

MAGNUS MAXIMUS AND THE PERSECUTION OF HERESY *

by A. R. BIRLEY, M.A., D.Phil., F.S.A.

PROFESSOR OF ANCIENT HISTORY
IN THE UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER

Magnus Maximus, proclaimed emperor in Britain sixteen hundred years ago, has attracted attention in this country on three principal counts: as a potent figure in early Welsh legend and genealogy;¹ as the man responsible for the "final abandonment of Hadrian's Wall";² and as a character in Rudyard Kipling's *Puck of Pook's Hill*.³ None of these topics will receive attention in this lecture, as the title indicates. The main importance of Maximus for the historian lies not in Britain but at Trier, and in the sentences carried out there at his orders on the Spanish bishop Priscillian and his followers. "The theory of persecution", wrote Gibbon, "was established by Theodosius, whose justice and piety have been applauded by the saints; but the practice of it, in the fullest extent, was reserved for his rival and colleague, Maximus, the first among the Christian princes who shed the blood of his Christian subjects, on account of their religious opinions".⁴

At the time that Gibbon wrote, Priscillian was known almost entirely through the writings of his opponents or hostile contemporaries—including Jerome and Augustine—who stigmatised him as a Gnostic and Manichee. But not quite a century ago a codex was discovered in the library at Würzburg containing eleven short works which appeared to be by Priscillian himself.⁵ Since the

* A lecture delivered in the John Rylands University Library of Manchester on Wednesday, 9 February 1983.

¹ R. Bromwich, "The character of the early Welsh tradition", in H. M. Chadwick et al., *Studies in Early British History* (1954), 83 ff., pp. 97, 107 ff. See now especially D. N. Dumville, "Sub-Roman Britain: history and legend", *History*, lxii (1977), 173-92.

² E.g. C. M. Daniels (ed.), J. Collingwood Bruce, *Handbook to the Roman Wall*, 13th ed. (1978), 9, deriving essentially from Gildas, as pointed out by P. J. Casey, "Magnus Maximus in Britain", in Casey (ed.), *The End of Roman Britain* (1979), 66-79, p. 66.

³ A. L. F. Rivet, *Rudyard Kipling's Roman Britain: Fact and Fiction* (Keele University, 1980).

⁴ *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, chapter 27.

⁵ In the autumn of 1885 by G. Schepss, who published an edition as vol. 18 of

discovery of the Würzburg tractates there has been intense interest in Priscillian and his teaching, particularly of course in Spain, where his followers perpetuated his memory for several centuries.⁶

Maximus' motives for rebellion are given variously in the sources. He himself was at pains to insist that he had had no choice.⁷ The Greek writers ascribe his actions to resentment at lack of promotion—perhaps, as a former officer of Theodosius' father, and evidently some kind of kinsman, he had hoped to be *magister militum*, rather than (as seems probable) only *dux Britanniarum*.⁸ Modern suggestions include the idea that there was ill-feeling at Gratian's excessive favour to barbarian troops, or simply that the aim was to replace the youthful Gratian and the child Valentinian with a tried military man.⁹ One might add that Theodosius' proclamation of his own infant son Arcadius as co-emperor at the beginning of 383¹⁰ may have been the final straw. It is impossible to claim any religious motivation, although Maximus' final action before being proclaimed was evidently to be baptised;¹¹ and it may be that he knew that Gratian was being 'soft' on heresy or that certain pagans were being given prominent posts by both Gratian and Theodosius.

To provide the context in which to evaluate Magnus Maximus, it is necessary briefly to review the earlier part of the fourth century. It opened with the empire radically transformed under Diocletian and his colleagues.¹² In 303 Diocletian launched the last and most savage persecution of the churches. Yet within a

the *CSEL* (1889). Whether Priscillian himself or a follower is the author of the Tractates (hereafter *Tr.*), still undecided, is immaterial for present purposes.

⁶ See the bibliography in B. Vollmann, art. "Priscillianus", *RE*, Supp. 14 (1974), 485-559, coll. 486-9; further H. Chadwick, *Priscillian of Avila. The occult and the charismatic in the early church* (1976); R. Garcia Villoslada (ed.), *Historia de la Iglesia en España. I. La Iglesia en la España romana y visigoda (siglos i-vii)* (1979), by M. Sotomayor y Muro, 233f. It is noteworthy that Sir Samuel Dill has virtually nothing on Priscillian in his admirable *Roman Society in the Last Century of the Western Empire* (1899).

⁷ Sulpicius Severus, *v. Martini*, 20.3, cf. Orosius, 7.34.9.

⁸ See A. R. Birley, *The Fasti of Roman Britain* (1981), 346 ff., where his career, origin and kinship with Theodosius are also discussed.

⁹ J. F. Matthews, *Western Aristocracies and Imperial Court, A.D. 364-425* (1975), 175 f.

¹⁰ *PLRE*, 1.99.

¹¹ P. 36, below.

¹² See now for detailed examination T. D. Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine* (1982).

decade the western half of the empire was controlled (following the Battle of the Milvian Bridge, 28 October 312) by a Christian emperor. Twelve years later Constantine mastered the east as well. In 325, at the Council of Nicaea, the assembled bishops laid down the creed which was to form the basis of the Catholic and orthodox faith. The especial problem for the Council was Arianism, that form of Christianity which denied the equal status of the Son.¹³ Shortly after Constantine's death a version of Arianism gained the ascendancy over the supporters of the Nicene creed. During much of the years 337-361, when Constantine's sons reigned, the internecine strife among the rival creeds weakened the attack on pagan cult.¹⁴ The apostate Julian, during his brief reign (361-3), restored pagan privileges and deliberately fostered factional strife among Christians.¹⁵ His immediate Christian successors, Jovian (363-4) and the brothers Valentinian I (364-375) and Valens (364-378), to a large extent practised toleration towards heretics and pagans alike. For one thing, Valentinian was a Catholic and Valens an Arian.¹⁶ But Valens' reign ended in the appalling disaster of Adrianople, one of the worst military defeats in Roman history. Valentinian I's elder son, Gratian, aged only sixteen, and brought up a pious Catholic, within a few months appointed as his colleague the able young general Theodosius. Theodosius was nominally junior, not only to Gratian but to Gratian's infant half-brother Valentinian II, who between them ruled the west, while Theodosius ruled the Greek provinces from Constantinople; but Theodosius unquestionably possessed the greatest authority.¹⁷ Furthermore, it seems to have been on his accession that a decisive pointer was given to imperial policy towards paganism: he never assumed the title of *pontifex maximus*, carrying with it the titular headship of the old pagan state cult; and it is probable that Gratian repudiated the title at the same time.¹⁸

¹³ See now T.D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (1981).

¹⁴ K.-L. Noethlichs, *Die gesetzgeberische Massnahmen der christlichen Kaiser des vierten Jhdts. gegen Häretiker, Heiden und Juden* (1971), esp. 50 ff.

¹⁵ Amm. Marc., 22.5.2-3.

¹⁶ Noethlichs (n. 14), 76 ff.

¹⁷ On Theodosius see esp. A. Lippold, "Theodosius I", *RE*, Supp. 13 (1973), 837-961; J.F. Matthews (n. 9), esp. 88 ff., 223 ff.

¹⁸ The statement that Gratian repudiated the robe of the *pontifex* is found only in Zosimus, 4.36. His story ends with a punning comment by the leader of

In the immediate aftermath of Adrianople, Gratian reiterated toleration.¹⁹ In February 380 Theodosius announced that all his subjects were to follow the faith of the Apostle Peter as practised by Damasus, Bishop of Rome, and his colleague Peter of Alexandria.²⁰ A series of edicts in 381 laid down punishments for heretics. That of 8 May was aimed at the Manichees, and it was, most unusually, made retrospective in its effect. Further attacks on heretics of all kinds followed in 382 and 383, with a final decree of 21 January 384, after which there was a pause for several years.²¹ During the period 381-3 anti-pagan legislation by Theodosius was also intensive.²² Gratian's activity was much less vigorous, to judge from the Theodosian Code. It may be noted that some Arian bishops were deposed at the synod of Aquileia in 381, while shortly before his death a decree laid down punishment for apostates from the faith, whether to the Manichees, Jews, or pagans.²³ The sincerity of Gratian's opposition to paganism was, however, made manifest late in 382 when he ordered the removal from the Senate house at Rome of the Altar of Victory, and turned a deaf ear to pleas for its restoration; in addition to this symbolic act, Gratian also deprived the pagan priesthood and the Vestals of their state funds.²⁴ But in comparison with Theodosius, Gratian

the pontifical delegation: "If the emperor does not wish to be named *pontifex*, very soon the *pontifex* will be Maximus". A. Cameron, "Gratian's repudiation of the pontifical robe", *JRS*, lviii (1968), 96-102, argues that the most plausible occasion for the rejection is early 383. Against, Noethlichs (n. 14), 198 ff., favouring 379, previously advocated by A. Alföldi, *A Festival of Isis in Rome under the Christian Emperors of the Fourth Century* (1937), 36. F. Paschoud, *Cinq études sur Zosime* (1975), 65 ff., has now put forward a strong case for 376, showing that the references in Ausonius' *Actio gratiarum* of January 379 (35, 42) to Gratian as *pontifex maximus* may be interpreted as intended to show the emperor as a new kind of Christian *pontifex*. See also L. Cracco Ruggini, *Il paganesimo romano tra religione e politica (384-394 d. C.)* (1979), 4 ff.

¹⁹ Reported by the ecclesiastical historians Socrates, 5.2, Sozomen, 7.1, Theodoret, 5.2. Noethlichs (n. 14), 104 ff., 398 f., shows that the edict was not repealed by the measure of August 379 (*CTh*, 16.5.5); this conclusion was arrived at independently by G. Gottlieb, *Ambrosius von Mailand und Kaiser Gratian* (1973), 71 ff.

²⁰ *CTh*, 16.1.2.

²¹ Noethlichs (n. 14), 128 ff.

²² *Ibid.*, 166 ff.

²³ *Ibid.*, 108.

