Constantius, St Germanus and fifth-century Britain

N.J. Higham

The two visits of Germanus to Britain that Constantius included in his Life of the saint were long a staple of insular history. Recently, however, they have come under close scrutiny, leading to the second visit in particular being considered unhistorical. This essay re-examines the two visits in the context of the whole work, concluding that Constantius had access to good-quality information for Germanus's activities. Focusing on two episodes of the first visit, Germanus's journey to the cult site of St Alban and the 'Alleluia Victory', allows us to explore what the bishop achieved in Britain. Recent suggestions that Germanus effectively 'invented' the cult of St Alban arguably go beyond the evidence available, but the bishop's interaction with the cult was an important, planned part of his anti-Pelagian strategy. The passages describing the two visits are also explored in terms of Constantius's wider purposes in writing the Life. In those terms his investment in stories regarding Germanus in Britain enabled him to develop his hero in ways which accord with his overall vision of an exemplary bishop. Germanus's deeds in Britain, therefore, need to be read both in terms of what they can offer in terms of British history and in the context of this author's wider agenda.

In the second half of the fifth century, a Gallo-Roman cleric, Constantius, included accounts in his *Vita Germani* of two visits by

* This essay arises out of a paper presented to the 'Crisis, what Crisis?' conference in the Mellon Foundation's Sawyer Seminar Series at the McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, University of Cambridge, from 30 November to 1 December 2009. I am particularly grateful to Professor Paul Fouracre for his critical reading of it in draft and numerous suggestions as to improvements, and to Professor Ian Wood for his speedy provision of recent articles, and correspondence regarding the relationship between Germanus and the cult of Alban. I am also grateful to the two anonymous referees, many of whose suggested improvements I have attempted to implement. All errors and the opinions expressed however remain my own.

Early Medieval Europe 2014 **22** (2) 113–137
© 2014 John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 9600 Garsington Road, Oxford OX4 2DQ, UK and 350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148, USA

Bishop Germanus to Britain to oppose Pelagianism,[1] the first in company with Bishop Lupus of Troyes,[2] the second with Bishop Severus of Trèves (Trier).[3] The scarcity of information relating to Britain encouraged medieval scholars to draw heavily on this account when writing insular history. Though there is no evidence that he had actually read Constantius, the seventh-century Leinster scholar, Muirchu, had St Patrick trained for the church at Auxerre under Germanus.[4] Constantius's testimony was included by Bede in his *Ecclesiastical History* virtually verbatim,[5] and the international dissemination of this work carried Germanus's visits to a wide audience. The bishop then appears in British (i.e. Welsh) histories, including the ninth-century *Historia Brittonum*, where he is confused with a British churchman of similar name, St Garman.[6] Constantius's account and the use made of Germanus in this text have little in common beyond his presence in Britain, but the saint's widespread activities again encouraged medieval writers to include Germanus's achievements in Britain in their own works.[7]

Against this backdrop, it is unsurprising that Constantius's account entered the canon of historical and/or archaeological writing as that developed across the early twentieth century. Scholars who were interested primarily in the ending of Roman Britain and then the arrival and settlement of the Anglo-Saxons focused particularly on Germanus leading British soldiers in the 'Alleluia Victory' – virtually the only conflict between Britons and Saxons (and Picts) of which a near-contemporary account has survived.[8] This episode was therefore included in his foundational volume of the Oxford History of England by R.G.

[1] *Vita Germani episcope Autissiodoruensis auctore Constantio*, ed. W. Levison, in *MGH SRM* 7.1, *Passiones Vitaeque Sanctorum Aevi Merovingicarum cum Supplemento et Appendice*, ed. B. Krusch and W. Levison (Hanover and Leipzig, 1919), pp. 247–83; *Constance de Lyon: Vie de Saint Germain D'Auxerre*, ed. and trans. R. Borius, Les Éditions Du Cerf 29 (Paris, 1965). There is a modern English translation in F.R. Hoare, *The Western Fathers* (London, 1954), pp. 283–320, but the translations offered here are my own. I have adopted throughout the numbering of chapters as I –LXVI (as Hoare), as opposed to the books and chapters used by Borius, and cited the *vita* hereafter as *VG*.

[2] Elected bishop in 426, still alive and in post *c*.472, death beyond that unknown.

[3] Elected bishop 446, died *c*.455.

[4] Muirchu, *Vita*, c. 6, in *St Patrick, his Writings and Muirchu's Life*, ed. and trans. A.B.E. Hood, (London, 1978), p. 64.

[5] Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica Gens Anglorum* I.17–21, in *Bede's Ecclesiastical History* ed. Bertram Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969).

[6] *Historia Brittonum* XXXII, ff. in *Nennius: British History and the Welsh Annals*, ed. John Morris (Chichester, 1980).

[7] Germanus's visit appears, for example, in Geoffrey of Monmouth: see *The History of the Kings of Britain* VI.101, ed. Michael D. Reeve and trans. Neil Wright (Woodbridge, 2007).

[8] The only other contender being the siege of Mount Badon in Gildas's *De Excidio Britanniae*, in *The Ruin of Britain and Other Documents*, ed. M. Winterbottom (London, 1978), but that is very brief and far from contemporary.

© 2014 John Wiley & Sons Ltd

Collingwood, who clearly accepted Constantius as a reliable witness.[9] A note of warning came in the 1950s, but only regarding the historicity of Germanus's second visit; Nora Chadwick noted that remarkably little actually happened and suggested that it might have been included as a doublet of the first visit, which she accepted as historical.[10] The very lack of action, though, meant that historians were generally less interested in the second visit anyway, so tended to focus on the events of the first. Collingwood's lead was followed by Sheppard Frere in 1967,[11] then Peter Salway in his replacement to Collingwood's volume of the Oxford History of England.[12]

To this point, therefore, the most attention generally lay on the much fuller account of the first visit, with the main focus on the 'Alleluia Victory'; the second visit was of less intrinsic interest and perhaps more doubtful. This consensus was then challenged by E.A. Thompson in his book-length study in 1984, who took as his subject matter all ten chapters of the *Vita Germani* which were located in Britain,[13] accepting the second visit as equally historical with the first and discussing its date at some length.[14] What Thompson sought to achieve was the rehabilitation of Constantius's story in its entirety as a source for fifth-century insular history.

At the same time, however, early medieval historians were re-assessing the ways in which hagiography might best be approached as evidence. This involved an understanding of structure and style, and recognition that, in writing the *Vita Germani*, Constantius was pursuing his own contemporary agenda as a homilist and utilizing not just stories regarding Germanus himself but other pre-existing hagiographical works, such as that of Sulpicius Severus.[15] Such thinking was brought home to English-speaking scholars primarily by Ian Wood's important contribution to the volume *Gildas: New Approaches*, published in the same year as Thompson's study. Wood took a very different approach to Thompson, insisting that the reader should first consider the author's purposes in writing and the audience at which the work was aimed, and only then

[9] R.G. Collingwood and J.N.L. Myres, *Roman Britain and the English Settlements* (Oxford, 1936), p. 306.
[10] N.K. Chadwick, *Poetry and Letters in Early Christian Gaul* (London, 1955), p. 259.
[11] S.S. Frere, *Roman Britain* (London, 1967), pp. 413–14.
[12] P. Salway, *Roman Britain* (Oxford, 1981), p. 470.
[13] E.A. Thompson, *St. Germanus of Auxerre and the End of Roman Britain* (Woodbridge, 1984), pp. 39–46.
[14] Thompson, *St. Germanus of Auxerre*, pp. 55–70.
[15] W. Gessel, 'Germanus von Auxerre (um 378 bis 448): Die Vita des Konstantius von Lyon als homiletische Paränese in hagiographischer Form', *Römische Quartalschrift für Christliche Altertumskunde und Kirchengeschichte* 65 (1970), pp. 1–14, particularly pp. 7–9.

