

invaders more comprehensively once they entered the Empire and began to ransack its northern provinces. This requires us to attempt to reconstruct the invaders' route and activities whilst in northern Gaul, as well as to consider the responses of Stilicho and the usurper, Constantine III, who controlled much of Gaul from 407 to 411. A letter written in 409 or 410 by Jerome, probably in Bethlehem, provides our most helpful and detailed source of information concerning the movements of the newcomers once inside the Empire.¹²⁸ According to the news he had received, the barbarians had ransacked Mainz, Worms, Reims, Amiens, Arras, Thérouanne, Tournai, Speyer, and Strasbourg, as well as causing damage in Aquitaine, Narbonensis, and Novempopulana. This is revealing in several important respects. First, it is clear that the invasion marked something new, in that the groups involved, on crossing the river, penetrated far deeper into Roman territory than the likes of the Alamanni, Franks, and Burgundians were accustomed to attempt. Secondly, Jerome's reference to cities such as Mainz, Worms, and Reims clearly indicates that the invaders' presence was felt in the vicinity of Trier, even if Jerome had not received any specific reports concerning the destruction of that city itself. Cologne, however, was located some distance downriver from the crossing-point at Mainz, and may therefore have escaped the attentions of the Vandals, Alans, and Sueves. Finally, it is striking that all of the cities Jerome mentions were in the north of Gaul, whilst his information concerning the south is limited to vague references to affected regions. As Kulikowski has convincingly argued, this implies that the invaders had probably remained almost exclusively in the north until shortly before Jerome

¹²⁸Jerome's contacts with Western aristocrats means he was well-placed to comment: Matthews, *Aristocracies*, p. 307.

wrote; that is, until at least the spring of 409.¹²⁹ This is supported by Hydatius' account, which claims that they crossed into Spain in the autumn of that year.¹³⁰

The invaders therefore appear to have remained in northern Gaul for some considerable time, causing extensive damage and imposing a significant burden on local populations. With regard to the effects of the invasion, Jerome's account of widespread destruction is corroborated by several melodramatic responses by Gallic poets. Perhaps the most frequently cited summary of the consequences of the invasion is supplied by Orientius, who wrote that 'all Gaul smoked in a single funeral pyre'.¹³¹ Other poems offering similarly lurid descriptions include the *Epigramma Paulini*, the *Carmen ad uxorem* or *ad coniugem*, usually attributed to Prosper of Aquitaine, and the *Carmen de providentia dei*, also probably written by Prosper.¹³² The *Carmen ad uxorem* describes how 'with sword, plague, starvation, chains, cold and heat – in a thousand ways – a single death snatches off wretched humankind', whilst the *Carmen de providentia dei* emphasises the invasion's widespread effects on all geographic locations, from lofty fortresses to riverside cities, and on all sectors of society, even hermits, bishops, and their churches.¹³³

¹²⁹Jerome, *Letter 123*, 16, pp. 236-7; Kulikowski, 'Barbarians in Gaul', p. 331.

¹³⁰Hydatius, *Chronicle, Olympiad 297*, 15 (34), in *The Chronicle of Hydatius and the Consularia Constantinopolitana: Two Contemporary Accounts of the Final Years of the Roman Empire*, ed. and trans. R. W. Burgess (Oxford, 1993) p. 80: 'The Alans, Vandals and Sueves entered Spain in 447 [of the Spanish] era. Some record 28 September, others 12 October, but it was a Tuesday, in the year when the consuls were Honorius for the eighth time and Theodosius the son of Arcadius for the third time'.

¹³¹Orientius, *Commonitorium*, Book II, line 184, ed. R. Ellis, in *Poetae Christiani Minores I*, CSEL 16 (Vienna, 1888), p. 234.

¹³²In accepting Prosper's authorship of these texts, I am following the lead of McLynn, 'Poetic Creativity and Political Crisis in Early Fifth-Century Gaul', *Journal of Late Antiquity* 2, issue 1 (Spring 2009), pp. 66, 68. For the texts themselves: *Sancti Paulini Epigramma*, ed. C. Schenkl, in *Poetae Christiani Minores I*, CSEL 16, pp. 503-8; *Carmen ad Uxorem: Carmen I* (attributed to Paulinus of Nola), ed. G. de Hartel, in *S. Pontii Meropii Paulini Nolani Opera II*, CSEL 30 (Vienna, 1894), pp. 344-8 (the quotation is from lines 25-6, p. 344); Prosper of Aquitaine (?) *Carmen de Providentia Dei*, ed. J. -P. Migne, *PL* 51 (Paris, 1861), columns 617-38 (see especially lines 35-64, column 618).

¹³³M. Roberts, 'Barbarians in Gaul: the Response of the Poets', in Drinkwater and Elton (eds), *Fifth-century Gaul: A Crisis of Identity*, pp. 100-2.

The specific literary genre to which these poems conform, the particular ideologies they were intended to convey, and, in the context of this thesis, the fact that they were written by individuals who had not directly experienced the invasion in northern Gaul are all good reasons to treat their hyperbole with caution.¹³⁴ Orientius' *Commonitorium*, for example, is a poem of over a thousand verses, written to advocate a virtuous Christian life, with the barbarian invasion included in order to press home the dire consequences of immorality. Paulinus' *Epigramma* similarly served as a denunciation of sin, with the invasion again used to reinforce this message, whilst Prosper's *Carmen ad Uxorem* has been described as 'an explicit summons to ascetic retirement', but one which, interestingly, fails to attribute any of the woes it lists explicitly to the barbarians.¹³⁵ Finally, in the case of the *Carmen de Providentia Dei*, historical opinion has concentrated on the ninety-six verses of the preface and the seventy-six of the conclusion, which relate to the invasion, and virtually ignored the main body of the text, which the preface and conclusion are supposed to frame and contextualise.¹³⁶ Nonetheless, these poems are persuasive by virtue of the cumulative volume of evidence they provide, and because of a certain degree of consistency between their claims and some of the archaeological evidence from Trier and Cologne, discussed in subsequent chapters, which also seems to suggest widespread destruction and abandonment in the first half of the fifth century.¹³⁷

The extent of the damage the invaders caused in northern Gaul makes Stilicho's failure to challenge them immediately following their crossing of the Rhine frontier all

¹³⁴McLynn, 'Poetic Creativity', pp. 60-74. For an example of these poetic responses being taken too literally, see B. Ward-Perkins, *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilisation* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 29-30. In response to McLynn's article, Ward-Perkins has since acknowledged the need for more careful analysis: B. Ward-Perkins, '407 and All That: Retrospective', *Journal of Late Antiquity* 2, issue 1 (Spring 2009), pp. 77-8.

¹³⁵Roberts, 'Barbarians in Gaul', p. 98; McLynn, 'Poetic Creativity', pp. 66-7.

¹³⁶McLynn, 'Poetic Creativity', pp. 68-9.

¹³⁷See below, pp. 140, 254-71.

the more puzzling. Although the general had recently defeated both Alaric and Radagaisus, and had probably expended significant manpower and material resources in the process, it seems unlikely that the Empire simply no longer had the means to overpower invading barbarian groups, even if doing so would have required them to summon reinforcements from Britain. The explanation must lie, therefore, in the preoccupation of both Stilicho and the usurper, Constantine III, with their internecine conflict; a preoccupation which, although disastrous in its consequences for the Rhineland, was entirely in accordance with the behaviour we would expect from both parties, on the basis of our evidence concerning the fourth century. Stilicho's failure to send troops to deal with the Vandals, Alans, and Sueves in early 407, before Constantine arrived in northern Gaul, was a crucial error of judgement, and one which, by the mid-fifth century, had led to such a deterioration in his reputation that he was, as we have seen, condemned not for having failed to prevent the invasion, but for having deliberately caused it.¹³⁸ Instead, Stilicho maintained his focus upon claiming Illyricum for the West, and sent one of his generals, Sarus, to lead an army against Constantine's forces. Despite some initial success, Sarus was compelled to retreat by the usurper's generals, and managed to escape only with difficulty, and by bribing the Bacaudae to allow him safe passage through the Alps into Italy.¹³⁹

Turning our attention to Constantine III, it is ironic, given the routine prioritisation of internal political conflict over the danger posed by barbarian groups, that Stilicho's failure to deal with the invaders seems to have aided the usurper's bid for power in 407. Constantine was but the latest in a series of hopefuls elevated to the purple in Britain, the earliest of whom had rebelled before the Rhine invasion of 406.

¹³⁸Orosius, *Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*, VII, 38, 3-4, p. 400; *The Gallic Chronicle of 452*, 55, p. 652; see above, p. 57.

¹³⁹On Stilicho's continued interest in Illyricum and the East: Zosimus, *New History*, V, 29-34, trans. R. T. Ridley (Sydney, 2006), pp. 114-17. On Sarus' expedition: Zosimus, *New History*, VI, 2, 3-5, p. 127.

His usurpation was, therefore, not a response to the invasion, but rather a reaction to imperial withdrawal from, and apparent disregard for, northern Gaul and Britain. The invasion of the Vandals, Alans and Sueves, and Stilicho's failure to prevent it, served to further legitimise Constantine's claim that the north was indeed suffering under imperial neglect, providing his usurpation with a greater sense of urgency than those that preceded it, and enhancing his chance of achieving widespread support.¹⁴⁰ In the initial absence of a challenge from Stilicho, Constantine was left with three categories of non-Roman groups to deal with upon his arrival in Gaul: peoples such as the Franks, Alamanni, and Burgundians, who had long associations with the Empire and remained at least nominally loyal; peoples who had taken part in the invasion but then sought to reconcile themselves with the Empire, notably Goar and the Alans; and the Vandals and their associates, who were still behaving in a more overtly hostile fashion.¹⁴¹ Initially at least, he seems to have coped relatively successfully; Zosimus recounted that he secured the Rhine more firmly than anyone since Julian had managed, whilst Orosius wrote of the treaties he made with the barbarian leaders.¹⁴² These treaties reveal that, even in the aftermath of the invasion of 406, traditional diplomatic approaches could still be adopted towards the more familiar barbarian leaders across the Rhine, so long as the individual claiming imperial authority had established firm control over the Rhineland. We should not read too much into Orosius' claim that Constantine III was 'made a fool of' by the barbarians' breaking of these treaties, since we have seen how Orosius' recognition of the Empire's growing weakness in the mid-fifth century influenced his portrayal of the preceding decades, and how the barbarians across the Rhine were in any

¹⁴⁰Matthews, *Aristocracies*, p. 308; I. Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms, 450-751* (London, 1994), p. 13; Drinkwater, 'The Usurpers', pp. 271-272; Heather, *Fall*, p. 210. Drinkwater has particularly emphasised the role of 'regional feelings of insecurity'.

¹⁴¹This useful distinction derives from Drinkwater, 'The Usurpers', p. 282.

¹⁴²Zosimus, *New History*, VI, 3, 3, p. 128; Orosius, *Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*, VII, 40, 4, pp. 404-5; Heather, *Fall*, p. 211.

case went to break their treaties at times of internal imperial political crisis.¹⁴³

Constantine III also succeeded in chasing down and inflicting heavy losses on the Vandals.¹⁴⁴

However, his approach was not as straightforwardly beneficial to the restoration of military and political authority on the Rhine as it might first appear. Despite praising Constantine's measures in securing the Rhine frontier, Zosimus was clear that the usurper had spurned a straightforward opportunity to pursue and ultimately defeat the Vandals after his initial success against them. Instead, for reasons our source does not attempt to explain, Constantine allowed them to escape, regroup, and remain at large in northern Gaul until sometime around 409, at which point they invaded Spain.¹⁴⁵ The most plausible explanation for this failure to deal with the Vandals once and for all is that Constantine was, understandably, reluctant to divert his attention for any length of time from cementing his own bid for the purple, and nullifying the threat Honorius and his generals posed. On the basis of Zosimus' account, it seems that the imperial response to Constantine's usurpation, in the form of the forces led by Sarus, was not too long delayed, and it was almost certainly the imminence of this conflict that prevented the usurper from engaging in a more protracted campaign against the Vandals.¹⁴⁶

To summarise, the invasion of 406 was very different to the more routine Frankish and Alamannic incursions of the fourth century, in that it was not carried out by the Empire's immediate neighbours, and would not have been easy to predict or prevent. It created conditions advantageous to Constantine III's usurpation by vividly highlighting how the northern provinces were being neglected by the legitimate

¹⁴³For more on how the Empire's weakness shaped Orosius' account of the preceding centuries, see above, p. 57. On the barbarians' incursions at times of imperial weakness, see above, pp. 24-5.

