PRIVATE ARMIES AND PERSONAL POWER

IN THE LATE ROMAN EMPIRE

by

Ryan H. Wilkinson

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SIGNED: RYAN HAYES WILKINSON

APPROVAL BY THESIS DIRECTOR

This thesis has been approved on the date shown below:

____________________________________ May 10, 2007
Alison Futrell
Professor of History
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ABSTRACT

This thesis’ case studies examine the critical roles played by personal power and private armies in the late Roman empire. Chapter 1 examines alleged military corruption in fourth-century C.E. north Africa, arguing that the imperial government’s power under the Dominate was diffused among competing interest groups within Roman society, whose interests were not always conducive to the security of the empire as a whole. Chapter 2 argues that bandit-ridden Isauria in Asia Minor was apparently successfully integrated into the imperial system, yet relied heavily on local personal power to control its violence-prone population. Chapter 3 argues that Roman pursuit of private or factional power sealed Rome’s loss of the Gallic provinces in the fifth century. Together, these three case studies argue that the later Roman empire was significantly influenced by internal divisions and private power, which were just as important as foreign, ‘barbarian’ influences in determining the empire’s fate.
INTRODUCTION

This thesis is a study of personal power and private armies in the late Roman empire. Cooperative personal power at multiple levels and the personal loyalty of the ‘state’ armies had provided foundational support for government by the emperors under the Principate. At the same time, competition between rival bearers of personal power led to tensions equally inherent in the empire. In the late empire, social-political factors, including changes in the structure and policies of the imperial government, increased the centrifugal effects of factional disunity in the empire. Where this trend could be restrained, personal power and even various private armies offered useful benefits to hard-pressed emperors. Where this trend was not restrained – i.e. in the western empire – the result was the end of Roman imperial rule and the transfer of control to warlords and independent private armies instead.

By ‘personal power,’ I mean the ability to control and influence situations and other human beings using resources or authority outside the formal apparatus of the Roman state. Here, I am particularly (though not exclusively) concerned with the manifestation of such power in the raising and/or directing of private armies. By ‘private army’ I mean a significant group organized for the purpose of projecting actual or potential lethal force, either answerable to persons outside the apparatus of the Roman state or whose loyalties have been focused using methods outside the official mechanisms of the state. My use of ‘significant’ in this definition, meant to distinguish an ‘army’ from (for example) a group of angry, drunken brawlers heading home from the tavern, is
of course subjective. I have no fixed size limit in mind for defining an army. The definition is meant to be flexible, but the key factor is the ability to influence areas of life which were traditionally under the purview of the state: regional or community defense, the administration of justice and of governmental policies, the enforcing of loyalty to state leaders, etc.

Rather than attempting a survey of the many private armies active in the late empire, my focus has been to understand the processes within Roman society which shaped and empowered a number of private forces, and the effects which those private armies in turn had on Roman politics and society. In beginning this project, several issues became clear: first, the realization that private armies could not be effectively understood through detailed description in a vacuum. They only existed because broader trends in society made them possible and indeed necessary or desirable to command. Second, although private armies have often been regarded as a trademark of the troubled later empire, I found that they were well-attested in Roman history for centuries before the reign of Diocletian. An understanding of Roman private armies would therefore need to address the socio-political roots of these forces and whether their role really changed in the late empire. I also asked whether there was any connection as cause or symptom between the prevalence of private armies and the dissolution of the western Roman empire in the fifth century. Finally, it was clear that private armies’ effects upon, and relationships with the state, were diverse. What made the state variously oppose, tolerate, or even encourage certain private forces? The present study reflects my attempt to answer these questions.
Power and Force under the Principate

Personal power was an integral and welcome part of the Roman imperial system from its inception. A key strength of rule by emperors was the marriage of their private power to state legitimacy. The emperor was at once the universal patron of the whole empire, a warlord commanding all the armies of Rome as his own private force, and (despite the insult to republican sensibilities) the central mediator of legitimate socio-political authority and allegiance. To prevent the violent breakdown of the late Republic from recurring, the state had been entrusted to a powerful warlord with the clout to maintain order.¹ Under his care, the Romans were free to exercise their own personal power within certain limits and only in cooperation with the imperial system. The smooth running of the empire, however, depended heavily on the cooperation of locally powerful individuals in each community. Rather than an absolutist state, the Roman empire was essentially a partnership between landed, urbanized aristocrats and the emperors, army, and administration.² Local elites surrendered taxes and loyalty in exchange for protection, participation in an empire-wide economic and cultural network, and official affirmation of the status quo, which inherently involved their dominance over the classes beneath them. The empire was in one sense a vast patron-client relationship


writ large between the emperor and the leading figures of each polis or civitas. This was the idea, and it usually worked.

On the other hand, the state’s reliance on personal power also brought weakness and invited trouble. The idea behind Tacitus’ famous ‘secret of empire’ could be rephrased as: the emperor’s private armies could be subverted, and whoever had the strongest private army could convert his own power and army into ‘the state.’ The realization led to civil wars and violence as a recurring part of imperial politics. Less pivotal though still significant were forces of disorder at the local level. There were always some elements in society which did not submit to the state’s control, and these persons were labeled brigands by the emperors and their supporters. I discuss brigandage and its relations with the state in greater detail in Chapters 2 and 3, using Brent Shaw’s model of the Roman bandit as the wielder of violence outside the boundaries of state legitimacy. The prevalence of brigandage led to the existence of small state-sanctioned local armies intended to fight off bandits and keep the peace, but their efforts were often compromised by local (even elite) support for banditry. If local cooperation by elites was an important part of the imperial program, there remained the potential for local power to undermine and resist the intent and needs of the imperial government on many levels.

Other trends in the empire contributed to centrifugal tendencies, including the influence of regional loyalties within the imperial system. This was particularly important during the notorious third-century crisis, during which two rebel polities,

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1 Tacitus, Histories 1.4.
centered in Gaul and Palmyra, vied for control with the legitimate court in Rome. Both rebellions involved usurping Augusti, and in both cases, the rebellious regions were easily reintegrated into the empire after the defeat of their leaders. This was an important aspect of power struggles in the empire: once people became familiar with Roman rule, they generally did not rebel against the empire, but rather for a bigger ‘slice of the pie’ within the empire. Localities with inadequate access to imperial patronage could produce a homegrown emperor to fit the bill.5

5For a discussion of these trends in Gaul during both the third century and the entire late imperial period, see Raymond Van Dam, Leadership and Community in Late Antique Gaul (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1985), 7-56.

Power and Force in the Late Empire

The third-century crisis ended with Diocletian’s stabilizing of the empire in 284. The establishment of the Dominate and the beginning of the fourth century brings us in range of this study’s three chapters. Although many of the trends already at work in Roman society continued into the late empire, important changes in power structures were underway, as this study will illustrate. I will address these changes here chapter-by-chapter.

Chapter 1 centers around a criminal investigation and cover-up following attacks on a minor frontier province in north Africa, arguing that this and other similar episodes show the weaknesses attending the growth of the late imperial government. As I discuss in Chapter 1, my views – with some important reservations – are heavily influenced by

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5For a discussion of these trends in Gaul during both the third century and the entire late imperial period, see Raymond Van Dam, Leadership and Community in Late Antique Gaul (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1985), 7-56.
those of Ramsay MacMullen and Christopher Kelly. The late imperial state apparatus was far larger than that of the Principate. The government bureaucracy grew tremendously in size under the Dominate and also attempted to regulate Roman life and society much more comprehensively. The expansion of the state apparatus made opportunities for authority and prestige available to a wider pool of individuals; among the agents of the expanded government were many persons connected to competing interest groups and networks of patronage within Roman society. In other words, the growth of the state apparatus drew members of various factions up into positions of official power. Meanwhile, the difficulty of monitoring and controlling a much larger bureaucracy from the center often isolated the emperors from the reality of their own provincial governments, giving many officials a chance to wield limited autonomy. Such officials found new ways to reward themselves, their clients, and their allies through their offices – even if their actions might be harmful to the overall health of the empire. In fact, different perspectives on corruption and legitimate action meant that many of these persons probably saw themselves as ‘in the right’ against other ‘corrupt’ rivals. Chapter 1 demonstrates that fierce competition and self-interested administration – by groups well-rooted in Roman society and the state – were rampant in the late empire and frequently compromised efforts to protect or strengthen the empire as a whole.

Chapter 2 moves to Isauria, a mountainous region of southern Asia Minor, famous in Roman times for its violent bandit armies. My discussion of Isauria is linked to two

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important trends in the history of power and force in the empire: first, the critical role local elites played in maintaining order in the empire’s rural hinterlands, and second, the later emperors’ experimentation with new sources for military recruitment – and the consequential rise of powerful new private armies. I reject the traditional view of Isaurian society as a kind of internal barbaricum, agreeing with Noel Lenski and Keith Hopwood that the area was apparently well-integrated into both Graeco-Roman civilization and the imperial program. With Hopwood (and contra Lenski) I understand large outbreaks of violence emanating from Isauria in the late empire to represent the break-down of typical Roman elite patronage, rather than a local elite program of resistance or opposition to the forces of the empire.  

In the fifth century, however, a number of Isaurians, including many former bandits, were drawn into military service at the highest levels; an Isaurian warlord even became emperor. Chapter 2 explains how the empire’s problems in recruiting adequate numbers of Romans into the army, along with the demand for violence-on-call in the many factional conflicts within and beyond the imperial court, led to continuing experimentation with new sources of military recruits. This was an age when mercenary soldiers in private armies could receive political and social legitimacy for their service to

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high imperial officials. In the case of Isauria, I argue that these opportunities probably established a new aristocracy, blending the world of the cities with the wilds of the bandit fortresses. This lasted for only a few decades in the late fifth century, until Isaurian power was broken by the emperor Anastasius. For the east, the crisis brought on by private power had passed. Not so for the west.

In Chapter 3, I discuss the end of imperial control in fifth-century Gaul, which became increasingly dominated by private armies and personal power – most notably power wielded by soldiers whom many contemporaries labeled ‘barbarians.’ Although posing risks, this situation initially offered some useful strategic solutions to the western emperors. These were particularly linked to the already-mentioned difficulties Rome faced in recruiting adequate military forces. The long-term reliance on private force, without comparable mustering of ‘state’ armies, eventually allowed private vice imperial control of Gaul to become total and permanent; Roman imperial rule in Gaul ended in any politically meaningful sense. Unrestrained private armies – again, predominantly but not entirely led by men who were labeled by contemporaries as ‘barbarians’ – were the mechanism of the actual end of Roman Gaul. That mechanism only succeeded, however, because of trends in Roman society which had been gaining momentum since at least the previous century.

This study therefore impinges on an important question in late antique studies: did the western Roman empire collapse from internal or external pressures? Various scholars, including but not limited to Thomas Burns and Ramsay MacMullen, have emphasized internal factors, while others – typified by Peter Heather – have emphasized
external pressures.\textsuperscript{8} There is no question that originally foreign groups of mercenary ‘barbarians’ were closely involved in the end of the west and inherited political control over former imperial territory. Still, two important reasons call for an emphasis on internal factors. The first is the intensive Roman influence experienced even by hostile ‘barbarians’ in the west. Taking the Visigoths before their 418 settlement in Aquitaine as an example, we have a group which – while clearly an ‘other’ in Roman society – also increasingly resembled an internal, not a foreign ‘other.’ In this sense, as I argue in Chapter 3, the early Visigoths seem more like a large private army of outcast ‘brigands,’ seeking reintegration into legitimate political circles, than foreign conquerors. Meanwhile, Roman rejection of the Visigoths (largely for immediate political reasons, not because of their original foreign identity) forced the Goths to continue developing a unique identity in the context of opposition to the Roman state; absorption of elements of Roman culture was continual, however, so the resulting identity was a hybrid between diverse foreign and Roman traditions.

The other internal factor I would emphasize in the downfall of the west is continued factionalism and disunity among the Romans. Internal civil strife severely compromised the Roman response to the Rhine invasion of 406, which led to the loss of Britain and ultimately to the catastrophic Vandal conquest of North Africa. The early Visigothic experience between 395 and 408 was heavily shaped by their use as a tool in conflicts between the western and eastern imperial courts or by factions within them. In

\textsuperscript{8}Peter Heather, “The Huns and the End of the Roman Empire in Western Europe,” \textit{The English Historical Review} 110, no. 435 (February 1995): 4-41; for his more recently-stated views see Peter Heather, \textit{The Fall of the Roman Empire} (London: MacMillan, 2005), 431-459. Also see Thomas S. Burns,
461, disunity severed ties between the Italian emperor and his only non-‘barbarian’ army in Gaul, after which point the emperors never again seem to have wielded effective control over the region. Although ‘Romanized’ foreigners took control of most of Gaul in the fifth century, Roman leaders had been offered several chances to prevent it. These chances were generally squandered in favor of self-interested internal conflict. The ongoing effects of illegal and even violent self-interested action in Roman society is a central theme of this project, reflecting my alignment with some (not all) of Ramsay MacMullen’s ideas about the gradual splintering of Roman imperial power into private hands. 9

Meanwhile, as I have tried to show through the arrangement of my chapters, the opportunistic and mercenary behavior of ‘barbarian’ kings who capitalized on the decline of Roman power in Gaul was in no way inherently non-Roman. Roman individuals had been making similar choices for a long time, advancing their own interests at the expense of the state. It was clear that such choices did not require one to renounce appreciation for Roman culture or civilization. The take-over of Roman Gaul occurred because Roman policies allowed large private armies to settle in Gaul and elsewhere in the west while opportunities to keep these private armies in line were lost; these losses were brought on by investing in yet other private armies, and in wasting military strength on internal wars. The end of Roman Gaul involved foreign, external elements, but those

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9MacMullen, Corruption and the Decline of Rome. I discuss his views in more depth in Chapter 1.
elements were profoundly shaped within the Roman world and ultimately were enabled to prevail through Roman choices and the nature of the Roman social-political system.

This thesis argues that the Roman state derived both significant benefits and critical weaknesses from private power within the empire. Private power maintained order in urban and rural communities and contributed to the strength of a number of imperial regimes. In the late empire, however, competition between rival groups holding private power contributed to the erosion of the imperial order. In the east, this trend was eventually brought under control; in the west, the trend led to the dismantling of the western empire. That process, however, fit into a long and troubled history in which the tension between private and state power had been influential for half a millennium.
CHAPTER 1: CORRUPTION, CONFLICT, AND POWER IN FOURTH-CENTURY TRIPOLITANIA

In the early 360’s C.E., Rome’s African province of Tripolitania was beset by a series of hostile foreign incursions. “Barbaric, rabid fury was burning, intent on widespread slaughter and rapine, while raiding boldly,” according to an account of these events. 10 Despite such a terrible picture, the province received little or no assistance from the Roman field army stationed in Africa, despite appeals for help from the embattled citizens. On the contrary, our most detailed source indicates that the commander of this army, named Romanus, not only abandoned the provincials, but launched an elaborate cover-up to hide his own negligence from the concerned eyes of the emperor, a cover-up which would prove effective for about a decade. Some scholars have interpreted this shocking incident as a classic example of the destructive effects of corruption in the later Roman empire.11

In reality the incident was complex and calls for careful analysis. This study attempts such an approach and sets out to locate and analyze alternate perspectives not demonstrated clearly in our source material. There are, in fact, compelling reasons to suspect that Romanus may have had legitimate cause for some of his actions, at least from his own perspective, and that the earlier illegal activities of some civilian elites in Tripolitania had weakened the military’s ability to provide effective defense on their

behalf. Consideration of these issues will lead to a discussion of corruption itself and the
ambiguities sometimes associated with using the term in historical analysis.

Ultimately, ‘the Romanus incident’ and similar stories offer insights into the
workings of power in fourth-century Roman society. These examples add to our
understanding of elite society as a web of diverse and sometimes competing networks of
patronage, connected with and having influence upon the imperial government. Such
influence benefited from a diffusion of imperial power among numerous officials in the
provinces and at court, but this lessened the government’s ability to pursue consistent,
uniform goals. Labeling Romanus as a villain too quickly conceals the scope of such
diffusion and the multiple parties who exploited it in fourth-century Africa.

The Saga of Romanus, *comes Africae*

Romanus, the *comes Africae*, or Count of Africa, held command of the field army
in the African diocese, which covered Rome’s holdings in what is now Algeria, Tunisia,
and parts of Libya. Our most detailed ancient source on Romanus is the late fourth-
century history of Ammianus Marcellinus, which provides a narrative of Romanus’
dealings with the Tripolitani and the imperial court. Ammianus’ account has a highly
negative picture of Romanus. The late-fifth-century historian Zosimus was equally
negative toward the general, but only mentioned him briefly. Finally, Augustine of
Hippo made brief mention of Romanus in an argument with a Donatist opponent in the

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first decade of the fifth century; his view of Romanus is more positive than our other sources. Because Ammianus provided our only detailed source, however, we must use his account to frame the narrative of Romanus’ story, though I will then consider how it compares with our other sources – and how Ammianus’ picture fares in the light of other evidence from fourth-century Africa.

Ammianus claimed Romanus was notorious for his greedy and exploitative nature, and left us with a colorful characterization of the general’s tenure in office:

He, while providing for his future and being cunning at shifting his unpopularity onto others, was detested by many for the brutality of his nature, chiefly because he was anxious to outdo the enemy in laying waste to the provinces. He relied upon his relationship by marriage to Remigius, who was then the *magister officiorum* [chief of staff], through whose reporting of distorted and contrary information, the most cautious emperor (as he made himself out to be) was long ignorant of the tear-inspiring losses of the Africans.¹²

The first example of such behavior came in the early 360’s in the province of Tripolitania. A neighboring ‘barbarian’ group, the Austoriana, began a series of destructive raids into Roman Tripolitania, a province south-east of Carthage covering the central and western parts of the Libyan coast. Citizens of the town of Lepcis appealed for help to Romanus, only recently appointed as *comes Africae*, most likely in 364.¹³ After his arrival on-scene, bringing with him some of the forces under his command, Romanus announced that he would not move against the Austoriana unless provided with a great amount of

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¹² Ammianus 27.9.2. “Qui venturi providus transferendaeque in alios invidiae artifex, saevitia morum multis erat exosus, hac praecepsie causa, quod superare hostes in vastandis provinciis festinabat, affinitate Remigii tunc magistri officiorum confusus, quo prava et contraria referente, princeps (ut prae se ferebat ipse) cautissimus, lacrimosa dispensa diutius ignoravit Afrorum [sic].”

¹³ For further discussion of the chronology of Romanus’ story see below at p. 26-27 and also B. H. Warmington, “The Career of Romanus, *Comes Africae*,” *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 49 (1956): 56-59, on which I rely for the relevant dates in this chapter.
provisions and 4,000 camels. The townspeople, still recovering from the damage of the raids, replied that in their present condition, scrounging together such supplies would be impossible. After forty days, Romanus left.\textsuperscript{14}

Up to this point, one might consider Romanus’ actions excusable; after all, how would his forces be able to cross the desert to strike back at the \textit{Austoriani} without these resources? The continuing story as told by Ammianus, however, clearly attributes unjust motives to Romanus. Unprotected by the \textit{comes}, the Tripolitani sent an embassy to congratulate the emperor Valentinian on his accession, and more importantly, to complain to him about Romanus’ inaction and to seek military aid. Upon hearing of this embassy, Romanus sent a fast courier to the capital, where his ally and relative Remigius served as \textit{magister officiorum}. At Romanus’ request, Remigius advocated for the \textit{comes} and tried to get judgment of the case referred to Romanus himself along with the \textit{vicarius} of Africa, the head of that diocese’s civil administration. Valentinian, however, did not initially believe either side and promised an official investigation, but the matter was postponed and lost in the shuffle of court business (presumably with help from Remigius).\textsuperscript{15}

After he received word in 365 from a second delegation, reporting that the Austoriani had again raided the province, the emperor dispatched Palladius, a trusted \textit{notarius} and \textit{tribunus}, both to deliver wages owed to the soldiers in Africa and to investigate the allegations concerning Romanus. While traveling through Tripolitania, Palladius allegedly saw ample evidence of the devastation suffered by the provincials,

\textsuperscript{14}Ammianus 28.6.1-6.
and he believed that Romanus had indeed been negligent. Romanus, however, had earlier given instructions to his officers that a great part of the money being distributed to the army should be offered back to Palladius. Palladius had accepted this large bribe, and when he confronted Romanus over his inaction, the comes promptly blackmailed the notarius.16

As a result, when he returned to the imperial court, Palladius was allegedly compelled to cover up the truth and support Romanus, stating that the complaints of the Tripolitani were groundless and that two of their spokesmen had even made some sort of offensive comments. The emperor sent Palladius back to Lepcis Magna to conduct a formal enquiry along with the vicarius of Africa. Romanus somehow induced the citizens of Lepcis to testify that the members of the second embassy to Valentinian had exceeded their instructions and had lied about the situation in Africa (Ammianus is vague on exactly how Romanus accomplished this). The emperor therefore condemned several spokesmen (including the civilian praeses of Tripolitania, Ruricius) to death or other unhappy punishments for lying to him. A few were able to flee into hiding, including two men who thus escaped having their tongues cut out – the two men, in fact, accused by Palladius of making offensive comments. The governor and a number of others were executed. This occurred sometime in or shortly after 370. The full story was not revealed for several more years, until the war against the rebel Firmus, apparently

15 Ammianus 28.6.7-9 (28.6.9 on the delay at court).
16 Ammianus 28.6.7-19.
provoked by further machinations of Romanus, brought the general Theodosius to Africa in 373.  