© 2014 John Wiley & Sons Ltd

seek to understand the narrative which he devised.[16] Wood considered this *vita* a well-constructed work written by an able and well-connected member of the Gallo-Roman Christian elite who was using the Life of Germanus as a vehicle through which to set out how bishops should behave.[17] Constantius was an advocate of Augustine's views, hostile to the Pelagian movement and keen to emphasize the value of faith over against direct action. He was also a writer who used allegory rather than exhortation to deliver his message.[18]

Wood's contribution redefined the ways in which scholars approached the *vita*, warning against the literal acceptance of its content as a source of fifth-century British 'facts'; the 'Alleluia Victory', was, therefore, potentially nothing more than an allegory of Germanus's triumph of orthodoxy over heresy. Michael Jones responded quickly to argue for the historicity of that battle,[19] but it was surely with Wood's caution in mind that in 1989 Simon Esmonde Cleary entirely rejected Constantius's account as evidence, on the grounds that the 'Alleluia Victory' belongs to the realm of hagiography as opposed to biography.[20] This goes far beyond Wood's remark, that the *vita* is 'less informative on the visit of 429 than is usually assumed'.[21] Fuller treatment was offered by Jeremy Knight,[22] who agreed that reading Constantius requires a grasp of its literary and rhetorical conventions but disagreed with Wood regarding the intended audience, seeing it as designed to be read out loud in public at Germanus's tomb in the suburbs of Auxerre.[23] Other scholars remained circumspect, passing over the Life quickly, or ignoring it entirely. Christopher Snyder acknowledged concerns regarding the historicity of the events but wove both visits into his discussion of the British church post-410.[24] David Mattingly very briefly alluded to elements from both visits but offered no analysis and remarked that 'sorting fact from fiction is difficult'.[25] Guy de la Bédoyère felt comfortable only with the first visit,

[16] I. Wood, 'The End of Roman Britain: Continental Evidence and Parallels', in M. Lapidge and D. Dumville (eds), *Gildas: New Approaches* (Woodbridge, 1984), pp. 1–26.
[17] Wood, 'End of Roman Britain', p. 9.
[18] Wood, 'End of Roman Britain', p. 14: it was 'primarily an allegorical account intended to instruct Paternus and his contemporaries'.
[19] M.E. Jones, 'The Historicity of the Alleluja Victory', *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 18.3 (1986), pp. 363–73, and see his *The End of Roman Britain* (Ithaca, NY, 1996), p. 183.
[20] S.E. Cleary, *The Ending of Roman Britain* (London, 1989), pp. 162, 166: 'To accept it as a historical source would be to be as credulous of its historical passages as the men of the Middle Ages were of its hagiographical ones.'
[21] Wood, 'End of Roman Britain', p. 12.
[22] J.K. Knight, *The End of Antiquity: Archaeology, Society and Religion, AD 235–700* (Stroud, 1999), pp. 60–2.
[23] Knight, *End of Antiquity*, p. 60.
[24] C.A. Snyder, *The Britons* (Malden, MA, 2003), pp. 115–16.
[25] D. Mattingly, *An Imperial Possession: Britain in the Roman Empire* (London, 2006), p. 535.

© 2014 John Wiley & Sons Ltd

remarking succinctly that Germanus and Lupus 'were sent by the church in Gaul to suppress the heresy [Pelagianism]. This they did with a mixture of spin, miracles and bravado in battle against the Saxons, and even presided over the healing of a tribune's daughter.'[26] Robin Fleming referred to Germanus visiting Britain but only offered any detail in the context of St Alban.[27] Neither Faulkner nor Laycock even mention him.[28] Most scholars today writing synthetic accounts of fifth-century Britain are archaeologists, with little experience of analysing early texts. Most seem unsure as to how much use should be made of the Life, and particularly of the second visit, resulting in a growing tendency to exclude it altogether.

The overall credibility of Germanus's deeds in Britain, and particularly of his second visit, is therefore in some doubt. This paper proposes to review the role of the 'British' chapters of the *Vita Germani* in the context of the overall work, asking how Constantius saw these sections contributing to his broader purpose as author. It will then turn to the two visits in more detail, to consider their historicity.

Author and text

Wood neatly summarized the little we know regarding Constantius himself, judging him a 'well-respected priest and poet'; his sermon at Clermont when the town was under siege was praised by Sidonius Apollinaris, who was such an admirer that he dedicated his first collection of letters to Constantius; letters to Constantius himself survive;[29] he is otherwise known to have composed verses to be inscribed in stone on a church dedicated by Bishop Patiens of Lyon.[30] There is very little to add. He may very well be the Constantius buried at Saint-Irenée, Lyon, whose memorial inscription indicates that he was eighty-four when he died,[31] but that cannot be confirmed. In very general terms, we should view Constantius as a figure who had close ties throughout the Christian, Gallo-Roman elite of central/eastern Gaul. The nature and quality of the education implicit in his authorship suggests that he was born to upper-class parents who could afford a traditional education, so he most likely belonged to a landowning family. His work reveals a keen interest in the

[26] G. De La Bédoyère, *Roman Britain: A New History* (London, 2006), p. 260.
[27] R. Fleming, *Britain after Rome: The Fall and Rise 400–1070* (London, 2010), p. 122.
[28] N. Faulkner, *The Decline and Fall of Roman Britain* (Stroud, 2000); S. Laycock, *Britannia: The Failed State* (Stroud, 2008).
[29] *Constance de Lyon*, ed. Borius, pp. 13–16.
[30] Wood, 'End of Roman Britain', p. 9.
[31] E. Le Blant, *Inscriptions chrétiennes de la Gaule antérieures au VIII^e siècle*, 3 vols (Paris, 1856), I, no. 34.

© 2014 John Wiley & Sons Ltd

operation of power in both the secular and ecclesiastical spheres, and in particular how these interacted, which may mean that his family and friends bridged the two. Constantius probably began his clerical career under Eucher, bishop of Lyon (434–50), an exegesist who had trained at Lérins.[32] Germanus founded a monastery outside Auxerre, and his close links with two other ex-monks of Lérins, Lupus and Hilary, bishop of Arles,[33] place him firmly in the monastic camp. These connections help explain Constantius's choice of Germanus as his subject.

His Life of Bishop Germanus of Auxerre in forty-six chapters is Constantius's only surviving work. There are no internal dates. Nor is the Life itself closely dated. It was long thought to have been composed in the 470s or 480s, with a preponderant view of *c.*480.[34] However, Richard Sharpe has recently argued convincingly that it was likely to have been written anything up to two decades earlier.[35] The primary letter of dedication which prefaces the Life states that it was composed initially for Patiens, bishop of Lyon into the early 470s but perhaps not much later.[36] This is confirmed by the second letter, which suggests that the *vita* had originally circulated within a very limited circle but had latterly come to the attention of Censurius, bishop of Auxerre.[37] Given its focus, Censurius naturally wished it to be read more widely and the second letter gives the author's permission for its broader dissemination.

If the Life was written in the 460s or, at latest, the early 470s, Constantius's own life overlapped with that of Germanus, perhaps by as much as two decades. One at least of those accompanying Germanus to Britain, Bishop Lupus, was still living when Constantius wrote his *vita*, and Constantius may well have known him. If not, then it seems fair to assume that he knew men who did. He may well earlier also have met Bishop Severus, who only died in the mid-450s. The bishops will have been accompanied to Britain by clergy and servants, some at least of whom may well have been closer to Constantius's generation and acquainted with him. There is a *prima facie* case, therefore, to think Constantius comparatively well informed about Germanus.

[32] *Constance de Lyon*, ed. Borius, p. 16.

[33] R.W. Mathisen, 'Hilarius, Germanus, and Lupus: The Aristocratic Background of the Chelidonius Affair', *Phoenix* 33.2 (1979), pp. 160–9.

[34] Wood, 'End of Roman Britain', p. 9; Thompson, *St Germanus of Auxerre*, p. 1, suggested 480–90; E. James, *Britain in the First Millennium* (London, 2001), pp. 79–80, suggested *c.*480.

