The Merovingian Archaeology of South-West Gaul

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p.1

"Apart from the brief blaze of glory in the late fourth and fifth centuries, with the flourishing of the Bordeaux schools and the reign of the Visigothic kings, south-west Gaul is very much a terra incognita from the time of Caesar's conquest down to the emergence of Romanesque architecture and the poetry of the troubadours. It is usually on the periphery of affairs, it nourished no authors of importance save in that one period of a hundred years, and it has attracted few historians in modern times. General histories of western Europe or of Gaul itself usually mention it only in asides. Yet the suspicion must arise that it was an area of great importance – in the preservation of classical traditions, and in the development of the feudal world. Clearly a crucial period in its history was the three hundred and fifty years separating its secession from the Roman Empire and its incorporation into what was to become the Carolingian Empire. For much of that time south-west Gaul was not under the domination of a power situated beyond the Loire or the Rhône, but was free to develop its own institutions and its own way of life."

*make sure to define “Gaul” and southwest France*

Southwest France of Julius Caesar included Roman province of Narbonensis (heavily Romanised) Celts and Aquitani *while Caesar famously states that all of Gaul was divided into three parts, actually five parts including 2 Roman provinces*

Narbonensis=Mediterranean littoral

Celtae=land between Garonne and Seine and Marne (broder with Belgae)

Aquitani=land between Garonne, Atlantic, and Pyrenees=modern day Gascony

Aquitani noted for connection with Iberian peninsula (Strabo remarked on resemblance of pop, and name reminiscent of names south of Pyrenees)

as early as Bronze Age cultural similarities between Aquitani region and Spain (Hallstatt culture continues here and in Spain long after La Tene culture begins to the north)

may not have been the Garonne that was the boundary but the alluvial deposits on the left bank which supported dense forests

these “divisions” not maintained by Augusts who gave the name Aquitania to the area between the Loire and the Pyrenees

Augustan province described by Orosius as Loire boundary, west Spain, nort/east Lugdunum, SE/S Narbo

in 3rd c reorganized=modern day Gascony became Novempopulana, what remained became Aquitanica I and II

seems to have been many different uses of the term Aquitania

Council of Arles (314) refers to 1/3 of Gaul along with Gallia and Viennensis

elsewhere Aquitanica I and II, w/ Novempopulana and Narbonenesis I

Ammianus Marcellinus uses it to describe the Dioceses of Seven Provinces

Aquitaine has a continued muddied history of usage through Middle Ages down to 13th century revival as Guienne

little known about SW gaul from literary sources

Garonne valley quick to adopt Roman fashions and tradition

capitals at Saintes, then Bordeaux

towns show greatest amount of Romanization (92% of names in Perigueux Roman)

highland zones show greatest resistance (Pyrenees and Massif Central)

also difference between twon and country within bourgs

great deal of regional variation in Romanization throughout SW Gaul

Salvian states that SW Gaul one of the most prosperous and fertile regions in the late Roman period (writing during a time when SW was likely land of the large landowner)

school of Bordeaux has cultural importance during time of Sulpicius Severus

all indications suggest only Garonne and Loire valleys heavily settled in th Roman and Merovingian period

Saxon raiding along coasts of Aquitanica II by 5th century

Visigoths settled in Garonne valley between Bordeaux and Toulouse in 418=Aquitanica II and some neighboring civitates (probably Toulouse and
Novempopulana

once settled relations seemed to vacillate between hostility and military assistance perhaps due to internal struggles amongst the Visigoths between pro-Roman and anti-Roman factions

Euric killed Theodoric II often argued to be because of Theodoric's reputation as savior of Roman race but may also be because Euric could provide protection to SW landowners that they felt the frequent changes in Emperors could not Euric conquered to the Loire by 480 and then beyond to Rhone

Also conquered up to Alps, Provence, Auvergne, and Upper Spain although the actual extent of occupation and influence in these areas likely varied and is not fleshed out

law codes first written under Euric and continued up to Alaric II

lots of attention paid to conflicts between Arians and Catholics (Goths and Romans) under Alaric but probably conflicts of local character

"...it is dangerous to follow Gregory and assume that religion played a large part in the campaigns of Clovis in south-west Gaul" 8-9

Franks capture Bordeaux in 496

Franks capture Vouillé in 507

509 Clovis captures Toulouse from Alaric

Narbonne Visigothic capital from 508-531

Gothic territory in Gaul known as Septimania (historians), Gothia (Franks), Gallia (Visigoths)