²⁴ See n. 90, below.

was strikingly inactive against heretics. There was, as we shall see, a move against the Priscillianists, but this was short-lived in its impact.²⁵

From the mid-fourth century onwards an important development in Latin Christendom was the spread of asceticism and the beginnings of monasticism. In the 360s Martin gathered around himself at Ligugé in Gaul small groups of semi-hermits which can be regarded as one of the first western monasteries. Martin continued to promote monasticism after his election as Bishop of Tours in 372.²⁶ Jerome seems to have first felt the call to the ascetic life while at Trier in the late 360s.²⁷ A story told to Augustine in 385 records how two members of the secret police had been converted at Trier by coming across a copy of Athanasius' *Life of Antony*, the Egyptian hermit.²⁸ When Jerome returned to Aquileia, near his Dalmatian home, he was able to join a group of ascetic laity and clergy living as an informal religious community.²⁹ Ambrose, who became bishop in 373, had groups of monks under his charge outside Milan³⁰ —, while his sister Marcellina had 'taken the veil' long before.³¹ At Rome a small group of aristocratic women, led by Marcella and Paula, adopted the 'monastic profession' in the 370s, influenced by the *Life of Antony* and by the Bishop of Alexandria, Peter, then in exile at Rome.³² The Bishop of Rome at that time, Damasus, was, it must be noted, a rather different sort of man. He had gained possession of the bishopric in 366 after a battle which left one hundred and sixty dead among his opponents.³³ Not for nothing was the great pagan aristocrat Praetextatus, prefect of Rome for a year shortly after this extraordinary episode, supposed to have said, "Make me

²⁵ See p. 22, below.

²⁶ On Martin see esp. the commentary on the *Vita Martini* by J. Fontaine (*Sources chrétiennes*, vols. 133-5 (1967-9)).

²⁷ J. N. D. Kelly, *Jerome. His life, writings, and controversies* (1975), 27 ff.

²⁸ Augustine, *Conf.*, 8.6.15.

²⁹ Kelly (n. 27), 30 ff.

³⁰ Augustine, *Conf.*, 8.6.14f. records this as something that he discovered after having been at Milan for some time (and it is not mentioned elsewhere).

³¹ Paulinus, v. *Amb.*, 4.

³² Kelly (n. 27), 91 ff.

³³ Amm. Marc., 27.3.13 gives the figure 137; the letter in the *Coll. Avellana* gives 160 (CSEL, 35.3.19).

bishop of Rome, and I'll become a Christian".³⁴ Damasus played a major part in the rise to supremacy of the papal see.³⁵

Some of those with aspirations towards the ascetic life travelled east to experience it. Jerome spent several years in the Syrian desert in the 370s.³⁶ A few years later, probably between 381 and 384, a wealthy and well-connected lady from the extreme west of the empire, Egeria, travelled to Syria, Palestine, and Mesopotamia to visit the holy places and witness the life of the desert communities.³⁷ There were indeed dangers. Certain forms of self-denial, such as hostility to marriage or vegetarianism, were liable to arouse the suspicion of Manicheism. That cult, invented by Mani in Mesopotamia in the mid-third century, had spread rapidly and was viewed with loathing and fear.³⁸ Some time in the 380s Filastrius, Bishop of Brixia, wrote a manual of heresies, in which he referred to Manichees "lurking both in Spain and in Aquitaine". He went on to describe another category, "in the Gauls, Spain and Aquitaine, who are as if abstinent, who follow the pernicious doctrine of the Gnostics and Manichees, and do not hesitate to preach this, persuading married couples to separate and requiring abstention from certain foods".³⁹

There seems to be no doubt that Filastrius meant by these "quasi abstinentes" Priscillian and his followers.⁴⁰ Priscillian was a Spaniard of noble birth, very wealthy, with a keen and restless intellect, eloquent and well read, very ready in argument and debate. Furthermore, he could endure hunger and thirst, scorned material possessions and was frugal in their use. All this was ruined, however, by his vain and excessive "profanarum rerum scientia" and his practice of the magic arts from his youth. The above description is that of Sulpicius Severus,⁴¹ heavily influenced

³⁴ Jerome, *contra Ioann. Hieros.*, 8. On Praetextatus see further p. 27 and n. 94 below.

³⁵ See esp. C. Pietri, *Roma Christiana* (1976), i. 727 ff.

³⁶ Kelly (n. 27), 46 ff.

³⁷ E. D. Hunt, *Holy Land Pilgrimage in the Later Roman Empire A.D. 312-460* (1982), 163 f.

³⁸ The literature is very copious. See e.g. P. Brown, "The diffusion of Manichaeism in the Roman empire", *JRS*, lix (1969), 93-102, and the works by F. Decret and H.C. Puech cited in nn. 158, 185, below.

³⁹ *Liber de haeresibus*, 61, 84 (*PL*, xii. 1175, 1196).

⁴⁰ Chadwick (n. 6), 119 f.

⁴¹ *Chron.*, 2.46.1 ff.

by the language of Sallust's monograph on Catiline.⁴² Priscillian was apparently taught by two persons, Agape, "non ignobilis mulier", and the rhetor Helpidius, themselves allegedly the disciples of an Egyptian Gnostic, "Mark of Memphis". Although not ordained priest, Priscillian studied⁴³ deeply and began to attract followers, women as well as men, and including two bishops, Instantius and Salvianus.⁴⁴ From time to time the group went into retreat and practised fasting.⁴⁵ It is not known how long it was before their activities aroused opposition. When it came, the man who denounced them was the Bishop of Cordova, Hyginus,⁴⁶ who is also known to have behaved harshly to Gregory, the aged Bishop of Iliberris, an extreme anti-Arian.⁴⁷ Hyginus reported on Priscillian and his friends to Hydatius, Bishop of Mérida. Hydatius initially attempted to deal with the matter himself, attacking the movement violently. But, after prolonged controversy, a synod of bishops was convened at Saragossa.⁴⁸ It met in October 380. Only twelve bishops attended, at least two of whom

⁴² See J. Fontaine, "L'affaire Priscillien ou l'ère des nouveaux Catilina. Observations sur le 'sallustianisme' de Sulpice-Sévère", in P.T. Brannan (ed.), *Classica et Iberica. A Festschrift in honor of J. M.-F. Marique* (1975), 335-92; G.K. van Andel, *The Christian Concept of History in the Chronicle of Sulpicius Severus* (1976), esp. 72 ff.

⁴³ *Chron.*, 2.46.2. E. C. Babut, *Priscillien et le priscillianisme* (1909), esp. 36 ff., argued that these details, also in Isidore, *de scriptorib. eccles.*, 15.19 (*PL*, lxxxiii. 1092), derived from a hostile pamphlet written by Ithacius of Osseonoba; and that "Mark of Memphis" never existed, but was invented on the basis of the gnostic attacked by the second century writer Irenaeus. See Chadwick (n. 6), 20 ff. Babut's further suggestion (p. 57) that Helpidius was the same man as the Bordeaux rhetor Delphidius (p. 22 below) is implausible, see Chadwick, 37 n. 1. I am not sure why J. Fontaine, "Société et culture chrétiennes sur l'aire circumpyrénéenne au siècle de Théodose", *Bull. Litt. Eccles.*, lxxv (1974), 241-82, p. 276, comments on Helpidius and Agape "tous deux aux noms typiquement grecs". For that matter, the emperor Theodosius himself had a Greek name, as did many of the Spanish episcopate and nobility. Why this should be so is another matter: the diffusion of Greek names among pagans as well as Christians in the Latin west during the fourth century is a question which still requires examination and explanation.

⁴⁴ *Chron.*, 2.46.5-7.

⁴⁵ See below, on the canons of Saragossa.

⁴⁶ *Chron.*, 2.46.8.

⁴⁷ As shown by the *libellus precum*, the appeal by two Spanish priests living in the east to Theodosius, *Collectio Avellana*, Ep. 2.73-6, esp. 75: "egregii et catholici episcopi Luciosus et Hyginus huius crudelitatis auctores sunt".

⁴⁸ *Chron.*, 2.46.8-9.

were from Aquitania, which must indicate that the movement already had support north of the Pyrenees. Hydatius was present, along with Ithacius of Ossonoba (near Faro in the Algarve, in the province of Lusitania), who before long was to assume the leading role in the attack on Priscillian. Rather surprisingly, Hyginus of Cordova, who had initiated the business, did not attend.⁴⁹

The council issued eight decisions, or canons, banning the following practices: women attending readings or meetings with men unrelated to them; fasting on Sundays and withdrawal from church in Lent and between 17 December and Epiphany; hiding away in retreat in country houses or in the mountains; praying barefoot; receiving the eucharistic elements without consuming them; bishops accepting into communion persons excommunicated by other bishops; clergy abandoning their duties to become monks; unauthorised persons taking the title 'doctor'; veiling of virgins before the age of forty.⁵⁰ Before the council, Damasus, himself a Spaniard, had been consulted, and laid down that no one should be condemned in absence without a proper trial.⁵¹ Neither Priscillian himself nor his two episcopal supporters were there, and in the event no one was condemned by name.⁵² But it was clear that much more was said against the movement than is listed in the canons. Hydatius issued a memorandum on discipline of life, and condemned the use of apocrypha.⁵³ Perhaps Manicheism, magical practices, and various specific heresies were also raised at Saragossa; but these charges may have been added later.⁵⁴

Hydatius, on returning from Saragossa to Mérida, was accused—on what charges it is not recorded—by one of his own priests. A few days later the accusations were circulated in writing among the churches of Priscillian and his supporters. A good many of Hydatius' own clergy withdrew from communion with the bishop.⁵⁵ The Priscillianists reported what was going on to Symposius and Hyginus. Symposius wrote back that the laity should compose a profession of their faith, and added his view

⁴⁹ J. Vives, *Concilios visigóticos hispano-romanos* (1963), 16.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 16 ff.

⁵¹ Priscillian, *Tr.*, 2.35.22-4.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 16-19, 21-2; 40.7-8; 42.19 ff.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 19 ff.; 42.

⁵⁴ See generally Chadwick (n. 6), 12 ff., 20 ff.