[35] R. Sharpe, 'Martyrs and Local Saints in Late Antique Britain', in A. Thacker and R. Sharpe (eds), *Local Saints and Local Churches in the Early Medieval West* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 115–16, n. 165.

[36] Patiens was bishop *c.*451 at least until the early 470s; the initial draft must have been completed by his death.

[37] Censurius was bishop until his death *c.*486, so the second dedication was necessarily added by about then. Censurius was known as a keen promoter of the cult of Germanus.

© 2014 John Wiley & Sons Ltd

There are ways that we can test this. For example, the geographical framework which Constantius offered for his work is generally plausible. Although the Life was eventually welcomed at Auxerre, some 230 kms to the north of Lyon (and somewhat further by road), it was not a work with horizons local to Auxerre or initially written for that audience.[38] Comparatively little of the action occurs in Germanus's own cathedral or at the monastery which he founded, and his tomb in its suburban basilica goes unmentioned. Rather, the focus is on Germanus the miracle-worker, often in the context of lengthy journeys. Only the first nine chapters focus on Auxerre itself and these are in a sense preparatory; in X and XI Germanus was travelling in Gaul, XII to XVIII cover his first visit to Britain, XIX to XXIV a journey to Arles, in XXV to XXVII he was back in Britain, then he set out for Italy in XXIX and died there. Auxerre was established as his primary locus in the first chapter, therefore, but the river Yonne on which it stands does occur later.[39] Constantius is often not very specific about Germanus's movements, but what he does offer is coherent. He presented the bishop's travels as generally directed to major cities or dioceses of the empire (as Ravenna, Arles, Italy, Britain), often in response to appeals from whole diocesan communities. His geographical references generally relate to the more distant journeys: Germanus visited Britain with the assistance of winds blowing from the 'Bay of Gaul';[40] his visit to Arles was via the river Saône and Lyon (of course Constantius had obvious reasons for including the latter);[41] and his final journey, to Ravenna, was via Autun, the Alps and Milan.[42] Lesser places named are *Alesia* (Alise-Sainte-Reine, about 75 km from Auxerre), where Germanus had a particularly close friend in Senator, and Piacenza in the Po valley, on the roads connecting Gaul with Ravenna,[43] where Constantius located a post-mortem healing miracle.

Constantius states in his first dedication that it was his purpose to give wider credit to Germanus's many virtues and, in particular, make his miracles more widely known. This purpose is reinforced at the close, when he asserts that the attested miracles that he has not included are more numerous than those that he had.[44] This speaks to a theme of incompleteness to which he referred in the second dedication, and then

[38] As Knight, *End of Antiquity*, p. 60.
[39] *VG*, VI.
[40] *VG*, XIII; presumably part of the northern coastline of modern France, since he was clearly crossing the Channel. Borius (*Constance de Lyon*, pp. 84, 212) supposed that he followed the Seine valley towards the coast, then crossed from Upper Normandy, so avoiding the Saxon settlements closer to Calais and in Lower Normandy.
[41] *VG*, XXIII.
[42] *VG*, XXX, XXXI, XXXV.
[43] *VG*, XXII, XLV.
[44] *VG*, XLVI.

© 2014 John Wiley & Sons Ltd

again in the preface. Such is, to an extent, part of the authorial modesty which was a conventional part of the opening lines of any *vita* of the period, which is reinforced here by an equally conventional (but unnecessary) apology for the rusticity of his Latin. However, it also underlines the agenda being followed throughout, for the *Vita Germani* is very much a selection of miracles framed by life stories, which serve as the essential proof of divine approval of the saint, his ascetism, deeds, theological stance and piety. What interested Constantius was less the bishop's life story itself (though that does provide a skeleton for the whole) than the evidence provided by a succession of miracles for Germanus's role as Christ's agent in opposing a variety of errors, both religious and political.

In a sense this is, as Wood proposed (above), a handbook on the role of bishops, but in practice it neglects whole areas of episcopal duty (including such fundamentals as the Mass, baptism, consecration and ordination) in favour of exorcism, preaching, the defence of orthodoxy and protection of the lay community vis-à-vis various threats. Indeed, Germanus presents as something of a classical hero-figure, performing strenuous deeds on behalf of whichever deserving communities asked for his aid.[45] It was this style of episcopal leadership through prompt and selfless service to the community that Constantius was promoting. At the core is Germanus's practice of asceticism outside the cloister, which Constantius highlights in particular in Chapters III and IV, but to which he returns repeatedly, portraying hardships and deprivation willingly suffered by his hero as equivalent to martyrdom. It was this model of the ascetic bishop who lived both as a solitary and in the world that Constantius was offering as a path by which to achieve sanctity.[46]

In line with this agenda, Constantius was not much interested in Germanus's early life: his family connections are unnamed and un-located more closely than by reference to Auxerre; his childhood receives minimal and entirely conventional attention; the bald fact of his marriage is included but his wife and her family are unnamed, though her rank and fortune are asserted; his career as an advocate is passed over in little more than a single sentence, and his military role so briefly as to become a matter of debate as to whether it had ever occurred. His life story prior to elevation to the episcopacy was summarized entirely within Chapter I. Thereafter, the story of his elevation warranted a chapter (II), followed by claims for his exemplary asceticism (III–IV), the exceptional quality of his hospitality notwithstanding (V), and his success as a bishop and holy man (VI). From there onwards most chapters offer miracle

[45] A. Gillett, *Envoys and Political Communication in the Late Antique West, 411–533* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 126–7.
[46] *VG*, III–VI.

© 2014 John Wiley & Sons Ltd

stories. Some are stock miracles of a type to be found in the Bible and/or in pre-existing hagiographies. Others have individual features and even comparatively full detail regarding the individuals involved, which clearly relate to actual incidents which have then been retold hagiographically so as to underline the especial sanctity of the bishop. Let us take a single, early example, from Chapter VII, which has Germanus identifying a thief who had stolen gold that had been collected as taxes from Provence by his guest, Januarius, and then publicly exorcising the demon which had possessed the guilty man. The wealth of incidental information surrounding this event implies that a real incident underlay it; it is told here in a way which invests in Germanus's authority and status. This example affirms that Constantius's account often rested on comparatively good-quality information.

Understandably, perhaps, the *vita* is not consistent as regards the level of detail offered: the later chapters generally offer more information than the earlier, reflecting more detailed stories reaching Constantius from his hero's later life. Taking the inclusion of proper names as indicative, it is noticeable that there are comparatively few in the early chapters. Setting aside the dedication and omitting Germanus himself whose name of course occurs throughout, the first half of the work contains the names of only eight individuals: Januarius (above, VII), Pelagius (XII, XIV), Lupus (XII, XIII, XIV), Alban (XVI), Senator, Nectariola and Agrestius (XXII) and Hilary (XXIII). Of these, Pelagius was not contemporary. That four of these figures occur in the last two chapters, leaving just four across the first twenty-one, illustrates just how thin personal naming actually is in the earlier sections. Most of these individuals were very well-known figures, familiarity with whom required no particular knowledge of Germanus's life: Pelagius was a notorious heresiarch; Lupus was the long-lived bishop of Troyes, and Alban's cult must have been known to Constantius at Auxerre.[47] Apart from Germanus himself, Senator is the only character who appears in both halves of the life (recurring in XXIX);[48] he is represented as a particularly close friend of the bishop but the exceptional detail offered may mean that he and his wife were known not just to Germanus but to Patiens and/or Constantius as well.

By comparison, there are fourteen individuals named across the second half of the work: Auxiliaris occurs as Prefect of the Gauls (XXIV); Bishop

[47] Richard Sharpe has recently argued that Germanus was responsible for the shortest, and earliest, *Passio Albani*, version 'E' (see below): 'The Late Antique Passion of St Alban', in M. Henig and P. Lindley (eds), *Alban and St Albans: Roman and Medieval Architecture, Art, and Archaeology*, British Archaeological Association Transactions 24 (2001), pp. 30–7, *contra* the identification by W. Meyer of the longer, version 'T' as primary: 'Die Legende des h. Albanus des Protomartyr Angliae in Texten vor Beda', *Abhandlungen der Königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen*, philologischen-historische Klasse, ns 8 (1904), pp. 3–81.