Shortly after the campaign against Firmus got underway, Theodosius began to treat Romanus as a criminal. Ammianus’ account does not provide much detail on why or how this change in policy occurred; it may have been in response to maladministration and inciting the revolt of Firmus. When Theodosius inspected the moveable property of the comes Africae, he found in Romanus’ private papers a letter revealing the truth about the Tripolitanian incidents. A final hearing then exonerated the remaining Tripolitanian envoys, who had been in hiding during the intervening years. Romanus and an associate complained at court that the final enquiry had been unfairly biased toward the provincials, but unsurprisingly got nowhere with this appeal. We have no record, though, that Romanus himself ever suffered any actual punishment for his actions after this point. “Romanus himself seems to have escaped any punishment more severe than removal from office,” Rodgers has noted, though pointing out that Ammianus does not actually provide any evidence that Romanus was formally acquitted during his final appeal. Exactly what happened to the comes after the affair of the Tripolitani was uncovered remains an intriguing mystery.

We also have a brief mention of Romanus in the work of the late fifth-century historian Zosimus. Zosimus wrote later and with less authority than Ammianus, and

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17 Ammianus 28.6.20-26. The general Theodosius was father to the emperor Theodosius I.
18 Ammianus, 27.6.26, 29.5.5-6; Warmington, “The Career of Romanus,” 60-64 suggests instead that Romanus’ arrest was due to factional politics at the imperial court after his ally Remigius left the office of magister officiorum.
unfortunately provided little detail, only repeating the charge that Romanus’ greed caused Firmus’ revolt, and that the whole affair followed from Valentinian I’s unwillingness to correct his senior officers for their misdeeds. 21 As mentioned earlier, Augustine of Hippo also provided a very short comment about Romanus, which constitutes our sole positive source on Romanus from antiquity. I will address Augustine’s comments in detail at a better point below. On the whole, though, Ammianus’ picture of Romanus as a heinous criminal remains our only source of detailed information on the comes and his actions.

**In Defense of Romanus?**

Despite the predominantly negative tone of our source material, some modern scholars have challenged such judgments against the comes. Matthews has called attributions of blame among the various actors in this unhappy story “naïve,” and Warmington has pointed out some important considerations that may have influenced Romanus’ motivation and actions. 22 Most recently, Heather has cautioned that we should not make this story too much an icon of Rome’s decline, in part since the use of office for private benefit had been happening in one form or another for centuries without serious harm to the empire. 23

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23 Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, 100-103. Heather amusingly refers to the whole incident as ‘Lepcisgate.’
Scholarly attitudes toward Romanus, however, have often been more negative. Thompson, for example, called him “incredibly villainous,” while more recently, MacMullen, Mattingly, and Kelly have all portrayed Romanus’ behavior as corrupt and reprehensible. MacMullen and Kelly in particular single out Romanus’ actions as a case study in corruption wearing away at the emperor’s power and the stability of the empire; their comments are particularly noteworthy, and I will return to them at length later in this study.

There are ample reasons to give Romanus a fresh hearing and to prefer interpretations which treat the Romanus affair with some subtlety. After combining evidence from other sources with a between-the-lines reading of Ammianus, a very different picture emerges of the Tripolitanian affair, in which avarice or incompetence are by no means the only possible explanations for Romanus’ actions. After exploring this possibility, I will turn to considerations of Ammianus himself as author, noting some external concerns which may have colored the narration of our most important source on Romanus. This process will illuminate some critical considerations for the study of corruption, power, and influence in the later empire.

Challenges to Ammianus’ criticism arise from the beginning of the story, when Romanus allegedly abandoned the Tripolitani. Romanus’ stated reason for leaving without pursuing the Austorians was that the townspeople would not or could not provide...
him with the supplies and mounts he had demanded.26 Years later, at the enquiry held by Palladius and the vicarius of Africa, Romanus’ troops responded to the testimony of a Tripolitanian envoy by angrily shouting that “the Tripolitani were not able to be defended, because they themselves had shirked supplying essentials necessary to the expedition.”27 This argument is compelling, whatever other issues may have complicated this affair. It is quite possible that there were in fact legitimate strategic dimensions to Romanus’ withdrawal, not least among them the extreme difficulty (even foolishness) of following raiders into their own territory across the north African desert without first ensuring complete logistical support. Romanus could hardly have successfully counter-attacked without adequate supplies, even had he wished to do so. Since Romanus’ troops were also owed their pay, which would finally be ‘delivered’ during the visit of Palladius, it is possible that Romanus did not think their present loyalty or morale strong enough to risk ordering an uncomfortable and dangerous strike across the desert.28

Even broader strategic factors may have convinced Romanus not to leave a stronger garrison in Tripolitania. Relative to other African regions, the province held a lower priority for the late Roman army, which was concentrated in the provinces farther west.29 To his credit, Romanus did spend forty days at Lepcis before leaving – though Ammianus treats this time as negligible.30 Still, one wonders whether Romanus, having

26 Ammianus 28.6.6.
27 Ammianus 28.6.23, “ideo Tripolitanos non potuisse defendi, quod ipsi ad expeditionis usus praebere necessaria detreactarunt.”
29 Mattingly, Tripolitania, 187-188.
30 Ammianus 28.6.6.
waited over a month at Lepcis in case of further raids, and having ruled out any kind of counter-strike across the desert, decided he could not justify diverting resources from the more critical lands to the west any longer, and therefore left. Perhaps there was not enough food on hand to feed his army, even if they simply stayed at Lepcis and mounted no desert counter-raids.

The Austorian attacks, moreover, did not require constant defense, but came in three waves spread over several years, so Romanus may have felt that the situation was less urgent than the pacing of Ammianus’ narrative implies. Warmington assembled a rough chronology by correlating details from Ammianus with dated epigraphic references to some of the officials involved in the story. According to Warmington, the first Austorian raid came in 363 or 364, with the unsuccessful appeal to Romanus in 364. The first Tripolitanian embassy was not sent to Valentinian until after the provincial council of 365. The same year also saw a second Austorian attack; Valentinian learned of this second attack and sent Palladius to investigate no earlier than the last months of 365. A third and final attack occurred at an uncertain date before the notarius arrived in Africa. The tangled process of cover-ups and investigations stretched on for years thereafter; it was not until at least 370 that the provincial governor and other opponents of Romanus were executed.

If the second and third Austorian attacks came in 365 (or 366 for the final raid), then the revolt of the eastern usurper Procopius in 365 coincided with some of the Austorian troubles and can only have given Romanus further reason not to divert his
troops to frontier garrison duties in Tripolitania. Ammianus wrote that Valentinian feared a Procopian invasion of Africa and took steps to reinforce the diocese by sending several loyal and experienced officers there.\(^{32}\) As soon as he learned about Procopius’ rebellion, it would make sense for Romanus not to scatter his troops on garrison duty at far-flung points on the frontier just in case of another raid into the empire. Protecting the area around Carthage would have been of critical importance, for at this date that region was the bread-basket of the city of Rome.\(^{33}\) Had Procopius invaded and seized this territory, or convinced its troops to defect to his side, he could have put pressure on the west by blocking grain shipments to Italy. I presume that Romanus concentrated his troops and his attention in this region until the end of the affair. The Procopian revolt, of course, can not explain all of Romanus’ behavior, for if the chronology detailed above is correct, then fears of a Procopian invasion can only have influenced Romanus’ decisions during the third and possibly second Austorian attacks. Yet there remains another possible reason for Romanus’ treatment of the Tripolitani, bringing us back to his original demand for supplies.

The burden of supplying food for the troops on the African frontier had in fact been assigned to local estates long before Romanus’ tenure in Africa. A law attributed to Valentinian, Valens, and Gratian refers back to and reaffirms this assignment, which had

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\(^{32}\)Ammianus 26.5.14.

been decreed by Annius Tiberianus, *comes Africae* in the 320’s.\(^{34}\) Moreover, this imperial decree cancelled exemptions which had previously been obtained “whether by the ‘pull’ or influence of anyone, or by furtive intercession.”\(^{35}\) Another law, issued in 365 and addressed to the *vicarius* of Africa, also mandates the same policy and accuses certain officials more specifically: “Let rations be transported to the frontier according to the position and proximity of the estates. This command hardly takes effect with difficulty, if the *tabularii* [accountants] should be kept clear of the customary frauds through fear of prompt and effective tortures.”\(^{36}\) Warmington suggests, based on the date of 365 and the address to the *vicarius* of Africa, that this edict was the initial imperial response to reports of the conflict between Romanus and the Tripolitani (although additional, non-extant copies of the law may have been addressed to other officials).\(^{37}\) At any rate, supply of the troops on the African frontier had apparently been complicated for years because certain officials and local elites had circumvented or ignored the laws. As Matthews has noted, “it is by no means impossible that Romanus, in making his demand, was reminding the provincials of years of neglect of their legal obligations.”\(^{38}\)

To be fair, Romanus’ direct request for supplies from the citizens of Lepcis Magna appears somewhat irregular. We have no evidence that the scope of the laws on

\(^{34}\) *Codex Iustinianus*. ed. Paul Krüger et al., vol. 2 of *Corpus Iuris Civilis* (Berlin: Weidmannsche, 1954) 11.59(60).1; on the connection between Romanus and these laws, see Warmington, “The Career of Romanus,” 56-57.

\(^{35}\) *Cod. Iust.* 11.59(60).1, “quidquid vel potentia uniuscuiusque elicuit vel furtiva deprecatio…”

\(^{36}\) *Codex Theodosianus*, ed. Theodor Mommsen et al., vol. 1 of *Theodosiani Libri XVI cum Constitutionibus Sirmontianis*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Weidmannsche, 1954), 11.1.11, “Pro loco ac proximitate possessionum annona ad limitem transvehatur. Quae iussio aut difficile capit effectum, si tabularii metu praesentium tormentorum a consuetis fraudibus arceantur.”


\(^{38}\) Matthews, *The Roman Empire of Ammianus*, 282.
military supply included impromptu requests for pack-camels. Moreover, the soldiers he brought with him to the city were presumably elements of his mobile field army, rather than the border troops who were theoretically provided for by the laws discussed above. Rations for the mobile field armies were normally collected by the nearest provincial governor – though this process could take up to a year, an untenable delay in this case. Perhaps the long-term neglect of the military supply chain in Africa meant that the appropriate procedures and infrastructure for quickly supplying the field army were not in place, making the normal channels useless and calling for unusual measures. However irregular the general’s request may have been, it was apparently not universally criticized among his colleagues. There is no record that Dracontius, the vicarius for the African diocese, objected; he seems to have remained favorable toward Romanus throughout the affair – even overseeing, with the notarius Palladius, the official enquiry which led to the execution of the provincial governor Ruricius. Warmington wondered whether Dracontius may even have stressed the corruption of local officials in the enquiry’s report.

A different side of the story is emerging. What if Romanus’ cupidity, condemned by Ammianus and Zosimus, was actually zealous or stubborn insistence that the civilian elites should play their mandated part in the maintenance of the empire? Could not such zeal be ‘spun’ by the curiales as an unjust desire to purloin their property? From Romanus’ point of view, perhaps, he was unable to do anything about the military

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41 Warmington, “The Career of Romanus,” 57 on this speculation and for the identification of Dracontius as the vicarius of Africa at this time.
situation in Tripolitania due to an illegal lack of supplies, and the *comes* later used the connections and resources at his disposal to prevent his being disciplined for a problem for which he felt he was not to blame.\(^{42}\) A change in perspective to that of the soldiers could change our judgments about who was and was not corrupt in this story. Blame might lie just as heavily on the wealthy landowners and the civilian officials who, for years, had together ignored the laws on military supply to the detriment of the realm’s defense. Indeed, Ammianus’ highly negative portrayal of Romanus may only have seemed accurate to certain groups in African society.

Evidence that some in Africa remembered Romanus much less negatively comes from the pen of Augustine of Hippo. Augustine’s comments were part of a written argument with the Donatist champion Petilian from the first decade of the 400’s C.E. Here, Augustine was responding to Petilian’s criticism of several imperial officials in fourth-century Africa – including Romanus – who had been remembered as persecutors of the Donatist church. In response, Augustine claimed:

> Truly, whatever Macarius, Taurinus and Romanus did on behalf of unity, by means of either their judicial or executive power, against the obstinate uproar of those men [the Donatists], it is known that those things were done in accordance with the laws …”\(^{43}\)

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\(^{43}\)Augustine *Contra Litteras Petiliani Libri Tres*, in *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*, ed. M. Petschenig, vol. 52 (Vienna, 1909; reprint, New York and London: Johnson, 1963), 3.25.29, “Macarius vero et Taurinus et Romanus quidquid vel iudiciaria vel executoria potestate adversus eorum obstinatem fuorem pro unitate fecerunt, secundum leges eos fecisse constat…” Macarius was a pro-Catholic imperial notary sent to Africa in the late 340’s to help bridge differences between the Catholic and Donatist churches, but instead he contributed to escalating tensions and ultimately persecuted Donatists in Numidia; Taurinus was a *comes Africae* around 340 who was ironically asked by Donatist bishops to quell Circumcellion unrest, but the Donatist casualties in a resulting marketplace battle were declared martyrs by the lower ranks of the Donatist clergy; Romanus used his troops more widely, seeking to stamp out Donatism. For all three, see W. H. C. Frend, *The Donatist Church: A Movement of Protest in Roman North Africa* (Oxford University Press, 1952) 177 ff., 197.
Augustine, of course, was quite hostile toward the Donatists. Considerations of the ethical or legal legitimacy of Romanus’ actions in this case aside, though, it is significant that Augustine considered Romanus’ memory respectable enough to deploy in his argument without further qualification. The bishop of Hippo was writing only three decades after Romanus’ downfall, so his claim that the manner of Romanus’ handling of the Donatists remained a known fact (‘constat’) is plausible. If Romanus’ career had chiefly been characterized, as Ammianus claimed, by savage and widespread exploitation of the provincials under his care (not just the Donatists), then I presume that even Augustine’s Catholic readers would be hostile to the memory of the comes. If both Catholics and Donatists had turned against Romanus, I suspect Augustine would have needed to provide further qualification for his argument. Such qualification is not forthcoming; apparently Augustine did not consider it necessary, suggesting that he felt many of his readers would have a much more positive view of Romanus than did Ammianus.

Given multiple perspectives on the career of Romanus, it is prudent to ask why Ammianus chose or accepted a negative picture of the comes for his history. The most probable answer lies in the nature of Ammianus’ sources and in the historian’s own narrative purposes for discussing Romanus. In his coverage of the revolt of Firmus and other actions in north Africa, it is generally now accepted that Ammianus drew on official records of the general Theodosius’ campaigns, such as a dossier or report he sent to the emperor.44 While this kind of source material may have provided Ammianus’

44Matthews, The Roman Empire of Ammianus, 381-382.
account with a high level of useful detail, it also means that he was heavily indebted to what had become the official version of events. Since Theodosius arrested Romanus, his reports to the emperor were likely quite hostile to the *comes Africae*. Ammianus also stated that a separate report, making known “a most complete confirmation of the deeds” which had transpired, had been drawn up by Virius Nicomachus Flavianus, the *vicarius* of Africa presiding at the final hearing which exonerated the surviving Tripolitanian envoys.⁴⁵ Perhaps Ammianus saw that report. If so, then he was again using a source which may have been markedly hostile toward the *comes Africae*; Romanus claimed that Flavianus had been overly biased in favor of the provincials.⁴⁶ Whether or not this was true is only conjecture, but it is quite possible that Ammianus’ source materials predisposed him against Romanus’ point of view.

Despite some scholars’ assertions, loyalty along class lines probably did not determine Ammianus’ perspective, as he most likely came not from a curial background, but rather from a senior military family.⁴⁷ Certainly, had Ammianus’ outlook been primarily curial, he might have been inclined to side with the Lepcitanian elites *a priori* in narrating the Romanus affair. More probably, however, Ammianus was the son of a senior military officer from the east. Such a background seems necessary to adequately explain his appointment, while still an inexperienced young man, as a *protector domesticus*, an elite post within the imperial bodyguard.⁴⁸ This background would add

⁴⁵ Ammianus 28.6.28.
⁴⁶ Ammianus 28.6.29.
depth to his personal understanding of the point of view of the empire’s military professionals, even beyond that attained during his own military service, so it does not follow that he sided with the Lepcitanians against Romanus only because of class interest.

Emphasizing the misdeeds of Romanus, however, did support the broader narrative goals of Ammianus’ history. Immediately after introducing Romanus and the troubles in Africa, Ammianus commented that while Valentinian punished lower-ranking soldiers most severely for their misdeeds, he was excessively lenient to the higher ranks – which only encouraged them to increase their crimes.49 The larger context for the historian’s narrative about Romanus is the need to support these claims. Painting Romanus in the most negative, corrupt light possible fit the overall rhetorical agenda of this section of Ammianus’ history – to depict the type of disastrous maladministration allegedly brought on by Valentinian’s tolerance of his high officials’ unjust behavior.50

The points covered thus far caution us not to accept Ammianus’ picture of Romanus too blindly. The historian was quite possibly working from written sources which Romanus himself would consider hostile. A portrayal of Romanus emphasizing corruption and injustice best suited Ammianus’ narrative intent. Furthermore, we have already noted a number of possible motives for Romanus’ initial actions in Tripolitania which Ammianus did not consider and which may provide alternate explanations to greed for the general’s behavior.


49 Ammianus 27.9.4.

Still, these arguments hardly exonerate Romanus. Rather, they caution us to think carefully and reserve judgment about aspects of the story that remain unclear. Whatever Romanus’ initial point of view, whatever his reasons for denying the Tripolitani military aid, the grim consequences (in Ammianus’ narrative) remain; a number of men were condemned to die as a result of judicial findings influenced by the *comes* and his allies. We have no source which directly contradicts Ammianus’ allegations. Perhaps Romanus did spend his years in Africa oppressively exploiting a number of the provincials while using his connections to hide his misdeeds from the emperor.

Nonetheless, taking into account the conflicting perspectives of rival interest-groups in society, what seemed shockingly corrupt and oppressive to one group may have seemed legitimate and normal to another. Each group’s definition of corruption may have differed substantially. As Kelly has noted, “illegality offers only one possible definition of corruption ... A society can equally well be made up of a series of competing ideals; ideals which impinge upon how power is – or may be – exercised appropriately.”51 To acknowledge that Romanus may have believed that he was right is not to set aside the pro-Tripolitanian point of view represented by Ammianus, but rather to examine both perspectives together while asking how each helps us understand the actions of the people involved. Also, though Romanus’ actions may have been purely self-interested, such an attitude may have seemed normal and appropriate among his peers and his use of influence for personal well-being a fully understandable example of the attractions which drew men to such positions of authority in the first place. As

51Kelly, *Ruling the Later Roman Empire*, 4.
unpalatable as it may seem, contemporary officeholders may have thought power should work that way, in which case understanding that view is important to understanding their actions. Whatever we may finally think of those opinions, they mattered in influencing society. It is therefore important that we allow for some subjectivity in our assessment of Romanus. MacMullen has argued,

> We do not understand the past best when we sit in judgment on it. However, where we detect disagreement among the actors in it, we may fairly follow out the consequences of the different preferences expressed, and compare them, and perhaps conclude at the end that one or the other was destructive or dysfunctional.\(^{52}\)

I would assert that sometimes we can and should sit in judgment on the past, and that the concepts of ‘destructive’ or ‘dysfunctional’ are themselves terms of judgment in favor of the stability or function of some preferred state of being.\(^{53}\) Yet I agree that to stop at judgment alone does not allow a good understanding of the ancient world and its affairs. In judging the past, we run the risk of doing so too quickly and lightly, or of forgetting to ask how power really worked (no matter how objectionable we may find its methods) and what it accomplished. These questions are necessary to understand the functioning (or dysfunctioning) of societies. Thus cautioned, we can now evaluate what the Romanus incident and analogous stories reveal about the workings of power in the fourth-century empire.

