

The Roman Remains of South-West France:
From the Loire Valley to the Pyrenees



THE ROMAN REMAINS OF SOUTH-WEST FRANCE

FROM THE LOIRE VALLEY
TO THE PYRENEES

A GUIDE BOOK

James Bromwich

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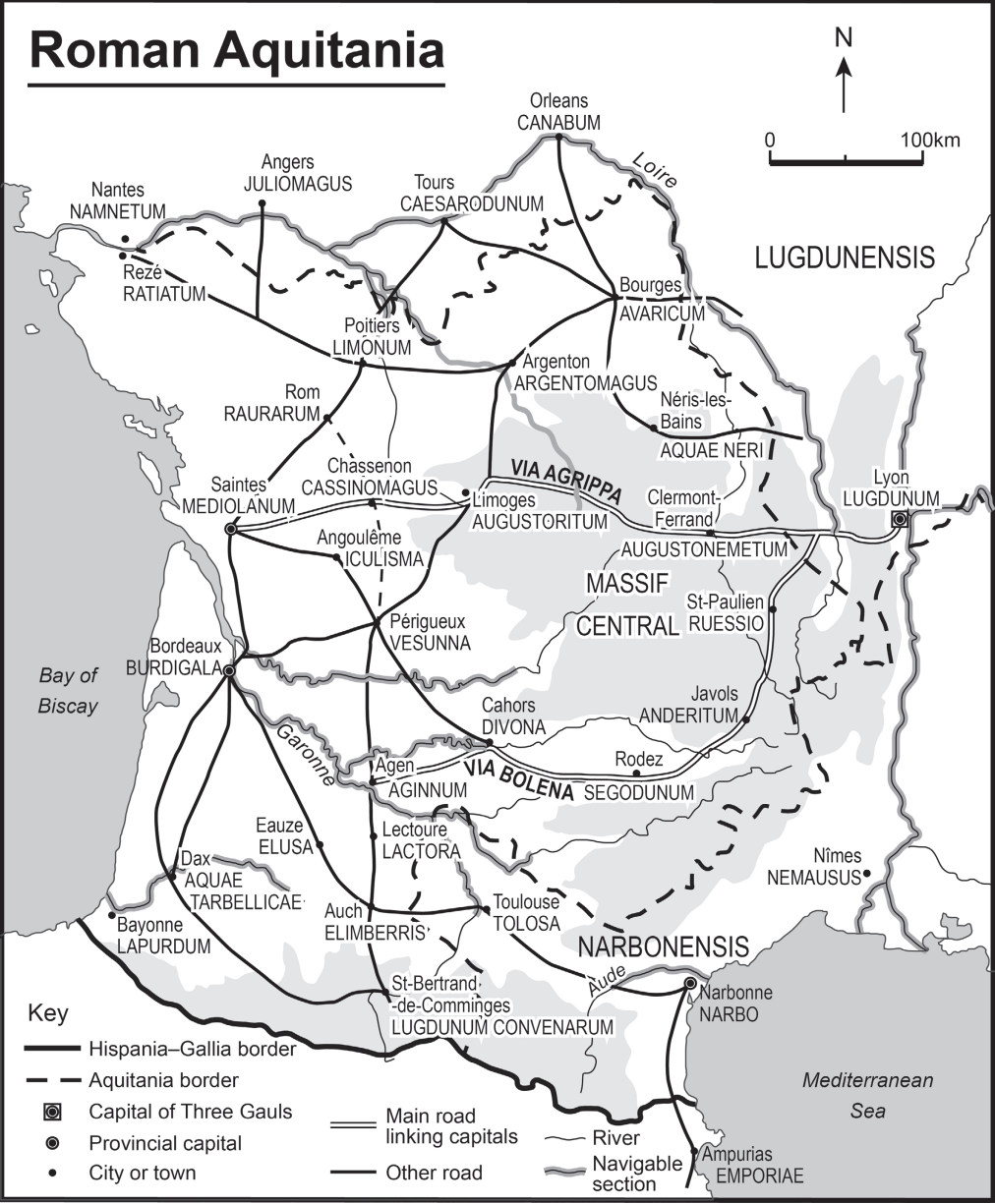
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Roman Aquitania



Map: Roman Aquitania during the Early Empire

INTRODUCTION

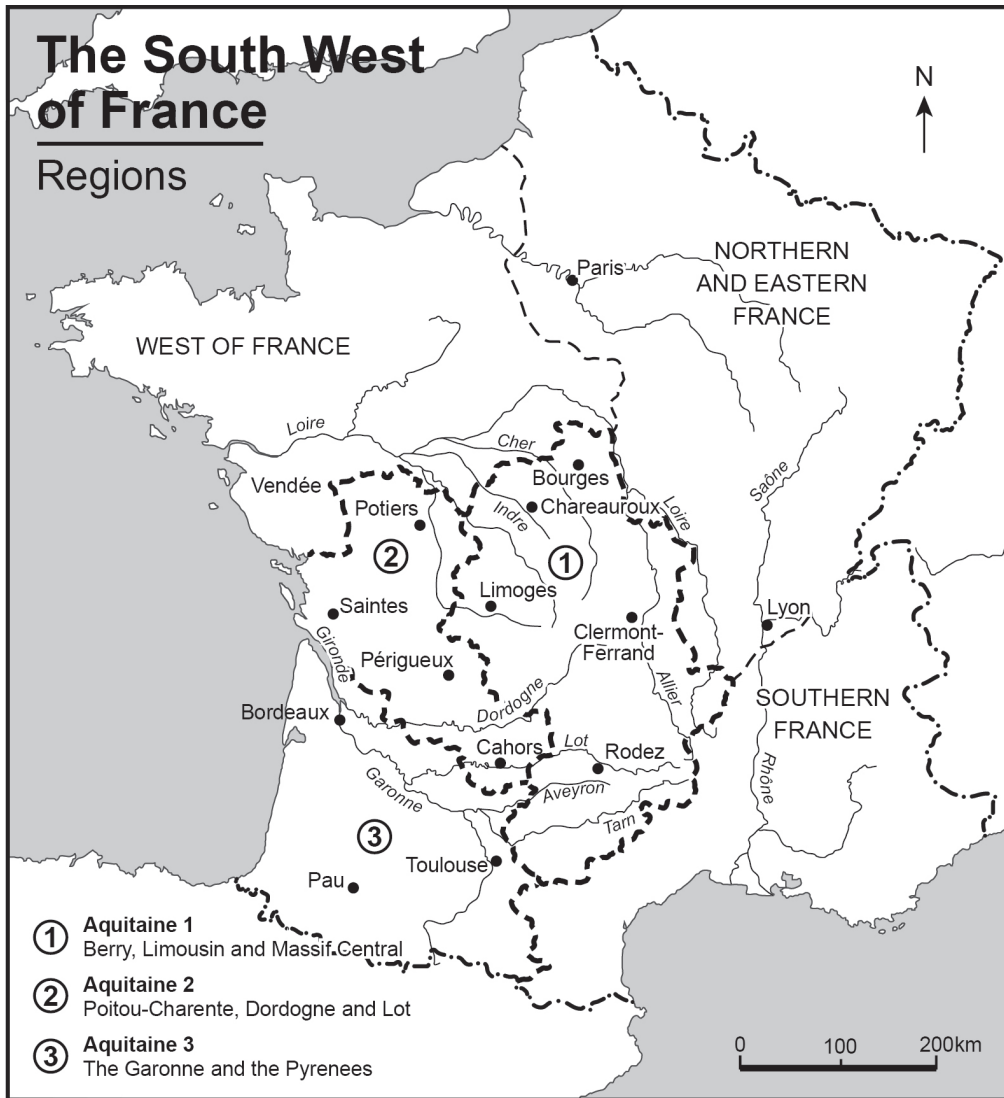
This book completes my set of guides to Roman France. My purpose remains the same. As I wrote in my first book on southern France: 'only destruction, insensitive modern building, and sometimes reconstruction can destroy our intuitive sense of the past; greater knowledge cannot.' However, there are a large number of sites in the South-West and this has led to a change from the previous guides: significantly more sites are covered briefly. This does not necessarily mean they are not worth seeing – I think St-Romain-de-Benet has the finest memorial tower in the whole region.

THE SOUTH-WEST OF FRANCE

Twenty-nine departments are covered by this book. The limits are obvious in the west and south: the Atlantic Ocean and the Pyrenees. The north and the east are defined by the Loire valley, not the river itself, barring a relatively short stretch, but the basin. Taking up half the area is the Massif Central, a plateau that gradually slopes down south-east to north-west, the core being the mountains and volcanic peaks of the Auvergne. The southern fringe, overlooking the Languedoc coastal plain, is formed by the hot, porous, arid limestone plateaux of the Causses cut by raging rivers.

