Placuit apostolicae (Ep. 1) of Zosimus of Rome and the Ecclesiastical Reorganization of Gaul

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Around the beginning of the fifth century the praetorian prefect for Gaul and the governor of Viennensis relocated their headquarters from Trier and Vienne respectively to Arles, which created a dispute between the bishops of Vienne and Arles as to whom should be metropolitan of the province of Viennensis. While the synod of Turin had proposed dividing the province in two ecclesiastically, problems emerged in 417 when Zosimus, bishop of Rome, within the first week of his election, asserted in his Epistula 1 (JK 328) that the bishop of Arles was to be metropolitan not only of Viennensis but over several provinces in the civil diocese of Septem Provinciae as well (depriving the bishops of Marseille, Vienne, and Narbonne of their metropolitan status) and thereby making him virtual papal vicar in the exercise of Roman prerogatives. This new arrangement created enormous religious conflict, as a further seven letters and synod in Rome in September 417 attest, including the efforts of Zosimus to declare the synod of Turin invalid. Ralph Mathisen investigated this episode and concluded that Zosimus’s efforts to assert his own authority over Gaul resulted only in uniting the Gallic churches against him. This paper seeks to analyse Zosimus’s involvement in Gaul and argues that this was not really his plan but rather that of the bishop of Arles. It also seeks to ask whether or not Zosimus anticipated the resultant conflict, as well as the authority by which he sought to make these changes.

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It has become rather commonplace in modern political life around the world for newly elected governments to produce ambitious plans for their first one hundred days in office, ever since Franklin D. Roosevelt did so when he was elected to his first term as President of the United States of America in 1933. An ambitious agenda is released and frenetic activity follows to instill the impression of taking the electoral mandate seriously and of not becoming self-indulgent and congratulatory with success. The initial days, weeks, and months of any new government these days are about promise, urgency, diligence, and dedication. The journalist Kenneth Walsh has summed up the allure and significance of this concept in modern presidential politics in the United States:

The underlying truth is that presidents tend to be most effective when they first take office, when their leadership style seems fresh and new, when the aura of victory is still powerful, and when their impact on Congress is usually at its height. There is nothing magic about the number, and many presidential aides over the years have complained that it is an artificial yardstick. But it has been used by the public, the media, and scholars as a gauge of presidential success and activism . . .

This is not to suggest that the notion of the first one hundred days in any way impacted upon the consciousness of leaders in late antiquity, whether they were civil or ecclesiastical. Yet, certainly in the case of Zosimus, bishop of Rome, elected to that office on 18 March 417 to replace Innocent I (402–417), we see what appears to be some sense of urgency at the start of his episcopate. Only a few days later, on 22 March, he wrote his first-surviving letter, *Placuit apostolicae*, to the bishops of the Gauls and the Septem Prouinciae (the two civil dioceses of what is modern France that were part of the praetorian prefecture of Gaul), endorsing or ordering (this needs to be considered later) sweeping changes to the ecclesiastical structure in several provinces in the civil diocese of Septem Prouinciae. Patroclus, bishop of Arles (ancient Colonia Iulia Paterna Arletensium Sextanorum or simply Arelate in the province of Viennensis, in the civil diocese of Septem

Prouinicae) was recognized by Rome as having an unprecedented authority over several provinces in southeast Gaul: Viennensis, Narbonensis Prima, Narbonensis Secunda, and probably Alpes Maritimae.

Zosimus appears to be someone in a hurry to make an impression straight after his election. Do we have an example here of a Roman bishop energetically making his mark at the start of his episcopate, wasting no time to implement some reform agenda? I am going to suggest that this would be a mistaken way of reading the evidence. In this paper I wish to analyze supposed plans held by Zosimus for the churches of Gaul, to investigate whether or not he foresaw or could have foreseen the great opposition it would engender there, and to consider by what authority he acted. *Epistula 1* (Placuit apostolicae) will be the principal evidence


for this presentation. The argument is going to be advanced that what was unfolding in Gaul was not his proposal at all, but one concocted by Patroclus and that Zosimus was not legislating this change but offering his considerable support and endorsement to this idea, as it would ultimately tie the Gallic churches, through Arles, closer to Rome. First, let us consider the question of the speed with which this decision was made and consider the considerable scholarship on this point.

PATROCLUS AND THE ELECTION OF ZOSIMUS

At the start of the twentieth century Louis Duchesne put forward the idea that, since the letter favoring him was written only four days after the election of Zosimus, Patroclus must have been in Rome in March 417. He must have offered support that was somehow deemed to have been useful and effective in securing the election result and was rewarded with this extraordinary appointment some days later. This has become the standard understanding of events. Indeed, Detlev Jasper has gone as far as to state (inexplicably I would contend, since that right belonged to the bishop of Ostia as we know from the events that would follow the death of Zosimus) that Patroclus was the ordaining bishop at his episcopal ordination.

