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Threatening Metropolitan Authority in Fifth-Century Gaul

Abstract: Metropolitan bishops were exposed to the same threats as their suffragans but, because of their superior rank, they faced particular challenges to their office. This paper aims to highlight the different contexts of adversity faced by metropolitan bishops in 5th century Gaul. On the one hand, we intend to re-evaluate the real incidence of those disputes between metropolitans over questions of jurisdiction with the greatest resonance in the sources, as well as the role of the bishop of Rome in their resolution. On the other hand, we will also analyse the concrete impact that the political vicissitudes had on the metropolitan bishops, especially in the wake of the rise of the new barbarian kingdoms.

1 Introduction

Despite their superior rank, the metropolitan bishops of the fifth century were not immune to threats from their suffragans. Their power, position – and even sometimes life – could be imperiled or challenged at any time. Like any other prelate, the metropolitans were also exposed – perhaps even more so than others – to *razzias* by the barbarians,¹ to internal factionalisms that weakened their internal authority² when they failed to depose them and replace them with a new bishop,³ or

1 Such as the martyrdom the Bishop Nicasius of Reims was subjected to during one of these raids. *PCBE* 4, 1363. – This contribution evolved in the framework of the Center for Advanced Study “RomanIslam – Center for Comparative Empire and Transcultural Studies”, funded by the German Research Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, DFG), at Universität Hamburg.

2 Honoratus and Hilary of Arles were two of the bishops who made an internal opposition. Regarding Honoratus, *Hil. Arel. Vita Honorat.* 28, 1. Heinzelmann 1992, 246. In the case of Hilary, Honoratus of Marseille, *Vita Hil. Arel.* 10. Müller 2003, 219. On the internal problems in the Arles see at the time of both bishops, see also Natal 2015a. Better known is the existence of the confronted ecclesiastical factions during the time of Bishop Caesarius. Delaplace 2012. Rusticus of Narbonne also had to face the opposition of two priests, Sabinianus and Leo. *Leo M. epist.* 167. Griffe 1966, 196. On ecclesiastical factionalisms in fifth-century Gaul, and collecting all the cited casuistry, see Mathisen 1989.

3 This fate was also suffered, for example, by Brice of Tours. *Greg. Tur. Franc.* II, 1; X, 31. Pietri 1983, 103–118.

to exile.⁴ Nor would they have been immune to political vicissitudes, sometimes with quite dramatic results, as occurred with the execution of Bishop Patroclus of Arles by order of the *magister militum* Flavius Felix.⁵ Additionally, there were other specific threats to the metropolitan, particularly ones that implied a direct attack on their privileges and scope of jurisdiction. This study will explore these issues and the strategies deployed by the bishops to manage them. To do this, we will limit the study to the fifth century and the situation that began with the Council of Turin (398/399),⁶ which laid the foundations for the metropolitan order that prevailed during the two subsequent centuries, and many of the challenges the metropolitan bishops would have to address during that period.

Generally, the historiographic focus is usually placed on the party that is doing the threatening, as a transgressor of the prevailing *status quo*, while the equally interesting actions carried out by the aggrieved parties go unnoticed. A detailed analysis of these actions, together with a prioritisation of social factors over institutional ones, particularly the role of personal networks,⁷ can facilitate a reassessment of the real impact some of the more significant threats had. What might have posed a serious threat to certain metropolitans could actually have been relative in view of the actions carried out by the aggrieved parties. As we will see, this perspective will be especially interesting when analysing territorial disputes between metropolitans in south-eastern Gaul. Focusing on the threatened parties will also allow us to re-evaluate the role of the papacy in fifth-century Gaul. When we know that the authority of a metropolitan was threatened, it is because we have documentary records left by the various papal interventions on those occasions. The richness of these records is often interpreted as reinforcing papal authority in Gaul during the fifth century.⁸ But the purpose of this study is to question this idea, generally assumed by historiography.

4 Episcopal exiles among metropolitans occurred especially in the Visigothic kingdom of Tolosa, particularly during the reigns of Euric (466–484) and Alaric II (584–507). See Stüber 2020.

5 On the circumstances that led to his execution, Natal 2012, 114; Dunn 2014, 11.

6 We take this date from the Mathisen 2013 study.

7 As recently stated by Wood 2019, 229, in the Hispanic case, “by unpicking cycles of dispute and resolution, it is possible to observe the important role that social, political, and ecclesiastical networks played in the establishment and maintenance of the bishop’s position in his city in relation to his peers at the provincial level”.

8 Griffe 1964, 351; Mathisen 1989, 205; Natal and Wood 2016. Conversely, given the dependence of our knowledge on the information sourced from the papal chancellery, a substantial informational imbalance occurs, since we have a good understanding of the vicissitudes of the metropolitan sees of the Gallic southeast, but know almost nothing about other areas such as Bordeaux, Trier or Reims. Griffe 1966, 141.

2 Victricius of Rouen, Brice of Tours and the First Interferences of the bishop of Rome in Gaul

In contrast to the previous period, interference by the bishop of Rome in the affairs of Gaul was common during the fifth century. It is true that papal intervention was never arbitrary, as it was always preceded by appeals from bishops, frequently of metropolitan rank. Deposed prelates – who sought replacement through the papal route – appealing to the pope was especially common.⁹ In other cases, the extreme action of deposing was not necessary, as the mere threat was sufficient for the aggrieved bishop to resort to Rome. This was the case with Victricius of Rouen,¹⁰ who was accused of heterodoxy by the bishops of his surrounding areas;¹¹ accusations that, beyond doctrinal questions, could underlie other types of motivations.¹² We know that during his episcopate, Victricius carried out intense evangelising activity beyond the space of his diocese.¹³ Given this extradiocesan activity, it would seem logical that Victricius might have tried to assert his metropolitan authority over the dioceses of his surrounding areas, and that the neighbouring bishops would not have lent themselves to allowing him to take parts of their autonomy. This might have been why Pope Innocent I (401–417) issued that subsequent decree, addressed to the bishops in Victricius' province regarding the accusations levelled against him and in which he insists on the metropolitan rights of Rouen. In it he makes it clear that no single bishop can ordain another prelate, much less without the approval of the metropolitan, who is granted the right of veto. Along the lines proposed by Geoffrey D. Dunn, it is possible that the pope was making amends for the situation that prevailed until then in some parts of Gaul, with bishops denying their superior theorists.¹⁴ After all, at this time the met-

9 Mathisen 1989, 22. As an example, already at the end of the fourth century we have the case of Martin's successor at the Tours see, Brice, who appealed to Rome after being deposed. Pietri 1983, 103–111; Müller 2003.

10 On Victricius, Andrieu-Guitrancourt 1970; Hunter 1999; *PCBE* 4, 1960–1964; Natal 2018.

11 Dunn 2011, 153. Paulinus of Nola refers to the existence of internal opponents in Rouen. Paul. Nol. epist. 37, 4. Victricius himself alludes to such internal opposition. Victric. 11, 17. Natal 2018, 308. If the accusations had only come from his community, the appeal to Rome for a matter of exclusive internal resonance would not have been understood. However, the decree issued by Pope Innocent following this episode was also addressed to the suffragan bishops of Victricius. Innocentius papa v. Epist. pontif. 2.

12 See Mathisen 1989, 46; Dunn 2011, 153–154, who is inclined to think that he might have been accused of Priscillianism.

13 Paul. Nol. epist. 18, 4.

14 Innocentius papa v. Epist. pontif. 2, 1; Dunn 2011, 156–159. 165.

ropolitan order was not yet consolidated, so it is not clear whether all the metropolitan bishops would have served as such. Within this scheme, it is possible to hypothesise that the accusations against Victricius had been a response by his suffragans to the attempts of the bishop of Rouen to exercise his metropolitan functions.