On the eastern flank, the land can be farmed in the wide valleys formed by the Allier and Loire stretching from the Limogne to Berry. The western flank, ranging from the lower Massif to the Atlantic coast, with its mild climate is perfect for mixed agriculture. Here too Aquitaine links easily with the Paris basin while the coast has a mix of marshland and good harbours. The Garonne valley and its tributaries are equally fortunate with mixed soils suited to vine, fruits and vegetables. In addition, the river from Toulouse to Bordeaux made a natural highway in Antiquity linking the Mediterranean and Atlantic. It also formed a dividing line. In the west, Atlantic gales and currents constantly changed the coast, forming sandbars, dunes and lagoons, until it was protected in modern times by the deliberate planting of pines, lining the beaches and the sand-based Landes, bleak, flat heathland in the past, today covered by unending pine forest. From west to east the plain gradually disappears in the Pyrenean foothills.

My South-West is remarkably close to the Roman province of Aquitania (compare maps Roman Aquitania with The South West of France on the next page). The southern boundaries of the tribes are the most debated, but the most obvious difference here is that I include Toulouse, whereas Tolosa was in the province of Narbonensis. In the north, I do not include the Vendée. This means a third of Pictivi territory was covered in my book on the West.



Map: Regions of South-West France

THE CHANGING PATTERN OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL STUDY IN THE SOUTH-WEST

The overall pattern is very similar to other regions. Renaissance learning prompted interest in the classical heritage and the collection of antiquities while the eighteenth-century enlightenment made the search for knowledge an end in itself. Romanticism gave a new value to ruins and the Revolution stimulated nationalism; public museums would be established and the State would seek to preserve historic buildings.

Two figures stand out marking the transition to true archaeological research: **Wigrin de Taillefer** (1761–1833), who devoted his later life to exploring and preserving Périgueux's Roman ruins; and **Alexandre du Mège** (1780–1862), who found the wonderful Roman sculptures in Chiragan villa and installed them in a public museum in Toulouse. The nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw the emergence of semi-professional archaeologists, people with private means or the support of a local society to provide funding. **Père Camille de La Croix** (1831–1911), **Marius Vazeilles** (1881–1973) and **Bertrand Sapène** (1880–1976) all made major contributions. Yet the man who embodied the future was **Léon Joulin** (1838–1911). A chemical engineer awarded the Légion d'honneur, in retirement he turned to his personal pleasure, archaeology. When asked to re-examine Chiragan villa, he demonstrated a truly modern approach – a concern for structured planning, progressive techniques in excavation, an awareness of stratigraphy, and an interest in villas beyond mosaics and sculpture – and produced a detailed report with a site plan that is still admired today.

In the twentieth century universities began to see archaeology as a separate discipline that could be taught. Bordeaux became a major centre, with Louis Maurin and then Alain Bouet as leading figures. The State too has taken on a major role. The Centre Nationale de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) was set up in 1939 and after the war grew dramatically. Employing thousands as well as having many associate members, it forms a reservoir of expertise across all disciplines including archaeology. Created in 1963 to oversee the regional 'patrimoine', the Direction Régionale des Affaires Culturelles (DRACs), with its Services Régionale d'Archéologie (SRAs), grew in significance.

The post-war boom took off in the 1960s, bringing more money for excavations, specialist equipment and laboratories, but it also meant wholesale destruction in many of the city centres where modernisation took priority. In the 1970s, while lobbying by archaeologists was growing, priority was still being given to shopping centres and underground car parks. Even in 1988, when an old hospital was pulled down in Toulouse and a large section of the Roman rampart was found along with a rare late Roman/Visigoth building, appeals for at least part to be preserved were ignored. However, the concept of rescue archaeology and clearer rules specifying the right of archaeologists to undertake investigations were becoming the norm. Crucially a new organisation was set up: l'Institut National des Recherches Archéologiques Préventives. INRAP employs more archaeologists than any other body in France and has done extensive work in the South-West. SRA archaeologists continue to carry out diagnostic work, surveys and long-term excavations. Archaeological work can also be contracted out to independent companies, though their share of the work done in this region is relatively minor.

Archaeology is not a male preserve in south-western France. Two of the finest archaeologists today are Sophie Krausz and Karene Robin, while the leading French authorities on Roman wall painting and architectural décor are respectively Alix Barbet and Dominique Tardy, both of whom have used their expertise on sites in the region; both are employed by the CNRS. Less formally, the role of Paulette Aragon-Launet (1913–92) was crucial in both preserving the site and directing the archaeology in the great Séviac villa site at Montréal-du-Gers.

Contemporary archaeological research has been characterised by surveys, focused diagnostic digs, rescue excavations ('fouilles préventive'), a few excavations for preservation and

programmed research. 'Projets collectifs de recherche' (PCRs), authorised by the regional DRAC, identify the many-faceted features to be studied and organise teams representing many specialisms. Initially granted for three years, they are often renewed. Yet local archaeological societies have not disappeared. At Barzan, volunteers dedicated to its protection have participated in survey and excavation work. Elsewhere a surprising number of societies have undertaken their own excavations – with DRAC support. Two to note are Gioux, a Roman farmstead in the Limousin, and Sanguinet in the Landes, where the diving expertise of the society has resulted in the identification of underwater settlements and the recovery of a large number of dugout canoes from the Bronze Age to the Roman era.

Some words of caution. While knowledge of the past has grown exponentially this does not mean that there has been any dramatic rise in the number of sites with visible remains. Rescue excavations far outnumber extended excavations and even with the latter there is no guarantee of preservation. Finds go into storage and only a small proportion end up on display in a museum. My entries introduce sites and museums with something to see.

ENTRY CHARGES AND OPENING TIMES

Charges are not included but times are given though these cannot be relied upon: I have been to places where the premises were declared open, but were locked up, and others where the hours change annually, but no one seems to know this beforehand. The Covid-19 epidemic led to a hiatus then new times. Monday or Tuesday are widely chosen as closing days for museums, but where a town has a number of galleries and museums, other days may feature.

FINDING SITES: MAPS, PLANS AND GPS

I hope that my maps and plans will help you find the sites and museums described here along with the GPS coordinates based on latitude and longitude (source Google Earth). Using a car, sat-nav will get you to many places but you may find a road atlas will not only show places on specific maps but also list them in the index. For the larger picture, I find a general road map valuable, such as Michelin's standard red 989 or 916. IGN's 1:25,000 maps, the equivalent of the UK's Ordnance Survey series, are excellent and should enable you to find even the most obscure rural site. They are GPS compatible.

Blay-Foldex and IGN town plans are comprehensive and have street indexes. Most tourist offices will provide free summary town maps: some are very good, others tend to cover no more than the town centre and limit the number of street names. Assistants are usually helpful, but sometimes simply do not know about Gallo-Roman remains. In villages, the local Mairie will frequently respond enthusiastically to helping visitors find their site or museum – even so, avoid lunchtime.

USING THE INTERNET

Information on sites and museums. As with other sources of knowledge on the web there is often a frustrating mix of the useful and interesting along with the desperately limited or fanciful. Details on finding out more on Gallo-Roman France using the web are provided in the bibliography.

INTRODUCTION

Maps. www.openstreetmap.fr provides not just streets, but maps of the whole of France. Sites are often indicated with a helpful amphorae symbol. Google provides places with a map but without geographical features and only a few sites are indicated; using satellite view can sometimes be helpful but Google Earth is better in many cases, though here too trees and buildings can hide sites: my GPS references should help.

CE AND BCE

AD and BC are still widely used, but they are not a neutral dating system. They embody overtly Christian terminology: *Anno Domini* means 'In the year of the Lord' and is taken from the Gregorian calendar while BC stands for 'Before Christ'. Though their usage has the strength of tradition, increasingly I have come to feel neither Britain nor Europe should be seen in this way. Although still based on a Christian calendar, CE – 'Common Era' – and BCE – 'Before Common Era' – are significantly less loaded abbreviations, used widely now in academic writings and gaining ground in more general works.

