PUTTING THE ROMAN PERIPHERY ON THE MAP: THE GEOGRAPHY OF ROMANNESS, ORTHODOXY, AND LEGITIMACY IN VICTRICIUS OF ROUEN’S *DE LAUDE SANCTORUM*.

Abstract

Victricius of Rouen’s *De laude sanctorum* (c. 396) contains an original discussion of the cult of relics, introduced by a brief excursus on his recent trip to Britain. In this article, I argue that Victricius used both sections to define two symbolic territories, Britain and the centre of the empire, which invited his audience to think geographically about the concepts of Romanness, orthodoxy, and legitimacy. Exploiting a long-standing tradition of stereotypes and geographical imaginations, Victricius used his argumentation of the unity of relics to justify his position in the Felician controversy, a contemporary episcopal and political conflict.

Keywords: late fourth century-Roman periphery- relics-identity

Around 396 Victricius (d. 407), the bishop of Rouen in northern Gaul, preached the *De laude sanctorum* (*Praising the saints*), a sermon that he later reworked as a treatise and sent to his friends Ambrose of Milan (d. 397) and Paulinus of Nola (d. 431).[[1]](#endnote-1)The *De laude sanctorum* celebrated the arrival in Rouen of different relics sent by Ambrose and, appropriately, it mostly focuses on the cult and miraculous powers of the saints. Victricius, however, devoted the second and third paragraphs of the sermon to explaining his recent trip to Britain, where he had been requested to deal with some unspecified ecclesiastical conflicts.

A long-ignored text, the *De laude sanctorum* has received considerable attention in the last decades. Much of this scholarship has focused on its unique exposition of the theology and the cult of relics. David Hunter, for example, has explained Victricius’ promotion of the cult of saints in the light of the context of the anti-relic sentiment in Gaul.[[2]](#endnote-2) Gillian Clark has focused on Victricius’ use of classical motifs and rhetoric to explain the cult of relics, and has interpreted the sermon as an attempt of cultural translation.[[3]](#endnote-3) More recently, Patricia Cox Miller has studied Victricius’ emphasis on the incarnational theology of relics and on the unity of their divine power despite their dispersion.[[4]](#endnote-4) Victricius’ excursus on Britain, on the other hand, is one of the few late fourth-century eyewitness accounts of the island, and has attracted the attention of scholars interested in the particularities of British Christianity and its detachment from the empire, such as Ben Croxford and William Frend.[[5]](#endnote-5) Most of previous research has thus analyzed either the excursus on Britain or the body of the sermon. Only recently, Meritxell Pérez Martínez has conducted an integrated study of both parts, arguing that Victricius’ mission to Britain aimed to spread the cult of relics as part of the ecclesiastical infighting in the aftermath of the Nicene controversy.[[6]](#endnote-6)

In this article, I will consider both sections as meaningful constituents of Victricius’ discourse, and will put forward two arguments. First, I will argue that the *De laude sanctorum* formed part of Victricius’ response to his adversaries in the Felician controversy, an episcopal and political conflict that was named after the bishop Felix of Trier (d. c. 399). The Felician controversy divided Gallic bishops into two groups from the mid 380s to the first quarter of the fifth century: the Felicians, who had strong connections with the local Gallic aristocracy that supported Maximus’ usurpation (383-388); and the anti-Felicians, such as Victricius, who maintained a close relationship with Ambrose of Milan and other Italian bishops.[[7]](#endnote-7) Secondly, I will argue that Victricius’ defence of his anti-Felician position was largely constructed in terms of identity and spatiality. Reworking an existing geography of stereotypes and identities, Victricius defined two symbolic territories, Britain and the centre of the empire, which he charged with opposing cultural and political meanings in order to encourage his audience to think geographically about the concepts of Romanness, orthodoxy, and political legitimacy. Victricius drew on old *topoi* that exaggerated the remoteness and primitivism of Britain, a province that had been frequently involved in usurpations and barbarian invasions. He used this depiction of the island as a warning to all those who, like the Felician bishops, had supported the usurpers. By contrast, he emphasized the unity of the relics and portrayed them as repositories of orthodoxy and political legitimacy in order to present the empire as a harmonic, civilizing polity that warded off chaos and barbarism. This game of opposites underpinned Victricius’ policy of cultivating strong extra-local relationships, as a way to keep the frontier city of Rouen connected to the religious and political centres of the Roman empire.

1. A bishop in the far north

Little is known about Victricius (born c. 340), whose only surviving text is the *De laude sanctorum*. Most of the existing information about him comes from a letter that his friend Paulinus of Nola sent to him around 398. According to Paulinus, he was born at ‘the end of the earth’, normally interpreted by scholars as Belgica or Britain.[[8]](#endnote-8) Victricius joined the imperial army, but quit after a sudden conversion, throwing his weapons at the feet of the tribune and refusing to engage in combat. He was consequently flogged and condemned to death, but miraculously eluded his fate and returned to Gaul, probably in the early 380s.[[9]](#endnote-9) Soon after, around 386, he became bishop of Rouen. Victricius’ past as an imperial soldier, however, remained an important element of his self-representation in the *De laude sanctorum*, an issue that I shall discuss in more detail below.

Many things changed in northern Gaul during Victricius’ lifetime. At the time Victricius was born, the region was one of the political centres of the empire, after Diocletian (d. 311) turned Trier into one of the four imperial courts in 293. Enlarged during the reign of Constantine (d. 337), Trier was an imperial residence for most of the fourth century, hosting a vast number of high-ranking military and administrative staff. The splendour of the new court is colourfully described in Ausonius’ *Mosella* (371), a grandiloquent poem that presents Trier as the new Rome of the north.[[10]](#endnote-10) By the time that Victricius left the army and returned to Gaul, however, the picture was rather different. In 380, Gratian moved the court south to Milan, which contributed to the increasing political instability in the region. Affected by the loss of the opportunities for advancement offered by imperial patronage, elements within the Gallic local aristocracy seem to have become more prone to support usurpers in the following years.[[11]](#endnote-11) One of them was Magnus Maximus, a Spanish general who was appointed emperor by his troops in Britain in 383, before killing the Emperor Gratian and establishing his court at Trier. Relying in part on the support of the Gallic aristocracy, Maximus’ reign lasted until 388, when he was defeated and executed by the Emperor Theodosius (d. 395). The peace, however, was short-lived. Only four years later, in 392, Eugenius and Arbogastes seized power in Trier, reigning until Theodosius defeated them in September 394. A new period of unrest started after Theodosius’ death, in January 395, and the subsequent division of the empire between his two sons, Honorius and Arcadius, which opened a period of confrontation between the eastern and western court.

Rouen was affected by these periods of usurpation and political instability. As capital of the province Lugdunensis Secunda, on the shores of the English Channel, Rouen was close to the main transport routes of British grain to the Rhine frontier. During the second and third centuries, Rouen experienced some economic prosperity, demonstrated by the construction of a group of high profile public buildings, including an amphitheatre and a complex of public baths.[[12]](#endnote-12) During the fourth century, however, the situation changed and the region suffered an economic downturn, visible archaeologically in a drastic reduction of urban areas and the almost total disappearance of villas.[[13]](#endnote-13) The progressive evanescence of imperial rule in Britain seems to have contributed further to this process. The sixth-century British historian Gildas dated the end of Roman Britain after the usurpation of Maximus, a picture that fits with contemporary accounts that emphasize the growing insecurity on the island, which suffered more frequent raids by the Scots and the Picts after 383. Modern archaeology has partially confirmed this scenario, showing a substantial decay in commodity trade with the Continent and signs of the military withdrawal.[[14]](#endnote-14) Just as Britain, Northern Gaul also suffered the increasing pressure of the barbarians and the removal of imperial institutions. After the translation of the court to Milan in 380, the Gallic prefecture was also moved from Trier to Arles in 395.[[15]](#endnote-15) Halfway between the English Channel and the Saxon border, late fourth-century Rouen was thus far from the relocated centres of the empire, but dangerously near to highly unstable regions. The threat of isolation was realized less than a decade after Victricius wrote his sermon, when much of the region was ravaged by usurpations, internal rebellions and barbarian invasions.[[16]](#endnote-16)

