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Reviewed work(s):

Source: *Britannia*, Vol. 31 (2000), pp. 325-345

Published by: [Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/526925>

Accessed: 06/08/2012 18:40

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Barbarians in Gaul, Usurpers in Britain

By MICHAEL KULIKOWSKI

In the first decade of the fifth century Gaul and Britain, Spain and Italy all suffered from a succession of barbarian invasions and Roman civil wars. We possess not just one but several literary accounts of the crisis, along with chronicles, poetry, and imperial laws that all help to illuminate its course, but the sequence of events bristles with technical difficulties. These have not been satisfactorily resolved in the countless modern narratives of the period, which regularly depend on one another rather than the ancient sources.¹ The most recent treatment of the topic, by John Drinkwater, appeared in the pages of this journal, and represents a tremendous advance on our understanding of the crisis. Drinkwater's analysis clarifies any number of crucial interpretative points, and should be the first port of call for any one interested in the study of the period.² Problems nevertheless remain. Drinkwater's episodic treatment of the period encourages a certain obscurity that a more systematic narrative might dispel, and he relies heavily upon badly understood ancient slanders against the regent Stilicho to underpin important parts of his narrative. What follows is in no sense an attack on Drinkwater's magisterial interpretation of usurpation and crisis, which warrants wholehearted endorsement. Instead, I would like to suggest that the welter of modern literature on the crisis has blinded us to how little we actually know about it, and that only by maintaining a rigorous awareness of what actually appears in the primary sources can we hope to enjoy the fruits of more nuanced interpretation.³

There are two basic problems. We know that a series of three short-lived usurpations in Britain, culminating in that of Constantine III in 407, was a response to an invasion of Vandals, Alans, and Sueves from across the Rhine. We know that the usurpation of Constantine's predecessor Marcus began some time in the course of 406. On the other hand, the only precise date assigned to the Rhine crossing in our sources appears to be 31 December 406. Obviously, a crossing on that day could not have provoked a usurpation already under way. The problem is impossible to circumvent, and a wide variety of solutions have been attempted, none of which is wholly satisfactory. All require the discarding of one or another part of the evidence, and many require unfounded speculation about the policies of the general Stilicho. In point of fact, a good deal more of our evidence can be accommodated than is traditionally allowed, and we do not need to accept variations on the ancient 'Stilicho-the-traitor' theme to explain the crisis of the early fifth century.

THE DATE OF THE RHINE CROSSING

The key to the problem is the barbarian invasion from across the Rhine, since all of our other

¹ The period is treated in the standard accounts of Seeck 1913, 377–90; Seeck 1920, 42–50; Schmidt 1942, 16–25; Stein 1959, 16–25; Demougeot 1951, 376–96 (to which Demougeot 1974 adds little); Courtois 1955, 38–58; Stevens 1957. Very few more recent accounts come to grips with the sources themselves, two exceptions being Matthews 1975, 307–20 and Arce 1988, while the commentary of Paschoud 1986 and 1989 is invaluable.

² Drinkwater 1998, which, along with recognizing for nearly the first time the pioneering contributions of Edward Augustus Freeman (1904) to the topic, is unique in realizing the true nature of the Spanish war of the usurper Constantine III.

³ I should point out that most of this article was written before Drinkwater 1998 appeared. It has since been recast to accommodate several points on which the latter work anticipated my own conclusions, and many others on which I stood corrected.

interpretative problems hinge on it. Our sources tell us that in the middle of winter, half way through the first decade of the fifth century, a mixed group of barbarians gathered on the right bank of the middle Rhine.⁴ Jerome gives a long and fanciful list of the tribes involved, but all agree that Vandals, Sueves, and Alans formed the core of the invasion.⁵ We cannot know why this group of barbarians appeared on the Rhine when it did, for none of our sources tell us anything about that. Some believe that the barbarian invaders were fleeing from the Huns, others that they formed the remnants of the Goth Radagaisus' defeated army, but there is no evidence to support either view.⁶ Still, though we can say very little about the invaders' motives, we know rather a lot about the invasion itself.

The Roman garrison of the Rhine had been depleted in the year 402 by the general Stilicho in order to fight the Gothic king Alaric in Italy.⁷ The freezing of the Rhine may have made the crossing easier, though our sources do not tell us so.⁸ Regardless, the Vandals, Sueves, and Alans faced no organized resistance to their crossing, though while still on the right bank of the Rhine they did have to fight against some Franks who may have been Roman allies. The course of the battle was recounted by the fifth-century historian Rhenanus Frigeridus, parts of whose lost history are embedded in the sixth-century history of Gregory of Tours. Frigeridus, through Gregory, gives us the following account: 'Goar [the Alan] had gone over to the Romans and Respendial, the King of the Alans, therefore withdrew his army from the Rhine. The Vandals were struggling in their war against the Franks, their King Godigisel was killed, and about twenty thousand of their troops had been slaughtered so that the entire nation of the Vandals would have been exterminated, save that the forces of the Alans came to their rescue in time'.⁹ And so, despite the divisions among the Alans and the resistance of the Franks, the Vandals, Sueves, and Alans were able to cross the Rhine into Gaul.

We will discuss the course and the effects of their invasion there, but first we need to ask a more immediately pressing question. When did the invasion take place? The answer has long been 31 December 406, but this date imports a number of insoluble chronological problems into the history of the era and can only be sustained by dismissing a good deal of our evidence.¹⁰ Two problems are particularly striking. One has to do with the response of the Roman imperial government, the other with the response of provincial Romans. In the early fifth century, the man who ran the Western government was not the young emperor Honorius, but rather his regent, the generalissimo Stilicho, a confidant of Honorius' father, the emperor Theodosius I. We know that Stilicho failed to make any immediate response to the invasion from across the Rhine. On the other hand, we also know

⁴ Mainz is often cited as the starting point of the invasion, but there is no precise evidence for this apart from the fact that Jerome, *Ep.* 123.15 places it first in a list of the cities sacked by the invaders.

⁵ Jerome, *Ep.* 123.16 (*Quodus Vandalus Sarmata Halani Gypedes Heruli Saxones Burgundiones Alamanni et — o lugenda respublica! — hostes Pannonii vastarunt*) is surely no more than a display of ethnographic virtuosity.

⁶ Huns: Heather 1995; Radagaisus: Drinkwater 1998.

⁷ Claudian, *Get.* 419–29.

⁸ The tralatitious dependence of most modern narratives on each other is revealed by the universal assumption that the freezing of the river is a known fact, grounded in the sources, rather than a plausible hypothesis which goes back to Gibbon. So far as I know, only Elton 1996, 78, recognizes the lack of ancient evidence for the Rhine being frozen at the time of the invasion.

⁹ Greg. Tur. 2.9 (= *MGH.SRM* 1.55): '*Interea Respendial rex Alanorum Goare ad Romanos transgresso, de Rheno agmen suorum conuertit, Wandalis Francorum bello laborantibus, Godigyselo rege absumpto, aciae viginti ferme milibus ferro premissis, cunctis Wandalarum ad internitionem delendis, nisi Alanorum uis in tempore subuenisset.*' The literature universally identifies these Franks as federates, but neither Gregory nor Oros. 7.40.3 goes beyond affirming that the Rhine was crossed after Frankish defenders were defeated. Burns 1994, 206–9 imagines a much larger defence by insecurely attested barbarian units in the Roman army.

¹⁰ The only objection to this traditional date in the literature was raised by Baynes 1955, an article comprehensively dismissed in subsequent literature because a number of obviously false arguments sit alongside his penetrating analysis of the Rhine crossing.

that by the winter of 406/407 Stilicho had dealt with a series of threats that had occupied him till then, and his hands were free. His failure to do anything about the Rhine crossing is therefore inexplicable, unless one has recourse to speculation about his long-term motives elsewhere in the Roman world; that is, Stilicho decided not to deal with the invaders because he was too preoccupied with trying to launch a long-cherished campaign against the Eastern Empire in the Balkans. The second problem concerns three consecutive usurpations in Britain which took place around this time. We are told explicitly that these usurpations were a response to the Vandals, Alans, and Sueves crossing the Rhine.¹¹ The troops in Britain were afraid that the barbarians might pose a threat to the island, and so they proclaimed their own emperors to deal with them. We also know that the first of these usurpations was already under way by the summer of 406.¹² The contradiction here should be clear: if the invasion took place on 31 December 406, a usurpation that began the previous summer cannot have been a response to it. In order to maintain a date in 406, we are forced to dismiss one or another part of our evidence.

However, if the Rhine crossing began on 31 December 405, all these contradictions disappear. The sequence of British usurpations makes perfect sense, and Stilicho's inaction is explained not by an eastern scheme insecurely attested at this date, but by a much worse threat closer to home. Although by 402 Stilicho had temporarily checked the manoeuvrings of the Gothic king Alaric, some time in 405 he was faced by an invasion of Italy under another Gothic leader, Radagaisus.¹³ We learn about this invasion from an anonymous chronicler who made use of some version of the consular annals current in fifth-century Italy. 'After Alaric had retreated,' he tells us, 'there followed another army of Goths who, having entered Italy with their king Radagaisus, laid Italy waste. In the following year, Stilicho advanced against them with an army and strong force of soldiers near the Tuscan town of Florence. When the battle had finished, Radagaisus was defeated and captured and beheaded before the city gates.'¹⁴ The date of this is supplied in the same chronicle: 'After many Gothic soldiers had been killed in Tuscany by an army under Stilicho, Radagaisus was overcome and captured before the gates of Florence on the 22 August.'¹⁵ What this means is that from some time in 405 until August 406, the general Stilicho had his hands full in Italy fighting a Gothic army. These Goths threatened not just a distant Rhineland province, but the very centre of the Empire and the emperor himself. There could be no question of Stilicho's priorities. As far as the imperial government was concerned, Gaul was on its own till Radagaisus was defeated, which is to say till late summer 406.