As a variation on Duchesne, Émilienne Demougeot suggested that Flavius Constantius, patricius and magister utriusque militiae, consul in 414 and 417, Stilicho’s ultimate replacement as power behind Honorius, who married the emperor’s half-sister Galla Placidia at the start of 417, was helpful in securing the election of Zosimus. The inference has been

8. Louis Duchesne, “Le concile de Turin,” Revue Historique 87 (1905): 278–302, at 281. Of course, since he was not a local cleric or bishop from the local area, Patroclus would have had no voting rights in Zosimus’s election. How he influenced the election outcome is not suggested by Duchesne.
10. See Avell. Ep. 17.4 (CSEL 35:64).
drawn that Patroclus was somehow the agent of Constantius in this, since Constantius would have had no rights in the election of Zosimus. One could posit that he brought some kind of pressure to bear upon the electors, either directly or through Patroclus, but there is no tangible evidence for it. However, how Constantius is supposed to have done this is not made explicit in Demougeot. This view about the role of Constantius has been accepted by some scholars.13 Most recently, David Frye has supported this overall position. Although he says nothing about Patroclus being in Rome at the time of the election, he states that the letter of Zosimus embodied the will and plans of Constantius for Gaul. He goes so far as to call Zosimus the puppet of Constantius.14 How Constantius might have influenced the outcome of the election and how that will was communicated to Zosimus is not explained here either.

Frye argues this because he believes that Constantius had a religious policy for Gaul of removing bishops who had supported the usurper Constantine III, who had controlled much of Gaul between 407 and 411, before Constantius defeated him in Arles, as well as a public policy of removing civic officials who had supported the illegitimate regime. Constantius in 411 had been able to remove two bishops, Heros in Arles and Lazarus in Aix-en-Provence (ancient Aquae Sextiae in the province of Narbonensis Secunda), whom Zosimus presents as being creatures of Constantine III.15 In the case of Arles, the argument is that he was able to

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bring in Patroclus as a replacement. Frye contends that Constantius had been unable to remove other, more entrenched bishops, and that later he used Zosimus for that purpose, who obliged with *Placuit apostolicae* as an instrument to tame those unruly bishops by placing them directly under the immediate supervision of Patroclus and providing the latter with the power to ensure that future Gallic bishops in the vast region would be friendly to Ravenna.\(^{16}\) Those unruly bishops are identified as Proculus of Marseille (ancient Massalia in the province of Vienensis), Hilary of Narbonne (ancient Colonia Narbo Martius in the province of Narbonensis Prima), and Simplicius of Vienne (ancient Vienna in the province of Vienensis).\(^{17}\) Thus, in this reconstruction, Zosimus moved as quickly as he did after his election because he owed his position to Constantius and his plan was really part of a longer-term strategy of Constantius.

Certainly, in terms of civic officials, we know that through Ravenna’s new praetorian prefect in Gaul, Claudius Postumus Dardanus (who held office between 412 and 413),\(^ {18}\) Constantius eventually was able to eliminate Constantine’s prefect, Decimus Rusticus (who held office between 409 and 411).\(^ {19}\) We are told that there was a purge of other officials as well.\(^ {20}\) Constantius acted swiftly here, but I do not support the notion that

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19. On Rusticus see *PLRE* 2.965 (Rusticus 9); Heinzelmann, *Bischofsherrschaft in Gallien*, 74; and Heinzelmann, “‘Gallische Prosopographie,’” 684–85 (Rusticus 3).
Constantius had such a developed or long-lasting interest in ecclesiastical affairs in Gaul nor that he was so impotent in 411/412 that he could not have dealt with all the bishops who might have troubled him if he had so wished, although his time in Arles was brief. I have argued this in detail elsewhere.\(^{21}\) While Constantius might have had a hand in the removal of Heros and Lazarus, the evidence is more limited with regard to his involvement in replacing them and non-existent with regard to other churches. Indeed, Prosper’s information that Patroclus was a friend of Constantius,\(^{22}\) when read carefully, seems to suggest that it had been Patroclus (or even the people of Arles) who had taken the initiative in exploiting that friendship for his or their own gain (when Prosper writes that “cuius [i.e. Constantius’s] per ipsum [Patroclus] gratia quaerebatur” by someone, which the use of the passive indicates), rather than this being driven by Constantius himself with any fully developed religious policy for Gaul.\(^{23}\) On my reading Constantius was drawn into a local squabble rather than being the driving force behind a wholesale change of episcopal leadership in Gaul.

Michael Kulikowski has rejected much of Frye, asserting that there is simply no evidence for Patroclus being in Rome at the time of the election of Zosimus. He argues that Patroclus was in Rome, as we know from Zosimus, but that it was later in the year, not in March.\(^{24}\) I agree with Kulikowski and want to offer further logical reasoning to support this position.

First, proponents of the view of Duchesne, Demougeot, and Frye would need to indicate how Patroclus would have influenced the election of Zosimus. While we do not know everything about episcopal elections in late antiquity, we know from the council of Nicaea in 325 that bishops were to

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23. Lütkenhaus, *Constantius III*, 56, believes that the initiative came from the people. I am more inclined to read Prosper as indicating that it came from Patroclus himself. We both agree that Prosper did not say it came from Constantius.

be elected by the bishops of the province. Other local clergy and the laity of Rome might have had an input, but a bishop from Gaul would have had no direct participation in the electoral process. It is only by reading between the lines that one would come up with the notion that Patroclus, a friend of the most powerful man in the empire, informally influenced the electors before the election to choose Zosimus and that Zosimus was known to be pliable to the plans of Constantius. As entertaining an argument as it is, there are other just as possible (and indeed, more probable) explanations.