⁵⁵ *Tr.*, 2.39.23 ff.

that no one had been condemned at Saragossa. The Priscillianists decided to go to Mérida to investigate. They never even got into the presbytery, being attacked and beaten by a crowd. However, they obtained a profession of faith, as Symposius had recommended, and wrote to "almost all their fellow-bishops" describing their treatment and enclosing the profession of faith. Further, they did not suppress the fact that "many of them were candidates for the *sacerdotium*"—which ought to mean "episcopal office". Most of the bishops replied favourably: a church council was required; the profession of faith was believed; there was no obstacle to election as bishop.⁵⁶ Nothing is said explicitly in the Würzburg tractates about Priscillian's own election,⁵⁷ but some time after the Saragossa council, and presumably shortly after the confrontation at Mérida, Priscillian was consecrated Bishop of Avila by his episcopal supporters Instantius and Salvianus.⁵⁸ Unfortunately, it is not clear to which of the Spanish provinces Avila—in Old Castile—then belonged. It had originally been in the largest of the three Augustan provinces, Tarraconensis. Later, it is thought to have been assigned to Lusitania. Some have even argued that it was in the new, enlarged province of Gallaecia.⁵⁹ It is perhaps logical to suppose that it was in the same province as the sees of Priscillian's principal opponents, Hydatius of Mérida and Ithacius of Ossonoba.⁶⁰ More important, perhaps, is the fact

⁵⁶ *Tr.*, 2.40.1-27.

⁵⁷ It is implied by "multi ex his post professionem ad sacerdotium peterentur" (2.40.23 f.) that Priscillian was not yet bishop at the time of the business at Mérida; cf. 35.3-4, 42.20 ff., referring to the time of the Saragossa council. Hydatius' attack on "pseudoepiscopi" (*Tr.*, 2.40.30, 41.1) suggests that Priscillian was consecrated soon after the bishops had replied to the circular letter.

⁵⁸ *Chron.*, 2.47.4.

⁵⁹ E. Albertini, *Les divisions administratives de l'Espagne romaine* (1923), 19, 39, 98, 115, 120, 122 n. 5, argues for Lusitania. But he depends partly on the identification with Ptolemy's *Obila* in the territory of the Vettones, for that people was certainly transferred to Lusitania during the principate. See A. Schulten, *RE*, xvii (1937), 1714 for a curt rejection; also id., *RE*, viiA (1948), 2036, assigning Avila to the Vaccaei, to which Cauca also belonged (ibid. 2038)—that people belonged to Tarraconensis under the principate, from Diocletian to the enlarged Gallaecia: A. Tranoy, *La Galice romaine* (1981), 402 f. The ancient name was evidently *Avela*, see *CIL*, ii. 942. Chadwick (n. 6), 33, refers to "the see of Abula (Avila) in Lusitania": "Abula" is a post-classical coinage (*Diccionario de Historia Ecclesiastica de España* I (1972), 156).

⁶⁰ Equally, however, it might be conjectured that they might have wished to avoid a Lusitanian see, for Hydatius' opposition began before the consecration.

that it lies only forty miles south of Cauca,⁶¹ the home of the new emperor of the east, Theodosius, who had recently been in residence on his estates, for over two years, from 376-378, up till his recall to public life after Adrianople.⁶²

Priscillian's consecration was claimed to be invalid, on the grounds that the bishops concerned had been condemned at Saragossa,⁶³ a charge which the Priscillianists repeatedly denied.⁶⁴ Hydatius obtained an imperial decision directing that the "Manichees and pseudo-bishops" should be banished.⁶⁵ No doubt he invoked the support of the bishop of Milan, Ambrose, who is said to have been given a false account of what had gone on.⁶⁶ Hydatius also attacked Hyginus of Cordova as a heretic. He must have been among those who responded favourably to the Priscillianists' letter.⁶⁷ Priscillian, Instantius and Salvianus now decided to appeal for support elsewhere. Travelling by a roundabout route—perhaps to evade arrest—they set off to Italy via Bordeaux. They were well received on the way at Elusa (Eauze), but the Bishop of Bordeaux, Delphinus, one of the participants in the Saragossa council, declined to see them. They were given hospitality on the nearby estate of Euchrotia, widow of a prominent local figure, the orator Attius Tiro Delphidius.⁶⁸ Euchrotia and her daughter Procula accompanied the three bishops on the remainder of their journey, which led to the story being circulated that Procula had conceived a child by Priscillian

⁶¹ J. F. Matthews (n. 9) (who sensibly locates Avila merely "in central Spain", 163) notes the proximity, 170.

⁶² He returned home, in retirement, after the sudden downfall of his father, a mysterious affair best elucidated by N. Gasperini, "La morte di Teodosio padre", *Contributi dell'Istituto di storia antica* (Milan), 1 (1972), 150-97, as brought about by Valens, motivated by superstitious fear after the Theodorus affair and powerful enough to eliminate the elder Theodosius after the death of Valentinian I. This explains why Gratian began to appoint kinsmen of Theodosius to high rank soon afterwards and of course why he selected Theodosius as emperor after Valens' death: he had been in no way involved in the elder Theodosius' execution.

⁶³ *Chron.*, 2.47.2 ff. is absolutely explicit.

⁶⁴ See n. 52 above.

⁶⁵ *Tr.*, 2.40.30, 41.1; *Chron.*, 2.47.5-7.

⁶⁶ *Tr.*, 2.41.2 f.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.41.5.

⁶⁸ *Chron.*, 2.48.1-2. For Delphidius: *PLRE*, i. 246. Matthews (n. 9), 169 points out that Elusa was the home of a prominent Gallic supporter of Theodosius, Fl. Rufinus.

and got rid of it by abortion.⁶⁹ Many years later Jerome was to refer mockingly to the conduct of Priscillian's followers: "Then there is Priscillian in Spain, whose infamy makes him as bad as Manichaeus, and whose disciples ... are rash enough to claim for themselves the twofold credit of perfection and wisdom. Yet they shut themselves up alone with women and justify their sinful embraces by quoting lines" from Virgil.⁷⁰ Shortly after Priscillian and his friends came to Rome, Jerome was to be made aware, from his own experience, that to encourage devout ascetism among noblewomen was to risk attack. In his vivid letter to Eustochium, written in 384, he writes "when they see another pale or sad they call her 'wretch' or 'Manichaean'; quite logically indeed, for on their principles fasting involves heresy"; and in the following year Jerome was hounded out of Rome.⁷¹

The group expressed the wish to have Hydatius' charges go before an ecclesiastical hearing, but not shunning a public—i.e. a secular—tribunal if Hydatius preferred.⁷² At Milan they presented a petition to the imperial quaestor. He declared their request justifiable, but delayed responding.⁷³ They pressed on to Rome, but Damasus would not see them, in spite of the eloquent written plea which they prepared.⁷⁴ Now without Salvianus, who died at Rome, they turned once more to Milan, where Ambrose likewise refused them audience. But they gained the support of the master of the offices, Macedonius—allegedly by bribery; at his instance the previous rescript was cancelled and they were restored to their bishoprics. The governor of Lusitania, Volventius, now summoned Ithacius to answer charges of stirring up trouble in the churches. (It is not clear why from this point the leading role in the opposition to the Priscillianists was assumed by Ithacius, rather than the senior Lusitanian Bishop Hydatius; but Sulpicius Severus makes it clear that it was so). Ithacius left Spain for Trier, where he won the support of the praetorian prefect Gregorius. But Macedonius again intervened, transferring the hearing away from the prefect to the *vicarius* of Spain. Ithacius was to be taken back

⁶⁹ *Chron.*, 2.48.3.

⁷⁰ Jerome, *Ep.*, 123.3.

⁷¹ *Ep.*, 24.14; Kelly (n. 27), 112 ff.

⁷² *Tr.*, 2.41.11 ff.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 2.41.14 ff.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.41.17 f. Sulp. Sev., *Chron.*, 2.48.4 omits the first visit to Milan.

under guard; but he evaded arrest and took refuge with the Bishop of Trier, Britto.⁷⁵

At this point, Sulpicius Severus records, "a rumour had gradually spread that Maximus had seized power in the British provinces and would soon break out into the Gauls".⁷⁶ Ithacius may also have heard that Maximus had been baptised immediately before his proclamation—as the emperor himself was to stress in a letter to Pope Siricius a few years later.⁷⁷ There is every likelihood that Maximus, as a kinsman of Theodosius, would be familiar with that part of Spain where the controversy was now centred.⁷⁸ Others, such as the pagan diehards at Rome, whose aspirations had been frustrated by Gratian's actions the previous year, may have mistakenly imagined that the usurper would favour their cause.⁷⁹ The exact date of Maximus' uprising is uncertain.⁸⁰ Gratian seems not to have known of it in June of 383.⁸¹ But he soon had to confront the usurper, at Paris. Here most of Gratian's forces deserted him; he fled south, but was captured at Lyon and treacherously put to death by Maximus' cavalry commander, Andragathius, on 25 August.⁸² When the victorious Maximus arrived at Trier, he was approached by Ithacius requesting action against the heretics. His response was to

⁷⁵ *Chron.*, 2.48.4, 49.4.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.49.5: "iam tum rumor inceserat clemens Maximum intra Britannias sumpsisse imperium ac brevi in Gallias erupturum". For "clemens" = "gradual" cf. Tacitus, *Ann.*, 13.38, *Hist.*, 3.52. The reading "Clementem" led to the mistaken view that the emperor was called Magnus Clemens Maximus, still reproduced e.g. by J. Ziegler, *Zur religiösen Haltung der Gegenkaiser* (1970), 74, B. Vollmann, *RE*, Supp. xiv (1974), 507, in spite of W. Ensslin, *RE*, xiv (1930), 2546.

⁷⁷ *Coll. Avellana Ep.*, 40.1 (*CSEL*, 35.90.28 f.); see p. 36 below.

⁷⁸ Referred to as Spanish by Zosimus, 4.35.3, as a kinsman only by Pacatus, *PL*, ii (12).24.1, 31.1. It is inferred from his promotion of a province—presumably Tarraconensis—that that was his home: thus A. Chastagnol, in *Les empereurs romains d'Espagne* (1965), 285 f. on *CIL*, ii. 4911. If the kinship with Theodosius can be accepted, one might infer that Maximus derived from the area of Tarraconensis close to Galicia.