¹⁴⁴Zosimus, *New History*, VI, 3, 2, p. 128.

¹⁴⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶*Ibid.*, VI, 2, 2-3, p. 127; Goffart, *Tides*, p. 98.

emperor, and caused the situation in northern Gaul to deteriorate to an extent unseen in the fourth century. However, the reasons for the failures of both Stilicho and Constantine III to deal with the invaders in the wake of their breaching of the Rhine frontier bear an important similarity with the circumstances that facilitated the most wide-reaching and damaging barbarian incursions of the fourth century. Just like the Franks and Alamanni, the Vandals, Alans, and Sueves were neither too powerful nor too numerous to be overcome, and indeed they apparently came very close to being defeated by Constantine. Instead, it was the habitual and necessary prioritisation by both emperor and usurper of their conflict with one another that permitted the invaders to remain at large in northern Gaul for almost three years, before they eventually moved south and then crossed into Spain.

The invasion of the Huns in 451, led by Attila, bore important similarities to that of the Vandals, Alans, and Sueves on 31 December 406, in that the group responsible were not immediate neighbours of the Empire at the Rhine frontier, and their crossing of the river did not form part of the long-established pattern of Roman-barbarian relations in the Rhineland, which involved the regular breakdown and renewal of diplomatic arrangements, interspersed with periods of peaceful interaction. However, it also occurred in a markedly different context. By 451, the Rhine was no longer an effective imperial frontier, since the cumulative effects of the invasion of 406, the subsequent barbarian incursions, discussed below, and the various challenges to imperial authority outside the Rhineland had long since rendered the Empire unable, or at best only very intermittently able, to defend it.¹⁴⁷ Another significant difference between this invasion of 451 and that of 406 – and one which is quite surprising, given the extent to which

¹⁴⁷The military and political weakness of the Empire in the aftermath of 406 is also suggested by Wood, *Kingdoms*, p. 13, and Anton, *Trier*, p. 40. Elton, 'Defence', pp. 170-1, instead claims that the Empire was still in reasonable control by 451.

imperial authority had deteriorated by the mid-fifth century – is that the Huns were successfully challenged following their arrival in Gaul.

The precise route by which the Huns entered the Empire remains unclear, although Anton has suggested, largely on the basis of Sidonius Apollinaris' description of the invasion in his panegyric honouring Avitus, that their crossing-point is likely to have been at Neuwied, just north of Koblenz.¹⁴⁸ This would imply that Cologne, further to the north, may have been unaffected by the Huns' invasion, although we should be wary of reading too much into Sidonius' clearly sensationalised version of events, which depicts how hordes of invaders from many tribes, including the Franks, 'poured forth' into Gaul.¹⁴⁹ Arguably the most important source for the invasion, Jordanes' *The Origin and Deeds of the Goths*, says nothing of the Huns' journey.¹⁵⁰ According to Gregory of Tours, the Huns travelled to the Rhine from Pannonia, and, having crossed the river, laid waste to the countryside as they advanced. He provides a memorable description of their arrival in Metz, a city not too far from Trier, on Easter Eve. There, Gregory claims, the Huns slaughtered the populace, killing the priests in front of their altars. From Metz, they moved on to other cities, penetrating as far as Orléans.¹⁵¹

Gregory's account is complemented by the *Liber Historiae Francorum*, written in 727, in which it is claimed that the Huns not only set fire to Metz, but also tore apart Trier.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸Anton, *Trier*, p. 49; Anton, 'Trier im Übergang von der römischen zur frankischen Herrschaft', *Francia* 12 (1984), pp. 16-8; Sidonius Apollinaris, *Panegyric on Avitus*, lines 319-28, in *Poems and Letters*, ed. and trans. W. B. Anderson (Cambridge, MA, 1936), pp. 144-6.

¹⁴⁹The Latin verb Sidonius uses is 'transfundere': *Panegyric on Avitus*, line 320, p. 146. His account is in contrast to those of Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, and the *Liber Historiae Francorum*, which mention only the Huns as invaders and have other tribes, including the Goths and Franks, as allies of the Empire: Jordanes, *The Origin and Deeds of the Goths*, XXXVI, 191, trans. C. Mierow (Princeton, 1908), p. 60; Gregory of Tours, *History*, II, 7, pp. 48-9; *Liber Historiae Francorum*, 5, ed. B. Krusch, *MGH SSRM II* (Hannover, 1888), p. 246.

¹⁵⁰Jordanes, *The Origin and Deeds of the Goths*, XXXVI, 184-196, pp. 57-61; S. Barnish, 'Old Kaspars: Attila's Invasion of Gaul in the Literary Sources', in Drinkwater and Elton (eds), *Fifth-century Gaul: A Crisis of Identity?*, p. 39.

¹⁵¹Gregory of Tours, *History*, II, 6-7. Barnish suggests, however, that Gregory's account is likely to be largely invented: 'Old Kaspars', p. 39.

¹⁵²*Liber Historiae Francorum*, 5, p. 246.

The *vita* of St Genovefa, meanwhile, provides an interesting account of how the inhabitants of Paris reacted to the Huns' approach: 'when the news got out that the king of the Huns, Attila, overcome by savagery, had begun to devastate the province[s] of Gaul, the citizens of Paris, as a result stricken with terror, attempted to convey the moveable property and money of their assets to other safer cities'.¹⁵³ As we shall see, this flight to less troubled regions of Gaul, particularly in the south, was a relatively common aristocratic response to the disturbances of the fifth century; Salvian of Marseilles, our main source for the Frankish incursions, was one such refugee.¹⁵⁴

The imperial forces, led by the *magister militum*, Aetius, and consisting predominantly of federate barbarians, among whom the Franks and Visigoths were prominent, first confronted the Huns at Orléans. From there the Huns retreated, so that the decisive battle was waged in the Champagne region of France, somewhere near Metz, although its precise location remains unclear.¹⁵⁵ It is described by Hydatius as 'the Catalaunian plains, not far from the city of Metz', but by Gregory of Tours as the 'Mauriac plain'. Jordanes, meanwhile, employed both designations: 'and so they met in the Catalaunian Plains, which are also called Mauriacan'. During this battle, Aetius' ally, the Gothic king, Theodoric, was killed, but Attila's forces were defeated and Attila himself fled the battlefield.¹⁵⁶

The accounts of the Huns' invasion, most notably those provided by Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, and in the *Liber Historiae Francorum*, are obviously essential for understanding the sequence of events following the invaders' arrival in northern Gaul,

¹⁵³*Vita Genovefae Virginis Parisiensis* 12, ed. B. Krusch, *MGH SSRM III* (Hannover, 1896), p. 219. Extracts are translated in R. W. Mathisen, *People, Personal Expression and Social Relations in Late Antiquity* (Michigan, 2003) p. 212.

¹⁵⁴See below, p. 74.

¹⁵⁵N. Gauthier, *L'évangélisation des pays de la Moselle: La province romaine de Première Belgique entre Antiquité et Moyen-Age (IIIe-VIIIe siècles)* (Paris, 1980), p. 117.

¹⁵⁶Hydatius, *Chronicle*, Olympiad 308, 28 (142), p. 100; Gregory of Tours, *History*, II, 7, p. 49; Jordanes, *The Origin and Deeds of the Goths*, XXXVI, 192, p. 60.

but should nonetheless be treated with a degree of caution, and not only because the authors wrote some considerable time after the events they described. Jordanes' *The Origin and Deeds of the Goths* has been assumed to be a fairly reliable version of events, although one should bear in mind that it was written not for political purposes, as one might assume from much of its content, but rather with the express aim of providing religious edification. Moreover, Jordanes relies to an indeterminable extent upon a number of sources, some named, including Cassiodorus, but others unnamed, whose reliability we cannot begin to assess. Importantly, one such anonymous source lies behind the section concerning Attila's invasion, meaning that the tale of political intrigue Jordanes presents, involving the Goths, the Huns, and the imperial authorities, although certainly plausible, is entirely unverifiable.¹⁵⁷ Gregory of Tours' account and the *Liber Historiae Francorum*, on the other hand, are both attempts to reconstruct the early history of the Frankish people, with the *Liber Historiae Francorum* in particular containing clearly mythical and fabricated elements. Additionally, it is important to recognise that both authors also viewed the events they described through a Christian lens. Their accounts of the Hunnic invasion serve to demonstrate the efficacy of fervent Christian prayer, emphasising the importance of the supplications of the Bishop of Orléans, Anianus, in bringing about the victory.¹⁵⁸ Indeed, in typical fashion, Gregory claims that, 'no one has any doubt that the army of the Huns was really defeated by the prayers of the bishop', even if it was Aetius and his allies who physically 'destroyed the enemy'.¹⁵⁹ As such, it is quite possible that they exaggerate the extent of destruction caused by the Huns, or the comprehensiveness of the imperial victory. Nonetheless, it is

¹⁵⁷J. J. O'Donnell, 'The Aims of Jordanes', *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 31 (1982), pp. 225, 229, 232-4. Barnish suggests that Jordanes reproduced Cassiodorus here, and that Cassiodorus in turn relied on Priscus, but this cannot be proven: 'Old Kaspars', p. 40. For a fuller discussion of the content of Jordanes' account, see below, pp. 86-7.

¹⁵⁸Barnish, 'Old Kaspars', p. 43. On some of the mythical elements in the *Liber Historiae Francorum* version of the Frankish past, see I. Wood, 'Defining the Franks: Frankish origins in early medieval historiography', in Noble (ed), *From Roman Provinces to Medieval Kingdoms*, pp. 110-19.

¹⁵⁹Gregory of Tours, *History*, II, 7. p. 50.

clear that Attila did retreat from northern Gaul, and that the Empire had, on this occasion, responded decisively to the challenge it faced. Unfortunately, as we shall see in what follows, it was too little, too late insofar as imperial control over the Rhineland was concerned. The series of barbarian incursions that had preceded the invasion, discussed below, had fundamentally eroded the Empire's authority in the region, and ensured that any damage caused by the Huns could do no more than compound existing problems. It would be only a few years later, in the mid-450s, that Cologne would come under Frankish control on a permanent basis.

To summarise, the invasions of 406 and 451 were very different from one another in terms of the groups involved, the response the invaders provoked from the imperial authorities, and the context in northern Gaul at the time that the attack was carried out. The invasion of 406 involved the Vandals, Alans, and Sueves, who were only belatedly challenged and not defeated. Their assault brought an end to a lengthy period of relative peace at the Rhine frontier. That of 451, on the other hand, was carried out by the Huns, who were successfully confronted by Aetius' forces and compelled to retreat from northern Gaul. Their attack came following half a century of repeated raids by the Empire's neighbours, so it can only have compounded existing damage. For all their differences, however, these two invasions have in common that they do not fit within the familiar framework of diplomacy, raiding, and punitive campaigning that usually shaped Roman-barbarian relations at the Rhine frontier.

