



Dating the baptism of Clovis: the bishop of Vienne vs the bishop of Tours

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This article re-examines the text and interpretation of three crucial passages in Avitus of Vienne's Epistle 46, the only contemporary document attesting the baptism of Clovis, and one passage in Gregory of Tours' Decem Libri Historiarum. The following conclusions relative to the date and circumstances of the baptism can be drawn. 1. Avitus addresses Clovis not as if he was a pagan convert, but as if he was a recent Arian sympathizer, possibly even a catechumen. 2. There is no allusion to Clovis' honorary consulship in Ep. 46, hence no terminus post quem of 508. 3. The populus adhuc nuper captivus cannot be the Alamanni or the newly-converted Franks. Clovis' letter to the bishops of Aquitaine and Avitus' known involvement in the ransoming of prisoners-of-war are adduced to suggest that the populus may most plausibly be identified with Catholic Gallo-Roman captives taken in the Franco-Visigothic war of 507. If this is right, it provides a terminus post quem, of 507 and suggests a baptism in Christmas 508. 4. Gregory of Tours' account of the Alamannic war is re-examined, and the following conclusions reached: the account fuses a 'Clotilde-spool' and a 'Constantinian-spool'; the battle against the Alamanni must date to late 506 (evidence from Cassiodorus and Ennodius); but Gregory himself did not know when it took place in absolute terms, and his relative chronology may well be unreliable. Thus the date of the battle and the date of conversion can be uncoupled. The most probable terminus post quem remains the freeing of the populus captivus, probably after the war of 507. The article ends by re-examining the implications of Clovis' and Avitus' relationship and correspondence.

It seems appropriate to return to the baptism of Clovis, 'un événement qui fait époque dans l'histoire du monde,'¹ in the year in which the French chose to celebrate its fifteen hundredth anniversary (496–1996).²

¹ L. Levillain, 'La conversion [et le baptême de Clovis]', *Revue d'histoire de l'Église de France* 21 (1935), pp. 161–92, at p. 161.

² 'XV^e Centenaire du Baptême de Clovis'. An academic conference organized by Michel Rouche in Reims on 19–25 September 1996. There were other notable and highly-publicized events as well, including a papal mass.

The date of the baptism is controversial: those who follow the chronology implied by Gregory of Tours place it in 496 (or shortly thereafter); those who favour other sources, such as Cassiodorus' *Variarum*, place it later, for example in 506 or 508.³ Clovis too has proved remarkably hard to pin down. How pagan was he? How catholic? How romanized? How barbarian? Two recent English articles address these problems. Spencer surveyed the *status quaestionis* on the dating in this journal and reaffirmed the traditional solution.⁴ Daly carefully re-examined the texts used to date and analyse Clovis' baptism to paint a revised picture of the Frankish king, a Clovis for the 1990s.⁵

I come to Clovis' baptism from translating the *Letters* of Avitus of Vienne. The much-discussed *Epistle* 46 is the only surviving contemporary evidence for the event, yet scholarly confusion about it is still rife in the literature. Many who use it have not constituted a text, or considered what criteria should be adduced to choose between variants. Some have failed, for example, to distinguish manuscripts from editions.⁶ Some show random eclecticism in choosing readings,⁷ yet extreme conservatism in textual reasoning, preferring invariably to bend interpretations or translations to fit what they think the text ought to say, rather than to admit that the text is either corrupt or demands some other translation or interpretation. As an unfortunate result of a scientifically tidy way of thinking of problems as having 'dossiers' that contain limited numbers of documents related to a case, scholars fail to look *beyond* their documents. To understand an individual letter written by Avitus, one must read Avitus' other letters; to interpret a chancery letter of Cassiodorus, one must study epistolary conventions.

'In the case of a key historical witness that has been investigated and discussed for a long time, a new approach is hindered, not just by the problems inherent in the text itself, but perhaps even more by the accumulated weight of the scholarship on the subject, whose traditional approaches to problems and entrenched positions on controversies develop a life of their own and a tendency towards self-justification. This is especially true of Avitus's letter to Clovis, for

³ F. Vogel, 'Chlodwigs Sieg [über die Alamannen und seine Taufe]', *Historische Zeitschrift* 56 (1886), pp. 385–403; A. Van de Vyver, 'La victoire [contre les Alamans aet la conversion de Clovis', I] *R[evue] B[elge de] Ph[ilologie et d'] H[istoire]* 15 (1936), pp. 859–914; *Idem*, 'La victoire [contre les Alamans et la conversion de Clovis' II], *RBPhH* 16 (1937), pp. 35–94; R. Weiss, *Chlodwigs Taufe*: Reims 508, Geist und Werk der Zeiten 29 (Frankfurt, 1971), and I.N. Wood, 'Gregory of Tours [and Clovis]', *RBPhH* 63 (1985), pp. 249–72, on all of which see Mark Spencer, 'Dating the Baptism [of Clovis, 1886–1993]', *Early Medieval Europe* 3 (1994), pp. 97–116, at pp. 99–101.

⁴ See above, n. 3.

⁵ William M. Daly, 'Clovis: How Barbaric, How Pagan?', *Speculum* 69 (1994), pp. 619–64.

⁶ E.g. Spencer, 'Dating the Baptism', p. 109, n. 64. For further examples see below, n. 59.

⁷ For more on this topic, see Staubach, below, n. 59.

virtually every sentence in it has already been turned upside-down and side-ways and made the basis for the most radically different hypotheses.⁸

Staubach has an important point: the weight of the scholarship on this problem threatens to compromise any discussion of the key primary texts. Scholars who have worked on the date of the baptism have all too often come to the texts with a point of view to defend, be it a late dating, an early dating, a need to justify Gregory of Tours, a desire to expose him, or simply the urge to agree or disagree with their predecessors.

Most who have worked on Clovis' baptism have been historians, usually early medievalists, only occasionally later Romanists. As a philologist, I will interpret a series of different *loci vexati* in the key texts, three from Avitus (*Ep.* 46) and one from Gregory of Tours. I will question the texts on four key problems in the baptism-controversy. First, what was Clovis' religion prior to his baptism? Second, is there an allusion to an honorary consulate held by Clovis in *Ep.* 46? Third, who is the *populus captivus* alluded to by Avitus in *Ep.* 46? Fourth, how accurate is Gregory's chronology, and did he know when Clovis' decisive battle against the Alamanni took place? Critical reading of the texts in question can indeed provide answers to these questions, or at any rate definitely exclude certain erroneous interpretations.

Avitus, *Epistle 46*, page 75, lines 2–4

Vestrae subtilitatis acrimoniam quorumcumque scismatum sectatores
sententiis suis variis opinione, diversis multitudine, vacuis veritate
Christiani nominis visi sunt obumbratione velare.⁹

Sententiis suis is clearly modified by the parallel tricolon of adjectives, *variis*, *diversis* and *vacuis*, all paired with limiting ablatives. *Christiani nominis* must then be construed progressively with *obumbratione velare*

⁸ N. Staubach, 'Germanisches Königtum und lateinische Literatur [vom fünften bis zum siebten Jahrhundert]', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 17 (1983), pp. 1–54, at p. 25: 'Bei einem historischen Schlüsselzeugnis, das seit langem immer wieder untersucht und diskutiert worden ist, wird ein neuer Zugang nicht nur durch die Probleme des Textes selbst, sondern vielleicht stärker noch durch das Gewicht der Forschungsgeschichte behindert, deren traditionelle Fragestellungen und verfestigte Kontroverspositionen eine Eigendynamik und die Tendenz zur Verselbständigung entwickeln. Dies gilt in besonderem Maße auch für den Brief des Avitus an Chlodwig, bei dem nahezu jeder Satz bereits hin- und hergewendet und zur Grundlage für die verschiedensten Hypothesen gemacht worden ist.' (English translation mine).

⁹ *Alcimi Ecdici Aviti Viennensis episcopi Opera quae supersunt*, ed. R. Peiper, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Auctores antiquissimi* [MGH, AA] (VI, 2 Munich, 1883), p. 75, lines 2–4 (75.2–4). Subsequent references to the text of Avitus will use the page and line numbers of Peiper's edition.

as the prose-rhythm suggests;¹⁰ the phrase can only mean ‘to gloss over/veil under the cover of the name “Christian”’. Some have construed *Christiani nominis* retrogressively with *veritate*, as ‘empty of the truth of the Christian name.’¹¹ But such a phrase is not the equivalent of ‘empty of the truth of Christianity’. The very use of the *nomen* suggests a contrast between the *nomen* and reality: the word has no function, unless it is construed progressively. A good parallel for Avitus’ use of this distinction is to be found in one of his campaign letters addressed to Sigismund, where he speaks of true Catholic Christians as *quicumque veraciter catholicorum nomen usurpant*.¹²

Van de Vyver (taking Labbeus’ *nisi* for *visi*) translates ‘des sectateurs de toutes sortes de schismes ont essayé de voiler la subtile perspicacité de Clovis en se couvrant du nom chrétien’ (my italics¹³). But in what sense can the schismatics have ‘veiled’ Clovis’ perspicacity? Does Van de Vyver mean ‘put a veil on his perspicacity, so that *Clovis* cannot see?’ *Velare* means ‘to cover, veil, cover up, conceal’, so that something not *be seen*, not ‘to fool’, ‘to blind’,¹⁴ ‘umnebeln’,¹⁵ ‘zu benebeln’,¹⁶ ‘voiler et obscurcir’,¹⁷ or ‘to bamboozle’, so that someone not *see*.¹⁸ If the schismatics are veiling Clovis, whence has Van de Vyver introduced ‘se couvrant’? *Vestrae subtilitatis acrimoniam* (= Clovis) cannot serve as a direct object for *velare*. The text is unsound, and all who have translated the passage have been driven to distort both the meaning of *velare* and the function of the phrase *sub obumbratione Christiani nominis*.¹⁹ One can compare Avitus, *Ep.* 15 (pp. 4–5) to see his use of *velo* as equivalent to *tego*: *si in eo inertiae meae noxam velaret ac tegeter magnitudo*.

Instead the sentence requires an object that is a pejorative word for

¹⁰ Peiper has mispunctuated. There should be a comma after *veritate*. *Vacuis veritate* is a regular *cursus velox* (pp4p), whereas *Christiani nominis* (p3pp) is not a standard type.

¹¹ Wood, ‘Gregory of Tours’, p. 267 construes *Christiani nominis* with *veritate*.

¹² *Ep.* 92, 99.18–19.

¹³ 1936, p. 903. A very similar translation is provided by Levillain, ‘La conversion’, p. 177: ‘Les sectateurs de certains schismes, par leurs doctrines discordantes, aussi diverses que nombreuses, vides de vérité, ont voilé la perspicacité de votre subtil esprit en se couvrant du titre de chrétien.’

¹⁴ E.g. Wood (Gregory of Tours), p. 267.

¹⁵ Staubach, ‘Germanisches Königtum und lateinische Literatur’, p. 34: ‘den scharfen Verstand des Herrschers mit den widersprüchlichen und unwahren Lehren ihres Scheinchristentums zu umnebeln versucht hätten.’

¹⁶ A. Angenendt, *Kaiserherrschaft und Königstaufe* (Berlin, 1984), p. 171: ‘Euren scharfen Geist haben die Anhänger von allerlei Sekten mit ihren verschieden gerichteten, vielfältigen, aller Wahrheit baren Lehrmeinungen als dunkle Christen zu benebeln gesucht.’

¹⁷ M. Rouche, *Clovis* (Paris, 1996), p. 396.