As to the three usurpations in Britain, we know that Constantine, the third in line, revolted in 407. The fifth-century historian and diplomat Olympiodorus recounts the episode: 'Constantine had been proclaimed emperor in Britain as a result of a mutiny by the troops there. Even before Honorius had entered into his seventh consulship [that is, 1 January 407], the military of those provinces had revolted and proclaimed a certain Marcus emperor. Then they killed him and raised Gratian in his place. After about four months they grew tired of him, put him to death, and

¹¹ Zos. 6.3.1. Oros. 7.40.4 clearly implies that the second usurper, Gratian, was raised to the purple after the invasion was already in progress, but Orosius' chronology throughout this section of his history telescopes events into a very distorted time frame and too much should not be made of it.

¹² Olymp., frag. 12 (Müller) = 13.1 (Blockley).

¹³ The best accounts of Stilicho's campaigns against Alaric are Cameron 1970, 156–88 and now Heather 1991, 199–213.

¹⁴ *Add. Haun.* (= *MGH.AA* 9.299): [In margin] '*Post Alarici introitum sequitur alius exercitus Gotorum et rege Radagaiso Italiam ingressus Italiam vastat. contra quem anno sequenti Stilico cum exercitu et robore militum apud Florentiam Tuscorum urbem occurrit commissoque proelio Radagaisus victus et captus est et ante portas civitatis capite truncatus.*' The *Additamenta Hauniensis*, or the Copenhagen Continuation, is a series of supplements and marginal notes to the chronicle of Prosper of Aquitaine which is drawn from the body of annalistic material christened the *Consularia Italica* by Mommsen in his edition of the *chronica minora* (see *MGH.AA* 9: 266–71 and Muhlberger 1984).

¹⁵ *ibid.*: [In text] '*Radagaisus in Tusciam multis Gothorum milibus caesis ducente exercitum Stilichone superatus et captus est apud Florentiam urbem ante portas X k. Sept.*'

proclaimed Constantine emperor.¹⁶ One passage in the *New History* of Zosimus, a later Greek historian who copied huge chunks of Olympiodorus into his own narrative, may suggest a date of February 407 for Constantine's accession.¹⁷ More importantly, however, Zosimus tells us that the British revolts were a response to the appearance of barbarians from across the Rhine in Gaul.¹⁸ From the combined testimony of these sources we may conclude that Stilicho's imperial government could do nothing to stop the Vandals, Alans, and Sueves from entering Gaul because it was too busy fighting Radagaisus in Italy. The British army then raised up two unsatisfactory usurpers before settling on Constantine in 407. All our historical sources fit into place if the Rhine crossing began on New Year's Eve 405, rather than 406. With our revised chronology, all our surviving evidence is explained, and none of it is explained away.

If all this is so self-evidently true, one may very well ask what has stopped people accepting a date in 405 from the very beginning. The answer lies in what looks like a solid, dated reference to the Rhine crossing in the chronicle of Prosper of Aquitaine. Prosper was a Gallic monk and theologian who lived in the first half of the fifth century and, among many other works, wrote a chronicle of his own times that he revised several times in the course of a long life.¹⁹ The chronicle is one of the quintessentially Christian forms of historical writing, which did not exist in pre-Christian antiquity. The essence of the chronicle form is that each year is marked out according to the author's chosen system of reckoning, and one or two events of outstanding importance are attributed to each year. The ultimate goal of this exercise is usually to place the events of human history in the framework of Christian time, to record the annual stages by which human history marches towards the Second Coming. Because chroniclers were always on the lookout for signs of the Apocalypse, they tended to focus on unpleasant events, and their works therefore provide us with one of our main records of wars and disasters. The chronicle is only just beginning to be studied as a literary genre in its own right, rather than a mere quarry of historical data.²⁰ One consequence of these studies has been a new and salutary emphasis on the milieu of our late antique chroniclers, and of the *Tendenzen* of the works they produced. In looking at Prosper's entry on the Rhine crossing, we need to bear all this in mind.

What Prosper says about the invasion is '*Arcadio VI et Probo, Wandali et Halani Gallias traiecto Rheno ingressi II k. Ian*'.²¹ The date of the year is supplied by the consuls, the emperor Arcadius for the sixth time and Probus. This translates into 406 by *anno domini* reckoning. The day before the kalends of January is 31 December. Literally translated, Prosper's words thus say 'in the year 406, the Vandals and Alans, having crossed the Rhine, entered Gaul on the day before the kalends of January [= 31 December]'. There can be very little doubt that Prosper's chronicle

¹⁶ Olymp., frag. 12 (Müller) = 13.1 (Blockley). Olympiodorus could not have been more explicit on this point, using the aorist infinitive of *hypoteuseuo* to establish the sequence of events. We should, however, remember that though we cite Olympiodorus according to numbered fragments, these are not genuine fragments but paraphrases or abridgements that appear in the *Bibliotheca* of the Byzantine patriarch Photius. For the date and context of Olympiodorus' history, see Matthews 1970 and Gillett 1993.

¹⁷ Zos. 5.27.1–2, with Paschoud 1989, 20.

¹⁸ Zos. 6.3.1. He places the barbarian invasion itself at an unspecified date in the consulate of Arcadius for the sixth time and Probus, which is to say, at an unspecified date in 406.

¹⁹ For Prosper see Valentin 1900 and for his chronicle Muhlberger 1990, 48–135.

²⁰ A good deal of progress towards understanding chronicles as a literary genre has also been made in a series of editions that collectively replace many parts of Mommsen's *chronica minora*: Favrod 1993, Placanica 1997, and most importantly Burgess 1993 (whose numeration of Hydatius is cited throughout the present work). For interpretation, Muhlberger 1990 is fundamental, and has good references to the earlier literature. Also important are the essays collected in Croke and Emmett 1983, Clarke 1990, and Holdsworth and Wiseman 1986. Arce 1995 demonstrates how important a literary appreciation of chronicles can be to our factual understanding of the past.

²¹ Prosper 1230 (= *MGH.AA* 9.465). The marginal date in the Copenhagen Continuation is *pridie kl. Ianuarii* (= *MGH.AA* 9.299). This is not an independent witness to the events, since it must either be derived from the text of Prosper itself, or from one of the *consularia* that were the common source of both Prosper and the Continuator.

entry, grammatically, implies a date of 31 December 406 rather than 31 December 405 for the barbarian invasion of Gaul.²² This need not necessarily be the case, however. The context in which the entry occurs, and Prosper's own practice in dating, make it possible that he meant to imply a date of 31 December 405. The early part of Prosper's chronicle concerns events that took place when he was himself a little boy, and it is this part from which our entry comes. For these early years Prosper relied on written sources, among them some version of the annals which Mommsen edited under the general rubric of *Consularia Italica*. But as we learn from the later parts of his work which he wrote from personal recollection, Prosper actually had very little interest in precise dates. He was much more concerned with historical style, with telling a good story, and he did not hesitate to deliberately alter chronology where he felt there was reason to do so.²³ There is no conceivable reason for Prosper to have deliberately falsified the date of the Rhine crossing, but his story-telling technique may give us a clue to what has happened in his text.

To the year before his entry on the Rhine crossing (coss: Stilicho II and Anthemius) Prosper dates the invasion of Radagaisus; to the year afterwards (Honorius VII and Theodosius II), the usurpation of Constantine. The three entries are linked, and together they tell a kind of story. What seems to have happened is this. Prosper was writing a chronicle, and the genre abhorred blank years.²⁴ Since his chosen genre demanded an entry for each of three years, Prosper simply portioned out his sequence of events, one event to the year. He does the same thing elsewhere in the chronicle, and the result is a misrepresentation of detail.²⁵ So it is in the present case: Radagaisus *did* invade Italy in 405, though he was not defeated until 406, and Constantine was raised to the purple in 407. As to the barbarians in Gaul, the substantive period of their invasion is placed quite correctly in an entry for the year 406, but this fact is masked by an attempted precision which, if read literally, dates the start of the invasion a year too late.²⁶

By spreading his information evenly across a span of three years, Prosper introduced the confusion that has bedevilled discussion of the problem ever since. The traditional reading of his text has meant that the causal connection between invasion and usurpation, made explicitly by Zosimus, has been ignored. It has also fueled untenable theories about the general Stilicho, whose inaction in Gaul has to be explained away by modern speculation about ancient slander. In passages taken from the history of Olympiodorus, Zosimus attests to a plot by Stilicho to take over eastern Illyricum from the regime of Arcadius.²⁷ In modern narratives, this testimony is usually taken to document Stilicho's long-term obsession with Illyricum, an obsession that bordered on

²² Though on the face of it, the 'day before the kalends of January in the consulate of Arcadius for the sixth time and Probus' might be acceptably read as 31 December 405, this is not the usual dating practice of late Antiquity: though our chronicles provide no strictly probative cases, the dating practice of the Theodosian Code is overwhelming. In fully twenty-two separate examples, dates from XVIII kal. Ian. to prid. (or II) kal. Ian. follow dates from the ides of December within a consular year, while in only one case does a date from the kalends of January precede a later date in the same consular year (*CTh.* 16.10.1: the law is dat. XVI kal. Ian. and acc. VIII Mar. in the same consular year, which means that it was issued in the previous calendar year by our modern system of reckoning).

²³ Examples in Muhlberger 1990, 73–8.

²⁴ See Muhlberger 1983, who demonstrates how the Mommsen edition of the Gallic Chronicle of 452 (*MGH AA* 9.646–62) badly distorts the manuscript evidence, and thus the dating practice of the anonymous chronicler, by placing in a single year entries which the chronicler had deliberately spread across two regnal years in order to avoid blank entries. Another example in which the shape of the genre, and the preference for matching single events to single years, creates a substantive distortion occurs in two reports of Radagaisus' invasion. Prosper 1228 (= *MGH AA* 9.465) places both Radagaisus' invasion and his death in 405, while Marcellinus Comes (= *MGH AA* 11.68) places his invasion in 406 and does not mention his death at all. The correct dates are established by the Copenhagen Continuator (see notes 14 and 15 above), and as we saw, the invasion actually spanned the years 405 and 406. Prosper and Marcellinus both compressed events into a single year and each picked a different one of the two available.

