

## **A Tale of Two States**

**To what extent can the study of the states of Soissons and Dalmatia provide insight into the state of the Western Roman Empire in the period around its fall in 476 AD?**

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## Chapter One – Introduction

The study of the decline and fall of the Western Roman Empire in the mid to late 400s AD is one of those periods in history to which a tremendous amount of research and writing has been devoted, no doubt fuelled by the still ongoing debates regarding particular what the cause of said fall was. One need only think of Gibbon's seminal *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* from the eighteenth century to realise what a hold this period has on the minds of many an ancient historian. In the last ten years four prominent books in particular have been published seeking to explain the fall of Rome from Heather, Ward-Perkins, and Goldsworthy.<sup>12</sup> None of these scholars however pays particular mind to the Roman states outside of Rome, save to paint them as continual victims of barbarian attack, either from the perspective of the Italian based Western Roman Empire or from that of the barbarians themselves often without even naming those individuals involved.<sup>3</sup> It seems strange that with the vast wealth of literature available discussing the state of the Western Roman Empire in this period quite so little attention appears to have been paid to the various Roman rump states outside of the Empire itself such as Soissons and Dalmatia. Given this seeming lack of interest one could even be forgiven for assuming that such states did not matter; they only existed for a short period after all, surely they could not provide us with anything of importance?

Fortunately however this has not always remained the case and there have been intermittent studies conducted on the two regions. Any study of Soissons appears to run into the perpetual problem when attempting to analyse the state; the lack of available primary sources. Gregory of Tours is effectively the sole source on Soissons and he was writing from a Frankish perspective over a century later. This Frankish perspective is fairly apparent when one considers Gregory's account of the war between Soissons and the Franks under Clovis I.<sup>4</sup> That said books eight and nine of his *History of the Franks* do contain fragments of texts from supposedly more contemporary writers to the period which could have indicated that this was something that Gregory was in the habit of doing throughout his writing of it. This dearth of primary source material for the state of Soissons naturally goes some way to explaining perhaps why it has not been studied in great detail. The lonely position of Gregory as a primary source may also have been the reason for the placing of Soissons into the narrative of Clovis' Frankish expansion in the first real piece of literature to tackle the region; J.B. Bury's 1924 article 'The End of Roman Rule in Northern Gaul'.<sup>5</sup> This idea or interpretation of Soissons being more of a foil to show the rise of the Salian Franks under Clovis as the Franks were now strong enough to conquer a Roman state would appear to have pervaded several of the other works covering Soissons and its region. Whilst this likely Gregory and Bury inspired viewpoint of course makes sense in Geary's *Before France and Germany: The Creation and Transformation of the Merovingian World* it is perhaps less understandable in a text with a title

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<sup>1</sup> P. Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire: A New History of Rome and the Barbarians* (Oxford University Press, 2007) p.461

<sup>2</sup> B. Ward-Perkins, *The Fall of Rome And the End of Civilization* (Oxford University Press, 2005) p.49

<sup>3</sup> A. Goldsworthy, *How Rome Fell: Death of a Superpower* (Yale University Press, 2009) p.358

<sup>4</sup> Gregory of Tours, *Historia Francorum*, II.27, transl. E. Brehaut, *History of the Franks* (Columbia University Press, 1916) pp.36-38

<sup>5</sup> J. B. Bury, 'The End of Roman Rule in North Gaul', *Cambridge Historical Journal*, Vol.1, No.2, 1924, (Cambridge University Press, 1924) pp.198-199

such as Anthony King's *Roman Gaul and Germany* in which Aegidius and Syagrius rule covers only two pages.<sup>6</sup>

More recent studies of the state have departed from this Frankish viewpoint however. Fanning's chapter in *Fifth Century Gaul: A Crisis of Identity* actually focusses specifically on the state of Soissons itself, rather than its interaction with external states. In particular the chapter focusses on the aspects and nature of the leadership of Aegidius and Syagrius in Soissons.<sup>7</sup> The focus on this in particular may well have been caused by the fact that aside from the two leaders of the state little is actually known regarding life inside it or under their rule. In any case this approach to analysis of the state was also undertaken by Penny MacGeorge in her monograph *Late Roman Warlords*. By far the most extensive study of the state of Soissons MacGeorge manages to bring together various fragmentary pieces of information in order to attempt to build an impression of the state and its workings from a top-down perspective in terms of governing of the province.<sup>8</sup> MacGeorge's work also goes a long way to critiquing and dismantling the assertion in Edward James' *The Franks* that the state of Soissons did not actually exist and that Syagrius was actually ruling a Frankish province in the name of Childeric and Clovis I.<sup>9</sup> As such I will not delve too deeply into James' arguments, given that MacGeorge is able to counter most if not all in her monograph.

The study of Dalmatia is likewise heavily framed by the perspective of approach being at the top level of the government. Much of the work regarding the state of Dalmatia focusses primarily on the character and actions of its two leaders Marcellinus and Julius Nepos. MacGeorge herself approaches the two figures in much the same way as Aegidius and Syagrius in the Dalmatian section of her *Late Roman Warlords* book; with her eye firmly on their governing of the region.<sup>10</sup> This is true of many of the works covering either one or both of Marcellinus or Julius Nepos; said texts focus on them rather than the actual state of Dalmatia. This is somewhat understandable given the fact that the primary sources available to us, as with Soissons, come from outside the state itself. Naturally those in bordering states would be principally concerned with the actions of the leaders of their neighbours and as such this will shape the perception of the state for historians. Those who have studied the state such as MacGeorge have therefore had to combine the separate perceptions and interpretations of Dalmatia from Western and Eastern Imperial Roman sources. Actual studies of the state itself aside from that of MacGeorge are not numerous, historians of the period have generally, perhaps thanks to its geographical location, included the state of Dalmatia with their examination of the Western Roman Empire proper rather than as its own separate state. As such those works, for example Bury's *History of the Later Roman Empire*, focus on the roles of Julius Nepos and Marcellinus more as opponents of Ricimer, his puppet emperors and then Odoacer rather than actively on their state of Dalmatia.<sup>11</sup> Research into more specific aspects of the state of Dalmatia is more helpful however; given Dalmatia's less isolated position compared to Soissons the greater

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<sup>6</sup> A. King, *Roman Gaul and Germany* (University of California Press, 1990), pp.210-211

<sup>7</sup> J. Drinkwater and H. Elton (eds.), *Fifth Century Gaul: A Crisis of Identity* (Cambridge University Press, 2002) p.289

<sup>8</sup> P. MacGeorge, *Late Roman Warlords* (Oxford University Press, 2002) pp.77-79

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* p.129

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* pp.21-22

<sup>11</sup> J. B. Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire, Volume I* (Macmillan & Co. Ltd. 1923) pp.407-409

number of available primary sources for aspects of more daily life has allowed some historians such as Glucksman to form a perception of these aspects such as trade in the state.<sup>12</sup>

It does not however appear that any of these historians have approached in any great detail the focus of my thesis question; that of the extent to which these states can inform us of the condition of the Western Roman Empire in the period. There have been studies of the states themselves and studies the role and relation between the Western Empire and these states but none of these really seek to explore what these states can tell us about the Empire from more isolated and independent regions of it. It is surely in these states that such aspects of the Western Empire as structure, governance, and culture would be most tested. By examining how these fared here it is my hope that this can then be extrapolated to provide an insight into what was happening in the Western Roman Empire at the time aside from simply looking at the political struggles and military aspects of it from within part, nominally or formerly, of the Empire itself rather than a truly external perspective such as that of the Eastern Roman Empire. The situation of the three states could be seen as somewhat similar politically in terms of their neighbours albeit on a larger scale with the Western Empire. All three states were threatened by Gothic kingdoms, Soissons and the Western Empire by the Visigoths and Dalmatia by the Ostrogoths, although admittedly the Ostrogoths appear to have been less marauding than their cousins, perhaps partly due to the Dalmatian geography making it difficult to invade.<sup>13</sup> Both Dalmatia and the Western Empire were involved in the political machinations and movements involving the Eastern Roman Empire.<sup>14</sup> Soissons and the Western Empire shared the situation of being effectively surrounded by either outright enemies or threats looking to take advantage of any perceived weakness.<sup>15</sup> With these similarities in situation in mind the states of Dalmatia and Soissons should be able to provide an insight into the less obvious aspects of the Western Roman Empire and go some way to bridging the gap between the two aforementioned approaches to studying these states in this period.