2. Victricius and the Felician controversy

Despite this volatile context, Rouen emerged as the main episcopal see in northwest Gaul. With a long Christian tradition, in the fourth century the city became a centre of an intensive missionary effort, which strengthened its metropolitan authority in the region.[[17]](#endnote-17) For an ex-legionnaire such as Victricius, becoming the bishop of Rouen in 386 was thus a major achievement. But the fourth-century Gallic church was a world in conflict, and Victricius’ episcopacy faced strong opposition. This is clear in a passage of the *De laude sanctorum*, in which Victricius recognized that part of his community protested the celebrations for the relics.[[18]](#endnote-18) Most of the historiography has rightly understood that Victricius’ sermon replied to the anti-relic faction, against whom the author deployed a vast number of novel arguments that illustrated the power and orthodoxy of relics.[[19]](#endnote-19) Relics, however, were not only objects of devotion, but also tokens that denoted political and episcopal affiliation.[[20]](#endnote-20) In Gaul, their cult had acquired stronger political connotations during the Felician schism, an episcopal conflict that involved the issue of the legitimacy of the ruling emperors.[[21]](#endnote-21)

The dispute had its origin in Magnus Maximus’ unsuccessful management of the Priscillianist controversy. The latter had started among the southern Spanish episcopacy, but had quickly escalated, involving some of the main civil and ecclesiastical authorities of the empire. Sometime between 384 and 386, Maximus sought to end the controversy and summoned a civil trial, in which the head of the movement, the ascetic bishop Priscillian of Avila, and some of his followers were found guilty of sorcery and put to death.[[22]](#endnote-22) Far from bringing peace, however, Maximus’ decision caused a new division between those who supported Priscillian’s condemnation, such as Felix of Trier; and those against it, such as Martin of Tours (d. 397) or Victricius of Rouen. Bishops of both sides excommunicated each other, and thus began the so-called Felician schism.

Both groups deployed different strategies and episcopal styles. The anti-Felicians had strong connections with the Italian church, especially with Ambrose of Milan, who had refused to communicate with Felix of Trier and his followers during his second embassy to Magnus Maximus around 385 or 386.[[23]](#endnote-23) As Ambrose, the anti-Felician bishops were also enthusiastic promoters of asceticism and the cult of relics. The Felicians, on the other hand, had closer connections with Magnus Maximus and with the Gallic local aristocracy that had supported the usurper. As none of their writings have been preserved, the Felician position about relic and martyr veneration cannot be stated, but they were probably not fervent defenders of these practices, considering that their foundational episode had been the execution of a Christian bishop in a civil trial, a case that was dangerously reminiscent of the old Christian martyrdoms.[[24]](#endnote-24)

Over the next years, the two opposing parties summoned separated councils in order to deal with the controversy.[[25]](#endnote-25) Ambrose emerged as a key actor among the anti-Felicians, presiding over a synod in Milan in 390, and being requested by the Emperor Valentinian II to attend other Gallic councils.[[26]](#endnote-26) A year after Ambrose’s death, in 398, anti-Felician bishops gathered at the Council of Turin, which partly followed the guidelines given by Ambrose and Siricius.[[27]](#endnote-27) The conflict, however, was not only negotiated through canonical law and procedures; Christian authors also defended their position in different types of texts. Composed around the same time as the *De laude sanctorum*, Sulpicius Severus’ *Life of Saint Martin of Tours* (c. 397) described how Martin refused to join the bishops that ‘had gathered around Maximus […], who had deprived one emperor [Valentinian II] of his kingdom, and other [Gratian] of his life’.[[28]](#endnote-28) As I shall explain later in this article, Victricius’ *De laude sanctorum* contains similar concerns about political legitimacy.

Victricius’ sympathy for the anti-Felician party started before his episcopal election. In 386, he met with the bishops Paulinus of Nola and Martin of Tours in Vienne, where they collected relics of the Milanese martyrs Gervasius and Protasius.[[29]](#endnote-29) Ambrose had discovered both saints in June that year, only two months after he had successfully confronted the Homoian Empress Justina in the so-called Conflict of the Basilicas. The dispute exteriorized the division between the Milanese Nicene and Homoian communities, divided by their different conception of the Trinity. Gervasius and Protasius thus became a token of Nicene belonging in northern Italy, where their relics were soon distributed.[[30]](#endnote-30) In northern Gaul, however, the impact of the Nicene controversy was considerably more limited.[[31]](#endnote-31) In that region, the two martyrs were chiefly a symbol of anti-Felician affiliation due to their connection with Milan, the main imperial residence in the west, and with Ambrose, who, despite his clash with Justina, was always a committed supporter of the ruling dynasty.[[32]](#endnote-32)

In 396, ten years after the meeting in Vienne, Victricius received the second batch of relics. A bold restatement of Victricius’ relationship with Ambrose, the new translation asserted his connections with like-minded anti-Felician bishops in Gaul and Italy. In the sermon delivered on the occasion, the *De laude sanctorum*, the bishop did not explicitly address the political issues of the controversy. As Victricius admitted, a solemn ceremony was not a suitable occasion for the open discussion of worldly affairs.[[33]](#endnote-33) Instead, he used spatial references as the conceptual locus of his argumentation, and justified his anti-Felician position through the meanings and associations conveyed by two geographical locations: Britain, which had a long record of usurpations and barbarian invasions, instantiated the dangers of breaking with the empire; while the places of origin of the relics, which included important political and religious centres, showed the advantages of Roman civilization. This discursive strategy aimed to exploit contemporary concerns about the progressive loss of imperial control in Britain and northern Gaul in order to galvanize opposition against those who supported the usurpations. Victricius’ cartographical construction drew on a tradition of stereotypes, which had long defined which attributes and behaviours were Roman, and therefore desirable, and which deviated from Roman fundamental values, and should be avoided.[[34]](#endnote-34) The *De laude sanctorum* participated in this long-established narrative of Romanness and barbarism, reusing some of its rhetorical motifs and remapping its geography of identities.

3. The Roman ‘peripherist’ discourse about Gaul and Britain.

Derogative stereotypes about peripheral provinces were common in Roman literature. Colouring the black-or-white distinction between Romans and barbarians, peripheral regions were presented as liminal territories both in geographical and cultural terms when described from the centre of the empire.[[35]](#endnote-35) This ‘peripherist’ discourse essentialized Roman provincials, who were frequently characterized as fiery, ignorant and uncivilized.[[36]](#endnote-36) Spatiality was also an important component in these portrayals and highly ideologized geographical imagery was used to depict liminal territories as remote, untamed landscapes.[[37]](#endnote-37) Deprecatory and patronizing, this narrative tells us more about Roman society than about the people they described. Social fears and projections, and particular political agendas informed Roman views about its farthest provinces. By recalling the menaces that lurked in the confines of the empire, this discourse reinforced a common identity and built legitimacy for the imperial institutions. This ideological construction pervaded much of the contemporary written sources, and it has also shaped modern historiographical views on the cultural and economic detachment of the peripheries of the empire.[[38]](#endnote-38)

Britain is a quintessential example of the ‘peripherist’ discourse. In most Roman sources about the island, a vast majority of which were written by outsiders, it rarely was a neutral geographical denomination. Centuries of derogative descriptions turned Britain and the Britons into a literary device that excited Roman imaginations about the northwest edge of the empire and conveyed the notions of otherness, savagery, and ignorance.[[39]](#endnote-39) This tradition started before the Roman conquest (43 C.E.), when the British were frequently described as bloodthirsty savages who lived naked and shared their women.[[40]](#endnote-40) Under Roman rule, the province underwent a deep process of acculturation, including a relatively early adoption of Christianity, but Roman attitudes towards Britain did not changed substantially.[[41]](#endnote-41)

The political turmoil in the fourth century reinvigorated derogative perceptions of this province. For the well-to-do intelligentsia, the British were objects of fear and ridicule, as it is shown in Ausonius’ famous word play about the Briton Silvius Bonus: ‘no good man (*bonus*) is a Briton’.[[42]](#endnote-42) Most of contemporary sources also continued portraying Britain as a mysterious island in the vicinity of the barbarians and hardly made any distinction between Romano-British and rebels or Scots beyond the borders. Writing in 400, the court poet Claudian (d. c. 404) described Britain with the same stereotypes that Strabo had used four centuries before: ‘wearing the skin of a Caledonian beast, her cheeks tattooed’.[[43]](#endnote-43) Far from being gratuitous vilification, however, the British caricature exteriorized contemporary fears and frustrations about the increasing barbarian pressure on the borders, and helped to rationalize the disintegration of Roman rule in the periphery. This is especially evident in historical narratives, such as Ammianus Marcellinus’ *Res Gestae* (c. 400), in which Britain is solely mentioned in relation to rebellion, invasion, and the exile of serious criminals.[[44]](#endnote-44)

British territory also received highly ideologized descriptions, in which space acquired emotional and rational sense. Exaggerations about the untamed British landscape were common in Roman discourse and contributed to accentuate its geographical extremity and the cultural liminality of the British.[[45]](#endnote-45) In this narrative, the sea played an important textual role as a symbol of Britain’s isolation and lawlessness. An example is the *Panegyric to the Emperor Maximian*, written in 289, where Britain is described as a refuge of pirates, who used the ocean to scape Roman authority: ‘What state of mind does that pirate have, when he sees your [Maximian’s] armies about to enter into that Channel?’[[46]](#endnote-46) A century later Claudian used similar imagery in his *Panegyric on the fourth Consulate of Honorius* (398), in which he compared Britain to the mythical most northern island of Thule: ‘How useful were the eternal frost, the cold skies, the unknown Channel against him [Honorius’ grandfather, Theodosius]? The Orcades were drenched red with Saxon defeat; Thule was warm with the blood of Picts; icy Hibernia cried for the piles of dead Scots’.[[47]](#endnote-47) The sea and the extreme weather thus contributed to represent Britain as an example of the turmoil and confusion of the imperial periphery.