⁷⁹ This is presupposed by the story in Zosimus, 4.36 (n. 18 above).

⁸⁰ V. Grumel, "Numismatique et histoire: l'époque valentinienne", *Rev. ét. byz.*, 7-31, p. 18, states without discussion that it was in the autumn of 382.

⁸¹ He was still at Verona on 16 June (*CTh*, 1.3.1) and then left to campaign against the Alamanni (Socrates, *HE*, 5.11.2), which he would surely not have done if he had heard of Maximus' actions.

⁸² Sources in *PLRE*, i. 401.

direct his praetorian prefect and the *vicarius* of Spain to have those concerned brought before a synod at Bordeaux.⁸³ How soon this was convened is unknown, but it is reasonable to assume that it was not until the following year, 384, at the earliest.⁸⁴

In the meantime, Maximus had other urgent business to transact. Embassies were despatched both to Milan and to Constantinople, the first led by a Count named Victor,⁸⁵ the second by the *praepositus sacri cubiculi*, who, unusually, was not a eunuch, as these officials normally were.⁸⁶ The demand at Milan was that the boy emperor Valentinian II, now twelve years old, and his mother Justina, should come to Trier to place themselves under Maximus' protection. The Milan court had already sent their own envoy to Trier, Ambrose. (It was the first time that a bishop had been used as an ambassador in this way). Ambrose, indeed, was already as far north as Mainz when he met Victor travelling south. Maximus' request was refused: Ambrose insisted that he had only come to seek peace and had no other instructions; but that the boy emperor and his widowed mother could not be expected to cross the Alps in winter. He was not allowed to return to Milan until Victor was back—bringing with him Maximus' brother Marcellinus, who had been in Italy and could have been used as a hostage. An uneasy peace was thus achieved.⁸⁷ As for Theodosius, it seems that he too recognised Maximus virtually at once. In the winter of 383-4 the newly appointed praetorian prefect of the east, Maternus Cynegius, a fellow-Spaniard and perhaps also a kinsman of Theodosius, was despatched to Egypt. His mission there included several separate items: the position of the *curiales*; the banning of pagan cults and closing of temples; and an emphatic public recognition of Maximus as Theodosius' colleague, involving the display of his

⁸³ *Chron.*, 2.49.6-8.

⁸⁴ Babut (n. 43), 244, assumes that it must be in 384—because he dates the trial at Trier to 385. Prosper, *Chron. min.*, i. 462 puts both the Bordeaux council and the Trier trial in 385. Hydatius, *Chron.*, 13 (ed. A. Tranoy, *Sources chrétiennes*, vol. 218, 108 ff., vol. 219, 18 ff.) puts the condemnation of Priscillian by the bishops in Gaul (including Martin), which is presumably a reference to the Bordeaux council, in 386 (not 385 as stated by Chadwick (n. 6), 45 n. 1, 132).

⁸⁵ Ambrose, *Ep.*, 24.6-7.

⁸⁶ Zosimus, 4.37.2; later a eunuch was installed, at the time of Ambrose's second embassy, *Ep.*, 24.2.

⁸⁷ Ambrose, *Ep.*, 24 is the sole source for these details.

portrait at Alexandria and the setting up of statues at public expense.⁸⁸

Maximus may have been led by Ambrose to believe that in the spring of 384 Valentinian would indeed come to join him at Trier. But this did not happen. Instead, Valentinian's military commander, Bauto, reinforced Italy's defences. Evidently Maximus now threatened invasion. Theodosius began making military preparations in the Balkans and let it be known that he intended to march west. Maximus was therefore constrained to renew his agreement (*foedus*) with his rivals.⁸⁹ During the second half of 384 Milan was preoccupied with an issue of a quite different kind. The prefect of Rome, Symmachus, came to appeal to Valentinian to restore the Altar of Victory to the senate-house, alluding delicately but unmistakably to the fate of the emperor who had had it removed.⁹⁰ Ambrose wrote sternly to Valentinian, stressing that even Maximus had not cancelled this measure of Gratian, and following up his letter with a detailed rebuttal of the *relatio* of Symmachus.⁹¹ The pagan party thus failed to achieve a major

⁸⁸ See esp. D. Vera, "I rapporti fra Magno Massimo, Teodosio e Valentiniano II nel 383-4", *Athenaeum*, n.s. liii (1975), 267-301, with refinements by F. Paschoud, *Zosime*, vol. 2 (1979), nn. 175-6, pp. 422 ff. Vera, 279 ff. stresses that Cynegius was sent to Egypt very shortly after his appointment, as shown by Libanius, *Or.*, 49.3. Zosimus, 4.37.3 is the other main source. J. F. Matthews, *CR*, xxiv (1974), 100 f. was doubtful about an early mission of Cynegius; see also his article "A pious supporter of Theodosius I: Maternus Cynegius and his family", *JThS*, xviii (1967), 438-46, and his work cited in n. 9, p. 111. A. Chastagnol (n. 78), 264, argues from the absence of Maximus' name in the address of Symmachus' *Relationes* that he was not recognised before the end of Symmachus' prefecture (sc. February 385 at latest), and his argument is accepted by J.-R. Palanque, *ib.* But see Vera, 283 n. 46, pointing out that the headings of Symmachus are in any case defective and were probably doctored before publication.

⁸⁹ Theodosius' supposed meeting with Valentinian at Verona on 31 August 384, based on the apparent place of issue of *CTh*, 12.1.107 of that date, still accepted by A. Lippold, *RE*, Supp. xiii (1973), 866, is to be rejected: see Vera (n. 88), 267 ff., Matthews (n. 9), 178, Paschoud (n. 88), 422 f. Vera, 299 offers a new interpretation of Pacatus, 2(12).30.2 as evidence for Maximus breaking the treaty of 383 the following year and being constrained by Theodosius' show of force to make a new one. Paschoud, 434 rejects this view.

⁹⁰ Symmachus, *Rel.*, 3, esp. 3.17. The episode has a vast bibliography, which it would be otiose to reproduce here.

⁹¹ *Epp.*, 17-18. Note esp. 17.16, in which Ambrose imagines the dead Gratian reproaching his young brother for contemplating doing what even Maximus had not done, viz. abrogating this measure.

objective. But it can be seen by an examination of what else was happening why they may have hoped for success.⁹² Symmachus' own appointment as prefect of Rome was one sign—the first pagan to hold the office for several years: the last ten prefects appointed by Gratian had nearly all been Christians.⁹³ Furthermore, the most distinguished of all the pagans, Vettius Agorius Praetextatus, was now back in office, after many years, as praetorian prefect of Italy.⁹⁴ Both the consuls of 384, Richomerus and Clearchus, were pagans,⁹⁵ and Praetextatus himself was designated to hold the *fascēs* for 385. The opportunity to confer posts on others which these two prefectures offered was certainly exploited, and Praetextatus seems to have persuaded one man, Marcianus, to abandon Christianity.⁹⁶ At a lower level, Symmachus was asked to nominate a professor of rhetoric for Milan: he recommended a young African Manichee, Augustine. In January 385 Augustine fulfilled one of his official duties at Milan, the delivery of a panegyric on the consul Bauto⁹⁷—who replaced Praetextatus, after the latter's sudden death; but like Praetextatus, Bauto was a pagan.⁹⁸

This favour shown to pagans is perhaps not surprising, given that Valentinian and his mother were Arians: there was a marked tendency for heretics to be 'softer' on paganism than were Catholics.⁹⁹ It is noteworthy that one of the bishops deposed for Arianism through Ambrose's efforts at the synod of Aquileia in 381, had actually advocated a new hearing of his case

⁹² Cracco Ruggini (n. 18), 7 ff.

⁹³ A. Chastagnol, *Les fastes de la préfecture de Rome* (1962), nos. 78-88, pp. 196-216. D. Vera, "Le statue del senato di Roma in onore di Flavio Teodosio e l'equilibrio dei poteri imperiali in età teodosiana", *Athenaeum* n.s. lvii (1979), 381-403, p. 386, slightly exaggerates: of the prefects from Gracchus in 376 to Bassus in 382, the religion of two is uncertain.

⁹⁴ A. Chastagnol, 171 ff.; *PLRE*, i. 722 f.; and now especially the brilliant study by Cracco Ruggini (n. 18), who shows that the anonymous prefect attacked in the *Carmen contra paganos* must be Praetextatus and not, as previously thought, the prefect of 394, Nichomachus Flavianus.

⁹⁵ *PLRE*, i. 765, 211.

⁹⁶ Cracco Ruggini (n. 18), 11, 100 ff.

⁹⁷ Augustine, *Conf.*, 5.12-13, 22-3; *c. litt. Petil.*, 3.25, 30.

⁹⁸ Cracco Ruggini (n. 18), 10, n. 13.

⁹⁹ This certainly applies to Valens and to Valentinian II, in spite of the rejection of the appeal over the Altar of Victory: see e.g. Noethlichs (n. 14), 95 ff., 125.

before a court which included pagans and Jews.¹⁰⁰ What is unexpected at this time is the favour shown to leading pagans by Theodosius—in spite of his despatch of Maternus Cynegius on an anti-pagan mission in Egypt. In 383 Theodosius gave appointments to the Nicomachi, father and son;¹⁰¹ and the pagan sophist Themistius was made prefect of Constantinople.¹⁰² The explanation presumably lies in part at least in the need for Theodosius no less than for Valentinian to conciliate the still powerful pagan aristocracy,¹⁰³ above all after the coup of Maximus. From the summer of 383 his target was clearly Italy. The decision to deny the appeal over the Altar of Victory was made by a court torn between two stools.