While Gregory of Tours remarks that many Gothic invasions happened after Clovis' death but it is unclear the nature and extent of these "reconquests"

“There is thus little hard evidence to support Wallace-Hadrill's claim that “Aquitaine was finally secured from the Visigoths at the cost of campaigning that lasted till the middle of the sixth century”. There is merely evidence that until this time the border between the Goths and the Franks fluctuated.” 9

"It is clear that for most of the sixth century a large part of south-west Gaul escaped effective royal control; the extent of this ineffectiveness is seen in the number of revolts whose centre was in the south-west.” 11

532 Arcadius revolts against Theuderic in Auvergne

Chramnus revolts against Clothar I

Gundovald revolted against Desiderius at Brives-la-Gaillard

“This tendency to rebellion was as much a result of distance from the centres of royal power as of dislike of Merovingian rule.” 11

center of Merovingian interest to the north only Dagobert I of the Merovingian kings resided anytime in southwest and that was only briefly

“...The Frankish kings seem to have been content to leave the administration of the church and the kingdom in the hands of the local Gallo-Roman aristocracy, to an even greater extent than elsewhere in Gaul.” 11

Gregory of Tours knew little about Novempopulana

south-west broke away from royal control in the seventh century because Merovingsians failed to realize military importance of Pyrenean frontier lots of confusing terminology make this area difficult to parse out Vasconia could be Gascony or homeland of Basques in Pyrenees; Vasconia can refer to Novempopulana or whole of Aquitaine

shifting meaning of the term Aquitania

Wascones from Pyrenees play important role in 7th-8th history of SW Gaul but it is unclear who they actually are sixth c. Novempopulana theoretically divided between Austrasia and Burgundy

10c source Miracles of St. Martial of Limoges

church council between 662-675 gives impression that ideals of clergy and laity in SW Gaul closely intermingled

717 Charles Martel defeats Chilperic and chooses Clothar IV as king

source called Chronicle of MOissac

Liber Pontificalis also source

Duke Eudo harbored Chilperic and had his own lands southwards

Edo attacked by Abd ar-Rahman al-Ghafiki (after possibly breaking a treaty with Martel) and asks Martel for help—Battle of Poitiers
Eudo swore loyalty to Charles
all this reveals new interest of Carolingians in the south which continued through 8th/9th centuries
However, although Charles united much, division of kingdom amongst sons did not include Aquitaine and it remained free of Carolingian rule under Eudo’s son as a duchy
Annal of Metz (source)
Annals of Moissac record Waifar as princ eof Aquitaine in 751
Royal Frankish Annals source
Pippen and Waifer engage in hostilities
distinction between “Romans” and Gascons (latter military danger)
after many years of campaigning 767 Pippen marches through Aquitaine and seizes Toulouse, Albi, Javols, Bourges, Agen
Waifer killed by own men, Pippen died hortly after and divided Aquitania between two sons although one source says it all went to Charles
Under Charles Aquitaine and Gascony seemingly pacified although defeat by Wascones may indicate continued resistance
evidence that southern Gaul is where writing in Roman manner survives
some kind of education system survived in SW Gaul
7th century correspondence of Desiderius of Cahors provides a limited picture on aristocracy of the area
many misionaires to north east Gaul from southwest Gaul
literary activity in 7th century: life of Praejectus from Auvergne; life of St Leodegarius from Poitou, lives of Dalmatus and Amandus from Rouergue; Vision of Barontus from Bourges

Chapter 5
“In addition to the factors which occur everywhere—the difficulty of locating suitable sites for excavation, the expense and inherent difficulties of such excavations, and the lack of trained archaeologists interested in the early medieval period—there are additional reasons for the absence of any Merovingian settlement sites in the south-west. It is an area exceptionally rich in both prehistoric and Glalo-Roman material, which attract the archaeologist more. Moreover, the greater part of the sites occupied in the Merovingian period not only had been settlements in the Roman period also, but are aften[sic] still occupied to this day, which makes systematic excavation almost impossible.” 161