Second, one should not be surprised with a Roman bishop writing soon after his election. It was standard practice for newly elected bishops to send letters of communion to their episcopal colleagues. Next to none of these survive, so we can presume that they must have been fairly standard and so plentiful that no one thought them worth preserving. One exception comes with the first preserved letter of Innocent I, the predecessor of Zosimus. His letter of communion to Anysius, bishop of Thessaloniki (ancient Thessalonica in the province of Macedonia) was preserved in the Collectio Thessalonicensis because it contains evidence which was deemed useful in the sixth-century debate about whether Rome or Constantinople had what today we would call patriarchal oversight for ecclesiastical affairs in Illyricum Orientale. Although that letter is undated it undoubtedly came at the start of Innocent’s episcopate. Not only did Innocent announce his election, but he took the opportunity to confirm what he thought were the arrangements in place about the bishop of Thessaloniki acting as a kind of primate in Illyricum Orientale (fulfilling Rome’s responsibility of


being a court of appeal for disputed verdicts reached at the local levels) and a conduit for communication with Rome.  

An even earlier example comes from the first surviving letter of Siricius (384–398) to Himerius, bishop of Tarragona (ancient Taccaco, provincial capital of Hispania Tarraconensis). He stated that he had succeeded Damasus (366–384) and that it was necessary for him to give notice of his promotion to the Roman episcopacy. He then proceeded to respond to the questions Himerius had addressed to Damasus. The question is whether this letter fulfilled both responsibilities, viz., Siricius announcing his election and responding to the questions from Himerius as seems to be the case with the letter from Innocent to Anysius, or whether the clause “... having first given notice, as was necessary, of my promotion ...” refers to a recently sent, standard letter that would have been sent to metropolitans announcing the election and asking them to distribute it throughout their provinces? I am more inclined to the second option given that the surviving letter to Himerius was written a couple of months after the election. Whatever the case, what we see with Siricius, Innocent, and Zosimus is new Roman bishops taking the opportunity at the start of their episcopates to deal with matters unresolved at the time of the death of their predecessors or needing to be negotiated afresh.

A letter to Gallic bishops announcing the election of a Roman bishop would not be unusual. All bishops must have been busy in the period after their election announcing it to their episcopal colleagues. That Zosimus writes three days after his own election ought not to be that surprising. Yet, it must be admitted that there is no mention by Zosimus of his election in Placuit apostolicae at all. This is not Zosimus taking the opportunity, while he is sending of letters of communion, to make an announcement, as Innocent had done. Indeed and interestingly, the letter is not addressed to an individual bishop, even a metropolitan, but to all the bishops of two

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civil dioceses, most of whom were not going to be affected by one of the provisions of the letter (but, as we shall see, were going to be affected by the other). The letter is composed specifically on the question addressed and sent broadly. It would seem that perhaps the standard letters of communion had been sent to metropolitans and, at virtually the same time, this accompanying letter was sent to the whole region.

As an aside, it is interesting that the letter is addressed to the bishops of the Gauls (i.e. the northern half of modern France), since they were not going to be affected by it at all. Why did Zosimus not just write to the bishops of the southern civil diocese? Even so, not all the bishops in the southern civil diocese were to be affected by this either. Yet, one can understand why the bishops of the other provinces in the civil diocese of Septem Provinciae might have been informed, out of courtesy. Given that he wrote to the bishops of two civil dioceses, why did he not write to the bishops of the rest of the prefecture, i.e, the bishops of the Britain and the Spanias?

Admittedly, there is nothing in the letter that indicates that Zosimus is newly elected, other than the date (and there is no reason to question that), but as Innocent had done with Thessaloniki, I think Zosimus was doing with Arles (to some extent at least; as will become apparent the parallels are not exact at all): as a new bishop he was stating his policy with regard to the way in which he wanted the relationship between Rome and the churches of that particular region to work. Yet, we should not think that the arrangement in Illyricum Orientale was identical with that for half the provinces of Septem Provinciae, as Mathisen warns.30 So there is a sense of Zosimus acting swiftly at the start of his episcopate in this letter.