[48] The only other candidate would be Pelagius, whose heresy is referred to again in XXV.

© 2014 John Wiley & Sons Ltd

Severus accompanied Germanus on his second visit to Britain; a leading Briton called Elafius appears in Chapters XXVI and XXVII; XXVIII refers to both the Roman commander Aëtius and the Alan king Goar; Senator reappears (XXIX); then Leporius (XXXIII), Bishop Peter (XXXV, XLIII), the Empress Placidia (XXXV, XLII, XLIII), Emperor Valentinian (XXXV), Volusianus (XXXVIII), Sigisvult (XXXVIII), Acolus/Acolius (XXXIX, XLIV) and Tibatto (XL) all occur in the context of Germanus's visit to Ravenna. The bulk of these clearly relate to the final year or so of Germanus's life. Most are again very prominent figures likely to have been known to Constantius by reputation, at least, and there is a clear grasp of context in most instances. Constantius's knowledge apparently improved, therefore, as Germanus's story reached forward towards his own time, allowing him to both detail and contextualize Germanus's deeds better. That said, the underlying historicity of the earlier half of his Life also seems generally secure.

The first visit to Britain

As has long been recognized, the fundamental fact of Germanus having visited Britain is confirmed by Prosper in his near-contemporary *Chronicle*. He notes, under the year 429, that Agricola, son of the Pelagian bishop Severianus, had infected the British church with his father's heresy and Germanus was sent by Pope Celestine as his representative on the advice of Palladius.[49] This Palladius was probably Germanus's deacon, despatched to Rome to obtain papal approval for a mission to Britain, and the same Palladius who was then sent by Celestine to Ireland in 431.[50] Celestine died in July 432.

Although it is far from proven, it is generally assumed on chronological grounds that the visit reported by Prosper was the first detailed by Constantius.[51] The narrative is significantly different, of course, but that need only reflect authors with very different agendas. Prosper was actively involved in the fight against Pelagianism and keen to place papal authority at the forefront of the defence of orthodoxy. Constantius was equally interested in confronting Pelagianism, but from a Gallic rather than a papal perspective. Reconciliation of the two accounts is feasible, but in

[49] *Prosperi Tironis epitome chronicon ed primum a CCCCXXXIII continuata ad a CCCCLV*, ed. T. Mommsen, *MGH Chronica Minora, Saec* IV, V, VI, VII, volume I, ed. T. Mommsen (Berlin, 1892), pp. 341–500 at p. 472.

[50] For Pelagianism in Britain, see R.A. Markus, 'Pelagianism: Britain and the Continent', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 37 (1986), pp. 191–204. For the papal position see T.M. Charles-Edwards, 'Palladius, Prosper, and Leo the Great: Mission and Primatial Authority', in D.N. Dumville (ed.), *Saint Patrick, A. D. 493–1993* (Woodbridge, 1993), pp. 1–12, at 7–8.

[51] For some hesitance on this issue, see R. Sharpe, 'The Late Antique Passion of St Alban', p. 37.

© 2014 John Wiley & Sons Ltd

general we should prefer the nearer-contemporary Prosper. For example, we should accept that there was some papal involvement in this initiative, to which Constantius does not refer. That said, it is important to acknowledge this confirmation that Germanus did visit Britain to preach against Pelagianism.

It is against this backdrop that we should evaluate Constantius's account of Germanus's first visit. It occurs in Chapters XII to XVIII, which comprise something like a sixth of the total work.[52] Like other journeys it was triggered by a request for assistance: the Britons putatively importuned the Gaulish bishops collectively, who in turn called upon Germanus and Lupus. As already noted, Germanus answering appeals is a common motif in this work.[53] There are parallels with his election (II), the appeal of a ghost for burial of his and a companion's bodies (X), his efforts to protect his own diocesans from taxation (XIX), the second visit to Britain (XXV), and his final journey to Ravenna to intercede on behalf of the Armoricans (XXVIII). The principal feature which distances the two appeals from Britain from these other claims on his time and energy is the presence of an intermediary body, the bishops of Gaul, to whom the Britons appealed rather than to Germanus directly. Given that the insular church had sent delegates to the synod of Arles in the early fourth century, and would again to the Council of Paris in 614, it is possible that there was a tradition of British representatives attending Gaulish synods, in which case Constantius may have had that context in mind, but the case is fragile.[54] Alternatively, this may have been a less formal meeting: there is plenty of evidence that some Gaulish bishops met on an ad hoc basis quite frequently. The appearance here of the bishops of Gaul en masse provided Constantius with a vehicle through which to associate the entire Gaulish church with the mission, so implying that it was united against Pelagianism. Such would have had obvious value to the Augustinian party in later fifth-century Gaul, but this does not negate the story that some sort of meeting occurred.

Constantius established Germanus as a Christ-figure early on in his account of the first visit. In particular, his calming of the tempest en route to Britain parallels Christ's calming of a storm on the Sea of Galilee;[55] Constantius told the tale at greater length than his biblical exemplar,

[52] Seven of forty-six chapters, but these include none of the very short chapters (as V, XXXVII, XL, XLV) encountered elsewhere.

[53] Gillett, *Envoys and Political Communication*, p. 127.

[54] That no other reference exists to a Gaulish synod in 428/9 does nothing to support such a construct: Thompson, *St Germanus of Auxerre*, p. 79.

[55] Matthew XVIII.23–7; Mark IV.35–41; Luke VIII.22–5. The theme of a tempest at sea associated with the gods also occurs in classical literature, as Virgil's *Aeneid* I.34–156, which Constantius knew: *Constance de Lyon*, ed. Borius, p. 8.

© 2014 John Wiley & Sons Ltd

adding numerous details. For example, he had the storm roused by demons opposed to the bishops' journey to Britain. Demons and evil spirits are encountered in ten different chapters of this *vita*,[56] marking them as a favoured literary ploy. Such encounters are, of course, a standard topos in the New Testament: casting out demons was a feature of Christ's healing miracles and he gave his followers authority to do the same.[57] Germanus's recurring ability to do this therefore confirmed the bishop's faith, apostolic status and Catholic orthodoxy. That Christ's miracle of exorcism involving the Gadarene swine is the very next story in the Testaments following his calming of the Galilean sea may have encouraged Constantius to depict Germanus's storm itself as demonically inspired.[58] The chapter closes with Germanus and his companions safely landed on shore where great crowds had gathered to meet him, reminiscent of those surrounding Christ on the Mount and/or beside the Sea of Galilee.[59] The tale is told, therefore, through a mélange of biblical analogy predominantly taken from the same section of the Bible. The purpose was to present Germanus as a Christ-figure and miracle-worker, and his opponents as demonic or demonically inspired.

The same theme continues into Chapter XIV, but with Germanus and Lupus now compared with the apostles. The contest with the Pelagians is depicted through biblical analogies: the Pelagians are possessed by evil spirits which are exorcized by the bishops, in a contest which has debts once more to the story of the Gadarene swine but owes something also to the contest of Elijah with the priests of Baal,[60] and the contests of Barnabas and Saul with both Elymas the sorcerer and the priest of Jupiter at Lystra.[61] The lavish clothes of the Pelagians contrast with the drab garb in which Constantius clothed Germanus in Chapter IV, underlining his saintly asceticism. The whole meeting is depicted in generalized terms, therefore, though that does not mean that it is necessarily fictional.

Chapter XV is a straightforward healing miracle. At the urging of his opponents as well as her parents and others, Germanus cured the blindness of a ten-year-old girl. The age of the child perhaps reads as a metaphor for the period during which Pelagianism was considered to have been spreading in Britain;[62] blindness was used similarly as a metaphor by Gildas,[63] and occurs widely in the Bible, both in Christ's miracles

[56] VII, VIII, IX, XIII, XIX, XXII, XXV, XXVI, XXXII, XXXIX.
[57] Matthew X.1; Mark XVI.17.
[58] Matthew VIII.28–34; Mark V.1–20; Luke VIII.26–40.
[59] Matthew VIII.1, 18.
[60] I Kings XVIII.21.
[61] Acts XIII.4–12; XIV.8–18.
[62] Wood, 'End of Roman Britain', p. 10; Knight, *End of Antiquity*, p. 61.
[63] Gildas, *De Excidio Britanniae* XXIII.1.