Much like Britain, late fourth-century Gaul was seen as a liminal country both in geographical and cultural terms. Long considered one of the cultural centres of the empire, Gaul had provided some of the most renowned rhetoricians and orators of the third and fourth centuries.[[48]](#endnote-48) As the political situation deteriorated, however, derogative stereotypes about Gallic primitivism gain in strength and, at the turn of the fifth century, the discourse about Gaul and the Gauls was a complex and often contradicting amalgam of clichés that highlighted their unruliness and barbarism. In 398, in a panegyric on the Emperor Honorius, Claudian echoed some of these *topoi*, as he acknowledged the difficulties in imposing an effective imperial authority in Gaul: ‘fierce Gaul shall submit to your [Honorius’] laws and our benevolent Spanish be guided by your just rule’.[[49]](#endnote-49) Non-ceremonial writings were even more explicit. In Ammianus’ *Res Gestae*, for instance, Gaul is mostly mentioned in relation to war, usurpation, and destruction.[[50]](#endnote-50) Ammianus also paid attention to the Gauls’ customs and physical appearance:

‘Almost all the Gauls are tall, pale and redheaded, terrible because of the savageness of their eyes, belligerent, and excessively insolent. In fact, a company of foreigners will not be able to withstand one of them in a fight if he brings his wife, much stronger than he and with gleaming eyes, […]. The voices of most of them are just as frightening and threatening when they are calm as when they are angry’.[[51]](#endnote-51)

Despite its apparent naivety, this description addressed the backbone of the Roman code of public appearance and behaviour, and portrayed the Gauls as the opposite of respectable citizens. Ammianus conspicuously drew on barbarian imagery that Dio Cassius (d. 235) had previously used for depicting Boudica (d. 60-61 C.E.), a British queen and rebel that became the archetypal example of the uncivilized ‘other’ in Roman sources: ‘In stature she was very tall, in appearance most terrifying, in the glance of her eye most fierce, and her voice was harsh; a great mass of the tawniest hair fell to her hips’.[[52]](#endnote-52) Ammianus’ implicit association of the Gauls with the British queen reflects an undercurrent of derogative stereotypes that crystalized in later sources, when Gaul’s Romanness was openly questioned. In 416, Orosius explicitly associated Gauls and British ‘who have wantonly attacked the Roman State’, and considered their usurpations and rebellions as external wars against the allies, instead of internal revolts of Romans.[[53]](#endnote-53)

Gaul’s cultural and political liminality was also expressed in geographical terms. The increasing fears of estrangement modified the way Romans understood Gallic territory and several later Roman sources described northern Gaul as a distant country, defined by the nearness to the barbarians and the decline of its cities.[[54]](#endnote-54) An example is provided in the letter that Paulinus of Nola sent to Victricius after having read his *De laude sanctorum* in 398*.* Although a native from Bordeaux, Paulinus had spent much of his life in Italy, where he had been first suffect consul and governor of Campania, and later bishop of Nola, near Napoli. From his see in southern Italy, Paulinus deployed a great deal of ‘peripherist’ geographical imagery to describe Victricius’ missions north of Rouen. According to Paulinus, Victricius came from ‘the end of the earth’ to enlighten ‘formerly dark regions’. Landscape and geographical extremity articulated his account, which portrayed Christianization as a civilizing process:

‘Where once barbarian strangers or native bandits gathered in deserted, equally dangerous areas of forest and shore, now venerable angelic choruses of saints fill the cities, towns, islands, and woods with churches and monasteries crowded with people and harmonious in peace’.

Paulinus further stressed these aspects by using classical and biblical references. He first compared the region to the ‘land of the shadow of death’ of Zebulun and Naphtali (Isaiah IX.11; Matthew XIV.15), two of the tribes of Israel on the border with the gentiles that had been humiliated by God and attacked by the barbarians. In the same sentence, he referred to Belgica, ‘which the growling ocean beats with barbarian waves’, as the land of the Morini, a Celtic tribe that had ruthlessly fought Caesar and Augustus.[[55]](#endnote-55) Emphasizing northern Gaul’s barbarism and extremity helped Paulinus to highlight the main argument of his letter, namely, that Victricius had transformed the region into a glistening centre of Christianity. Yet, Paulinus’ exaggeration shows how deep these stereotypes ran in the centre of the empire.

The ‘peripherist’ discourse, however, was not only fabricated in the heart of the empire; peripheral regions also internalized this ideological construction.[[56]](#endnote-56) In Gaul, local stories overstated Britain’s wilderness and barbarism in an attempt to offload the stigma of difference. Jerome, a correspondent and good friend of Paulinus of Nola, mentioned in 393 that he had heard in Gaul that the British tribe of the Attacotti enjoyed eating human flesh.[[57]](#endnote-57) Probably during the same stay, Jerome came to know about the scandalous sexual mores of Scots and Attacotti, who shared their women and raised their children communally.[[58]](#endnote-58) Composed amidst this ideological background, the *De laude sanctorum* reflects similar self-conscious apprehensions about the position of northern Gaul in the empire. Victricius also put a lot of rhetorical élan into dissociating Rouen from its unwanted neighbour, Britain. But in the context of conflict that engulfed Rouen, highlighting Britain’s otherness was not only a strategy of distinction, but also a central argument in support of Victricius’ political and episcopal agenda.

3. Britain, outside ‘the bond of discipline’

Britain plays an essential role in the *De laude sanctorum* that historians have not yet fully appreciated. Victricius devoted two paragraphs to describing his trip to the island, and decided to preserve this section in the published version of his sermon, despite the fact that it did not contribute to his discussion about the universal power of relics.[[59]](#endnote-59) The excursus on Britain, however, was the linchpin of Victricius’ justification of his anti-Felician loyalties. Victricius organized the *De laude sanctorum* as a game of opposites. At the beginning of the treatise, Britain worked as a photographic negative of the empire, a window from which his audience could peer out into a world without the protection of Rome. The picture contrasted with the centres of political and religious administration that he mentioned in the following paragraphs. This layout helped Victricius to convey his main implicit argument, namely, that the power of the relics helped to hold Rouen tightly connected with the centres of Christianity and decision-making, and away from the chaos that lay outside the cosy confines of the empire.