¹⁸ E.g. virgins were veiled, not so that *they* could not see, but so that no one could see them.

¹⁹ For example, W. Von den Steinen, ‘Chlodwigs [Übergang zum Christentum, Eine quellenkritische Studie], *Mitteilungen des Österreichischen Instituts für Geschichtsforschung* 12, Erg.-Band (1932), pp. 417–501, at p. 480: ‘die Ketzler werfen einen Schatten auf den Namen “Christ”’.

unorthodoxy, such as *haeresim*, or else a more neutral word, qualified by an unfavourable adjective: the schismatics gloss over their heresy or unorthodoxy or their evil doctrine by calling it Christianity, that is they put a covering over it, and call that covering 'Christianity'. *Vestrae subtilitatis acrimoniam* is an acceptable honorific for Clovis. *Acrimonia* can be used for *acumen* (*Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* (TLL) s.v. 'acrimonia' 432.1–17), and Avitus would have known this usage from Sidonius, *Epistle* 8.6.6. He used the same phrase in a theological letter to Gundobad.²⁰

So what to do with the text? One might have tried to fit in *subtilitatis vestrae acrimoniam* as an indirect object, that is the schismatics tried to veil their heresy from Clovis' keen sense.²¹ But *velare* is not construed with a dative or with *a* + ablative: it would require *ne* + purpose clause. The most economical solution is to posit a lacuna, and to supply, *exempli gratia*, the missing object of *velare*. *Acrimoniam* may have originally been *acrimonia*, an ablative of agent originally construed with a (now lost) perfect participle passive. *Acrimoniam* is a medieval correction, intended to supply the missing object.

Avitus uses a variety of words to allude to heretical opinions. Some, such as *haeresis*²² or *schisma* are fairly neutral in tone. Others are metaphorical, and highly pejorative, for example *pernicies*,²³ *furor*,²⁴ *contagium*,²⁵ *venenum*.²⁶ Which to choose? The heretofore mysterious (and perhaps pejorative) *ista* at p. 75, line 3 (*dum ista nos aeternitati committimus*) suggest that whatever is missing was a neutral plural noun. It is worth attempting a purely *diagnostic* conjecture.²⁷

Later on in the same letter Avitus alludes to Arianism (76.10) as *pravorum dogmatum germina*.²⁸ Perhaps the fairly neutral *dogmata* stood here? Avitus used *dogma* and *sectatores* very close to one another elsewhere.²⁹ One might supply *detecta* ('uncovered') to match the

²⁰ *Ep.* 30, 60.21 *acrimoniae vestrae*, 61.35 *acrimonia vestra*. (References to TLL come from *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* (Leipzig, 1905–). For Sidonius, see *Gaii Solii Apollinaris Sidonii Epistulae et Carmina*, ed. Chr. Luetjohann, *MGH*, AA VIII (Munich 1887).)

²¹ *Celo*, for example, can take a double accusative.

²² Avitus of Vienne, *Contra Eutychem et Nestorium* [CE], in *Alcimi Ecdici Aviti Opera quae supersunt*, ed. R. Peiper, *MGH*, AA VI, 2 (Munich, 1883), 1.16.19.

²³ CE 1.16.5 and 16.

²⁴ CE 1.15.12.

²⁵ CE 1.16.3 and 17.

²⁶ CE 1.16.12.

²⁷ A diagnostic conjecture does not pretend to be an *exact* restoration of the author's text. Instead it is an editorial solution, where the editor knows what thought was intended, or what sort of words might have been used, but cannot, with complete certainty, swear that the restoration is exact.

²⁸ He also refers to the *dogmata tenebrarum* in *Ep.* 8, 40.1, another text that describes conversion. For more seeds of heresy, see CE 1.16.17–18.

²⁹ CE 2.29.15–17 *Ad cuius pristinum dogma denotandum vel corrigendum aliquantisper, sicut optandum est, sectatores pauca haec suscepisse sufficiat.*

metaphor of *velare* and to justify the presence of *acrimoniam* which may once have been an ablative of agent 'uncovered by your keen subtlety'.³⁰ But 'uncovered dogmas' is not quite right. Avitus clearly needed a word that put a somewhat negative 'spin' on *dogmata*. One could try adding *mendacia*,³¹ but the prose rhythm is awkward,³² so *detecta mendacia* without *dogmata* seems a better diagnostic conjecture.

Vestrae subtilitatis acrimonia <detecta mendacia > quorumcumque
scismatum sectatores sententiis suis variis opinione, diversis
multitudine, vacuis veritate, Christiani nominis nisi³³ sunt
obumbratione velare.

From this text as conjecturally restored it is clear that there had been a concerted attempt by heretical Christians to convert Clovis from paganism. Who were these heretics? Van de Vyver suggests that Avitus uses the deliberately vague *quorumcumque* in order to avoid hurting Gundobad's feelings,³⁴ but that these were Arians nonetheless.³⁵ While the existence of other types of unorthodox Christians is attested in Gaul in this period,³⁶ Arians remain the obvious ones to have evangelized Clovis, and their influence can be detected in the religious beliefs of his sisters, Audofleda and Lenticildis.³⁷ Furthermore, at the end of the letter when Avitus turns to pagan barbarians who have as yet been uncorrupted by heresy, even though he again uses a vague phrase *pravorum dogmatum germina*, Arianism is the only heresy he could have intended.

³⁰ *Detecta* was chosen to match the metaphor *velare*. Note that Avitus uses this word of Eutyches, when his heresy was unmasked. See Avitus, ed. Peiper, 16.15 *Discussus, detectus, atque damnatus est*.

³¹ Either *fallacia* or *mendacia* would produce a regular *cursus tardus*. Another less likely possibility might be *perversa*.

³² *Vestrae subtilitatis acrimonia (tardus) <detecta mendacia (tardus) dogmata > quorumcumque scismatum sectatores sententiis suis variis opinione, diversis multitudine, vacuis veritate, Christiani nominis nisi sunt obumbratione velare*. If one reads *detecta mendacia (tardus) dogmata*, there is a conflict between prose-rhythm and sense. *Detecta mendacia* forms a *tardus* that would indicate a sense-unit, but *mendacia dogmata* likewise forms a *tardus*.

³³ Taking Labbeus' palmary conjecture for *visi codd*.

³⁴ As will be clear from my discussion below, it is unlikely that this letter envisages Gundobad as a 'secondary audience'. Van de Vyver has made an important and correct observation, but the vague terms are intended to mollify Clovis. See below pp. 36–37.

³⁵ Van de Vyver, 'La victoire' I (1936), p. 901 'Pour mieux faire ressortir combien le choix de Clovis est méritoire et décisif et sans viser trop directement l'hérésie arienne, le prélat multiplie sans préciser (*quorumcumque*) le nombre des sectes et des doctrines que le converti aurait eu à écarter.'

³⁶ Cf. *Ep.* 31 that mentions Bonosiaci among Arians and Catholics. *Ep.* 26 mentions a Donatist. See Van de Vyver, 'La victoire' I (1936), p. 901 for semi-pelagianism and Eutychianism, and Von den Steinen, 'Chlodwigs', p. 486, who leaves the question open.

³⁷ See *Gregorii Episcopi Turonensis Decem libri historiarum [DLH]*, ed. B. Krusch and W. Levison, *MGH, Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum* I.1 (Hanover, 1951), 2.31 and Avitus, ed. Peiper, p. 152.

Avitus' other letters must be introduced as a control group, to show us whether he is prepared to call an Arian an Arian to his face, or not, and to document the language he uses about heresy. Once his usage is established, it may be possible to make a more precise argument about Clovis's state of belief and religious status on the basis of Avitus' diction and rhetoric.³⁸

The bishop of Vienne could judge his audience. The language of the fragmentary *Contra Arianos*, because it is addressed to Gundobad, is very restrained, despite Avitus' claim that the king had enjoined *libertas* upon him.³⁹ In a few places Avitus allows himself allusions to *ineptia* and to *versutiae*,⁴⁰ but makes it clear that the culprits, both *imperiti* and *callidi*, are Gundobad's bishops.⁴¹ In the *Contra Eutychen*, however, the technique is very different. Because the heresy under fire is not one shared by his addressee, Avitus freely employs a full battery of pejorative expressions for the beliefs of Eutyches.⁴² Avitus uses language charged with contempt and disgust, when writing to his suffragan, Victorius of Grenoble, about the re-use of basilicas that had been taken over by Arians,⁴³ and when writing to the pope he speaks of the stain of Arian heresy by name.⁴⁴

Even the letters to the converted Sigismund do not mince words about Arianism. In *Ep.* 23 Avitus makes a triple pun about Gundobad's bishops: *sacerdotibus, immo magis seductoribus, et, ut adhuc verius dicamus, sectatoribus suis, se velle proponere*. (The same bishops are politely referred to as *sacerdotes vestri* when Avitus addresses Gundobad!)⁴⁵ *Ep.* 31 warns of further dangers from heretics: a council with Arian bishops as an *annuum quoddam contagium*.⁴⁶ A follower of Bonosus is like a plague called up from the nethermost regions of hell.⁴⁷ The word *Arrianus* is used openly as well as *haeresis* and *schisma*.⁴⁸ But nonetheless Avitus' language is notably less graphic than it is in either *Ep.*

³⁸ For parallel argumentation, in this case arguing, on the basis of Sidonius' silence about Arianism, for Catholicism as the perceived religion of many Burgundians, see J. Harries, *Sidonius Apollinaris [and the Fall of Rome, 407–485]* (Oxford, 1994), p. 232.

³⁹ Avitus of Vienne, *Contra Arianos in Alcimi Ecdici Aviti Opera quae supersunt* [CA], ed. R. Peiper, *MGH, AA VI*, 2 (Munich, 1883), 14.37.

⁴⁰ CA 14.9 *quanta ineptia*; CA 15.2 *ne tolerando imperitorum versutias et ineptias callidorum suspendamini a professione cum iam dudum in confessione teneamini*.

⁴¹ CA 14.38–15.2

⁴² See the examples above, nn. 22–6.

⁴³ Avitus, ed. Peiper, *Ep.* 7, 36.5: *aperta perversitate pereunt*; *Ibid.*, 38.7: *morticinum dogmatis alieni*; *Ibid.*, 38.11: *saeviuunt, quidem, cum possunt, foedis unguibus alienarum aedium pevasores*.

⁴⁴ Avitus, ed. Peiper, *Ep.* 8, 40.3–4: *haeresis Arriana maculaverat*.

⁴⁵ CA 13.17 and 14.38.

⁴⁶ Avitus, ed. Peiper, *Ep.* 31, 62.9: the phrase is an implicit pun on *concilium*.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 62.16.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 62.17; 62.20; 62.21–2.

7, or in the *Contra Eutychen*, where his correspondents are clearly of the same theological party as he is.

The language of the letter to Clovis emerges from these comparisons as highly guarded.⁴⁹ Avitus does not specify which heresy precisely is at issue. While he indulges in a slightly mean word (*sectatores*)⁵⁰ to describe his rivals, he deliberately draws a line between their obfuscations and Clovis' *acrimonia*. The second sentence comes as a surprise to anyone who knows Avitus' views on Arianism: *dum ista nos aeternitati committimus, dum, quid recti unusquisque sentiat, futuro examini reservamus etiam in praesentibus interlucens radius veritatis emicuit*. Here the bishop of Vienne seems prepared simply to let these matters go till the Last Judgement,⁵¹ and be content with the light that has shone forth because of Clovis' choice. To put it crudely, it almost sounds as if a coin had been tossed, and, surprisingly, things turned out right. Avitus is magnanimous and pleased, but, above all, eager to forget the immediate past. All of these factors (no explicit mention of Arianism, the lack of openly pejorative vocabulary, the suggestion that such matters are best left to Higher Authorities in the future) suggest that he is addressing someone who has recently been seriously involved with the doctrine in question. Clovis is treated in much the same way as Gundobad, but in an even more gingerly fashion.