© 2014 John Wiley & Sons Ltd

and those of the Apostles; there are parallels also with the blinding of St Paul.[64] This miracle, therefore, symbolizes Germanus's recovery of Britain from the spiritual blindness of the Pelagian heresy.

With that achieved, Germanus and Lupus in XVI then visited the shrine of St Alban. Constantius tells his audience very little about this visit, focusing instead on two miracles which occurred on the way: Germanus's miraculous escape from a house fire and his healing through the visitation of an angel. These, of course, further validate Germanus as a humble agent of the Lord in the Augustinian tradition. There exists, though, a second, fuller and earlier witness to this episode: Richard Sharpe has now established that the shortest ('E') version of the *passio Albani* is the oldest now surviving, and should be associated with the visit by Germanus. The bishop's actions conclude the *passio*: St Germanus placed relics which he had brought with him in the grave and took away a lump of earth stained with the martyr's blood. With the exception of this final passage, within which *beatus* applied to Germanus implies that he was already dead, the *passio* should probably be read as a manuscript copy of a text displayed at a church which Germanus had built and dedicated to St Alban at Auxerre. If so, its composition lies no later than the 430s or 440s; Constantius did not need to elaborate Germanus's actions at the tomb because his circle was already familiar with the story.[65]

Ian Wood has taken this interpretation a stage further. It is the 'T' text of the *passio Albani* that informs us that the text was displayed by Germanus on *tituli*.[66] This same later version also inserts the claim that Germanus experienced a vision of St Alban through which he learned the story of the latter's martyrdom. This has led Wood to conjecture that Germanus invented both the story and even the name Alban in support of his campaign against Pelagianism in Britain.[67]

However, this exciting and thought-provoking reinterpretation is probably pressing the available evidence too far. Assuming that 'T' is a later continental elaboration of the earlier 'E' text,[68] its author is unlikely

[64] Acts XXVI.14–18.

[65] Sharpe, 'The Late Antique Passion', pp. 30–7; for the 'T' and 'P' versions of the *passio*, see Meyer, 'Die Legende des h. Albanus des Protomartyr Angliae in Texten vor Beda'; W. Levison, 'St Alban and St Alban's', *Antiquity* 15 (1941), pp. 337–59; a corrected version of the 'E' text is very usefully printed at the close of Wood's 'Levison and St Alban', at pp. 183–5.

[66] Sharpe, 'The Late Antique Passion', p. 36, translates this as 'placards'; Wood prefers the idea of a text painted within panels on the wall, perhaps with images as well: I. Wood, 'Levison and St Alban', in M. Becher and Y. Hen (eds), *Wilelm Levison (1876–1947). Ein Jüdisches Forscherleben Zwischen Wissenschaft licher Anerkennung und Politischen Exil* (Siegburg, 2010), pp. 171–85, at p. 174.

[67] Wood, 'Levison and St Alban', p. 177; 'Germanus, Alban and Auxerre', *Bulletin du centre d'études médiévales d'Auxerre* 13 (2009), pp. 123–9, at p. 125.

[68] The 'T' manuscript is late eighth/early ninth century; the text was perhaps somewhat earlier but it is most unlikely to pre-date the Carolingian era.

© 2014 John Wiley & Sons Ltd

to have had fresh information regarding events in Britain in the early fifth century to add to what already existed in the 'E' text. If the *tituli* were in Auxerre,[69] then this redactor should probably be accepted as a reliable witness to them. He cannot, though, be considered authoritative when adding Germanus's receipt of the *passio* story direct from Alban. Instead, the 'E' version has Germanus coming to 'Alban's *basilica*, bearing relics of all the apostles and of several martyrs'. Implicit here is the assumption that Germanus was already aware of the cult of St Alban when leaving Gaul, and that he brought with him offerings with the express purpose of depositing them in this famous tomb. This would make good sense in terms of his mission, claiming Britain's most famous cult for Catholicism, and implies a well-planned anti-Pelagian strategy worked out on the Continent before embarkation, with St Alban in mind.[70] It cannot be reconciled with his stumbling upon an otherwise unknown and anonymous cult.

There is independent evidence that the cult of St Alban was known on the near-Continent by *c.*400. Victricius of Rouen, who had himself earlier visited Britain, arguably had St Alban in mind when mentioning a saint who 'instructed rivers to draw back, lest he should be delayed in his haste' (to martyrdom).[71] This parallels part of the story as told in the *passio*, but, as Wood notes,[72] Vitricius does not actually name the saint. This does not, though, imply that he was ignorant of the name since the reference comes in an extended list of similar allusions to *passiones* over which he was proposing that his readers should linger.[73] That he named none of them suggests rather that all were sufficiently well known for an allusion to their *passio* to be sufficient in each case to identify the martyr. While we cannot be certain, it seems most unlikely that Victricius was here referring to an anonymous cult; Albanus and his *passio* were most probably well-known at Rouen by 400.

Further support for an active cult at this date comes from recent archaeological exploration of the abbey site at St Albans, which overlays a Romano-British cemetery of the late third-to-fifth centuries. Part of this was out of use by the later fourth century, giving way to a spread of gravel onto which numerous Roman coins, fragments of pottery and shards of glass had accumulated. The excavators suggest that the evidence is

[69] As opposed to Verulamium: Wood, 'Levison and St Albans', p. 175, n. 26; 'Germanus, Alban and Auxerre', p. 125.

[70] Wood, 'The End of Roman Britain', pp. 12–13.

[71] Victricius of Rouen, *De Laude Sanctorum* XII.104, in *Foebadius, Victricius, Leporius, Vincentius Lerinensis, Evagrius, Rubricius*, ed. R. Demeulenaere, CCSL 64 (Turnhout, 1985), pp. 69–93, at p. 92. For a translation, see G. Clark, 'Victricius of Rouen: Praising the Saints', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 7.3 (1999), pp. 365–99, at pp. 397–8.

[72] Wood, 'Levison and St Alban', p. 178.

[73] Victricius, *De Laude Sanctorum* XII.104–5, at pp. 92–3.

© 2014 John Wiley & Sons Ltd

entirely consistent with concentrations of visitors to a shrine, the main basilica of which is likely to have lain downhill from the excavations.[74] To suppose that this activity centred on an anonymous cult seems improbable. Where cults did decay in early medieval Britain, it is generally the story which was lost first, not the name.[75]

While Wood makes an interesting case for Alban's name being devised by Germanus as a 'native of Britain' (from *Alba*/*Albion*) and/or as a 'symbol of the neophyte British Church' (from *alba*, Latin for white),[76] neither seems very likely. *Albion* was an ancient name for Britain recorded by Pliny but already probably obsolete in the later Roman period,[77] though later revived by Bede,[78] so unlikely to be known to Germanus. Such associations may, of course, have helped with later promotion of the cult, but that is a different matter. The name derives originally from the town of Alba Longa in Latium, where are also *Lacus Albanus* and *Mons Albanus*;[79] it was supposedly destroyed by the Romans in early antiquity and its population re-settled at Rome. There was an imperial villa there in the early empire and it was later the birthplace of Pope Innocent (401/2–17).[80] The name is evidenced in Britain on a tombstone found at Cirencester, and on the handle of an imported bronze *trulla* (a handled skillet) found at the Roman fort site at Broxtowe, Nottinghamshire.[81] That both names were arguably those of non-Britons opens up the possibility that Albanus was either himself an immigrant or at least of immigrant origins.