²⁵ Muhlberger 1990, 97, 121–6.

²⁶ For the implication of Zos. 6.3.1, which does not date the start of the invasion precisely but attests to its impact in 406, see note 33 below.

²⁷ Zos. 5.26.2; 5.27.2; 5.29.7. See Paschoud 1986, 196–200.

the neurotic and was pursued by the generalissimo through the whole course of his regency.²⁸ Illyrian preoccupations are a useful all-purpose explanation for those times when Stilicho's actions defy more transparent explication. The chronological problems of the present discussion are a case in point. If the Vandals, Alans, and Sueves crossed the Rhine on the last day of 406, and Stilicho still did nothing about it, we must find something that would have kept him occupied. A plot against Illyricum comes to hand.

It is true that the charge cannot be dismissed outright, since it derives from Olympiodorus who had none of Zosimus' own overt anti-Stilichonian prejudice. Before accepting the charges, however, we need to think carefully both about their substance and their date, in order to differentiate the period in which there is evidence of a plot from the period in which all we have are statements that there was a plot. That is, we need to distinguish evidence of action from evidence of intention, because the latter cannot be corroborated. The contrast is revealing. Zosimus refers to the Illyrian plot three times, first implying a date of 405 or 406, then dates of 407 and 408.²⁹ In each instance, nothing in his testimony suggests action on Stilicho's part. In fact, the only mention of the Illyrian plot outside Zosimus' own narrative is also the only substantive evidence that there really was a plot. We learn that in 407, the Western court appointed one Jovius as praetorian prefect of Illyricum.³⁰ This appointment is much solidier evidence than Zosimus' unverifiable references to the intentions of Stilicho, on which no argument can safely be based, though whether it is in fact adequate evidence of Stilicho's hostile intent is open to question.³¹ Either way, the key point is the timing. The appointment of Jovius took place some time in the middle of 407. Whatever it may tell us about Stilicho's Illyrian intentions in that year, the appointment is not evidence for his motives before then. In the present context, this means that regardless of whether the Rhine crossing took place on 31 December 405 or 31 December 406, Stilicho's failure to react to it should not be explained by appeal to his interest in Illyricum.

On the other hand, none of this is an issue if we read Prosper differently. The entry should be taken to say: 'In the consulate of Arcadius for the sixth time and Probus [406], the Vandals and Alans entered the Gauls, having crossed the Rhine, on the day before the kalends of January [31 December 405].' That reading distorts the Latin somewhat, but it makes good structural sense in the context of Prosper's chronicle. Far more importantly, it brings a new clarity to our other sources. If the invasion took place on the last day of 405, Stilicho was busy fighting Radagaisus and remained so throughout the first half of 406. The rigours of this campaign are demonstrated by two imperial constitutions ordering the recruitment of slaves into the army in despite of the long-standing prohibition of this practice.³² It was in this first part of 406, while Stilicho was thus occupied, that the impact of the Rhine crossing was registered, though it had begun on the last day of the previous year.³³ When Stilicho was finally rid of Radagaisus in August 406 he may well have turned his attention to Gaul, but mustering an army to send to Gaul was a slow process, as his later attempts show.³⁴ In the mean time, his inactivity in Gaul provoked the British army to raise first Marcus, then Gratian, and finally Constantine to the purple. We do not know if Stilicho had

²⁸ Drinkwater 1998, relying heavily on Burns 1994, continues to see this plot as the key to Stilicho's regency.

²⁹ 405/406 (Radagaisus is still alive): Zos. 5.26.2; 407: 5.27.2; 408: 5.29.7.

³⁰ Soz. 8.25.3; 9.4.3, which derive from the same section of Olympiodorus' account as was used by Zosimus.

³¹ My own belief, which I shall document in a forthcoming article, is that the whole Illyrian plot is a fiction, as Cameron 1970, 59–62, long ago recognized.

³² *CTh.* 7.13.16 (17 April 406); 7.13.17 (19 April 406). For the prohibition on arming slaves, *CTh.* 7.13.8.

³³ Hence Prosper's misleading dating, and the evidence of Zos. 6.3.1 which places the invasion in the course of 406. It has been suggested to me, and is surely possible, that the Roman or Italian testimony on which both Zosimus' source Olympiodorus and Prosper relied associated the Rhine crossing with the year 406 because that was when Rome first learned of it.

³⁴ The army which Stilicho had gathered at Ticinum by Spring 408 to fight Constantine III had taken more than half a year to put together (Zos. 5.32.4). On the difficulties of a call up, see Elton 1996, 235.

tried to help the Gauls once Radagaisus was out of the way, but even if he did, it was too late. The third of the British usurpers had already brought the invaders to a halt, and the Gallic problem had taken on the trappings of a Roman civil war. If we look at these events more closely, we will see that they make much more sense with our new reading of Prosper in place.

THE BARBARIANS IN GAUL

The Vandals, Sueves, and Alans, as we have argued, crossed the Rhine into Gaul beginning on New Year's Eve 405. Once across the river, they set out westwards, and their itinerary can be variously traced.³⁵ How specifically we do so depends entirely on the faith we repose in our sources. Some have been willing to plot very detailed itineraries on the unreliable testimony of late hagiographies and toponymy.³⁶ Our only really sound information comes from a letter of St Jerome written from Bethlehem. He reports the destruction of Mainz, Worms, Reims, Amiens, Arras, Théroutanne, Tournai, Speyer, and Strasbourg, and goes on to speak of damage wrought upon Aquitaine, Narbonensis, and Novempopulana, noting that Toulouse had 'not yet fallen'.³⁷ This information is precious, and in fact more precious than it seems at first. All the cities Jerome names as having fallen lie in three provinces in the north of Gaul, specifically Belgica Prima, Belgica Secunda, and Germania Prima. These correspond roughly to the area north of the Seine, Marne, and upper Moselle rivers and west of the Rhine. For the south of Gaul, however, Jerome's information is extremely vague. Now, Jerome had a taste for detail, and rarely disdained to invent it where none was handy. Had he known the names of other cities struck by the invaders, he would have deployed them.

This point is crucial, because it allows us to import a date into our understanding of the invasion. At the time he wrote his letter, Jerome had precise knowledge of barbarian devastations in Germania I and the two Belgicas. For the provinces south of Belgica he had no firm information and in this highly-coloured rhetorical context his words may mean less than they say. Perhaps he knew that the southern provinces had been invaded and that there had been an assault on Toulouse. Perhaps he only feared the worst. Regardless, the limitations of his knowledge are significant. Our task, accordingly, is to date Jerome's letter. If we can do so, we can also fix the date until which the barbarians remained confined to the north of Gaul. The letter, it seems, must have been addressed either very late in 409 or early in 410.³⁸ But how out-of-date is the information it contains? For the sake of argument we can exaggerate the slowness with which news reached Jerome in Bethlehem and assume that his information is half a year out of date. A six-month delay is almost certainly too long, but even if we allow for that much time, and also place the letter itself as early as possible, that is, in late 409, we still arrive at an important conclusion: by Spring 409, which is to say three-and-a-half years after the Rhine crossing, the Vandals, Sueves, and Alans had either not yet passed, or had only just begun to pass, beyond the northernmost provinces of Gaul. Jerome thus had specific information about their devastations in the North, but only the vaguest of intimations about the South.

³⁵ See especially Schmidt 1942, 17–18; Demougeot 1951, 385–7; Courtois 1955, 43.

³⁶ e.g., Courtois 1955, 44–7, who questions the value of such evidence but still uses it to map the barbarian itinerary.

³⁷ *Epp.* 123.15 (= *CSEL* 56.92): '*Mogontiacus, nobilis quondam ciuitas, capta atque subuersa est et in ecclesia multa hominum milia trucidata, Vangiones longa obsidione finiti, Remorum urbs praepotens, Ambiani, Atrabatae extremique hominum Morini, Tornacus, Nemetae, Argentoratus translatae in Germaniam, Aquitaniae Novemque populorum, Lugdunensis et Narbonensis prouinciae praeter paucas urbes cuncta populata sunt, quas in ipsas foris gladius, intus uastat fames. non possum absque lacrimis Tolosae facere mentionem, quae ut hucusque non rueret, sancti episcopi Exsuperii merita praestiterunt. ipsae Hispaniae iam iamque periturae cotidie contremescunt recordantes inruptionis Cymbricae et, quicquid alii semel passi sunt, illae semper timore patiuntur.*'

³⁸ Cavallera 1922, 2:52.

At some point, it is true, the barbarians did appear south of the Belgicas, in the provinces of Aquitania and Narbonensis. They are not, however, attested there at specific sites or at definite times and the evidence of late hagiographical sources is of negligible value though it is sometimes cited in the modern literature. All our good evidence associates their presence in southern Gaul with the revolt of Gerontius against Constantine III.³⁹ This took place in 409, and we shall return to our barbarians in precisely this context. In the mean time, however, a reassessment of the evidence suggests that from January 406 until January 409 at the earliest, the Vandals, Sueves, and Alans had remained in the provinces of Belgica I and II and Germania I, which is to say the northern provinces away from the Gallic heartland.