Victricius used different rhetorical strategies in order to insinuate Britain’s barbarism and backwardness. For instance, he tapped into old-age prejudices that portrayed the British as uneducated and violent: ‘I spread among the wise the love of peace. I read to the teachable, I indoctrinated the ignorant, I forced the unwilling, as the Apostle says, *in season and out of season* (II Tim 4.2), I reached their souls with instruction and flattery (*palpatio*)’.[[60]](#endnote-60) Victricius had admittedly been required to deal with dissension among the bishops, what fits with the substantial development of Christianity on the island.[[61]](#endnote-61) Nothing, however, is said about the British episcopate or the reasons for their conflict. This omission, on the other hand, contributed to present Victricius’ trip to Britain as a Christianizing, civilizing mission, such as those he conducted among the Belgians.[[62]](#endnote-62)

Significantly, although Victricius’ role in Britain was that of a peacemaker, he used abundant military imagery for describing his assignment: ‘The reason why I went to Britain and stayed there was to fulfil your [the saints’] orders (*praecepta*). My fellow priests, venerated bishops, called me there to make peace. As your soldier, I could not refuse’.[[63]](#endnote-63) Victricius’ self-portrait was not a novelty; the ‘soldier of God’ (*miles Christi*) was a well-established *topos* in Christian rhetoric, which had been used, among others, by Tertullian (d. c. 220) for describing the Christian life, and Jerome two centuries later for characterizing female ascetics.[[64]](#endnote-64) In late fourth-century Italy and Gaul, the motif of the *miles Christi* also became part of the common language and ritual of the anti-Felician leaders. Ambrose of Milan had used the *topos* extensively in his writings on virginity and on the occasion of the discovery of the relics of Gervasius and Protasius in the outskirts of Milan: ‘such are the soldiers I have, not soldiers of this world, but soldiers of Christ’. The allusion was also a reference to the adjacent reliquaries of Nabor and Felix, two Christian legionaries who had been executed at the beginning of the fourth century. Some years earlier, all the soldiers of the Theban Legion had also suffered martyrdom in the Gallic town of Acaunum, now Saint-Maurice, in the Swiss Alps. A supporter of Ambrose, the bishop Theodulus of Octodurum (Martigny) discovered their relics sometime before 391, and popularized their cult in Eastern Gaul.[[65]](#endnote-65) A more recent example of the *miles Christi* was the anti-Felician bishop Martin of Tours. According to Sulpicius Severus, after spending his youth in the army, Martin converted to Christianity in the late 350s, confronting the Emperor Julian by stating: ‘I am a soldier of Christ, it is not allowed for me to fight.’[[66]](#endnote-66)

Victricius, like Martin, also used the military metaphor for obliquely alluding to his own past in the imperial army: ‘experienced and veteran soldiers respect the Lord more… Such, then, is the soldier who comes to meet you’.[[67]](#endnote-67) Victricius’ tangible use of the *miles Christi*, helped to draw parallels between his past, battling to impose the Roman order, and his present, fighting to defend Christianity in the fringes of the Roman empire.[[68]](#endnote-68) By blurring the lines between these two assignments, Victricius presented himself as an active soldier who went to Britain with a double mission: to impose peace, and to reintegrate the British, ‘who had totally fallen away the bond of discipline’, into the Christian community.[[69]](#endnote-69) Victricius’ self-portrait perfectly suited the political climate. Around the time he wrote the *De laude sanctorum*, Picts and Scots plundered the Roman territories south of Hadrian’s Wall, forcing Stilicho to intervene on the island in 396 or 397.[[70]](#endnote-70) This context offered Victricius an implicit parallel between the imposition of imperial rule against the rebellious peripheries, and his own intervention against the indiscipline and heresy of the British.

In order to enhance this centre-periphery juxtaposition, Victricius also participated in the geographical tradition that accentuated the extremity of Britain, despite its nearness to Rouen. In the middle of the second paragraph, Victricius enunciated for the first time the main explicit argument of his sermon, namely, that relics preserve their unity and ubiquitous power despite their dispersion: ‘I knew that you are everywhere due to your virtue; heavenly splendour is not stolen from any place on earth’.[[71]](#endnote-71) This idea of unity, however, contrasted with Victricius’ subsequent reference to the ocean that separated Britain from the relics: ‘I followed your [the saints’] requests in Britain and although I was separated from you by the ocean which surrounds it, I was detained there at your service’.[[72]](#endnote-72) Victricius reused the motif of the sea in the next paragraph, this time not as a symbol of distance and isolation, but as a metaphor for the dangers he faced in Britain: ‘I did what sailors do at the height of the storm: they do not implore the skills of the helmsman, but the mercy of the celestial majesty’.[[73]](#endnote-73) Inspired by a passage from the gospel of Matthew (VIII.23-25), his language was in tune with the geographical imagery traditionally used for portraying Britain as the last frontier of Roman civilization.

Victricius’ account set the island as an example of distant otherness that showed how detachment from the Roman empire led to political and religious unrest. Britain thus served as a warning for the Felician bishops and the local aristocracy that had seconded the usurpations. For the late fourth-century Rouenese, however, the island was a very near case both, in geographical and social terms. Gaul and Britain shared a recent history of political rebellion and barbarian attacks, and the threat of detachment from the empire loomed similarly on both sides of the English Channel[[74]](#endnote-74). Throughout the rest of the sermon, Victricius played with his audience’s geographical imaginations in order to explain how his policy of imperial-wide contacts brought Rouen nearer to the centres of the empire and far from the chaos and turmoil that lay outside its borders.

4. ‘A multitude of celestial citizens’: Rouen in the empire

With the exception of the two paragraphs on Britain, the treatise is largely devoted to discussing the cult of relics. As previous historiography has rightly shown, Victricius focused on the orthodoxy of the cult and the unity of relics despite its geographical dispersion.[[75]](#endnote-75) Much less attention, however, has received Victricius’ interest in political legitimacy, despite the fact that it was a key issue in the sermon. Victricius interpreted the relics as containers of these three properties – geographical unity, religious orthodoxy and legitimacy – in order to support his endorsement of strong connections with their places of origin. In contrast with his account on Britain, Victricius employed in this section a language of nearness and harmony, with which he set Rouen close to the heart of the empire.

An important element in Victricius’ account is Ambrose of Milan, the bishop of the imperial court, who already in 396 was a recognized champion of orthodoxy and an example of loyalty to the emperors. Ambrose had organized the transfer of the relics, entrusting three members of his clergy to do the long trip from Milan to Rouen. He was thus a central figure in the arrival ceremony, despite the fact that Victricius only mentioned him once in the sermon, just after his excursus on Britain and before introducing the relics and their bearers: ‘With what veneration shall I embrace (*complexer*) you, blessed Ambrose?’[[76]](#endnote-76) Victricius did not need to stress Ambrose’s political relevance; by 396 the bishop of Milan was a well-known personality in Rouen, a city that had hosted the relics of Gervasius and Protasius for ten years. Apart from being a committed anti-Felician, Ambrose was a key political actor in the empire and a faithful supporter of the legitimate emperors. He had been an advisor of Gratian, who died fighting against Magnus Maximus; a mentor during the last years of Valentinian II, just before he died in a plot probably orchestrated by Arbogastes; and a counsellor of Theodosius, the defeater of both usurpations, and father of the reigning Emperors, Honorius and Arcadius. As an ally of the imperial dynasties, Ambrose was the antithesis of the Felician leader Felix of Trier, who had supported Magnus Maximus. Besides, the better-versed audience of the *De laude sanctorum* probably knew Ambrose’s funeral oration for Theodosius (395), in which the bishop of Milan elaborated a political theology for the Christian empire by binding together the two meanings of *fides*, religious faith and political loyalty.[[77]](#endnote-77)

Ambrose was not the only symbol of legitimacy in the sermon; Victricius deliberately described the welcoming procession of the relics as an imperial *adventus:* ‘in place of the royal cloak, here is the garment of the eternal light. The togas of the saints have absorbed this purple’.[[78]](#endnote-78) A traditional ceremony for commemorating the arrival of the emperor and other high-ranking officials, the *adventus* celebrated their lawful authority in the provinces. By repeating the same sequence of rites in different geographical locations, the *adventus* also actualized the unity of the empire, fostering cohesion and helping to keep the illusion of nearness to the court and the emperor.[[79]](#endnote-79) The use of this imagery is Victricius’ own contribution to the ceremony of the translation of relics, a strong political statement that contrasted with his self-description as a soldier of Christ in Britain. Victricius skilfully used these two opposing metaphors in order to broaden the distance between Britain and Rouen. The *adventus* of the relics confirmed Rouen’s centrality in the religious and political geography of the empire, while in Britain, imperial soldiers and *milites Christi* fought hand in hand to keep the island under Roman rule and Christian discipline.