1.2.3 The barbarian *incursions* from the imperial perspective

Between the invasions of 406 and 451, a number of Frankish incursions took place across the Rhine frontier, which specifically affected the cities of Trier and

Cologne. These incursions were quite different from the invasions, in that the perpetrators were the Empire's immediate neighbours, and, as we shall see, their actions can be placed within the long-established framework of Roman-barbarian interactions in the Rhineland. Our main source for the incursions is Salvian of Marseilles, who was a native of the Rhineland with first-hand experience of the events, which he described vividly in *On the Government of God*. From his account, we know that there were at least four attacks, since he summarises how Trier was 'laid low by a destruction four times repeated'.¹⁶⁰ The precise dates at which these various assaults took place are unclear, although the earlier ones are easier to approximate than the later ones. Renatus Profuturus Frigeridus helps us establish a date for the second incursion with relative confidence, since he reports that 'the city of Trier was sacked and burnt by the Franks in a second attack' around the time that the usurper, Jovinus' (411 – 413) noble supporters were captured by Honorius' generals.¹⁶¹ On the basis of this one fixed point in the chronology, Anton places the first attack in 410 or 411, around the time that Constantine III's usurpation floundered. It may be the case that this is the attack to which Fredegar makes a somewhat jumbled reference, stating that, 'the city of Trier was captured and burned by the Franks [through the efforts] of the faction of one of the senators, Lucius by name'.¹⁶² We should not, however, read too much into Fredegar's report, since he goes on to explain that the context for the betrayal was that Lucius' wife had been seduced by the Emperor Avitus. This not only sounds implausible, but is chronologically impossible, given that Avitus' reign was half a century later than the

¹⁶⁰Salvian of Marseilles, *On the Government of God*, VI, 8, trans. E. M. Sanford (New York, 1930), p. 170.

¹⁶¹Renatus Profuturus Frigeridus, quoted in Gregory of Tours, *History*, II, 9, p. 57.

¹⁶²Fredegar, *Chronicarum quae dicuntur Fredegarii Scholastici*, III, 7, ed. B. Krusch, *MGH SSRM II* (Hannover, 1888), p. 94.

period to which this section of Fredegar's chronicle relates.¹⁶³ Anton assigns the third attack a date of 419 or 420, on the basis of Frigeridus' mention of a retaliatory campaign against the Franks in which Castinus, who was then *magister domesticorum*, was sent to participate.¹⁶⁴ Frigeridus' mention of Castinus' title is crucial to dating this campaign, since Castinus held that office during the ascendancy of Constantius III, before being promoted to *magister militum* in 421, around the time of Constantius' death. Moreover, Frigeridus mentions that at the same time as Castinus was sent to Gaul, Asterius was made a patrician, and we know that this happened in 420.¹⁶⁵ There is, however, nothing to explicitly indicate that the campaign came in the immediate aftermath of a third incursion, rather than being a belated response to the previous decade's repeated assaults. Finally, the fourth attack is cautiously dated to 428, although, as Anton acknowledges, this is largely speculative.¹⁶⁶ One might reasonably suggest that this imprecision regarding the latter two incursions does not matter all that much, since the general evidential problems concerning the fifth-century Rhineland are such that even if the proposed dates for them were valid, it would still be extremely difficult to situate these in any meaningful context.

As an eyewitness account, and our only substantial description of these incursions, Salvian's *On the Government of God* is an indispensable source of information concerning not only the attacks themselves, but also how they could be interpreted by a contemporary Christian priest. However, his text presents an analytical challenge, particularly when attempting to understand political change, because he was

¹⁶³R. W. Mathisen, *Roman Aristocrats in Barbarian Gaul: Strategies for Survival in an Age of Transition* (Austin, Texas, 1993), p. 77. Anton suggests that this may, in fact, be a reference to an incursion of the 450s: Anton, 'Übergang', p. 18, p. 21.

¹⁶⁴Anton, *Trier*, p. 47.

¹⁶⁵Renatus Profuturus Frigeridus, quoted in Gregory of Tours, *History*, II, 9, p. 57; Castinus 2, *PLRE* II, p. 269; Asterius 4, *PLRE* II, p. 171; H. Heinen, 'Reichstreue *nobiles* im zerstörten Trier. Überlegungen zu Salvian, gub. VI 72-89', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 131 (2000), p. 273; O'Flynn, *Generalissimos*, p. 75.

¹⁶⁶Anton, *Trier*, p. 47.

much more concerned to impart moral lessons than to offer a clear account of events. His aim was not to create a narrative through which the attacks could be understood, but rather to condemn un-Christian behaviour within Roman society, especially amongst élites who should have known better.¹⁶⁷ The theme of the Romans' ruined morality thus recurs throughout, as Salvian laments 'honoured old men, feeble Christians, when the ruin of their state was already imminent, making themselves slaves to appetite and lust'.¹⁶⁸ The barbarians, meanwhile, are introduced initially as his rhetorical antithesis of the sinful Romans: whereas corruption within the Empire drove its citizens to 'seek among the barbarians Roman mercy, since they cannot endure the barbarous mercilessness they find among the Romans', the barbarians, although guilty of sin, were 'lacking the Roman training or any other sort of civilised education, knowing nothing whatever unless they have heard it from their teachers', and were thus less responsible for the immoral acts they committed.¹⁶⁹ Thereafter, the barbarians' invasions and incursions are explicitly presented as divine punishment for the Romans' sins.¹⁷⁰ Moreover, particularly for our purposes, Salvian's account, although vivid, is disappointingly deficient in the circumstantial detail necessary for a meaningful reconstruction of events. He refers to the cities of Cologne, Mainz, and Trier by name, but, aside from the circus at Trier, the rhetorical function of which within the text must

¹⁶⁷The most important study to date of Salvian's motives in writing *On the Government of God* is Lambert's unpublished D.Phil. thesis, 'History and Community in the Works of Salvian of Marseille', Brasenose College, Oxford, 2002). I am grateful to the author for allowing me to benefit from reading his work. On the points raised here, see especially p. 20 and p. 189. See also I. Wood, 'Continuity or calamity: the constraints of literary models', in Drinkwater and Elton (eds), *Fifth-century Gaul: A Crisis of Identity?*, pp. 9, 12.

¹⁶⁸Salvian of Marseilles, *On the Government of God*, VI, 13, p. 180.

¹⁶⁹*Ibid.*, V, 5, p. 141; V, 2, p. 135.

¹⁷⁰*Ibid.*, VI, 13, pp. 180-1.

be borne in mind, he fails to provide details of specific damage to persons or buildings in any of the cities concerned.¹⁷¹

In light of these limitations, one must resist the temptation to use *On the Government of God* as an interpretative framework for discussing the fate of Trier and Cologne in the first half of the fifth century, or for understanding archaeological evidence of disuse or destruction. Nonetheless, the specific information Salvian does provide can reasonably be accepted. There is no reason to doubt that there were four Frankish incursions across the Rhine between 413 and c. 440, or that they caused significant damage within the Rhineland provinces, since, as Lambert has pointed out, factual details were designed to enhance, rather than undermine, the author's literary purpose, so Salvian would scarcely have included details his audience would have known to be untrue.¹⁷² We can similarly accept that all of the major Rhineland cities were directly affected by the assaults; Salvian reported that Trier was 'laid low by a destruction four times repeated', whilst Mainz was 'destroyed and wiped out' and Cologne was 'overrun by the enemy'.¹⁷³ The territories of these *civitates* presumably suffered similarly. Trier appears to have fared worse than most cities, perhaps because of its recent importance as an imperial capital, which may have made it a particularly attractive target for Frankish leaders hoping to attract the emperors' attention and to maximise their gains.¹⁷⁴ Salvian reports that Trier was 'three times destroyed by successive captures', until 'the whole city had been burned to the ground'.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷¹*Ibid.*, VI, 8, p. 173; VI, 14, p. 182. Salvian's account of the local nobles' request for circus games amid the ruins of Trier serves both to reinforce his portrayal of Roman immorality, and to accentuate his account of the city's extensive destruction.

¹⁷²Lambert, 'History and Community', p. 18.

¹⁷³Salvian of Marseilles, *On the Government of God*, VI, 8, p. 170.

¹⁷⁴A similar strategy was also adopted by the Goths in southern Gaul, who regularly attacked Arles as a means of 'raising the "market value" of the Gothic federates': H. Wolfram, *History of the Goths* (Berkeley, 1988), p. 175.

¹⁷⁵Salvian of Marseilles, *On the Government of God*, VI, 14, p. 183.

Salvian's own flight from the Rhineland is a further persuasive indication that, despite the sensationalist descriptions characteristic of *On the Government of God*, the region was indeed significantly damaged by the incursions. In the chapter of his work that goes on to deal with the four sacks of 'the wealthiest city of Gaul', by which he doubtless means Trier, Salvian refers to the area affected by the attacks as 'my own country, in the Gallic states'. On this basis, we can conclude that he was a native of one of the Belgic or Germanic provinces, and quite possibly of Trier or Cologne. Immediately thereafter, he emphasises that he was present during one of the attacks on Trier: 'I myself have seen men of lofty birth and honour... despoiled and plundered'.¹⁷⁶ We can only conclude, therefore, that he must have fled the city following this assault, since he was not in the Rhineland, but probably beside the Mediterranean, at the monastery at Lérins, when he wrote *On the Government of God*.¹⁷⁷ Significantly, Salvian was not the only northern Gallic aristocratic refugee; flight seems to have been a relatively common response to the attacks, with many of those who fled ending up, like Salvian, at the monastery of Lérins. For example, a letter written by Salvian to the monastery asks the monks to give refuge to his young relative from Cologne, who had fled his homeland. The youth's mother, Salvian tells us, had been forced by impoverishment to serve in a barbarian household.¹⁷⁸ Both Lupus of Troyes and Vincentius of Lérins seem to have come from Toul, on the upper Mosel, in the first

¹⁷⁶*Ibid.*, VI, 13, pp. 179-80.

¹⁷⁷Anton suggests that he went to Lérins in 424/5, and wrote *On the Government of God* between 440 and 450: Anton, 'Übergang', p. 2. Prinz's account permits us to assume a similar date for Salvian's arrival at Lérins, although he provides no date: F. Prinz, *Frühes Mönchtum im Frankenreich* (Munich, 1975), pp. 53-4.

¹⁷⁸Salvian of Marseilles, *Letter 1*, ed. C. Halm, in *Salviani Epistolae, MGH AA I, 1* (Berlin, 1877), pp. 108-9, Prinz, *Mönchtum*, p. 54.

decades of the fifth century, and are, therefore, also likely to have been driven south by the barbarian attacks.¹⁷⁹

From Salvian's account, therefore, it appears that the Franks were able to launch a succession of attacks over two decades, and to carry out incursions of significant magnitude, intensity, danger, and duration. This literary evidence may be substantiated by archaeological and epigraphic indications of damage to and deterioration of urban structures in Trier and Cologne in the first half of the fifth century, although this physical evidence is deliberately omitted from this chapter, on the basis that no precise connection can be made between any of it and the barbarians' assaults on the cities.¹⁸⁰ In light of Salvian's description alone, it is difficult to see how Trier and Cologne could have survived the attacks, but survive they did. Indeed, Salvian himself, alongside the destruction he recorded, gives strong indications of the resilience of the population of Trier in particular. In the first place, the very occurrence of four incursions provides obvious confirmation that the city continued to be worth attacking. More specifically, Salvian commented that the aforementioned 'men of lofty birth and honour', although 'despoiled and plundered', were 'still less ruined in fortunes than in morality; for, ravaged and stripped though they were, something still remained to them of their property'.¹⁸¹ It appears, then, that many of the local magnates whose livelihoods had been badly damaged by the invasions had nonetheless managed to retain their lands, and that the incursions, although locally devastating, had not fundamentally undermined the

¹⁷⁹Prinz, *Mönchtum*, pp. 49, 52; Mathisen, *Aristocrats*, pp. 58-60, provides further examples, including the dubious one of Bishop Severinus of Cologne, which is drawn from his problematic later *Vita* and should probably be dismissed.

¹⁸⁰This evidence is discussed in the subsequent chapters of this work: see especially pp. 140, 254-71.