In concluding, I should like to draw attention to a telling phrase at the end of the same letter. Avitus refers to the Franks as Clovis' *gens*, and suggests that he should evangelize other *gentes* beyond his borders who are still in their state of native ignorance (i.e. 'poor benighted 'eathen'), and have not been corrupted by Arianism.⁵² He then refers to these foreign *gentes* as *externi quique populi paganorum*. Avitus has no compunctions about using *populi paganorum* at the end of the letter to someone whom we know to have been a *paganus* himself.⁵³ What are we to make of this?

It is significant that the only other place in his writings where Avitus uses *paganus* is in *Homilia* 20, delivered on the occasion of the consecration of a church on the site of a destroyed pagan temple: *si paganus hic forte iam deeest, qui plures deos velit excoli, gemit haereticus qui unum conspicit exorari*.⁵⁴ The clear force of the passage is that even though now perhaps there is no *pagan* to worship *many* gods present, at least the *heretic* will be unhappy who sees *one* God being prayed to. This sermon

⁴⁹ Pace Von den Steinen 'Chlodwigs', pp. 485–6.

⁵⁰ See above, n. 45.

⁵¹ Clearly the force of *aeternitas* and *futurum examen* in contrast to *in praesentibus*.

⁵² Avitus, ed. Peiper, 76.9.

⁵³ Cf. Gregory's description of Clovis at *DLH*, 2.27 *adhuc fanaticis erroribus involutus*.

⁵⁴ Avitus, ed. Peiper, *Hom.* 20, 134.9.

uses the impolite *paganus*, because none is present. Avitus would not have spoken of *populi paganorum* to Clovis, had he thought of Clovis himself as a recent or current member of that group. He is a canny contemporary writer who knows the formulae for civil epistolary intercourse, for example, when and whom to call a barbarian a *barbarus* or a *natio a natio*.⁵⁵ He has no need to pussyfoot around paganism, *because he does not think of Clovis as a pagan*. Instead he expends his linguistic efforts to be politically correct on the terminology related to heresy, for, in his eyes, Clovis was an all-too-recent heretic. These observations support Wood's suggestion that Clovis went through an intermediate stage as an Arian catechumen.⁵⁶ They directly contradict the silence of Gregory of Tours.

When we compare a documentary source, addressed to Clovis, some extremely important information emerges. Avitus is to be trusted, because he is clearly *not* eager to draw too much attention to Clovis' heretical flirtations. Yet what he says supports something *in the margins* of Gregory's account: Lentichildis needed to be *reconverted* to Catholicism. We know that Avitus himself gave a sermon (now lost) on the occasion of her conversion.⁵⁷ All of this suggests that Gregory here, as elsewhere,⁵⁸ is deliberately *suppressing* facts.

Avitus, *Epistle 46*, page 76, lines 16–17

Gaudeat equidem Graecia principem legisse nostrum: sed non iam quae
tanti muneris dono sola mereatur.

Many have tried to use this sentence to date *Ep.* 46. Most of the previous historical discussions have been based on false apprehensions, first about the text, and second about its interpretation.⁵⁹ It is thus crucial to begin with the manuscript-readings.

⁵⁵ *Ep.* 8 to the pope tellingly shows both these words used without inhibitions. For more on *paganus*, see J. Zeiller, *Paganus: Étude de terminologie historique* (Paris–Freiburg, 1917), and *TLL* s.v. 'paganus' 81.3–84.12. The word is never used as a self-description.

⁵⁶ Wood 'Gregory of Tours', pp. 266–7. This is not, however, to suggest that he underwent Arian baptism.

⁵⁷ See Avitus, ed. Peiper, *Homilia* 31, 152.23: *de conversione Lenteildis Chlodovaei sororis*.

⁵⁸ E.g. his complete suppression of the Franco-Burgundian alliance in the war of 507–8.

⁵⁹ Various scholars have difficulties with the apparatus criticus. J.N. Hillgarth, *Christianity and Paganism*, 350–750 (Philadelphia, 1969), pp. 76–8 translates, 'Let Greece indeed rejoice it has elected an emperor who shares our faith; it is no longer alone in deserving such a favor.' He seems to be taking the reading of S, *se principem habere legis nostrae*. But *habere* cannot possibly mean 'elected', and emperors were not 'elected' in the modern sense of the word. This aspect of his translation seems to reflect *legisse*. For completely justified and apposite criticism of this sort of textual critical double-think, see Staubach, 'Germanisches Königtum und lateinische Literatur', p. 20. Bruno Krusch, 'Die erste deutsche Kaiserkrönung in Tours Weihnachten 508', *Sitzungsberichte der deutschen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin* (1933), pp. 1060–6, at p. 1063 also has a peculiar composite text: '*Gaudeat equidem Graecia habere se principem (= Kaiser) legis nostrae* (so ist zu emendieren), *sed non iam, quae tanti muneris dono sola mereatur*'.

L and S offer different readings of the passage. L is a manuscript (Lyon, Bibliothèque de la Ville, no. 535, s xi/xii). S is more difficult to interpret: the *siglum* represents Sirmond's *editio princeps* of 1643, a text based on a manuscript that has been lost. Early editors did not, however, regularly distinguish between the readings of their manuscripts and their own conjectures.⁶⁰ Thus, although a manuscript lies *behind* S, it cannot be treated as if it *were* one. Indeed many of its readings are likely to be Sirmond's improvements.⁶¹

The relationship between the lost manuscript used by Sirmond and L cannot always be established, unless a third manuscript is available. In a few cases, where a letter present both in L and S has been transmitted by a third source, one can see some light. For example a comparison of the text of *Ep.* 7 in Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, lat. 574 (P) seems to suggest that S and Palatinus share a hyparchetype that is independent of L.⁶² But then again, there is the difficulty of a passage found only in P.⁶³ In many cases, the readings of S seem to be emendations and *lectiones faciliores*. But this is not true of *all* of its readings.

The manuscript behind S represented genuinely independent testimony,⁶⁴ for there are places where firstly, it had correct readings that could not be Sirmond's own conjectures, secondly, it correctly filled *lacunae* that could not have been filled using conjectural emendation,⁶⁵ lastly, it showed independent *lacunae*, not found in L.⁶⁶

What must the editor's strategy be? The safest method is to examine the text of L first, and see whether it is sound. It should be given every chance. If it is not sound, then one should turn to S, try to evaluate whether S's reading is Sirmond's conjecture (which could be very good indeed) or a genuine reading.⁶⁷

Lyon, Bibliothèque de la Ville, no. 535

L reads *Gaudeat equidem Graecia principem legisse nostrum, sed non iam quae tanti muneris donum sola mereatur*: 'As far as I am concerned, let Greece⁶⁸ rejoice in having chosen our ruler.' *Principem legisse*

⁶⁰ Avitus, ed. Peiper, pp. v–vi for Sirmond's practice.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. v, xii and xiv.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. xiv.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 39.14; See Peiper, *Ibid.*, p. xvi, who does not offer an explanation. He seems to be suggesting independent omission both by L and S.

⁶⁴ That is, Sirmond's manuscript was not merely a copy of L.

⁶⁵ In at least one place (Avitus, ed. Peiper, *Ep.* 74, 91.15–17) S has text that cannot be a conjectural supplement.

⁶⁶ The Sirmond manuscript, for example, did not have the text of *Epp.* 6, 50, 58 and 64. It misses an important phrase in L at *Ep.* 46, 75.27: *qua competentem vos profitebamini*.

⁶⁷ Essentially Peiper's position (Avitus, ed. Peiper, p. xvi). I would agree that he often goes overboard in trying to justify L's readings.

⁶⁸ That is, Byzantium.

nostrum has caused many problems. Who is the *princeps*? What does the phrase mean? Avitus' use of *princeps* is not a decisive factor: four times he uses it to refer to the eastern emperor,⁶⁹ but he also uses it of barbarian kings.⁷⁰ There are basically three types of historical interpretations.

First, it has been interpreted as a reference to the events described in Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum* (DLMH) 2.38 (*Igitur ab Anastasio imperatore codecillos de consolato accepit et in basilica beati Martini tunica blattea indutus et clamide inponens vertice diadema ... et ab ea die tamquam consul aut augustus vocitatus*).⁷¹ But Avitus clearly cannot allude to a consulship, ordinary or honorary – the proper word would have been *designare* or *decorare insignibus* – and we have the contemporary formula for appointment preserved in Cassiodorus, *Variae* 6.1. While Avitus does not refer to consuls in any of his own writings,⁷² we may assume that he would have known the proper vocabulary from the writings of Sidonius,⁷³ if not from elsewhere. Even though someone like Gregory of Tours confuses offices and their terminology, so that a certain vagueness obscures what actually happened,⁷⁴ Avitus cannot be expected to write in a similar fashion.⁷⁵ If he thought that Clovis had been made consul, he might have expressed it this way: *Gaudeat equidem Graecia se principem nostrum consulem designare/designasse* or *Gaudeat equidem Graecia se principem nostrum consularibus insignibus decorasse*. *Principem legisse nostrum* would have been insufficient as an allusion to the consulship described by Gregory.

Second, others see here a less specific allusion to Clovis. Weiss, for example, translates the passage: 'Griechenland soll sich freuen, dass unser Fürst (Chlodwig) (sc. Katholizismus) gewählt hat.'⁷⁶ But, if Clovis had been intended, it is highly unlikely that Avitus would have called him *princeps noster* – even at a time, such as 507–8, when the Franks and Burgundians were allied against the Visigoths, or 501–2 when the

⁶⁹ Avitus, ed. Peiper, 22.23; 22.25; 43.6; 100.3.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 34.25; 36.11; 39.14; 146.26.

⁷¹ Vogel, 'Chlodwigs sieg', pp. 398–9 and Wood, 'Gregory of Tours', p. 269. For a discussion of Clovis' consulate, see J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Long-Haired Kings and other Studies in Frankish History* (London, 1962), pp. 175–6.

⁷² The following allusions are all in other people's writings: Avitus, ed. Peiper, 63.22 (Vignier fake); 70.11 (date of receipt in the papal chancery); 72.26 (date noted by the papal chancery).

⁷³ Sidonius, *Ep.* 8.6, p. 131.3 ff. clearly shows that he knew the 'drill' about consuls and consulships. Consuls show up constantly in his writings; cf. the index to the MGH edition, p. 457 for a list.

⁷⁴ See M. McCormick, 'Clovis at Tours, Byzantine Public Ritual and the Origins of Medieval Ruler Symbolism', in E.K. Chrysos and A. Schwarz (eds) *Das Reich und die Barbaren* (Wien-Köln, 1989), pp. 155–80, at pp. 159–60. While Gallo-Romans would certainly have known the difference between a real and an honorary consulate, Gregory might well not have known what precisely a consulate was, or how it was described.

⁷⁵ That is, consul and Augustus.

⁷⁶ R. Weiss, *Chlodwigs Taufe*, p. 49. The choice for him is Catholicism, according to Weiss.