This picture fitted into Victricius’ embellished description of Rouen’s religious life: ‘Here a crowd of monks purified by fasting gathers together. Here resounds the loud joy of innocent children. Here the chorus of devout and untouched virgins carries the sign of the cross. Here a multitude of celibates and widows gathers, wholly worthy of such a duty’.[[80]](#endnote-80) Later in the text, Victricius also boasted about the high number of relics in Rouen: ‘Here, therefore, there is such a multitude of celestial citizens, that on the arrival of your majesty we had to look for another place’.[[81]](#endnote-81) The description fascinated Paulinus of Nola, who enthusiastically described how Victricius had turned the community of Rouen, ‘which was only poorly known even in neighbouring districts’, into the ‘exact image of Jerusalem’.[[82]](#endnote-82)

Victricius too struggled to reconcile the cognitive tension produced by the convergent spatial models of spiritual centrality and cultural and geographical extremity. Despite his inflated description of Rouen’s religiosity, Victricius did not ignore that the city was on the edge of the empire, dangerously close to the barbarians and frequently involved in usurpations against the legitimate emperors in Milan. The bishop partly solved this contradiction by manipulating geographical distance and creating the idea of a strong physical connection with the main centres of Christianity and political power. On the one hand, Victricius did so by omitting any allusion to the long distance that separated Rouen from Milan. The bishop thanked the bearers of the relics with an austere ‘I thank your zeal and also your waiting, but the apostles and martyrs have already paid for your effort and duty’.[[83]](#endnote-83) The lack of any reference to a 600 miles trip across the Alps contrasts with Victricius’ previous allusion to the British Channel.[[84]](#endnote-84)

On the other hand, the bishop used his discussion on the theology of relics as the theoretical foundation of a transcendent cartography that overlooked geographical distance. Throughout the treatise, Victricius emphasized that the received relics established a very physical connection between Rouen and their cities of origin: ‘there is no doubt that the places of martyrdoms will cure when we embrace (*amplexata*) them’.[[85]](#endnote-85) As it has been already noticed, much of the sermon focuses on explaining that divinity is not bound by space and relics preserved their unity and power despite their division and dispersion.[[86]](#endnote-86) Nonetheless, Victricius’ couched this explanation in unmistakable geographical terms:

‘Do they [the relics] offer healing to the wretched differently in the East, at Constantinople, at Antioch, at Thessalonica, at Naissus, at Rome, in Italy? […] John the Evangelist cures at Ephesus, and also in many other places… and that same healing power is here with us. Proculus and Agricola cure at Bononia, and here too we perceive their majesty. Antonius cures at Placentia. Saturninus and Troianus cure in Macedonia. Nazarius cures at Milan’.[[87]](#endnote-87)

Victricius’ interest in detailing the origin of all the relics was not accidental. The list included some of the landmarks of the exclusive geography of martyrdom that constituted a distant and fascinating world of wonders for the Rouenese. Most of these cities were also centres of political power. Victricius’ transcendent cartography thus helped his audience to relocate Rouen in the cultural and political core of the Roman empire, despite the fact that most of the key imperial institutions were far from northern Gaul.[[88]](#endnote-88)

The fact that the relics came from different places of the Roman world also transmitted a misleading image of unity and harmony, which contrasted with the dissension in Britain. In 396, however, the empire boiled with political turmoil. In January 395, it had been divided into two parts, and in November that year the first open conflict broke out between both courts. Things were not smoother in the religious arena, affected by different regional- and imperial-wide debates, such as the Origenist controversy.[[89]](#endnote-89) As a well-connected bishop, Victricius surely knew about these debates, but omitted any allusions to them. The only reference to a controversy is his endorsement of the Nicene formula of the Trinity, a quite innocuous remark considering that by 396 the Homoian controversy was already winding down in northern Gaul.[[90]](#endnote-90)

As I have just explained, the real targets of Victricius’ sermon were not the Homoians, but the Felician episcopacy and their aristocratic supporters. Against them, Victricius used the power of the relics to defend his program of tight relationships with the centre of the empire. His opposition, however, backfired after the publication of the *De laude sanctorum*. Although the exact charges against Victricius are unknown, it is most likely that it was the cult of relics that provoked the accusations. As the conflict escalated, Victricius resorted once more to his imperial-wide connections and in 403 travelled to Rome, where he succeeded in gaining the support of Pope Innocent.[[91]](#endnote-91) In line with his the *De laude sanctorum*, Victricius’ behaviour in this later stage of the controversy shows how much his episcopal authority depended on his capacity for overcoming the geographical distance that separated the remote community of Rouen from the imperial centres.

5. Conclusions

In *De laude sanctorum,* Victricius put all his rhetorical expertise to work in order to defend the universal power of relics, and consistently emphasized that they were not bound by time or space. Both coordinates, however, were of paramount importance in Victricius’ interpretation of the newly arrived relics in Rouen. On the one hand, the ceremony of arrival took place in a delicate moment for Victricius, who faced the opposition of the more local-centred Felician clergy and the regional aristocracy who had supported the previous usurpations. Victricius thus used his discussion on relics to defend his position in the controversy and to explain the benefits of strengthening Rouen’s imperial-wide connections.

On the other hand, as I have shown above, he largely constructed his apology in geographical terms. Victricius’ argumentation partly relied on the strong generative power of relics; that is, the capacity of dislocated corporealities to create different meanings when relocated in new contexts.[[92]](#endnote-92) Victricius thus ignored the specific origin of the relics, and presented all of them as containers of Romanness, orthodoxy, and political legitimacy, three properties that defined the centres of the empire, from where these relics came. Besides, Victricius used his theological discussion on the unity and ubiquitous power of the relics as the theoretical underpinning of a transcendent cartography that disregarded geographical distance. This allowed him to construct a very physical explanation of how the relics brought the dwelling places of the martyrs closer to the Roman periphery.

This presentation sharply contrasted with Victricius’ allusions to Britain, at the beginning of his treatise. Drawing on traditional imagery that depicted the island as a remote, alien country despite its nearness to Rouen, the bishop sought to present Britain as an example of the negative consequences of breaking with the empire, and a warning against those who supported the usurpations. Victricius’ manipulation of his audience’s geographical imagination skilfully tapped into the fears and projections of his contemporaries, who lived in a changing world, where the borders of ‘civilization’ were continuously redrawn.

Victricius was not a unique case; other late antique intellectuals showed similar ‘geographical anxiety’.[[93]](#endnote-93) A remarkable example, and one that contains many resemblances with the *De laude sanctorum,* is the *Vita Germani,* a hagiographical account of the life of the bishop Germanus of Auxerre (d. c. 448) written sometime between 470 and 480. The text contains very few chronological references, but pays significant attention to geographical space, describing in detail Germanus’ trips to conflictive hotspots such as Britain and Armorica, and to key administrative cities such as Arles, Lyon, Milan, and the new imperial court in Ravenna. An important episode in this narrativeis Germanus’ first trip to Britain in 429.[[94]](#endnote-94) Following the request of the local bishops, he and his colleague Lupus of Troyes embarked on a dangerous trip across the English Channel in order to fight Pelagianism. Once on the island, they converted the heretics not only by refuting their arguments in a public debate, but also by using the power of local and imported relics.[[95]](#endnote-95) This was not, however, the end of their mission. Self-appointed military commander (*dux proelii*), Germanus helped the British to repel the attacks of Picts and Saxons. Like Victricius in Rouen, he thus succeeded in keeping Britain within the Roman discipline and Christian orthodoxy nineteen years after the emperor Honorius had supposedly renounced to defend the island.[[96]](#endnote-96)

Writings such as the *De laude sanctorum* and the *Vita Germani* show how the barbarian pressure on the borders and the political reorganization of the empire increased the concerns over spatiality. Geography and identity thus became a more suitable conceptual arena for discussing different political agendas.[[97]](#endnote-97) This was not, however, a novel phenomenon; the ‘peripherist’ discourse drew on a tradition of stereotypes that had long defined Romanness by setting it side by side with the example of the barbarians beyond the borders and the provincials from the peripheries. Essential for the construction of Roman cultural and political identity, this discourse impregnated much of late antique literature and has long biased our understanding of the fragmentation of the Roman empire.[[98]](#endnote-98)

In such a context of shrinking geographical horizons, knowledge of the world beyond became a more valuable source of prestige and social power, as Victricius’ case shows.[[99]](#endnote-99) The bishop lacked strong local support, but he made virtue out of necessity and linked his episcopal authority to his status as an outsider. As a well-travelled ascetic, Victricius was familiar with much of the empire and had also visited its furthest reaches in Britain. In Rouen, he presented himself as a direct link with the cultural and institutional centres of the Roman world. Flaunting his imperial-wide connections and his cosmopolitan charisma, Victricius sought to show that only he, who knew the map of the empire, could put Rouen on it.

1. ### Victricius, *De laude sanctorum* (hereafter *De laud*.), CCSL 64, pp. 53-65. For a translation of the text see G. Clark, ‘Victricius of Rouen: Praising the Saints’, *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 7.3 (1999), pp. 365-99. Paul. Nol. *ep.* 18, CSEL 29, pp. 128-37.