Whatever the reasons, the truth is that Victricius, seeing his position threatened, chose to turn to Pope Innocent, personally travelling to Rome between the end of 403 and the beginning of 404 to obtain his support. Such a move denotes a lack of internal support for Victricius that would have made an appeal to Rome unnecessary.¹⁵ At the same time, appealing is a sign of the bishop of Rouen's helplessness, who finds himself unable to reverse the situation internally. His eagerness to accumulate relics during the previous years may have been part of a strategy aimed at reversing his precarious situation, but it certainly did not have the desired effects.¹⁶ We must also remember that appealing to Rome was not a normalised practice at this time. Innocent I responded with the aforementioned decree, emphasising papal support for Victricius and his theses.¹⁷ The mandate given by Innocent to Victricius to disseminate the decree also showed support for his authority in the region and his role as a direct intermediary between the pope and the bishops around him.

Unfortunately, the death of Victricius shortly after the papal decree was issued means we cannot know whether it had any effect, although we are inclined to think that its incidence was quite relative, if not null. This is the impression that we also get from the case of Brice of Tours, who at a fairly late time in his episcopate was accused by the people of Tours of fornication and deposed accordingly. Brice would go to the bishop of Rome, Celestine (422–432), who hosted him for seven years, until he was restored to his episcopal see.¹⁸ The fact that, despite having papal support, he spent so much time in exile is an indication of the little influence the bishop of Rome had in the Gallic metropolitan churches. In fact, it seems that his restitution was due more to a change in the relationship of powers within the city of Tours and not so much to papal support. In short, the cases of Victricius and Brice shed light on how metropolitan bishops' need for external support made Rome an intermediary for appeals when it came to settling conflicts within the Gallic episcopate.¹⁹

¹⁵ Also highlighting this lack of internal support, Natal 2018, 326.

¹⁶ On the arrival and role of these relics, Van Dam 1985, 59–60; Natal 2018.

¹⁷ On this letter; Andrieu-Guitrancourt 1970; Dunn 2011.

¹⁸ Greg. Tur. Franc. II, 1; X, 31.

¹⁹ Natal and Wood 2016, 54.

3 Patroclus' Fight for Primacy: A Real Threat?

It is no surprise that the bishops who were more firmly established internally did not turn to the pope to address antagonistic situations. This is the situation that arose from an interference from the see of Arles during the episcopate of Patroclus, who tried to impose his ecclesiastical primacy by using the homologation of his ecclesiastical rank as a pretext over the recent civil title acquired by the city of Arles as see of the prefecture of the praetorium, first, and subsequently, the governorate of the province Viennensis.²⁰ This, however, meant breaking the order defined in the Council of Turin, where metropolitan jurisdiction was distributed over the various episcopal dioceses of the Viennensis between Vienne and Arles. According to this synod, both metropolitan sees would only have jurisdiction over the nearest dioceses.²¹ In this author's opinion, more than the cause,²² this homologation served as a pretext for an ambitious bishop who saw the opportunity to claim, with intense parallel activity, a position of primacy to the detriment of his metropolitan counterparts.²³ In particular, Patroclus claimed supreme authority in the episcopal ordination of the surrounding provinces (Viennensis, Narbonensis Prima and Narbonensis Secunda). Likewise, he also demanded that all communication to Rome be previously ratified by him.²⁴ This situation supposed a dilution of the other metropolitans' authority, who in practice became mere suffragans of Patroclus.²⁵ To carry out his aspirations, the ambitious bishop of Arles enlisted the support of Pope Zosimus (417–418),²⁶ who confirmed his rights over the neighbouring provinces, which would rectify and delegitimise the resolutions of the Council of Turin.²⁷ In return, Zosimus was able to ensure his influence over Gaul as an arbitration authority.²⁸ Nevertheless, papal support was not enough to accomplish his aspirations. In fact, Zosimus himself acknowledged that his au-

²⁰ On the chronological problem that revolves around the civil promotion of Arles, Dunn 2013, 170–171.

²¹ Council of Turin (398/9) c. 2.

²² Cf. Dunn 2013, 172.

²³ Neil 2018, 97: “Deep self-interest also played a part, then as now, with bishops seeking to promote their own diocese at the expense of others”.

²⁴ Zosimus, *Epistolae Arelatenses genuinae* 1.

²⁵ Dunn 2015a, 45; 2016, 26–28.

²⁶ It has been suggested that in reality the powerful figure of Flavius Constancius was behind the promotion of Arles and the attacks on the other metropolitan sees, but this is a difficult assumption to confirm: Frye 1991; Heinzelmann 1992, 245; Villegas 2017.

²⁷ Zosimus, *Epistolae Arelatenses genuinae* 1; 4–5.

²⁸ Natal and Wood 2016, 49–50.

thority alone was not sufficient, which is why he legitimised the new order based on the tradition of Trophimus, of which he was guarantor.²⁹ It is perhaps also for this reason that he settled these matters in a council in Rome in 417, in which Patroclus also participated.³⁰

Faced with Patroclus and Zosimus' attempts to pervert the order created in Turin, the aggrieved bishops responded in different ways, although with points in common. For example, none of them attended the Roman council of 417, despite having been summoned.³¹ Perhaps they were aware that they would achieve nothing by attending the council, beyond being humiliated. However, in general, we notice a differential attitude towards the threat embodied by Patroclus, perhaps due to the personality or ambitions of the actors involved. Some specialists group the aggrieved bishops within the same faction, attributing to them a capacity for coordination and a willingness to join forces.³² However, the evidence does not allow us to reach such conclusions.³³ For example, some assume that Proculus of Marseille and Simplicius of Vienne acted in collusion. Furthermore, a letter from Zosimus shows that Simplicius protested directly to the pope at the request of Proculus.³⁴ However, the letter only denounces the permissiveness of the bishop of Vienne to Proculus' action,³⁵ but there is no record of any collaboration between the two. Simplicius' general attitude thus seemed to be passive in this matter, perhaps knowing that the papal resolution by itself had no influence. We observe the same attitude in Hilary of Narbonne,³⁶ who would have only limited himself to replying with a letter to Zosimus.³⁷ It has been argued that Hilary's lack of response stemmed from being intimidated by Zosimus, who in his letter threatened the bishop of Narbonne with excommunication and even accused him of having obtained the

29 According to Zosimus, the privileges granted to Arles derived from the greater antiquity of this metropolitan see, supposedly founded by Trophimus in the third century by mandate of the bishop of Rome. Zosimus, *Epistolae Arelatenses genuinae* 1; 3; 5. Dunn 2015b. However, as Mar Marcos 2013, 147, stated, the pope did not offer irrefutable proof of such ancient rights, nor does he give the impression that they had been previously used by the Arlesian see.

30 On this council, Dunn 2015c.

31 Zosimus, *Epistolae Arelatenses genuinae* 5. Mathisen 1989, 51–52; Dunn 2015a, 52.

32 Mathisen 1989, 60; Riess 2013, 81.

33 Supporting this perspective, the lack of unity of the Western churches has recently been highlighted: Schulz 2019.

34 Zosimus, *Epistolae Arelatenses genuinae* 5. Mathisen 1989, 58; Dunn 2013, 179–180; Dunn 2016, 29–30. In a similar vein, Griffe 1966, 187.

35 *PCBE* 4, 1815.