Burgundians were the Franks' tributaries. The expression would have been treasonable, and there is reason to believe that Avitus was aware of the dangers of incautious remarks in correspondence. See *Ep* 36, 66.8 *actionem verbo potius referendam portitoris auribus allegavi*; and the extreme and intentional vagueness of his letters to his cousin Apollinaris that would have had to reach him in Visigothic territory.⁷⁷ There were always the cautionary tales of Aprunculus of Langres and of Caesarius of Arles.⁷⁸ Van de Vyver is wrong to insist that this letter was written with Gundobad as the indirect audience.⁷⁹

Third, others have seen here an allusion to Anastasius. Reydellet (p. III) suggests the following: 'Le prince qu'a choisi la Grèce est qualifié de *noster*, c'est-à-dire qu'il partage notre foi, à nous évêques catholiques d'Occident.' *Principem nostrum* allegedly means 'an orthodox emperor.'⁸⁰ Impossible. *Noster* serves to distinguish whatever is characterized as 'noster' from what belongs to someone else. The sphere of the separation, however, is always defined by the context, and is often not stated explicitly – hence the difficulties with this passage. The immediate context in no way suggests that *nostrum* could or should mean 'orthodox'.⁸¹ So one must return to the unmarked meaning of *nostrum*, 'ours', that is, 'belonging to us' (Avitus), in the most basic sense. In that case, whatever *nostrum* means is clearly opposed to what *Graecia* means.⁸² Although Avitus uses *noster* of the eastern emperor in *Ep*. 93, 100.3 (*gloriosissimo principi nostro*), the letter was written *in Sigismund's name*, and, since the king is fishing for the title of *Magister Militum* from Anastasius, he is doing everything to emphasize that he is working for the emperor (100.13 *per nos administratis*), and that he is *his* ruler. Here there is no such context.

⁷⁷ *Epp.* 24, 36, 51, and 52. *Ep.* 87 to Apollinaris of Valence also begins with some extended caginess.

⁷⁸ Gregory, *DLH*, 2.23. Caesarius was exiled to Bordeaux when suspected of treasonous relations with Gundobad, see *Vita Caes. Arl.* 16–18 and 21 ff. for the suspicion he came under during the siege of Arles.

⁷⁹ 'La victoire' I (1936), pp. 900–1, 908, 911 and 913. Followed by J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Long-Haired Kings*, p. 171. L. Schmidt, *Die Ostgermanen* (Munich, 1969), p. 149 took the same line, but was aware of the political dangers such correspondence would have involved.

⁸⁰ Staubach, 'Germanisches Königtum und lateinische Literatur', p. 20 seems to suggest that M. Reydellet, *La Royauté [dans la littérature latine de Sidoine Apollinaire à Isidore de Séville]* (Rome, 1981) has combined *legisse nostrum* and *legis nostrae*. This is not clear, for although Reydellet (p. III, n. 92) cites Courcelle's translation 'qui partage notre foi', he cites the text of L (at p. 109, n. 86), not a composite text like those of the scholars above. See above, n. 59. It seems instead that he is packing too much meaning into *nostrum*. Von den Steinen, 'Chlodwigs', p. 479 and Staubach both overstate the case in assuming that *legis nostrae* is an emendation of Sirmond's. It could well be a transmitted correct reding. Reydellet has now been followed by Spencer, 'Dating the Baptism', p. 109.

⁸¹ Contrast Avitus, ed. Peiper, 75.7: *vestra fides nostra victoria est*, where *nostra* clearly means 'Catholic'.

⁸² It would most probably refer to someone who was 'ours' in that he was western as opposed to eastern, or 'ours' in that he was Burgundian as opposed to something else, or else that he was 'our princeps' as opposed to someone else's.

As a final nail in L's coffin I would cite the following vaguer, but not insignificant objections. L's text *principem legisse nostrum* simply does not mean much in itself. It is insufficiently transparent. Chosen our ruler *for what?* The purpose of the choosing or else the object of choice must be deducible from the context, or explicitly stated.⁸³ It is not. This objection applies both to the suggested translation in which *principem* is taken as the subject of the accusative-infinitive construction,⁸⁴ and to the one in which *principem* is taken as the object of *legisse*. In addition, the tone is somewhat problematically dismissive, given the jussive subjunctive and the presence of *equidem*.⁸⁵ Even the construction with *gaudere* is slightly unusual. In his verse, presumably for reasons of brevity, Avitus prefers *gaudere* + infinitive.⁸⁶ But in most places in his prose he uses the construction *gaudere* + accusative-infinitive.⁸⁷ All of this adds up to strong *prima facie* evidence that L's reading is incorrect.

The impression is further confirmed by the lack of concinnity between the first and second clauses. L reads *sed non iam quae tanti muneris donum sola mereatur*. This clearly must mean, 'but she is no longer the one to deserve so great a gift alone.' The sentence clearly implies that the east has had this gift up till now, but that now someone else other than the east (the west) has it. But if the east chose a *princeps*, in what sense does the west choose a *princeps* now too? And in what sense is the act of choosing a *donum*? Usually a *donum* is something that is *accorded one*.⁸⁸

Sirmond's editio princeps

Gaudeat ergo quidem Graecia habere se principem legis nostrae, sed non iam quae tanti muneris dono sola mereatur illustrari.

'Therefore let Greece, to be sure, rejoice that she has a ruler who is orthodox,'⁸⁹ but she is no longer the only one to deserve to bask in the illumination of such a great gift.'

⁸³ For the normal construction, see Avitus, ed. Peiper, *Ep.* 94, 101.15 *non me quidem legis officii mei compotem*. Vogel, 'Chlodwigs Sieg', p. 399 was rightly uneasy about this construction, saying that one had to supply *consulem*. He seems not to have been suggesting an emendation, but a mental addition, because as a parallel he cites Ennodius, *Panegyricus*, ed. Fr. Vogel, *MGH, AA VII* (Berlin, 1885), 4.16, p. 205.16 *lector* (= *is qui consules creat*). In that passage, however, there is an earlier and explicit allusion to the consulship, so that the context is transparent. This is not the case in Avitus.

⁸⁴ See Weiss above, n. 76.

⁸⁵ *Equidem* draws attention to the speaker's contrasting point of view, often in rhetorical contexts, and usually accompanying a first-person verb. I know of no other example of the word in Avitus' writings.

⁸⁶ H. Goelzer, *Le Latin de Saint Avit* (Paris, 1909), p. 238. Four examples from the verse. One at 100.30, and this passage.

⁸⁷ Goelzer, *Le Latin de Saint Avit*, p. 249 with numerous examples.

⁸⁸ This objection can be raised to Weiss' translation, see above p. 39.

⁸⁹ For *lex nostra* in this sense, see Avitus, ed. Peiper, *Ep.* 8, 40.15. For Arianism as the *lex aliena*, see *ibid.*, *Ep.* 38, 67.8 *clericos legis alienae*.

The sequence of thought in the first two clauses is definitely better, if one takes S's reading. The rather rude *equidem* vanishes. *Quidem* serves to introduce the contrast in *sed non iam*. The *donum* is clearly a gift – the possession of a Catholic emperor.⁹⁰ The *princeps* in question is Anastasius,⁹¹ and the point of the sentence, as befits the content of the letter, is that the west can now rejoice that it too has a Catholic *princeps*. The orthodox brightness of the east now illumines the west, and at Clovis' Christmas baptism a western version of the Star of Bethlehem has risen to summon the gentiles to worship.⁹² It is worth emphasizing at this stage that, once one has rejected L's meaningless *principem legis nostrum*, one cannot try to extract an allusion to the accession of Anastasius in 491 from Sirmond's text.⁹³ If Avitus had wanted to say that *Graecia* had just acquired its orthodox emperor, he would have had to have written: *Gaudeat ergo quidem Graecia se <nunc> habere principem legis nostrae*. There is no evidence that he did, and *habere se* implies no more than that the east currently has an orthodox emperor.

The text of L should be rejected. While it is impossible to tell how much of S is Sirmond and how much his manuscript, its text makes sense, and can reasonably be given the benefit of the doubt.

Avitus, *Epistle 46*, page 76, lines 3–8

Vellem vero praeconiis vestris quiddam exhortationis adnectere, si aliquid vel scientiam vestram vel observantiam praeteriret. Numquid fidem perfecto praedicabimus, quam ante perfectione sine praedicatore vidistis? an forte humilitatem, quam iam dudum nobis devotione impenditis, quam nunc primam professione debetis? *An misericordiam, quam solutus a vobis adhuc nuper populus captivus gaudiis mundo insinuat, lacrimis deo* [my italics]?

'I would have liked to add some exhortation to my praise of you, had anything escaped either your knowledge or your watchfulness. Certainly I am not going to preach the faith that you saw without a preacher⁹⁴ before your baptism to you once you have found it? Or should I preach humility perhaps? You had long ago paid it to me by

⁹⁰ The differences between L's and S's text in the final clause do not matter: the important words, *mereor* and *donum* are common to both.

⁹¹ Avitus was unaware of Anastasius' pro-Monophysite sympathies until 511. See Wood, 'Gregory of Tours', p. 269, esp. n. 154.

⁹² On this topic, see the excellent treatment in Staubach, 'Germanisches Königtum und lateinische Literatur', p. 26–8.

⁹³ Reydellet, 'La Royauté', pp. 96–7 followed by Spencer, 'Dating the Baptism', p. 109.

⁹⁴ The allusion is to Romans X.14–15. Clovis surprisingly has done it on his own. Levillain, 'La conversion', p. 173 wrongly takes *fidem* as *miraculum*.

your service, even though only now do you owe it to me through your profession of faith. Or perhaps I should preach pity that a people up till recently captive, once released by you, by its joy conveys to the world and by its tears to God?’

This passage could provide a *terminus post quem* for Clovis’ baptism, and there have been many different historical interpretations of the reference to a *populus captivus*. Some have seen it as an allusion to Clovis’ mercy to the conquered Alamanni (Cassiodorus *Variae* 2.41).⁹⁵ Others following G. Reverdy took the *populus captivus* to be Clovis’ own Franks.⁹⁶ Levillain rather improbably took it to refer to the Frankish soldiers baptized with Clovis.⁹⁷ Others,⁹⁸ most recently including Wood, saw the *populus captivus* as the Gallo-Romans of Aquitaine, liberated from Visigothic rule in 507–8.⁹⁹

The first two interpretations are demonstrably wrong. Reverdy had already pointed out two of the deficiencies of Kurth’s translation, ‘Parlerai-je de votre miséricorde, glorifiée devant Dieu et devant les hommes par la joie et par les larmes d’un peuple vaincu dont vous avez daigné défaire les chaînes:’¹⁰⁰ first that *captivus* does not mean ‘vaincu’, and second that since the Alamanni were not Christian, how could they proclaim Clovis’ mercy by offering their tears to a God whom they did not know? He is right about both of these points, but needed to raise a third. Translators have skated over the adverbs in the passage too. *Adhuc* modifies *nuper*, which in turn modifies *captivus*: the captivity of this people had been a state that had continued for a time up till recently.¹⁰¹ The word order makes it clear that *nuper* cannot be construed with *solutus*, as ‘recently freed by you’. And, if one tried that, *adhuc* then would be rendered nonsensical, because it must apply to a continuous

⁹⁵ W. Junghans, *Histoire critique de règnes de Childrich et de Chlodovech*, trans. G. Monod (Paris, 1979), p. 50; H. von Schubert, *Die Unterwerfung der Alamannen unter die Franken* (Strassburg, 1884), pp. 170–1; Vogel, ‘Chlodwigs Sieg’, p. 395; *Cassiodori Senatoris Variae*, ed. Th. Mommsen, *MGH, AA XII* (Berlin, 1894), p. xxxiii; A. Ruppertsberg, ‘Über Ort und Zeit von Chlodwigs Alamannensieg’, *Bonner Jahrbücher* 101 (1897), pp. 38–61, at p. 58; G. Kurth, *Clovis* (2nd edn, Paris 1901), 1.305, n. 1; A. Hauck, *Kirchengeschichte Deutschlands* 1 (3rd–4th edn, 1904), p. 599; L. Levillain, ‘Le baptême de Clovis’, *Bibliothèque de l’Ecole des Chartes*, 1906, pp. 472–88, at p. 483; all cited by G. Reverdy, ‘Note [sur l’interprétation d’un passage d’Avisus]’, *Le moyen âge* 26 (1913), pp. 274–7, at p. 275, nn. 1–8.