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\(^{52}\)MacMullen, *Corruption and the Decline of Rome*, 123.

\(^{53}\)In fairness, MacMullen is awake to this issue. In *Corruption and the Decline of Rome*, 1-57 *passim*, he addresses the subjectivity of ‘decline’ and provides related insights.
The Workings of Power in the Late Empire

The story of Romanus and the Tripolitani, and several similar episodes we will examine, illustrate important developments in the functions of influence in late Roman society. First, they point to a diffusion of power across the government (and elite society in general) under the Dominate. Compared to the situation under the Principate, this diffusion left the emperors relatively isolated from their subjects and often less able to focus the empire’s activities in a unified direction. Our examples also show how much the ‘official’ Roman government of the later empire was constituted of diverse interest groups, often in competition with one another, whose goals did not necessarily coincide with those of the emperors. While members of these groups had responsibilities to the emperors (sometimes met, sometimes ignored) they also had equally significant private interests and commitments which shaped their performance of ‘public’ duties.

Two scholars who have discussed such issues in depth are Ramsay MacMullen (in *Corruption and the Decline of Rome*) and Christopher Kelly (in *Ruling the Later Roman Empire*). Ironically, despite having a sophisticated understanding of corruption in general, both authors accept Ammianus’ very negative picture of Romanus with little or no qualification. Nonetheless, each scholar fortunately still makes some valuable observations on the broader implications of the Romanus affair. Both scholars use the story as a key illustration of the emperors’ loss of power and isolation from their subjects. Roman government in the fourth century A.D., they note, was larger, more bureaucratic, and more violent than earlier Roman analogues. The reforms of Diocletian and his
successors had ushered in an era in which the government, as a whole, was theoretically much more powerful than it had been before. Although multiplying the numbers and powers of civilian and military bureaucrats allowed them to influence society more thoroughly, it also divided the emperor’s power that much more, diffusing responsibility and authority for government action among many more officials with a more complex chain of communication than had been the case under the Principate. The emperors’ ability to monitor and control the activities of the government diminished; meanwhile emperors became isolated from their subjects, and officials often found it easier to redirect their public authority toward private ends without penalty. Romanus’ ability to hide the truth from Valentinian I and Gratian for a decade, and then apparently avoid punishment, is a powerful example of the trend described by MacMullen and Kelly.  

MacMullen in particular sees the diffusion of power as a crucial weakness in late Roman society. In fairness, his ideas about the decline of the Roman order are built upon more than just the isolation of the emperors. Still, for him the key idea underpinning all these issues is a gradual usurpation of the imperial government’s authority and resources by private parties for private ends. His thesis might be summarized by saying that the long-term pursuit of self-interest across the empire was responsible for the decline of imperial power, and thus the territorial integrity of the empire. This thesis has some compelling aspects, though it needs important caveats as I will illustrate below. My intent in this study, however, is not to grapple with

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54 MacMullen, *Corruption and the Decline of Rome*, 148-197 develops this idea (as part of a greater whole). Kelly, *Ruling the Later Roman Empire*, 225-227 explains the idea of the isolated emperor clearly.

MacMullen’s full argument, but simply to explore the implications of the diffusion of power from the emperors in late antiquity, especially where illuminated by the story of Romanus and similar examples. Within that purpose, MacMullen’s ideas remain useful whether or not one accepts his thesis wholesale.

In much the same way, I value Kelly’s treatment of imperial isolation while having significant concerns over some parts of the larger picture of the emperors he develops in *Ruling the Later Roman Empire*. In particular, Kelly suggests that a number of the seeming inconsistencies and radical contradictions in imperial dictates from late antiquity were actually deliberate, intended to keep officials who chafed for autonomy ‘on their toes’ and wary of an unpredictable emperor; thus emperors could combat bureaucrats’ tendency to settle into and then exploit defined patterns of power at the ruler’s expense. I have less faith in such imperial cleverness than Kelly does, but I do not intend to debate that question here either. I prefer to focus on his very useful descriptions of private power and imperial isolation, which I think neatly complement the ideas I find useful from MacMullen’s work on self-interest and corruption in the late empire. Based on the discussion so far, these two authors seem to be right on many of the implications of the Romanus affair and its analogues, even if each scholar could afford to give a better hearing to the *comes Africae*.

The story of Romanus’ conflict with the Tripolitani is not unique; similar stories from the late empire also illustrate the same imperial isolation and diffusion of power. Indeed, Ammianus himself suggested that the difficulties in focusing the emperor on an

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56 Kelly, *Ruling the Later Roman Empire*, 216 ff.
investigation of the Tripolitanian situation merely reflected business as usual at the imperial court.⁵⁷ Upon first being told of Romanus’ conduct by the Tripolitanian envoys, the emperor promised a full investigation, which Ammianus says was derailed and delayed at court “in the manner whereby high authorities are typically deceived among the duties of the powerful.”⁵⁸ So effective was this diversion that when we again meet Romanus in Ammianus’ history, one book and about ten years later, he is using his old tactics against a new enemy, and this time provokes the nobleman Firmus to revolt. Firmus had few other options, because Romanus’ ally at the imperial court, Remigius, had blocked Firmus’ complaints to the emperor by insisting that “among the more important engagements of the emperor these complaints were not able to be read except at the right time, as they were minor and superfluous.”⁵⁹

Another episode from Ammianus, also illustrating the ability of private factions to isolate the emperors from the reality of the provinces, involved a certain Sabinianus, an elderly and thoroughly unmilitary aristocrat who purchased a generalship in Syria. Ammianus claimed that, due to Sabinianus’ negligent inaction, advancing Persians were able to besiege and capture the city of Amida unopposed by the imperial field army in 359. Though the emperor commissioned an official investigation into Amida’s fall, powerful figures at the imperial court allegedly diverted blame to a scapegoat in order to

⁵⁷ Though by this point, one suspects that some measure of literary exaggeration may have been involved here.
⁵⁸ Ammianus 28.6.9, “…dilata est eo more, quo solent inter potiorum occupationes ludi potestates excelsae.”
⁵⁹ Ammianus 29.5.2, “…inter potiores imperatoris necessitates haec velut minima et superflua, non nisi opportune legi posse adseverante.”
avoid offending the court eunuch responsible for Sabinianus’ appointment. The incident provides a clear parallel with the alleged obstruction of justice by Romanus and his allies.

As with the Romanus incident, however, we need to treat Ammianus’ allegations against Sabinianus with some caution. The “fall guy” who took the blame for Amida’s capitulation was none other than the senior officer Ursicinus, on whose staff Ammianus himself served. A great admirer of Ursicinus, Ammianus was strongly biased in his favor and railed against the enemies who allegedly conspired to bring him down. The polemical language with which Ammianus described Ursicinus’ detractors is vitriolic, almost farcically so. The eunuchs and other officials who hatched their evil plan to enrich themselves while destroying Ursicinus did so in a matter befitting “brothels and the stage;” Ammianus described their character, saying that eunuchs, “always savage and unpleasant, and lacking other relatives, embrace riches alone as their most delightful little daughters.” We should not blindly trust so strongly colored a narrative; this example gives us further reason for caution in assessing the Romanus affair, where Ammianus (though not, in this instance, so personally involved) resorted on a lesser scale to the same kind of melodramatic language. Note, for example, Ammianus’ histrionic

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60 Ammianus, 18.6.1, 18.6.7, 18.7.7, 19.3.1, 20.2.1-3.
61 Matthews, *The Roman Empire of Ammianus*, 40-47.
62 Ammianus 18.5.6, “…quasi per lustra aguntur et scaenam…”
63 Ammianus 18.5.4, “…feri et acidi semper, carentesque necessitudinibus ceteris, divitias solas ut filiolas iucundissimas ampectuntur.”
assertion that Romanus was hated “chiefly because he was anxious to outdo the enemy in laying waste to the provinces.”

Though we may hesitate to affirm that the manners of Ursicinus’ opponents were fit only for the brothel, or to agree that Romanus was chiefly concerned with exceeding the rapacity of the ‘barbarians,’ we can still see in Ammianus’ narrative evidence of the diffusion of imperial power and the encroaching influence of rival interest groups on the affairs of the ‘official’ government. In these incidents, the driving force affecting what the Roman government did to or for its provincial subjects was not the decree of the Augustus, but the actions of networks of men, often in high positions, acting with a certain degree of autonomy while the emperors were left in ignorance. Emperors had never known and controlled everything happening in the empire, of course; they had in fact always depended on the cooperation and coordination of local elites outside the ‘official’ imperial government to maintain order in the provinces. This remained the case in the late empire, when members of power-groups outside the civilian and military bureaucracies – such as bishops, monks, senators, curiales, etc. – filled important leadership roles in late antique society, sometimes gaining additional importance through emerging currencies of power (especially in the case of ecclesiastical leaders).

By the late fourth century, however, the diffusion of power had made the ‘official’ government itself an arena where rival social elites could more effectively use

\[\text{\textsuperscript{64}}\text{Ammianus 27.9.2, “…hac praecipue causa, quod superare hostes in vastandis provinciis festinabat.”}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{65}}\text{For discussion of the role of these private figures in keeping the empire running smoothly see MacMullen, \textit{Corruption and the Decline of Rome}, 58-121; Veyne, \textit{Bread and Circuses}, 40-46; Millett, “The Romanization of Britain,” 65-101. Also see MacMullen 122-170 on the emergence in the late empire of a more ‘official’ (and more violent) way of government.}\]
imperial power to promote their private (and often conflicting) interests. The incidents we have examined do not merely show a lack of official awareness of contrary activities by private persons outside the government, but rather the ‘official’ government itself grossly divided and often working in mutually opposed directions. We should remember that the men in the Romanus affair who had allowed the Tripolitanian landowners to evade their responsibilities for the military *annona* were – like Romanus – themselves part of the government. They too were servants of the emperor, but their interests in this case were different from his. Individuals with careers in the government were commonly connected with extra-governmental interest groups. The need for heavy recruitment of officials for the expanded government of the Dominate had lifted broad segments of elite society up into the enlarged bureaucracy, providing more elites with access to ‘official’ power and the ability to drive governmental actions in ways amenable to their interests. The government was not a separate entity standing apart from and above other groups in elite society, but was rather deeply influenced by the concerns of constituent elites, and reflected their often conflicting desires in many of its actions.\(^66\) Meanwhile, as the diffusion of power offered more influence to lesser patrons, the level of direct control over the empire held by the emperors diminished.

Of course, the emperor’s involvement was not necessarily always beneficial for society. Sometimes emperors and those closest to them could themselves promote corruption and mismanagement. A story told by the historian Zosimus illustrates the

\(^66\) For a thorough exploration of these points on the interconnections between ‘public’ and ‘private’ groups in the late empire, and the increased influence of elite groups within the government, see John Matthews, *Western Aristocracies and Imperial Court A.D. 364–425* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), *passim*. 
possibility of such negative influence. Arbazacius, an early fifth-century general, was sent to quell large-scale Isaurian bandit raids threatening nearby regions in Asia Minor. This officer, after some initial easy victories, allegedly chose to ease up the pace of his campaign and enjoy his recovered plunder amid the pleasures of town life. The brigands, who could have been crushed, instead escaped to their mountain fastnesses and were free to continue their destructive raiding. After Arbazacius’ conduct was made known at the capital, he expected condemnation, yet was able to escape punishment by sharing his plunder at the court. 67 So far this sounds a lot like the story of Sabinianus, the magister equitum who was protected by his court connections after losing the city of Amida to the Persians. Indeed, MacMullen uses this story too as evidence of the ability of some officials to hide negligent blunders from the emperors, and the consequences for the empire. 68

Rather than isolation, however, this story really suggests complicity at the highest levels of imperial power. Arbazacius did not just share his plunder with the ‘right people’ – Zosimus is much more specific – he says that the goods went to the Empress Eudoxia herself (one presumes via suitable intermediaries at court). We have already seen that very senior officials (including a magister officiorum in the Romanus affair) were among those who isolated late Roman emperors to serve their own purposes. That a member of the imperial family, though, could be ‘bribed’ to pardon destructive negligence presents a caveat concerning the emperors’ contribution to the empire’s stability. Of course, the Emperor and his Augusta were not always allies in matters of

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67 Zosimus 5.25.
imperial policy, but isolation doesn’t seem the most relevant factor when the emperor’s own wife is the final beneficiary of payments to the court. If isolation was involved here, then apparently Eudoxia herself played some role in it – in which case we should be looking at specific issues of politics within the court itself as much as at systemic weaknesses in the late Roman system. Such familial palace intrigues had been happening as far back as the Julio-Claudians. However much the emperor himself knew of all this, what is important is that whichever person (or persons) actually controlled decision-making at the court (which may be the functional equivalent of the concept ‘the emperor’) was allegedly a willing party to Arbazacius’ paid pardon, and was perhaps more interested in reaping financial gain than in scrupulously troubling with the details of provincial defense. Those at the very top of the imperial system were of course human, fallible and often driven by self-interest themselves. They were not merely passive victims of the process of isolation, but sometimes participants in and even promoters of corrupt behaviors which helped to weaken the empire. This held true for the emperors themselves as much as it did for their associates; an emperor’s primary goal was not necessarily the smooth and just administration of the empire.

**Conclusions**

The diffusion of power across late Roman government and society was a mixed blessing, even from the perspective of the emperors. Despite the attendant problems of

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isolation, the expanded size of the late imperial bureaucracy enabled emperors to
vicariously impose their will much more broadly, so long as they could control their own
officials. 69 Though focused in this study on examples of corruption, conflict, and
instability, I do not aim to under-rate the real importance of the emperors in society, or to
suggest that fourth-century Roman government was rarely capable of unified or altruistic
action. Further, even when the diffusion of power came at the emperors’ expense, it may
have seemed quite beneficial to a lowly client, blessed with access to patrons who were
better able to effectively influence his life than the Augusti in their distant palaces. Still,
the isolation of the emperors diminished their ability to override factional squabbles and
drive the empire in a unified direction without significant support from subordinate
groups, thus often necessitating government through compromise and coalition. 70
Sometimes the emperors’ isolation allowed material losses to the empire to go
unchecked, as Ammianus claimed was the case in Tripolitania and at Amida.

Too eagerly seeking a culpable villain to blame for such losses, however, can
blind us to some of the larger systemic issues at work. In writing off the story of
Romanus under the label of ‘corruption,’ we may fail to appreciate the rival points of
view involved in the incident and in fourth-century society as a whole. Rather than a tale
with an obvious villain, the episode suggests a conflict between competing interest

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69 Kelly, Ruling the Later Roman Empire, 190.
70 Even that spectacular claim of imperial authority to order radical change in society, the legal
Christianization of the empire by Theodosius I, was first advocated and then, at times, enforced by
powerful elite supporters of the emperor. For a discussion of fourth-century ‘rule by coalition,’ see Walter
E. Roberts, “A Study of Concordia: Changing Conceptions of Power and Responsibility in Late Antiquity”
(Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 2003), 44-376; for the role played by Christian elites in Theodosius’
movement toward mandating Nicene Christianity across the empire, Matthews, Western Aristocracies and
Imperial Court, 101-252.
groups, for all of whom the performance of public duties was significantly influenced by private interests. Calling Romanus a corrupt villain may in fact be quite accurate, but we should not presume that the norms advocated by his curial opponents were in the long run any less corrupt or harmful to the empire’s stability.
CHAPTER 2: THE BANDITS OF ISAURIA

We now turn from the deserts of Africa to the coastal mountains of southern Asia Minor. There, in a region known as Isauria or Rough Cilicia, violent bandit armies repeatedly formed and played havoc on the neighboring regions. Despite their dubious reputation, in the late fifth century, one of the Isaurians became emperor of the east, having converted the rough violence of the Isaurians into political capital. As I will show, scholars are quite divided on how to understand Isauria and its place within the Roman world. I reject the traditional view of Isaurian society as a kind of internal barbaricum, agreeing with Noel Lenski and Keith Hopwood that the area was apparently well-integrated into both Graeco-Roman civilization and the imperial program. As a result, Isauria serves as an example of the importance of local, personal elite power in maintaining order in the rural hinterlands of the empire’s cities. With Hopwood (and contra Lenski) I understand large outbreaks of violence emanating from Isauria in the late empire to represent the break-down of typical Roman elite patronage, rather than a local elite program of resistance or opposition to the forces of the empire.

Isauria’s history in the fifth century was dominated by men drawn into military service at the highest levels. Their careers illustrate how the empire’s problems in recruiting adequate numbers of Romans into the army, along with the demand for violence-on-call in the many factional conflicts within and outside the imperial court, led to continuing experimentation with new sources of military recruits. This was an age when mercenary soldiers in private armies could receive political and social legitimacy
for their service to high imperial officials. In the case of Isauria, I argue that these opportunities probably established a new aristocracy blending the world of the cities with the wilds of the bandit fortresses. This lasted for only a few decades in the late fifth century, until the emperor Anastasius broke the power of Isauria’s powerful private armies.

Isaurian Geography and History

The rugged Isaurian terrain played an important part in shaping the region’s history. When I speak in this study of Isauria or Rough Cilicia, I am generally referring to a specific region – the administrative territory of the late imperial province of Isauria – beyond which lay other lands which, ambiguously, might be called Isaurian or Cilician. The area defined as ‘Cilicia’ got progressively smaller in classical geography, originally encompassing most of southeastern Anatolia in the pre-classical Greek geographical awareness. The events and issues which I intend to explain in this chapter, however, were centered around the territory within the province of Isauria, and thus I consider it an adequate geographical range for consideration. This is especially suitable because a local ethnos, the Cietae, dominated this region. Nonetheless, I will explain the transition in terminology.

Isauria, a mountainous “u”-shaped curve projecting into the Mediterranean, stands on the southern Anatolian coast directly north of Cyprus. Directly to the east is the level
Cilician Plain, home of the city Tarsus, and known in Roman times as Cilicia Pedias (Smooth or Level Cilicia); Isauria was sometimes, in contrast, called Cilicia Tracheia (Rough Cilicia). Since the time of the Hittites, the whole region and its surrounding areas had belonged to a cultural-linguistic group known as ‘Luwian,’ although by Hellenistic and Roman times, Luwian traces were rare and generally limited to highland areas. By the time Rome became heavily involved in Asia Minor in the late Republic, Cilicia Pedias had been thoroughly integrated into Hellenic civilization and urban life, but Cilicia Tracheia remained a fairly wild place and more fully maintained traces of pre-classical identity. The inhabitants of the mountains of Cilicia Tracheia, those still showing signs of Luwian traditions, called themselves Cetae or Cietae, although subdivisions among the Cietae are attested. Under the empire, most outsiders referred to the people of Isauria Tracheia as Isauri, even though ironically the source of this name (the cities of Isaura Vetus and Isaura Nova) ended up outside the late imperial province of Isauria. So, when speaking of the Isaurians in the Roman empire, we are using a loose and flexible term, but one rooted in the community of Cietae dwelling in Cilicia Tracheia, especially around the Calycadnos River.72

To the north of Isauria was the inland plain of Lycaonia; to the west of Isauria, along the coast, was Pamphylia, very fertile; east of Isauria was the plain of Cilicia – or, more properly, Cilicia Pedias. Although most of Isauria is mountainous, the coastal area and the lower reaches of the Calycadnos river-valley were less rugged and held cities

which were Hellenized before the highlands. The hinterland itself, however, was a rough
country, with stands of excellent timber at the highest levels. Despite the area’s
reputation as a rugged haunt of bandits, there were also a number of urban settlements
throughout the inland mountains. Various external powers in the Hellenistic and early
Roman imperial age held sovereignty over part or all of this region, with only limited
impact on the culture and loyalty of the highland people. Often they just left the
highlands alone. The rise of piracy based along the coastline of Cilicia invited the
intervention of Roman armies. Campaigns under one P. Servilius Vatia ‘Isauricus’ seem
to have been intended only “to curb rather than suppress piracy.”73 Pompey the Great,
having broken the Isaurian pirates and crushed King Mithridates, organized a large
Roman province of Cilicia. Within a few years the province incorporated both Cilicia
Pedias and Tracheia as well as surrounding territories on the mainland and Cyprus.
Under Julius Caesar this province was broken up and Tracheia was given once more into
the hands of a series of client-kings so that Rome would not be troubled with its
demanding yet economically unrewarding care. In the first century C.E. there were
several failed rebellions of the Cietae which culminated in defeated rebels being settled in
a series of new towns on the upper Calycadnos basin. In 72, Vespasian annexed Cilicia
Tracheia and added it to a renewed province of Isauria. Further urbanization and the
spread of Roman culture spread apace.74

No further rebellions in Isauria are specifically attested until the third century, but
after that violent outbreaks on a large scale, involving raiding into surrounding regions,

73 Mitford, “Roman Rough Cilicia,” 1236.
seem to have become frequent. We have a (questionable) report of a local revolt under Gallienus during the crisis of the third century and evidence of a possibly Isaurian brigand troubling regions to the west in the 270’s; securely-attested attacks occurred in 353, 359, 367, 375, 404, and 441. Troubles continued after this point, but important changes in the role of Isaurians in the empire were afoot; I will discuss them in detail below. Amidst this increase in violence, Diocletian’s radical restructuring of the imperial map created a new, smaller province of Isauria with its seat at Seleucia-on-the-Calycadnos.