36 Dunn 2015a, 47–48.

37 This is deduced from reading the first lines of: Zosimus, *Epistolae Arelatenses genuinae* 3.

episcopate surreptitiously.³⁸ However, it is possible that, like Simplicius, in reality Hilary would not have felt very threatened by the papal resolution and would have continued to exercise his metropolitan rights over the region, at least over the areas of interest to him.³⁹ Proof of his rejection of the papal resolution is the fact that he addressed himself directly to Zosimus, and ignored the procedure set by Zosimus of referring first to Patroclus.⁴⁰

There was also no reaction in the case of Remigius of Aix. It is possible that in this case his passivity was due to a possible alignment with Patroclus, with the aim of obtaining territories controlled by Proculus of Marseille,⁴¹ or simply as revenge against the person who, years ago, promoted his episcopal deposition during the usurpation of Constantine III.⁴² It would be the bishop of Marseille who would show a more bellicose attitude towards Patroclus and Zosimus, or this is the impression we get from the letters written by the bishop of Rome, who concentrates most of his criticism on Proculus. Although in theory, Marseille did not have the rank of metropolitan, Aix did, by virtue of the resolutions of the Council of Turin, when the exceptional commitment of allowing Proculus to maintain metropolitan rights in the *Narbonensis Secunda* was made, but only in a personal capacity. Only at his death would the metropolitan rank pass to the bishop of Aix.⁴³ However, Pope Zosimus delegitimised the Turin resolutions and accused Proculus of usurping metropolitan rights.⁴⁴ By extension, he also accused him of having illegitimately ordained Tuentius and Ursus as bishops in Citharista and Gargaria, enclaves situated in the vicinity of Marseille and which, we must assume, had

38 Zosimus, *Epistolae Arelatenses genuinae* 3. See Dunn 2015a. It has even been suggested that Hilary complied with Zosimus' orders even after his death. *PCBE* 4, 1008.

39 We do not rule out, as Dunn 2015a, 51–52, does, that this would have allowed Patroclus to act in a certain way.

40 See other readings in: Griffe 1966, 149–151; Natal 2012, 113.

41 Dunn 2013, 181.

42 Proculus of Marseille saw a risk in the usurper to consolidate his metropolitan rights, obtaining his support to depose the bishop of Aix, occupied at that moment by Remigius, and Arles. He would subsequently encourage the episcopal promotion of its own candidates, Lazarus, for the Aix see and Heros for the Arlesian one. However, making the episcopal chair dependent on political circumstances would result in the change of context and putting such chairs at risk. This is what happened when the ruling party recovered Gaul. Patroclus of Arles replaced Heros, Lazarus of Aix was deposed, and Remigius consequently returned. See Mathisen 1989, 30–36; Frye 1991; *PCBE* 4, 1599.

43 Council of Turin (398/9) c. 1. Alluding to these extraordinary rights, Zosimus, *Epistolae Arelatenses genuinae* 5.

44 Zosimus, *Epistolae Arelatenses genuinae* 4–5.

until then been integrated into the diocese of Marseille itself.⁴⁵ We thus observe how Proculus would establish new dioceses and ordain bishops directly dependent on him to reaffirm his metropolitan jurisdiction against the claims of Patroclus and Remigius.⁴⁶

To settle the matter, Zosimus would celebrate the aforementioned council of Rome in 417, where Proculus was dismissed and the bishops of Citharista and Gargaria excommunicated.⁴⁷ However, the bishop of Marseille defied the papal orders and continued his activity. With regard to Tuentius and Ursus, it is more difficult to know their fate, but it is possible that they managed to maintain their episcopal position, at least during Proculus' life. That is, the bishop of Marseille limited himself to ignoring the papal precepts, knowing the internal strength of his position.⁴⁸ Such that, it may be that Tuentius was the bishop with whom Pope Celestine corresponded years later.⁴⁹ Faced with his defiant attitude, Zosimus tried to undermine Proculus' internal support by addressing the clergy and the people of Marseille directly to let them know first-hand about the dismissal of their bishop. However, his appeals were completely unsuccessful.⁵⁰

Zosimus' movements had absolutely no effect whatsoever in asserting Patroclus' supra-provincial aspirations. The pope himself was ineffective in the face of the other bishops' apathy.⁵¹ It is true that Zosimus expressed greater concern for Proculus, which could serve as an indirect indication of Hilary of Narbonne and Simplicius of Vienne's submission to papal orders, but it is also true that he only removed the bishop of Marseille, which meant a greater humiliation.

Zosimus abandoned his attempts to promote the bishop of Arles and to impose his authority over Gaul, but Patroclus did not and instead remained obstinate in asserting his theoretical primacy by deploying new strategies. On one hand, he would choose to use religious arguments to revile and weaken his enemies.⁵² He specifically accused them of Priscillianism; an accusation that, beyond having a real basis, functioned as a pretext in his campaign to achieve supra-provincial ju-

45 Zosimus, *Epistolae Arelatenses genuinae* 2. Unfortunately, we do not know what see each of these characters occupied. Regarding Ursus, it has been suggested that he was the same person with whom Proculus had a dispute long ago: Natal 2012, 114.

46 Natal and Wood 2016, 52. On the importance of this episcopal ordination by the metropolitan, Müller 2003, 235–236.

47 Zosimus, *Epistolae Arelatenses genuinae* 2; 4.

48 Revealing the ineffectiveness of the papal decrees towards Proculus: Mathisen 1989, 59.

49 *PCBE* 4, 1898.

50 Zosimus, *Epistolae Arelatenses genuinae* 7.

51 Zosimus, *Epistolae Arelatenses genuinae* 6.

52 Frye 1991, 360.

risdiction.⁵³ Having made such accusations, Patroclus tried to gain Augustine of Hippo's moral support by using Consencius as an intermediary, but the African bishop was uncommitted. He also tried to attract episcopal support in Tarragona, but was unsuccessful there too.⁵⁴ As these manoeuvres bore no fruit, Patroclus chose to appeal to the highest instances of secular power. In 425, he succeeded in having Emperor Valentinian III – perhaps through the intermediation of his mother Gala Placidia – grant him the power to judge the orthodoxy of Gallic bishops, ability to depose and replace those he considered heretical, and convene councils for the entire episcopate of Gaul.⁵⁵ However, the decree did not come to have any effect, since Patroclus was assassinated the following year.

Within Patroclus' campaign, there was an interesting occurrence that is worth noting. In the year 421/2 Patroclus ordained a new bishop for the see of Lodève, integrated into Narbonensis I. Faced with this interference, Boniface, the bishop of Rome (418–422), much less inclined to grant privileges to Patroclus, denounced the ordainment, doubtless using the occurrence as an excuse to rectify his predecessor's actions and deprive Arles of its supra-metropolitan rights.⁵⁶ The curious thing about this is that it was the people of Lodève who denounced Patroclus' invasion to the pope, not the metropolitan bishop, Hilary, proof that it was often much more effective to remain passive in the face of threats than to act. The papal resolution demanded the bishop of Narbonne to leave for Lodève to take charge of the situation as a competent authority.⁵⁷ Such behaviour could be understood as a submission to Patroclus,⁵⁸ which contrasts with the complaints sent to Rome by Hilary years ago. For this reason, we prefer to see a certain indifference from the bishop of Narbonne when it comes to exercising his metropolitan rights over this region. Moreover, it gave the impression that the Diocese of Lodève had acted outside any metropolitan jurisdiction, perhaps due to its own peripheral situation,⁵⁹ and that the bishop of Narbonne himself had not bothered to reverse the situation.

53 As Bronwen Neil 2018, 94, recently noted, “religious conflict may mask other root causes of conflict, whether over politics, material conditions, institutional or social status, or a combination of these factors”.

54 On these movements, Ubric Rabaneda 2013; Villegas 2017, 313.

55 Mathisen 1989, 72; Frye 1991, 359–360.

56 Villegas 2017, 314. On the bellicose attitude of Pope Boniface and his successor Celestine towards Patroclus and his aspirations, Mathisen 1989, 69–71. 74. 98–99.