⁹⁶ Above n. 97, pp. 274–7, followed by Daly, ‘Clovis’, p. 638, n. 56.

⁹⁷ Levillain, ‘La conversion’, p. 188.

⁹⁸ B. Krusch, ‘Zwei Heiligenleben des Jonas von Susa’, *Mitteilungen des Instituts für österreichische Geschichtsforschung* 14 (1893), pp. 385–448, at p. 444; W. Levison, ‘Zur Geschichte [des Frankenkönigs Chlodovech]’, *Bonner Jahrbücher* 103 (1898), pp. 42–86, at p. 66.

⁹⁹ Wood, ‘Gregory of Tours’, pp. 269–70.

¹⁰⁰ Reverdy, ‘Note’, p. 275.

¹⁰¹ Reverdy translates the adverbs correctly, *ibid.*, p. 276.

state, such as *captivitas*, not to a punctual action, such as *solutus*.¹⁰² These people cannot be the recently conquered *Alamanni*.¹⁰³

What of the spiritual captivity? This seems more promising, despite the fact that Reverdy does not cite any parallels for the interpretation he proposes. The figurative use of *captivitas* in Christian contexts is well known.¹⁰⁴ A contemporary letter of Pope Symmachus employs the trope in a missionary context.¹⁰⁵ The Franks could certainly be described as *captivi (sensu spirituali)* up till recently, and they could in some sense have been seen to have been *soluti* (released) by Clovis.

But there are difficulties with interpreting the passage in this way, and to see them one must go back a few lines to the beginning of Avitus' tripartite rhetorical quasi-*praeteritio*, three questions that anticipate a negative answer (*numquid*). Avitus might have wanted to preach three Christian virtues to Clovis: *fides*, *humilitas* and *misericordia*, but he finds that he does not need to. Faith Clovis has already accepted without a preacher; humility he has been demonstrating *de facto* for a long time by paying attention to Avitus' advice, and now by finally making his profession *de iure* in public.

And *misericordia*? Reverdy rejects the standard meaning 'clémence' in favour of 'bonté active', but it is unclear on what basis he does so.¹⁰⁶ *Misericordia* is the sense of mercy or pity that causes one to be kind to those who are weak. The scenario does not fit the conversion of the Franks. First, there is no evidence that they were crying out to be permitted to convert. Second, authors are best elucidated through their own usage, and paganism is not described as a state of *miseria* requiring *misericordia* in Avitus. Compare his description of the state of being pagan in *Ep.* 8, 40. 1–5: *diu dogmata tenebrarum et mysteriorum orientalium ferocium barbarorum corda secluserant ... sic diversarum terribiles animos nationum aut haeresis Arriana maculaverat aut naturalis inmanitas possidebat*. Paganism is a rough, dangerous, and fierce business. Thirdly, the rhetorical parallelism in the passage does not work, if one accepts Reverdy's interpretation. For it is clear that *unum*

¹⁰² Von den Steinen, 'Chlodwigs', p. 483, tries this: 'grad eben von Euch freigelassene Schar'. But he has omitted the *adhuc*.

¹⁰³ Van de Vyver, 'La Victoire' II (1937), p. 53 states that this interpretation has been abandoned, 'qu'à présent personne n'applique encore aux Alamans.'

¹⁰⁴ See *TLL s.v. 'captivitas'* 368.57 ff.

¹⁰⁵ Symmachus, *Ep.* 12.8 (A. Thiel, *Epistolae Romanorum Pontificum Genuinae* (Brunsborg, 1868), p. 714): *Si enim qui praeessit beatitudinem tuam inter sanctos constitutus Leo archiepiscopus ad Attilam tunc errorem barbarum per se currere non duxit indignum, ut captivitatem corrigeret corporalem, nec tantum Christianorum, sed et Judaeorum, ut credibile est, atque paganorum: quanto magis festinare ad tuam attinet sanctitatem, non ad corporeae, quae bello fit, captivitatis correctionem atque conversionem, sed animarum, quae captivatae sunt vel quotidie captivantur!*

¹⁰⁶ Reverdy, 'Note', p. 277.

est, quod velimus augeri ... introduces a *new* topic. Clovis does not need any improvement in the area of *fides*, *humilitas* and *misericordia*, but he *does* need to start evangelizing. And given that *misericordia*, which all who follow Reverdy must take in the sense of 'relenting', or 'taking pity on paganism', is distinguished from the *evangelization*, it seems best to take it in its customary sense of 'clemency or kindness inspired by pity'.

Reverdy did not see how the Gallo-Romans in general could be said to have been captive under the Visigoths.¹⁰⁷ While I would agree that the idea is problematic, if one takes it literally, it is perfectly possible, if understood figuratively. Authors such as Victor of Vita¹⁰⁸ and Jerome¹⁰⁹ used Old Testament typology to dramatize the plight of Romans in times of barbarian invasion. But one wonders what the average Burgundian would have thought, had Avitus openly described the relationship between Gallo-Romans and Arian barbarian king as *captivitas*. Avitus is a 'collaborator', and he could not have used those particular colours to depict the situation of Romans under barbarian rule. For this reason I find it unlikely that this is an allusion to Gallo-Romans living either under Frankish or under Visigothic domination.

The conclusion is clear: Avitus here alludes to some real Christian *populus captivus*, that is to say, people who had been taken captive. And this is no surprise, for he had frequently been involved in the ransoming of prisoners taken in war. But while there have been treatments of the ransoming of captives in relation to other figures such as Caesarius of Arles¹¹⁰ and Sidonius Apollinaris,¹¹¹ Avitus' activities have passed largely unremarked.

The freeing and ransoming of captives was an important act of *misericordia*.¹¹² Bishops regularly helped ransom their own people, taken captive abroad. But they also, on occasion, ransomed enemy captives held in their

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 276, citing Hauck, *Kirchengeschichte Deutschlands* (5 vols in 6, Leipzig 1904), I, 599.

¹⁰⁸ See *Historia Persecutionis Vandalicae* 1.1.4 and 1.2.7 for two of many examples of scriptural quotations adduced to create an atmosphere of Old Testament emergency.

¹⁰⁹ Take Jerome's *Ep.* 127.12 on the fall of Rome, for example.

¹¹⁰ Klingshirn, 'Charity and Power[': Caesarius of Arles and the Ransoming of Captives in Sub-Roman Gaul], *Journal of Roman Studies* 75 (1985), pp. 183–203.

¹¹¹ J. Harries, *Sidonius Apollinaris*, p. 210 on *Ep.* 6.4.

¹¹² Ambrose, *De Officiis Ministrorum* 2.15, Ambrose, *Des officiis: Les devoirs*, ed. M. Testard (Paris, 1984–92); also Patricius, *Epistula ad Coroticum* 14, Patricius, *Epistula ad Coroticum*, in Patrick, *Confession et Lettre à Coroticus*, ed. R.P.C. Hanson and C. Blanc, Sources Chrétiennes 249 (Paris, 1978) with a specific allusion to the practice of Christian Gallo-Romans. In this context, see Von den Steinen, 'Chlodwigs', p. 488, 'Loskauf der Kriegsgefangenen eine Haupt Sorge der Kirche.' Also for laymen. See Ennodius, *Ep.* 5.20 (*Vita Epifani in Magni Felicis Enodi [VE] Opera*, ed. F. Vogel, *MGH, AA VII* (Berlin, 1885), LXXX (Opusc. 3), pp. 84–109) for a request to Avitus 3 on behalf of a friend: *germanum suum praefatus in vicinitate Aquileiensis civitatis adserit esse captivum; qui ut a vobis iuvetur exposcit. sanctae domus vestrae consuetudo vulgata est.*

own territory. When Klingshirn discussed Caesarius of Arles' ransoming of captives, he made the interesting and important suggestion that Caesarius stood to gain ecclesiastical status for himself and for Arles when he acted as *redemptor captivorum* for pagan Franks taken in the war of 507–8 and for Burgundians (in 512–13) who lay *outside* his episcopal jurisdiction.¹¹³ Klingshirn, however, failed to mention a very important precedent for Caesarius' action: his metropolitan rival, Avitus, who had already ransomed Ligurian prisoners taken by the Burgundians in the mid-490s.¹¹⁴ He had not merely ransomed enemy prisoners (*Vita Epifani* [VE] 174) taken by his own regional king, Gundobad, but had also seen to it that Godegisel (in Geneva, outside his metropolitan jurisdiction) relinquished claim to the prisoners he held (VE 174).¹¹⁵

Misericordia

Avitus' involvement in ransoming was not confined to the well-known episode mentioned in the *Vita Epifani*. Three of his surviving letters deal with the practical aspects of the business,¹¹⁶ and in them *misericordia* plays a prominent part. In *Ep.* 12 (to Maximus of Pavia), 46.1, *misericordia* is the kindness shown by the Italian bishop to Gallic captives in northern Italy that makes them feel as if they were back in their own *patria*.¹¹⁷ In *Ep.* 10 also (to Eustorgius of Milan), where again the context is one of the ransoming of Gallic captives and the *nostrarum aerumna regionum* (44.20–1), *misericordia* is the virtue that inspires Eustorgius' financial intercession.¹¹⁸ For Avitus, as one would expect, *misericordia* is mercy inspired by pity, particularly pity aroused by *miseria*. See, tellingly, *Ep.* 11 (to Caesarius of Arles), 45.11 *misericordiae aditus non lateat, ubi est miseriae locus*, where the *miseriae locus* is Maximianus' own homeland, recently overturned by invasion.¹¹⁹

Lacrimae

Whoever the *populus* is, after inspiring *misericordia* in Clovis, and causing him to free it, it is now conveying or publicizing Clovis' *miseri-*

¹¹³ Klingshirn, 'Charity and Power', p. 190, 192, 194 and 197.

¹¹⁴ See Ennodius, VE 173–4 *Dedit etiam praestantissimus inter Gallos Avitus, Viennensis episcopus, in quo se peritiam velut in diversorio lucidae domus inclusit ... nec in uno loco summus vir in illa se regione continuit, ne forsitan in longinquo degentes dominorum feritas impedit.*

¹¹⁵ Cf. Klingshirn, 'Charity and Power', p. 191, on Caesarius: 'True the ransom of enemy prisoners was unusual, but it was not unprecedented ... What is most unusual about Caesarius is not his ransom of prisoners in the city of Arles, but his ransom of captives from other cities in Gaul.'

¹¹⁶ *Epp.* 10, 12 and 35.