Given the approach of those writers focussing on the states of Dalmatia and Soissons as being aimed at the leadership of the states this is, by necessity, the approach I too shall have to adopt with regard to examining these states myself. In order to tackle what insight the study of these two states can bring first I shall have to examine both. Given the top-down approach to the states that I have had to take this examination of the states will have to be through the focus of their sources and representation of power. By examining these aspects I will be able to draw and infer further meaning and ideas of what the state was like at other levels. These will then feed into my examination of whether or not these states were actually Roman. This may seem like a fairly straightforward question but when considered with the various sources and representations of power and their implications it develops in complexity. As isolated states it is important to examine this identity of the states before trying to use them to gain insight into the Western Roman Empire; if they had seemingly completely abandoned Roman customs, practices and policies they could hardly be useful in this regard. Finally in the last chapter I shall return to the original question of this thesis now armed with the information and conclusions that the previous two chapters have given

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<sup>12</sup> K. Glucksman, 'Internal and External Trade in the Roman Province of Dalmatia', *Opuscula Archaeologica, Papers of the Department of Archaeology, Vol.29, No.1, December 2005* (University of Zagreb, 2005) p.203

<sup>13</sup> F. Wozniak, 'East Rome, Ravenna and Western Illyricum: 454-536 AD', *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte, Bd.30, H.3, 1981* (Franz Steiner Verlag, 1981) p.354

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* p.353

<sup>15</sup> MacGeorge, *Late Roman Warlords*, p.94

me regarding the states of Dalmatia and Soissons and their statuses. In this conclusion I shall compare and contrast the two states to a degree, as the differences and parallels between them may lead to insights on its own regarding the state of aspects of the Western Roman Empire and its people as general principles and themes. The conclusion will also consist of a comparison of the situations of not only Dalmatia and Soissons but also the Western Roman Empire of the period itself. From this again similarities and differences between the three states can be highlighted. Given the analysis of the two smaller states as being focussed around their leadership and government it is with these aspects in mind that I shall attempt to use themes and differences between Soissons and Dalmatia to gain insight into the state of leadership and government in the Western Roman Empire of the time. However should themes outside this focus be uncovered in the course of my research these too could be applicable to the Western Roman Empire, again through further comparison and contrasting of the three states. It is worth clarifying now that in this comparison I will primarily be focussed on the Western Roman Empire as it was under Ricimer in the lead up to Odoacer's conquest in 476 AD. Whilst discussion of Odoacer and his state are relevant in the examination of Soissons and Dalmatia in order to answer the thesis question in my conclusion I will have to consider the state of the Western Roman Empire around its fall. Since Odoacer's conquest in 476 AD is one of the most popular dates to define this fall as being it seems unnecessary to include Odoacer's state; clearly by 476 AD the fall of Rome had already been headed towards. Given that it is the leadership and government of the Western Roman Empire that seems to be if not most known then at least most written about by historians of the period it is my hope that it is these potential latter insights outside of this focus that I am most keen to investigate.

## Chapter Two – A Lonely State

### 2.1 - Sources and Representations of Power in Soissons

As covered in the previous chapter, discussion of the state of Soissons under Aegidius and Syagrius is somewhat problematic given the relative lack of primary sources focussed on the state itself. This is not to say that investigating the sources of Aegidius and Syagrius' power is impossible however. The most obvious source of their power in the state of Soissons came from the positions and titles of Aegidius and Syagrius themselves. Both father and son nominally at least held the office of magister militum, the late Roman provincial title, although only Aegidius was actually appointed to the position in the time of a Western Roman Emperor (Majorian).<sup>16</sup> Although theoretically a military based title it does seem that some degree of political or administrative power came with it, given that even in the time of Majorian Aegidius was able to exercise some degree of autonomous power in working with the Franks under Childeric to try and secure his position against the Goths. Of course perhaps the ultimate example of the potential power a magister militum could wield is Ricimer who used it to control the Western Roman Empire behind puppet emperors in this period. This renders the thought that it was through this power that Aegidius retained authority in Soissons hardly a stretch. Regarding the continued use of the magister militum title itself Aegidius had long been a known and outspoken supporter of Majorian and so perhaps his continued use of it following the emperor's deposition and death in 461 AD could be a symbol of a stubborn loyalty to his former emperor. This ties in to the suggestion that Ricimer may have attempted to appoint a new magister militum; as well as a show of loyalty Aegidius' retention of the title was a means of annoying his enemy.<sup>17</sup> Of course it could also have been to simply retain symbolic ties with the Western Roman Empire, despite Aegidius' near complete severing of them following the death of Majorian and Ricimer's subsequent actions.<sup>18</sup> Aegidius had been heavily involved in campaigns against the Visigoths in southern Gaul with Majorian and so may have hoped the continued use of the title under which they had been victorious could have served as a cautionary reminder to the Visigoths and any other would be attackers, as well as of course being an outward show of a continued united front with Rome.

Aegidius' continued use of the title of magister militum also ensured his position as the focal point of any Roman support or grievances in the broad area of northern Gaul; if others tried to challenge him he could simply reference his official title as proof of his leadership credentials. This role of the title as being a focus for Roman interests in the region is perhaps best demonstrated by the fragment of a letter in Gildas' *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae*, known as 'The Groans of the Britons'. This letter petitioned a Roman commander named in it as Agitus for aid following Rome's withdrawal of support for Roman Britain following 410 AD. There has been some scholarly debate as to the identity of the Agitus in the petition; the majority of scholars have concluded that it refers to Aetius, Aegidius' father, pointing to the reference to his third consulship as a means of dating the petition. Others such as Leslie Alcock however have suggested that in fact the Agitus in the text is a corruption of Aegidius' name.<sup>19</sup> Whilst current belief seems to lean in favour of Aetius the precise identity of the recipient is not as important to this thesis as the fact that both of the men debated as

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<sup>16</sup> MacGeorge, *Late Roman Warlords*, p.92

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* p.94

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* p.93

<sup>19</sup> L. Alcock, *Arthur's Britain: History and Archaeology, AD 367-634* (Penguin Books, 1971) p.104

being Agitus held the same position of magister militum. This is a clear indication of the focussing nature of the title; the Roman Britons wrote to a magister militum for aid despite him being stationed across the sea because he was their nearest centre of Roman authority and power. It serves to demonstrate the potential power across the region that Aegidius could retain with the title.

Syagrius' theoretical continued use of the title of magister militum is less straightforward.<sup>20</sup> He would not have been regarded in any sense as an official appointee to the post; the title was traditionally not inheritable.<sup>21</sup> Whilst the fact that Syagrius inherited and built upon his father's power in the region seems without doubt.<sup>22</sup> At first glance however his continued use of the title itself, rather than retaining the power it had bestowed and letting the title die with his father may seem unusual. Of course Aegidius' father Aetius had also held the position, however Aegidius had been appointed to it on merit rather than simply through inheriting the title. One relatively straightforward explanation for the use of the title itself was that it gave Syagrius' governance added legitimacy despite its uninheritable nature. By tying his rule to his father's it gave Syagrius' assumption of power a sense of stability; there would presumably be no great changes between the leadership of father and the son he raised as implied by the son assuming his father's mantle. The earlier points as to Aegidius' use of the title being both something of a focal point for the region as well as a security measure are again relevant to Syagrius, the latter of these arguably even more so. This was due to the fact that whereas the main threat to his father was the Visigoths to the south, Syagrius also had to contend with the rising strength of his father's Frankish former allies to the East under the leadership of Childeric I and Clovis I which would eventually culminate in the invasion and conquering of Soissons by the latter in 486 AD.<sup>2324</sup>

Of course with the fall of Rome to Odoacer in 476 AD the idea of the title of magister militum tying Syagrius and Soissons to the Western Roman Empire decreases in relevance given its much weaker state; it was hardly the fearsome deterrent of old. Indeed Gregory of Tours went as far as to ascribe an entirely new title to Syagrius, that of 'rex Romanorum'. Historians have long taken issue with this title citing principally the deep seated Roman aversion to any forms of kingship since the reign of Tarquinius Superbus. This mistrust over the attribution of this title led to the *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire* to revise the initial translation of Gregory's title as king following its first edition and instead refer to Syagrius as a 'Roman ruler' in subsequent editions.<sup>25</sup> Whilst at the time this could have been a simple means to avoid the issue of referring to a post-Tarquinian Roman as a king. However subsequent work by Fanning has suggested that this interpretation may bear more merit, referring to other examples of the use of 'rex' without negative connotations as lending weight to the use of 'rex' as a referral to ruler ship or leadership rather than overt kingship.<sup>26</sup> What is particularly interesting in the context of this thesis however is the

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<sup>20</sup> MacGeorge, *Late Roman Warlords*, p.136

<sup>21</sup> E. James, 'Childéric, Syagrius et la disparition du royaume de Soissons', *Revue archéologique de Picardie*, Vol.3, No.3-4, 1988 (Picardie, 1988) p.11

<sup>22</sup> J. R. Martindale, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire, Volume 2, AD 395-527* (Cambridge University Press, 1980) p.1041

<sup>23</sup> W. M. Daly, 'Clovis: How Barbaric, How Pagan?', *Speculum*, Vol.69, No.3, 1994, (Medieval Academy of America, 1994) p.624

<sup>24</sup> Gregory of Tours, *Historia Francorum*, II.27, transl. Brehaut, pp.36-38

<sup>25</sup> Martindale, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire, Volume 2*, p.1041

<sup>26</sup> Drinkwater and Elton (eds.), *Fifth Century Gaul*, p.289



'Romanorum' in this title. Unlike the magister militum title this does not solely apply to the region in Gaul but instead to the Romans as a whole people. Much like the magister militum title when the Western Roman Empire proper still existed, the rex Romanorum title if Syagrius was using it could have been a source of power by acting as a draw for any remnants of the empire that wished to continue their Roman way of life and feared outside invasion and conquest.

Naturally for a state with such dangerous enemies as the Visigoths and later the Salian Franks to name those most prominent threats military might played a large part in the leadership of both Aegidius and Syagrius. Whilst these two foes were those whom sources suggest were most commonly campaigned against, Soissons isolated position from the rest of the Empire (whilst it still lasted) left it vulnerable if not full scale invasions then raids and forays from other nearby non-Romans such as the Burgundians to the South East.<sup>27</sup> The only direction of respite for Soissons was the north due to the states coastal border. The magister militum position that both Aegidius held was of course by nature a military one and Aegidius in particular had a long and distinguished military career prior to taking it.<sup>28</sup> Naturally this brought a deal of skill to military affairs, not to mention giving them command of all remaining Roman forces in Gaul.<sup>29</sup> Indeed this military might was such that it may have prompted Ricimer to bribe the Visigoths into attacking Aegidius' defences when he threatened a military invasion of the Italian peninsula rather than risk any kind of engagement with Aegidius' forces.<sup>30</sup> No actual figures exist documenting the strength of the state but given the position and status of Aegidius it is likely that he commanded a sizeable and loyal army thanks to his title and personal military history.<sup>31</sup> One need only look at famous Romans such as Julius Caesar to see the loyalty that success could buy a general.