CHRONOLOGY

Dates	Rome and its government	Gaul
754/3 BCE	Supposed foundation of Rome	
8th–5th centuries		Much of Gaul becomes Celtic. Greeks and Phoenicians dominate Mediterranean: major colonies: Greek Marseille and Phoenician Carthage
510	Republic established	Tribal structure in Gaul
390	Gauls sack Rome	
4th–3rd centuries	Rome emerges to challenge in western Mediterranean	<i>Oppida</i> , mining, coins and importing wine
264–146	Punic Wars with Carthage for dominance in the western Mediterranean. Fighting in Spain v. Carthaginians then Iberians. Rome needs to secure southern Gaul land route	Roman armies in southern Gaul
118	State dominated by competing elite men	Narbonne colony founded and Toulouse military outpost
77–71		Pompey campaigns on both sides of the Pyrenees
58–50		Julius Caesar triumphs in Gallic Wars
49–45	Civil war. Julius Caesar victorious	
44	Julius Caesar assassinated.	
43	Civil war again. Octavian, aged 20, Caesar's adopted son, leads one group	<i>Lugdunum</i> /Lyon founded
40–39	Octavian in Gaul	Agrippa governor of Gaul. Oversees road network based on Lyon and campaigns against Aquitani

THE ROMAN REMAINS OF SOUTH-WEST FRANCE

Dates	Rome and its government	Gaul
31	Octavian’s naval victory at Actium. His friend Agrippa directs his forces	
27	Octavian proclaimed <i>Princeps</i> and re-named Augustus. He visits Gaul.	Tribes begin adopting Roman urban administration: the <i>civitates</i>
27 BCE–284 CE	EARLY ROMAN EMPIRE	
27 BCE–68 CE	<i>Julio-Claudian family</i>	
16 BCE–14 CE	Augustus Emperor	Augustus in Gaul. Three provinces formalised
12 BCE		Condate altar constructed at Lyon
14–37 CE	Tiberius	
21		Gallic rebellion quickly crushed
43	Claudius 41–54	Invasion of Britain
54–68	Nero Civil war 68–9	
69–96	<i>Flavian family</i>	
69–79	Vespasian	Monumental stone public buildings being built
79–81	Titus	
81–96	Domitian	
96–180	<i>Emperors by adoption</i>	
97–117	Trajan	Empire reaches peak extent
117–38	Hadrian	
138–61	Antoninus Pius	Plague spreads from Egypt
161–80	Marcus Aurelius with Lucius Verus (161–9)	
180–92	Commodus	
192–3	Civil war	
193–235	Severan family	
193–211	Septimus Severus	197. Severus defeats claimant Albinus near Lyon
211–17	Caracalla	
217–35	Later Severans	
235–84	Short-lived emperors. Frontier pressures. Conflict frequent	Barbarian raids across Rhine. 260–273 Gallic Roman Empire. City rampart building begins

INTRODUCTION

Dates	Rome and its government	Gaul
284–476	LATE ROMAN EMPIRE	
284–305	Diocletian restructures Empire: appoints Maximian Emperor to rule in West (286–305)	Rampart building continues
4th century onwards	Empire often divided into eastern and western halves	Trier capital of Galliae and often residence of western Emperors
306–63	<i>House of Constantine</i>	
306–37	Constantine I ('the Great')	Christianity accepted and gets State support.
337–40	Constantine II	Spreads quickly in East, slowly in West. Franks recruited by Romans and settlement begins in northern Gaul
337–61	Constantius II	
337–50	Constans I	
361–3	Julian the Apostate. Fails to restore paganism	
	<i>House of Valentinian</i>	
364–75	Valentinian I	Militant Christian missionaries
378	Visigoths defeat and kill Valens (eastern Emperor) at Adrianople. Visigoths cross Danube entering Empire, made <i>foederati</i>	
379–95	Theodosius makes Christianity the only religion	Elite seek to be bishops
395–423	Honorius (western Emperor) lives in Ravenna	
406		Vandals, Suevi and Alans cross Rhine and range over Gaul then move to Spain
410 418	Visigoths sack Rome.	Visigoths granted right to settle along Garonne under their king, Theodoric. Make Toulouse their capital
451	Huns defeated in Gaul by Romans, Franks and Visigoths	Theodoric killed in battle. Merovingian family begin rise to power amongst Franks north of Loire.
466–84		Visigoth king Euric takes all Roman cities in Aquitaine
476	Last western Emperor, Romulus (a boy), deposed, lives and not replaced	
507		Battle of Vouillé. Merovingian Franks led by Clovis defeat Visigoths who only retain Septimania. New Visigoth kingdom in Spain

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

THE LATE IRON AGE

Most archaeologists use the term ‘Iron Age’ and its constituent phases as a shorthand with rough chronological and socio-economic implications. Others are happy to accept site sequences using ‘Hallstatt’ and ‘La Tène’, models from which they can work to identify what may be marked differences in comparison with the original type sites in Austria and Switzerland.

Period	South-west France	Dates (BCE)	People and change
Early Iron Age Finds largely burials.	Hallstatt C	Begins c. 800	‘Protohistorique’ period begins Earliest Celtic languages
Bourges is the only ‘principdom’ in the region	Hallstatt D	Begins c. 650	‘Principdoms:’ defended sites in northern Europe benefiting from trade with the Mediterranean
Middle Iron Age Torc necklaces and	Early La Tène A	Begins c. 475	Spread of Celtic art and design Warrior societies
flowing geometric design. Angoulême helmet	Early La Tène B	Begins c. 375	Migrations often violent movement
Coinage and trade with Mediterranean expands	Middle La Tène C	Begins c. 275	Large open settlements such as Aulnet. Arverni become the foremost tribe in south-west Gaul
Late Iron Age	Final La Tène D	Begins c. 150	Large defended settlements called <i>oppida</i> The Aedui and Arverni are the leading tribes

Iron Age archaeological sequence

Source for dates: J.-L. Brunaux, *Les Gaulois*, 2004, page 35. They are all approximate; regions and individual sites can vary. They are also liable to change as research refines knowledge.

THE LATE IRON AGE/FINAL LA TÈNE D (C. 150–30 BCE)

Caesar in his *Commentarii de Bello Gallico* (BG) divided the South-West into two groups, the Celtae (Celts) or Galli (Gauls) and the Aquitani, separated by the Garonne river, a simplification but broadly true (BG I.1). From his annual commentaries and the works of Strabo and Ptolemy

it is clear that the Celts were distinguished by relatively large tribes and the Aquitani by rather smaller groups; Caesar also remarks that their language and ‘customs’ set them apart. Archaeology has demonstrated that in this period both areas saw a considerable rise in the number of sites known, reflecting increasing economic activity and growing populations. Seed studies have revealed a variety of crops being grown while bone analysis has shown that people kept cattle, pigs, sheep and goats. As well as iron farm tools, finds included bronze and gold jewellery, glass paste beads and imported amphorae. Mining and metalworking expanded. Timber had multiple uses but resin was also significant and exported for waterproofing. Along the Atlantic coast settlements exploited the sea and marshlands for fish, birds and salt – hundreds of salterns have been noted.

Commerce was clearly a major stimulant. The Rhône/Saône route had always been important for trade between the Mediterranean and northern Europe; but stimulated by the Carthaginian grip on Spain and the Straits of Gibraltar closing the sea route, the rivers Aude and Garonne, with a short land trans-shipment between, offered another route. During the third century it grew in importance with peak exports of amphorae coming in the later second century. The scale of this trade is staggering. Cunliffe quotes one estimate of nearly two million gallons of wine a year! (*Europe between the Oceans*, 2008, page 376). Sources suggest members of the elite would lay on great wine-filled feasts, so promoting their status. They would also be able to display their cultivated tastes by using the Roman tableware that often accompanied the wine. In this way a noble could build up his followers. Louernius established his family as preeminent amongst the Arverni and took a leading position in Gaul during the later second century BCE. The wine did not come free: the traders obtained metals, resin and slaves – prisoners taken in inter-tribal conflict or brought from Britain – in exchange for wine-filled amphorae. In south-west Gaul the major entrepôt was Toulouse. From here amphorae could be passed on to subsidiary centres like Châteaumeillant in Berry, where large numbers of these containers have been found.

Compared with La Tène C, both open and enclosed settlement sites are far more frequent. Open sites were on plains or in river valleys, while most of the enclosed settlements were on promontories or hills. Caesar called them *oppida* and this term is used widely by French archaeologists. They generally imply a rampart and evidence of some town planning such as streets, districts for artisans and others for dwellings. They ranged from 150ha to as little as seven hectares. The contrast may well be less than it seems, as the actual habitation area within large *oppida* was often smaller than the area enclosed by the rampart; Caesar confirms this indirectly by pointing out that large numbers of refugees could camp inside Bourges *oppidum*.