¹⁸¹Salvian of Marseilles, *On the Government of God*, VI, 13, p. 179.

basic structure of society.¹⁸² Trier's nobles' demands for circus games provide a further clue to this effect.¹⁸³

The fact that these repeated incursions, which caused such significant damage, were carried out by the Empire's immediate neighbours, including the Franks, begs the question of what had changed since the fourth century, so that the attacks were no longer sporadic or isolated incidents, but instead were repeated during a sustained period. Since the first and second incursions most likely took place in the immediate aftermath of the defeats of the usurpers Constantine III and Jovinus, it is important that we pause to examine the second of these usurpations, which we have hitherto mentioned only in passing. Jovinus, a prominent northern Gallo-Roman aristocrat, was proclaimed emperor in Mainz in 411, and was evidently supposed to provide the Rhineland with a new imperial figurehead.¹⁸⁴ However, he did not remain in the region for long before heading towards southern Gaul, in order to make his failed attempt to consolidate his claim to the purple. Having gained the loyalty of the general, Sarus, who had defected from Honorius' regime, Jovinus formed an alliance with the Visigoths under Athaulf. This partnership had potential to be the making of the usurpation, but instead, it brought about Jovinus' downfall. Athaulf killed Sarus, and Jovinus, whether annoyed at this, or perhaps keen to demonstrate his independence of action, raised his own brother, Sebastian, to the rank of emperor without consulting the Gothic leader. As

¹⁸²Wood, 'Continuity or Calamity', p. 11.

¹⁸³Salvian of Marseilles, *On the Government of God*, VI, 14, pp. 183-4.

¹⁸⁴Orosius described him as 'the highest-ranking man in the Gallic provinces': *Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*, VII, 42, 6, p. 408.

a result, Athaulf switched his allegiance to Honorius, captured Jovinus, and handed him over to the emperor's praetorian prefect, Dardanus.¹⁸⁵

As well as providing the context for the second Frankish incursion, Jovinus' usurpation reveals certain important features of early fifth-century society in the Rhineland. In the first place, as Drinkwater suggests, it is a clear indication that, despite the failure of Constantine III's usurpation and the troubles that Gaul had experienced in recent years, a significant proportion of the Gallo-Roman élite in the north-eastern provinces were unwilling to accept the re-imposition of imperial rule from Ravenna.¹⁸⁶ It is unlikely that this was as a result of growing separatist tendencies, or a disinclination to be part of the Empire full-stop, since in elevating Jovinus to the purple, these nobles were clearly seeking involvement in, not withdrawal from, the imperial political superstructure. Instead, in switching their support to Jovinus as Constantine III's usurpation collapsed, they were probably seeking to demonstrate their unwillingness to continue to be politically marginalised and left exposed to further attack, as they had been since the late fourth century. In light of this, Jovinus' usurpation, despite achieving relatively widespread Gallic support, was clearly a response not only to Constantine III's failure, but also to the acute power vacuum that had emerged in the Rhineland in light of the removal from it of both civilian and military imperial institutions.

However, Jovinus was not only supported by aristocrats living within the Empire; he also received significant barbarian backing, notably from Gunthar, king of the Burgundians, and the Alans' king, Goar. He was soon able to add the Franks and

¹⁸⁵Olympiodorus, fragment 18, fragment 20, in *The Fragmentary Classicising Historians of the Later Roman Empire: Eunapius, Olympiodorus, Priscus, and Malchus II*, ed. and trans. R. C. Blockley (Liverpool, 1983), pp. 183-5; Scharf, 'Jovinus – Kaiser in Gallien', *Francia* 20 (1993), pp. 1-2; Drinkwater, 'The Usurpers', pp. 289-90.

¹⁸⁶Drinkwater, 'The Usurpers', p. 288.

Alamanni to the ranks of his followers.¹⁸⁷ His usurpation was, therefore, sponsored by all major Rhineland interest groups, and had a regional character more developed than any of its predecessors; it was, at its root, a *Rhineland* usurpation. This collaboration between groups on both sides of the Rhine is an early indication that, as the political situation in the Rhineland became increasingly fluid and unclear, and the conceptual distinction between ‘Roman’ and ‘barbarian’ was eroded, the barbarian leaders, who in any case were not naive, but had a long history of involvement in imperial political life, found themselves able to exert increased political and military influence. They were evidently willing and able to go beyond the occasional raiding that was more familiar to them, and to seek more meaningful involvement in the political alliances of north-eastern Gaul. In this regard, it is important to note that the barbarian leaders had no more inclination to break away from the Empire completely than did the Gallo-Roman aristocracy; for his barbarian supporters, Jovinus was an imperial figurehead with whom they could negotiate, and from whom they could expect to receive tribute and other concessions. Gallo-Roman aristocrats, for their part, could readily see these barbarian leaders as the legitimate “sub-contracted” representatives of imperial authority, especially when they acted as allies to Roman military forces, as in 406 and 451, backed the same usurpation attempts, and were given leave to remain on the western side of the Rhine.

Thus, the Frankish incursions of the first half of the fifth century were a direct response to the political situation within the Empire. The first assault was, we might reasonably presume, a reaction to the defeat of Constantine III, who had travelled to the Rhineland, secured the frontier, and in all probability concluded treaties with the barbarian leaders. It therefore forms part of the generally consistent pattern of Roman-

¹⁸⁷Olympiodorus, fragment 17, in *Fragmentary Classicizing Historians*, ed. and trans. Blockley, p. 18; Scharf, ‘Jovinus’, p. 1.

barbarian relations we know to have existed in the fourth century, whereby the barbarians' raids, aimed at securing moveable wealth and provoking a reaction from the Empire, were a fairly predictable consequence of any breakdown of their agreements with individuals claiming imperial authority. The second attack then came when the alternative, collaborative approach that led to Jovinus' usurpation failed, prompting the Franks to return to their tried-and-tested policy of raiding. Significantly, the raids do not seem to have been immediately sparked by the invasion of 406, even if some small groups are likely to have opportunistically followed in the wake of the Vandals, Alans, and Sueves. Instead, the surviving fragments of Frigeridus make it plain that the Vandals were attacked by the Franks, who sought to defend themselves and the Rhine frontier, and killed the Vandal king, Godigisel.¹⁸⁸

The major difference between these fifth-century incursions and the attacks of the fourth century cannot, therefore, be found in the behaviour of the Franks, even if their active involvement in politics west of the Rhine, through their support of Jovinus' usurpation, was new. Instead, it was the imperial authorities whose actions did not fit within the generally consistent and long-established framework governing imperial-barbarian relations at the frontier. To remind ourselves, in the fourth century, the resolution of any internal political crisis sufficient to draw the attention of the imperial authorities was followed by retaliatory measures against the barbarian groups who had exploited such situations to raid the imperial provinces. Following the comprehensive defeat of the barbarians, treaties were put in place to ensure that peace was maintained until the next time either side became unwilling or unable to abide by the agreed terms. Having defeated Jovinus in 413, as far as we know, the imperial authorities did not

¹⁸⁸Renatus Profuturus Frigeridus, quoted in Gregory of Tours, *History*, II, 9, pp. 55-6. Orosius also implies that the Vandals, Alans, and Sueves met Frankish resistance, having 'crushed the Franks' to invade Gaul: *Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*, VII, 40, 3, p. 404.

launch a punitive campaign against the Franks, nor indeed against the Alamanni, until c.420. It was this lack of any effective imperial response, rather than any change in the cohesiveness or aggressiveness of the Franks, that made the difference between the short-lived incursions of the fourth century, and the more sustained period of attacks affecting Trier and Cologne in the fifth century. The Franks raided on at least four separate occasions simply because the imperial retaliation that usually stopped the assaults and created the context for a new peace treaty never came. Any attempt to negotiate without first subduing the barbarians militarily, meanwhile, would have been fundamentally undermined by the Empire's obvious inability to enforce the terms of any treaty, should the barbarian leaders contravene them. Nonetheless, it would be mistaken to interpret the Empire's failure to respond effectively to the incursions as an indication of a deliberate abandonment of the Rhineland. Instead, we can plausibly attribute it both to the Empire's more immediate concerns in Italy, specifically Alaric and his Goths, and to the effects of the invasion of 406, which had caused the situation in northern Gaul to deteriorate far more seriously and rapidly than could ever have been envisaged.

Imperial campaigns in the Rhineland in the fifth century amounted, insofar as we can tell, to the aforementioned episode in 420 in which Castinus participated; two of short duration by Aetius against the Alamanni, Burgundians, or Franks in 428 and 432; and possibly one by Aegidius, Majorian's general, in the 460s, who may, however, have been acting upon his own initiative rather than on the Empire's behalf.¹⁸⁹ Almost nothing is known of Castinus' campaign, which plausibly came in response to the third Frankish assault, but its success was evidently limited, since it was followed only a few years later by another Frankish attack. Aetius' subsequent operations may reasonably be

¹⁸⁹For a fuller discussion of Aegidius, see below, pp. 100-2.

described as a more successful, albeit tardy, response to the incursions; they seem, at least, to have put an end to the repeated raiding, and led to conclusion of a new treaty, the terms of which are unknown.¹⁹⁰ These campaigns clearly demonstrate that the imperial authorities had not given up the Rhineland, even if their ability to intervene there had been restricted in recent years. However, it is important to recognise that Aetius' efforts lacked the decisiveness of fourth-century imperial campaigns against the Empire's neighbours across the Rhine. Rather than a sustained campaign to drive the barbarians back across the frontier, followed by a retaliatory strike within their own territory to reinforce imperial domination over them, as had been the norm in the fourth century, Aetius' operations against the barbarians in the Rhineland appear to have been brief, and, crucially, to have taken place *inside* what the barbarians, who retreated to lands they recognised as their own between each attack, clearly considered imperial territory.¹⁹¹ As far as we know, they were neither exhaustive enough to drive out all unauthorised incomers, such as Julian's campaigns had done, nor were they followed by punitive strikes into Frankish territory east of the Rhine.

1.2.4 The barbarian invasions and incursions from the barbarian perspective

We have established that the perpetrators of the various invasions and incursions of the fifth century were recognised by Roman writers as belonging to a variety of barbarian peoples, and that each assault was distinctive insofar as the Empire's capacity to predict, prevent, or respond to it is concerned. It is equally important to acknowledge

¹⁹⁰Merobaudes, *Panegyric II*, line 5, ed. F. Vollmer, *MGH AA XIV* (Berlin, 1905), p. 11.

¹⁹¹Sidonius Apollinaris, *Panegyric on Majorian*, lines 210-13, in *Poems and Letters*, ed. and trans. Anderson, p. 78 ; *Panegyric on Avitus*, lines 230-40, p. 138; Prosper of Aquitaine, *Chronicle*, 1298, p. 472; Cassiodorus, *Chronica*, 428, ed. T. Mommsen, *MGH AA XI* (Berlin, 1894), p. 156; Hydatius, *Chronicle, Olympiad 303, 12 (99)*, p. 92; Jordanes, *The Origin and Deeds of the Goths*, XXXIV, 176, p. 55.

that each of the barbarian peoples had their own specific aims and motivations for attacking the Empire, which were bound up with the particular political context in which the group found itself. The invasions of 406 and 451 were, as we have seen, isolated incidents, and therefore require individual consideration. The invaders on these occasions were not peoples who had ever been settled close to the Rhine frontier, and their attacks do not fit within the fairly consistent pattern that characterised relations between the Empire and its immediate neighbours across the river, the Franks and Alamanni. For the Rhineland, the invasions were devastating, but nonetheless transient; neither the Vandals, Alans, and Sueves, nor the Huns established a permanent presence in the region. In the case of the Franks and their incursions, meanwhile, the similarity between the political context that prompted them to attack in the fifth century and their incentive for launching raids in the fourth century has already been noted, but requires further explanation. What is already clear, however, is that it would be inaccurate to portray the series of breaches of the Rhine frontier between 406 and 451 as part of some kind of abstract but all-encompassing phenomenon. Determining the motivations of the various barbarian groups who attacked the Empire in the fifth century is of central importance in helping us to answer the question with which this chapter opened, of whether the collapse of the Roman Empire in the Rhineland was the result of external pressure caused by barbarian attacks, or of internal problems that fundamentally undermined the imperial system.