Naturally such military strength solidified Aegidius and Syagrius' power from the aforementioned external threats. The state of the Roman army however was, by this period, hardly the seemingly unstoppable juggernaut of old and whilst the forces of Soissons proved effective at repelling enemies the same could not be said for any expansive efforts. Aegidius in particular, once an alliance with his Salian Frankish neighbours was established, appears to have attempted to renew the earlier campaigns against the Visigoths to the south.<sup>32</sup> In terms of battles Aegidius seems to have had some success, but no lasting territorial gains could be made nor could he significantly damage the Visigoth forces.<sup>33</sup> Despite this it would be somewhat unwise to conclude that Aegidius' campaigns had no longer term effects beyond the battles themselves. By conducting these campaigns in foreign territory and being successful at least in battle Aegidius would have been enhancing the perception of the military prowess of Soissons. Whilst this would have been unlikely to prevent any outside aggression outright such victories would have given foes cause for caution, particularly in terms of overcommitting their forces in case Soissons crushed them in battle and crippled them. Syagrius would appear to have dropped the more aggressive policies of his father. With the alliance with the Salian Franks no longer in effect following his father's death since it was tied to him personally, combined with a continually weakening and introspective Western Roman

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<sup>27</sup> Drinkwater and Elton, *Fifth Century Gaul*, p.289

<sup>28</sup> MacGeorge, *Late Roman Warlords*, p.85

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* MacGeorge, *Late Roman Warlords*, p.154

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* pp.92-93

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* p.154

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* p.97

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* p.98

Empire the reasons behind a much more defensive military stance seem obvious.<sup>3435</sup> Consolidation of power appears to have something of a theme in Syagrius' rule. Under him the state of Soissons was much more clearly defined and established as opposed to the relatively loose leadership of his father who seemed to use Soissons as a base of power for his army rather than a state at times.<sup>3637</sup> The value of the military in terms of maintaining power in Soissons for Aegidius and Syagrius has not been lost on historians, with Elton even remarking that the borders of the state of Soissons were 'probably not much bigger than a day's march from their army'.<sup>38</sup>

At first one may consider Elton's statement to be referring to simply the threat of external aggression; the armies of Soissons would have to swiftly react to any invasion hence the idea of the borders extending as far as an army could march in a day. With threats surrounding the state quick responses were necessary so as to dissuade any others from taking advantage of the preoccupied military. Such a situation appears to have been the subject of attempted exploit by the Visigoths on at least one occasion.<sup>39</sup> However on further inspection Elton could just as easily have been referring to the borders being maintained at a day's march due to internal pressures. Particularly for Syagrius' rule the power and influence of the Western Roman Empire was fading even prior to Odoacer's conquest. As such those in former states of the empire such as Soissons may have felt that perhaps their best interest lay in leaving the smaller state and throwing their lot in with would be conquerors rather than wait for the seemingly inevitable. As such the military would again have been a valuable vessel for maintaining power for Aegidius and Syagrius' within their borders too. Should any region or significantly large area or population attempt to break away from Soissons or revolt it was imperative that military intervention was able to reach the problem quickly so as to prevent any exploitation of the trouble as well as quelling the issue before it could draw more support. Of course the use of military might to retain and solidify power was not a new concept to Romans however in such an isolated and relatively small state there were no established supply lines or networks of fortifications to support long term engagements. As such this military organisation may have appeared differently to that of Roman forces in the past; necessity forced a change in the applications of the military in Soissons even if its actual role was a familiar one.

The infrastructure of the city of Soissons itself, formerly known as Novidunorum, cannot be overlooked in any discussion of power in the state. Since its capture by Julius Caesar during his Gallic conquests the city had been a Roman possession and would appear to have grown in stature over time. It developed into one of the principal settlements in northern Gaul and indeed of the whole Gallic region following the Battle of Lugdunum in 197 AD which would cripple influence of the latter city and capital of Roman Gaul. As such upon his appointment to magister militum Aegidius established Soissons as his base of operations as it were; from his foundations here he could strike at the Visigoths and other factions encroaching on Roman Gallic territory.<sup>40</sup> Naturally once disillusioned and seeking a measure of independence following Majorian's death Aegidius returned to the city

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* p.97

<sup>35</sup> T. J. Craughwell, *How the Barbarian Invasions Shaped the Modern World*, (Fair Winds Press, 2008) p.123

<sup>36</sup> Craughwell, *How Barbarian Invasions Shaped the Modern World*, p.123

<sup>37</sup> Drinkwater and Elton, *Fifth Century Gaul*, p.289

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* p.173

<sup>39</sup> MacGeorge, *Late Roman Warlords*, p.93

<sup>40</sup> King, *Roman Gaul and Germany*, p.210

and established it as a centre for his continued campaigns in Gaul.<sup>41</sup> Given the isolated situation that the state of Soissons was in it is only logical that Aegidius would have selected a city well suited to being a stable and secure base of operations. With the isolation in mind he would have required a city that could fulfil all the myriad needs such a role would demand in a small isolated state such as a capacity for trade, administration, and military presence. Since Soissons was the city selected it is only logical to conclude that it had these features; for a small isolated state a strong capital was a must as it would be central to securing power in the region. This viewpoint is supported by the somewhat more independent minded Syagrius establishing the city as a fully-fledged state capital as part of his consolidation of power.<sup>42</sup> With the various aspects of state control based in the capital it centralised power for Aegidius and Syagrius and strengthened their position; even if an outlying city were to fall to invasion their capital would still give them a solid foundation to strike back from.

Infrastructure in the region as a source of power also includes the payment of the military that maintained the borders of Soissons. Naturally as a prominent city Soissons would have been capable of generating considerable wealth for its holder, allowing for the maintaining and satisfying of an army. There are some historians such as Demougeot who suggest that coins in the name of the emperor Majorian minted in this period were done so under the orders of Flavius Aetius in his office as *magister militum*.<sup>43</sup> This has then led to some numismatists such as Grierson and Blackburn, citing the work of Lafaurie, expanding upon this idea further with their suggestion that Flavius Aetius' minting of coins as *magister militum* may have meant that in the same role Aegidius and possibly even Syagrius would have had access to the same minting capabilities, citing the same coins produced in Majorian's name at this time.<sup>44</sup> Whilst they appear to be in the minority opinion in this regard it is worth considering the implications in terms of power that access to a mint would bring Soissons, and that neither leader of the state of Soissons appeared to have many problems controlling and therefore paying their army. This also ties into the discovery of seemingly unofficial yet Roman coins discovered in Northern Gaul which MacGeorge outlines, already suggesting that these may have been produced by Aegidius and Syagrius.<sup>45</sup> Any lingering doubts over the value of Soissons as a city are nullified when one considers the actions of Clovis I. Following his successful invasion of the state in 486-7 AD Clovis established Soissons as part of the centre of power around his new capital city of Paris; clearly it must have been valuable in order for him to have included it in the formation of his the heartland of his new kingdom.<sup>46</sup> Clovis even used the city as his capital prior to Paris.<sup>47</sup> Clovis' decision here highlights Soissons as a seat of power in the state and wider region. The considered value of Soissons as a city was highlighted again upon Clovis' death whereupon Soissons was distributed as the head of one of the four kingdoms that were divided between his sons along with Rheims, Paris, and Orléans.<sup>48</sup> The city of Soissons therefore seems to have had the capacity to bestow power both in the literal and physical sense of it being home to a developed

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<sup>41</sup> Craughwell, *How Barbarian Invasions Shaped the Modern World*, p.123

<sup>42</sup> Martindale, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire, Volume 2*, p.1041

<sup>43</sup> É. Demougeot, 'A propos des Solidi gallici du Ve siècle après J.-C.', *Revue Historique* 270, (Presses universitaires de France, 1983)

<sup>44</sup> P. Grierson and M. Blackburn, *Medieval European Coinage: Volume 1, The Early Middle Ages (5th-10th Centuries)*, (Cambridge University Press, 2007) p.45

<sup>45</sup> MacGeorge, *Late Roman Warlords*, p.144

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* p.147

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* pp.124-125, 148

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* p.147-8

infrastructure, but also in terms of it being a symbol of power. Whilst of course not in the same league as somewhere like Rome it still stood out in its state and so would confer symbolic power and authority upon its holder.

## 2.2 - Soissons: A Roman State?

Soissons under Aegidius and Syagrius was clearly a state with troubles. As has been documented and explored in the previous subchapter the threat of the various peoples around them seems to have been near constant and the isolated position of Soissons from the rest of the Western Roman Empire hardly alleviated the situation. There are several points from the sources and representations of power in the state that could suggest a movement away from the model of a Roman state in the period towards something else. The first such point regards the use of titles in the state by Aegidius and Syagrius. Aegidius' use of the title of *magister militum* at first is not particularly troubling; he was appointed to it by the emperor Majorian as was proper and served the post in its traditional capacity. However it would seem that upon his apparent departure from the Western Roman Empire with the death of Majorian Aegidius retained and continued to use the title openly.<sup>49</sup> This appears somewhat at odds with its traditional structure as being a position appointable only by emperors; Aegidius took it upon himself to bear the title. Issues with the use of the title are only increased upon the assumption of leadership of the state of Soissons by Syagrius. Syagrius' adoption, arguably inheritance, of his father's title of *magister militum* seems particularly problematic. Whilst adoption of the title by a succeeding general may have been somewhat permissible the fact that Syagrius was Aegidius' son makes it appear to be much more akin to an inheritance. Inheritance of a title that had by then seemingly developed to imply rule over the state (given its transference from one ruler to another) combined with it passing down the family tree begins to resemble the despised hereditary rule of the Tarquins and therefore that most hated form of government to Romans: kingship. Clearly the possible adoption of a system similar to that so reviled in Roman culture can hardly be seen as an action of a truly Roman state. Gregory of Tours description of Syagrius as '*rex Romanorum*' therefore does not help matters, with his ascription of that so detested word to a man who had taken command of the state following his father's death. If Syagrius was using this title perhaps it would have been better if he had simply declared himself king of Soissons or Northern Gaul and formally cut all ties to Rome. This could have been preferable in Roman eyes to a man calling himself king of the Romans; something that went against seemingly their whole identity and history. Some have suggested that this is in fact what Syagrius did, with there being various sources describing his actions as representative of such a mentality.<sup>5051</sup>