I would add that the papal vicar of Thessaloniki was already a metropolitan, whereas Arles had only recently become metropolitan of Vienensis (in place of Vienne), as it was now the residence of the provincial governor (although the exact date of that transfer is debated), and was also, at least since Petronius, who held office between 402 and 408, the residence of the praetorian prefect, one of the most powerful men in the western empire.31 When Innocent wrote to Anysius he believed that Any-

31. Kulikowski, “Two Councils of Turin,” 164, dates the move of the praetorian prefect from Trier in the face of the barbarian incursion to 407 at roughly the same time as the governor fled back to Italy from Vienne in the face of both the barbarians and the usurper Constantine III, with a more formal arrangement in Arles after the defeat of Constantine in 411 and Jovinus in 413. Presumably Constantine had installed a governor in Arles and Constantius continued the practice. It was the confusion over how permanent this move was to be that led to the discussion we see reflected in what
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he sees as the second synod of Turin. This is in contrast with Mathisen, Ecclesiastical Factionalism, 19 and 25, and “The Council of Turin,” 284–90, who supports a much earlier date of 395 for the move of the prefect. Of course it is the date of the transfer of the governor, not the prefect, that affects the status of Arles as metropolitan capital. Mathisen’s reconstruction of transfer of prefect in 395, sole synod of Turin in 398 or 399, and move of the governor sometime later is consistent with my point. Of course, if the governor had moved to Arles before the synod of Turin met, this would have weakened the claims of the church of Vienne. What the canon from the synod tells us is that there was still confusion about what city was metropolis. In either reconstruction, Arles had not long enjoyed an upgraded status. Thus, I would disagree with Klingshirn, Caesarius of Arles, 65, that it was the relocation of the prefect that made the bishop of Arles argue that his city should be the metropolitan capital; the relocation of the prefect made the local bishop argue at the synod for an increased status, despite not yet being the provincial capital. On Petronius see Honorius’s letter Saluberrima magnificentiae of 17 April 418 (Liber auctoritatem ecclesiae Arelatensis, Ep. 8 [MGHEpp 3:14]); PLRE 2:862–63; Heinzelmann, “Gallische Prosopographeie,” 668 (Petronius 1); and Ralph W. Mathisen, “Petronius, Hilarius and Valerianus: Prosopographical Notes on the Conversion of the Roman Aristocracy,” Hist 30 (1981): 106–12. On governors in the late Roman empire see Bernhard Palme, “Die Officia der Statthalter in der Spätantike: Forschungsstand und Perspektiven,” Antiquité Tardive 7 (1999): 85–133. On praetorian prefects see Timothy D. Barnes, “Regional Prefectures,” in Bonner Historia-Augusta-Colloquium 1984/1985, ed. J. Straub, Antiquitas. Reihe 4, Beiträge zur Historia-Augusta-Forschung (Bonn: R. Habelt, 1987), 13–24; and P. S. Barnwell, Emperor, Prefects, and Kings: The Roman West, 395–565 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 58–62.

Our letter is not preserved in any collection that originated in Rome, like the *Collectio Dionysiana*, where the archives must have kept hundreds of such letters, but was preserved in the local *Liber auctoritatem ecclesiae Arelatensis*, where it would have had been a significant piece of evidence in the claim by Arles to importance in the region.\textsuperscript{33}

So if Patroclus was not in Rome at the time of the election of Zosimus, why is it that the new Roman bishop was writing to Gaul four days after his election, or, more precisely, from where has the idea for the rearrangement of ecclesiastical structure in Gaul come? If not from Patroclus then was it something Zosimus had on his mind before he was elected? If I am correct that Patroclus was not in Rome at the time of the election (and Constantius was not behind the election outcome) does it not make *Placuit apostolicae* all the more suggestive of Zosimus coming to the Roman episcopate with a plan in mind, which he implemented immediately, as a kind of ancient precursor of the first one hundred days plan? I think not. One may argue still that Patroclus was behind the idea, just that he did not have to be in Rome to convey it personally.\textsuperscript{34} He could well have written to Rome while Innocent was still alive putting forward the idea that since it was now clear that Arles was to be the permanent base of the governor (if we accept that the move from Vienne to Arles was not necessarily intended as being permanent at the time),\textsuperscript{35} as it was now also of the praetorian

\textsuperscript{33} Friedrich Maassen, *Geschichte der Quellen und der Literatur des canonischen Rechts im Abendlande bis zum Ausgange des Mittelalters*, Bd. 1 (Gratz: Leuschner and Lubensky, 1870), 767–71.

\textsuperscript{34} Thus, I agree with Pietri, *Roma Christiana*, 1006, to the extent that he sees the idea being primarily Patroclus's, although I disagree with him that Patroclus presented it in person, when he writes that: “Patrocle, à son arrivée, vit sans doute mourir le vieil Innocent: son successeur, dix jours après son élection, se saisit de la plainte.”

\textsuperscript{35} Even if Mathisen, “The Council of Turin,” 285, is right that the inscription of Eventius tells us nothing about the date of the transfer of the governor, the point to be made is that it must come after that of the transfer of the prefect and the (second) synod of Turin, which Mathisen accepts (remembering of course that he argues for only one synod). However, this does not preclude the fact that a governor (even if not Eventius) could have fled Vienne at the time of the barbarian incursions in 407, as had Limenius, the praetorian prefect (on Limenius see *PLRE* 2:684 [Limenius 2] and Heizelmann, “Gallische Prosopographie,” 639) and Chariobaudes, the *magister equitum per Gallias* (*PLRE* 2:283; and Heizelmann, “Gallische Prosopographie,” 621 [Hariobaudes 3]) (Zosimus, *H.N.* 5.32.4 [François Paschoud, ed., *Zosime. Histoire nouvelle*, t. 3/1, Livre V, Collection des Universités de France {Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2003}, 48]), and that the first governor in Arles was one appointed by Constantine III, and that it was only after Constantius took Arles in 411 that there was any clarity that Arles had become the metropolis of the province (regardless of the fact that prefects had been resident there since 395). Matthews, *Western Aristocracies*, 333, thinks that the Eventius inscription tells us nothing about the move of the
prefect (who had moved from Trier), the bishop of Arles ought to have (and ought to be recognized by Rome as having) a superior authority to that of his local colleagues.