Looking across all the evidence, therefore, Alban's name and story were well known in Britain and in Gaul by the late fourth century. When Germanus set out he did so already prepared to involve Alban's cult in his campaign against Pelagianism. He therefore brought the relics of various Catholic saints with him which he deposited in the tomb, and took away a sod of earth which later served as a relic for his new church at Auxerre. Though it is nowhere stated, it seems unlikely that the events described

[74] M. Biddle and B. Kjølbye-Biddle, 'The Origins of St Albans Abbey: Romano-British Cemetery and Anglo-Saxon Monastery', in Henig and Lindsey (eds), *Alban and St Albans*, 45–77; M. Biddle, 'Alban (d. c 303)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004), <www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/272> [accessed 10 Jan 2013]. For wider archaeological discussion, see J. Wacher, *The Towns of Roman Britain*, 2nd edn (London, 1995), pp. 214–41; R. Niblett, 'St Albans in the post-Roman Period', in R. Niblett and I. Thompson, *Alban's Buried Towns: An Assessment of St Alban's Archaeology up to AD 1600* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 166–77.

[75] As Sts Aaron and Julius at Caerleon, and St Sixtus in south-east England.

[76] Wood, 'Levison and St Alban', pp. 178–9; 'Germanus, Alban and Auxerre', p. 125.

[77] A.L.F. Rivet and C. Smith, *The Place-Names of Roman Britain* (London, 1979), p. 248.

[78] Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica* I.1.

[79] C.T. Lewis and L. Short, *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford, 1878).

[80] *The Book of Pontiffs*, ed. and trans. R. Davies, 2nd edn (Liverpool, 2000), XVII, at p. 32.

[81] R.G. Collingwood and R.P. Wright, *The Roman Inscriptions of Britain*, I, *Inscriptions on Stone* (Oxford, 1965), no. 108; S.S. Frere and R.S.O. Tomlinson (eds), *The Roman Inscriptions of Britain*, II, Fascicule 2 (Stroud, 1991), pp. 44–5.

© 2014 John Wiley & Sons Ltd

could have occurred anywhere but Verulamium – the name is provided first by Gildas, though he does not specifically state that Alban's death occurred there.[82] The earliest surviving *passio*, the 'E' text, was almost certainly written at Auxerre following the visit of Germanus to Alban's tomb. The last passage, detailing the bishop's visit, was necessarily added following Germanus's death, though perhaps not much later, when the first manuscript copy was made. The remainder was written in or on a church dedicated to St Alban which Germanus built at Auxerre. Behind this text, in turn, was a *passio* already containing elements at least of the familiar story transmitted either orally or in manuscript form, which was the source used by Germanus.

What follows in the last two chapters of the *vita* that deal with the first visit to Britain (XVII, XVIII) is Constantius's account of the 'Alleluia Victory'. This is the one place in this work where Constantius sought to develop Germanus as the physical protector of his flock, as well as their spiritual and diplomatic champion.[83] In preparation, he is seen baptizing the soldiers in camp at Easter. Whether the Britons were pagan or heretics in unclear,[84] but their baptism by a Catholic bishop claimed the subsequent victory for the Catholic church and positioned Germanus as God's champion in ways familiar from the Old Testament. The nature of the enemy force interested Constantius very little; joint action by Saxons and Picts seems unlikely. He later (in XVIII) referred to the Saxons alone, implying that all that really mattered to him was that they were pagan barbarians. The core of the account, in XVIII, then reads as follows:

> And now the fierce multitude of the enemy approached, that they looked to draw into the ambushes they had prepared, when suddenly Germanus reminded and instructed [them] of the universal sign, that they should respond with one voice with a war-cry [*clamor*] and with a confident enemy still sure that their arrival was unexpected the bishops three times chanted the Alleluia. All followed with one voice and the exalted war-cry [*clamor*] rang through the air and multiplied,

[82] *De Excidio Britanniae* X.2: Gildas called Alban 'the Verulamian' (*sanctum Albanum Verolamiensem*); his reference to the Thames as the river which parted to allow Alban to walk across may imply that Alban's trial and execution occurred at London, with his body then removed to his native Verulamium for burial, but Gildas may have been mistaken in this. It is generally agreed that Gildas had a version of the *passio* but that it is not clear which, though his assumption that this persecution occurred under Diocletian conflicts with the 'T' version, which offers Severus. Both were probably independently attempting to develop the information offered by the 'E' text, which does not offer a date. For recent discussion, see K. George, *Gildas's* DEB *and the Early British Church* (Woodbridge, 2009), pp. 110–26.

[83] That this had considerable dangers for a hagiographical work is pointed out by Jones, 'The Historicity of the Alleluja Victory', pp. 363–7.

[84] They are generally assumed to have been pagan but the inference here may be that they were heretic.

© 2014 John Wiley & Sons Ltd

> shut in the mountains. The enemy army was struck down by terror, thinking not only that the surrounding rocks were falling down on them but even the sky itself, and the belief spread, in fear, that swiftness of foot could scarcely save them. They fled in all directions, threw down their arms, glad to save only their bare bodies. Many were even devoured in their panic by the precipitous river which they had crossed in good order on their approach.

By the standards of Constantius's 'British' chapters to this point, the telling is comparatively sober and the miraculous little in evidence. Nor is the 'Alleluia Victory' obviously a biblical topos: the only candidate so far proposed is that of the fall of the walls of Jericho,[85] but dissimilarities outweigh parallels to the point where the connection seems no more than an allusion at best.[86] Reference to mountains might suggest that the setting was contrived, given the general absence of mountainous landscapes from southern England, but there are plenty of steep-sided valleys in, for example, the Weald or the Downs, which could have provided the necessary backdrop that has been exaggerated in the telling by an author with no personal experience of Britain.

This victory provided Constantius with an opportunity to enhance his portrait of Germanus in ways which were supportive of his agenda: by terming him *dux* in Chapter I, he had already hinted that Germanus had held military rank, providing a warrior's protection to his people prior to his election as bishop, even though the historicity of this claim is disputed.[87] It is only in the 'Alleluia Victory' that this allusion is then developed, with the saintly bishops taking over leadership of a dispirited British army, injecting it with purpose and leading it to a glorious but bloodless triumph. Clearly, it was central to Constantius's purpose to emphasize the importance of Catholic faith, and this was a victory gained 'by faith and not by force'. So, too, did the victory give him the opportunity to couple the Pelagians with the Saxons and Picts as worsted opponents of Germanus, to the disadvantage of theological opponents in late fifth-century Gaul, who were, implicitly at least, being categorized alongside savage barbarian sea-raiders.

In default of biblical or hagiographical exemplars from which it could have originated, it seems very likely that a real event underpins this account.[88] At the core of the 'Alleluia Victory' is the dramatic effect of a war-cry repeated several times by a force lying in ambush, just as their

[85] Offered by Wood, 'End of Roman Britain', p. 11.
[86] The lack of walls, marching of circuits and trumpets are clear dissimilarities.
[87] It failed to impress Wood, 'End of Roman Britain', p. 14, but is accepted by E. James, *Britain in the First Millennium* (London, 2001), p. 80.
[88] Jones, 'The Historicity of the Alleluja Victory', p. 367.

© 2014 John Wiley & Sons Ltd

opponents came up to them. Such fits well with the recommended practice of war as set out by Vegetius, in what became the principle manual of warfare in late antiquity and the Middle Ages:[89]

> The shout [*clamor*], however, which they [barbarian soldiers] call the *barritum*, ought not to be raised before both forces meet; for it is an act of the inexperienced or the cowardly to shout at a distance, because the enemy are more terrified if the horror of the battle-cry [*clamor*] comes at the same time as the flow of weapons.

This was a work which was already circulating in the west in the fifth century,[90] and could well have been read by Germanus. The 'Alleluia Victory' reads as an application of contemporary military practice. It does seem very likely, therefore, that Germanus and Lupus did take charge of a small British force and used their knowledge of contemporary military tactics to rout a barbarian war band. The historicity of the 'Alleluia Victory' rests exclusively on the Life, which is our sole witness, but it has to be said in support that it forms a prominent part of the first visit to Britain by Germanus, the main events of which otherwise seem essentially factual.