Further issues arise when one considers the actions of Aegidius and Syagrius when ruling regarding their military actions. Whilst the defence of the state of Soissons is naturally self-explanatory in order to preserve themselves against foreign threats the actions of both leaders in terms of military offensive action is not. Aegidius had long been campaigning against the Visigoths in southern Gaul; however that had been for the Western Roman Empire. With the establishment of the state of Soissons and the continued ascendancy of his rival and enemy Ricimer in the Western Empire Aegidius had been operating on significantly diminished relations with the Western Empire. This however did not seem to dissuade him from these campaigns and the first few could simply be explained by Aegidius attempting to both continue his old battles and drive the Visigoths away from Soissons' borders. The lack of noticeable gains in terms of land against his Visigothic enemies did not however seem to persuade Aegidius that the adoption of a more defensive mind set was wiser

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<sup>49</sup> Martindale, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire, Volume 2*, p.12

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* p.1041

<sup>51</sup> James, 'Childéric, Syagrius et la disparition du royaume de Soissons', p.11

instead his success in individual battles seems to have both won him recognition and spurred him to keep pushing.<sup>5253</sup> When Romans in the past had reached across the Danube and made no real ground the legions had retreated back across the river and then fortified Roman lands along it against the Germanic tribes. Aegidius however rather than protecting the land and people under his command kept attempting to push. When one considers the isolated position of Soissons the decision to keep attempting to take more land rather than securing the Roman lands and citizens already controlled smacks more of a warlord on conquest for personal riches and glory rather than a Roman leader primarily concerned with the consolidation of Roman lands and the security of the Roman citizens within.

Syagrius at least appeared of a different mind than his father in terms of military emphasis, focussing on defence far more than offense for the majority of his reign, again returning to the theme of his consolidation and cementing of power in the state of Soissons. When he lost the final formal ties to his father's old ally in the Franks with the death of Childeric and accession of Clovis I one may have thought that Syagrius would have given up on Soissons and attempted to make for the relative safety of Italy or the Eastern Roman Empire. At least he may have been able to find potential support or sanctuary there for him and his subjects rather than facing the now far more overt threat of invasion manifested. However Syagrius stayed, fought, and lost, personally escaping to the Visigothic Kingdom only to then be surrendered to and executed by Clovis.<sup>54</sup> Whilst it may seem overly critical, a retreat could have been attempted given the tremendous odds Syagrius seemed to face in attempting to retain the state of Soissons. The threats he faced in taking such a course of action were surely at most equally dangerous to remaining in Soissons. As it is his attempt to stay and fight in a clearly desperate situation seems more like the actions of a desperate leader or warlord or even king trying to cling to his personal lands and subjects, rather than the actions of a Roman leader with the best interests of his citizens at heart.

This is not, however, to say that Aegidius' and Syagrius' rule in the state of Soissons was an affront to Roman sensibilities. Indeed there appears to be evidence to in fact suggest quite the contrary. Their continued use of the title *magister militum* is one such example. Although the issues with their practical usage of the title are explored above it is the title itself which is important here. To continue using the title itself, unmodified or amended, at least suggests an attempt to remain tied to the Western Roman Empire through it.<sup>55</sup> It was originally conferred on Aegidius by a Western Emperor of course and so gave the bearer a legitimacy of command; something which would immediately have been lost should the bearer have attempted to elevate themselves to the level of the Emperor. The continued use of the title then indicates that no matter the practicalities Aegidius and Syagrius both wanted people to still consider them Roman provincial governors and leaders. Given the lack of civil unrest in their state it would seem that the people within it were happy with this representation. The attribution of the title '*rex Romanorum*' to Syagrius by Gregory of Tours is therefore worth reconsideration in this light. Whilst there is much debate still ongoing over the precise meaning and implications of the '*rex*' portion of the title, such as whether it was simply the Frankish interpretation of the position, or if it in fact indicated ruler rather than specifically king, it is

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<sup>52</sup> Martindale, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire, Volume 2*, p.12

<sup>53</sup> MacGeorge, *Late Roman Warlords*, p.101

<sup>54</sup> Gregory of Tours, *Historia Francorum*, II.27, transl. Brehaut, pp.36-38

<sup>55</sup> MacGeorge, *Late Roman Warlords*, p.93

the 'Romanorum' part that is particularly interesting. It would seem that Syagrius and likely Aegidius too were still presenting themselves as Roman citizens in charge of other Roman citizens; they were being described as king of the Romans rather than kings of Soissons or anything else to indicate a desire for new identity. Given that this view comes from the Frankish former allies of Soissons one can assume that this is the perception that the two leaders were giving to those outside the state. Of course, if this is what they were indicating to those outside the state it is likely what they were attempting to portray within the state too. To avoid the accusations of kingship they retained the gubernatorial title of magister militum and given the lack of apparent civic troubles and unrest it would appear that those within the state of Soissons accepted this and considered themselves still Romans lead by other Romans. This presentation of Soissons as being a Roman state may even have reached across the sea to Britannia. If Aegidius was indeed the intended recipient of the Groans of the Britons then it indicates a perception of Soissons as being a Roman state; the petition was after all requesting aid for the Roman Britons from other Romans.<sup>56</sup>

Whilst the use of the military to maintain Soissons borders is something akin to the actions of a warlord it was hardly a new concept to the Romans. The military was one of the pillars upon which the empire had been built and, referring back to the earlier example of the Danube fortifications, the use of the military to defend against external threats was not a novel concept. The idea that the boundaries of the state extended as far as its army could march in a day was not so much a centralisation of power for a warlord but rather a necessity given the large number of surrounding threats to the state and its relatively small size.<sup>57</sup> The actualities and realities of power in the state of Soissons being different from the presentation of power is an idea that appears frequently. The actions, uses, and sources of power appearing somewhat unusual for a Roman state and in Aegidius' and Syagrius' case appearing more suited to a warlord than the provincial governor that they purported to be is a recurring theme. However the relevance of the geographical and political situation that Soissons was in cannot be overlooked. Isolated and surrounded by warlords and tribal kings Soissons could have fallen much quicker if it attempted to act as a normal Roman province but without the support from the Western Empire and her legions. Instead a shift can be seen very quickly after Aegidius' settling in Soissons and his establishing of the state. To explore this it is worth once again returning to the use of 'rex Romanorum' by Gregory of Tours, this time to consider exactly who it was who made this description. Given the Frankish basis of Gregory of Tours it is reasonable to assume that this came from a contemporary Frank to Syagrius who would have been being ruled himself at the time by likely a tribal king, and Childeric or Clovis of the Salian Franks at that. As such this description would seem to indicate that the one making it viewed Syagrius in the same way that they viewed their own leader; a tribal king.<sup>58</sup> This in itself indicates a great deal about the reality of power in Soissons. Surrounded by the threats from tribal kings and warlords Aegidius and Syagrius had had to adapt. In order to survive surrounded by tribal kingdoms Soissons had had to become one itself. The conflict with the presentation of power is then apparent through the above points regarding both Aegidius and Syagrius, as well as of course the citizens within Soissons, seemingly still considering themselves Roman provincial leaders and citizens.

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<sup>56</sup> M. Miller, 'Bede's Use of Gildas', *The English Historical Review*, Vol.90, No.355, April 1975 (Oxford University Press, 1975) p.247

<sup>57</sup> Drinkwater and Elton, *Fifth Century Gaul*, p.173

<sup>58</sup> E. James, *The Franks* (Blackwell Press, 1988) p.71

Ultimately therefore Soissons might appear to have been a tribal kingdom masquerading as a Roman state.<sup>59</sup> However by seemingly going so far to stress the fact that it was a Roman state and the people within it appear to have viewed it as such one must ask which is more important to how a state is defined; the realities of its power or the perception of it both internally and externally. In the case of Soissons it would seem that it is the perception of power that has a stronger case; the changes to the structure and governing of Soissons were effectively forced upon it or risk destruction. When in the face of these changes and a lack of support from the Western Roman Empire itself the leaders and people of Soissons still proclaimed themselves Romans it is easy to suggest that despite any realities of power Soissons was a Roman state.

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<sup>59</sup> H. Wolfram, *The Roman Empire and Its Germanic Peoples* (University of California Press, 1997) p.203



## Chapter Three – A Balance of Power

### 3.1 - Sources and Representation of Power in Dalmatia

Akin to Aegidius in Soissons, Marcellinus' split from the Western Roman Empire had occurred prior to the actual fall of it. Upon the murder of Flavius Aetius (Aegidius' father incidentally) in 454 AD Marcellinus rebelled against the Western Empire and using the forces that he was leading in Dalmatia at the time seized control of the region.<sup>60</sup> From the outset of the formation of the state it was clear that military might was going to be a prominent factor in any discussion of sources of power in the region. However it did not appear to be quite so key a factor in the retention of power in the state. Marcellinus was willing to pledge allegiance to the Emperor Majorian and campaign for him in Sicily where he was appointed *magister militum*, suggesting that he was able to leave the Dalmatian state to itself without fear of invasion or trouble.<sup>61</sup> In pledging allegiance to Majorian it does not seem that Marcellinus actually sacrificed any autonomy in Dalmatia and following Majorian's death he simply left Sicily and returned to his state. Following this point Marcellinus and Dalmatia's military strength does appear to have been of more importance in retaining his power as more of a deterrent factor to any potential invaders rather than any outright extended conflicts. Whilst the state was bordered by the Ostrogothic Kingdom and this was the most overt threat of military action there does not appear to have been an overtly convincing attempt at conquest of Dalmatia. Naturally, the repelling of any inquisitive Ostrogothic incursions across the border by Dalmatian forces would have dissuaded such a course of action. The state of Dalmatia's ties with both the Eastern and Western Roman Empires further made this a daunting prospect. A point is often made of describing Marcellinus' forces as 'well-equipped' which Wozniak suggests may have actually come about thanks to the mines and factories in Dalmatia; the prospect of such a well-equipped army can hardly have increased the chances of an attempted invasion.<sup>62</sup> MacGeorge further identifies the origin of this description as being Damascius.<sup>63</sup> The highlighting of such a factor can hardly be overlooked; if writers of the time were making a note of it any erstwhile conquerors of Dalmatia would be sure to have noticed it too. This idea of the army being more of a deterrent is brought about in part due to the political situation surrounding Dalmatia, particularly when combined with the unfavourable terrain of Dalmatia mentioned in chapter one of this thesis.