Little is known of the backgrounds of the invaders of 406, save that they had always inhabited territories a significant distance away from the Rhine, and were located in the middle Danube region for much of the fourth century, probably, as Claudian tells us, across the frontier from Raetia.¹⁹² Their opportunity to cross the

¹⁹²Claudian, *Gothic War*, lines 278-81 and 414-5, pp. 146, 156.

Rhine frontier was, as we have seen, provided by the Empire's weakness in the region. However, since these groups were not near-neighbours of the Empire at the Rhine, and their invasion did not immediately follow the depletion of troops stationed there, opportunism alone cannot satisfactorily explain what prompted them to invade when and where they did.¹⁹³ Unfortunately, our sources are of precious little help in determining what other factors might have influenced them. Procopius, one of very few late antique writers to explain the invaders' motivation, claims that they were 'pressed by hunger', but this seems unlikely to be anything more than a default explanation for an invasion of unknown cause, especially since Procopius was removed from the event by both time and distance.¹⁹⁴

In light of the importance of this invasion within modern scholarly attempts to understand the collapse of the Western Roman Empire, various hypotheses have emerged to fill this explanatory vacuum. Heather, for example, suggests that the Vandals, Alans, and Sueves were forced towards the frontier by the Huns, who are known to have been reaching central Europe by the 420s. He postulates that they arrived on the middle Danube just before the crisis period of c.405-8, driving Radagaisus into Italy, and the Vandals, Alans, and Sueves westwards. Their eventual arrival in the vicinity of the Rhineland led to a build-up of pressure at the frontier, which culminated in the invasion.¹⁹⁵ For Heather, therefore, 406 was 'a rerun of 376',¹⁹⁶ and 'the invasions of 376 and 405-8 were not random events, but two moments of crisis generated by the same strategic revolution: the rise of Hunnic power'.¹⁹⁷ His

¹⁹³The running-down of frontier troops is discussed in more detail above, pp. 53-4.

¹⁹⁴Procopius, *History of the Wars*, III, 3, 1, ed. and trans. H. B. Dewing (London, 1916) p. 23; Heather, 'Why did the Barbarian Cross the Rhine?', p. 7.

¹⁹⁵Heather, *Fall*, p. 433; Heather, 'Why did the Barbarian Cross the Rhine?', pp. 8-10. For a similar interpretation, see also F. M. Clover, 'Gaiseric and Attila', in F. M. Clover (ed.), *The Late Roman West and the Vandals* (Aldershot, 1993), p. 104.

¹⁹⁶Heather, 'Why did the Barbarian Cross the Rhine?', p. 10; Heather, *Fall*, p. 202.

¹⁹⁷Heather, *Fall*, p. 433.

interpretation is plausible, since the centre of Hunnic operations was still well to the east in the late fourth century, when they are known to have launched a raid into imperial territory across the Caucasus mountains, but had moved to the vicinity of the Danube by 427, when they were expelled from Pannonia by imperial forces.¹⁹⁸ The evidence of the Huns' driving out the Vandals, Alans, and Sueves is, nevertheless, circumstantial at best, since it is based purely on the Huns being in approximately the right place, possibly at the right time.¹⁹⁹ It is also important to note that although several contemporary accounts of the invasion survive, none of them attribute it to the Huns, whilst any build-up of pressure at the frontier is likely to have resulted from the formation of more stable and cohesive political units by the Empire's immediate neighbours, rather than from the arrival of a significant number of newcomers.²⁰⁰

Two of the most influential alternative interpretations, against which Heather has specifically reasserted his original position, have been offered by Goffart and Halsall.²⁰¹ Goffart, for his part, whilst accepting Heather's interpretation that the Huns arrived on the middle Danube around 405, insists that we consider the possibility that they arrived after the Vandals, Alans, and Sueves had left, thereby having no direct role in causing their departure, and merely filling the political void their exodus had created.²⁰² To explain the invaders' move westwards, he postulates that news spread that the Rhine was undefended, so that they merely exploited the opportunity to cross without facing Roman opposition. In particular, the Alans, as recent allies of the Empire on its Danube frontier, were plausibly in a position to have had inside knowledge of the removal of troops from the Rhine frontier. It is also possible, Goffart suggests, that the

¹⁹⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 202-3.

¹⁹⁹This is acknowledged by Heather himself, who notes that 'we need to *envisage* [my italics] a second phase of Hunnic intrusion into Europe': 'Why did the Barbarian Cross the Rhine?', p. 9.

²⁰⁰Goffart, *Tides*, p. 77; Halsall, *Migrations*, pp. 152, 161.

²⁰¹Heather, 'Why did the Barbarian Cross the Rhine?', p. 10.

²⁰²Goffart, *Tides*, pp. 76-7.

Vandals, Alans, and Sueves may have sought for themselves a favourable settlement on Roman soil, such as that which had been granted to the Goths in 382.²⁰³ To Goffart, therefore, the causes of the collapse of the Rhine frontier are to be found within the Empire; in particular, in its recent, more accommodating policy towards its barbarian neighbours, and its inadequate frontier defences. Halsall, meanwhile, similarly sees the invasion of 406 as having been caused by internal factors. In his analysis, the running-down of defences at the Rhine frontier during the usurpations of Magnus Maximus and Eugenius and in the first years of the fifth century, leaving it protected only by the goodwill of barbarian kings, left northern Gaul fatally exposed. It was this, coupled with Stilicho's preoccupation with Italy and the Balkans, that paved the way for the invasion.²⁰⁴

On balance, a combination of certain elements from each of these hypotheses probably represents the best guess at what led to the invasion. As Heather suggests, the imminent arrival of the Huns at the Danube may well have incentivised the Vandals, Alans, and Sueves to seek pastures new. However, this does not, in itself, explain why they invaded the Empire, since, as we have seen, there is no convincing evidence to suggest that their arrival caused an unmanageable increase in population east of the Rhine. The most plausible motive and opportunity for the invasion itself, then, are those suggested by Goffart and Halsall; realising that the Rhine frontier was largely undefended, the invaders were inspired to seize the opportunity for plunder. In this analysis, it becomes clear that neither internal nor external factors, but rather a disastrous combination of both, were the causes of the invasion of 406. The resulting attack was a seminal moment, which irreversibly changing the course of history in the

²⁰³*Ibid.*, pp. 94-5.

²⁰⁴Halsall, *Migrations*, pp. 199-212.

Rhineland, but which would have been extremely difficult for the imperial authorities to foresee.

Turning to the Huns' own invasion across the Rhine frontier in 451, our sources offer a diverse range of possible contexts – or, perhaps better, pretexts – for Attila's attack on the West. For example, Jordanes suggested that the Hunnic leader, having become increasingly enmeshed in Western politics, had been bribed by the Vandal King Gaiseric to stir up trouble between Aetius and the Visigoths.²⁰⁵ It is doubtful that we can take Jordanes' account at face-value, however, since, as Maenchen-Helfen has pointed out, it is difficult to see how Gaiseric's envoys could have made their way across the Empire to Attila's court undetected.²⁰⁶ An alternative possibility is offered by Priscus, who claims that the Emperor Valentinian III's sister, Honoria, offered Attila her hand in marriage, together with the Western Empire as her dowry, if he rescued her from her imminent wedding to a dull senator by the name of Herculianus.²⁰⁷ Although it is inconceivable that Attila would ever have expected the imperial authorities to hand over the West to him, and the story itself may simply have been gossip emanating from the Eastern imperial court, it is certainly possible that he may have recognised in an appeal from Honoria an invitation to launch an invasion, or at least a reasonable excuse for doing so.²⁰⁸

However, Attila's prime motivation should probably not be sought in specific suggestions such as these, but rather within the wider context of his series of political and military engagements with the central imperial authorities, notably Aetius, and in the overall power and influence he had thereby come to possess. There is no room here

²⁰⁵Jordanes, *The Origin and Deeds of the Goths*, XXXVI, 184-6, pp. 57-8.

²⁰⁶O. J. Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns: Studies in their History and Culture* (London, 1973), p. 130.

²⁰⁷Heather, *Fall*, p. 335; Priscus, fragment 17 and fragment 20, 2-3, in *Fragmentary Classicizing Historians*, ed. and trans. Blockley, pp. 301, 305-9.

²⁰⁸Maenchen-Helfen, *Huns*, p. 130.

for full discussion of these interactions, save to say that the invasion of 451 was the culmination of a protracted period of conflict and cooperation, during which he and the Huns had fought both against and on behalf of the Empire.²⁰⁹ As such, the accounts of Jordanes and Priscus have most value not for the details of their explanations, which cannot be substantiated, but because they serve as important general indications of how complicated the political situation in the West had become by the mid-fifth century, and of how heavily Attila had come to be embroiled in imperial politics and military strategy. Attila's attack across the Rhine frontier was a massive raid, which should be understood within the context of his growing authority and desire to seek further concessions from the Empire. It was not, as Clover suggests, motivated by an 'appetite for world conquest'.²¹⁰ The lack of defences at the Rhine frontier, which by 451 had lost all meaning as a Roman political boundary, probably encouraged its selection as the route for his attack, whilst the road and river network of the Roman Rhineland, which had previously served to maintain the imperial military and political infrastructure, provided him with a straightforward course into central Gaul.

Focusing our attention now on the Frankish incursions into the Rhineland in the fifth century, if one wishes to establish parallels for these attacks, one must look not to the invasions of 406 and 451, but rather to the assaults the Franks' own forebears had intermittently carried out in the fourth century. Although the fifth-century Franks opportunistically crossed the barely defended Rhine in pursuit of plunder, much as the invaders of 406 did, they were not spurred on by opportunism alone, and were not entirely unprovoked. Instead, in attacking the Empire repeatedly, the Frankish leaders can be seen to have been motivated by similar considerations as had driven their fourth-

²⁰⁹For an account of the activities of Attila and his Huns, see: Heather, *Fall*, pp. 313-48; Maenchen-Helfen, *Huns*, pp. 18-168.

²¹⁰Clover, 'Gaiseric and Attila', p. 112.

century predecessors: securing moveable wealth and confirming their political primacy, in the absence of treaties with the Empire that would provide such resources and status through patronage. As in the preceding century, their assaults amounted only to raiding, and were not aimed at conquest, at completely destroying the cities they targeted, or at bringing Roman life in the region to an end. Unlike, for example, the Vandals, who moved ever deeper into imperial territory, the Frankish leaders apparently retreated between each assault to lands east of the Rhine that they recognised as their own. Indeed, one could argue that in pillaging the provinces to secure the resources required to maintain their primacy, the leaders' activities were actually intended to maintain the political status quo amongst their following as best they could, whilst awaiting the imperial response and the re-establishment of a peaceful relationship they had come to expect.²¹¹ As noted earlier, the novel feature of these attacks therefore lay not in the behaviour of the Franks, but in the absence of an effective imperial counter-attack to reassert regional authority, within the context of the Empire's more generalised failure to assert itself in the Rhineland in any meaningful or lasting way in the fifth century. This led to the proliferation of the attacks during a sustained period, causing significant localised damage in Trier and Cologne.

The Franks' reactions to the major invasions in 406 and 451 confirm that they were in no way hostile to the existence of the Empire. In 406, they attacked and almost defeated the Vandals, who had to be rescued from them by the Alans.²¹² In so doing, they probably acted in accordance with the agreement they had reached with Stilicho, since it is reasonable to surmise that the general would have compensated for the running-down of frontier troops by explicitly assigning defensive responsibilities to the allied groups bordering the Empire. In 451, likewise, Jordanes observed that Aetius

²¹¹Goffart, *Tides*, p. 37.