¹¹⁷ Note the telling parallel commonplace in *Ep. Austrasiacae* 2.3: *captivos exinde liberabis et a iugo servitutis absolvas: si quis in conspectu vestro venerit, peregrinum se esse non sentiat.*

¹¹⁸ Avitus, ed. Peiper, *Ep.* 10, 44.25.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 11, 45.8–9: *nec illa vobis regionis suae subversio quasi incognita exaggerari debeat.*

cordia to men, in its joy to be released, and to God, in its tears. The *Vita Epifani* provides some interesting comparative material. One of its central episodes is a description of Epifanius' embassy to Gundobad to redeem Ligurian captives taken by the Burgundians. *Clementia* and *misericordia* are the *Leitmotifs* of Epifanius' speech. Theodoric begs a favour *miseriquiditer*, out of pity for the Ligurians, and Gundobad is to grant it through his clemency.¹²⁰ Tears are part of the response of the captives as they return.¹²¹ Tears of joy are mentioned by Epifanius: *monstrant lacrimae gaudiorum, quas dolorum alumnas nunc parturit exultatio*.¹²² And tears move Laconius, Gundobad's counsellor to pity.¹²³ Tears are very much part of the aftermath of a ransoming.

Clovis and the ransoming of prisoners

As we have seen, Avitus was interested in the ransoming of captives. But the topic also comes up on various occasions in letters written to, or by, Clovis. Long before his conversion, Bishop Remigius had urged Clovis to use his wealth to ransom prisoners, when he wrote to him on the occasion of his taking charge in Belgica Secunda.¹²⁴ And after the war of 507, in his letter to the Aquitainian bishops Clovis himself addressed the plight of those who had been taken prisoner. The beginning of this letter specifically deals with ecclesiastics who suffered the *vis captivitatis*.¹²⁵ They had supposedly been immune to this outrage. Clovis then goes on to discuss lay people who were taken captive *extra pace*, presumably in battle. They are to be released, provided their bishops vouch for them.¹²⁶ The third category of captive seems to include both clerics and lay people abducted *in pace nostra*.¹²⁷ Who were these *captivi*? Given that they are under the protection of Catholic bishops (*apostolica sede dignissimis*), we must assume that they are Gallo-Romans from Visigothic territory.¹²⁸

¹²⁰ VE 155: *si quod ille misericquiditer postulat, tu clementer accomodes*. Also VE 157: *animi tui clementia* and VE 162: *Parum enim gratiae impendimus illius imperio, cuius misericquidiae nil debemus*.

¹²¹ VE 175: *et pro mactandorum sanguine terram madefieri lacrimis exultantium*.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 142–3.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 169: *cuius te precibus fuisse permotum, cum apud nos verba faceret, animorum indices lacrimae testabantur*.

¹²⁴ Ep. Austrasiacae 2.3: *Paternas quascunque opes possides, captivos exinde liberabis et a iugo servitutis absolvas*.

¹²⁵ *Cblodowici regis ad episcopos epistola*, ed. A. Boretius, *MGH, Capitularia Regum Francorum* (Hanover, 1883), pp. 1–2.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, *De caeteris quidem captivis laicis qui extra pace sunt captivati et fuerint adprobati, apostolia cui volueritis arbitrii vestri est non negandum*.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, *Nam de his qui in pace nostra tam clerici quam laici subrepti fuissent . . .*

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, *Enuntiante fama quod actum fuerit vel praeceptum omni exercitui nostro, priusquam in patriam Gotorum ingrederemur, beatitudini vestrae praeterire non potuit*.

Clovis gives assurance that episcopal *apostolia* will be honoured, but ends the letter with what almost looks like a warning: *Sic tamen populus noster petit, ut cuicumque epistulas vestras praestare fueritis dignati cum sacramentum per Deum et benedictione vestra dicere non tardetis, rem istam quae poscitur veram esse: quia multorum varietates vel falsitates inventae sunt ut compraehendatur, sicut scriptum est: 'Perit iustus cum impio.'* The quotation from Genesis XVIII.23 is ominous, since it suggests that captives might be subject, not just to servitude, but to death.¹²⁹ Clovis acknowledges that he had promised protection to Catholic ecclesiastics, but that his armies had not observed his orders. There is no apology or justification: 'qui s'excuse, s'accuse'. Instead he simply says that he will honour Catholic bishops' letters of intercession for their parishioners, but that they must be properly authenticated with personal seals. Since the bishops are warned to make sure that they vouch for captives in good faith, and since Clovis explicitly speaks of *multorum varietates vel falsitates*, it is clear that there was no general amnesty. Some people (and some bishops, no doubt) were doctoring their documents, and Clovis was not having any of that.

While Clovis' letter cannot be dated precisely (it must be later than summer 507 and the battle of Vogliacum, and before 511, Clovis' death), it seems most reasonable to place it in the immediate aftermath of the war, say in 508.¹³⁰ Clearly a large number of Gallo-Romans had been captured, some legitimately, some not.

Von den Steinen had suggested that the *populus captivus* of Avitus' letter were Gallo-Roman inhabitants of Bordeaux, taken by Clovis in 498.¹³¹ Now while theoretically there were a number of occasions on which Clovis could have taken Christian prisoners, we lack specific evidence. Avitus *could*, for example, have been alluding to some act of mercy of Clovis' that affected Burgundian captives taken in 500–1. He would have had an interest in such people. But we are at the mercy of the surviving sources, and there is no concrete evidence – hence no license for reconstructing an allusion to an otherwise unattested event. All we can do is look for evidence of Christian prisoners whose freeing is *attested* in contemporary primary sources.

I would suggest that Avitus' *populus captivus* refers specifically to Catholic Gallo-Romans taken captive during the wars of 507–8. The situation is a very precise one, and one that is attested in Clovis' letter to the Aquitainian bishops. Clovis' letter might be read as background to

¹²⁹ Ennodius claims that the Burgundians killed prisoners who comported themselves with excessive pride. See *VE* 161.

¹³⁰ Daly, 'Clovis', p. 645.

¹³¹ Von den Steinen, 'Chlodwigs', pp. 498 and 476, n. 1. He cites the *Auct. Hauniense* s.a. 498 in *MGH AA IX* (Munich, 1892), p. 331.

Avitus. A bishop, well known to have been involved in freeing captives himself, thanks a king, who had recently been prickly on the subject, for his concessions to Catholics in distress. Avitus had a cousin, Apollinaris (and other close kinsmen), living in Visigothic territory, and he frequently exhibited concern about his political peril.¹³² Romans from the Auvergne, including Apollinaris, had fought alongside the Visigoths at Vogliacum, and were hence subject to Clovis' wrath.¹³³ Avitus may well have had a personal, in addition to a professional, interest in Roman prisoners taken by the Franks in 507–8. Since Gundobad and Clovis were allies, he was in a good position to intercede. Interestingly enough, in a letter that must immediately post-date the death of Alaric II, Avitus sends his brother, Apollinaris of Valence, detailed instructions regarding the fashioning of an episcopal signet ring.¹³⁴ Dare one hazard a guess that his personal seal may have been frequently required on documents regarding prisoners in the wake of the wars of 507–8?

Populus would have to be understood in a more restricted sense, not as a nation or totality of a population or tribe, but as a collective noun used for a large number of people who had been captured. We do not know for certain how many prisoners were taken during the war of 507, but Ennodius' *Vita Epifani* provides some comparative material to show how many captives *could* be taken in a single invasion, and what sort of inflammatory rhetoric was used to amplify the magnitude of the disaster. At VE 138 Ennodius speaks of *universa Italiae loca originariis viduata cultoribus* and at VE 157 he trots out a prosopopoeia of the whole country. Yet VE 138 and 162 paint a desolate picture of the fields of Liguria *alone*, and in fact it was only there that the Burgundians had made their incursions. When the captives are graciously freed by Gundobad at VE 171 the numbers who left are said to make the rural areas of Gaul seem empty.¹³⁵ On their march back, they are described as *tantae liberatorum falanges*.¹³⁶ The figures quoted are 400 captives from Lyons and more than 6,000 altogether.¹³⁷

Avitus in Vienne and Aeonius and Caesarius in Arles had been disputing the primacy of the Gauls,¹³⁸ and one wonders whether Caesarius' ransomings were not part of a more complicated series of episcopal displays of charity that began with Avitus in 495 and continued with Avitus supplicating Clovis on behalf of Gallo-Romans from

¹³² *Epp.* 24, 36, 51 and 52.

¹³³ *DLH* 2.37.

¹³⁴ *Ep.* 87.

¹³⁵ VE 171: *Tanta istius iam liberae multitudinis frequentia subito adstitit, ut desolata crederes esse etiam incolis rura Gallorum.*

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 175.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 172: *Plus quam sex milia animarum.* Others escaped.

¹³⁸ L. Duchesne, *Fastes épiscopaux de l'ancienne Gaul*, (3 vols, Paris 1907), I.134–6.

Aquitaine in 507–8. After 510 Avitus was negotiating the liberation of Ostrogothic captives in Burgundian territory on behalf of Liberius and Gemellus, and generously refusing to accept ransom payments.¹³⁹ Avitus wrote to Maximus of Pavia, in the wake of Burgundian-Ostrogothic hostilities, thanked him for his kindness to Gallic captives, and asked him to help negotiate the release of a hostage, Avulus.¹⁴⁰ Thus Avitus seems to have set himself up as a counsellor to supplement or compete with St Remigius. He congratulates Clovis on his baptism (while carefully avoiding *any* allusion to his brother bishop)¹⁴¹ and encourages him in acts of mercy and evangelization.

Three things are at issue here: Clovis' clemency, Avitus' interest in the ransoming of captives (perhaps his personal interest in these particular captives) and – behind all of this – a *terminus post quem* for Clovis' baptism. His baptism (though not necessarily, I emphasize, his conversion)¹⁴² must post-date the freeing of the *populus captivus*. If these are indeed Catholic Gallo-Romans taken prisoner by the Franks in Visigothic territory, then the baptism occurred after 507.

Gregory of Tours and Clovis' battle against the Alamanni

In textual criticism there is an axiom that codices must be weighed, not counted.¹⁴³ The same should apply *mutatis mutandis* to historical sources. Daly draws a distinction between 'primary' and 'secondary' sources in a way that makes it clear that to him 'primary' means above all 'contemporary', and 'secondary' means 'later'.¹⁴⁴ But it is not merely the fact that Gregory is later that diminishes his value: later sources can draw on highly accurate earlier ones.¹⁴⁵ Gregory's work is, whether one likes it or not, a non-documentary literary text. However much pomp and rhetoric went into Avitus' letter, it remains a document,¹⁴⁶ not the product of research or imagination alone, but of an occasion. It is firmly anchored to a known recipient. This is to say that when one considers

¹³⁹ See Avitus, ed. Peiper, *Ep.* 35, esp. 65.30 *pretio tamen, quod portitores adtulerant, non recepto*.

¹⁴⁰ Avitus, *Ep.* 12.

¹⁴¹ See Vogel, 'Chlodwigs Sieg', pp. 397–8 who rightly points to the influence of the Remigius-legend on Gregory.

¹⁴² For this important distinction, see Wood, 'Gregory of Tours', p. 270.

¹⁴³ *Ponderandi non numerandi*.

¹⁴⁴ Daly, 'Clovis', p. 619 'My purpose in what follows is to draw attention to what early sources can offer on their own, individually and as a group.' Wood, 'Gregory of Tours', p. 250.

¹⁴⁵ Gregory had sources too, of course. See Von den Steinen, 'Chlodwigs', pp. 421–3.