57 Bonifatius I. papa v. Epist. pontif. 12.

58 Mathisen 1989, 58, intuites a pact between Patroclus and Hilary.

59 This is what Boniface himself noted in his letter: Bonifatius I. papa v. Epist. pontif. 12.

4 The Incidence of the Social Factor: The Case of Hilary and Ravenius of Arles’ Supra-Metropolitan Aspirations

The tables will turn with Patroclus’ successors in the Arles sees. Honoratus and, above all, Hilary of Arles will learn from the mistakes of their predecessor and will try to extend a supra-metropolitan authority for Arles through their direct intervention in areas of jurisdiction that theoretically depended on another metropolitan bishop. We can attribute such actions to the ambition of their promoters, but also to a certain need to assert themselves against rival internal factions.⁶⁰ The majority of the aggrieved bishops will turn to Rome during the first decades of the fifth century, and the pope will generally speak in favour of the appellant. This was the case of Celestine, who in a decree addressed to the bishops of the Viennensis and the Narbonensis ordered them not to occupy the jurisdiction of other dioceses and ecclesiastical provinces other than their own, and not to ordain foreign or individuals of a secular condition to the implicated see.⁶¹ We know that Honoratus, in a violation of his jurisdiction, had appointed the bishop of Tarentaise as the metropolitan head of the Alps Graiae province, so it is more than likely that the decree had been addressed to him.⁶² The mere fact that Pope Celestine did not dare to directly accuse Honoratus is an indication of the papal inability to enforce his orders.

This papal impotence will also be evident in later moments, particularly in the times of Pope Leo (440–461) and Bishop Hilary of Arles, who will try to impose ecclesiastical primacy over a large part of the Gallic territory.⁶³ Regarding his actions, in approximately 439 he presided over the Council of Riez, where bishops from the Viennensis, Narbonensis Secunda and Alpes Maritimae provinces met under the pretext of judging the irregular ordainment of Bishop Armentarius of Embrun. The council is resolved by dismissing the ordination and defending the exclusive authority of the bishop of Arles to ordain a new prelate here and in all these three provinces.⁶⁴ In this way Hilary was taking advantage of the support offered by the bishops in this council to do away with the metropolitan of Embrun. Hilary would celebrate a new synod in Orange in 441, where he again received the sup-

⁶⁰ See n. 2.

⁶¹ Caelestinus papa v. Epist. pontif. 4, 4–6.

⁶² Mathisen 1989, 99–100.

⁶³ Heinzelmann 1992.

⁶⁴ Council of Riez (a. 439), cc. 3–4, 6. See De Leo 1983, 23–24.

port of the bishops of these provinces, and also of Eucherius of Lyons, to assume the power to summon all the Gallic episcopate to a council.⁶⁵ Making a show of his prerogatives, he did so again one year later also in Vaison, summoning the bishops of these provinces, including one of the Narbonensis Prima, Constantius of Uzès.⁶⁶

While legitimising his supra-provincial aspirations through the council, Hilary intervened directly in the dioceses of other provinces, including some of metropolitan rank, deposing and ordaining bishops at will. This occurred in the aforementioned case of Embrun, where he deposed Armentarius and subsequently promoted Ingenuus. A similar interventionism was carried out in Besançon, the metropolitan see of the Sequanensis, in which he promoted the deposition of his bishop Celidonius in a new council, as a result of harsh accusations made against him.⁶⁷ He would subsequently promote a candidate he trusted as a substitute for Celidonius, without attending to the canonical norms.⁶⁸ Furthermore, Hilary was especially adept at mobilising internal ecclesiastical factions against Celidonius. The ambitious bishop of Arles did not limit himself only to acting on metropolitan sees, but also promoted similar actions in dioceses of lesser rank. We know, for example, that he promoted the dismissal of a certain Projectus, whose see was unknown. In this case, he even resorted to intimidation, being accompanied by an armed entourage.⁶⁹ We also know that he ordained Constantius of Uzès, who theoretically depended on Narbonne.⁷⁰ Interestingly, we have no documents recording how Armentarius reacted, who perhaps resigned himself to accepting the resolution taken at Riez; and there also is no indication of how the bishop of Narbonne reacted to the ordination of Constantius. We do, however, know that Celidonius and Projectus ended up turning to Pope Leo, who aligned himself in favour of the appellants and thus against Hilary's supra-provincial aspirations.⁷¹ In a harsh resolution dated 445, Leo deprived Hilary of his metropolitan rank, and forbade him from convening councils and participating in episcopal tribunals.⁷² He simultaneously decreed the restitution of Celidonius and Projectus to their respective

⁶⁵ Council of Orange (a. 441), c. 28 (29).

⁶⁶ Council of Vaison (a. 442), *Subscr*: On Uzès' ties to Arles, Loseby 1992, 147–148.

⁶⁷ On the accusations and the process against Celidonius, Leo M. epist. 10, 3; Honoratus of Marseille, *Vita Hil. Arel.* 21. De Leo 1983, 25–27.

⁶⁸ Loftus 2011, 425. 430.

⁶⁹ Leo M. epist. 10, 4. Heinzelmänn 1992, 240–241.

⁷⁰ Mathisen 1989, 113.

⁷¹ Leo M. epist. 10, 2. Heinzelmänn 1992.

⁷² Leo M. epist. 10, 7. Heinzelmänn 1992, 241.

sees.⁷³ These resolutions would also be sanctioned by a civil decree made by Valentinian III.⁷⁴

This is how the threatening bishop began to occupy a threatened position. But to what extent? Nothing indicates that the papal resolutions had taken effect. It is true that there are no other overreaches by Hilary in the time that was left to him. A different case is that of his successor Ravenius, who claimed a supra-provincial jurisdiction from quite early on, as we will see later.⁷⁵ The security shown by Ravenius only makes sense if it had followed a previous trend. On the other hand, Pope Leo's own actions in dealing with this cause reflects a certain degree of impotence when it comes to asserting his orders and authority over the Gallic episcopate. For example, instead of issuing a resolution on his own authority, he first summoned a council in Rome to judge the cause and then appealed to the imperial authority, which issued a parallel sentence.⁷⁶

Leo's behaviour reflects the enormous internal power that Hilary enjoyed in Gaul. But what was the basis of his power? The answer lies in the dense networks of influence that he wove from a large part of the Gallic episcopate, especially among those from the monastery of Lérins;⁷⁷ with that network, he was able to form a powerful faction around him, against which no other metropolitan bishop could compete. Hilary's networks extended in the secular sphere; as an example they included those who promoted him to the chair of Arles, such as the *magister militum*.⁷⁸ Because of them, Hilary had enormous capacity for manoeuvring on a supra-provincial scale that allowed him to relieve and appoint bishops at will without the need for a legal basis.⁷⁹ A particularly important factor in the construction of these networks was his intervention in the episcopal appointments of all possi-

73 Leo M. epist. 10, 3–4.

74 *Constitutio Valentiniani III Augusti*, in Leo M. epist. 11. As Mathisen 1989, 164–165, states: “it merely acted as an enforcement arm for the church in Rome”.

75 Mathisen 1989, 170.

76 Hilary himself would have gone to Rome, but left as soon as he saw that he had no way to assert his position. Honoratus of Marseille, *Vita Hil. Arel.* 22. Heinzelmann 1976, 79–80; Mathisen 1989, 158–159.