Perhaps at the very time that Symmachus was making his eloquent plea for religious toleration, Priscillian and Instantius appeared before the synod of Bordeaux. The only details are supplied by Sulpicius Severus. Instantius' case was taken first. His defence was rejected and he was deposed from his bishopric. Then Priscillian, to avoid being heard by the bishops, Sulpicius says, appealed to the emperor. "The bishops, through want of resolution, failed to prevent the request from being granted".¹⁰⁴ There is an apparent contradiction in his account, for although he here states that Priscillian appealed *before* being tried—like Paul before Festus—he later speaks of Martin referring to "the heretics [plural] who had been judged by the bishops' decision and expelled from the churches", before the trial at Trier.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, the fifth-century Galician chronicler Hydatius of Lemica unambiguously states that the bishops, including Martin, condemned Priscillian before his appeal.¹⁰⁶ However this may be, Priscillian was taken to Trier, where he was in due course tried and

¹⁰⁰ Cracco Ruggini (n. 18), 37 ff.

¹⁰¹ J. P. Callu, "Les préfectures de Nicomache Flavien", *Mélanges Seston* (1974), 73-80; Cracco Ruggini (n. 18), 8 ff.

¹⁰² *PLRE*, i. 892.

¹⁰³ D. Vera (n. 93) argues that there were longstanding links between Theodosius and the pagan aristocracy of Rome.

¹⁰⁴ *Chron.*, 2.49.8-9.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.50.5.

¹⁰⁶ Hydatius, *Chron.*, 13b: "Inibi [sc. in Galliis], similiter a sancto Martino et ab aliis episcopis haereticus iudicatus, appellat at Caesarem, quia in Gallia hisdem diebus potestatem tyrannus Maximus obtinebat imperii". (This is assigned to the year 386, see n. 84 above). K. Girardet, "Trier 385", *Chiron*, iv (1974), 577-608, p. 592, endeavours to explain this discrepancy.

condemned. But how soon? Sulpicius Severus' account clearly indicates that there were delays. But he gives only a rather imprecise indication of date at the very end of his *Chronicle*, when he comments that the dissensions which followed the trial had lasted for fifteen years.¹⁰⁷ He implies earlier that he was writing in the year 400, the first consulate of Stilicho;¹⁰⁸ but it can be shown that he revised the work as much as two or three years later.¹⁰⁹ In another work, the Dialogue *Gallus*, Sulpicius states that Martin lived "for sixteen years" after the synod at Trier which followed the trial.¹¹⁰ As Martin's death can be assigned to the year 397,¹¹¹ this would put the trial of Priscillian in 381 or 382, which is quite impossible—before Maximus was emperor. "XVI" has been emended to "XIV", producing the year 384 for Priscillian's death.¹¹² But "XVI" or "sedecim" could be emended in other ways, for example to "decem".¹¹³ The Gallic chronicler Prosper of Aquitaine, writing in the mid-fifth century, gives the year 385;¹¹⁴ but, apart from the general unreliability of Prosper,¹¹⁵ it seems likely that he simply calculated the date from Sulpicius' "fifteen years of dissension".¹¹⁶ Hydatius of Lemica, who was intensely interested in Priscillianism, assigns Priscillian's appeal to 386 and his death to 387.¹¹⁷ In desperation scholars have turned

¹⁰⁷ *Chron.*, 2.51.8: "at inter nostros perpetuum discordiarum bellum exarserat, quod iam per quindecim annos foedis dissensionibus agitatum nullo modo sopiri poterat".

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.27.5: "Dominus cruci fixus est Fufio Gemino et Rubellio Gemino consulibus: a quo tempore usque in Stiliconem consulem sunt anni CCCLXXII".

¹⁰⁹ See Chadwick (n. 6), 132, referring to the borrowing in *Chron.*, 2.31.3, 33-5, from Paulinus of Nola, *Ep.*, 31, written in 402 or 403.

¹¹⁰ *Dial.*, 3.13.6.

¹¹¹ Greg. Tur., *Hist. Franc.*, 1.48, 10.31.

¹¹² Cf. Chadwick (n. 6), 133, who overlooks the discussion by J. Fontaine (next note).

¹¹³ See J. Fontaine, "Vérité et fiction dans la chronologie de la *Vita martini*", *Studia Anselmiana*, xlv (1961), 189-236, pp. 195 ff., noting that a corruption of "undecim" is also possible, but preferring "decem", postulating a corruption initially to "virtuti sedecem", whence "virtutis sedecem", etc. The process would be assisted by the fact that the next sentence begins with "sed". One might add that "se" is repeated in the sentence immediately preceding. "decem" would of course produce 387 as the year of Priscillian's end.

¹¹⁴ *Chron. min.* i 462.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Mommsen's comments, *Chron. min.*, i. 348.

¹¹⁶ Thus Babut (n. 43), 241.

¹¹⁷ Hydatius, *Chron.*, 16 (Tranoy, p. 108 f.), cf. n. 84 above. The *Chronicler of*

instead to Ambrose, whose works include a letter written to Valentinian with an account of his second embassy to Maximus. At the end of the letter Ambrose refers to his refusal to take communion with the bishops who were in communion with Maximus, and "who were seeking the death penalty for some people, who were, to be sure, heterodox in their faith". He also reports that he saw the elderly Hyginus of Cordova, now implicated with the Priscillianists, being led off into exile, as he himself was setting off to Italy. He was roughly thrust aside when he protested to Hyginus' escort about the old man's poor conditions for travel.¹¹⁸

Thus Ambrose was at Trier for the second time when the trial was in progress. But it must be admitted that attempts to assign a precise date to this visit have been singularly unsuccessful. Solutions have varied between Spring 384 and Spring 387.¹¹⁹ There is, it seems to me, evidence in Sulpicius Severus' *vita Martini* which provides an important *terminus ante quem non*. In chapter 20 Sulpicius describes how the saint met Maximus, clearly for the first time. A number of bishops had assembled before the emperor from various parts. Martin, too, was often invited to dine at the palace, but refused on the grounds that he could not sit at table with one who had deprived one emperor of his kingdom and the other of his life.¹²⁰ But in the end, when Maximus maintained that he had not assumed the sovereignty of his own accord, and that he had simply defended the necessity of empire by arms, imposed on him by the soldiers in accordance with the divine will,¹²¹ Martin conceded and came. "Men of the highest and most illustrious rank were present", the biographer records, and they included "the prefect, who was also consul, named Euodius, one of the most righteous men that ever lived".¹²² Now Euodius was

AD 452 (*Chron. min.*, i. 646) is too muddled to assist: P. J. Casey (n. 2), 70 ff., has not clarified matters (he omits discussion of the items relevant for present purposes).

¹¹⁸ Ambrose, *Ep.*, 24.12.

¹¹⁹ Chadwick (n. 6), 135 n. 3.

¹²⁰ Gratian is the second emperor referred to; quite what is meant by the first half of the remark is not at once clear, but the sense is presumably that Maximus was usurping what should have been inherited by Valentinian II, viz. the three western dioceses.

¹²¹ This is echoed by Orosius, 7.34.9.

¹²² v. *Mart.*, 20.4: "convivae autem aderant, velut ad diem festum evocati,

consul in 386—his tenure being recognised in the rest of the empire, it may be noted, a sign that Maximus was accepted quite openly as co-ruler by the end of 385.¹²³ Thus at some point in 386, the trial of Priscillian was clearly not yet in progress.¹²⁴ Martin remained at Trier for some time. In the *Dialogues* Sulpicius Severus relates how Maximus frequently sent for Martin, received him into the palace, and treated him with honour, discussing theological matters. Maximus' wife insisted that she should serve Martin's meals, for which display of piety the empress is compared by Sulpicius to the Queen of Sheba, and to both Martha and Mary. Martin's conduct and relations with Maximus once the trial had started, and after it was over, are described elsewhere, and were very different.¹²⁵

It is proper to turn back at this point to Ambrose, for Milan, too, saw fierce debates over religion at this time. After the Altar of Victory affair in 384, came the struggle over the basilicas. Some time in 385 Ambrose was summoned before the imperial consistory and asked to hand over one basilica for the use of the Arian court, but refused.¹²⁶ The response of the court was the

summi atque inlustres viri, praefectus idemque consul Euodius, vir quo nihil umquam iustius fuit".

¹²³ *PLRE*, i. 297 (but dating this episode to 385).

¹²⁴ J. Fontaine (n. 113), 194 f., notes that the fact that Martin is stated to have been "septuagenario" (*Dial.*, 2.7.4) at the time of this visit is not in itself sufficient to date it, although he provides good reasons to put Martin's birth between July 316 and July 317. On p. 195, n. 16 he puts it "soit au début de 386, soit même en 385, où Evodius était déjà 'consul designatus'", but he bases this on the assumption that Priscillian's execution was in the autumn of 386, following J.-R. Palanque. *St. Ambroise et l'empire romain* (1953), 516 ff. Palanque relied for his date there partly on the order of events in Paulinus, v. *Ambrosii*, 12-19, an argument retracted in "L'empereur Maxime", in *Les empereurs romains d'Espagne* (1965), 255-263, p. 259. But the case is still strong.

¹²⁵ *Dial.*, 2.6-7; 3.11-13.