   [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. D.G. Hunter, ‘Vigilantius of Calagurris and Victricius of Rouen: Ascetics, Relics, and Clerics in Late Roman Gaul’, *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 7.3 (1999), pp. 401-30. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. G. Clark, ‘Translating relics: Victricius of Rouen and fourth-century debate’, *EME* 10.2 (2001), pp. 161-76. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. P. Cox Miller, *The Corporeal Imagination: Signifying the Holy in late ancient Christianity* (Philadelphia, 2009), pp. 35-40; 51-2; esp. 95-102. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. B. Croxford, ‘Iconoclasm in Roman Britain?’, *Britannia* 34 (2003), pp. 81-95; W.H.C. Frend, ‘Roman Britain, a Failed Promise’, in M. Carver (ed.), *The cross goes North. Processes of Conversion in Northern Europe, AD 300-1300* (York, 2003), pp. 79-91; W.H.C. Frend, ‘Altare subnixus: a cult of relics in the Romano-British church?’, *The Journal of Theological Studies* 48.1 (1997), pp. 125-8; W.H.C. Frend, ‘Pagans, Christians, and 'the Barbarian Conspiracy' of A. D. 367 in Roman Britain’, *Britannia* 23 (1992), pp. 121-31. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. M. Pérez Martínez, ‘Britain: Approaching Controversy on the Western Fringes of the Roman Empire’, in G.M. Berndt and R. Steinacher (eds.), *Arianism: Roman heresy and barbarian creed* (Farnham, 2014), pp. 297-310. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. In his explanation of the *De laude sanctorum*, Hunter briefly mentioned the Felician controversy, but without considering the political implications of the conflict, Hunter ‘Vigilantius of Calagurris’, pp. 415-16. About the Felician controversy, see R.W. Mathisen, *Ecclesiastical Factionalism and Religious Controversy in fifth-century Gaul* (Washington, 1989), pp. 11-26; 44-8. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Paul. Nol. *ep*. 18.4, CSEL 29, p. 131: *extimo orbis*; Victricius’ place of birth is debated, see CCSL 64, p. 55. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Paul. Nol. *ep.* 18.7, CSEL 29, pp. 133-5. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Aus. *Mosella*, 374-89, ed. R. Green (Oxford, 1999), pp. 126-7. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. J. Matthews, *Western Aristocracies and imperial Court, A.D. 364-425* (Oxford, 1975), pp. 232-52; J. Szidat, ‘Gaul and the Roman Emperors of the fourth century’, in J. Wienand (ed.), *Contested Monarchy: Integrating the Roman Empire in the Fourth Century AD* (Oxford, 2014), pp. 119-34. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. ## P. Halbout et al., *Rouen gallo-romain: fouilles et recherches archéologiques 1978-1982* (Rouen, 1982), pp. 11-12; B. Gauthiez ‘Le théâtre gallo-romain de Rouen?’, *Annales de Normandie*, 32.4 (1982), pp. 343-6; P. Halbout et al. ‘Rouen: récentes découvertes sur la ville gallo-romaine’, *Dossiers histoire et archéologie* 72 (1983), pp. 28-37; E. Follain ‘Les thermes de Rouen’, *Les Dossiers d'archéologie* 323 (2007), pp. 36-43.