**Isaurian Leadership and Unrest: Three Models**

The most significant historical approaches to Isauria in recent decades have been those of Brent Shaw, Noel Lenski, and Keith Hopwood. Each has attempted to explain the large outbreaks of Isaurian violence in the late empire using a different model of Isaurian social organization. In short, Shaw suggests that Isauria was peopled largely by culturally unassimilated tribes which the Romans were never able to fully integrate into the empire and who periodically raided for loot and/or fought to protect their autonomy. Lenski argues that Isauria was successfully integrated into the Roman empire, culturally and politically, but a crisis or series of crises in the third century provoked a general movement led by urbanized Isaurian elites who would periodically resist Roman rule for

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74 Mitford, “Roman Rough Cilicia,” 1236-1251 passim.
over two centuries.\textsuperscript{77} Hopwood, meanwhile, also argues for the general integration of Isaurian urban society into the fabric of the empire, but suggests that the Isaurian uprisings occurred when vertical ties of patronage between urban elites and their rural clients broke down.\textsuperscript{78} For reasons discussed below, Hopwood’s model is probably the most acceptable for Isauria (at least until the mid-fifth century).

Shaw’s model hangs on the idea that the difficult terrain of the Taurus mountains prevented Rome (and other powers) from effectively controlling or assimilating the Isaurians. He surveys the history of relations between the region’s inhabitants and external imperial forces from the Hittites through the Byzantines, concluding that each of these empires was unable to truly control the mountain-dwellers, and could only assert suzerainty over them through relationships with loosely-allied local magnates. This pattern, Shaw claims, generally held true for areas of mountain-plain contact around the ancient Mediterranean. To Shaw, the Romans fared no differently in Isauria than their predecessors: “During most of the period of the high Roman empire Isauria was a zone of permanent dissidence located wholly within the outer frontiers of the empire … Even the ruling elites were immune to imperial acculturation.”\textsuperscript{79} In such a setting Rome could only treat with local strongmen, maintaining a fiction of dominance over the highlands, and at times pursue more violent action which in the end would “resolve itself into a form

\textsuperscript{77}Lenski, “Assimilation and Revolt.”
\textsuperscript{78}For a bibliographical overview of Hopwood’s work on Isauria see p. 233, n. 12 of Hopwood, “Ammianus Marcellinus on Isauria.” Particularly relevant works are Hopwood, “Bandits, Elites, and Rural Order,” and Hopwood, “Towers, Territory, and Terror.”
\textsuperscript{79}Shaw, “Bandit Highlands and Lowland Peace,” 261.
of unending ‘trench warfare’ that became routinized as part of the normal relations between mountain and plain.”

Archaeological evidence, however, does not support this view. Signs of Graeco-Roman acculturation are common at numerous urban sites across the Isaurian highlands, along with indications that local elites accepted the generally empire-wide norms of provincial interaction with and attitudes toward the emperors. Isauria today remains a rugged land and difficult to work in, but nonetheless the excavator, the epigrapher, and the numismatist have uncovered much evidence pointing to a significantly Hellenized, urbanized hinterland under the High Empire. To give a general picture before moving on to some specific details:

Evidence remains for town councils (boulai) in five communities from the hinterland … Four highland towns are known to have minted coins from the second century joined by two more in the third. Seven style themselves poleis in surviving coins and inscriptions … The inhabitants of [Isaurian] cities also conducted civic business in Greek and composed their inscriptions in Greek, some even in Latin. In addition to native Luwian names, these same highlanders chose Greek and Roman names in a rough proportion of 2:2:1. They assimilated their native pantheon to that of the Greeks and constructed temples and altars to these gods in Greek fashion.

The material record, then, does not support Shaw’s view of the Taurus mountains as an impenetrable barrier to Greco-Roman civilization. None of this, of course, is to suggest that Hellenic culture comprehensively replaced earlier Luwian cultural norms. As in

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80 Shaw, “Bandit Highlands and Lowland Peace,” 263.
81 The staff of a multi-year field survey project in ‘Rough Cilicia’ have recently noted the difficulties which the rugged and overgrown landscape presents to researchers. In one incident, surveyors did not see the “massive remains of the late Roman fortress Frengez Kale standing directly across from their location” because of the dense forest blocking their view. “Rough Cilicia Archaeological Survey Project, Report of the 2004 Season” (Document online, accessed April 13 2007); available at http://pasture.ecn.purdue.edu/~rauhn/rc2004/RC04_report.htm; Internet.
most places, cultural assimilation included the adoption of numerous foreign habits, the retention of some native elements, and in many cases a fusion of foreign and native customs or ideas. My point here is to firmly reject the idea that these highland areas were not or perhaps even could not be effectively influenced by Graeco-Roman culture; on the contrary, the evidence suggests that significant foreign cultural norms (particularly Hellenic ones) became a central part of normal life in Isauria, mirroring the experience of the eastern Mediterranean at large in the Hellenistic and Roman era. The adoption of Greek or Roman cultural norms by itself, however, does not prove political loyalty or submission; yet inscriptions and coins from the inland towns of Isauria do in fact suggest a normative relationship between provincial elites and the emperors.

In presenting examples of Greek and Roman influence on life in Isauria I will focus on cases drawn from the ‘Decapolis’ of the eastern-central Isaurian highlands. These are the cities clustered on or near the upper forks of the Calycadnos River, far from the coast. I chose this emphasis for several reasons. Citing the plentiful examples of Graeco-Roman cultural norms being practiced in Isauria’s coastal cities does nothing to dispel the idea of the inland mountains being cultural islands within the empire; what is needed is evidence of Graeco-Roman civilization being celebrated deep inside Isauria. For this, the Decapolis fits the bill. The area is also well within Isauria proper (that is, the late imperial province of that name) and so we avoid relying on peripheral areas which might or might not be considered ‘Isaurian’ or ‘Cilician’ at various times. Several prominent cities in the Decapolis (Eirenopolis, Germanicopolis, Philadelphia, possibly

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others) were founded in the first century C.E. by King Antiochus IV of Commagene, who had chosen to settle vanquished rebels of the Cietae in new cities. If there was continuity of resistance to foreign culture and control between pre-Roman and Roman-era Isauria, as Shaw has claimed, then the new settlements of these rebellious Cietae should provide a good place to look for it. Finally, several sites in or near the Decapolis are linked in various ways by our sources to the violent bandit armies of late imperial Isauria, as I will discuss in detail later in this chapter. In general, the Decapolis offers an area clearly within Isauria proper, distant from the sea and its easy communication with the outside world, settled by residents with a known history of resistance to foreign authority, and clearly a region of importance to at least some of the large bandit forces of the later province. Against expectation, this region produces telling examples of integration within the cultural, economic, and political systems of the Roman empire. If the search were broadened to include more peripheral areas of Isauria, the list of examples would be both much longer and much more clearly in evidence of political and cultural integration.

First, to consider some epigraphic evidence. From Coropissus, far inland, comes an inscription dedicated to Septimius Severus and reportedly accompanying his statue. The inscription is dedicated by the *polis* and hails the emperor as “father of the

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83Mitford, “Roman Rough Cilicia,” 1244. Mitford notes that the area of the Decapolis probably only had one other city in it at that time (Domitiopolis), so the impact of these settling Cietae on the future character of the region will presumably have been quite strong. Mitford reports that two cities on Isauria’s western coast (Antioch-on-the-Cragus and Iotape) were likewise settled at this time using defeated Cietae. Yet the loyalty of the coastal zone is taken for granted by scholars in Shaw’s camp.
fatherland, master of the earth and sea” along with other honorifics. Elsewhere, an inscription at Claudiopolis (if properly reconstructed) reads in part “The triple-colonnade [tristoon] of the mouseion was prepared by L. Septimius Severus Pius Pertinax Augustus and by Marcus Aurelius Antoninus Caesar [i.e. Caracalla] …” Although this version has been heavily reconstructed by its finder (with additional clean-up by Bean and Mitford), the reference to the tristoon and several of the imperial titles are not in the reconstructed portion, along with the majority of the verb “was prepared by” (kateskeuasthe) and the requisite genitive of agent in the aforementioned imperial titles. It seems a safe guess that Claudiopolis was in this case the recipient of a visible act of imperial patronage, odd if the Isaurians were an irredeemably rebellious and unacculturated people.86

84 "Autokratora Kais[a]ra L[oukion] Septim[i]on Seouero[n] Pertinaka Seb(aston) Augouston Euseb(e) Eu[tu]che Arabiko[n] Adiabeniko[n] p(atera) p(atridos) ton ges k[ai] thalas(ses) desp[o]ten he polis." From Kurt Tomaschitz, Unpublizierte Inschriften Westkilikiens aus dem Nachlass Terence B. Mitfords (Wien: Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1998), 71. The statue of Severus is not mentioned there, but it is connected with this inscription by one of its discoverers at p. 1249 (n. 86) of Mitford, “Roman Rough Cilicia.” Unfortunately, it is unclear from Mitford’s account whether the statue remains standing or whether its existence was implied through the inscriptional context.

85 George Ewart Bean and Terence Bruce Mitford, Journeys in Rough Cilicia 1964-1968 (Wien: Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1970) 235-236. Bean and Mitford’s version is based on a (likewise heavily reconstructed) reading of this now no longer extant inscription, initially recorded in J. R. S. Sterrett, The Wolfe Expedition to Asia Minor (Boston 1888) non vidi, and later updated with minor suggested improvements by Rudolf Heberdey and Adolf Wilhelm, Reisen in Kilikien, Denkschr. Kais. Ad. Wien 44 (1896), non vidi. Although I have not seen either nineteenth-century version, Bean and Mitford include Sterrett’s version as well as their reconstruction and their rationale for their proposed changes. Bean and Mitford read: “[hypo L. Septimiou Seouerou Euse]B. Pertinakos Seb. kai Markou Au[reliou Antoneinou Kaisaros kat]eskeuasthe kai to tristoon tou mo[usaio dia - - Antoniou Balbou tou] kuriou hegemonos vacat.” As reported by Bean and Mitford, Sterrett’s text read: “- - - L. Septimiou Se]B(erou) Pertinakos Seb(aston) kai Markou [Aureliou Antoneinou - - - kat]eseuasthe kai to tristoon tou Mo - - - [epimelethentos - -] k. . . piou hegemonos - -.” Again, in both versions the probable endowment of a tristoon by an emperor seems the most likely conclusion to be drawn from the non-reconstructed sections of text.

86 Monuments erected by imperial order or with reference to the emperors are not necessarily a sign of positive imperial relations with a community. They can also act as reminders of subjugation and imperial dominance; note the temple of Claudius at Camulodunum, hated as a symbol of tyranny at the time of the Boudican revolt, and other examples discussed at p. 3 of R. Häussler, “Architecture, Performance and Ritual: the Role of State Architecture in the Roman Empire,” in TRAC 1998: Proceedings of the Eighth Annual Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference Leicester 1998, ed. Patricia Barker et al. (Oxford: Oxbow, 1999), 1-13. For the temple of Claudius at Camulodunum, see Tacitus The
Other epigraphic testimony to highland integration into Roman provincial norms exists. Also from Claudiopolis comes an inscription possibly referring to Antoninus Pius and his legate, P. Cassius Dexter, and possibly found on a former statue base. A more mundane example comes from Philadelphia (just east of Germanicopolis), where a sarcophagus refers to the councilman M. Aurelius Solon the son of Diodotus, and his wife Immas daughter of Kallistratos. Note the citizen’s triple name for the husband; the phenomenon occurs in a number of examples from the Isaurian hinterland. The epigraphic record for the imperial cult in Isauria is more ambiguous; while well-attested in the coastal cities, the cult has left no trace in the inland Decapolis. The cult is likewise unattested, however, at Seleucia-on-the-Calycadnos (the late imperial provincial capital), where we would expect such a manifestation of Graeco-Roman culture and loyalty to the Roman state to be strong at least until the legal supremacy of Christian worship. We should thus hesitate to explain this silence as evidence of disloyalty in the Decapolis.

Numismatic evidence also bears strong testimony to the public acceptance of the emperors even in the Isaurian highlands. Numerous coins locally-produced by highland cities depict holders of the purple. A few examples include coins of Hadrian at Claudiopolis (Ob: \textit{AUTKAITRA[ADRIANOSSEB}, Rev: \textit{KLAU DIOPOLITO}), Coropissus (Ob: \textit{ADRIANOS KAISAR}, Rev: \textit{KOROPI SS--}), and Germanicopolis (Ob: \textit{...}).

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\textsuperscript{87}Bean and Mitford, \textit{Journeys in Rough Cilicia 1964-1968}, 235.
\textsuperscript{88}Bean and Mitford, \textit{Journeys in Rough Cilicia 1964-1968}, 28: “M. Aur. Solon Diodoto<\textsuperscript{u}>(?)
\textsuperscript{[B]}oule<\textsuperscript{u}>tes kai Immas Kallistratou gune a<\textsuperscript{u}>tou katestesen ten makran heautois tai (sic) kai tois huiois
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Coins for other emperors or from other sites can be attested without turning to the coastal cities, which produced many imperial coins as well. These coins show that Isaurian cities accepted integration into the empire’s economic networks, and strongly suggest that they had few or no ideological reservations about publicly recognizing the Roman emperor’s authority.

To return to Shaw’s model of Isaurian society, it seems quite clear that the material evidence from the region contradicts the idea of a zone of permanent autonomy or of the Taurus mountains as an effective barrier against the spread of Graeco-Roman culture and civilization. On the contrary, architecture, epigraphy and numismatics all point to heavy adoption of some elements of Graeco-Roman culture and even suggest acceptance of normative relations with the rulers of the empire. Given such evidence, some other explanatory model is needed.

One such model, which took into account the evidence that Isauria’s elites were successfully integrated into the cultural and even the political fabric of the empire, is that of Noel Lenski. Lenski proposed in 1999 that the major outbreaks of Isaurian violence in the late empire were supported or led by urbanized, ‘Romanized’ leaders. He argued that while Isauria had a comfortable place in the Roman political world under the high empire, something eventually happened (most likely during the third-century crisis) that

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auton Diodotoi kai [Isi]doroi.” Two other instances (for example) of the Roman tria nomina in the Isaurian Decapolis are provided by Bean and Mitford at pp. 213 and 232.

George Francis Hill, Catalogue of the Greek Coins of Lycaonia, Isauria, and Cilicia. Unnumbered volume of A Catalog of the Greek Coins in the British Museum (London: The British Museum, 1900), 60, 65, 81. The utility of numismatic evidence for demonstrating political loyalty in the Isaurian highlands has been argued by Terence Bruce Mitford, “The Cults of Roman Rough Cilicia” in Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt II.18.3 (1990), 2130-2160, at p. 2152 and by Lenski, “Assimilation and Revolt,” 432. It is perhaps best to simply say that such numismatic evidence suggests
undermined Isaurian loyalty to the Roman state. After this point, Isaurian leaders remained part of the Graeco-Roman cultural world but allegedly strove to maintain political autonomy, attacking Roman cities in defense of that autonomy or in pursuit of funds and prestige for rivalries internal to Isaurian society.

The claim that Isauria’s urban elites were implicated in the region’s troubles may have some support from the historical sources. According to Ammianus, at the end of the hostilities of 368, the Isaurians

... requested that peace be granted to them through a truce, this being suggested by the Germanicopolitani (whose opinions always held sway among them like the standard-bearers of a unit). And having given hostages (as was commanded), they remained at rest for a long time, daring to do nothing hostile.\(^90\)

The influence of the settled community of Germanicopolis is interesting, as is the giving of hostages upon demand – suggesting that the Romans believed a hierarchy of some sort was in place among the raiders, which could be controlled or at least influenced by holding key persons. Further details on this practice come from the fifth-century *Life and Miracles of Thecla*. Saint Thecla, allegedly a first-century comrade of Paul the Apostle, is said in the *Life and Miracles* to have never died, but rather to have vanished into the Isaurian earth, thence ‘haunting’ the region for centuries and blessing it with a series of miracles. The *Life and Miracles*, in its first part, paraphrases Thecla’s biography (from the earlier *Acts* of Thecla), but the more extensive second part, the *Miracles*, chronicles the saint’s alleged activities in Isauria down to the time of the fifth-century author. One

\(^{90}\) Ammianus 27.9.7.
of these stories introduces Bassiana, ‘one of the well-born woman of the Cietae’, who was being held near the provincial capital of Seleucia as a hostage, pursuant to a treaty against brigandage. The author of the Miracles claimed that Bassiana’s son Modestos, a distinguished member of society in the inland town of Eirenopolis, was his own living contemporary.\textsuperscript{91} Apparently the Romans had decided that making treaties (involving hostage-taking) with local urban elites could have a limiting effect on future outbreaks of brigandage. In addition to Bassiana and the role played in 367 by the Germanicopolitani, the sheer scale of some of the Isaurian uprisings may also suggest some level of coordination among Isaurian leaders; when Isaurian raiders advanced on the provincial capital, Seleucia, in the early 350’s, they outnumbered three experienced legions stationed in the city.\textsuperscript{92} In the early 400’s, Isaurian raids were so far-ranging that they reached deep into the Levant and panicked the inhabitants of Jerusalem.\textsuperscript{93} Raids on such a scale might suggest support from more than only the disenfranchised elements of Isaurian society.

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{91}Anonymous, \textit{Life and Miracles of Theclæ}, in \textit{Vie et Miracles de Sainte Théclæ: Texte Grec, Traduction et Commentaire}, ed. and trans. into French Gilbert Dagron, \textit{Subsidia Hagiographica} 62 (Brussels: Societe des Bollandistes, 1978), \textit{Miracle} 19. Though (as I will discuss later in this chapter) Isaurian society changed significantly in the mid-fifth century, the most likely date for the story of Bassiana is the early fifth century, maintaining the story’s relevance to conditions before the rise of the Isaurian warlords. Since the \textit{Miracles} were likely penned in the mid-fifth century, and the author states that Bassiana’s son was a child at the time of the miracle, but is now a distinguished member of society, we should place the story several decades at least before the writing of the \textit{Miracles}. An early fifth-century date for Bassiana’s service as a hostage, then, makes sense. On the probable date of composition of the \textit{Miracles} (in four installments between the 440’s and 470’s) see Dagron, \textit{Vie et Miracles de Sainte Théclæ}, 17-19, and Scott Fitzgerald Johnson, \textit{The Life and Miracles of Thekla: A Literary Study} (Cambridge, MA and London: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2006) 5, note 18, to which I am indebted for an English-language exposition of Dagron’s views.

\textsuperscript{92}Ammianus 14.2.14-15.