The rivalry of the two halves of the Empire is well documented, and there was something of a personal enmity between Ricimer and Marcellinus given Ricimer's unsuccessful attempted bribery of Marcellinus' Dalmatian forces whilst Marcellinus himself had been in Sicily.<sup>64</sup> This meant that Marcellinus still retained his full forces to potentially resist an invasion from Italy and Ricimer, whilst at least guaranteeing that such a conflict would not be over quickly; a prolonged engagement would likely have been susceptible to some form of intervention from the Eastern Empire. Dalmatia's geographical position between the two great powers accurately reflected its political one, something which actually helped Marcellinus secure his power there as the two halves of the Empire faced off around him; he could be seen as something of a buffer state and by setting the two sides against

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<sup>60</sup> J. M. O'Flynn, *Generalissimos of the Western Roman Empire* (University of Alberta Press, 1983) p.116

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.* p.116

<sup>62</sup> Wozniak, 'East Rome, Ravenna and West Illyricum', p.357

<sup>63</sup> MacGeorge, *Late Roman Warlords*, p.43

<sup>64</sup> O'Flynn, *Generalissimos of the Western Roman Empire*, p.116

each other he could remain relatively trouble free.<sup>65</sup> Wozniak further explores this idea with the suggestion that the presence of Marcellinus in Dalmatia and his cooperative attitude actually gave the Eastern Roman Empire their best platform from which to interfere with the Western Roman Empire for years.<sup>66</sup>

This political situation of course shifted heavily between 468 and 475 AD, first with the death of Marcellinus in Sicily in 468. His nephew Julius Nepos then assumed control of the province of Dalmatia as its governor. Whilst not much is known of Nepos' time in charge of the province as governor he had clearly done enough to earn the attention of the Eastern Roman Emperor Leo who appointed Nepos to overthrow Glycerius, the usurper of the throne of the Western Roman Empire.<sup>67</sup><sup>68</sup> Initially successful, driving Glycerius from the throne and assuming it himself with Leo's backing in 474 AD, Nepos himself was subsequently overthrown by Orestes and forced to flee back to Dalmatia.<sup>69</sup> The presence of Julius Nepos upon his, admittedly rather forced, return lent the semi-independent stance of Dalmatia much more credibility and power. Although now deposed Nepos still nominally held the position of Emperor of the Western Roman Empire once Romulus Augustus was usurped. As such his continuation of his uncle's stance of Dalmatia theoretically being a part of the Western Roman Empire but in actuality acting mostly independently gained weight. Of course as a now deposed emperor he would want to act in his own interests rather than those of his usurpers. Nepos now had a more official reason and authority to rule Dalmatia as he did when compared with his uncle; he was still Emperor in name and so his actions gained a certain weight; it was not a rogue general operating in Dalmatia now it was the Western Roman Emperor himself. Whilst this helped shore up Nepos' power in Dalmatia with regard to external threats to it, it did of course aid him in increasing his power internally within the state. Before his Imperial appointment in 474 AD any potential opponents of Nepos within the state would have had to contend with him as a governor and the military that supported him. Following his deposition however opposing Nepos now meant not only facing off against him, but theoretically 'his' entire Western Empire, not to mention his Eastern Empire allies. Hardly an enticing prospect made all the less tantalising by the fact that even if such opposition to Nepos succeeded his victorious opponents would presumably have to soon face invasion from Odoacer who had long been seeking to regain Dalmatia's mines and factories. Such considerations would have secured Nepos' power following his return to Dalmatia; the odds of a successful coup would hardly be in his opponents favour and in fact the latter factor of Odoacer's invasion actually came to pass after Nepos' assassination in 480 AD. On top of Nepos' own personal right to rule thanks to his title was the fact that he had been chosen for the position by the Eastern Roman Emperor Leo through his right to choose his counterpart emperor. Although brief, Nepos' time as the Emperor therefore would appear to have had much stronger legitimacy than that of Orestes' short-lived appointment of his son Romulus Augustus. Whilst Romulus Augustus' own deposer Odoacer from 476 AD was not in quite such a tenuous position, following his recognition as Patricius by the Eastern Roman Emperor Zeno, he was not formally allowed to hold the title of Western Roman Emperor itself. This, Zeno insisted, still belonged to Julius Nepos.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Wozniak, 'East Rome, Ravenna and West Illyricum', pp.359-360

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.* p.363

<sup>67</sup> MacGeorge, *Late Roman Warlords*, p.61

<sup>68</sup> Martindale, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire, Volume 2*, p.777

<sup>69</sup> Wozniak, 'East Rome, Ravenna and West Illyricum', p.362

<sup>70</sup> Martindale, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire, Volume 2*, p.793

At first this may appear to have been something of a limiter to Julius Nepos' power. The intervention and insistence of Zeno could well have given the impression that he was nothing more than a dummy ruler for the Eastern Roman Empire. While the using of Nepos to affect influence within the Western Roman Empire may well have been Zeno's intention Nepos does not appear to have taken it as such and in fact used this support to both his and the state of Dalmatia's advantage. With Zeno's insistence that Nepos be placed as Western Roman Emperor it gave the impression that interference with Nepos meant interfering in the interests of the Eastern Roman Empire. As such Odoacer would have been far more reluctant to take action both against Nepos and his state of Dalmatia as it meant action against Zeno. Indeed, as discussed later Odoacer seems to have attempted to show public support for Nepos, almost undoubtedly for Zeno's benefit. This idea is supported in the aftermath of Nepos' death in 480 AD; only a few months later Odoacer uses the pretext of Nepos' death to invade and subjugate Dalmatia with no objection from the Eastern Roman Empire.<sup>71</sup> Zeno's endorsement of Nepos may also have further enhanced Nepos' personal power. Although he was of course merely the Western Roman Emperor in name not practice the personal support of the Eastern Roman Emperor for Nepos to be his counterpart must have increased his personal standing. Whilst his time as governor of Dalmatia had convinced Leo to select him in the first place the endorsement of another Emperor served as further testament to Nepos' character and ability; the Eastern Roman Emperor theoretically considered Nepos as being worthy of being his equal. This lent further weight to Nepos' words and actions even when he was relatively powerless in actuality outside of his Dalmatian state.

Nepos' position as Western Roman Emperor may also have created a source of power from any unrest or disaffected peoples, ironically, within the Western Roman Empire. Given the upheaval regarding the rapid changing of, whilst not always emperors in name, those in power of the Empire it is easy to imagine dissatisfaction with life in the Empire building. After all, one need only point to the aforementioned succession of leaders to highlight the fact that people in the Western Roman Empire were not happy with its direction. As such, the stable and apparently good rule of Nepos in Dalmatia must have seemed rather appealing, particularly when considered with the fact that he was still Emperor in name; he could be a powerful potential ally. As such Nepos may have garnered physical support in terms of migrants from the Western Empire joining him in Dalmatia as well as political support across the Empire with those disillusioned by the current rule. This was likely only increased as a source of power for Nepos upon the adoption of the title of King by Odoacer.<sup>72</sup> Those who still considered themselves Roman would presumably have felt at odds with such a decision and with Julius Nepos as the remaining symbol or representative of the Western Roman Empire as it had been and so turned to him.<sup>73</sup>

The minting of the coins of Julius Nepos as Western Emperor was one of the methods alluded to earlier with which Odoacer appears to have been trying to convey his support for Nepos to the Eastern Roman Empire. They were certainly commissioned by Odoacer at least; the mints from which the coins were produced were all in regions under his control.<sup>74</sup> However they could have been a source of power in a similar means as the mere title in the above paragraph. The use of

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<sup>71</sup> Wozniak, 'East Rome, Ravenna and West Illyricum', p.362

<sup>72</sup> Martindale, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire, Volume 2*, p.793

<sup>73</sup> Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire*, p.406

<sup>74</sup> Grierson and Blackburn, *Medieval European Coinage, Volume 1*, pp.25, 28

coins to convey political messages is well documented, with rulers throughout the history of Rome commissioning new coins to commemorate events or portray themselves in a certain way. Since Nepos was not actually the one behind the creation of his coins it is unlikely that any overt message was meant to be carried in them; indeed those found of him appear fairly similar to those of recent previous Western Roman Emperors.<sup>75</sup> However the mere fact that these coins were distributed bearing Nepos as the Western Roman Emperor in particular like those before was a source of power for him. It cemented his position between Odoacer and Zeno for a start; Odoacer certainly could not take overt action without Zeno being able to interfere now that Odoacer himself seemed to have recognised Nepos as Emperor. Further to this the circulation of coins as a pseudo messaging service would have meant that many people would have seen this apparent acceptance of Nepos as Western Emperor.<sup>76</sup> Whilst it is unlikely that many truly believed he was the man in charge of the Western Roman Empire at this point it did nevertheless tie Nepos to those illustrious emperors who had come before him in Rome's glorious past through his title. As such it again limited the open actions Odoacer could take against Nepos; it was one thing to invade an independent region to quash the threat of a false claimant to his power but quite another to do it against the man that he himself had legitimised as the Western Roman Emperor through these coins. Since he himself had established Nepos as the Western Emperor in the minds of the people any actions Odoacer took against Nepos could have caused rumblings and questioning of his leadership amongst the people in the Western Roman Empire. The threat that the people would pose if they no longer wanted his rule was far greater to Odoacer than that of the relatively neutered Nepos. Odoacer would in fact later use this legitimisation and apparent acceptance of Julius Nepos as Western Roman Emperor as the primary cause for his invasion of Dalmatia in the wake of Nepos' assassination.<sup>7778</sup> However whilst Nepos remained alive and Western Roman Emperor the production and distribution of these coins helped Nepos maintain power by limiting Odoacer's options in controlling or opposing Nepos due to threats at home and abroad.