77 See Mathisen 1989.

78 Heinzelmann 1976, 78–82; Heinzelmann 1992, 246. On Hilary's secular supports, see also Mathisen 1989, 155–156.

79 Leo himself acknowledged the importance of these personal networks when he alludes to the fact that it is personal affinity that determined the exercise of a supra-metropolitan jurisdiction to Hilary. Leo M. epist. 10, 6.

ble dioceses, regardless of their territory and entity.⁸⁰ In order to secure the support of the greatest possible number of bishops he would go as far as to found new dioceses, some of them short-lived, as is the case of Castellane and Thorame. The creation of such networks was a slow process, which is why we do not have evidence of Hilary's first transgressions until well into his episcopate. This is also why it took years to gather the necessary support to convene the first supra-provincial councils, specifically one decade after his ascent to the episcopate. He would then hold three councils in a very short space of time: one in Riez (439), another in Orange (441) and another in Vaison (442). By then he had already consolidated ties with bishops of all ranks and from different territories, thanks to which he obtained a majority in the councils in his favour. Being aware of his control over the conciliar debates, means that his interest in raising all episcopal disputes to council is comprehensible.⁸¹ As David Natal stated for a somewhat earlier context, "the objectives of councils were not to facilitate debate, but to legitimise the opinion of the most powerful episcopal group."⁸² By extension, councils would only have been encouraged when their promoter was sure that the result would be resolved in a manner favourable to their interests. Furthermore, in a clear display of force, but also in a provocation to his opponents, Hilary summoned these councils in territories over which Arles had long claimed jurisdiction.

For Hilary, the councils were merely instrumental – used for ecclesiastical primacy in Gaul. Consequently, canonical regulations would have been of a similar nature. Within this system, Hilary would have resorted to the canonical argument when it benefited him, but, without fear of consequences, he would have transgressed when it did not suit him, knowing that all internal complaints were destined to fail. In the end, regulations were pushed into the background when there was majority support. The first assumption was applied at the time of deposing Armentarius of Embrun, while the second is evident in the case of Besançon. This is how, according to Peter van Nuffelen, the canonical regulation functioned, and although different to the rules of the game, it was still part of the game itself.⁸³

80 Honoratus of Marseille, *Vita Hil. Arl.* 30. As such, we find him appointing bishops in minor nuclei such as Toulon or Carpentras. About this activity, Loseby 1992, 147–148. Many of the ordained bishops had trained directly with Hilary. Honoratus of Marseille, *Vita Hil. Arl.* 11.

81 Council of Vaison (a. 442), cc. 7–8. However, such a majority was not synonymous with consensus, so the councils laid the groundwork for the aggrieved parties to appeal to the pope. The success of the Council of Turin was due to it being a council that had the intervention of Italian agents, presumably impartial, whose decision, due to its arbitrary nature, had a greater chance of being accepted by the parties. Only an impartial council could achieve a mutually acceptable solution. On the subsequent acceptance of the Council of Turin, Mathisen 2013, 304–307.

82 Natal 2015b, 41.

83 Van Nuffelen 2011, 245.

Hilary's networks would have spread over numerous dioceses, which, regardless of their original affiliation, were suffragans of Arles. Some metropolitan bishops would not have had the power to contradict the authority of Hilary, and had no choice but to allow his interference within their provinces.⁸⁴ It is thus striking that the aforementioned Projectus, a suffragan bishop, addressed his complaint directly to the pope and not to the aggrieved metropolitan, possibly Claudius of Vienne.⁸⁵ In fact, Claudius of Vienne and the metropolitan of Lyon attended some of the councils chaired by Hilary,⁸⁶ a sign that they had become part of his powerful networks of influence, or that, at least, they attributed a higher moral authority to him.⁸⁷ We can thus deduce how some metropolitans, even seeing their jurisdiction diminished, were impassive and even docile in the face of the continuous violations against their authority.⁸⁸ Perhaps Claudius kept his rank by accepting the new situation, a rank with which he signed conciliar proceedings. This was not the case of Ingenuus of Embrun, who in exchange for his episcopal promotion freely ceded all his metropolitan rights to Hilary,⁸⁹ to the point of signing the proceedings as a suffragan.⁹⁰ Pope Leo himself would reproach the attitude of these metropolitans who renounced their rights and describe them as deserters of their rank, precisely for allowing Hilary to ordain bishops in their provinces.⁹¹ Ingenuus' approval of the Council of Orange in 441 contrasts with that of the other two metropolitans present, Claudius of Vienne and Eucherius of Lyon, who sign after Hilary.⁹² We can deduce two different metropolitan bishop profiles based on the different ways they approve the councils: the first are those metropolitans, such as the holder of Vienne, who would maintain their rights but afford Hilary a higher authority and allow him to interfere in their provinces and, on the second, those who re-

84 As proposed by Mathisen 1989, 157, for the second profile, "Hilary's extended metropolitan rights, therefore, even according to Leo, had not been seized from unwilling metropolitans, but had been ceded willingly to him by the metropolitans concerned".

85 Perhaps now we can understand the papal accusation that he usurped metropolitan rights in the Vienne province. Leo M. epist. 10, 7. We rule out that the aforementioned Projectus had been a metropolitan bishop, as defended by Mathisen 1989, 151–152.

86 Regarding his relationship with the bishop of Lyon, we know that he had corresponded with him and that literary compositions were exchanged. *PCBE* 4, 1000.

87 Griffe 1966, 140.

88 Highlighting episcopal support for Hilary, Heinzelmann 1976, 81.

89 Mathisen 1989, 106–107. 220. It is not surprising that some have attributed Ingenuus with a certain attitude of indifference: Griffe 1966, 166. Cf. Mathisen 1989, 223.

90 *PCBE* 4, 1039.

91 Leo M. epist. 10, 6.

92 Council of Orange (a. 441), *Subscr*

nounced all their privileges and became mere suffragans, as happened with Ingenuus of Embrun.

Of course, not all metropolitans would have willingly accepted this order of things, but they would have been a minority and with little authority. Faced with this situation, some of them would have simply resigned themselves to it, and included themselves in Hilary's networks. Others, particularly those who were able to escape Hilary's authority, would have been indifferent. Then there would be those who, even under the authority of the bishop of Arles, tried to resist, albeit passively, for example, by not attending his councils.⁹³ Lastly, there would be the most affected, such as Celidonius, who opted to oppose Hilary's autarkic policies. They only had one option: to appeal to Rome. The fact that they ended up resorting to external interference by the pope is an indication of Celidonius' failure to build dense personal networks not only among his own suffragan episcopate, but among the local population itself.⁹⁴ If this were true, perhaps Hilary's threat would not have had such weight or, at least, Celidonius could have addressed the issue in better conditions.⁹⁵ We could say that his precarious situation was a consequence of his lack of proactivity.⁹⁶ The deposed bishop of Besançon only reacted when it was too late, leaving him one last and the least effective resort: an appeal to Rome.⁹⁷

In contrast, Rusticus of Narbonne was able to retain his position and jurisdiction, while freeing himself from any of Hilary's influence. This is evidenced by his absence, and the absence of his suffragans – with the exception of Constantius of Uzès – in the councils presided over by Hilary,⁹⁸ a symptom of the strong control that Rusticus exercised over his bishops.⁹⁹ Perhaps as a response to Hilary's aspirations, in Rusticus there are unprecedented claims of his authority and independ-

⁹³ This could have been the case with Aix, who never attended Hilary's councils, although some of his theoretically suffragan bishops did. Mathisen 1989, 118. 220. See *infra*.

⁹⁴ This situation is especially evident in the case of Besançon.

⁹⁵ As stated by Wood 2019, 239, even though he was referring to the Hispanic case, "cultivating connection to local populations was vital if the bishop was to establish his power in the first place and later to resist outside interference or challenges from within the bishopric".

⁹⁶ Wood 2019, 234: "Those who sought to resolve disputes were clearly reactive rather than proactive".