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If, as Lenski suggests, the elites supported late imperial insurrections in Isauria, then something must have happened to turn their loyalties away from Rome. Lenski proposes that this likely happened in the later third century. The notorious *Historia Augusta* (*HA*), one of the more troublesome sources in Roman historiography, claims that a usurper named Trebellianus rose up in Isauria against Gallienus (Gallienus reigned 253-268 CE). This Trebellianus allegedly built himself a palace in the heights of Isauria, minted coinage, and was finally crushed by one of the emperor’s generals; the *HA* goes on to say that it was since that time that Rome had treated the Isaurians as barbarians, who were protected behind their mountains.\(^{94}\) While this story is generally given little credence by modern scholars,\(^{95}\) Lenski suggests that it should be taken more seriously, and that if Trebellianus or someone like him did rise up to protect Isaurians from the instability of the third century crisis, the forcible re-integration of the region by the central government may have been what alienated Isaurians for generations. Yet the very analogs which make the idea of an Isaurian usurper seem plausible also make the *HA*’s claim more dubious. There is nothing outlandish about the idea of a usurper under Gallienus – this was the era, after all, of the ‘Gallic’ emperors in the west and the independence of Palmyra under Zenobia in the east. The usurpations in Gaul and Palmyra, however, did not prevent an effective reconciliation with Rome once the areas

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\(^{95}\) Ronald Syme, *Ammianus and the Historia Augusta* (Oxford, 1968), 47-48, 173, pointing to some discernible fabrications in the account, treats Trebellianus as pure invention applying later conditions backward to the third century; Matthews, *The Roman Empire of Ammianus*, 362, likewise sees the Trebellianus episode as incredible, though possibly of value for later conditions in the fourth century. Shaw, “Bandit Highlands and Lowland Peace,” 238 at note 107, is more sympathetic but considers the appellation of ‘usurper’ to be “no more than another one of the labels generated from the perspective of the
were recovered by military force. It would be unexpected, then, for the squashing of a usurper in Isauria (if he did in fact exist) to poison Isaurian elite sentiments for the next two centuries.

Other issues also pose problems for Lenski’s model of elite revolt. Clearly, not all the towns of Isauria, even those in the highlands, were without Roman control in the late empire. Although significantly reconstructed, an inscription from the town of Eirenopolis seems to say that a wall was built there in the late 350’s by someone sympathetic to the emperors, possibly the *comes et praeses* (count and governor) of Isauria.\(^\text{96}\) We can presume that the Romans would not fortify a rebel stronghold – apparently Eirenopolis was either a Roman-occupied city (for which I know of no evidence), or a friendly city. Bassiana, the elite hostage from the *Miracles of Thecla*, had a son who lived in Eirenopolis; perhaps, then, Bassiana herself came from that city. If so, her city was apparently not a long-standing bastion of irreconcilable opposition to Rome, despite the requirement that she serve as a hostage.

Moreover, the character of warfare against the Isaurian raiders, as Ammianus describes it, does not suggest a struggle against enemies linked to specific town-sites. We need caution here, as we should expect Ammianus’ account to treat the brigands pejoratively as rude barbarians (cf. his similar treatment of Firmus’ rebel armies in

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\(^{96}\)Bean and Mitford, *Journeys in Rough Cilicia 1964-1968*, 205-6. \(^{[iuss]u dd nn Constantii triumfatoris Augusti et Iuliani nob. Caesaris} \) *murus aedificatus est* Hirenopolit\(\text{anorum civitati} \) A\(\text{ur(elia) ious[to] com[ite] et praeside c(uram) a gente}\)). Bean and Mitford’s reconstruction is shaped by the example of the almost entirely extant inscription at Antiochia, beginning with the same formula (“\(^{[iuss]u dd nn Constantii triumfatoris Augusti et Iuliani nob. Caesaris} \text{castellum diu ante…} \)”). For discussion of the inscription at Antiochia and its circumstances see below, next page.
Mauretania, despite Firmus’ earlier participation in the imperial system). Nonetheless, Ammianus’ raiders never returned home “to their cities and towns,” but rather to savage haunts in the mountains. Their great advantage, Ammianus claims, was their skill at mountaineering, which allowed them to elude and outmaneuver Roman troops in the countryside. Yet, since the time of the high empire a road had connected the coastal cities, via Germanicopolis, with the inland province of Lycaonia. If Ammianus 27.9 (telling of the peace-and-hostages overture recommended by the Germanicopolitani) implies that the citizens of that town were leading an armed revolt against Rome, one wonders why Roman legions could not march up the road and attack the city directly, in which case there would be no need to pursue skilled mountaineers across the rough terrain of Isauria. Rather, we hear nothing of Roman assaults or sieges on towns; the picture is instead one of frustration at a mobile enemy who cannot be pinned down, who sneakily lives in hidden and inaccessible places where Romans cannot effectively follow them. If this is an accurate description, the enemies were surely not the resident elites of the upland towns, whose locations were well-known to Rome’s officers. An example (outside of Ammianus) of direct Roman assault upon a named point involves the recovery of a rural fortress, not a town; an inscription at a site deep within northern Isauria tells us that the comes Lauricius recovered a castellum there (in 359) from long

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97Ammianus 29.5, passim.
98See Ammianus 14.2.5-7 for the raiders’ advantage on mountainous terrain, 19.13.1, wherein raiders come down from their “jagged, trackless ravines” (saltibus degressi scrubulosis et inviis), or 27.9.7 for an example of the return to upland “secret mountain rocks, where they live” (ad labrosa montium saxa, quae incolunt).
occupation by brigands, and renamed the site Antiochia. A recent survey of this site hardly depicts it as a town; Antiochia is rather an imposing rock spire hundreds of feet high with a few traces of buildings on the top, with the inscription carved 35 feet up on the rock wall. No other monuments are recorded for the site. Presumably it was the fortlet’s commanding position by a river crossing on the highway from Lycaonia south into Isauria that made it so strategic for the Isaurians – and such a pressing target for Lauricius.

In assessing the level of urbanization among the Isaurian bandits, one might ask whether Ammianus’ accounts are too biased to be of use here, whether his depiction of Isaurian brigands as creatures of trackless mountain wastes was merely Roman ‘statist’ prejudice covering over an inconvenient truth. In other sections of his history, however, where Ammianus’ prejudices were clearly in play, he was willing to acknowledge the link between ‘barbaric’ rebels and their fixed places of habitation. To turn again to the story of Firmus’ revolt in Africa, Ammianus there rather unrealistically painted the quasi-usurer Firmus as a leader of savage barbarians (notwithstanding Firmus’ earlier participation in the Roman governmental regime and his acclamation by certain Roman soldiers). In his account of the campaign, however, Ammianus appears to have made liberal use of official records, describing by name various settlements subdued by the

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99. Castellum diu ante a latronibus possessum et provinciis perniciosum Bassidius Lauricius v.c. com. et praeses occupavit ad\[q\]ue ad perpetuam [q]\uie\[q\]uitarum \[q\]uietis firmitatem militum praesidio munitum Antiochiam nuncupavit. Bean and Mitford, Journeys in Rough Cilicia 1964-1968, 205-6. Ammianus does not mention this recovery but does mention Lauricius’ appointment in response to fresh outbreaks of violence, and his successful prosecution of his command (though Ammianus characterizes Lauricius as able to rely on diplomacy and threats rather than action), Ammianus 19.13.1-2.
Roman general, Theodosius (examples include the estate Petrensis, ‘built up in the manner of a city,’ the oppidum Lamfoctum, and the municipium Sugabarritanum, all held by the enemy or his supporters). When Ammianus knew the names and locations of enemy strongholds, he was apparently willing to link ‘savage barbarians’ to such places even when they were “running about and unexpected, trusting more in clandestine ambush than in steady combat.” There is no reason, then, to think that prejudice against the highland ‘barbarians’ would make Ammianus deny an urban connection for the Isaurian raiders.

The picture of a largely rural setting for the Isaurian bandits is also supported by several accounts in Zosimus. One involves Isaurians raiding outside of Isauria and then retreating to their wild mountain uplands where Roman troops fail to follow – the same pattern seen in Ammianus. Another account is more interesting; the general Arbazacius actually pursued raiders back into the mountains in the early fifth century, where he captured many of their villages and slew a great many persons before allegedly surrendering to negligence and luxury, thus allowing the bandits to escape justice. According to Zosimus, the raiders’ homes were villages (komas), the targets on the

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100 For the description of Antiochia, see Friedrich Hild and Hansgerd Hellenkemper, Kilikien und Isaurien, vol. 5, part I of Tabula Imperii Byzantini, 193. The site’s strategic significance is noted at Mitford, “Roman Rough Cilicia,” 1251 and Lenski, “Assimilation and Revolt,” 422.
101 For Petrensis and Lamfoctum, Ammianus 29.5.13; for Sugabarritanum, 29.5.20.
102 Ammianus 29.5.7, referring to Firmus, “hostem … discursatorem et repentinum, insidiisque potius clandestinis, quam proeliorum stabilitate confisum.”
103 Zosimus 4.20.
104 Zosimus 5.25. This is the same Arbazacius whom we met in Chapter 1, who ‘donated’ part of his plunder to the Empress to escape punishment for his later actions. I am also aware of a theory of Stephen Mitchell’s, which I have not had time to thoroughly consider, suggesting that the Isaurian-born bandit Lydius mentioned in Zosimus 1.69 was actually leading a regional rebellion against Rome supported by Cremnans acting as his hosts and not his prisoners. Since Cremna is near but not in Isauria, if this is
nearby plains were cities (*poleis*). Though one might perhaps argue that Zosimus considered the small towns and cities of Isauria to be mere villages, there is no immediately apparent reason why this passage should not support the picture of Isaurian raiders coming from a rural rather than urban setting. In both Ammianus and Zosimus, Roman military responses which penetrate into Isauria always involve (and are usually hindered by) a mountainous, non-urban environment. Yet surely the cities would have been the logical targets for Roman commanders, if urban elites were recognized as the root of the province’s troubles as Lenski suggests. Instead, Romans seem to have perceived the bandits of Isauria as inhabitants of the wild lands away from the highland cities, areas difficult for Roman troops to effectively control. Given this perception, along with the evidence for imperial control (or at least support) in the mid-fourth century at Eirenopolis (as well as concerns over whether an alleged third-century usurpation would be likely to poison relations with the Roman government for several centuries) I believe that Lenski’s model of elite culpability in the bandit uprisings of Isauria is inadequate.

If we reject Lenski’s view of elite revolt, however, we must still account for Isaurian uprisings and for Rome’s perception that pressuring urban elite communities (as seen in Ammianus 27.9.7 and in the *Miracles of Thecla*) could limit such violent outbreaks. The third model of Isaurian society mentioned above, that of Keith Hopwood, is probably best able to do so. Hopwood (who has traveled extensively in Isauria) acknowledges the influence of Graeco-Roman urban culture on the region, and points to
vertical ties of elite patronage as the key to preventing rural rebellion rather than fostering it. Noting the poor agricultural possibilities in the rough region, Hopwood says that “it is an impressive feat of exploitation that a sufficient surplus was extracted from such a territory to finance large-scale public building works at private expense in the cities, where even to provide a surplus for urban consumption must have been difficult.”

Hopwood points out that, since these cities survived and did apparently extract such a surplus, they must have usually been able to maintain some sort of effective order in their surrounding countryside. Farther from the cities, shepherds were likely also bound by ties of employment and protection to the urban elites. The curial elites therefore presumably had ties with many of the inhabitants of the countryside. We know from Isauria’s reputation that that countryside was notorious for its bandits. Yet across most of the empire and in most centuries, successful Roman brigands were generally understood

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Hopwood, “Bandits, Elites, and Rural Order,” 172. Elsewhere, a recent archaeological field survey of a thin strip of western coastal Isaria argues that the observed low density of production sites in the survey area mean the region’s internal production was likely insufficient to meet even local consumption needs, and that “city economies were based largely on interregional exchange, not on the exploitation of local rural populations.” Richard E. Blanton, *Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine Settlement Patterns of the Coast Lands of Western Rough Cilicia*, BAR International Series 879 (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2000), 74. Giving due credit to the time-consuming nature of the field survey, I question the applicability of these findings to the inland cities of Isaria, since the region of intensive survey extended at most ca. 3 km inland, and at some points less than 1 km, over a section of the south-west coast of the Isarian promontory.

Despite their remote ‘workplace,’ shepherds are typically dependent on nearby urban contacts for winter-time shelter in lowland areas, payment/employment, protection and even right-of-passage or pasturage rental agreements: Hopwood “Towers, Territory, and Terror,” 348-49, and especially Lenski “Assimilation and Revolt,” 446-55 for a detailed discussion and bibliography of interdisciplinary/comparative research on sedentary control of mountain pastoralism (some of it based directly on the modern Taurus mountains around ancient Isaria). Lenski argues that “ownership of herds and the control of pasturage varies widely among pastoralists, but tends to become especially concentrated in the hands of elites when pastoralist groups are enclosed by sedentarist neighbors” (p. 448). Both Hopwood and Lenski have a notably similar view of Isarian society, their key difference being Hopwood’s belief that large eruptions of violence from Isaria represented failures in the patronage of local elites, *contra* Lenski (who argues that elites endorsed and supported such outbreaks).
to be heavily dependent on local support – even landed, elite support.\(^{107}\) It is safe to assume that the pattern was no different in Isauria, and that urban elites were (at least on occasion) patrons of bandits. Elites will have been able to offer bandits shelter, employment on estates, and even freedom from prosecution – since the curial elites were, after all, generally responsible for local law enforcement around the cities. As Hopwood notes, ancients also recognized how far local ‘law enforcement’ could stray, as evidenced by a fifth-century imperial edict ordering that the office of *eirenarch* (local ‘peace officers’) be done away with, as a “race pernicious to the republic!”\(^{108}\) Meanwhile, elite influence over men of violence in the hills could be used either to curb that violence, or to control and direct it for personal needs: the protection of estates, the menacing of rivals or fractious clients, collecting a ‘take’ of the proceeds of robbery, etc. It should be restated that such collaboration was by no means irregular within the Roman empire. Within such a paradigm, low-level banditry might have remained endemic and normal (as across most of the late empire). Certainly not all ancient bandits were accountable to a wealthy master. As a general pattern, however, the control of rural violence under the influence of the wealthy elite was probably sought as a measure for maintaining the dominance of those elites in the countryside.\(^{109}\)

When elites were able to adequately protect or provide for their clients, the economic hardships which can only make banditry or revolt more appealing may have been significantly mitigated. Large outbreaks of Isaurian brigandage, Hopwood argues,


were most likely the result of temporary breakdowns or problems in the relationships of vertical patronage between urban elites and rural mountain-men; violence occurred when “the structure of relationships faced challenges it had not the elasticity to face.”

The fruits of such failures – significant outbreaks of violence involving bandit armies able to seriously damage territories held by cities, penetrate into provinces beyond Isauria, and confront imperial armies (i.e., bandit forces clearly moving beyond the control and boundaries of a local patron-client relationship) – were against the interests of the curial elites and erstwhile patrons of the violent men of the hills. Thus, the peace-making Germanicopolitani in the late 360’s would have had good reason to seek a return to the status quo, and they would have been capable as intermediaries to treat with both the Roman government and the bandit raiders (their sometime clients). In such a system, the rationale for the holding of elite hostages by the Roman authorities would not be to account for direct elite culpability and rebellion, but rather to pressure local elites to work hard at maintaining the relationships necessary to keep order, in a region where failures to do so were unpleasantly frequent and destructive.

110 Hopwood, “Towers, Territory, and Terror,” 352. As an example, Hopwood points to Ammianus’ reason for the 354 uprising: outrage over the execution of some Isaurian bandits by beasts in the arena at Iconium, northwest of Isauria (Ammianus 14.2).
111 Hopwood, “Towers, Territory, and Terror,” 351, where Hopwood admits, responding to Ammianus’ claim (Ammianus 27.9.7) that these Germanicopolitani were like signiferae manus, “Clearly the mediating role of the town councilors must have been embarrassing at times.” These elites had close ties with both the Roman government and the raiders themselves.
The Rise of Isaurian Warlords

I have argued above that large-scale Isaurian violence in the fourth and early fifth century most likely represented the break-down of vertical ties with urban elites, who generally opposed and tried to suppress major uprisings along with the Roman government. The fifth century, however, saw radical changes in the power of Isaurian violence and in its role within the imperial political system. In short, fifth-century changes in society and politics at the imperial level provided a way for Isaurian bandits to be legitimized as useful and valuable actors in the political system beyond Isauria (albeit potentially dangerous ones, as with most actors in the might-makes-right environment of the fifth-century court). These changes, stemming from the growing weakness of traditional imperial power, prompted the rise of Isaurian super-elites who wielded power in Constantinople, in Isauria’s cities, and in the strongholds of the wild Isaurian mountains. Such magnates appear to have formed a new kind of aristocracy in Isauria, albeit temporarily. Before their defeat and dissolution under the emperor Anastasius, these men seem to have harnessed both halves of Isaurian society – town and country – more powerfully and dangerously than any other group since the Roman annexation.

I have already traced Isauria’s history, but a look in further detail at the fifth century is appropriate. The century began with a bang, a major outbreak of banditry occurring between 404-408 and extending beyond Asia Minor, even threatening the island of Cyprus and the Levant. In a letter of 405, Jerome mentioned that his work had been delayed because of an Isaurian raid, which had devastated Phoenicia and Galilee
and thrown Jerusalem into panic.\textsuperscript{112} This uprising was finally put down by the intervention of the \textit{comes} Arbazacius, who pursued the raiders from the plains back to their highland homes, where he seized many villages and slew many of the raiders (or, at least, many of the inhabitants of said villages). I have already discussed Zosimus’ treatment of Arbazacius in Chapter 1. We also know of other Isaurian raiding in the early 440’s.\textsuperscript{113} Also significant in the 440’s was the emergence of the first Isaurian general to attain prominence at the imperial court, one Flavius Zeno. As a \textit{magister militum} under Theodosius II, Fl. Zeno led the defense of Constantinople against a Hunnic siege in 447 and held a consulship the following year. Theodosius II seems to have groomed Fl. Zeno as a counter to the power of the Gothic faction at court. Fl. Zeno’s rise to power gave him great influence of his own, and by 449 the emperor suspected that Zeno planned to rebel against him. The deaths of both Theodosius and Fl. Zeno the following year forestalled whatever showdown for control of the empire might have occurred.\textsuperscript{114}

A similar situation occurred in the late 460’s, when an Isaurian officer named Tarasis son of Codissa\textsuperscript{115} was again chosen by the emperor (Leo I) to act as a foil against ‘barbarian’ power in the empire, this time personified in the powerful Alan, Aspar. Leo owed his throne to Aspar and had promised this kingmaker his daughter’s hand. Wishing to break out from Aspar’s control, however, around 466 Leo gave his daughter Ariadne to

\textsuperscript{112}Jerome \textit{Epistula} 114.
the aforementioned Isaurian, Tarasis, and promoted him at about the same time to *magister militum per orientem*. Tarasis changed his name to Zeno, probably in honor of the earlier warlord of that name. The following years saw a series of complicated and bloody conspiracies between ‘barbarian’ and Isaurian factions at court; by Leo I’s death in 474, Aspar had been slain in the palace and his followers eclipsed by those of Zeno. Leo II, the young child of Zeno and Ariadne, now ‘took over’ the empire but reigned jointly with his father. The child died shortly thereafter and the empire was left in Zeno’s hands – no doubt a shock to those who embraced the typical Roman stereotype of the Isaurians!\(^{116}\)

Zeno’s reign was relatively long (474-491) yet as troubled as its prelude. In 475 Zeno faced the serious usurpation of his relative by marriage, the empress dowager’s brother Basiliscus, made the more serious through the support of Zeno’s erstwhile lieutenants, the Isaurian brothers Illus and Trocundes. Zeno and Ariadne fled Constantinople and took refuge in a fortress in the Isaurian mountains. Illus and Trocundes besieged Zeno but eventually gave him back their support, after which Zeno retook his throne. Meanwhile, Illus held Zeno’s brother Longinus as a hostage in an Isaurian castle; ongoing tensions between the emperor and his general prompted Illus to rebel in 484. Illus and his supporters were at length forced to retreat to Papirium, a famed Isaurian fortress, where they met their end after a four-year siege; Longinus was

\(^{115}\)See R. M. Harrison, “The Emperor Zeno’s Real Name,” *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 74 (1981): 27-28 on this spelling vs. the traditional ‘Tarassicodissa.’

freed, and the rebels were executed. Following this, Zeno ordered an extensive campaign of de-fortification across the Isaurian countryside, demolishing many forlorn in the mountains before his death in 491.117

The saga of the fifth-century Isaurians held one last climax. The Isaurian ascendancy at court was controversial and unpopular even while the Isaurian Zeno held the throne, and upon his death his brother Longinus was passed over and exiled while Zeno’s not-too-bereaved widow Ariadne managed to have the purple conferred on Anastasius, a junior court official and an anti-Chalcedonian, whom she then married. In rapid succession, a bloc of elites in Isauria (including a local bishop and the comes of the province) rose in revolt against Anastasius, the new emperor expelled Isaurians from the capital (whereupon many of them, including a magister officiorum, immediately reinforced the rebels), and the lines were drawn for civil war. The Isaurians met Anastasius’ forces only to be crushed at Kotyaeion, north of Isauria, and were forced to retreat back to the mountains. Anastasius then launched a massive campaign to whittle down the Isaurians, attacking towns and rural fortresses, eventually crushing the rebellion by 498 and deporting numerous Isaurians for resettlement in Thrace. Benefiting, ironically, from Zeno’s own de-fortification campaign, Anastasius seems to have broken Isauria’s power as a bandit sanctuary on an effectively long-term basis.118 His war against the Isaurians, however, should in no way be seen as a struggle of ‘Romans’ vs. ‘barbarians,’ but rather as a conflict between two powerful imperial factions fighting for

control of the state, following the rapid and unexpected degradation of the Isaurian faction (and the complications involved in Anastasius’ heterodox beliefs). 119

More surprising than the outbreak of the war is the seemingly unified nature of Isaurian resistance to Anastasius. The apparent lack of factions within the ranks of known Isaurian leaders of the 490s has been noted. 120 Even more interesting is the militancy of both city and mountain against the new imperial regime. Claudiopolis was besieged by imperial troops in 493, but a sizeable army of rebels came down from the mountains and almost starved out the besieging force before the rebels were driven off by imperial reinforcements. 121 The assault on Claudiopolis is the first Roman attack on an Isaurian city (after the annexation in the first century) of which I know. Other imperial targets during this war were those mountain fortresses which had escaped the de-fortification campaign of Zeno after his war with Illus. Anastasius’ armies waged war against both town and country in Isauria, and the rebel leaders – elites within a recently prominent Roman faction – seem to have had roots and support in both spheres. If the model I have advocated earlier in this chapter for fourth-century Isaurian society is correct, such rural-urban partnership in large-scale violent uprising was a novelty in Roman Isauria, and something must have changed during the fifth century to make it possible.