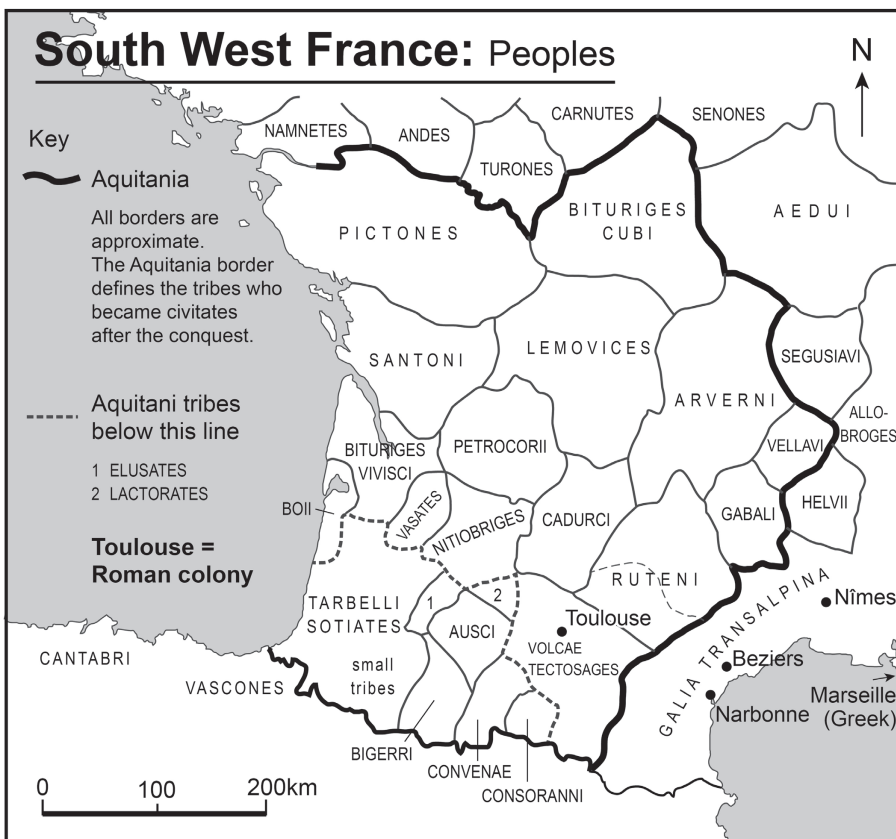
Bourges had a rampart described by Caesar (BGVII.23) as a *muris gallicis* recognised first at Murcens in 1867. It is suggested that they were not necessarily for defence but to proclaim an important settlement. It is likely the larger *oppida* were the political, economic, social and religious centres of the tribes. In the South-West, CORENT has provided the strongest evidence to date, with its sanctuary, council building, housing districts, workshops and even a zone for food storage, though it is currently lacking strong evidence for a rampart.

The changes in Iron Age Gaul during the Middle and late Iron Age had not occurred in a vacuum. The Mediterranean coastal regions in the south of Gaul had experienced Greek colonies since 600 BCE, followed by an increasing Roman presence culminating in the creation of *Provincia*, formally called *Transalpinga*, due to Rome’s struggles with Carthaginians and Iberian tribes in

Spain. It led to the acquisition of Toulouse and an alliance with the Aedui, a major tribe living in Burgundy, to counter the potential threat from the Arverni. Nor were Roman settlers in the south the only Romans in Gaul. There would have been Roman merchants trading across independent Gaul: they would have not only exchanged goods, but spread a conception of life the Roman way while providing descriptions of the Gallic world for Romans. Inevitably, Rome, like all imperial states since, would have been concerned about political changes outside its area of control. Unluckily for those Gauls who valued their independence Julius Caesar, an ambitious politician, a brilliant general and a masterful publicist, obtained a five-year special command in Gaul. Caesar wrote his *Commentaries*, giving a year by year account of the war; they are vivid, compelling – and biased. There are no Gallic sources to provide an alternative perspective.

THE GALLIC WARS (58–51 BCE) AND THE SOUTH-WEST

Caesar entered independent Gaul to challenge Helvetii migrants and German intruders and by the end of 58 BCE had defeated both. Yet in the following year he was leading his forces against the Belgae and Armorican tribes of northern France, the tribes posing the least threat to the 'Province': it had become a war of conquest. His *Commentaries* were designed to enhance his prestige with a stream of victories, so promoting his struggle for power in Rome. They also



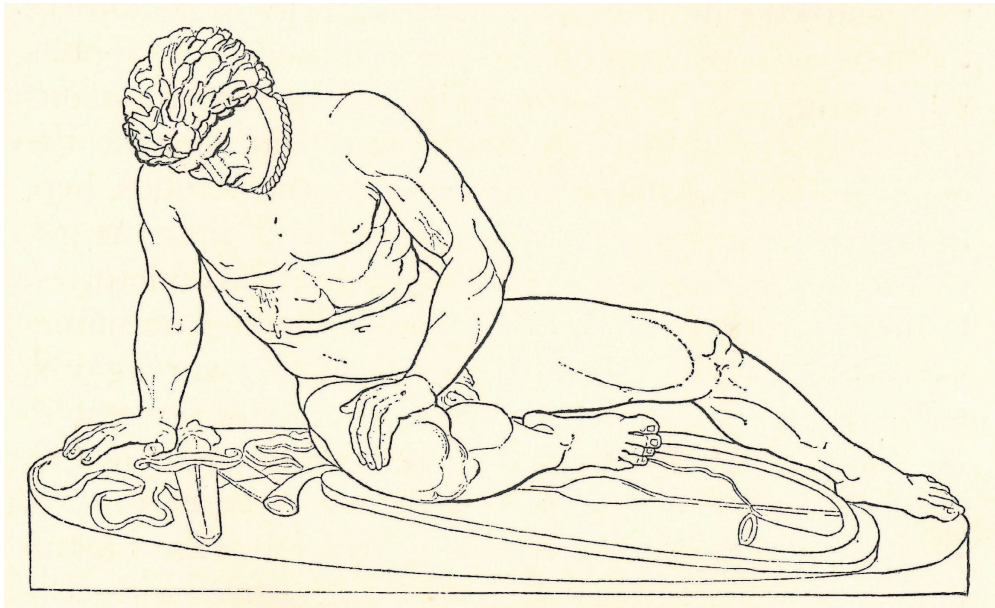
Map: People of the South-West: Celts and Aquitani



Vercingetorix defeating Romans. A wishful nineteenth-century vision. Clermont-Ferrand

show Caesar rightly calculated that the tribes of the South-West did not pose a threat in the early years. In 56 BCE Crassus had quickly dealt with the Aquitani, while the Celtic tribes who had benefited from Roman trade along the Garonne and its tributaries saw little reason to resist Roman power. Indeed, until 52 BCE Caesar could count on the Gallic tribes each looking out for their own interests, only occasionally acting in groups. In addition virtually all the tribes had competing elites and their struggles took on a pro- or anti-Roman tinge: when Vercingetorix first tried to inspire the Arverni to resist Caesar's legions he was thrown out by pro-Roman elders. Then, whether by force of personality or finally recognising that acting together was their only hope, most of Gaul agreed to fight Caesar. It was too late.

It would be a mistake to see the Gauls as unsophisticated barbarians. They were aware of Roman battle tactics, as many had served with the Romans as auxiliary troops; and they also understood Roman siege methods, as their remodelling of *oppida* defences demonstrates, using 'dump' ramparts to resist battering rams and mining. However, as the years of war went by, many skilled warriors will have died. Caesar claimed the army sent to rescue Vercingetorix in 52 BCE consisted of nearly 250,000 men. The 100,000 drawn from the South-West will have certainly contained fresh fighting men, but no doubt many farmers as well, whereas the other 150,000 will have been made up of the weary, the old and the inexperienced. However brave they were, they could not equal the trained, hardened and even fresh Roman troops (Caesar made sure there were regular replacements in the ranks). The Gauls' defeat and the surrender



A Gaul, recognised by his Gallic neck torc, dying of his wounds. A drawing of the statue in the Capitoline collection, Rome. A.S. Murray, A History of Greek Sculpture (1890, p. 381)

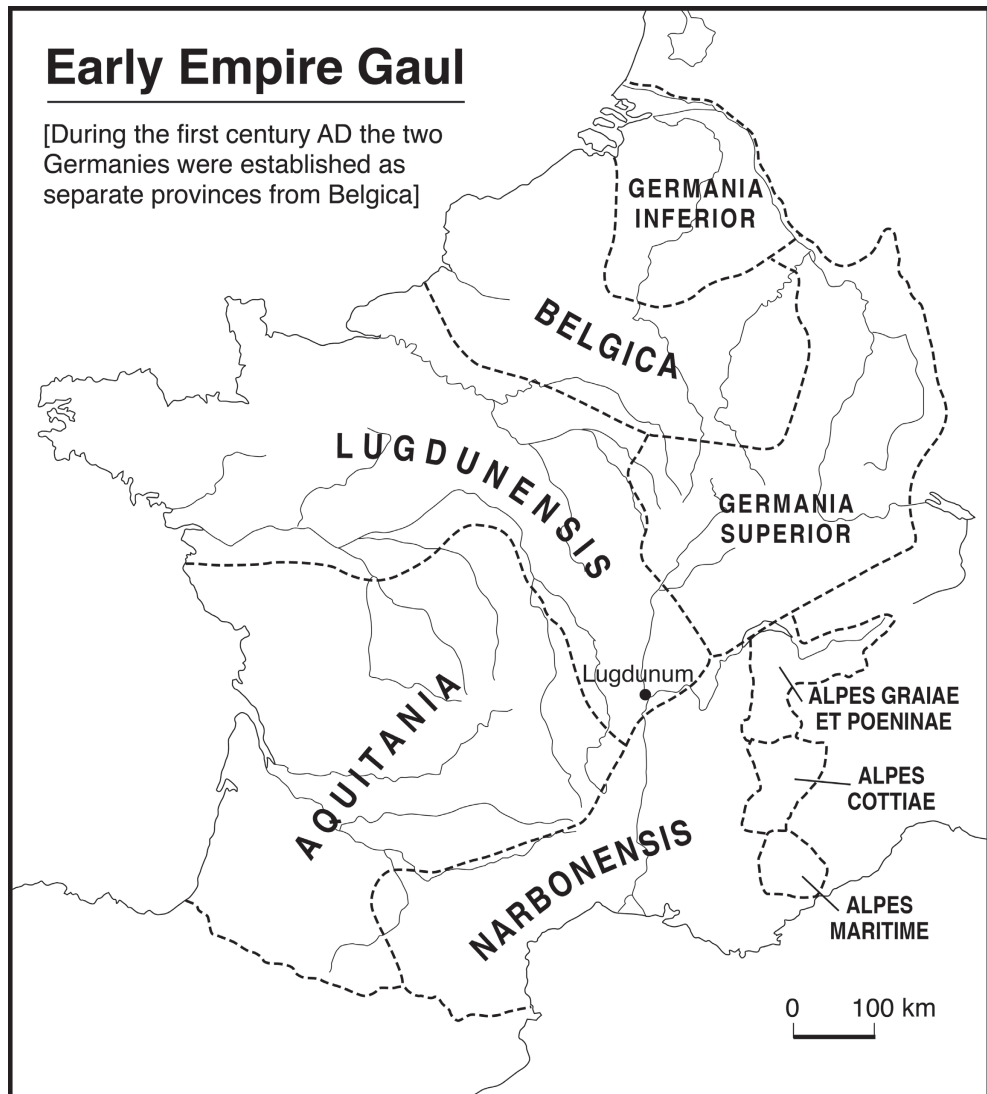
of Vercingetorix at Alesia 52 BCE were decisive. The Romans had fought with a tenacious, merciless brutality, burning farms and *oppida*, requisitioning crops and willingly undertaking massacres. Countless thousands of Gauls died during the eight years of Caesar's conquest.