⁹⁷ Metropolitans themselves may not have looked favourably on papal meddling in their affairs, but their powerlessness in dealing with the dense personal networks of their adversaries left them no choice.

⁹⁸ Heinzelmänn 1992, 250; *PCBE* 4, 1658.

⁹⁹ Rusticus' networks would have spread outside his province, for example, to the diocese of Marseille, with whose bishop Venerio he had close contacts. *PCBE* 4, 1924.

ence from the bishop of Arles himself,¹⁰⁰ being the first prelate to date the religious buildings promoted by him, such as the Basilica of Saint-Félix of Narbonne and the altar of Minerva, from his years as episcopate.¹⁰¹

Aware of his strengths, Hilary mobilised his networks to challenge Pope Leo's attempts to undermine his authority. For example, he ordered that the response to Leo be led by an entourage made up of bishops from outside the Viennensis, such as Constantius de Uzès, in a clear provocation to the pope, aimed at making his internal forces visible.¹⁰² For this he also turned to the secular powers that supported him.¹⁰³ What is striking is that the entourage did not address the pope, but the imperial powers. Hilary's concern was not so much the papal resolution, but the decree of Valentinian III, which reaffirmed the bishop of Rome's limited powers when it came to enforcing his orders in Gaul.

The personal networks of different agents of power thus became the determining factor in better coping with the threats to metropolitan authority and, in particular, those that came from Rome. This same situation occurred during the time of Hilary's successor at the Arles see, Ravenius. The new bishop inherited the episcopal networks of his powerful predecessor, which gave him a greater capacity for influence than the rest of his Gallic counterparts, although it is true that the change of head in the Arles see caused Ravenius to lose control of other sees. However, Ravenius was able to ordain a bishop at Vaison, which was theoretically under the jurisdiction of Nicetas of Vienne. The latter would be much less complacent than his predecessor Claudius, but, knowing the strength of Ravenius, he had no choice but to turn to Pope Leo to resolve this interference in his jurisdiction.¹⁰⁴ In a new display of strength, and showing that his power was similar to that of his predecessor, Ravenius mobilised his episcopal networks, ensuring that 19 bishops from the southern Gaul, and from different provinces, demanded metropolitan rights from the pope for the Arlesian see over the Vienne provinces, the two Narbonensis provinces and Alpes Maritimae.¹⁰⁵ The request was still a formality in a *de facto* situation, despite previous papal resolutions. In fact, it is possible that Rav-

100 Riess 2013, 83.

101 Marrou 1970; Riess 2013, 80–92.

102 Honoratus of Marseille, *Vita Hil. Arel.* 22.

103 The Romanus' of Condat *vita*, from the beginning of the sixth century, confirms the support that the most powerful secular agents gave him. Heinzelmann 1992, 242.

104 It is interesting to note that it was the bishops Nicetas of Vienne and Narbonne who anointed Ravenius, perhaps with the hope that he would not show the same aspirations as his predecessor Leo, *Ep. Coll. Arelat.* 9. Mathisen 1989, 173.

105 Zosimus, *Epistolae Arelatenses genuinae* 12.

enius' intention was to show the pope his willingness to continue exercising supra-provincial jurisdiction, whether he had approval from Rome or not.

On this occasion, instead of betting again on a lost cause, Pope Leo would end up recognising the factual power of Ravenius and the see of Arles. Thus, in a new decree dating from 450, he attributed the dioceses of Tarentaise, Valence, Geneva and Grenoble to Vienne, while the rest of the Viennensis sees, including Die and Viviers, were handed over to Arles.¹⁰⁶ In an indirect acknowledgement of his helplessness, Leo accepts the current state of affairs, including Ravenius' authority over Vaison's see.¹⁰⁷ Despite being the appellant, Nicetas of Vienne would end up humiliated. Beyond the fact that Leo tried to make his decree serve as a compromise between both parties, he was aware that his orders would only be followed if his resolution pleased Ravenius. Otherwise, he risked them falling on deaf ears.

5 The Chronic Precariousness of Certain Metropolitan Sees

Despite his primacy, Ravenius would have had some difficulty maintaining Hilary's networks. The bishop of Vienne was not alone in claiming metropolitan rights for Embrun, the bishops of the Alpes Maritimae, led by Veranus of Vence, also defended them.¹⁰⁸ It is not unreasonable to suggest that behind this claim was Ingenuus of Embrun, who had no other option but to act behind the scenes due to his inability to directly confront his main supporter. Unlike the sees of Vienne and Narbonne, the bishops of Embrun were unable to easily impose themselves on their counterparts in Arles.

Embrun would thus enter the group of metropolitan sees that, despite attempts, showed a chronic inability to establish a real jurisdiction over neighbouring dioceses. The Aix see would also fall into this category. Both metropolitan sees were able to intermittently influence their theoretical suffragan bishoprics throughout the fifth century, and often treated the bishop of Arles as their metropolitan.¹⁰⁹ Ravenius of Arles, for example, presided over a council addressing a dispute between the abbot Faustus of Lerins and the bishop Theodore of Fréjus, who

106 Leo M. epist. 66.

107 It has been said that Ravenius had the pope's support. Griffe 1966, 160–161. However, if that were the case, the bishops' actions would not have been necessary.

108 Hil. Arel. epist. 12, 1.

109 Griffe 1966, 154–155. Aix would end up losing its metropolitan rank in the sixth century. Duval, Fevrier, and Guyon 1986, 67–68.

was within the jurisdiction of Aix.¹¹⁰ As far as Embrun is concerned, we have already mentioned the voluntary subordination of its bishop Ingenuus to Hilary. Before the power of Arles, they could only show a passive or veiled resistance when circumstances allowed it, as occurred in the case of Ingenuus during the time of Ravenius of Arles. This is how we also understand the absence of Aix at the council proceedings chaired by Hilary or Ravenius.¹¹¹ To face their precariousness, and given the impossibility of competing with powerful metropolitan sees, both Aix and Embrun opted to compete between themselves.¹¹² We know, for example, that Auxanius of Aix acted against Ingenuus of Embrun, invading his jurisdiction over the diocese of Cimiez by promoting a bishop in the enclave of Nice.¹¹³ His intervention in other dioceses is not ruled out either.¹¹⁴ Here we can see how, for a time, there were two bishops in the same territory, each dependent on a different metropolitan. Faced with such an invasion, Ingenuus appealed to the bishop of Rome, who dealt with the matter in a council and would conclude by ordering Auxanius to desist in his aspirations on Nice.¹¹⁵

Later, there would be those other metropolitan sees whose bishops showed, not so much incapacity, but a certain disinterest, in exercising their theoretical prerogatives. This is the attitude that we perceive in the case of Bourges, the see that we find under the orbit of Tours during the time of Bishop Leo.¹¹⁶ Faced with Bourges' apathy, it is possible that Clermont had adopted a *de facto* metropolitan role from the episcopate of Sidonius Apollinaris that was never answered by Bourges, or at least has not transpired, which is a symptom of his weakness. Perhaps also out of disinterest, Tours found it difficult to assert his metropolitan rights under Bishop Brice. It would not be until the episcopates of his successors, Eusto-

110 *Exemplar epistulae generalis quae ad episcopos inuitandos in causa insulae Lerinensis missa est; Institutio sanctorum episcoporum Ravennii, Rustici, Nectari, Flori, Constanti(i), Ascelpi(i), Maximi, iusti, Saloni(i), Ingenui, Enanti(i), Zotici, Chrysantii, in causa insula Lerinensis.*

111 On absence, Griffe 1966, 164–165.

112 On this competition, Griffe 1950, 71–74; Griffe 1966, 164–166. We do not rule out that this competition had also occurred with Marseille after Proculus. Mathisen 1989, 219–220. Others, however, rule out that Proculus' successors had tried to reproduce a metropolitan jurisdiction for their sees. Griffe 1950, 67.