That change, I believe, was the rise of military super-magnates whose positions and resources enabled domination or co-optation of the illegitimately violent in the

countryside as well as patronage of the traditional elites of the cities. The prominence of Isaurians in the fifth-century eastern court helped advance many who no doubt rose through the ranks as career soldiers, which we know occurred before Zeno’s time. Many of these will have been townsmen themselves. Their acquisition of high imperial office will naturally have been a windfall for their home communities, access to imperial patrons being universally valued in the Roman world. The influence and prominence of such military leaders can only have continually increased in Isauria’s urban society.

These leaders, however, also seem to have become unusually effective and intimate patrons of the bandits of the mountains. While still the power behind the throne, Zeno sparked a riot in Constantinople by bringing into the city an Isaurian garrison-force whose members had only recently been brigands plundering and murdering near Rhodes! The enforcer of the peace was apparently a sponsor of violent men of crime when they were useful to him. Also before he received the purple, Zeno subdued an Isaurian renegade named Indakos Cottounes. Zeno seems to have spared the defeated Indakos Cottounes, as he again played a part years later in Illus’ rebellion against Zeno. Perhaps Cottounes was initially pardoned so that, like a vanquished ‘barbarian’ dediticius, he might now fight on behalf of his conqueror? There was nothing particularly ‘barbarian’ or un-Roman about recruiting former enemies of the state; in

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124 John of Antioch, fragment 206.2.
125 John of Antioch, fragment 214.6.
Gaul, for example, the emperor Julian had enlisted the aid of the bandit leader Charietto against trans-Rhenish invaders. Powerful Isaurian warlords will have had serious incentives with which to tame bandit forces from the highlands. Generals such as Zeno or Illus probably used both carrot and stick, since their high positions made them effective patrons and mediators of power to clients while their military commands and competence made them formidable opponents to their enemies.

In recruiting such bands of personal retainers, Zeno and his compatriots illustrated one of the significant political trends of the late empire, i.e. the growing dependence on ‘out-sourcing’ of military needs to private individuals capable of mustering violence on demand in return for wealth, power, and legitimacy. This trend was not limited to the emperors and their armies; wealthy citizens also employed private soldiers on their estates, either replacing the weakened protection of the army or capitalizing (for more nefarious purposes than local defense) on that weakness. Isaurian fighters were apparently much sought-after by citizens of the eastern empire anxious to flex some muscle. A law of 468 promulgated by Leo (when Zeno was already his son-in-law) states:

We wish that license be precluded for everyone among the cities and fields having *bucellarii* [fighting client-retainers] or Isaurians or armed servants. But if anyone – except for those whom our gentleness has beneficially set in order – will have attempted to retain armed slaves, or *bucellarii* or Isaurians in his estates or nearby himself, we enact that the most severe vengeance is to be advanced against them…

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126 Ammianus 17.10.5, Zosimus 3.7.
127 *Cod. Iust.* 9-12.10.
It is not surprising, given his dependence on Zeno’s Isaurians, that Leo should make exception for those ‘whom our gentleness has beneficially set in order!’ More noteworthy is the casual way in which Leo makes ‘Isaurian’ equivalent with ‘bucellarius’ or ‘armed slave,’ giving the impression that Isaurian mercenaries were generally recognized as a leading (almost stereotypical) source of hired violence and were scattered broadly across the empire. That enterprising Isaurians would venture out into the empire to market their mountain-bred toughness seems quite likely. Less likely, I think, are claims that many of these mercenaries might count as a kind of auxiliary force for Fl. Zeno in the event of civil war, merely by fact of shared nationality; there could be significant difficulties in coordinating such assistance even if such scattered, independently-employed expatriate Isaurians did wish to help in a ‘national’ defense of their imperial compatriot.128

To return to those powerful Isaurians who were integrated into the life of the imperial court, it remains to consider what effect their success had on society back in Isauria. The key to the changes involved was at the level of the court, not local to Isauria; it was the emperors’ need for a new source of armed power that made the careers of Fl. Zeno and the later Zeno possible. Their success, however, offered a radical legitimization of the traditionally violent segment of Isaurian society. For the first time, Isaurian ‘bandits’ could become aides to the most powerful men in the empire – as seems to have happened to Indakos Cottounes, the brigand leader captured and spared by Zeno only to side with Illus in his later rebellion. Indakos’ fortress of Papirium went from

128 *Contra* Thompson, “The Isaurians under Theodosius II” 25-6.
bandit’s lair to a strategic and hotly-contested stronghold in the struggles between Zeno and Illus. Indakos’ almost surprising continued lease on life apparently involved his wielding of traditional ‘mountain power’ on behalf of his current master(s). If the ranks of prominent Isaurians under Zeno included a number of such ‘former’ thugs, then the bloc of elite officials who united against Anastasius in 491 – who seem to have had influence in both Isauria’s towns and country strongholds – probably included some who had started out their careers on Isauria’s darker side. At the very least, Zeno’s men seem to have become comfortable and familiar with the environment of the mountain lairs. I suggest that the weakness of the central government and the ensuing need for private force to support the emperors made possible a brief but new kind of aristocracy in the Isaurian highlands, made up of men who often came from (or benefited from the support of) the bandits of Isauria. Because of the empire’s weakness, these ‘new men’ found opportunities and legitimacy that the traditional vertical patronage of the urban elites had never been able to offer. For a brief moment, Isauria’s highland towns and restive mountains may have been united under leadership that had never (in Roman times) so thoroughly exploited local power.
CHAPTER 3: ‘BARBARIAN’ ARMIES, IMPERIAL FACTIONS, AND THE END OF ROMAN GAUL

Whereas the influence of private Isaurian armies in the eastern empire had been short-lived, fifth-century Gaul became increasingly dominated by private armies and personal power, most notably power wielded by soldiers whom many contemporaries labeled ‘barbarians.’ Although posing risks, this situation also initially offered some useful (albeit short-term) strategic solutions to the western emperors and their advisors. Eventually, however, private vice imperial control of Gaul became total and permanent, and Roman imperial rule of Gaul ended in any politically meaningful sense. This happened because (and when) the central state could no longer project military strength or ideological influence sufficient to keep these private armies in a subordinate position. As a result, fifth-century emperors went from being superiors in Gaul, to equals, to absentee landlords with little real ability to compel compliance with their wishes from various private generals.

In my view, while so-called ‘barbarian’ elements played an essential role in the end of Roman Gaul (and by extension, the western empire), the events and the actors that brought about this end were inextricably tied to processes within Roman society itself. I emphasize the latter phenomena here, which distances me somewhat from ideas traditionally championed by Peter Heather (who has stressed the importance of external factors in bringing a largely stable empire to its knees). On the other hand, my focus places me somewhat closer to the views (on diverse points) of scholars such as Tom Burns or Ramsay MacMullen, who have each emphasized internal processes whereby
late imperial ‘outsiders’ became prominent in ways clearly reflecting internal trends within the empire (although I hope to demonstrate that some of Heather’s work offers what I believe is an acceptable compromise). On a more narrowly-focused topic – the extent to which foreign mercenaries (especially the Visigoths) wanted to be fully integrated into the social and political world of the empire – my position again rests somewhere between Heather’s and Burns’, stressing both the important foreign roots of the early Visigothic leaders (with Heather) and their mounting assimilation into Roman military society (with Burns). Whatever their initial desires, these immigrant soldiers would be deeply influenced by the Roman world after their arrival. On the other hand, the specific forms of assimilation experienced by these immigrants, matched with trends already at work in Gallic and Roman society, helped them participate in ushering in a new Gaul that cannot really be considered part of the empire. As important as the Visigoths and other so-called ‘barbarian’ groups were to this process, however, I feel strongly that Roman choices and failures enabled the loss of Gaul to private armies. The Romans appear to have had several opportunities to save the imperial order in Gaul, but largely squandered those chances in favor of pursuing personal or factional gain. Unrestrained private armies – again, predominantly but not entirely led by men who were labeled by contemporaries as ‘barbarians’ – seem to have been the mechanism of the actual end of Roman Gaul. That mechanism only succeeded, however, because of trends in Roman society which had been gaining momentum since at least the previous century.

129 Heather, “The Huns and the End of the Roman Empire in Western Europe.” For his more recently-stated views see Heather, The Fall of the Roman Empire, ch. 10. Also see Burns, Barbarians within the Gates of Rome, and MacMullen, Corruption and the Decline of Rome.
Defining ‘Barbarians’

Given the centrality of so-called ‘barbarians’ to much of this chapter I should discuss this term before moving forward; its use requires important caveats. Certainly the peoples living beyond the frontiers and not under Roman law may conveniently be defined as barbarian, meaning ‘foreign,’ though the limes were of course not a fixed line separating areas of Roman influence and authority from the barbaricum. Similarly, the descendants of such foreigners, having immigrated into the empire, may be referred to as barbarian in a loose ethnic sense to distinguish their foreign ancestry. In doing so, however, it is important not to equate foreign ancestry with a lack of serious support for the empire or social-cultural assimilation, even enjoyment of the more refined elements of classical Graeco-Roman culture. By the fifth century a very significant number, quite possibly the majority, of the personnel in the Roman army were of foreign ancestry.130 In other words, when loyal ‘Roman’ armies fought ‘barbarian’ armies in the fourth and fifth centuries, most of the fighting and dying was being done by men of at least partially foreign descent. In such a context, ‘barbarian’ had a very different meaning: a political one, a description or verdict on one’s position regarding submission to the Roman empire, or more specifically a given Roman regime. The definition of barbarism as

130 J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, Barbarians and Bishops: Army, Church and State in the Age of Arcadius and Chrysostom (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), chs. 1-2. Also, see J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, “The End of the Roman Army in the Western Empire,” in War and Society in the Roman World, ed. John Rich and Graham Shipley (London and New York: Routledge, 1993) 265-276, at p. 266; L. mentions that Hugh Elton’s dissertation (non vidi) argued “that the proportion was much smaller than has generally been thought, perhaps around twenty-five percent. But that their numbers were significant at all levels is not in doubt.” For Elton’s views see Hugh Elton, Aspects of Defence in Roman Europe AD 350-500 (D.Phil. thesis, Oxford University: 1990).
‘disloyalty to legitimate authority’ led to its highly flexible and selective application. Roman subjects who rebelled could suddenly be perceived as barbarians; recall the fourth-century rebellion of Firmus in Africa, whose followers Ammianus sometimes characterized as barbarian savages despite Firmus’ earlier participation in the imperial system.131

The army of the Visigoths, which wandered throughout the empire for several decades until being settled by the government in Aquitaine in 418, offers a particularly good example of the type of ambiguities which could attend a group labeled as ‘barbarian.’ Although undoubtedly having important cultural roots outside the empire which contributed to their developing identity, and despite frequently doing violence to the armies and subjects of the empire, Visigothic leaders often cooperated with Romans and tried repeatedly to convert their own military power into legitimate political authority within the Roman government. Over time, the Visigoths began to look less and less like a foreign army and more like a disowned segment of the Roman world, despite the ongoing growth of their communal identity as a separate people under a ‘barbarian’ king.132 Their alleged ‘barbaric’ incompatibility with the Roman order sprang from their shifting political loyalties – focused on individual patrons rather than the state – more than their ethnic background. Had Alaric or Athaulf managed to permanently reintegrate

131 For Firmus, see Ammianus 29.5 passim, e.g. 29.5.12, 39, 41. ‘Barbarian’ as a construct had long roots in the classical world and could indeed be applied for a wide range of rhetorical or ideological purposes. For a discussion of the classical roots of the concept of ‘barbarian’ see Edith Hall, Inventing the Barbarian (New York: Oxford, 1989), and François Hartog, The Mirror of Herodotus, trans. Janet Lloyd (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).
their followers into the Roman command system, the political side of their ‘barbarism’ could largely have disappeared. After all, other men of foreign descent (called ‘barbarians’ by their rivals and detractors within Roman society) had reached some of the highest offices of state in this era.\textsuperscript{133}

Still, the mercenary ‘barbarian’ armies which took control of Roman Gaul were clearly perceived by many contemporaries as ‘others.’ To be different in the Roman empire, though, did not necessarily mean being foreign; it could also mean being a brigand. This is how I suggest we might best understand the structural role within the empire of groups such as the Visigoths. They were outsiders because their experience of assimilation into Roman society had involved the ‘wrong Rome’ – the bandit’s Rome, i.e. the world of interacting with Roman society from outside the normal patterns and control of the state. Here, I am indebted to Brent Shaw’s picture of the Roman brigand as the man of violence operating outside those controls, a phenomenon created by “the shifting frontiers of the definition of authority within the state itself.”\textsuperscript{134} Labeling the Visigoths as ‘barbarians’ raises problems; while sometimes they were outsiders to the state, they do not seem to have necessarily been outsiders to the Roman world itself.

Because of these complications, I will endeavor to avoid unclear references to fifth-century individuals or groups who might be described as ‘barbarian’ in different

\textsuperscript{133}E.g., Stilicho, son of a Vandal in the Roman cavalry, was one of the most powerful men in the empire between 395-408 and acted as ward to the young emperor Honorius after the death of Theodosius I. For his career, see A. H. M. Jones et al., \textit{Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire}, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971) 853 ff.

\textsuperscript{134}Thomas J. Dunlap (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), chs. 3-4. My views on the ‘Romanness’ of these Goths owe more however to Burns, \textit{Barbarians within the Gates of Rome}.
ways. Where appropriate, reference to them as foreigners, rebels, mercenaries, etc. may clarify the actual meaning ‘barbarian’ carried in each circumstance. Where use of the word ‘barbarian’ seems beneficial I will include it within quotations. At times this will be a useful way to conveniently refer to groups such as the Visigoths, Burgundians, etc., who formed hybrid societies melding foreign and traditionally Roman cultural forms. ‘Barbarian’ is thus my attempt to describe them while recognizing their somewhat ambiguous status between two older worlds. These issues addressed, we can again turn to the process whereby Roman Gaul, in three quarters of a century, became the domain of various forces wielding personal instead of imperial power.

**Explaining the End of Roman Gaul**

The end-state in Gaul was the result of several factors. First, the relative quality and numbers of the standing imperial army in the region, compared with competing private armed forces in Gaul, declined in the fifth century. Meanwhile, internal conflict and factionalism among the Romans themselves eroded their army’s effectiveness, gave uncooperative ‘barbarian’ leaders opportunities to expand or regroup, and eventually also severed the emperors’ hold on both Britain and northern Gaul. Roman disunity finally robbed the Italian emperor of his last non-private army in Gaul, effectively sealing the end of traditional imperial rule there after *circa* 461. Roman leaders had also become

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134 Shaw, “Bandits in the Roman Empire.” Shaw has pointed to the similarity from the state’s perspective between outer foreign ‘barbarians’ and the more organized brigand communities living within the empire, p. 42.
increasingly dependent on troops motivated by personal rather than traditional ‘institutional’ ties of loyalty, influencing both the character of the army and the potential for conflicts between rival Romans. All these factors contributed to a late-fifth-century Gaul in which private force was abundant and direct imperial force had become nonexistent.

As imperial power crumbled, Rome’s unruly mercenary ‘allies’ happily filled the vacuum. While one might suggest that ‘barbarian’ warlords betrayed their Roman employers and evidenced their own foreign disregard for Roman security, there was actually nothing inherently foreign or ‘barbarian’ about such behavior. Romans acted the same way against each other in the fifth century, at great cost to the state, and had been doing so for centuries. Centrifugal forces tearing at society had been felt since the Late Republic; the tensions between legitimate authority, private power, and personal gain had been central to the imperial system since its foundation. 135 Moreover, the character, composition, and identities of the allied ‘barbarian’ armies in Gaul were shaped by interactions with the Roman government, military, and population. In some cases these ‘barbarian’ armies even included segments of the Roman population; to a significant extent, these armies were products of the Roman world. 136

To illustrate the trends outlined above, I will be focusing on two critical periods in fifth-century Gallic history: the years between 406-418, which led to the settlement of

135 Refer, for example, to my discussion of the nature of power in the Principate above at p. 8-10.
136 I borrow a phrase here from Burns, who closes Barbarians within the Gates of Rome with the statement that “Rome’s barbarian soldiers were products of its own frontiers. It knew them well.” (p. 284).
the Visigoths in Aquitaine, and the years following the death of Valentinian III in 455 up to and beyond the end of effective imperial control of Gaul around 461.

**406-418**

The years 406-418 saw the establishment of strong private armies in Gaul and laid a foundation for the end of imperial control decades later. The events of these years were complex and call for a brief summary account before analyzing them; although focused on Gaul, the inter-relatedness of events in nearby regions (especially Spain and Italy) will cause some necessary narrative excursions.

The years leading up to 406 had been marked by competition and conspiracy between figures at the eastern and western courts, especially between the powerful western general Stilicho and a number of rivals in the east. Another important figure in these years was Alaric, a foreign-born leader and former officer in the imperial army, whose position in the Roman order moved uneasily between legitimacy and outlawry. In 406, Stilicho (with Alaric’s aid) was planning a large invasion of the eastern empire. Two roughly contemporaneous events forced Stilicho to call off this attack. A large number of Alans, Vandals and others crossed the frozen Rhine and invaded Gaul on the last day of 406. Also, troops in Britain hailed their commander as emperor (Constantine III) and crossed the Channel in 407 to fight the foreign invaders and advance Constantine’s claim to imperial power. Although Stilicho began making arrangements
for a counter-strike against Constantine, Stilicho and many of his supporters fell victim to court intrigue in 408 and were killed.\textsuperscript{137}

Constantine III delegated some of his forces to fight both loyalist Romans and Vandals who had crossed into Spain, but Gerontius, Constantine’s general in Spain, betrayed him. Gerontius made peace with the Vandals, rebelled against both Constantine and the central government, and put forward his own emperor, Maximus, in 409. In that year Alaric also raised his own puppet emperor in Italy, the senator Priscus Attalus, though he soon abandoned his support of this minor usurper. Unable to negotiate a reintegration into Honorius’ government, Alaric sacked Rome in 410. He soon died and was succeeded as king by his brother Athaulf. In 411 Honorius’ general Constantius captured Constantine III and also defeated Gerontius, who then killed himself. A new usurpation under Jovinus, a Gallo-Roman relying heavily on support from Burgundian auxiliaries, was crushed by Athaulf’s Visigoths, now working as allies of Honorius’ court. By this arrangement Rome was reinforced by Gothic arms, and the Goths were subsidized with Roman grain. In 414, Athaulf married Galla Placidia, Honorius’ half-sister, whom the Goths had captured in Italy. Athaulf’s general policy, certainly after this point, was to seek rapprochement with the Romans, but Honorius was apparently unwilling to grant formal Roman office to his sister’s ‘captor’; it was not until Wallia ascended the Gothic throne after Athaulf’s death (following fighting in Spain to mop up the remnants of Gerontius’ forces and harry the Vandals) that the western Roman court

\textsuperscript{137}Jones et al., \textit{PLRE} vol. 1, “Fl. Stilicho,” 853 ff.; Martindale, \textit{PLRE} vol. 2, “Alaricus 1,” 43 ff.; Burns, \textit{Barbarians within the Gates of Rome}, chs. 4-7; Matthews, \textit{Western Aristocracies and Imperial Court}, ch. 10.
was willing to formalize an alliance with the Goths (the widowed Galla Placidia was returned to Honorius). In 418, now under Theodoric I, the Visigoths were settled permanently in Aquitaine by imperial order, after several years of campaigning in Gaul and Spain.\footnote{Martindale, \textit{PLRE} vol. 2, “Alaricus I,” 43 ff., “Athaulfus,” 176-178; Burns, \textit{Barbarians within...}}

Several trends from these years stand out as particularly important and should be addressed in some depth. First, we should note the high cost of Roman disunity in lost territory, military strength, material resources, and strategic opportunities. In the same vein, the strength of Rome’s armies in Gaul by 418 is an important point worth considering. Also of great importance for future developments in Gaul was the formation of a new ‘barbarian’ identity among the Visigoths and other groups during this period.