When examining Nepos' power within Dalmatia itself it is worth considering the period following Marcellinus' death and prior to Nepos' appointment to the position of Western Roman Emperor by Leo. In terms of his governance of the province it would seem as though he did a particularly good job; it was after all one of the driving factors behind his selection for the role of Western Emperor by Leo. Certainly this would have helped him secure the power that he already held; a well-governed state is generally less likely to produce large amounts of dissent and opposition to a ruler. However it is the very start of his rule in Dalmatia that is of particular interest. Upon his uncle's death in 468 AD Nepos inherited the control of the state. However rather than simply inheriting the leadership position his uncle had held and ruling the state as a governor Nepos specifically inherited his uncle's title of *magister militum* (by now *magister militum Dalmatiae* thanks to the actions of Marcellinus).<sup>79</sup> Much like with the situation involving the inheritance of this title between Aegidius and Syagrius in Soissons this seems to have been a deliberate adoption of the title. Presumably it aided Nepos' position by tying him clearly to his uncle who had established Dalmatia as a state in a clear way; it tied him to Marcellinus' power and achievements and therefore

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<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.* pp.25, 28

<sup>76</sup> Grierson and Blackburn, *Medieval European Coinage, Volume 1*, pp.25, 28

<sup>77</sup> Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire, Volume I*, p.410

<sup>78</sup> MacGeorge, *Late Roman Warlords*, p.62

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.* pp.40-41

increased his own appearance of power by association in the same vein as later the depiction of Nepos on coins as discussed above would tie him to previous Western Roman Emperors.

As with Syagrius' and Aegidius' use of the title *magister militum* it also tied the Dalmatian state to the Western Roman Empire through its original awarding to Marcellinus by the Western Emperor Majorian.<sup>80</sup> Whilst Dalmatia was acting mostly independently at this time, a further link to the Western Empire to which the state nominally belonged would have been beneficial in a couple of ways, particularly with the transition of power from Marcellinus to Julius Nepos in mind.<sup>81</sup> First was of course the fact that the continued use of the title whilst ruling would aid in offsetting any potential fears or unrest from those people in the state who wished to remain attached to the Western Empire rather than truly independent.<sup>82</sup> Secondly the continued use of the title meant that the ruler of the Western Empire could not use the apparent cutting of ties with the dropping of the title as a pretext to invade and regain Dalmatia. In both cases the death of Marcellinus created opportunities for those looking to take advantage; with the man who established the state dead it would be easier to take advantage of any poor decisions from Nepos as he presumably would not have had quite the same support base. The use of the title that had been awarded by the Western Roman Emperor would act as something of a counter to any significant interest in the allegiance of Dalmatia from the Eastern Roman Empire. If any overtures were made from the Eastern Empire Nepos would be able to use his title that had come from the Western Emperor as an argument point. The idea being that Nepos and Dalmatia could not join the Eastern Empire whilst the ruler of Dalmatia held this title; to do so would be an antagonistic action from the Eastern Emperor towards his Western counterpart as he would be taking his land no matter how loosely affiliated it was. Once again the state of Dalmatia seems to have been attempting something of a balancing act between the Western and Eastern Roman Empires, with its continued independence relying on finding the correct point between the two.

The final point of note regarding Julius Nepos' adoption of the *magister militum* concerns, perhaps unsurprisingly, the military. The forces that Marcellinus had built up had formed the backbone of his capture of Dalmatia in the first place and afterwards had helped him in the establishing and consolidating of his power in the region.<sup>83</sup> As such, whilst MacGeorge asserts that the title had come to imply certain legal and civil duties and requirements, it was still the military implication that was the most important to Nepos and the state.<sup>84</sup> The deliberate description of them by Damascius combined with the targeting of the army by Ricimer as discussed earlier serves to support this view. Naturally therefore, the continued support of his uncle's forces would be vital for Julius Nepos in securing and maintaining power. Dalmatia itself would have helped him in this regard. Given its rich mines and arms factory Nepos would have been able to use this as the basis for a fairly strong economy.<sup>85</sup> He would have been able to keep his forces well-armed, well fed, and mostly of all for their morale and support, well paid. One need only consider the fates of significant Roman figures of the past such as Ulpian to see what could happen when a legion realised that those in charge did not have the best interests of their purses at heart. By maintaining a well-paid military

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<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.* pp.40-41

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.* pp.40-41

<sup>82</sup> MacGeorge, *Late Roman Warlords*, pp.40-41

<sup>83</sup> O'Flynn, *Generalissimos of the Western Roman Empire*, p.116

<sup>84</sup> MacGeorge, *Late Roman Warlords*, pp.40-41

<sup>85</sup> Glisckman, 'Internal and External Trade in the Roman Province of Dalmatia', p.203

therefore Nepos could use them to secure his position even prior to using any ideological or symbolical persuasive tactics on them. His adoption of the *magister militum* title therefore was perhaps the most significant of these symbolic actions in order to acquire or secure the support of the army. For the non-Roman elements of the army especially, in particular thinking of the Huns which were seemingly so worthy of note in Marcellinus' forces, Nepos was providing a clear and obvious link to his uncle. By inheriting Marcellinus' title Nepos was giving a clear indication to this military force that he was aiming to continue commanding them like his uncle had; he was continuing his legacy. The importance of using the title specifically, rather than relying on other means of doing this meant that it could be clearly understood by all members of the army; it was a statement of intent. Of course, Nepos did not have much choice with regard to other means of demonstrating this intent; unlike his uncle he did not have the option of conquering a region like Marcellinus had, given the ever present threat of Dalmatia's Eastern and Western Imperial neighbours. The strength of Dalmatia's Ostrogothic neighbours also negated this option; an invasion of their lands would likely have resulted in a long drawn out campaign, presenting the opportunity to in particular the Western Roman Empire to launch their own invasion of the now relatively unguarded Dalmatian state. The adoption of the title was likely therefore in this sense a piece of propaganda however given the earlier discourse on the importance of the military to maintaining Dalmatia's position it was likely a vital one.

### 3.2 - Dalmatia: A Roman State?

It may seem somewhat odd at first to question whether a state that was led by the Western Roman Emperor himself was truly a Roman state. Indeed situated as it was between both the Eastern and Western Roman Empires it is hard to imagine how a state in that position could be anything but Roman. However on closer inspection the definition of the state may not be quite so apparent. For a start, much like with Soissons, the actual formation of the state raises some issues. When Marcellinus effectively invaded Dalmatia with his forces he was not driving back invading forces and liberating Roman citizens. Instead he was conquering Roman lands using what was effectively his personal army in rebellion against the Western Roman Empire following the murder of his friend. Whilst he was willing to swear fealty to Majorian he did not return control of Dalmatia and retained most of his autonomy. An independent state borne of the personal grievances of a general appears more like the origins of an independent kingdom than a Roman state, despite Marcellinus' later slight reconciliation.

Much like Soissons, the title of *magister militum* also highlights some problems. Whilst Marcellinus' acquisition of the title was straightforward he, like Aegidius, did not relinquish it even after the death of Majorian, the Western Emperor who had awarded it to him. Over time it also appears to have changed during his life to that of *magister militum Dalmatiae*. Whilst this could be viewed as a simple expansion to the title, given Marcellinus' power base in the state it does carry hints of a more separatist mind set. By including the state in the title it sounds like an intended hereditary title that now belongs to the leader of Dalmatia than an official office appointable by the Western Roman Emperor. MacGeorge's argument that the implications of implied power that came with the title were expanded with this change goes some way to supporting this viewpoint.<sup>86</sup> Of course the title of *magister militum* was inherited or adopted it was by Marcellinus' nephew Julius Nepos upon his death much as in the case of Aegidius and Syagrius in Soissons. Whilst there was the long established Roman tradition of dynasticism and trying to keep titles in the family this case seems different. Marcellinus simply could have wished Julius Nepos to succeed him as governor of the state if it was a case of putting his family first. Instead Nepos took the seemingly specifically created title and role of *magister militum Dalmatiae* from his uncle upon the latter's death.<sup>87</sup> Whilst the reasons for taking the title have been discussed earlier in terms of power the discussion over the taking of this title with regard to being a Roman state is more problematic. Marcellinus had seemingly created this title for the purpose of indicating his rule in this state, and even if he himself had not actually created it the inheriting of it by Nepos makes his perception of the title clear; it indicated the right to rule the state. If it had simply been the title of governor of the state it is likely not much would be read into this decision. However the use of a specifically created title that indicated the ruler gives it monarchical undertones. After all there was a perfectly good Roman title that seemed to mean much the same thing (that of simply a provincial governor) but it was overshadowed by this new title; perhaps indicating the future of the state too.<sup>88</sup> This seems somewhat familiar to the discussion surrounding Syagrius and the *magister militum* and *rex Romanorum* titles however in this case the inheritor Julius Nepos seems to have actively chosen this different title. The issues surrounding Nepos' adoption or inheritance of this title are compounded

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<sup>86</sup> MacGeorge, *Late Roman Warlords*, pp.40-41