Whatever personal ambition Patroclus might have had, the changed civil arrangements in southern Gaul provided the opportunity (or necessity as Patroclus must have seen it) for realigning ecclesiastical structures to match. Indeed, if Mathisen is correct in his recent restatement about the date of the synod of Turin, then we would have to conclude that the augmentation of the authority of the church of Arles was a gradual thing. It would seem that his predecessor (and we do not know if that was still Ingenuus), after the prefect’s move to Arles, had argued for an increased status, which resulted in the compromise reached at the synod of Turin, with the bishops of Arles and Vienne splitting ecclesiastical supervision for the province between them.36 Once the governor had moved to Arles, the local bishop would have been in a better position to argue that the compromise needed revisiting, although the years between 407 and 411, with barbarian invasions and local usurpers, did not make that convenient.37 From 412, when Patroclus took over and a sense of stability returned to the area, it would have been the right time to argue that since Arles was now the home of both the governor and the prefect, not only should the bishop of Arles be metropolitan but something approaching what today we would term a primate or patriarch. Even so, what Patroclus proposed for himself was not simply supervision over other metropolitans, as Thessaloniki exercised, but the demotion of a couple of other metropolitans. Yet, he was not arguing for his own increased status to match that of someone like Anysius in Thessaloniki because of the gradually increasing civic importance of Arles in Gaul, but arguing for himself as the sole metropolitan over an area roughly equivalent with the old Roman province of Gallia Narbonensis (formerly Gallia Transalpina), although with Arles at its center rather than Narbonne.

We do not have evidence either way, it must be admitted, but I would be


more inclined to see that initiative coming from Arles rather than Rome for this. In this I follow the sense Griffe had of the incident, whereby Zosimus was responding to something that was being pursued from Arles.38

The point to be made is that rather than Arles initiating the request at the time of the election of Zosimus, it could have been sent to Rome in a written communication several months earlier. Perhaps Innocent, seeing an opportunity to further cement Rome’s influence in the Gallic churches, had discussed this with his advisors and had been drafting a letter before death intervened, a letter which Zosimus was happy to sign in his own name. Alternatively, perhaps Innocent had not reached a decision, or intended to reject it, before his death intervened (a tentative or impending decision that Zosimus then made or reversed), but the point is that it could have been (or, most likely was) Patroclus who initiated the request and that it (not he) had been in Rome for some time. To this extent I diverge from Kulikowski’s interpretation when he writes: “Nothing could be clearer to Zosimus as he set about finding a bishop through whom he could conduct his Gallic affairs.”39 I think it was Patroclus doing the seeking and that he had first sought out Innocent to endorse his plan.

So what we have, I think, at least with as much plausibility as other current interpretations, is not a new Roman bishop intent upon making his mark and setting forth his new reform agenda, but one who inherited some unfinished business from his predecessor and had to clear out the in-tray, as it were. On this suggested reading Zosimus is not some scheming bishop with a plan nor a puppet doing the imperial will but a conscientious man in a new position, diligently tidying things up and getting things in order promptly. The idea of Zosimus as “homme aux décision promptes et au tempérament autoritaire” is not the only way to assess him, at least on the basis of this first letter.40

Third, the idea that Constantius influenced the Roman episcopal election somehow is contrary to the evidence from the next election, where he seems to have followed or, more likely, created Honorius’s policy of neutrality with regard to the two rival candidates who emerged, Eulalius and Boniface. This neutrality lasted until Eulalius broke the conditions imposed by Ravenna of keeping both individuals out of Rome to maintain peace in the city and to allow the bishops time to decide themselves between the two of them. A letter from Constantius himself to the urban prefect, Aurelius Anicius Symmachus, preserved in the Collectio Avellana, is best

38. Griffe, La Gaule chrétienne, 2.123.
40. Griffe, La Gaule chrétienne, 2:147.
read along these lines. While it could be argued that Constantius was prepared to be neutral in 419 because he had got what he wanted with regard to Gaul in 417, the fact that there was to be so much ongoing negative reaction to the first-preserved letter of Zosimus in Gaul, would suggest that Constantius needed to make sure that the next Roman bishop would follow the same line in order to achieve the results in Gaul that as yet had eluded him. If he knew that one of the two candidates was going to be amenable, one would have thought that he would have been more active in advocating for that person than the evidence indicates.