\textbf{The Cost of Disunity}

Roman strategic power weakened in and around Gaul between 406-418. At a time when dangerous foreign enemies were active across much of Gaul, the state had to deal with the threat posed by multiple usurpers. It was not a good time for Roman armies to be busy fighting each other. I would like to emphasize several of the losses Rome experienced as a result of the civil wars and other internal conflicts of the era, including losses in territory and attendant material resources, loss in military manpower, and the granting of time and opportunity to enemies who would later develop into more serious threats.
Although peripheral to Gaul, a noteworthy territorial loss stemming from the civil wars after 406 was the abandonment of Britain. After the withdrawal of Constantine III’s armies from the island, Rome does not appear to have ever effectively recovered control of Britain, even after Constantine’s defeat. Apparently the many strategic problems on the continent prevented the reassignment of Roman troops. Zosimus says that the inhabitants of Britain revolted again Roman rule at this time and fended for themselves; if this happened, it is unclear whether the central government tried to win the island back.\textsuperscript{139} Whether they revolted in frustration at being abandoned by the usurper’s army, or whether Honorius’ government later lacked adequate military force to protect the British after spending several years at war against the army originally assigned to garrison the island, is unclear. The precise fate of Roman Britain is highly controversial, but 410 is likely a good approximate date for the end of imperial control there, and it is probable that the end was related to either Romano-British rebellion or imperial weakness after the civil wars. Had the era of the Vandal invasion been free from usurpers, Rome might well have retained Britain.\textsuperscript{140}

Back in Gaul, the depredations of the Alans and Vandals and the effect of civil wars had been damaging to local populations and infrastructure, which of course had further effects on the empire’s tax base and material resources. This in turn affected the ability to raise new troops to replace those lost in the wars (I will return in more detail below to the state of the army around 418). One cannot help but think that the damage

\textsuperscript{139} Zosimus 6.6.
would have been far less had the Roman armies in Gaul been cooperating with each other. Indeed, in some regards the large numbers of Vandal fighters may have presented something of an opportunity; had united Roman forces been able to beat them quickly, a traditional treaty of *receptio* offered to the defeated foes could have added them to the Roman army, strengthening total Roman numbers rather than wearing them down. Instead, Roman leaders squandered this opportunity by jockeying for power amongst themselves, investing time and armies in civil wars. The state ultimately prevailed over the usurpers, but by that time much damage had been done in Gaul. The Vandals were now resting uneasily in Spain instead of on the Rhine (and in future decades would conquer Roman Africa, a catastrophe for the empire). Rome, having accepted the Visigoths as semi-autonomous allies since the empire so badly needed military manpower, had settled them on territories where they would be, at various times, either a help or a thorn in the side. As I will discuss shortly, the military situation in 418 was still tenable for the western emperors, but Gaul had been weakened and important chances had been sacrificed because of conflicts among the Romans.

**The Strategic Outlook in 418**

Rome’s western armies were badly mauled between 406-418 and subsequently had to be heavily reinforced with new regiments. The significant casualty rate is attested

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within the army lists of the *Notitia Dignitatum*, a document listing the various military
units and commands (along with civil offices) of both the east and western empires
around the beginning of the fifth century. The extant western army list is probably the
result of several revisions which led to a final production ca. 420; therefore the *Notitia*
gives a useful though imperfect view of the western army around the time of the
Visigothic settlement of 418. According to Jones’ calculations based on the *Notitia*,
the elite *comitatenses* (regiments of the central field armies) were hit very hard by the
wars under Honorius. Only one third of the original *comitatenses* extant in 395 survived
by the end of Honorius’ reign, and adequately replacing them was difficult:

Apart then from the *auxilia palatina*, of which a substantial number of
new units were raised, the great gaps in the western *comitatus* were almost
entirely filled in Honorius’ reign by upgrading *limitanei*; for the most part
the reinforcement was a paper change only, the local *limitanei* remaining
in their old areas. The losses in cavalry in Europe were largely left
unfilled; it is notable that there was no regular cavalry in Spain or
Illyricum, where presumably the *comites* had to rely on federates.

Around 420 there was a full army – in theory – but the overall quality of the army had
most likely seriously diminished as low-grade border troops replaced the more elite
regiments of the field armies. In cases where promoted units of *limitanei* remained in
their original barracks while filling slots in the field armies ‘on paper,’ this would also
represent an actual decline in total numbers of the army.

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141 Burns, *Barbarians within the Gates of Rome*, 206-7 on the potential opportunity posed by the Vandal presence. On the practice of *receptio*, see below, but especially Burns’ ch. 5.
143 Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*, 1425-6.
Although this grim picture might make us think Rome’s ability to keep the Visigoths and similar groups in check after 418 was in trouble, the Romans actually seem to have continued to wage war successfully. For one thing, the entries in the *Notitia Dignitatum* do not include allied federate troops, neither those engaged in a long-term agreement with Rome (as was the case with the Visigoths) nor those simply recruited along the frontiers to serve in a single campaign; and the numbers of federates relative to regular troops in the mid-fifth century’s campaigns seems to have increased, as pointed out by W. Liebeschuetz. Rome will have been able to draw upon additional sources of soldiery so long as it could afford to pay them. Whether using federates or regular troops, Roman armies fighting in Gaul in the decades after 418 generally won their battles and their wars and appear to have remained able to campaign regularly and effectively to keep rebels, unruly federates, and invaders in line. Hugh Elton has optimistically suggested that the Roman army in Gaul was as effective in 450 as at the beginning of the century. Elton is certainly more optimistic than Liebeschuetz, whose main concern is to identify the federates and *bucellarii* in the army as more effective than the standing elements; yet, if the mid-fifth-century army’s reliance on federates instead of standing troops was paying off, then Rome had a currently effective strategy for the time being, and Elton would still be right (so long as we include federates as part of the ‘Roman army,’ which may cut somewhat against the grain of Elton’s overall point).

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144 Liebeschuetz, “The End of the Roman Army in the Western Empire,” 265-276.

So long as Roman arms in Gaul remained powerful enough to keep the Visigoths and other federates in check, the strategy of the 418 settlement in Aquitaine was a relatively safe one, and offered significant benefits. Planting the Visigoths in a small area of the empire which would be responsible for their upkeep freed the imperial government from coordinating the provision of regular grain subsidies for the Gothic allies. The settlement’s location in south-western Gaul also placed the Goths within striking distance of the troublesome Vandals and Suevi in Spain, while establishing a new reserve force in Gaul upon which the emperors could call for reinforcement.\textsuperscript{146} The Romans may have also hoped that the Visigoths would eventually be assimilated into the fabric of imperial society, as were the subjects of many client kings in the early empire.\textsuperscript{147} Although the settlement of autonomous \textit{reges} on Roman soil had fateful consequences once Roman power in Gaul declined, the 418 settlement seems to have initially answered immediate needs of the western emperors. From such a viewpoint, one might say with Burns, “for Rome, 418 was a very good year.”\textsuperscript{148}

\textbf{‘Barbarian’ Identities}

Another key process at work in the early fifth century was the formation of new ‘barbarian’ identities. The first thing to note about the Visigoths, Burgundians, and (to a less definite extent) Franks who came to control fifth-century Gaul is that, as I noted

\textsuperscript{146}On the various strategic and administrative benefits of the Visigothic settlement, see Burns, \textit{Barbarians within the Gates of Rome}, 263 ff.
\textsuperscript{147}Elton, “Defence in Fifth-century Gaul,” 169.
\textsuperscript{148}Burns, \textit{Barbarians within the Gates of Rome}, 277.
earlier, they were generally products of the Roman world (in broad terms), not just alien interlopers. One of the most successful realizations of late antique scholarship in recent decades has been the understanding that, far from being ethnically homogenous tribal fighters unsuited to classical culture and caught up in a centuries-long migration from Scandinavia, the originally-foreign armies which seized the Roman west owed much of their existence and identity to traditions, policies, and processes within the empire. 149

Before the early 400’s, foreigners from outside the frontiers had been entering the empire for centuries to enlist as soldiers in Roman service. This practice accelerated in the late empire, when the Roman army became increasingly staffed by men of foreign ancestry. This does not mean that Rome’s army was therefore inherently disloyal or unreliable; foreign-born troops fought and died loyally in great numbers for the empire. Using the process of receptio, Roman authorities often happily accepted the service of foreign recruits; meanwhile, the chance to serve as a Roman soldier offered new troops a doorway to economic security, prestige, social mobility, and perhaps assimilation into the world of the great empire to the south. Burns has claimed that the foreigners who invaded Gaul in 406 bypassed the Roman garrisons because it was clear that both rations and receptio were impossible to adequately provide for so many persons in the dead of winter with only a skeleton garrison on the Rhine; in less extreme circumstances the invasion might have instead become a recruitment drive. 150 For many soldiers, entering

149 For a recent overview of the barbarian invaders and a rejection of the idea of a unified barbarian ‘Germanic’ identity see Walter Goffart, Barbarian Tides: The Migration Age and the Later Roman Empire (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006). On the interaction of ‘barbarian’ identity with the Roman military system see in particular Burns, Barbarians within the Gates of Rome, especially 92-147.
150 Burns, Barbarians within the Gates of Rome, 206-208. The skeleton garrison was because Stilicho’s troops had been massed in Italy to prepare for an invasion of the east.
Roman service destined their families for full and prosperous participation in Roman society; Stilicho’s father had been a Vandal in the Roman cavalry under Valens.\textsuperscript{151}

Rome also influenced foreigners remaining across the frontiers. Attesting to a cultural fusion between Roman military society and neighboring frontier peoples, in many frontier areas archaeologists find a great deal of ‘Roman’ material cultural remains outside the empire along with ‘foreign’ material cultural remains within it.\textsuperscript{152} While Rome’s militarized society on the frontiers was being deeply infused with foreign customs and personnel (yet largely remaining a loyal and foundational element of the Roman imperial program), neighboring foreign groups were in frequent contact with and were heavily influenced by their Roman neighbors. For many men among these groups, a good career choice involved movement into the empire as soldiers or merchants – on the empire’s terms. Other warriors, of course, entered the empire with less friendly intent, but raiding bands once defeated could also be recruited into the Roman military (though often referred to as dediticii, rather than beneficiaries of receptio, to mark their defeated status). Proximity to the Roman frontier had profound cultural and social consequences. Even though sometimes hostile, foreigners who approached the empire

\textsuperscript{151}Jones et al., \textit{PLRE} vol. 1, “Fl. Stilicho,” 853.

\textsuperscript{152}For a discussion of this trend illustrated near the Transalpine frontier districts of Raetia, see Burns, \textit{Barbarians within the Gates of Rome}, 112-147. Also see C. R. Whittaker, “Supplying the System: Frontiers and Beyond,” in \textit{Barbarians and Romans in North-West Europe}, eds. J.C. Barrett et al., BAR 471 (Oxford: 1989), 64-80. Such issues are common in frontier/’borderland’ regions; for discussion of the similarities between ‘borderland’ residents on either side of the frontier, and a detailed comparison of Rome’s frontiers with those of ancient China, see Owen Lattimore, \textit{Studies in Frontier History: Collected Papers, 1928-1958} (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 469-91. In addition to the fluidity of practical communications across the frontiers, Roman ideological attitudes to the frontier emphasized Rome’s pre-existing sovereignty over areas beyond the temporary administrative boundaries of the frontier; see C. R. Whittaker, \textit{Frontiers of the Roman Empire} (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1994), 1-59.
were already in a peripheral part of ‘the Roman world’ before they set foot on Roman territory.  

This remained true for the ‘barbarian’ groups which assumed control of Gaul in the fifth century. The Visigoths, Burgundians, and Franks, although strongly identified with foreign origins, were clearly influenced by Rome before, during and after their ascension in Gaul. The Visigoths campaigning inside the empire in the years leading up to 418 reflected very clear Roman influence. Less clear, however, is the extent to which the earliest Visigothic leaders wanted to be assimilated into Roman military society. Tom Burns has argued that the rewards of the Roman command system were an attractive lure in their own right, and Alaric’s stormy relationship with the government centered around his frustrated desire for promotion (and eventually continued participation) within the Roman military. In other words, although obviously a mercenary, Alaric’s long-term goals were set firmly within the Roman military-political system. Peter Heather, on the other hand, has interpreted Alaric and his Goths as much more independent, willing to use the Roman system for their advantage but inherently suspicious of Roman bad faith and fiercely opposed to the undermining of their collective autonomy by the assimilating forces within Roman military society. The right view, I think, is somewhere in between these two scholars’ opinions.

First for Burns’ view. The core of the Visigothic army were soldiers who had been commanded by Alaric as federates in the army of Theodosius I, when the emperor

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153 Burns, *Barbarians within the Gates of Rome*, passim, but especially chs. 1 and 5; pp. 12-13 for *dediticii*.
154 Burns, *Barbarians within the Gates of Rome*.
crushed the usurper Eugenius’ army at the hard-fought Battle of the River Frigidus in 394. Alaric’s key concerns involved his desire for promotion to a higher Roman command, which would not only grant him prestige but the ability to plug his client-army into the Roman supply system more effectively. Frustrated in his attempts to hold significant military rank over standing troops within the Roman army, and eventually abandoned by factions within the imperial government after serving as a tool in conflicts between the eastern and western courts, Alaric in desperation assumed the role of a ‘barbarian’ king in 400 as a ‘fall-back’ alternative to the Roman authority he desired. The foundation of Visigothic kingship in Alaric’s army was thus not Alaric’s fiercely-held ancestral privilege, but rather his defensive responses to policies of the Roman government. The pattern was then taken further under Athaulf, who faced a similarly uncooperative Roman government in the years after Galla Placidia’s seizure. Burns argues,

Because Alaric and Athaulf were unable to gain recognition of their commands inside the Empire, the decade 408 to 418 witnessed the forced birth of a new Gothic self-awareness as they and their followers were repeatedly forced back upon their own resources and traditions … Roman strength kept the Goths at bay; Roman weakness allowed them to remain together. From this limbo state arose a new Gothic identity that was more newly created than remembered.156

Additionally, the Visigothic army continued to grow, adding a diverse range of past experience of the empire to the Gothic force. Slaves and deserters from the Roman army fled to Alaric’s ranks, including former troops of Stilicho who joined the Goths en masse after their families were murdered in the wake of Stilicho’s fall. After Alaric’s death, his

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156 Burns, Barbarians within the Gates of Rome, 282.
brother-in-law and heir Athaulf continued to seek rapprochement with Rome, marrying an emperor’s daughter (albeit a hostage) and expressing his desire to support the Roman name with Gothic arms; the wedding of Athaulf and Galla Placidia was thoroughly Roman in character. Thus Alaric and Athaulf actively sought real reintegration into legitimate Roman power circles, but rejection by Roman authorities for political reasons encouraged the ongoing growth of a unique identity among their followers.

Peter Heather’s vision of early Visigothic identity focuses much more on Alaric and Athaulf’s attempts to use Roman rewards to promote their authority within a Gothic context, while avoiding loss of independence to Roman masters who may have held potentially dangerous attitudes to their foreign mercenary troops. Like Burns, but in a very different way, Heather underlines the criticality of Roman influence for the cementing of Visigothic identity. He argues that the Visigoths predominantly formed from the fusion of diverse Gothic elements left over from the Theodosian settlement of Goths after Adrianople. Heather argues that, in contrast with their earlier balkanization, these many Gothic groups chose to unite to thwart the threat of Roman power:

Visigoths were Gothic, because their defining elite caste – much more than a few noble clans – was composed largely of Goths. This does not make them, however, anything other than situational constructs. Their existence is inconceivable outside the frontiers of the Roman Empire. Without the threat of Roman power, and the availability of hard Roman cash, Gothic freemen and nobles would not have been ready to put aside a history of separate development.

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157 Burns, *Barbarians within the Gates of Rome*, 258.
158 Burns, *Barbarians within the Gates of Rome*, chs. 4, 6-9 passim.
159 Heather, *The Goths*, chs. 5-6.
What Roman power could mean for the Gothic allies was allegedly driven home by the Gothic experience fighting at the River Frigidus. There, thousands of foreign allied troops fighting at the front of the Roman army were killed in heavy fighting during the first day of the battle. Heather believes the Goths “probably realized that casualties incurred in Roman civil wars threatened their continued independence … the Roman state tolerated Gothic autonomy only because it had no choice. Should Gothic military manpower be whittled away, that necessity would disappear.”\(^{161}\) Deeply suspicious of Roman intentions, many Goths thus allegedly banded together into a new and larger formation. According to Heather, Alaric was the winner of the ensuing power-struggle for the unified leadership of this mobile polity. Meanwhile his pursuit of the fruits of Roman command was largely meant to strengthen his position as king over the Visigoths; command would include recognition of his importance by the Romans and gold to offer his own troops. Leading a new fusion of different Gothic groups, Alaric was breaking new ground in developing Gothic kingship. That is where his interests chiefly lay; he was willing to use the empire, but also suspicious of its strength.

Both Burns’ and Heather’s views should be modified somewhat to a middle position, I believe, though in the end I believe Burns’ view is the better tack. Heather’s claim that Alaric and the Visigoths were suspicious of the costs of full integration into the Roman system because of their experience at the Frigidus does not seem clearly substantiated by ancient testimony. Zosimus tells us that Alaric was angry at not having been awarded a command over ‘Roman’ soldiers, i.e. probably at not being awarded a

\(^{161}\)Heather, *The Goths*, 139.
command within the regular standing army (the units included on the Notitia Dignitatum, as opposed to his probably federate command of allies).\textsuperscript{162} Given Alaric’s subsequent pattern of seeking military command, it seems risky to assume Alaric was deeply suspicious of Rome (in the ways suggested by Heather) without clear evidence. Burns, on the other hand, could afford to pay a bit more attention to Alaric’s early years before the Battle of the River Frigidus in Barbarians within the Gates of Rome; although Burns introduces Alaric at the Frigidus, Alaric is suspected of having led an armed band which, in 391, almost captured Theodosius I in the countryside.\textsuperscript{163} As a foreign-born bandit leader not long before the battle of the Frigidus, Alaric should perhaps not be first introduced as a loyal fighter in Theodosius’ army. Alaric’s possible earlier career underlines the multiple options open to him and his familiarity with a life outside Roman rule. Of course, Burns’ focus is explicitly on the Roman command system and how foreign fighters interacted with it after receptio, not on the birth of Gothic kingship, Alaric’s Gothic identity, or any other internal Gothic issue.\textsuperscript{164} The book is thus understandably predisposed to avoiding certain elements of Alaric’s career. Still, Alaric and many of his followers were apparently first-generation immigrants to the empire, and their formative years were shaped by foreign experiences as well as Roman influence. Nonetheless, I believe Burns’ primary focus on the Visigoths as actors within the structures of the Roman world remains appropriate. The peripheral areas of the empire were full of individuals happily living both as servants of the emperors and traditional

\textsuperscript{162}Zosimus 5.5.  
\textsuperscript{163}Martindale, PLRE vol. 2, “Alaricus 1,” 44.  
\textsuperscript{164}Burns, Barbarians within the Gates of Rome, xvi.
tribal leaders. There was nothing inherently incompatible between the two roles. Take, for example, once again, the case of the rebel Firmus of the House of Nubel, who raised areas of Mauretania in revolt in the late fourth century. Firmus had been an influential nobleman with access to figures at the imperial court, yet his rebellion benefited greatly from his status as a tribal elite among the surrounding peoples.\textsuperscript{165} The imperial system accepted many local authority figures, keeping them in a subordinate position, and used such petty leaders as mediators and maintainers of the status quo in the provinces.\textsuperscript{166} What mattered was their full cooperation with Rome and their willingness to limit their own authority to a suitable place in the hierarchy of empire. Even if Alaric’s sense of Gothic identity was alive and well, he still had every reason to pursue the benefits of Roman command and full participation in the imperial system. Local and imperial identities could be complementary. So Burns’ focus on how Alaric’s army functioned as a section of greater Roman society seems appropriate.