113 Hil. Arel. epist. 12, 1.

114 Griffe 1966, 166.

115 Hil. Arel. epist. 12, 1. Griffe 1950, 73–74; Duval, Fevrier; and Guyon 1986, 68.

116 We find him attending the Council of Angers in 453, presided over by Eustochius of Tours, a council which, apart from the aforementioned Leo, was only attended by suffragan bishops of Tours. He also attended the Council of Tours in 461, but this was attended by more bishops from other provinces, possibly because of the celebration of the *receptio Martini* in this city. Pietri 1983, 145.

chius and Perpetuus, that Tours would begin to claim and exercise a real metropolitan authority.¹¹⁷ Just as in Belgica Secunda, we did not observe a clear metropolitan activity until the time of Remigius of Reims, that is, from the second half of the fifth century, when we observed the first appointments of suffragan bishops.¹¹⁸ A similar case is that of Trier, whose metropolitan role was diluted throughout the fifth century, with no signs of reactivation until the Merovingian period.¹¹⁹ One factor that might have influenced the dissolution of the metropolitan role of both sees could have been the little Christianisation of these areas, and also their greater exposure to barbarian incursions. However, this had a lower incidence compared to the first, since in the case of Trier, for example, there continued to be a regular succession of bishops throughout the century.¹²⁰ Germania had less luck, where we have no record of the presence of any bishop, not even in its metropolitan see, Mayence, as did Strasbourg, Spire and Worms.¹²¹

6 The Instrumentalisation of the Pope by the New Secular Power

It was not only episcopal agents who would appeal to Rome. Certain secular powers also saw a possible way to preserve their interests in the papacy. This happened in 463 as a result of the consecration of Marcellus as the new bishop of Die by Mamertus of Vienne.¹²² This appointment was a violation of the previous resolutions of Pope Leo, but also of the will of the Die people, whose opinion would not have been taken into account.¹²³ This interference led to intervention by Gondioc, king of the Burgundians and ultimately *magister militum* of the Empire in Gaul, who appealed to Pope Hilary (461–468) to denounce Mamertus' behaviour.¹²⁴ The bishop

117 Pietri 1983, 143–152. In a similar vein, *PCBE* 4, 713: “il [Eustochius] est le premier évêque de Tours à revendiquer, sans employer encore le terme, l'autorité d'un métropolitain”. On the metropolitan activity of Perpetuus, Bourges 2012.

118 Until then, we only know of the Châlons-sur-Marne and Senlis sees in operation. This map will be multiplied, in time with the evangelisation of the region, at the end of the episcopate of Remigius with the addition of Amiens, Beauvais, Soissons, Arras, Laon, Senlis, Tournai and Saint-Quentin. Isaïa 2011, 140–161.

119 On such reactivation, Poveda Arias 2021.

120 Griffe 1966, 135. Cf. Anton 1989, 61.

121 Gauthier 1980, 129. As this author shows, at that time it would have been the bishops of Belgica Prima who were in charge of the pastoral care and evangelisation of the region.

122 On the identification of this Marcellus with the bishop of Die, Stüber 2020, 78–88.

123 Leo M. epist. 66; Ven. Fort. Vita Marcell. 3.

124 Hil. Arel. *Epistolae Arelatenses genuinae* 19–21.

of Rome responded by addressing the alleged main aggrieved party, Leontius of Arles, whose jurisdiction was ultimately being violated. Leontius was also given a warning for not having made him aware of the bishop of Vienne's movements. He was also required to address the problem in a council chaired by himself.¹²⁵ Thus, we see a resignation on the part of Rome to take justice into their own hands in matters of Gaul, limiting itself to only ordering the Gallic episcopate to resolve their affairs. The final resolution of the conflict confirms this. The Gallic bishops met and settled this episode in council. However, far from denouncing Mamertus' behaviour, they accepted Marcellus' appointment and, therefore, the interference of the bishop of Vienne in Die. Faced with this episcopal resolution, Hilary was forced to accept the *status quo*, requesting only that the ordination of Mamertus be confirmed by Leontius.¹²⁶

In line with this event, Leontius of Arles' attitude is striking: he was completely impassive in the face of Mamertus' interference in his supposed area of influence. We thus get the impression that Leontius was much less ambitious than his famous predecessors, and that not only did he not aspire to exercise supra-provincial rights,¹²⁷ but he may have even neglected the exercise of his metropolitan functions within its own province.¹²⁸ The fact that both Leontius and the bishops gathered in the aforementioned council accepted the current reality is an indication that it had been normalised. The legal arguments were thus swept under the carpet when the different parties accepted a *status quo* supported solely by social practice,¹²⁹ in this case in the *de facto* exercise of a metropolitan jurisdiction over Die by a strong and ambitious personality such as Mamertus. In the end, the only one interested in appealing to Rome was Gondioc. It has been argued that the king acted solely to fulfil his functions as *magister militum*,¹³⁰ but this contrasts with the general attitude of his predecessors in office, who showed a total indifference towards ecclesiastical affairs. For this reason, we understand that Gondioc's behaviour was a strategy aimed at extending Burgundian influence over this region. His interest in Die would have been to promote a candidate related to him,¹³¹ but also in attracting the population of this city who were dissatisfied with the nomination

125 Hil. Arel. *Epistolae Arelatenses genuinae* 19.

126 Hil. Arel. *Epistolae Arelatenses genuinae* 21. Stüber 2020, 82–83. See also Griffe 1966, 163.

127 In fact, the Embrun and Aix sees seem to have enjoyed a few years of stability and independence from Arles, and not because of their greater strength, but because Pope Hilary acknowledged their rank. Hil. Arel. epist. 8; 11. Mathisen 1989, 220.

128 Cf. Mathisen 1989, 205.

129 In a similar vein, Van Nuffelen 2011, 245.

130 Stüber 2020, 82.

131 Nimmegeers 2014, 47; Stüber 2020, 82.

of Marcellus as the new bishop of Die. Thus, Gondioc, through his appeal to Rome, would have become the champion of the popular will in a movement aimed at achieving the support of the city at a nascent moment of his power. Additionally, the episode would have served him to confront Mamertus of Die, with whom we believe he had a tense relationship.

Visigothic prince Frederic would have been pursuing the same intentions when he also appealed to the same pope because of the appointment of Hermes as the new bishop of Narbonne,¹³² a city that had just been taken over by the Visigoths.¹³³ Frederic took advantage of the irregular nature of the appointment of Hermes, who, contrary to canonical norms, had left the episcopal chair of Béziers to become metropolitan of Narbonne, to champion the cause and bring it to Rome. Again, it is striking that it was a secular agent who appealed to the pope and that – as in the previous case – the other bishops did not voice their opposition to the promotion of Hermes, despite the fact that it violated canonical regulations.¹³⁴ What is more, certain bishops, such as Faustus of Riez and Auxanius of Aix, would travel to Rome to defend him.¹³⁵ It is possible that the controversy generated around the election of Hermes had been exploited by the new Visigothic power as a way to legitimise and vindicate itself in front of the Narbonne community, in this case through assuming a role of arbitration,¹³⁶ while gaining the sympathies of groups opposed to Hermes. At the same time, if successful, Frederic would manage to rid himself of someone who opposed Visigothic rule.