So my conclusion is that Zosimus, busy as any new bishop would be after his election in announcing that fact and possibly tidying up unfinished business left at the death of his predecessor, was not responsible for the idea of new ecclesiastical arrangements in Gaul, but was instead quite happy to endorse a plan that had come from Patroclus. We may now investigate the letter itself.

CONTENTS AND CONTEXT OF THE LETTER

What Zosimus agreed to was twofold. The first was that no cleric from anywhere within the two civil dioceses in modern France was to visit Rome or elsewhere without an accompanying testimonial letter (*littera formata*) from Patroclus indicating that he had approved the travel to Rome.42 One should note how careful Zosimus was here not to limit this provision to bishops.43 This first provision parallels the arrangements in Illyricum Orientale and no doubt referred to judicial appeals, but the second does not.


43. Although, in the case of the African presbyter Apiarius, Zosimus would be happy to hear a petition from a cleric who did not have leave to appeal, even though the Africans themselves insisted that this was necessary (at least for bishops) before heading to Rome. See Jane E. Merdinger, *Rome and the African Church in the Time of Augustine* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 111–35; and Geoffrey D. Dunn, “The Appeal of Apiarius to the Transmarine Church of Rome,” *Journal of the Australian Early Medieval Association* 8 (2012): 9–29.
second is that Patroclus was to have the authority to ordain bishops in the provinces of Viennensis, Narbonensis Prima, and Narbonensis Secunda. Mathisen thinks that Alpes Maritimae was also included in this group. Canon 4 of the Council of Nicaea (325) had decreed that a bishop was to be elected by all the bishops of the province (at least a minimum of three present) and that any decision needed to be ratified by the metropolitan. In effect, what Zosimus was supporting was the demotion of several metropolitans by creating Arles as the metropolitan church of a province that resembled the pre-Diocletianic situation.

This second provision of the letter did not affect most of the Gallic bishops, although it certainly affected some, but the first one affected them all. While it might not have been too objectionable a requirement for there to be such a channel (the Africans and the Illyrians had a similar provision in place within their jurisdictions), making the bishop of Arles that conduit could have been objectionable since it was not traditionally a leading city in the region. Arles was now the base of the praetorian prefect, making it a de facto capital for the two civil dioceses (and Spain and Britain as well, in theory). Yet, Arles did not have the tradition or prestige that Carthage or Thessaloniki did. The changes in the Roman provincial system due to barbarian incursions, upon which the church based its own organization, gave Arles a legitimate—if new—right, even though it had no legacy of being a leading church. One can imagine that any Roman bishop would have liked bishops in a far-flung region of the empire agreeing to formalize a process whereby judicial appeals would be directed to Rome. In a sense, this was the price Patroclus was prepared to pay in order to augment his own position at the same time.

In contrast to the first provision that affected everyone and was not uncommon, the second provision was unprecedented anywhere in the Christian world. In essence, therefore, what Zosimus endorsed, with this second provision, was that Arles should take over metropolitan responsibilities for several provinces, all of which had metropolitans already, who presumably thereby would be demoted. This is very unlike the situ-


45. Mathisen, Ecclesiastical Factionalism, 9, following Duchesne, Fastes épiscopaux, 1:87.

ation in Illyricum Orientale where the bishop of Thessaloniki was given no rights in any other province except his own with regard to episcopal elections; his authority within other provinces was with regard only to judicial appeals. The status of Arles was to be a return supposedly to the status enjoyed by Trophimus, reputedly the first bishop in the region.\(^47\) According to Gregory of Tours this had taken place in the early 250s, and he was one of seven bishops sent to Gaul.\(^48\) In other words, Patroclus, if we accept him as being the instigator of this idea, was turning his back on the church following the civil pattern imposed by Diocletian in provincial structure and attempting to reinstate a more ancient sense of the structure of the Gauls, recreating ecclesiastically the now defunct Gallia Transalpina or Gallia Narbonensis.\(^49\)

Proculus of Marseille, Hilary of Narbonne, and Simplicius of Vienne were to be stripped of an authority guaranteed by the great council itself. The move by Zosimus must be understood within recent Gallic church events to see how driven the new bishop of Arles was to cement what he believed to be his rightful authority.

We know that a group of bishops had met in synod in Turin (ancient Augusta Taurinorum in the Italian province of Liguria) on 22 September in some year to discuss the ecclesiastical impact of this move of the praetorian prefect. Elsewhere I have reviewed the evidence about whether there were one or two synods at Turin in these years (agreeing that there were two), and concurring with Kulikowski (with a slight modification) that


\(^{48}\) Greg.-T., *Hist.* 1.30 (MGHSSrerMerov 1/1:23). As other letters from Zosimus will reveal, the argument was that Trophimus had enjoyed metropolitan authority over the whole region. However, Gregory indicates that among the original seven bishops were Paulus of Narbonne and Saturninus of Toulouse. The idea that Trophimus was the superior of these two is not something contained in Gregory.