¹⁴⁶ Albeit a transmitted one: a commemorative inscription on stone would be a good example of a non-transmitted documentary text.

the possibilities for error, and the degree and the nature of the lying¹⁴⁷ possible whether for Gregory writing well after Clovis' death or for Avitus writing directly to Clovis at the time of his baptism, it is clear that for most matters Avitus is the more reliable source.

Gregory can be convincingly shown to introduce Biblical typology into his narrative,¹⁴⁸ to model events on earlier historical events (and tell us so too, as is the case with Constantine and Clovis¹⁴⁹), and to have had considerable difficulties in calculating dates.¹⁵⁰ Much has been made of the fact that Gregory places Clovis' Alamannic victory *before* his conversion, and there has been much discussion of how many Alamannic victories there were.¹⁵¹

In 1898 Wilhelm Levison, following Hauck,¹⁵² drew attention to two spools of material in Gregory's account of Clovis' conversion. The one attributes the process of conversion to Clotilde's persistence, the other (one could call it the Constantinian typological account) to a miracle during the battle against the Alemanni.¹⁵³ Levison adduced the letter of Nicetius of Trier as close-to-contemporary evidence that, though it mentions victories against Gundobad and Alaric as consequences of conversion, says nothing about any battle against the Alemanni in connection with the conversion.¹⁵⁴ Nicetius' letter supports the 'Clotilde-spool' in Gregory's account, and *ex silentio* discredits the 'Constantinian spool'. There are thus sound source-critical arguments for discarding the chronological link between the battle against the Alemanni and the conversion.

But for those who still persist in believing Gregory's chronology (battle against the Alamanni—conversion—baptism—Burgundian war, and so on), I should like to draw attention to a simple detail in the passage where Gregory mentions Clovis' battle against the Alamanni. An accurate interpretation of this passage has considerable importance both

¹⁴⁷ Von den Steinen, 'Chlodwigs', p. 420 draws a false dichotomy between 'Wissen oder Falschwissen', and tells us that Gregory 'will ... nicht irgend etwas erzählen, sondern ... wie es seines Wissens gewesen ist.' Distortion, deliberate or otherwise, must always be taken into account.

¹⁴⁸ See *DLH* 2.31 *tria milia* and Acts II.41.

¹⁴⁹ See *DLH* 2.31; Eusebius, *Vita Constantini* 1.27 ff.; Vogel, 'Chlodwigs Sieg', p. 383; G. Monod, *Études critiques sur les sources de l'histoire mérovingienne* (Paris, 1872), p. 77.

¹⁵⁰ See Wood, 'Gregory of Tours', p. 254 for Gregory's evident difficulties in working out Clovis' death-date.

¹⁵¹ Van de Vyver, 'La victoire' II (1937), pp. 45–58; Weiss, *Chlodwigs Taufe*, pp. 23–32.

¹⁵² Levison cited A. Hauck, *Kirchengeschichte Deutschlands* (2nd edn, 1904), I, 595–9. I have been unable to obtain that edition, but the passage referred to is probably the same as A. Hauck, *Kirchengeschichte Deutschlands* (Leipzig, 1887), I, 107–9, esp. p. 108, n.2 which has an account of the two strands of material in Gregory of Tours. This note seems to have been removed from the 1922 edition of Hauck (pp. 106–7).

¹⁵³ W. Levison, 'Zur Geschichte', pp. 55–6.

¹⁵⁴ Levison, 'Zur Geschichte', p. 57.

for our assessment of the chronology implied by Gregory's text and for our belief in at least one of the much-vaunted quinquennial dates that appear in only some manuscripts of the *DLH*.¹⁵⁵

Regina vero non cessabat praedicare, ut deum cognosceret, et idola neglegerit. Sed nullo modo ad haec credenda poterat commoveri, donec tandem aliquando bellum contra Alamannos commoveretur, in quo compulsus est confiteri necessitate, quod prius voluntate negaverat. Factum est autem, ut confligente utroque exercitu, vehementer caederentur... (*DLH*, 2.30)

Queen Clotild continued to pray that her husband might recognize the true God and give up his idol-worship. Nothing could persuade him to accept Christianity. Finally war broke out against the Alamanni and in this conflict he was forced by necessity to accept what he had refused of his own free will. It turned out that when the two armies met on the battlefield there was great slaughter... (trans L. Thorpe, Harmondsworth, 1974)

A small, but important word has been neglected both by Thorpe and by others:¹⁵⁶ the adverb *aliquando*. A crude, but more accurate translation of the passage would be: 'The queen did not give up trying to preach and to convince [him] to recognize God and abandon idols, but it was impossible to move [him] to believe in these things, until, finally, **at some time or other**, war was started against the Alamanns.' O.M. Dalton's version is far more accurate, but its old-fashioned style may puzzle some modern readers: 'Now the queen without ceasing urged the king to confess the true God, and forsake his idols; but in no wise could she move him to this belief until at length he made war **upon a time** against the Alamanni.'

Nothing could be more damaging than that *aliquando*, 'some time or other'. Gregory is telling us very clearly that *he did not know when the battle against the Alamanni took place*, that is he did not know its absolute chronology. And if he did not know its absolute chronology, what reason is there to trust his relative chronology (Alamannic battle—conversion—campaign against Gundobad), reeking of pious *imitatio Constantini*, as it does? Furthermore, the presence of the deliberately vague *aliquando* is a strong argument against the authenticity of the

¹⁵⁵ See Levison, 'Zur Geschichte', p. 50.

¹⁵⁶ E.g. Von den Steinen, 'Chlodwigs', p. 426: 'erst als der Alamannenkrieg ausbrach'. One need hardly say that the presence of *aliquando* undoes Von den Steinen's reconstruction (followed by Levillain, 'La conversion', p. 167) of the Alamannen-Krieg narrative as the eye-witness account of the aging Chrotechildis, narrated to Gregory! Thorpe's translation is taken from *Gregory of Tours, History of the Franks*, trans. L. Thorpe (Harmondsworth, 1974), p. 143. Dalton's translation is from *Gregory of Tours, History of the Franks*, ed. and trans. O.M. Dalton (Oxford, 1972), p. 68.

quinquennial dates in the *DLH*.¹⁵⁷ The Gregorian *aliquando* directly contradicts *actum anno 15 regni sui* in *DLH* 2.30.¹⁵⁸ Here again are further grounds for no preferring non-documentary sources to documentary ones.

Cassiodorus' *Variae* 2.41 to Clovis that must date to 506 – early 507 at the latest shows that there had been a very recent victory against the Alamanni in which their king was killed. One simply does not send diplomatic letters of congratulation to fellow-kings on battles that they won *eleven years before*. Nothing could be clearer than the phrase *nova proelia* at the beginning of the letter.¹⁵⁹

The battle in which the Alamannic king was killed has traditionally generated a *terminus post quem* for the chronology of Clovis' conversion. Gregory of Tours connects the conversion with the battle; therefore it must have occurred after the battle. All exponents of an early date of baptism have to try to explain away *Variae* 2.41, arguing that the letter is very early,¹⁶⁰ that the victory mentioned need not be recent,¹⁶¹ or else that there were several Alamannic battles,¹⁶² and that either Gregory¹⁶³ or Cassiodorus is confused about which battle the Alamannic battle mentioned by Cassiodorus, which must date to 506 at the earliest, need not be the same as the battle that was the scene of Clovis' conversion.

The dilemma is stark. Those who want to hold on to Gregory's battlefield conversion must accept a later date of baptism: *Variae* 2.41 shows that the battle occurred shortly before spring 507, probably late in the campaigning season in 506.¹⁶⁴ Three independent sources mention the

¹⁵⁷ For more on this problem see Levison, 'Zur Geschichte', pp. 45–50. Kurth, *Études franques* (2 vols, Paris and Brussels 1919), II.213 thought that the dates came from annals of Tours.

¹⁵⁸ Krusch (*MGH Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum* I (Hanover, 1884), p. 76 n. 2) rightly brackets the words citing Bonnet; see also B. Krusch, 'Chlodovechs Taufe in Tours 507 und die Legende Gregors von Tours (Reims 496)', *Neues Archiv der Gesellschaft für ältere deutsche Geschichtskunde* 49 (1932), 457–69, at 465.

¹⁵⁹ *Variae* 2.41.1: *gratulamur quod gentem Francorum ... in nova proelia concitastis et Alamannicos populos ... subdidistis*. The combination of tenses, present and present perfect, makes it absolutely clear that the battle is an action that was recently completed – in present time. Pace Levillain, 'La conversion', pp. 176–7 and W. Levison, 'Zur Geschichte', p. 50. Van de Vyver 'La victoire' II (1937), p. 49 rightly takes *nova* in an adverbial sense.

¹⁶⁰ This is implicitly the position of W. Junghans, *Kritische Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der fränkischen Könige Childerich und Chlodovich* (Göttingen, 1857), pp. 41 and 74 where he states that Theodoric had seen the problem coming for a long time.

¹⁶¹ See Van de Vyver, 'La victoire' I (1936), p. 861.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 860.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 867.

¹⁶⁴ Vogel, 'Chlodwigs Sieg', p. 391 and 401. He puts the battle in the first half of 506. C. Tanzi, 'Studio sulla cronologia dei libri 'Variarum' di Cassiodoro Senatore', *Archeografo Triestino*, n.s. 13 (1887), pp. 1–36, at p. 34, had seen the problem long ago, when he weighed Gregory's evidence against Cassiodorus. Gregory's chronology is off. For further discussion of the chronology of Cassiodorus' diplomatic letters related to the Franco-Visigothic war see my 'Two Clocks and a Wedding: Theodoric's Diplomatic Relations with the Burgundians', forthcoming in *Romanobarbarica*.

death of the Alemannic king, as an identifying mark, so the *onus probandi* is on those who want to claim that these are two different battles.¹⁶⁵ The French have celebrated Clovis' baptism prematurely. Could they forgo a Clovis who, like Christ, was baptized in his 30th year?¹⁶⁶ Those prepared to give up Gregory's tale of a battlefield conversion in light of the evidence that Gregory did not know when the battle was in absolute terms (and may not have known its chronology in relation to other events), can then uncouple the conversion and the battle:¹⁶⁷ there is then no *terminus post quem* for Clovis' conversion other than the freeing of the *populus captivus* mentioned in Avitus, *Ep.* 46.

Finally I should like briefly to explore some of the implications of these findings for the relationship between Clovis and Avitus. Not surprisingly, perhaps, this Clovis begins to look a great deal more like Gundobad. Less the rough-and-ready pagan and splitter of skulls than someone with mental *acrimonia*, someone whom Arians have worked on for a while, and someone who both receives letters from bishops, and sends them. In drawing such a Clovis, I part company with Gibbon who stated, 'But the savage conqueror of Gaul was incapable of examining the proofs of a religion which depends on the laborious investigation of historic evidence and speculative theology.'¹⁶⁸ Even more important is that Clovis deals with extra-territorial bishops. In *Ep.* 46, 75.25–8 Avitus states that he has received a letter from Clovis announcing his intention to be baptized. Later on in the same letter (76.6) he alludes to the *humilitas* the king has long (*iam dudum*) shown him in his service (*devotio*). Clearly there had been correspondence for some time, perhaps even an encounter.