Back in Gaul

Constantius rounded off the story of Germanus's first visit to Britain as a glorious success, with both spiritual and human foes defeated, allowing the bishops to return to Gaul across seas whose calmness reflected their achievements at least as much as the weather (XVIII). Germanus returned to find his diocese oppressed by excessive taxation (XIX), so set out to seek remedy from the imperial authorities in Arles. The story of the loss of his horse to a thief was told in XX, then XXI makes great claims for the bishop's charisma in the settlements through which he passed, where whole populations turned out to meet him. In XXII we find the account of a miracle which is fuller in detail, with reference not only to the place (*Alesia*: see above) but also three individuals – Senator, Nectariola and Agrestius – which suggests a historical basis to these events. In XXIII, Germanus passed through Lyon, where Constantius tells us at length about the manner of his reception. Constantius will have known eyewitnesses, if he was not one himself. The narrative then jumps

[89] Flavius Vegetius Renatus, *Epitoma Rei Militaris* XVIII, ed. and trans. Leo F. Stern (New York, 1990), pp. 184–7; the translation here is my own.

[90] The latest estimates of its composition focus on the reign of Valentinian III (423–55) but it could be late fourth century: *Epitoma Rei Militaris*, ed. Stern, pp. xiv, xv.

© 2014 John Wiley & Sons Ltd

to Germanus's arrival in Arles, omitting all the places in between. This emphasizes what we have already deduced, that Constantius was writing for an audience centred on Lyon, and was portraying Germanus as an exemplary bishop who defended his people and the Catholic church. It was in the former capacity that Germanus then (in XXIV) met with the Prefect, Auxiliaris, at Arles, impressing the latter by his knowledge and *gravitas* and persuading Auxiliaris to relieve his diocesans of their excessive tax burden. In confirmation of his status, Germanus then cured the Prefect's wife of illness before returning to Auxerre.

The second visit to Britain

In regard to the second visit, the central issue is its consistency with the chronology of the later career of Germanus. His death was traditionally placed in the late 440s,[91] but in response to perceived difficulties with Constantius's account, arguments were raised by both Thompson and Wood in favour of the 430s.[92] However, the issue has now been reconsidered at some length by Anthony Barrett,[93] whose reasoning regarding the date of death shifts the weight of probability back to the later 440s. A consequence of this re-examination of the chronology is recognition that the second visit made by Germanus to Britain is a poor fit with the other events which surround it in the *vita*. We are left with only two options: either to follow Barrett (and ultimately Chadwick) in dismissing the second visit as unhistorical, or to assume that the sequence as outlined by Constantius is flawed and the second visit occurred earlier.

The second visit is told more briefly than the first, in only three chapters, and conditions are represented as far less hostile than those confronting him previously: Pelagianism was now only being spread by a few misguided individuals and the demons which had been vanquished previously were now unable to raise a storm against him. Germanus, with Bishop Severus this time, was, therefore, represented as returning to Britain to reinforce his earlier triumphs rather than to achieve them *ab initio*. Once more evil spirits were active, alerting the populace to the bishops' arrival, but this time there was no full-scale confrontation necessary and no exorcism, for those who were involved were few and easily identified (XXVI). Constantius developed this story by reference to a named British leader, one 'Elafius', whose son was a cripple with a deformed leg that Germanus then cured miraculously. This should

[91] As Wessel, 'Germanus von Auxerre (um 378 bis 448)'; R. Mathisen, 'The Last Year of Saint Germanus of Auxerre', *Analecta Bollandiana* 99 (1981), pp. 151–9.
[92] Thompson, *St Germanus of Auxerre*, pp. 55–70; Wood, 'End of Roman Britain', pp. 15–17.
[93] A.A. Barrett, 'Saint Germanus and the British Missions', *Britannia* 40 (2010), pp. 197–217.

© 2014 John Wiley & Sons Ltd

probably be read allegorically, centring on the lameness of faith and the sense in which British Christianity was malformed by heresy, as opposed to utter blindness at the time of the first visit. This is, therefore, a very similar mechanism to the one that Constantius used to validate the first visit, but selected so as to put over a less-damaged condition.

The brevity and excessive generality of this account have long encouraged scholars to see Constantius as virtually without information regarding the second visit to Britain beyond its occurrence,[94] or even to doubt that it occurred at all.[95] However, information offered here is unlikely to be entirely fictional. Firstly there is Germanus's new companion, Bishop Severus, who was a major figure in eastern Gaul during Constantius's life and whose life story was presumably well known in outline at least at the time of writing. Had the second visit been entirely invention, it seems most unlikely that Constantius would have included Severus. Secondly there is Elafius, who is the only British figure whom Constantius named at all. This is a Romanized Greek name.[96] Of course, Britain received Greek-speaking visitors and settlers during the Roman period: that their naming practices had some influence within insular society is evidenced by Pelagius himself, who similarly bore a Romanized Greek name. There are in addition numerous inscriptions on portable objects found in Britain using Greek lettering, some of which provide Greek names. That the name Elafius should have been borne by a high-ranking Briton in the 430s, is not, therefore, implausible. It would not, though, be the obvious choice if the account were fictional. Thirdly, the Pelagians were to be identified, condemned, brought to the bishops and then conducted by them to the Continent. This treatment derives from a law enacted by Emperor Honorius in 418,[97] and is paralleled by comments in Prosper's *Contra Collatorum*, where he credited Pope Celestine with removing the Pelagians from Britain through Germanus.[98] For it to appear in the *vita* implies that this passage was based on stories reaching Constantius from participants in the visits. The whole episode comes from the later part of Constantius's Life, which we have already established is better provided with factual detail than earlier sections.

On balance, therefore, it seems quite possible that Germanus did visit Britain a second time and that he was accompanied by Bishop Severus,

[94] As R.P.C. Hanson, *Saint Patrick: His Origins and Career* (Oxford, 1968), p. 50.
[95] Chadwick, *Poetry and Letters*, p. 259; Barrett, 'Saint Germanus', *passim*.
[96] Thompson, *St Germanus of Auxerre*, p. 9: in contrast, all those named by Gildas are either Roman or British names.
[97] Charles-Edwards, 'Palladius, Prosper, and Leo the Great', pp. 7–8.
[98] Prosper, *Contra Collatorem* XXI, <www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/04z/z_0390-0465_Prosperus_Aquitanus_Pro_Augustino_Liber_Contra_Collatorem_MLT.pdf.html> [accessed 7 January 2014].

© 2014 John Wiley & Sons Ltd

though the dating of this event is necessarily in flux. The overall context of the second mission was very different to the first, with the need to reinforce earlier efforts rather than to begin again from scratch.[99] While in Britain it does seem likely that he met a prominent individual called Elafius. The bishops sought to isolate, condemn and remove into exile those teaching Pelagianism, though precisely who these were remains unclear.

While the historicity of the second visit must remain in question, therefore, it should not be written off. Why, though, did Constantius include it at all and why, having done so, did he make so little of it? Given Constantius's own comment that he left out more than he included, the first is an important point, particularly since the second visit does upset the carefully ordered succession of Germanus's journeys, which otherwise progress smoothly up the scale of difficulty. First is a local trip within Gaul which brought him into contact with no one of any political note (X–XI), then come a succession of ever-more impressive journeys associating him with ever-more important individuals that culminates in an arduous, long-distance trip across the Alps to the imperial court at Ravenna. The first visit to Britain across the Channel and then the long journey to the regional imperial headquarters at Arles fit well in this sequence, but the second visit to Britain offers nothing to the progression, taking Germanus back to a location in which his achievements had already been described at some length. Given that Constantius might have decided to omit it altogether so as not to disturb the rhetorical structure of his Life, its inclusion was necessarily for cogent reasons.