CONSTANTINE III

We must give much of the credit for this feat to the usurper Constantine III, who was raised to the purple in 407 and almost immediately crossed to Gaul. His predecessors had been Marcus and Gratian. Marcus' usurpation began in 406, the year before Honorius entered his seventh consulate, and had been a response to the Rhine crossing at the start of that year.⁴⁰ He was swiftly killed by the British soldiers, though we do not know precisely when this took place.⁴¹ His successor Gratian lasted a mere four months in turn.⁴² Constantine, the third usurper in line, was to prove luckier. Though Stilicho had finally defeated Radagaisus in August 406, there cannot yet have been time to organize any action in Gaul. In fact, Honorius' praetorian prefect had actually retreated from Trier in the face of the invasion.⁴³ With no imperial help forthcoming, Marcus and then Gratian were proclaimed in order to deal with the barbarians. Much unnecessary confusion has resulted from the belief that Gratian was a civilian rather than a soldier, and thus unsuited to the task of fighting barbarians. This notion, fortunately, rests on a misunderstanding, and Gratian is as likely as not to have been a soldier just like Constantine.⁴⁴ Neither his nor Marcus' murder is susceptible of explanation. Perhaps they failed in their defensive task or perhaps the British troops wanted to go on the offensive and murdered their commanders when they refused. There is no way of telling, and we in fact know almost nothing about the British usurpation under Marcus and Gratian. Under their successor Constantine, things become much clearer.

³⁹ Apart from Jerome's letter, Sozomen and three more or less contemporary poems (the *Ad uxorem*, the *Carmen de diuina providentia*, and the *Epigramma* of Paulinus on which see below) attest to a barbarian presence in southern Gaul. Soz. 9.12.3 explicitly ties that presence to the rebellion of Gerontius against Constantine III in 409. Oros. 7.40.3 condenses more than three years of events into a single sentence which tells us nothing about chronology.

⁴⁰ Zos. 6.3.1. While there can be no doubt that the string of British usurpations swiftly entered into the mainstream of imperial power politics, it makes little sense, *contra* Burns 1994, 210, and Drinkwater 1998, 272, to discard our one piece of explicit evidence (i.e., Zos. 6.3.1), which links the usurpations to the Rhine crossing, in favour of some unspecified local (or perhaps imperial) threat that touched off the revolt.

⁴¹ *contra* Ehling 1997, 1, we cannot be sure that Marcus reigned only a few days or weeks; her chronology is vitiated throughout by an ignorance of Paschoud 1986 and 1989, and a consequent dependence on the deeply unreliable Book VI of Zosimus over not only Sozomen and the Photian fragments of Olympiodorus, but also Zosimus' own Book V.

⁴² Olymp., frag. 12 (Müller) = 13.1 (Blockley); Soz. 9.11.1 (on Gratian).

⁴³ Chastagnol 1973 demonstrates conclusively that the transfer of the praetorian prefecture from Trier to Arles did not take place in 395 as commonly asserted, and argues persuasively, if not conclusively, that it took place in reaction to the Rhine crossing. Drinkwater 1998, 274–5, argues plausibly for an intermediate stage in the transfer when the prefecture was located at Lyon, though he perhaps dates it too early. Note that there is no evidence for a sack of Trier at this time: Anton 1984, 1–14.

⁴⁴ See e.g. Burns 1994, 209, but the reference of Oros. 7.40.4 to Gratian as *municeps eiusdem insulae* (sc. *Britanniae*) simply means that Gratian was British: the use of *municeps* to signify nothing more definite than 'inhabitant of such and such a place' is attested as early as Cicero (*Brut.* 70.246).

Though a common soldier and not an officer, Constantine was raised to the purple on the strength of his name, which seemed to portend great things.⁴⁵ Whatever Marcus' and Gratian's goals had been, Constantine swiftly revealed himself as a usurper in the mould of Magnus Maximus, who had crossed from Britain to Gaul and deposed Valentinian's son Gratian in 383. In 407, Constantine crossed the Channel to fight the barbarians in Belgica, but his own goals were personal. He wished to gain recognition as a legitimate Augustus and found a dynasty. One of his sons was plucked from a monastery, made a Caesar, and married off with a view to producing heirs.⁴⁶ Both he and his younger brother were given new names, Constans and Julian respectively, which also attest to dynastic ambitions.⁴⁷

We do not know exactly when in 407 Gratian was deposed and Constantine raised to the purple, but it was probably very early in the year.⁴⁸ The new emperor seems to have crossed to Gaul almost immediately, both to fight the barbarians and to secure a firmer base for his usurpation. Before leaving Britain he appointed as *magistri militum* Justinus and Neobigast and then crossed over to Bononia, modern Boulogne on the Channel coast.⁴⁹ He met no resistance from the imperial establishment and the troops of Gaul and the *Quinque Provinciae* rallied to him before he advanced any further into the Gallic diocese. Around the same time, and before he had advanced very far into Gaul, the provincial governors of Spain also recognized Constantine.⁵⁰ Then, Constantine halted the movements of the barbarians in the northern provinces, where they were to remain until 409 when Constantine faced a different set of challenges altogether. He will have done this through some combination of force and treaties, though he seems to have won at least one victory over them since his earliest coins portray him as *Restitutor Rei Publicae*.⁵¹ In time he was also able to restore Roman administration in those regions through which the barbarians had passed, for not only was the Rhine regarrisoned but the mint at Trier began to strike coins in Constantine's name.⁵²

The chronology of these events is not entirely clear, however, and is inextricably linked to the progress of Constantine's relations with the legitimate government of Honorius. One of the greatest merits of Drinkwater's recent work is to have rendered the sequence of Constantine's advance into Gaul from Bononia intelligible for the first time. Our only firm evidence is the sequence of Constantine's coinages, and these would imply that the usurper initially made neither for the Rhineland nor straight for the Rhône valley.⁵³ Instead, he marched on Lyon, where his first

⁴⁵ Soz. 9.11.2; Oros. 7.40.4.

⁴⁶ Oros. 7.40.7: '*Constantinus Constantem filium suum — pro dolor! — ex monacho Caesarem factum.*' The marriage emerges from Greg. Tur. 2.9 (= *MGH.SRM* 1.56), who tells us that Constans left his wife behind him in Caesaraugusta when he departed Spain for Arles in 409.

⁴⁷ On this, and Constantine's dynasticism generally, see Drinkwater 1998, 272, but note that the adoption of Constantinian imagery by the new emperor need not be a token of some atavistic 'Constantinian dream' (as in Arce 1988 where the *sueño constantiniano* appears as an explanation for Constantine's actions in three separate places, viz. 90, 98, 108. Jones 1996, 247–52 contains rather more far-fetched speculation on the same theme and has not learned the lessons of Dumville 1977). By officially styling himself Flavius Claudius Constantinus, Constantine III was making an obvious statement about kinship and dynastic continuity. As with all such fictive claims to kinship, their symbolic value in the politics of the Late Empire did not depend on anyone's believing them to be literally true.

⁴⁸ Paschoud 1989, 20, on Zos. 5.27.1–2, suggests a date in February which is reasonable though not demonstrable.

⁴⁹ Olymp., frag. 12 (Müller) = 13.1 (Blockley). For Neobigast's name I follow the Photian fragments of Olympiodorus over Zosimus' Nebiogast.

⁵⁰ See below.

⁵¹ Battles (Zos. 6.3.2) and treaties (Oros. 7.40.4). Coins: *RIC* 10.144. It is possible, of course, that the legend merely proclaims Constantine's intention of fighting the barbarians and restoring the *respublica*.

⁵² Zos. 6.3.3; *RIC* 10.146–7. An inscription from Trier (*JG* 14.2559) also attests to the establishment of Constantine's regime there.

⁵³ For the coins, *RIC* 10.143–9; 347–50. The interpretation of them in relation to Constantine's progress belongs to Drinkwater 1998, 275–9.

coins were struck and where the praetorian prefecture may at this point have been located.⁵⁴ On the other hand, it was not until early in 408 that the mints of Trier and Arles began to strike coins in Constantine's name. Taken together, the evidence implies that throughout 407 and the winter of 407/408, the Provençal region around Arles remained in the hands of the legitimate emperor Honorius, while Constantine concentrated on the North and North-East of Gaul. We know that some Honorian officials, such as the praetorian prefect Limenius and the *magister equitum* Chariobaudes, did eventually flee before Constantine's advance.⁵⁵ Once again, our chronological indications are unhelpful; all we know is that Limenius and Chariobaudes must have left Gaul before August 408, when both were killed in the Pavian mutiny.⁵⁶ We are thus left to fall back on the coin evidence, which suggests a period of Gallic cohabitation between the governments of Constantine and Honorius. This will have come to an end with the well-documented assault of Sarus on Constantine's generals near Valence.

Sarus' campaign began at the instigation of Stilicho, who was once again fully in control of Italy. Constantine's general Justinus advanced to meet Sarus but was defeated and killed, whereupon the Goth besieged Constantine in Valentia, modern Valence, in the Rhône valley half-way between Vienne and Arles.⁵⁷ Constantine's other *magister militum*, Neobigast, entered into negotiations with Sarus, who accepted Neobigast's overtures only to murder him at their first meeting.⁵⁸ Constantine's reaction was to appoint new *magistri*, Gerontius and Edobich, whose sally put Sarus to flight a mere seven days into the siege of Valentia.⁵⁹ Whether the legitimate Gallic prefect Limenius fled now or had already done so, the way to Arles was opened to Constantine by the retreat of Sarus. By spring 408, when the Arles mint began to strike coins in his name, Constantine controlled the whole of Gaul.⁶⁰

It was now that he faced a serious threat from Spain. It has long been thought that Constantine needed to conquer Spain from the legitimate emperor, a fact that has occasioned much surprise so out of keeping is it with the normal pattern of Western usurpations that goes back to the third century. Drinkwater has shown that this was simply not the case. From almost the moment of his landing in Gaul, Spain had submitted to the usurper's regime. In a famous passage, Orosius says that Constantine sent *iudices* to Spain who were received there obediently.⁶¹ This took place

⁵⁴ Chastagnol 1973 suggests correctly that the seat of the prefecture was moved from Trier to Arles to escape the barbarian invaders, but his chronology requires adjustment. Since he accepts the date of New Year's Eve 406 for the Rhine crossing, Chastagnol has the prefecture move from Trier to Arles within the very cramped time-span of early 407, and is also forced to argue that the prefect Petronius, who organized the withdrawal from Trier, remained prefect until 408 and was then replaced by Limenius who very soon thereafter fled from Gaul himself because of Constantine III. Now, Petronius' attestation as prefect (*CJ* 11.74.3) can date from any time between 402 and May 408, and is not therefore much use as a chronological guide. Drinkwater 1998, 277, would prefer an intermediate stage, with the prefecture at Lyon under Petronius from 402, and the move to Arles forced by Constantine's advance. A Lyonais stage makes good sense, but there is no reason to dissociate the abandonment of Trier from the Rhine crossing. Indeed, if we date the Rhine crossing to 31 December 405, the more spacious chronology allows both for a retreat from Trier and a further retreat to Arles, while also providing enough time for Petronius to have been succeeded by Limenius.