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.* pp.40-41

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.* pp.40-41

by the argument by some historians that Julius Nepos was in fact Marcellinus' son rather than his nephew. This would highlight the inheritable and monarchical nature of the created title all the more directly and as such would intensify the questions over it. MacGeorge however asserts that this identification of Marcellinus as being Nepos' father is likely the result of Marcellinus Comes being quoted, rather than several different sources and as such is rendered somewhat doubtful by the higher number of sources available stating otherwise, although it should be noted that they are not all in accord as to the identity of Nepos' father either.<sup>899091</sup>

The stance of Dalmatia regarding the Eastern and Western Roman Empires also seems to be somewhat troublesome. Whilst nominally part of the Western Roman Empire Dalmatia acted effectively independently the vast majority of the time. This often led to strained relations between the Western Roman Emperor and Dalmatia. Conversely however the relations between the Eastern Roman Empire and Emperor and Dalmatia were frequently quite strong, with both Marcellinus and Julius Nepos working closely with the Eastern Emperor Leo and then Nepos subsequently working with Leo's successor Zeno too.<sup>92</sup> One could have thought therefore that given the strained relations between the Western Emperor and Dalmatia, rather than risk its security Dalmatia would swear fealty to the Eastern Roman Emperor instead. However the rulers of Dalmatia both seem to have not even entertained the idea. Given Dalmatia's supposed identity as a Roman state it may be thought that surely being part of one of the two Empires properly would be best for the people. Instead it appears as though the rulers acted somewhat selfishly, fighting any attempts from either Empire for reconciliation or subjugation so as to preserve their own personal regional power.<sup>93</sup> There seemed to be a direct disregard for Roman interests when compared with their personal ones.

However to simply brand the state of Dalmatia as completely non-Roman would be oversimplifying things. Although perhaps not quite so obvious or apparent as the aforementioned points there are some factors which highlight the possibility of Dalmatia instead being a Roman state. Most overtly there is the fact that despite acting more or less independently in the state both Marcellinus and Julius Nepos were willing to at least nominally remain a part of the Western Roman Empire.<sup>94</sup> This lack of a true declaration of independence could be seen as an active willingness to still remain Roman politically and therefore at least nominally. Whilst of course the actuality of the state could have been not Roman at all the fact of this action and affiliation does suggest that Marcellinus and Nepos wanted Dalmatia to be considered and perceived as a Roman state. Of course some might suggest that this was merely the only option available to Dalmatia to truly cement its position, bordered as it was by the Eastern and Western Roman Empires; any true declaration of independence would have led to justified conquest from the Western Empire or an opportunist Eastern Empire. Whilst it is certainly true that this was a significant and very useful benefit of swearing nominal fealty to the Western Roman Empire to state that it was the sole motivation for this action seems somewhat overly simple. After all, if the swearing of fealty was just to retain a measure of secure independence then one must ask why they swore it to the Western Empire who both Marcellinus and Julius Nepos had had issues with in the past. The Eastern Empire

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<sup>89</sup> MacGeorge, *Late Roman Warlords*, p.29

<sup>90</sup> Martindale, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire, Volume 2*, p.778

<sup>91</sup> Drinkwater and Elton, *Fifth Century Gaul*, p.24

<sup>92</sup> O'Flynn, *Generalissimos of the Western Empire*, p.116

<sup>93</sup> Wozniak, 'East Rome, Ravenna and Western Illyricum', p.359

<sup>94</sup> O'Flynn, *Generalissimos of the Western Empire*, p.116



had long been a friend and something of an ally for both men, who had worked closely with Eastern Emperors. As such swearing this nominal fealty to the Eastern Empire instead may have been an easier and safer option. It is in examining why both Marcellinus and Julius Nepos did not do this that another argument in favour of them and their state still being Roman develops. Whilst there were political motivations for Julius Nepos not to following his deposition as Western Roman Emperor in that he did not want to risk losing his imperial claim, for both men as *magister militum Dalmatiae* leading the state prior to this the same reasoning does not apply. There seems to have been little to stop them declaring their loyalty to the Eastern Roman Empire instead; the only real threat was that the Eastern Empire would attempt to truly subjugate their state which was a threat that they faced in the Western Roman Empire anyway. Marcellinus, according to O'Flynn, actually made a similar swearing of fealty to the Eastern Emperor as he had done to the West.<sup>95</sup> It is with this in mind therefore that one can start to view the decision to remain specifically part of the Western Roman Empire as perhaps being indicative of both the wishes of Marcellinus and Nepos and therefore likely, given the lack of any significant trouble with their rules, the wishes of the people in Dalmatia too. They did not want to be viewed as just any kind of Roman; to their mind despite being a mostly independent state they were still citizens of a specifically Western Roman state in the Western Roman Empire.

The next point is something of a counterpoint to that regarding the use of the *magister militum Dalmatiae* title rather than a completely new idea. The title itself was specifically Roman in origin and so ties to the previous point regarding the self-identification of those within Dalmatia. With the title of the ruler being overtly Roman in origin it could have alleviated some of the fears of those who wished to remain a Roman state and part of the Western Empire, which as the previous paragraphs suggests, was likely a majority of the citizens in the state. Much like the use of the *magister militum* title in Soissons it gave the changing and evolving leadership position of this new state a clearly identifiable tie to Rome, invaluable in persuading doubters of the intentions of the leader and the future of the state.<sup>96</sup>

It is with regard to what the title had actually meant prior to the inception of the Dalmatian state that is a true counterpoint to the earlier argument of the monarchical implications of the title. Marcellinus had been appointed *magister militum* initially by Majorian in the specifically military role that it had fulfilled in the Western Roman Empire. The holding of this title led him on campaigns in Sicily and other regions around Italy and of course tied his own personal prestige and fame to that of the title itself. The fame of Marcellinus was also reflected on his troops who, as discussed previously, were vital in both his taking and holding of the Dalmatian state and they were renowned for their more exotic components (the Huns that Ricimer attempted to bribe) and their equipment.<sup>97</sup> As such with both their prestige and Marcellinus' growing it is easy to see that the forces under his command may have come to regard the title of *magister militum Dalmatiae* as being that specifically of the man worthy of commanding them; no other title would take precedence. Certainly the fact that these men remained specifically loyal to their commander in his independent state rather than serving the Western Roman Empire as a whole would seem to indicate such a loyalty to the man and his title. With this in mind the inheritance or adoption of the *magister militum Dalmatiae* title by

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<sup>95</sup> O'Flynn, *Generalissimos of the Western Empire*, p.116

<sup>96</sup> MacGeorge, *Late Roman Warlords*, pp.40-41

<sup>97</sup> Wozniak, 'East Rome, Ravenna and Western Illyricum', p.357

Julius Nepos would appear to have taken on a new interpretation, again linking to the idea that MacGeorge pushed.<sup>98</sup> The idea of the title as being monarchical in this light is therefore irrelevant; Nepos' only choice was to take the title because of the implied leadership of the forces that his uncle Marcellinus had established. Given the importance of this military in securing power in the state both internally versus dissenters and externally as a deterrent for both the Eastern and Western Roman Empires it is easy to see why Nepos placed the satisfaction and fulfilment of the demands of his military before any other considerations regarding his action in inheriting his uncle's title; without it his power and the position of Dalmatia as an independent state would be much more precarious. Of course this would suggest that the military was key to power in the state; such a situation may be more reminiscent of tribal kingdoms and warlords who retained power through military might and fear, rather than of a Roman state.<sup>99</sup> However the use of the military to secure power was hardly an alien concept to Roman sensibilities; one need only think of Julius Caesar crossing the Danube in order to build an idea of the weight the presence of a military force could carry in the political landscape.

All of this therefore frames the state of Dalmatia in something of a similar way to Soissons regarding the question over whether it was a Roman state. Again it would have appeared that the actual realities of the sourcing and maintaining of power in the region were somewhat removed from what one might expect of a Roman state. However again, like in Soissons, the presentation and perception of the identity of the state and its people was of them being Roman, from both an internal and external viewpoint. The question of Dalmatia being a Roman state therefore would seem to have highlighted the same conflict between the realities of power as opposed to the representation and perception of a state as was found in the earlier examination of Soissons. The actuality of power was often borne out of necessity, for example the prominence of the military in holding power in the region being linked to position of Dalmatia between its two threatening Imperial neighbours. Unlike Soissons however the shift this caused in Dalmatia as a state is not quite so overt; it was not surrounded simply by aggressive militaristic tribes but rather two large and complex empires. As such Dalmatia appears to have had to adapt to be something of a balancing point between the East and West; rather than aping tribal neighbours like Soissons Dalmatia had to ape the complex political machinations of its two neighbouring empires. However much like Soissons those in charge and seemingly the citizens of the state believed that they were still a Roman state, and again the strength of this belief and its manifestation in the presentation of the state leads to the conclusion that this belief bears prominence over the actualities of power in the region; Dalmatia was a Roman state.

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<sup>98</sup> MacGeorge, *Late Roman Warlords*, pp.40-41

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.* p.41

## Chapter Four

### Conclusions

Both Soissons and Dalmatia as states seem fairly connected with regard to their identity as Roman. Both had had to adapt the real structure and sources of their power and government due to the threats of their neighbours yet both still retained the belief and the presentation that they were still Roman states. However the precise way in which the two states went about these things differed. Soissons always appeared more immediately vulnerable to external threat than Dalmatia; the threat of tribal conquest was a constant presence and the military was indeed actively used to fend off incursions from neighbours. Dalmatia's threat meanwhile was less militaristic and more politically involved in the constant struggle and plays for prominence between the Eastern and Western Roman Empires. As such it shifted to being something of a balancing act between the two Empires in order to preserve its own interests. Despite these actual shifts being different in nature what is not different is the cause for both. In the cases of both states it was the surrounding political landscape which shaped their changes and in most cases appears to have made said changes a necessity for survival rather than simply an option. As it was the states of Soissons and Dalmatia on inspection do not seem all that alien to Roman history. Soissons seems to be somewhat similar to the structure of the early Roman state. It was surrounded on all sides by threats and enemies and had to adapt militarily in order to combat these and defend itself principally. In spite of these similarities with their neighbours both the early Roman state and Soissons retained the belief that they were Roman which in itself implied a sense of superiority to those that they were in reality actually aping in terms of power. Dalmatia too seems somewhat similar to Rome in the past, although in this case a precise timeframe is harder to pin down. Instead Dalmatia seems fairly indicative of the factional and dynastic struggles of Imperial Rome. Julius Nepos himself was representing his home state and family and in order to secure their survival had to play the two much larger and stronger factions of the Eastern and Western Roman Empires against each other for the benefit of Dalmatia.