¹²⁶ The chronology of this affair is also controversial. I follow J.J. van Haeringen, "De Valentiniano II et Ambrosio. Illustrantur et digeruntur res anno 386 gestae", *Mnemosyne*, 3rd ser., v (1937), 28-33, 152-8, 229-40 (the second part of the article is printed before the first part), who shows, improving on earlier attempts, that both *Ep.*, 20 to Ambrose's sister, and *Ep.*, 21, to Valentinian, belong to 386, and that the order should be retained, while the *Sermo contra Auxentium* should go between the two. The controversy of 385 is referred to in *Sermo*, 29 ("superiore anno quando at palatium sum petitus ... cum imperator basilicam vellet eripere"). See now also A. Lenox-Conyngham, "The topography of the basilica conflict of AD 385/6 in Milan", *Historia*, xxxi (1982), 353-63.

issuing of an edict, on 23 January 386, guaranteeing freedom of worship for Arians and threatening any who opposed or even criticised it with death.¹²⁷ Ambrose remained adamant. During Holy Week attempts were made to seize a basilica by force, culminating in a lengthy siege.¹²⁸ He was again summoned to appear before the consistory, but refused.¹²⁹ The court evidently gave in. The events at Milan not surprisingly attracted the attention of Maximus, who wrote a stern letter to Valentinian, expressing his alarm at having heard "quae nunc agi dicuntur in partibus tranquillitatis tuae: catholicae legis turbatio atque convulsio". He had heard of force being brought against Catholic churches under Valentinian's new edicts, of bishops besieged in basilicas. He goes on to proclaim that the Catholic faith was firmly held in all Italy and Africa, in Gaul, Aquitania, all of Spain and at Rome, with only Illyricum dissenting. His language clearly echoes phrases in Ambrose's letter to Valentinian of April 386.¹³⁰ Yet there is no hint in Maximus' letter about the trial of Priscillian, which he was spontaneously to cite as evidence of his zeal for the orthodox faith, in a letter to Pope Siricius.¹³¹ Furthermore, it seems inconceivable that he would have referred with such concern to the bishop of Milan after the unfriendly encounter during Ambrose's second embassy to Trier.¹³²

How long after the basilicas conflict Ambrose's relations with the court remained embittered cannot be established. But in June 386 he was able dramatically to increase the fervent support of his own faithful congregation, when he uncovered the relics of two early martyrs, Gervasius and Protasius. Their remains, which at

¹²⁷ *CTh*, 16.1.4. (It is astonishing that this pro-Arian item was included in the *CTh*).

¹²⁸ The ecclesiastical historians relate the episode with varying degrees of accuracy. For a recent discussion of its importance see F. Kolb, "Der Bussakt von Mailand: Zum Verhältnis von Staat und Kirche in der Spätantike", in H. Boockmann, K. Jürgensen, G. Stoltenberg (edd.), *Geschichte und Gegenwart. Festschr. K. D. Erdmann* (1980), 41-74, esp. 44f., 59ff.

¹²⁹ *Ep.*, 21.17, 20.

¹³⁰ *Coll. Avellana Ep.*, 39 (*CSEL*, 35.88-90). Compare 39.4 "hac fide gloriantur Gallia, Aquitania, omnis Hispania" with Ambrose, *Ep.*, 21.14 "hanc fidem Galliae tenent, hanc Hispaniae".

¹³¹ *Coll. Avellana, Ep.* 40.3-4 (*CSEL*, 35.91) (see p. 36f. below).

¹³² See Palanque, *St Ambroise* (n. 124), 517.

once had miraculous effects, were reinterred to the accompaniment of edifying preaching against the Arians.¹³³

We must now return to the trial—or trials—of Priscillian. In my view there is much to be said for the view that the affair was not concluded until 387—the traditional date. The letter in which Ambrose describes his second meeting with Maximus shows clearly that relations between the two courts were then very bad. One of Maximus' complaints was that "people with Valentinian" were departing to Theodosius.¹³⁴ This suggests a moment not very long before Valentinian and his mother themselves fled. Some time after 19 May 387 Valentinian moved from Milan to Aquileia.¹³⁵ It was from there that he sent his last embassy to Maximus, that of the elderly Syrian Domninus, which unwittingly brought Maximus' invasion force back with it.¹³⁶ It has been argued that Ambrose's second embassy must have taken place before the basilicas conflict of 386. In the letter to his sister Marcellina describing that conflict Ambrose refers to Maximus' complaints about the effects of Ambrose's first embassy, in language which evokes Maximus' actual remarks during the second one.¹³⁷ But Ambrose would already have known Maximus' views about the first embassy long before he returned to Trier.¹³⁸

Priscillian's appeal to Maximus at Bordeaux was surely not made in the hope or expectation of being tried before a secular

¹³³ Ambrose, *Ep.*, 22 is the primary source; the ecclesiastical historians also dwell on the episode.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 24.11.

¹³⁵ *CTh*, 11.30.48 shows Valentinian still at Milan.

¹³⁶ Zosimus, 4.42.

¹³⁷ *Ep.* 20.23: "Non hoc Maximum dicere, quod tyrannus ego sim Valentiniani, qui se meae legationis obiectu queritur ad Italiam non potuisse transire"; *Ep.* 24.4: "Ad postremum erupit dicens: 'Quoniam me lusisti ... etc'. Ad haec ego leniter ... 'Propterea et ego veni, quia prima legatione, dum mihi credis, per me deceptum esse asserebas'". In 20.23 "queritur" in the present tense indicates that Maximus "is complaining", while in 24.5 the imperfect "asserebas" surely refers back to complaints made before the second embassy—and Ambrose claims to have come on that precisely because of the complaints Maximus had made.

¹³⁸ As for Ambrose's comment in his letter to Valentinian, 21.20: "Ego in consistorio nisi pro te stare non didici", this can perfectly well refer only to his appearance before Maximus' consistory in 383 (*Ep.*, 24.3) and on the second embassy the attempt to avoid going to the consistory (*Ep.*, 24.2) makes perfect sense if he had already refused to attend that of Valentinian.

tribunal. Doubtless he hoped that Maximus would convene a new, less biased synod, at Trier. Just as the Donatists, after the council at Rome in 313, had asked Constantine to convene an African synod, or as Athanasius, after the council of Tyre in 335, had requested the emperor to convene a "lawful synod of bishops", so Priscillian's aim will have been to get Maximus to call a synod of Spanish bishops.¹³⁹ What transpired, however, was quite different. Sulpicius Severus refers to a "double trial".¹⁴⁰ The business began at a court presided over by Maximus himself. Martin did his best to persuade Ithacius to withdraw his accusations and Maximus from shedding blood, "for it was a shameful and unheard-of iniquity that a secular ruler should be judge in an ecclesiastical case".¹⁴¹ Martin was accused of being a heretic himself;¹⁴² but as long as he remained at Trier he succeeded in having the trial adjourned. On the eve of his departure he obtained a promise from Maximus that he would not sentence the defendants to death. But after Martin had left, Maximus "was corrupted by bishops Magnus and Rufus". He now handed over the case to the prefect Euodius, "a stern and severe man".¹⁴³ Apart from the influence of these two bishops (otherwise unknown), one must also invoke the confession which Priscillian evidently made after the first hearing.¹⁴⁴ It was extracted under torture, if one may believe the orator Pacatus.¹⁴⁵ At the second trial, Ithacius withdrew as prosecutor. Maximus appointed a secular advocate in his place, Patricius, *patronus fisci*.¹⁴⁶ Priscillian's confession amounted to the following: that he had studied ill-omened teachings; that he had held nocturnal assemblies of shameful women; that he had prayed naked.¹⁴⁷ He was found guilty of *maleficium*, sorcery, as were a number of his followers. A report was made to Maximus, who duly confirmed the sentences:

¹³⁹ See K. Girardet (n. 106), 587 ff.

¹⁴⁰ *Chron.*, 2.50.8, repeated with different wording 51.1; convincingly explained by Girardet (n. 106), 596 ff.

¹⁴¹ 2.50.5.

¹⁴² 2.50.4.

¹⁴³ 2.50.6-7.

¹⁴⁴ "inter iudicia", *Coll. Avellana, Ep.*, 40.4 (CSEL, 35.91.24), cf. Girardet (n. 106), 597.

¹⁴⁵ *PL*, 2 (12).29.3: "gemitus et tormenta miserorum". See also n. 152 below on the disgusting practices which may have been allegedly confessed to.

¹⁴⁶ 2.51.1-2.

¹⁴⁷ 2.50.8.

death for Priscillian himself, two priests named Felicissimus and Armenius, the poet Latronianus and the widowed noblewoman Euchrotia. All were beheaded. Instantius was deported to the Isle of Scilly. In subsequent hearings two more men were sentenced to death, Asarivus and the deacon Aurelius, while Tiberianus, another supporter of high rank, was banished to Scilly after confiscation of his property.¹⁴⁸

The immediate aftermath is described by Sulpicius Severus, not in his *Chronicle* but in his third *Dialogue*. "The emperor Maximus, a good man, certainly, in other respects, but corrupted by the advice of bishops" was protecting Ithacius and his associates from the hostile reaction. In the meantime he was planning "to send tribunes to Spain with full powers to search out heretics and deprive them of their life and property". The bishops, aware of how Martin would react, asked Maximus to keep him out of Trier unless he consented to take communion with them. Martin managed to enter the city by night and went to the palace the next day with a number of petitions for clemency—including several for high officials still under arrest for their stubborn loyalty to Gratian—but above all requesting that the tribunes should not be sent to Spain. For two days he was kept in suspense, "either because Maximus was too compliant towards the bishops or because, as most people believed, he was influenced by avarice after gazing longingly at the property that was to be confiscated". Remarkably, Sulpicius condones this attitude: "the state treasury had been drained by former rulers, and Maximus, being almost always in expectation of and readiness for civil wars, will readily be excused for having sought resources from any kind of opportunity for the defence of the empire". The bishops insisted that only one other person, Theognitus, had openly condemned Priscillian's opponents, and Maximus was apparently almost persuaded to inflict the fate of the heretics on Martin too. Instead, he tried privately to persuade him to change his attitude: the heretics had been sentenced legally, in public trials, not by episcopal persecutions; Martin should not refuse communion with Ithacius and the others—a synod a few days earlier had actually pronounced Ithacius blameless. Martin was not moved, and Maximus became angry, ending the interview abruptly and ordering the despatch of the executioners. Martin at last gave

¹⁴⁸ 2.50.8, 2.51.2-4.

way, returned to the palace, and promised to take communion if the tribunes were recalled. The following day a new Bishop of Trier, Felix, was consecrated, and Martin reluctantly participated, although refusing to sign his name, deeply depressed by what had taken place.¹⁴⁹

In the summer of 387 Maximus finally lost patience and invaded Italy.¹⁵⁰ Valentinian and his mother fled to Theodosius, who obliged them to renounce Arianism in return for his support, while he himself, recently widowed, cemented the alliance by marrying Justina's daughter Galla.¹⁵¹ Some time after the execution of the Priscillianists, Siricius, Bishop of Rome, wrote to Maximus. The letter is not preserved, but its contents can be inferred to some extent from Maximus' reply. Siricius enquired about the Catholic faith, in general, and about a certain Agroecius, who, he evidently claimed, had been improperly ordained. Maximus replied in fulsome tones. His care for the Catholic faith was all the greater since he had risen to the imperial power straight from the saving font of baptism; God had always favoured him in all his undertakings and successes and deigned at this time, and, he hoped, for ever would deign, to be his protector and guardian. He promised to convene a synod to decide the case of Agroecius: for what greater respect could he show for "our Catholic religion" than that Catholic bishops should adjudicate in such a case? He wished the Catholic faith to continue unharmed and inviolable, with all dissension removed and all bishops in harmony, unanimously serving God. For, he concluded, his advent had caught out and uncovered things so defiled and stained by pollution, that had not his precautions and medicine, which came from his fear of God the Highest, brought rapid succour, a colossal rending apart and ruin would certainly have arisen, resulting in the growth of almost incurable damage. The crime of which it had recently

¹⁴⁹ *Dial.*, 3.11-13.