⁵⁵ But not the *consularis Viennensis* Eventius, since Drinkwater 1998, 276, finally eliminates his Vatican epitaph (on which see Marrou 1952) as evidence for Constantine's advance.

⁵⁶ Zos. 5.32.4.

⁵⁷ Zos. 6.2.3.

⁵⁸ Zos. 6.2.4. From the narrative of Zosimus it is unclear whether Neobigast negotiated on his own behalf or on that of his emperor. That is to say, he may have tried to negotiate a truce on behalf of Constantine, with the eventual goal of his recognition as legitimate Augustus, or he may have intended to betray Constantine to Sarus.

⁵⁹ Zos. 6.2.4. Drinkwater 1998, 278, would have them returning from the regarrisoning of the Rhineland and leading an army in part drawn from that region. Plausible though this theory might be, it has no foundation in the sources.

⁶⁰ This is probably confirmed by Zos. 5.31.4 which implies that Constantine was already in possession of Arles when the western court learned of the death of Arcadius (1 May 408).

⁶¹ Oros. 7.40.5: '[Constantinus] misit in Hispanias iudices: quos cum prouinciae obedienter accepissent, duo fratres iuuenes nobiles et locupletes Didymus et Verinianus non assumere aduersus tyrannum quidem tyrannidem sed imperatori iusto aduersos tyrannum et barbaros tueri sese patriamque suam moliti sunt.'

shortly after Constantine had crossed to Gaul, and certainly before he had established himself at Arles. What this means is that the Spanish administration recognized the usurper, that the provincial government of Spain became Constantinian, and that no conquest was necessary.⁶² The opposition to Constantine came later, and not from the Spanish government, but from two Hispano-Roman aristocrats. They were relatives of the legitimate emperor Honorius to be sure, but they had no official status. They waged their war against Constantine as private citizens, as rebels in a province whose government recognized the usurper. We actually hear of four members of the Theodosian dynasty in Spain at this time, Didymus, Verinianus, Theodosiolus, and Lagodius. The latter two acquiesced in the usurpation.⁶³ Didymus and Verinianus, on the other hand, despite being on bad terms with each other, put aside their differences and raised an army from among their servile dependants.⁶⁴ It was this rebel band which Constantine needed an army to defeat.

The time-frame for these events is genuinely opaque, however. Orosius, typically enough, gives us no clue as to date. From Sozomen, we learn that shortly after taking Arles Constantine raised his son Constans to the rank of Caesar before despatching him with an army to Spain.⁶⁵ This would place Constans' promotion in early 408, and the Spanish campaign in spring or summer of that year. Didymus and Verinianus would thus have had nearly a year to prepare their rebellion, preparations which Constantine's officials were powerless to prevent. The sources are united in recording two battles, the first a victory for the Spanish rebels, the second a total defeat.⁶⁶ The location of the first of these is obscure, but the decisive battle was fought in Lusitania.⁶⁷ Constans probably took no part in it himself, instead remaining behind at his residence in Caesaraugusta with the praetorian prefect Apollinaris and the master of offices Decimius Rusticus.⁶⁸ Gerontius, whom Constans had brought with him as *comes* and *magister militum*, will therefore have conducted the actual campaign, in which he only succeeded after calling in re-enforcements.⁶⁹ Lagodius and Theodosiolus, who had remained quiet up to this point, now fled from Spain, the former seeking refuge with Theodosius II at Constantinople, the latter with Honorius at Ravenna. The victorious Constans allowed one unit of his troops, the *Honoriaci*, to sack the *campi*

⁶² Nor for that matter could a Spanish government have opposed Constantine, since the peninsula was to all intents and purposes demilitarized: the *Notitia Dignitatum*, which might be thought to describe troops in Spain at this period, is not admissible evidence for a military presence in Spain in 407/408. Two recent and only partly compatible approaches to the *Notitia*, Brennan 1995 and Kulikowski 2000, both demonstrate that the western sections of the document are virtually impossible to deploy as evidence for specific data, save where they are confirmed by outside evidence. In the case of Spain in the early fifth century, they are not.

⁶³ Soz. 9.12.1.

⁶⁴ Soz. 9.11.4; Oros. 7.40.6. This is not, as Sanz 1986 would have it, evidence for the existence of private armies in early fifth-century Spain: Didymus and Verinianus raise an army from among *agroikon kai oiketou* precisely because they have access neither to such troops as may have existed in Spain nor to any private soldiers of their own.

⁶⁵ Photius' abbreviation of Olympiodorus is silent on this point, but Sozomen 9.11.4 is united with Zosimus 6.4.1 in linking the promotion with the mission to Spain, and both imply that the incidents took place as soon as Gaul was secure.

⁶⁶ Soz. 9.11.4–12.1; Oros. 7.40.6–8.

⁶⁷ Sozomen, following Olympiodorus, places both battles in Lusitania. Orosius, on the other hand, states that the brothers set up their defences in the Pyrenees after crossing the peninsula unopposed, but he does not place the site of the second battle specifically. Zos. 6.4.3–4 is muddled, introducing Lusitanian troops (which, *contra* Paschoud 1989, 33–4, at no time existed) in place of a battle in Lusitania. Certainty is impossible and any solution requires discarding part of either Orosius or Sozomen. Some sort of Pyrenean defence is entirely possible, perhaps conducted at a strongpoint like Clausurae, modern Les-Cluses in the French Pyrenees, on which see Castellvi 1995.

⁶⁸ Greg. Tur. 2.9 (= *MGH.SRM* 1.56) shows that shortly after this date Constans had his court in Caesaraugusta. It is curious that Constans should have had his own praetorian prefect, since the western prefects had been resident in Gaul for more than half a century. Perhaps Constantine felt that the ex-monk Constans was incapable of governing without assistance. As to Decimius Rusticus, later attested as *ex officiorum magistro* in Gregory, his name is almost certainly hidden in the lacuna at Zos. 6.4.2 (see Paschoud 1989, 32).

⁶⁹ Soz. 9.12.1.

Pallentini,⁷⁰ after which his army, along with his wife and court, remained in Spain under the command of Gerontius.⁷¹ The Caesar and his prefect Apollinaris, meanwhile, escorted Didymus and Verinianus back to Constantine at Arles.⁷² The dates for these events must remain hypothetical, but if Constans first went to Spain in spring 408, he cannot have returned to Arles before late in the year.

Constantine, meanwhile, seems simply to have stayed put in his court at Arles from the point in spring when it fell to him. There was no reason for him to do otherwise, since the Rhine had been regarrisoned, the barbarians remained confined in northern Gaul, and his Caesar was dealing with affairs in Spain. Perhaps it was now that he began to indulge the drunkenness and gluttony for which he was censured by Frigeridus.⁷³ Regardless, he continued to trumpet his own legitimacy, and his coins, now minted not only at Lyon, but at Trier and Arles as well, continue to proclaim the *concordia* of Augusti, now only three since the death of Arcadius.⁷⁴ Honorius' government was having none of this, and with Alaric again under some sort of control, Stilicho had set about gathering an army to send against the usurper. But then political events in Italy supervened.

Constantine's regime was providentially delivered from Stilicho's planned attack by a combination of Italian crises. First, the army which Stilicho had mustered at Ticinum revolted on 13 August 408 and massacred its Stilichonian officials.⁷⁵ Stilicho himself then fell foul of the emperor and went calmly to his execution on 22 August.⁷⁶ By this act, Honorius had rid himself of a general he suspected, but was left without any strong allies to take his place. The court at Ravenna immediately descended into an orgy of palace intrigue, just when the death of Stilicho inspired Alaric to resume raising havoc. This renewed Gothic threat immediately occupied the imperial attention. The planned attack on Constantine was shelved. With the prospect of an invasion from Italy suddenly remote, Constantine's response was well considered. Sitting patiently at Arles, he allowed Honorius' position to deteriorate still further, until the time was right to bid for the recognition which would turn his self-proclaimed legitimacy into the real thing. As soon as the opportunity arose late in 408, Constantine sent an embassy to make overtures to Honorius.⁷⁷

The date of this embassy is not entirely certain. Because Photius' abridgement of Olympiodorus is here very severe, we have instead to rely on Zosimus, who places Constantine's embassy late in 408, at the same time that the treaty with Alaric was agreed.⁷⁸ Didymus and Verinianus were already dead, though Honorius had not yet learned of their deaths, and as we saw they had been

⁷⁰ See Soz. 9.12.1; Oros. 7.40.7–8: Orosius describes the *Honoriaci* as *barbari*, but given their title they were clearly a regular unit of the Roman army. *Contra Paschoud* 1989, 33, there is no way to equate them to any of the several units of Honoriani in the *Notitia Dignitatum*, Occ. 5 and 7 (Seeck 1876). The *campi Pallentini* were presumably the region of Palantia, in the Meseta along the middle course of the Duero, and the site of a large number of sumptuous residential villas, on which see the map in Fernández Castro 1982, 42 with the references in her index.