\(^{49}\) Of course Arles had never been capital of Gallia Narbonensis, so when Zosimus wrote *sicuti semper habuit* and *reuocet*, these words were not just an appeal to restore the boundaries of the old Gallia Narbonensis but to restore what must have been a legendary situation whereby in the third century the first bishop of Arles had enjoyed a superior status to bishops established in metropolitan cities, like Narbonne itself. In Gregory of Tours we read of Trophimus having companions (like Paul sent to Narbonne) without any sense of their being a hierarchy among those seven bishops. The question is whether or not Gregory’s story reflects the understanding of the third century or whether Gregory’s account reflects how the story developed in response to Arles’s claims. On the impact of Rome in Gaul see Greg Woolf, *Becoming Roman: The Origins of Provincial Civilization in Gaul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
the second synod, from which the canons survive, is to be dated between 412 and 416. Mathisen’s magisterial article causes one to rethink one’s position, and perhaps accept an earlier date for a single synod at Turin. During these years we may surmise that the governor of the province had taken up residence in Arles on a permanent basis, thereby opening the possibly for Patroclus to argue for an even greater status than had been obtained at the synod of Turin.

Canon 2 from the synod of Turin had been the bishops’ original solution when the prefect had moved to Arles: when it became clear which city was to be the permanent capital of the province, that bishop would be recognized as metropolitan, but in the meantime the two bishops ought to split the province between them. This was not acceptable to Patroclus when it became clear that the governor would reside there as well permanently, and this explains why he wrote to Innocent and eventually received support from Zosimus.

The second matter of concern to us resulting from the synod involves ordinations performed by Proculus of Marseille in Narbonensis Secunda. Marseille was not the metropolitan city, which was Aix-en-Provence, which had enjoyed that status only for a short period of time. Marseille was the more ancient church and had exercised rights over churches in the area for some time. The synod decided to accept ordinations by Proculus as...
valid, while asserting that Aix-en-Provence was definitely the metropoli-
tan city. He was compensated with the personal honor of being regarded
as the equivalent of a metropolitan for his lifetime.

The synod had tried to move with the times and adapt the ecclesiastical
structures to changes in the civil structure, while at the same time respecting
traditions and not humiliating those affected negatively by change. Only
Patroclus seems not to have accepted this compromise (even if his prede-
cessors like Ingenuus and Heros had) because, as the years progressed, the
city of Arles grew in importance, which he believed was not reflected in his
position. This is the background to and contents of the letter by Zosimus.

DID ZOSIMUS FORESEE PROBLEMS?

We know that this letter provoked a strong negative reaction among the
Gallic bishops, resulting in Zosimus calling a synod in Rome in September
417 to address the issue.\textsuperscript{54} Could Zosimus have foreseen such a reaction?
Did he want it in order to deal with the recalcitrant bishops on behalf of
Constantius, as Frye suggests?

By the time Zosimus writes, Arles has become the capital of Vienennes-
sis (on the basis of the governor’s relocation), and so on that level he was
right to uphold the validity of the claims by Patroclus within his own
province, although perhaps he was less than sensitive to the tradition that
the bishop of Vienne had enjoyed. However, the decision with regard to
the supremacy of Arles over the bishops of Narbonensis Prima and Nar-onensis Secunda is more puzzling. A situation of supervision akin to
that in Illyricum Orientale would have been understandable, but making
him metropolitan over several provinces does indeed seem to have been a
direct challenge to the metropolitans in Narbonne and Aix-en-Provence,
as well as to Marseille. One should note that the other provinces of the
civil diocese (Aquitanica I and II, and Nouem Populana) were not included
in this arrangement. They had not annoyed Patroclus as had those closer
to home or simply they had not been part of the earlier larger province
of Gallia Narbonensis.

It is quite possible that Zosimus was unaware of the depth of feeling
in Gaul against the proposal by Patroclus, either because it had not been
expressed or had been masked by Patroclus. Perhaps one would expect

\textsuperscript{54} Frye, “Bishops in Early Fifth-Century Gaul,” 356–57, rejects the notion of
there being a synod in Rome. Instead he has Zosimus attend the synod of Turin in
September 417. This radical reinterpretation is one I cannot accept.
that anyone skilled in the art of understanding human nature would have realized that no one is ever happy with demotion. While Zosimus probably believed that the prestige of the Roman church would have been sufficient to stifle any dissent, later events would show the extent to which he (and Patroclus) had misjudged the situation and the extent to which he (and Patroclus) was prepared to act in order to maintain his dignity in the face of the unfolding opposition.

THE AUTHORITY OF ZOSIMUS

By what authority had Zosimus intervened? We know that Innocent I had asserted that Rome ought to be the church to which the Gallic bishops turned when they had problems they could not resolve in a system of provincial synods or when they were discussing issues of major significance.\(^{55}\) It would seem that Zosimus took the appeal by Patroclus to Rome as an indication that there were problems in Gaul that could not be resolved locally.

Although Gaul was starting to be seen as coming under the episcopal oversight of the Roman bishop, at least as far as being a court of appeal, as Innocent’s letters to Victricius of Rouen (ancient Rotomagus in the province of Lugdunensis Secunda) and Exsuperius of Toulouse (ancient Palladia Tolosa in the province of Narbonensis Prima) demonstrate,\(^{56}\) such supervision and authority were less developed and direct there than the role Rome exercised over Illyricum Orientale.