Hilary would respond to this new violation of the rules. In a first letter, he would again reproach Leontius of Arles for his passivity in the face of a new violation of the *status quo*, to then issue a resolution unfavourable to the interests of Hermes. In it, Hermes was allowed to keep the Narbonnean chair, but he was deprived of his metropolitan rank, which was granted temporarily, until the death of Hermes himself, to the most veteran bishop of the province, in this case the prelate of Uzès. Hilary could not risk being humiliated before a harsher resolution that deposed Hermes that he could not comply with, so he chose an in between. Knowing whether the papal resolution had any effect is more difficult, but without a doubt

132 Hil. Arel. epist. 7. See Langgärtner 1964, 93–94. 98–90, who denies that he was actually Theodor-ic's brother. Among those who advocate the contrary option, Mathisen 1989, 207. About Frederic, Serrano Madroñal, 2020.

133 Hyd. chron. 212 [217]; Isid. hist. 33.

134 This factor shows how social reality used to prevail over what was prescribed in canonical norms. See Van Nuffelen 2011.

135 Griffe 1966, 184.

136 Cf. Mathisen and Sivan 1999, 42.

the Visigothic power would have struggled to enforce it and prevent Hermes from exercising a metropolitan position.¹³⁷

7 The Rising of the New *Regna* and the Fragmentation of the Ecclesiastical Provinces

The cases of Gondioc and Frederic reveal the growing weight that the new barbarian powers began to have from the second half of the fifth century as potential threats to the metropolitan bishops. However, some prelates saw in the incursion of these new actors as an opportunity rather than a potential danger.¹³⁸ Remigius of Reims, for example, would approach the Frankish king Clovis, the temporal coincidence of the extension of his metropolitan authority with his approach to the Merovingian was not accidental.¹³⁹ Less promising was the outlook for the metropolitans with the Visigothic occupation in the southern half of Gaul, which led to the decomposition of the current ecclesiastical and administrative order. The ecclesiastical provinces were thus exposed to a fragmentation of their territory.¹⁴⁰

The see of Narbonne was especially damaged, until it was finally conquered by the Visigoths. Its metropolitan maintained the ascendancy over the sees which, like her, were still under the control of the Empire, as is the case of Béziers, Lodève, Nîmes and, theoretically, Uzès as well, but the western part of her province, which included Toulouse, was under the control of the Visigoths, which in practice meant the loss of all influence over them.¹⁴¹ Already integrated into the Visigothic kingdom, Narbonne would on this occasion lose control over those dioceses that were under Burgundian control. Arles also saw its province fragmented, as we will see below. For its part, Aix – also integrated into the Visigothic kingdom – ended up losing control over Gap, Sistero and Apt, which remained under Burgundian rule. Embrun, annexed to the Burgundian kingdom, also suffered the consequences of the expansionism of both kingdoms, losing its control over its entire province, particularly over Digne and Senez, which fell under Visigothic domination. Lacking strength, it is understood that for a time it depended directly on Vienne.¹⁴²

137 Hil. Arel. epist. 7–8. Langgärtner 1964, 95; Griffe 1966, 185; Mathisen 1989, 208–210.

138 Mathisen 1993, 153–158; Díaz 2016.

139 See Poveda Arias, 2019.

140 Schäferdiek 1967, 38–41; Nimmegeers 2014, 50.

141 Mathisen 1989, 120; Riess 2013, 83.

142 Duval, Fevrier, and Guyon 1986, 67–68; Nimmegeers, 2014: 57.

A priori, political boundaries should not influence the internal functioning of the Church but, in reality, they resulted in an isolation of churches according to their political affiliation. In particular, the bishoprics integrated into the Visigothic kingdom did not participate in the Gallic councils that were held outside the areas controlled by the Visigoths, perhaps in a conscious attempt by the latter to isolate their bishops.¹⁴³ Faced with such a threat, the metropolitans had little room for manoeuvre, but they would not resign themselves to accepting the new situation. Basilius of Aix and Leontius of Arles, for example, together with the bishops Graecus of Marseille and Faustus of Riez, would be personally involved in the negotiations that the Visigoth king Euric had with the Empire between the years 474 and 475 to agree on the annexation of new territories.¹⁴⁴ In principle, these bishops attended the negotiations on behalf of the Gallic Church that had not yet fallen under Visigothic domination. However, it is to be expected that they ended up prioritising their personal interests, particularly in regard to maintaining the territorial integrity of their provinces, and put collective interests in the background. Sidonius Apollinaris himself – who in the course of these negotiations attended the Visigothic annexation of his see, Clermont – reproached these bishops for their selfishness.¹⁴⁵ However, the order defined in such negotiations would be destined to be quite ephemeral, since the fall of the Empire in the West left the way clear for the Visigoths to take Arles, Aix and part of their respective territories.

It was especially difficult for Eonius of Arles to accept the fragmentation of his ecclesiastical province. The dioceses north of Durance (St. Paul-Trois-Châteaux, Vaison, Orange, Carpentras, Avignon, Cavaillon) were integrated into the Burgundian kingdom, which allowed the metropolitan of Vienne to take control of them.¹⁴⁶ The bishop of Rome, in this case Anastasius (496–498), would end up recognising the new political order, confirming to Avitus of Vienne his jurisdiction over such dioceses. Eonius of Arles would appeal the papal resolution to Anastasius' successor in the Petrine chair: Symmachus (498–514). To settle the dispute, the bishop of Rome summoned the parties, but apparently neither of them appeared. Consequently, Symmachus did not dare issue a final judgement.¹⁴⁷ We are surprised to see Eonius' claim to his jurisdiction over dioceses that, because of political borders, he

¹⁴³ Mathisen and Sivan 1999, 41. The isolation of the churches in the Visigothic kingdom contrasts with the active participation in the Gallic councils of those ones integrated into the Burgundian kingdom.

¹⁴⁴ Sidon. epist. VII, 6, 10.

¹⁴⁵ Sidon. epist. VII, 7, 4.

¹⁴⁶ Nimmegeers 2014, 50.

¹⁴⁷ Symmachus, *Epistolae Arelatenses genuinae* 23–24. Mathisen 1997, 546–547; *PCBE* 4, 56; Nimmegeers 2014, 50.

could not control, in what we understand as a denial of the new order. In fact, Avitus expressed a desire to resolve the dispute through the conciliar way, but he knew holding a council with the different parties was impossible because of these same political borders.¹⁴⁸

8 Conclusions

The metropolitan bishops had to face the same dangers as their suffragans: barbaric invasions, natural catastrophes, internal factionalism and exiles, among others. However, because of the idiosyncrasies of their position, they were also exposed to dangers that were particular to their rank, specifically to questions and violations of their metropolitan jurisdiction. In such situations, we have seen that the social factor – specifically the creation of a complex network of personal ties with the surrounding episcopate, as well as with the local population – were decisive when it came to being able to face such threats, but also to prevent them from arising. Regardless of the institutional order in force, the only thing that guaranteed the metropolitans real exercise of their authority was internal support. Not even intervention from the pope, despite his authority, could reverse this reality. In fact, the bishops of Rome were consistently unable to enforce their orders,¹⁴⁹ except when they folded and accepted the *status quo*. Appeals to Rome always comprised a certain helplessness on the part of certain metropolitans who were incapable of asserting their rights and aspirations through internal channels. Only political vicissitudes could render social factors irrelevant. In particular, the formation of the new *regna* in Gaul brought with it a fragmentation of the ecclesiastical provinces that prevented the metropolitans from exercising a real authority over the territories located in a different political reality; dynamics that, far from abating, will intensify during the Merovingian dynasty immediately afterwards.¹⁵⁰

148 Alc. Avit. epist. 34.

149 In a way, the words of B. Neil (2018, 97) become true when he stated the following: “The church of Gaul had sufficient wealth and power of its own to be able to ignore papal bluster”. In a line similar to that defended here, Marcos 2013, 160.

150 Some of these problems are treated in: Poveda Arias 2021.

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