¹⁵⁰ After 19 May 387 (*CTh*, 11.30.48). There seems to be no other clear means of dating these events. See Paschoud (n. 88), 435.

¹⁵¹ References in *PLRE*, i. 382. Zosimus, 4.44.2f. stresses the impact of Galla's beauty on the widowed Theodosius. Gibbon's remarks (*Decline and Fall*, ch. 27) deserve quotation: "For my own part, I shall frankly confess, that I am willing to find, or even to seek, in the revolutions of the world, some traces of the mild and tender sentiments of domestic life; and, amidst the crowd of fierce and ambitious conquerors, I can distinguish, with peculiar complacency, a gentle hero, who may be supposed to receive his armour from the hands of love".

been revealed that "the Manichees" were guilty—revealed not by assertions nor by dubious or uncertain suspicions but by their own confession between the trials—he preferred that his Holiness should learn from the published proceedings themselves rather than from his own lips, since he could not utter things of this kind, disgraceful as deeds but shameful even to speak of, without blushing.¹⁵²

The exchange of letters may well have taken place after Maximus had gained control of Italy. It must be stressed, however, that there is no warrant for the assertion that Siricius had written in the first instance about the Priscillianists.¹⁵³ Apart from his specific complaint about the priest Agroecius, he may be presumed to have solicited an open declaration of Catholic allegiance. This would be entirely appropriate in the light of Valentinian's continued support for Arianism and his actions in 385-6. Now Siricius could satisfy himself and the Catholics of Italy that the new ruler was orthodox. Maximus' invasion seems also to have been welcomed by the pagans. At any rate, there were pagan demonstrations in Maximus' support at Alexandria,¹⁵⁴ while Symmachus delivered a panegyric in his honour at Milan in January 388.¹⁵⁵ It may be, indeed, that after what had taken place at Trier, Maximus felt he had gone far enough to demonstrate his Catholic credentials, and now felt it expedient to conciliate other groups. When a synagogue was destroyed at Rome, Maximus

¹⁵² *Coll. Avellana*, 40 (CSEL, 35.90-91). Augustine, *de natura boni*, 44, 47, speaks of disgusting practices confessed by the Manichees "not only in Paphlagonia but in Gaul" (mixing human semen with the eucharistic elements). See Chadwick (n. 6), 206 f. F. Decret, *L'Afrique manichéenne (IV^e-V^e siècles)* (1978), i. 132 ff., stresses that Augustine had heard of this in Rome, which he left in the summer of 388 for the last time. Hence it is probable that he had been told of the "gestis ipsis" sent by Maximus to Siricius, which Maximus forebore to quote in his letter. Decret, 134 notes that Augustine at that time knew only of "Manichees", and learned about the "Priscillianists" many years later, *Ep.*, 166.7.

¹⁵³ Chadwick (n. 6), 147, actually writes that "the Trier trial was condemned not only by Martin and Ambrose but also by pope Siricius, who wrote a formal letter to Maximus to protest. The letter is lost, but its content can be largely deduced from Maximus' extant reply". Yet Maximus' letter shows that Siricius wrote about Maximus' attitude to the Catholic faith ("fidei vero catholicae, de qua clementiam nostram consulere voluisti", 40.1) and about the priest Agroecius (40.2).

¹⁵⁴ Libanius, *or.*, 19.14.

¹⁵⁵ Symmachus, *Ep.*, 2.13, 2.28, 30, 31, 32; 8.69; Socrates, *HE*, 5.14.6.

denounced the action—with the result, according to Ambrose, that the people of Rome labelled the new ruler a Jew; and this active sympathy for the Jews sealed Maximus' fate, Ambrose claimed afterwards.¹⁵⁶ How Ambrose comported himself while Maximus controlled Italy is not recorded.¹⁵⁷ It should be noted, however, that in a letter written not long after the trials at Trier he firmly denounced the role of Ithacius and the other bishops (without referring to them by name).¹⁵⁸ In other works, which may date shortly before Maximus' invasion of Italy, he compared Andragathius, Gratian's murderer, to Judas, and Maximus himself to Pilate or Herod.¹⁵⁹

It must be stressed that Maximus was not the person principally under attack for the executions—it was the bloodthirsty bishops who were most reviled.¹⁶⁰ The official view, both in Trier at the time, and after Maximus' overthrow, was, of course, that Priscillian and his friends had been sentenced for a serious civil offence, *maleficium*, and that Priscillian and Instantius were in any case no longer bishops by the time that they came before the tribunals of Maximus and Euodius.¹⁶¹

Were Priscillian and his followers actually heretics? If one were to judge from the Würzburg Tractates alone, clearly not.¹⁶² Against this must be set the evidence of their opponents. Augustine used the powerful argument that the Priscillianists deliberately perjured themselves: "Iura, periura, secretum prodere noli".¹⁶³ No certainty seems attainable.¹⁶⁴

Maximus was overthrown by Theodosius and put to death on

¹⁵⁶ Ambrose, *EP.*, 40.23.

¹⁵⁷ Palanque, *St. Ambroise* (n. 124), 520ff., tentatively assigns the *Apol. proph. David* to the period just before the invasion, cf. esp. 27: "inde adhuc nobis barbarus hostis insultat, dum parata adversum se in nos arma vertuntur".

¹⁵⁸ *Ep.*, 26.3. I have not yet been able to consult M. Sordi, "Magno Massimo e l'Italia Settentrionale", *Antichità Altoadriatiche*, xxii (1982), 51-65.

¹⁵⁹ *Expl. ps. LXI*, 16-26. See Palanque, *St. Ambroise* (n. 124), 518f.

¹⁶⁰ See esp. Sulpicius Severus, *Dial.*, 3.111.2.

¹⁶¹ Thus esp. Girardet (n. 106), 607f.

¹⁶² B. Vollmann, *RE*, Supp. xiv (1974), 523f.

¹⁶³ *Ep.*, 237.3; *de haeres.*, 70.

¹⁶⁴ See Chadwick (n. 6), 57ff. The view that the movement was a form of social protest, cloaked as a heresy, argued by A. Barbero de Aguilera, *Cuad. hist. Espana*, 37-8 (1963), 5-41, seems unsupported by the evidence. It certainly enjoyed popular support, but that is not sufficient.

28 July 388,¹⁶⁵ not quite five years after the death of Gratian. Although his young son Victor, left behind in Gaul, was also killed,¹⁶⁶ no one else suffered, and Theodosius' clemency was underlined by his grant of a pension to Maximus' mother and his arranging for Maximus' daughters to be brought up by one of his female relatives.¹⁶⁷ There is no mention of the fate of Maximus' pious wife. Theodosius' conduct may perhaps reflect the kinship with Maximus which the latter had claimed.¹⁶⁸

This discussion of Maximus has necessarily concentrated on his relations with the churches. He did have other concerns—and achievements—which must not be overlooked.¹⁶⁹

The following summer a Gallic orator, Latinus Pacatus Drepanius, delivered a panegyric of Theodosius before the senate at Rome, much of it devoted to Maximus' usurpation and defeat. Pacatus dwells in shocked tones on the executions at Trier, not naming the victims, but referring to Priscillian and the other men as "unfamiliar with public office and emperors, distinguished only among their own people, men who poured out their noble spirits under the executioner".¹⁷⁰ He stresses particularly the fate of the "famous poet's widow", whose only fault had been "excessive religion and too diligent a worship of the divinity".¹⁷¹ He then denounces the bloodthirsty episcopal prosecutors and informers.¹⁷²

Three years later Jerome, by then ensconced at Bethlehem, wrote his *De viris illustribus*. Priscillian and two of his lay followers, Latronianus and Tiberianus, are included. Priscillian is described as "bishop of Avila", and as having been "put to death

¹⁶⁵ 28 July seems preferable to 28 August, since Augustine, who left Rome after Maximus' death (*c. litt. Petil.*, 3.25.30) was already at Thagaste, after going first to Carthage, in September (Possidius, *v. Augustini*, 3f.). See O. Perler, *Les voyages de St. Augustin* (1969), 197 ff.

¹⁶⁶ *PLRE*, i. 961.

¹⁶⁷ Ambrose, *Ep.*, 40.32.

¹⁶⁸ Note the comment in the *epit. de Caes.*, 48.18: "cognatos affinesque parentis animo complecti". Perhaps one ought to ask whether the Iberian *gentilitas* system was the basis for Maximus' kinship. See on this M. L. Albertos Firmat, *Organizaciones soprafamiliares en Hispania antigua* (1975).

¹⁶⁹ See esp. J. Harries, "Church and state in the *Notitia Galliarum*", *JRS*, lxxviii (1978), 26-43.