many cemeteries grouped around ecclesiastical centers
customs of reuse and grave robbing further confounding dating issues
burial site
  Monpalais
  Civaux–Vienne near early medieval church; also Gallo-Roman site; highly destructive excavations in 18th century
  Herpes–Chrente; chaotic excavations, dispersal of finds upon death of excavator
  Biron–Carente Maritime;
  Neuvicq-Montguyon–Charente-Maritime; known since 19th century; additional excavations made in 1946, 1964 (both as a result of road building)
  Bordeaux–Saint-Seurin near early medieval church; excavated in 1909-10 by Courteault(unpublished) and between 1959-1970 by R. Duru; 18th c burials destroyed Merovingians layer
  Montferrand–Aude near early medieval church; also Gallo-Roman site
  Tabariane–Teilhet (Ariège)
  Estagel–site of Las Tumbas relatively intact when excavated, some destruction in late 19th c; Lantier excavations in 1935, 36, 46, 47, 48
  Mailhac
  St-Maurice-Navacelles
"For a long time Merovingian archaeology suffered from the existence of a number of hypotheses about burial customs which threatened to become dogmas." 178

continuity not just with Roman tradition, but also pre-Roman tradition

two great innovations in burial customs of south-west Gaul–increasing tendency to associate cemeteries with ecclesiastical sites; appearance of grave goods

Chapter 6

Visigoths arrive from Italy in 418 (no idea the number of people involved in this migration) moreover settlers in 5th century may have been Visigothic in leadership but not necessarily in composition

little trace of Visigothic settlement in archaeology or place names

Septimania only area to produce quantity of Visigothic material

what happened to Visigothic communities after collapse of their kingdom

Visigoths and Franks major Germanic peoples connected with area but small settlement of other Germanic and Asiatic peoples few traces

Saxons have left clear but meagre traces of settlements along coast

settlement of Franks surprisingly not confirmed by written sources

"Every country in western Europe in the early Middle Ages underwent a process of invasion and settlement by Germanic peoples: what are not so often dealt with...are the contemporaneous invasions and settlements by the indigenous inhabitants of western Europe"207

written sources suggest Basques settlement but difficult to find any non dubious evidence

"...there is little or no evidence to support the idea that any of the barbarian peoples made a significant contribution to the population or culture of Gaul in the early Middle Ages. A history of the area is to a large extent the history of the indigenous inhabitants, left to their own devices in isolation both from the Empire and from the new barbarian kingdoms: this is probably more true of the south-west than of any other area in Europe....In a large measure this freedom from large-scale barbarian settlement or influence was also due to geographical position: the Garonne valley, the heart of south-west Gaul of the independent duchy of Aquitaine, was, as we shall see, remarkably isolated from the rest of Europe." 210

Chapter 7

Aquitaine on a number of major trade routes during classical period

two of three routes from Med to Britain led through rivers of Aquitaine; archaeological evidence suggests these were not in use during early Middle Ages; however Atlantic ports remained part of Atlantic-sea province

contact between Ireland and SW Gaul exist in late Roman period but certainly increased in early Middle Ages

Coin hoards

Hvères

Narbonne

Tourouzelle

Mauléon
Bordeaux
Plassac
Viviers
Gourdon
Buis
St-Pierre-les-Etieux
St-Michel-le Clucq
Chinon
Savonnières
Crondall
Canterbury
Sutton Hoo
Velsen
Escharen

Mint Sites c.700 (Bordeaux Hoard)
  Rouen
  Paris
  Poitiers
  Cahors
  Rodez
  Blond
  Banassac
  Marseilles
  Toledo
  Merida

*Do network analysis on coin hoards*

Mint Sites c735 (Plassac Hoard)
  Rouen
  Paris
  Le Mans
  Poitiers
  Bourges
  Plassac

*No evidence of large scale exportation of SW Gaul sarcophagi*

*In addition to sarcophagi and coins, third "export was Aquitanian buckles*

*Also pottery*

*All of these had different travels and changes of hands*
southwest Gaul seems to have split into "a number of fairly isolated economic regions: septimania, the Garonne valley, and the Loire valley." 258

Chapter 8

"Apart from oppida reoccupied and perhaps refortified in the late Roman and Merovingian period the archaeologist has found no indisputable Merovingian fortified settlement in the south-west." 293

"The picture of the south-west Gallic aristocracy left to us by Sidonius Apollinaris—an aristocracy with predominantly local interests, administering their estates, hunting, and writing the first Gallic literature that has survived—is undoubtedly deepened if we look at what they chose to be buried in: sarcophagi, made from local marble, decorated with Christian and with local Gallic motifs, in a style that was wholly new, even if it had links with earlier Aquitanian sculpture and with the centres of Arles and Marseilles." 294