What, therefore, was Constantius seeking to achieve by including the second visit to Britain? Although Prosper's *Chronicle* refers only to Germanus in its description of the first visit, omitting Lupus altogether, it is quite possible that in Gaul this first visit was viewed very much as a joint venture, credit for which was shared and responsibility for which lay with the Gaulish church as a whole, rather than Germanus in particular. Indeed, Lupus's much longer survival may have encouraged the view by the 460s that the bulk of the credit for the achievements of the first visit should go to Lupus rather than Germanus. By including the second visit, Constantius was able to reposition Germanus as the central figure in these 'British' episodes, simply because it was Germanus alone who had made both visits. In that case, the purpose within the Life of the second visit was primarily to sustain Germanus's ownership of the first. If that were the main reason then it was unnecessary to offer much detail, since the very fact that Germanus participated in both was the key point that

[99] Although Pelagian views continued to circulate in Britain after this date, leaving some doubt as to the actual effectiveness of Germanus's efforts.

© 2014 John Wiley & Sons Ltd

Constantius was here seeking to establish. This is Constantius at his most subtle, therefore, demonstrating his command of his material, rather than struggling with inadequate sources to make any comment at all.

Chapter XXVII closes with the peaceful return of the two bishops to Gaul, where Germanus was met with yet another petition from a suffering people to aid them in their need. This time it was the Armoricans seeking protection from the threat of barbarian assault in punishment for their rebellion, a punishment unleashed by Aëtius as representative of Roman authority. Germanus's attempt to persuade the emperor to countermand the punishment dominates the remainder of the Life, taking him all the way to Ravenna and his death there (XLII), after which his body was returned triumphantly to Gaul. At the close, his authority and *gravitas* are clearly manifested even at the heart of imperial power, at Ravenna, and the Life successfully conjures the image of a bishop whose pleas on behalf of his people were listened to within the highest counsels in the land.

Conclusion

Very properly, there has been a reaction against the broad acceptance of Constantius's account of Germanus in Britain that was standard before World War II. That account is highly rhetorical in style, voiced from a particular perspective and designed to present Germanus in particular ways, using a range of Christian metaphors and literary strategies to carry the author's agenda forward. At its very core, this is a Life told through exhibitions of the miraculous. However, behind the miracles the *vita* does offer a chronologically organized overview of some at least of the bishop's actions from his elevation until his death. While there remains room for disagreement regarding the reading of particular metaphors, the broad outline of the account in Chapters XII to XVI of his first visit to Britain seems well established:[100] it is based on an actual visit regarding which Constantius had some broadly reliable information. While the basic events are historical he wrote them into his *vita* in a style familiar from other sections: the low levels of interest in geography and lack of individual names are not out of place, particularly in the first half of the work; the deployment of demons and evil spirits as opponents of Germanus is a common feature; so too is the conversion of mundane events into miracle stories, or the lacing of an otherwise factually based account with miracles taken from the Bible. Constantius's practice throughout was to write up actual events in ways capable of supporting his overarching

[100] The foundations having been laid effectively by Wood in 1984.

© 2014 John Wiley & Sons Ltd

depiction of Germanus as an exemplary Catholic bishop in the Augustinian camp. This affects how he treats Germanus's first visit to Britain, which is clearly allowed space according to its value to that agenda, but is notwithstanding based on an actual visit.

From the historical perspective, two episodes within the first visit stand out: Germanus's interest in the cult of Alban and the 'Alleluia Victory'. Germanus prepared for his visit to St Alban's tomb with care, bringing with him from the Continent a range of continental relics and taking away with him a sod of earth stained with the martyr's blood, which became the central relic in a new church dedicated to the cult at Auxerre. The cult was already well known in both Britain and Gaul, and Germanus and his allies were determined to enlist it against the Pelagians. The 'E' text of the *passio* derives from continuing interest in the cult at Auxerre following the bishop's death, but the major part of the text is essentially the story as he received it. Turning to the 'Alleluia Victory', there is no clear parallel in the Bible or in pre-existing hagiography capable of providing Constantius with an original on which to have constructed this story, many of the characteristics of which are unique. However, Constantius's account does connect with Vegetius's advice regarding use of the war-cry on the battlefield. Hints that Germanus had served in a military capacity in earlier life lend some credibility to the possibility that Germanus was welcomed into a British force in a command role. The story implies knowledge of current tactics and an ability to implement them. The 'Alleluia Victory' is likely, therefore, to have been based on received stories regarding an actual event, albeit written up within a rhetorical framework which exaggerated the topography in which it was set, the role of Germanus as commander and even the supposed bloodlessness of the outcome. While we should remain cautious, it does seem likely that the 'Alleluia Victory' did actually happen.

The second visit similarly fits within Constantius's wider agenda to good effect but was included only in so far as it accorded with rather limited rhetorical purposes. It seems likely that it was used to confirm Germanus as the central figure of the earlier visit. It also underwrites Germanus's willingness to respond to the needs of the populace, whether within his own diocese or without. A carefully selected healing miracle validates this as yet one more proof of Germanus's apostolic or Christ-like role, and so his value as an exemplar to contemporary churchmen. Despite the doubts which have been expressed, the new information provided may mean that a second visit did occur. Firstly, Germanus was this time given a new companion in Severus, a prominent figure within Constantius's own adult lifetime who is unlikely to be entirely misrepresented here. Secondly, the naming of Elafius may mean that some

© 2014 John Wiley & Sons Ltd

information had reached the author, ultimately from those returning from the visit. Thirdly, the way that Germanus's opponents were dealt with is a unique element in the Life which is most unlikely to have been contrived without some factual basis.

Both visits to Britain are developed as part of a more general rhetorical strategy by which Constantius progressively made claims on behalf of Germanus across a whole succession of episodes as episcopal Catholic hero, holy man and figure of power. The positioning of both visits alongside comparable journeys on the Continent helps us to understand why each of these episodes was selected, over against the numerous stories which Constantius tells us he omitted. In the first, Germanus was presented as a Christ-figure battling successfully with both heretics and heathens for the spiritual and temporal welfare of a Christian people. This is an extended account in which Constantius invested heavily, it occurs early in his succession of journeys and it provides substantial support to his general thesis. From his perspective, the importance of the second visit lies less in what was then actually achieved on the ground than in Germanus, solely, having made both journeys, so allowing him to be portrayed as the central figure. It seems likely, therefore, that the second visit was included primarily to support a particular interpretation of the first, which might otherwise have been contested. There was no need to offer much detail to serve those purposes, leading to an economy in this part of the narrative to which scholars have been right to call attention.

Opinion is today more favourable towards a gradual winding down of Roman-type administration in Britain across the first half of the fifth century than it was in the later twentieth century,[101] when the ending of Roman Britain was very much thought of as a short, sharp break with the past and with the near-Continent. The message offered here is that the two visits made by Germanus are capable of providing significant evidence of continuing contacts into the late 420s and perhaps even later, between communities who had had comparable political and cultural experiences over several centuries, who saw themselves as close associates, and who shared concerns about the church. That there is comparatively little information regarding Britain is hardly surprising in a work written

[101] The view that Roman Britain ended very suddenly is best presented by Cleary, *Ending of Roman Britain*, and has recently been restated by D. Mattingly, *An Imperial Possession: Britain in the Roman Empire* (London, 2006), pp. 529–39, but Cleary distanced himself from that position at the 'Crisis, what Crisis?' conference at Cambridge in 2009. A more gradual process is explored in N.J. Higham, *Rome, Britain and the Anglo-Saxons* (London, 1992); C.A. Snyder, *An Age of Tyrants: Britain and the Britons, AD 400–600* (University Park, PA, 1998); R. White, *Britannia Prima: Britain's Last Roman Province* (Stroud, 2007); and S. Laycock, *Britannia, The Failed State* (Stroud, 2008).

© 2014 John Wiley & Sons Ltd

for a local audience in central/eastern Gaul a generation after these events occurred. Careful reading within the context in which it was written allows us to explore the role these 'British' visits played in the Life, and therefore Constantius's purpose in including both in a work through which he was offering a particular blueprint for the episcopacy in Gaul.

University of Manchester

© 2014 John Wiley & Sons Ltd