Whichever of these two scholars is more correct, what is clear is that the years leading up to 418 were tremendously influential in forming a new Visigothic identity as a distinct, unique community which nonetheless drew heavily on Roman culture. By 418 the Visigoths had a home base deep within the empire, imperial recognition of their kings which also identified them as allies of the emperors, and were beginning the slow process of reconciling themselves and their Gallo-Roman neighbors (and subjects) to life together. Although their roots lay in diverse groups of foreign immigrants, in 418 the

\textsuperscript{165}Ammianus 29.5.
\textsuperscript{166}For a discussion of this principle (using Britain as an example) see Millett, The Romanization of Britain, 65-101.
Visigoths were an internal ‘other’ clearly identified as living outside the norms of traditional Roman state authority, yet also very clearly blending into the cultural melting pot of the empire.

455 – ca. 461: The End of Roman Gaul

To recap: factionalism and disunity among the Roman authorities after 406 eroded the quality and numbers of the army, amplified the consequences of the invasion of 406, and led to damage or even abandonment of Roman territories. Meanwhile, various outcast elements of Roman society whom contemporaries commonly lumped together with foreigners under the label ‘barbarians’ were developing new communal identities offering an alternative to life within the Roman imperial order. At the same time, these outsiders could often be enlisted as short-term allies of the imperial government and, in the case of the Visigoths, this relationship was formalized in 418 with the granting of a permanent base of supply in Aquitaine. Events in these years laid the foundation for the later domination of Gaul by private ‘barbarian’ power.

By the late 450’s, the balance of power in Gaul was quite different from that in 418. Rome’s standing army had declined still further in ability and the emperors now relied much more heavily on allied mercenaries; Roman leaders were much more dependent on personal ties of loyalty with followers and allies. ‘Barbarian’ federate kings had begun to integrate Roman provincials and foreign settlers into new societies which could envision, even accept, living functionally outside the rule of the Roman
empire. Finally, whatever chance Rome might have had to salvage the situation was ended by further factionalism among the leaders of the state; after ties between the Italian emperor and his last standing field army in Gaul were severed, Roman authority in Gaul became unenforceable. Only private leaders, most of them of foreign descent, were left to govern Gaul.

Before discussing trends in Roman Gaul later in the century, a summary of historical events will again be useful. The decades between 418 and 455 had been dominated by the figure of the western general Fl. Aetius. A highly successful general, Aetius kept the western federates, Roman rebels, and even Attila the Hun from tearing apart Roman Gaul, although he relied heavily on paid immigrant auxiliaries to complement standing Roman armies. Eventually, however, the emperor Valentinian III grew jealous and afraid of his generalissimo and personally murdered him in 454. The following year, Valentinian himself was killed. 167

The emperor Petronius Maximus briefly succeeded Valentinian III, but he was killed by an angry Roman mob while trying to flee the impending Vandal sack of Rome in 455. The ensuing power vacuum was filled by a prominent Gallo-Roman named Eparchius Avitus, an aristocrat with both civil and military experience who had been magister militum in Gaul under Petronius Maximus. 168 In this role, and earlier as an officer for Aetius, Avitus had built personal diplomatic connections with the Visigothic throne. As a result, in 455 Theoderic offered to support Avitus if he would accept the

168 Details on the career and reign of Avitus are from Ralph Whitney Mathisen, “Avitus (9/10 July 455 - 17/18 October 456)” [article on-line in De Imperatoribus Romanis: An Online Encyclopedia of
purple. According to a panegyric delivered at Avitus’ accession by his son-in-law Sidonius Appolinaris, Theoderic allegedly told Avitus, “With you leading, I am a friend of Rome; with you as princeps, I am Rome’s soldier.” The panegyric also depicts the Goths practically fawning over Avitus, which hardly seems likely, but the quote above, recognizing the simple fact of a political alliance between Avitus and Theoderic, seems a good expression of the Gothic king’s personal – and thus limited – allegiance to the Roman emperor. Backed by a Visigothic army, Avitus was hailed as emperor by a regional Gallic council and proceeded to Rome, where he was able to assume unopposed control as Augustus of the west. His Gothic alliance was not popular with the Italian aristocracy, of course, but the potential force represented by the Visigothic army seems to have forestalled any immediate opposition. In addition to his Gothic alliance, Avitus was also a strong champion of Gallic power, preferring Gallic and even ‘barbarian’ appointees over Italians at the court – another matter which surely annoyed Italian senators. The Visigoths were soon engaged with campaigning in Spain against the Suevi (and apparently some Roman neighbors as well). These campaigns, though allegedly on Avitus’ behalf, increased Theoderic’s regional power, an important reward for his support. In 457, however, with most of the Visigothic army off fighting in the west, Avitus was deposed in a coup by two of his generals, Majorian and Ricimer (both had been high generals before Avitus’ accession). The rebel forces crushed those allies Avitus was able to assemble, and the emperor was forced into retirement as a local bishop.

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and possibly killed shortly thereafter. Majorian became the next emperor, with Ricimer as a power behind the throne. Majorian ruled only briefly, yet seems to have managed a reconciliation with many Gauls following the deposition of Avitus; Ricimer, however, soon murdered Majorian and replaced him with a puppet, Libius Severus, in 461.

Majorian’s murder cost Rome its last real strategic control of Gaul.171 Aegidius, commander of the Roman field army in northern Gaul, refused to recognize Libius Severus’ authority, essentially revolting against the not-so-legal regime in Rome (he did not, interestingly, proclaim an imperial candidate of his own). As a result, the only armies left in Gaul to which Severus could turn were those of ‘barbarian’ federates. In fact, Severus tried to use the Visigoths to defeat Aegidius (another case of Romans being willing to kill other Romans and strengthen outsiders for personal gain!) but the Goths were unsuccessful. Not until 486 would the isolated ‘Roman’ army in northern Gaul, now under Aegidius’ son Syagrius, fall to the Franks under Clovis at the Battle of Soissons. Meanwhile, the Goths, Burgundians, and other groups were now generally free to do what they wanted in Gaul without effective imperial intervention; the king of the Burgundians was apparently appointed as the Italian court’s *magister militum per Gallias* (Master of Soldiers in Gaul) to replace the rebellious Aegidius.172 While the Burgundians became proxies for Roman power, the accession of the aggressive Euric to the Visigothic throne in 466 led to an increase in Visigothic expansion into neighboring Gallic territories at Roman expense. Franks and Burgundians also expanded their territories

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170 Sidonius 7.404-34.
during these years. Circa 470, a joint campaign against Euric combining an Italian army and Burgundian, Breton, and other Gallic allies failed; Euric’s forces crushed the army sent from Italy. It is possible that Julius Nepos, last legitimate emperor in the west, achieved some kind of success in Gaul in 475, but this is not clear. In general, Rome’s ability to project decisive strategic force into Gaul after Aegidius’ break in 461 had become impotent. Real power in Gaul would now be held by ‘barbarian’ kings or independent warlords like Aegidius and Syagrius. As a cultural and diplomatic presence, the Roman empire continued to influence Gaul, but in terms of political control, Roman Gaul had ceased to exist.

The Role of Private Power in the End of Roman Gaul

As I noted earlier, the years leading up to this point were marked by several trends: the decline of standing imperial armies relative to private forces, the expansion of ‘barbarian’ kingdoms and their ongoing integration of Roman subjects into a new kind of society, and once again, negative consequences of Roman disunity.

First for the army. Although we do not know exactly how and when the standing field army faded away in Gaul, auxiliary regiments of foreign mercenaries seem to have played an increasingly important role in deciding battles during the mid-fifth century. Possible reasons for a decline in the standing armies include the state’s difficulties in

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173 On the failed joint campaign against the Visigoths and for possible action under Julius Nepos see Jones, *Later Roman Empire*, 243-244.
174 Liebeschuetz, “The End of the Roman Army in the Western Empire,” 265 ff.
finding willing recruits within the empire’s civilian populace, and the frequent successful resistance of the great landlords to conscription of their tenants; also, being badly strapped for cash, the state seems to have preferred hiring men for single campaigns rather than paying for a standing army.  

Of course, over time the trend of investing gold in mercenaries while neglecting the standing army will have had negative consequences for the quality of the field units, and once the empire could no longer afford to assemble mercenary armies there was little it could do to protect its interests in Gaul.  

In the meantime, however, the foreign auxiliaries were available and offered short-term solutions. Longer-term solutions also existed outside the traditional framework of the standing army, in particular through the custom of retaining *bucellarii* as clients of a powerful officer. In such cases, core components of a Roman army would be composed of skilled soldiers following the general as a personal patron; such arrangements offered these mercenary clients “the assurance that it would be a powerful man’s responsibility to provide for them, without imposing an expensive obligation on the state.”  

If such arrangements benefited the imperial fisc, they were also valuable for the political longevity of various generals. The great Fl. Aetius himself not only employed Hunnic troops in his Gallic campaigns, but earlier owed his life and career on two occasions to Hunnic forces which he had led into Italy from beyond the empire and

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175 Liebeschuetz, “The End of the Roman Army in the Western Empire,” 274.
then turned against enemies at court.\textsuperscript{178} It is likely that such personal loyalties among his troops were also helpful to the \textit{magister militum per Gallias} Aegidius when he chose to turn from the Italian court in 461.\textsuperscript{179} By the late 450’s, then, Rome’s armies in Gaul were increasingly dependent on outside mercenary forces and personal ties of loyalty, a trend which made it easier for commanders to do violence to other Roman leaders or factions.

For many inhabitants of Gaul it was the absence, not the quality of the army, that was of greatest concern. In such cases notable instances of local self-help sometimes occurred. Civilian-led private armies, often commanded by local magnates and bishops, defended a number of Roman towns against ‘barbarian’ expansion, with mixed results.\textsuperscript{180} Yet some private armies led by civilians were less in accord with Roman power. Armies of \textit{Bacaudae}, traditionally seen as peasant rebels waging a class-war against Roman elites, but likely actually representing the forces of local patrons fending for themselves with little desire to return to the questionable benefits of Roman taxation, caused trouble for the authorities on multiple occasions; there was also (possibly Bacaudic) rebellion in Armorica in northwestern Gaul, which had to be put down by force. Across mid- and late-fifth-century Gaul, then, the government’s reliance on external sources of armed strength in the face of fiscal and military decline was matched by civilian attempts, whether loyal or disloyal to Rome, to assemble some kind of protection against the many forces of destruction active in the countryside.

\textsuperscript{179} Penny MacGeorge, \textit{Late Roman Warlords} (Oxford University Press, 2002), 154.
While Roman authority in Gaul was becoming increasingly dependent on personal power, ‘barbarian’ kings were solidifying their realms into stable kingdoms and expanding their territories. In 443 Aetius had settled a second federate nation, the Burgundians, in southeastern Gaul. Until the death of Aetius the empire seems to have been able to keep the allied kingdoms in Gaul in check, though not without difficulties. When the Huns invaded Gaul in 451, Visigoths, Franks, and Alans joined Aetius’ army in fighting against Attila at Chalons (though the Visigoths may have come only because they wished to avoid fighting Attila later by themselves).181 After the deaths of Aetius and Valentinian III, ‘barbarian’ expansion in Gaul became harder to control. Visigoths expanded south into Spain under Avitus, although this was technically done in the emperor’s name. An obviously key aspect of Avitus’ reign, short as it was, was the foundational contribution of Gothic power to a legitimate emperor’s influence. Avitus’ close relationship with them was at once a recognition of the emerging balance of power in the empire, and (had his reign been successful) might have paved the way for a rapprochement with some of the ‘barbarians’ of the west.182 When Majorian took the purple after Avitus’ deposition, he successfully forced both Goths and Burgundians to relinquish cities they had seized amid the political turmoil following Avitus’ death.183 Majorian’s death was followed by Aegidius’ revolt, after which Rome was never able to control its erstwhile ‘allies’ in Gaul.

183 Jones, Later Roman Empire, 241.
While their political fortunes improved abroad, the ‘barbarian’ kings were also busy forging new relationships with their subjects. The late fifth century saw Gallo-Roman elites beginning to serve these kings in increasing numbers as court officials or even military commanders. The period also witnessed the birth of royal law codes modeled on Roman law. If the Visigoths had looked like a Roman brigand army in the early 400s, they were now looking like a legitimate nation of their own.\textsuperscript{184}

The dominance of Gaul by ‘barbarian’ kingdoms was cemented in the 460’s because of Roman disunity. As a result of the split between Aegidius and Libius Severus in 461,

Severus now had the authority, but not the military strength, to dominate the Visigoths or the Burgundians. Aegidius, on the other hand, had the troops (so long as he could pay them), but no authority. Severus could attempt to regain control in Gaul only through the barbarian kingdoms…\textsuperscript{185}

The pattern of Roman internal competition being exploited by potential enemies within the empire had long roots in the fifth century. Having seriously amplified the consequences of the 406 Rhine invasion, the trend now sealed the process begun decades earlier.

\textsuperscript{184} The process of assimilation is discussed in Mathisen, \textit{Roman Aristocrats in Barbarian Gaul} chs. 9-12.

\textsuperscript{185} Elton, “Defence in Fifth-century Gaul,” 172.
Conclusions

Long-term reliance on private force, without comparable mustering of armies whose primary loyalty was to imperial/state leaders, eventually allowed private *vice* imperial control of Gaul to become total and permanent, and Roman imperial rule of Gaul ended in any politically meaningful sense. In my opinion unrestrained private armies – again, predominantly but not entirely led by men who were labeled by contemporaries as ‘barbarians’ – were the mechanism of the actual end of Roman Gaul. That mechanism only succeeded, however, because of trends in Roman society which had been gaining momentum since at least the previous century.

This study touches on an important question in late antique studies: did the western Roman empire collapse from internal or external pressures? Various scholars such as Thomas Burns and Walter Goffart have emphasized internal factors, while others – typified by Peter Heather – have emphasized external pressures. Heather has asked “What would have happened had barbarians not invaded the empire en masse[?] … Despite continued attempts of late to stress the importance of internal factors, there is still not the slightest sign that the Empire would have collapsed under its own weight.”¹⁸⁶ There is no question that originally foreign groups of mercenary ‘barbarians’ were closely involved in the end of the west and inherited political control over former imperial territory. Still, in my opinion, explaining the end of Roman Gaul does require a

¹⁸⁶Heather, “The Huns and the End of the Roman Empire in Western Europe,” 39. Again, for the views of Burns and Goffart, see Burns, *Barbarians within the Gates of Rome*, and for Goffart, *Barbarian Tides* (most recently).
strong focus on internal factors. Among those factors, I have emphasized the influence of Rome on foreign immigrant armies, the decline of the standing Roman army relative to private forces, and the dangerous effects of internal conflict within the empire.

To me, the ongoing factionalism and disunity among the Romans is of special importance. This emphasis loosely aligns me with the ideas in Ramsay MacMullen’s *Corruption and the Decline of Rome* (which I discussed at some length in Chapter 1), in which MacMullen argued that private abuse and expropriation of governmental power critically weakened the empire. Internal power struggles severely compromised the Roman response to the Rhine invasion of 406, which led to the loss of Britain and ultimately to the catastrophic Vandal conquest of north Africa. The early Visigothic experience between 395-408 was heavily shaped by their use as a tool in conflicts between the western and eastern imperial courts or factions within them. In 461, disunity severed ties between the Italian emperor and his only non-‘barbarian’ army in Gaul, after which point the emperors never again seem to have wielded effective control over the region. If ‘Romanized’ foreigners took control of most of Gaul in the fifth century, Roman leaders had several chances to prevent it. These chances were generally squandered in favor of self-interested internal conflict.

To try and answer Heather’s earlier question about the likely fate of Rome had foreigners not invaded, I would first agree with him that there was nothing crushingly unsustainable about the empire. The empire was merely vulnerable. Had there been no invasions, the end of the west would not have happened as it did. On the other hand, Roman defeat by large, ‘barbarian’ private armies was by no means a foregone
conclusion even when they did invade. As I have hopefully made clear, the troubles following 406 were exacerbated by disunity. In my opinion, a united Roman front could likely have crushed the invaders and received them as fresh recruits dominated by a still-large and effective Roman army. Still, to be fair to Heather, I believe that one can find grounds for compromise within his work. His recent meta-narrative account of the fall of the western empire points to a fairly balanced view recognizing the importance of both internal and external factors. According to Heather,

There is no serious historian who thinks that the western empire fell entirely because of internal problems, or entirely because of exogenous shock. The emphasis of this book has been primarily on the latter … rather than talking of internal Roman ‘weaknesses’ predestining the late imperial system to collapse, it makes more sense to talk of ‘limitations’ – military, economic and political – which made it impossible for the west to deal with the particular crisis it faced in the fifth century. These internal limitations were a necessary factor in, but not by themselves sufficient cause for, imperial collapse. Without the barbarians, there is not the slightest evidence that the western empire would have ceased to exist in the fifth century. ¹⁸⁷

This seems a sensible approach. I suspect it is less at loggerheads with proponents of the ‘internal factors’ school than the polarized framing of the debate might suggest.

Meanwhile the opportunistic and mercenary behavior of ‘barbarian’ kings who capitalized on the decline of Roman power in Gaul was in no way inherently due to their foreign perspective. One might even call it fashionably Roman; citizens of the empire had been making similar choices for a long time, advancing their own interests at the expense of the state. Recall the intense factionalism between civilian and military elites on the Tripolitanian frontier witnessed in Chapter 1. The willingness to put private

¹⁸⁷ Heather, The Fall of the Roman Empire, 445, 449.
power above community health – in the most extreme forms, the willingness to kill other Romans to promote one’s own power – was seen as far back as the Republic. Of course, many who behaved thus will have claimed and perhaps even believed that what they were doing was for the good of the Republic, because they saw their faction or point of view as the appropriate caretaker of the state. Recall Sulla and his reforms. When Romans unsuccessfully challenged the current regime, however, they were typically labeled bandits. Although there are obvious pejorative connotations here that mean we should not take the appellation too seriously, on the other hand it may be a very good fit. Brent Shaw has defined Roman brigandage as the use of violence by persons who, while part of Roman society, acted outside the controls of the state. Significantly, Shaw has also pointed out that the Latin term *latro* – bandit – was originally used to signify a wage laborer, and then a mercenary. In contrast with the unpaid citizen-soldiers of the early and middle Republic, *latrones* were the non-citizens who offered their violence to employers. According to Shaw,

> Superficially state soldiers do not seem to perform different work from mercenaries and, as stated above, as the Roman empire grew its soldiers became more and more like paid professionals and less and less like the ideal of the selfless peasant soldier of the early Republic. Every index we have of soldiers’ ambition in the late Republic and early empire points in the direction of betterment of their contractual terms of service including, above all, pay. Increasingly, therefore, there was little except the sanction of the state that separated the roles of ‘regular soldier; and ‘mercenary’ or *latro*.\(^{189}\)

In this light, a central tension within Roman society was the recurring struggle between forces of brigandage – that is, private power seeking its own betterment outside the limits

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\(^{188}\)Shaw, “Bandits in the Roman Empire,” 23.
imposed by the state – and the forces of central order – typically dominated by the party which had won the previous conflict of private power. At the end of the Republic, Octavian’s brigandage gave him undisputed control of the empire, allowing him to fully claim legitimacy within the state. In the late western empire, by contrast, similar competitive forces of brigandage, complemented by similar though not necessarily violent illegal abuses of imperial law (as seen in Chapter 1), led to the breakup of the state. The ‘barbarian’ kings, although of foreign extraction, participated in a private dismantling of central Roman order which was already underway before they arrived. Their specific actions were of course important, but the context of those actions can be placed within the longer story of the balance between private and public power in the Roman world.

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