AFTER-EFFECTS AND STEPS TO A NEW WORLD

It will have taken years for the shattered and bemused survivors to recover; environmental studies suggest that agriculture suffered substantially and there is evidence of land reverting to forest and pasture. At first, Gallia Comata – 'longhaired' Gaul – was simply conquered territory embodying two things: Roman troops and the payment of tribute, with little effort made to change it. The road building, initiated by Agrippa in 39 BCE that turned *Lugdunum*/Lyon into a virtual capital, was, in the first instance, undertaken to speed up the movement of Roman armies. Even the 27 BCE census was primarily to give a rational basis to tax collection.

THE EARLY ROMAN EMPIRE

Following Augustus' visit to Gaul in 16 BCE, Transalpine Gaul was renamed *Narbonensis* and the newly conquered Gaul was organised in three provinces: *Lugdunensis*, *Belgica* and *Aquitania*. Each province had a governor responsible for maintaining order with a procurator for imperial taxation. The central role of *Lugdunum* (Lyon) was formalised with the foundation of the *Condate* altar, dedicated to proclaiming the greatness of Rome (12 BCE). A priesthood drawn from the leading families across Gaul demonstrated their loyalty here at an annual



Map: Early Empire provinces in Roman Gaul

meeting. They learnt the Roman approach to religious ritual where political and social power were also expressed through religious leadership. It enhanced their status and must have made it easier for them to accept Rome's determination to destroy the Druids. Day-to-day administration would be carried out by tribes re-fashioned as *civitates*. These were defined by having a town as their capital and centre of communal life supported by the surrounding countryside; the model was of course Rome itself.

THE CIVITAS CAPITALS

Excavation in a few cities such as Poitiers and Auch has revealed wood and plaster housing on stone foundations from as early as 30 BCE, but many *civitas* capitals in the South-West did not really emerge until the new millennium. For the elite, no longer warriors [see TINTIGNAC], it meant new ways of asserting their status, embodied in their clothes, their homes and the way they interacted with others.

The tribal elite now lived in *domus*, grand town houses, and ruled through a council (*ordo*) as councillors (*decuriones*) appointing their magistrates, not only for taxation and justice, but also with responsibility for public building. *Civitas* income came from local taxes; rents, primarily agricultural but also urban; and liturgies, fees paid by magistrates as a charge to their position. In the first instance architects and specialists, such as mosaicists, will have come from Narbonensis, or even Italy. Council members could enhance their reputations by funding festivals or new public buildings 'at their own expense'. Dependants or 'clients' could win building contracts, plead for help in avoiding taxes or gain judicial favour.

No visitors from other parts of the Empire would have found much that was unfamiliar in the appearance of the South-West's new cities, small towns or villas; for the literate, the inscriptions on buildings, milestones and memorials would all have been in Latin. While many would still be speaking Gallic – or Aquitanian – no doubt with local variations, the elite quickly adopted the new language and amongst some groups of workers Latin would also have been used, best shown by the sigillata potters' graffiti.

The size of *civitas* capitals and other towns is as difficult to estimate in the South-West as elsewhere. All the capitals eventually established a road grid forming blocks of land or *insulae*. Archaeological work can painstakingly build up a picture indicating which *insulae* were occupied and which were not leading to an approximate living area for the town, but the process can be difficult as so much has been destroyed. By the mid-second century the biggest Gallo-Roman towns – Clermont-Ferrand, Bordeaux and Poitiers – covered 140–180ha. Others are put in the 80–100ha range, while some such as Auch and Eauze were only c. 30ha. It is still only conjecture to estimate what this means in population numbers.

THE COUNTRYSIDE

The South-West is large and very diverse. Aerial photography, field walking and electronic surveying have transformed our knowledge of the landscape but there are still major gaps in coverage. The best known are Berry, the Auvergne and the Garonne valley. The most distinctive new feature in the Gallo-Roman landscape was the villa – the rural equivalent of a town *domus*. Villas typically consisted of two sections, the *pars urbana* – the owner's living area, characterised by Roman décor and often a bath complex – and the *pars rustica*, the working area. Of the hundreds spread over the South-West, a dozen feature in the guide. Some were clearly local market driven: clusters are known near Bourges and Clermont-Ferrand. Agricultural produce was the basis of elite wealth, but as landowners they derived additional income from owning forests, mines, smelters, forges and workshops, quarries, salt workings and potteries. The extent of slavery is unknown, but it is likely there were many slaves working in the households, fields and enterprises; even the free will have been dependants of

some kind. Though many farms are known, the vast majority have not justified preservation; GIOUX is a fine example of a large farmstead. Recent environmental studies in the Empire as a whole suggest that the ability to sustain a larger population came in the late Iron Age, not after conquest. Despite appearances it may be that being ruled by Rome did not mean greater overall wealth, but rather a sharper division between the elite and the rest.

ROMANISED RELIGION

Figures of Gallic cross-legged squatting gods still feature and pipeclay figurines of mother goddesses characterise the whole region. Many local gods were combined with apparently similar Roman gods, a common feature in the provinces. Visitors would have noted Apollo and Mars linked with local gods and the Arverni saw their tribal god as Mercury. Classic Roman temples are known, but many more temples – *fana* – had a square or circular *cella* enclosed by a gallery; even the spectacular Roman mountaintop sanctuary Puy-de-Dôme hid a *fanum* at its heart. There are other impressive sanctuaries, such as Sanxay (the most complete) and St-Cybardeaux with a stunning hillside theatre, while many are not in rural isolation as once thought, but surrounded by settlements, like Chassenon, which has the most complete Roman baths in Gaul. Hot springs, as elsewhere, became significant centres of worship and relaxation. There are even hints of sacred groves: oak seeds were plentiful at Chamalières spring and the ‘cisterns’ found at Chassenon sanctuary are now interpreted as a man-made grove. In the Pyrenean *civitates* grand sanctuaries are rare, but in Convenae territory there are numerous altars of classic Roman design dedicated to gods unrecorded elsewhere. Caves too could be residences of the gods. Temples dedicated to the emperor were often linked with a local god or even an eastern cult, such as Asia Minor’s Cybele. Two temples to Mithras are known in Bordeaux.

THE THIRD-CENTURY CRISIS

The Empire experienced numerous challenges during the third century. The seriousness and extent of some of these problems has been questioned and the appropriateness of the term ‘crisis’ debated, but undoubtedly, when we compare the position in the late second century with the end of the third century, Gaul had changed significantly.

External threats to the Empire were greater than ever before whether from the revitalised Persians in the east or peoples along the Rhine-Danube frontier. As warfare became endemic so the Roman military came to play a central role in the Empire. Three quarters of imperial revenue was spent on the army. In the third century the men who became emperors were almost all generals – often born in the least Romanised border provinces – who had made their way simply through an army career. Winning the imperial purple was often by brutal army takeovers. Between 235 and 284, an emperor lasted on average 2¼ years, compared with ten years during the previous two centuries. The crudity of the struggles between the generals can only have undermined belief in a god-like emperor.