Epistle 46 of Avitus still needs further elucidation: what were the occasions that led to contact between Clovis and Avitus? Was Remigius, despite his famous eloquence,¹⁶⁹ not doing an adequate job as a spokesman for Catholicism?¹⁷⁰ Was this why Clovis went beyond his

¹⁶⁵ See Vogel, 'Chlodwigs Sieg', p. 388. Ennodius, *Panegyricus* 72: *Cui evenit habere regem, postquam meruit perdidisse; Variarum* 2.41 2: *sufficiat illum regem cum gentis cecidisse superbia*. Even L. Schmidt concedes this point, see *Geschichte der deutschen Stämme* 2 (Berlin, 1915), pp. 296–7. Spencer, 'Dating the Baptism', p. 116, obfuscates the issue in claiming that the two Alaman battles are 'very differently described'. The salient feature, that the Alaman king was killed, is common to both.

¹⁶⁶ For the suggestion that the date was mystical see G. Tessier, *Le Baptême de Clovis* (Paris, 1964), p. 82. Also C. Grell, 'Clovis du grand siècle aux lumières', *Bibliothèque de l'École des Chartes* 154 (1996), pp. 173–218, at p. 196.

¹⁶⁷ Vogel, 'Chlodwigs Sieg', pp. 394–5, even though he argues for a late date for the battle (506), wishes to couple battle and conversion, for he believed that the *populus captivus* in Avitus, *Ep.* 46 was the Alamanni. See above p. 43.

¹⁶⁸ Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (New York, 1932), vol. II. 391.

¹⁶⁹ See Sidonius, *Ep.* 9.7.

¹⁷⁰ Note how Avitus fails to mention him at all, and implies, with an allusion to Romans, that Clovis has been converted *sine praedicatorum*. See above, n. 94.

territories to consult a Burgundian bishop? Or did Avitus spontaneously make contact with Clovis and try to convert him? Was he working on Lenticildis too?¹⁷¹ Did Avitus meet Clovis in the course of the negotiations following the Franco-Burgundian war of 500–1 – perhaps in connection with the ransoming of captives?¹⁷² Or was Avitus the marriage-broker for the Catholic Chrotechildis? He seems to have been involved in planning a foreign marriage for an anonymous daughter of Gundobad's who died prematurely after 501.¹⁷³ If Clovis married Chrotechildis late (i.e. after 501),¹⁷⁴ it is quite possible, as Van de Vyver suggested, that he had been promised this girl first.¹⁷⁵ Indeed, Clovis is really the only likely candidate as a prospective son-in-law for Gundobad shortly after 501. Theodoric was already married to Audofledis, and had no male heirs. Although Gundobad might have wanted to repay the Visigoths for sheltering him against Clovis, Alaric II had married Theodegotha.¹⁷⁶ Thrasamund was married to Amalafriada. The Warni, Heruli, and Thuringians were allies of Alaric's.¹⁷⁷ If Avitus had been involved in trying to marry Gundobad's anonymous daughter to Clovis, then we have a meaningful context for Clovis' and the bishop of Vienne's relationship, and specifically for Avitus' interest in the king's *religiosus* beliefs. Any reconstruction of such events must of necessity be tentative and conjectural, but Avitus' *Ep.* 46 still raises questions that should be asked – and some answers can be essayed.

My re-examination of these four problematic passages has led to the following conclusions. First, that Clovis was not a pagan, but an Arian catechumen, or at least closely influenced by Arians at the time of his conversion. This is obviously something that French historians might prefer not to highlight: an Arianizing Clovis looks just like the other barbarian kings. He ceases to be a pagan *unicum* – the Frank who saw the light. Second, there is no allusion to Clovis' honorary consulate in

¹⁷¹ See above, n. 31.

¹⁷² Gundobad exiled Frankish captives to Toulouse. See *DLH* 2.33.

¹⁷³ The girl died before her marriage to an external *rex*. *Ep.* 5 is a consolation-letter written by Avitus to Gundobad. He implies that he (Avitus) needed consolation for the girl's death, and that his rivals would have had reason to exult over his failure, had the girl died immediately after her marriage, rather than before it.

¹⁷⁴ See Weiss *Chlodwigs Taufe* pp. 44 and 53.

¹⁷⁵ The suggestion was made tentatively by A. Van de Vyver, 'Clovis et la politique méditerranéenne', in *Recueil d'Études dédiées à la mémoire de H. Pirenne* (Bruxelles 1937), pp. 367–87, at pp. 375–6. Followed by Weiss, *Chlodwigs Taufe* p. 41–2.

¹⁷⁶ J. Moorhead, *Theodoric in Italy* (Oxford, 1992), p. 52, dates the marriage to the early 490s. It may have been connected to the help against Odoacer, extended to Theodoric by the Visigoths. See Jordanes, *Getica*, in *Jordanis Romana et Getica*, *MGH, AA V,1* (Berlin, 1882), pp. 297–8; *Bellum Gothicum*, in Procopius, *Opera Omnia*, ed. J. Haury, vol. 2 (4 vols, Leipzig, 1963), 12.22.43; *Anonymus Valesianus*, ed. V. Gardthausen, in *Ammiani Marcellini rerum gestarum quae supersunt*, vol. 2 (2 vols, Stuttgart, 1966), 12.63 (who reverses the daughters).

¹⁷⁷ Cassiodorus, *Variae* 3.3.3.

Avitus, *Ep.* 46, 75.17, so that that passage does not provide a later *terminus post quem* of 508 for the baptism. Third, the allusion to the freeing of a *populus captivus* is most plausibly connected with Aquitanian prisoners from the war of 507–8. It suggests a late date for the baptism: Christmas 508. Fourth, Gregory of Tours did not know when precisely Clovis had fought against the Alamanni and killed their king.

‘L’histoire des lectures de Grégoire de Tours reste encore à écrire.’¹⁷⁸ Meanwhile the tradition of defending him persists. This has something to do with his style. He is long, selectively detailed, memorable, vivid, and, above all, *there*. Like Tacitus and Ammianus, he is a historian who impinges on his readers’ imaginations and takes them over: one *wants* to believe the man – it seems *so* much easier that way. But to do so would often be a mistake. Time and time again, both his chronology and his facts have been seriously called into question.

Gregory is lively and gripping.¹⁷⁹ He writes a curious sort of Vulgar Latin that lends him a certain folksy respectability or authenticity. This tempts scholars to see him as someone who is part of an oral tradition – one that can conveniently be traced to important actors in events of the beginning of the sixth century.¹⁸⁰ He writes ‘bad’ or ‘naive’ Latin. Therefore there is no art here. ‘Therefore the man is telling the truth,’ goes the faulty syllogism.¹⁸¹

Because he writes Vulgar Latin, classicists rarely study Gregory. This is a pity. In the nineteenth century German medieval historians could still recognize a glaring literary topos when they saw one and treat it accordingly. Yet many scholars still persist in labelling obvious literary inventions as ‘oral folk tradition’ or ‘eye-witness accounts.’¹⁸² According to Grell, French scholars treat the sources for the French monarchy with ‘une curieuse absence de sens critique et une hypertrophie d’interprétation.’¹⁸³ She has put her finger on something *very important* about the way Gregory is handled. I would state my supposition even more provo-

¹⁷⁸ Grell, ‘Clovis,’ p. 177.

¹⁷⁹ Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis* [the *Representation of Reality in Western Literature*] (Princeton, 1974), p. 87, draws our attention to horse-urine and on pp. 94–5 discusses the ‘everyday reality’ and ‘reawakening sensory apprehension of things and events’ in Gregory’s work. He fails to discuss any of Gregory’s sources or spoils of material.

¹⁸⁰ For the trickledown of this idea see Auerbach, *Mimesis* pp. 85 and 95.

¹⁸¹ I was delighted to see that Grell (‘Clovis,’ p. 180) shares my views precisely: ‘les défauts de Grégoire deviennent ses qualités . . . Les érudits supposent qu’en ces temps frustes et sauvages, les historiens ignoraient le mensonge et la dissimulation.’

¹⁸² A textbook example is the treatment of Clotilde’s sermon to Clovis in *DLH* 2.29. Gibbon saw the problem, see *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (New York, 1932), II, 389 n. 25. Yet Rouche, despite his better instincts, is *still* defending this preposterous literary pastiche, which clearly has a *written* source, as oral tradition. See Rouche, *Clovis*, pp. 260–1.

¹⁸³ Grell, ‘Clovis,’ p. 179.

catively: since Gregory is a 'foundation text', he is treated as if he were the Bible. One attempts to make sense of it. One explains away glaring discrepancies. One assumes that it is not subject to the constraints of transmission that other texts are, that is, that it does not have a textual criticism. It has a higher status. It 'trumps' other texts. One cannot add or subtract from it – after all Gregory had said so himself. (*DLH*, 10.18)¹⁸⁴

The date of Clovis' major victory against the Alamanni and his baptism is yet another case in point. Something had to 'give', and it turned out to be Gregory. This should be kept in mind, and we should be less willing to perform historiographical contortions merely to justify Gregory – even if he became 'père de l'Histoire de France.'¹⁸⁵ Only Louis Halphen dared to pose 'cette question sacrilège,' 'Grégoire mérite-t-il vraiment créance?,' and reply in the negative.¹⁸⁶ The father of French history, whatever his intentions, became for Halphen the father of lies, and he concluded that 'Se figurer qu'il est possible d'évoquer à l'aide de Grégoire de Tours la société franque au temps de Clovis est une dangereuse illusion.'¹⁸⁷ Few will go that far in throwing out the baby with the bathwater. But I suspect that Gregory is probably more reliable when *overheard* than when *listened to* – when he is inadvertently disclosing some significant *realia* than when he is preaching on the Franco-Visigothic war.¹⁸⁸ The contemporary epistolographic sources, Cassiodorus and Avitus, are more trustworthy, and should be accorded pride of place. To turn from Clovis to Avitus: I hope to have brought into relief the connections between various important issues in *Ep.* 46 and the bishop of Vienne's known career and interests – notably the ransoming of captives – and also to have made some conjectures, however tentative, about the origins of Clovis' and Avitus' correspondence.¹⁸⁹

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¹⁸⁴ The parallel with Revelation XXII.18–19 is clear.

¹⁸⁵ Claude Fauchet, *Oeuvres* vol. 1, f. 147v (Paris, 1610). Fauchet's endorsement was qualified: what he actually said was '*Toutesfois tel qu'il est, il le faut appeller Pere de nostre histoire.*' *No one* however, cites Fauchet's complete sentence. Gregory became an authority. G. Monod, *Études critiques sur les sources de l'histoire mérovingienne* (Paris, 1872), p. 58, points out that Gregory was the first Latin historian of the Middle Ages to be printed in France (in 1522).

¹⁸⁶ L. Halphen, 'Grégoire de Tours: historien de Clovis', in *Mélanges d'histoire du moyen âge offerts à M. Ferdinand Lot* (Paris 1925), pp. 235–44 at p. 235. Krusch is ridiculed by Kurth (*Études franques*, II.240) for suggesting that Gregory invented the story of Clovis' baptism.

¹⁸⁷ Halphen, 'Grégoire de Tours', pp. 243–4.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 238–40 points out Gregory's anti-Arianism.

¹⁸⁹ Although this piece is an offshoot of a collaborative project with Ian Wood to translate and annotate the *Epistles* of Avitus of Vienne, the opinions expressed represent my point of view about the texts under discussion. On many of these matters Wood and I agree; on others – as is the wont of philologists and historians – we do not. But I gratefully acknowledge my many e-mail discussions with my collaborator, his exceptional expertise in this area, and his kindness in allowing me to bounce ideas off him. I would also like to thank Professor Staubach and Professor Noble for their helpful criticism of a draft of this paper and Roger Tomlin for his generosity in tracking down material in Valesius and in Fauchet for me.