²¹²See above, p. 79.

counted the Franks, alongside ‘some other Celtic or Germanic tribes’, amongst the coalition of barbarian forces that helped him defeat Attila.²¹³

In summary, the discussion of the invasions of 406 and 451 in this chapter makes it clear that the incomers crossed the frontier uninvited and caused significant damage. As such, the description of these episodes as ‘invasions’ seems entirely appropriate, and to speak of their movements in any other terms would misleadingly diminish the importance of the damage they caused and the emotional responses this provoked. The invasion of 406 marked a crucial turning-point insofar as imperial control in the Rhineland was concerned, causing the Empire’s authority to deteriorate far quicker and more thoroughly than could ever have been predicted at the time when military resources were withdrawn from the region.²¹⁴ However, there is no evidence to suggest that this was the intention of the invaders from the outset; instead, they may have reacted to pressure exerted upon them by the Huns to move away from the Danube, and to the opportunity presented to them by the barely defended Rhine.²¹⁵ Attila’s invasion of 451, on the other hand, certainly was intended to threaten imperial authority. However, it occurred at a time when central control over the Belgic and Germanic provinces was already negligible, and the region had already been subjected to a series of attacks. As such, its impact on imperial control in Trier, Cologne, and the surrounding area was minimal.

The Frankish incursions are a very different, and more complex, proposition, since the Franks did eventually settle in large numbers on the formerly Roman side of the Rhine, by means of a process that was alternately peaceful and cooperative, and

²¹³Jordanes, *The Origin and Deeds of the Goths*, XXXVI, 191, p. 60.

²¹⁴Anton, ‘Übergang’, pp. 1-2; Anton, *Trier*, p. 40.

²¹⁵Heather, *Fall*, pp. 202-3, 433; Heather, ‘Why did the Barbarian Cross the Rhine?’, pp. 3-29; Goffart, *Tides*, p. 95.

violent and destructive. In attempting to resolve the issue of their role in the collapse of imperial control in the Rhineland, the fact that the Franks had no discernible inclination or motive to bring the Roman Empire to an end is significant. As late as 451, they can be seen to have been willing to work with the imperial authorities to uphold the imperial system. As such, whilst we should not seek to minimise the detrimental effects of their incursions on Trier, Cologne, and elsewhere, their eventual settlement within imperial territory seems to amount more to a gradual – even cautious – process of migration across the river, exploiting the absence of effective imperial control and the emergence of a power vacuum, than to a deliberate attempt to seize land and power by means of invasion.

1.2.5 Trier and Cologne as political centres in the fifth century

Over the first half of the fifth century, the exercise of centralised imperial authority in the Rhineland disintegrated and collapsed. Discussion of the region in that century must, therefore, include an attempt to understand how those who remained in Trier and Cologne reconstituted their political lives and social order to meet the challenges of life outside the imperial superstructure. One would expect this to have involved fundamental transformation, given the overarching changes in political control in the region, which saw the Rhineland cease to be part of the Roman Empire and become incorporated into the emerging Merovingian kingdom. One might imagine, moreover, that this transitional period would be of particular historical interest, yet a paucity of evidence means that discussions of political change in the first half of the fifth century in the Rhineland are often limited to issues bound up with the barbarian invasions and incursions, and the limits of imperial intervention, despite the enthusiasm

with which the regional political situation is examined in fourth-century and sixth-century contexts.²¹⁶ In light of these evidential issues, the interpretation offered here of the nature of Rhineland politics in the first half of the fifth century must be considered hypothetical, and derives not only from the events of that period, but also from the dynamics of the region in the fourth century. With regard to the second half of the fifth century, however, a limited volume of evidence does exist, which permits a relatively confident reconstruction of what local forms of government had developed over the intervening crisis period.

In attempting to establish how the aristocracies of Trier and Cologne sought to secure their stake in local and imperial politics, and to ensure the survival of their cities as political centres in the first half of the fifth century, it is important to note, first of all, that they had in the past demonstrated their willingness to seek local solutions to political crises, in the absence of imperial directives or effective intervention. The mid-fourth-century usurpations of Magnentius and Silvanus provide good illustrations of this for both cities. In Cologne, we might assume that Silvanus could count on the support of local aristocrats as well as his own troops, in order to make his usurpation viable.²¹⁷ In Trier, meanwhile, local nobles and prefecture officials turned their backs on Magnentius' regime as his power began to wane, shutting the city gates to his general and brother, Decentius, and electing their own leader, Poemenius, 'for the defence of the people'.²¹⁸ Ammianus provides a brief account of this episode, but the context of Poemenius' election is further informed by coins struck at Trier during the latter stages of Magnentius' usurpation, bearing the name and image of Constantius. The coins bear

²¹⁶ Anton, for example, discusses in detail the four attacks on Trier in the first half of the fifth century, the Huns' invasion, and Arbogast's time in office, but neglects to discuss what local forms of government may have been in place between the turn of the fifth century and the 470s. Anton, *Trier*, pp. 39-58; Anton, 'Übergang', pp. 1-42.

²¹⁷ Ammianus tells us that Silvanus had managed to get his chief officers on-side with promises of rewards: Ammianus Marcellinus, XV, 5, 16, pp. 142-4.

²¹⁸ 'Ad defendam plebem': *Ibid.*, XV, 6, 4, p. 158; Drinkwater, *Alamanni*, p. 213.

a resemblance to those minted for Magnentius, and therefore suggest a shift in loyalty in Trier akin to that described by Ammianus. In electing Poemenius, Trier's nobility demonstrated their readiness to implement local strategies for the protection and government of their city, as well as their capacity for independence of action from the imperial figurehead under whose rule they were supposed to be. Their rejection of Magnentius appears to have come only in the latter stages of his usurpation, when his imminent defeat was widely expected, and they were well-advised to extricate themselves from association with him.²¹⁹

Jovinus' usurpation, around sixty years later, was, as we have seen, a rebellion of Rhineland origin, based upon the support of local leaders, both Roman and barbarian.²²⁰ As such, it reveals that the spirited determination of the local aristocracy to secure their participation in the imperial political system remained undented in the first part of the fifth century. Since the motives of both the Romans and the barbarians have been discussed already, they need not detain us long here. However, it is important to reiterate that Jovinus' usurpation marked a crucial moment, at which it becomes evident that powerful individuals and groups on both sides of the Rhine could and would cooperate with one another in the interests of achieving political stability within their region, and filling the power vacuum that had emerged. Moreover, although Jovinus was no mere puppet emperor, the barbarian leaders were evidently no longer mere clients of the Empire either, but instead could be seen as legitimate participants in politics west of the Rhine. As we have seen, both the Roman nobility and the barbarian chiefs remained willing to work within the imperial system, but the alliances that they formed should nonetheless be interpreted as reflective of an important shift in the

²¹⁹Heinen, *Trevererland*, p. 233; Wightman, *Trier*, p. 61.

²²⁰See above, pp. 76-8.

balance of power in the Rhineland, and a forerunner to the political situation that developed in the later part of the century.

We may imagine that this closer cooperation between Roman and barbarian élites and tendency towards regionalisation would only have been exacerbated by feelings of rejection borne out of the Empire's withdrawal from the Rhineland, but we should be wary of taking this interpretation too far.²²¹ Although Trier was affected by the same events and general patterns of change that affected Cologne and elsewhere in the fifth century, and, as we shall see in subsequent chapters, it did not remain, in political terms or otherwise, the island of *Romanitas* it has often been described as, its aristocratic residents do appear to have clung on to the ideal of being part of the Roman Empire relatively tenaciously and until a comparatively late stage.²²² This is most clear in Salvian's account of how 'the few men of rank who had survived destruction demanded of the emperors circuses as the sovereign remedy for a ruined city'.²²³ In the face of regional upheaval such as had not been seen since the third century, therefore, Trier's nobility turned not to its own initiative, but to the emperor. What they really wanted, of course, were not the games themselves, but the affirmation of the emperor's commitment to their city, as a counterpoint to their loyalty, that the games would represent. Indeed, it is possible that this loyalty to the imperial system may have made the political adjustments required of them in the course of the fifth century that much more difficult.

²²¹R. W. Mathisen, *Ecclesiastical Factionalism and Religious Controversy in fifth-century Gaul* (Washington, D.C., 1989), p. 20.

²²²The sentiment of Trier's enduring *Romanitas* is expressed by Anton, *Trier*, pp. 59-66, and by Gauthier, *L'évangélisation*, pp. 136-8. The word '*Romanitas*' to describe Trier is used by, for example, Loseby, 'Decline and Change', p. 67, and G. Halsall, *Cemeteries and Society in Merovingian Gaul: Selected Studies in History and Archaeology, 1992-2009* (Leiden, 2010), p. 229.

²²³Salvian of Marseilles, *On the Government of God*, VI, 14, p. 183.

These indications are admittedly far from conclusive, but they do nonetheless allow us to make some general points regarding the likely nature of political authority in Trier and Cologne in the first half of the fifth century. Salvian's account reveals that Trier in particular remained home to a sizeable population of local aristocrats, so it seems reasonable to assume that the administration of the city would have continued largely in accordance with imperial practices, at least insofar as was possible during the recurrent outbreaks of turmoil. However, the indications from both cities of an independence of spirit and a willingness to seize the initiative suggest that locally powerful people may also have been devising their own strategies, intended to fill the power vacuum at the pinnacle of local leadership that had resulted from the Empire's political and military withdrawal from the region. It is likely that as the century wore on, barbarian leaders came to play increasingly prominent roles in these strategies, as they too sought to identify new methods of upholding their status amongst their kinsmen.

By the late 450s, for example, Cologne fell permanently under the control of a group of Franks known as the *Ripuarii*, whose name probably signifies their previous settlement on the bank (*ripa*) of the Rhine.²²⁴ The evidence for this takeover is extremely sketchy, since no contemporary reference to it survives.²²⁵ It seems, however, to broadly correspond to Kulikowski's recent interpretation of political authority in the fifth-century West, in which he suggests that barbarian kings, who essentially fitted the mould of the Empire's fourth-century clients, established themselves on Roman soil in the absence of imperial intervention in their affairs.²²⁶ In order to date the Franks'

²²⁴Bernhard, 'Die römische Geschichte', p. 160; E. Zöllner, *Geschichte der Franken bis zur Mitte des sechsten Jahrhunderts* (Munich, 1970), pp. 31-2; Carroll, *Romans*, p. 146; Anton, *Trier*, pp. 42-3; Anton, 'Übergang', p. 15.

²²⁵B. Paffgen and S. Ristow, 'Die Römerstadt Köln zur Merowingerzeit', in R. Kaiser (ed.), *Die Franken. Roms Erben und Wegbereiter Europas* (Mainz, 1996), p. 147.

²²⁶Kulikowski, 'The Western Kingdoms', pp. 32-4.

takeover, past interpretations have made use of a vague reference in Salvian's *On the Government of God* to the city having been 'overrun by the enemy', but this evidence is fallible, not least because the phrase does not necessarily have to denote a Frankish occupation of Cologne, but may instead simply be a reference to the city having been looted.²²⁷ Indeed, Salvian's precise wording may simply stem from a desire to vary his language from the accompanying references to Mainz and Trier, which he says were respectively 'wiped out' and 'laid low by a destruction'.²²⁸ More decisively, Salvian is believed to have written *On the Government of God* in the first half of the 440s, on the grounds of internal references to historical events and his omission of any reference to the Huns' invasion in 451 or the Vandal sack of Rome in 455, both events that we might expect to have made an impression on him.²²⁹ His account is, therefore, obviously completely unworkable as evidence for a Frankish takeover of Cologne in the 450s. The only other textual evidence for this takeover is provided by the eighth-century *Liber Historiae Francorum*, which claims that the Franks' capture of Cologne was opposed by Aegidius, the Empire's *magister militum* in Gaul in the 450s and early 460s.²³⁰ It is, therefore, from this somewhat later, problematic, source that the dating of Cologne's Frankish takeover derives.²³¹

By the time the Franks took Cologne, it had been half a century since the Empire last exerted its military and political control over the Rhine frontier in any meaningful way, and, as such, it is not entirely surprising that the imperial authorities put up little resistance to the renewed Frankish occupation of the city. Nonetheless, it would be mistaken to assume that they had necessarily abandoned all hope of restoring their

²²⁷See, for example, Anton, *Trier*, p. 43, footnote 19.