    [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. G. Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West, 376-568* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 71-9. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Gild. *De excidio Britanniae*, 13-15, ed. M. Winterbottom (London, 1978), p. 93; J. Gerrard, *The ruin of Roman Britain: an archaeological perspective* (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 80-100; Halsall, *Barbarian migrations*, pp. 196-9. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. J.-R. Palanque, ‘La date du transfert de la Préfecture des Gaules de Trêves à Arles’, *Revue des Études Antiques* 3 (1934), pp. 359-65; J.F. Drinkwater, ‘The usurpers Constantine III (407-411) and Jovinus (411-413)’, *Britannia* 29 (1998), pp. 269-98. For a different chronology see A. Chastagnol, ‘Le repli sur Arles des services administratifs gaulois en l'an 407 de notre ère’, *Revue Historique* 249 (1973), pp. 23-40. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Hier. *ep.* 123.16, CSEL 56, pp. 84-5; Rutilius Namatianus, *De reditu Suo,* 1.211-216*,* ed. É. Wolff (Paris, 2007), p. 12; A. Ferrill, *The Fall of the Roman Empire: the military explanation* (London, 1986), pp. 95-115; Matthews, *Western Aristocracies*, p. 333; Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, pp. 347-50. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. R. Herval, *Origines chrétiennes de la IIe Lyonnaise gallo-romaine à la Normandie ducale (IVe-XIe siècles)* (Rouen-Paris, 1966), pp. 12-15; P. Andrieu-Guitrancourt, ‘Essai sur Victrice. L'Église et la province ecclésiastique de Rouen aux derniers temps Gallo-Romains’, *L'Année cannonique* 14 (1970), pp. 1-23; J. Fontaine, ‘Victrice de Rouen et les origines du monachisme dans l'ouest de la Gaule (IVe-VIe S.)’, in *Aspects du monachisme en Normandie (IVe-XVIIIe S.)* (Paris, 1982), pp. 9-29, esp. 18-24; S.M. Pearce, ‘Processes of Conversion in North-west Roman Gaul’, in M. Carver (ed.), *The cross goes North. Processes of conversion in Northern Europe, AD 300-1300* (York, 2003), pp. 61-78; esp. 69-76. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Victr. *De laud.* 11.17, CCSL 64, p. 87. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Hunter, ‘Vigilantius of Calagurris’, pp. 426-7; Clark, ‘Translating relics’, pp. 173-6; Cox Miller, *Corporeal Imagination*, pp. 51-2; 95-102. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. P. Brown, *The cult of the saints: its rise and function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago, 2014, enlarged edition), pp. 35-42; R. Van Dam, *Saints and their miracles in late antique Gaul* (Princeton, 1993), pp. 7, 94-104. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. H. Chadwick, *Priscillian of Avila: the Occult and the Charismatic in the Early Church* (Oxford, 1976), pp.158-83; Mathisen, *Ecclesiastical Factionalism*, pp. 11-26. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. Sulp. Sev. *Chron.* 2.46-51, CSEL 1, pp. 99-105; Chadwick, *Priscillian*, pp. 111-31; V. Burrus, *The Making of a Heretic: Gender, Authority, and the Priscillianist Controversy* (Berkeley-London, 1995), pp. 25-42; M.V. Escribano Paño, *Iglesia y Estado en el Certamen Priscilianista: causa ecclesiae y iudicium publicum* (Zaragoza, 1988), pp. 246-83. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Ambr. *ep. extra coll.* 11.6, CSEL 82.3, p. 214; N.B. McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan: church and court in a Christian capital* (Berkeley, 1994), pp. 149-51; Chadwick, *Priscillian of Avila,* pp. 132-5; Y.-M. Duval, ‘Les Ambassades de Saint Ambroise auprès de l ́usurpateur Maxime en 383 et 384’ in J.M. Carrié, R. Lizzi Testa and P. Brown (eds.) *Humana sapit: études d'antiquité tardive offertes à Lellia Cracco Ruggini* (Turnhout, 2002), pp. 239-53. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Mathisen, *Ecclesiastical Factionalism*, pp. 11-17; 44-8. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. Sulp. Sev. *Dial.* 2.13.8, CSEL 1, pp. 196-7, mentions a Felician Council in Nîmes. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. Ambr. *ep. extra coll.* 11.6, CSEL 82.3, p. 214; Ambr. De *Obitu* *Valentiniani,* 25, CSEL 73, p. 342. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. *Acta Conc. Taur.* 6, CCSL 148, pp. 57-8. The chronology of the Council is disputed, but 398 is widely accepted; for a recent discussion see R.W. Mathisen, ‘The Council of Turin (398/399) and the Reorganization of Gaul ca. 395/406’, *Journal of Late Antiquity* 6.2 (2013), pp. 264-307. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. Sulp. Sev. *Vita* *Mart.* 20.1-2, CSEL 1, p. 129. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. Paul. Nol. *ep*. 18.9, CSEL 29, p. 136. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. Gaudentius, *Tractatus,* 17.12, CSEL 68, p. 144; McLynn, *Ambrose*, p. 284. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. U. Heil, ‘Homoians in Gaul’ in G.M. Berndt and R. Steinacher (eds.), *Arianism: Roman heresy and barbarian creed* (Farnham, 2014), p. 271. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. See below n. 78. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. Vict. *De laud*. 3.31, CCSL 64, p. 74: ‘human matters are despised where divine matters are considered’. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. B.H. Isaac, *The invention of Racism in classical Antiquity* (Princeton, 2004), pp. 411-26; D. J. Mattingly, *Imperialism, Power, and Identity: experiencing the Roman empire* (Princeton-Oxford, 2011), pp. 203-33. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. On the precarious relationship centre-periphery in Rome, F. Millar, ‘Emperors at Work’, *Journal of Roman Studies* 57.1 (1967), pp. 9-19; C. R. Whittaker, *Rome and its Frontiers: the Dynamics of Empire* (London, 2004), pp. 63-87; P. Eich, ‘Centre and Periphery. Administrative communication in Roman Imperial times’, in S. Benoist (ed.) *Rome, a City and its Empire in perspective* (Leiden, 2012), pp. 85-108. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. The term ‘peripherism’ is inspired by Said’s ‘orientalism’ and Todorova’s ‘balkanism’, two postocolonial approaches that provide a useful theoretical framework for analyzing Victricius’ discourse. See E.W. Said, *Orientalism* (Harmondsworth, 1995), pp. 29-48; M. Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (London, 1997), p. 88. ‘Peripherism’ has already been used in postcolonial approaches to sociolinguistics: V. Vaish, ‘A Peripherist view of English as a Language of Decolonization in Post-Colonial India’, *Language Policy* 4.2 (2005), pp. 187-206. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. On spatiality and identity, see D. Gregory, *Geographical Imaginations* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 22-33; D. Gregory, ‘Imaginative Geographies’, *Progress in Human Geography* 19.4 (1995), pp. 447-85; A. Cerwonka, *Native to the Nation: disciplining Landscapes and Bodies in Australia* (Minneapolis, 2004), pp. 53-73; S. Tomasch and S. Gilles (eds.) *Text and territory: Geographical Imagination in the European Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, 1998), pp. 1-12; K.D. Lilley (ed.), *Mapping medieval geographies: geographical encounters in the Latin West and beyond, 300-1600* (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 1-20. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, pp. 142-4. [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. D.J. Mattingly, *An imperial possession: Britain in the Roman Empire, 54 BC-AD 409* (London, 2006), pp. 522-8; A. Birley, *The fasti of Roman Britain* (Oxford, 1981), p. 328; M.E. Jones, *The end of Roman Britain* (Ithaca-London, 1996), p. 140; A.S. Esmonde Cleary, *The ending of Roman Britain* (London, 1989), pp. 43-50. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. Caesar, *De Bello Gallico*, 5.12-14, ed. W. Hering (Leipzig, 1987), pp. 72-3; Strabo, *Geog*. 4.5.2, ed. F. Lasserre (Paris, 1966), pp. 165-6. [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. Tacitus, *Agricola,* 10-11, ed. E. Köstermann (Leipzig, 1964), pp. 39-41; Dio Cassius, 76.12.1-5, ed. U.P. Boissevain (Berlin, 1955), pp. 366-8; *Panegyric on Constantius Caesar* 11, ed. R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford, 1964), pp. 222. [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. Aus. *Epigrams* 117-119, ed. R.P.H. Green (Oxford, 1991), pp. 95-6. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
43. Claud. *De consulatu Stilichonis*, 2, 247-255, ed. J.B. Hall (Leipzig, 1985), pp. 214-15; see also Hier. *ep*. 69.3, CSEL 56, pp. 84-5. [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
44. Amm. 20.1;26.4.5; 27.8; 28.1.21; 28.3, ed. W. Seyfarth vols. 1-2 (Stuttgart-Leipzig, 1978), pp. 183-4; 9; 46-8; 64; 75-7. [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
45. See for instance Strabo, *Geog*. 4.5.2, ed. Lasserre, pp. 165-6; Tacitus, *Agricola,* 12, ed. Köstermann, pp. 41-2; Herodian, 3.14.6-7, ed. C. Stavenhagen (Stuttgart, 1966), p. 105; Dio Cassius, 76.12.1-5, ed. Boissevain, pp. 366-8. [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
46. *Panegyric on Maximian*, 12.1-2, ed. Mynors, pp. 252-3; see also *Panegyric on Constantius Caesar*, 6.4; 11, ed. Mynors, pp. 218-19; 222. [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
47. Claud. *De quarto consulatu Honorii* 24-33, ed. Hall, p. 62. [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
48. C.E.V. Nixon, B.S Rodgers, *In praise of later Roman Emperors* (Berkeley-Oxford, 1994), pp. 7-8. [↑](#endnote-ref-48)
49. Claud. *De quarto consulatu Honorii.* 391-393, ed. Hall, pp. 75-6. [↑](#endnote-ref-49)