⁷¹ This too is fraught with controversy. Orosius (7.40.9–10) and Sozomen (9.12.3) both record that Constans left his own soldiers (Orosius makes them the *Honoriaci*) to guard the Pyrenean passes in defiance of an old custom whereby local *rustici* had that duty. One cannot simply dismiss this out of hand as it is recorded in two independent sources, but the information is inexplicable. Who these traditional guardians were can only be guessed at, for there is not a shred of evidence. They were obviously not regular troops, and after Constans had beaten Didymus and Verinianus there is no conceivable reason for his having garrisoned the passes.

⁷² Apollinaris must have returned to Arles with Constans, since when he fell from grace and was replaced by Decimius Rusticus, Constans was at Arles: Zos. 6.13.1.

⁷³ Greg. Tur. 2.9 (= *MGH.SRM* 1.56): '*Constantinus gulae et ventre deditus.*'

⁷⁴ *RIC* 10.143–9.

⁷⁵ *Excerpta Sangallensia*. s.a. 408 (= *MGH.AA* 9.300): '*Ticeno multi maiores occisi sunt id. Aug.*' Zos. 5.32.2–7 gives a full but undated narrative.

⁷⁶ *Excerpta Sangallensia* s.a. 408 (= *MGH.AA* 9.300): '*occisus est Stilico Ravenna XI kl. Septembres.*'

⁷⁷ For the interpretation of these events, see Drinkwater 1998, 280–2.

⁷⁸ Olymp., frag. 12 (Müller) = 13.1 (Blockley); Zos. 5.43.1–2.

brought back to Arles by Constans some time late in 408. On this evidence, Constantine's embassy will have set off for Ravenna some time in the autumn of 408. With his hands full in Italy, and lacking a competent general to press his cause, Honorius acknowledged Constantine as his colleague and sent him an imperial robe.⁷⁹ And though their joint consulate seems never to have been recognized outside Constantine's own *pars imperii*, in January 409 Constantine and Honorius entered the consulate together as imperial colleagues.⁸⁰

The year 409, then, opened propitiously for Constantine. He had been acknowledged by Honorius and could claim to share the consulate with him. He and Constans were safely at Arles. The Spanish resistance had been crushed and Spain was securely held by Gerontius. Constantine, in this moment of triumph, raised his son Constans to the rank of Augustus, and the foundation of his new Gallic dynasty seemed secure. But Constantine overplayed his hand and his triumphs soon came crashing down around him. Once again, our sources give a very deceptive view of the time-frame of events. The relative chronologies preserved by Sozomen and, especially, Zosimus, suggest that the Caesar Constans, having hauled Didymus and Verinianus back to Arles, was immediately sent back to Spain with a new *magister* to replace Gerontius. This impression, which has deceived more than one inquirer into misdating Constans' victory in Spain, is belied by the rest of the narrative. What is never stated but must none the less be inferred is that Constans, upon returning to Arles with his prisoners in 408, remained there with his father until the spring or summer of 409. The date is established as follows. Gerontius revolted either just before or just after Constans returned to Spain. The barbarian invasion of Spain was a direct consequence of Gerontius' revolt. This invasion of Vandals, Alans, and Sueves occurred at the latest on 12 October 409. So Constans' return to Spain must be fixed some time in the spring or summer of that year.

The linchpin, as that chronology shows, is the revolt of Gerontius, and that is a problem in itself.⁸¹ Regardless of whether or not Gerontius had already revolted, Constans set off for Spain with the general Justus in tow, while as soon as he decided to revolt, Gerontius set up his own emperor.⁸² This was Maximus, one of his clients and a *domesticus*.⁸³ Gerontius chose Tarraco as his residence, logically enough since the provincial capital was in easy communication with Gaul.⁸⁴ The mint at Barcino immediately began producing issues in Maximus' name, and a major repair of that city's walls seems to have been undertaken.⁸⁵ But his new regime faced the serious challenge of the returning Constans, and so Gerontius decided to fight back with a powerful,

⁷⁹ Zos. 5.43.2. Olymp., frag. 12 (Müller) = 13.1 (Blockley), states only that Honorius recognized Constantine temporarily on account of the troubles facing him in Italy.

⁸⁰ *IG* 14.2559 (Trier) has Honorius and Constantine as joint Augusti. Hydatius, Prosper, Victor of Aquitaine, Marcellinus, Cassiodorus, the *Consularia Constantinopolitana*, and the *Chronicon Paschale* all give the consular year as *Honorio VIII et Theodosio III*. The *Consularia Italica* offers neither information nor consular date for 409, which leaves open a very slight possibility that the joint consulship of Honorius and Constantine was at some point acknowledged in Italy and later excised. But see *CLRE* 353.

⁸¹ It is possible that Gerontius rebelled against Constantine and that in consequence, Constans was made Augustus and sent to Spain. It is equally possible that the promotion of Constans and the replacement of his praetorian prefect Apollinaris by Decimius Rusticus (Zos. 6.13.1) worried Gerontius enough that he was driven to revolt.

⁸² *contra* Paschoud 1989, 37 and Drinkwater 1998, 284. Even though Olymp., frag. 16 (Müller) = 17.1 (Blockley) says that Gerontius created his own emperor only after Constans had been put to flight, this suggests a Photian abbreviation where the much fuller narrative of Soz. 9.13 places the usurpation at the same time as the rebellion. *PLRE* 2, 744–5, gives Maximus' dates correctly.

⁸³ The status of Maximus *vis-à-vis* his sponsor is the subject of endless controversy. Maximus appears as *pais* and *domestikos* in Olympiodorus and *oikeos* in Sozomen. For Gregory of Tours (2.9 = *MGH.SRM* 1.56), he is *unum e clientibus suis*, while Orosius (7.42.5) contents himself with a *Maximus quidam*. Both possibilities have numerous advocates, though client tends to be preferred (e.g., *PLRE* 2.744; Drinkwater 1998, 284). That Maximus was allowed to live after his patron's suicide (Prosper 1245 = *MGH.AA* 9.466) may argue against their blood kinship.

⁸⁴ Soz. 9.13.1.

⁸⁵ Coins: *RIC* 10, 150–1. Walls: Járrega Domínguez 1991.

though ultimately uncontrollable, weapon: he stirred up the barbarians in Gaul against Constantine.⁸⁶

These barbarians had been silent since 407. As the evidence of Jerome canvassed above suggests, until 409 they had remained in the Belgicas in northern Gaul. But Gerontius encouraged them to move. We have already noted the existence of some literary references to barbarian devastations in the south of Gaul. It is to this period, the second half of 409 after the revolt of Gerontius, to which the poetic record of devastation in the south of Gaul belongs. The shock of this invasion was very severe, all the more so because of the tremendous prosperity and political efflorescence of southern Gaul in recent years.⁸⁷ The literary sources paint a dark and dramatic picture, and one most noteworthy for the surprise it registers: things like this were simply not supposed to happen. No summary can do justice to the Latin of the originals, where genuine feeling is visible behind the walls of late antique rhetoric.⁸⁸ An anonymous lament complains of peace having left the world, of all suffering equally by sword and disease, hunger and cold and captivity.⁸⁹ Written slightly later, the anonymous *Carmen de Providentia Dei* and Orientius' *Commonitorium* also evoke the horrors of life during wartime. The catalogue is similar in every case: famine, disease, random murder, pillage, looting, and burning.⁹⁰ An *Epigramma* attributed to one Paulinus makes special reference to the Vandals and the 'swift Alans', their arson and their looting.⁹¹ But the same poem reproves the victims of these atrocities for swiftly returning to their old way of life. That, in turn, is a salutary warning to us.

One cannot read the South Gallic poets and remain unmoved, but we do history no favours if we take them uncritically at their word. It is too easy for us to apply these poetic lamentations indiscriminately to the whole of Gaul, in the whole period from the Rhine crossing onwards. We gain a rather more realistic perspective if we realize how narrow the geographical context of these works really is. The barbarian devastations in Aquitaine and Narbonensis only began late in 409, and only as a consequence of a Roman civil war. Gerontius could use the barbarians in his fight against Constantine and did so. How much of a blow this dealt to Constantine's authority cannot be accurately gauged. On the other hand, it may be significant that the famous British revolt against Rome, with its expulsion of Roman officials, took place precisely now in 409.⁹² It is not in the least improbable that the Romano-Britons, aware not just of a major revolt against their emperor Constantine, but also of renewed activity among those barbarians that Constantine had been made emperor to defeat, decided that if they were going to rebel again, they might as well throw out the Roman administration. Given that we shall never know what actually happened in Britain in 409/410, a relationship between the British revolt and Gerontius' rebellion against Constantine can never be more than speculative, but the timing is at the least suggestive. As to

⁸⁶ Zos. 6.5.2.

⁸⁷ For the urban life of southern Gaul see Rivet 1988; Harries 1992; and the somewhat less rosy picture presented by Loseby 1996. For Gallo-Roman political life see Stroheker 1948; Matthews 1975, 56–87; and recently Sivan 1993.

⁸⁸ Courcelle 1964, 79–101, collects these sources and more, and brings them to life with unsurpassable skill. Like the closing chapter of Piganiol's *L'empire chrétien*, the first edition (1948) of Courcelle's book was written when the memory of a more recent German occupation of Gaul was still raw. If this perhaps coloured historical vision, it contributed immensely to the sympathy with which both authors handled their Roman sources.

⁸⁹ *Poema coniugis ad uxorem* (CSEL 30.344).

⁹⁰ *Carmen de divina providentia* (PL 51.617–38); Orientius (CSEL 16). On these and the works cited in the preceding notes see now Roberts 1992.

⁹¹ *Epigramma* (CSEL 16.503): 'Et tamen jē si quid uastavit Sarmata, si quid / Vandalus incedit ueloxque abduxit Alanus, / ambiguis spebus licet et conatibus aegris / nitimur in quandam speciem reparare priorum.'