This clash between the reality of power in order to survive and the presentations and perceptions of these states is a common theme when examining power in both states; despite the changes almost forced upon the states they retained the belief of being Roman states. This in itself is an interesting point when one broadens the scope and examines the Western Roman Empire itself at the time. On closer inspection this state too appears to have been having issues regarding the clash of the reality of power against its perception. The succession of Western Emperors who were effectively puppets of Ricimer is the most obvious example of this. Due to his Germanic tribal heritage Ricimer could not assume the mantle of Western Roman Emperor himself and so instead used his military strength to place puppet rulers on the throne.<sup>100</sup> Under these emperors the Western Empire was effectively a military dictatorship under Ricimer when one considers the realities and actualities of power in the Empire; Ricimer's unpopular elevation of Libius Severus in 461 AD for example brought open hostilities between him and the prominent West Roman generals in Aegidius and Marcellinus who both threatened him with war over the issue.<sup>101</sup> However thanks to his personal military strength combined with that of his now puppeted Western Roman Empire

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<sup>100</sup> Martindale, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire, Volume 2*, pp.943-945

<sup>101</sup> MacGeorge, *Late Roman Warlords*, p.93

Ricimer was able to retain power effectively through the military might protecting him and his puppets alone.<sup>102</sup> In spite of this Ricimer and his puppets seem to have still endeavoured to retain some outward display of a continuation of normal Western Roman political practice; the appointment of Western Emperors still theoretically had to be sanctioned by the Eastern Emperor for example. Even the motivations for assuming power in this manner appear to be somewhat similar to those in Soissons and Dalmatia. Although it cannot be argued that Ricimer was not acting in self-interest he did seem to fill something of a necessary role for the Western Roman Empire's continued survival. His military strength of course was important with regard to physically defending the Western Empire from the Visigoths however this necessity was not solely physical. When one inspects what happened in the Western Empire following Ricimer's death in 472 AD the change in stability in the Empire is clearly apparent with a rapid turnover of Western Emperors none of whom could effectively consolidate power like Ricimer had.<sup>103</sup> As such perhaps Ricimer could be viewed as something of a necessity for the Western Empire at the time; without a unifying leader like him the Empire would have been in much greater trouble and the rise of such a figure was a forced and necessary change in government and power for the Empire's survival. The ascendance of the military in Ricimer's Western Roman Empire also mirrors the situation in both Soissons and Dalmatia. In all three cases the states were held together seemingly principally by the strength of the commander and their military forces. In the cases of both Dalmatia and Soissons this has already been examined and identified as a necessary shift in the emphasis of power. With Ricimer and the Western Roman Empire the aforementioned point regarding him and the shift in power being a necessary change for the survival of the Empire again is relevant. Without Ricimer's strong military he could not have been the centralising and consolidating force that he was internally in the Western Empire, nor could he have adequately defended the Empire from the many enemies that now surrounded it like the Visigoths. Again, much like in Soissons and Dalmatia these changes were born of necessity for survival. It is with all of these points in mind therefore that one could suggest that the states of Soissons and Dalmatia actually provide something of a microcosm of the problems and necessary changes occurring in the Western Roman Empire in the same period. All three states appear to have undergone a necessary and similar shift in the sourcing of power in order to survive, and yet all three still portrayed themselves as the same Roman states as before. Whilst different in the actual specifics all three states seem to have developed along parallel lines regarding the overall theme in all three of the realities of power versus its representation.

Whilst this in itself is an important conclusion to draw it is not the only one. The examination of the Roman identity of Soissons and Dalmatia on a state level also appears to provide an interesting insight. Soissons would appear to have gone to great lengths to emphasise the 'Roman-ness' of the state. When compared to Dalmatia there seem to have been stronger attempts to portray this Roman identity for example the continued use of the *magister militum* title even when effectively abandoned by the Western Roman Empire, the possible use of the '*rex Romanorum*' title, the use of Soissons the city as a traditional Roman provincial capital. All of these things give the impression that the presentation of the state and therefore its people as being Roman was very important to those living within and leading it. It was the aspects of the state and government that provided clear links to the Western Empire that were most frequently presented across and out of the state. Those arguably less traditionally Roman factors such as the emphasis on the military as the

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<sup>102</sup> MacGeorge, *Late Roman Warlords*, p.215

<sup>103</sup> O'Flynn, *Generalissimos of the Western Roman Empire*, pp.126-127

state's source of power were not emphasised at all, despite the fact that they were usually necessary for the survival of the state. The adherence to the show of loyalty to the Western Empire may even have brought Soissons more negative than positive outcomes; no support from the Western Empire was received and the Visigoths who had been making incursions into the borders of the Western Empire proper were now presented with another Roman target isolated north of them. This is something of a contrast with Dalmatia in which the emphasis on the state as being Roman does not appear to have been quite such a priority. Whilst the state, as discussed in chapter 3.2, did appear to attempt some displays of Roman identity such as the use of the *magister militum* title and the reluctance to join the Eastern Roman Empire these do not appear to have been as overt as in Soissons. Roman identity was much more of a seeming assumption in this state; it did not need to be restated repeatedly, of more importance was its distinction and balancing between East and West Rome. The action of both states with regard to Roman identity provides two conclusions. The first is that the presence of non-Romans appears to have intensified the need to stress the state's own Roman identity in Soissons. Dalmatia was bordered by the two Roman Empires and as such was not in a tremendous amount of doubt regarding its broadly Roman identity. Soissons however was surrounded by hostile tribes and had had to adapt to some of their ways in order to preserve the state. The same need of Soissons to emphasise this Roman identity appears to have been similar to that of the Roman Moors in North Africa in the same period that retained their Latin names as a means of separation from the various tribes around them, particularly with regard to the inscription in Altava describing the ruler of the city, Masuna, as the king of the Roman and Moorish peoples.<sup>104105</sup> It would appear that Soissons and Dalmatia therefore provide an example of the 'Other' acting as a catalyst for self-identification; Soissons felt more need to clarify its identity due to its surrounding non-Roman cultures than the Roman surrounded Dalmatia. This appears similar to the approach that Gruen finds present in Tacitus' examination of Germanic tribes; by examining this 'Other' one learns more about oneself.<sup>106</sup>

The second conclusion that can be drawn regards the actual meaning of Roman identity for these states. Both professed to be and gave the outward impression that they were Roman states, regardless of the actualities of their power and governmental structures. However both exercised an incredible amount of autonomy and independence from the Western Roman Empire and therefore Rome itself. In the past profession of being Roman without any actual ties to the city and state would have been seen as something of an oxymoron; how could one be Roman without being part of Rome? Aegidius and Syagrius were seemingly Frankish Gauls in origin (Wolfram describes Aegidius as such in his *History of the Goths*) and Julius Nepos likely came from an established Dalmatian family. All of them had fairly understandable motivations if they wanted to cut ties with the failing West Roman state and their Roman identity given that they held power in their home regions. However all three seem to have done the opposite and emphasised the Roman identity of themselves and their particular state, even after the Western Roman Empire had fallen to Odoacer in 476 AD. This would suggest that by now Roman identity was no longer tied to the city itself at all; instead being Roman now meant an entire culture. When the city of Rome fell to Odoacer Rome did not truly fall, only its political state did in the shape of the Western Roman Empire. Rome now lived

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<sup>104</sup> Martindale, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, p.734

<sup>105</sup> A. H. Merrills (ed.), *Vandals, Romans and Berbers: New Perspectives on Late Antique North Africa* (Ashgate Press, 2004) p.299

<sup>106</sup> E. S. Gruen, *Rethinking the Other in Antiquity* (Princeton University Press, 2011) pp.159-161

on through its people and their culture and traditions. This change in culture allowed Rome as a concept to survive through the fall of its physical state, and Soissons and Dalmatia can be something of a focus regarding this point.

In conclusion therefore there is much in the way of insight that the study of the states of Soissons and Dalmatia can provide as to the state of the Western Roman Empire in the period of its fall. The conclusions regarding the changing of what it meant to be Roman are of course important, as is the example of the 'Other' influencing identity when comparing Soissons and Dalmatia. However it is within the context of the realities of power set against the presentation of it that I think the most important conclusion can be drawn regarding the importance of Soissons and Dalmatia. The parallel development of these two states along with the Western Roman Empire under Ricimer's control is fairly remarkable in their similarity. Survival appears to have been the primary motivation for these changes, the increased emphasis on military strength equating to power, and then the eventual downfall of all three states when an aspect of this shift in power structure failed them. In the case of Soissons this was the loss of the Western Roman Empire and Childeric as potential allies, for Dalmatia it was the scheming of dissenting factions within the state (admittedly possibly on Odoacer's orders), and for the Western Roman Empire it was the loss of Ricimer and the failure to reconsolidate power as he had been able to. With the persistent theme of all three emphasising that they were Roman states it appears to me that the study of Soissons and Dalmatia as microcosms of the Western Roman Empire and the development and troubles the Empire faced in the period around its fall is by far the most useful and important insight that the two states can provide.

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