50. Amm. 14.10.1-3; 14.11.9; 15.5; 15.8, ed. Seyfarth, pp. 26-7; 31; 46-55; 56-60. [↑](#endnote-ref-50)
51. Amm. 15.12.1-2, ed. Seyfarth, p. 67; T.D. Barnes, *Ammianus Marcellinus and the representation of historical reality* (Ithaca-London, 1998), p. 100. [↑](#endnote-ref-51)
52. Dio Cassius, 62.2.3-4, ed. Boissevain, p. 44, trans. E. Cary (Cambridge Mass., 1969), p. 85; M.J. Aldhouse-Green, *Boudica Britannia: rebel, war-leader and queen* (Harlow, 2006), 130-2. [↑](#endnote-ref-52)
53. Oros. *Hist.* 5.22.5-11, CSEL 5, pp. 337-8. In a similar veinZos. *Hist*. 6.5.3, ed. F. Paschoud (Paris, 1989), p. 9. [↑](#endnote-ref-53)
54. Amm. 15.11, ed. Seyfarth, pp. 64-6; Rutilius Namatianus, *De Reditu Suo*, 1.223-228, ed. Wolff, p. 12. [↑](#endnote-ref-54)
55. Paul. Nol. *ep.* 18.4, CSEL 29, pp.130-2; E.A. Thompson, ‘Christianity and the Northern Barbarians’, in A. Momigliano (ed.), *The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the fourth century* (Oxford, 1963), pp. 56-78; É. Griffe, *La Gaule chrétienne à l'époque romaine, v. 1. Des origines chrétiennes a la fin du IVe siècle* (Paris, 1964), pp. 228-9. [↑](#endnote-ref-55)
56. This process of internalization and gradation of derogative stereotypes has been described as ‘nesting orientalism’, M. Bakić-Hayden and R. Hayden, ‘Orientalist Variations on the Theme “Balkans”: Symbolic Geography in Recent Yugoslav Cultural Politics’, *Slavic Review* 51.1 (1992), pp. 1-10. [↑](#endnote-ref-56)
57. Hier. *Adversus Jovinianum,* 2.7, PL 23, 308D-309. [↑](#endnote-ref-57)
58. Hier. *ep*. 69.3.6, CSEL 54, p. 684. [↑](#endnote-ref-58)
59. The two paragraphs on Britain contain Victricius’ explanation for his late arrival in Rouen and suitably introduce his oration, which indicates that they most probably belonged to his original address. J.N. Hillgarth, however, omitted this section in his translation of what he considered to be Victricius’ sermon, *Christianity and paganism, 350-750: the conversion of Western Europe* (Philadelphia, 1986), pp. 19, 23. [↑](#endnote-ref-59)
60. Victr. *De laud.* 1. 40-43, CCSL 64, p. 71, In Jerome’s *Vulgate* (382 CE) Isaiah XXXII.14, *palpatio* is coupled with obscurity (*tenebra et palpatio*) and used as a synonym of terror in a chapter on how God’s wrath prevents the rule of a just king: ‘Because the palaces shall be forsaken; the multitude of the city shall be left; the forts and towers shall be for dens for ever…’. Victricius’ most versed audience could probably appreciate the double meaning of his word choice. [↑](#endnote-ref-60)
61. Frend, ‘Roman Britain’, pp.79-91. [↑](#endnote-ref-61)
62. See n. 55. [↑](#endnote-ref-62)
63. Victr. *De laud.* 1.24-28, CCSL 64, p. 70. See also 12.66-67, CCSL 64, pp. 90-1: ‘To fight with such fellow soldiers and with Christ as commander (*imperatore*) is certain victory’. [↑](#endnote-ref-63)
64. Tert. *Mart.* 3.1, CCSL 1, p. 188; Hier. *ep*. 22.20, CSEL 54, pp. 170-1. [↑](#endnote-ref-64)
65. Theodulus of Octodurum was at the council of Aquileia, Actae concilii Aquileiensis, CSEL 82.3, pp. . Eucherius, *Passio Acaunensium martyrum,* MGH SRM 3, pp. 32-40. Eucherius mentioned that he knew the episode through Isaac of Geneva, Eucherius, *ep*. 1, CSEL 31, p. 173. D. F. O'Reilly, ‘The Theban Legion of St. Maurice’, *Vigiliae Christianae,* 32.3, (1978), pp. 195-207. [↑](#endnote-ref-65)
66. Sulp. Sev. *Vita* *Mart.* 4.3, CSEL 1, p. 114; Sulp. Sev. *Dial.* 2.11.2-7, CSEL 1, pp. 192-3; J. Fontaine, ‘Sulpice Severe a-t-il travesti Saint Martin de Tours en martyr militaire?’, *Analecta Bollandiana* 81 (1963), pp. 31-58. [↑](#endnote-ref-66)
67. Victr. *De laud.* 3.1-2, CCSL 64, p. 73. [↑](#endnote-ref-67)
68. After reading Victricius’ sermon, Paulinus of Nola described him as a soldier, whom ‘God had allowed to fight for Caesar so he could learn to fight for God’, Paul. Nol. *ep.* 18.7, CSEL 29, pp. 133. [↑](#endnote-ref-68)
69. Victr. *De laud.* 1.49-50, CCSL 64, p. 71. For a similar example of this imagery see K. Cooper, *The Fall of the Roman Household* (Cambridge 2007), pp. 17-37, esp. 29-33. [↑](#endnote-ref-69)
70. Claud. *In Eutropium* 1.392-394, ed. Hall, p. 158; Claud. *De consulatu Stilichonis* 2.249-257, ed. Hall, pp. 214-5; Olympiodorus mentioned the discontent in Britain due to Stilicho’s policy against the tribes, Olymp. 12, ed. L. Dindorf (Leipzig, 1870), pp. 453-4; M. Miller, ‘Stilicho's Pictish War’, *Britannia* 6 (1975), pp. 141-5. [↑](#endnote-ref-70)
71. Victr. *De laud.* 1.29-30, CCSL 64, p. 70. [↑](#endnote-ref-71)
72. Victr. *De laud.* 1.31-33, CCSL 64, p. 70. [↑](#endnote-ref-72)
73. Victr. *De laud.* 1.45-48, CCSL 64, p. 71. [↑](#endnote-ref-73)
74. Matthews, *Western Aristocracies*, pp. 320-2; R. Van Dam, *Leadership and Community in Late Antique Gaul* (Berkeley, 1985), pp. 25-56; Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, pp. 346-68. [↑](#endnote-ref-74)
75. Hunter, ‘Vigilantius of Calagurris’, pp. 426-8; Clark, ‘Victricius of Rouen’, p. 369; Clark, ‘Translating relics’, pp. 175; Cox Miller, *Corporeal Imagination*, pp. 51-2. [↑](#endnote-ref-75)
76. Victr. *De laud.* 2.1, CCSL 64, p. 71. [↑](#endnote-ref-76)
77. Ambr. *De Ob. Theod.* 6, CSEL 73, p. 374; G. Bonamente,‘Potere politico e autorità religiosa nel De Obitu Theodosii’, in *Chiesa e società dal secolo IV ai nostri giorni* (Roma, 1979), pp. 83-133; S. Pricoco, ‘Non regno sed fide princeps. L´imperatore Teodosio, Ambrogio e Paolino di Nola’, in R. Teja and C. Pérez (eds.), *La Hispania de Teodosio* (Valladolid-Segovia, 1997), pp. 207-15. [↑](#endnote-ref-77)
78. Victr. *De laud.* 12.25-28, CCSL 64, p. 89. [↑](#endnote-ref-78)
79. N. Gussone, ‘Adventus-Zeremoniell und Translation von Reliquien. Victricius von Rouen, De laude sanctorum’, *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 10 (1976), pp. 125-33; P. Brown, *The cult of the saints*, pp. 98-101; R. Van Dam, *Leadership and Community*, p. 59; S. MacCormack, ‘Change and Continuity in Late Antiquity: the Ceremony of Adventus’, *Historia* 21.4 (1972), pp. 721-52. [↑](#endnote-ref-79)
80. Victr. *De laud.* 3.11-15, CCSL 64, p. 73; P. Andrieu-Guitrancourt, ‘La vie ascétique à Rouen au temps de saint Victrice’, *Recherches de science religieuse* 40 (1951-2), pp. 90-106. [↑](#endnote-ref-80)
81. Victr. *De laud.* 6.37-40, CCSL 64, p. 78. [↑](#endnote-ref-81)
82. Paul. Nol. *ep*. 18.5, CSEL 29, p. 132. [↑](#endnote-ref-82)
83. Victr. *De laud.* 2.8-10, CCSL 64, p. 72. [↑](#endnote-ref-83)
84. Victr. *De laud.* 1.31-33, CCSL 64, p. 70. [↑](#endnote-ref-84)
85. Victr. *De laud.* 2.13-14, CCSL 64, p. 72. [↑](#endnote-ref-85)
86. See n. 76 above. [↑](#endnote-ref-86)
87. Victr. *De laud.* 11.2-10, CCSL 64, p. 86. [↑](#endnote-ref-87)
88. On the impact of narratives on spatiality see R.M. Downs and D. Stea, *Maps in minds: reflections on cognitive mapping* (New York, 1977), pp. 4-7. [↑](#endnote-ref-88)
89. Hier. *Contra Joannem,* 1, 14, PL 23, 371, 382C-383; Hier. *ep*. 51, CSEL 54, pp. 395-412. [↑](#endnote-ref-89)
90. See n. 31 above. [↑](#endnote-ref-90)
91. Innocent, *ep*. 3, PL 20, 469-481; Paul. Nol. *ep.* 37.4, CSEL 29, pp. 319-20; Hunter ‘Vigilantius of Calagurris’, pp. 422-3; a good synthesis of the different interpretations of the episode appears in G.D. Dunn, ‘Canonical Legislation on the Ordination of Bishops: Innocent I's Letter to Victricius of Gaul’, in J. Leemans, P. Van Nuffelen, S.W.J. Keough and C. Nicolaye (eds.), *Episcopal Elections in Late Antiquity* (Berlin, 2011), pp. 153-4. [↑](#endnote-ref-91)
92. See S. Greenblatt, *Marvelous possessions: the wonder of the New World* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 52-86; S. Greenblatt, ‘Cultural Mobility: an introduction’, in S. Greenblatt (ed.), *Cultural mobility: a manifesto* (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 1-23. [↑](#endnote-ref-92)
93. The phrase is borrowed from Derek Gregory, who coined the term ‘cartographical anxiety’ for alluding to the uncertainty about the capacity of cartography for attaining objective representations of geographical realities. ‘Geographical anxiety’ refers here to the concerns about geography and spatiality. The expression has already been employed with a similar meaning by Tomasch and Gilles, *Text and territory*, p. 7. [↑](#endnote-ref-93)
94. Prosper a. 429, ; A. A. Barrett, 'Saint Germanus and the British Missions', *Britannia* 40 (2009), pp. 197-218. [↑](#endnote-ref-94)
95. Constantius, *Vita Germani,* 12-16, ed. Borius . The *Vita Germani* provides one of the first evidences of local saint cult in Britain, see R. Sharpe, 'The Late Antique Passion of St Alban', in M. Henig, ed., *Alban and St Albans. Roman and medieval architecture, art and archaeology* (Leeds, 2001), pp. 30-37; I. Wood, ‘Levison and St Alban’, in M. Becher and Y. Hen, eds., *Wilhelm Levison (1876-1947): ein jüdisches Forscherleben zwischen wissenschaftlicher Anerkennung und politischem Exil* (Siegburg, 2010), pp. 171-85. [↑](#endnote-ref-95)
96. Zos. *Hist*. 6.5.2, ed. F. Paschoud (Paris, 1989), p. 9. Constantius, *Vita Germani,* 17-18, ed. Borius , Ian Wood has convincingly argued that the text was a guide for Gallic bishops to cope with the end of Roman administration, I. Wood, 'The end of Roman Britain: continental evidence and parallels', in M. Lapidge and D. Dumville, eds., *Gildas: new approaches* (Woodbridge, 1984), pp. 1-25. [↑](#endnote-ref-96)
97. See for instance Amm. 15.9-12, ed. Seyfarth, pp. 60-8; Orosius *Hist*. 1.2, CSEL 5, pp. 9-40; De reditu Suo. [↑](#endnote-ref-97)
98. Halsall, *Barbarian invasions*, pp. 141-4; Mattingly, *Imperialism*, pp. 14-22. [↑](#endnote-ref-98)
99. P. Brown, ‘The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity’, *Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (1971), pp. 80-101. [↑](#endnote-ref-99)