⁹² Zos. 6.3.3. The literature on this event is enormous and it is treated in all the standard histories of Roman Britain. There is a long series of articles on the subject by E.A. Thompson, the last of which, Thompson 1982, is a response to the provocative work of Bartholomew 1982 and contains full references to Thompson's earlier work on the subject. Neither the recent work of Jones 1996 nor Esmonde Cleary 1989 deals with the episode satisfactorily, but there is much of value in Muhlberger 1983.

Gerontius, his rebellion was neither the first nor the last time that a Roman general deployed barbarians on his own behalf in the course of a civil war.⁹³ In this case, however, events exceeded Gerontius' ability to control them. The battle against Constans occupied all his attention, the passes over the Pyrenees were either neglected or (less plausibly) betrayed, and so Spain as well as southern Gaul lay open to the barbarians.⁹⁴

Constantine, in the mean time, had designs on Italy. He sent another embassy to Honorius at about the time of Alaric's first march on Rome.⁹⁵ Conducted by Jovius, it achieved nothing substantive, but did provide a chance to subvert one of Honorius' generals, the *magister equitum* Allobich.⁹⁶ Constantine therefore determined to lead an army into Italy, perhaps on the pretext of assisting his imperial colleague against Alaric. This action is once again hard to date, but it is very likely that Constantine advanced into Italy in spring 410.⁹⁷ He got no further than the Po, however, and turned round at Liberonna when he heard of Allobich's death.⁹⁸ He reached Arles at the same time as his son Constans, who had been forced to retreat from his Spanish campaign against Gerontius.⁹⁹

This point is important, because it gives the lie to one of the more enduring misapprehensions about this stage of the crisis. Constans is usually depicted as an incompetent, fleeing ignominiously from Gerontius without a fight. But this impression once again results from the way in which the sources compress the time-frame. Gerontius had revolted in summer 409, but Constans did not arrive back at Arles until spring 410 or thereabouts, at roughly the same time that Constantine returned from Italy. This implies that Constans and Justus had waged war against Gerontius and been defeated. They retreated only after losing a contest of arms. Constans was not a good general, but it was not for lack of trying. Indeed, the myth of his cowardice is further belied by his subsequent actions. Father and son, imperial colleagues, conferred at Arles and decided upon a plan of action. They relied upon the customary torpor of Honorius: even after Constantine's abortive invasion of Italy, the legitimate emperor could probably be relied upon to do nothing. Gerontius was clearly a greater threat.

The loyal *magister militum* Edebich was therefore sent to the Rhine to secure the assistance of Frankish soldiers. Constans, meanwhile, went back against his former subordinate yet again and was yet again defeated. This time, however, Gerontius succeeded in killing Constans at Vienne. That fact is puzzling, for Vienne lies far up the Rhône valley and not on any logical route between Spain and Arles. The sequence of events is likewise a bit unclear. Photius' abbreviation of Olympiodorus states merely that Gerontius pursued Constans and killed him.¹⁰⁰ Sozomen, on the

⁹³ Some sort of treaty between the government of Maximus/Gerontius and the barbarian invaders of Spain is usually asserted (e.g., Schmidt 1933, 109 and Schmidt 1942, 22; Reinhart 1952, 299; Stroheker 1972, 596; Paschoud 1989, 37; Burns 1994, 255), but Zos. 6.5.2 is not a reference to a treaty. As importantly, Hydatius never so much as hints at such an agreement, the passage of Orosius (7.43.14) which is often cited in support of the theory actually has to do with the conquest of the Siling Vandals and Alans by the Goths, and, *contra* Burns 1994, 255, the *Epistula Honorii* has nothing to do with the *receptio* of barbarians (see Kulikowski 1998).

⁹⁴ Oros. 7.40.9 blames the *Honoriaci* for betraying the passes. Soz. 9.12.6 says merely that those who were to have been guarding the passes failed in their duty. If Gerontius was as wholeheartedly occupied in fighting Constans as the sources imply, it is no wonder that he wasted little effort on garrisons.

⁹⁵ Zos. 6.1.1. Drinkwater 1998, 286–7 is good on the Italian context.

⁹⁶ Allobich was almost certainly in correspondence with Constantine. He was executed on suspicion of just that, but the proof lies in the fact that Constantine called a halt to his invasion of Italy upon hearing of Allobich's death: Olymp., frag. 14 (Müller) = 15.1 (Blockley); Soz. 9.12.5.

⁹⁷ There is no way to extract a date from the sources here, and, as has been said, the relative chronology is unduly compressed by Sozomen. Logic dictates that if the embassy which preceded the invasion took place late in 409, the invasion itself would have been put off to the next spring's campaigning season (on dating which see Elton 1996, 236).

⁹⁸ The location has given trouble. Either it is Libarna, on the Po in Liguria, or Verona, which is not in Liguria. See Blockley 1983, 214, n. 37, but the problem is insoluble.

⁹⁹ Soz. 9.12.6.

¹⁰⁰ Olymp., frag. 16 (Müller) = 17.1 (Blockley).

other hand, says both that Gerontius marched out of Spain to confront Constantine, killing Constans along the way, and that Constantine had sent Constans out to defend Vienne.¹⁰¹ Whatever solution one adopts will be arbitrary, insofar as it is unclear which of Sozomen's statements is an accurate reflection of the Olympiodoran original or indeed whether that original was itself any clearer. A number of reconstructions are possible, but one accommodates most of the available evidence. At the same time as Constans set out from Arles to fight Gerontius, Gerontius set out from Spain to fight Constantine. Constans intercepted Gerontius somewhere along the way and diverted him from his original plan of marching on Arles. Defeated in this battle, Constans retreated not to his father's capital, but to Vienne, which lay on the route that Edobich would be taking back from the Rhine. Gerontius succeeded in killing the young Augustus there and then turned to confront Constantine at Arles. Though it is speculative, there is at least very little to object to in this hypothesis.

However, regardless of what precisely happened, it all must have taken some time. How long is unclear, but a few points are worth making. By the time Gerontius had succeeded in killing Constans, Honorius' generals Constantius and Ulfila had crossed the Alps into Gaul.¹⁰² The defeat of Constantine followed very quickly thereafter, and we know that the usurper was executed in northern Italy in September 411. This implies that Constantius and Ulfila launched their campaign at the start of the 411 campaigning season. Working backwards, this would imply that the series of battles between Gerontius and Constans occupied much of 410. The son's death will therefore have preceded his father's by only a few months, that is, early in 411.

Constantine was still at Arles waiting for Edobich to return from the Rhineland when Gerontius advanced down the Rhône from Vienne.¹⁰³ Gerontius besieged his former master there, but fled when the army of Constantius and Ulfila, which had apparently met no resistance at the Alps, arrived before the city walls. Most of Gerontius' troops went over to Constantius, who then pressed on with the siege that Gerontius had begun.¹⁰⁴ Constantine refused to submit, placing his trust in the arrival of Edobich. When news of the latter's approach arrived at Arles, Constantius and Ulfila advanced to meet him. They had to cross the Rhône to do so, since Roman Arles straddled the river with habitation on both sides.¹⁰⁵ The main road south from the Rhineland, along which Edobich was presumably returning, runs along the left bank of the river. Ulfila and Constantius had therefore been conducting their siege from the right bank. Crossing the Rhône, they marched north to intercept Edobich, trapping him between two sections of their army.¹⁰⁶ Constantine's general was routed. While his troops surrendered, he himself fled to the nobleman Ecdicius, to whom he was bound by ties of friendship. Despite these, Ecdicius had Edobich put to death and took his head to Constantius.¹⁰⁷

This latter had returned with Ulfila to the siege of Arles. Faced with certain defeat, Constantine retired to a church and had himself ordained.¹⁰⁸ The gates of the city were opened, Constantius and Ulfila entered victorious, and took prisoner Constantine and his surviving son, the *nobilissimus* Julian. They were sent to Honorius in Italy and executed *en route* beside the river Mincio.¹⁰⁹ The date was September 411. On the 18th of that month, the usurper's head was displayed on a stake at

¹⁰¹ Soz. 9.13.1.

¹⁰² Olymp., frag. 16 (Müller) = 17.1 (Blockley).

¹⁰³ Soz. 9.15.1.

¹⁰⁴ Soz. 9.13.3.

¹⁰⁵ For maps see Rivet 1988, 192, though Loseby 1996, 46–8, suggests that there was almost no late antique habitation on the right bank of the river.

¹⁰⁶ For the strategy see Elton 1996, 254.

¹⁰⁷ Soz. 9.14.2–4. His reward was a lapidary reprimand on the duties of hospitality.

¹⁰⁸ Soz. 9.15.1.

¹⁰⁹ Olymp., frag. 16 (Müller) = 17.1 (Blockley); Soz. 9.15.2–3; Greg. Tur. 2.9 (= *MGH.SRM* 1.56).

Ravenna.¹¹⁰ Gerontius, meanwhile, had committed a dramatic suicide: besieged by his own soldiers, his last refuge in flames around him, he killed his faithful servant and his devout wife, before falling on his dagger.¹¹¹ His client Maximus, bereft of all support, put aside the purple and departed to live amongst the barbarians who had by now partitioned much of Spain among themselves.¹¹²

CONCLUSIONS

In many respects, the foregoing account does not differ materially from one or another of those that have gone before. Two points on which the present narrative rests are quite different, however. One of these is the dating of the Rhine crossing, which we have argued took place on 31 December 405 rather than the traditional 406. The second is the progress of the subsequent invasion. On the evidence of Jerome's letter, which is in fact the only specific evidence we have, we have argued that the barbarians remained in the three north Gallic provinces during 406, 407, and 408, only moving southwards after the revolt of Gerontius in spring or summer 409. These propositions must stand or fall on the strength of technical arguments. However, there remains to be addressed what we might call a structural question of interpretation.