²²⁸Salvian of Marseilles, *On the Government of God*, VI, 8, p. 170.

²²⁹D. Lambert, 'The Uses of Decay: History in Salvian's *De gubernatione dei*', *Augustinian Studies* 30, issue 2 (1999), p. 115, footnote 1.

²³⁰*Liber Historiae Francorum* 8, p. 250. In this section, the *LHF* derives its content from Gregory of Tours' history of the Franks.

²³¹For a brief discussion of the problematic nature of the *Liber Historiae Francorum*, see above, pp. 67-8.

control in the Rhineland. Instead, their inertia in the face of the Franks' actions should be attributed to the ongoing political crises at the heart of central government and in the Mediterranean regions of the Empire. Following the deaths of Aetius and the Emperor Valentinian III in 454 and 455 respectively, Avitus was made southern Gaul's claimant to the purple. He was replaced in short order by Majorian, who presented the best hope of restoring some degree of stability to the Western Empire, but whose death in 461 as a result of court intrigue marked the decisive end of imperial control over much of northern and central Gaul. Thereafter, the *magister militum* in Gaul, Aegidius, refused to recognise Majorian's successor, Severus, effectively depriving the Empire of the military means to exert its influence west of the Alps. Meanwhile, Aegidius was drawn into war against the Visigoths, and his reliance on the Franks as allies in this conflict precluded him from militarily challenging their capture of Cologne.²³²

Little is known of the short-term impact of this Frankish takeover on Cologne, since very little evidence survives concerning any aspect of fifth-century life in the city. Indeed, we know the name of only one of the city's Frankish kings – Sigibert the Lame, who was killed by his son, Cloderic, and whose territory was then taken by Clovis.²³³ The Franks' permanent occupation of the city did not, however, cause Cologne to collapse; the reasonable degree of continuity, particularly in respect of burials at church sites and production of glassware, between the late fourth century and the sixth century suggests that life continued, albeit on a reduced scale.²³⁴ The establishment of a new ruling élite in the city would certainly have required some readjustment on the part of

²³²Elton, 'Defence', p. 172; Heather, 'Western Empire', pp. 20-5; S. Fanning, 'Emperors and Empires in Fifth-Century Gaul', in Drinkwater and Elton (eds), *Fifth-century Gaul: A Crisis of Identity?*, p. 288.

²³³Gregory of Tours, *History*, II, 40, p. 90.

²³⁴On the production of glassware: M. Riedel, *Köln: Ein römisches Wirtschaftszentrum* (Cologne, 1982), especially pp. 67-78. U. Koch, 'Glas – Luxus der Wohlhabenden', in Kaiser (ed.), *Die Franken: Roms Erben*, pp. 605-17. Steuer, *Die Franken*, urges caution: it is not clear what happened to the Roman glass industry in Cologne in the Merovingian period, but the catalogue of forms and quantity of finds are fairly small: pp. 138-9. For burials of probable mid-fifth-century date at the church of St Severinus, see below, p. 161.

the original inhabitants, but in many ways they were well placed to cope. Living at the frontier, the residents of Cologne were accustomed to the presence of soldiers, many of whom were of non-Roman descent. Their city was not conquered by an unfamiliar and hostile people, but rather was taken over by Frankish leaders who had for centuries been their neighbours, and periodic allies, across the Rhine. Relations had not always been friendly, but they had not always been hostile either; the frontier at Cologne had long been an area of exchange and interaction, culturally and economically, as much as it was a political boundary.²³⁵ In conjunction with the aforementioned climate of cooperation in the fifth century, this should have made the change in political power and the personal adjustments it might have necessitated far less traumatic and dramatic than one might superficially assume. Furthermore, the Franks' adoption of Cologne as their political centre ensured that the city retained its function as regional capital, despite the collapse of the Roman system that had given it that centrality in the first place.

In Trier, meanwhile, Salvian's reference to the nobility petitioning the emperor for circus games is our last allusion to local forms of government or leadership until the 470s, when the city was administered by a *comes* by the name of Arbogast, a descendant of the fourth-century *magister militum* of the same name.²³⁶ Described as '*comes Trevirorum*', Arbogast is most likely to have had both military and civil responsibilities, but we do not know precisely what his office encompassed, or how it came about, since he is one of the earliest holders of the office of *comes civitatis* to whom any reference survives.²³⁷ In the absence of any useful precedents for Arbogast's role, our only direct evidence for the situation in Trier in the mid-470s is provided by two letters to Arbogast, one from Auspicius of Toul, asking him to respect the bishop of

²³⁵Halsall, *Migrations*, pp. 141-3; Elton, 'Defence', p. 167; Drinkwater, "'Germanic Threat'", p. 26.

²³⁶Auspicius of Toul, *Letter to Arbogast*: full text in translation provided in Mathisen, *People*, pp. 34-8.

²³⁷Arbogast, *PLRE II*, pp. 128-9; P. MacGeorge, *Late Roman Warlords* (Oxford, 2002), p. 75.

Trier, Jamblychus, and one from Sidonius Apollinaris, in response to a letter he had received from Arbogast.

Auspicius' letter, which asks Arbogast to respect the status of Jamblychus, the bishop of Trier, suggests that the author's conception of Arbogast's office lay within the Roman hierarchical system, since it was addressed to 'the outstanding, respectable Count Arbogast', reflecting the customary association of the office of *comes* with the rank of *vir spectabilis*.²³⁸ This could indicate that, despite the novelty of the office of *comes civitatis*, some degree of clarity had been achieved regarding how it could be incorporated within the Roman system of offices. However, we should be wary of taking this inference too far; the terminology Auspicius uses is hard to unpick, and could have been employed by the bishop either because it suited his purposes of appealing to Arbogast to respect the rights of his bishop, or because of a lack of suitable alternative titles to denote this new type of ruler. In placing Arbogast's office within an established framework of political relations, Auspicius' letter bears similarities to that sent to Clovis by Bishop Remigius of Reims, in which the bishop conceived of the Frankish king, in the early stages of his reign, as a Roman governor.²³⁹ This may imply that, further to the barbarians' growing political influence west of the Rhine during the fifth century, distinctions between Roman and barbarian personal identities and political structures were becoming ever more blurred, so that it was possible to think of barbarians exercising their kingship on Roman soil and long-since Romanised or Roman administrators using a very similar conceptual framework. It also gives us good reason to question whether Arbogast was necessarily an imperial appointment, for all that he bore an imperial title. Once again, however, we should be cautious in our analysis; Remigius may have been motivated to address Clovis using a Roman title by

²³⁸ Auspicius of Toul, *Letter to Arbogast*, in Mathisen, *People*, p. 34.

²³⁹ *Austrasian Letter 2, Epistulae Austrasicae*, ed. W. Gundlach, *MGH Epp.* III (Berlin, 1892), p. 113.

precisely the same kinds of considerations as may have prompted Auspicius to situate Arbogast within the familiar and comforting categories of the senatorial aristocracy.

Meanwhile, Sidonius Apollinaris' letter to Arbogast is interesting, first and foremost, simply because it demonstrates that the two men were on one another's radars, at a time when it is widely assumed that northern Gaul had become socially and politically cut off. For Arbogast, the maintenance of social contact with aristocrats in southern Gaul must have been good for his image, whilst Sidonius, for his part, must have felt there was something to be gained in terms of his own prestige and influence from being in touch with powerful individuals in the north.²⁴⁰ Sidonius' letter reveals, moreover, that Arbogast was, unsurprisingly, finding it necessary to foster good relations with the increasingly-influential Frankish aristocracy of northern Gaul. In typically playful fashion, Sidonius wrote of Arbogast, 'you are intimate with the barbarians but are innocent of barbarisms'.²⁴¹ Sidonius' implication here is clearly that the 'barbarians', who, in his mind, were socially and politically distinct from the Gallo-Roman population, were in close cooperation with the recognised authority figure in Trier. This is important, but we should not assume that Sidonius' perception of two distinct population groups necessarily reflected the reality of life in northern Gaul; indeed, we have various clues to the contrary, not least the aforementioned letter from Remigius to Clovis.

As the similarities between the letters of Bishops Auspicius of Toul and Remigius of Reims to Arbogast and Clovis respectively suggest, Arbogast's situation should not be viewed in isolation, but in comparison with other magnates, both Gallo-

²⁴⁰Sidonius also wrote to Syagrius: Sidonius Apollinaris, *Letter V*, 5, in *Poems and Letters*, ed. and trans. Anderson, pp. 180-2.

²⁴¹Sidonius Apollinaris, *Letter IV*, 17, 1, in *Poems and Letters*, ed. and trans. Anderson, p. 126. Sidonius similarly compliments Syagrius for his command of the barbarians' language: Sidonius Apollinaris, *Letter V*, 5, 1, p. 180.

Roman and Frankish, who similarly claimed authority over a particular region within northern Gaul. This not only provides an important complement to the little direct evidence for Arbogast, helping us to better understand the nature of his office, but also allows us to place the political circumstances of Trier and Cologne in a helpful wider context. Rather than focusing upon Clovis, however, it is more fruitful to turn our attention to his father and Arbogast's contemporary, the Frankish king, Childeric I, as well as to the aforementioned rebel *magister militum*, Aegidius, his son Syagrius, and to a *comes* named Paul.²⁴² By so doing, we can deduce that by the later fifth century, there no longer appears to have been any significant difference between the leadership provided by a barbarian king who governed a formerly imperial territory, and that of an individual of Roman descent, who ostensibly exercised an imperial office.

In terms of helping us to better understand the nature and scope of Arbogast's rule in Trier, the most important source for Aegidius, Childeric, and Paul is a single chapter of Gregory of Tours' ten books of history. In this chapter, in markedly dissimilar style to the rest of his work, Gregory provides a list of short and seemingly random statements concerning military conflicts involving Aegidius, Childeric, Paul, and a Saxon king named Odovacer, perhaps the same person as the later ruler of Italy. On the basis of Gregory's terse style here, and the specific geographical focus of this chapter, it seems reasonable to infer that he was reproducing, possibly verbatim, the contents of a lost 'Angers Chronicle'. For our purposes, the inter-relationship of the cryptic events described in the chapter is unimportant, but what is significant is that Gregory's statements reveal to us the importance of the military leadership provided by

²⁴²Anton draws similar parallels, but only with Aegidius, Syagrius, and Paul: Anton, 'Übergang', pp. 36-7.

the various rulers.²⁴³ Gregory recounts that ‘Childeric fought battles at Orléans’; Aegidius died, the implication being that this was during battle; and ‘Count Paul... advanced against the Goths’. We can supplement these with his subsequent report of how Aegidius’ son, Syagrius, ‘king of the Romans’, was defeated by Clovis.²⁴⁴ On the basis of this description of the actions of Arbogast’s contemporaries, it would appear that his administrative control, which is alluded to in the letters from Auspicius and Sidonius, must have been complemented by a capacity for military generalship.

These rulers of northern Gaul in the later fifth century exhibit notable differences in their backgrounds and titles. As we have seen, Aegidius had been serving as *magister militum* for Majorian, and continued to exercise control within Gaul in an independent capacity following the emperor’s deposition.²⁴⁵ Whilst openly rebelling against Ricimer, the general wielding power in Italy, he apparently also ruled over Childeric’s subjects during the Frankish king’s time in exile in Thuringia.²⁴⁶ As Frye suggests, this seems entirely plausible, since Aegidius would already have commanded the Franks in his capacity as *magister militum*, and there are no convincing grounds for assuming that his Roman identity would have necessarily precluded him being able to govern a barbarian confederacy.²⁴⁷ Aegidius was succeeded by his son, Syagrius, so that in effect, despite starting out in northern Gaul as an imperial *magister militum*, he had formed for himself a small independent polity based on Soissons.²⁴⁸ The authority of the Frankish king, Childeric I, Clovis’ father, was obviously closely connected with that of

²⁴³D. Frye, ‘Aegidius, Childeric, Odovacer, and Paul’, *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 36 (1992), pp. 1-14, offers a convincing reconstruction; Wood, *Kingdoms*, pp. 38-9.