How far did these problems affect the region? The Alemanni breached the frontier in 259/260, stimulating a ‘Gallic Roman Empire’, with the Rhine commander Postumus proclaimed Emperor and ensuring security in the 260s. Aurelian’s victorious campaign in 274 reclaimed Gaul, but in the following year, sources describe a major barbarian assault that spread terror

throughout Gaul, although this is now downplayed by modern scholars. In the South-West there is minimal evidence for raiding barbarians or clashes of competing Roman armies. Yet this focuses too much on events.

Increased spending on the army was in part funded by heavier taxation, in part by debasing the silver coinage. The pressure on magistrates to ensure taxes were collected – and for the payment of liturgies – made them increasingly unwilling to take on the responsibility. The decline in silver content in ‘silver’ coins went from around 75% in 194 to 1% in 270, undermining their income as well. It is known that a plague, probably incurable smallpox, hit Egypt then Rome (165–90) with a second major outbreak in the 250s. These deadly pandemics were unlikely to have missed Gaul. Their deeper economic impact may be uncertain, but undoubtedly they will have brought widespread and indiscriminate suffering.

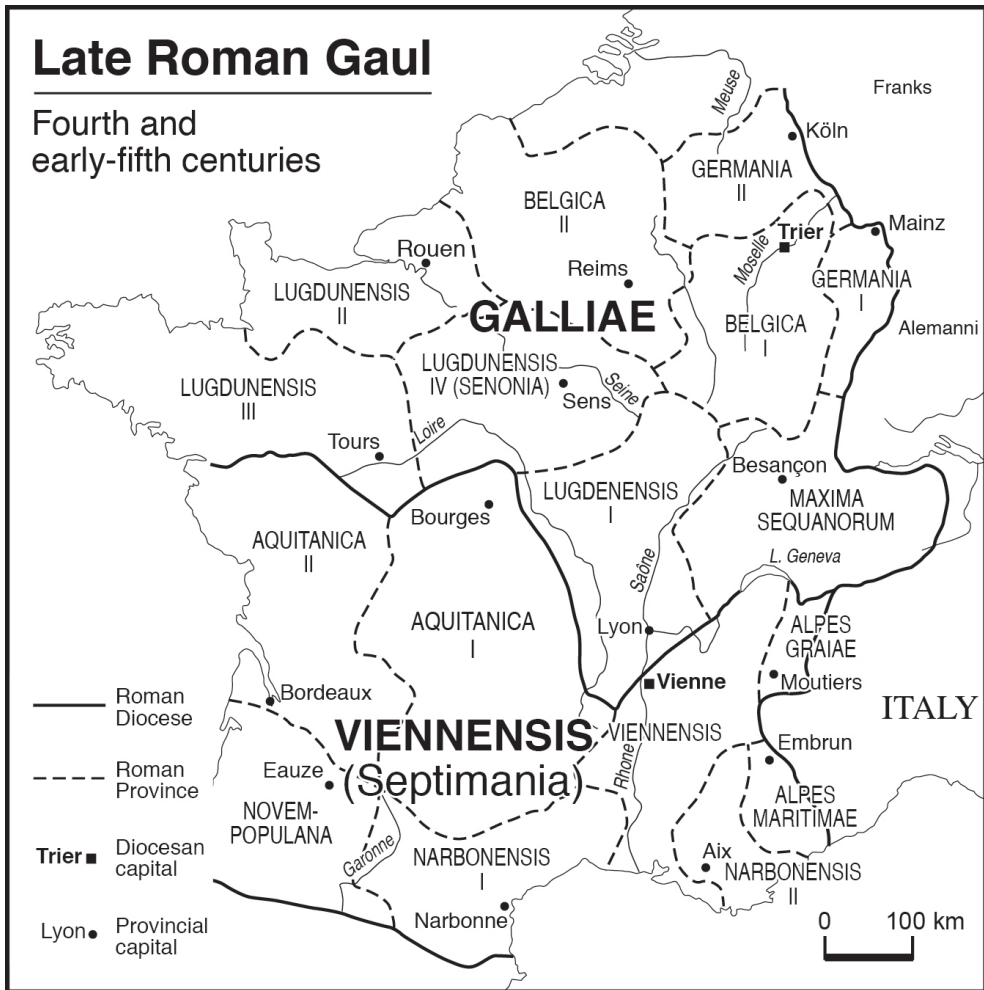
It has been argued this was a pre-industrial society entering a period of diminishing returns and declining population. What is certain is that some towns in the South-West, though not all, experienced urban contraction: growth stopped. Indeed, it is virtually impossible to find any examples of new public building in towns after 235. Numerous sanctuaries great and small were being abandoned; large numbers of small rural settlements and farms disappeared. Fundamental social change was taking place.

THE LATE ROMAN EMPIRE AND SOUTH-WESTERN FRANCE

That the Empire did not disintegrate was the result of measures taken by two determined and competent leaders, Diocletian (284–305) and Constantine (306–337). During the fourth century Rome stopped being the imperial residence and therefore politically significant, though it remained the cultural and emotional heart. The preservation of Gaul and the German provinces focused on Trier, which developed all the features of an imperial capital. In the south, Vienne provided similar facilities, linked in turn with the Italian capital at Milan. Diocletian attempted to handle imperial control by formalising shared responsibilities. His ‘tetrarchy’, or four-man rule, entailed two emperors (Augusti) and a supporter for each (Caesars). After Diocletian’s retirement one-man rule resumed with periodic upheavals: usurpers did not disappear. Yet the underlying logic was that the Empire was now too much for one person to handle. In the second half of the fourth century it became the norm for emperors to appoint fellow emperors, often with assistant Caesars; an east–west split became increasingly common and from 395 it was automatic.

AN ENLARGED BUREAUCRACY

The courts of two Augusti and two Caesars quadrupled the number of high officials and encouraged the proliferation of courtiers. To increase imperial control and prevent the development of local power bases, a new administrative level, the diocese, under a *vicarius*, was inserted, while the old provinces were divided up. Aquitania I, II and III along with Narbonensis I formed the south-west part of *Septem Provinciae* diocese. This entailed new diocesan officials and seven governors replacing the previous two along with their supporting staff and courtiers.



Map: Late Roman Gaul

MILITARY REFORM

The army was not suddenly changed, but had evolved into a new force. The need for greater mobility had led to field armies or *comitatus*, particularly strong in cavalry, under the command of a *magister militum*, the 'master of the soldiers' directly responsible to an Emperor or Caesar. The legions were much smaller, c. 1000+ men instead of the old c. 5000. It was not perhaps a major change because they had long fought in smaller units or vexillations, but it did reduce the difference between them and auxiliary units. Recruits, too, were different, drawn increasingly from less Romanised peoples: in the fourth century Germans, especially Franks, became the major resource for the western armies and could be found at all levels including commanding armies. There were also more men in the army. The total during the

second century is generally thought to have numbered 250–300,000; there were now perhaps as many as 400,000. A major cost.

A NEW TAXATION SYSTEM

The third-century crisis had made it clear that for stable government and an effective army, a better taxation system was needed. Diocletian introduced a standard unit for census officials to calculate the tax load. In principle it was much fairer, taking into account variations in real income, perhaps producing higher revenues, though never enough to fund imperial needs. The *civitates* were still the mechanism for collection, but now imperial *curatores* came to check that towns delivered. Whilst gathering taxes had never been popular, and making up shortfalls even less so, for those with municipal authority the compensation had been the enhancement of local prestige. The third century had broken this link: despite laws being passed to make service on town councils compulsory, rich men in the fourth century avoided local responsibility and taxes. Some sought the increased number of positions available at court or entered the Church as bishops, both roles providing tax exemption; some concentrated on their estates, avoiding obligations through simple corruption.

THE CIVITAS CAPITALS AND OTHER TOWNS

Undoubtedly urban life was transformed. Most cities had shrunk, while many were enclosed by ramparts. The immediate stimulant may have been the decision of Aurelian (270–75) to have a massive new rampart round Rome, but the rationale for Gaul has been debated for years. Archaeologists at first saw ramparts as a panic response after the 275 barbarian incursion; then, recognising they were built very carefully over a number of years, encouraged the view that they were built for prestige and status. However, this too has been questioned. Scholars have pointed out that ramparts were positioned round the best defensible area rather than the early empire core; that public buildings and cemetery memorials were ruthlessly pulled down for building stone; and that the walls all followed a standard pattern with thick foundations using *remploi* extensively, facings of *petit-appareil* stone and occasional brick courses, dated to the late third or early fourth century. They concluded that ramparts were built for military reasons and ordered by the State which had the men and funds to do it. In Aquitania the three largest circuits were at Poitiers, Bordeaux and Bourges, yet enclosing only a quarter to a third of the early Empire cities.¹ A military rationale can be seen for these three cities and those at Dax and Bayonne: they were on the roads linking Spain, a major producer of cereals, to the Rhine armies. By the mid-fourth century more cities got ramparts while others were still undefended, perhaps because the South-West was less menaced by disorder or barbarians than elsewhere.