Everything we see about Rome’s dealings with churches so far removed from Italy in the previous half century would indicate that Rome did not see itself (nor did other churches see it) as having a primacy of jurisdiction over all other churches in the West. Rome certainly was in the center of the western ecclesiastical world in the sense that it was a place to hear appeals and it was a church of apostolic foundation in the empire’s largest and most important city and a church of enormous and almost irresistible


prestige and influence, but it did not consider itself as having the authority to dictate to other churches or intervene in their affairs directly. This I have investigated elsewhere.57

From this point of view I would think that Patroclus was not asking Rome to create some new arrangement in Gaul but asking for its support or endorsement for his own plan. Thus, I would disagree with Erich Caspar who wrote that “Das Schreiben an alle Bischöfe Galliens und der sieben Provinzen, welches er von dem neuen Papst erwirkte, gewährte ihm drei Privilegien.”58 My argument is that Zosimus did not “grant” anything to Patroclus, but rather than he supported the claims put forward by Patroclus. Indeed, much of the letter does not lay down the law for the churches in Gaul as much as it sets out consequences for bishops who fail to follow its provisions. Those consequences deal with Rome’s bishop refusing to receive that cleric in Rome.59 There seems to be an acknowledgement here that Rome had little recognized authority to intervene in Gallic affairs and could only threaten to withhold future legal assistance from any who disregarded its position.

However, Zosimus states specifically that “we have granted this privilege of the testimonial letters to our holy brother and fellow bishop, Patroclus, in special contemplation of his merits.”60 Here I would point out is where Zosimus did have something to grant. As much as Patroclus might have been prepared to recognize Rome’s superior rights in judicial appeals by


agreeing to be the conduit through which they were channelled, in order to augment his own authority, he could not grant such a right to himself; the Roman bishop was the one to authorize how appeals to Rome were to be processed. However, with regard to the second provision, that of restructuring the local Gallic hierarchy and its metropolitans, it would seem that Zosimus was endorsing the claims from Arles. I take “... ad pontificium suum revocet” as Zosimus recognizing the agency of Patroclus in this matter not just treating him as a recipient of some Roman gift.

We have to deal with the fact that, with regard to this second provision, Zosimus did start off with the forceful verb *iussumus* and go on to refer to *apostolicae sedis statuta*. At first glance this might suggest the Roman bishop acting as a legislator. No doubt it suited Zosimus to be so regarded and to act as though he were in such a position as to issue such orders.

Having Rome onside should have helped persuade the rest of his Gallic episcopal colleagues to accept the plan from Patroclus. In that both Patroclus and Zosimus miscalculated seriously, as later events would indicate, but they are beyond our scope here. The reaction of quite a few Gallic bishops would seem to dispel the notion that it was commonly accepted in Gaul that the church of Rome did have the authority to order an ecclesiastical reorganization so far away. The authority of the Roman bishop stemmed from the willingness of other churches to accept it. He threatened sanctions: those who ordain bishops or who are ordained as bishops without the agreement of Patroclus are to be deprived of their positions.61 The only teeth such a threat contained was with regard to the support Rome could withhold from such a bishop in the future should they have need of it.

My conclusion would be that Zosimus did indeed legislate about how appeals to Rome from Gaul were to be conducted and acted as though he were legislating about the reorganization of the ecclesiastical hierarchy in southern Gaul but was actually endorsing what Patroclus claimed for himself by issuing the threat of sanctions against those who ignored his endorsement.

CONCLUSION

*Plascuit apostolicae* cannot be taken as an indication that at the start of his episcopate Zosimus had a reform agenda he was eager to implement immediately. The situation in Gaul was one he inherited from his predecessor and no doubt much, if not all, of the initiative for reform came from Patroclus of Arles. Zosimus took the occasion of writing the expected letter of communion announcing his election to add some response to the situation. The steps outlined in our letter seem unusual; rather than deciding between a couple of disputes about who was metropolitan in those provinces, Zosimus supported Patroclus as metropolitan over all of them. This move was unprecedented and contrary to an implicit policy of following the imperial civil provincial structure if several provinces were to be folded into one. It is obvious that Patroclus had complained about several of his episcopal colleagues who had frustrated his ambitions over the past five years, and it appears that Zosimus listened. The appeal to the legendary figure of Trophimus meant that Patroclus was turning his back on the church following the imperial provincial system as reformed by Diocletian. He was not exercising the kind of papal primacy of jurisdiction we are used to seeing the Roman bishop employ in subsequent centuries, but he certainly was trying to yield an authority that made it look as though the initiative did rest with him, even though I would think that it did not. Zosimus, only a bishop for a couple of days, was prepared to endorse and support this plan.

While deciding that Arles should be metropolitan in Viennensis instead of Vienne and even that Arles ought to have some supervisory role over other provincial groups of bishops in the area could be justified, the radical nature of the solution could have been anticipated as going to create trouble, so it would seem that Zosimus was prepared for a fight. It is certainly what he got. The situation in Gaul was to plague the remainder of his brief eighteen-month episcopate.

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