²⁴⁴Gregory of Tours, *History*, II, 18, and II, 27, pp. 65, 71.

²⁴⁵Elton, ‘Defence’, p. 172; Aegidius, *PLRE* II, pp. 11-13.

²⁴⁶Gregory of Tours, *History*, II, 12, pp. 61-2.

²⁴⁷Frye, ‘Aegidius’, pp. 5-6.

²⁴⁸MacGeorge, *Warlords*, pp. 92-7. The size and importance of the kingdom of Soissons, over which Aegidius is said to have ruled, has been deemed an exaggeration, based on a passing reference in Gregory of Tours’ *Histories* to Syagrius’ seat being in the city, as his father’s had been. Aegidius’ domain is of unknown size, and may originally have been in a different area: MacGeorge, *Warlords*, p. 109; E. James, *The Franks* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 78-80.

Aegidius, and was based first on the Loire and later in Tournai. Childeric initially held power within nominally imperial territory by virtue of his status as leader of a federate warband, but in practice, he ruled autonomously.²⁴⁹ He is traditionally seen as an ally of Aegidius and Syagrius, but is convincingly depicted by Frye as an enemy of Aegidius, from whom he had to wrest control of his former followers after his return from exile.²⁵⁰ Lastly, the precise office of the *comes* named Paul is not revealed by our sources, so he has in the past been variously interpreted as a *magister militum per Gallias*, *comes rei militaris*, or a *comes civitatis*.²⁵¹ Whilst we cannot be certain, Frye rightly points out that Paul's close association with the city of Angers makes it possible that he, like Arbogast, held the office of *comes civitatis*.²⁵² Thus, these three magnates, who all held military and administrative power over relatively small political territories within Gaul, came from diverse backgrounds and, perhaps more importantly, held very different positions within the Roman framework: rebel *magister militum*; federate barbarian king; and, plausibly, *comes civitatis*. Their title and background appear to have been of precious little significance in determining the nature or extent of their authority. The establishment of their polities is indicative of a pattern of change in northern Gaul by the 460s and 470s, to which Trier, governed by Arbogast, and Cologne, held by the Ripuarian Franks, clearly correspond. Despite the contrasting backgrounds and titles of their rulers, we can, therefore, assume that Trier and Cologne in the 460s and 470s were probably not as different from one another in terms of their political circumstances as they may superficially appear.

²⁴⁹Childeric I, *PLRE* II, pp. 285-6.

²⁵⁰Frye, 'Aegidius', p. 4. This interpretation is supported by Halsall, *Migrations*, p. 269.

²⁵¹Paulus 20, *PLRE* II, pp. 851-2. The *PLRE* tentatively gives Paul's office as *Comes rei militaris*.

²⁵²Frye, 'Aegidius', pp. 11-2; MacGeorge, *Warlords*, p. 104. Halsall suggests instead that he was a former officer of Aegidius, now serving Childeric: *Migrations*, p. 270. There is, however, no evidence to suggest that Paul was Childeric's subordinate.

The process through which these separate territories came into being and their governors were appointed is impossible to know, and probably varied significantly from case to case. Whilst Kulikowski's interpretation of barbarian 'client' kings moving into the Empire in the absence of effective imperial directives is almost certainly correct in some instances, it cannot explain the leadership provided by ethnically Roman or long-since Romanised individuals like Arbogast, Aegidius, Syagrius, and Paul.²⁵³ Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to speculate that the creation of the office of *comes civitatis* and the establishment of independent polities by other rulers were corollaries of the Empire's inability to intervene militarily or politically in the Rhineland in any decisive way for most of the fifth century, and of the consequential importance, for Roman and barbarian populations alike, of the leadership provided by the most powerful local magnates. The remaining question is whether the *comes* Arbogast of Trier is likely to have been the candidate of local magnates looking to fill the worsening power vacuum in the area, who was perhaps subsequently recognised by the central imperial authorities as a means of displaying some semblance of control over the situation, or whether he started out as an imperial appointee. In the absence of any direct evidence, the answer offered here can only be tentative and provisional. However, there do seem to be some grounds to believe that Arbogast was most likely a local appointment, who then was either recognised by the remaining imperial authorities in Italy, or else assumed or was assigned the Roman title of *comes civitatis* by others to create a greater sense of legitimacy and a more readily comprehensible conceptual framework for his rule.²⁵⁴ In the first place, given that imperial withdrawal from the Rhineland took place by the early fifth century and was followed by the series of barbarian invasions and incursions, it is difficult to see – even as early as the 450s and

²⁵³Kulikowski, 'Western Kingdoms', pp. 32-4.

²⁵⁴Anton disagrees, seeing Arbogast as a Roman official, defending Roman power: *Trier*, pp. 51-4.

460s, if Arbogast had predecessors – how the imperial authorities in Rome could have successfully installed their choice of *comes* in Trier, even if the office of *comes civitatis* was a central innovation. Secondly, we have seen how the aristocracy of the Rhineland – and of Gaul more generally – had something of a history of independent action, of which the establishment of the Gallic Empire in the third century, the Trier nobility's election of Poemenius to defend their city during Magnentius' mid-fourth-century usurpation, and Jovinus' usurpation in the early fifth century are but a handful of examples. As such, it seems entirely conceivable that the élite population of Trier might have chosen their own ruler, or else naturally gravitated towards the pre-eminent local figure, in the absence of imperial intervention and directives.

Conclusion

Throughout most of the fourth century, the Rhineland was the political centre of the Western Empire, and the presence of the imperial court and praetorian prefecture in Trier attracted a large number of aristocrats to the city from other regions, whilst providing opportunities for the local nobility to secure roles in central government. The region's political importance both necessitated and facilitated its stringent defence, meaning that breaches of security at the Rhine frontier were few and far between, whilst those that did occur were dealt with in relatively short order. By the turn of the fifth century, however, both the imperial residence and the praetorian prefecture had been removed from Trier, and this had dramatic implications for the strategic and political importance of the Rhineland. No longer at the heart of the Western political system, defence of the region ceased to be an imperial priority, and primary responsibility for

protecting the frontier increasingly fell to the Empire's barbarian allies whose lands bordered the Rhine.

This is not to say, however, that imperial withdrawal from the region, which began with Gratian's decision to relocate his court to Milan and culminated in the running down of defences at the Rhine frontier, was part of a new, preconceived strategy for governing the Western Empire. Instead, Gratian's move to Italy was probably a contingent response to trouble on the Danube frontier, which was never reversed. The prefecture was then relocated in or soon after 395 not because of any immediate considerations, but because it was rational for the Gallic prefect to be based within reasonable proximity of the imperial residence. Stilicho's possible withdrawal of troops from the frontier came in the wake of this transfer of the institutions of central government out of Trier, in response to serious threats facing the Empire in Italy. By temporarily leaving the Rhine frontier under-garrisoned, the general was risking none of the institutions of central government, which were however at risk if he did not successfully combat the invasions of Radagaisus and Alaric. As such, his decision seems perfectly logical. There is no evidence that Stilicho's removal of troops was designed to be a permanent measure, but the subsequent unfolding of events ensured that it could not feasibly be reversed.

In light of these significant changes in the political situation west of the Rhine, it is important to note that throughout the fourth century and the first half of the fifth century, the behaviour of the Franks appears consistent, and was determined by the state of their diplomatic relations with the Empire. Their incursions invariably occurred in the context of political instability within the Empire, especially usurpations, which forced the imperial authorities to neglect the frontier and rendered the maintenance of diplomatic agreements between the Empire and its barbarian neighbours impossible. In

the fourth century, the imperial authorities followed up their successful resolution of the problems that had drawn their attention with retaliatory strikes against the Franks and Alamanni, which ensured the barbarians' submission and the agreement of new treaties. The precise terms of these treaties would have varied depending on how comprehensive the Romans' victory was, but the Empire remained the dominant player in the relationship. In the fifth century, however, the situation changed as a result of the actions – or rather, inaction – of the imperial authorities. As far as we can tell, the first raid across the Rhine frontier by the Franks, which was probably prompted by the collapse of their treaties with the Empire, went unpunished. This incentivised their leaders to plunder more frequently in pursuit of the moveable wealth that confirmed their status, whilst they awaited the anticipated imperial counter-strike and the renewal of diplomatic agreements.

Whilst the invasion of 406 may have been prompted in part by the running-down of defences at the Rhine frontier, it was a decisive turning-point in the deterioration of imperial control over the Rhineland, causing the political situation in the region to deteriorate so suddenly and dramatically that it slipped over the horizon of feasible intervention by the imperial authorities. Up until the invasion, little had changed in the region as a result of Stilicho's withdrawal of frontier troops, and the Franks and Alamanni had been abiding by the terms of their agreements with the Empire. The Vandals, Alans, and Sueves not only ransacked northern Gaul themselves for the better part of three years, but also may have brought about the collapse of the treaties that had been regulating relations between the Empire and its barbarian neighbours, encouraging the series of incursions so vividly described by Salvian. Entering the realms of speculation, it is possible that had the invasion not entirely transformed the state of play, Stilicho might have been able to return the frontier troops

from the Rhine to their station, stabilising the political situation in the region and preventing the series of subsequent barbarian attacks that contributed to the collapse of imperial control over the Rhineland.

In seeking to understand what forms of local and regional government replaced the central imperial authorities in the Rhineland, we should emphasise the role of regional magnates, whether Roman or barbarian, for whom a role in the political process was a fundamental part of their identity. It would appear that in Trier, Cologne, and northern Gaul more generally, a series of small, independent polities arose based upon cities, which were led by recognised individuals with the support of other Gallo-Roman and Frankish magnates. The selection of each individual leader must have been based on a variety of factors, including their efficacy as governor and warrior, but there is no uniformity in their ethnic origins or the Roman titles with which they came to be associated. This form of political organisation should not be overlooked, since it represents an important transitional phase between the Roman Empire and the Merovingian kingdoms that were emerging by the end of the fifth century. Based on the cities, the old centres of government and politics, it permitted all parties a stake in regional politics, without the need for dramatic restructuring of local political structures or personal identities.

Returning to the question with which this chapter opened – of whether the collapse of the Roman Empire in the Rhineland was the result of internal weaknesses or external pressures – the answer is, unavoidably, somewhat circular. This is nowhere truer than in the case of the invasion of 406-7. However, there can be little getting away from the conclusion that the Empire's own withdrawal from the Rhineland lies at the root of its loss of control over the region. Whilst the invasion caused the situation in the Rhineland to change suddenly and irreparably, it seems that the region's lowered

position on the list of imperial priorities was both a factor in enabling the invasion to occur, and a major reason why no determined campaigns were undertaken to decisively restore imperial control at any point thereafter. Nonetheless, this does not mean that the purpose of this chapter has been to apportion *blame* for the collapse of imperial authority over the Belgic and Germanic provinces to the Empire's own government. Insofar as we can tell, there was nothing inherently weaker about the imperial system as a whole in the fifth century than in the fourth century, and nothing that might have suggested its imminent collapse under its own weight. Meanwhile, the decisions taken by the imperial authorities to withdraw from the Rhineland in the late fourth century were probably never intended to become permanent, but instead appear to have been the product of immediate contingencies. Their consequences could never have been predicted, even if the rapidity with which regional security had deteriorated in times of temporary imperial weakness in the fourth century should perhaps have rung alarm bells.

The Empire's collapse in the Rhineland, as a result of its own decisions, and the ensuing barbarian invasions and incursions would have been felt nowhere more sharply than in Trier and Cologne, two of the region's most prominent cities, which had benefited during the fourth century from the influx of wealth and high-status personnel that had accompanied the imperial court and the praetorian prefecture. The fortunes of these cities over the course of the fourth and fifth centuries were, as we shall see, inextricably connected to their changing political circumstances. As such, this chapter provides an essential framework for our discussion of certain aspects of urban change in Trier and Cologne in the following two chapters. It is to the first of these aspects – the Christianisation of the cities – that our attention will now turn.