That question is one that besets anyone who tries to write on the period, the problem of what late antique barbarians were actually like. Part of what has been argued here is that from 407 to mid-409 it was possible for the regime of Constantine III to keep the Vandals, Alans, and Sueves contained in the northern part of Gaul. A corollary of this is that the picture of barbarian hordes rampaging uncontrollably through Gaul cannot be sustained. Some might question the plausibility of this picture. After all, we have Jerome's picture of sacked cities in the North on the one hand. On the other we have the poetic lamentations from the South of Gaul, and Hydatius' grim account of the Vandals, Alans, and Sueves in Spain. Is it credible that these barbarous invaders could have been immobilized for a couple of years only to pick up their devastations where they left off after Gerontius got them going again? What did they do in the mean time? Can they possibly have been content to live in peace one year and set off marauding again the next? To many, one suspects, the answer can only be no. And yet before we accept that hasty reaction we ought to ask whether it does not in fact presume more about the Vandals, Alans, and Sueves than we actually know.

If we face up to the problem of how much we really know about these barbarians, we are led into a thicket of vexed questions. We do not know how many Vandals, Alans, and Sueves there were. We do not know anything meaningful about their ethnicity or their consciousness of it. We do not know anything about their social composition, whether they were a giant army or a collection of warbands, whether they were peoples in migration with women and children along, or whether they were a campaign army trailing its camp followers. We do not know what rate of attrition the invaders suffered, how many of them made it from the Rhine to Spain, indeed how many of them tried to do so. We do not even know how much kinship the Vandals, Alans, and Sueves who divided the Spanish provinces between them in 411 felt with the Vandals, Alans, and Sueves who crossed the Rhine in 405.¹¹³ All we know for sure is that a few Roman observers developed a few barbarian stereotypes with which they characterized the people who in one context or another they labelled Vandals, Alans, and Sueves. But when we maintain that Constantine could not possibly have arrested the invaders of 405, we implicitly make assumptions about each one of these uncertainties.

¹¹⁰ *Cons. Const.*, s.a. 411 (= Burgess 1993, 243).

¹¹¹ *Soz.* 9.13.4–7.

¹¹² *Oros.* 7.40.5. For the barbarians in Spain during Maximus' reign there, see *Hyd.* 34–42.

¹¹³ The presence of the Vandal king Gunderic in both processes (*Add. Prosp. Haun.*, s.a. 406 [= *MGH.AA* 9.299]; *Hyd.* 63) must have contributed to some sense of continuity for at least some of those involved.

On the other hand, by recognizing what we do not know about late antique barbarians, we are in a better position to work with those points about which we do know at least something. Recent research has shown us a lot of things about the culture and the nature of the barbarians. First, there tended not to be very many of them.¹¹⁴ More importantly, their tribal or ethnic or national identity tended to be very fluid, and in times of war or migration that identity became even more open to change.¹¹⁵ This fluid identity, and the relatively small numbers identified with a particular identity at a particular time, has consequences. It has been shown that when on the move, our late antique barbarians behaved very much like mobile armies and it is now very hard to maintain the traditional view that along with every barbarian warrior there were four non-combatants in tow.¹¹⁶ All these observations have been developed with special reference to the Goths, despite the fact that a number of our Roman sources actually do describe late fourth- and early fifth-century Gothic movements as the migration of a large people, women and children included.¹¹⁷ The implications of that fact for the Rhine crossing are rather more forceful, for in this case not one source refers to the Vandals, Alans, and Sueves save in military terms. Now the ease with which ancient soldiers became farmers has often been observed, but it has also been observed that many would much rather fight than work.¹¹⁸ Given the chance to do neither, they took it.

The point of the present digression follows from these recent studies. All that Constantine would have needed to do to stop the military activity of the invaders was to make not fighting seem more attractive than fighting. This would have required both the stick of the battles he seems to have won, and some sort of carrot for good behaviour. The imperial bureaucracy in Gaul had vast resources and finding such a carrot cannot have been hard.¹¹⁹ He need not even have convinced every one of the barbarian invaders, but only enough of them to disperse the forward momentum they gathered when travelling *en masse*. That such dispersal was possible had been demonstrated by the Alan Goar before the invaders had even made it across the Rhine, and later by the successful defence of Bazas in 414, accomplished by turning Alan against Goth.¹²⁰ A similar approach works equally well for the events of 409. All Gerontius had to do was make fighting seem more attractive than not fighting. He need not have convinced every Vandal, Alan, and Sueve. The Vandals, Alans, and Sueves he convinced need not all have been the same men that had themselves crossed the Rhine in 405. The ease with which barbarian identities came and went ensures as much.¹²¹

Who our Vandals, Alans, and Sueves were, and most of what they did, are tantalizing questions

¹¹⁴ In contrast to the older work of Schmidt 1933 or Musset 1975, see Elton 1996, 15–88; Christie 1995; and Wood 1994, 1–54.

¹¹⁵ There is no room to rehearse the vast and growing literature on the ethnicity and ethnogenesis of early medieval peoples. The notion of ethnogenesis was brought to the study of early medieval peoples by the philologist Reinhard Wenskus and popularized by the Austrian historian Herwig Wolfram. Wolfram 1988 placed questions of ethnicity and its meaning at the heart of late antique and early medieval political history. The clearest statement of the developed Wolfram-Wenskus theory is now Wolfram 1995, while the most recent work on the subject, with copious references to the bibliography, is collected in Pohl and Reimitz 1998. Amory 1997 is a cogent, if hyperbolic, challenge to much of the newly prevalent ethnogenesis-orthodoxy. See also the wonderfully concise review article of Halsall 1999, in almost every way superior to the works it surveys.

¹¹⁶ Liebeschuetz 1989, 48–85, and 1992.

¹¹⁷ The point is stressed throughout the works of Peter Heather, most cogently in Heather 1991, 122–56; 193–226. But see Halsall 1999 on the methodology.

¹¹⁸ See the seminal work of Macmullen 1965. Elton 1996, 45–57, insists that the typically subsistence economies of barbarians made them inefficient soldiers over the long term. While this is certainly true of settled barbarian groups, either outside the Empire or, like the Goths from 379–395, within it, I am not so sure it holds true of the invaders of 405/406.

¹¹⁹ Despite which, *pace* Burns 1994, 197–256, there is no way for us to fit the evidence of the Rhine crossing into any more specific discussion of late Roman techniques of accommodation with the barbarians.

¹²⁰ See above, n. 9, for Goar. The siege of Bazas is known from Paulinus of Pella, *Eucharisticus* 372–5 (ed. W. Brandes, *CSEL* 16).

¹²¹ And not just barbarian identities. For Romans becoming barbarians, see de Ste. Croix 1981, 474–88.

about which we can know nothing. We can deny Constantine's ability to restrain the invaders of 405 only by appeal to something innate in the barbarian character. Barbarians were a certain way, so they could not have done this or must have done that.¹²² But we know next to nothing about the motivation of late antique barbarians, less even than we know about their behaviour. What different barbarians wanted when they crossed the Rhine, what different ones did when they got to Gaul, what particular measures particular Romans took to deal with them, all these things are questions that cannot be answered. They are precisely the sort of imponderable that this article avoids in its reconstruction of the Rhine crossing and the consequent Roman civil war. It makes no attempt to fill out the narrative with what can only be a subjective interpretation of motive, or of what must or must not have happened. Instead, it derives its narrative from the implications of such positive evidence as we do have.

The historian Orosius thought that Honorius was the special favourite of a God who allowed him so providentially to defeat the serried ranks of usurpers that faced him during his long reign.¹²³ Honorius was not an active emperor and one may well seek some explanation for his successes. These were, indeed, providential, but he was blessed not by God but by the incompetence of his opponents. Constantine was an ambitious opportunist, whose recognition by Honorius was Alaric's doing, not his own. He may never have led an army in battle himself, and he could not even pick effective subordinates, as the successive fates of Justinus and Neobigast, Edobich and Gerontius show. As for this last, despite the beguiling story of his last hours, his failure was unmitigated. His first victory, against an army of rural clients, came only on a second attempt. He could not control the barbarian force he unleashed. And it took him more than a year to defeat the ex-monk Constans, the only general of the era less competent than himself. A rigid disciplinarian who could nevertheless win no victories, it is no wonder that in the end his troops deserted him intent upon murder. With that said, it is less surprising that Honorius should have emerged in possession of his throne. Had he been faced by a Magnentius or a Magnus Maximus events would surely have unfolded differently. But the singular inability of his challengers made it inevitable that the advent of a competent general would seal their fates. In the event, Honorius' saviour Constantius was more than merely competent, able not only to defeat Constantine but to deal with the mess left behind in Spain and Gaul.

The events of the early fifth century are among the most difficult to untangle in late Roman history, in part because we need to confront a bewildering mixture of contradictory sources. The narrative proposed in the present article attempts to accommodate as much of the available evidence as possible. More particularly, it attempts to avoid basing arguments on speculation about the frankly unknowable motives of the men involved. When we realize that the Vandals, Alans, and Sueves began their invasion of the Gallic provinces on the last day of 405 every other piece of evidence slots quite comfortably into place. Imperial preoccupations in Italy prevented any effective action in Gaul, which in turn provoked a series of usurpations in Britain. When the scene of these usurpations shifted from Britain to Gaul, the conflict begun by the Rhine crossing became a full-fledged civil war amongst Romans. And that, ultimately, is the most important of many conclusions possible, and it is not in itself particularly novel. What I hope to have shown, however, is that any approach to the early fifth-century crisis must not only be grounded in the primary sources, but must also keep the distinction between source-based evidence and plausible hypothesis much clearer than is normally done. It is only by keeping that crucial distinction constantly before our eyes that larger interpretative efforts can be truly useful.¹²⁴

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¹²² For an inspiring attack on this methodology, see the sadly neglected work of Lindner 1981.

¹²³ Oros. 7.42.15–17.

¹²⁴ This paper has been through many stages, and I have benefited variously from the criticisms of Tim Barnes, Walter Goffart, Sandy Murray, and Ralph Mathisen.

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