Real threats in the early fifth century brought a new phase of rampart building across the Pyrenean foothill towns. These had thinner walls and fewer towers, and rarely used *remploi* in their foundations. Little is known about what kind of building lay inside the ramparts but the obvious inference is that they were civilian administration, military quarters and episcopal buildings – and a few houses for the privileged. Some occupation continued outside the walls, the inhabitants no doubt hoping they could go inside if threatened.

¹ The Toulouse ramparts enclosed much more, but it was a first-century construction.

THE COUNTRYSIDE

There was an overall decline in the number of villas but the most striking feature is the growth of 'palatial' villas. The largest known is Chiragan (Martres-Tolosane). Others were almost as impressive [see MONTMAURIN, VALENTINE, PLESSAC and MONTRÉAL-DU-GERS]. They represent wealth generated by hundreds of slaves and dependants, often spread over a number of estates in Gaul. Ausonius inherited three and ended his life with at least seven. Other owners often had estates spread across the Empire. Unlike small-scale farmers they could weather harsh taxes, exactions and economic setbacks. However, there were contrasts across the region. In Berry there were certainly fewer villas and there is little evidence they grew significantly in size, though supplying Bourges enabled its suburban villas to maintain themselves. In the Cantal a comprehensive survey surprised the archaeologists: there were no villas but cultivation was being extended up the mountain valleys.

THE IMPACT OF CHRISTIANITY

The lack of reliable contemporary literary evidence makes it difficult to construct more than a general history of the Church in south-west France before the seventh century. Constantine's Edict of Milan (313) brought religious toleration for all. Even then progress seems to have been slow. However, imperial restrictions on paganism grew until Theodosius (379–95) made Christianity the only permissible religion and banned all pagan religious practices. In the fifth century, when imperial rule began to crumble, the Church was able to offer converts continuity in uncertain times, the comfort of one all-embracing God, an afterlife, a communal experience, and even a new social philanthropy. Yet it took time to create an episcopal structure and by 400 CE it is estimated that a quarter of the cities in Gaul still did not have bishops; and their intermittent attendance at Gallic church councils suggests vacancies were not uncommon.

Archaeology is able to give a more nuanced picture, noting in particular new burial practices. Distinct Christian cemeteries and tombstones with Christian symbols show the spread of Christianity, but many of these are post-400. Sarcophagi demonstrate with biblical scenes or the chi-rho that some of the elite were adopting Christianity. Firmly dated churches and baptisteries are rare, many classed as 'early Christian', that is fourth to sixth century. This is partly due to old excavations where techniques limited accurate dating, but also because so many Christian sites have been under later ecclesiastical buildings and it has only been possible to examine a small part where dating evidence may be minimal. Equally, buildings may re-use stone and brick or even walls, from earlier non-Christian structures. Undoubtedly Poitiers has the grandest baptistery with fourth- and fifth-century remains inside the evocative later building. Conversion to Christianity was much slower amongst the *pagani*, the country-dwellers; it is thought the parish structure only became really significant in the eighth century.

THE END OF THE WESTERN ROMAN EMPIRE AND LATE ANTIQUITY

THE LOOSENING GRIP

Under Constantine and his sons the barbarian threat to the Rhineland borders was largely contained. Then in 350, Magnentius, a field army commander, murdered the western Emperor, put together a large army in Gaul, but suffered total defeat at Mursa Major (353): thousands of troops died. It meant new exactions, reduced manning levels, more arbitrary military behaviour and more barbarian recruitment to fill the gaps. Campaigns against German inroads conducted by Julian (356–9) and then by Valentinian I (364–75) fought off a whole series of attacks. Meanwhile the Gallic elite enjoyed the continued vitality of Trier as western capital and Ausonius could write his masterpiece on the joys of the river Moselle when serving the Emperor Gratian (367–383).

Imperial power in Gaul might have survived longer but for two decisive battles. First came the shattering defeat at Adrianople in 378, when the Visigoths killed the eastern Emperor Valens and two-thirds of his field army, shocking the entire Roman world. It inspired Arbogast (a Frank), the western Master of the Soldiers, to try and force the new eastern ruler Theodosius to accept his puppet western Emperor. The ensuing battle at Frigidus (394) was extremely bloody and most of the western mobile army was destroyed. Theodosius and his eastern successors had been unable to find a solution to the Visigoths, who wished to be accepted within the Empire; they were given *foederati* status, but no place to settle. Their wanderings eventually brought them to Italy, where the western Augustus, Honorius, secure in Ravenna, had neither the energy nor the resources to meet the challenge. In 410, the Visigoths, led by Alaric, entered Rome – the first barbarians to do so since the Gauls, 800 years before. There was universal horror, but no action.

THE VANDALS, SUEBI AND ALANS

Federations such as the Vandals and Suebi emerged in northern Europe, whilst nomadic horsemen, like the Alans and Huns, came from the vast Steppes. How groups saw themselves is obscure – or derived from imaginative later sources. At the beginning of the fifth century the **Vandals** were seen as being two distinct groups, the Asdings and Silings who, both fearing the Huns, had ended up in the Rhineland. The **Suebi** (also called Suevi) were a confederation of western Germans who had been dangerous raiders on Gaul since the third century. They were joined in the Rhineland by the **Alans**. They all saw the potential of a frontier with very few troops. A frozen Rhine in December 405 made it easy to cross. The intervention of yet another usurper, Constantine III, with the last available troops drawn from Britain, initially restricted the invaders to north-eastern Gaul but his incompetence eventually led to his defeat at the hands of Constantius, Honorius' Master of the Soldiers.

The barbarians meanwhile headed south-west. A Christian poet from Auch, Orientis, recalled about 20 years later in the 430s, 'All Gaul smoked as on a funeral pyre' (Book II, 184–5). Their reputation certainly suggests they caused significant damage, but the archaeology gives little evidence of this and when they set about besieging Toulouse, its bishop persuaded them to withdraw. They crossed the Pyrenees (409) to pillage the barely touched provinces of Spain. They supposedly drew lots on which areas they would lay waste: the Alans the west, the Suebi

the north-west, the Asdings the north-east and the Silings the south. At no point did any of them try to get approval from Honorius to settle in Gaul or Spain.

THE VISIGOTHS

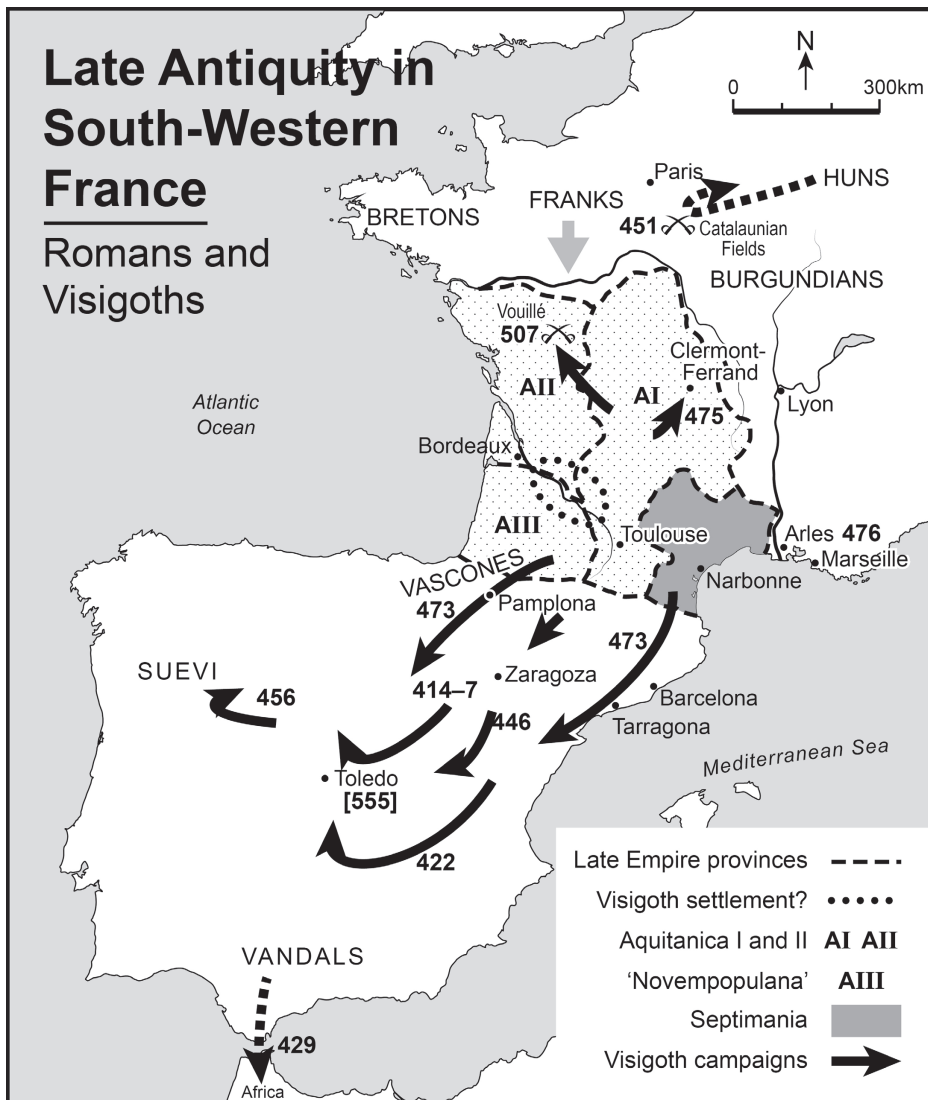
Wanderings continued. On Alaric's death in 410, his successor Athaulf led them into southern Gaul, spending seven years fighting with or against Roman forces there and in Spain; they hoped eventually to overcome the distress they had provoked by the sack of Rome and gain imperial recognition. By 413 they had returned to Gaul and took Bordeaux, Toulouse and Narbonne; they were too powerful to budge. In 414 Athaulf married Honorius' sister Galla Placidia, a hostage taken in Rome four years before. Athaulf was murdered the same year.