¹⁷⁰ *PL*, 2 (12).28.5.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 29.2.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 29.3-4.

by the usurper Maximus through the faction of Hydatius and Ithacius". Jerome adds that Priscillian was "still accused by some of Gnostic heresy, while others defend him, saying that he did not believe what he is accused of".¹⁷³ Sulpicius Severus reveals that Ithacius was removed from his bishopric, while Hydatius resigned spontaneously. Priscillian was revered as a martyr: "the remains of the dead were taken to Spain and their funerals celebrated with great ceremony; indeed, to swear by Priscillian was regarded as *summa religio*". The Church in Gaul was left in a state of discord, with which it was still wracked when he was writing, fifteen years after the trials.¹⁷⁴

It would be inappropriate in this place to attempt to trace the subsequent history of the Priscillianist movement in any detail.¹⁷⁵ A few brief words must suffice. A council of the Spanish church was held at Toledo in 400, its main concern being Priscillianism. Symposius of Astorga and most of the suspect clergy present satisfied the council of their orthodoxy by repudiating the forbidden doctrines, bar four who refused to recant.¹⁷⁶ A few years later the Priscillianists are listed with other heresies in imperial edicts.¹⁷⁷ Augustine and Jerome both duly denounced them.¹⁷⁸ However, the sect was still entrenched in north-western Spain in the mid-fifth century, when it was condemned by Pope Leo, in response to a request from Turibius of Astorga.¹⁷⁹ Over a hundred years after that it had to be condemned again, at the first council of Braga in 561.¹⁸⁰ By the time of the second council of Braga in 572 there is only a faint allusion to any Priscillianist practice.¹⁸¹ In the seventh century Braulio, Bishop of Saragossa,

¹⁷³ Jerome, *de vir. ill.*, 121-3.

¹⁷⁴ *Chron.*, 2.51.5-10.

¹⁷⁵ See esp. Chadwick (n. 6), 148 ff.

¹⁷⁶ J. Vives (n. 49), 19 ff.; Chadwick (n. 6), 170-88 (with edition of the principal anti-Priscillianist portions, 234-9).

¹⁷⁷ *CTh*, 16.5.40 (A.D. 407), 43 (A.D. 407), 48 (A.D. 410), 59 (A.D. 423), 65 (A.D. 428). A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire 284-602* (1964), iii. 324, n. 34, insists that the "Priscillianistae" of the *Code* were a brand of Montanists, "so called from their devotion to the prophetess Priscilla". Doubtless they were confused with the Montanists by the imperial chancery; but that is another matter.

¹⁷⁸ Babut (n. 43), 25 ff., conveniently quotes the principal passages; see also Chadwick (n. 6), 206 ff.

¹⁷⁹ Leo, *Ep.*, 15, discussed by Chadwick (n. 6), 208-17.

¹⁸⁰ J. Vives (n. 49), 65 ff.; Chadwick (n. 6), 217 ff., 224 ff.

¹⁸¹ Chadwick (n. 6), 229 f.

could still refer to Priscillianism with some respect as a serious matter, writing to a Galician priest.¹⁸² The only later mention comes in passing in a letter of Pope Adrian to a Spanish cleric at the end of the eighth century.¹⁸³ However, the suggestion has been made that the cult of the martyred Priscillian was transmuted into another and much more famous one, that of St. James, at Santiago de Compostella.¹⁸⁴ The possibility of proof seems remote. Another hypothesis, which has received scant attention, is that the Cathars might have derived their ideas from late survivals of Priscillianism.¹⁸⁵ Certainly, during Priscillian's lifetime the movement was active not only throughout Spain but north of the Pyrenees.¹⁸⁶ But it has customarily been held that after his death it retreated into Galicia and was confined in that remote fastness until its disappearance in the later sixth century.¹⁸⁷

It is impossible to refrain from mentioning the most recently discovered evidence about the sect, which shows it to have been flourishing in Catalonia and Provence more than thirty years after Priscillian's death. This has been revealed in the collection of hitherto unknown letters from the correspondence of Augustine, published two years ago.¹⁸⁸ The eleventh letter in the collection is addressed to Augustine by the Spanish cleric Consentius, evidently writing from one of the Balearic islands.¹⁸⁹ It opens with the statement that Patroclus, Bishop of Arles, had insisted on Consentius writing against the Priscillianists, by whom the Gallic provinces too were being devastated.¹⁹⁰ Consentius had intended

¹⁸² *Ep.*, 44 (*PL*, 80.693D).

¹⁸³ *MGH Epist.*, iii. 644 ff., taken by Barbero de Aguilera (n. 165), 18 as evidence either for the sect's survival or for its memory being very much alive.

¹⁸⁴ B. Vollmann, *RE Supp.*, xiv (1974), 517; Chadwick (n. 6), 233.

¹⁸⁵ Thus L. Varga, "Les Cathares sont-ils des Néomanichéens ou des Néagnostiques?", *Rev. de l'hist. des rel.*, cxx (1939), 175-93, a contribution largely ignored; but dismissed curtly by H. C. Puech, *Sur le Manichéisme et autres essais* (1979), 397 n. 2.

¹⁸⁶ See esp. the admirable study by J. Fontaine (n. 43).

¹⁸⁷ See, e.g. B. Vollmann, *RE Supp.* xiv (1974), 516 ff.

¹⁸⁸ *Sancti Augustini Opera. Epistolae ex duobus codicibus nuper in lucem prolatae*, rec. J. Divjak (*CSEL*, 88, 1981).

¹⁸⁹ Consentius' origin in the Balearics, previously inferred, is now confirmed by *Ep.*, 12.4.1, *CSEL*, 88.72.8, a second letter of his to Augustine.

¹⁹⁰ "Beatissimus dominus meus, frater sanctitatis vestrae, Patroclus episcopus adversum Priscillianistas, a quibus iam etiam Galliae vastabantur, quaedam me vel inepta atque absurda conscribere violenta compulsi caritate", *Ep.*, 11.1.1, *CSEL*, 88.5117-20.

not to bother Augustine with the matter, but had now received an astounding report from a "servant of Christ" named Fronto, whom he had sent to Spain. Most of the letter is occupied by Fronto's verbatim report.¹⁹¹ He had posed as a heretic, to gain information—and this conduct was to arouse Augustine's indignation, expressed in his *contra mendacium*—and had received a great deal from a heretic named Severa at Tarragona. The leader of the sect was a wealthy and powerful priest named Severus.¹⁹² The previous year this Severus, on his way to a *castellum*, was caught by a group of barbarians.¹⁹³ They found in his baggage three vast codices containing "omnia sacrilegiorum genera" and took them to the nearby town of Lérida. When they realised that the books were "exsecrables", they left them with the bishop, Sagittius. He cut them up, removed the parts containing "magicorum carminum ... scientia", and sent one expurgated volume to Titianus, the metropolitan at Tarragona, pretending that that was the worst of the three, while he kept the other two in his archive.¹⁹⁴ Titianus passed on the volume to his colleague at Huesca, Syagrius, Severus' bishop, whom Severus was able to convince of his innocence, although he had in the meantime secretly got the other two volumes back from Sagittius.¹⁹⁵ Fronto now denounced the heretic priest at Tarragona. But Severus, who turned out to be related to Count Asterius, the

¹⁹¹ "verum accidit, ut quidam famulus Christi nomine Fronto ... subitus adveniret ... multa mihi non solum gaudenda verum etiam stupenda narravit. iniunxeram quidem ei anno superiore, ut adversus memoratos Priscillianistas, quibus ita Hispaniae scatent, ut circa eos tantum barbari nihil egisse videantur, innocentissima fretus astutia bella susciperet" (*Ep.*, 11.1.2-4; *CSEL*, 88.52.2-10). As pointed out by Divjak, p. lix, the letter may be dated to A.D. 419, hence the mission of Fronto, which occupies *Ep.*, 11.2-23, *CSEL*, 88.52.20-67.26, may be assigned to the year 418.

¹⁹² "moxque omni ratione atque instructione percepta ad Severam illam haereticam ... transcurri ... quae mihi inter cetera ait Severum quendam presbyterum divitiis atque potentia, litteris etiam clarum, huius principem doctrinae" (*Ep.*, 11.2.2, 53.1-8).

¹⁹³ "nam cum superiore anno [sc. A.D. 417] idem Severus aestimans barbaros longius abscississe post obitum matris castellum in quo consistebat expeteret, dominus noster Iesus Christus omnium secretorum inspector, omnium casuum dispensator, sarcinas eius, ut tantum flagitium proderetur, a barbaris voluit comprehendere" (*Ep.*, 11.2.4, 53.9-14). The *castellum* in which Severus *consistebat* may have been a fortified villa.

¹⁹⁴ *Ep.*, 11.2.5-8, 53.14-54.5.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.3.1-2, 54.6-16.

Roman military commander, then preparing a campaign against the barbarians,¹⁹⁶ was influential and had popular support. Fronto was nearly lynched. But the Count showed himself to be fair, and Fronto was able to prove that Severus had perjured himself.¹⁹⁷ He went on to seek help from Patroclus of Arles, who had shown outstanding constancy in attacking this heresy.¹⁹⁸ A synod was to be held at Béziers. Consentius comments that the Spanish bishops would certainly not attend, although Patroclus and the bishops of Gaul were zealous in their opposition to such a great plague and were to approach the emperor for assistance.¹⁹⁹ Consentius asks Augustine to make it clear that the Priscillianists are very different from the Donatists, whose priests are being re-admitted to the Catholic church. He himself expresses the difference crudely: in Spain there is secret incest, in Africa public fornication; the Spaniards tremble to be detected in their sacrilege, the Africans stubbornly glory in schism.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 11.4.1, 3, 54.22-6, 55.2-8. Asterius' preparations are referred to later, 11.7.3, 56.24-6: "venit protinus Tarraconam vir illustris Asterius comes cui tanti exercitus cura et tanti belli summa commissa est" and later he asked Fronto to pray for his success, *Ep.*, 11.12.2, 60.5-7: "'indulge, obsecro', ait, 'Christi famule, si quid forsitan laesimus meque ad proelium, ut vides, cum exercitu properantem orationum tuarum virtute proseguere!'". Asterius was previously known to have expelled the Vandals from Gallaecia in 420: *PLRE*, ii. 171.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 11.5.1-20.4. The wealth of fascinating detail in this account demands and will surely receive copious commentary in the near future.

¹⁹⁸ He was compelled to leave Tarragona, "invalescentibus in me cunctorum odiis" (ibid., 11.23.1, 67.14), and went to Arles (ibid., 67.15-18).

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 11.23.2, 67.18-22; 24.2-3, 68.7-18.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 11.25.1-26.3, 68.19-69.20, esp. 26.2, 69.12-17.