Settlement in Aquitania (418). The short-lived Visigoth king Vallia (or Walla) handed Placidia over to Constantius (who subsequently married her). At last a deal was made. The Visigoths, now led by Theodoric, agreed a joint campaign in Spain with Constantius, defeating the Siling Vandals and the Alans. In return Constantius and Honorius at last gave the Visigoths secure, formally recognised settlement in the Garonne basin. It was described as *hospitalitas*, its meaning debatable but probably a mix of tax collection and land; in return, they would protect the region from Rome's enemies and operate in Spain when necessary.

The kingdom of Toulouse. Theodoric I (418–51) was king of a group of warrior chiefs and their Visigoth followers. However, after spending 40 years in the Empire they had picked up other warriors, their kin and followers, attracted by the Visigoths' successful survival across the Roman world. Many envied the wealth of the Roman elite and its culture and wanted to adopt the lifestyle. The cities of Toulouse and Bordeaux quickly recognised the Visigoths as the real regional power.

The Visigoths had adopted Arianism in the 340s, rather than the orthodox version of Christianity. Although this was a potential source of friction, this did not materialise under Theodoric's 33-year rule: clearly both sets of believers chose accommodation. No doubt there were land confiscations, but not on a mass scale. In the disintegrating Roman State, it possibly meant less rapacious taxes and some security for many of the local nobility and their possessions in both the countryside and cities and, for many years, the elite could continue to believe that they were part of an Empire-wide culture protected by a formidable force. Toulouse became the Visigoth capital. Excavations have identified buildings that could be a palace, a church and a memorial chapel, but in general evidence of their presence is very thin in both towns and countryside: only tiny numbers of identifiable Gothic burials and no villas have demonstrably Gothic owners. The most convincing explanation is that when they settled here they had already adopted many features of a Roman lifestyle and in so doing merged with the locals. They did, though, retain their warrior spirit.

Under Theodoric there were occasional clashes with the Empire, such as an attempt to take Arles in 430, but most of the time the Visigoths acted as *foederati*, frequently as the key element in an imperial army. Their campaigns in Spain played a major part in stimulating the Vandals to leave in 429 for safer and richer pickings in Roman north Africa. Another joint campaign in 446 against the Suebi, who had now moved into central Spain, had more limited success. Theodoric's last act was to provide the largest component in the allied army commanded



Map: Late Antiquity in South-West France

by the Roman general Aetius at the victorious battle of Catalaunian Fields (451) that turned the Huns away from Europe. Theoderic died in the fighting. For the Empire it was a mixed blessing, as Aetius' good relationship with the Huns was broken: they would no longer provide troops powerful enough to keep other barbarians in check.

Theoderic II (453–66), having murdered his brother Thorismund, took Narbonne and then Narbonnesis as far as the Rhône, the area named Septimania. It had become clear that Rome had neither the troops nor the tax base to raise more armies. North of the Loire was being taken over by Franks and the central spine of Gaul was in the hands of the Burgundians. **Euric**

(466–84), in another case of fratricide, took over, and recognising the western Roman Empire was no more than a shell, moved east into the Auvergne, took Clermont-Ferrand and, by the time he died in 484, held the land as far north as the Loire. The western Empire died in 476. The boy emperor Romulus in 476 was retired, not replaced *and* allowed to live. It was now a question of State creation.

The Visigoth model was inevitably Roman, but it also had to have a distinct Gothic identity in contrast not only to the defunct Roman Empire but also to the equally new Frank and Burgundian states. Euric began the process by issuing a set of laws rather than relying purely on Roman law and Gothic custom. His son, **Alaric II** (484–507), took this further with his *Breviary*, a code defining the rights and responsibilities of Goths and ‘Romans’. This was clearly based on the Theodosian Code (438) – indeed many of the laws were the same – but the *Breviary* stresses the distinctiveness of the Gothic leadership. The number of Gothic-style finds in burials increases in the later fifth century, but the regime was not anti-Gallo-Roman – apart from a brief period of pro-Arian interference in church matters by Euric. The Gallo-Roman elite were anyway as prepared to work for Gothic kings as they had been for the emperor. Burials suggest they were adopting Gothic clothes and brooches, even wearing swords. The great Gallo-Roman letter writer Sidonius Apollinaris, a passionate supporter of the Empire, had finally recognised its incapacity when he was sold out attempting to defend Clermont-Ferrand (475). Visigoth power in Spain was firmly established in the 470s with a massive pincer attack in 473 across the Pyrenees. Serious resistance to the Visigoths collapsed in Spain and Gothic nobles began to settle there, although the Suebi remained secure in the north-west and the indigenous tribe, the Vascones, related to the Aquitani and ancestors of the Gascons and the Basques, hung on in the north-east.

The real problem for the kingdom of Toulouse was the Franks. Since the 480s, the Merovingian king Clovis had murdered relatives and challengers without compunction; he was also prepared to take on the Visigoths for dominance in Gaul. During the 490s his armies struck as far south as Saintes and Bordeaux. Alaric II, recognising the need to confront the Merovingian king directly, led his army north and met the Franks at Vouillé (507). He was killed and the Visigoth defeat was decisive. It was the end of the kingdom of Toulouse, though the Visigoths hung on to Septimania and built a new kingdom in Spain that survived until the Arab conquest in 712.

HOW ROMAN WAS LIFE IN SOUTH-WEST FRANCE AFTER THE EMPIRE?

For most of the Gallo-Roman population the difference between Roman, Visigoth and Merovingian rule must have seemed relatively slight. The taxes collected were the same as those of the fourth century; the laws were largely late Roman, modified by royal decree, just as they had been by imperial edict; and the need to petition to mollify the oppressiveness of the regime hardly differed. Even if the villas fell into ruin and some landowning families were replaced by ‘barbarians’ the estates did not disappear; slaves and tied labourers were still present, though increasingly living in hamlets and villages. The move away from a market economy, with reduced long-distance trade and the gradual disappearance of low value coins, had been continuous since the later 200s. Latin remained the written language of all educated people and forms of Gallo-Latin were still spoken at least north of the Garonne.

How then did Gallo-Romans perceive themselves in this world? Social class was one deep-seated division between people. Whilst Roman law was gradually modified it did not fundamentally change the position of the wealthy, who could still avoid torture and receive lesser forms of punishment. Given that the power of landlords and military men had not changed (though the holders of that power did), for the mass of inhabitants the strongest feelings will have been for family and locality. As Christianity spread, so this too came to form a major part in identity.

The landowning elite of late Roman Gaul had been gradually adjusting to fit new realities throughout the fourth, fifth and sixth centuries. Of course numbers were killed and others fled, but survival as a group and retention of as much wealth as possible, primarily their estates, lay in redefining their Gallo-Roman identity. Certainly in the fifth and sixth century lifestyles changed: the grandiose villas were abandoned and status was defined by clothes and jewellery. During the fifth century they gradually learnt there was no future in a traditional Roman administrative or political career. For all the Gallo-Roman elite, the key to the retention of any authority under barbarian rule now lay in their cultural heritage.

Legal expertise, literature, even rhetoric were needed by the new states, and elite families could supply advisers, courtiers and lawyers, just as they had to governors and emperors. Some, like the son of Sidonius Apollinaris, represented a new generation who even became warriors: he fought in the Visigoth army at Vouillé (507) and lost his life. More crucial, because it gave them a status less dependent on the whims and immediate needs of kings, was to adapt their control of communities by becoming bishops in the Christian church. Whilst many fourth-century bishops are shadowy figures or militants often from a low status background, in the fifth century the great landowners were taking over: episcopal sanctity enhanced them as patron brokers between the people and the state. Many aristocratic families competed fiercely for episcopal sees. Long-term, for all Gallo-Romans the future meant fusion and the evolution of new identities.